Rethinking Self-Discovery Through Ethical Choice in Han Suyin's *The Mountain is Young*

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Abstract
Han Suyin's *The Mountain is Young* (1958) portrays the love story of a married Eurasian woman in Kathmandu. While the remarkable love story unfolds alongside the protagonist's struggle against the rigid European colonial morality, many studies primarily focus on the woman's self-discovery and spiritual awakening through romantic love, failing to explore the ethical implications behind her choices that lead to self-discovery. Nie Zhenzhao's ethical literary criticism highlights that the ethical dilemmas and choices of characters influence their actions and the progression of plot within the literary works. Drawing on Nie's framework, along with postcolonial concepts of neocolonialism and Otherness, this study examines the ethical dilemmas and choices faced by a married Eurasian woman in Nepal's post-colonial period, focusing on how these moral struggles shape her self-discovery. Examining her ethical choices, this study argues that the Eurasian woman's search for self is essentially an ethical issue, resulting from the moral dilemmas imposed by European colonial standards. An ethical literary analysis of the Eurasian woman's self-discovery not only offers a new perspective on the novel but also reveals the ethical choice of a female Eurasian writer to resist the old colonial ethical order in the post-colonial period.

Keywords
Han Suyin, *The Mountain is Young*, Eurasian woman, ethical choice, ethical identity

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Introduction

Nie Zhenzhao's ethical literary criticism emphasises that literature is fundamentally linked to morality ("Ethical Literary" 189), as it is "produced out of the need of humans to express their views on ethics or the desire to share their ethical experience" ("Towards an Ethical" 85). Therefore, moral education and enlightenment are the primary functions of literature. In this sense, Nie defines ethical literary criticism as an approach to analyzing literary works and their authors from an ethical perspective ("Towards an Ethical" 84). However, unlike traditional moral criticism, which focuses on evaluating a literary work based on modern-day moral principles, this approach examines the ethical values in a given work in the historical context in which it is written ("Towards an Ethical" 84). By taking ethics as the origin of literature, Nie argues that ethical practice in literary criticism involves exploring ethical factors that give rise to literature and the ethical influences on characters and events in literary works ("Towards an Ethical" 84). In simple terms, an ethical literary analysis does not aim to debate what is right or wrong but seeks to explain how and why events in a specific literary work unfold the way they do. Ethical literary criticism therefore aims to "establish new interpretations, cognitions, and new findings, surpassing thereby the existing scholarship, and ultimately moving critical scholarship forward" ("Towards an Ethical" 100). As Shang points out, Nie's ethical literary criticism exemplifies the best resource for the study of literature by facilitating new ways of engaging with literature and fostering new understandings of literary history (6). Along this line of thinking, this article attempts to examine a Eurasian woman's journey of self-discovery in Han Suyin's *The Mountain is Young* (1958) through the lens of ethical literary criticism. The novel's engagement with a Eurasian woman's struggles against rigid European colonial morality makes it a suitable text for such an analysis, allowing for a fresh interpretation of its themes and historical significance.

Han Suyin's *The Mountain is Young* tells the love story of Anne, a married Eurasian woman, in Kathmandu, Nepal. Against the backdrop of Kathmandu, Anne gradually learns to be independent of her former subservient position. She eventually abandons her passionless marriage to John Ford, a retired colonial civil servant, and develops an intimate relationship with Unni Menon, a South Indian engineer. Anne's love story, particularly her journey of self-discovery through romantic love, has received much attention. According to Zhang, Anne's intimate relationship with Unni in the novel reflects Han's own love story with her third husband, Vincent Ratnaswamy (90). Tickell also maintains that Han's intimate episodes in her life are re-imagined as the basis for fiction (242). Moreover, Anne's love for Unni is deeply connected to her "gradual liberation" (Tickell 250). By examining Anne's mental activities for love and sexual consciousness, Fang claims that the novel displays Anne's intense self-awareness as a woman (25-29). Hussein similarly notes the novel's direct depiction of the female body

and desire and its connection to Anne's self-awakening (285). Although these previous studies have emphasised Anne's self-transformation, they tend to limit the discussion to her romantic relationship, overlooking the colonial and ethical forces shaping her determination to change herself.

