

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL
KOREAN ADOPTION STUDIES RESEARCH
SYMPOSIUM**

INTERNATIONAL KOREAN ADOPTEE ASSOCIATIONS (IKAA)
GATHERING 2007

JULY 31, 2007

DONGGUK UNIVERSITY, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

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Proceedings of the First International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium
International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) Gathering 2007
July 31, 2007
Dongguk University, Seoul, South Korea
Edited by Kim Park Nelson, Eleana Kim and Lene Myong Petersen

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**First International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium
International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) Gathering 2007
Dongguk University, Seoul, South Korea, 31 July 2007**

9:30 A.M.	Welcome and Introduction: Tim Holm and Kim Park Nelson	
10:00 A.M.	Social Science Panel moderated by Eleana Kim	
	Lisa Ellingson	Creating a Climate for “Best Interests”: Recognizing Intercountry Adoption as a Disfavored Placement under the Hague Convention
	Boon Young Han	Contextualizing Modern Korean Adoption Law
	Jean Kim	U.S. Militarism, Imperial Discourses, and Cold War Notions of Self through Transnational Adoption
	Peter Selman	Intercountry Adoption in the Twenty-first Century: An Examination of the Rise and Fall of Countries of Origin
Social Science Panel Questions and Discussion		
1:00 P.M.	Humanities Panel moderated by Kim Park Nelson	
	Rebecca Burditt	Seeing in Believing: 1950s Popular Media Representations of Korean Adoption in the United States
	Hosu Kim*	Television Mothers – Lost & Found in Search and Reunion Narrative
	Tobias Hübinette	Bodies Out-of-Place and Out-of-Control: Examining the Transracial Existence of Adopted Koreans
Sarah Park	“I Flew to My Parents on a Spaceship.” Adopted Koreans in Children’s Picture Books	
Humanities Panel Questions and Discussion		
2:50 P.M.	Afternoon Break	
3:05 P.M.	Behavioral Science Panel moderated by Lene Petersen	
	Kelli Donigan	Factors Influencing Korean Adult Adoptees’ Adaptation in Korea
	Richard Lee	Culture Matters even After Adoption: Post-adoption Protective and Risk Factors for Korean Children Adopted Internationally
	Beth Kyong Lo	Personal Narratives of Korean Adoptees: Predominant Themes, Perspectives on Mental Health Issues, and Psychological Treatment Implications (Preliminary Results)
Hollee McGinnis	Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption	
Behavioral Science Panel Questions and Discussion		
4:55 P.M.	Gathering Announcements/Close	

* Hosu Kim is unable to appear to present her paper; it will be read by Eleana Kim.

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL KOREAN ADOPTEE ASSOCIATIONS (IKAA)

IKAA was first made official in March 2004, when the European associations formed IKAA Europe, followed shortly after by the establishment of IKAA USA. IKAA collaborates with Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L) based in Seoul.

The mission of IKAA is to serve the Korean adoptee community, to create a strong communication forum, to build global relationships, and to provide a location where Korean adoptees can turn when in need of a resource.

The independent member associations that make up IKAA have existed between six and 20 years; their membership is composed overwhelmingly of adult adoptees and they organize activities and events for their members on a regular basis. By bringing these organizations together, IKAA has developed a network that reaches out to thousands of adoptees worldwide. IKAA member associations join together to plan large-scale international adoptee events such as the IKAA Gathering 2007 in Seoul, South Korea, where the papers included in this proceedings were presented.

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IKAA Europe

Adopted Koreans' Association (Sweden): www.akf.nu
Arierang (The Netherlands): www.arierang.nl
Forum for Korean Adoptees (Norway): www.fkanorway.org
KoBel (Belgium): www.ikaa.org/kobel
Korea Klubben (Denmark): www.koreaklubben.dk
Racines Coréennes (France): www.racinescoreennes.org

IKAA U.S.A.

AKConnection: www.akconnection.com
Also-Known-As, Inc.: www.alsoknownas.org
Asian Adult Adoptees of Washington (AAAW): www.aaawashington.org

IKAA Korea

Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L): www.goal.or.kr

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Not all of our Symposium participants were able to supply us with their papers by our press deadline, and some of the contributors to the proceedings are not Symposium participants. We had extremely limited capacity for speakers for the July 31, 2007 Symposium, and could only invite 12 speakers. However, we wanted to include the work of several “alternates” in the proceedings, including that of our editors/selection committee. While we recognize that it is unconventional to include the work of scholars in a conference proceedings who did not appear at the conference, we very much wanted to provide a forum for some of the excellent work we received in response to our call for papers, even though we did not have enough time in our Symposium for all of these additional scholars to present their work. The volume that you now hold is therefore a compilation of 10 papers or abstracts from our Symposium participants, as well as 7 additional papers or abstracts from alternates and editors. The contributors’ biographical notes include all proceedings authors, as well as two Symposium presenters whose work is not in this proceedings.

Rebecca Burditt received her B.A. in art history from Williams College in 2006 and is currently a second year graduate student in the Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. While an undergraduate, she attempted to bridge cultural history and visual analysis in her study of Korean War orphan and adoptee representations in popular picture magazines such as *Life* and *Look*. Her other research interests include critical nostalgia, feminist film theory, and U.S. and British popular culture. She was a Mellon Mays Fellow from 2004-2006, and has held positions at the Williams College Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago. She is honored to be a part of the ICAA Research Symposium and is excited to be back in Korea for the first time since her adoption.

Sara Docan-Morgan is a Ph.D. candidate in Communication at the University of Washington. Her areas of interest include adoptive family communication and race. She is currently completing her dissertation research, in which she examines how adoptive families communicate during and after intrusive public interactions (e.g., when strangers ask questions such as, “Where is she from?” or “Are they real sisters?”) and instances where the adoptee reports racism or discrimination to his/her parents. Sara was awarded a Top Student Paper Award at the National Communication Association Conference (NCA) in 2006 for her critical examination of adoption agency websites, and at the 2007 NCA conference, she will be presenting a paper that examines the liminality of adoptee identity in the films *First Person Plural* and *Daughter from Danang* in the context of the international transracial adoption debate. At the University of Washington, she teaches courses in Interpersonal Communication, as well as Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Media.

Kelli Donigan was born in Jinhae, Korea, lived in Spain shortly thereafter, and then settled down in the United States (Michigan). She majored in English Literature at the University of

Michigan. After graduation, she came to Korea where she taught at a public middle school and later at an International School in Seoul. In 2002-2004, she attended Seoul National University to do research on adoption where she received her masters in Social Psychology. She is happy to present and share her research study with the adoptee community today. She works for Korea Tourism Organization as an English editor and also writes for the *Seoul Selection* Monthly Magazine and *The Groove* Magazine. She is passionate about writing and hopes to pursue a career in this field. She has been actively involved with GOA'L since it began, working as the employment coordinator and now as the senior Editor of the GOA'L newsletter. She hopes to make more contributions to the Korean adoptee community as well as the international adoptee community. During the entirety of her stay in Korea, she has met so many beautiful and special people from all walks of life who have extended their friendship, kindness, love and helpfulness in so many ways, which she feels indebted to.

Lisa Ellingson was born in Seoul, South Korea and was adopted when she was four months old. She grew up with her parents and younger brother in Bemidji, Minnesota, USA. She studied at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota and at the Centre Universitaire d'Etudes Francaises in Grenoble, France. She received her Bachelor's Degree in music and French. After graduating from college, Lisa participated in the Inje Institute for International Human Resources (IIHR) program for Korean adoptees in Gimhae, South Korea. Lisa is a rising third-year student at the University of St. Thomas School of Law in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is a member of the St. Thomas Law Journal and the University Diversity Advisory Committee. Lisa is also on the board of AK Connection. She is currently working as a summer associate at the law firm of Dorsey & Whitney in Minneapolis.

Jeanne A. Howard, Ph.D. is Research and Policy Director at the Adoption Institute as well as a Professor of Social Work at Illinois State University, where she co-directed the Center for Adoption Studies for six years. Dr. Howard completed her Ph.D. in social work at the University of Chicago and was involved in several seminal studies conducted by Chapin Hall Center for Children. She has contributed to the development of a body of knowledge to inform adoption policy and practice throughout her career, starting with a groundbreaking study on adoption disruption in the late 1980s through her recent publication -- co-authored with Susan Smith, who is now the Adoption Institute's Program and Project Director -- of *After Adoption: The Needs of Adopted Youth*, the largest study of its kind. Howard and Smith also conducted a national study of post-legal grant projects funded by the U.S. Children's Bureau and, in partnership with the American Public Human Services Association, conducted a qualitative study of post-adoption services across the nation. Howard consults and provides trainings nationally on adoption-related issues for major private, public and governmental organizations. Her outstanding body of work -- including scholarly journal articles, book chapters, monographs, and presentations -- was recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with an Adoption 2002 Excellence Award. Dr. Howard is currently working on a manuscript on adoption and identity.

Boon Young Han, grew up in Denmark but has been living in Korea on and off since 2002. She is currently pursuing a Master in Arts in Korean Studies at Yonsei Graduate School of International Studies expecting to graduate February 2008. With an undergrad degree in busi-

ness administration, her focus in relation to the adoption issue has been the commercialization of social welfare practice.

Tobias Hübinette (Korean name: Lee Sam-dol) is a researcher at the Multicultural Centre, Botkyrka, Sweden. His Ph.D. thesis in Korean Studies at Stockholm University, “Comforting an Orphaned Nation,” examined the Korean adoption issue and representations of adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture. His current research project studies the concept of transraciality in relation to how transracial adoptees are experiencing racialisation and discrimination. He is working within the international and multidisciplinary fields of Korean adoption studies, adoption cultural studies and critical adoption studies, and is also building up an archive and library related to the subject. He is a political activist concerning adoption and Korea related topics and contexts, and he works with and makes research for journalistic and artistic projects, gives lectures and publishes books, and writes in newspapers and journals on issues concerning National Socialism and Fascism, racism and (post)colonialism, Korean-Swedish and East Asian-Swedish relations, Swedish and Western images and representations of Korea and Asia, interracial marriage and biracial children, and transnational adoption and transracial adoptees.

Eleana Kim (Ph.D., Anthropology, NYU) is an assistant professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Rochester. Her dissertation, “Remembering Loss: the Cultural Politics of Overseas Adoption from South Korea” examines the emergence of the international adult Korean adoptee community. Articles based on her research on Korean adoption have appeared in *Visual Anthropology Review*, *Social Text*, and *Anthropological Quarterly*, as well as a number of edited volumes, including *Cultures of Transnational Adoption* (Duke University Press, 2005).

Hosu Kim is currently completing her Ph.D. dissertation, entitled *Performing Loss: The Emergent Figure of the Korean Birthmother* at City University of New York, The Graduate Center. Her dissertation examines the cultural politics of loss deployed in various figures of Korean birthmothers in popular media, such as television search shows and the Internet. As a native of Korea, she came to the United States in early 1990s. Her research interests are Adoption, Media Studies, Performance Studies and Korean Nationalism. In addition, she has produced and performed auto-ethnographic pieces. One of them, *The Taste of 6.25*, part of Still Present Pasts (www.stillpresentpasts.org), a multi-media art exhibit on Korean Americans’ collective memories about the Korean War, is currently on a national tour of major U.S. cities. During the academic year 2007-2008, she will be teaching at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Fordham University as a Visiting Assistant Professor.

Jean J. Kim* is currently an Assistant Professor of History at Dartmouth College. She received her Ph.D. in History from Cornell University in August of 2005. Her research focuses on migration, medicine, and the broad impact of U.S. imperialism on epidemiology and constructions of race. She teaches courses in U.S. and Asian American history as well as courses on disease and the social construction of bodies. Kim is currently working on a book

* This author is presenting at the First International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium, but does not appear in this proceedings.

manuscript, “U.S. Imperial Biopolitics at the Crossroads of Modernity: Plantation Medicine and Hygienic Assimilation in Hawai’i, 1898-1946.” It focuses on the history of healthcare on Hawai’i’s sugar plantations from American annexation to the dismantling of corporate healthcare in 1946. Her research interest in U.S. imperialism extends to encompass studies of the social consequences of U.S. military relations with Korea.

Richard M. Lee, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Asian American Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus. He received his undergraduate education at Simon’s Rock College of Bard and Boston College (B.A., 1990) and his graduate education at Virginia Commonwealth University (Ph.D., 1996). Dr. Lee previously taught at the University of Texas at Austin from 1997–2000. His research focuses on the process and outcome of cultural socialization and its relevance to the development and mental health of Asian American populations, including immigrants, refugees, adoptees, and US-born. He has published over 40 journal articles and book chapters on ethnic identity, acculturation, family conflicts, cultural socialization parenting practices, and mental health and well-being. Dr. Lee’s current research on Korean adoption stems from his longstanding scholarly and community interest in the psychology of diaspora of Korean people and is funded by a five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health. He may be reached at richlee@umn.edu.

Beth Kyong Lo was born in South Korea and adopted in 1975. She is currently a Psy.D. Candidate at Minnesota School of Professional Psychology in clinical psychology, and has had numerous creative nonfiction and fiction pieces published. Her work can be found in *Outsiders Within: Writings on Transracial Adoption*, *Seeds From a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees*, *A View From the Loft*, *Journal of the Asian American Renaissance*, *Colors Magazine*, and *Paj Ntaub Voice*.

Hollee McGinnis, MSSW, is Policy and Operations Director at the Adoption Institute and is a prominent educator, speaker and community activist on international and transracial adoptions. McGinnis founded the non-profit adult intercountry adoptee organization, Also-Known-As, in 1996 to provide post-adoption services for adult adoptees and adoptive families. She graduated cum laude from Mount Holyoke College, where she completed an independent study on ethnic and racial identity of college-aged Korean adoptees, and a paper on the history of Vietnamese intercountry adoptions. She received her masters of science at Columbia University School of Social Work, where she concentrated in social policy practice and international social welfare. McGinnis has spoken regularly over the past ten years to adoption agencies, adoptive parent support groups, and at conferences, addressing issues of racial and ethnic identity, birth search and reunion, history of intercountry adoptions, and parenting adopted children. Her published pieces are included in *Handbook of Adoption: Implications for Researchers, Practitioners, and Families*; *Adoption Parenting: Creating A Toolbox, Building Connections*; *Parents at Last: Celebrating Adoption and the New Pathways to Parenthood*, and *Voices from Another Place*. In addition her essays and editorials have appeared in *Hi Families*, *Adoptive Families*, *Adoption Today*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Korean Quarterly*. She has been widely interviewed by the media. McGinnis, adopted from South Korea at the age of three, has been in reunion with her birth family since 1996.

Jane Park is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers University. She obtained her MA degree from The New School for Social Research (NYC) by studying diasporic practices of Korean Barmaids. Her second MA degree is in Anthropology from Rutgers University. Her current research focus lies in “Diasporic Identity Practices of Korean American Adoptees,” which will be the central frame of her dissertation. She is currently collecting interviews from adult Korean adoptees.

Sarah Park is a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She received an M.A. in Asian American Studies (2004) and a B.A. in History and Asian American Studies (2002) from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include the construction of Korean/Korean American children’s experiences and identities in children’s literature, children’s literature and librarianship, social justice, transracial adoption, and Korean American and Asian American history. Sarah critically analyzes representations of Korean adoptees in children’s literature in her dissertation project. She has taught courses in Asian American history, Asian American children’s literature, and social justice in the information profession, and gives guest lectures on Korean American and Asian American children’s literature. She teaches “Korean American Culture” to adopted Korean youth and “Issues in Korean American History and Korean American Children’s Literature” to adoptive parents at Kamp Kimchee in Minnesota, and “Issues in Chinese American History and Chinese American Children’s Literature” to adoptive parents at the Illinois Chinese Adopted Sibling Program. For more information please see www.sarahpark.com.

Kim Park Nelson is a scholar and educator of Korean adoption, Asian American Studies, American race relations, and American Studies. Between 2003 and 2006, she collected 73 oral histories from Korean adoptees in the United States and the around the world. She also developed and taught the first college course on Korean adoption in the United States. Her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Minnesota American Studies Department is titled “Korean Looks, American Eyes: Korean American Adoptees, Race, Culture and Nation.” This research explores the many identities of adult Korean adoptees, as well as the cultural, social, historical and political significance of over 50 years of Korean adoption to the United States. In addition, Park Nelson also participates in public engagement work through presentations and community-based projects focusing on transnational and transracial adoption in the United States.

Lene Myong Petersen was born in Seoul, Korea in 1972, and was adopted by Danish parents the following year. She holds an MA in comparative literature and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus. In her dissertation on adult Korean adoptees raised in Denmark, Myong Petersen explores discursive processes of subjectification marked by race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. She currently resides in Copenhagen.

Elise Prébin was born in Korea in 1978, was adopted in France at age four with her younger sister, and found her Korean birth family in 1999. She received a Ph.D. in Korean anthropology in 2006 at Université Paris X Nanterre. She will be a Korea Foundation Fellow at Har-

vard Korea Institute from September 2007 to August 2008. Her doctoral dissertation will be published under the title: *The Spiritual Return of International Adoptees to South Korea*. She is currently working on different projects including new funeral industries and practices in South Korea, social issues related to the peninsula partition and comparisons between Korea and Germany.

Scott Ryan is an Associate Professor and Associate Dean at Florida State University's College of Social Work, and is also the Director of the Institute for Social Work Research. He is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and holds several advanced degrees: a Master's in Social Work from Columbia University, a Master's in Business Administration from Howard University, and a Doctorate in Social Work from Case Western Reserve University. Dr. Ryan has worked extensively with adoptive families for over a decade as a clinician, educator, trainer and researcher. He has led research projects on an array of significant topics relating to adoption and child welfare; they include: the efficacy of play therapy, adoption disruption, child development in same-sex adoptive families, the impact of institutionalization on children adopted from Romania, and post-placement support services. Dr. Ryan is the Editor of *Adoption Quarterly* and, for the last three years, has led a study to identify those factors contributing to successful outcomes for special needs adoptees and their families funded by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.

Peter Selman is Visiting Fellow in the School of Geography, Politics & Sociology at the Newcastle University, UK, where he teaches courses in Comparative Social Policy and Adoption; a worldwide perspective. His main areas of research interest are child adoption, teenage pregnancy and demographic change and public policy. He is currently Chair of the Network for Intercountry Adoption and a member of the Board of Trustees of the British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering. He is editor of *Intercountry Adoption; Development, trends and perspectives* (British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering, 2000) and has written many articles and chapters on adoption policy including: "Trends in Intercountry Adoption 1998–2004: A demographic analysis of data from 20 receiving states" in the *Journal of Population Research* 23 (2) – special issue on "Globalisation and Demographic Change" (2006); "Adoption – a cure for (too) many ills?" in F. Bowie (ed) *Cross Cultural Approaches to Adoption*, London: Routledge, 2004, and "Intercountry Adoption in the new millennium: the silent migration revisited" *Population Research & Policy Review* 21 (2002).

Sonja van den Berg has been living in the Netherlands since her adoption by Dutch parents in 1979. She currently lives in the city of The Hague. She was born in 1979 in Seoul from unwed Korean parents. In the Netherlands she studied Autonomous Art, Philosophy and Korean Language and Culture. She also studied Korean Language at the University of Ewha. She has returned to Korea three times. In 2005 she graduated in Literary Studies at the University of Leiden. Her Masters thesis focused on the opposition between Western inside and Korean outside of Korean adoptees. In her current academic and artistic work she investigates several themes that are inherently connected to intercountry adoption, most notably that of death and second lives. She has one younger brother who is also adopted from Korea.

Jenny Wills was born in Incheon, South Korea, and came to Ontario, Canada as a transracial adoptee. She is a doctoral student at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. Her primary research focuses on transracial/national Asian adoption in fiction (literature and film). She has published works in Asian North American and refugee studies, and has presented papers on a variety of topics, including adoption, refugees in cinema, neo-feminist teen-pics, domestic abuse and the queer Asian diaspora. Her previous studies include a Bachelor of Journalism from Ryerson University, an Honours English Degree from the University of Waterloo, and a Master of Arts Degree from Wilfrid Laurier University. In addition to adoption studies, she is currently interested in the (trans)national depictions of fashion and beauty in Victorian novels.

INTRODUCTION

Though research on Korean adoption has been taking place for almost the entire history of the practice starting in the 1950s, this proceedings collects papers and abstracts from the first academic symposium of Korean Adoption Studies in history, making this the first printed proceedings collecting Korean Adoption Studies papers. Less than ten years ago, such a symposium would have been unthinkable; there would have been too few scholars internationally to make it a worthwhile gathering, and it probably would have been of little interest to the Korean adoptee community, as so few of us would have been represented. When they realized that there are finally enough researchers in Korean Adoption Studies to support a conference, the idea for this symposium began with Swedish Korean Adoption Studies scholar Tobias Hübinette and Dae-won Wenger, Secretary General at the Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOA'L), an organization which supports Korean adoptees in South Korea. Though originally conceived as a stand-alone conference, their proposal was eventually picked up by the 2007 planners of the International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) Gathering of adult Korean adoptees as a single day symposium to kick off the week-long conference by and for Korean adoptees.

Large scale international gatherings of adult Korean adoptees have been taking place since 1999, but this is the first such conference that has included a forum for academic research by, about, and from within Korean adoptee communities. This underlines the nascent but growing research on our communities from a variety of different academic fields as well as the ever-present interest among Korean adoptees in intellectual work about us, whether it analyzes or queries adoption law and policy, adoption related cultural production or our everyday lived experiences. I am especially pleased that the First International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium has been included in the 2007 IKAA Gathering schedule because it is an all-to-rare opportunity for academics to publicly share their research and findings specifically with the community on whom our research is based. It is my hope that this forum will help support lateral dialogue and feedback between academics and communities that enriches everyone intellectually and also strengthens our social connections and responsibilities.

Symposium presenters were not chosen based on the degree of their work within the Korean adoptee community, and our call did not specify that work should reflect this perspective. However, this collection is remarkable in the large number of community-based submissions, including several from Korean adoptee scholars. I am reminded of the activist battle cry for inclusion "Nothing About Us Without Us!" and of historical shifts in traditional fields of study that were radically changed with the admission scholars from the groups of study and the creation of fields in Ethnic Studies and Women's/Gender /Sexuality Studies that began as fields by, about and for these same groups. Since the 1970s, behavioral science research has been conducted on transracial adoptees, but in the last 10 years, transnational and transracial adoption studies has become a burgeoning field (probably related to the heightened visibility

of transnational and transracial adoptees as more and more become adults). As has been the case in many new fields, most adoptees and other academics studying Korean adoption are still junior scholars developing new ideas and research within more traditional fields.

As it turns out, community-based and adoptee-centered foci in Korean Adoption Studies makes a significant difference in both research questions and outcomes. In these community-based research efforts, there is more emphasis on social, psychological, political and cultural consequences of Korean adoption than ever before. There is now much more interest and available research on the whole-life experiences of individual adoptees instead of the past preference for parental experiences or family experiences that only understand Korean adoption as a family-building strategy. This new emphasis in Korean Adoption Studies leads to the possibility of socio-cultural queries about the effects of raising non-white persons in white families, the meaning of whiteness and the role of race in family, society and politics, and the complex and multilayered identities of transnationally adopted persons. In addition, our community-based research tends to make connections to social justice, anti-imperial and anti-colonial movements and ideology by articulating critiques of racism, the geopolitical imbalances, class imbalances, and sexism against women in the global east and south (who are not deemed worthy parents in comparison with white women in the global north and west) inherent in the current configuration of Korean and much other transnational adoption. And finally, the role of Korean Adoption Studies research has now been peeled away from the interests of the adoption industry, because an adoptee-focus is being (and sometimes must be) independent of the adoption process and the pursuit of “best practices” for adoption procedures.

The importance of interdisciplinarity in a number of academic fields is always growing, and Korean Adoption Studies exists as necessarily interdisciplinary. Since Korean Adoption Studies are taking place in Europe, North America and Asia in disciplines as diverse as Psychology, English, Law, History, International Studies, Geography, International Studies, Women’s Studies, Sociology, Social Work, Library and Information Studies, Asian American Studies, and American Studies (among others, I am certain), this Symposium is also a rare and important opportunity for Korean Adoption Studies scholars to network and exchange ideas among colleagues across the disciplines. I am hopeful that the connections made at First International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium will be meaningful and lasting in our intellectual and adoption communities.

Kim Park Nelson
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SECTION I: SOCIAL SCIENCES

CREATING A CLIMATE FOR “BEST INTERESTS”: RECOGNIZING INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION AS A DISFAVORED PLACEMENT UNDER THE HAGUE CONVENTION

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International adoption is a unique transaction where children needing homes and parents wanting children come across distance, culture, language, race, and class to merge into a single family. Children born in nations with underdeveloped social programs are given the opportunity to grow up with the advantages enjoyed by citizens of developed and affluent Western states.² International adoptive parents benefit as well, receiving the personal fulfillment that comes with parenting more readily and discriminately than if they had chosen domestic adoption.³

But, international adoption is a disfavored placement for children. It is the culmination of complex unfavorable social, cultural, and economic conditions within families and states. The conditions that cause the need for international adoption are most poignantly identified by the third and least visible member of the adoption triad: the birth mothers who have relinquished their children.

“I had to send you away because I was sending you to a better environment and a better place where you could be happy rather than live with an incompetent mother. It may sound like an excuse, but it would be too cruel to raise you as the child of a single unwed mother in this society because of the way people would treat you...”⁴

“My baby, when you grow up you may ask why your mother gave you up for adoption abroad. You may think that if you had grown up in Korea and had been adopted by a Korean family, you would not have gone through so much hardship. However, when I was faced with the decision of giving you up for adoption I believed that you would be better off in a country where you would be given an equal chance...”⁵

In order to understand international adoption, the conditions within sending and receiving countries must be examined. These conditions are what allow, and sometimes require, international adoption to continue.⁶ If these unfavorable conditions are truly static and unchangeable, then international adoption may be rightfully seen as the only option that fully recognizes the best interests of children who would otherwise have no opportunity to become part of a family. The conditions would be justification for and even promotion of international ad-

option. But, if the conditions can be changed, then they raise important questions about the necessity of and justification for international adoption.

The Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) presents a broader schema for understanding which placements are in a child's best interests. It gives both sending and receiving countries a guideline for their own internal international adoption policies by setting forth a hierarchy of preferred placement for adoptions.⁷ Part I of this article explores the legal meaning and effect of the Hague Convention's hierarchy. Part II focuses on the South Korean policies that promote that hierarchy. South Korea's newest initiatives include efforts to promote birth family stability and domestic adoption, both of which are favored alternatives to international adoption under the Hague Convention. Although South Korea is not yet a party to the Hague Convention, its policies are nonetheless noteworthy as it has been a sending country in intercountry adoption for over fifty years.⁸ It has sent more children abroad than any other nation.⁹ Because of its extensive experience with overseas adoption, its policies and decisions have been and are likely to continue to be influential to other sending countries.¹⁰ Part III of this article examines the United States' responsibilities as a receiving country that will soon be subject to the provisions of the Hague Convention. The principles embraced by the United States, as the country that adopts more foreign-born children than all other receiving countries combined,¹¹ are likely to have a profound impact on other receiving nations.

PART I: THE MEANING OF 'BEST INTERESTS' UNDER THE HAGUE CONVENTION

The Hague Convention is the first formal international recognition of intercountry adoption.¹² It provides standards and procedures for an industry that is largely as yet unregulated.¹³ These standards apply to member states that are sending and receiving children through international adoption.¹⁴ The Hague Convention requires each member state to designate its own Central Authority that will ensure the state's compliance with its provisions.¹⁵ The Hague Conference on Private International Law oversees the Central Authorities.¹⁶

Although some scholars have theorized that the burden of compliance with the Hague Convention's requirements will discourage ratification, sixty-nine states have already become parties to the Convention.¹⁷ Of the four countries sending the greatest number of children to the United States through international adoption—Russia, China, Guatemala, and South Korea—only South Korea has not yet signed the Convention.¹⁸ Although states that do not ratify the Convention are not prohibited from participating in intercountry adoption, international pressure from the growing number of member states may encourage non-members to ratify.¹⁹ The Convention is expected to come into force in the United States in 2007.²⁰

The standard for adoption placements is that they must be in the "best interests" of the child. The Hague Convention sets forth a scheme to help define the meaning of "best interests."²¹ In its Preamble, the Hague Convention states that it is better for a child to "grow up in a fam-

ily environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,” than to be institutionalized.²² But, the Convention also establishes that certain types of family environments should be preferred over others.²³ It requires that states take, “as a matter of priority, appropriate measures to enable the child to remain in the care of his or her family of origin.”²⁴ Thus, the ideal situation under the Hague Convention is for a child to remain with her biological family.

If the child cannot remain with her biological family, the Hague Convention requires that “possibilities for placement of the child within the State of origin [be] given due consideration” before a sending state allows a child to be adopted overseas.²⁵ Overseas adoption is only permissible when “a suitable family cannot be found in [a child’s] State of origin.”²⁶ Thus, domestic adoption is preferred over international adoption. International adoption is acceptable only after the exhaustion of other alternatives. Even if a child must be adopted internationally, the Hague Convention requires that the child’s state of origin “give due consideration to the child’s upbringing and to his or her ethnic, religious and cultural background.”²⁷ Therefore, there are conditions that apply even to placements in international adoption.

In sum, the Hague Convention sets forth a hierarchy of the placements that promote a child’s best interests. The ideal placement is for a child to remain within her family of origin. If the child cannot remain within her family of origin, then she should be domestically adopted within her state of origin. If the child is not adopted domestically, then she can be considered for international adoption, although even then, consideration must be given to the child’s background. If the child is not adopted overseas, then she will likely remain in an institution within her country of origin.²⁸

Adoption scholars have often focused their analyses on the experiences of international adoptive parents in acquiring a foreign-born child. Adoptive parents play a critical role in the adoption process; without their participation, international adoption would not be possible. But, focusing on the interests of international adoptive parents ignores the importance of birth family placements and domestic adoption under the Hague Convention’s hierarchy.²⁹

The Hague Convention’s hierarchy requires a more extended analysis of the conditions that currently prevent children from remaining within their families and states of origin. These conditions are not immutable, but rather are constantly changing and improving. Sending countries are gaining awareness of the problems that cause the need for international adoption and are beginning to develop social welfare systems accordingly. Thus, because these unfavorable conditions can be changed, international adoption is justifiable only as a temporary solution to the problem of how to care for a state’s relinquished children. It is acceptable only until a country develops sufficient social and financial systems to provide care for its own children.³⁰ As societies develop and cultural attitudes change, more children will be welcomed within their own biological families. More children will find willing adoptive families within their own birth countries. By promoting improved conditions in sending countries, countries can promote the hierarchy of the Hague Convention.

Even though the Hague Convention's placement preference scheme is clearly stated, the language of the treaty does not expressly require sending and receiving states to take measures to promote its placement scheme. Since the obligation to promote favorable placements is not explicit, must states act at all?

Given that state policies and conditions can change, the continuation of international adoption implicates sending states by showing their present inability or unwillingness to remove obstacles to family stability and domestic adoption. It shows complacency with the status quo. International adoption also indirectly implicates receiving states whose citizens benefit from the international transport of children. Foreign children become adoptable and eligible for transport overseas only because of unfavorable conditions in their countries of origin. Receiving states and families benefit from the children made available because of the desperate situations of birth mothers and underdevelopment in sending states. The continued availability of foreign children for international adoption is contingent upon the stasis of those unfavorable conditions. Because both sending and receiving states have a stake in a transaction ultimately made possible by poor conditions for families in sending states, both have an obligation to act.

PART II: SOUTH KOREA'S CHANGING ADOPTION POLICY

South Korea has a long history of sending children in international adoption.³¹ The first Korean overseas adoptees were orphans sent to the United States at the end of the Korean War in 1953.³² Korean adoption has continued since, with an estimated total of 193,000 Korean children sent abroad from 1953 to 1997.³³ Nonetheless, the number of children adopted overseas from Korea has been decreasing since 1990.³⁴ In 1990, 2,620 immigrant visas were issued to Korean children adopted to the United States.³⁵ This number generally declined over the next fifteen years to 1,630 in 2005.³⁶

The decrease in overseas Korean adoption was partially a response to the publicity of Korea's adoption program during the 1988 Olympics in Seoul.³⁷ At that time, international criticism was directed at the South Korean government for holding South Korea out as an industrialized nation while simultaneously exporting thousands of children overseas each year. South Koreans were embarrassed by the suggestion that, despite their collective economic success, they were unable or unwilling to care for their own children.³⁸ In 1989, the government took a more drastic step and introduced a policy to end international adoption altogether by 1995, with exceptions for mixed-race children and children with disabilities.³⁹ Although the goal of ending international Korean adoption by 1995 was not achieved, the South Korean government has continued promulgating regulations aimed at terminating international adoption.

Within the past year, there has been a new push toward adoption reform in South Korea. In 2006, South Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare ("Ministry") began actively promoting measures to end South Korea's status as a sending country. These measures are more comprehensive and more thoughtful than previous efforts. Although an individual South Korean law-

maker, Rep. Ko Kyung-hwa of the Grand National Party, did propose an immediate outright ban on international adoption in May of 2006,⁴⁰ most of the Ministry’s efforts have been more tempered and more organic. The measures are designed to attack the problems that cause the need for international adoption, rather than the institution of adoption itself. By addressing the social, economic, and cultural conditions that prevent birth mothers from keeping their children and discourage Korean families from choosing domestic adoption, the Ministry is complying with the placement principles set forth in the Hague Convention.

A. Encouraging Families to Keep their Children

As set forth under the Hague Convention, the ideal situation for a child is to remain with her biological family. Even though South Korea is not yet a party to the Hague Convention, its Ministry has begun to provide support for single mothers. The majority of single mothers in South Korea give their children up for adoption.⁴¹ The majority of children given up for international adoption from South Korea are born of single mothers.⁴² Thus, support for single mothers is essential if children are to remain with their families of origin.

There are eleven birth mother centers in South Korea.⁴³ These centers provide temporary housing for pregnant women, as well as education, counseling, and medical care.⁴⁴ In 2003, the Korean government began providing some financial aid to birth mother centers.⁴⁵ Single mothers themselves can receive about 400,000 won (431 USD) per month if they have a low income and are registered with the national basic livelihood protection program.⁴⁶ Also, single fathers can now receive benefits from the government.⁴⁷ Support for single fathers is important since Korean fathers are typically granted sole legal and physical custody of their children after a divorce.⁴⁸

However, in order to truly enable single parents to keep their children, the government’s efforts must include more than increased financial support. Although financial ability is a factor for birth mothers considering adoption, the main obstacle preventing them from keeping their children is society’s attitude toward them.⁴⁹ The Rev. Kim Do-hyun, the director of a center for international adoptees in Seoul called KoRoot, summarizes this stigma:

“The main factor forcing birthmothers not to raise their own children is our society’s general idea of patriarchy - baby girls are abandoned due to the preference for boys, single mothers are discriminated against as unmarried women’s pregnancies are considered shameful, and sometimes a man who would marry a single woman with children asks the woman to give up her children for a family with his own blood line.”⁵⁰

Thus, if the Korean government truly wishes to curb the flow of Korean children overseas, it must address the social stigma imposed on single mothers.

B. Promoting Domestic Adoption

The Ministry has begun actively promoting domestic adoption through its “domestic adoption-first” initiative.⁵¹ This program requires that for five months after a child is relinquished for adoption, the government must attempt to match her domestically with Korean parents.⁵² If no match is found within those five months, then the child becomes eligible to be adopted overseas.⁵³ An exception to the five-month waiting period will be made for children who need urgent medical care.⁵⁴

The Ministry has also introduced other measures to encourage domestic adoption and help prevent children from remaining in institutional care during the waiting period.⁵⁵ Beginning in 2007, single parents will be allowed to adopt domestically.⁵⁶ The number of single households is increasing, accounting for 20 percent of the total households in Korea.⁵⁷ Although there is a strong social stigma against single mothers in Korea, it is possible that some unmarried adults will nonetheless choose to adopt. The Ministry has also declared that certain older adults previously ineligible to adopt because of their age will be permitted to adopt.⁵⁸ It has also lifted restrictions limiting the number of children that a family can adopt.⁵⁹ By allowing previously ineligible classes of people to adopt, the Ministry has increased the likelihood, albeit marginally in some cases, that a child will be adopted domestically.

The Ministry has also announced that it will grant financial support to each family that adopts a child domestically.⁶⁰ Domestic adoptive parents will receive a one-time sum of approximately two million won (2,145 USD) to cover adoption administrative fees.⁶¹ Some local governments are providing additional subsidies to encourage domestic adoption in their jurisdictions.⁶² The government of the Seoul suburb of Gwacheon provides a one-time payment of one million won (1,072 USD) to cover adoption fees.⁶³ These incentives can help defray the cost of adopting and thereby remove the financial barriers that discourage families from adopting domestically.

The government’s financial support has gone further than simply reimbursing adoptive parents for administrative fees. Domestic adoptive parents are given another financial incentive to adopt by way of monthly subsidies to help provide for their adopted children. Under the Ministry’s new regulations, adoptive parents will receive 100,000 won (107 USD) per adoptive child each month until the child turns eighteen.⁶⁴ The city of Gwacheon also provides 200,000 won (214 USD) per month for up to three years to adoptive families.⁶⁵ The Incheon city government and the North Jeolla provincial government also provide monthly subsidies to adoptive parents.⁶⁶ A special monthly subsidy of 525,000 won (563 USD) is available from the Ministry for families who adopt a child with special needs.⁶⁷

But, the Ministry’s grant of extended eligibility for adoptive parents and financial incentives for adoption would be insufficient without measures to change the cultural and social stigma against domestic adoption. This residual stigma is not unlike that directed against single mothers and their children. The Ministry must address the social and cultural conditions in order to succeed in decreasing the number of Korean children sent overseas for adoption.

C. Combating Social Stigma

The Korean government has begun making some progress in encouraging social acceptance of single parents and domestic adoption. During the family law reform of 1990, children adopted domestically received an improved legal status within their new families. As a result of the reform, adopted children were granted equal participation rights and are allowed to succeed the head of the adoptive family.⁶⁸

In 2005, the Korean National Assembly passed a modification to the country’s longstanding Confucian family registry system.⁶⁹ The document of the family registry system, called *hojeok*, is like a birth certificate that identifies an individual based on male lineage.⁷⁰ It records a distinction between adopted children and biological children.⁷¹ The National Assembly’s modification will remove this distinction beginning in 2008.⁷² By changing the *hojeok*, and effectively giving adoptive and biological children an identical status, the National Assembly will remove some of the legal differentiation between a Korean family with an adopted child and a Korean family with a biological child.⁷³

Beginning in 2007, the South Korean government will allow each new adoptive parent two weeks of adoption leave.⁷⁴ This measure shows official support and acceptance of domestic adoption. It is another illustration of the Korean government’s efforts to treat adoptive and biological children in the same way.

Early in 2005, the Ministry declared that beginning in 2006, each May 11th will be known as Adoption Day.⁷⁵ The week following May 11th will be known as Adoption Week, during which time the government will host a variety of events to promote adoption within South Korea.⁷⁶ This public governmental support for domestic adoption may help erase social stigma that surrounds adoption and discourages Korean families from adopting. It may also serve to educate Koreans about the possibilities and need for domestic adoption. The government also plans to include education about domestic adoption in school curriculum to promote an earlier awareness of domestic adoption.⁷⁷ It intends to continue to develop new measures to increase domestic adoption.⁷⁸

Despite the South Korean government’s efforts thus far, nearly 10,000 Korean children relinquished by their birth mothers are still waiting for a placement either domestically or overseas.⁷⁹ In 2005, only 1,461 children were adopted domestically, while 2,001 children were adopted internationally.⁸⁰ The overall percentage of children adopted domestically has not changed in recent years.⁸¹ These numbers suggest that the government’s efforts thus far have made little progress in promoting domestic adoption.

The Korean government must continue to develop new ways to encourage domestic adoption. It must strive to develop a tradition of domestic adoption.⁸² But in addition to increasing support for domestic adoption, it must also begin to actively address the social stigma that surrounds single mothers. It must create programs to encourage society to accept single mothers and their children as a welcome part of the community from the earliest stages of pregnancy. It must work to erase the stigma of pre-marital sex that falls hardest on birth mothers. It must

require birth fathers to be responsible to and supportive of their children, even if the couple chooses not to marry. It must continue to move away from the patrilineal system that gives children worth and value only with respect to their relationship to their fathers. Thus, there are many ways in which the government can continue to work towards social acceptance and equality for single parents and their children. When this acceptance and equality are a reality in Korean society, there will be no need for international adoption, and the Hague Convention's hierarchy will be fully realized.

Because of its long history of international adoption⁸³ and its large numbers of children sent overseas through international adoption,⁸⁴ South Korea's adoption policy has been a model for other sending countries. But, South Korea's adoption policy is drastically changing as the country enjoys increased economic expansion and self-sufficiency.⁸⁵ As a result of its economic, political, and social progression, South Korea is now sending fewer children overseas.⁸⁶ Although other sending countries are developmentally, structurally, and socially very different from South Korea, it is likely that as they continue to develop, they will follow South Korea's example. South Korea's unique role among sending countries will likely presage other changes in sending nations' adoption policies to come.

PART III: AMERICA'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE HAGUE CONVENTION

The United States is set to ratify the Hague Convention in 2007.⁸⁷ There are no specific provisions in the Hague Convention dictating if and how receiving countries are obligated to help promote its placement hierarchy. Nonetheless, as the country whose citizens are receiving the greatest benefits in the form of the greatest number of children from international adoption, the United States and its citizens have an obligation to follow the spirit of the Hague Convention and support its placement scheme.⁸⁸

There are many reasons why American citizens choose to adopt internationally. In an April 1993 survey, the General Accounting Office tracked 203 adoptive families' reasons for choosing international adoption over domestic adoption.⁸⁹ Over half of the families surveyed chose to adopt overseas because they believed that they were ineligible to adopt domestically.⁹⁰ Many chose intercountry adoption because they believed that it was easier, faster, and cheaper than domestic adoption.⁹¹ Over one-quarter of the families surveyed chose to adopt internationally because they preferred to raise children with certain characteristics.⁹²

None of these reasons for choosing intercountry adoption reflect a decision made primarily in the best interests of the child. In fact, only nine percent of the families in the General Accounting Office survey indicated that they adopted internationally in order to help disadvantaged children.⁹³ Rather, the adoptive parents' proffered reasons reflect their own conveniences and preferences. Overall, the adoptive parents wanted children, regardless of whether they themselves would be qualified under American adoption standards to become parents. They wanted children with certain features, and they wanted them quickly and cheaply. Only

a small percentage of families were purely motivated to adopt internationally based on the best interests of the child.

Many families believe that international adoption is always in the child’s best interests. They believe that if not for international adoption, relinquished children will languish in institutions or be left homeless to fend for themselves.⁹⁴ But, the Hague Convention has established that although intercountry adoption is one possible placement for relinquished children, it is a disfavored placement. Receiving states and their citizens should promote favored placements with biological families and domestic adoptive parents, even though they themselves would receive less benefit from those placements. As set forth by the Hague Convention, adoption is never meant to benefit the adoptive parent or the adoptive states. Rather, it is always for the best interests of the child. In this context, the Hague Convention has established what placements correspond with those best interests.

The question of how best to place adoptable children is not unique to foreign nations. An analogous situation exists within the United States’ own domestic transracial adoption policies. As noted by Dorothy Roberts in her article *Adoption Myths and Racial Realities in the United States*:

White compassion for Black children should not depend on Black children ‘belonging’ to white people Rather, white people should show their care for Black children by struggling for programs and policies that would improve the welfare of Black children living within their own families and communities.⁹⁵

According to Roberts, white Americans concerned for a black child’s best interests have a responsibility to act. But, action does not mean that white Americans should begin removing black children from their homes. Black children would be better served by financial assistance and social support so that they can grow and thrive surrounded by their biological families and communities.

Similarly, Americans may not be operating in a foreign child’s best interests by simply removing the child from her biological family, community, and culture through intercountry adoption. In their willingness to adopt, Americans overlook the endemic conditions that make a child “adoptable.” They are eager to help cure the symptoms of a struggling nation by removing its children, but are content to ignore and benefit from conditions which cause the children to be relinquished in the first place.⁹⁶

Individuals in receiving countries concerned for the best interests of a foreign nation’s children can be part of an alternative solution more consonant with the Hague Convention’s hierarchy. They can affect positive change in other ways besides adopting a sending country’s children. If Americans are truly committed to the best interests of the world’s children, they should use their resources and experiences to help children develop within their biological families and communities. Sending countries and their citizens who wish to help underprivileged children should do so with financial assistance and social support.⁹⁷ These methods

would encompass more than individual cases and would provide a long-term solution for the problems of poverty and discrimination.⁹⁸

Citizens of receiving countries can also promote the Hague Convention's hierarchy by adopting children who have the greatest needs. Even parents whose motivation in adopting internationally is to help disadvantaged children often limit their searches to healthy babies. Left behind are older children, children with developmental disabilities, and AIDS orphans, who are the least likely to be adopted domestically and who have the greatest need for care.⁹⁹ By being open to adopting an older child or a child with special medical or emotional needs, citizens of receiving countries can also help promote the child's best interests.

The governments of receiving states can also promote adoption of children with special needs. In the United States, adoptive parents of intercountry adoptees with special needs do not receive the same assistance as adoptive parents of domestic adoptees with special needs.¹⁰⁰ By providing an equal amount of financial support to all families who choose to adopt special needs children, whether that adoption is domestic or international, receiving states can discourage institutionalization and thereby respect the Hague Convention's hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

The Hague Convention has created a standardized framework for understanding intercountry adoption. This framework is legally binding on all member states. It sets forth an order of family placements that promote a child's best interests. Under this framework, a child ideally remains with her biological family. When the child cannot remain with her biological family, she should be adopted domestically. If domestic adoption is impossible, international adoption becomes an option. Institutionalization is a last resort.

Both sending and receiving member states have an obligation to comply with the spirit of the Hague Convention and encourage biological family placements and domestic adoption so that intercountry adoption is never necessary. Sending countries can do this by providing financial assistance to birth mothers and domestic adoptive parents. They can implement social welfare and education programs that change negative cultural attitudes and encourage the acceptance of single mothers, domestic adoptive parents, and their children.

Receiving countries can fully comply with the Hague Convention by remembering that intercountry adoption is a disfavored placement. In order to promote a child's best interests, receiving countries may be required to forgo opportunities to benefit through the international transfer of children. Rather, they should use their financial and social resources to help change the conditions that create the need for international adoption. With their resources, they can help enable children to stay with biological families or to be placed within their biological communities and fulfill the Hague Convention's preferred placements.

Both sending and receiving member states will be called upon to expend resources to comply with the Hague Convention. This cost may seem initially to provide little benefit, especially to the sending state and its citizens. But, it must be recalled that the Hague Convention was not meant to ensure progress or opportunity for a single state. It was envisioned to help promote the best interests of children regardless of their country of origin. States who expend resources toward this common goal transcend the limitations of national interests. They fulfill their obligations not only to international law, but also to the world’s children.

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- 1 The author was born in Seoul, South Korea and was adopted to Bemidji, Minnesota, USA. She participated in the fall 2004 Inje Institute for International Human Resources (IIHR) program for Korean adoptees and is currently on the board of AK Connection. She wishes to thank Rene Bowser, Margie Axtmann, and Wright Walling for their generous assistance with this paper. She also wishes to thank her family for their support.
- 2 Rita J. Simon and Howard Altstein, *Adoption Across Borders: Serving the Children in Transracial and Intercountry Adoptions* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 6.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 89–92.
- 4 Sarah Dorow, ed., *I Wish for You a Beautiful Life: Letters from the Korean Birth Mothers of Ae Ran Won to their Children* (Yeong & Yeong, 1999), 29.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 6 Dorothy Roberts, “Adoption Myths and Racial Realities in the United States,” in *Outsiders Within: Writings on Transracial Adoption*, ed. Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah and Sun Yung Shin (South End Press 2006), 49. Roberts notes that the critical question of what causes the need for adoption is often overlooked. Her question, as it relates to domestic American transracial adoption is: “Why are there so many children in foster care in the first place and why are so many of them Black?”
- 7 *Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* (“Hague Convention”), May 29, 1993 (May 2, 2006).
- 8 Simon and Altstein, *Adoption Across Borders*, 7.
- 9 *Ibid.*, “The Republic of Korea (ROK) has historically supplied the United States and the West with the majority of their intercountry adoptees.”
- 10 M. E. Fieweger, “Stolen Children and International Adoptions”, *Child Welfare* 70, no. 2 (1991), 286, 291. Fieweger notes that in the 1980s, adoptions from Latin American countries increased because of poor economic conditions and high birthrates. Meanwhile adoptions declined from Asian countries, which had more stabilized birthrates and improved living conditions.
- 11 Joan Heifetz Hollinger, “Intercountry Adoption: A Frontier without Boundaries”, in *Families by Law: An Adoption Reader*, ed. Naomi R. Cahn and Joan Heifetz Hollinger, 215 (New York University Press, 2004).
- 12 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, *Hague Convention: Advantages and Disadvantages*: http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/convention/convention_2300.html (last updated April 2005).
- 13 Heifetz Hollinger, “Intercountry Adoption”, 216.
- 14 *Hague Convention*.
- 15 *Ibid.*, at ch. III, art. 6.
- 16 *Ibid.*, at ch. III, art. 13 and ch. VI, art. 42.

- 17 Hague Conference on Private International Law, *Status Table 33: Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*: http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.status&cid=69 (last updated Aug. 31, 2006). See also Caeli Elizabeth Kimball, “Barriers to the Successful Implementation of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption,” 33 *Denv. J. Intl. L. & Policy* 561, 564 (Fall 2005). (“The undue economic burden of compliance, in conjunction with underlying social and cultural opposition to intercountry adoption, provides little incentive for ratification by major sending countries, such as China and Korea, who have actively participated in intercountry adoption for over half a century.”).
- 18 Jane Morse, *United States Implementing Intercountry Adoption Standards: Thousands of Children in Need of Families Will Benefit*, U.S. Officials Say, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, The Washington File (Nov. 14, 2006).
- 19 *Hague Convention*.
- 20 U.S. Department of State, *Fact Sheet: Implementation of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption*: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/61274.htm> (last updated February 15, 2006).
- 21 *Hague Convention*.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*, at ch. II, art. 4.
- 26 *Ibid.*, at pmb1.
- 27 *Ibid.*, at ch. IV, art. 16.
- 28 It is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate the wisdom of the Hague Convention’s placement hierarchy. For further discussion of adoption placement priorities and an examination of whether international adoption is ever an acceptable solution for relinquished children, see Julia Chinyere Oparah, Sun Yung Shin and Jane Jeong Trenka, “Introduction”, in *Outsiders Within*, 1; Heifetz Hollinger, “Intercountry Adoption”, 216-17; Madelyn Freundlich, “Transracial & Transcultural Adoptions: A Look at the Ethical Issues”, *Family Advocate* 27 (Fall 2004) 40, 41; Susan Freivalds, “Nature and Nurture: A New Look at How Families Work”, in *Families by Law: An Adoption Reader*, ed. Naomi R. Cahn and Joan Heifetz Hollinger (New York University Press, 2004), 85; Simon and Altstein, *Adoption Across Borders*, 141.
- 29 UNICEF, *Inter-country adoption*, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_15011.html (accessed December 1, 2006). The United Nations Children’s Fund’s (UNICEF) position on intercountry adoption mirrors that of the Hague Convention. It prioritizes most in-country placements over intercountry adoption: “For children who cannot be raised by their own families, an appropriate alternative family environment should be sought in preference to institutional care, which should be used only as a last resort and as a temporary measure. Inter-country adoption is one of a range of care options

which may be open to children, and for individual children who cannot be placed in a permanent family setting in their countries of origin, it may indeed be the best solution”.

30 Professor Sara Dillon summarizes the precarious balance between actively promoting in-country placements and providing for the immediate needs of children already relinquished. Care for a child should not be compromised by strict adherence to idealistic principles. She states: “Expressing commitment to investment in long-term solutions to the problem of abandonment has no logical corollary in disregarding the immediate matter of children presently in institutions, street children, children carrying out hazardous labor, child prostitution, or even infanticide and gender-selective abortions—these latter being aspects of the problem of ‘gendercide.’ As mentioned, intercountry adoption will not solve these problems any more than international asylum law will tackle the problem of political persecution; but, from a human rights point of view, intercountry adoption can actually relieve the violation of the rights of certain children in the here and now, something that is of clear value to individual children.” See Sara Dillon, *Making Legal Regimes for Intercountry Adoption Reflect Human Rights Principles: Transforming the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child with the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption*, 21 B.U. Intl. L.J. 179, (Fall 2003): 196–97.

31 Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, “Research: Adoption Facts”:
<http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/research/internationaladoption.php#2>, (last accessed November 26, 2006).

