

Multimodal Analysis of Graphic Novels: A Case Study Featuring Two Asian Women Travelers

Kin-wai CHU & Simon COFFEY
King's College London, UK

Abstract: This is an interdisciplinary case study focusing on two autobiographical graphic novels featuring two Asian women travelers. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional critical discourse analytical model is used as the main analytical framework, drawing on heuristic tools in visual, social and textual analysis. As the graphic novel represents time and space in multimodal ways using comic, graphic and textual semiotic modes, it has become an increasingly popular means to depict travel narratives across South East Asia. Since the mid-2000s there has been a growing number of autobiographical travel graphic novels depicting independent women artists/ travelers. This paper aims at unraveling this genre of graphic novels in South East Asia as a means to highlight its empowerment potential on both the travel writers and their wide readership. Two pioneer examples, *Hitoritabi I Nensei* and *Merhaba! My Turkey Journey* were chosen for this study. We will also explore the power relationship between autographical travel narratives and the macroscopic social practice behind the production and circulation of those graphic novels.

Keywords: Graphic novels, comics, travel narratives, autobiography

1. Introduction

Within the context of technological development and globalization, effective communication cannot simply be drawn on language, but is drawn on a range of shared symbols and images because contemporary texts are always composed of multiple semiotic modes. Kress (2000, p.153) uses the word 'multimodality' to describe the fact that 'language is no longer the only or even the central semiotic mode'.

Comics and graphic novels adopt both literary and pictorial representation in their narratives, so engagement with these texts constitutes 'multimodal literacy', a term suggested by Kress and Jewitt (2003). In the book of the same title they (2003, p.1) define 'mode' as a "regularised and organised set of resources for meaning making". The growing popularity in multimodal communication and means of text circulation has seen a rise in the popularity of comics since the 19th century. Over the past few decades, comics and graphic novels have been booming in the publishing industry, with two out of ten books sold being graphic novels in certain European countries (Baskind & Omer-Sherman, 2010), let alone the very mature comic markets in North America and Japan. Through storytelling, comics and graphic novels aim at representing the spatial temporal aspects and a

combination of human senses that McCloud (1994, p.123) describes as ‘synaesthetics’¹.

Like in many media for entertainment, narrative tension plays an important part in making the comics and graphic novels engrossing. As graphic novels and comics are simulating spatial and temporal reality using words and pictures, this coincides with the notion of travel suggested by James Clifford (1992) whereby travelers can explore the time and space dimension of human experience in their journey. Therefore, graphic novels having the theme of travel can combine the travel writer/artists’ aesthetic and literary ambition in narration, differentiating them from travel writing or other visual records of travel. However, most research on comics and graphic novels is related to superheroes and women or Jewish trauma narratives (Gardner, 2012; Baskind & Omer-Sherman, 2010) while little research has been done on graphic novels about travels except on the famous imaginative graphic novels like *The Adventures of Tintin*² (McCarthy, 2007 & 2012; Mountfort, 2011; Dunnett, 2009).

In terms of written autobiographical travel narratives, extensive studies have been done from literary, cultural, political, and gender perspectives (Bird, 2012; Blanton, 2002; Smith, 2001; Clifford, 1992; Champbell, 1988). Independent travel has long been regarded as a means of empowerment especially for women (Bird, 2012; Blanton, 2002; Smith, 2001; Campbell, 1988). However, gender studies on travel writing were largely about women travelers traveling from the West to explore the ‘exotic’ East while travel writing written by Asian women travelers has been rarely explored.

In this study, two pioneer autobiographical travel graphic novels featuring two independent Asian women travelers were analysed. They are *Hitoritabi I Nensei* and *Merhaba! My Turkey Journey*. The paper will begin with a historical overview and literature review of graphic novels and travel narratives. Then, Fairclough’s (1995) critical discourse analytical framework will be adopted for an interdisciplinary analysis, drawing on both textual discourse and social theories. Following this, the dynamics of textual, discourse and social practices emerging from the graphic novels and constituting the identities of the two independent Asian women travelers will be discussed, along with the implication of how the micro-level textual analysis articulates the macro-level of cultural and social impact on the writers. Finally, we will conclude that the two graphic novelists have extended the narrative representation of womanhood by emphasising the enjoyment of independent travel as childlike adults. From the analysis of the discourse as social practice among the two travel writers, it is found that their graphic novels have empowered themselves and some readers in the way they travel and publish their travel narratives.

1.1. Comics, Commix, Cartoons, Sequential Art and Graphic Novels

McCloud (1994, p.9) defines comics as “plural in form, used with a singular verb, juxtaposed pictorial

¹This term has its origin in medical science, describing a neurological condition known as ‘synesthesia’ or ‘synaesthesia’ in which some people can involuntarily have multiple senses triggered when getting a single sensory stimulus (José de Córdoba et al., 2014). Synesthesia in art is an area for experiments in which some artists produce artworks involving multiple senses such as visual music.

²The study of *Tintin* series has been very popular and the fans called themselves *Tintinologists* (Apostolidès, 2007).

and other images in deliberate sequence in which it is intended to convey information ...". (However, *comics* can be taken as a countable noun when it refers to *comic books* according to Cambridge Dictionary, 2014.) Moreover, McCloud claims that pictures without words, such as the stained glass depicting sequential biblical events in churches, are not comics but sequential art. However, Will Eisner (2008) uses the term 'sequential art' to refer to the animation-like comics which figuratively demonstrate actions. In this sense, Eisner focuses on the graphic but not literal aspects of comics in his definition. Besides, Spiegelman (1988) proposes another term, *commix*, to highlight the co-mixing nature of pictures and words.

Sequentiality is always taken as an integral element in modern comics that are usually regarded as a written form of animations (Gardner, 2012). Also, McCloud (1994, p.60) introduced the concept of 'closure' to describe the construction of virtual reality in the reader's brain when the brain automatically renders the comic panels separated by gutters into animation-like sequence. Besides, McCloud (1994, p. 21) tries to differentiate cartoons and comics whereby cartoons employ "an approach to picture-making" while he considers comics as a medium which often employs cartooning approach by means of "amplification through simplification". In other words, cartooning an image involves eliminating its details but retaining or even exaggerating its features in a way that realistic art forms like photography cannot achieve. He continues that the simplicity of cartoon characters in comics can make readers focus on the "realm of concepts" (*ibid*, p.39).