In the novel, Anne's story takes place in Nepal in the 1950s, a period of social, cultural, and political change. The 1950s world witnessed global decolonisation while experiencing the rise of neocolonialism. The end of the Second World War marked a new world order and its dramatic impact was deeply felt by the centuries-old colonial power of Britain. Post-war Britain's power was rapidly declining, making it difficult to retain its colonies. Although these colonies gradually achieved independence, Britain still endeavoured to preserve its ability "to go on extracting profit from formerly colonised areas" (Childs and Williams 5) and to maintain its political influence on them through cultural means. This indirect influence or control over former colonies, in contrast to the previous direct military domination, is known as neocolonialism. Neocolonialism is essentially a continuation of colonialism, as the two coexist (Huggan 20). In the novel, Han highlights neocolonialism through English missionary efforts and American and Indian infrastructural aid programs, such as the construction of roads, dams, and schools (Han, *Mountain* 175). Han situates Anne within an environment, where Britain, as a declining world power, struggles to maintain its supremacy over former colonies, particularly by upholding its colonial morality through missionary work. In alignment with Jules Harmand's justification of colonialism (Curtin 292-295), European colonial morality, rooted in the belief that Western culture, race, and values are superior to those of non-Westerners, reinforces racial and cultural hierarchies while privileging whiteness. These sociocultural, historical, and political contexts significantly influence Anne's self-transformation. In this environment, European colonial morality continues to exert dominance through missionary work, deepening the ethical conflicts between her Eurasian heritage and the expectations of the white English community. Anne's self-discovery is therefore deeply intertwined with these ethical dilemmas.

The study therefore attempts to re-examine Anne's journey of self-discovery through the lens of ethical literary criticism. Specifically, the study examines the ethical dilemmas and choices faced by the married Eurasian woman and investigates how these dilemmas and choices influence her journey of self-discovery. Heavily influenced by European colonial morality, Anne faces ethical dilemmas both in her interactions with the cultures of the "Other" and in her unequal, passionless marriage. However, through her ethical choices in challenging colonial norms, Anne ultimately overcomes the constraints imposed on her due to her mixed-race heritage and marginalised gender. An analysis of Anne's ethical choices demonstrates that the novel is more than just a married

Eurasian woman's love story and reflects the ethical value of the novel in the post-colonial period.

Ethical dilemma of a married Eurasian woman in the 1950s

The ethical interpretation of literature depends on its historical context to avoid misjudgments in "a falsely autonomous situation" (Nie, "Towards an Ethical" 92). Simply put, ethical literary critics must expound and evaluate a literary work within its specific ethical environment, as literature cannot be separated from its historical context, which carries its distinct ethical environment. A slight change of the ethical environment could lead to misunderstandings and unreliable conclusions. Instead of deploying the modern-day ethics to critique past events, ethical literary critics must consider the ethics of the time in which the events occurred. This principle is evident in *The Mountain is Young* The novel situates the story in the 1950s, which witnessed a global decolonisation and the rise of neocolonialism. It is within this ethical environment — where European colonial morality continues to shape social and cultural hierarchies — that Anne struggles to find herself and starts to re-examine her identity.