32 *Ibid.*

33 Lee Jin-woo, “Foster Parents to Get W2 Mil. for Adoption”, *The Korea Times* (March 17, 2006).

34 Simon and Altstein, *Adoption Across Borders*, 89–92.

35 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Immigrant Visas Issued to Orphans Coming to the U.S.”,
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36 *Ibid.*

37 Madelyn Freundlich and Joy Kim Lieberthal, “The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees: Adoptees’ Perceptions of International Adoption”:
<http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/proed/korfindings.html> (last updated June 2000).

38 Notesong Srisopark Thompson, “Hague is Enough?: A Call for More Protective, Uniform Law Guiding International Adoption”, 22 *Wis. Intl. L.J.* (Spring 2004): 441, 445. For more on modern Korean adoption laws, see Tobias Hübinette, “From Orphan Trains to Babylifts: Colonial Trafficking, Empire Building, and Social Engineering”, in *Outsiders Within*, 145–47.

39 Freundlich and Lieberthal, “The Gathering of the First Generation”.

40 Lee Sun-young, “Lawmaker Pushes Ban on Overseas Adoption,” *The Korea Herald*, May 10, 2006; Joint Council on International Children’s Services:
<http://www.jcics.org/Korea.htm> (last updated September 26, 2006). “[T]he

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45 R. Kim, “Single Mothers Face Discrimination.”

46 Kim Soe-jung, “Slowly, Adoption Loses its Stigma,” *JoongAng Daily*, May 11, 2006.

47 Ibid.

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57 Lee Hyo-sik, “Singles Represent 20 Percent of Households,” *The Korea Times*, July 26, 2006.

58 Park, “Singles Can Adopt Children.”

59 Ibid.

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61 Ibid.

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- 67 R. Kim, “Adoptive Families to Receive More Childcare Support,” *The Korea Times*, May 10, 2006.
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- 70 Rosa Kim, “The Legacy of Institutionalized Gender Inequality in South Korea: The Family Law,” 14 B.C. Third World L.J. (Winter 1994): 145, 149.
- 71 Bae, “May 11 Designated as Adoption Day.”
- 72 Ibid.
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- 74 Park, “Singles Can Adopt Children.”
- 75 Bae, “May 11 Designated as Adoption Day.”
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Lee, “Foster Parents to Get W2 Mil. For Adoption.”
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 R. Kim, “Slowly, Adoption Loses its Stigma.”
- 82 Simon and Altstein, *Adoption Across Borders*.
- 83 Ibid., 7.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Fieweger, “Stolen Children and International Adoptions,” 291.
- 86 See Simon & Altstein, *Adoption Across Borders*, 8: “The reasons for Korea’s reduction have to do with national pride and the fact that Korea is no longer considered a developing country incapable of caring for its own. By the end of the twentieth century, Korea has become a major economic force in the world’s markets, rich enough to provide for its own orphans.”
- 87 U.S. Department of State, *Hague Convention: Advantages and Disadvantages*.
- 88 Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist, “International Asian Adoption: In the Best Interest of the Child?,” 10 Tex. Wesleyan L. Rev. (Spring 2004): 343, 350. Bergquist writes: “Receiving countries, if truly engaged in promoting the best interests of children, have the responsibility to support adoptions within sending countries above the interests of a demand-driven Western market and to actively promote the social and economic development of developing countries so that children may remain within their native states.”

- 89 In 2002, over 134,000 American children were in foster homes waiting for adoptive families. *Executive Summary, National Adoption Attitudes Survey: Research Report*, June, 2002.
- 90 Simon and Altstein, *Adoption Across Borders*, n. 5, 88–89. According to the General Accounting Office survey, 51% believed they were ineligible for domestic adoption, 38% believed that international adoption was faster, 27% wanted to adopt a child with certain characteristics, 20% believed that international adoption was easier, and 13% believed that international adoption was cheaper. Families could indicate more than one reason for their decision.); see also Bergquist, “International Asian Adoption,” 346–47. A study of parents who chose international adoption “reflect[s] the pragmatism and parent-centered motivations in adoption and perhaps suggest a romanticization or exoticization of the country of origin.”
- 91 Simon and Altstein, *Adoption Across Borders*, 88–89.
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 *Ibid.*
- 94 See Linda J. Olsen, “Live or Let Die: Could Intercountry Adoption Make the Difference?” 22 Penn. St. Intl. L.R. 483 (Winter 2004).
- 95 Roberts, “Adoption Myths and Racial Realities in the United States.”
- 96 Bergquist, “International Asian Adoption”, 349–50: “At worst, [the practice of international adoption] allows countries to abdicate responsibility for enacting sociopolitical change to secure the well-being of all children, thereby positioning receiving countries as complicit in the problem.”
- 97 D. Marianne Blair, “Safeguarding the Interests of Children in Intercountry Adoption: Assessing the Gatekeepers,” 34 Cap. U. L. Rev. (Winter 2005): 349, 398. Blair writes: “Sending and receiving nations attempting to reform their intercountry adoption practices in order to encourage domestic adoption in countries of origin face many challenges. Often, countries of origin need financial assistance to develop or improve both child protective services and a social service infrastructure that can build and facilitate domestic adoption.”
- 98 See Bergquist, “International Asian Adoption,” 349, where she writes: “Economic necessity is one of the dominant factors in a relinquishment, whether it be by a birth parent or a country whose social services infrastructure cannot support the number of children in care, at least initially.”
- 99 But see Heifetz Hollinger, “Intercountry Adoption: A Frontier without Boundaries” and Jacqueline Bhabha, “Moving Babies: Globalization, Markets and Transnational Adoption,” 28 SUM Fletcher Forum of World Affairs 181, 193 (Summer 2004). Bhabha writes: “Though there is a general acknowledgement that remaining within one’s own family of origin is the optimal situation for a child, there is no more specific impetus to curb or limit the amount of transnational adoption. Nor is there a motivation to encourage adoption of the most needy, rather than the most apparently appealing, babies. Adoption of AIDS orphans should clearly be encouraged, but the same is not true of children whose birth mothers have been forced by social factors and political policies to give up their children. In practice, the demand-driven market

basis of transnational adoption privileges the latter group over the former”.

100 Heifetz Hollinger, “Intercountry Adoption: A Frontier without Boundaries,” 216. Hollinger writes: “There is no consensus in this country as to whether foreign-born adoptees with severe physical, cognitive, or emotional disabilities should be eligible for the kinds of public or other financial assistance programs that children adopted from domestic public agencies may obtain.”

CONTEXTUALIZING MODERN KOREAN ADOPTION LAW

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INTRODUCTION

The current Korean adoption system has persisted without much alteration since the end of the Korean War. From the receiving side the system has often been praised for its efficiency, as has the country itself for its healthy and adaptable babies.¹ However, concern over the contingency of intercountry adoption from Korea has been raised from various sides of the international and domestic community. I will therefore argue that, despite its world-leading position among sending countries, the Korean practice is not without shortcomings.

Acknowledging that intercountry from Korea is not unproblematic, the focus of this article is an examination of the legal framework that facilitates and supports intercountry adoption from Korea. The first modern adoption law, the Law of Special Application for Adoption of Orphans (고아입양특례법 ; *koaiyangt'ŭngnyeobŏp*), was enacted September 30, 1961 and has since then undergone two major revisions, in 1976 and 1995. However, it is still subject to much criticism, as Korea has yet to withdraw its reservations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) or to become a party to the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention).

The majority of the existing works on intercountry adoption have come from the beneficiaries of adoption, such as social workers, adoption agencies, or adopting parents. However, the diversity in information on adoption has been greatly broadened with the more recent trend of adoptee-produced literature. The adoptee community has, without doubt, a unique background to speak about the ongoing phenomenon of intercountry adoption, though no one by default is an expert in the field. I hope this chapter can support an increasing curiosity about the Korean adoption system and, furthermore, challenge us all to be critical of a history and system of which we have become a part.

EVALUATING SOURCES

The main sources for this paper are domestic and international laws relevant to the issue of Korean adoption. Furthermore, in order to understand the negotiations, concessions, and interpretations in the creation of these laws, I have searched for documents discussing the practice of adoption. Whereas these few assessments are of important value, the absence of a broader debate on the issue itself testifies to an environment in which the adoption issue has been generally ignored or paid only scant attention. Only recently, since the late 1990s, has Korean civil society shown an interest in the issue and become more vocal. An increasing amount of information in both Korean and English has been the positive result of this interest.

The Overseas Korean Foundation, established in 1997, and the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, established in 2001, have each in their own way contributed to an increased allocation of resources for data collection on matters related to adoption and children in general. However, adoption within the academic sphere remains a much under-researched area. The development of the Korean Adoption Law has also, to a surprisingly high degree, been affected by emotional arguments. I do not believe an individual *positive* adoption experience by default justifies the practice of adoption; nor do I believe that an individual *negative* experience in itself allows us to determine the overall condition of the adoption system. Thus, I will aim to move away from this trend and focus instead on building a discussion of the adoption system based on its legal structure. In doing so, we will find out when and where the system was constructed and, more importantly, be able to answer who influenced it and why.

Korea has undergone remarkable social, economic, and political development since the Korean War (1951–1953). In spite of this, the nation is still among the leading countries in sending children abroad for adoption and, furthermore, an entire decade has passed since the UN first raised its concerns over the Korean reservations with the UNCRC and the non-ratification of the Hague Convention. Korea's unique positioning as an OECD member and as the world's 10th largest economy on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as the 'Cadillac' of national adoption programs, despite the lack of acceptance of internationally agreed-upon children's rights standards, leaves questions about the Korean adoption system wide open.

Adoption in Korea is regulated by the Civil Act and the Act on Special Cases Concerning the Promotion and Procedure of Adoption (Adoption Law). Also relevant for overseas Korean adoptees is the Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans (Overseas Korean Act) and the Nationality Act. Of general interest is the relationship between Korean law and international law.

The term 'modern' is applied to limit the study of Korean adoption to the beginning of its institutionalization and commercialization from around the time of the Korean War. I would like to emphasize that adoption in Korea is not a practice exclusive to the past fifty or sixty years. It has, in fact, been practiced for centuries or even millennia. However, non-agnatic adoption was not fully legalized before 1938, during the Japanese colonial occupation. Thus, what during the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910) was used as a method of primarily ensuring an

heir through adoption of male children, (preferably nephews), greatly changed with the legalization of adoption outside the family.

DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN KOREAN ADOPTION LAW

The Korean Adoption Law and its development are important indicators for the status of children in Korea, and can, furthermore, help to explain the extraordinarily long and systematic practice of Korean adoption. Law reflects the norms and values in a society and is, for this reason, an important instrument in understanding the culture of a specific society.² This also means that law is developed and shaped by society and therefore in nature always will be conservative. In Korea, on the issue of intercountry adoption, changing attitudes, whether regarding domestic or intercountry placements, have been realized through legal modifications over time. In some instances, ‘public opinion’ has been the direct cause for these changes, which is testimony to an interesting dynamic between theoretical and practical attitudes towards adoption.

Ancient Korean adoption system

The current legislation relevant to adoption has grown out of ancient practices, described by Hübinette as “an indigenous Korean adoption system”³ similar to that of the Western concept of today. Legends describe how Chumong, the founder of Koguryo and also King Talhae (57–80) of Shilla both became kings after having been adopted. Adoption for the purpose of showing mercy to orphans or pursuing economic advantages by securing servants or slaves changed during the Chosŏn Dynasty. The heavy influence of neo-Confucianism and official state adaptation of this ideology provide an explanation for the creation of an adoption system with the primary purpose of ensuring a family heir. Thus, adoption at the time was characterized by the preference for boys from within the family, most often selected from a generation younger than the adopting parent. The Confucian ideology applied in the late Chosŏn Dynasty gave only little consideration to individual rights, including children’s rights. Though the legal status of the child has been improved over the last century, society at large still fails to recognize the child as an independent citizen having independent rights. A child remains an object of protection rather than a subject which attains rights and this notion is evident in the two different adoption systems in Korea: one for succession and one for social welfare. Thus, although a culture of fostering children in need exists, this practice is not related to the child’s entitlement to any legal rights.⁴

Classification of adoptions

The historic division between the protection of a child and the rights of the child also shows the different purposes adoption has served over time and the changing roles that adoptees

‘perform.’ Adoptions in contemporary Korea take place under one of the following three systems: general adoption, full adoption, or special cases.⁵ They will each be described in detail below:

General adoption

The procedure of adoption within this ‘system’ is based on a contract between the child and the adopting parents. For the adoption to come into effect there must be consent between the two parties and the child must be enrolled on the *hojŏk* (호적; family register). For children under the age of fifteen, the decision may be made by a guardian after obtaining permission from the Family Court. Without any further requirements for the adoption to take effect, this system is open to much abuse as no attention is given to the needs and rights of the child.

Full adoption

Full adoption is regulated by the Civil Act, Chapter 4 Section 2. Article 908(2) was amended March 31, 2005 with the purpose of moving away from contractual-based adoption to a system in which the state recognizes its duty to protect the child. These provisions will be enforced beginning January 1, 2008 and will include an outline of requirements for the adopting parents to fulfill prior to the adoption. Among the new conditions are an investigation into the prospective adoptive parent’s or parents’ ability to raise a child and their motives for the adoption. Furthermore, for the sake of the child, all adoptions in the future must be approved by the Family Court rather than simply agreed upon by the parties involved.

Special cases

The third system through which children are adopted in Korea is regulated by the Adoption Law. Adoption agencies arrange these adoptions and are often a child’s legal guardian, though they do not have the authority to authorize the adoptions themselves. This remains under the jurisdiction of the Family Court. These ‘special case’ children are those from facilities and institutions going into an adoptive family, as is the case of the 158,343 officially recorded overseas Korean adoptees between 1953 and 2005.

Both domestic and overseas adoptions are facilitated under the Adoption Law. Thirty-six percent of the officially recorded 240,265 adoptions between 1958 and 2003 were domestic placements and this is a figure often criticized for being too low. To address this situation, provisions have been made to promote domestic adoption over intercountry adoption. However, the fundamental factors contributing to the majority of these adoption cases have yet to receive adequate attention from civil society or official institutions. Approximately 88 percent of the total number of children relinquished for adoption over the last ten years has

come from single mothers and, in intercountry adoption alone, single mothers account for 97 percent of all cases during the same period.⁶

Korean legislation regulating adoption

Legislation applied to intercountry adoption has been subject to much concern and criticism for its inadequacies. A main issue has been the mismatch between domestic laws among countries involved in the transnational movement of children.⁷ Another critique of the legislation for intercountry adoption is the fact that the Adoption Law was first developed for domestic cases and is therefore not able to provide comprehensive solutions to issues specific to intercountry adoption.⁸

Domestic and intercountry adoptions are often discussed with the understanding that a reduction in intercountry adoptions can be achieved by increasing domestic adoption. Korea is certainly an example of this approach, and among the most recent measures in Korea to promote domestic adoption and improve the cultural understanding of adoption itself is the governmental designation of May 11 as Adoption Day and the following week as Adoption Week. The relatively low number of domestic adoptions is commonly attributed to cultural characteristics without consideration of the reasons behind these culturally-specific constructions. I would argue that the current notion of the low acceptance among Koreans to adopt can only be justified when Korean cultural practice is limited to the Chosŏn Dynasty (or specific parts of this period). It is this heavy focus on and belief in a neo-Confucian legacy that constitutes the foundation to the contemporary approach to the adoption issue in Korea.

Civil Law

The Civil Law includes sections on requisites for adoption, invalidity, annulment, and the dissolution of adoption. Amendments of March 31, 2005 will come into effect on January 1, 2008. This new sub-section clearly has a purpose to protect the child and even allows for the Family Court to deny adoption requests in cases where it is found inappropriate for the welfare of the child. Furthermore, detailed criteria for adoption are outlined to estimate the prospective parents' capability to care for and raise a child. This is a significant change from the previous criteria stipulated in Article 866, which defines the capacity for adoption to be "anyone having reached adulthood."

Another important issue has been included in Article 908-4(1) for the protection of the birth parents' rights to their child. An adoption in which the birth parents have not given their consent, or have no fault in not giving such consent, can be annulled. The birth parent will have six months to make a request for annulment of the adoption to the Family Court from the day they become aware of the adoption. This measure can hopefully help Korea reduce the numbers of children obtained illegally through fraud and deception as has been criticized by UNICEF.⁹

Three articles in the Civil Law, Articles 870, 878 and 881, are inconsistent with the UNCRC article 21(a), which addresses the issue of the authorization of the adoption of a child. The UNCRC requires an establishment of a *competent authority* and only this entity can authorize an adoption. In Korea, authorization can be obtained with the consent of parents or any other lineal ascendant if consent from parents cannot be obtained and the adoption will become effective when a report has been submitted according to the Family Registry Act. The two laws are not contradictory but conflicting due to the international demand for an official independent body to supervise and regulate the adoption process. The establishment of a *competent authority* can be understood as the State's recognition of its obligations to the child to ensure that all relevant matters are conducted under the best interest of the child. This is a key element of the Hague Convention and will be further discussed later in this paper.

Adoption Law

The first modern Korean Adoption Law, the Law of Special Application for the Adoption of Orphans (고아입양특례법; *koaiyangt'ŭngnyebŏp*) was enforced in 1961 after nearly a decade of unregulated post-Korean War movement of children. The purpose of the law was to promote the welfare of the child, exclusively understood to mean improved living conditions, which, in turn, further simplified the intercountry adoption procedure. Requirements for the adopting parents were also focused on their financial ability to support a child with no regard to the child's rights to support in adjusting to a new family, new culture, language and country. The failure to recognize the rights of the child combined with the smooth procedure raised criticism of the law shortly after it was promulgated. Numerous shortcomings of the law, as mentioned above, and a lack of explanation of the relationship between private international law and the adoption law itself, have led to reasonable speculations as to whether the law was, in fact, a measure intended to export social problems, rather than to take care of and solve them. Another point of critique is the heavy involvement of private institutions. Arguments were made regarding the importance of formulating a national policy to limit the involvement of private persons and groups to solve the fundamental problems that resulted in child abandonment and avoid all forms of exploitation in the process. However, Article 6 allowed for institutions to be designated by parents to handle the actual adoption, at the convenience of the adopting parents, so they would not have to travel to Korea.¹⁰

The first changes to the Adoption Law were made in 1966. These changes altogether contributed to the institutionalization and efficiency of intercountry adoption. Article 4(1) in the initial law required the adopting parent to obtain consent from the adoptee "in case the orphan possesses the capacity of reasonable judgement," yet this article was taken out of the 1966 amendment. Furthermore, the court was required to make public a notice of the adoption in case of uncertainty about the legal guardian of the adoptee. The guardian was originally allowed twenty days to report to the court, but this was then reduced to fifteen days. Adoption agencies' activities were also addressed and accordingly they were required to apply for permission to operate their businesses. Enforcement ordinance and enforcement regulation, first enforced in 1967 and later amended in 1969, outline in detail the requirements to receive per-

mission to run an adoption agency. These conditions included the submission of a business plan, possession of a minimum of three million won, a 19.8 square-meter office, a 9.9 square-meter consultation room, and two consultants for every sixty children intended for adoption.

The initial Adoption Law underwent its first major revision in 1976 and was afterwards renamed the Act for Special Cases of Adoption (입양특례법; *ibyangt'ŭngnyebŏp*). The number of adoption agencies was limited to four, and these were required to be fully Korean-run. The revision also aimed to phase out intercountry adoption by 1981 through a newly developed quota system. This was, however, abolished upon the assassination of then president Park Chung Hee. The adoption law, instead, was liberated to such an extent that the agencies were allowed to compete against each other for securing babies.¹¹

A second plan to phase out intercountry adoption came after a temporary stop after the 1988 Olympics. The aim was to completely bring an end to the program by 1996, with the exception of bi-racial and handicapped children. However, without any realistic prospects of reaching this goal, a more conservative plan was formulated in 1994. The deadline was later extended to 2015, with plans for an annual reduction of three to five percent in the number of intercountry adoptions.

The law underwent a second major revision in 1995 and was renamed the Act on Special Cases Concerning the Promotion and Procedure of Adoption (입양촉진및 절차에관한 특례법; *ibyangch'okchinmit chŏlch'aekwanhan t'ŭngnyebŏp*). The purpose of the new Adoption Law according to Article 1 was “to provide the matter necessary for promoting adoption of children requiring protection, and to improve the protection and welfare of those who are adopted.” In the following amendments, duties and responsibilities of the adoption agencies are outlined in detail to ensure the adequate protection of the adopted child. In line with critique of the first Adoption Law from 1961, this revision would not likely draw objections due to the improvements made to protect the welfare of the child, but it also gives justification to the adoption agencies and legitimizes the solid establishment of private organizations' influence in social matters that are in great need of impartial management, regulation, and supervision.

In 2007, legislation continues to address the relatively high number of intercountry adoptions and the relatively low number of domestic adoptions. The current Adoption Law is characterised by various measures enforced to encourage domestic adoption. Systematic support has been legislated, such as maternity leave for public officials who adopt, the requirement of a five-month period during which the pursuit of domestic adoption is prioritised before an agency can designate a child for intercountry adoption, and the relaxation of the qualifications to adopt. Thus, the permitted age gap between child and adopting parents has been increased from fifty to sixty years, and unmarried couples have been allowed to adopt. The financial burden for raising a child has been raised as a reason for the reluctance of Koreans to adopt. Article 9 in the enforcement ordinances covers the issue of “payment of subsidy, etc., for bringing up an adopted child.” Adopting parents are now able to receive an adoption stipend of two million won (equivalent to the price of an adoption) and monthly financial support of 100,000 won until the child is twelve years old.

Post-adoption services have also become a part of the duty of the adoption agencies and include the four main categories: 1) Motherland tours 2) Language courses in the mother tongue 3) Support for information on the motherland and 4) Post-adoption services for adopted children, which the Ministry of Health and Welfare admits as being necessary. In reality, the distribution of funds unfortunately gives priority to quantity over quality. Thus, there is only a little support available for the growing number of adoptees resettling in Korea, as most services are aimed at short-term visitors.

Another important issue, often perceived as *the* issue in post-adoption services, is birth family search. The Adoption Law does not explicitly grant or deny adoptees the right to information about their families, but it is commonly understood to be a violation of the birth family's privacy rights to disclose their personal information. However, in practice, there are various and inconsistent policies applied by the four different adoption agencies. Family reunions over the last couple of years have been popularized by entertainment programs as *Ach'im madang* and *Happy Sunday*, but without a common and consistent policy adoptees are often left without guidelines to follow in their birth family search. Though the current Adoption Law recognizes the need for post-adoption services, the adoptive community has yet to have its voice heard in this regard.¹²

UNCRC AND HAGUE CONVENTION

The UNCRC and the Hague Convention together constitute the international framework regulating and supervising intercountry adoption. The UNCRC entered into force on September 2, 1990, and a vast majority of the 193 participating nations have signed the convention.¹³ The UNCRC "contained no mechanism itself for promulgating and enforcing a specific intercountry adoption policy."¹⁴ Rather, there are guidelines for implementation found in the Hague Convention. Therefore, in the absence of ratification of the Hague Convention, there are insignificant practical implications of being a signatory to the UNCRC. The UNCRC precedes the 1993 Hague Convention, which has been signed by fifty-one of the sixty-six member states and ten non-member states.

In recognition of the importance of the practical application of the measures outlined in the previously mentioned conventions, the seemingly conflicting principles of the two conventions have become increasingly important to resolve to ensure children's rights. The UNCRC prioritizes domestic foster care and other measures necessary to keep a child in his or her country of origin over intercountry adoption, whereas the Hague Convention gives preference to permanent family relationships over temporary domestic foster care or institutional care. Ratification of either convention does not, however, preclude intercountry adoption as an alternative for a child without a family. Furthermore, neither convention calls for the creation of domestic alternatives in cases where these do not already exist. However, despite these differences, the Hague Convention is most often regarded as the practical delineation of the principles outlined in the UNCRC.¹⁵

Although the guidelines stated in the international conventions function as a measurement of children's rights standards, they are also criticised for facilitating and normalizing an uncritical approach to a practice otherwise difficult to support.¹⁶

Legal standardizing of the adoption process is naturally aimed at those nations most active in this practice, and Korea, being among the leading sending countries, has, for this reason, been criticized for its reservations in signing the UNCRC and failure to ratify the Hague Convention.¹⁷

Korean reservations and future directions

Korea currently has three reservations to the UNCRC: Article 9(3), 21(a) and 40(2)(v)(b). Most relevant to the discussion of adoption is Article 21(a) regarding the authorization of an adoption. The UNCRC allows the adoption of a child by permission of a competent authority only, whereas Korean law does not require the court's authorization when the parents of a child agree on the adoption.

The UN raised concern over Korea's reservations after Korea's State Party Report was submitted in both 1996 and 2000; the UN Concluding Observations from 2003 called for:

- (a) A comprehensive review of the system of domestic and intercountry adoptions with a view to reforming legislation in order to bring it into full conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 21.
- (b) The ratification of the Hague Convention of 1993 on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

Nations are expected to report every four to five years, but Korea was, as an exception, allowed to consolidate the next two country reports, the third and fourth, and submit this on the due date for the fourth report. It was a measure agreed upon to help Korea catch up with its reporting obligations and the next report is subsequently due by December 19, 2008.

Amendment of the Civil Act to be enforced January 1, 2008 should be viewed within this context. The Korean government will not be able to maintain its reservations to the UNCRC nor avoid signing the Hague Convention. This process has, however, been subject to great discussion for the implications it will have on the adoption system. Currently, private organizations are running the adoption system with minimal state involvement. In contrast, if and when Korea signs and ratifies the Hague Convention, a cornerstone of which is the establishment of *competent authorities*, Korea will be required to shift responsibility and financial commitment from the adoption agencies to an independent body. The supervision from a central authority has been a demand intended to protect children from abduction, sale, and trafficking.¹⁸ Compliance with international law seems the only realistic path for the future of the Korean adoption system. Whereas international standards should guarantee basic funda-

mental rights of the child, it is still necessary to consider the practice of adoption itself. In the Korean case, because the country is moving towards greater acceptance of the rights of the child and consideration is given to the process as a whole, considerable resources spent on adoption now also include post-adoption funds. Though the adoptee community greatly benefits from this recognition, I find it problematic that the distribution of these post-adoption funds from the government in support of adoptees is controlled by the adoption agencies rather than the adoptee community. Post-adoption services have apparently become a method for adoption agencies to ensure additional funding support. Furthermore, whereas I do recognize the need for support of a *re-Koreanization* process, I think it is just as important to consider how similar financial support could help prevent the initial family breakdown.

Legal response to the contingency of intercountry adoption was discussed during public hearings held at the National Assembly in fall and winter 2005, and a complete revision with a ban on intercountry adoption was mentioned several times, though a bill has yet to be proposed. Allegedly, Congresswoman Ko Kyung Hwa chose to delay her prospective measure regarding intercountry adoption after successful lobbying from several adoption agencies based in the United States. This group of adoption agencies had initiated a massive pro-intercountry adoption campaign to display “well-adjusted” cases, arguing that, because these adoptees are happy, then intercountry adoption is good. The disproportionate political power of individual stories are in line with Article 3(4)(7) of the Adoption Law laying responsibility on the State and local governments to “scout for good examples of adoption.” It has become a method to attempt justification of the practice of intercountry adoption by a simple and random selection of “well-adjusted” cases.

LEGAL STATUS OF OVERSEAS KOREAN ADOPTEES IN KOREA

As the critical mass of overseas Korean adoptees has reached adulthood, the group has become more visible. It has been in a consciously continuing process of forming its own communities and creating an independent voice. Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A'L), the only adoptee-run non-profit organization (NPO) in Korea, received their official registration in February 2002 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As of May 2007, 180 adoptees are living in Korea and are included on a text-messaging service, but the organization estimates that as many as 500 overseas Korean adoptees have returned and are currently living in the country. The number of people has increased along with the awareness of the organization itself, but there are unfortunately no official statistics on the historical development of the resettlement of Korean adoptees. Visits paid to adoption agencies in Korea corroborate the same trend. Official numbers recorded in 2005 report of more than 3,300 visits to the four adoption agencies.¹⁹ Unofficial sources set the annual number of returning adoptees as high as 5,000.²⁰ Many of these visits are financially supported indirectly by the Korean government through adoption agencies, who, according to the 1995 amendment of the Adoption Law, are required to make motherland tours available.

Compatriots of Foreign Nationality

Overseas Korean adoptees will, in accordance with the Nationality Act Article 15(2), lose their Korean nationality retroactively at the time of acquisition of the nationality of an adoptive parent with a foreign nationality.²¹ Thus, no legal rights in Korea have been granted to overseas adoptees in recognition of their ties to Korea before the 1999 enactment of the Overseas Korean Act. Overseas Koreans adoptees are, with this Act, legally recognized as part of the Korean diaspora in line with approximately seven million other overseas Koreans.

The Overseas Korean Act was the Korean government's compromised response to heavy lobbying by Korean (North) Americans for dual citizenship. However, rather than opening up dual citizenship by revising the Nationality Act, visa status was improved and other restrictions on foreign exchange and property rights were removed. The final draft made under the administration of Kim Dae Jung was designed to give aliens of Korean descent rights beyond those granted to aliens of non-Korean descent.²²

Chaeoe tongp'o (제외동포), which is translated as 'overseas Korean,' literally means 'overseas compatriot.' The Overseas Korean Act applies to two groups of 'overseas compatriots,' those holding Korean citizenship *chaeoe kungmin* (제외국민; overseas Korean nationals) and those who hold foreign citizenship *haeoe kukchök tongp'o* (해외 국적동포; compatriots of foreign nationality). Thus, for overseas Korean adoptees, the emphasis on ethnicity in the Korean law allows them to enjoy extensive rights and benefits.

The F-4 visa, or, "overseas Korean status of sojourn," has become synonymous with this recognition, allowing overseas Koreans to stay in Korea for up to two years, with multiple entry and possible extensions. The Overseas Korean Act Article 10(5) allows for free employment and other economic activities. On the issue of real estate transactions it is stated in Article 11(1) that overseas Koreans shall have "equal rights with a Korean national in the acquisition, possession, utilization, and disposal of real estate." Whereas adoptees clearly benefit from the newly enacted the F-4 visa, they are still excluded from equal footing alongside with Korean nationals. The idea of citizenship and rights based on lineal descendants has created a grey-zone of 'quasi-citizenship,' likely to signal only partial acceptance and approval.

Two major rights are not included in the Overseas Korean Act: first is the eligibility to become a civil servant and second is the full right to vote. To a limited extent, however, the Seoul Metropolitan Government does employ foreign nationals and the legal market is an example of a field that has been opened, with the acceptance of foreign-educated lawyers. Furthermore, foreigners are now allowed to sit for the Korean bar exam, although in practice, few would be likely to have the required language proficiency skills necessary to pass. Even without certified Korean credentials, foreign-trained lawyers are able to practice in Korea, yet they are not allowed to use the title of *pyönhosa* (lawyer), but instead work under the designation of "foreign legal consultant." In addition, legal acceptance of foreigners and their rights in Korea took another historical step forward during the local elections in May 2006. At that time *hwakyo* (ethnic Chinese) and other non-ethnic-Korean citizens were allowed for

the first time to exercise their voting rights in Korea. This voting right was granted to permanent residents who have lived in Korea for more than three years, yet it does not extend to either the presidential or parliamentary elections.

Reinstatement of Nationality

The Korean Nationality Law is based on *ius sanguinis* (right of blood) though, in a few exceptions, *ius soli* (right of soil) may be applied. Thus, Korean nationality is obtained through descent, rather than being based on birth in a territory, in contrast to the United States, for example. The *ius sanguinis* rule was, until the complete revision of the Nationality Law in 1997, based on the principle of patrilineality. That is, a child born to a Korean father and a foreign mother can automatically obtain Korean citizenship at birth, whereas a child born to a Korean mother and a foreign father cannot.

Overseas Korean adoptees are often in a position in which they lack actual knowledge of their birth parents and thus of their ethnic descent. However, Article 2(2) clearly states that an abandoned child found in Korea shall be recognized as born in the country and, with the application of *ius soli*, be able to obtain Korean nationality. Upon adoption and acquisition of foreign nationality, Korean nationality is subsequently lost. However, overseas Korean adoptees who wish to become Korean citizens do not have to be naturalized as other non-ethnic-Koreans, but are, according to Article 9, able to acquire Korean nationality through reinstatement of nationality. Applicants who wish to do so must complete an application form as prescribed by the Ordinance of the Ministry of Justice and submit it to the Ministry of Justice.

With increased transnational interaction and migration, the issues of citizenship and dual nationality have become more and more relevant. Historically, arguments against dual citizenship have been a matter of domestic security and national loyalty. In the Korean case, the country does not accept dual citizenship after the age of 22, due to mandatory military service for all Korean men. For the overseas Korean adoptees who return to live in Korea, dual citizenship is not an unthinkable response to the issue of legal belonging. G.O.A'L has therefore, on several occasions, brought the matter to the public's attention. However, even if Korea would move to allow its 'compatriots' citizenship, some receiving countries of adoptees continue to disallow dual citizenship. Thus, most European countries, in particular the Nordic countries, have a political tradition of being against dual citizenship. Eight of the European countries signed the Strasbourg Convention on the Reduction of Cases of Multiple Nationality and Military Obligations in Cases of Multiple Nationality in May 1963.²³ Yet today, Europe as a whole has moved away from the principles outlined in this Convention, with, for example, the enforcement in 2000 of the 1997 European Convention on Nationality. In practice, however, Sweden is, as of July 1, 2001 the only Nordic country allowing dual citizenship. The so-called "classical immigration" countries: the USA, Canada, and Australia and former colonial powers such as France and the UK all allow dual citizenship to the benefit of an increasing number of citizens, who as a result of globalization operate with multiple identities.²⁴

CONCLUSION

The practice and perception of adoption in modern Korea grew out the Confucian tradition of exclusive agnatic adoption. Though adoption outside the family was fully legalized in 1938 during Japanese colonial rule, much reluctance to adopt still remains in contemporary society. The neo-Confucian notion prevails, though a culture of adoption much like the one we know in the West today, existed in Korea before the Chosŏn Dynasty.

The notion behind the two very different purposes of adoption, ensuring an heir and showing mercy to orphans, is evident today in the application of the Act on Special Cases Concerning the Promotion and Procedure of Adoption and the Civil Act, respectively. Three classifications of adoptions exist in Korea today: general, full, and special adoption. General adoption is a contract-based system between the child and the adopting parents. The lack of protection of children in these cases has led to an amendment of the Adoption Law and it will, from January 1, 2008, no longer be possible to authorize an adoption without consent from the Family Court. Civil law covers full adoptions, where the most recent changes have been made to ensure the rights of the child and in general grant an increased focus on the needs of the child rather than simply facilitating the adoption process. The Adoption Law applies to cases in which a child from an institution or facility is adopted either domestically or internationally through an adoption agency. The 158,703 overseas Korean adoptees fall into this category and the high number of cases gives testimony to the efficiency of the system. The Adoption Law was initially enforced to ease the adoption procedure for foreigners and thus provide welfare for the child at a time when there was a limited understanding of the importance of cultural or linguistic factors in a child's adjustment to an alien society.

Adoption agencies have created a solid position for themselves in this practice and have been reluctant to accept the international requirements of a *competent authority*. However, after repeated criticisms from the UN, Korea is most likely to withdraw its reservations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and also to become signatory to the practical delineation of the Hague Convention of 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption. In doing so, the power structure of the adoption system will be required to shift from the adoption agencies to a central authority, thereby demanding a higher degree of commitment from the state.

Post-adoption services have become an important element in the adoption process today. The adoption agencies are by law required to provide various activities, though most in reality are focused on short-term visits to Korea, popularly known as "Motherland tours." An increasing number of adoptees have returned to Korea with the purpose of residing there, but G.O.A'L, the only adoptee-run NPO in Korea, continues to struggle to have its voice heard. The most visible recognition of the overseas adoptee community was its inclusion in the Overseas Korean Act, thus making adoptees eligible for the F-4 visa. Their status as overseas Koreans allows for various rights beyond those granted to non-Korean foreigners.

In conclusion, Korea has taken initial steps to improve current legislation relevant to adoption. In this process, however, it is easy to forget to question the system itself. The international framework for intercountry adoption has, evidently, been well established, but this does not mean it should be followed uncritically. Korea has yet to acknowledge the fundamental social issues behind the need for an adoption system in the first place; therefore, the need for a persistent debate to be carried out in civil society should ultimately be reflected in the law.

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INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RISE AND FALL OF COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the implications of developments in intercountry adoption (ICA) worldwide in the early years of the 21st century, based on a demographic analysis of trends in numbers and rates in 22 receiving countries between 1998 and 2005. The incidence of ICA in countries of origin has been estimated using data from these 22 countries (see Appendix). The aim of the paper is to explore the factors influencing changes in the level of adoption from countries of origin by looking at both recent changes and earlier movements, including the reduction of adoptions from Sri Lanka and many Latin American countries, which were major sources in the 1980s. Attention will also be paid to Brazil, which continues intercountry adoption, but only allows older and special-needs children to be adopted abroad.¹ These changes are compared to the experience of South Korea over the past 60 years, and the paper concludes with some thoughts on the future of both international and in-country adoption in Korea with reference to the experience of England and Wales over the same period.

A DEMOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

Intercountry adoption is usually accepted as commencing as a global phenomenon in the years following the Second World War,² although the movement of children between countries has a much longer history—see (e.g.) the child migrants from the UK to Australia and Canada.³ During this period over 400,000 children were sent for adoption to the United States and over 160,000 sent by Korea alone. My estimate for global movements over the 60 years would be for 800,000–850,000, with a current addition of over 40,000 a year and the likelihood that by 2010 more than one million adoptees will have been involved in international adoption.

Between 1998 and 2004 there was a marked increase in the global number of intercountry adoptions, with an estimated minimum of 45,000 officially recorded annual adoptions by 2004 (Table 1), an increase of 41 per cent since 1998 (Table 2). However, figures for 2005 and pro-

visional estimates for 2006 suggest a clear reversal of this pattern, driven by major reductions in the number of children sent from Eastern European countries⁴ (see Table 12).

Table 1: Intercountry Adoption 1998 to 2005: Receiving Countries taking 600 or more children in 1998; totals for 22 countries;⁵ and proportion going to top five countries and USA.

Country	1998	1999	2001	2003	2004	2005
United States	15,774	16,363	19,237	21,616	22,884	22,728
France	3,777	3,597	3,094	3,995	4,079	4,136
Italy	2,233	2,177	2,225	2,772	3,403	2,840
Canada	2,222	2,019	1,874	2,180	1,955	1,871
Spain	1,487	2,006	3,428	3,951	5,541	5,423
<i>Sub-total for 5 top countries</i>	25,493	26,162	29,430	34,514	37,862	42,604
Sweden	928	1,019	1,044	1,046	1,109	1,083
Germany	922	977	798	674	650	560
Netherlands	825	993	1,122	1,154	1,307	1,185
Norway	643	589	713	714	706	582
Denmark	624	697	631	522	527	586
Total (22 countries)	31,924	32,896	36,376	41,527	45,288	43,821
% to top 5	80%	80%	81%	83%	84%	84%
% to USA	49%	50%	53%	52%	51%	52%

Although the United States takes the most children, other countries have a higher level per 100,000 population or 1,000 live births (adoption ratio) as shown in Table 2 below.⁶

Table 2: Intercountry adoption ratios, 2004 and 1998

Country	Number of adoptions 2004	Adoptions per 100,000 population 2004	Adoptions per 1,000 live births 2004	Adoptions per 1,000 live births 1998	% increase in number of adoptions 1998–2004
Norway	706	15.35	12.8	11.2	+58%
Spain	5,541	12.99	12.4	4.2	+273%
Sweden	1,109	12.31	11.7	10.8	+20%
Denmark	528	9.75	8.4	9.9	-15%
Switzerland	557	7.69	8.2	8.6	+22%
Ireland	398	9.75	6.3	2.8	+171%
USA	22,884	7.75	5.5	4.2	+45%
UK	332	0.56	0.5	0.4	+29%

THE CHANGING PATTERN OF COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

There are no comprehensive global statistics on international adoption. The longest sequences of reliable statistics are for the US as a receiving state (1948–2006) and Korea as a state of origin (1953–2005). The former allows us a quick snapshot of movement over 60 years, although it must be remembered that it exaggerates the predominance of Korean adoptions, 70 per cent of which have been to the US.⁷ Table 3 shows the top five countries sending children to the US between 1947 and 2006. Korea dominates until 1990 but China has been at the top since 1996. The total number increased tenfold between 1967 and 2006.

Table 3: United States major countries of origin for children granted orphan visas 1948–2006 (European in Bold)

1948-1962	1967	1972	1982
Korea 22% Greece 16% Japan 13% Germany 10% Austria 4%	Germany 30% Korea 25% Italy 7% Japan 5% England 4%	Korea 52% Canada 12% Germany 7% Philippines 4% Vietnam 4%	Korea 57% Colombia 9% India 7% Philippines 6% El Salvador 3%
19,230	1,905	3,023	5,749

1991	1996	2001	2006
Romania 28% Korea 20% Peru 8% Colombia 6% India 5%	China 29% Russia 22% Korea 14% Romania 5% Guatemala 4%	China 24% Russia 22% Korea 10% Guatemala 8% Ukraine 6%	China 31% Guatemala 20% Russia 18% Korea 7% Ethiopia 5%
9,008	11,316	19,237	20,679

Sources: Altstein and Simon (1991); US Department of State (2007)⁸

As a receiving country, the United States accounts for about half of all intercountry adoptions, but in recent years the most common origin countries for adoptions to the United States have differed from the origin countries associated with other countries receiving large numbers of children, especially Italy, France and Canada. It is important, therefore, to look at ALL children sent.

Table 4 shows the global pattern of international adoption by countries of origin from the 1980s through to 2004, based on aggregation of data from receiving countries.⁹ The last few years have seen a dramatic reduction in the number of children sent by Romania and Bulgaria as they sought entry into the European Union and there have been declines in other Eastern European countries such as Belarus. Guatemala continues to be a major source for the United States despite many concerns over child-trafficking,¹⁰ which have led most other receiving countries to suspend adoptions from that country.

Table 4: Major sources of children for intercountry adoption 1980–2004

1980–89	1995	Rank by number sent	1998	2004
Korea	China	1	Russia	China
India	Korea	2	China	Russia
Colombia	Russia	3	Vietnam	Guatemala
Brazil	Vietnam	4	Korea	Korea
Sri Lanka	Colombia	5	Colombia	Ukraine
Chile	India	6	Guatemala	Colombia
Philippines	Brazil	7	India	Ethiopia
Guatemala	Guatemala	8	Romania	Haiti
Peru	Romania	9	Brazil	India
El Salvador	Philippines	10	Ethiopia	Kazakhstan

Sources: Kane (1993); Selman (2002, 2006)

The marked differences between major receiving countries in 2004 are shown clearly in Table 5. South Korea features only in North America. Italy receives children mainly from Eastern Europe and South America and none from China. France takes larger numbers from Franco-phone countries such as Haiti, Vietnam and Madagascar.

Table 5: 10 Countries of Origin sending most children for adoption to the US, Spain, France, Italy, and Canada in 2004

USA	SPAIN	FRANCE	ITALY	CANADA
China	China	Haiti	Russia	China
Russia	Russia	China	Ukraine	Haiti
Guatemala	Ukraine	Russia	Colombia	Russia
S Korea	Colombia	Ethiopia	Belarus	S Korea
Kazakhstan	Ethiopia	Vietnam	Brazil	USA
Ukraine	India	Colombia	Poland	Philippines
India	Bolivia	Madagascar	Ethiopia	Thailand
Haiti	Nepal	Ukraine	Romania	Colombia
Ethiopia	Bulgaria	Latvia	Bulgaria	India
Colombia	Romania	Brazil	India	Ethiopia

China is currently the major source of children worldwide; China and Russia together accounted for 51 per cent of all adoptions to the 22 receiving countries in 2004 (72 % of those to Spain). But standardisation show that the level of adoptions per 1,000 live births is low in China—with highest ratios in 2004 found in Guatemala and Eastern Europe (see Table 6).

Table 6: Standardised adoption rates and ratios in countries of origin 2003: Adoptions to 22 receiving countries listed in order of ratio in 2003 and 2004

Country	Number of Adoptions 2003	Rate (per 10,000 population under age 5)	Ratio (per 1,000 live births) 2003	Adoption Ratio 2004
Bulgaria	962	31.5	15.5	6.3
Belarus	636	14.9	7.2	7.1
Guatemala	2,677	13.8	6.4	8.2
Russia	7,746	12.7	6.3	7.7
Ukraine	2,052	10.1	5.0	5.0
South Korea	2,308	7.9	4.7	4.7
Haiti	1,055	9.4	4.2	4.6
China	11,230	1.2	0.6	0.8
Ethiopia	854	0.7	0.3	0.5
India	1,172	0.1	0.05	0.04

Korea continues to have one of the highest ratios despite a decline in total adoptions over the past 20 years. In 1986, when Korean adoptions were at their highest, the adoption ratio was 13.3 (similar to that of Bulgaria in 2003, but lower than that of Romania in 1991—when the ratio is over 25 if we use the UNICEF estimated total of 7,000 worldwide¹¹). However, an analysis of Korean adoptions standardised against the changing number of live births shows that the ratio rose by over 50 per cent between 1995 and 2005—making it the same that year as it had been in 1980, a year in which there were twice as many adoptions (see Table 7).

Table 7: International Adoptions, live births, adoption ratios and total fertility rate, Korea 1970–2005

YEAR	Adoptions	Births	Adoption Ratio	TFR
1970	1,932	1,006,645	1.9	4.53
1975	5,077	874,869	5.8	3.47
1980	4,144	865,350	4.8	2.83
1985	8,837	662,510	13.3	1.67
1990	2,962	658,552	4.5	1.59
1995	2,180	721,074	3.0	1.65
2000	2,360	636,780	3.7	1.30
2005	2,101	438,062	4.8	1.08

The reason for this was that the last decade has seen a dramatic reduction in the level of births in Korea; the total fertility rate has fallen from 1.65 in 1995 to an all-time low of 1.08 in 2005.

But Korea is not alone in sending children to countries with much higher fertility (see Table 8), exposing the myth that intercountry adoption is a solution to Malthusian problems of over-population created by high rates of child-bearing in sending countries.

Table 8: Social and demographic characteristics of countries sending and receiving most children for international adoption in 2004

Country	Adoptions 2004	GNI per capita	Fertility (TFR)	Mortality (IMR)
Countries of origin				
China	13,408	1,100	1.8	30
Russia	9,440	2,610	1.1	16
Guatemala	3,420	1,910	4.4	35
Korea	2,238	12,030	1.2	5
Ukraine	2,046	970	1.2	15
Receiving Countries				
United States	22,884	41,400	2.0	7
Spain	5,541	21,210	1.3	4
France	4,079	30,090	1.9	4
Italy	3,403	26,120	1.3	4
Canada	1,955	28,390	1.5	5

Four of the top five receiving countries have sub-replacement fertility and three of these have lower fertility than any of the top five receiving countries, even though these include Spain and Italy which had the lowest fertility rate (1.3) in the EU in 2004.

Tables 9 and 10 show the gender and age of children adopted in the United States and Europe in recent years. That China sends mainly girls is widely known, but it is less recognised that Korea now sends mainly boys, whereas in the past the majority of children sent were girls.

The current pattern may reflect the preference for girls by in-country adopters, concerned with issues of lineage and heritage.

Table 9: Gender of children adopted internationally in 2005

	EurAdopt ¹² 2005			United States 2005		
	Female	Male	% Female	Female	Male	% Female
China	1,724	118	94%	7,545	394	95%
India	123	71	63%	235	89	73%
Ethiopia	164	201	45%	234	196	54%
Korea	65	186	26%	606	998	38%

There are also major differences in age at adoption. Korea now sends almost entirely children under one year of age, a very different pattern from the large movements of older children in the 1970s. In sharp contrast, Brazil has now ended infant adoption to other countries and a majority of children sent are over age five, with the younger children usually having special needs or being part of a sibling group.

Table 10: Age of children adopted from selected countries of origin

	United States 2005			France 2004		
	Under 1	1–4	5+	Under 1	1–4	5+
Korea	92%	8%	1%	97%	3%	0
Guatemala	79%	18%	3%	43%	54%	3%
China	35%	63%	3%	13.4%	86.4%	0.2%
Brazil	5%	22%	74%	2%	27%	71%

THE RISE AND FALL OF COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

In this section, I discuss some specific examples of the rise (and fall) of countries of origin and the reasons lying behind the changes. The initial justification for intercountry adoption in Korea has often been discussed, as has the sharp reversal after the Seoul Olympics and the persistence of the movement of children from 1990 to 2005, despite the rapid economic growth of that period and further reductions in an already low birth rate.¹³ Less attention has been paid to other countries which have sent large numbers of children for many years but have subsequently reduced these numbers, changed the nature of children sent, or virtually ended the practice of intercountry adoption. It is hoped that a review of some of these may stimulate discussion of current Korean government plans to reduce numbers, faced with growing calls for Korea to end such adoptions entirely.¹⁴

Austria, Germany, Greece and Japan after the Second World War

Before the Korean War, international adoption was largely about movement from Europe and Japan and as late as 1967, Japan and Europe shared the top places with Korea. (See Table 3.) All are now rich developed countries but only Korea continues to send children on a significant scale. Adoption from Germany continued longest with 6,578 children going to the United States between 1963 and 1981; the experience of one child “rescued” from a German orphanage is vividly portrayed by Peter Dodds¹⁵ who now runs a web-site on international adoption.

Austria, Greece and Germany are all now receiving countries and only Japan continues to send significant numbers of children abroad, mainly to the United States.

It is often forgotten that many Finnish children moved to other Scandinavian countries during the Second World War; 70,000 to Sweden alone.¹⁶ Many of these former “war children” remained silent and then in their forties and fifties began to feel the need to give voice to their experiences and to meet others who could understand what they had been through. Their experience mirrors the gradual emergence of the voice of the British child migrants and foreshadows the Korean adoptee gatherings of today and the future voice of the many Chinese girls adopted in the last decade, who will soon outnumber the Korean adoptees of the last 60 years.

Adoption from Korea

The history of adoption from Korea has been well documented by others.¹⁷ Beginning in the mid-1950s in the aftermath of the Korean War, when it largely involved mixed-race children, by the mid 1960s Korean adoptions were accounting for a third of all adoptions to the United States and from 1972 to 1987 for over half. Total numbers peaked in 1985 when 8,837 children were sent to other countries (5,694 to the US). By 1991 the total number sent had fallen to 2,197 and remained at this level for the next 14 years—falling to under 2,000 only in 2006. With the exception of 1991 when Romania sent most children worldwide, Korea remained the major source of children in the US until 1995 when China and Russia began to dominate. Even today it is the fourth largest supplier of “orphans”, despite being one of the strongest economies and having one of the lowest birth rates in the world (see Table 7). It is against this extraordinary continuation of adoption from Korea that I want to consider the rise and fall of intercountry adoption in other countries of origin.

New Sources of Children from 1970–1989¹⁸

Vietnamese War

The adoption of Vietnamese “orphans” began during the long Vietnam War and accelerated with the fall of Saigon on April 30th 1975; in the months leading up to which over 2,000 infants and children were airlifted from Vietnam and adopted by families around the world in the notorious “Operation Babylift.”¹⁹ Ever since, international adoption from Vietnam has been surrounded by controversy and accusations of corruption. In the 1990s there was a sharp rise in the number of children sent, especially to France (from 65 in 1991 to 1,393 in 1996) and the USA (from 110 in 1993 to 766 in 2002). France suspended adoptions from Vietnam in 1999²⁰ and the number fell to only 3 in 2000. Vietnam halted adoptions to many countries from 2003–4 while it reviewed its policies and implemented bi-lateral agreements. In the US the number of visas issued for Vietnam fell to 21 in 2004 and 7 in 2005; but the number rose again to 163 in 2006 after such an agreement was signed.