Graphic novels are sometimes called graphic writing; they appear later than modern comics³ and are commonly understood as the book length version of comics with more sophisticated novel features (Dauber, 2010). Roth (2010) concludes that failing to come up with a consensus in defining the nature of comics is the core problem in theorizing it. We think that claiming graphic novels as either a medium or a genre is reductive to a certain extent, and this paper does not aim to theorize graphic novels but to investigate the social and ideological implications the two chosen graphic novels can bring about. Therefore, this paper takes graphic novels as a discourse in which more encompassing elements like the travel practice of the two graphic novelists are taken into analysis.

Hitoritabi 1 Nensei (Primary One Student Travelling Alone)

Hitoritabi 1 Nensei (referred as *Hitoritabi* hereafter), which literally means "*travelling alone year one student*", was written by a Japanese illustrator, Naoko Takagi, who embarked on her debut solitary travels inside Japan. This book was published in Japan in 2006 and became very popular, and later it was translated into Chinese and Korean. By 2012, over 250,000 copies were sold across South East Asia according to the figures released by the publisher. Indeed, Takagi had become famous since 2003 after she published a trilogy of '150cm life' depicting some funny things happening to her as a 150cm tall adult. She also published three autobiographical graphic novels describing her life living alone, enjoying hot spring alone and going to Tokyo alone. Aligned with the common theme of doing things

³Rodolphe Töpffer who created a series of 'picture story' in 1820 and 1830, is believed to be the founding father of modern comics (Roth 2010, p. 4 & McCloud, 1994).

alone, *Hitoritabi INensei* records the first solo travels of hers.

Merhaba! My Turkey Journey

Peiyu Chang, a Taiwanese Geography teacher, traveled to Turkey in 2004 and published her debut graphic novel, *Merhaba! My Turkey Journey* (referred as *Merhaba hereafter*), in form of a travelogue. Twelve editions have been published since 2005. Though it might seem that the pictures serve as illustrations because most pictures are presented in a non-sequential manner without gutters and panels, *Merhaba* is still a graphic novel according to Rothschild's (1995) definition of graphic novels in which both the texts and pictures are complementary, but not supplementary to each other. In fact, the pictures in *Merhaba* are indispensable and closely interwoven into the narratives throughout the book as the whole book is handwritten but not Chinese word-processed, so the words and the layout can be viewed as part of the graphic representations. On the other hand, this book is the manuscript of Chang's diary recording her journey in a real-time-like manner, so every page is a visual and textual representation of her discursive practice of travel.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multimodal Narratives in Comics/ Graphic Novels

Storytelling seems to be an indispensable element in history, art, literature, and so on. Baskind and Omer-Shermann (2010, p. 18) argue that there is an "irresistible inclination towards narrative forms of illustration in human beings". Comics or graphic novels share some similarities with other forms of art like painting and novels, in which both paintings and the images in the graphic novels require readers to read in a non-linear way, while novels and the texts in the graphic novels are narrated in a linear manner. Therefore, comics or graphic novels become an interesting platform for multimodal narrative studies. However, comics have long been marginalized and taken as an illegitimate medium in the literary and artistic world because of the academic prestige of literacy and fine art. Sabin (1996) posits that comics started to gain more scholarly attention since the 1980s, especially after Art Spiegelman's *Maus* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and he reiterates a growing claim that 'comics' is a language having its own grammar and conventions by weaving words and images in distinctive ways for narration that Rothschild (1995, p.14) describes as "a whole that a text-only book cannot match." Though comics narratives are generally believed to be readily digestible, Gardner (2012, p. 11) argues that comics are an inefficient narrative form demanding readers' active imagination because different semantic systems are multimodally fitted into crowded frames, making meaning both 'collaborative and competitive'. Indeed, both arguments are valid because comics, as a language which is developed under social and cultural influence, can cause strain to the readers from different cultures.

2.2. A Historical Overview of Travel Narratives

From the 4th century BC to 13th century CE, travel was usually purposeful, and most travelers were

mainly Crusaders, pilgrims, merchants and conquistadors such as Marco Polo and William of Rubruck (Blanton, 2002; Mould, 2013). Travel at that time was mostly hazardous to both body and soul, and the travel narrative styles were mostly factual and descriptive in forms of logs and correspondences or heroic myths such as *The Odyssey*.

From the Middle Ages to the Age of Enlightenment, travel narrative styles diverged when Europeans started to explore the world. Fiction-like narrative styles appeared, but most travel narratives at that time reflected Eurocentric, even xenophobic, perspectives of the other (Pratt, 1992). Travel was taken as a scientific exploration and a way to search for identity in the Age of Enlightenment (Bird, 2012). Famous travel writers included Victor Hugo and James Boswell; the latter's journals set the trend for the Grand Tour, which was taken as a rite of passage, a means of self-discovery and intellectual betterment (Chard, 1999). During the Romantic period of the 19th century CE, travel literature echoed with the core literary features of this period. Gunn (1982, p.60) comments that the Romantic period marked the beginning of the "full flowering of the autobiographical genre" that is still in vogue today.

Since the mid-19th century, questioning about otherness is not as emphasised in the travel narratives owing to the influence of the postmodernist worldview that the travelers and the locals are not essentially a dichotomy (Blanton, 2002). This can be explained by the fact that knowledge about cultural differences is more accessible due to technological advances and diasporic contacts.

2.3. The Cultural Significance of Autobiographical Travel Narratives

Travel narratives provide people with a means to understand the history and culture of travel though such accounts are inevitably dramatized, restricted in the sense that they represent limited aspects of the reality and loaded with the travel writers' subjectivity. Although artifacts and factual documents may be considered more reliable documents for people to understand the past travel practices, they lack characters and narratives for people to understand contacts between cultures (Mould, 2013). Hymes (1996) insists that the narrative describing transcendental or new experience may be fairly common among travelers, because it is actually culturally shaped. As Coffey (2011, p. 74) states, autobiographical accounts have been increasingly used as research data because one's personal life stories are intrinsically entangled with culture so travel literature can be viewed as "culturally (re) produced narratives". Moreover, Fairclough (2001) summarizes Giddens's (1991) view and justifies the prevalence and significance of autobiography as people become increasingly reflective about their social life.