According to Nie, most ethical issues in literary works are intimately connected with the ethical identities of the characters (*Introduction* 263). He defines ethical identity as an individual's objective sense of self in relation to other human beings, including identities based on kinship, moral norms, social relationships, and one's profession (*Introduction* 263). In the novel, Anne possesses multiple ethical identities: a Eurasian, a teacher, the wife of an English colonial civil servant, and the lover of an Indian engineer. These identities do not exist in isolation but rather work together to influence her ethical struggles. As Crenshaw argues, the intersection of multiple dimensions of identity such as race, gender, and class is crucial in shaping unique experiences of women of colour (1245). In Anne's case, her ethical struggles arise from the interplay between her racial and gendered identities within colonial power structures. More specifically, Anne's position as both a Eurasian and the wife of an Englishman creates ethical dilemmas, forcing her to navigate conflicting societal norms and personal desires.

To better explicate this ethical issue, it is essential to examine Anne's experiences both as a Eurasian and as the wife of an English man in the early 20th century. Born in China, Anne is educated at an English mission boarding school in Shanghai before being sent to England. She continues her studies there and eventually marries John. Despite being a Eurasian with Chinese and English parentage, Anne is educated in English ideology and gradually comes to identify with the English. This may explain why Han purposefully introduces Anne as an "English girl" in her compiled list of characters. However, Anne is never fully accepted by the white English community. She undergoes severe racial discrimination from it from a young age. In the English mission boarding school, Anne, as "one of that small handful of Eurasians" (Han, *Mountain* 35), is insulted

as an "ugly little yellow bastard" by her white schoolmates (Han, *Mountain* 222). She is also displayed to visitors as part of the "charity cases," where Eurasians at the school are shown as objects of sympathy to inspire charitable responses (Han, *Mountain* 222). These experiences instill in Anne a deep sense of racial shame, leading her to internalize White English superiority.

Anne's marriage to John does not grant her the sense of belonging to the white English community. Instead, it traps her within both patriarchal and colonial power structures. The power imbalance in the marriage is illustrated through John's satisfaction with manipulating Anne's emotions. When Anne finds it hard to understand John, particularly his English way of thinking, she often responds with "little apologetic laughs," a reaction John enjoys (Han, *Mountain* 14). This response signifies Anne's compliance with John's expectations, aligning with traditional gender roles that demand women to be pleasing and passive. Anne's anger is often treated as emotional excess by John. He belittles Anne's feelings by claiming "[y]ou may be an artist and all that but there's no excuse for being so high-strung" (Han, *Mountain* 14). His belittling comments portray Anne's feelings as irrational and unworthy of respect. His reference to her "age and background" as the cause of her anger echoes a colonial mindset, where individuals from mixed-race backgrounds "are prone to mental unbalance, hysteria" (Han, *Mortal Flower* 129). Moreover, his assertion "I am your husband, you know" (Han *Mountain* 14) reinforces the patriarchal belief that as her husband, he has the right to control her emotion and behaviour. Different aspects of identity like race and gender interact to influence individuals' experiences of power and inequality (Cho 797). Anne's identity as a female Eurasian position her at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. Despite the subordination and exclusion she faces, Anne strives to conform to societal norms imposed by the white English community to secure social acceptance. As Anne confesses, "[T]here was nothing that I would not overcome with my desire, my anxiety to please" (Han, *Mountain* 224). However, her attempt to think and behave like the white English does not lead to equality or a sense of belonging within their community. John consistently adopts a colonist's manipulative attitude towards her (Han, *Mountain* 13-14). Additionally, Isobel, her former schoolmate from the English mission boarding school, continues to perceive her as a troubled Eurasian who always needs the white English to help her to "keep *fit* and keep *healthy*, both mentally and physically" (Han, *Mountain* 80).