India and the Philippines

The Philippines—a country with a long tradition of links to and dependence on the US—became a new source of children for the United States in the late 1960s and was featured in the top six sending countries through to 1992 and in the top 12 for the next 14 years: 245 children were granted orphan visas in 2006. In 2005, the Philippines sent 480 children worldwide (less than a quarter the number going from Korea) and the ratio in 2004 was 0.19 per 1,000 births, compared to 3.98 in Korea. Adoption from India started in the mid-1970s and India was in the top five countries sending children to the US from 1978 to 1995 and in the top 10 through to 2006. The adoption ratio in India is even lower than that in the Philippines: 0.04 per 1,000 in 2004 (see Table 6). This may explain why India recently announced plans to increase the number of children sent. However, there are many stories of corruption in some Indian states in India and suggestions that the actual number of children sent may be higher.²¹

Table 11: Orphan visas issued for Latin American and Caribbean nations by USA, 1989–2005

Country	1989	1993	1997	2001	2005
Colombia	716	426	233	407	291
Chile	253	302	<50	3	5
Paraguay	252	282	<50	1	0
Peru	222	440	<50	23	28
Guatemala	202	512	788	1,609	3,783
Brazil	175	228	<50	33	66
Honduras	131	197	<50	5	3
Cuba	95	<60	<50	0	0
El Salvador	94	100	<50	4	15
Mexico	91	112	152	73	98
Haiti	80	64	142	192	231
Costa Rica	78	<60	<50	9	4
All countries	8,102	7,377	12,743	19,237	22,728

Countries of Latin America

In Kane’s study of intercountry adoption in the 1980s, six of the top ten sending countries were in Latin America. By 2004 only two (Guatemala and Colombia) remained in the top ten, and some (such as Chile and El Salvador) had virtually stopped. In the United States, 10 of the top 20 countries in 1989 were from Latin America and a further two from the Caribbean. By 1997, only five of these remained in the top 20, sending more than 50 children annually (see Table 11).

By 2005 only four Latin American/Caribbean countries remained in the top 20; five countries sent fewer than 10 children; and only two (Guatemala in Central America and Haiti in the Caribbean) were sending significantly more children than in 1989, although the total number of orphan visas had nearly trebled. The children sent from Brazil in 2005 were over five years

of age or had special needs (see Table 10). From the mid 1990s, the number of children sent from Guatemala to the US began to rise sharply, reaching 4,135 in 2006.

Romania and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe

The impact of Romania on the world of international adoption has been well documented and frequently discussed from the onset of the practice in 1990 following the fall of Ceausescu in December 1989.²² Less than twenty years later, the Romanian government—after many previous “moratoria”—finally announced that intercountry adoptions were to end: only biological grandparents living in another country will be able to adopt Romanian orphans, and then only if no other relative or Romanian family will adopt the child.²³

In 2007 Romania and Bulgaria became the latest members of the European Union. Huge pressure was brought on them in the preceding years of their application for membership to improve their child care provision and end reliance on international adoption. Both Romania and Bulgaria have at different times had the highest annual number of international adoptions per 1,000 live births (for Romania in 1991 the estimated ratio was 25 per 1,000; for Bulgaria in 2003 the ratio was 15.3 per 1,000²⁴).

Table 12 shows the final stages of decline in the two countries between 2003 and 2005. The table shows a similar reduction in Belarus; little change in Russia and the Ukraine; and growth in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, all longer-standing members of the EU.

Table 12: International adoptions from Eastern Europe to 22 receiving countries

	2003	2004	2005
Russia	7,746	9,425	7,366
Ukraine	2,052	2,021	1,705
Bulgaria	962	368	115
Belarus	636	627	23
Romania	471	289	15
Poland	345	408	397
Latvia	65	124	114
Lithuania	85	103	78

Many argue that the effect of intercountry adoption has been negative, delaying the reform of institutional care and the development of in-country adoption,²⁵ but in America angry voices have been raised about the EU’s lack of consideration for the “many thousands still housed in appalling conditions”²⁶ and as early as 2001, a Korean reporter for the *International Herald Tribune* condemned the Romanian authorities, citing South Korea’s wisdom in not banning adoption by foreigners.²⁷

In 2007, Ukraine announced new legislation on intercountry adoption and concern has been growing in Russia following reports of the murder of Russian children by their adoptive parents in the US and the case of the a five-year-old girl adopted by a paedophile for purposes of sexual exploitation.²⁸ This second wave of “European” adoptions accelerated with the arrival of Romania, Russia and the Ukraine in the 1990s but may now be coming to an end.

Countries where numbers have fallen largely as a result of the actions of receiving countries

Table 13 below looks at intercountry adoptions from Cambodia, which has for some years been a matter of concern²⁹ (Selman 2005a). From 1998 to 2002 the most striking feature is that most of the children sent went to two countries—the United States and France. However, evidence of corruption was growing and in the aftermath of the exposure and prosecution of Laurin Gallindo for visa fraud³⁰ the US State Department announced a suspension of adoptions from 2002 and in 2004 none were recorded in published lists.

Numbers sent fell sharply in 2003 following growing concerns in those countries, but in the same year 40 applications were approved in the UK and the number to Italy rose to 29. Subsequently the UK called a halt to adoptions from Cambodia³¹ and no applications were approved in 2004. However, the number going to Italy rose to 43 in 2004 and 76 in 2005. A growing number of adoptions was also reported by the Austrian agency *Family for You*: 7 in 2004 and 41 in 2005.

Table 13: Intercountry adoptions from Cambodia 1998–2004: major receiving countries

Receiving State	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
USA	249	248	402	407	254	124	0
France	95	153	169	278	328	60	6
Italy	0	0	0	0	14	29	43
Canada	N/A	N/A	21	19	22	23	14
UK	2	0	1	0	6	40	0
TOTAL	347	403	596	706	626	309	94

Source: Based on data for 20 receiving countries (Selman 2006)

In contrast, although most European countries will not allow the adoption of children from Guatemala because of the known corruption in the system,³² the number sent to the US has risen steadily from 257 in 1990 to 4,135 in 2006, despite the State Department noting that Guatemala’s adoption procedures do not meet the standards of the Hague Convention (Guatemala’s accession to the Convention has been challenged by several contracting countries) and cautioning US citizens against adopting from Guatemala. It is expected that numbers may fall dramatically when the US finally ratifies the Convention.³³

Countries whose decision comes from internal pressures

Most of the South American countries which have reduced the number of children sent for intercountry adoption have done so because they felt it inappropriate as they become richer and often from a deep sense of shame. The ending of intercountry adoption is often also linked to a drive to develop in-country adoption. Brazil is a good example of this³⁴—and it is equally true of the belated decision of the UK to end child migration. Other countries outside America which have stopped, having once been major sending countries, include Sri Lanka which sent 117 children to EurAdopt agencies in 1993 but fewer than 10 in 2005 and 2006, despite many pressures to restart after the disaster of 2006 tsunami. Brazil has reduced numbers significantly and ended infant adoption but still sends many older and special-needs children—it will be interesting to see when this, in turn, will cease when Brazil decides that it should be able to provide for these children.

The rise and rise of intercountry adoption in China and Ethiopia

While many countries are reducing the number of children sent for intercountry adoption, the outstanding exceptions in recent years—apart from Guatemala, which was discussed earlier—have been China and Ethiopia. The number of children sent by China doubled between 1998 and 2004; the number sent by Ethiopia doubled between 2001 and 2005 and in 2005 it was second to only China in the number of children sent to EurAdopt agencies. China sent 1,500 fewer children to the US in 2006, but the number from Ethiopia rose by 75% and the number from Liberia by 93% suggesting that Africa may now be becoming the new source for a market facing supply problems when demand is as high as ever.

THE END OF INFANT ADOPTION IN EUROPE

Finally, I want to look back at the decline in infant adoption in Europe with special reference to England & Wales. The decline in infant adoption in Scandinavia and the Netherlands can be dated back to the late 1950s and infant adoption is now very rare. Intercountry adoption increasingly replaced domestic adoption as a solution for infertile couples.

The decline in England and Wales started in the late 1960s and coincides with the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act. In 1973, oral contraception was made free on the National Health Service (NHS) and financial support for single mothers improved. All these factors led to a reduction in adoptions despite a rise in non-marital births. The proportion of out-of-wedlock births leading to adoption by a stranger fell from over 20% in 1968 to under 4% in 1983.³⁵ Infant adoption remains rare in England but adoption of older children from the care system is increasing as a part of Government child care strategy,³⁶ a pattern not found in mainland Europe. “Special needs” adoption is also encouraged in the United Countries, but there infant adoption is now flourishing in a lucrative private market and is being encouraged by pro-life

groups seeing it as an alternative to abortion. The development of the so-called “safe havens”³⁷ is a reminder that countries can move backwards as well as forwards.

Table 14: China and Ethiopia 1998–2005, with major destinations ranked by number of children sent in 2005 and percentage increase 2002–2005

Country	1998	2002	2003	2004	2005	Growth 2002-2005
		CHINA				
US	4,206	5,053	6,859	7,044	7,906	+56%
Spain	196	1,427	1,043	2,389	2,753	+93%
Canada	901	771	1,108	1,001	973	+26%
NL	210	510	567	800	666	+31%
Sweden	123	316	373	497	462	+46%
France	23	210	360	491	458	+118%
TOTAL	6,115	9,135	11,230	13,408	14,357	+59%
		ETHIOPIA				
USA	96	105	135	289	441	+320%
France	155	209	217	390	397	+90%
Spain	0	12	107	220	227	-
Italy	9	112	47	193	211	+88%
NL	18	25	39	72	72	+188%
Belgium	46	41	52	62	112	+173%
Australia	37	36	39	45	59	+64%
TOTAL	481	695	854	1,528	1,713	+146

LESSONS FOR KOREA

I hesitate to suggest lessons for Korea, as many more qualified than I are already pressing for change, but I hope that the data presented above may be useful in stimulating discussion. There seems to me little outside pressure on Korea to stop sending children for adoption. Indeed the demand for Korean babies in the US, Australia and Scandinavia is as great as ever—healthy young babies who have been well cared for before placement. So there is no EU-type pressure; likewise, there is no Cambodian rejection, although a clear message of concern has been sent from the UN.³⁸ The pressures are largely from within—and not least from many thousands of adoptees. But many observers, including myself, have noted that intercountry adoption is an anomaly in a rich, low-birth-rate country like South Korea. This leaves open the wider issue of the future of all international adoption.³⁹

However, the lessons from Europe seem to me important in that the birth mothers of children placed for adoption in Korea (whether domestic or international) are predominantly young unmarried women facing the stigma of an illegitimate birth in a society which offers no support for the single parent. It is important for Korea to address this issue as otherwise any end to intercountry adoption will simply lead to a rise in domestic adoption or children in institutions. Unlike Brazil, intercountry adoption in Korea largely concerns young infants—so an

end will have little impact on the large number of children in institutional care in Korea. Their needs must be addressed, and it is for Korea to decide whether international adoption can play a part or whether to follow Europe in the development of foster care as an alternative, or the US and Britain in developing domestic special-needs adoption. Whatever course is taken, the major need is for improved support for birth families and an end to the stigma surrounding unmarried parenthood.

APPENDIX

Although reliable data are available for some countries of origin (notably South Korea) for many other countries it has proven impossible to obtain these, at least until very recent years for those submitting returns to The Hague Special Commission of September 2005. I have, therefore, made use instead of estimates based on data from receiving countries. For the period 2003–2006 these are based on 22 receiving countries and probably represent an accurate picture. For 1980s I have used Kane’s estimate from 14 receiving countries and for 1995 my own based on 10 countries. These are reasonable for Korea as we both had access to the key countries receiving children from Korea. The table below indicates that where a suitable range of receiving countries are used estimates can be very close to the actual figures provided by a state of origin, minor discrepancies being due to different dates for recording adoptions. Elsewhere I have demonstrated similar accuracy for recent estimates for India,⁴⁰ and Kane⁴¹ shows the same for Colombia in the 1980s.

ADOPTIONS FROM KOREA 1986–2006
Estimates based on data from receiving countries

	1986	1989	1995	1998	2003	2004	2005	2006
	Kane	Kane	Selman	Selman	Selman	Selman	Selman	Selman
USA	6188*	3,544	1,666	1,829	1,790	1,716	1,630	1,376
Sweden	345*	75*	106	96	111	121	104	90
Australia	*	*	71	69	101	98	96	103
Canada	? ¹	? ¹	1	8	73	97	97	N/A
Norway	192*	153*	125	121	81	87	79	59
Denmark	350*	282*	70e	72	56	53	46	40
France	736*	220*	96	95	46	42	38	N/A
Luxembourg	-	-	33	24	28	24	24	24
Netherlands	157*	107*	15	42	17	0	0	0
Germany	E ²	E ²	-	-	2	0	1	0
Malta	-	-	-	-	2	0	0	0
TOTAL³	8,637	4,353	2,183	2,356	2,308	2,238	2,115	N/A
% to USA	72%	81%	76%	75%	78%	77%	77%	-
Korean Data⁴	8,680	4,191	2,180	2,443	2,287	2,258	2,101	1,899
Adoption Ratio⁵	13.5	6.5	3.1	3.8	4.6	4.7	4.8	-

* Countries providing accurate data to Kane, where numbers are cited for receiving states these are taken from country data for 1986 and 1989; for Denmark and the Netherlands, data are for 1986 and 1988.

¹ Quebec only.

² Estimate based on 5 *Lander* (regions).

³ Overall figure from Kane’s data, applies only to 1986 and 1989 – 8,637 and 4,353

⁴ Republic of Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2006.

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CONSUMING KOREAN BODIES: OVERSEAS ADOPTEES AND THE SOUTH KOREAN MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Recent studies of global migration and media have demonstrated how the circulation of images and narratives in proliferating “mediascapes” of global capitalism constitute and reinforce ethnic identifications and conjure powerful nostalgic sentiments for the “homeland.”¹ These media also contribute to the formation of new public forums of opinion making, transnational social imaginaries, and normative orders of belonging within the dialectics of the local and the global, and sometimes lay the ground for transnational political solidarities.² Although scholars disagree over the extent to which these new social formations and imaginaries are captive or resistant to the hegemonic power of global capitalism, they do agree that these publics and counterpublics present novel forms of social life that exceed the territorial and regulatory boundaries of the nation-state.³

Many of these studies focus on the ways in which subaltern and diasporic groups appropriate available media technologies to engage in the production of imagined communities, usually distinct from dominant narratives of the “nation” that exclude, distort, or erase their identities. Creating alternative sites for the circulation of this media in “narrowcast” or ethnically-defined circuits of distribution and spaces of exhibition, both online and off, diasporic (like indigenous) media are often defined in opposition to dominant national or transnational mediascapes, sometimes in the service of translocal political projects.⁴ It should be noted, however, that representations that may have once been typified as “narrowcast” or “diasporic” media, are now increasingly integrated into broadband internet technologies and satellite television feeds, resulting in a much more complex intersection of “local,” national, or “global” imaginaries, which must be viewed as co-constitutive and mutually informing. Thus, “oppositional logics are insufficient for grasping media practices” and, as Ginsburg et al. encourage, “our models must allow for the simultaneity of hegemonic and anti-hegemonic effects.”⁵

This paper is informed by these recent studies, but is organized around concerns that have less to do with “diasporic media” than with the “diasporic” within media—that is, the production of images about transnational subjects that emanate from dominant media outlets in the “homeland.” Like the narratives of national identity and modernity that are produced by state-controlled or corporate media and which increasingly circulate in transnational mediascapes,⁶ the South Korean case I focus on here also engages in the construction of dominant views of

the nation, in particular, defined against its overseas “others.” Like the figures of overseas Chinese in Yang’s study of a transnational Chinese social imaginary,⁷ representations of overseas Koreans in South Korean media also contribute to a sense of heightened cosmopolitanism in the homeland and are simultaneously constitutive of and constituted by deterritorialized subjectivities, but, as I will argue, in the case of adoptees, they also reinforce notions of immutable ethnonational identity as a response to the effects of cultural globalization. In my analysis, I draw upon ethnographic observations of the interactions between transnationally adopted Koreans and South Korean media producers to suggest how the dialectics of nationalism and globalization play out in both the context of production (journalistic interviews) and the resulting media texts. I show how, through the mediation of both the South Korean state and journalists, adoptees are presented as peculiar, culturally deficient “Koreans,” whose mimicry offers a source of pleasure, yet simultaneously reveals broader anxieties about hegemonic national identity.⁸ In both performative encounters and symbolic representations, adoptees are imagined as “others” to the nation in context of broader global processes, thereby reflecting the perceived threats to “tradition” and promises of cosmopolitanism presented by “globalization.”

There are roughly 200,000 Korean children who have been transnationally and transracially adopted by white parents in more than a dozen different nations across the Western world since the end of the Korean War. More than half are now adults, and an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 adoptees are returning to Korea annually to visit, live and work and/or to search for biological and cultural “roots.” With the inclusion of adoptees as “overseas Koreans” in the 1999 Overseas Koreans Act (*chaeoe tongp’o pōp*), the Overseas Koreans Foundation (OKF; *chaeoe tongp’o chaedan*) began offering a summer motherland tour (*moguk munhwa ch’ehōm yōnsu*) for adult adoptees which included various activities that sought to “train” adoptees in Korean traditional culture and expose them to contemporary Korean life, under an official mandate to “restore (homogeneous) ethnic identity” (*tongchilsōng hoebok*) to adoptees. I worked as a “counselor” on three of these tours between 2001 and 2004, and during each, the oftentimes oppressive media presence served as a recurrent reminder (to adoptees and myself) that adoptees were “on display” for an imagined yet distant “Korean public.”⁹

In what follows, I focus on the microprocesses of adoptee and journalist encounters during the 2004 OKF motherland tour to demonstrate how adoptees’ constitutive hybridity and liminality trouble attempts to assimilate them into dominant narratives of the nation as defined by ethnic homogeneity and cultural continuity. I found that adoptees, some motivated by the hope of finding their biological families, were drawn into interviews with journalists, and were asked to perform their cultural alterity and stereotypic cultural “awkwardness” in order to project an amusing or tragicomic image for the Korean public. In the context of social anxiety over the effects of cultural globalization on Korean national identity, I argue that media representations of adoptees that construct them as “family” by dint of having Korean “blood” were also mobilized to buttress conservative narratives of Korean authenticity, in which displays of adoptees’ “foreignness” were elicited in ways that reinscribed the coherence of the national imaginary.

FEEDING ON KOREAN ADOPTEES

We were in the main conference hall of a convention center and hotel in Suwon City, which was called, in bureaucratically utilitarian fashion, “The Kyeonggi Province Training Center for Small to Midsize Businesses.” Here, just beyond the borders of metropolitan Seoul, the Overseas Koreans Foundation was hosting part of its annual, 10-day motherland tour for adult overseas adopted Koreans. As had become customary for this government-sponsored tour, on this day, a traditional Korean wedding ceremony was being staged under the supervision of the director of cultural preservation of Kyeonggi province.

As he gave three pairs of brides and grooms a crash course in the proper form for a traditional deep bow (*kŭn jŏl*), his assistants dressed the rest of the wedding party. These middle-aged Korean women tied bows on the women’s hanboks (traditional Korean dress) and fastened the ankle ties on the men’s pantaloons, applied the brides’ makeup and attached embroidered ornaments to their hanboks. The adoptees’ bodies were made docile under the expert hands of the director and his assistants as they were dressed, groomed, and trained. As we waited for the rehearsals to end and for the ceremony to begin, the room became increasingly stuffy, and the participants fidgeted uncomfortably in their hanboks, which, despite their gossamer like delicacy, can conserve heat remarkably well. Nevertheless, when it was all ready to go, the bright rustling fabrics in fuschia, indigo, lime green, and scarlet red, made a lush spectacle, rendering the “non-place”¹⁰ of the conference hall a space of elaborate cultural display.

After the wedding rituals had been performed, the room was being rearranged for the dumpling making class. Overheated from the hanboks, some adoptees were changing back into their casual clothes while others were snapping digital pictures of each other in their traditional getups. The dozen or so television reporters who had been filming the colorful cultural performance were positioned near the back of the room, trying to grab hold of adoptees for short interviews. Whereas some adoptees actively avoided the reporters, others agreed to answer questions that typically covered topics such as their thoughts about the wedding ceremony, comparisons with weddings in their adoptive countries, and opinions about wearing traditional Korean dress.

An adoptee in her early twenties who was in Korea for the first time since her adoption to Texas at four years old, volunteered to speak with two female reporters and a camera operator. This is the interview that transpired:

Reporters (R): “Do you like wearing Korean hanbok? Does it make you feel Korean?”

Adoptee (A): “I really like wearing hanboks, uhm, I think they’re very beautiful, and uhm...makes me feel Korean!”

R: “When else do you feel Korean?”

A: “I guess when I eat Korean food.”

R: "What kind of Korean food?"

A: "When I eat kimchee..."

R: "Anything else?"

A: "Uhm...kimbap? Chapchae?"

R: "Can you say some words in Korean?"

After this awkward verbal nudging of the adoptee to perform her cultural (in)competence, the reporters concluded the interview, thanked her, and set off to find their next subject. As soon as the production assistant switched off the blinding fill light, the adoptee's face, suddenly in shadow, clouded over with confusion and disappointment. She had expected to have a chance to tell her adoption story, in hopes of making contact with her birthmother and was not prepared for the interview to be over so quickly. She hesitated an instant before hurrying after the reporters, asking if she could tell her adoption story on camera. As I watched from a few yards away, the light was turned back on, and she pulled out a childhood photo and told them what little she knew about her adoption history.

From my vantage point (fig. 1), it struck me that the two reporters, young women dressed casually in t-shirts and cargo pants, might, to an uninformed observer, appear to be the "inauthentic" Koreans, interviewing the "native" Korean in her "traditional" dress. This auto-Orientalizing is a common trope in state sponsored tourism, yet since most young Koreans do not wear hanboks, or, for that matter, even own hanboks of their own, even had the event been a "real" Korean wedding, it would still be uncommon to see a young woman wearing a hanbok, especially in this semi-urban setting. Thus, it would make perfect sense to most Koreans that the woman in the hanbok was a tourist, dressed up to "feel Korean" for a day, and that it was the women in the "westernized" clothes who were the true Koreans. One might say then that wearing a hanbok in urban, postmodern Korea therefore signifies an embrace of folkloric "tradition" that stems from a lack of "culture," rather than an embodiment of it. And it is adoptees' embodiment of cultural lack that provides the basis for the media spectacle.

Curious to know which station the reporters were from, I approached the two women between interviews. Expecting to hear that they were working for one of the main networks such as KBS, MBC, SBS, or one of their local affiliates, I was surprised to hear that they were with a cable show on the Food Channel. They told me that the report was to air on a program called "Taste Your Life" and that they had come to tape the OKF program after hearing about the event from the PR department of the company that had donated the electric steamers for the dumpling cooking class.

"Taste Your Life," which has since been discontinued, was a cooking show symptomatic of the health and lifestyle craze known as "well-being" that took Korea by storm in the early 2000s. A self-consciously globalized approach to the middle-class good life, "well-being"

took “traditional” Korean foods, folk medicine, and other daily practices and fused them with Western alternative and eco-friendly trends into modern, up-to-date lifestyle choices. The segment about the OKF tour aired a few weeks later, as part of a segment of “Taste Your Life” called “Your Trend,” which on previous weeks had featured the history and uses of olives, tableware design and the remodeling of a restaurant. It seemed that adoptees had truly arrived as objects for national consumption.



Figure 1. Reporters from the Food Channel interviewing an American adoptee, September 2004. Photo by author.

ADOPTees AND THE MEDIA

The relationship between adoptees and the South Korean media (which, especially since the liberalization of the media following Korea’s “democratization,” can hardly be considered to make up a monolithic entity) and is embedded in broader social and historical contexts linked to Korea’s modern history, the national division, and South Korea’s geopolitical position with respect to American economic and cultural hegemony.¹¹ Adoptee narratives also recall the mass-mediated reunions of the separated families of the Korean War (*isan kajok*) and play into the popularity of melodramatic telenovellas (*dŭrama*) that have become an institutionalized part of Korean public culture and the national social imaginary. They are also, as part of the Korean Wave (*hallyu*), a heavily-promoted export commodity.¹² Family search and reunion programs have multiplied over the past few years, with the popular daily program Morning Forum (*Ach’im Madang*) being the prime venue for a diversity of Koreans seeking long lost kin. Other shows that sometimes feature adoptees looking for biological family are “I must see you once more” (*Kkok Hanbŏn Mannagosipŏyo*) and “Bearing Love” (*Sarangŭl sitgo*), which tend to offer lighter, heartwarming stories of people searching for middle school

sweethearts or intimate friends, but also have shown the more gripping stories of older adoptees who have memories of their lives in Korea.

As adult adoptees have returned to Korea in increasing numbers since the early 1990s, adoptee stories have appeared frequently in newspaper and television reports about birth family search and/or reunion, as well as in coverage of roots tours that predominate during the summer months. Less frequently, profiles of adoptees living and working in Korea appear in magazines and newspapers, as well as in stories that feature “celebrity” adoptees, such as Toby Dawson, who recently won a bronze medal in the Turin Winter Olympics (and who was reunited with his Korean father to great media fanfare in early 2007). Adoptee stories are ripe for melodramatic renderings, and adoptee representations are invariably constructed to maximize emotional effect. Language saturated with sentimentality, maudlin soundtracks, and emphatic visual effects characterize the majority of television reports about adoptees.

In both television and print media reports, adoptee search and reunion stories and accounts of adoptees’ learning about their cultural roots tend to be distinctly separate types of news stories. The former focus on individual stories and zoom in on tear-stained faces and the confessions of guilt-ridden birthmothers and emotionally scarred adoptees. The latter are more light-hearted accounts of group tours that show adoptees learning about Korean history and customs, and that comment obliquely on the more complex emotions they may be feeling around their return to the motherland.

HOW TO FEEL KOREAN

The program that aired on the Food Channel in October 2004 began with the following voiceover introduction, framing adoptees with respect to the ethnonational “us”:

Black pupils, yellow skin...Eyes, nose, lips, there is nothing about them that is different from us. Yet for them, Korea, the object of vague longings, seemed so far away. Summer 2004, they have returned to this land to seek their own roots (*chasinŭi ppurirŭl ch’atgi*). As very young children they were loaded onto planes to go to their adoptive parents overseas. During the short period of a week, as these adoptees (*ibyanga*) experience (*ch’ehŏm*) a traditional wedding ceremony and the making of dumplings (*mandu bitgi*), what will they see, feel and learn?

Why are they looking so busy? These young people dressed up beautifully in hanboks appear somehow awkward. Redoing the tie on the jacket of the hanbok, braiding hair, taking pictures of their new and curious appearances on their new cameras, then taking more pictures. It’s because they are overseas adoptees, and it’s their first time since they were born to be wearing hanboks.

For the purposes of this paper, the program as a text, however, is less relevant than the interview, which, as a genre of speaking, I take to be a form of social action and cultural

reproduction. My interests lie in the journalistic interview as an intercultural exchange that is performed against the background of an imagined “Korean public” and national community. From media producers’ perspectives, the public is a market of viewers, of whom they are a part, who may be entertained or touched by the image of adoptees wearing hanboks, awkwardly bowing in a mock ritual, or fumbling with chopsticks as they try to grab a hold of the slippery, misshapen dumplings they have learned to make. There are specific narrative tropes that provide the discursive context upon which reporters draw in formulating their questions, as well as a set of dominant assumptions about who adoptees are that shape the telling of these stories. From my observations, adoptees are often asked to perform their cultural alterity in ways that reinforce dominant tropes of adopteehood for the Korean public, and these are “received ideas” that reporters, generally in their 20s and 30s, have appropriated from their own lifetime as consumers of media images of adoptees and upon which they depend when writing their stories against deadline or grabbing a quick interview for maximum sound-byte efficiency. They are like the “fast-thinkers” of the television media world that Bourdieu¹³ describes dismissively in his treatise *On Television*. Fast-thinkers, he writes,

...think in clichés...received ideas...banal, conventional common ideas that are received generally. ...[W]hen you transmit a received idea, it’s as if everything is set, and the problem solves itself. Communication is instantaneous because, in a sense, it has not occurred: or it only seems to have taken place.

The commodification of grief and loss in the Korean media has produced a climate in which reporters, who are also consumers of media, seek to (re)produce received ideas about adoptees—invariably highlighting either kinship or cultural loss.

For instance, I sat in on an interview between an adoptee who had been adopted to the U.S. in 1961 and a television journalist from Arirang TV. The adoptee described her experience arriving on a plane from Korea, and being raised in a rural area of the Pacific Northwest. She also talked about having less interest in finding her birth parents than in knowing whether or not she might have biological siblings. Despite this, the journalist continued to try to steer the conversation back to the adoptee’s Korean parents, and after the interview was over, confided to me that although she had not known what to expect from the interview since it was her first with an adoptee, she had thought that the adoptee would cry, and was disappointed that she hadn’t captured a more demonstrative display of emotion. She added, with a tone of self-reproach: “It seemed like she was getting emotional, but I couldn’t get her to say more.” Among the handful of journalists I met, only one had had any prior experience reporting on adoptees or adoptee issues. Given the tight production schedule and turn around time for filing their stories, these reporters honed in on adoptees to get images and sound bites that they could insert into their preconceived narratives of birth family search or roots searching. In addition, it is not uncommon, according to reporters I spoke with, for senior editors to rewrite stories and cut quotes out of whole cloth to conform to what they believe is the story that needs to be told, leaving the even the most conscientious reporter in an uncomfortable ethical bind.

Some adoptees who agree to answer questions posed by reporters become unknowingly or uncomfortably complicit in the objectification of adoptees as culturally deficient Koreans. These exchanges, which, with a few exceptions, take place in English, are entered into on the presumption of an implicitly agreed upon framework of journalistic standards and ethical practice. From the adoptees' perspective, the media provide the means to reach the (phantom) Korean public, imagined as a nation of strangers with whom they may hope to make an intimate connection. It is, however, a public with which the adoptees themselves do not identify, and to which, because of limited language ability, they have restricted access. In fact, adoptees themselves very rarely get to see the final news product, and, unless they live in Korea, are unlikely to recognize the newspaper or broadcasting company the reporter is working for or to be able to interpret its position within the broader field of cultural production. When they do see themselves featured in an article, it is surprisingly common to find that they have been misquoted, misidentified, or have had entire statements falsely attributed to them.

In one particularly egregious and unusual case, an adoptee had told her adoption story to a reporter hoping to get information about her biological family, and the next day, photos of her as a child and as an adult appeared on the first column of the front page, accompanied by a poem addressed to her birth mother, in the voice of the adoptee, but penned by the journalist. When I pointed this out to the adoptee, she was surprised and affronted, but ultimately was more concerned about whether or not the identifying information she had given the reporter had been included than she was about the appropriation of her story by the free-versifying and ventriloquizing writer.

Adoptees' encounters with Korean journalists recall Louisa Schein's description of the "rhetorical vulnerability" of Miao women in China in encounters with Hmong American media-makers. In these interactions, individuals are "commandeered to represent themselves in codes not of their making to audiences not visible to them."¹⁴ As more and more adoptees are subject to "rhetorical vulnerability" by the news media in Korea (and influenced by their own understandings of representational politics in Western media environments), stories of unethical practices and the exploitation of adoptee vulnerability especially in cases of family search and reunion have fueled collective skepticism and distrust.

The interview with the adoptee from Texas ended up appearing in the episode of "Taste Your Life," along with other adoptee sound bites about the beauty of hanboks and the tastiness of Korean food. At the program's end, an additional few minutes were included in which this adoptee and another from Denmark spoke into the camera about their adoption histories and desires to find Korean relatives. In contrast to the fast-paced edits and jovial nature of the program proper, this coda was accompanied by slow and sentimental music, and the tacked-on and unedited quality of these clips suggested the difficulty of incorporating the excess of adoptee histories into the conventional "roots" tour narrative. Indeed, it is in these moments that the less amusing reasons for adoptees' cultural lack, difference, and mimicry are revealed—one had been found at a train station at four years old and had vague memories of other siblings, the other abandoned as an infant without any identifying information—and the

repressed histories of abandonment that constitute adoptees' claims to Korea begin to be broached.

CONCLUSION

The collective memory of adoptees raises multiple specters—of individual family loss, of national betrayal, of secrets kept and records lost. In recent years, the media have filled in a gap between adoption agencies who cannot or will not provide information that adoptees sometimes feel is essential to their completion as full persons, and a government that expresses its debt to adoptive parents and its pride (and relief) that the nation's abandoned children have turned out so well, but which has done little to redress adoptees' practical and material needs in Korea. Yet encounters with media producers, in addition to the resulting media representations, reveal the suppression of adoptee subjectivity in the production and reproduction of a specific narrative of adoptees as (inauthentic) Koreans, as "others" to the Korean nation. Especially in light of cultural globalization and anxieties over the nation's "identity crisis," adoptees serve as a reminder that Korean "blood" is inalienable and that cultural "roots," even if deeply submerged, are still extant. The "Taste Your Life" segment ended with a group photo of the adoptees with an accompanying text that read, "Korean [people's] blood flows in them."

Thus, in some respects at odds with the purpose of the government motherland tour, these discursive productions objectify adoptees as "like us," sharing physical traits, kinship and "blood," yet, in doing so, they reinscribe notions of culturally authentic Koreanness and the homogenous "we" that implicitly excludes adoptees from the national body. If the state's *segzehwa*/globalization project seeks to imbue adoptees with "culture," with the goal of instilling a shared sense of personhood or *hanminjok* among adoptees as "overseas Koreans," media accounts which indulge in highlighting adoptee alterity effectively undermine adoptees' cultural belonging by reproducing homogenizing nationalist constructions of Korean identity as embedded in shared traditions and "culture." As adoptees consume Korean foods and cultural products, Koreans consume images of adoptees whose attempts at approximating Koreanness are constructed as being at once pathetic and adorable—evoking the shameful and tragic histories of adoption and abandonment but also presenting amusing performances that in their imprecision and awkwardness help to remind audiences of the embedded hierarchies that define their own Koreanness.¹⁵

South Korea has had nearly total television saturation rates since the early 1990s and with the relaxation of state control and censorship over the media since the 1980s, and in conjunction with the 1990s expansion of cable and satellite television, middle-class South Korean viewers currently have a plethora of choices for engaging in transnational imaginaries. A glance at the schedule for the Food Channel demonstrates this quite well—the Korean show "Big Mama's Kitchen" is aired next to Britain's "The Naked Chef" and the American reality show "Extreme Makeover." Now, the troped-out adoptee body is available for broadcast across this diversified media landscape, in certain contexts representing the pain of severed kinship ties

and a shared history of familial dislocation, in others, the flexibility of transnational subjects who can don a hanbok or ingest Korean food and, for a moment, help the national “us” feel Korean.

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- 6 Lisa Rofel, "Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics in Contemporary China," *American Ethnologist* 21 (1994); Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Arlene Davila, "El Kiosko Budweiser: The Making of a 'National' Television Show in Puerto Rico," *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 3 (1998): 452-470.
- 7 Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "Mass Media."
- 8 See Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). Bhabha, in the context of colonial power and subjectification of the colonized, writes of mimicry in ways that resonate with the construction of adoptees as almost, but not quite, "Korean": "...colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (1994, 86; emphasis in original).
- 9 See Eleana Kim, "Wedding Citizenship and Culture: Korean Adoptees and the Global Family of Korea," in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby A. Volkman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

- 10 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1995).
- 11 For an in-depth analysis of adoptee representations in Korean popular culture, see Tobias Hübinette, “Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture,” Ph.D. diss., Stockholm University, 2005.
- 12 In addition, transnational adoptee characters have appeared with increasing frequency in Korean television dramas, the most popular instance being the 2004 soap opera “I’m Sorry I Love You” (*Mianhada saranghanda*) which featured the misadventures of an adoptee from Australia who returns to Korea as an adult. The cyber community that developed among fans of the program became drawn by the program to issues related to overseas adoption and even became involved in a short-lived campaign to help overseas adoptees.
- 13 Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: New Press, 1999).
- 14 Louisa Schein, “Mapping Hmong Media,” 239.
- 15 Arlene Davila, “El Kiosko Budweiser.”

DISCUSSION OF DIFFERENCE: TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES' REPORTS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION ABOUT RACE

ABSTRACT

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This paper will explore adult Korean adoptees' reported experiences with intrusive public encounters and communicated racism, resulting from their status as transracial Korean adoptees. Using in-depth interviews, this study will attempt to answer the following questions:

- What, if any, are adult transracial adoptees' reported experiences with communicated racism and intrusive interactions?
- What, if any, do adoptive family members report are their responses to interactions involving communicated racism and intrusive interactions?
- Regarding interactions involving communicated racism and/or intrusive interactions, what family responses do transracial adoptees say that they find the most effective and/or helpful? Why do they say they were helpful?

White American families who adopt Korean children form families through what Galvin (2006) calls *visible adoption*. Families formed in this way have become increasingly common. This commonness does not mean that visibly adoptive families are widely considered "normal," however. Instead, the visibility of these adoptive families can create potentially uncomfortable communicative encounters with strangers.

One type of encounter involves interactions where visibly adoptive families are singled out by strangers who have curious questions or comments. Questions such as "Is she your real daughter?" or "How much did she cost?" are questions not typically posed to biologically formed families, but for visibly adoptive families, these questions may not be surprising. Because they are anomalies in a world of biologically formed families, visibly adoptive families are not allotted the same privacy as families whose physical appearance is racially consistent. As a result, strangers, who may be acting out of genuine curiosity and friendliness, feel entitled to make comments and ask questions. Despite the lack of ill intentions from outsiders, some adoptive parents find these interactions disconcerting and annoying (Register, 1991). Because these public interactions invade upon the privacy of these families, they will be labeled under the broad heading "intrusive interactions."

Another potentially problematic, public communicative encounter that visibly adoptive families may face is communicated racism, wherein the adoptee is the victim of malevolent comments or questions related explicitly to race (e.g., “chink,” “slant-eye”). Whether they are present during the encounter or not, parents are presented with the decision of how to help their children cope during and after these encounters, if at all. Developing coping strategies for communicated racism may be particularly challenging for adoptive parents, given that most are White and have not likely been the victims of racism themselves. Yet, assuming that they desire to engage in effective parenting strategies, adoptive parents would be aided by knowledge of how to help their children respond in ways that are both communicatively competent and beneficial to the children’s psychosocial development.

Both intrusive comments and communicated racism appear to be common experiences for visibly adoptive families, and parents have expressed a desire to know more about how to help their children cope (de Haymes, 2003). Further, at least one study (Evan B. Donaldson, 2000) suggests that how parents respond to instances of communicated racism influences how adoptees view these challenging encounters and, indeed, themselves. Thus, communicated racism and intrusive interactions are communicative encounters for the *entire family*, not only the person to whom the questions or comments are directed. This interactive nature is, at heart, a communicative process and can thus be well-informed by a communication studies approach.

NEGOTIATING *THE REAL*?: EXPLORING “OUT-OF-PLACE” SUBJECTIVITY¹

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In a conference organized for Korean adoptees and their adoptive families a couple of years ago, one parent shared a personal episode that involved her family and her adopted daughter from Korea.

My family went to a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown to celebrate my daughter's fifth birthday. We thought it would give her a precious opportunity to see people who look like her. To our amazement, when ordering the dinner, my daughter blurted out loudly in a roomful of Asian people, “Mom! Dad! We are the only White people around here!”

Her account elicited laughter with sympathetic nods and looks from the audience. The episode poignantly illustrates the sense of misplacement and out-of-placeness among transracial adoptees in their daily lives. At the same time, it reveals the ways in which the relations of kinship and family confer a sense of belonging, and brings out the need to examine this sense of belonging in relation to what we think about the social relations of race and culture. My paper is such an exercise in thinking through the ways in which transracial and transnational adoptees challenge what we take for granted when it comes to our relationship to family and kin. By specifically looking at the experiences of Korean American adoptees, who constitute one of the largest and oldest transnational adoptee groups in the United States, my paper explores a few theoretical issues which confront conventional assumptions underlying the institution of modern families and kinship in the U.S.: Namely, the place of the “real” and of “common sense”² in the constitution of kinship and family in relation to cultural construction of Korean American adoptee subjectivities. “Common sense,” following Gramsci, connotes the distillation of ideological and material forces in popular consciousness. The ideological association of family as a primarily consanguineous unit, in short, familial ideology, is manifested in historically sedimented practices and discourses surrounding the familial institution. One instance could be the practice of “matching” utilized by social workers and social agencies that place children in adoptive and foster homes based on perceived physical similarities between the children and their future family members.³ In this sense, David Schneider and Judith Modell highlighted adoption's ability to mask some middle-class families' inability to biologically reproduce.⁴

Nevertheless, adoption's mimicry of biological reproduction is not only instrumental to the hegemony of the genealogical model of family, but also provides an occasion to examine “familial ideology.”⁵ Adopting non-blood members into your familial unit is a potentially radical move, since what adoption does is to point to the *disjuncture* between meanings and practices

regarding family and kinship, which merits further exposition. What interracial adoption adds to this complexity is to visually materialize this disjuncture, unsettling the assumptions underlying familial organization at the level of everyday life. If secretcies surrounding domestic intraracial adoptions in previous decades—and in certain cases during the contemporary period—assisted the construction of familial units by prohibiting the disjuncture from being enunciated, transracial adoption, by its visual representation, defies such secretcies. Precisely because it points to the ambiguous fissures between the status of “being” and that of “becoming (doing)” a family, the disjuncture is threatening to the familial ideology, which relies on the entitlement of “being” for its definitional moment. “Becoming” a family is an ambiguous state, consisting in numerous acts of solidarity and performances of affect in mundane lives.

Adoptee narratives and historical/ethnographical investigations of adoptees’ lives offer us an incisive critique of the ideological nexus between self/identity and sociocultural structures in which various selves and identities become legible. The following three stories, culled from adoptee autobiographies, adoption literature, and my own fieldnotes,⁶ illustrate the world constructed by “common sense” to which Korean adoptees retain skewed relationships. The first two stories highlight the racial consciousness of Korean adoptees cultivated by the socio-cultural milieu they are living in. The last story, in contrast, shows one way in which Korean adoptees can craft their own racial/ethnic identity as they grapple with their own ambiguous locations vis-à-vis both Korean and American societies. In short, these stories, taken together, challenge the fixity of identities conferred by the system of kinship and family, blurring boundaries between being and becoming for a self engendered through familial relations.

Story One: Racial Other

“Daddy, when I grow up I want to be white, just like you.” –Aaron, age three⁷

When the teach had my parents try to explain to me what being ‘adopted’ meant, I still couldn’t understand why I couldn’t be Irish. If Da said he was Irish, then I was Irish, too. It didn’t matter where I came from. At least it didn’t matter until I became convinced that where I came from should matter, when I could no longer try to simply ignore the taunts of having a flat face, squinty eyes, and buckteeth. Then the traits that I thought I shared with my dad, his self-assuredness, his athleticism, his wit and aptitude for making friends, no longer seemed related to me.⁸

Story One deals with adoptee narratives that exemplify the socio-cultural dynamics that surround adoptive families in which Korean American adoptees grow up. Korean adoptee autobiographies invariably include various encounters these adoptees had as children with social strangers who questioned the adoptees’ rightful status. When visiting a family tree farm in rural Minnesota, Jim Milroy and his brother, not being allowed to bring their toys there, played with stones and pebbles as imaginary cars. Milroy writes, “Big quartz rocks became bulldozers. Long thin skipping stones were Indy racers driven by Mario Andretti.”⁹ His ima-

ginativeness, however, turned cold when he realized the limits of human imagination reflected in the comments made by strangers: “My brother has never had to explain to strangers that he is adopted. I have had to explain my adoption all my life. People will believe that stones are cars before they’ll accept that my brother, or sisters, or father or mother is my *real* family.”¹⁰

Racial difference among family members here is an indisputably charged marker in that it not only accentuates the—perceptual—absence of blood ties among family members,¹¹ but it also creates dissonance among observers who are accustomed to the idea—again, “common sense”—that relatedness manifests in likeness. In the account above, Milroy’s White¹² brother, also adopted by the Milroys, was spared from the efforts to defend his status to on-lookers whereas Jim’s Asian physiognomy constantly marked him as “the Other.” Race is *the* salient marker to identify likeness in a culture where people and their life chances are stratified according to racial differences.¹³ In this story, we clearly see that race is a signifier of immutable difference, full of polysemous meanings that could be deployed in complex ways. Many scholars have documented and analyzed the stigma of “race” and the productive hindsight that “raced” subjects could gain.¹⁴ The questions that interest me here are: What sorts of insights can these transracial adoptee experiences provide us; and, what are their implications for the institution of family and kinship in the contemporary U.S.?

Story Two: What Are You?

Regardless of *how white we may think* we act, dress or speak, to everyone else we are not white nor will we ever be considered white. We can never assimilate. At best we might be able to acculturate.¹⁵

As I journeyed through life, I was presented with many different types of questions. I just could not believe that the majority of the questions were from myself to me, Lee. [...] Then comes the section where I have to make a decision; it has a space for: OPTIONAL: CHECK THE BOX WHICH BEST DESCRIBES YOURSELF: AFRICAN-AMERICAN, ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER; CAUCASIAN; LATINO; NATIVE AMERICAN; OTHER. Once I reach this part, I am like a writer with a major writer’s block. I begin brainstorming. [...] Should I check the space next to Asian/Pacific Islander since it does contain the word ‘Asian?’ [...] Maybe my choice should be the box labeled ‘other’ and I can explain the fact that I am a Korean adoptee. Do others have this dilemma?¹⁶

Story Two deals with the ambiguities that the adoptees grapple with in articulating their identities. Naming her book *Are Those Kids Yours?*, Register describes the constant questions she as an adoptive mother of two Korean children has to answer to on-lookers. According to her, another popular question that boggles the mind of transracial adoptees is “What are you?”:

What are you? is a profoundly American question. I know of at least one young woman, born to a Korean mother and an African-American father,

who coyly answers “Presbyterian.” *She knows full well what kind of information is being sought.*¹⁷

In a multiracial, multiethnic society such as the U.S., the question, “What are you?” is a seemingly ordinary question that can be thrown at anyone.¹⁸ Depending on the tone and context in which it is delivered, the question is one of *common sense* ice-breakers among relatively new acquaintances. But what is being asked here? What are the common sense assumptions that require the questioned to *know fully well* what is asked? The understanding shared by the questioner and the questioned illustrates the interpellating power of the ideological discourses.¹⁹ In Korean adoptee experiences, the nexus of kinship, race, and identity is overdetermined by the ways in which common sense operates to insure *excesses* to be thrown out of the realm of cultural legibility.²⁰ The fact that transracial adoptees’ answers necessarily entail long, if defensive, explanations about what they are speaks volumes about what is legible or not in our culture. “I am Jewish in religious observances learned from my Dad. I am also good at Irish folk dancing since my Mom is Irish and she prodded me along. But I have another Korean birthmother and another father of unknown origin.” Of course, one can avoid going into it in such detail by answering, for instance, “Presbyterian” to the question. However, the understanding shared by the questioner and the questioned illustrates the interpellating power of the ideological discourses,²¹ in the interstices of which identities are constructed.

The ideological discourses on race and kinship, in their collaboration, give impetus to *common sense* understandings of the world. The world thus construed by common sense and its dialectical relations to ideological discourses of race and kinship enables the production of subjects and subjectivities endowed with cultural legibility. In comprehending this complex dynamic, Faubion’s analysis of “kinship as a system—or array of systems—of subjectivation” proves helpful.²² Utilizing Foucault’s notion of subjectivation (*assujettissement*) as both “subjection” and “intersubjectivity” in examining kinship and its powerful hold on people’s lives, Faubion finds the instrumentality of kinship and family ideology in its ability to engender a useful mode of subjectivation. This subjectivation is enabled through incorporating differences and identities among people in a legible register:

Kinship is in fact illustrative of the constitution of intersubjectivity, of organized alterity, in two respects. First, even when ‘descriptive’ or ‘ego-centric,’ the terms of kinship are very like those of offices, open to any number of individuals who happen (more often than not, as a matter of birth) to be qualified to occupy them. *My mother may thus be unique, but mothers (and sons) are legion.* Second, the terms of kinship are inherently linking terms; always and everywhere, they render the self in and through its relation to certain others (and vice versa).²³

By structuring subject positions (such as Mother, Father, etc.) that can sort out diverse individuals (see my emphasis above), and locating individuals in webs of *particular* (that is, individualized) social relations, kinship and family become the primary grounds upon which individual subjectivity is molded in the realm of cultural legibility. The familial ideology and system of kinship

...effect a far more dramatic reduction of complexity than could ever be achieved by such indefinite, abstract, potentially infinitistic systems of subjectivation as those of nationality or race or caste, or for that matter, of class or gender or sexuality. Perhaps needless to say, they impose far more cybernetic order than one could ever expect from such particularistic relations as friendship or romantic love, of which 'complexity' is the very spice (or bane, as the case may be). They thus render *the self uniquely 'communicable'—to others, but also to itself.*²⁴

Reduction of human/social complexity lodges on "natural," and/or "instinctual" human bonds supposed to enshrine the familial ideology and kinship. By conceiving kinship and the familial ideology as a mode of subjectivation, Faubion rescues the debate over the meaning and practices of kinship from the impasse created by the dichotomous conception of kinship as either grounded in biology or in culture. In his theorization, the value of kinship and the familial ideology is inherently sociopolitical, and their grounding in naturalizing discourses—surrounding blood, genes, race, etc.—should be critically analyzed, rather than assumed.

The question "what are you?" and the ambiguities that Korean adoptees experience in answering it may be comprehensible in the rift between the familial subjectivation and its shadow. Despite occupying subject positions in their White adoptive families, Korean adoptees' presence in those families is a conspicuous one, loaded with the possibility of potential duplication of the subject position elsewhere as well as racially marked. In analyzing several films produced by and about Korean American adoptees, Kim has argued that the common ground which underpins productions of various adoptee autobiographies is "the shared recognition and acceptance of 'living in halftones,' of *being a hybrid subject*, of existing between social categories, and of belonging to two families, across cultural and national borders."²⁵ With the help of Kim and Faubion, we come to grasp the in-between status of Korean adoptees on the terrain of subjectivation elicited by kinship and familial ideology. What is intriguing about Korean adoptee autobiographies and films is the articulation of this hybrid subjectivity, which destabilizes and refigures the familial subjectivation. In the process of coming into consciousness of their hybridity, Korean adoptees enlighten us about the ever-precarious project of subject formation.

Story Three: Appropriation of Cultural Authenticity

For Story Three, I use my fieldnotes to describe the practice of "cultural consumption," to point to one way in which Korean adoptees actively craft and mold their own racial/ethnic selves.

Summer of 2003, one sultry afternoon, a flock of Asian faces crowds a hotel lobby in [Washington,] DC. As always, Korean adoptee conferences give me a moment of confusion of being misplaced somehow. Most of them came to this country, too young to retain clear memory of language and original family. By various means, some of them try to recover the loss generated in the painful process of assimilation into a new adopted

family. Now is the place where they could see and meet a lot of those who seem to share a similar predicament of being a Korean adoptee in this foreign land. The stands that sell Korean artworks, antiques, letters, books, and so many paraphernalia of Korean traditions—some of them ironically displaying “made in US” labels—are populated by those adoptees who have never seen things Korean in so many numbers and in such diversity. I hurriedly help the merchant translate each item for Avery, whom I just met. Candy, an adoptee and successful academic, shouted over her breath with a big chuckle, “She is in that mode, you know, where you want to grab everything you see, because you have never seen Korean things before!”

—Fieldnotes, July, 2002

When “culture” can be packaged neatly and priced numerically, we may be able to nurture the illusion of grasping it absolutely and finally. However, Korean adoptee consumption of things Korean is more than a reflection of 21st-century late capitalist practices of consuming “the exotic Other.” By purchasing the products of (and about) Korea, Korean adoptees attempt to materialize the memory and heritage lost in their cross-cultural journey to a U.S. family. This is to instantiate their desire to make “real” the experiences and histories that they brought to the U.S. On the other hand, the experiences and memories that these adoptees cling to in the act of consumption surely contain the elements of imagination. Histories, i.e., past experiences, are constructed and legitimated with an eye toward the interests and purposes of the present.²⁶ Not that these adoptees do not know this themselves. Cultural artifacts that they purchase elude their full comprehension of cultural contexts in which they are used, appropriated, and manufactured, just like their past. Material things here present them with simulacra of their predicament. Trans-cultured and out-of-place, Korean things and Korean adoptees who don or display them in a characteristically American manner illuminate the cultural interstices in which they craft their selves and identities. What they want to symbolize, it seems, is their refusal to choose either an American or Korean identity in them. Attempting *promiscuous* appropriations of Korean culture, Korean American adoptees try to combine multiple dimensions of their identities in their own unique ways. I insert another episode before concluding this story.

My friend and Korean adoptee, Andrea, calls me one day. Having just given birth to a girl, she was already planning her daughter’s 100th Day Party, which is an occasion for big celebratory party in Korea. Having heard from a Korean friend that she needed 4 kinds of rice cakes for this party, Andrea is asking me the specific items to use for this party. On the day of celebration, Andrea ordered 4 kinds of rice cakes from a nearby Korean grocery store. The guests, all white except me, are hesitant to try the sticky rice cakes which are colored in pink, green, yellow, purple, and white. I saw one guest pick one up out of politeness but as Andrea turned her back toward him, he threw it swiftly into the wastebasket nearby.

—Fieldnotes, February, 2003.