2.4. Autobiographical Women Travel Narratives

Edward Said (1994) claims that foreigners can see a place they visit differently from the locals as they maintain a degree of marginality. From a feminist perspective, Wolff (1995) believes that women's historical marginality makes them regard traveling abroad as a way for self-discovery and emancipation. However, women traveling independently challenge the traditional home-bound and dependent gender role of women as Leed (1991, p.113) claims that travel shows the "sessility of

women and mobility of men". Women travelers took their solo journey as a breakthrough into womanhood, but it was hard for people to accept travel as a proper activity for women (Birkett, 1991). Therefore, travel is essentially tied up with gender and this sensitizes travel as a focus for gender studies. In Victorian times, independent women travelers were marked as isolated cases, and they were under social pressure to "conform, masquerade, or rebel discreetly within a set of normatively male definitions and experience" (Clifford, 1992, p.105). This explains why early women travel writers like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was only the companion of her husband.

Indeed, the transforming effect that dislocation entails may enable travelers to "re-write the self and discover a new form of expression" (Kaplan, 1987, p.190). Autobiographical women travelogues started to flourish since the mid-19th century, and some famous independent women travel writers like Mary Kingsley attracted widespread attention because they successfully challenged the macho tradition of travel and overcame the social, ideological and physical constraints on Victorian women (Smith, 2001; Wolff, 1995). Bird (2012) found such travelogues redefined the female gender identity through textual means. The travel narratives written by independent Asian women travelers only appeared from the mid-20th century onwards (Xinhua, 2011). Though women are much empowered and independent now, Asian women remain under a glass ceiling in many aspects in society. The traditional notions of womanhood still hold strong in many Asian countries like Japan and Taiwan.

3. Theoretical Frameworks: Critical Discourse Analysis

This study aims at addressing the following questions:

1. What is the significance of using graphic novels, as a multimodal medium, in presenting the travel narratives written by Takagi and Chang?
2. How do Takagi and Chang construct their identities in their travel narratives presented in autobiographical graphic novels?

Fairclough's (1995, 2001, 2003) three-dimensional model used in critical discourse analysis (CDA) was adopted as the main analytical framework. With its intrinsically interdisciplinary nature, the analysis of the multimodal graphic novels draws on cultural, social, narrative and visual theories. Such a framework can systematically unweave the interwoven power relations manifested through the interplay of textual, discursive and social practices as it encompasses the micro analysis of text; meso-level analysis of discursive practice which functions as the mediator between text and social practice including "the production, distribution and consumption of a text" (Fairclough 1995, p.135); and macro analysis of social practices and structures. This analytical framework also articulates Foucault's (1982, p. 789) idea about the relationship of power that "a mode of action acts upon other actions".

In addressing Question 1, the multimodality of graphic novels was analysed using the first

dimension of the framework, discourse as text. Visual and comic theories are adopted since the multimodal graphic novels present travel narratives using graphic, literal and comic semiotic modes. Fairclough (2003, p.16) studied the temporal-spatial dimension in relation to language and concluded:

The description of how time and space are represented in an attempt to work textually with the social research question in a way which one would not arrive at by simply describing the text in terms of what grammars of English say about the representation of time and space.

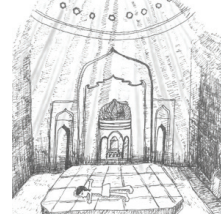
This chimes with Harvey's (1996) claim that time and space are inseparable and socially constructed. Therefore, the remaining two dimensions of the framework can shed light on how the graphic novels can represent the temporal spatial travel experience of the two graphic novelists.

For Question 2, the autobiographical travel narratives indeed provide constructive data for research on identities as Fairclough (2003) believes identities, as reflected in people's behavior and writing, are ambivalently co-constructed under social influence and inner psychological development. Though there is a constant debate on the academic credibility of autobiography, feminists insist that subjectivity exists in the production of knowledge which is always mistakenly regarded as an objective process (Harding, 1986; Smith, 1987; Cosslett et al., 2000). Van Langenhove and Harré (1993, p. 89) explored how biographical studies related to discourse analysis and concluded that "personal identity and selfhood are manifested in discursive practices, among which are the writing and telling of lives". This aligns with the claim that autobiographical writing can be taken as a discursive practice (Cosslett et al., 2000). However, CDA has been criticised for over-emphasising the circulation of linguistic elements and not paying adequate attention to the non-linguistic discursive components of participation (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Blommaert, 2005; Rampton, 2001), so narrative and visual analytical tools were integrated into the analytical framework to examine the identities of Takagi and Chang through their solo travel. As Fairclough claims power and ideology can be revealed at each level, the analysis of these two dimensions can articulate the empowerment of Takagi and Chang. The third dimension of analysis focused on the tension between the social and cultural expectation on Asian women, and how Takagi and Chang are empowered from their independent travel as presented textually in their graphic novels. These all provide strong methodological and theoretical support for the use of autobiographical data and CDA framework to investigate the empowering effect of travel on the two graphic novelists.

4. Discourse as Text

The first dimension of the CDA framework concentrated on the semiotic mode of the visual elements of the texts. Some graphic novel excerpts are included in the paper and the appendixes as examples.

4.1. Characterisation – Appearance

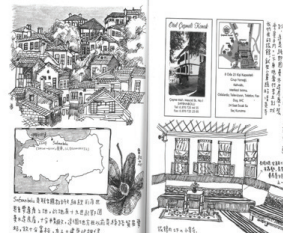
Figure 3. *Hitoritabi* CoverFigure 4. *Hitoritabi*, p. 48Figure 5. *Hitoritabi*, p. 56Figure 6. *Merhaba*, p. 5Figure 7. *Merhaba*, p. 75Figure 8. *Merhaba*, p. 129

In *Hitoritabi*, Takagi portrayed herself as a little girl without a trace of womanly characteristics (see examples in Figures 3-5). Similarly, Chang is a pigtailed girl in *Merhaba* though she does not emphasise the childlike figure as obviously as Takagi does (See examples in Figures 6-7). Both of them were actually in their late twenties and early thirties when they travelled and created such graphic novels. One explanation for this construction of a youthful image could be the influence of the kidult phenomenon (Fruedi, 2003) and Japanese ‘kawaii’ culture (Kinsella, 1995) in which many adults consciously maintain some childhood behaviour and appearance. The Japanese word *kawaii* literally means “childlike, sweet, innocent and adorable” that can be used to describe “inexperienced social behavior and adorable physical appearance”, and this culture is prominent across South East Asia since the 1980s (Kinsella, 1995, p. 220). On the other hand, kidult is a term describing those 20-to-35-year-old adults who still indulge in children’s or teenage entertainment and hobbies (Fruedi, 2003). In general, Takagi’s childlike looks and moves are widely accepted in Japan and places such as Taiwan where Japanese culture have great influence. Moreover, their childlike appearance is analogous to the iconic teenage image of Tintin. As an imaginative character, Tintin’s appearance stays the same throughout a few decades, but his heroic youth image constructed in his adventurous travel narratives made him the “super-child ideal” (Apostolidès, 2007). Though Takagi and Chang did not carry out any dramatic heroic deeds, they create the same pun as Tintin did—they have accomplished their solo journey even though they look physically vulnerable.