Anne's sense of inferiority and alienation within the white English community fundamentally stems from both racial and gender discrimination, specifically, the longstanding European view of mixed-race individuals as degenerate (Han, *Mortal Flower* 129) and the societal expectations imposed on women. This sense of alienation causes Anne to confront an ethical dilemma. As Nie explains, an ethical dilemma arises when an individual must choose between two mutually exclusive options, both of which are morally correct when

considered separately (*Introduction* 262). In Anne's case, she must choose between fully assimilating into the white English community to achieve a sense of belonging—thereby conforming to the oppressive morality of European colonial standards—or challenging these norms to assert her true identity. This dilemma drives Anne to rethink her ethical identities. As she confesses, "I cannot lie any more, or I shall again go dead as I have been dead for so long, in fact, until I heard the word Kathmandu. I mustn't dramatize myself" (Han, *Mountain* 43). Therefore, Anne decides to come to Kathmandu to find out "Who am I?" (Han, *Mountain* 87). Anne's journey to Kathmandu is crucial in her negotiation of ethical dilemmas, as it involves significant ethical choices regarding her treatment of Nepalese religious culture and her intimate relationship with an Indian engineer. These choices not only signify Anne's personal self-discovery but also serve as her resistance against the constraints of European colonial morality.

Arrogance or humility

Confronting Nepalese religious culture in Kathmandu, Anne faces an ethical dilemma about whether to compromise with the white English characters, which raises the question of whether she should approach Nepalese religious culture with arrogance or humility. Kathmandu is a land of temples and gods. As Anne notes, "[T]here are more temples and shrines than houses, more gods than humans, and every corner of every street is studded with symbolic lingams or phallic divinities" (Han, *Mountain* 210). However, the white English characters, such as Isobel and her colleagues in the Girls' Institute of Kathmandu express great disdain for Nepalese religious culture. Isobel believes that the carvings and paintings in the temples are "horrid things." Whenever she passes a temple, Isobel says aloud in a trembling voice, "Nasty, nasty" (Han, *Mountain* 34). Isobel's view reflects the European colonial construction of the Orient—one of the most recurring images of the "Other" (Said 2), which is perceived as primitive, backward, and irrational (Said 40). By labeling the temple carvings as "horrid" and "nasty," Isobel upholds a colonial discourse that devalues non-Western religious cultures. Viewing Nepalese religious culture as "lascivious things, gooseflesh-making disagreeable things" (Han, *Mountain* 81), Isobel and her colleagues firmly believe they are on a mission to cultivate the Nepalese girls and "turn them from their evil heathen ways to the Light, and wash their soul clean" (Han, *Mountain* 156). Therefore, they watch Nepalese girls at the Institute like hawks, prohibiting interaction between girls and boys. They also require these non-Christian Nepalese girls to listen to prayers before and after lessons to save them from "the grip of Satan" (Han, *Mountain* 156). They perceive the Nepalese as inherently lascivious, sinful, and inferior, asserting that only their God can save them. The so-called help provided by these white English individuals is essentially a new form of colonisation aimed at preserving their superiority and nobility. Their behaviour is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having

authority over the Orient" (Said 3), exemplifying how European colonial morality denies the legitimacy of "Other" cultures. This colonial morality fosters arrogance rather than humility and consequently results in their unequal treatment of the Nepalese religious culture and reinforcement of colonial dominance.

From the perspective of the White English teachers at the Girls' Institute, Anne, as a newly employed teacher, is also expected to take responsibility for saving the Nepalese girls from their "evil heathen ways". Anne is therefore required to say prayers before and after each lesson. When Anne forgets to do this, Isobel and the other teachers convince her that praying in front of the girls is beneficial, believing that "[q]uite suddenly, God will touch their hard hearts sunk in wickedness" (Han, *Mountain* 156). Deeply influenced by her education at the English mission boarding school in Shanghai, Anne promises Isobel that she will not forget prayers again and will follow "the same as [they] had in Shanghai" (Han, *Mountain* 156). Although Anne initially compromises with the white English characters, she gradually realises that "[s]he must stop coming to terms with them, or she would become like them" (Han, *Mountain* 198).