For Andrea, her daughter's conception was expected and longed for. Although she does not have any memories of Korea, and asserts that she is American and not Korean, it must have been important for her to show her daughter—however young she may be—and others that her mother was Korean American. I wonder whether her desperation to find and procure ethnic products reflects her “*out-of-placeness*” anxiety, due to the lack of a culturally available narrative that legitimizes her experiences as indisputably Korean and American at the same time. Cultural consumer goods here signify the interplay between self-representation and materiality, which is one of the ways of self-creation proffered by late capitalism. Enriching her daughter's 100th day with a variety of ethnic products that she herself could not find when she was young, Andrea fashioned her Korean American identity anew. A product of a racialized economy of family and kinship, Korean American adoptees chart out a new niche, in which their ambiguous identities are legible and given proper cultural elaboration. In so doing, they clearly show that our identities are always in the process of *becoming*.

TRANSRACIAL/TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION, KINSHIP, AND IDENTITY

As stated in the beginning, the three stories as a whole elucidate the theoretical challenges in studying the experiences of Korean adoptees in this country. Destabilizing kinship boundaries previously assumed by blood and race, and materializing the fact that our identities are socio-culturally constructed, Korean adoptee experiences present us with productive questions that require sustained analysis. Further, we cannot lose sight of the impact of transnational/transracial adoption in contemporary practices of U.S. kinship upon society, culture, and individuals in and outside of adoption practices.

To borrow Butler's phrase, the (transracial) adoptive family throws into sharp relief “the reiterative and citational practice(s)” that constitute a family.²⁷ The adoptive family's mimicry of the genealogical model of family allows us to locate the site of familial constitution in agentive moments, rather than in biological entitlements. This succinctly brings out the uncertainty and ambiguity of the familial ideology, disturbing the “commonsensical” notions of what families should be like.²⁸ Butler asserts, “the critical task is...to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions [such as the familial ideology and common sense], to affirm the *local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present immanent possibility of contesting them.*”²⁹ Transracial adoption poses a deconstructive stance toward the familial ideology at multiple levels, being one such possibility of intervention into the normative familial ideology.

Family and kin, popularly conceived as consanguineal relations, provide the primary grid to draw the social boundary between those who belong and those who do not. Crossing consanguineal lines in transracial families is prominently marked because of its rejection of the *common sense* assumptions about relatedness and likeness as well as the familial ideology. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, “common sense” in Gramscian exposition connotes

the distillation of ideological material forces in popular consciousness. In other words, the familial ideology is efficacious due to its historical sedimentation in “common sense.” The power of common sense is manifest in engineering the stigma of adoptees as “abandoned children” or “orphans” in the popular imaginary.³⁰ Wegar charges that

...most commentators, researchers, and activists have tended to cut off experiences of adoption from the cultural contexts in which these experiences are embedded. Personal accounts are certainly valid sources of knowledge, but they cannot be understood apart from the cultural vocabularies in which they are formulated. In my view, any account of experiences of adoption that ignores *the cultural symbolism and stigmatization of adoption* runs the danger of unintentionally reproducing the structures and stereotypes it sets out to debunk.³¹

The familial ideology, i.e., “the cultural symbolism” of kinship and blood, in Wegar’s phrase, successfully reaffirms itself, by pathologizing the adoptee status, and rendering its deconstructive possibilities innocuous. The subversive potentials held by adoptive practices become *fragmented moments* in autobiographies. Heeding Wegar’s caution that we should locate adoptee autobiographies in the cultural contexts where they are embedded helps us delineate the multiple registers in which the familial ideology and its attendant “common sense” operate.

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2 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (1971; reprint, New York, NY: International Publishers, 1999).

3 Judith Modell, *Kinship with Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Judith Modell and Naomi Dambacher, “Making a ‘Real’ Family: Matching and Cultural Biologism in American Adoption,” *Adoption Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1997): 3-33; Sandra Patton, *BirthMarks: Transracial Adoption in Contemporary America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000).

4 David M. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1984); Modell, *Kinship with Strangers*.

5 Modell, *Kinship with Strangers*; Joyce A Ladner, *Mixed Families: Adopting Across Racial Boundaries* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1978).

6 The names of the individuals described from my fieldnotes are rendered fictitious to protect the identities of my informants.

7 Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall, *Inside Transracial Adoption* (Indianapolis, IN: Perspectives Press, 2000), 31.

8 Peter Kearly, “I am Iwish,” in *After the Morning Calm: Reflections of Korean Adoptees*, eds. Dr. Sook Wilkinson, and Nancy Fox (Bloomfield, MI: Sunrise Ventures, 2002), 60–61.

9 Jim Milroy, “The Stone Parable, in *Voices From Another Place: A Collection of Works from a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries*, ed. Susan Soon-Keum Cox (St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book Company, 1999), 58–59.

10 *Ibid.*, 59; emphasis added.

11 As we know well by now, phenotypic distinctions among races are never stable. Popular perceptions of racial difference are often quite erroneous. Lazarre (1996) poignantly presents her dilemma as a White Jewish biological mother of two Black sons. Strangers often could not recognize the physical likeness between her sons and her, and were often surprised to realize that Lazarre and her sons were together. The ambiguities of racial categories often generate contradictory responses from on-lookers.

12 To emphasize “race” as a socially constructed fact, racial labels such as “White” or “Black” are here capitalized.

13 Historical examinations of European contact with the Others provide further insights on people’s conceptualization of us vs. them (cf. Sandra Gilman 1985). For instance,

Herodotus, considered as the father of the discipline of history, might be the first ethnographer in human history. Studying fifty different ethnic groups by traveling far and wide, Herodotus illuminates the construction of the epistemological sense in which self/Other emerged (cf. Whitten 2001, 4). His account illuminates that, in the European context, contact between different ethnic groups of people precedes the familial organization in its construction of social boundary between us and them. See Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995) for a critique on Foucault's works on similar points. If we accept Engels' theorization of how family as we know it came about, this can be an interesting issue to elaborate further on its own. Particularly relevant to the discussion of the analogical relationship between likeness and racial classification is Mary Bouquet, "Figures of Relations: Reconnecting Kinship Studies and Museum Collections," in *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*, ed. Janet Carsten (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For practical implications of this issue for transracial adoption, see Steinberg and Hall, *Inside Transracial Adoption*.

- 14 It could be termed "double-consciousness," as in W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1989), or "outsider-within perspective," as in Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), or something more original. The productive originality of Korean adoptees can be seen, for instance, in their naming of themselves as "AKA," which appears in organization titles, several Korean adoptee internet groups, and listserves. This abbreviation, by its polysemy, reveals a complex terrain in which Korean adoptees come of age in the U.S. AKA could mean "A Korean Adoptee," as they have been called and described on numerous occasions, or "Also-Known-As," as they deal with multiple names and identifications produced by geographical and cross-cultural relocation. See also Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967) and Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).
- 15 Mary Lee Vance, "To Be of Credit" in *After the Morning Calm: Reflections of Korean Adoptees*, eds. Dr. Sook Wilkinson, and Nancy Fox (Bloomfield, MI: Sunrise Ventures, 2002), 82; emphasis added)
- 16 Lee Lind "Who am I?," in *After the Morning Calm: Reflections of Korean Adoptees*, eds. Dr. Sook Wilkinson and Nancy Fox (Bloomfield, MI: Sunrise Ventures, 2002), 130-131.
- 17 Cheri Register, "Are those Kids Yours?": *American Families with Children Adopted from Other Countries* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991), 152; emphasis added.
- 18 A similar question, especially reserved for those with marked accents (both dialects within the U.S. or ethnically inflected accents) is "where are you from?" which is an interesting twist in which biological registers of social locations are projected onto national cartographies. All Asians in the U.S. may be accustomed to answering this question, regardless of accent, as this question is usually posed before speech has even occurred. The mere appearance of an Asian face has long connoted foreignness and distant/exotic origins. I thank Eleana Kim for her insightful comments on this.

- 19 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1971).
- 20 cf. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 78.
- 21 Althusser, "Ideology."
- 22 James D. Faubion, "Introduction: Toward an Anthropology of the Ethics of Kinship, in *The Ethics of Kinship: Ethnographic Inquiries*, ed. James D. Faubion (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 13.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 2–3; emphasis added.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 15; emphases added.
- 25 Eleana Kim, "Korean Adoptee Auto-Ethnography: Refashioning Self, Family, and Finding Community," *Visual Anthropology Review* 16, no. 1 (2001): 62; emphasis added.
- 26 See for example Modell, *Kinship with Strangers*. For a similar argument in other contexts, see Jonathan Boyarin, ed., *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Timespace* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) and Joanne Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, [1990] 1998). This can also be seen in the phenomenon of so-called "invented traditions" especially in the midst of nationalist consciousness-raising in many countries. See, for instance, Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 27 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.
- 28 cf. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*.
- 29 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 147; emphases added.
- 30 Another image could be "bad blood." See Ladner, *Mixed Families* and Katarina Wegar, *Adoption, Identity, and Kinship: The Debate Over Sealed Birth Records* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).
- 31 *Ibid.*, x; emphasis added.

SEEING IS BELIEVING: 1950s POPULAR MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF KOREAN ADOPTION IN THE UNITED STATES

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INTRODUCTION

In June of 1961, *Look* magazine published a photo-essay titled, “An ‘Unadoptable’ Finds a Home,” which traced the transformation of Hong Soon Im, a mixed-race Korean War orphan, into “Susan Hughes, American.”¹ This story of a “frightened, undernourished...tragic fruit of war” who was eventually “flown to America” and adopted by a white, middle-class family would eventually become a familiar fixture in popular postwar journalism, and a predecessor to media representations of transnational adoptions today.² In classic photo-essay format,³ images and captions drive the story of “Susie Hughes,” opening with what had become a conventional representation of newly adopted children: the adoptee in her Sunday best, waving an American flag, flanked by her two adoptive parents who are beaming with pride (see Figure 1). In the pages that followed, *Look* laid out a scrapbook of Susie’s apparently seamless assimilation into the Hughes family, attempting with almost paranoid determination to convince readers of her status as an authentic American child, despite her “Oriental features.”⁴ The photographs depict Susie playing outside with her adoptive brothers; happily licking her fingers after a baking project; crying in her mother’s arms after a “fall from a swing sends [her] after a bit of maternal solace”⁵ (see Figure 2).

As these photographs demonstrate, the adoption of Korean War orphans into white American families raised a number of important issues, particularly during such a staunchly conservative and conformist period. Unlike adoptions during previous decades, which could still rely heavily on racial “matching” and therefore maintain the illusion of white homogeneity, adoption from Korea ushered in a new era of family formation characterized by simultaneous honesty and disavowal. Although in these cases, adoption could no longer be hidden or denied, popular media representation of the practice attempted to smooth over the visible marks it left on American families, emphasizing the full and eager assimilation of the adoptee and rendering any differences—racial or cultural—as hollow and impotent reminders of a past now replaced by a superior American experience. As is visible in the case of Susie Hughes, popular magazines like *Life* and *Look* strained to make readers see (now undeniable) differences as evidence of how American abundance, moral superiority, and charitable outreach rescued orphans from their former lives.

Hong Soon Im was an unwanted child of war until an American family's love brought her home

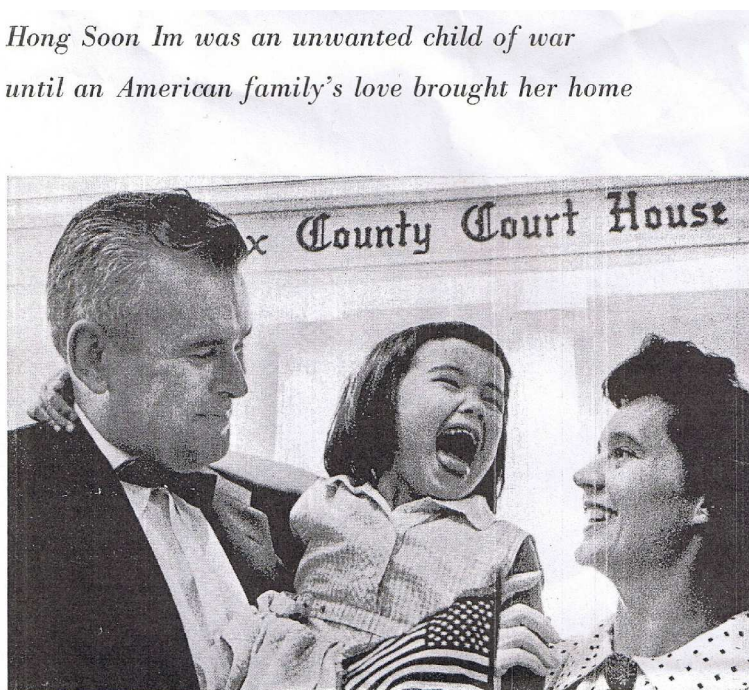


Figure 1: “An ‘Unadoptable’ Finds a Home,” p. 83.⁶



Figure 2: “An ‘Unadoptable’ Finds a Home,” p. 85.⁷

In this paper, I will discuss the postwar ideological framework with regard to international adoption and analyze the ways in which popular photojournalistic representation of the practice both reflected and reinforced Americans’ uniquely idealized self-image. In studying representations of adoptees *and* their adoptive families, I will indicate the means by which deviation from the norm was coded for both parties. I aim to demonstrate that under close visual scrutiny, the disjuncture between reality and its idealized representation becomes readily ap-

parent, and thus, the great efforts expended to mask aberrations—or any elements that might undermine contemporary values or beliefs—in fact reveal the weakness and instability of the ideological framework instead of its all-encompassing strength.

POSTWAR IDEOLOGY

In moments of incredible self-reflectivity, “An ‘Unadoptable’” references contemporary biases against international adoption: “Occasionally, an unthinking person would ask the Hugheses how they could have accepted ‘that strange little girl’ as their own. ‘She was ours,’ says Mrs. Hughes, simply.”⁸ Positioning these prejudices as the “unthinking” and backwards thoughts of *other* people, the article encourages the Hugheses’ more progressive outlook on adoption—one that appreciates the practice’s reciprocity and looks beyond racial difference in favor of an essential human understanding.⁹ With this, the article acknowledges but denounces the potential of American ideologies to become proponents of American ethnocentrism, closing with Mrs. Hughes’s reassuring sentiments: “...we wouldn’t change her oriental features for all the world. We want her to be proud of her heritage, as we are.”¹⁰ In framing a rescue narrative (saving a “tragic fruit of war”) within white tolerance and acceptance, the article effectively lays to rest the thorny issue of racism while still promoting a less offensive version of American superiority. Thus, although Susie Hughes’s story celebrates a more humble, self-effacing attitude on behalf of the adoptive family (Says Mrs. Hughes: “Susie gives us more than we’ll ever be able to return...”¹¹), this article remains entrenched in contemporary ideologies, returning again to the American generosity and ability to save others through its superior economic, moral, and domestic values.

According to Althusser, ideology is very much the product of the conceptual and experiential relationship to reality within a given community; as he says, it “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”¹² Dominant ideology is therefore a natural and inescapable part of our everyday existence. Representations of society that seem to be analogous to reality and even the most radical counter-ideological movements are defined by the ideologies that they attempt to upset, and thus remain wedded to them.¹³ Therefore, despite its progressive and tolerant overtones, “An ‘Unadoptable’” remains neatly embedded in the American conception of west versus east and savior versus the saved. Alongside statements like “Susie gives us more than we’ll ever be able to return,” are photographs and captions that suggest quite the opposite.¹⁴

We often position ideology as the tacit, intangible force that envelops a community and silently drives their conception of reality. The ideological framework that is often referenced, even blamed, for poor judgment, poor representation, and for the mistakes that we have since corrected, is in fact not an all-encompassing power to which we are automatically subjected, but rather a frame of reference that we actively construct and perpetuate. While it is tempting to believe that the public is but a helpless victim of ideological constructions, in reality, all victims of ideology play a crucial role in sustaining it.

Photojournalism, long misunderstood as the transparent window onto an unmediated truth, in fact is one of the most powerful perpetrators of ideology *because* of its assumed relationship to the real. As Sue Thornham comments, in relation to Barthes's *Mythologies*: "Ideology seeks always to efface the signs of its own operation and present its meanings as...self-evident."¹⁵ In this respect, then, photojournalism—believed to be truthful because of its spontaneous aesthetic and long affiliation with news reportage—is a convenient and deeply effective carrier of ideology. Popular photojournalism has always been a business that attempts to retain the attention of the American public through its ability to entertain and cater to its audience's values, beliefs, and preferences.¹⁶ Indeed, many popular periodicals such as *Life* and *Look*, and the individual photo-essays that they presented, acted as both a mirror and catalyst of contemporary ideologies rather than of reality itself.

Photojournalism is therefore a rich medium through which to analyze and begin to understand not only the link between reality and its ideologically loaded representation, but also the ways in which Americans—both the encoders and decoders¹⁷ of such representations—*actively constructed and indulged in* those ideologies. Since the layers of meaning encoded into these articles/photo-essays by the writers, photographers, and editorial staff of the magazine were in direct response to the perceived ideological leanings of the readership, these photojournalistic representations candidly portrayed the intersection of reality and idealism, as well as of public self-conception and the media's desire to uphold it. The *constructedness* that then becomes evident from these texts, and the ways in which actuality is smoothed over in order to appropriately speak to the ideological needs of the audience (or, in Thornham's terms, what the text must "exclude and repress in order to maintain its surface of ideological coherence"¹⁸) reflects the how contemporary society constructs and maintains dominant ideologies. It is in this capacity that photojournalistic representation is most helpful in understanding how international adoption could have been represented in such a way that continued to serve the stifling, idealizing, and often hegemonic values of postwar America.

NOSTALGIA IN THE PRESENT

In her retrospective on 1950s photography, Helen Gee comments:

Television and a recent rash of musicals and films have contributed largely to the myopic view of the 'fabulous fifties' as a time of calm and innocence, a period of social stability before the upheaval of the 1960s... Americans played together and prayed together, and after the trauma of the Great Depression and two world wars, the American dream was realized at last.¹⁹

Nostalgia, such as the kind described by Gee, is dangerous. Not only does it make us miserable—causing us to masochistically and futilely long for a place and time to which we can never return—but, as many postmodern theorists agree, it taints our understanding of history and transforms historical truth into meaningless simulacra.²⁰ Historical accuracy therefore is replaced by hollow symbols that obscure any accurate understanding of the past. As Frederic

Jameson claims, “we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images...which itself remains forever out of reach.”²¹ Linda Hutcheon, who claims that there is no such thing as wholly “accurate” or unbiased historicism, believes that all remembrances of the past must bear the marks of present: “...the only ‘genuine historicity’ becomes that which would openly acknowledge its own discursive, contingent identity.”²² Yet even in her efforts to redeem postmodern historicism, she still condemns “sentimental nostalgia,” which she characterizes as the blind emotional attachment to a steamrollered idealization of reality.²³ It is this base form of nostalgia that is popularly blamed for our current—false, idealized—way of remembering the 1950s as “...the privileged lost object of desire.”²⁴

The creative work of sentimental nostalgia is not necessarily limited to (mis)remembering past events; the construction of reality into an intentionally false, unattainably perfect idealization can also be a driving factor when envisioning the present. However attached we may be in the twentieth century to our perceptions of 1950s frivolity and stability, this myth of ‘50s culture was in fact an idealization that postwar Americans actively sought and constructed for themselves.²⁵ During a time when the nation suddenly found itself contending with a myriad of dizzying social, political, and intellectual changes, Americans attempted to use the safe and predictable means of domesticity to escape from present realities.²⁶ The adoption of Korean War orphans allowed individual families to situate themselves within a global context and form a tangible, personal link between themselves and broader political abstractions that were largely inaccessible to the average American.²⁷ By enacting the broader ideals of patriotism, humanitarian outreach, and first world superiority through a medium that they could understand and control, American adoptive families embodied what Elaine Tyler May famously called “domestic containment,” using domesticity as a means of combating communism’s most detrimental effects (depriving children of what they conceived to be a “proper” family and living environment), one child at a time.²⁸

For many, constructing a world in which international troubles could be remedied through the domestic perfection and stability of the nuclear family was an important way of boosting confidence and escaping fear. As Marshall Blonsky claims, “one of the ways that you deal with fear is obviously through nonthinking. Nostalgia is a nonthinking mode.”²⁹ For postwar Americans, nostalgia in the present was one manner of contending with the fear that pervaded the period: fear of invasion, fear of change, fear, even, of the “strange little girls” that were being welcomed into white American suburbia.

“THE LITTLE BOY WHO WOULDN’T SMILE”

The quintessential happy ending to any Korean War orphan story—or at least the ones popularized by the postwar media—was adoption into a white family and assimilation into mainstream American culture. It is this final stage of the adoption process that serves as the point of contact between fantasy and reality, and most lucidly illustrates the constructedness of American ideologies. The photographic representations of this stage in the adoption process

unabashedly (and perhaps unintentionally) exhibit the nostalgia for the present that had previously remained hidden, imagined, and thus further idealized.

Many popular postwar picture magazines chronicled some aspect of the international adoption process, establishing a collective identity for these children and solidifying in the minds of American readers a steady trajectory of the various stages: from war waif to American-sponsored orphan to (eventually) Korean American adoptee. The saga began with the depiction of the war waifs, the homeless, parent-less, often filthy and malnourished children who wandered the streets.³⁰ The second, or “intermediate,” stage often featured orphans who were informally taken in by GIs or military men serving in Korea. Photojournalistic representation of these relationships stressed the emotional connection between orphans and their American father figures. Yet in emphasizing the American influence on these children (children were depicted playing with American toys, hugging American soldiers, bearing all the visible signs of Americanness, such as cowboy hats and toy hip pistols), these images also emphasized the shortcomings of informal military base relationships³¹ (see Figure 3). The juxtaposition of third world instability (orphaned children) and American strength (male soldiers) indicates the western potential to save, to love, and to bestow abundance, but calls attention to the absence of what might make this potential into a reality.³²



Figure 3: “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile,” p. 94.³³

In the representations of these earliest stages of adoption, the American family is *imagined* rather than *represented*, giving readers the freedom to imagine themselves and their lifestyle in as idealizing a manner as they wished. It is only in the actual point of contact between adoptee and adoptive family that American ideologies are put to the test because Americans themselves suddenly become subjected to the same scrutiny as the objects of their charity. We can see in these representations of the American adoptive families, the ruptures in the surface of the dominant ideology,³⁴ and the ways in which reality could not hope to measure up to the ideals Americans constructed for themselves.

Kang Koo Ri was one of the most famous Korean War orphans of his time, appearing in *Life* on three separate occasions and eliciting a great amount of reader response.³⁵ *Life* traced his progression from a helpless abandoned child in 1951 to a happy adoptee in 1956, making Kang a celebrity in the realm of international adoption and literally a poster child for suffering abroad.³⁶ The first installment of his story, titled “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile,” introduced Kang to American readers as a helpless boy who was found lying next to his dead mother after a raid on his village (see Figure 4). The article depicts Kang’s rescue by American GIs, his gradual recovery on the military base after receiving basic care and medical treatment, and even delivers a temporary “happy ending” to this episode, closing with a photograph of Kang and a female caregiver who has finally managed to make him laugh.³⁷ One year later, Kang appeared in *Life*’s “Picture of the Week” after having lived in an American-sponsored orphanage (see Figure 5). Now smiling, healthy, and triumphantly holding up the image that made him famous, the visual comparison between old and new evokes the seemingly drastic improvement that American influences have had on his life. In the final stage of his narrative, *Life* features Kang in “An Orphan Finds a Happy Home,” the neat, satisfying conclusion to his plight that depicts him settling into his new American family and “...happily learning about life in the U.S.”³⁸

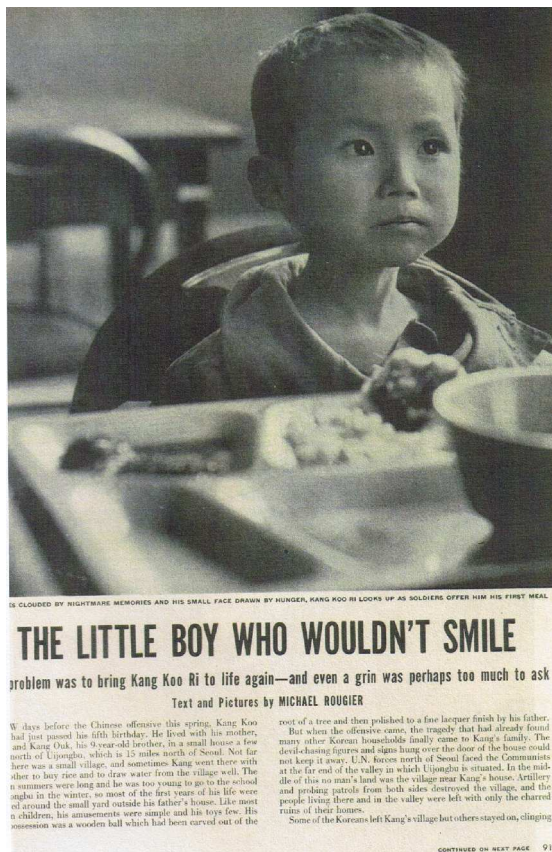


Figure 4: “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile,” p. 91.³⁹



Figure 5: “Kang Koo Ri and His New Face,” p. 37.⁴⁰

The front page of this follow up article is overwhelmingly visual and establishes a clear comparison between then and now, old and new, eastern poverty and western abundance (see Fig-

ure 6). The photograph of the “new”—the Americanized, adopted—Kang, consumes most of the page, with Rougier’s iconic photograph from “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile” relegated to a thumbnail reproduction in the upper left hand corner of the page. The text itself—that which conveys information and details of Kang’s adoption—is only about five sentences long and occupies a secondary position in relation to the images. Thus, this article seems to imply that the actual story and details of Kang’s adoption is far less important than the illusion of a sweeping happy ending and the immediate, visceral reaction that the photographs were intended to elicit.



Figure 6: “A Famous Orphan Finds a Happy Home,” p. 129.⁴¹

Sitting high atop a carousel horse and beaming in the main photograph, Kang seems completely transformed from the solemn, weak, and unhappy child he once was. The original image by Rougier was ponderous, inert, and acetic in content and composition (see Figure 4). It was decidedly bottom-heavy, with all of the forms directed downward to mirror Kang’s frown: the yoke-like collar around his frail neck, the hang of his jowls, the partitioned tray that anchored the image and forcefully pulled the viewer *into* the picture plane. In contrast, this follow-up image of the “new” Kang depicts a lively and healthy subject, with the formal qualities of the photograph mirroring his improved state. While the direction of the forms in the original image was *in* and *down*, in this image the direction is decidedly *up* and *out*. The carousel horse exploding from the confines of two-dimensional space and jutting out of the picture plane evokes a sense of perpetual motion, vibrancy, and the excitement of beginning anew.

As an iconic figure of the international adoption, one might assume that Kang's "picture perfect" end as a Korean American adoptee would be photographed in a similar manner as other adoptees, such as Susie Hughes, who met the same fate. Yet we notice the article does not employ any of the conventional ways of representing happy adoptees and their families. Kang, even though he has finally found "a happy home," is not photographed in the home or with his adoptive family in this opening image. If one bothered to read the accompanying text, one would realize that perhaps the reason for this visual aberration is because reality, in this case, could not be salvaged in any way to reinforce popular ideology of what an American family—and particularly, an American family who might extend its patriotic goodness to the rest of the world—should look like.⁴²

Conspicuously missing from the entire article is the traditional "family" photograph of the happy adoptee flanked by his two proud adoptive parents (see Figures 1 and 7). When we read the text on the opening page, we realize that *Mrs. Cordelle Lefer* adopted Kang, and it is only after we turn the page when we discover that she is a single parent, "a widow"⁴³ (lest any *Life* reader suspect that she willingly undermined the nuclear family ideal by either choosing to remain single or divorcing her husband). The article carefully articulates her moral and religious values as well as her economic solvency, positioning her motives for adoption—as she claims, "I got down on my knees and prayed and was told to adopt him..."⁴⁴—alongside photographic evidence of her ability to provide material comforts for her new son (a trip to the carousel, a new outfit). Yet despite all of these credentials, the fact that she is a single parent precludes the use of the conventional family photograph. The stability and normality that the nuclear family was thought to provide simply did not exist in Cordelle and Kang's situation, and photographing them using this "conventional" composition would have only emphasized their visual asymmetricality and further jeopardized their status as a "real" American family. In an act of denial, then, "A Famous Orphan Finds a Happy Home" attempted to mask over the very un-ideal state of Kang's adoptive family in order to maintain the dominant illusion of nuclear and domestic perfection.



Figure 7: "Saga of Sam and a Colonel," *Life*, 25 February 1957, p. 138.⁴⁵

On the following page is a series of three photographs, each of Kang interacting with his new environment (see Figure 8). Similar to the front-page photograph, his relationship with *things* rather than *people* or *family* demonstrates the immense effort on behalf of writers, photographers, and editors to exhibit the aspects of American ideologies that Cordelle could adequately deliver, rather than what she could not (namely, her inability to give Kang a stable nuclear family). The images focus on her ability to provide new gadgets such as a television and a telephone, allowing the representation of Kang’s awkward wonder at operating western technology—mundane things to which American children his age would be very accustomed—to replace representations of Kang’s first interactions with his new family. In fact, Cordelle only appears once in the entire article, positioned in the background, out-of-focus, and partially obscured by Kang.



Figure 8: “A Famous Orphan Finds a Happy Home” and Bell Telephone Systems Advertisement, p. 130–131.⁴⁶

As Daniel Mitch and Edwin Eberman say, “...editors have a responsibility to advertisers as well as readers.”⁴⁷ Maitland Edey, an assistant editor of this issue of *Life*, claimed that advertising slots were pre-sold, and the layout revolved around the template already established by the advertising scheme.⁴⁸ Thus, it is perhaps more than a coincidence that on the page opposite from the “A Famous Orphan...” article is a full-page advertisement for Bell Telephone Systems that features the typical businessman in the foreground, dressed in his suit and tie and worriedly struggling to juggle domestic duties: a crying baby in one arm, a pile of dishes in the other. In the upper right hand corner of the page is an image of a woman sitting at a desk, clearly aiming to entertain readers with this blatant gender reversal (see Figure 9). These visuals, coupled with the caption, “Madam! Suppose you traded jobs with your husband?” seem to play a dual role. Although every element of this advertisement is intended to sell the product at hand, they also have special relevance with respect to Kang and Cordelle’s

unique family structure. The juxtaposition of this advertisement and article seem to tell the reader that despite Cordelle's status as a single mother, she is still a *mother*; and as such, she can (reassuringly) provide Kang with the benefits of domestic stability that fit well within the American ideological framework. As the advertisement implies, one mother in her appropriate domestic setting, certainly, is better than none.

CONCLUSION

Although popular photojournalistic representations of adoptees and their adoptive families functioned differently to contemporary audiences, their conformation to the particular ideological framework of the period provides us today with a candid view of those ideologies and ways in which they were constructed. Under close scrutiny, the imperfections in the idealized world that Americans attempted to create for themselves become evident, and it is only under this critical lens that such "popular" texts have the power to educate and the potential to be read subversively. It is in practicing this distance with artifacts from a different period that will allow us to gain the appropriate critical distance from representations of international adoption today. As Thornham claims, "it becomes the act of reading/criticism, rather than the text itself, which reveal[s] the workings of ideology."⁴⁹ In turning this critical attention to the texts of today, we can be more savvy and aware of ideologies, how they perform, and to what ends. Perhaps ideology is inescapable, but with a critical eye, we can reveal how those ideologies are constructed and divorce ourselves from its grasp.

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1 Sam Castan, “An ‘Unadoptable’ Finds A Home,” *Look*, April 11, 1961, 83.

2 Ibid.

3 A photo-essay is a biased narrative of a newsworthy event in which images and captions guide as much of the viewer’s response as the text itself. Such narratives gave the impression of being “life as it really was,” despite being heavily guided by photographer, writer, editor, and design team. See Erika Doss, “Introduction,” in *Looking at Life Magazine*, ed. Erika Doss (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 15 for definition.

4 In the words of Susie’s mother, Millie Hughes. Castan, “‘Unadoptable’ Finds A Home,” 84.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid, 83.

7 Ibid., 85.

8 Ibid.

9 This concept of an essential human core underlying all exterior (physical and visible) differences was an idealized vision of humanity that gained great momentum in the 1950s, particularly after the debut of *The Family of Man* exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955. Curated by Edward Steichen, the show featured a series of photographs depicting different stages of life (birth, love, childhood, death, among others) around the world. The ultimate message was that despite cultural or racial differences, human beings share similar experiences and are essentially all the same. See Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955). As Christina Klein suggests in her definition of 1950’s “popular sentimentality,” “The sentimental is thus a universalizing mode that imagines the possibility of transcending particularity by recognizing a common and shared humanity,” Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945–1961*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 14. The problem, of course, is that within this conception of humanity, “Exoticism is insistently stressed, the infinite variations of the species... Then, from this pluralism, a type of unity is magically produced...” Roland Barthes, “The Great Family of Man,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Anette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 100.

10 Castan, “‘Unadoptable’ Finds A Home,” 84.

11 Ibid.

12 Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press 1971), 162, quoted in Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13.

13 See Sue Thornham, *Passionate Detachments: An Introduction to Feminist Film* (London: Arnold, 1997) 26, where she discusses the film scholarship of Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni and their five categories of film. Their article is titled, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” in *Movies and Methods*, ed. B. Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969): 22–30.

- 14 As Elaine Tyler May claims: “The house and commodity boom also had tremendous propaganda value, for it was those affluent homes, complete with breadwinner and homemaker, that provided evidence of the superiority of the American way of life. Since much of the cold war was waged in propaganda battles, this vision of domesticity was a powerful weapon,” *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 149.
- 15 Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 25. It is important to note that Thornham is specifically discussing Barthes in relation to film.
- 16 The *Life* audience during the postwar period encompassed an estimated 20 million (mostly white) readers. Wendy Kozol, *Life’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 159.
- 17 I use “encoding” and “decoding” in reference to Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, ed. Stuart Hall et al (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128–134.
- 18 Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 27.
- 19 Helen Gee, *Photography of the Fifties: An American Perspective* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona Press, 1983), 1.
- 20 According to Jameson, simulacra is an “identical copy for which no original has ever existed.” Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 18.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 22 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 24.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 24 Jameson, 19.
- 25 See Alan Brinkley, “The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture,” in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 62.
- 26 1950s realities included racial/gender unrest, and the uncertainties of the Cold War and the spread of communism. See Gee, *Photography of the Fifties*, 1–3.
- 27 According to Christina Klein in *Cold War Orientalism*, popular sentimentality was a trend that swept 1950s America, exemplified by political initiatives such as Eisenhower’s “People-to-People” project, which encouraged cultural exchange across racial and geographical borders as a means by which to facilitate better international relations. As she states, “In this vision, America was less a free-standing, armed defender of the world and more a member of a community bound together through emotional bonds” (54). Thus, engaging in international adoption was a way that American families could participate in the nation’s broader political agenda while remaining consistent with their own values and fulfilling their ideological needs.
- 28 Term coined by Elaine Tyler May in her seminal text *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. May elaborates: “With security as the common thread,

- the cold war ideology and the domestic revival reinforced each other. The powerful political consensus that supported cold war policies abroad and anticommunism at home fueled conformity to the suburban family ideal. In turn, the domestic ideology encouraged private solutions to social problems and further weakened the potential for challenges to the cold war consensus” (187).
- 29 Marney Rich Keenan, “Behind the Times in a Lackluster Present, Living in the Past Can Make the Future Look Brighter,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 18, 1988, 1.
- 30 Often, orphans were the offspring of American GIs and Korean women who, because of their mixed heritage, were social outcasts in Korea (see Castan, “‘Unadoptable’ Finds A Home,” 83), or they were children who had lost their homes and families in the war. Examples of this type of representation include Marvin Koner, “Korea’s Children: The Old in Heart,” *Colliers*, July 25, 1953, 24+; and Howard A Rusk, “Voice from Korea: Won’t You Help Us Off Our Knees?” *Life*, June 7, 1954, 178–82+.
- 31 As Wendy Kozol claims, grafting American identity onto “racialized bodies” via accessories such as clothing and props, often helped to convince white American audiences that these racially different people were capable of being “American” as well. In this sense, American citizenship and identity in the popular media became conflated with American “things.” Wendy Kozol, “Relocating Citizenship in Photographs of Japanese Americans During World War II,” in *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the Real*, ed. Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 231.
- 32 Some examples of this stage include, again, Koner’s “Korea’s Children: The Old in Heart,” as well as Michael Rougier’s “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile,” *Life*, July 28, 1951, 91–98 (especially p. 94).
- 33 Rougier, “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile,” *Life*, July 28, 1951, 94.
- 34 See Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 26, where she discusses Comolli and Narboni’s discussion of subversive, anti-ideological filmmaking.
- 35 See “Letters to the Editor,” *Life*, August 13, 1951.
- 36 Rougier’s photograph of Kang from “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile” was used on a war relief poster by the Protestant United Appeal for Overseas Relief. See “Kang Koo Ri and His New Face,” *Life*, March 17, 1952, 37.
- 37 See Rougier, “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile,” 98.
- 38 “A Famous Orphan Finds a Happy Home,” *Life*, May 14, 1956, 129. Photographed by Allan Grant.
- 39 Rougier “The Little Boy Who Wouldn’t Smile., 91.
- 40 “Kang Koo Ri and His New Face,” *Life* 17 March 1952, 37. In this brief article, the photographer is named as Lieutenant Kenneth C. Cooley, but in a later letter to the editor dated April 7, 1952, Cooley corrects *Life* and asserts that the true photographer was Lieutenant William C. Correll, 31st Fighter Escort Wing.
- 41 Allan, Grant, “A Famous Orphan Finds a Happy Home,” *Life*, May 14, 1956, 129.

42 Wendy Kozol states that “visual artifacts” such as *Life* and other picture magazines
“...created and promoted the nuclear family as quintessentially American.” Kozol,
Life’s America, introduction.

43 Ibid., 130.

44 Ibid., 129.

45 “Saga of Sam and a Colonel,” *Life*, 25 February 1957, 138.

46 “A Famous Orphan Finds a Happy Home” next to Bell Telephone Advertisement in
Life, May 14, 1956, 130–131.

47 See Daniel D. Mitch and Edwin Eberman, *The Technique of the Picture Story* (New
York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1945), 110.

48 See Maitland Edey and Constance Sullivan, *Great Photographic Essays from Life*
(Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978), 15.

49 Thornham, *Passionate Detachments*, 27.

TELEVISION MOTHERS: LOST & FOUND IN SEARCH AND REUNION NARRATIVES

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Another summer visit. Back home in Korea. I turned on the television and my mother's favorite morning show—*Ach'im madang* (Morning Forum) was about to start. Everything looked the same as a year ago. The show had the same host and hostess; the studio setting and the format of the show were still the same. People with stories of separation, identifiable physical traits, and any traceable information come to the podium one after another looking for their loved ones. Two Korean adoptees were included. Nothing special! I could fall asleep to unrelenting stories of separation and loss—these monotonous tones of people's voices and the expected interventions, with the host saying everything that had already been said again and again. Watching yet another reality search program, I had no clue about the role that I would soon play for the show and for the reunion of Nina de Bruijin, a. k. a. Lee, Jung Soon and her birth mother, Cho, Soon Ok.

Ach'im madang's "I Want to Meet This Person" is the longest weekly search show embedded in a morning program since 1996. This morning show is estimated to be the most watched of the several family-search type programs aired on Korean television.¹ Based on the show's website information regarding Korean adoptees, more than 130 Korean adoptees have appeared, leading to thirty-seven reunions since 1999.² An average number of five or six people, including one or two Korean adoptees, come to a live studio and, in hope of a reunion, share their stories of loss every Wednesday.

The appearance of Korean adoptees on Korean television is a recent phenomenon. Korea's outlandish involvement in transnational adoption practice had ironically been shielded from its own people until 1988 when the western media's moral accusations brought the world's negative attention to South Korea. Ever since, the subject of Korean transnational adoption and stories of Korean adoptees have been among the most popular subjects for television broadcast, whether in the form of social commentary or family search programming. Over the past decade, this international practice, which lacks national memory, has been made to be remembered as a shameful but inevitable fact in Korea's *past* despite its unceasing engagement in the present.

At the cusp of the new millennium in South Korea, the rhetoric of "eradicating past vices" (과거청산 ; *kwagŏch'ŏngsan*) has been appropriated to frame social issues that originate out of a

series of traumatic events in Korea's past. For instance, Japanese colonialism, repression by the South Korean military government, and the violation of citizens' rights have been called forth by a newly vocal civil society as well as by the recent civilian presidential administrations, which push forward a politics of reconciliation that echoes similar processes taking place in other international political contexts. As acclaimed Korean adoptee scholar Tobias Hübinette argues, Korea's fifty-year history of transnational adoption, interlaced with Korea's modern nation-building project, has been folded into this discourse of reconciliation.³ In addition, under a slogan of globalization (세계화; *segvehwa*), the new global economic imperative, the Korean government has recognized Korean adoptees as belonging to a group of "overseas Koreans" who are potentially important in terms of their role as bridges between the West and the East.⁴

Given this political and socioeconomic re-signification of Korean adoption and adoptees, this paper examines a Korean television show's most popular narrative, the narrative of search and reunion, laying the groundwork for establishing a social memory of adoption. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Neal Smith defines a cultural trauma as "a memory [that] must be made culturally relevant, that is represented as obliterating, damaging for an essential value of society [and] therefore, associated with a strong negative affect, usually, disgust, shame, or guilt."⁵ Characterized by shame and guilt, this newly available social memory of Korea's transnational adoption is configured into Korea's cultural trauma. Paul Connerton, in *How Societies Remember*, emphasizes the role of a particular narrative in the formation of social memory. He argues, "In the name of a particular narrative commitment, an attempt is being made to integrate isolated or alien phenomena into a single unified process."⁶ And, making an event, particularly a traumatic event, socially available, Jeffrey Alexander argues, requires attention to the crucial role mass media plays in making cultural trauma affectively available by attributing a certain perspective to the event.⁷

Noting that a suspiciously uniform narrative of transnational Korean adoption has repeatedly shown up on television—affectively enriched with a sense of shame and guilt—I argue that Korean television search shows have produced a cultural trauma out of Korea's fifty-year-long involvement in transnational adoption. The search and reunion narrative brings Korean adoptees as well as their Korean mothers, who were once erased from Korea's official history, forward as the individual subjects of national trauma. Therefore, the story of Korean adoptees' *search for their birthmothers* and their eventual reunion are seen as a reconciliation, both with personal trauma and with Korea's cultural trauma. By forging broken family ties, Korean adoptees and their Korean mothers become nationally recognized citizens who push forward Korea's reconciliation with its past as well as carry out Korea's global agenda.

This paper looks particularly at the ways in which the figure of the birthmother, who has been utterly erased from Korea's official history and adoption discourse, becomes a central and newly significant figure who is appropriated as an allegory for Korea in the search and reunion narrative, which is itself contingent upon television technology. Attending to the temporal and technological apparatuses that the figure of the birthmother inhabits, I call this figure a "virtual mother." The virtual mother is drawn from Deleuze's notion of a machinic assemblage; here, organic bodies of women join technological apparatuses to configure a new

identity as a virtual mother. The virtual mother is not granted motherhood simply from the fact that she gave birth to a child who is now an adoptee. By focusing on the very processes involved in mothering within the radical and fragmented temporality of a television show, virtual mothering instead emphasizes the performative aspect of mothering. Of the many heterogeneous elements and forces contingently configuring virtual mothering, I also draw attention to the qualities present and the affects and effectiveness of the assemblage.⁸

In the following section, I interrogate the ways in which a woman whose motherhood, once revoked, turns into a virtual mother whose motherhood is instantiated and claimed in terms of three tropes: biological, affective, and developmental motherhood. In other words, the focus of analysis is on how such birthmothers' maternal citizenship juxtaposes with Korea as the imaginary "homeland" and thus becomes a symbolic receptacle for the loss involved in transnational adoption practice. With awareness of my particular involvement as a translator (both on- and off-stage) for a televised search and reunion show, I organize this paper around a critical reflection on my participation both in the production of the show and in the personal interaction between the birthmother and the adoptee. I also offer a close reading of the search and reunion narrative as it is presented in *Ach'im madang*.

Ach'im madang – "I want to meet this person"⁹

On my research trip to Korea in 2005, I visited G.O.A.L. (Global Overseas Adoptees' Link), an adoptee self-advocacy organization; one of their primary functions is to help Korean adoptees reunite with their Korean families. I introduced myself as a researcher working on a project about Korean birthmothers. Not a week had passed after my visit to G.O.A.L. when I received a phone call from a staff member. She asked me whether I was available and interested in working on an upcoming reunion show production. I agreed. This is how I came to be a translator between a Korean adoptee, Nina de Bruijin, and her birthmother Cho, Soon Ok.

My involvement in the show's production leaves me with a methodological dilemma. The rich backstage information has no place to be discussed when employing discourse analysis. If I organize my storyline in terms of my participant observation, then I risk diluting the processes by which the figure of the birthmother is virtually recognized. In an attempt to overcome this dilemma, based on three sequences which aired on July 20, August 3, and August 17, 2005,¹⁰ I combine my auto/ethnography with discourse analysis in order to highlight the ways in which the particular story of Cho, Soon Ok and Nina de Bruijin folds into a clichéd media story of search and reunion, with a focus on a virtual mother and the nationalistic discourse of adoption.

I. STUDIO A: MATERNAL CITIZENSHIP – NATURALIZED MOTHERHOOD

In order for a Korean adoptee to search for his or her Korean family, Korean adoptees are instantly reterritorialized into Korean subjects by reasserting their Korean names. Nina de Bruijin was not an exception. During her first appearance on this television show, Nina de Bruijin, a Korea born Dutch adoptee, presented herself by saying, “안녕하세요. 제 이름은 이정순입니다” (*annyŏnghaseyo, che irimŭn ichŏngsoonimnida*; “Hi, my name is Lee, Jungsoon.”) in her fresh—a bit too fresh to be a convincing—Korean. As she translated herself back into English, also a foreign language to her, a more elaborate version of the introduction followed.

Hello, My name is Nina, I was born in Seoul, on September 4th, 1978. I was born in Kangnam-gu, Taepyung Midwife’s Clinic. I was brought to Korea Social Service on September 5, 1978, sent to the Netherlands when I was three months old.

This Korean adoptee performs her greetings in Korean and jumps right back to her Dutch identity—Nina de Bruijin—which, along with her adoptive family, was never mentioned throughout show. Throughout the entire show, she is referred to by her Korean name, Lee, Jungsoon.

The show’s hostess mentions that this adoptee’s name, Jungsoon, was allegedly given by a third party, presumably a social worker at an adoption agency, who might have made her name by taking one syllable from each her biological parents’ names.¹¹ In other words, “Lee, Jungsoon” was an utterly fabricated identity, once created in order to find a home for the child outside Korea; but this time, her Korean name admits Nina de Bruijin back in to Korea. This Korean name, Lee, Jungsoon, suggests that Nina de Bruijin must have a connection in Korea and thus lays the ground for suturing the broken family ties between this Korean adoptee and her Korean family, which had no knowledge of Nina’s birth and adoption until the show’s production.

Shortly after Jungsoon’s profile and pictures air, there is a phone call allegedly from her birth mother. While watching the first segment of Nina and Cho’s search and reunion as a regular viewer, I could not fathom what made this mysteriously coincidental timing of the phone call possible but had to believe that it was a random accident of pure luck. “Maybe Nina is extremely lucky,” I thought. The hostess unexpectedly interrupts herself and urgently informs Jungsoon. “Jungsoon-ssi,¹² There is a phone call. M-o-t-h-e-r? From a mother.” A translator’s indistinct voice follows. The camera rests for a speechless moment on Nina’s face. The hostess asks Jungsoon to take the call from her mother. Nina’s face registers bewilderment. A sense of uncertainty fills the entire studio. The translator says something to Nina. Nina imitates the translator’s “Um-ma”—mother, in Korean—a word whose meaning she might not even understand. A woman on the phone says, “그래, 정순아. 미안하다.” (*kŭrae, chŏngsoona, mianhada*; “Hello, okay, Jungsoon-ah; I am sorry.”) The show’s hostess interrupts and verifies the information by confirming the caller’s name, Cho, Soon Ok, her husband’s name, and

the fact that she has five daughters. This alleged birthmother affirms everything that the hostess asks. A round of applause follows. Their reunion, after DNA tests have been arranged and a further cross-examination of background information has been made, is aired two weeks later.

Later, I learn from Nina's birthmother that she hadn't called in. In fact, it was the show's producers who had called her. Cho, Soon Ok's close friend, apparently having no knowledge of the adoption, had watched the preview of *Ach'im madang* and told Cho, Soon Ok, "There is someone called Lee, Jungsoon, looking for you and your husband." At first, the mother replied, "I don't know what you are talking about." But soon Cho, Soon Ok began to remember a baby she left behind, unnamed, a few hours after a delivery. She was too nervous to call the television network, so her friend called for her. Then, around 9 o'clock on the day that Nina's search aired live, a television crew called Cho, Soon Ok and told her to wait on the line.

It was in this manner that Cho, Soon Ok joined the television narrative of search and reunion, which is inextricable from television technology, and became a virtual mother who greeted her just-returned daughter over the phone. Television technology and its particular storytelling techniques cannot be disentangled from the televised figure of the birthmother, for it is television technology that searches and finds a birthmother—in this case, Cho, Soon Ok—who voluntarily or involuntarily, agrees to respond to a child's call via television. Her virtual mothering is thereby activated.

In the show's narrative, the birthmother, Cho, Soon Ok, instantly recognizes her daughter after tens of thousands of days of separation; this is supposed to indicate the irrevocable tie between a mother and a daughter. Cho, Soon Ok's call to the studio is made to appear as though it is spontaneous, thus suggesting that this alleged birthmother has been waiting all along for her daughter's impending return. She utters her daughter's virtual Korean name, Jungsoon, as if it is a name that she remembers, and apologizes to the alleged daughter, thus following the script of virtual mothering. As soon as the basic information from Nina's adoption file is acknowledged and the caller's familial information is put forth, a sense of the firm belief that they are related is forged by the show. The scripted acts that Cho, Soon Ok performs establish the necessary conditions for this alleged birthmother to be perceived as a credible mother.

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Today is a day of reunion between Nina de Bruijin and her Korean mother. I am nervous about appearing on a national television show as an interpreter, although it should only take five to ten minutes. At 6 o'clock sharp in the morning, I arrive at KBS and see three women sitting in the studio. One young Korean lady is smoking nervously. Instantly, I realize that person must be the Dutch adoptee for whom I am going to translate. I introduce myself to Nina de Bruijin and her childhood friend, Imca, who accompanied Nina from the Netherlands to this foreign country. Nina already seems to have been informed that she is going to meet her birth mother today.

Around 6:30, a woman, one of the writers for the show, walks out of the building and ushers us into the waiting room where today's participants are practicing their presentations and waiting for the show to begin. Of today's participants, there is one other Korean adoptee from Norway. A scripter sits down with each participant in turn and helps him or her to memorize the storylines. They form a story of separation together. This scripter tells me, "You can speak English in a full voice; these days many audience members speak English in Korea. They prefer it that way." This only makes me more nervous. We enter the studio ten minutes before the 8:30 a.m. show time.

"Wow! The studio looks much smaller than it appears on television," I think to myself. "Quite intimate. Hmm. Oh, these guys are the famous hosts." Across from me sits a familiar looking actress, who often plays a grandmother in Korean films or television shows. She is wearing a glamorous hairdo and makeup. She looks very young in reality. I am trying not to get too fascinated and distracted by this new and cool experience. I turn to look at Nina. She looks very nervous. Her anxiety seeps into my body and doubles my anxiety level. I learn that the ladies sitting next to us are paid audience members. Some of them have handkerchiefs on their laps, ready to start crying at any moment. Today, in addition to Nina's reunion, there are five people scheduled to introduce themselves in hopes of a reunion of their own.

After two participants present their stories of separation, Nina and I rise from our seats and walk to the center of the small studio, which will shortly turn into a crucial site where Nina and Cho, Soon Ok can meet as family. One turns into a daughter and the other into a mother whose ties are instantaneously woven through a narrative of DNA and its subsequent accounts of physical resemblance. The show's host repeats that one can recognize her mother or her daughter just from glancing at the other's face. According to the hosts, "We don't need to go on with the DNA test. I can automatically tell they are related, but just in case..." As soon as Nina and her mother hug each other and shed tears, a ritual of reunion has ended, and a male professor of forensic science at a prestigious university informs them of the DNA test results over the phone: "I examined seventeen non-sex chromosomes as well as five sex chromosomes. A daughter inherits everything from her mother, so that I can confirm that they are mother and daughter. Congratulations!" This male stranger, an invisible figure, but the voice of authority and science, confirms the terms of relation between Nina and Cho, Soon Ok as that of mother and daughter. Another round of applause follows from the audience.