4.2. Color Symbolism

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002, p. 344), color can serve textual, cultural and social

functions, as it is a “semiotic mode” in making meaning although the meaning can be paradoxically universal or different from culture to culture. When analysing the colors used in both graphic novels, it is assumed that the colors semiotically link to the travel narratives and identities of the writers. According to McCloud (1994, p.188), colors are both “expressionistic” and “iconic”, for instance, the costume colors of some American comic heroes can make readers associate the colors with the heroes. In *Hitoritabi*, soft pastel colors are always used to establish a light-hearted mood of travel since lighter mixtures of colors may help project a “tender and leisurely” mood (Odbert et al., 1942, p.165). Even when Takagi was terrified when getting lost on a night out, she used pastel gray as background to downplay the helpless feeling (Figure 10). Therefore, the color choices in the book have created a unified easy-going mood.

Figure 9. *Hitoritabi*, p. 104Figure 10. *Hitoritabi*, p. 22Figure 11. *Hitoritabi*, p. 50Figure 12. *Merhaba*, pp. 134-135

Panchanathan et al. (2000) claim that colors can be used for gender role socialization, for example, pastel colors are commonly called baby colors, and pastel pink is widely used in baby girl products while pastel blue is for baby boys. The pastel colors in *Hitoritabi* thus reinforce the childlike and *kawaii* image Takagi projects. It is interesting to note that Takagi may want to distinguish her childlike cuteness from femininity by avoiding the stereotypical pastel pink but frequently adopting a wider range of pastel colors. Besides, bright colors are rarely used unless the colors are part of the narratives such as the time when Takagi showed the colorful kimono choices in Kyoto (Figure 9).

The colors used in *Merhaba* are more realistic, but some pictures are only highlighted using one or two colors or just left black and white (Figures 6-8). This is probably because the whole graphic novel was handwritten as a diary during Chang's journey, so some pictures may not be delicately drawn and colored. Besides, Chang adopted various drawing styles in *Merhaba* such as realistic sketching

when drawing buildings⁴ (Figure 12) and cartooning in some narratives (Appendix 3). This can be explained using McCloud's (1994, p. 39) theory that Chang tended to focus on the "realm of senses" when drawing buildings and objects as she simply wanted to show the physical beauty of them while she focused on the "realm of concepts" using comic cartooning style when telling stories in order to draw readers' attention to the storyline instead of the drawing techniques of the pictures.

4.3. The Use of Gutters and Panels

As mentioned, time is expressed spatially in comics, and closure is achieved through the reader's mental effort to merge the panels between gutters. Unlike American mainstream superhero comics in which McCloud (1994, p.74) believes closure is necessary for readers to digest the action scenes that are primarily presented in 'moment-to-moment' and 'action-to-action' manner between the panels, he finds closure is not as necessary for Japanese comics because they mainly adopt 'subject-to-subject' and 'aspect-to-aspect' transitions. *Hitoritabi* is a typical example in which gutters are basically used to separate different scenes in adjacent panels so readers have to bring two and two together and rely on contexts to make sense of the abruptly changing scenes between panels. In *Merhaba*, panels and gutters are always missing as Chang sometimes simply used numbers to signify sequential actions instead of using panels and gutters (Appendix 3). To sum up, these two graphic novels demonstrate the insufficiency of current comic theories that are mostly developed based on American action comic genres so this also provides the breeding ground for further research.

4.4. The Use of Motion Lines

Motion lines are lines used to illustrate the path of movements; Marcel Duchamp was the first artist who used overlapping images to express movements, modern comic writers later simplified this technique using motion lines (McCloud, 1994). In *Hitoritabi*, Takagi used a lot of motion lines (Figure 5 & 11) while few motion lines are used in *Merhaba*, because Chang seldom describes actions except on p. 79 (shown in Appendix 3). Such motion lines not only represent motions, but also help create a funny and *kawaii* style (Figure 4-5).

4.5. Universal Identification

Takagi portrayed herself like a child using a very simple and iconic cartooning style. Similarly, Chang drew her face with only the glasses and hairstyle as her facial features, but she could actually sketch some buildings with great complexity (Figure 12). Aesthetically, Takagi's drawing technique can be criticized as not sophisticated enough, but the simplification of the facial features can achieve "universal identification", referring to the way in which different people associate the same meaning when

⁴Buildings are drawn on pp. 7, 72, 82, 89, 104, 122, 129, 134-6, 138, 148, 160, 163, 168, 175, 185-6, 195, 211-2, 232.

they see the cartoon, similarly as for example, a smiley signifies happiness in all cultures (McCloud, 1994, p. 36). McCloud insists that a very simple style of cartoon can pull readers to another realm and make readers feel like being the comic character. Besides, the simple icons of Takagi and her childlike drawing style may also strengthen her kawaii and kidult characteristics.

5. Discursive Practice

Discursive practice, the second dimension of the three-dimensional CDA framework, involves how texts are constructed, circulated and interpreted, so analysis usually draws on conversation analysis and pragmatics (Fairclough, 1995). However, these two approaches are not suitable to analyze Takagi and Chang's multimodal graphic novels in which conversations are rarely present. Therefore, the analysis will focus on how the texts were produced based on Takagi and Chang's travel practices in which their personalities and identities can be discursively interpreted.

5.1. Characterization of Takagi

Takagi mentioned her hesitation and worry about traveling alone in the preface of *Hitoritabi* which recorded her debut solo travels in Japan (See Appendix 1). At the end of the preface, she encouraged herself not to express doubt but simply go ahead. The book is divided into eight chapters chronologically recording her domestic solo travels for a year. The transformation of Takagi can be seen gradually as the narrative develops.