Anne's self-awareness to stop compromising with the white English characters begins with her exposure to Nepalese religious culture. Unlike Isobel and her colleagues, who strongly view non-Western cultures as inferior, Anne finds herself attracted to "the fantastic and divine elements of the Valley" (Han, *Mountain* 147). She attributes this openness to her Chinese mentality, explaining, "I was born in Asia, in Shanghai. That too has conditioned me, made it easier for me here" (Han, *Mountain* 220). In a sense, the land of temples and gods awakens Anne's Chinese mentality that has been suppressed under European colonial morality. Her Chinese mentality, which Field Marshal describes as a form of humility, is crucial for true understanding. As Field Marshal remarks, "The humility indispensable for true seeing and hearing... Lack of humility is a lack of the awareness of God, or the gods" (Han, *Mountain* 150). It is this humility that allows Anne to accept and appreciate Nepalese religious culture rather than disdaining it. By embracing humility, Anne challenges the racial and cultural hierarchies that have influenced her ways of seeing the world. This shift in her ethical perspective enables her to carefully observe the Nepalese religious culture and develop a view that contrasts with that of the white English characters:

> I see now no difference save that our type of ritual is devoted to the religion of man, and the other, the Nepalese one, we call inefficient and medieval because it is still devoted to the gods who don't care about man at all. I can see no difference now between the woman who rubs herself on a lingam stone and waters it with milk and water and crowns it with flowers, and the woman who rubs a brand new kind of lipstick upon her mouth, both believing that it will help them in their heart's desire. (Han, *Mountain* 213)

For Anne, Nepalese religious culture cannot be seen as nasty or inferior because she perceives no fundamental difference between the Nepalese worship of the deities in the form of sexual carvings and modern attitudes towards sex. In her view, the main distinction is that the former is devoted to gods rather than humans and is presented in a more open, joyful manner, whereas the latter is often disguised in a justifiable way. Consequently, Anne feels ecstatic and attracted to Nepalese religious culture. Her acceptance of it marks an ethical departure from European colonial morality, indicating her move towards a more self-determined identity.

Anne's careful observation of Nepalese religious culture allows her to perceive the white English characters' sense of superiority over cultures of the "Other". Recognising the arrogance of the white English characters towards Nepalese religious culture, Anne ultimately becomes unwilling to compromise with them. Instead, she embraces humility, adopting an ethical position that respects and values Nepalese religious culture for what it truly is, rather than viewing it through the lens of colonial superiority. Anne's ethical choice is notably made out of rational will. As Nie explains, characters in literary works often embody what he terms the "Sphinx factor" ("Ethical Literary" 15). The Sphinx factor manifests in three forms: natural will, free will, and rational will. Natural will represents the primitive desire of human beings, particularly *libido*, while free will expresses broader human desires, and rational will embodies reason (Nie, *Introduction* 42). These three forms mutually restrain and influence one another, shaping characters' ethical choices. In Anne's case, rational will predominately govern her behaviour, guiding her to reject colonial morality. This rational will align with Kuek's argument that an individual's choice may not be driven by what is morally right or wrong but rather by ethical considerations (48). Velasquez et al. identify five ethical considerations that determine an individual's choices: the utilitarian approach, the rights approach, the common good approach, the justice approach, and the virtue approach (qtd. in Kuek 48-49). The justice approach, which advocates treating everyone equally (qtd. in Kuek 48), is particularly relevant to understanding Anne's ethical choice. Her decision regarding Nepalese religious culture is based on the fundamental moral question of whether her actions demonstrate discrimination or promote equality. By choosing to treat Nepalese religious culture with humility and respect, she embraces a more inclusive and respectful ethical stance.