Through the DNA-testing ritual, Nina de Bruijin is reborn as a Korean national, without any margin of error. This moment of connection, backed by scientific authority, epitomizes the patriarchal order that ultimately dictates the terms of kinship in the realm of the traditional family while maintaining the patriarch's absence. One of the hosts nicely asks Nina, "I heard you are the one who really wanted to do the DNA test. Why did you ask for that? Can't you just believe that you have found your (birth)mother?" In my translation of this question, which I later found to be very offensive, I unconsciously mimicked the host's soothing voice. How can anyone identify a mother of whom she has no memory, merely by looking at her? How can any woman identify a child from whom she was separated after its birth?

An inviolable bond between a mother and a daughter, corroborated by a scientific narrative of DNA, develops into a reconstruction of family in terms of ‘a compulsive narrative of identification,’ what Eleana Kim characterizes as the process of integration of Korean adoptees into a homogeneous model of Korean citizenship.¹³ During the show, a well-known Korean actress, in the role of a commentator, asks whether the birthmother’s other five daughters also have curly hair, and Cho, Soon Ok responds that she and everyone in her family has curly hair. Curly hair, a common feature, shared amongst all family members manifests their ties, symbolizing an irrevocable identity mapped out in blood. The Korean birthmother signifies not only the biological origin of this Korean adoptee but also the biological hub of the rest of her family members.

The final sequence of Nina’s search and reunion show starts with the female host’s narration—“This is the way home”—driven by a visual narrative of Jungsoon’s homecoming, as we see Nina making her way to the home of her Korean family, a place where she has never been and which she has never called home. A close-up shot of two hands (Nina and her mother’s) holding each other leads the host’s commentary: “Although there is no shared language, it must be really great to be with a mother. It must be really good.” Witnessing Nina’s devastating level of frustration with the absence of language, I found the host’s comment to be a futile effort to make the experience of the reunion uncanny, by suggesting that a mother signifies “home.” Home, in other words, refers to a place where one can find an ultimate sense of peace and comfort.

The final image of Nina’s story depicts the family, along with Nina’s friend, Imca, and me, her translator, as we all gather together to share some fruit. What is not captured on camera is one of the television cameramen suggesting that the mother hand a piece of fruit to her daughter. Cho, Soon Ok gives Nina a piece of watermelon, and Nina responds by giving a tangerine to her mother. The host once more congratulated Lee, Jung Soon and her Korean family, and the scene concludes with Nina smiling as the host says, “Now, the whole family has come full circle with their found daughter filling her own empty spot.”

Many feminist accounts illustrate that women acquire their own citizenship via their identity as a wife and mother in the process of nation building.¹⁴ According to Moon Seung Sook, Korean official nationalistic discourse is based on the patrilineal family—a male-headed family structure is the basic unit of the nation. In her words, “...the Korean nation is essentially a familial community in which members have collective orientation.”¹⁵ In this light, I argue that the ways in which Cho, Soon Ok becomes a virtual mother as a legitimate married woman suggests how her citizenship is gendered in the support of a patriarchal family structure, the basis of the nation.

Women’s gendered citizenship is often discussed in terms of their reproductive function. Yuval-Davis argues in her book, *Gender and Nation* (1997), that blood and a sense of belongingness constitute national identity.¹⁶ Soon after Cho appears on television, positive DNA results corroborate this virtual mother’s maternal citizenship. This strong assumption about blood and belongingness reinforces the myth that “blood is thicker than water,” underlying the fantasy of Korean adoptees’ inviolable ties to Korea and their irrevocable identity as

Koreans, and thereby explaining their ultimate journey to Korea as the motherland. The figure of the birthmother as a repository of shared blood functions as an affective pull toward the homeland.

The motherhood of this virtual mother is contingent upon an adoptee's arrival and search premised on the narrative of redemption. I argue that Cho, Soon Ok as a site of origin *and* destination through the myth of home/land suggests the conditions of possibility for the maternal citizenship of Korean birthmothers. Cho, Soon Ok becomes visible and recognizable as a mother of this newly-made Korean subject only within the national sphere. She is realized as a virtual mother who embodies the adoptee's lost origin, roots, and home, which Nina is able to claim upon her reunion, sited within the television studio and its particular temporality. Television's particular temporality freezes and linearizes the loss of time experienced by both parties, e.g., the birthmother and her child. It flattens the complexities of loss, and instead spatializes the loss to be cast onto the body of this virtual mother, which is actualized in each scene.

A critique of the trope of naturalized motherhood is found in Hübinette's analysis of cultural representations of Korean adoptees and birthmothers, where he poignantly discusses a blurred merging of the birthmother with Korea and the political implications of that merging.¹⁷ Korea becomes a motherland when a birthmother's maternal citizenship is claimed through its symbols of origin, roots, and home. Upon reunion, a Korean adoptee claims her Korean-ness. The slippage between mother as nation and nation as mother fosters naturalized and nationalized maternal images of birthmothers whose loss is also recuperated through Korean adoptees' homecoming. I argue that the naturalized discourse of motherhood in "roots," "origin," and "home" forecloses an analysis of systematic social constraints pushing transnational adoption. Instead, the discourse tends to appropriate the body of the birthmother, once more in the service of national reconciliation in the process of Korea's nation-building project in the global era.

II. STUDIO B: AFFECTIVE MOTHERHOOD

While watching the first part of Nina's search show, a Korean woman calls into the studio three minutes after Nina's appearance. Her first words, over the phone, are "Jungsoon-ah, I am sorry." I find this apology directed to her alleged daughter to be disturbing rather than heartbreaking. Her voice is too dry, too calm, too lacking in emotion, shattering my own expectation of a mother who was separated from her baby for twenty-eight years. I think to myself, "She is a mother who should have more feelings." Yet, this act of apology, despite its lack of emotion, is integral to the forward progression of the narrative of search and reunion. By apologizing, she admits her own guilt in not raising her child. It is through this apology that Cho, Soon Ok is re-territorialized into a virtual mother who performs the role of a legitimate birth mother.

For the following two weeks after Nina's initial appearance on *Ach'im madang*, Cho, Soon Ok cried in public and in private. Once unleashed, tears, belatedly but unceasingly, took over this woman. In the meantime, she tried hard to find where Nina was staying in Seoul so that she could arrange a meeting as early as she could, even earlier than the television show schedule. But the crew and producers would not give her any detailed information about Nina's whereabouts. Nina was traveling in Korea, they said. She had to wait for the television production schedule. Two weeks passed. The two women were only permitted to meet during the production of the show.

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I find myself worrying about whether I will cry in the middle of Nina's reunion as I rise from my seat and walk toward the center of the television studio. Nina is facing toward a gate in the back of the studio set. The moment of the meeting between Nina and her alleged Korean mother after twenty-eight years of separation closes in. The host urges Nina to call out for "Umma." *Umma*. Her Korean umma does not show up immediately. "*Umma*," Nina calls out again, and I, as Nina's translator, whisper to her to call "a bit louder." *Umma*. This calling enacts Nina's search for her mother. Nina's repetition of the word builds a moment of suspense and shakes up the scripted scenario of the meeting by allowing some doubt about whether or not she will come forward. After Nina calls out a third time, a woman neatly dressed in a blue striped shirt and a navy blue pair of pants walks towards the stage, entering through a separate entrance in the back of studio.

As Cho, Soon Ok walks through the studio, she pauses briefly to greet the audience. She does not take any time to look at her daughter's face, a face that she has not seen in more than twenty-eight years. Instead, this Korean *umma* immediately proceeds towards Nina and embraces her. Nina hugs her back. I have no memory of what I was feeling or seeing. But the television screen tells me that there are a few seconds of indistinct voices and sobs from Nina's Korean mother. The scene is accompanied by melodramatic background music, which cannot be heard from inside studio. The camera zooms in to get a close-up shot on the birth-mother's sobbing face, which is already covered in Nina's shoulder. Instead, Nina's face is pictured. She is smiling but not crying.



Fig 1.1

Cho, Soon Ok emerges out of secrecy and shadow. She is instantly made to become a mother to her adopted daughter when this Korean adoptee utters “umma.” The reunion scene is aligned with the belief that this birthmother has been waiting all along for her daughter to call her “umma” so that she can come out of the shadows and mother her long-lost daughter.

In her murmuring, the birthmother says, “I am so sorry” once more. Cho, Soon Ok sobs and sheds tears although I, as both a translator inside and a viewer outside of the studio, cannot see tears in her aging eyes. Her crying indicates the suffering and pain Cho, Soon Ok, as a mother, herself must have lived with all these years. Furthermore, Cho’s emotional display echoes the Korean nation’s emotions toward Korean adoptees, one all-too-well manifest in the following presidential speech:

[...] Looking at you, I am *proud* of such accomplished adults, but I am also overwhelmed with an enormous *sense of regret* and all *the pain* you must have been subjected to. Some 200,000 Korean children have been adopted to the United States, Canada, and many European countries over the years. I am *pained* to think that we could not raise you ourselves, and had to give you away for foreign adoption. The reason for the adoption was primarily economic difficulty. But there were other reasons. Koreans traditionally have a habit-of-the-heart that placed too much importance on blood-ties. And when you don’t have that, people rarely adopt children. So, we sent you away. Imagining all the *pain* and psychological conflicts that you must have gone through, we are *shamed*. We are *grateful* to your adopted parents, who have loved you and raised you, but we are also filled with *shame* (Kim Dae Jung, a former president of Korea).¹⁸

In 1998, then president Kim, Dae Jung invited a group of adult Korean adoptees from the U.S. and Western European countries to his presidential residence. Kim acknowledged the pains and the losses of Korean adoptees. This unprecedented official apology is indicative of the way that adoption discourse in Korea is often deeply associated with negative affects such as shame and guilt.

Given this as a backdrop, I posit that the affective narrative of shame in which the figure of the birthmother engages with the configuration of a virtual mother, as in Nina's search and reunion, grounds the maternal citizenship of the birthmother, Cho, Soon Ok. The rhetoric of mother-as-nation vis-à-vis nation-as-mother once again juxtaposes a mother's shame and guilt with Korea's emotional state in the context of the fifty-year-long practice of transnational adoption, and, further, develops into the politics of reconciliation.

Sarah Ahmed discusses the politics of shame and reconciliation in her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. She argues that shame involves a double play of "exposure and concealment." In her words, "...shame exposes that which has been covered...shame covers that which is exposed (we turn away, we lower our face, we avert our gaze)...."¹⁹ In the process of Cho, Soon Ok's involvement in virtual mothering, these dual qualities of shame clearly emerge. Cho, Soon Ok, despite her flat delivery, engages the affective narrative by acknowledging her guilt as soon as she becomes a virtual mother on the phone. The sense of shame and guilt becomes more poignantly palpable when she enters the studio for the reunion. As she walks out of secrecy and shadow, she immediately covers herself by averting her eyes and looking down, her physical mask throughout the show. The birthmother's downcast gaze exposes that she is in shame. Her motion of hurriedly burying herself in Nina's shoulder further suggests this shame. The series of her actions attempting to cover herself indicates her state of being straddled down with shame. Cho, Soon Ok becomes a virtual mother by displaying the shame of not having fulfilled her motherhood.

Shame reconstitutes a social ideal and thus makes the ashamed aligned with affective citizenship.

Shame can reintegrate subjects in their moment of failure to live up to a social ideal. Such an argument suggests that the failure to live up to an ideal is a way of taking up that ideal and confirming its necessity; despite the negation of shame experiences, my shame confirms my love, and my commitment to such ideals in the first place.²⁰

The exposure of her shame is a moment for the birthmother, Cho Soon Ok, to show her failure to live up to the ideal of motherhood. On the other hand, through her very shame, she once again is recognized as a mother who *aspires* to live up to that ideal. She is now acknowledged as a birthmother virtually unto this Korean adoptee. Her motherhood is fleshed out in terms of her exposure and display of shame, an integral part of virtual mothering in the search and reunion narrative. For a birthmother whose motherhood had not been acknowledged in the national sphere, her maternal citizenship is revoked, and then restored through the performance of shame. The figure of the birthmother is once again made to reassert a source of

national disgrace in a ritual of media slaughter, thus the unrelenting practice of transnational adoption from Korea turns into a personal misfortune. In return, the birthmother acquires her maternal citizenship to Korea.

Aside from symbolic qualities—home, origin, and roots of motherhood—feminist accounts point out that affective qualities of motherhood play a crucial part in the production of citizenship and a nation-state. Affective qualities are no less important than “blood” in the construction of the nation-state.²¹ For example, Tobias Hübinette explains how Korean nationalism is not just based on a biological genealogy of family but also a particular emotional state, such as *han*. The term *han*, according to Hübinette, is generally defined “as a long accumulated, suppressed pent-up mixture of sorrow and anger caused by the injustices and hardships of Korean history.”²² In other words, Cho, Soon Ok’s affective quality of shame suggests a uniquely Korean cultural aspect of suffering shared by Korean people throughout their long history.

The shame does not just apply to Cho, Soon Ok’s maternal citizenship but also pushes Korea’s reconciliation process. As Ahmed points out, “shame becomes crucial to the process of reconciliation or the healing of past wounds.”²³ Applying her insights on shame and reconciliation and feminist accounts of gendered citizenship to a configuration of the virtual mother, I recognize parallels with Korea’s emotional position toward transnational adoption and also its movement toward reconciliation. The shame renders not only the birthmother as a virtual mother but also Korea as a nation that deplores the losses involved in transnational adoption and thus is ready to enter the process of reconciliation. Through affective deployment of the figure of the birthmother who is epitomized as a figure of shame and guilt in the search and reunion narrative, Korea brackets loss and re-covers from its shameful past.

As the narrative of search and reunion progresses, affective qualities of the show make a transition from a sense of shame and guilt to a sense of reconciliation and pride. Via the defraction of shame onto the body of women who absolve their failed duty as mother-citizens, virtual mothering paves the way for Korea’s move from shame in its past to a proud Korea in the era of globalization. This progression in the narrative might be characterized in terms of Ahmed’s idea regarding “the work of re-covering” shame toward reconciliation.²⁴ The ways in which adoption storytelling recovers from its shameful stage is built into the following discourse of motherhood in development.

STUDIO C: MOTHERHOOD IN DEVELOPMENT

As soon as I entered the waiting room with Nina and Imca, following after the female scripter, I found a dozen Korean national participants getting ready for the search show. The majority of those people are working-class and were separated from their family members primarily due to economic reasons, predominantly during the 1960s and 1970s. Under Korea’s national development slogan, “First, Growth; Second, Distribution,” a low-wage and long-hour working environment was believed to be a legitimate labor practice imposed on

many working-class Koreans who were thus made to participate in Korea's belated modern economic development. Needless to say, little public assistance was available for working-class families in dire economic situations. In extreme cases, these difficult circumstances led to family disintegration. After separation from their families, many of the show's participants grew up in orphanages. I can only guess at the struggles and hardships of their lives through their stories. Nina, through her attentive gaze, seemed to be trying to figure out what kind of life she might have led if she had remained in Korea.

On *Ach'im madang*, Korean adoptees' search for family is placed in the landscape of general family separation among Korean people, mostly induced by poverty, which creates a very specific context within which the adoption narrative of search and reunion is coordinated. Aligning Korean adoptees with other Korean national participants flattens the complexities around the causes of adoption entirely into one of absolute poverty, always prefacing Korea's adoption discourse with the following: "Poverty leads to adoption from Korea." The poverty which once took away Cho's motherhood is now integral to the narrative of search and reunion in which Cho is being re-territorialized into a virtual mother.

During the initial contact over the phone, Cho, Soon Ok, the then alleged birthmother, is asked to confirm family information, including the names of her husband and daughters as well as to rationalize the circumstances surrounding Nina's adoption. "You were economically devastated at that time, weren't you?" The host prompts poverty as a primary motivation for adoption by telling the alleged birthmother and the audience, "At that time, [the economic] situation [was bad], right?" Cho answers: "...the [economic] situation was pretty bleak and *my leg was in pain*." Cho's answer folds nicely into a scenario in which she could not raise her own child due to bad health and poverty. No comments or further questions are provided regarding her simple explanation for why Nina had to be given away to live her life without knowing that her Korean family existed.

No one dared to ask why Cho, Soon Ok, like so many others, had such extreme economic hardship that she would be forced her to choose adoption for her just-born baby. The answer tacitly can be found in Nina's birthfather's total absence from the show. While Cho, Soon Ok's sexuality has been brought into the public's purview and is tightly confirmed within the domain of the family imaginary, the figure of the birthfather is never brought to light. However, as soon as the adopted child is proven to be situated in a web of a legitimate family, the figure of the birthfather is slipped out into the background of the search and reunion show. Regardless of Cho Soon Ok's current marital status (married), the figure of the birth father is the constitutive outside to the search and reunion narrative, made into a present-absence so that Nina's adoption story can fall neatly into a generic origin narrative, one of absolute poverty. Thus, Cho Soon Ok could just as well be portrayed as a single mother in extreme poverty, who, at the time of the birth, was considered incapable of parenting a child without a husband.

The absence of the birthfather along with a patriarchal belief that a father should be a primary provider, leads naturally to the narrative of poverty as a driving force for adoption—which is considered to be an individual birthmother's misfortune rather than the responsibility of any-

one in particular or of the Korean government. Poverty is not only the viscerally painful backdrop of adoption, but also a familiar reality for many working-class people in the past. This shared history of poverty renders a poverty-induced family separation a traumatic event rather than an irresponsible parental act, which leaves the figure of the birthmother a victim of poverty.

On the day of reunion, as soon as their precarious relationship is confirmed as that of a mother and a daughter, the show's host starts to weave a narrative of adoption circumstances for Nina's case. The hostess insinuates the possible reasons for adoption: poverty and too many daughters. Cho, Soon Ok, in turn, reaffirms the circumstances of Jungsoon's adoption to be economic difficulties and five daughters as if repeating after the host. Cho goes on: "그때 당시에는 좋은부모 만나서 잘 살으라고 그래서 보낸 것..." (*kŭttae tangsienŭn choŭnbumo mannasŏ chal sarŭrago kŭrraesŏ ponaen kŏt*; "I wished she [Nina] could find good parents and live well. That was my hope for her at that time").

This narrative of dire economic conditions coordinates with Cho's good intentions, and is translated into a conscious and motherly choice in the common storyline of adoption. Cho, Soon Ok becomes a virtual mother who reunites with her daughter, a newly-made Korean subject, by articulating her well-meaning intention of continuing to be good mother, its notion having been somewhat radically redefined. Therefore, this virtual mother is not just passively located as a victim but, rather, in the narrative of progress and development, is rendered a heroic figure who demonstrates courage and sacrifice in her actions.

In the logic of the show's narrative, in order for a poor mother to invest her beloved child to adoption, there must be a firm belief that adoption offers a better life opportunity than the one she herself could provide. A sense of affirmation in Cho's assumptions follows in the form of silence. The sequence of those scenes, interwoven in the show's narrative, suggests that there is a shared consensus on the "better future" that the child is about to step into in the name of adoption. What could explain this shared cultural belief that transnational adoption offers a better life?

Many Korean diasporic cultural theorists, such as Choi, Choong Mu, Park, Kye Young, and Yuh, Ji Yun, point out the enduring popular cultural belief, from postwar Korea and continuing to the present day, of the "American dream" among South Koreans, who hold up the U.S. as an expressway to modernity and prosperity.²⁵ Given the history of the United States' strong, almost exclusive, foreign cultural and military presence in South Korea as well as its having the longest and largest international adoption practice, I extend the notion of the American dream to birthmothers' idealization of life and of adoptive parents in the West. Although Cho, Soon Ok's daughter, Lee, Jungsoon had been adopted to a country other than America, I speculate that a mother's wish upon choosing adoption dwells in her belief that her daughter had been sent to *a place like America* where her daughter's modern development will be provisioned for.

The show's host asks me to ask Nina what she does in the Netherlands. Nina, with her usual bright smile, answers, "I am still in school but almost graduating. I am writing my thesis in social science." After my translation of Nina's answer into Korean, the host adds, "Like the mother wished, her daughter turned out great. She is almost graduated from school, so she will be able to be a successful career woman in the near future." A commentator sitting at the edge of the stage intervenes: "I sort of knew that Lee, Jungsoon would turn out really well due to her absolutely positive attitude." Cho, Soon Ok becomes a virtual mother with the proof of her investment in adoption successfully delivered in the form of Nina's resilient personality and her prospective life as a young professional, and, perhaps most importantly, by her (inevitable) return to her mother/land.

The figure of the birthmother, so far disclosed only as an emblem of shame and guilt, is re-territorialized into a figure who privileges the child's development by giving up her own mothering. Through her choice of adoption, Cho, Soon Ok sacrifices her own mothering, and performs the ultimate act of motherly love, an act grounded in the American dream, promising a better opportunity for her beloved baby. That she invests her child in the hope for individual development fulfills her responsibility as a mother. Upon the reunion, often suggesting the resolution of separations, this developmental narrative allows the pains and the losses associated with adoption practice to be considered as part and parcel of "development." Hence, the adoption narrative of search and reunion shifts its affective turn from a deep sense of sadness, shame, and guilt into a story of glory and success.

A close examination of the process by which a virtual mother is articulated in the terms of developmental discourse reveals a nationalistic appropriation of motherhood in adoption. A constant juxtaposition of Korea as a nation-state with the figure of the birthmother unfurls a story of adoption that goes like this: Due solely to poverty, Korea had to send numerous children away, but with a well-meaning intent to provide Korean children with better life opportunities in more prosperous countries. As Korean adoptees return to their homeland, Korea acknowledges the sad and shameful part of such an event and steps forward to claim national pride via individual adoptees' life-transforming stories of glory and success.

As part of the modern nation-building project, Tahk, Kane, and Hübinette argue that the Korean national government had been actively involved in fertility control with a promotion of emigration, arguably including foreign adoption from the 1960s to the 1980s.²⁶ Twenty-eight years earlier, a Korean birthmother, Cho, Soon Ok, by disowning her child, participated in the Korean government's modern nation-building project. Now, in the very same logic of "development," Cho's disavowal of motherhood, translated into a mother's sacrifice of her own mothering on behalf of the beloved child, reinforces the traditional ideology of motherhood. Cho enacts a woman's duty as a patriotic citizen who once gave up and now claims her motherhood, all of which depends on Korea's nationalistic agenda. Korea overcomes its own shame by re-covering the adoption story within this narrative of development, all of which is based on a fantasy of an adoptee's return, success, and willingness to participate in Korea's familialized national sphere, which is also undergoing a re-territorialization into "global Korea."

* * * * *

My official role as a translator for the reunion was over as I walked out of the television studio. Yet the real job of translating had just begun and would span from several hours to whole days of conversation that tried to fill the time lost by this family. Contrary to the congratulatory messages the television show ended with and my mother's excitement about me appearing in her favorite morning show, the reunion that I witnessed was accompanied with more tears than laughter. The stories were confusing, frustrating, and unsatisfying, after days of limited and disrupted conversations riddled with holes of memory, language, and broken narratives of family.

After the reunion, I was able to meet Nina's sisters and her biological father, all of whom are deeply affected by Nina's appearance in their lives. No one knew there was another member of the family. Nina's concern about her life with this Korean family did not dissipate but became more volatile after the meeting. She kept asking questions regarding the circumstances of her adoption as if she could recapture her life from her birth to the hundred days of her first life in Korea by arranging such accounts back into order. But her Korean mother barely remembers anything. Her Korean father claims that he did not know of her existence. In the meantime, her Korean sisters and her Korean mother cry a lot, and so has Nina.

My invasive journey into this family's past drowned me. I felt like I had been caught up with the personal drama and dilemmas of a stranger who found my role vital. However, my involvement in Nina's meeting with her Korean family thinned over time. They constantly needed a translator day and night in order to communicate with each other, a need which I found to be beyond my capacity. At the same time, leaving them also left me with a sense of guilt and uneasiness. Before coming back to the States, I had several conversations with a frustrated and tearful Nina. I also received a few angry phone calls from her birth father and many more calls from her elder sister. Nina left for Amsterdam on the fifteenth of August, the day of commemoration for Korea's liberation from Japan after the WWII. I wondered whether Nina also felt liberated upon her departure.

MELANCHOLIC LOGIC OF SEARCH AND REUNION NARRATIVES

The story of Nina de Bruijin follows a formulaic narrative of a Korean adoptee's search and reunion with a birthmother. Troubling the narrative circumscription of the motherhood of birthmothers, this paper has examined the heterogeneous elements and processes involved in the configuration of a virtual mother who is uniformly, repetitively, and compulsively actualized in a particular storytelling technique of search and reunion. Cho, Soon Ok is articulated into a virtual mother who deploys selective nodal features of motherhood—motherly qualities such as “naturalized” ones (origin, roots, and homeland), affective qualities (failure and reclamation of ideal motherhood), and nurturing qualities related to the child's development (disavowal and restitution of motherhood).

Highlighting the processes involved in the configuration of birthmothers' maternal qualities inversely indicates that birthmothers' motherhood is neither of "nature" nor of "nurture" but of the "machinic assemblage" between birthmothers' organic bodies and technological apparatuses. The radical finitude of virtual mothering disrupts a tendency to assume the motherhood of a birthmother outside of the television studio and beyond television time. In other words, virtual mothering does not grant an immediate building of a maternal relationship to the adopted person who just met his or her Korean mother after their one-time "reunion." Instead, as Anagnost noted in her discussion of technological mediation and production of kinship, virtual mothering suggests how birthmothers' reclamation of motherhood is interlaced with their performance of maternal citizenship and its implications for the politics of national reconciliation within a redemptive narrative of loss.

In order for loss to be retrieved so that it can be recovered, the loss has to be contained in a certain time and locatable in a certain place. The narrative of search and reunion arrests spatio-temporal movements thereby bestowing the confinement of loss onto the body of the birthmother who is becoming virtual. Her virtual mothering is acknowledged and activated in the framework of family reunion, a culminating point suggesting resolution of all negative consequences related to the adoption practice. As Anne McClintock contends in her analysis of family as a metaphor for a nation, "Since children 'naturally' progress into adults, projecting the family image on to national 'Progress' enabled what was often murderously violent change to be legitimized as the progressive unfolding of natural decree."²⁷ This redemptive narrative of loss interlacing with virtual mothering in the search and reunion narrative tends to normalize a fifty-year-long practice of inter-country adoption as a shameful but inevitable side effect of Korea's rapid economic development.

Attending to Korea's seemingly forthright adoption discourse, which centers on a narrative of search and reunion, I offer a deconstructionist approach to the narrative; the way the narrative of search and reunion operates in terms of an "elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss." The fantasy and exclusion that Anne Anlin Cheng points out illustrate the development of melancholic subjectivity.²⁸

...the melancholic must exercise in order to maintain this elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss. First, the melancholic must deny loss as loss in order to sustain the fiction of possession. Second, the melancholic would have to make sure that the "object" never returns, for such a return would surely jeopardize...a form of possession more intimate than any material relationship could produce.²⁹

The sequential narrative of search and reunion relies on the succession of fantasized events: a Korean adoptee's inevitable return, successful reunion with a birth mother, and rebuilding a family. Meanwhile, this fantasized narrative is produced by a methodical, deliberate exclusion of a disproportionately large number of children born out-of-wedlock, unwed birthmothers, most importantly the figure of the birth father from the storyline, all of which constantly disrupt the male-centered, heterosexual, middle-class family imaginary.

Drawing upon Cheng's insights, Korea's adoption discourse based on fantasy and exclusion as operatives of the search and reunion narrative reveals the elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss, suggesting Korea's melancholic state vis-à-vis its fifty-year-long engagement with transnational adoption. The narrative of search and reunion in adoption discourse brings the figure of the birthmother forward, out of the shadows, and yet, this birthmother figure is once again deployed to serve a nationalistic rendering of loss within an intricate dynamic of fantasy and exclusion in the story of adoption. Despite arduous efforts to redeem the loss, I argue that what Korea has continuously lost but never mentioned in its continuous involvement in transnational adoption is its own patriarchal family imaginary.

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- 1 In Korea, television search shows have particular cultural and historical significance. The theme of “search and reunion with family” is of powerful and unyielding interest for Korean people who have suffered through the Korean War, which alone resulted in ten million separated families. According to Yi, Jae Oh, a KBS producer, “... Adoption, separation because of war, it doesn’t matter. The idea of reuniting families has universal appeal in Korea. The reunion of a family is very important” (Vickery, 2004).
- 2 In comparison, the number of Korean national participants is 1,976, resulting in 590 reunions. However, Korean adoptees are sometimes listed only by their Korean names, which suggests that there may be a margin of error in these figures. (See www.kbs.co.kr/1tv/amplaza)
- 3 Tobias Hübinette, “Comforting an Orphaned Nation” (Ph.D. diss., Stockholm University, 2005).
- 4 Eleana Kim, “Wedding Citizenship and Culture: Korean Adoptees and the Global Family of Korea”, in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. by Toby A. Volkman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 50.
- 5 Neal Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma”, in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 36.
- 6 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 26.
- 7 Jeffery C. Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
- 8 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 257.
- 9 Since the show was conducted in Korean—excepting Nina’s introduction which was in English and my translations for Nina—this description is the author’s own translation.
- 10 I translated for Nina on two programs, which aired on August 3 and 17, 2005. The first segment on July 20 had a different translator.
- 11 A Korean name usually consists of two syllables, so “Jungsoon” is supposedly a combination of her Korean father’s “Jung” and her Korean mother’s “Soon.”
- 12 Suffix for “adult”, similar to “Ma’am” for women and “Sir” for men.
- 13 Kim, “Wedding Citizenship and Culture.”
- 14 Seung Sook Moon, “Begetting the Nation: The Androcentric Discourse of National History and Tradition in South Korea,” in *Dangerous Women*, ed. by Elaine Kim and Chung Moo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 54; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997); Anne McClintock, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family,” *Feminist Review* 44, no. 3 (1993); Hübinette, “Comforting an Orphaned Nation.”; Sungsook Cho, ‘어머니’라는 이데올로기 [*The Ideology of Motherhood*]. (Seoul, Hanoil Academy, 2001).

- 15 Moon, "Begetting the Nation," 54.
- 16 Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*.
- 17 Hübinette, "Comforting an Orphaned Nation."
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Speech: October 23, 1998 at the Blue House." *Chosen Child* 1, no 5 (1999): 15–16;
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- 19 Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 104.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 21 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*; Hübinette, "Comforting an Orphaned Nation"; Yuval-
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- 22 Hübinette, "Comforting an Orphaned Nation," 118.
- 23 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 101.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Chungmoo Choi, "Transnational Capitalism, National Imaginary, the Protest Theater
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- 26 Hübinette, "Comforting an Orphaned Nation."
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BODIES OUT-OF-PLACE AND OUT-OF-CONTROL: EXAMINING THE TRANSRACIAL SUBJECTIVITY OF ADOPTED KOREANS

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INTRODUCING THE ADOPTED KOREANS

During the last decade, there has been an upsurge in academic studies examining previously forgotten and unrecognized groups, identities and experiences transcending antithetical and binary opposites of white/non-white, male/female, hetero/homo and the like. Words like borders and margins, and prefixes like bi- (e.g. biracial), inter- (e.g. intersexual) and trans- (e.g. transgender) frequently turn up in this exciting and fascinating research trend challenging essentialist theories and notions, and territorialized identities and collectivities. Based on a social constructivist and performative understanding of identity development and subject formation, this research trend takes place at the intersection of postcolonial, feminist and queer theories. With this new research development in mind, this article sets out to examine one of these hitherto neglected and under-researched groups, namely the specific ethnic Korean diaspora of 160,000 children who, since the end of the Korean War, and during a period of over half a century have been adopted to 15 different Western countries. The adopted Koreans have, up until now, been more or less overlooked and invisible in Asian and Korean studies, in migration and diaspora studies, and in race and ethnicity studies. This article may therefore offer new and valuable insights into the situation of a forced migration from Korea and a marginalized Asian diaspora growing up with white parents and in white families, and residing in predominantly white communities and white neighborhoods, contrary to the vast majority of other voluntary migrants from Korea and Asia living in Western countries.

For many years, governments and organizations, and groups and individuals variously involved with international adoption were the only ones who spoke for and represented the adopted Koreans who were more or less deprived of their voice and agency. In this regard, I argue that the adopted Koreans can well be likened to subalterns in the sense of Gayatri Spivak (1988), as they up until recently could not speak for themselves, represented as they were as mute physical ties by supplying and receiving governments and as grateful objects of rescue by adoption agencies and adoptive parents. Furthermore, a Western multiculturalist ideology perceived international adoption as a left-liberal progressive act and a way of creating a rainbow family, and a Korean ethnonationalism utilized the adoptees as physical bonds with Western allies and made claims on them as part of its ethno-racial diaspora policy. For the adoption agencies, Korean adoption was marketed as the flagship of international adoption,

while adoption researchers represented the group as the most perfect international adoptees in terms of adjustment and assimilation.

It was not until the end of the 1980s when adopted Koreans started to organize themselves, that the group for the first time was able to speak out about their own experiences and make themselves heard in the public in a more pronounced manner. From the mid-1990s, there has been a veritable explosion of adopted Korean autobiographical works creating a cultural field of its own and encompassing such diverse genres like novels, plays and poems, performances, art works and paintings, and documentaries and films. These previously subjugated self-narratives make it possible for the first time to listen to the voices of the adopted Koreans themselves beyond what has been previously written and said about the group. The purpose of this article is therefore to try to understand the adopted Korean experience by reading and interpreting a selected corpus of written self-narratives, focusing on the ethnic subjectivities and identifications expressed within the texts. The autobiographical texts have been published since the end of the 1990s in connection with the emergence of a global adopted Korean movement, and have been taken from journals and magazines, books and anthologies, or from Internet homepages and websites, reflecting the fact that the adopted Korean movement is very much a virtual community.

This article argues that the adopted Korean existence subjectivity is characterized by white identification and a continuous performance of Whiteness after having grown up in a white family and living in wholly white surroundings, suburbs or small-towns, thereby making the group different from other urban- and community-based Korean and Asian immigrants and minorities in Western countries. In the article, I also write against the general celebratory hype of hybridity in postmodern writing, as this identification with and performance of Whiteness is always interrupted, questioned and disturbed by contradictory, unstable and repeated passings and transgressions, in the form of a never-ending negotiation and navigation between the discourses of Orientalism, Immigrantism and Koreanness. This ethnic instability leads to severe psychic violence and physical alienation, and makes the inhabitation of this hybrid in-between space painful and not very easy to live in. I argue that this finding may help to explain the high preponderance of suicide rates, mental illness and social problems among international adoptees as reflected in the depressing and worrying results of recent Swedish adoption research.¹ My interpretation can therefore be seen as a critique of postmodern concepts of nomadism and cosmopolitanism that glorify liminal existences and border-crossers like the adopted Koreans, to argue that passing and transgressing as an ethnic chameleon is not always a self-liberatory act or a pleasant and seamless experience.

PERFORMING AND MIMICKING WHITENESS

Both my Danish and my American family are white, all my friends here in Denmark are white...my husband is white...and my two sons are often mistaken for being white. So whether I like it or not—and I actually don't—I've developed a white identity. When I look in the mirror I'm actually surprised to see an Asian woman and I honestly don't know how to feel

about the woman I see. I actually expect to see a white woman with rosy skin, blond hair and blue eyes.²

Growing up in a large Swedish community in the Midwest introduced me to the first criteria of what was considered the norm. Fair skin and blond hair were the standards I measured myself against. Honestly, I had no idea I didn't fit that description unless I saw my reflection in the mirror. I thought of myself as a Caucasian. What a shock to find out that I wasn't.³

I used to believe I was white. At least I was completely emotionally invested in this belief. Theoretically I was white, my family is white, the community I grew up in was white, and I could not point out Korea on a map, nor did I care about such place. The only thing I heard about Korea was that they ate dogs...However, my image staring back at me in the mirror betrayed such a belief...I hated myself, this betrayal, being given such a look without any knowledge of where it came from.⁴

The first and foremost point of departure when examining the identity development and subject formation of adopted Koreans must be the fact that they have been subjected to a self-identification as white Westerners after having grown up with a white family and living in a wholly white surrounding, and seldom in places and settings where the population is more diverse and multicultural. The fact that adopted Koreans identify themselves as white Westerners gives strong empirical support to the queer theorist Judith Butler's performativity theory which states that subject formation is not necessarily tied to material and bodily facts, and to the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory which argues that the colonized and the colonizer are mimicking and contaminating each other, and that a new kind of subject arises out of the colonial encounter, which he calls hybridized.⁵ For Butler and Bhabha, identity formation or subjectivization takes place on the level of the body regardless of anatomical features and biological differences, and the subject comes into existence by entering the social order, and sustains its subject position or subjectivity through endless repetition or iterability of what are known as performatives.

In line with this, one could say that the adopted Koreans are upholding this white identification and subjectivity by constantly performing and mimicking Whiteness on an everyday level, meaning that they are often able to pass as native Westerners in spite of having a physical Korean appearance. In this regard, adopted Koreans can be likened to ethnic drags and cross-dressers, transvestites or even transgenders who are troubling, mocking and parodying supposedly fixed racial, ethnic and national identities and belongings. This subversive and liberating interpretation of postmodern theory and the white subjectivization of adopted Korean is indeed compelling and also appealing as it actually means that there is no authentic or original way of being a white Westerner. Rather, as adopted Koreans have acquired a white self-image and are able to perform and mimic Whiteness more or less to perfection, they must also be considered as white Westerners.

So have adopted Koreans managed to break the walls of Whiteness, which in the classical colonial era seemed to be so impregnable even for mixed race people who barely could pass as

white? Unfortunately, I do not think so even if I still firmly adhere to a social constructivist and performative understanding of ethnic identities. Rather, I argue that to have a white self-identification as a non-white person coming from a non-Western country cannot be seen as unproblematic. The acquisition of a white subject position is also made mandatory in adoption research, and a white self-identification is even praised by an adoption ideology representing international adoption as a physical bond between cultures and a symbol for racial harmony, valorizing adoptees as living diversity tokens. It has also led proponents for international adoption to argue that a white subjectivity is exactly what diasporic non-whites need to develop to be able to survive and compete in a world of white supremacy and white privileges, and to conceptualize international adoptive families as ideal examples of post-national, post-ethnic, post-racial or even non-racial kinship. This tendency is present in several recent works by Western adoption researchers inspired by postmodern theories.⁶

Instead, for me, to have a white self-image makes adopted Koreans together with other international adoptees absolutely unique in modern history as never before has any non-white group ever been subjectivized as white, probably with the exception of a few odd individuals among African slaves and Asian coolies who also were completely severed from their biological families and cultural communities and were allowed to grow up with and be educated by whites. This bizarre and by all means queer phenomenon of having a completely distorted physical self-image may easily lead to self-hate, self-contempt and self-destructiveness, and makes adopted Koreans strangers to their own bodies. The Asian-American scholar David Eng also conceptualizes the adopted Koreans as a queer diaspora in his extraordinary examination of the psychic realm of Korean adoptees.⁷ The distorted bodily self-image seems to haunt the adopted Koreans especially in the form of the reflection of the mirror, always betraying and rejecting the white identification of the adoptees, as evident in the three citations. In other words, the material body does matter in this case in spite of an almost complete identification with Whiteness.

While most people check in the mirror for renegade poppy seeds stuck between their teeth, I look to see if I am white: have my eyes formed wonderfully lazy lids to cover sky blue irises? Has my lost nose bridge reinstated itself to its true Nordic beauty? I do admittedly check my teeth but more to ignore my disappointment that this highly anticipated transformation has not yet occurred. I say "yet" because even though I am twenty-four, I still harbour fantasies of having not been adopted, and more so, of being white like my adoptive family. As an international adoptee, I don't know what upsets me more: that I am indeed adopted or that I will never feel a part of any culture...Exchanging my Korean face for that of a German's is obviously a child's solution to a much more complicated issue...Once, when addressed in Korean by a stranger at the age of five, I asked my father why the person thought I was Korean. My questions remains for me a sad punch-line to a confusing story and I cannot help feeling that I was somehow the victim of a cruel joke...It is difficult to know where to direct the pain...When I was encouraged to focus on Korea for school projects I would feign disinterest, while at other times, I would hide my shame at the distasteful association made between myself and

that country. No one knew of my ambivalence. No one pressed beyond my fortress of silence. I was left to turn into a self-hating, introverted teenager who could not figure out what her reflection was trying to tell her. It has taken me many painful years to overcome my multitudinous methods of coping and I am by no means through with them...Perhaps the process of forgiving has to start with myself. I am not white but I never fooled anyone but myself...My reflection will never change but my vision is getting clearer.⁸

Whiteness and white bodies have always been highly valued and ambivalent objects of identification and desire for colonized subjects, and today this desiring of Whiteness particularly concerns the descendants of slaves and indentured laborers and postcolonial migrants living in Western countries. However, even if these groups can be said to be more or less Westernized on a cultural level, they are still racially subjected as non-whites, and accordingly they are desiring Whiteness but they have not acquired a white subject position and bodily self-image. With this in mind, international adoption can truly be seen as the final triumph of the colonial project as international adoptees must be the most whitened and Westernized subjects ever in the history of colonialism.

THE ORIENTAL STEREOTYPE, THE ASIAN IMMIGRANT AND THE OVERSEAS KOREAN

Many have faced racial teasing and discrimination, looking different and being treated differently from their peers, taunts as children calling them “Chinks” or “Japs”, “flat-face” or “squint-eye”...The harm is doubly intensified by the adoptee’s ignorance of his or her own culture and origin, lack of having many, if any, models; having to explain that “No, I’m not Chinese or Japanese—I’m Korean” and not really knowing what that means. The difficulty that all adolescents face in trying to fit in with their peers is intensified in trying to look “white”, act “white”, and not looking like the people you are most likely to imitate—one’s parents.⁹

I walk in this skin. And in this skin, I am any American. A single image has been etched inside of me...But my skin conflicts with me. The world sees me as a Color. Crossing the culture gap with other pioneers who are braving the elements of their own prejudices, I realize how much energy it takes to open the mind, however willing the spirit. And I slam up against the impenetrable wall. It hurts so much to still be on the outside. It is altogether a lovely pain, one with which I am intimate.¹⁰

Adopted Koreans face a cultural divide. We live lives of disjointed identity, balancing between what’s seen and what’s felt. Our minds belong in one universe, while our bodies exist in another. But as adopted Koreans, we can never truly call either sphere our own...Although the experiences of adopted Koreans range across the board, the zebra-like contrast between our culture and our beauty is at the core of us all. And each of us

learns how to solder a unique link between our inner steel and our outer shell.¹¹

So the subject formation of adopted Korean cannot be reduced to something as simple and unproblematic as the performing and mimicking of Whiteness, which Butler's and Bhabha's theories may seem to promise at first sight. This might have been the case in an ideal world, but having a body marked and inscribed with a long history of otherness in a Western culture and society imbued with racist practices, regimes and discourses actually does matter. In spite of being bestowed with a Western name and a growing up in a white family, and in spite of only speaking a Western language and behaving like a Westerner, having a non-white body does create limitations to sustain a white subjectivity. The frequent, painful and humiliating moments when adopted Koreans are revealed and exposed as a kind of ethnic pastiches and copycats are good examples of what Butler calls a misfire, meaning when a performative fails to reproduce its intended effect and instead ends up in an infelicitous performative. The performative character of the subject simultaneously constitutes its stability and its vulnerability, as it is always possible to oppose and subvert, and re-signify and transform this iterability of performatives to create new subject positions, whether for good or for bad. So when are adopted Koreans failing to maintain a white subjectivity, and when are they misfiring and performing infelicitously? What is exactly interrupting and fragmenting, and destroying and crushing their white identification and self-image?

According to the autobiographical works of adopted Koreans, I have identified three principal and often sequential interventions when they are not being acknowledged, accepted and taken as a white Westerner. These moments occur when the imaginary of Orientalism, the discourse of Immigrantism and the ideology of Koreanness intervene and they are imagined as an Oriental stereotype, addressed as an Asian immigrant and interpellated as an overseas Korean. It is here important to remember that performativity theory is not about advocating a strategy of individualistic or, even worse, neo-liberal identity politics in the form of free role-playing and funny theatrical gestures, which some proponents may believe it to be. Butler also reminds that subject formation is heavily constrained by a ritualized repetition or iterability of cultural rites and social norms policing and regulating the subject under the threat of marginalization or even death. Bodies sometimes do matter as the surface of some bodies are inscribed with meanings, and that these inscriptions have a history making such bodies particularly vulnerable to socially ingrained and historicized discourses, imaginaries and ideologies.

I was a "gook", a "chink", a "boat person" and a "V.C." (Viet Cong). My actual origin was not important enough to know. Conversely, to teachers, clergy and my own extended family, I was "adorable", a.k.a. "a little china doll". In the schoolyard, I was ridiculed and taunted, picked on and beaten up...I ran from a boy who screamed in my ear, "pork fried rice", with the perceived stereotypical *Asian accent*. I was so deeply bothered by slurs about rice and chopsticks that I never wanted to be seen eating anything as such. Likewise with karate and kung fu, I would not agree to take karate lessons as my mother had wanted for my own protection.¹²

Growing up, I was the perfect abducted daughter. Good, smart, considerate. I had a close relationship with my abductive parents, and I felt like I really loved them. So hearing them make comments like, “Our daughter is so obedient, it must be in her genes!” and listening to my abductive family use words like “Oriental”, “Chinaman”, and “China doll” to describe me and other Asians seriously sucked.¹³

Sometimes my adoptive mother will see an Asian woman on tv and declare, “Oh she looks just like you!” Or when we eat in a Chinese restaurant the first thing they will comment on will be the “ching chong Chinese music.”¹⁴

With an Asian body constantly signifying Orientalism, the sudden and powerful intervention of the Orientalist imaginary turning up at the most unexpected occasions always threatens to fetishize adopted Koreans into ethnic stereotypes. It is evident that this Orientalization of adopted Koreans takes place even within the adoptive family, as having an adopted child from Korea does not stop one from being racist, and it is perhaps no coincidence that So Yung Kim likens adoption to “abduction” and adoptive parents to “abductive parents” given her personal experiences within her own family. It is a well-known phenomenon that Asians and Asian children in many Western countries are perceived as being docile and submissive, clever and hardworking, and quiet and kind, and the fact that Asia is the dominating supplying continent of internationally adopted children with countries like Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, India, and Sri Lanka, probably further underscores the Orientalist imagery at work. Catherine Ceniza Choy and Gregory Paul Choy have also paid attention to this Orientalization of Korean adoptee bodies in their textual analysis of adopted Korean poems and literary works.¹⁵

Again, coming back to the ever-present reflection in the mirror, it is here important to note that in practice for most adopted Koreans, the Orientalist imaginary is practically the only available mirror image at hand for physical self-identification besides the white bodies surrounding them during their upbringing and daily life. In this respect, there are of course similarities to other ethnic Koreans in Western countries like those living in interracial relationships, or being of mixed race origin as these groups usually are alienated from both their homeland and sometimes from the mainstream Korean and Asian diaspora communities as well. However, what makes the state of Korean adopteehood so unique is the complete severance of familial ties, cultural routes and social connections to all kinds of Koreanness and Asianness whatsoever. This is also the reason behind an ambivalent response to the Orientalist imaginary as it at least offers a bodily mirror image, while other diasporic Koreans usually do not recognize themselves in it, and even distance themselves and takes it as a misrepresentation and as a distorted fiction. Accordingly, it is no coincidence that many adopted Koreans also perform Orientalism, almost fully embodying the Orientalist fantasies in its most gendered and heterosexual forms as men often have taken on a nerdy lifestyle while women instead exoticize themselves. By this reading, I do not claim that this voluntary self-Orientalization means that adopted Koreans are acquiring a false consciousness of some sort. Rather, I am assuming and proposing that Orientalism may well be practically the only know-

ledge and model adoptees have of Koreanness and Asianness, and, of course, these are very often mediated through popular culture representations.

I remember feeling pulled between being white and being Asian when I watched "Miss Saigon" the first time...I didn't feel Asian, but as white as the friends who sat next to me. And yet the stirrings of identity were beginning, because I was emotionally drawn to the Asian American actors... Watching the play was exhilarating...It was like falling in love. I was giddy with the American dream it presented, tearful over the hardships of war, and became infatuated with the relationship between Kim and Chris, the lovers the story focused on. It was love, and I fell hard for "Miss Saigon"...I let myself be wooed by decent music, dramatic and lavish sets, and the story of a prostitute who was sold for a night of sex with an American Marine, fell in love, bore their child, and ended up killing herself in a star-spangled flame of sacrifice.¹⁶

I didn't want to be like the Asian geeks I saw in movies...I'd watch with my lighter complexioned friends and laugh along with them. Laughing, I thought, would distance me from the popular Asian looking icons of American humor. I did not want to be another typical Asian overachiever, both praised as a model minority that other people of color should follow and denigrated as an emasculated sex-starved wallflower. I tried to stay away from other Asian guys at school.¹⁷

"I am Korean but, God, do I wish I was white!" To me, whiteness was the embodiment of everything good, everything pure. Who was always the good guy in the cartoons I watched after school? Why, the man in the white cowboy hat, of course...Thus, my idealization of the color white stemmed from my early experiences, and I ultimately succeeded in internalizing the dominant culture's standards and imprisoning myself in a cell of self-hatred.¹⁸

Furthermore, adopted Koreans always risk the threat of being taken for a non-Western immigrant of Asian origin by a discourse of Immigrantism or perhaps just pure xenophobia, dividing phenotypically between native whites and immigrant and minority non-whites in practically every contemporary Western society. With the background of being the most integrated and assimilated of "immigrants" in any Western country, this might sound ironic as adopted Koreans are of course in no way a danger to the upholding of a perceived and threatened cultural homogeneity and social harmony in Western countries. In response, they often perform Whiteness even more intensely, and often in combination with an over-exaggerated middle- or upper-class disposition with the hope of being taken for an Asian adoptive child to a white elite family rather than being mistaken as a working-class Asian immigrant, thereby asserting a certain belongingness both to family, class, culture and nation.

In my daily plan of achieving perfection, I made sure I was never associated with any of the other Korean adoptees at school. This worked out great because they were also hiding out in their other identities. What I

hadn't anticipated was the first Hmong family that came to my school. I felt their stares in the hallway. They were immediately drawn to that thing I hated most about myself then—my Asian features. I avoided them like the plague. I figured they might blow my cover and actually call to attention to the fact that I looked like them.¹⁹

During this period, there was no way I would be caught dead in a group of other Asian people. My perception of Asians at the time was negative because of what many of my peers said about Asian people who they assumed were immigrants—"Oh look they are fresh off the boat." Meaning, I'd probably look like someone who only spoke a foreign group of syllables and consonants that came out the same, "Me how ping pong."²⁰

I watched the way Americans moved, talked, used their hands; and I became a master at imitation. I had a better understanding of the language than the American-born children I went to school with.²¹

An extreme example of this over-performed middle- or upper-classness and Whiteness is apparently, according to the citations, to avoid the company of Asians and people of color including other adopted Koreans by any means. The other choice is to identify and socialize with Korean immigrants and Asian minorities, but this is not an easy option as adopted Koreans often end up as an outsider in both the white world and among diasporic communities. This interpretation is in line with Bhabha, who argues that the hybridized is usually rendered different both from the colonizer and the colonized and becomes an Other in-between and beyond both cultures and worlds, namely both the white majority society and the non-white minority community. When prejudices, racism and discrimination come from both sides, and racial expectations do not fit well with cultural experiences, adopted Koreans like Arthur Hinds express a frustrating feeling of incommensurability for never being able to unite and reconcile with both worlds at the same time.

My Asian friends tell me that other Korean adoptees are too white, like bananas. They tell me it is good that I am learning about what it is to be Asian American. What it is to be a person of colour. And how white people think of me. I have white parents... Twinkie, banana, sell-out. I've heard them all before, and hate them just the same... I can see the racism from all my white friends, from my grandparents, and cousins... They say that my racism is internalized and that I have been tricked into believing the great white lie. Maybe I have. But what are they telling me? That I should hate my father? ... White people think I'm just some gook. White people who don't know me, that is. Can you speak English? Oh your English is very good. Where are you from? How long have you lived in America? I didn't really know what to say to that. How can I say that I feel I am more American than you, you third generation European immigrant. My family has been here since the 18th Century. My great great grandfather was making money in New York while yours was working some field in another country. Don't talk to me about speaking English. My mother is an English professor. That is what I think when white

people are racist to me. What about Koreans? I'm one of them right? Wrong. Maybe it's just me, but I really feel out of place when I am around them. I also feel very...good. I'm one of them, yet there is always a sense of exclusion...I need their acceptance. But I would rather not risk their rejection and simply just not have anything to do with them.²²

Finally, recently Korean ethnonationalism has started to call for the adopted Koreans to "come back" and "return home." This lure of essentialism in the form of Koreanness by letting oneself be reclaimed and embraced by Korean ethno-racial body politics and visiting and re-settling in Korea is naturally also threatening a white subject position. However, again, this is not an easy alternative given the almost complete inseparability between race, language and culture in Korean nationalism.