Over the course of her year-long travels, Takagi transformed from a timid to a confident traveler though she sometimes overtly expressed her insecure feeling when travelling alone. At first, she mentioned she had not traveled alone before she was 32 years old mainly because of her timidity (Figure 13). Though she claimed that she liked staying alone, it seems that she only liked being alone at home⁵. She demonstrated how uneasy she was when she was eating out alone, and sometimes she even dared not walk into restaurants on her own. In Chapter One⁶, she ended up going home without eating because she dared not enter a restaurant (Appendix 2). In her second trip, she made her way into a restaurant, but she felt embarrassed (Figure 14) as she imagined the other customers might think she was "a lonely jerk". Such acts may seem awkward in Western culture, but these are not considered a problem in many Asian countries for a woman to feel embarrassed eating alone in the same way a young girl with few social experiences might feel because Takagi's kidult and childlike image is widely accepted in the first place. Besides, demonstrating shyness is a cultural norm for Japanese women so Takagi may not be a special case. Indeed many women readers may even share the same feeling. To explain using the cultural meaning of dining, eating out with others serves a socializing function whereas eating alone is a sign of unsociable behavior.

⁵The pictures describing her fear of traveling alone are shown on pp. 10, 12, 14.

⁶The pictures depicting her fear of going into a restaurant alone are shown on pp. 14, 16, 28, 74, 75, 108.

In later chapters, Takagi no longer mentioned struggling outside restaurants but simply described the food and her enjoyable experience, these are signs showing she was later accustomed to eating out alone⁷. However, she was again afraid of entering a restaurant for dinner in Chapter Seven when she was in Kyoto (Figure 15). This seems strange when compared with her enjoyment of having lunch alone on the same day, but it makes sense considering where she was. She was in Gion which historically since hundreds of years ago has been a famous place mainly for men of high social status to enjoy geisha performances.

Figure 13. *Hitoritabi*, p. 10

Translation

Even until this age, I have never travelled alone.
[Reasons in orange bubbles- clockwise from top]
Like staying at home;
Like being alone;
Being timid;
Poor sense of direction;
Physically weak

Figure 14. *Hitoritabi*, p. 18

Translation

(Takagi was sitting alone. people at the back were chitchatting.)
Eating alone in a tourist attraction makes me feel so uncomfortable.
(Thought bubbles)
Nobody was alone. Don't know if they will say I am such a lonely jerk.

Figure 15. *Hitoritabi*, p. 108

Translation

I kept looking for a place for dinner, but I didn't go anywhere in the end because I really did not want to go to any restaurant alone.
(turning around, hesitating, not moving forward)
(noisy) [Inside the restaurant].

Figure 16. *Merhaba*, p. 13

Translation

After having breakfast, I was in full gear for my adventure. Hatice taught me some useful expressions but she said I wore too much. I then explained to her that I did not want to be tan. She laughed out loud after that.

⁷This can be seen on pp.71, 90, 97,102, 103, 113, 115, 125

In addition, Takagi is still emotionally dependent on her mother like a little child. For instance, she yelled out 'Mama' when getting lost (Figure 10), and she thrice mentioned she felt safe by imagining an old lady walking near her as her mother during her trip⁸. Again, her mental dependence on her mother is one typical kidult feature, and her childlike image may make such narratives more convincing and natural.

Though Takagi depicts her physical and emotional vulnerability being a mature lady with a childish body and soul, she radiates her all-in-all positive attitude towards life and travel throughout the whole book. For example, she tried to stretch her extremity by trying things seemingly insurmountable to her such as taking a scuba diving course in Okinawa as a person who never played sports; and taking the longest night bus ride in Japan from Tokyo to Hakata. She always described the hardship she endured with a twist of humor and the concluding remark at the end of each chapter is positive.

5.2. Characterisation of Chang

In *Merhaba*, Chang behaved very differently from Takagi; she was more sociable and she enjoyed doing different things alone without caring how others might judge her. She first arrived in Istanbul to take a one-month Turkish course and stayed with her host mother, a single female English teacher. Basically, Chang rarely described negative experiences except the time when she decided to drop out two weeks after taking the Turkish course because she failed to catch up with the learning progress.

Despite the language barrier, she always reflected her outgoing personality by interacting with the local Turkish people, doing live sketching on the street alone. She was conscious of her Asian appearance catching people's attention in Turkey, but that did not deter her from sitting down and drawing wherever she went. Throughout the whole book, she always drew herself with a smiling face and this implies that she enjoyed her journey and took the potential danger of solo traveling in her stride though she sometimes described her worries due to her different appearance from the locals'. This indeed reverberates with the common nervousness and awareness of the potential dangers and constraints imposed on independent women travelers in many women travelers' narratives (Falconer, 2011; Blanton, 2002).

Compared with Takagi, Chang's appearance is less childlike, and she portrayed herself as a ponytailed teenage-looking girl wearing glasses and casual wear (Figures 6-7). Instead of consistently acting like a kidult, she sometimes mentioned her effort to achieve the standard of Asian beauty by maintaining fair skin (Figure 16).

As a Geography teacher, Chang not only displays her interest but professional geographical knowledge in drawing maps and routes (Figure 11). Also, her travel narratives are sometimes informative and educational with the inclusion of history and folklore instead of merely a travel autobiography. Referring to their discursive practice, sometimes it is unavoidable to touch upon the effect of social practice as Fairclough (2003) mentioned a personality is constructed as a result of

⁹ This can be seen on pp. 12, 22, 90

balancing what one concerns and what social roles one plays.

6. Social Practice

Comics are indeed fundamentally loaded with codes by means of ‘reductive iconography’, and both the artist and reader rely on stereotypes to communicate (Royal, 2007, p.7; Eisner, 2008). From the two graphic novels, they are inevitably reductive and limited not only in the iconography but also in the cultural observation. As Clifford (1992, p. 99) describes the difference between the discourse of ethnography and travel, travels do not have the “privileged relations of dwelling”, so the travelers are likely seeing part of the picture. What makes Takagi and Chang’s books significant is how the multimodal autobiographical graphic novels can reflect the impact of social structures on them, and how they can construct their identities and narratives in a textual and multimodal manner.