Lust or love

In addition to this ethical choice, Anne's decision to leave her white husband John for the dark-skinned Unni can also be seen as her resistance to European colonial morality. Anne's marriage to John reflects her initial acceptance of the colonial mindset—the belief in the superiority of white Europeans. From the perspective of white English individuals like Isobel, Anne's marriage to an

Englishman is considered "a safe anchorage" because as a Eurasian, she "*does* need someone to look after her" (Han, *Mountain* 80). Isobel believes that she and John are ideally suited to take the responsibility for helping Anne "keep *healthy*, both mentally and physically" (Han, *Mountain* 80). In this respect, Anne's marriage to John is viewed as a blessing for her. However, the supposed help from Isobel and John to keep Anne healthy is essentially their way of asserting their self-importance and upholding European colonial morality. The following excerpt illustrates John's arrogant attitude towards Anne:

> Then to his 'What, what's that? What d' you mean!' (always abrupt, delivered with a jerk of the head to emphasize the virile precision, and a flash of the eyes, employed for fifteen years of administratorship in a colony now become self-governing) she had responded with laughter verging on a giggle, a puzzled, girlish, unassured mirth which was her reflex to jokes she did not understand. He had known this timidity in her, an uncertain apprehension of causing offence, and it had pleased him, as it pleases some men to keep their marriage partner in simpering placation as they expect their dogs to wag tails when they come home. (Han, *Mountain* 13-14)

The excerpt shows that John's behaviour is portrayed as being influenced by his long experience as an administrator in a colony, indicating that he has internalised the colonial structures of power. In this context, his authoritarian gestures highlight the colonial experience where those in power view themselves as inherently superior. His actions towards Anne are not merely about controlling his wife but also reflect his colonial arrogance that arises from his belief in his inherent superiority.

Isobel's judgement of Anne's marriage and John's arrogant attitude towards her reflect entrenched European prejudice against Eurasians. Eurasians are viewed as a threat to the presumed purity and supremacy of the white race (Ifekwunigwe 9). Additionally, they are considered the offspring of promiscuity and therefore inherently promiscuous themselves (Ling 414). In her second autobiography, *A Mortal Flower* (1966), Han recalls reading a book called *Races of the World,* which claims that the white race is distinguished from other races by having the highest brain weight, and that "[r]acial mixtures are prone to mental unbalance, hysteria, alcoholism, generally of weak character and untrustworthy" (129). Given prevalent racial views and prejudice against mixed-race individuals, Isobel's judgement of Anne's marriage and John's manipulative behaviour towards Anne become more understandable. Both Isobel and John are deeply entrenched in European colonial morality.

Despite the injustice and inequality Anne endures in her marriage, she initially chooses to compromise by pretending to understand him and be a good wife, aiming to sustain her sense of belonging within the white English community and preserve marital harmony. Anne's initial choice aligns with a

utilitarian approach, which seeks to produce the most good and the least harm, as described by Velasquez et al. (qtd. in Kuek 48). In her case, tolerating John's arrogance and repressing her feelings and rights appears to be the lesser harm compared to disrupting the established social order. However, this approach ultimately leads to Anne's loss of an independent self as a Eurasian. She realises, "I cannot lie any more, or I shall again go dead as I have been dead for so long, in fact until I heard the word Kathmandu" (Han, *Mountain* 43). Her growing self-awareness signals a critical ethical awakening, as she recognises that suppressing one's true self is a morally indefensible sacrifice for maintaining social order. Her decision to abandon her "performative" marriage (Müllerovâ 15) signifies her recognition of the injustice in her marital dynamics. This marks an ethical shift from passive adherence to colonial norms to an assertion of moral autonomy.