This year in Korea has been a challenge for me particularly because I do not speak Korean well...Basically, people here think I'm some person who's trying to make them angry by deliberately not speaking what should obviously be my native language, based on my physical appearance. This is how most people react when they first meet me. And it always goes like this...: A guy in the street stops to ask me directions, speaking in rapid-fire Korean...After I clearly state that I don't speak Korean, the questions begin. First question: "Aren't you Korean?" Second question: "Well, then, don't you speak Korean?" Third question: "Why not? Didn't your mother-father-other Korean influences you had in your life growing up, teach you Korean?" How do you answer to this type of mentality? You can't. You will honestly go crazy if you try to.²³

From the mid-1990s, the adopted Koreans have increasingly been included as a part of the Korean diaspora and treated as ethnic Koreans overseas, and they are nowadays regularly mentioned and included in official works and speeches dealing with the worldwide diasporic community of Koreans. However, it is one thing when the Korean government or president is addressing the adoptees as "Korean brothers and sisters", but in reality on an everyday level to not speak fluent Korean and to not behave like a native Korean create obstacles, as the experiences of Sunny Diaz point toward.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF PSYCHIC VIOLENCE AND PHYSICAL ALIENATION

It is my conviction that this besieged subject position as a white Westerner, made fragile and questioned by having an Asian body that is perpetually under the threat of being fetishized, racialized and essentialized, results in severe psychic violence and physical alienation in the form of an almost permanent state of tremendous stress, rage, agony and melancholia for never being able to fit in and find a balance between racial expectations and ethnic and cultural identifications and experiences, and always feel like a social misfit and an ethnic outsider. Having nowhere to hide and rest, no place to find solace and no free zone or safe space, and no significant others to defend or at least understand and emphasize with them which other

Asian and Korean immigrants arguably do have in their own families and communities, death in the form of suicide becomes the ultimate way for the adopted Koreans to escape from this endless struggle to survive, and negotiate and navigate between all these self-identifications, imaginaries, discourses and ideologies, and in the end to be left alone. This interpretation is in line with what Dani Isaac Meier observes in his dissertation based on interviews, where he illustrates how adopted Koreans are continuously and painfully negotiating their multiple racial and ethnic subject positions.²⁴

By this interpretation, I am also consciously ignoring and leaving behind mainstream positivistic adoption research dominated by psychologists and psychiatrists, which instead wants to explain such “deviant” results as suicide among international adoptees only with genetic defects, low IQs, separation traumas, and attachment disorders. Instead, I suggest that it might be more productive to understand the recent finding that suicide is five times more common among international adoptees in Sweden than among native Swedes in the light of the severe psychic violence and physical alienation expressed in the adopted Korean self-narratives.²⁵

During childhood, this constant battle of acceptance of my heritage and the rejection of my looks created a kind of a constant, inner displacement, a gap which widened as I grew older. It helps when I can speak—because through my fluent Danish language, I can express my cultural heritage... But when I am silent, my appearance overpowers me and takes control. This dominance makes me feel, on the one hand, sad... On the other hand, I am sometimes overwhelmed by the longing to escape myself, which makes me extremely angry, because I feel predestined in a negative way. The result is a lack of balance when it comes to identity. I was looking for white features, hoping I was biracial, longing for blond hair, blue eyes, and ultimately hating my body and avoiding mirrors.²⁶

Our search for ourselves does not have an end—neither does the pain. You saw that, but what you couldn't see was a way to ease the difficulty of your earthly journey. Somewhere along the way, you forgot to open your eyes and catch a glimpse of hope. A friend recently commented that we, as adopted Koreans live a lie. In order to assimilate into not only a white society, but also our adoptive families, we learn to see ourselves as others want to see us. We turn our lies into betrayal—of ourselves. Maybe you got tired of wearing your mask. Maybe you forgot who existed beneath the weight of that façade.²⁷

Alienation, or the feeling that one is alien, is unavoidable when people ask incessantly, “So where are you from? No, where are you really from?” Since when is “I'm from Austin, Minnesota” not a good enough answer?... Most adoptees have an “a-ha” moment at some point in their lives when they look in the mirror and realize, “I'm not white.” A painful self-consciousness usually follows, with sometimes comical and sometimes tragic attempts to “fit in” with the majority. I know a few adoptees who, in their childhood, would have literally “whitewashed” themselves if physically possible. Feeling rejected for never being white enough, some

adoptees turn their backs on the dominant culture and look for acceptance and affirmation in the Korean American community, or will even go visit the "motherland". Sadly, many discover even more hostility from the Korean people for not being "Korean enough"...So the adoptee is left with the bewildering question: Who am I if I'm not white enough for America and not Korean enough for Korea? Where do I go from here?²⁸

The adopted Korean subjectivity is in other words not only characterized by a firm identification with Whiteness, but also by numerous and constant, and unwilling and uncanny passings and transgressions. As Butler points out, the boundaries surrounding privileged subject positions like Whiteness are governed by numerous regulatory and circumscribing juridical laws, cultural customs and social conventions which delimit and constrain the potentialities for passing as a white Westerner, and which punish those who dare to by social marginalization or biological death. So it may be that adopted Koreans are disembedded and free-floating Asian bodies who have gone completely out of place and out of control, and who constantly disturb and disquiet the taken-for-granted boundaries of race, culture and nationality, but they always risk to end up being severely punished for their passings and transgressions.

To conclude, my main argument is that adopted Koreans have been fully acculturated and socialized into a self-identification as white. At the same time as having a Korean body, they are incessantly liable to a whole regime of Orientalist imaginaries trying to fetishize them into an ethnic stereotype. Furthermore, being a non-white body, an ever-present discourse of Immigrantism wants to racialize them into an Asian and non-Western immigrant. Lastly as an ethnic Korean, nowadays they are also warmly interpellated by a Korean diaspora policy that essentializes them into and hails them as overseas Koreans. Contrary to the liberationist interpretations of Butler's performativity theory and Bhabha's hybridity theory being so common in postmodern studies, I regard this acquisition of a white self-identification by adopted Koreans as a complete subordination to white hegemonic power, and as a magnificent symbol of the final triumph of the colonial project. Here again, it is important to note that this does not mean that I am advocating an essentialist understanding of what a non-white body should consist of, as I am aware of the fact that the white subjectivization of adopted Koreans may also be interpreted as a subversive undermining of Whiteness itself. However, despite its revolutionary potential on a theoretical level, I believe that this self-identification is highly problematic in real life for a non-white person of non-Western descent living in a heavily racialized culture and society such as those of the West. In this way, I also go against dominant normative adoption ideology where the acquisition of a white self-image is the primary goal of international adoption itself, conceptualized as adjustment, attachment and assimilation.

Moreover, I am aware of the fact that hybridity is mostly linked to postcolonial diasporas, and to second generation immigrants and mixed race people. However, for me it is the adopted Koreans who provide the best example of a hybridized existence going beyond all kinds of classical categories normally associated with *ethnies* and diasporas like kinship and territory, culture, religion and language, and memory and myth, as they are completely severed and isolated from both the North and South Korean nation states and other diasporized Korean immigrants. The uniqueness of the adopted Koreans, which makes them different from other

Korean and Asian minorities is precisely this estrangement from their biological families and ethnic communities, and which not only make them to identify themselves as white Westerners but also to respond differently to the discourses of Orientalism, Immigrantism, and Koreanness. However, even if many adopted Koreans understandably may feel like mistranslated white Westerners, misrepresented Oriental stereotypes, misrecognized Asian immigrants, and misappropriated overseas Koreans, some of them have apparently come to accept that the only way to understand and accept the fate of being an adopted Korean is precisely to say that it is a never-ending story of misfiring and infelicitous performatives.

I have struggled much of my life to understand the complexities of my identity. At one point I believed I was white. Soon however, racist comments destroyed that misconception, and I grew to loathe the mirror's reflection and its seeming contradiction. According to others, I was not American, yet in my mind neither was I Korean. After I grew to identify as Korean, I traveled to South Korea where I was promptly informed that I was actually American. In the end, I finally returned to the United States and became Korean-American...After such a complex path to self-discovery, I have now dedicated my life to helping redefine what it means to be "American."²⁹

Lately, I have had to confront a pastiche of labels: Asian, Korean, American, and adopted. A situation such as this has made me realize identity is not something that can be buried or ignored. I have too many hyphens to interconnect what it is that supposedly constitutes my existence that I have given up attaching any kind of "label". Ultimately, there is no term that will explain entirely that which makes me. So, call me what you will, but keep it clean.³⁰

I don't fit into any pre-existing categories: I'm not Caucasian, Korean, Korean-American, or biracial...I can't choose an ethnicity intelligibly...Is ethnicity a question of choice?...But I've accepted my liminal status. I'll try to dance while trapped in this perpetual limbo.³¹

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“I FLEW TO MY PARENTS ON A SPACESHIP”: ADOPTED KOREANS IN CHILDREN’S PICTURE BOOKS

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INTRODUCTION

I’m a librarian and recently found an old book in my school library called *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John* by Pearl S. Buck. I read it and it is completely charming... [But] I don’t know enough about this time period or the situation... Maybe you can help me with some of this or point me in the right direction.¹

In 2006, a school librarian found my personal website² about Korean American children’s books and e-mailed me because she wanted to know more about the background of biracial Korean War orphans who were often abandoned by their birth families and then adopted by white Americans. She asked what I thought of *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John* and if there were better Korean adoption stories she could include in her collection. When I received this e-mail, it became immediately clear to me that many librarians and educators may be unaware about the history and experiences of transracially adopted children and uninformed about issues regarding their representations in children’s literature. I resolved to critically analyze these representations so that everyone—adopted Koreans, general readers, parents, librarians, and educators—could be better informed and more critical consumers of children’s books.

Children today are still brought up on these tales of emotional fulfillment through adoption, stories in which delightful children blossom in the care of wise, sensitive adoptive parents who are sometimes explicitly portrayed as ‘better’ for their children than their birth parents would have been. Very rarely is an adoption portrayed as problematic.³

I started researching Korean adoptee experiences in American children’s literature in 2002, when I began a master’s program with a fellow student who was adopted from Korea as an infant. She was making a documentary about Korean adoptees, and her work took a dramatic turn in 2003 when she met her birth parents and five older sisters for the first time in twenty-five years. Meanwhile, I researched American children’s picture books portraying Koreans and Korean Americans for my own thesis. A third of the stories, authored mostly by white

American females, depicted children adopted from Korea, yet stories resembling my friend's experience searching for and meeting her birth family were virtually absent. I found similar stories of intense curiosity, searching and reunions in memoirs, anthologies, and documentaries, but the children's literature seemed to insist on presenting an entirely different narrative. I explore one aspect of these differences by focusing on the ways first-person adopted Korean narrators in children's picture books talk about issues related to their adoptive experiences, and how they are similar to or different from the ways the adopted Koreans talk about the same issues in their own self-produced works, and what those similarities and differences may mean or imply.

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION FROM KOREA

The first major wave of Korean adoptees in the 1950s comprised mostly biracial war orphans, products of the Korean War (1950–1953) conceived by Korean mothers and non-Korean military fathers. A middle class emerged in the rapidly industrializing Korean society during the 1960s and 1970s, and the birth of out-of-wedlock babies rose, especially among young female factory workers. Biracial orphaned babies were no longer the majority of Korean international adoption as more full-Korean babies began to be adopted out of Korea.

Transnational adoption from Korea became highly systematized in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴ Between 1952 and 2006, more than 150,000⁵ Koreans were adopted to the United States and other countries, mostly by white families living in homogeneous, middle or upper class suburban or rural areas.⁶ There are more than one million ethnic Koreans in the United States; thus adopted Koreans comprise about ten per cent of the Korean population in the United States.

Adoption from Korea peaked at almost 9,000 in 1985. In 1988, in the midst of intense publicity as Korea hosted the international Olympic Games, news reporters depicted Korea as treating orphaned children as an lucrative export industry,⁷ thus making an international public spectacle out of an otherwise "quiet migration."⁸ The government spoke of scaling back and eventually terminating international adoption, but for several decades Korea continued to be the top "exporter" of babies to other countries. Currently, China, Guatemala, and Russia send more babies abroad, even as Korea continues to send out about 2,000 babies each year.⁹

Adult Korean adoptees comprise the earliest and oldest cohort of transnational and transracial adoption in the United States. Some adoptees of the earlier generations critique their transnational and transracial adoptive experiences, rejecting the assimilationist models with which they were raised.¹⁰ However, the unwillingness of Koreans in Korea to adopt and the high demand by white parents outside Korea¹¹ indicate that the practice will continue for some time.

The call from some Korean adoptees to end transnational and transracial adoption, based on the trauma of being cut off from their birth countries and adopted into all-white families often living in all-white areas, underscores the importance of providing support to talk about issues

such as identity, racism, and birth families. Korean adoptee Sunny Jo calls on fellow adoptees to "[reach] out to younger adoptees through such activities as volunteering as camp counselors and mentors at culture camps."¹² Additionally, as noted by Korean adoptee and scholar Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist, children's literature emerges as a critical medium through which issues can be discussed,¹³ where adult adoptees can function as educators to share their stories not only with adopted Korean children, but with all children.

ADOPTED KOREANS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS: AN OVERVIEW

The body of research addressing transracial adoption is still forming as the practice becomes more visible, and as scholars realize that adoption-related topics can be studied through different disciplines.¹⁴ Early studies came mostly out of psychology and social work and tended to focus on the adoptees' psychosocial adjustment, attachment to adoptive families, and assimilation to American culture.¹⁵ I agree with John Raible, a biracial black and white adoptee of white adoptive parents, and others who are critical of the way that scholarship on transracial adoption has been dominated by non-adoptees.¹⁶ He says research will "remain incomplete and inadequate until the voices of mature adoptees and family members are included," and points out that the generations of transracial adoptees from the 1960s onward come of age and their works disrupt the infantilization of adoptees as perpetual children.¹⁷ I contend that the subgenre of Korean American children's literature portraying transracial adoption will also remain incomplete and inadequate until the voices of mature Korean adoptees are included.

In other arenas, adult Korean adoptees carve out a space for themselves by creating communities and publishing personal narratives and research.¹⁸ Sunny Jo defines the emerging unity among the KAD (**K**orean **A**Doptee) nation as a category culturally, ethnically, and nationally distinct from Korea and adoptive countries,¹⁹ while Tobias Hübinette describes the third space²⁰ where adopted Korean identities transcend "categories of race, citizenship, language, religion and culture."²¹ Kimberly Stock defines the emerging community of Korean adoptees returning to Korea as a fourth culture.²² The voices coming out of these third and fourth space cultures increasingly counter the dominating narratives produced by non-adoptees in scholarship and literature, but not yet in children's literature.

The number of children's stories portraying adoption has grown in the past several decades. Librarian and adoptive parent Susan Miles' bibliography contains 503 annotations for all age groups across many topics: sibling adoption, foster parent adoption, transracial adoption, intercountry adoption, Amerasian children, minority family, and so on.²³ Nancy Schimmel and Susan Love stress that "a child's own adoption story is the most important one," yet they evaluate "positive"²⁴ adoption stories that are not from a child's own *voice*. Most are written by adults who adopt, not children who were adopted, in the same way that adoption research is frequently conducted by adoptive parents when their adopted children are still young.²⁵ However, the authors do point out specificities of wording configurations, as well as emphasize that the "before-placement part of the child's history" is integral but often missing.²⁶

The first treatment of Korean orphans and adoption as a genre in children's literature is a subsection of the first major survey of Korean American children's literature.²⁷ Belinda Louie says "the adoption of Korean children was an important service because the mixed race children were not accepted by Korean society,"²⁸ a statement that lacks the complex background that the U.S. army's presence in Korea birthed those mixed raced children, and that taking care of them, whether by adoption or another method, is not so much a "service" as it is a responsibility.²⁹ Also, the only book among Louie's list to portray a biracial Korean adoptee is a novel meant for slightly older audiences, and has been criticized as inauthentic.³⁰ Louie uncritically describes the storylines of these adoption stories without problematizing the fact that most are written by non-adoptees, nor by noting that books about adoption from Korea comprised much of the pre-1990s children's literature that portray an ethnic Korean character.³¹

More critically, Kathleen Bergquist analyzes the ways that children's literature is used as bibliotherapy to discuss transracial Asian adoption issues such as "identity, race, ethnicity, and marginalization," and how the stories contextualize "sociopolitical factors of international adoption."³² She also notes that "the majority of the pieces were written, illustrated, and edited by adoptive parents or adoption professionals."³³ Most stories are written in either the second- or third-person, rather than narrated by an adoptee himself or herself. Bergquist's work is a strong model for critically analyzing children's stories about transracial Asian adoption, not only for its methodological and political contributions, but also when considering the disproportionate lack of scholarship on adoption children's books compared to the number of adoption stories published for youth.

My study seeks to make another contribution and further these discussions by giving a select group of these adoption stories a focused treatment.

THE OTHER

I frame this study with the understanding that the relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea that arose during and in the aftermath of the Korean War shaped and continues to shape the unequal relationship and unequal movement of bodies between the two countries. Although Korea was and is not colonized by the United States in the traditional sense, scholars acknowledge the United States' continuing "overarching political and military role in South Korea," and economic role as well.³⁴ Thus I study these children's books through a neocolonial lens, as they are material embodiments, cultural reflections, and ideological/hegemonic reproductions born of and reflecting the ongoing neocolonial relationship between the two countries.

I also find useful Perry Nodelman's application of *The Other* to childhood and children's literature³⁵ by way of Edward Said's definition of Orientalism. According to Said:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it,

authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.³⁶

Perry Nodelman adapted Said's words to his understanding of childhood and children's literature:

Child psychology and children's literature can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with childhood—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, child psychology and children's literature as an adult style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over childhood.³⁷

Nodelman claims that adults colonize children and treat them as inherently inferior in the same way that "Europeans...describe and analyze the Orient because the Orientals are not capable of describing and analyzing themselves."³⁸ He contends that adults believe children are "incapable of speaking for themselves."³⁹ In the same way, some Korean adoptees have expressed criticism at the way they have been silenced and talked about: "Adoptees are usually identified and defined as children. That we mature, grow up and come into our own wisdom is often not acknowledged. We can and wish to speak for ourselves."⁴⁰ Thus,

The treatment of adoption can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with adoptees—dealing with them by making statements about them, authorizing views of them, describing them, by teaching about them, settling them, ruling over them; in short, the practice of adoption as a Western style for dominating, structuring, and having authority over adoptees.⁴¹

Neocolonialism, Orientalism, the colonization of childhood and the colonization of adoptees break down the similar issues of being controlled, silenced and spoken for, and it is through these lenses that I analyze children's picture books.

THE STUDY

I analyze three children's picture books and an anthology of poetry, fiction and personal narratives by Korean adoptees to understand how the discourse of non-adopted authors of the children's books differs from the discourse of adopted Koreans regarding transracially adoptive experiences and identities. The picture books are *We Adopted You, Benjamin Koo* (1989, protagonist Benjamin), *Families are Different* (1991, protagonist Nico), and *My Family is Forever* (2004, nameless protagonist). I limit this study to picture books where narrators talk to the reader in the first person from the perspective of a Korean adoptee, as opposed to stories that are told from the third person or by another narrator, such as an adoptive sibling or parent, because authors most aggressively speak directly for adopted Koreans by writing in a first person voice.

The anthology, *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology By Korean Adoptees*, was produced out of a desire to “break a certain silence,” shatter illusions about transracial adoption, and encourage other Korean adoptees not to be silent, but rather to “define, re-define, explore and question.”⁴² It is the first anthology of Korean adoptees’ writings that is also edited by Korean adoptees. It includes forty five pieces by thirty-two adoptees, reflecting a broad range of experiences of adopted Koreans who “[write] overwhelmingly in the first person”⁴³ to creatively express their concerns, life stories and fantasies. These distinctions are important because of an earlier work that some might consider the first anthology. In 1993, Korean American social worker Frances Koh published a collection of narratives based on interviews with eleven Korean adoptees. However, since all the adoptees answer the same questions,⁴⁴ her methodology limits their creative expression and homogenizes the topics contained therein. The *ways* stories are told are as important as the content; as Korean adoptee Su Niles writes in a reflective piece in *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, “If this reads as though I am going in a multitude of directions, then it is an accurate reflection of what’s happening inside of me.”⁴⁵

[Children’s] books are explicitly written as identity models for young adoptees, unlike earlier orphan novels. But when those adoptees reach adolescence or adulthood, what sorts of fictions will they be reading? And, more important, what fictions will they be inventing for themselves?⁴⁶

Margaret Homans says that “adoptive origins and origin stories are not discovered in the past so much as they are created in the present and for the present.”⁴⁷ Whether fictitiously reconstructed or more accurately remembered, the *presence* of origin stories in the anthology speaks to the incredible importance of pre-adoptive histories and birth families. Unlike most children’s adoption stories that begin at or after the initial airport arrival,⁴⁸ Benjamin Koo’s story begins in Korea at the doorsteps of an orphanage. After his arrival, he tells the reader that his adoptive “parents made up for *lost time* by cuddling me, playing with me...” (emphasis mine) as if his life *prior* to adoption belonged to them. Catherine Choy and Gregory Choy observe that Korean adoptees “retrieve memories of their early childhood in Korean orphanages” in their writings throughout the anthology.⁴⁹ Although the narration of Benjamin’s story begins pre-arrival at the orphanage, the phrase “lost time” suggests that his parents do not regard those experiences as a valid part of his life.

Both *Families are Different* and *My Family is Forever* are silent on the pre-adoption parts of the adoptees’ lives. In *Families are Different*, Nico simply tells the reader, “We came from Korea when we were babies...Korea is a country on the other side of the world. Sometimes we wear our special Korean outfits.” The nameless protagonist of *My Family is Forever* is less specific: she says, “I flew to my parents on a spaceship. Well, I *was* born far away, but my parents just took an airplane to come get me.” The first adoptee limits her thoughts of Korea to its geographic distance and foreignness, and her ability to “wear” a Korean identity. The ambiguity of the second adoptee’s origins suggests she could have been adopted from any Asian country, and the reference to a spaceship suggests she is a literal Alien Other.

Some scholars contend that writings by or about adoptees problematize fixed notions of origins. Margaret Homans questions how “roots trips” back to birth countries assume a “know-

able, memorable, documentable" origin; that is, autobiographical stories are ultimately "fictionally constructed."⁵⁰ Likewise, physical and national dislocations "deny the possibility of a seamless narrative of origin"⁵¹ and force an imagined rather than documented story of origin. However, Ellwyn Kauffman says, "I miss my own past... I never want to hear that my past should be left alone / That what I'm searching for are ghosts. / Would I be here if my past wasn't real?"⁵² In addition to other writings, such as those by Thomas Clement Park, Sam Rogers, K. Burdette, and Deann Borshay, Kauffman's poem is one example of how deeply (and defensively) some Korean adoptees guard their memories of their pasts. They write their own histories as a way to assert control and ownership over their stories.

Generally, stories told by adoptive parents to adoptees "tend to involve a loving birth family acting in the child's best interests by abandoning it in such a way that it will be adopted – preferably by a family from the West."⁵³ Similar to the children's stories studied by Kathleen Bergquist, in these picture books the Korean adoptees tend not to question the abandonment⁵⁴ aspect of their stories. The nameless protagonist of *My Family is Forever* asks "Does my birth mother's hair stick up like mine? Is my birth father a good reader like me?" At the beginning Benjamin Koo wonders a bit about his birth mother, but later he comments, "When Mom and Dad said I had a birthmother, it didn't really mean anything. 'We adopted you from Korea' sounded no different than 'Uncle Jack was born in Pittsburgh.'" He is angry when he realizes he looks different from his adoptive parents, but one talk with his school counselor makes him feel better. The simplistic resolutions of these two characters' concerns are unrealistic; Korean adoptees make clear in *Seeds from a Silent Tree* that understanding their relinquishment and transracial adoption is an ongoing process, not a destination. Bergquist also comments on the need to allow that process to continually unfold: "Finding where one belongs can be a dynamic, lifelong process. These [children's] stories, however, seem to foreclose that process."⁵⁵

Similarly, simplifying racial differences closes opportunities for dialogue and trivializes the adoptee's need and process of trying to feel comfortable in his or her own skin. Even if the adoptee characters in children's books mention discomfort with their appearances, at the end they have somehow accepted their racial difference. However, in *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, YoungHee writes, "I was not born with shame. I learned shame... By the time I was twelve, I knew looking a certain way was more valued."⁵⁶

Choy and Choy say, "We can read the space of the mirror... as an arena where representation, rehabilitation, and recuperation of identity are in countenance."⁵⁷ Children's books use mirrors as well; readers look at illustrations and gaze at the physical difference between the adoptee protagonist and his or her white adoptive parents, and within the story adoptee characters gaze at themselves in the mirror to observe how different they are from their white adoptive parents. Benjamin Koo says, "One morning... I was combing my hair, and my hand just stopped. I stared at myself in the mirror. I saw that I was Korean!" In *My Family is Forever*, the nameless adoptee says, "My family was formed by adoption so I look just like... me! (And I'm pretty cute.)" But the illustrations betray the text; she is not cute, and the persistent and repetitive portrayal of the character's Orientalist, slanted, black eyes are reminiscent of exclusionary political cartoons and offensive stereotypes of Asians in popular culture.⁵⁸

Moreover, she does not look at herself in the mirror behind her; if she was really cute, she would admire herself in the mirror, and invite the reader to gaze at her image in the mirror as well. Instead, her back is to the mirror and she is the object of the reader's gaze.

While the adoptees in the first two picture books use mirrors literally, *Families are Different* uses mirrors figuratively. She says, "Angel looks a lot like me. We are both adopted. We came from Korea." Because they are both adopted from Korea and ethnically Korean, Nico sees her mirror reflection in her Korean adoptive sister. Lumping, which strips Asians of their unique individuality and instead suggests that "all Asians look the same" is a rampant, continuing problem in children's books.⁵⁹

Korean adoptees talk about mirrors differently in *Seeds from a Silent Tree*. "The confirmation of racialized physical otherness through one's reflection in the mirror and the inability of typically American behavior to overcome the stigma of racial differences" recur, and "The mirror, or reflection therein, is a site for recognizing racial differences because of what it both signifies and denies to its onlooker."⁶⁰ Wayne A. Berry writes, "As comfortable as I pretended to be, I could not deny the fact that I was Korean. I was always reminded of this when I looked in the mirror or paged through family photo albums."⁶¹ Ellwyn Kauffman asks, "Who was this Korean in the mirror? The mirror was the inescapable reminder of where I had come from."⁶² In another instance, YoungHee says, "I denied that I was Korean to everyone, most painfully I denied it to myself. However, my image staring back at me in the mirror betrayed such a belief."⁶³

Despite racial differences, the adopted characters in the children's books tell the readers that they matter not in light of their family's colorblind love. Benjamin assures the reader that although he looks different and has had a few issues with schoolmates, "I'm pretty happy with my life. I have parents and a sister and grandparents and aunts and uncles who really love me." He continues, "If you ended up safe and taken care of, it probably means your birth-mother did the best she could for you... But that's in the past. Right now, your name is your name and your family is your family." He emphasizes how much his family *now* loves him, and the emphasis of the *now* erases the existence of a pre-adoptive birth family and their love for him.

Choy and Choy explain that "sentimental discourse of familial love without national boundaries...became popular in the United States during the Cold War,"⁶⁴ the period immediately following the Korean War. However, many transracial adoptees criticize the rhetoric of colorblind love across national and racial boundaries. In the anthology *Outsiders Within* (2006), Black adoptee Jeni C. Wright says, "What I had been told about race by my parents could be summed up in three words—Love Is Colorblind."⁶⁵ Adoptive parents may push the idea of colorblind love because they might not be prepared to talk about issues of race and racism with their racially different children. This attitude is reflected in children's books to encourage readers to believe that colorblind love validates transnational adoption. Nico says, "I don't think I'm strange at all. I'm just like everyone else...I'm different! And boy oh boy, my family must be stuck together with strong glue because...There's sure a TON of love around here!" The nameless protagonist of *My Family is Forever* tells the reader, "No matter where I

go or what I do, I'll always have a family by my side... because families are forever!" According to these Korean adoptee characters, colorblind love trumps issues of racial difference.

In contrast to what these children's book characters say, Wright articulates the feelings of many adoptees: "My wish is that instead [my mother] had given me the gift of a simple acknowledgment: that our home may be colorblind but outside sometimes wasn't."⁶⁶ Some Korean adoptees say colorblind love does not sufficiently legitimize their circumstances. Mi Ok Song Bruining says, "My adoptive parents believed that they rescued me—a poor, little helpless 'orphan' child. Perhaps they did but the psychological damage done to me as a child has been tremendous."⁶⁷ She continues, "adolescence is traumatic enough without being targeted for being racially different, culturally identified as 'alien' and looking like no one else."⁶⁸ Similarly, Kari Ruth says, "The struggles of racial identity cannot be solved at culture camps, outreach events, panel discussions or trips back to our birth country. They cannot be described as growing pains nor diagnosed with color-blind love... [The] price [parents] paid for us was insignificant to the price we pay to fit into their world."⁶⁹ Deann Borshay speaks of how, despite the love she received from her adoptive parents, "now our relationship was filled with tension, anger, confusion and regret. I became angry at them for having adopted me, for keeping my true identity from me, and for being so American."⁷⁰ These adoptees realize that their adoptive parents love them, yet that love is insufficient to address incredibly complex issues of abandonment, difference, and racial and ethnic identities.

Children's stories conventionally have closure; adults are uncomfortable giving children books that do not finish with a sense of security and that all is right with the world. These children's books about adopted Koreans leave readers with a resolved sense of peace. Despite problems the characters face in terms of origins, racial identities, and familial situations, the adoptees are smiling and content with their lives on the last page. The final section of the anthology *Seeds from a Silent Tree* is titled "Seeds of Resolution," suggesting potential but not absolute resolution. Su Niles acknowledges that, "Regardless of how many Korean cultural events I attend, regardless of how much of the Korean language I learn, and regardless of how many Korean friends I make, I will never, ever regain in full measure what I have lost. This is my greatest sorrow. I will never be wholly Korean."⁷¹ This piece, among many others, demonstrates that racial and adoptive identity formation is an ongoing, constantly negotiated, and very complicated and often painful process.

LOOKING FORWARD

The goal of my research is not to argue that these picture books are essentially bad or completely inaccurate. As Kathleen Bergquist points out, adoptive parents and professionals often seek children's books to facilitate discussion about adoption and provide a language with which to talk about specific issues,⁷² thus it is necessary for adults to understand that issues about race, family, and adoption run much deeper than most children's books suggest. Parents and educators need to be more critical and selective, and aware of issues and how those is-

sues are talked about by different groups when choosing adoption stories to use with youth. Moreover, they must be prepared in case these books fail to address those issues.

As adoptive parents accept the persistence of memory, as they encourage the duality of identity and the exploration of birth culture, they discover the inadequacy of their own narratives of their children's alternative life.

While claiming to validate the adoptee's birth culture, such stories ignore both the political reality and personal possibility; but as adoptees mature, it may be the political reality that they want to reconcile with individual imaginings... it will be the collective counter-memories that are mobilized when adoptees find a political voice.⁷³

I conclude with a call for transracially and transnationally adopted Koreans to continue using their collective, political voice, to publish their counter-memories, and to share their "political reality" and "individual imaginings" not only with their peers but also with younger generations of adoptees, in the hope that those stories of earlier generations will help shape the experiences of the current and future generations.

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- 1 Personal communication, March 14, 2006.
- 2 I created www.sarahpark.com in 2004 to serve as an information resource about Korean American children's books.
- 3 Elizabeth Alice Honig, "Phantom Lives, Narratives of Possibility," in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 213.
- 4 Tobias Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006a), 40, 44–59.
- 5 According to the *Adoptive Families* website, 1,376 children were adopted from Korea in 2006, a drop from 1,630 in 2005, and 1,716 in 2004. These numbers do not concur with the *U.S. Department of State*: 1,668 in 2005 and 1,773 in 2004. Sources vary on the exact total since the 1950s, but it is estimated to be between 150,000–200,000.
- 6 Eleana Kim, "Korean Adoptee Auto-Ethnography: Refashioning Self, Family and Finding Community," *Visual Anthropology Review* 16, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 45.
- 7 Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 59–60; Eleana Kim, "Wedding Citizenship and Culture: Korean Adoptees and the Global Family of Korea," in Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 57; Kim, "Korean Adoptee Auto-Ethnography," 44. Each adoption process "costs" about \$20,000–\$30,000, or \$20–30 million annually. The word "export" may raise concerns, but I use it with caution and defer to Korean Swedish adoptee/scholar Tobias Hübinette, who titles a subsection of his third chapter "The orphan exporting country" in his book, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006a), 71.
- 8 Toby Alice Volkman, "Embodying Chinese Culture: Transnational Adoption in North America," in Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 81; Richard H. Weil, "International Adoption: The Quiet Migration," *International Migration Review* 18, no. 2 (1984): 276–293.
- 9 Tobias Hübinette, "From Orphan Trains to Baby Lifts: Colonial Trafficking, Empire Building, and Social Engineering," in *Outsiders Within: Writings on Transracial Adoption*, ed. Julia Chinyere Oparah, Sun Yung Shin and Jane Jeong Trenka (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006b), 147.
- 10 Kim, "Wedding Citizenship and Culture," 59; Julia Chinyere Oparah, Sun Yung Shin, and Jane Jeong Trenka, "Introduction," in Oparah, Shin, and Trenka, *Outsiders Within*, 1; Toby Alice Volkman, "Introduction: Transnational Adoption," *Social Text* 74, no. 1 (2003 Spring): 2–3; Toby Alice Volkman, "Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship," in Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 10.
- 11 Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 55; Rosemary C. Sarri, Yenoak Baik, and Marti Bombyk, "Goal Displacement and Dependency in South Korean-United States Intercountry Adoption," *Children and Youth Services Review* 20, no. 1/2 (1998): 89.
- 12 Sunny Jo, "The Making of KAD Nation," in Oparah, Shin and Trenka, *Outsiders Within*, 289.

- 13 Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist, “Once Upon a Time: A Critical Look at How Children's Literature Contextualizes Adoption for Asian Adoptees,” in *International Korean Adoption: A Fifty Year History of Policy and Practice*, ed. Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist, Elizabeth Vonk, Dong Soo Kim and Marvin D. Feit (New York: Hayworth Press, 2007), 295–313.
- 14 For example, Kim Park Nelson, an adopted Korean and Ph.D. candidate in American Studies at the University of Minnesota, and Dr. Eleana Kim, Assistant Professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Rochester, noticed the growing number of adoption-related individual paper presentations and full panels at the Association for Asian American Studies annual meetings. They convened the first transnational adoption caucus at the 2007 meeting in New York City. Scholars came from Anthropology, Sociology, American Studies, Psychology, Library and Information Science, and English, among other disciplines.
- 15 Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 5; Richard M. Lee, “The Cultural Paradox of Adoption: A Behavioral Science Perspective” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian American Studies, New York, NY, April 5, 2007); Volkman, “Introduction,” 4.
- 16 John Raible, “Lifelong Impact, Enduring Need,” in Oparah, Shin and Trenka, *Outsiders Within*, 182; Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 19; Kim Park Nelson, “Shopping for Children in the International Marketplace,” in Oparah, Shin and Trenka, *Outsiders Within*, 90; Oparah, Shin and Trenka, “Introduction,” 1. I recognize as I say this that I myself am not an adopted Korean. However, I hope that my work will not perpetuate the trend of outsiders studying Korean adoptees and their experiences, but that my research will illuminate the need for more Korean adoptees to write about their childhood experiences in a yet untapped medium—children’s literature.
- 17 Raible, “Lifelong Impact,” 182; Park Nelson, “Shopping for Children,” 90; Oparah, Shin and Trenka, “Introduction.” 2.
- 18 Sara K. Dorow, *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender and Kinship* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 8; Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 7–8.
- 19 Jo, “The Making of KAD Nation,” 285.
- 20 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
- 21 Tobias Hübinette, “Adopted Koreans and the Development of Identity in the ‘Third Space,’” *Adoption & Fostering* 28, no. 1 (2004): 22.
- 22 Kimberly K.H. Stock, “Rise of a Fourth Culture: Korean Adoptees,” *Transcultural* 1:11 (1999). The first three discourses/cultures/spaces are: 1) Korean; 2) American; and 3) Korean American.
- 23 Susan G. Miles, *Adoption Literature for Children and Young Adults: an Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).
- 24 Nancy Schimmel and Susan Love, “Books on Adoption for Young Children: Looking at Language,” *School Library Journal* (1997 July): 32. Schimmel and Love’s goal was to “look at some current efforts to present a *positive* view of adoption” (emphasis

- mine).
- 25 Raible, "Lifelong Impact," 181; Volkman, "Introduction," in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 2; Schimmel and Love, "Books on Adoption," 32. Schimmel and Love have a special relationship to adoption, in the same way that many researchers do. Schimmel is a reunited birth mother, and Love is both an adoptee and an adoptive mother.
- 26 Schimmel and Love, "Books on Adoption," 32.
- 27 Belinda Y. Louie, "Unwrapping the *Pojagi*: Traditional Values and Changing Times in a Survey of Korean-American Juvenile Literature," *Children's Literature in Education* 36, no. 2 (2005): 173–195.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 187.
- 29 Sarri, Baik, and Bombyk, "Goal Displacement and Dependency," 89–92. "Responsibility" of caring for these orphaned biracial children is incredibly complicated and tied up with attitudes of some white adoptive parents who feel burdened to "rescue" orphans from "poverty stricken," "war-torn," "Third World" countries. However, that discussion exceeds the scope of this paper. See Arissa Oh, "A New Kind of Missionary Work: Christians, Christian Americanists, and the Adoption of Korean GI Babies, 1955–1961," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3&4 (Fall/Winter 2005): 161–188; Laura Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Transnational and Transracial Adoption," *Gender and History* 15, no. 2 (2003 August, 2003): 179–200.
- 30 Hillel Italie, "Fact Or Fiction of a Memoir: Questions of Misrepresentation and Doubt Surround Korean American's Memoir." *AsianWeek*, Nov 3–9, 2000.
- 31 Ethnic children's literature became more common in the 1960s and 1970s, and then slowed down in the conservative backlash of the 1980s, and then became more common again in the 1990s. Few scholars recognize that stories about adopting from Korea appeared as early as 1955 (*Kim of Korea* by Faith Norris and Peter Lumn).
- 32 Bergquist, "Once upon a Time," 295–313.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 300.
- 34 Carter Eckert, Ki-baik Lee, Young Ick Lew, Michael Robinson, and Edward W. Wagner, *Korea Old and New: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 416; Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 382, 458; Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 18, 53; Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 3. Korea is not currently colonized by the United States in the same way or to the same degree as it was colonized by Japan (1910–1945). That said, Korean American historian Ji-Yeon Yuh sharply criticizes the gendered, neoimperialistic/neocolonial relationship between the United States and Korea in *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, especially in terms of the protectionist agenda of the gendered male, the United States, and Korea as the feminine other in need of protection.
- 35 Perry Nodelman, "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 17 (1992): 29.

- 36 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 3.
- 37 Perry Nodelman, "The Other," 29.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 40 Susan Soon-Keum Cox, "Introduction," in *Voices from another Place: A Collection of Works from a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries*, ed. Susan Soon-Keum Cox (St. Paul: Yeong & Yeong Book Company, 1999), 2.
- 41 Sarah Park (2006).
- 42 Tonya Bishoff, "Introduction," in *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees*, ed. Tonya Bishoff and Jo Rankin (San Diego: Pandal Press, 1997), 2.
- 43 Catherine Ceniza Choy and Gregory Paul Choy, "Transformative Terrains: Korean Adoptees and the Social Construction of an American Childhood," in *The American Child: a Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Caroline F. Lavendar and Carol J. Singley (Rutgers University Press, 2003), 273.
- 44 Frances Koh, *Adopted from Asia: How It Feels to Grow Up in America* (Minneapolis: EastWest Press, 1993). Adoptees responded to specific questions and Koh constructed the narratives from their responses, rather than allow the adoptees to tell their own stories in their own creative ways.
- 45 Su Niles, "Obstacles and Challenges," in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 152.
- 46 Honig, "Phantom Lives," 214.
- 47 Margaret Homans, "Adoption Narratives, Trauma, Origins," *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (2006): 5.
- 48 Bergquist, "Once Upon a Time," 305–306.
- 49 Choy and Choy, "Transformative Terrains," 273.
- 50 Homans, "Adoption Narratives, Trauma, Origins," 5.
- 51 Barbara Yngvesson and Maureen A. Mahoney, "'As One Should, Ought and Wants to Be': Belonging and Authenticity in Identity Narratives," *Theory, Culture and Society* 17, no. 6 (2000): 77.
- 52 Kauffman, "Never," in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 159.
- 53 Honig, "Phantom Lives," 217; Kay Johnson, "Chaobao: The Plight of Chinese Adoptive Parents in the Era of the One-Child Policy," in Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 117–141.
- 54 Bergquist, "Once Upon a Time," 305.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 301.
- 56 YoungHee, "Laurel" in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 88.
- 57 Choy and Choy, "Transformative Terrains," 276.

- 58 Albert V. Schwartz, "The Five Chinese Brothers: Time to Retire," *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin* 8, no. 3 (1977): 3–7; Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Yokota, "Asian American Literature," 323–335. In 1977, Schwartz pointed out that the illustrations in *The Five Chinese Brothers* (Bishop, 1938) were particularly offensive because all the Chinese characters were drawn with stereotypically Orientalist "slit and slanted eyes." The use of slit and slanted eyes on Asian faces is an ongoing issue in children's books in particular and in pop culture in general.
- 59 Claire Hutchet Bishop, *The Five Chinese Brothers* (New York: Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers, 1938); Schwartz, "The Five Chinese Brothers: Time to Retire," 3–7.
- 60 Choy and Choy, "Transformative Terrains," 268.
- 61 Wayne A. Berry (Oh, Ji Soo), "Completing My Puzzle..." in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 121.
- 62 Kauffman, "Bulgogi," in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 46.
- 63 YoungHee, "Laurel," in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 86.
- 64 Choy and Choy, "Transformative Terrains," 264.
- 65 Jeni C. Wright, "Love is Colorblind: Reflections of a Mixed Girl," in Oparah, Shin and Trenka, *Outsiders Within*, 28.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 67 Mi Ok Song Bruining, M.S.W, "A Few Words From Another Left-Handed Adopted Korean Lesbian," in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 65.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 69 Kari Ruth, "Dear Luuk," in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 143–144.
- 70 Deann Borshay, "Remembering The Way Home: a Documentary Video Proposal," in Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, 118.
- 71 Niles, "Obstacles and Challenges," 153.
- 72 Bergquist, "Once Upon a Time," 295.
- 73 Honig, "Phantom Lives," 220.

SECTION II: HUMANITIES

THE RACIAL BODY IN THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY

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INTRODUCTION

How does the racial body of non-Western intercountry adoptees, specifically Korean adoptees, function in the adoptive family? What are its effects?

The first part of my paper shows how the racial body of Korean adoptees cannot be taken as naturally given. During the adoption process it is constructed into a *racial* body, before the child even arrives in its new home country. The discourse of intercountry adoption cannot overcome the racial bodily markers of Korean (as non-Western) adoptees and therefore explicitly activates these markers to create a readymade racial identity and body for Korean adoptees.

The main part of my paper discusses the specific function and effect of this racial/ Korean body in the adoptive family. By analysis of text fragments of Korean adoptees and an adoptive mother of a Korean adoptee I show the painful paradox it creates.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RACIAL BODY

The discourse of intercountry adoption speaks in a racializing vocabulary. This racial and nationalistic discourse is already active and prepared to write the child in before it even arrives in the West. The demand made to adoptees to become fully Western is from the beginning already doomed to fail because of certain outer characteristics of their body are already pointed to as and activated as, markers of a racial identity.

Illustrative of this process are the forms of the Nederlandse Associatie voor Interlandelijke Adoptie en Jeugdwelzijn (Dutch Association for Intercountry Adoption and Youth Welfare). They were meant for future-to-be adoptive parents and though the papers have nowadays been replaced by more modern forms, most of the adoptees who came to the Netherlands as part of the second adoption gulf (in the 1970s and beginning of 1980s), had parents who filled in these forms.

The fragments I cite concern specific information belonging to the “Choice Form” on which future adoptive parents could specify some of their preferences and wishes about their foreign adoptive child. In the “Information about Countries” -part following the subheading “South-

Korea” we read: “De huidskleur van Koreaanse kinderen is meestal vrij licht, doch de kinderen zijn door hun scheefstaande ogen zéér duidelijk afwijkend van het europese type [sic]”¹ [The skin colour of Korean children is most often quite fair, though the children are because of their slanting eyes very apparently discernable of the european type] (translation mine).

And after that:

De kinderen die door bemiddeling van het BIA ² naar Nederland komen zijn altijd afkomstig uit landen buiten Europa [sic]. Dat brengt met zich mee dat de door het BIA geplaatste kinderen altijd een van het Europese type afwijkend uiterlijk hebben, steeds gekleurd en soms heel donker van huidskleur zijn. Daardoor zullen die kinderen herkenbaar blijven als adoptiefkind ³

[The children that through the mediation of the BIA, come to The Netherlands are always originating from countries outside Europe. That means that the children that are placed by the BIA always have a from the European type deviating look, are always coloured and sometimes very dark skinned. Because of this these children will always be recognizable as being an adopted child] (translation mine)

So before the adoption itself is an official fact, the adoptive child is already racially marked. And above all these racial characteristics are considered as something that could be of annoyance to (some of) the adoptive parents. The dark skin colour or the “slanting eyes” makes the child recognizable as a child that is adopted. It therefore becomes impossible for the adoptive parents to construct a kinship that also makes itself visible, or rather *seems* to make itself visible, through outward looks, something which was still possible when white parents adopted white children. In the above text fragments, skin colour and slanting eyes are formulated as a handicap because, just as parents with biological children, adoptive parents also often have the wish that “the adopted child will grow up in their own image.”⁴ The racial body of the adoptive child blocks this, what I will call, “fictive” biological kinship in adoptive families and will therefore always be recognizable as an adoptive kinship.

FUNCTION AND EFFECTS OF THE KOREAN BODY IN THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY

Paradoxically, at the same time the adoptee is explicitly viewed as a member of the white adoptive family. I would like to analyse this paradox a little by reading two text fragments of intercountry adoptees born in Korea and adopted by American parents.

So, the adopted child has arrived in its new home country and suddenly found itself with a racial body and identity. What happens next to this racial body of intercountry adoptees, or, in this case, Korean adoptees? What are the effects of the Korean body in the adoptive family?

In the following text Korean adoptee Dottie Enrico tells us about the first time she was being confronted with the way she looked.

My parents weren't trying to pretend we weren't adopted; they just never discussed our identities as Asians. To them, I was their daughter—the child of an Italian engineer and his German-American wife. Korea was simply the place where I was born, and my parents naively believed that being an Asian in America wasn't any different than coming from another faraway place like Oslo or Vienna...On the other hand, it is also easy to understand why they felt uncomfortable about supplying me with a Korean identity. First-generation Americans of various races have immersed their biological children in American culture at the expense of their own ethnicities—but these parents had the luxury of sharing the same eyes, hair and genes as their children. Perhaps years of rocking me to sleep and answering my cries in the night had truly blinded my parents to our racial differences. Outsiders, however, were always eager to point them out. As my brother and I stood alongside three or four neighborhood kids waiting to start our first day of kindergarten, a busload of older students passed, and many hung out the window pointing to our group and yelled, “Chinese cherries! Look at the Chinese cherries!” Several boys pulled the corners of their eyes toward their temples to form “Chink eyes.” They laughed and asked us what we had in our lunch boxes, chop suey?

I looked at the children around me...I craned my neck, and asked my playmates where the Chinese people were. As they began to snicker, my brother's face twisted in painful awareness. “Dottie, they're talking about us,” he said. “We're the Chinese people.” I looked back at him in disbelief. We were not Chinese. We were Italians born in Korea, living in California. I vowed to ask my mother all about this when I got home. When the bus came, I purposely sat in the front so I could see my face in the driver's mirror. Relieved, I saw the same features that had stared back at me when I brushed my teeth that morning. When school was over, I came home and asked my mother what those kids had been talking about. Her response was unsettling. She breathed a long sigh and said gently, “Well, honey, you and your brother do have sort of an Asian look, like many Chinese and Japanese people. This is something people are going to say to you for a long time.” Mother never told me whether it was good or bad to be Asian; she didn't have to. The mocking voices of the kids on the bus had told me that many people thought Asians were second-rate and not as good as whites. [...] That first day of school taught me that not everyone would see me as I saw myself—a little American girl who liked to show off by dancing to the Beatles. To many I would simply be the “Asian girl”, my whole identity reduced to “someone who isn't white”⁵

It is not Enrico herself who can decide with which image, or which images, she identifies. In her case the “American girl who liked to show off by dancing to the Beatles”. What constitutes her as a subject is how is she seen by others (here the passing schoolchildren). Before

she was mocked by the schoolchildren she did not see herself as someone with an Asian look. At the first moment she did not even realize they were talking about her: "I...asked my playmates were the Chinese people were."⁶ She describes how, on her way back home, she looked in the mirror of the bus driver intently, trying to discover the reason that might have led to the words of the schoolchildren: "Relieved, I saw the same features that had stared back at me when I brushed my teeth that morning."⁷ On that moment she could not find any confirmation that had led to the offending words. What she sees is not an Asian but a racially non-specified face.

Notice the theoretical opening her text offers (theoretical because in daily life it would be unrealizable). By implicitly stating that if Enrico would never have had to realize, through others, that it was otherwise, she would have considered her body white for the rest of her life. For Enrico her body is a white body just as naturally as it an Asian body for the schoolchildren. What made herself think this way is the construction of the *fictive* biological kinship bond between her and her adoptive family. The concept of shared "blood" convinced her that also the inherent property of 'whiteness' has passed to her and her Korean brother. Enrico places herself in one unbroken lineage with her "white" adoptive father.⁸ She and her brother are "*Italians* born in Korea, living in California (emphasis mine)".⁹ To her Korea is a neutral birthplace. Of course it is a place far removed from the United States but it does not differ from other faraway places like Oslo or Vienna. It is only when her mother acknowledges the remarks of the schoolchildren by saying: "...you and your brother do have sort of an Asian look"¹⁰, that she begins to realise that not only she looks different but that this difference in looks deviates in an essential way from what passes as normal.

By explicitly acknowledging the words of the schoolchildren, her mother states two different things I would like to separate theoretically. Firstly, she states that Enrico deviates from the racial norm, because she is not white. And her mother does not forget to mention this deviation will not be allowed to be forgotten since it is "something people are going to say to you for a long time."¹¹

Secondly, Enrico's mother does not speak about Enrico's looks as being specifically Korean. She speaks about "a *sort of* an Asian look (emphasis mine)."¹² Enrico looks "like many Chinese and Japanese people."¹³ Her mother is not able to specify the body of her daughter into a Korean body. It means that she is only able to acknowledge the stereotypical slurs the schoolchildren called out to Enrico and she negates the biological origin of her daughter. Enrico is not seen as a Korean, a member of a specific ethnic and national group, but simply as the stereotype of the Asian. Enrico makes clear it are notions which, in Western eyes, signify the Asian race: "chink eyes," yellow skin and chop suey. Enrico is "simply...the 'Asian girl'...[and that is] 'someone who isn't white'."¹⁴ Enrico's Korean body is only defined in negative ways, firstly by being generalized into an "sort of an Asian body" and then by being made into a "non-white" body.

The effect is that intercountry adoptees form a separate group in connection to diaspora and migrancy. It is exactly the emptiness of the negative definition of the Korean body of Enrico, beginning with her looks, that makes her different than, for example, Glissant's migrant with

a “root identity”. Enrico finds nowhere, not even in her own Korean body, a reference to a “former...belonging.”¹⁵ The racial body of Enrico refers to nothing but the stereotypes North-American society holds about Asians. How can we speak about the so called multicultural identity of intercountry adoptees when Enrico’s mother is not even able to recognize the body of her daughter as a Korean one?

In my opinion, though her inability to recognize the body of her daughter as Korean is partly motivated by her *unwillingness* to acknowledge the body of Enrico as Korean. The mother cannot recognize Enrico’s looks as Korean because for her the racial looks of her daughter only refer to a collection of stereotypes. But if, on the other hand, she would acknowledge the body of her daughter in a positive way she would reveal their kinship bond which has passed itself of as biological, as fictive.