6.1. Kidult and Kawaii Styles

The hype of *kidult* and *kawaii* styles in Asia as mentioned in the last two dimensions of analysis constitutes part of the social practice, which dynamically affects the text and discursive practice of the two graphic novelists. Besides, some images and narratives in the graphic novels can also articulate the long-standing liberating effects that travels bring to women in a textual manner. The significance of their graphic novels depicting enjoyable independent travel experience does not simply lie in challenging the reductive traditional notion of womanhood in Asia, because a growing number of single career women and travelers have been doing so since a few decades ago; the significance of Takagi and Chang’s graphic novels is that they have widened the possibilities of womanhood. Their travel experience may seem shallow and childish compared with the academic studies on female backpacking tourism done in Europe and Americas which claim that independent backpacking is always associated with a hedonic quest for exotic and erotic adventures (Black, 2001; Cohen, 2004; Falconer, 2011).

One might argue their childlike appearance and childish behavior might not work in reality if they traveled overseas alone because they might become easy targets for robbery and fraud. This might be true as Chang did not as intentionally stress her childlike appearance as Takagi did, and she shared how she ensured her own safety by taking public transport and not staying out alone at night though her childish behavior can also be seen sometimes (Appendix 3). Takagi can avoid the troubles that foreign tourists may face as she actually traveled within her home country Japan, but she succumbed to the negative connotation of single women eating out alone at the beginning. However, she overcomes such uneasiness when the narrative unfolds. In fact, single women travelers are still perceived as ‘brave’ in Japan since the owner of a noodle shop praised Takagi after knowing she was traveling alone¹⁰.

¹⁰This can be seen on p. 75.

6.2. Empowerment

Cornwall (1997, p.12) defines empowerment as the ability of a person to expand his/her “power within” so as to have the authority to do things of his/her own free will. As mentioned by Bird (2012), travel subsumes positive change. Wolff (1995, pp. 3-4) describes the change in more details as she finds contemporary women value traveling abroad and learning a foreign language as a “catalyst in change, in development, and often, in literary and other forms of creativity”. Indeed, the transforming effect travels can bring is not gendered, but the impact on female travelers is more salient given the fact that they encounter more restrictions and safety issues on their journey.

Takagi and Chang are certainly empowered from their journeys, and their travel practices are different from many contemporary Western independent women travelers and Victorian women travelers who are fond of ‘vagabondage’, defined as travel without a fixed itinerary with a view to searching for identity through mobility (Bird, 2012, p.3). Instead, both of them embarked on a comparatively safe, well-planned journey, and this may be due to the more conservative cultures they grew up in. Therefore, they did not mention socializing with the opposite sex in their travels, and Takagi was too shy to dine in restaurants dominated by men even after she was no longer afraid of eating out alone. However, their transformation is still prominent; for instance, Takagi started off to travel for a day trip and extended to taking a 19-hour night bus ride to her journey destination some months later. Based on the prevalent *kawaii* culture, her childish moves in her travels are not at all perceived as powerless, but can be viewed as an expansion of power in which she can extend her female identity and behave either like a woman or like a kid as she wishes.

Allied with this, the graphic novels have empowered Takagi and Chang textually, personally and professionally. Chang kept on traveling and publishing her graphic novels in 2007, 2009, and 2011 after her debut graphic novel was well received. Whereas the empowering effect on Takagi is not as obvious because she had already been popular before publishing *Hitoritabi*. In fact, she had not explored such a travel genre before, and she was empowered in that she could publish a sequel *Hitoritabi 2 Nensei* in 2009 and remain a sought-after graphic novelist.

Some may argue that travel graphic novels are not a new genre as multimodal travel notebooks with detailed drawing and literary descriptions appeared in Europe more than a century ago, for instance, Eugene Delacroix’s *Moroccan Notebook* (1832), Victor Hugo’s *Bruxelles* (1837) and Paul Gaughin’s *Noa Noa* (1897). Fraser (2010) claims that such travel images cannot be classified as travel narratives because “the artist presents not a narrative of experience but a disconnected, fragmented description that is not chronological” (p. 126). The images in such notebooks are indeed “re-presentation of visual information” (ibid).

As two of the pioneers publishing autobiographical graphic novels featuring their travel narratives in South East Asia, Takagi and Chang have started a fashion, like James Boswell, for some independent Asian women travelers to follow. Dozens of similar multimodal travel literature have been introduced in the South East Asian market since then. Therefore, the social impact they brought about is prominent.

In addition, the Asian learning culture has influenced Takagi and Chang’s travel practice as they attached more importance to learning than simply seeking fun in their journey. In particular, Takagi

asked herself what she could learn from her journey in the preface (Appendix 1); she then took a scuba diving course and a one-day geisha workshop in two of her journeys. For Chang, she enrolled in a Turkish course at the beginning of her journey. In the next graphic novel, she embarked on a tea-leaves-picking course in Darjeeling. From these experiences it can be seen that both of them strived for intellectual betterment from their travel experience.

7. Conclusion

This paper has explored the implications of using two multimodal graphic novels, *Hitoritabi I Nensei* and *Merhaba! My Turkey Journey*, to present autobiographical travel narratives featuring two independent Asian women travelers, Takagi and Chang. Drawing on various social, comic and visual theories, Fairclough's (1995, 2001, 2003) three-dimensional critical discourse analytical framework was used to bring to light the empowerment Takagi and Chang gained through textual means.

In summary, the significance of the multimodal graphic novels lies in the characterisation and construction of travel narratives. Takagi and Chang can successfully construct their kidult and *kawaii* characters and travel practices through the use of a combination of semiotic modes in visual and literary representation. The sequential cartooning images and texts are indispensable in the construction of their travel narratives, which written and realistic photographic semiotic modes fail to achieve. Their identities are articulated in the autobiographical travel narratives in which they identify themselves as kidlike independent travelers who travel for self-improvement. Their travel accounts became popular and this has empowered them textually. Takagi and Chang can continue to develop their career or secondary career through publishing graphic novels, and they have helped initiate a trend of publishing autobiographical travel graphic novels in South East Asia.

In their graphic novels, Takagi and Chang often portrayed themselves as cute childlike 'kidults' who feel good being solo travelers. However, it may be myopic to assume Western and Eastern women travelers construct the same gender identities through independent travelling. The discussion above indicates that the microscopic analysis of the graphic novels can articulate the macroscopic social and gender impact on the graphic novelists. The childish behavior and the kidlike drawing styles can be seen as an extension of femininity by introducing new possibilities of womanhood. Based on the sale figures of the two graphic novels and the fact that dozens of travel graphic novels mostly written by other independent women travelers later appeared in the South East Asian markets, travel graphic novels can be seen as a new genre for further multimodal analysis in order to investigate how different autobiographical travel narratives are constructed.