Anne's transformation deepens through her experience at the Temple of Pashupatinath. Inspired by the devoted pilgrims who walk barefoot to the Temple of Pashupatinath, Anne decides to visit the temple and explore it with Unni. The gods with multiple faces, arms, and hands enable Anne to realise that "[n]o man is a monolith, and not to admit his many faces, complexities, uses, contradictions, is to reject the reality of the man" (Han, *Mountain* 195). The multiplicity within the oneness displayed by the Nepalese religious culture convinces Anne that her identity is "like the many-armed, many-faced goddesses" (Han, *Mountain* 197). Her experience at the Temple of Pashupatinath deepens her awareness of her mixed identities, allowing her to appreciate the diversity inherent in Nepalese religious culture. This awareness prompts her to see herself beyond the rigid European moral framework that has constrained her, strengthening her determination to break from her marriage to John. After visiting the temple, Anne becomes certain that she no longer "wanted to lie in the bed next to him [John] and pretend to sleep again" (Han, *Mountain* 197). Thus, Anne's decision to leave John is not merely a personal rejection of an unfulfilling marriage but an ethical act of resistance against European colonial morality that has governed her life. Her subsequent choice to develop an intimate relationship with Unni further demonstrates her commitment to pursuing love as an independent Eurasian, marking a radical departure from colonial morality. Anne's behaviour of leaving her White husband for an Indian man violates the ethical taboo of the English community, which enforces racial and colonial hierarchies in intimate relationships. Taboos are the "basis for the formation of ethical order and the maintenance of that order" (Nie, "Towards an Ethical" 90). By transgressing this ethical order, Anne faces social sanctions from the English community.

Anne is maligned by the white English characters as a promiscuous woman. For John, Anne's choice to become the lover of an Indian man is a great humiliation, as he firmly believes in the superiority of white men over non-white

individuals, particularly black ones. As a result, he becomes extremely infuriated with her, shouting:

> 'I know what you're after. A phallus, that's what you're after. You've lost all sense of dignity. First it's Fred Maltby, and now that I've scared him away, you throw yourself at this black syphilitic Indian. Don't smile. I forbid you to smile. *All* Indians are syphilitic. I know them. I've been years in India. No content with one paramour, you want that black bastard to — you. But you'll soon find out who's important here. I won't have men snooping around, sitting on the lawn with you like that bastard Biefield I caught just now, having you rub yourself against black bastards like that Menon. He's filthy, black, black, dirty. If I were a woman I'd be sick just to look at his face. I won't have it, do you hear?' (Han, *Mountain* 374)

John's outburst at Anne exposes European colonial morality regarding both Eurasian women and men of color, revealing the perception that non-White individuals are inferior and sexually promiscuous. In John's opinion, Anne's relationship with Unni simply reflects her sexually loose behaviour as a Eurasian. Consequently, he uses "whore" and "tart" to slander Anne (Han, *Mountain* 373). Additionally, he repeats the word "black" five times and "bastard" three times to express his contempt for an Indian man. His use of the word "ape" (Han, *Mountain* 373) further demonstrates his perception of an Indian man not as a rational human being but as an animal. These words indicate John's deep racial discrimination against non-white individuals. However, readers may notice that the stereotyped attributes typically assigned to white and non-white individuals are reversed in this context. Unni, a dark-skinned man whom John despises, is portrayed as rational and capable, while John, a white man, is shown to be childlike and neurotic in contrast. John's views on Eurasians and black individuals reveal not only his prejudice but also his arrogance as a white Englishman. His manner of expression further underscores his self-importance and sense of superiority as a citizen of the former European empire. This is evident in his assertion that he knows all Indian men well and his repeated emphasis on "I won't have it."

Moreover, other white English characters, such as Miss Potter and Miss Newell at the Girls' Institute, also assume that Anne has sexual relationships with numerous men. Isobel, in particular, believes that Anne succumbs to her sexual desire, viewing her love for Unni as "a sinful way of life" (Han, *Mountain* 414). These characters all believe that Anne is sexually available to anyone, including a black man. In response to their malicious slander and ingrained prejudice, Anne chooses to stop compromising with them. She resolves never to live with John, even if he were the last man on earth. Instead, she chooses to be with Unni, believing that her love for him stems not from lust, but from a genuine self-discovery of a Eurasian woman seeking love based on freedom and equality. In