The following text fragment is from the Korean born, and American adopted, Kil Ja Kim:

On many times my family would say stuff to me like, “I love you. I don’t see you as Korean. I see you as my daughter.” Or, when debating immigration, my family would be quick to point out that my presence in the US was fine—it was all the other immigrants that had to “get the hell out of the country” (our presence is always “allowed” if white people can regulate it and determine the terms of acceptability). Often, my beloved family would make fun of how Asian people talked by speaking in a mock “Chinaman” voice, never batting an eye but getting really heated when I said something to them about it. Once, my father told me to “Get your wok and go” in front of his new wife, and they laughed and laughed.¹⁶

The first thing we notice is the way the kinship bond collides with the racializing of Kim’s body. Her family says to her: “I don’t see you as Korean. I see you as my daughter.”¹⁷ The second excludes the first. Kim cannot be both Korean and a member of her adoptive family at the same time. The discourse of adoption, which has as its goal passing the bond between Kim and her adoptive family as biological, acknowledges her racial body and then tries to deny it. So we see how the adoption discourse is highly ambivalent towards Kim’s racial body. Until now it has not been able fully to reformulate the racial body of intercountry adoptees as only a deviating, handicapped body.

Now notice how Kim’s adoptive family explicitly refers to Kim’s racial body. They use it to exclude her from other migrants when making derogative remarks based on stereotypes of racial and cultural minorities. Kim’s adoptive family tolerates her presence in the United States because they consider her a member of their family and not a migrant. This exclusion of adoptees in their adoptive families is based on the inherent hierarchical power relations that characterize the adoption discourse.

HYBRIDITY

We have seen how the racial body of (Korean) intercountry adoptees forms an ambivalent notion in the adoption discourse. My paper discusses texts from Korean adoptees because they make this ambivalence so explicit to us. The adoption discourse denies the racial body but is forced to acknowledge its existence and its force at the same time. This makes clear to us how intercountry adoption is not only rooted in the dominant definition of biological kinship and the core family but also crosses discourses of race, hybridity and exoticism. This other, older, vocabulary of a hidden desire towards the racial Other comes, for example, to the open when we analyse the text of Rebekah M. Smith. She is an adoptive mother who speaks about her Korean born daughter.

And I confess, when I looked at my daughter's face during those difficult years I often felt dislike. After she stopped looking like a China doll...I stopped loving her features. An overall roundness, fleshy jaw and lower cheeks, eyes not very large, small mouth.[...] I can't tell her I don't like her foreignness, because that would offend her. But unless I do that, I can't tell her the reasons behind it, which are this: I want her to be mine. I love her. I hate anything that puts us apart. Even in the difficult years I was proud of her, wanted her to look like me so people would quit wondering how much my daughter she was and how much I was her mother. She has been so distant from me I have been terrified of losing her. If she'd been my own flesh and blood I could have hung on to that. You're connected that way, aren't you, even if they run off? ¹⁸

Smith explicitly voices the cultural belief that the blood connection is a bond that is unbreakable and stronger than the adoptive ties that connect her with her Korean daughter.

Notice too her use of a much known exotic stereotype to describe her daughter with when she is little: a "china doll". The 'china doll' is one of the master notions of the West about the Asian Other: harmless and passive. It connotes femininity and (sexual) availability. When Smith's daughter grows up and no longer looks like a 'china doll' Smith stops loving her features. Now Smith describes those facial features that are thought to be characteristic of adult Koreans—an other racial stereotype: fleshy jaw and small eyes. They are features, she lets us no room for misunderstanding, which she does not like. She tells us explicitly: she does not like the "foreignness" of her daughter. She tells us this is because it stands in the way of her motherly feelings for her child. Because it is exactly this "foreignness" that continually makes Smith realise that her daughter is not her daughter through flesh and blood though she paradoxically still and does consider her that way: as her daughter. The racial deviating body of her daughter here becomes a fully dangerous element that feeds the constant fear of Smith that there "really is a 'birth bond' stronger than nurturing'."¹⁹

But what is it exactly Smith voices when she says she does not like her daughter's "foreignness"? Is it truly her motherly desire that her daughter is 'hers' and that they will never be separated from each other? Or could we also understand her as expressing an implicit dislike of the fact that she transgressed several cultural taboos by not only mothering a stranger's

child but, even worse, a child of an other race—a child that now carries her family name and will continue her white family lineage? What we hear in her words is a clear echo of the revulsion of transgressing racial borders which refer to “[t]he fear of cultural and racial pollution...”²⁰ As Loomba states, “The specter of miscegenation most graphically brings together anxieties about female sexuality and racial purity, and, as colonial contacts widen and deepen, it increasingly haunts European and Euro-American culture.”²¹

There is a hidden meaning of revulsion for the racial Other in her words. It happens when she uses racial stereotypes of East-Asians (the ‘china doll’ and the dull face of the adult Korean) and then connects one of them to the “foreignness” she does not like. Of course the adoptive family of Smith has not in any literal sense anything to do with hybridity—just as there did not occur any sex outside marital relations to make a surrogate mother pregnant. But the ghost is there. And, we could claim, more importantly, the effects are the same. Not only does the racial body of Smith’s daughter undermine the category of ‘race’ as a biological given entity, but as with traditional surrogacy, it transgresses the borders of traditional marriage and the couple as the only true legitimate location of reproduction.²²

ADOPTIVE KINSHIP AS FICTIVE BIOLOGICAL KINSHIP

My analysis of the texts of Dottie Enrico, Kil Ja Kim en Rebekah Smith provides insight in the discursive violence that is an essential characteristic of the discourse of intercountry adoption. One location where this violence can be traceable is, ironic enough, within the private space of the adoptive family.

The ‘rainbow family’ is unmasked as an illusion. We see how the body of intercountry adoptees, of which I have used adoptees from Korea as an example, in its function as a racial body undermines the dominant ideology of kinship. This ideology of kinship still dominates North-American and West-European society. Believed to be a “state of almost mystical commonality and identity”²³ being related with each other by the blood tie is truly seen as a bond that is unbreakable. The racial body of intercountry adoptees openly criticizes the adoption discourse that models adoptive kinship on biological kinship. Because it refers to the non-existing blood ties between adoptees and their adoptive families. Above all, this racial body is the dark ghost of the ‘real’ parents who might even come back one day to claim the blood tie that is rightfully theirs.

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ADOPTees AS “WHITE” KOREANS: IDENTITY, RACIAL VISIBILITY AND THE POLITICS OF PASSING AMONG KOREAN AMERICAN ADOPTees

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RACIAL VISIBILITY, INVISIBILITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Racial Identity in America

The strict enforcement of race-only identity in a racist, white-dominated society has contributed to the development of multiple strategies for survival among non-white persons (or more correctly, persons identified as racially non-white in dominant discourses). For persons with white or almost-white phenotype, one of these strategies is “passing” or “passing for white.” With passing, an individual can use their racially ambiguous or white appearance in conjunction with culturally ambiguous or white behavior to disappear into the white majority, thereby escaping racialization and negative association with their minority racial group. For persons with non-white cultural heritage, the price of passing is imagined to be high, and an accusation of racial passing is certainly pejorative.¹ For instance, in James Weldon Johnson’s novel, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, the biracial African American protagonist who passes for white ultimately despairs of his choice to trade away his African American heritage and identity, despite the fact that this choice may well have saved his life in the violently anti-Black and anti-miscegenationist social milieu of the American South.²

While the legal structures that encouraged passing have largely disappeared, cultural penalties for race mixing and racial ambiguity remain high. The continuing racial segregation in American society ensures that interlopers who cross the color line can look forward to ostracism and isolation. Individuals with hybrid identities are pressured to “pick a side,” usually assumed to be the most visibly obvious race (consider the general public rejection for Tiger Woods’ claim of a mixed race Caucasian, black and Asian “Cablasan” racial identity in favor of identifying him as black). Whites and non-whites alike have taken up the politics of passing. In the current cultural moment, the practice or perception of passing or trying to pass is also often equated with a lack of cultural authenticity or pride in one’s racial and/or ethnic identity.³ Contemporary slurs of “apple,” “oreo,” or “twinkie” applied to individuals who are perceived to be racially Red, Black or Yellow, but who are thought to act “too white,” underscore the cultural price of (supposed) assimilation of non-white individuals into dominant American societies.

Currently, “colorblindness,” imagined as the more “innocent” side to the phenomenon of passing, has taken firm hold in contemporary American society and politics. The ideology of colorblindness has its appeal in the seemingly benevolent repositioning of race as a social (rather than a biological) construct, and the recognition of race itself as the act around which racism occurs. Following this line of reasoning, if we do not recognize race (which as a social construct, can be just as easily removed from or maintained within society), there will be no racism. Not surprisingly, colorblindness has great appeal among whites who have not experienced racial discrimination and seek a low-investment approach to solving America’s race problems, and who do not want to continue to operate as the villain in white-dominated American race relations. While colorblindness frequently figures in neoliberal discourses under the guise of racial justice (often quoting Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech), the insistence that race as a category that is “not real” ends up concealing current and historical inequalities that are unresolved in our (still) very racist society. With the refusal to accept or recognize race as a significant and historically grounded difference among people, the burden of passing shifts from a decision of the racialized individual to an expectation enforced by family, community or the general public instead. Where passing involves the self-denial of a racialized identity for an individual, colorblindness denies racialized identity for anyone.

Certain theorists have articulated more nuanced formulations of “colorblindness.” Gilroy⁴ imagines a reality of “against race thinking” and Darder and Torres⁵ conceptualize a Marxist ideology based on class rather than on race, encompassing a deracialized—but not colorblind—future. Both these formulations condemn the use of race as a primary mode of identity. Like their neoliberal counterparts, these theorists argue that the use of race as a category of identity only further reifies race as a “real”—rather than a socially constructed—state, and tends to ignore other bases for discrimination, such as class. On the one hand, these theorists account for historical and institutional racisms and differentiate themselves from “weak” or liberal multiculturalists by acknowledging the continuing importance of equality and social justice in light of these historical injustices. On the other hand, these theorists do not include an analysis of how this type of “against race thinking” intersects with whiteness as a dominant discourse and with the neoliberal concept of colorblindness—which, as a popular, dominant ideology of racelessness, is also an artifact of white privilege.

Most non-whites in America must navigate racializations within dominant discourses of society and cope with stereotypes about their racial/social/cultural group. In a society with a low tolerance for hybridized identities, individual and social strategies of passing and colorblindness obscure the richness and complexity of multilayered racial and ethnic (not to mention class, sexual, and gender) identity. In my work involving Korean adoptees, I seek to recognize these complexities, while incorporating an analysis of the very real processes of “passing,” “colorblindness,” and “racial visibility.” I note that adoptee subjects navigate their multifaceted identities (in a society that enforces categorized or non-existent racial and ethnic identity) using any and all social and cultural tools at their disposal. Among these tools is the choice to claim one or more racial and ethnic identities in order to cope with socially enforced visibility or invisibility for people of color.

Authentic Visibility, Real Invisibility

Paradoxically, two of the main problems for racialized groups of people are hyper-visibility and total invisibility. For the hyper-visible, racial stereotypes associated with negative characteristics (such as inassimilability, unintelligence, laziness, deviousness, etc.) prevail. For the invisible, society discriminates through ignorance by not noticing difference at all, and by ignoring needs of communities with culture-specific practices, desires and requirements. I argue that these racisms are linked and operate in tandem. The racism of hyper-visibility operates with the racism of invisibility by insisting that visible characteristics of individuals can be used to determine cultural knowledge and group identity/loyalty, ignoring the actual cultural nuances and lived characteristics of specific groups of people. The persistent and general understanding that all Asian peoples in America are Chinese or Japanese (and certainly are foreigners), and the perception that American Indians are feathered reservation-dwellers lingering on the edge of extinction, are two such examples.

The tendency towards absolute racial categorization (with no real possibility for hybridity) along with adherence to persistent racial stereotypes leaves many people of color with limited choices about how to express racial and ethnic identity. Without an understanding that racial visibility and invisibility are two sides of a single oppressive ideology, it is impossible to see that neither is necessarily a good choice. Racism is not necessarily only the condition of having no choices, but also of having only bad choices. However, this is the paradigm within which many American people of color must operate. This has led to arguments for and against racial visibility and invisibility as being “liberatory.”

Ostracism among one’s “real” racial group notwithstanding (though I certainly do not consider this reality to be trivial), passing carries many social benefits—which often translate to economic advantages. Certainly, one does not have to look hard to realize the many advantages of whiteness in a society dominated culturally, socially, and economically by whites. We know all too well the advantages in earnings, lifespan, and social access that are associated with whiteness. In his seminal research on stereotype threat (the psychological internalization of perceived dominant stereotypes by persons in the stereotyped group), Claude Steele acknowledges that one way to escape stereotype threat is to dissociate oneself from the stereotyped group.⁶ Historically, this option is especially feasible for persons with hybridized identities, whether they are racially, ethnically or culturally mixed. In the strictest sense, passing is only possible for those with phenotypes close enough to a norm of whiteness so as to not cause question. Incidentally, as the American historical understanding of “whiteness” has become inclusive of “darker” phenotypes (with the inclusion of Irish, Southern, and Eastern Europeans), this type of passing has become possible for darker-skinned mixed-race people. However, passing also requires sufficient proficiency in the cultural practices of the dominant society to camouflage one’s own differences from the norm. In exchange for passing, one can expect entry into dominant societal discourses, freedom from minoritization, and presumably, from acts of discrimination and from racism itself.

As dominant American society becomes both racially more hybridized and socially more colorblind to racial difference, passing has become more and more possible even for those who

do not have “white looks.” In a strange twist of history, racial colorblindness has become a legal and moral imperative for many Americans. As passing becomes easier for more people of color and more accepted in dominant society, both the expectations to pass and benefits for passing have increased. Thus, passing invisibly into dominant American society has potentially become part of a nationalizing project whereby primary identification is with the American nation, instead of with a specific racial or cultural group.

In addition to giving rise to neoliberal understandings of racial unity and justice-through-colorblindness, the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s also gave rise to racial identity movements. Among other goals, these movements sought to heighten the visibility of people of color beyond negative racial stereotypes. Identity-based activism had—and continue to have—enormous positive effects on American society, transforming the social, political and academic landscapes. And despite the rise of colorblind agendas, these struggles for social justice continue. These historical and contemporary movements of self-defined racial visibility give communities of people of color platforms from which to speak, in order to demand equality, justice, and recognition of difference.

Mechanisms for defining what constitutes a “race” or “ethnicity” are integral to the establishment of racial or ethnic identity—including unambiguous ways for marking identity borders. In many ways, the claiming of racial or ethnic identity is only possible through the dialectic process of defining who or what is outside the boundaries of that identity. Often, these considerations are based on the concept of authenticity. The confounding question is: who has the authority to decide who is in and who is out, who is authentic and who is not? Ironically, by seeking acceptance through visibility, identity-based movements may tend to exclude those perceived to be outsiders. We are cautioned by scholars such as Vincent J. Cheng to have a thorough understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of claims on cultural authenticity because “...the search for genuine or authentic native voices will serve only to provide us with a feel-good liberal and multicultural glow—while in actuality merely recycling tokenism and nostalgia.”⁷

Though the politics of passing, visibility, and racial identity are very real, I focus instead on another, just as potent, reality: heterogeneity and the authenticity of complicated identities. While the group I discuss, Korean American adoptees, is often depicted in absolutely racial terms (as “Asians”) or in absolutely raceless terms (as “Americans,” or as “humans”), I approach adoptees as people who navigate both sets of ideologies, who are engaged in endlessly complicated conversation with dominant discourses that would seek to categorize adoptees neatly within their so-called “real” identities.

LOCATING AND DISLOCATING WHITENESS IN KOREAN ADOPTEES

Adoption from Korea to the United States has been ongoing since 1953. Korea has historically been a prolific sending country in transnational (adoption of children born in one nation

by parents of another nation) and transracial (usually adoption of children of color by white parents) adoption. More than 200,000 Korean-born people have been adopted outside Korea, over half having been adopted into the United States. The vast majority of these persons were adopted into white families.

In 2003, I began collecting the life stories of adult Korean adoptees as oral histories. Over the course of four years, many of the 73 adult Korean adoptees who recounted their life histories to me spoke about their experiences of whiteness and passing in their white families and communities. All subjects were audio-recorded with their consent, and the recordings were used in conjunction with observation notes to construct examples of adoptee responses for this research.

Embraced and Informed by Whiteness: Korean Adoptees in Colorblind America

White Family, White Community

In her article "Brown-Skinned White Girls" about women of African descent who self-identify as white, Frances Winddance Twine summarizes four necessary conditions for the construction of a white identity among a population visibly coded as non-white. These are: 1) isolation from other non-whites⁸ (though this is debatable in her example, since a number of her subjects were living with their non-white mothers); 2) "racially neutral" environments that have colorblind interpretations of family and community;⁹ 3) an ethic that privileges individualism¹⁰ and; 4) high priority placed on the material achievements of a middle class existence.¹¹

In many ways, Twine's theories can be applied to Korean adoptees as well; most are in family and social environments that fulfill Twine's conditions. Among my subjects, most were placed into families that are entirely or predominantly identified as white; both adoptive mothers and fathers of most of my subjects are white, and adopted siblings, if present, are the only other people of color in the immediate family. In their white American families, the Korean adoptees I interviewed tended to be "raised white,"¹² possibly because of a lack of interest in the birth culture of the adoptee, certainly because of the lack of available parenting models that privileged cultural modeling of another culture over the parents' own, and because of the powerful role of whiteness as a race-neutralizing human identity.

As members of families that are generally identified as white, Korean adoptees are often assimilated into the family as white and subsequently assimilated into racial and cultural identities of whiteness. One adoptee remarked, "When I was growing up, of course, the only people I saw were white." Because of acculturation to whiteness through rearing, many Korean adoptees find easy access to "white" privileges and life options, both because of a general support for white identities and a lack of support for non-white ones.

The practice of transracial adoption works to both highlight and erase race in adoptees. While most adoptees can never escape the reality that they are one of the few—if not the only—person of color in their adoptive families (and often in their communities), white parents and even entire communities often work to erase racial differences using a number of strategies. This might be accomplished by instilling value for a “weak” multiculturalism (which celebrates difference but does not address a history of racism and imperialistic injustice), by downplaying racial incidents, or by enacting racially homogenizing ideologies.

For Korean adoptees, the ambiguity of Asian American racializations is compounded by racial ambiguity within adoptive families that use the trope of colorblindness¹³ to smooth over racial differences within the family and to conform to a normative construct of family defined by blood ties and physical resemblance between parents and children. While most families continue to acknowledge the racial difference within their adoptive families, these differences can be wiped away by the claiming of a single culture and national identity (usually white American culture) by adoptees and their families. The tendency to conflate culture and race in mainstream American society¹⁴ supports this privileging of cultural sameness over racial difference. Additionally, the emphasis on sameness in family supports familial and social concepts of racial neutrality and colorblindness.

I also argue that individualism is a quality that is valued in mainstream American society, and especially in adoptive families, which have most likely approached child acquisition with much decision-making and deliberation. Many adoptive parents tell adopted children, “I chose YOU!” in order to make adopted children feel special despite their lack of biological relations to the family. Though there are surely good intentions in this particular parenting strategy, unbeknown to parents, this can be construed by adoptees as a very one-sided choice; most adoptees understand very well that they had absolutely no choice in their family placement—certainly no more than biological children have to be born into a family.

Using Twine’s logic, the conditions necessary to create a white identity, regardless of phenotype, are in place for most Korean adoptees. That they would develop white identities while in white families could be seen as predictable, even unavoidable. Vincent Cheng notes, for better or for worse, interracial/cultural “...adoptions make a radical mockery of any notions of an authentic identity. Children adopted as infants...have almost no experience of their birth parents and of the culture of their birth parents.”¹⁵ This was true for most of the Korean adoptees who spoke with me: a white identity was part of their personal history.

Adult Korean Adoptee Racial Identities

Since Korean adoptees are indoctrinated into whiteness as children, it should come as no surprise that they would continue to live with this identification as they get older. Several adoptees with whom I spoke mentioned whiteness prominently in their social and family histories; many discussed having identified as white and having only considered dating white partners, initially. However, in my conversations with Korean adoptees, it became clear that these white identities do not always last a lifetime. For most of my informants, white identity de-

creased after leaving home and becoming independent as adults, though this process often proved complicated and difficult.

Many adoptees felt that the development of a non-white identity, though culturally rewarding, carries a high price, including coming to terms with one’s own lack of Korean cultural knowledge and experiencing rejection or dislocation within the family. A late-emerging Asian or Korean identity seems to be a phenomenon common among Korean adoptees; many of my informants began to question or reject their white identity in their late twenties and early thirties.

For many Korean adoptees who identify as white throughout childhood, the social pressure to re-identify as non-white is often realized during dating and college years. This corroborates Twine’s findings; her subjects experienced breakdown of white identities as a result of “reality checks” with dating and immersion in a more racially diverse environment in college.¹⁶ Many adoptees who experience this realignment of identity are traumatized by the change, but also see its benefits in terms of their sense of ethnic pride.¹⁷ However, it is important to note that Korean adoptees who self-identify as white do not necessarily ever stop using this identifier; conversely, this analysis is not meant to suggest that all Korean adoptees necessarily develop white identities.

An emerging Asian or Asian American identity can be particularly risky for adoptees who have previously expressed a white or culturally white identity. For many adoptees, changing identities is a painful and confusing process that their families may not be able to understand. One informant stated:

The sad thing about it is that once you take the lid off it, you can’t go back. It’s a can of worms. In some ways I wish I could be so ignorant again; you know that ignorance is bliss. My mom knows that there is something terribly wrong in our relationship on a gut level, but she doesn’t know what. She’s blinded by her privilege. I try to engage her and understand that whiteness is about being totally blocked off and not having to look at anything you don’t want to, and I keep bumping my head against this, and it’s impermeable. It’s an obstruction I can’t get through.

In this example, the informant feels isolated from her mother because of the racial exploration she has undertaken as she has gotten older. One of the major contradictions faced by Korean adoptees comes from the fact that they tend to be raised white, but are then told, upon reaching adulthood, that they are *not* white by those inside or outside the family. An adoptee recounts:

I did identify as white. I remember asking my mom when I filled out my college form what to put. She said, “Well you’re ASIAN.” But that totally flies in the face of what I’ve been told...if I’m raised white then I’m supposed to be white. As a good liberal college student, then race doesn’t matter, and I’m going to mark white. But then I found out that other people

didn't know that I was white [laughs]...it gets complicated because other people actually look at you. So then I have to think about what I'm marking on those boxes and I started changing it every semester, and that does not sit well with people.

Here, the Korean adoptee informant pays a social price for making choices about racial identity and then changing her mind. Even though Korean adoptees are well versed in enacting whiteness, they are sometimes reminded that they are **not** white, at least not biologically or visibly, by those around them. Unlike the white ethnics that they may try to emulate, for Korean adoptees, identity-switching is much less acceptable in a practical sense—because racial changelings are more threatening than ethnic ones, given that race is a more meaningful identifier in everyday life than ethnicity.

This contradiction has been named the *Transracial Adoptee Paradox* by research counseling psychologist Richard M. Lee. He describes the paradox as the contradiction felt by non-white persons adopted by white parents as, "...racial/ethnic minorities in society...perceived and treated by others [inside the family]...as if they are members of the majority culture."¹⁸ Lee's research objectives query the psycho-social development of these individuals, paying particular attention to identity building and psychological adjustment in the adoption experience. This paradox may become a problem when adoptees have to transition from racial invisibility within white families and communities that do not recognize a racial element of their identities to the visibility of "the real world" where race is recognized and adoptees must cope with more obvious forms of racialization. One adoptee recounts:

Going to college, I was getting really depressed. Just not dealing with my emotions and all the anxieties I had; it was all happening at the same time. I'd called home and said, "I don't know what to do. I feel like I want to kill myself, I'm so depressed right now. I've been crying for all day long and I don't know what to do. I think I need to leave or something." I said, "Mom I feel really suicidal and I'm so depressed." I just remember the conversation was really short. She said, "Oh, you'll figure it out, it will work out, you'll figure it out, it's okay."...We just said bye; I called my brother and said, "I just don't know what to do." He listened. But I decided I just needed to drop out. I came back home. I started trying to explain to my parents that I feel like I'm having issues with being Asian. People look at me like I'm Asian. People look at me like I'm a foreign exchange student. I don't know. There's a lot of issues, that's when I started realizing that I was very very different and people saw me and they didn't see who I really was.

In the complex racial reality of transracial adoptees, the "real world" is represented broadly by a racist dominant society if and when transracial adoptees encounter racist language or forms of racial discrimination among strangers and peers, or in institutional settings such as work or school. However, the racial rules of the "real world" are also enforced by the racializing tendency to consider categories of race and ethnicity bounded and impermeable; Lee's paradox operates with an assumption that transracial adoptees contend with the bounded

identity categories of either “white” or “non-white.” Miri Song suggests this impermeability is compounded by the enforcement of dominant society, wherein the act of “opting out” of one ethnic or cultural group can only be achieved by successfully “opting into” another group, which leaves little flexibility for individuals to exist in a space in between groups.¹⁹ She goes as far as to cite research that suggests mixed-race people suffer with identity crisis and low self-esteem.²⁰ The dissonance of claiming an identity not supported by others (the social consequences of being “wrong” about your identity, such as what happens when a person checks “white” when he or she *really* is Asian) is of primary concern to many adoption researchers.²¹ The fear is that an acculturation to whiteness may not prepare Korean adoptees or other transracial adoptees to live in a racist society, and that these survival skills are best learned from parents of the same race as the child. In addition, other people of color may exert social pressure on transracial adoptees to suggest that adopting a white identity is symptomatic of poor identity development or denial of one’s “true” self. While well-intentioned, these renderings of the “real” racial identity of transracial adoptees are often just as ignorant of transracial adoptee life-experience as is the supposedly racially ignorant and isolated white family.

At the same time, pressure to “be more Asian” within Asian American communities, the Korean adoptee community included, can be high for Korean adopted adults. So many Korean adoptees have the experience of being “raised white” that one mark of maturity among adoptees is to revert to or discover one’s “roots.” This journey of discovery often includes travel back to Korea, searching for birthparents, self-education about Korea, Asia and/or Asian America, and sometimes, the rejection of white family and friends. Korean adoptees may be responding to these pressures if they seek to move away from culturally white identities as they mature.

However, for some Korean adoptees, just as the incentives to accept a white identity in a white family are powerful, the consequences of rejecting such an identity can be grave; I have found that adoptees sometimes see the act of challenging this white identity as threatening to continued inclusion in their white families. This is consistent with the aforementioned racial ambiguities enforced within many adoptive families in order to achieve normative familial sameness by de-emphasizing racial differences. If family harmony is dependent upon adoptees’ understanding and agreement that race doesn’t matter, the insistence that racial difference *does* matter can upset this balance, sometimes in extreme ways.

In contrast to the race-neutral positions cast for Korean adoptees by parents or the race-positive positions cast by some adoption researchers and members of communities of color, many of the Korean adoptees I spoke with expressed a profound sense of racial “in-betweenness.” Considering the competing social pressures to identify as white (usually among family and close friends) and as Asian (in larger social contexts among groups that do not identify the adoptee as Asian and/or adopted) it is not surprising that Korean adoptees feel divided.

Flexible Racial Boundaries, Mobile Racial Hierarchies

He handed out this thing where you were supposed to put your name, your age, your race-slash-identity. As a knee-jerk reaction, I put 'Korean.' Then 'sort-of.' I am 32 years old and I still don't know.

Most of the informants with whom I spoke had identified as white earlier in life, when they lived with their parents, and had an epiphany of sorts sometime during adulthood, in which their racial designation shifted away from white. Some experienced this as adolescents, some as young adults, some not until they were in their thirties. Not surprisingly, I found ambiguity among adoptees as they were transitioning and questioning their racial and cultural identities. For many, the price of changing racial and cultural identities (from white to Korean or Asian) was high. Most eventually chose identities that were Asian or Asian American. However, many remarked that even this identity did not entirely fit their life experiences. One subject said: "I'm not claimed by the people I am most comfortable with and I am not comfortable with the people I look like." Another remarked: "...as an adoptee, you're always going to be in between, you're not Asian enough and you're not white enough." In a more complicated rendering of this idea, a third adoptee remarked on the stark contrasts between her white and Korean identities:

Minnesota is profoundly white; it doesn't get any whiter than this, except North Dakota, and I'm from a town near the North Dakota border—the population and the ignorance and the white privilege that comes with that. But then I think what is the alternative?...I can move to California or Hawaii...but then I think, I can't even make it to the grocery store...I can't even make it to King's [*a local Korean restaurant*], because then I have to be profoundly Korean.

Later she continued with these thoughts about her condition of in-betweenness:

I really struggle with feeling fraudulent...that's a thing...I have a really hard time hanging out with people who were raised Korean, because I have such tremendous feelings of insecurity about that. I get in these situations of racial starkness...if everyone is starkly Korean, then I feel really white. If I'm with my family, I feel really not white. It goes in degrees, depending on the cultural consequence, because if I'm not white, then I must be Korean and that doesn't take me very far either. Right now I feel very not white and very white at the same time...that has to do with cultural competence and it's the chameleon thing, like who am I standing next to...These days, the only people I feel completely comfortable being around are my Korean adoptee friends because I don't feel fraudulent.

Though the position and experience of in-betweenness²² is commonly mentioned among Korean adoptees, dominant ideologies outside adoptee communities seek to regulate Korean adoptee identity more rigidly. Resistance to any Korean adoptee self-concept that complicates simple identity categories takes many forms, all of which attempt to pigeonhole adoptee iden-

tity into either "white" or "Asian/Korean" categories. This response echoes the experience of many mixed-race individuals and second-generation immigrants who also want the freedom to exert choice in their identities.²³ Korean adoptees have much in common with both groups: as highly assimilated immigrants because of their immersion in white American society at a young age, and as individuals who are often mixed in their cultural and national identification.

Because of their age and their awareness about whiteness as a problematic identity in their lives, many adoptees in my research expressed some rejection of the whiteness that they had embraced as younger people. These rejections were filled with painful realizations of what was lost to gain their whiteness, and what is lost in rejecting whiteness. Many equate whiteness with a deeply held ignorance about the perspectives and experiences of non-white people and about difference in general. Some reported experiencing a profound sense of internal conflict because, although they understood well how such ignorance was produced and maintained, it was painful for them to confront.

When specifically asked what whiteness means to them today, as adults, Korean adoptees offered a variety of responses, including some explanations that focused on contradictory access to the benefits of white privilege, some that equated whiteness with ignorance, and some that rejected whiteness altogether. Though the adoptees with whom I explicitly discussed whiteness acknowledged that they had some access to the privileges of whiteness, their statements showed that their experiences of white privilege were complicated by encounters with racism within whiteness and by partial, rather than full, access to the privileges of being considered white.

In navigating Asian American roles, the role of the model minority may have special appeal to Korean adoptees. Some adoptees see the position of being the "best of the worst" as an alluring one, holding the prospect for adoptees as people of color to co-exist in their largely white world. The racially neutral position of many white families and social circles would not allow adoptees to acknowledge that a model minority position enacts an inferior racialization, only that it is far better than a negative Asian racialization, or the racializations of other people of color groups.

The ambivalence expressed by some Korean adoptees about their racial identities in their conversations with me appeared to be related to the pressure many adoptees felt to "pick a side." Limiting adoptees to the choice of white identity or Asian identity leads many to seek a "third space" where the complex realities of adoptee racial and cultural identity can be more easily rendered. This space of racial ambiguity expresses itself in two major sites: Korean adoptee communities and race-neutral communities, often of or around adoptive families.

In Richard Lee's concept of the transracial adoptee paradox, he describes a familial space where race is not recognized, and a space outside the family where the rules of racial engagement are much harsher.²⁴ Adoptive families develop race-neutral values in order to minimize the obvious biological differences within their families, but I argue that in contemporary American society, many transracial adoptees can increasingly choose to stay within a race-

neutral space. Expanding on his concept of the race-neutral family which Lee applies to the individual adoptee subject, I suggest that the practice of transracial adoption has contributed significantly to the development of race-neutrality as a moral imperative extending beyond families to their communities, becoming significant even at a national scale.²⁵ Many adoptees who contributed oral histories discussed their extended families, churches, schools, and towns as having similar race-neutral values.

Drawing from Omi and Winant's concept of *racial etiquette*, where "[e]verybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification...[r]ace becomes 'common sense'—a way of comprehending, explaining, an acting in the world,"²⁶ I suggest that there is a specific racial etiquette to transracial adoption, wherein the white communities tend to politely overlook the racial difference between the white majority and the adoptees themselves. Some community members may follow this etiquette of denying racial difference because of obligation to adoptive families who are enforcing a race-neutral ethic. Some may have overarching beliefs in the importance of colorblindness as a solution to America's race-relations problems. Either way, I argue that transracial adoptees can remain racially invisible even outside their adoptive families. Because of high acculturation into white society and comprehensive understanding of white social and racial rules, adoptees often make it easy for those around them to look past their race, which in turn enforces the correctness of colorblind racial etiquette among non-adoptees in their communities. Certainly, many adoptees see any acknowledgment of their race as racist or at least uncouth. These cultural demands of adoptees and adoptive families to maintain colorblind perspectives feeds back into their communities and helps to maintain the racial invisibility preferred by some adoptees.

However, some Korean adoptees have found communities consisting of other Korean adoptees can offer a more comfortable environment. Fellow adoptees are able to readily recognize adoptee differences from both the white racial majority and from Asian and Korean American communities. It is in these adoptee-centered communities that many adoptees are able to express cultural and racial hybridity without feeling pressured to pick a single racial identity. One adoptee remarked:

The other day when I was feeling really in despair about the whole whiteness thing, I think it has to do with identifying myself in terms of negations...you're not white, you're not Korean and that's how it always is. That's why it's so affirming to be around other adoptees, because for one time you can refer to yourself in the positive, you know, linguistically. Because I'm always negating myself otherwise.

Other adoptees echoed this informant's experience of being at home around other adoptees. The development of a Korean adoptee identity, which is neither culturally Korean nor culturally white, functions for these adoptees as a remedy for feelings of in-betweenness. When I asked when she began to identify less with being white, one informant explained how the development of a Korean adoptee identity marked an advance towards a positive expression of identity for the first time:

Really, it would have to be when I started meeting other Korean adoptees. The word minority would be tossed around, but I didn’t like that because that would mean you are less. People of color... that wasn’t used enough to feel like that was something I could claim. When I met other Korean adoptees, I could feel some pride. Before that, I still wouldn’t have said I was white as much as when I was younger, but I still had no other language to use.

Unfortunately, these Korean adoptee communities almost always exist outside mainstream communities and other adoptive communities. Adoptees seem to recognize that the identification with the “third space” of Korean adoptee communities is sometimes still too “Korean” for colorblind communities. Referencing the precarious position adoptees find themselves in when trying to break free of white identities, another adoptee stated, “We know not to congregate [with other Korean adoptees]. It’s too conspicuous,” as if the mere act of being seen with other adoptees or other Asians would be threatening to white family and friends.

Consistent with assimilationist understandings of Korean adoptee adjustment, designations of “well-adjusted” or “happy” are sometimes conflated with “white” while opposite designations of “bitter” or “angry” are associated with “Asian.” Though racial unrest is not always articulated as the primary reason for feelings of dissatisfaction with being adopted, it is often inferred. In these cases, heightened consciousness around being a person of color, an Asian American, or a Korean adoptee can incite accusations of ungratefulness, poor adjustment, or mental instability.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, the binary understanding of Korean adoptee identity politics has been used to mobilize adoptees against one another. A recent and striking example of the polarizing tendency in Korean adoptee communities took place in 2006, when an American adoption agency, which has a long history of facilitating Korean adoptions, responded to a legislative proposal in South Korea which advocated for the end transnational adoption from Korea. The agency initiated a letter-writing campaign directed at South Korean legislators, soliciting Korean adoptees to express support for continuing transnational adoption from South Korea. A letter addressed to Korean American adoptees stated:

Some of you may have already heard about this proposed legislation... One of the driving forces behind this legislation is the fact that Korean officials are only hearing from adopted Korean adults *living in Korea* currently who had *negative* adoption experiences and who support ending international adoption in Korea. We felt that there was a need for Korean officials to hear from voices of *other* adopted adults when the timing was right.... many [Korean] officials see adopted Koreans still as “poor orphans,” as one put it, and continue to apologize for the fact that they

were adopted, when in fact they are leading *productive and satisfied lives*.²⁷ (emphasis mine).

The letter, which was written by an agency director who is not a Korean adoptee, was sent and signed by agency workers who are Korean adoptees in order to use their appeal to other adoptees to further the cause of the agency. That the agency, which has both a financial and a moral stake in the continuation and success of Korean adoption to the United States, opposes the end of transnational adoption from Korea is not surprising. However, the tactics it chose to use writes the race-aware (those adoptees living in Korea) and race-neutral (“concerned friends” of the agency who are living in the United States) script onto adoptees as happy versus angry and uses divisive techniques to pit so-called happy (“productive and satisfied,” presumably grateful) adoptees against so-called angry (those with “negative adoption experiences”) adoptees.

Gratefulness is a quality that has always been a prerequisite for admission into white American society for people of color. Embedded in the demand for grateful American people of color is the strong maintenance of whiteness as hierarchically superior to all other races. Using this logic, any non-white person allowed to be elevated to a position of whiteness should be grateful. The accusation of ungratefulness is both common and disturbing when launched at Korean adoptees. This charge almost always refers to adoptees’ ungratefulness for their own adoptions, which historically is almost always into white families. Inferred here is the ethnocentric assumption that any person adopted from Korea (or any poor country that sends its children to rich countries for adoption) should be grateful for their adoption since the American quality of life is obviously higher than that of Korea. Those who accuse adoptees of ungratefulness are attempting to enforce the colorblind racial etiquette of transracial adoption by accusing the adoptees themselves of breaking the rules of etiquette. Any adoptee who is ungrateful, especially if racial difference is the basis for personal problems experienced by individual adoptees, is disrupting the more harmonious norm of colorblindness—a norm that denies racialization as a potentially divisive and threatening characteristic for people of color in America

Ungratefulness among Korean adoptees potentially threatens adoptive family systems and relationships, the multi-million dollar transnational adoption industry, and paternalistic relations between the United States and peripheral adoption-sending nations. So, for grateful Korean adoptees, becoming and remaining white (equated with becoming and remaining American) fulfills an important nation-building function of transnational adoption. As the stakes are high in maintaining Korean adoptees as culturally white and grateful, there is little tolerance for adoptees who express interest in Asian, Korean, or in-between identities.

Despite efforts to regulate Korean adoptee identity as either angry-Asian or grateful-to-be-white, many Korean adoptees respond to being placed in the either/or position by staking a claim to the in-between space. While adoptees do express frustration at being neither here nor there, neither American nor Korean, neither white or Asian, Korean adoptee identity occupies any and all of these identities as well as any number of hybridized identities between them.

As I research and fraternize with Korean American adoptee populations, I note much difficulty in the community because of mistaken-identity pigeonholing tied to stereotyping and racialization. While the strategies among Korean adoptees are quite divergent, the will to self-define and the dissent against dominant definitions of identity based on common racializations are clearly evident. Though every racialized group has a different history of racialization in America, Korean adoptees are resisting racial assumptions, socializations, and categorizations thrust on them through dominant discourses of law, policy, media representations, and family. While this resistance is contentious and the social price for it may be high, its evidence in my work with Korean adoptee oral histories is apparent. This group, pressured into incomplete identity binaries (Asian or white, Korean or American) that often collapse into identities of non-choice (as in, "You *think* you are Asian or white, but clearly, you are not!") undermines the process of forced racialization by consistently using strategies that subvert racial categorization to reinvent their images as infinitely more complex.

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- 1 Miri Song, *Choosing Ethnic Identity* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), 68.
- 2 James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (Boston: Sherman French & Company, 1912).
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- 8 Frances Winddance Twine, "Brown-Skinned White Girls," in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 220.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 222.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 227.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 225.
- 12 Phrase borrowed from Twine, "Brown-Skinned White Girls", 218.
- 13 Hawley Fogg-Davis, *The Ethics of Transracial Adoption* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 9.
- 14 Song, *Choosing Ethnic Identity*. Song discusses the politically correct tendency to emphasize culture over race in contemporary British society on page 18 and I would argue that the substitution of culture for race operates similarly in American society.
- 15 Cheng, *Inauthentic*, 70.
- 16 Twine, "Brown-Skinned White Girls," 230, 233.
- 17 Richard Lee, Hyung Chol Yoo and Sara Evans, "Coming of Age of Korean Adoptees: Ethnic Identity Development and Psychological Adjustment," in *Korean-Americans: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Ilpyong J. Kim (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp., 2004).
- 18 Richard M. Lee, "The Transracial Adoption Paradox: History, Research and Counseling Implications of Cultural Socialization." *The Counseling Psychologist* 711-44 (2003): 711.
- 19 Song, *Choosing Ethnic Identity*, 56.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 21 Bagley 1993, Feigelman 2000, Freundlich and Lieberthal 2000, Hollingsworth 1997, Verslius-den Bieman and Vehulst 1995, and others.

- 22 This strategy is also identified as “partical identification” by Miri Song in *Choosing Ethnic Identity*, 58, though she claims this as a position between dominant culture and one’s own community, suggesting this is a position of ambiguity between a “real” and “convenient” identity.
- 23 Song, *Choosing Ethnic Identity*.
- 24 Lee, “The Transracial Adoption Paradox.”
- 25 Adam Pertman, *Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
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- 27 E-mail message to the author, August 10, 2006.

KOREAN ORPHANS, DOMESTIC ADOPTEES, AND INTERNATIONAL ADOPTEES: THREE OUTCOMES OF CHILD CIRCULATION AND FAMILY SEPARATION PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of my doctoral research was to answer questions related to the issue of international adoption in South Korean society. These questions included: Why does international adoption continue even if South Korea is now a wealthy country? Why is adoption so well covered by the South Korean media while remaining a sensitive issue? Why is it relatively easy to find birth families in South Korea compared to other countries which also give children away? Why do many family reunions between adoptees and biological relatives conclude in new separations?¹

But before I started focusing on the South Korean side of international adoption, I posted a note on the Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network (KAAN) website asking if any members of the adoptee community would answer some of my questions. I received several responses. I would like to thank those persons for expressing their interest in my work, even if I never used the information they gave me.

Among those, I clearly remember an adoptive father's email in which he asked me to explain the discrepancy between the fact that he had been told by the adoption agency that his adoptive son would never be able to find his birth parents and the fact that many adult adoptees are able to achieve this goal no matter how structured adoption law is against potential reunions. This father's questions and worries raised an interesting problem: they showed that knowledge of Korean culture and South Korean society was needed to understand the issue of international adoption. In many respects, I was also still surprised by my own adoption story. Unexpectedly finding my birth family in 1999 at the age of twenty-one made me very curious about the conditions surrounding such an event, which never appeared natural or normal to me.

I believe that adult adoptees and adoptive parents need to look at Korean culture from a distance and enlarge our views on our stories. Representations of adoption vary from one country to another, even within the West. I read somewhere that some adoptive parents would rather choose international adoption to ensure a separation between their adoptive child and

the remote biological parents. But, as we know, this illusion is becoming increasingly hard to maintain, especially in the case of Korea.

Early in my research, I believed that answers to my questions were partially to be found in a weekly national television program which is devoted to family searches and reunions: *Ach'im madang: kũ sarami pogosip'ta* (*Morning Forum: I Want To Meet This Person*; 아침마당-그사람이 보고싶다). Launched in 1997, this program is still one of the top twenty television shows in South Korea, attracting 11 to 12 percent of viewing households. Each Wednesday morning, two television stars and a literature professor from the most prestigious university in Seoul conduct searches and reunions for seven or eight participants. The participants are Korean orphans, domestic adoptees, or international adoptees. Their ages range from early twenties to late sixties. They either appear for the first time to introduce themselves and relate how they were separated from their family or they appear for a second time in order to meet their family in the studio. Seven broadcasts of this television show will provide examples of child circulation in South Korea, which, I argue, is related to international adoption.

PRACTICES OF SEPARATION

The term “separation” (헤어지다; *heöchida*) obliterates the circumstances and the reasons of family dispersal, which are not only historical and economic in nature but are also due to family configurations and the effect of the kinship system on poor families.

Ach'im madang participants who lost their families try to research the causes of their separation. Only two participants out of approximately fifty really recall how they got lost on their way home:

July 30, 2003, 8:47: One day he had gone to his maternal relatives (외갓집; *oegatchip*); he had to go home alone, and he got lost.

August 13, 2003, 8:41: [The participant] got lost in 1971, in Seoul Station. That was the first semester of his first year at the elementary school of Sindong.

Others never say that their parents “abandoned” them or their siblings. Most explain that parental death, desertion, or divorce, led inexorably to their “separation,” stating, “... and that is the way we all got separated” (이렇게 헤어졌어요; *irök'e heöjössöyo*), “It’s the way we were all scattered” (뿔뿔이 흩어졌다; *ppulbburi hũt'yöjötta*); these are the common expressions Korean participants use during the show. “Abandonment” (버려지다, 버림받다; *pöryöjita, pörimbatta*) is never evoked because the word itself would sound like an accusation, which would make the recovery of those bonds difficult.

On *Ach'im madang*, almost every person's story reveals the same chronological process. At the beginning, families try to overcome the loss of balance caused by death or absence of one of the parents, but soon capitulate and must give up a child or children. There are many options in this case, including: child servitude in a strangers' house; child fosterage by an elderly person; adoption by a relative or an acquaintance; sending one or several children to an orphanage; abandonment in a public place, train, or train station. The word "separation" encompasses different practices and usually implies choices made by female adults—mostly mothers, paternal or maternal aunts, and grandmothers—in the absence of fathers. Before being "separated," children are, in fact, taken care of by relatives, friends, or neighbors because parents are in a difficult situation. Korean orphans, domestic adoptees, and international adoptees are the outcomes of these survival strategies.

In one case, sibling separation follows a parent's death. Members of the paternal family decide to take care of the boy but eventually decide to leave the girl with her mother. She ends up in an orphanage:

July 9, 2003, 8:58: When the dramatic music starts, a man who wears a badge with the title, "little brother," dashes onto the stage in tears, applauded by the spectators. He hugs his older sister and cries very loudly. On the screen, the viewers can read: "Shin Myōng-Gap, forty-six years old"; "meeting with her little brother, after thirty-seven years of separation." An old man came with the little brother and stands behind, in silence.

8:59: After the siblings calm down, the old man, who is a cousin from the house of the elder paternal uncle (큰집 사촌오빠; *k'ŭnjip sach'on oppa*) explains through tears that his own parents took care of the little brother, Shin Myōng-Gap. But, although they are of the elder household (*k'ŭn jip*), his family could not support the older sister, who stayed with her mother. Before long, they lost touch with the two of them and were ignorant of whether they were alive or not.

The adoption of the boy clearly respects the will to perpetuate the patriline. It was the duty of the father's older brother to take care of his younger brother's male descendant.

To leave a child definitively to an orphanage is another option for parents. They choose this option in the case of widowhood, divorce, or remarriage. Many participants' stories confirm that it was a common practice. And it still is, as we will see:

July 16, 2003, 9:10: ...[I]n 1997, he met his father thanks to the pastor in charge of the orphanage. [...] Too old, this father has lost his memory. He only recalls that they divorced and got rid of their children.

July 30, 2003, 8:54: She looks for her little brother and little sister, who must be now forty-nine and fifty-five years old. They were all sent to the orphanage at a young age by their paternal aunt after their mother had died. Their father had died even earlier.

August 6, 2003, 9:14: She was separated from her little brother when he was ten. Their father had died and their mother had remarried. They were sent to their mother's family, and the little brother was sent to an orphanage. Once he escaped to find them and was sent back to the orphanage. They had no contact since then.

August 13, 2003, 9:08: A picture of him at five years old is displayed. He thinks that his paternal aunt took him to Holt adoption agency. He vaguely remembers that his father was working in a casino.

August 13, 2003; 9:14: [A French participant, Chi Seon-Yeong, 30, looks for her brother and] says their parents passed away—their mother first and then their father. They lived together with their paternal aunt (고모; *komo*) before Seon-Yeong was sent to Holt adoption agency and was adopted internationally.

August 27, 2003, 8:42: She and her brother lived with their mother, and their father visited them from time to time. At some point, they left their mother to live with their father. But when he remarried, he sent them to an orphanage.

Different from sending a child to an orphanage, which entails, most of the time, legal relinquishment, illegal abandonment is common but never designated as such by *Ach'im madang* participants. Three participants talk about their parents' "fleeing away":

June 4, 2003, 8:45: [The participant's] mother left home one day and the father left as well, leaving a note which said: "I went out to look for mom." Neither of them ever came back.

June 4, 2003, 8:56: [The participant's father] confesses he cheated on his wife who subsequently left behind their two daughters.

August 13, 2003, 8:48: One day, [the participant's] mother fell down, dead from an aneurysm. Her father remarried and disappeared. He fled away, she thinks.

Several participants recall the way their father or their mother randomly lost one of their siblings, or gave them to an unidentified person:

August 6, 2003, 8:43: He seeks his parents, his older brother, and his older sister, who he lost after he followed his drunk father. His father took him to a train station, told him to wait, and never came back. That was November 1981.

August 6, 2003, 9:14: [The participant] starts crying when she evokes her mother who passed away while giving birth. [...] They were in dire straits and could not eat every-day. Under the influence of alcohol, the father often beat the little sister. One day, he ran out with her and gave her to an unknown woman who had no children. Later he remembered that woman's name: Sun Ch'ön-Yök. But it must have been a fake name. The participant Kim Yöng-Lan and her older sister decided to look for her, but to no avail.

One participant was obviously kidnapped:

August 27, 2003, 9:02: ...[W]hen [the participant] Park Mun-Söng was five years old, his mother, who was going to work at the windmill factory, fell down one day in 1974, and died soon after. His father took him to Seoul to visit a cousin who owned a shop there. The child went out to buy some candies in the next shop but disappeared, having been taken away by a stranger on a bike. That is what the witnesses said.

Some participants do not have a clear memory of how they became separated:

July 30, 2003, 9:17: The participant explains that he does not remember what happened very well. His mother and his younger sister were together when an accident occurred. His mother lost all memories of the fact. He found her later, roaming about alone in the neighborhood of the University of Kyemyeong.

Others hear versions of the separation story from their relatives they meet on stage. The birth family always provides vague justifications:

July 9, 2003, 9:41-42: While they are all hugging each other, the screen displays the following text: "Meeting after thirty-one years of separation." [...] Park Min-Kyang, thirty-eight years old, older sister of the participant, says they all went to the market with their father and she was carrying on her back her little brother, Park Kyung-Mun, who came today as well. The participant Park Min-Hyang was walking next to her. She must have got lost when their father walked aside to smoke a cigarette. The older sister imagines: "She must have followed another woman she took for our mother; maybe because she was wearing the same outfit..."

July 30, 2003, 8:39: Embarrassed, [the participant's brother] answers: "In my opinion, life was very difficult, that's why..." The hosts do not ask for further explanation.

August 27, 2003, 8:36: The mother, Choi Kŭm-Sun, looks at her children but does not hug them; she does not say anything. She subconsciously tries to turn her back to the camera and bites her lips. [...] She mumbles, "...it is because of my situation...I don't know what happened to their father...".

In one case, the host denies the culpability of a father who fled away after his wife's death, leaving his children alone without resources:

August 13, 2003, 8:48: Lee Keum-Hŭi [the host] comments, "Hmm...it was difficult for your father after your mother died...".

These words show that the stories, no matter how incomplete they are, by their own deficient nature, normalize the practice of separation. Those stories function as minimal but sufficient explanation of the unacceptable. It seems normal to think that a single or widowed parent, especially the father, is not able to take care of children on his own. Therefore, it is rational that extra-conjugal relationships lead to divorce and provoke the separation from one's own children. Furthermore, it is mostly the youngest children or the girls who are separated from the rest of the family. These stories illustrate implicitly the "preference for boys" (남아 선호). Yet, the bond between a father and his children seems very fragile in reality despite the fact that it is considered to be the most important relationship under Confucianism. It is the father who is most often involved in the abandonments, either because of his unexplained absence, or by his inability to raise children.²

Memories of family intimacy relate most often to female relatives. Even today, the parent who stays at home and raises the children is the mother.³ Physical intimacy between the child and the mother is constant in everyday life—it is on her back the child discovers the world; it is with her the child sleeps and takes his bath; it is she who feeds the child at any time of the day and puts food directly inside his mouth. Love between a mother and her child is designated under a combination of the word *chŏng* (정) and *mo* (모), the word for mother—*mo-chŏng* (모정)—which some compare to *ae-jeong* (애정), or erotic love. (I could not find the equivalent for "paternal love.")⁴

This intimacy between a mother and her children, and, to a certain extent, between older sisters and younger siblings when families were larger, sheds light on the fact mothers appear often on the stage of *Ach'im madang*, whereas fathers remain absent.