References

- Apostolidès, Jean-Marie. (2007). Hergè and the Myth of the Superchild. *Yale French Studies*, 111, 45-57.
- Baskind, Samantha & Omer-Sherman, Ranen. (2010). (Ed.) *The Jewish graphic novel: Critical approaches*. New Brunswick, New Jersey & London: Rutgers University Press.
- Bird, Dúnlaith. (2012). *Travelling in different skins: Gender identity in European women's Oriental*

- travelogues, 1850-1950*. Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online.
- Birkett, Dea. (1991). *Spinsters abroad: Victorian lady explorers*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Black, Paula. (2001). Walking on the beaches looking at the ...bodies. In Kathryn Backett-Milburn & Linda McKie (Eds.) *Constructing gendered bodies* (pp. 104-120). New York: Palgrave.
- Blanton, Casey. (2002). *Travel writing: The self and the world*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Blommaert, Jan. (2005). *Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blommaert, Jan & Bulcaen, Chris. (2000). Critical Discourse Analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29, 447-66.
- Cambridge Dictionaries online. (2014). Retrieved 20 September 2014 from http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-chinesetraditional/comic_2?q=comics
- Campbell, Mary B. (1988). *The witness and the other world: Exotic European travel writing, 400-1600*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Chang, Peiyu. (2005). *Merhaba! My Turkey journey*. Taipei: Linking Publishing.
- Chard, Chloe. (1999). *Pleasure and guilt on the grand tour: Travel writing and imaginative geography 1600-1830*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Clifford, James. (1992). Traveling cultures. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson & P. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural studies*, (pp. 96-116). New York: Routledge.
- Coffey, Simon. (2011). Modern language learning as a figured world of privilege. In Fenoulhet, J. & Rose i Solé, C. (Eds.), *Mobility and localization in language learning: A view from languages of the wider world*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Cohen, Erik. (2004). Backpacking: Diversity and change. In Greg Richards & Julie Wilson, *The global nomad: Backpacker travel in theory and practice* (pp. 43-59). UK: Channel view publications.
- Cornwall, Andrea. (1997). Men, masculinity and gender in development. *Gender and Development*, 5(2), 8-13.
- Cosslett, Tess; Lury, Celia & Summerfield, Penny. (2000). *Feminism and autobiography: Texts, theories, methods*. London: Routledge.
- Dauber, Jeremy. (2010). Comic books, tragic stories: Will Eisner's American Jewish history. In Baskind, S. & Omer-Sherman (Eds.). *The Jewish graphic novel: Critical approaches* (pp. 22-42). New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Dunnett, Oliver. (2009). Identity and geopolitics in Hergé's Adventures of Tintin. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 10(5), 583-598.
- Eisner, Will. (2008). Comics and sequential Art: *Principles and practices from the legendary cartoonist (Will Eisner Instructional Books)*. WW Norton & Company.
- Fairclough, Norman. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, Norman. (2001). The discourse of New Labour: Critical discourse analysis. In Wetherwell, M., S.; Taylor, S. & Yates, S. (Eds.), *Discourses as Data: A Guide for Analysis* (pp. 229-266). London: Sage.
- Fairclough, Norman. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.
- Falconer, Emily. (2011). Risk, excitement and emotional conflict in women's travel narratives. *Recreation and Society in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, 1(2). 65-89.

- Foucault, Michel. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777-795.
- Fraser, Elizabeth A. (2010). Images of uncertainty: Delacroix and the art of nineteenth-century expansionism. In Mary D. Sheriff (Ed.), *Cultural Contact and the Making of European Art Since the Age of Exploration* (pp. 123-152). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Fruedi, Frank. (2003). The children who won't grow up. *Spiked Essays*. Retrieved 20 September, 2014 from <http://www.spiked-online.com/articles/00000006DE8D.htm>
- Gardner, Jared. (2012). *Projections: Comics and the history of twenty-first-century storytelling*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Gidden, Anthony. (1991). *Modernity and self identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gunn, Janet Varner. (1982). *Autobiography: Toward a poetics of experience*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Harding, Sandra. (1986). *The science questions in feminism*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Harvey, David. (1996). *Justice, nature and geography of difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hymes, Dell. (1996). *Ethnography, linguistics, narrative inequality: Toward the understanding of voice*. London & Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis.
- José de Córdoba, María; Riccò, Dina & Day, Sean A. (2014). *Synaesthesia: Theoretical, artistic and scientific foundations*. Granada: Imprenta Del Carmen.
- Kaplan, Caren. (1987). Deterritorializations: The rewriting of home and exile in western feminist discourse, *Cultural Critique*, 6, 187-198.
- Kinsella, Sharon. (1995). Cuties in Japan. In Skos, L. & Moeran, B. (Eds.), *Women, media and consumption in Japan* (pp. 220-254). Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Kress, Gunther. (2000). Design and transformation: New theories of meaning. In Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 153-161), New York: Routledge.
- Kress, Gunther & Jewitt, Carey. (2003). *Multimodal literacy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kress, Gunther & Van Leeuwen, Theo. (2002). Colour as a semiotic mode: Notes for a grammar of colour. *Visual Communication*, 1(3), 343-368.
- Leed, Eric. (1991). *The mind of the traveller: From Gilgamesh to global tourism*. New York: Basic Books.
- McCarthy, Tom. (2007). *Tintin and the secret of literature*. Great Britain: Granta Books.
- McCarthy, Tom. (2012). *Men in space*. New York: Random House Digital, Inc.
- McCloud, Scot. (1994). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Mills, Sara. (1991). *Discourses of difference: An analysis of women's travel writing and colonialism*. London: Routledge.
- Mould, David. (2013). Time and motion studies. *Times Higher Magazine*, February 2013, 40-43.
- Mountfort, Paul. (2011). Yellow skin, black hair. Careful, Tintin: Herge and Orientalism. *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 1(1), 33-49.
- Odbert, Henry S.; Karwoski, Theodore F. & Eckerson, A. B. (1942). Studies in Synesthetic thinking: I. Musical and verbal associations of color and mood. *The Journal of General Psychology*, 26(1), 153-173.
- Panchanathan, Sethuraman; Park, Y. C.; Kim, K. S.; Kim, P. & Golshani, F. (2000). The role of colour in content-based image retrieval. *Image Processing. Proceedings. International Conference, 1*, 517-520.