her words, her relationship with Unni is "not the stifling pattern of submission and domination, a limited and mutually exclusive imprisonment," but rather "a live, full freedom for both" (Han, *Mountain* 544). This perspective is reinforced by Unni's discussion with Anne about love and promiscuity. As Unni points out, Anne's relationship with him is not driven by sexual desires, otherwise, she might have been with Leo or Ranchit, who had previously seduced her. Anne's ethical choice to pursue an intimate relationship with Unni is driven by her rational will. Her decision is guided by her perception of love rather than the colonial morality that upholds racial hierarchies and devalues interracial marriages. Additionally, Anne's choice is aligned with the rights approach, an ethical perspective that, as described by Velasquez et al., emphasises respecting fundamental human moral rights (qtd. in Kuek 48). This choice reflects Anne's pursuit of an intimate relationship with shared dignity, where both individuals' rights are respected. Therefore, her ethical perspective is grounded in the belief that an intimate relationship should be built on mutual respect and equality.

To sum up, Anne's ethical choices to treat the cultures of the "Other" with equality and to pursue love free from domination or submission mirror Han's ethical stance as a female Eurasian writer in the post-colonial period. Anne's ethical choice to engage respectfully with Nepalese religious culture embodies Han's critique of European colonial arrogance. Britain, as a former European imperial power, sought to maintain its control over the less developed countries through indirect cultural influence, which essentially preserved its colonial cultural arrogance. Through Anne's ethical choice regarding the cultures of the "Other," Han articulates a defiant voice against European colonial morality and neocolonialism, expecting the English to perceive themselves critically and foster mutual cultural appreciation rather than conflicts. In addition, Han defends Eurasians through Anne's ethical choice to seek love as a form of identity affirmation. During Han's era, Eurasians were often perceived as sexually loose. In her second volume of autobiography, Han recalls how Eurasians were regarded by others in relation to sexual matters: "as Eurasians we were expected to be just for sleeping with, and that whatever we did people always brought that up. Sex was supposed to be our availability" (Han, *Mortal Flower* 173). By portraying Anne's pursuit of love, Han subverts these negative stereotypes of Eurasians and asserts that a Eurasian woman has the basic right to seek love based on freedom. Anne's eventual self-transformation in the post-colonial period highlights the urgency and necessity of resisting rigid European colonial morality.

Han expresses her repudiation of the legacy of the former European empire, more specifically, her resistance to the old colonial ethical order in the post-colonial period. As Han claims, Asian and African writers bear the responsibility of "taking up the fight for progress, a frontline position on all aspects of human endeavour for a better world" in an era when the Third World

was engaged in national liberation ("Asian and African Writers" 3-7). This commitment reflects Han's view of the significant ethical role that these writers must assume, aligning with the ethical purpose she attempts to fulfil in the novel.

Conclusion

In *The Mountain is Young*, Anne's journey of self-discovery is often interpreted through her romantic relationship with Unni. However, her choices in this journey are inextricably linked to the rigid European colonial morality. Although the end of the Second World War ushered in a tendency to repudiate racism and colonialism, European colonial morality continued to influence many English people in the 1950s. In the novel, Anne, a Eurasian married to an Englishman, continues to encounter racial discrimination from the white English characters. To achieve a sense of belonging within the white English community and preserve her marital harmony, she initially conforms to these colonial standards. However, this compromise not only fails to eradicate the racial discrimination she faces but also intensifies her loss of self as a Eurasian woman. Anne's life in Kathmandu inspires her to rethink her ethical identity and stop compromising with the white English characters. Her final ethical choices, concerning the treatment of the cultures of the "Other" and the pursuit of love, represent her resistance to European colonial morality.

Through Anne's ethical choices, Han conveys her hope for a transformation of the old colonial ethical order in the post-colonial period. Therefore, the novel should be viewed not merely as a love story or a narrative of self-discovery through romantic love, but as a reflection of ethical values in the post-colonial era. An ethical analysis of the novel offers a fresh perspective on the protagonist's self-discovery while highlighting the role of ethics as a fundamental function of literature, as emphasised by Nie's ethical literary criticism.

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