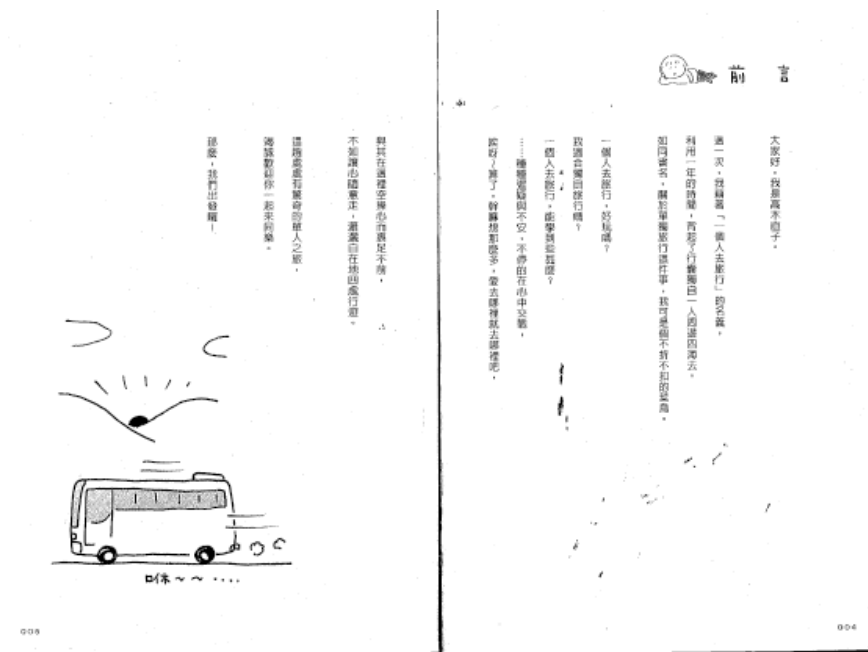
- Pratt, Mary Louise. (1992). *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*. London: Routledge.
- Rampton, Ben. (2001). Critique in interaction. *Critique in Anthropology*, 21(1), 83-107.
- Roth, Laurence. (2010). Contemporary American Jewish comic books. In Baskind, Samantha & Omer-Sherman, Ranen (Eds.), *The Jewish graphic novel: Critical approaches* (pp. 3-21). New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Rothschild, D. Aviva. (1995). *Graphic novels: A bibliographic guide to book-length comics*. Englewood: Libraries Unlimited.
- Royal, Derek Parker. (2007). Introduction: Colouring America: Multi-ethnic engagements with graphic narrative. *MELUS*, 32(3), 7-22.
- Said, Edward. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. London: Vintage.
- Sabin, Roger. (1996). *Comics, commix and graphic novels*. London: Phaidon Press Limited.
- Sayer, Andrew. (2000). *Realism and social science*. London: Sage
- Smith, Dorothy. (1987). *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Smith, Sidonie. (2001). *Moving lives: Twentieth-century women's travel writing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Spiegelman, Art. (1988). Commix: An idiosyncratic historical and aesthetic overview. *Print*, 42(7).
- Takagi, Naoko (2006). *Hitoritabi I Nensei*. Tokyo: Media Fakutorī.
- Wolff, Janet. (1995). *Resident alien: Feminist cultural criticism*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Van Langenhove, Luk & Harré, Rom. (1993). Positioning and autobiography: Telling your life. In Coupland, Nikolas & Nussbaum, John F. (Eds.), *Discourse and lifespan identity. Language and language behaviors, Vol. 4*. (pp. 81-99). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- XinHua. (2011). 單士厘中國最早的女旅行作家:現代女性的榜樣[Shan Shili, the first female travel writer in China: Role model for modern women]. Retrieved 1 July 2013 from http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/cq.news.cn/dxs/2011-12/15/content_24341061.htm.

Author Note

Kin-wai Chu is a college lecturer at Lingnan Institute of Further Education. She graduated from King's College London with a Master of Arts in Language and Cultural Diversity. This paper is the abridged and edited version of her MA dissertation written under the supervision of Dr. Simon Coffey.

Dr. Simon Coffey is a lecturer in Language Education and program director of the Master of Arts in Language and Cultural Diversity at King's College London. His research interests include modern foreign language teaching and methodology, narrative and identity, autobiographical writing and the intercultural dimension.

Appendix 1. Hitoritabi, Preface



Translation

Hello, I am Takagi Naoko.

I spent a year travelling around in the name of *Hitoritabi I Nensei*.

Like the book title suggests, I am a total beginner of a traveler.

(1 Nensei means year one student)

Is it enjoyable to travel alone?

Am I suitable for travelling alone?

Can I learn anything when travelling alone?

....All sorts of uncertainties and hesitation occupy my mind.

Aiya~let it be, why do I think so much, just go to wherever I like;

Worrying too much can just hinder my journey,

I should then follow my heart and travel freely in a cool manner.

The journeys are full of surprises,

I cordially invite you to share my happiness.

So, let's go!

(Translated by K. W. Chu)

Appendix 2. Hitoritabi, p. 16

TranslationTop Left

Then, I looked for another dumpling restaurant, but....I really had no gut to enter. (there was only one staff person making dumplings inside)

(Thought bubble) Why isn't there any customer?

Top Right

I wandered around the street near the restaurant but still I saw no one was inside after a while.

(Thought bubble) What should I do? I wanna eat but it's too embarrassing to go inside alone.

Bottom

At the end, I did not go and eat inside.

This is the end of my first solo trip but it ended up with regret.

(Thought bubble) woo....I should be brave enough to walk in, I have already come to the door step of the restaurant...

(Translated by K. W. Chu)

Appendix 3. Merhaba, p. 79

Translation

When I was wandering around the market, Hatice pointed to the wall and asked me, 'What do you think it is?' [She] said it is an intercom connected to the tea house nearby since Turkish cannot live a day without tea. Some shopkeepers in the market even buy tea tokens……

I was amazed by this and I asked, 'How to use it?' However, before Hatice replied, I had already pushed the button out of curiosity…… Then, I heard a voice from the intercom…… 'Evet, Evet……'

I was so shocked to react, then I ran away like a child.

(Translated by K. W. Chu)