In contrast with the careful words and phrases used on the KBS stage which lack precise subjects, and therefore lack accountable agents, the terms used in documentaries since the 1990s to criticize children abandonment stigmatize the parents. Most of these documentaries focus especially on the problem of teenage mothers which is directly linked to the international adoption issue: since the mid-1990s, up to 80 percent of babies given for international adoption⁵ have been born to young single mothers.⁶

Cases of abandonment are more seldom than other forms of separation on *Ach'im madang* because those who have been abandoned are less likely to have enough information about their birth family and, as such, have less chance to appear on television. Hence, the program indirectly perpetuates this ideological consensus, inciting respect and protection of parents rather than of children. In fact, many sources confirm that child abandonments have been a social problem ever since the end of the Korean War. David Kim, employee and friend of Harry Holt, who was the founder of the first international adoption agency, confirms that child abandonment was still very common in the 1980s:

Three successive changes of government within a period of eleven months [after the Park Chung-Hee assassination in October 1979] wrought chaos and economic instability in Korea. More and more unemployed moved into Seoul and other big cities seeking jobs. The number of abandoned babies increased, particularly in Seoul. [...] Most of the 800 orphanages in the country were in Seoul or nearby cities. Eighty thousand children were accommodated in these institutions. It would be easy for the parents to bring their babies to one of them. But for some reason, people chose to leave their babies on the doorsteps of individual homes, bus stations, train stations, or marketplaces where the babies would be spotted by those who passed by. Whoever found these babies usually reported it to the nearby police station or brought them to the city children's department.

The police would initiate an investigation to identify the person who abandoned the child. Abandonment was a criminal offence with a prison sentence of up to eight years. Because of the heavy penalty, abandonment was done discreetly. The police were almost never successful in finding the parents.⁷

Industrialization and modernization in South Korea seem to be the main causes of child abandonment, but the high rate of international adoption seems also to be linked to the disappearance of the separation practices evoked on *Ach'im madang*. The common feature of all these practices is their temporary and informal character. A second analysis of the separation stories will reveal practices which are characteristic of dysfunctional families in crisis in the Korean context. It leads us to consider international adoption as a new mode of temporary separation.

TO ABANDON IN THE HOPE OF REUNION: TEMPORARY SEPARATIONS

During one broadcast, *Ach'im madang*'s hosts attest that some parents decide to separate from their children in the hope of finding them later on:

July 16, 2003, 9:05: [The adoptee has] on her forearms a "kind of tattoo," according to the interpreter: two symmetric dark dots which don't look natural (쌍긴점; *saenggjin*

chŏm) but handmade (사람 만든 점; *saram mandŭn chŏm*), maybe in order to find her later. The female host confirms: “I heard the story of a father who had marked his child on purpose, and found his child later...”.

The analysis of different cases leads one to conclude that many separations are, at the time, imagined as temporary by the parents. They either leave the child in an orphanage, at relatives' houses, or rich strangers' houses.

Used by participants and displayed on the screen during the show, terms such as “adoption” (입양; *ibyang*) or “sending” (보내짐; *ponaejim*) are ambiguous. They can be used indiscriminately although they have, according to Western definitions, an impact on the nature of the separations. The separation is supposed to be final in the case of adoption and temporary in the case of fosterage or child servitude.

Among the many ways to separate, child servitude in rich houses was the most common before industrialization. Participants evoke this practice on *Ach'im madang*, regarding themselves as well as the siblings “they lost touch with,” because “they did not live at home anymore.” It is obvious that child servitude was normal in poor and large families, as soon as the child was old enough to work.⁸

South Korean sociologist Lee Dong-Won has also noted several cases in a sample of *Ach'im madang* participants he interviewed. He designates the practice as a kind of begging called “*saballongsa*” (사발농사; *sabal*: bowl; *nongsa*: cultivate):

...this expression describes the situation of a poor family where several children are sent to rich relatives [...] In general, boys were sent to relatives temporarily, while girls are sent to strangers, or with travelling merchants, in remote regions, where they were definitively separated from their birth family. When the children were sent too young, they had no memories of their name, age, and family. They would travel and if they ever came home their parents would be gone. Generally, girls would experience this situation. [...] One can infer sexual discrimination [from] these [examples].⁹

Children sent to work were sometimes adopted by rich families, but the outcome of child servitude was as uncertain as the status of the child in those rich families was unclear:

June 4, 2003, 8:45: The participant lived with a neighbor her mother used to call “older sister” because they were close friends. Her little sister was sent to an old woman's house.

June 4, 2003, 8:49: He has no memory of his father. His two older brothers left home to work in rich houses when they were six or seven. He is ignorant of their fate.

July 30, 2003, 8:47: His two older brothers shined shoes and lived apart from the rest of the family. [...] His father worked in a coal mine and seldom came home. Although sick, his mother worked also.

August 6, 2003, 8:57: The father was a vagabond and was never home. The two older sisters were sent to a rich stranger's home to work.

Even though very young, girls can be hired in houses as servants or caretakers. Young boys are temporarily sent to relatives' homes and, if that is not possible, to orphanages.¹⁰

Adoption is another solution to poverty, divorce, or widowhood:

July 30, 2003, 8:42: [The participant] looks for her father. She knows that her mother died early. Her father was a soldier who, once remarried, gave her up for adoption at the age of five to a friend from the same platoon.

July 30, 2003, 9:09: [The participant who] does not remember her name [...] has no memory of her father. Her mother worked in a rich house. She was adopted (양어머니 덕분에 가게됨; *yangŏmōni taekŭro kagetoem*) at seven by in-laws of her maternal grandmother, in Taegu.

August 27, 2003, 8:55: [The participant] looks for her older sister. [...] who, in her memories, was adopted by a very rich family of the Andong region. She herself was adopted into a family who lived in the same neighborhood. That's why she knows where her older sister lived. [...] Her own adoptive family left for Pusan one day and that's the way she lost her sister.

The first example above demonstrates that, in practice,¹¹ the child must come from a legitimate union; it also illustrates that the child's status is bilateral although the society is patrilineal. Moreover, the fact that a widower gives his daughter to a friend shows that adoption between friends can be seen as a gift.

In many cases, defining the limit between adoption and the "sending away" of a child to strangers' houses is difficult. For instance, some examples show that some adoptions were considered to be definite by birth parents but did not last. Some adoptive parents would send back or abandon the child after a trial period, especially if the child was already older:

June 4, 2003, 9:04: First he lived with his parents in the countryside. But they sent him to another family who adopted him. They were in Seoul, he remembers. Since he would always ask his adoptive parents where his birth parents were, his adoptive father said they would go together to see them. He fell asleep in the train and when he woke up,

he was alone in the Seoul train station. Some people found him and took him to Holt Adoption Agency. Then he was sent to France.

July 16, 2003, 8:50: The second drawing shows the house where he was adopted for a short period. He thinks the people were rich because of the tiles on the roof. But suddenly, he was back home, with his birth parents, in a shanty. He does not know exactly what happened in the adoptive family, but they sent them back. When he was returned, his father was very angry at him and punished him severely.

August 27, 2003, 9:12: He was adopted by a woman who was called his “twin mother” by other adults, but he did not like her and fled away. He was not able to find his way home.

These examples of unsuccessful adoptions related on *Ach'im madang* indicate that adoptions of boys are more problematic than adoptions of girls. Much is expected from the adoptive son, as opposed to the adoptive daughter who will leave the adoptive home anyway when she gets married.

In other cases, adoption is generally seen by the birth family as fosterage. The practice of fosterage, which indicates the care of another's child without becoming a legal parent, has been studied throughout the world. Fosterage conflicts with adoption, which is supposed to create a real rupture that is legally recognized.¹² In the case of Korea, like in many other cultures, this strict opposition does not make sense. The birth family would often still visit the child, even after the adoption, and sometimes, arguments would start and the adoptive family would appropriate the child:

June 4, 2003, 9:14: The host calls Song Suk-Ja, fifty-six, who is looking for her younger sister, separated from the rest of the family. [...] The mother died suddenly from a heart attack. The oldest of four children, Song Suk-Ja had to take care of her two younger brothers and her younger sister. The father sent the two boys to families in the southwest region of South Korea and the youngest girl to a family in the neighbourhood of Samch'ŏnp'o, their hometown, in the southeast region of the country. She herself left for Seoul to get a job and got married. After her father's disappearance, she went back to look for her brothers and put one of them in a hospital because he had epilepsy and put the other in an orphanage. She also found her little sister and started visiting her so often that the foster family moved without notice to lose touch with her. That's the way she lost track of her sister.

July 9, 2003, 8:50: The participant does not remember his father. His mother alone, as a travelling merchant, provided for the needs of her two children with difficulty. They lived close to the main gate of Yonsei University (연세정문; *yŏnsechŏngmun*). What made their life most difficult was the nature of her job. That's why the mother put his

older sister in the care of an old woman who lived alone by selling food in the streets. She needed help. One day, the old woman disappeared with the girl and they never heard from them again.

July 30, 2003, 8:40: They are looking for their youngest sister, An Ae-Sun, forty-six. The older brother repeats what the mother has told him: "As it was very difficult (in terms of economy), we sent her to the school director's house (the information is displayed on the television screen). She was adopted there, but we did not hear from them afterwards."

Temporarily sending a child to an orphanage was also a very common practice:

Parents usually brought children they were unable to care for to a nearby orphanage; the orphanage evaluated the situation carefully before accepting the child into their care. Most families needed only temporary care until they could provide for the child again.¹³

Often the decision of a third party, such as a maternal grandmother, an aunt, or a midwife, the sending of a child to an orphanage is not as definitive as the contemporary Western conception might imply. Adults go to see the child, hoping for better days when the family will be reunited again:

August 6, 2003, 8:50: Because of poverty, her mother left home to work in a rich house. She was sent to a relative's home, which was not too far. [...] As she kept asking for her mother, her maternal aunt took her to the rich house where her mother worked. The housewife took her to an orphanage where she attended the kindergarten. During that period of time, only her maternal aunt and the housewife visited her.

August 13, 2003, 8:57: The mother explains: giving birth to their third daughter left her exhausted. As she was not recovering, she gave her newborn to her own mother for a while. Her state was not improving and the maternal grandmother decided to give the baby to someone she knew who took the baby to an orphanage. Before the mother could react and get her baby back, the baby had been adopted abroad.

Until recently, social workers tried to make Korean birth parents understand that the inconsistency of their relationship with their children was damaging for the children's balanced development. This was a strong argument used to send all these children abroad. This misunderstanding comes from a Westernized definition of adoption held by Western and Korean social workers, which is opposed to those held by Korean birth parents. Anthropologists also tend to oppose adoption and fosterage, which demonstrates the difficulty of thinking of certain dynamics of kinship which may not belong to one category or the other.¹⁴

However, the evolution of practices of adoption in Western countries, especially the United States, which enable contact between birth parents and adoptive parents, also have a strong

influence on the practices of adoption in today's South Korea. It happens often that birth mothers choose international adoption because they think that adoptive parents will let them have some rights to their child. Of course, this is not the case if adoptive parents are Koreans: they will remain unknown and will appropriate the child as their own without permitting any contact.¹⁵

Like their American counterparts, South Korean social workers recognize the differences between *abandonment*—to abandon a child without leaving information about his background or identity—and *relinquishment*—to leave a child in the care of an institution. To relinquish signifies “to stop having something, especially when this happens unwillingly,”¹⁶ which means to renounce the charge of a child because of unfavorable circumstances. Thus, it is a legal form of abandonment. In this case, the parent must provide a justification and have an interview with the social workers of the establishment. The single mothers cared for in institutions legally relinquish their baby. They seldom choose to take care of their baby on their own and most often choose between domestic adoption and international adoption.

Life stories of single mothers I met and interviewed frequently attest to their wish to, in the future, find the child they relinquish today. *Aeranwon* is an establishment which hosts, at no charge, up to forty single mothers during their pregnancy and after the child is born. Rooms are shared by three or four women who also use a kitchen, a living room, a library, a gymnasium, a laundry room, a bathroom, a chapel, and a meeting room. They participate in different activities relating to their pregnancy but also attend computer and English classes, Bible studies, and art and music workshops, depending on the qualifications of the volunteers to teach them. The establishment was founded by a Presbyterian missionary, Mrs Vanlierop, in 1960, for prostitutes and runaway girls. The brochures available at the entrance of the building indicate that the foundation was then entirely financed by private donations. After the founder retired in 1983 the South Korean government decided to finance 70 percent of the institution. The rest still comes from private donors.¹⁷

During an interview, *Aeranwon*'s president, Mrs. Han, confirmed the continuous influence of the American social welfare model on South Korea. She recalled that in 1994, social workers from the Holt office in Korea went to the United States and noticed how different the methods of adoption were from those in their own country:

First of all, contrary South Korean practice, American adoptive parents do not choose the child they want to adopt;¹⁸ second, it happens they keep in touch with the birth parents, which is beneficial to all. So, since 1994, open adoption (공개입양; *konggaeibyang*) according to the American practice, is proposed to birth mothers as well as to American and South Korean adoptive parents.¹⁹

Mrs. Han explained that, before 1994, all international adoptions were closed, but a show like *Ach'im madang* helps to remedy this situation in South Korea:

A show like *Ach'im madang* turns old closed adoptions into open ones (아침마당그사람이 보고싶다 같은 방송이 옛입양은 공개 입양으로 태우다; *Ach'im madang kūsarami pogosip'ta kat'ŭn pangsongi yetibyangŭn konggae ibyangŭro t'aeuda*), in the case where birth parents contact their children. It is absolutely positive, because birth mothers can change their minds during their lives.²⁰

Except in rare cases, Korean adoptive parents try to hide their adoptive child's origins. So, in practice, birth mothers at Aeranwon really have the choice between closed domestic adoption, closed international adoption,²¹ and open international adoption. Open adoption does not maintain judicial links between adoptive parents and their child but only an informal contact based on a non-legally binding contract and goodwill between birth parents and adoptive parents.²²

After this interview with Mrs. Han, I was authorized to meet with two young single mothers who volunteered to talk to me. Ms. Kim had lived with her grandparents since her parents had divorced; she had given birth to her first child not very long ago. He had been adopted abroad and the second would be as well. Ms. Cho was a runaway teenager and her parents were unaware of her pregnancy—she was almost due. She cried several times during our conversation.

It was the first time they had met an adoptee and prior to our meeting, it had been an unheard-of experience for them. That I spoke Korean and was older than they was also quite surprising. They told me about their choice regarding the future of their child. Both of them had chosen closed international adoption for these reasons:

- a) South Korean society is too discriminatory (편견하다; *p'yŏn'gyŏnhada*).
- b) I am too young and my parents don't know about my situation.
- c) I desire to see my child again, which will be impossible if I choose domestic adoption.²³
- d) I heard there are villages (입양 동네 같은 곳이 있다면서요; *ibyang tongne kat'ŭn kosi ittamyŏnsŏyo*) inhabited only by adoptive families and their adopted children. They live happily, without problems (문제가 없어요; *munjega ōbsŏyo*).

I asked for more explanations about the last point (d): Which country seems the best for your child? They looked at each other with perplexed expressions and said there was not too much difference. They admitted they hadn't thought about it. The notion of international or foreign was rather vague for them. I believe they referred to the United States and especially Minnesota²⁴ when they evoked the “villages” of adoptees. Even if they expressed their worries about the adoptive parents' personalities, they were quite trustful, and adoption in the United States appeared as ideal.

Argument (c) confirms the wish of many single mothers to see their child again. The child's return seems to be an expected event.²⁵

Another day, an employee at Holt introduced me to Ms. Lee, a thirty-year-old single mother who had just sent her daughter to the United States. She came often to Holt offices to receive advice but also to send gifts to her daughter for her first birthday (첫돌; *ch'ōtdol*), which is a very special day for Koreans, as she had explained in a letter to the adoptive parents I translated for her.²⁶

She agreed to speak with me, and before I could ask a question, she started telling me her story. Her sense of her own culpability was very strong. She cried every now and then but kept her monologue going. Until now, her family was ignorant of the fact that she had had a baby since she had pretended to go on a trip to Europe when she found out she was pregnant. And the hardest thing for her was to hear her mother and sisters talk about abandoned children while watching television.

The reason she had chosen open international adoption²⁷ was her hope that her daughter would come back to her one day. That was her only hope in life and she would not remarry "like other mothers do," unless her husband accepted her daughter as his own. Thus, in her letter to the adoptive parents, she indulged in slight criticism. She showed me a picture of the baby the American family had sent recently: her daughter looked like a very healthy baby. She was surrounded by two older blond boys. The family was Protestant, which made her glad, for she was herself a devout Christian. However, she reproached the fact that her daughter had "become fat" whereas she had been so pretty when she had left. She had written to the parents that her daughter had put on so much weight that she had a hard time recognizing her. She was asking the adoptive parents in a postscript to sing her "if possible" a lullaby based on Psalm (찬송가; *ch'ansong'ka*) 436: "The Good Shepherd" (다정하신 목자 예수; *tajōnghasin mokja yesu*), which her own parents used to sing to her before she went to sleep. Then, she told me she wished they could make her learn Korean so that, when she returns, they can speak together. For her, it was too late to start learning English. In order to keep her daughter in contact with Korean culture, she sent Korean craftwork, such as a little necklace, Korean metallic chopsticks, an ancient fan, and a paper cutter to the parents. She implored them to send her news often.

At the end of our conversation, she summed up her vision of the situation:

Nowadays, many parents send their children abroad, even at a very young age, so that they can study. International adoption is like sending your child abroad to study (해외입양은 유학 같아요; *haeoeibyangŭn yuhak kat'ayo*). That's the way I see the situation...

In spite of this statement which tended to make her situation common and temporary, she was very worried. She came to the Holt offices very often, always with new gifts, which the social

workers disapproved of. Pretty as she was, she may have been seduced by a co-worker or a boss, and she should have just remarried, they thought.

Ms. Lee was watching attentively all television shows on international adoption and criticized the media for only showing those adoptees who succeed. One day she had seen the documentary on the unlucky Swedish adoptee Suzanne Brink and knew adoption was not happy for all.²⁸

In this case, it is obvious that open international adoption is interpreted as a temporary situation by this birthmother who waits for her daughter's return. Besides, this birthmother attributes the qualities of spiritual parents to the adoptive parents, meaning that despite the separation, she remains the "real" mother of the child. This way of thinking is quite common among Korean birth mothers, even in the case of closed adoptions. A television program such as *Ach'im madang* and the broadcast of the reunion picture—mother and child hugging each other with tears—incite today's birth mothers to think of separations as temporary and reunions as possible.

In the context of the national partition, family separation is denounced as the worst evil, a result of the war and the cause of social disorder. But after examination, most family separations seem to have been "practiced" for diverse reasons, from economic problems to divorce. However, the options for separation are limited to abandonment, adoption, fosterage, and child servitude. But the demarcations between practices are very fluid, especially when it comes to domestic adoption. Domestic adoption could turn into fosterage or child servitude, and vice versa, depending on circumstances and adoptive or birth parents' needs.

That is why one can conclude that, in many cases, the separation was voluntary and thought of as temporary. Interviews with single mothers tend to confirm this long-lasting way of thinking: international adoption has become a new modality of temporary separation, seen as a practice which stands among choosing a godparent, the sending away of children to study abroad, and fosterage. Encouraged by the media, single mothers are convinced their child will come back to South Korea and they will be able to find them.

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- 1 Description of my fieldwork and results of my research can be found in my doctoral dissertation to be published in English: Elise Prébin, *Adoption Internationale: Les Revenants de Corée [The Spiritual Returns of International Adoptees to South Korea]*. (Ph.D. diss., Université Paris X Nanterre, 2006).
- 2 Even today, the father is often said to be absent and feared by children. He may take his meals alone; he may want to rest after endless workdays. Or he may come back home drunk after hours of drinking with co-workers. This could explain the creation at the end of the 1990's of a "fathers' club" in Seoul, where fathers who knew only a "father's ghosts" can spend time to gather with their children. See a journalist's account in Tristan de Bourbon-Parme and Nathalie Turret, *La Corée dévoilée, quinze portraits pour comprendre* (L'Harmattan, 2004), 52–65.
- 3 Noriko O. Tsuya and Larry L. Bumpass, *Marriage, Work, and Family Life in Comparative Perspective: Japan, South Korea and the United States* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).
- 4 L.I. Kim, "To Name Our Feelings: Searching out Korean Psychology, Ethos And Emotions," *Korean Quarterly* 3, no.4 (Summer 2000): 10–13.
- 5 Since 2000, 2,300 to 2,400 South Korean children a year have been adopted internationally.
- 6 See the collection of videos on social welfare and issues related to international adoption recorded by employees of Holt's Children Services since 1983. The collection is available at Holt's Children Services office in Seoul: Video no. 68, MBC live program (9 May 1992): "Confessions of a Single Mother"; Video no. 72, KBS (1993): "Where is the respect for human being in our society? Abandoned Children"; Video no. 102, MBC (31 May 1994): "The Month of Family"; Video no. 106, (19 November 1994) "Abandoned Angels", Video no. 148 SBS (21 April 1997): "I Want to Know: Teenagers' Sexual Education"; Video no. 180 (26 July 1999): KBS "News Today: Emergencies: Abandoned Children."
- 7 David, 227.
- 8 About the different practices of child circulation in different cultures, see Suzanne Lallemand, *La circulation des enfants en société traditionnelle, Prêt, don, échange* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993). From 19th- and 20th-century sources, the author distinguishes two practices of adoption in Confucian Korea: one which aims at maintaining the patriline and one which functions as a form of survival in poor families. The child is, in the latter case, a labor resource who can be lent for an undetermined length of time to another household to lighten the burden of feeding a large family. The motivation is then only economic. This practice is illustrated in the cases on *Ach'im madang*. I analyze these different examples given by 'types' of separations as well as the causes for the displacement of children. But the nature of the sources allows only for the analysis of the child donors and of their motivations. Consequently, I do not establish correlations between separations and strategies regarding alliances, which anthropologists have noticed elsewhere.
- 9 Dong-Won Lee, *대중 매체와 가족 (Daejung Maech'ewa Kajok)*, (Seoul: Yang Seo Weon, 2000), 335-337; freely translated.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 336

- 11 According to the law until 1991, a father could bring back home the child of a woman who was not his legitimate spouse. One can see that, in practice, the case is rather rare. Cf. S.-S. Moon, “Begetting the nation: The Androcentric Discourse of National History and Tradition in South Korea,” in *Dangerous Women, Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine H. , 1998), 53.
- 12 S. Lallemand, 48; See also Claudia Fonseca, “Patterns of Shared Parenthood among the Brazilian Poor”, in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. T.A. Volkman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 143-161. Fonseca illustrates the flexibility of the fosterage system among women. She states possible conflicts between several “mothers,” freedom of residence for children, confusion of generations—the grandmother sometimes becomes the mother of her grandchildren—and the conception of the lending of children as gifts rather than as a way of displacing burdens. Most of these aspects were present in the Korean pre industrial context.
- 13 David (Eugene, Oregon, Holt International, 2001) 227.
- 14 M. Etienne, « Maternité sociale, rapport d’adoption et pouvoir des femmes chez les Baoulé » (Ivory Coast). *L’Homme* 19, 3–4 (1979) 66-107, quoted in Lallemand, 49; Fonseca, 143–161.
- 15 Open adoption is still rare in Western countries. Cf. Agnès Fine, « Pluriparentalités et système de filiation dans les sociétés occidentales » in *La pluriparentalité*, ed. D. Le Gall and Y. Bettahar (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), 85–86.
- 16 *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- 17 “Ae-Ran,” Mrs Vanlierop’s Korean name, means “planting love.” See Ae-Ran-Won, *Annual Report* (Seoul: 2004).
- 18 See also Video no. 128 (2 September 1996), KBS “Ach’im madang (Friday): Our Children.”
- 19 Personal interview, 3 June 2004.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 See Valérie Doumeng, « Etude comparative de l’adoption française et de l’adoption ouverte aux Etats-Unis, » in *Parents de sang Parents adoptifs, Approches juridiques et anthropologiques de l’adoption; France, Europe, USA*, ed. Agnès Fine and Claire Neirinck, (Paris: Canada Maison des Sciences de l’Homme Droit et société, 2000), 153–154.
- 22 Fine, « Pluriparentalités et système, » 85–86.
- 23 Video no. 74 MBC (12 July 1993): “Abandoned Children. Let’s Stop International Adoption in 1996; Domestic Adoption Today.”
- 24 “With a population of 5 million Minnesota is without doubt the region in the world which has the highest density of adopted Koreans—roughly 10,000. The question of why ethnic Scandinavians apparently dominate the field of international adoption both in Europe and in the United States is perhaps worthy of a study itself.” See Tobias Hübinette “*Comforting an Orphaned Nation*” (Ph.D. diss., Stockholm University, 2005), 78, note 45; see also www.koreanquarterly.org.

- 25 This conception of adoption as a provisional separation, as opposed to its legal definition, has been observed elsewhere. Some anthropologists wonder if, in these societies, the state should institutionalize fosterage by helping foster parents financially and to respect a kinship system that is culturally accepted instead of imposing external kinship values and practices. See Fonseca, "Patterns of Shared Parenthood," 155–157.
- 26 Doumeng, « Etude comparative de l'adoption, » 147–167.
- 27 In South Korea, closed adoptions constitute the majority of adoptions. Open adoptions are extremely rare and even if they have partisans who go on television and open the debate, most Korean adoptive parents choose the older system. They try to artificially recreate the ideal filiation by choosing the youngest children, with the best backgrounds, and with the same family name. When they receive the baby, they move residences so that neighbors won't know about the adoption. Sometimes, even relatives are ignorant of the fact that an adoption took place.
- 28 Personal interview, 11 June 2004.

BROKEN LINES: TRANSRACIAL-TRANSNATIONAL ASIAN ADOPTION AND THE INSUFFICIENCY OF WITNESSING THE TRAUMA

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The popularity of American and Canadian adoption of Asian-born children began shortly after the conclusion of the Korean War and has been fuelled by the socio-economic circumstances of “sending nations” and the increasing trend for “receiving nations” to embrace non-traditional family constructions. According to statistics published by the U.S. Department of State, nearly 54,000 Chinese and over 19,000 Korean children have been adopted since 1995¹, not to mention the numerous international adoptions occurring in the decades prior to this census and the children chosen from other, less popular adoption nations, like Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines. Furthermore, post-Korean war, 110,000 children immigrated as orphans to the United States and Canada². As a result of Asian transnational-transracial adoption—stemming from countless political (wars), social (poverty) and natural (hurricanes, tsunami) disasters, and additionally, governmental restrictions placed upon domestic rights—the representation of the mother-daughter relationship so notorious to Asian North American literature takes on a whole new signification. When Helen Zia suggests that “[a]s more Korean [and I would argue, Asian in general] adoptees have grown into adulthood in recent years, the arts have offered an outlet for them to explore their identities,”³ she implicitly contends that this unique form of literature is both therapeutic and contributive to subject-formation—a process that many sociologists would argue is necessary as means of overcoming the initial trauma of the adoptee experience. Adoption, after all, *is* trauma, and furthermore, it is an *on-going* trauma that is unique in its longevity, muteness and naturalization. More specifically, Asian transnational-transracial adoption is the source of cultural trauma as the adoptee’s identity is constructed as simultaneously liminal (neither entirely Eastern nor Western) and hybrid (with qualities that are both Eastern *and* Western). Racial distinction from the adoptive mother causes unique trauma within the adoptee and melancholic grief for an unknown past. The solution offered by Zia, and many other adoption sociologists is to narrate, or witness (to employ Shoshanna Felman and Cathy Caruth’s nomenclature) the trauma in a mutually fictional and non-fictional manner.

This essay will explore some of these literary attempts to *write* Korean adoption trauma, excerpts from the non-fiction anthology *Seeds from a Silent Tree* and letters from *I Wish for you a Beautiful Life*, a compilation of Korean birth-mother’s apologies to their adopted children. By examining the working-through of Asian adoption trauma through literature, I will focus on two sides of the adoption trichotomy: the experiences of the guilt-ridden biological mother and the ‘dislocated’ adoptee. Yet what plagues my acceptance of ‘traumatic witnessing’ as the

cure for the trauma of Asian adoption⁴ is the understanding that it is a trauma that is continuous, is event-less, and is unnarratable in most cases—making any literary depiction only an insufficient attempt to identify with something that is ultimately never to be known. The unattainable fantasy of overcoming the trauma of adoption thus mimics the idealistic fantasy of reuniting with the birthmother and being unconditionally loved by both sets of parents. This essay attempts to argue that witnessing, though often a successful process of healing in most traumatic experiences, is an insufficient alleviation of the Asian adoption trauma, as it endeavours to narrate the *truly* impossible (due to hidden information, secret identities, and the ‘clean break’ from the biological family). Thus, the question must be posed: is Asian adoption an impossible trauma to overcome?

Often linked by critics to Quentin Tarantino’s 2003 ‘ruthless mother’ film, *Kill Bill*, Chan-wook Park’s final instalment to his Revenge Trilogy, *A Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*⁵(2005) also features a wronged mother who seeks violent retribution on a murderous man. In *Kill Bill* and *Lady Vengeance*, both mothers lose their daughters at the hands of male villains—men who must be killed for their thievery of motherhood. Likewise, both mothers’ targets think that they have gotten away with murder for years before the women enact their revenge. However, there is a striking difference between Tarantino’s bloodstained Bride (a former assassin) and Park’s beautiful and innocent Geum-Ja: Geum-Ja’s daughter, Jenny, survives. Part of the villainous Mr. Baek’s cruelty to Guem-Ja is the kidnapping of her infant child and the placement of Jenny in an adoption agency. Thus, Guem-Ja’s quest is twofold: to find Jenny and explain her situation to her and to destroy the man who instigated the adoption in the first place. *Lady Vengeance* surprisingly participates in the ever-growing subgenre of Korean adoption fiction—a subgenre that is emerging out of the typical memoir and (auto)-biographic/documentary texts that have appeared in the past few decades⁶. This article will address the representation of *Lady Vengeance* as a transracial/national Asian adoption narrative, with specific interest in its metaphoric linking of adoption with death. I will access this film through various discourses, including Asian American and trauma theories, to suggest that *Lady Vengeance* makes a poignant commentary that deglamourises Korean adoption in contrast to its recent superficial novelty⁷.

TRAUMA AND ASIAN ADOPTION

For Nancy Newton Verrier and Betty Jean Lifton, two prominent adoption theorists, the adoption plot is inextricably linked to trauma theory both psychologically and narratively. Relying on the work of Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman, the adoptee is wounded, for Lifton “psychically,” and for Verrier “primally”⁸. Both theorists relate the adoptee experience with post traumatic stress disorder, claiming that the separation from the biological mother results in a wound that manifests itself through numbing, anxiety, depression, distrustfulness, and similar intrusions and constrictions as those who survive war or childhood sexual abuse⁹. Further implicating the trauma of adoption, Sara Dorow incorporates language of violence, noting that “it is separation and rupture that make adoption possible,”¹⁰ intentionally employing hostile and aggressive diction to emphasize the physical and emotional severance. Adopt-

tion, to Dorow and many other theorists, is a traumatic experience that is best articulated in Tanya Bishoff and Jo Rankin's anthology, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, which compiles various reactions toward adoption by Korean adoptees. Bishoff's often-cited poem, "Unnamed Blood," describes the trauma of separation in very metaphorically graphic ways:

I was squeezed through the opening
of a powerful steel bird
that carried me far away,
and with each mile,
I felt the needle
tear the thread.¹¹

Bishoff's imagined depiction of her own birthing history as one that occurs not biologically, but technologically, geographically (and most importantly), traumatically, draws attention to the violence of the adoption process. Notoriously referred to as the "clean break" of immigration—a lost and found narrative—the Asian adoptee experience is a "dislocation the child is aware she did not volunteer for"¹². To speak generally of adoption, however, it is an anxiety that stems from the initial trauma of separation and rejection, and the language used in articulating these experiences clearly illustrate the 'wound' that remains unhealed in most.

This wound, I would argue, occurs significantly from the destabilized position of the adoptee as she¹³ understands that she has been betrayed, but cannot be alleviated with the reason behind that betrayal. Leah Sieck's poem "Homeless" further illustrates the trauma of the adoptee's initial betrayal. Commencing her poem,

Mother,
Why did you leave me?
Where is my birth place?
How can I come home?¹⁴

Sieck reiterates the question of rejection present in most adoption literature. "Why did you leave me?" is posed throughout the poem in repetition, illustrating the persistence of the pain of abandonment within the adoptee. Interestingly, 'abandonment,' is a term that Kay Johnson has discovered to be offensive for adoptive parents. Johnson notes that American adoptive parents are focused on the superficial quality of the term that villainizes the biological parents as negligent, uncaring and rejecting of their children. She argues that

[m]ost [American adoptive parents] want to put as positive a spin as possible on the story of abandonment. Indeed, many refuse to use the word 'abandonment' and are surprised, if not offended when I do. [...] To most, abandoning a birth child is unthinkable. [It is not] easy to construe abandonment as a brave act.¹⁵

However, Johnson's sociological evaluation aside, the adoptee maintains a notion of betrayal in the form of abandonment from her biological parents, but one that is not accusatory. Instead, the adoptee suffers with the idea that she has been rejected and is therefore traumatized

by that unmistakable event. Johnson acknowledges that adoptive parents' argument that the linguistics of the situation can unfairly villainize the birth mother and therefore lead to additional the psychological torment of the adoptee.

Dorow, however, prioritizes the traumatic effect of adoption, declaring that it *is* "abandonment," and contending that it is "powerful because it cuts children off from what we take to be an essential part of themselves, yet never does so completely"¹⁶. What is most significant about Dorow's claim is the unending, continuous nature of the abandonment trauma that haunts the adoptee without cease. By suggesting that adoptees are never entirely 'cut off' from their previous identities, Dorow points to the understanding that the past is an unavoidable part of the present and future, and therefore, the circumstances of the initial betrayal will linger with the adoptee throughout her life. For this reason, adoption is a unique form of trauma that is differentiated from any 'event' or tragedy—rather, the trauma becomes an element of the adoptee's subjectivity.

In other words, adoption trauma is an extreme version of what Cathy Caruth describes as a history of trauma. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth claims that "[f]or history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence"¹⁷. Caruth's analysis suggests that traumatic history is one that is incomprehensible to the subject's psyche at the time of its occurrence, therefore relying on concepts of witnessing and re-experiencing the initial trauma. Adoption, therefore, with its extended experience of abandonment, is a traumatic history (without a proper referential) that is ongoing and incomprehensible to the experiencer.

Beyond the ongoing nature of the event of trauma is the additional internal conflict that occurs specifically for the Asian adoptee—a trauma that is recognized by neither adoption theory nor the discourse of racial or ethnic analyses. What is implicit in inter-race adoption is the melancholic loss of the family. The Asian adoptee is additionally severed from her culture, ethnicity and any other referential of racial identification. In an essay entitled, "Going 'Home': Adoption, Loss of Bearings, and the Mythology of Roots," Barbara Yngevesson argues that,

in the world of intercountry adoption, two stories predominate: a story of abandonment and a story about roots [...] In International adoptions, the child will also be separated from its state of origin...so that it can be connected to a new family, a new name, a new nation.¹⁸

Although she employs a somewhat 'positive' attitude toward the adoptee's split identity (as this disjuncture *enables* the success of the adoptee's assimilation into the new family), Yngevesson's article alludes to the additional anxieties of transnational adoptees. The emphasized uncertainty of the adoptee's country of identity in Yngevesson's title alone indicates the destabilization of her identity. Furthermore, Yngevesson's contention that the transnational adoptee is "separated" from her past suggests a fragmentation of identity that is twofold: she is severed from her familial ancestry *and* her cultural identification.

The loss of culture is, what I would argue, the unidentifiable object of loss that categorizes the adoptee as melancholic. When Sigmund Freud differentiates the concept of mourning from melancholia, he contends that both states are triggered by a “reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, and ideal, and so on”¹⁹. He goes on to note that the act of mourning progresses by means of a successful experience of grief, relinquishing emotional ties to the lost concept²⁰. Melancholics, conversely, are unable to rid themselves of their loss, instead absorbing the loss into themselves. Differentiated from a mourner who can identify the source of their grief, the adoptee’s melancholic loss is abstract, as she can never fully comprehend or articulate the ‘lack’ of her cultural identity. When Melissa Lin Hanson states, “My heritage is a black hole,”²¹ she describes the unreachable and unidentifiable object that she longs for, generalizing her loss with the umbrella term “heritage.” Hanson’s loss, as it represents all Asian adoptee loss, is melancholic by the mere fact that she seeks an unidentifiable referential at which to direct her mourning, but also because her culture of origin is so enigmatic and disjointed from her American ethnicity she can not specifically articulate any one object of lack. In other words, this essay is attempting to illustrate that the numerous narcissistic objects that should contribute to the adoptee’s ego that are lost (family, nationality, culture, history, et cetera) result in an inability to accurately recognize the specific amalgamation of objects of loss—thereby disabling proper mourning and resulting in perpetual melancholia. The multiplicity of the Asian adoptee’s losses—ethnicity, subjectivity, history, culture, and family—produce so disarrayed a source of anxiety that the adoptee suffers melancholic despair stemming from that multiplicity.

However, Hanson’s grief is articulated beyond her cultural fragmentation, when she draws attention the racial distancing occurring between her and her mother. In a subsection of her poem, “Behind my Eyes” entitled “Family,” Hanson notes:

My family is not normal, not natural, not true.
I don’t have a real mom and dad
if I am not
their race.²²

Evidenced by Hanson’s poem is that the abandonment trauma of the adoptee extends beyond the birth mother and relocates itself also within the adoptive family—as the adoptee understands nurture to be implicitly linked to nature. Thus, the racial ‘otherness’ of her physical appearance limits her identity even within her new subjectivity. Contributing to the trauma of Asian adoption is the stark difference between the child and her adoptive mother, disallowing a total nurturing relationship to occur. Reminiscent of the emotional disjuncture motif popularized in the mother-daughter narrative of Asian North American literature, there is a tension that often appears between the adoptee and the adoptive mother. This tension, I would argue, is constructed from the trauma of the adoption experience and is perpetuated by racial distancing, Orientalism and melancholia.

In a poem entitled, “In America” Leah Sieck’s narrator expresses a desire to look into her *own* eyes in something other than a mirror—synecdochically imagining Asian eyes as repres-

entative of an entire Asian identity, and therefore, racial authorization. It becomes evident that transnational Asian adoptee literature concerns itself with the most obvious distance that can occur between the mother and child—physical appearance. The narrator of this poem’s anxious tone illustrates the isolation that occurs when a child’s appearance differs so distinctly from her mother’s, thus illustrating the torment of racial trauma as it occurs between the Asian adoptee and her adoptive family. Additionally, the adoptive mother can never entirely respond to her Asian child’s anxieties of physical appearance. When Young Hee describes her appearance as “the rude and awful truth...slanted-hooded eyes, non-existent eye-lashes, “yellow” skin, short legs, and long torso,”²³ she later acknowledges the inability for the white women she “obsesses over”²⁴ to respond. Extreme whiteness signifying a generalization of her inability to articulate the pain of her Asianess to her family, and most specifically, her mother, Young’s text can be read as a literalisation of the self-hatred and repulsion of the traumatized adoptee.

By appropriating the theory of psychoanalytic loss described in Anne Anlin Cheng’s *The Melancholy of Race* as a means of evaluating adoptee literature, I wish to now complicate the notion of mourning, as the adoptee is, what I call, the ‘double melancholic’ subject: unaware of the specific object she lacks as I have articulated above, but also “grieving” as a “so-called minority subject”—to employ Cheng’s notorious terminology²⁵. What is important to my analysis is the acknowledgment of the adoptee’s increased grievance resulting from physical difference and geographic distance. This “racial isolation” is what Josephine Lee would identify as the primary source of alienation between the adoptive parents and the child²⁶, and I would concur, contending that the adopted child can neither fully approach her mother with these concerns nor believe any explanations and assurances—and furthermore, that the adopting mother can never fully comprehend the complexities of her daughter’s self-consciousness. Similar to the cultural unease between the mother and daughter in Asian American literature, the adoptee’s alienation is augmented by the simultaneous anxieties of guilt and fear of betrayal.

Thus, insecurity and confused subjectivities are often conflicts with which the Asian adoptee character struggles. The experience of the Asian adoptee in North America literalises what David Palumbo-Liu refers to as the “Asian American’s social subjectivity [insofar as it] vacillates between whiteness and colour”²⁷. Employing Palumbo-Liu’s theory of existing “in transit,” or the minority’s experience of being “both a “minority” identity and a “majority” identity,”²⁸ I will explore the effects of hybridity and liminality as they destabilize the Asian adoptee. For, I would argue that the Asian adoptee is alienated both as a marginalized racial other from North American visual society, *and* from her ethnic mother-culture. Consider the anxiety experienced by Artemis in Larissa Lai’s *When Fox is a Thousand* (a Chinese Canadian example of this adoption marginalization) as forthright Diane refers to her Caucasian parents as “Asian-philes” asking Artemis if they collect “artefacts” and finally suggesting that Artemis is “part of the collection”²⁹. Western Orientalism is, for Artemis, what she both relates to and is fragmented by. She is a hybrid of cultures, but is liminally isolated as well. The anxiety of ‘the gaze’ affects Artemis who is analyzed as a spectacle by both Asians and non-Asians, to non-adoptees and curious objectifiers. Aside from the possibility that transracial adoption occurs as a result of what Lee refers to as “an act of charity”³⁰, I would argue

that Edward Said's notion of Orientalism also terrorizes the Asian adoptee insofar as she is impeded from further developing her subjectivity, lest she become aware of the 'novelty' of her arrival. Artemis, for instance, is objectified by her externally imposed identity that is constructed predominantly around her adoption-based intrigue. Furthermore, the adoptive mother's attempts to acknowledge the child's difference ("My mother wants to make sure I am aware of my history"³¹ while simultaneously reinforcing that the child is the "same" as the rest of the family and society, further embeds the binary conflict of fragmented identity within the Asian adoptee. Artemis describes how her mother makes her "cook Chinese,"³² performing what Eleana Kim calls an "ethnographic tableau"³³—her "troped-out body" mimicking her mother's attempt at alleviating the trauma of her cultural and racial severance. Of course, this superficial performance is insufficient as a cure to *any* level of racial trauma. Additionally, unlike the second-generation Asian American daughter's narrative *bildungsroman* that eventually evokes cultural respect for the maternal figure, the adoptee's fantasy of being known by her biological mother and mother culture can never be fulfilled. Performing Asianness is the superficial attempt to appease the trauma of maternal and cultural abandonment.

I would like to shift now away from the Lai's fictional novel, which, although is helpful by means of its articulation of Asian adoptee trauma, is limited in its evaluation of a cure for Artemis' experience. Instead, returning to Cathy Caruth's notion of "witnessing" or exploring trauma through narrative, I wish to suggest that this solution to trauma recuperation is insufficient to the Asian adoptee. Sara Dorow poses the question in *Transnational Adoption* of "[h]ow is one supposed to know how to feel about a child's abandonment. Let alone explain it to a child so that she, too, can make sense of it?"³⁴. Dorow's inquiry suggests a particular responsibility (of adoptive parents, society and scholars) to attempt to ease the trauma of the Asian adoptee's grief. In answer to her own question, she argues that storytelling is the solution, claiming, "narrative formation is social, evolving, and historical, striving to provide coherence to identity through a retelling of the past in order to make sense of the present and future"³⁵—that, "because [the trauma of adoption] cannot be remembered, it must be narrated"³⁶. Three main narratives emerge as the material attempts to witness adoption trauma: the birth mother's guilt (which I will address in the following section), the adoptive mother's fear of betrayal and the adoptee's effort to articulate her many anxieties (for instance, those which I have outlined above).

In a manner reminiscent of 'perpetrator's guilt', wherein the executor of trauma experiences trauma from their moral shame and self-loathing, the birth mother in the Asian adoption triangle experiences profound shame for abandoning her child. In the introduction to *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, Toby Volkman describes the guilty consciences of Asian birth mothers.

Typically, in the adoption triad of child, adoptive parent, and birth parent, it is the latter who is absent, the voice that is not heard. This is particularly the case in transnational adoption, where in addition to personal pain and loss, birth parents may face recriminations for unwed pregnancies that are considered deeply shameful or for acts of abandonment that are illegal or frowned on.³⁷

Clear from Volkman's analysis is the idea that extreme shame and guilt traumatize the birth mothers of transnational adopted children, both on an emotional and socio-political level. Sara Dorow compiles an anthology of letters from Korean birth mothers to their adopted children in *I Wish for you a Beautiful Life*. In the introduction by Han Sang-soon, the director of Ae Ran Won, a hospital/hostel for women giving up their children for adoption, she notes that the "mothers often appear to be apathetic, almost numb, and they remain aloof from their problems, even denying them"³⁸. Han continues, further employing the language often associated with trauma victims, saying,

I believe that such behaviour is defensive, and is the result of the scars and pain of the negative experiences in their lives, their unexpected pregnancies, and the shock of giving birth without any preparation. These feelings eventually lead them to think that they are helpless and alone.³⁹

Han's comments suggest the traumatized state of the Korean birth mothers who are shamed by their culture and guilt-ridden by their decisions to relinquish their babies to other mothers. The remainder of the text is comprised of various statements, further emphasizing the trauma of the birth mothers that resembles the self-loathing experienced by both trauma survivors and perpetrators. Reiterations of love, guilt, sorrow and apologies fill the text in each epistle.

"The first thing I want to tell you is that I am sorry and that I love you"⁴⁰;

"I am sorry!"⁴¹;

"My darling, as your birth mother I am ashamed and sorry that I could not show you the warm affection I had for you"⁴²;

"I have no explanation at all"⁴³;

"I hope your hate and reproach will be lighter after reading this letter"⁴⁴.

As a conduit through which the birth mother's trauma can be expressed, the letters of *I Wish for you a Beautiful Life*, therapeutically enable a level of witnessing that is impossible for the adoptee. While the birth mother consciously experiences the trauma of her separation from her child, with a memory that permits proper witnessing, the adoptee is denied any tangible connection to the initial event of her loss.

Obviously problematic in Dorow's simplistic solution that narrative is the key to understanding the trauma of Asian adoption is that the adoptee cannot witness a trauma that she both lacks cognitive memory of and is socially restricted from revealing (as most transnational adoption records are inaccessible). Thus, when Caruth contends that witnessing and re-witnessing trauma is the key toward the process of healing, the adoptee is excluded from this possibility. Highlighting the insufficiency of her own argument, Dorow refers to the quick severance of the adoptee from her biological family, country and history as a "clean break"—arguing that the impossibility of a complete reunion with her past results in an unquestionable disjuncture between her biological and adoptive lives. "Such 'clean break' adoptions," ex-

plains Dorow, “leave melancholic holes... the parents both fear and long to fill; the questions of why a child was abandoned, by whom, and under what circumstances remain mostly unanswered”⁴⁵. The Asian adoptee, though revealed throughout this paper to be traumatized, cannot overcome her anxiety through the methods of witnessing and re-living often prescribed to other victims of trauma. Margaret Homans, in her article, “Adoption Narratives, Trauma, and Origins” further emphasizes the similarity between the genres of Trauma literature and Adoption witnessing, claiming that “like...trauma narratives, adoption narratives are often obsessively oriented towards an irretrievable past, and like...trauma, adoption compels the creation of plausible if not verifiable narratives”⁴⁶. Homans draws attention to the impossibility of accurately witnessing the adoption trauma, insofar that false narratives must be (at times) constructed as a form of appeasement. Memory, as Marita Sturken argues, “provides the core of identity,”⁴⁷ thereby leaving the Asian adoptee identity-less, history-less and cure-less of their initial trauma of abandonment.

When Melissa Lin Hanson concludes her poem she draws attention to the insufficiency of narration as an attempt to witness the un-witnessable in Asian adoption. She articulates,

I can identify what happened to me.
I now have a voice and I can speak my mind.
I can speak and I can write.
But something is missing.
My past is lost
and questions pervade.⁴⁸

Hanson’s conclusion illustrates that she can comprehend the event of her trauma, but she can never fully witness it. She can write *about* the experience, but she can never find a cure for her trauma *through* writing. In her poem, Hanson reveals the insufficiency of typical traumatic healing processes in relation to Asian adoption—that can never be witnessed, as the trauma is continual, secretive and multifarious. As this essay has illustrated the uniqueness of Asian adoption within the frameworks of Asian North American literature and trauma narratives, so too does it become apparent that it requires a new lens of comprehension. For, as Asian adoption narratives must be articulated in manners divergent from the standard Asian North American text, there must likewise be an understanding that witnessing will never be ‘enough’ in the process of overcoming the continuous, unending, and unspeakable trauma of the adoptee’s past.

LADY VENGEANCE: LITERALISING THE TRAUMA

For Park’s film, the traumatic consequences of adoption are distributed amongst several characters, but, like the authors of the epistles in *I Wish for You a Beautiful Life*, the birthmother, Geum-Ja,’s trauma is brought to the forefront. The film opens with Guem-Ja’s release from prison and her obvious transformation from the pure and innocent persona that she performed while incarcerated. She is confronted by the first ally she meets, who accuses her of being cold-hearted and brazen—indicated visually for the audience Guem-Ja’s recent predilection

for bright red eye shadow. Through media flashbacks and the anecdotes of Detective Choi (Il-woo Nam) and Guem-Ja herself, it is revealed to the audience the actual occurrences from thirteen years earlier. Guem-Ja, a single, teenaged mother, was accused of abducting and suffocating a six-year-old boy, Won-mo. Everyone was shocked by the naïve and frail appearance of Guem-Ja, the case was highly sensationalized and she became a celebrity villain. In prison, we learn that Guem-Ja was building allies with her other female inmates so that she could seek vengeance on the man who was responsible for Won-mo's murder and her own false imprisonment. An Australian family, in the meantime, adopted Jenny, Guem-Ja's biological daughter, who was growing embittered partially because she could not speak Korean, partially because she did not understand *why* she was left at an adoption agency. Guem-Ja goes to great lengths to find Jenny, scaling the wall and breaking into the agency and announcing her connection to her biological daughter at the adoptive parents' house in Australia.

It becomes increasingly apparent that transracial adoption, especially from Korea, is tied to the concept of child violence, and more specifically, murder and abduction. Jenny is kidnapped just as Baek's other victims are abducted, metaphorically linking adoption with kidnapping. Furthermore, Baek, ensuring that Guem-Ja assumes the guilt for Won-mo's murder, takes Jenny as a preventative measure. Later, Guem-Ja rallies the parents and guardians of Baek's victims, and together, they destroy the man who stole parenthood from them, from the families, but killing their children, from Guem-Ja, for placing her child in an adoption agency. This hyperbolized connection that Park constructs between adoption and kidnapping reiterates the trauma, secrecy, and violence of adoption

Jenny's traumatic reaction to her adoption is represented first when she threatens to kill herself if she is prevented from returning to Korea with Guem-Ja, and second through a letter that she sends to her biological mother.⁴⁹ In this letter, "Jenny" vows revenge on her biological mother for abandoning her. This letter is ironically read by Guem-Ja as she closes in on her own target for revenge, Mr. Baek. The idea of revenging the trauma created by adoption is likened to the murders enacted by Mr. Baek as both he and Guem-Ja are aligned as targets. Furthermore, each time that Guem-Ja and Jenny stare silently at one another, unable to communicate, it becomes painfully obvious that Korea has been stolen from Jenny with as much violence that Jenny was stolen from Korea.

So what then is the more general statement that is being made about adoption trauma in this film? *Lady Vengeance* literalises what the earlier section of this essay has attempted to present. In other words, the violence and trauma evoked, and unwitnessed by Korean adoptees in their contributions to literary and poetic anthologies, is presented in *Lady Vengeance's* obvious linking of adoption to trauma. The melodrama of the film aside, *Lady Vengeance* is successful in its visual representation of the private experiences of adoption, and more specifically, the aftermath of adoption trauma for both the biological parent *and* the adoptee.

CONCLUSION

Although some thinkers assume that ‘trauma’ is categorically a temporal event, and that the aftermath of trauma is simply that, I tend to interpret the idea of trauma as being an ongoing experience that, for Caruth and Feldman, requires consistent “telling” and “witnessing” with the hopes of successfully overcoming the pain. Asian adoptees experience this very kind of ongoing trauma—emotional for the most part, but also traumatic to their subjectivities, as they are reminded of their traumatic pasts by their traumatic presents through daily reminders of their ethnic lack and racial complexity. What this article has pointed to is the impossibility of fully witnessing the trauma of transracial/national Asian adoption—an idea that is exemplified in Park’s *Lady Vengeance*. For a variety of reasons, the Asian adoptee’s trauma is silenced and the origins of their trauma (the “abandonment”) is originless. Thus, these narratives are not the self-reflexive and therapeutic forms of witnessing that Caruth and Feldman associate with the ability to heal from trauma. Sadly, for many Asian adoptees, their experiences are un-witnessable—and their traumas are unspoken.

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- 1 “Immigrant Visas Issued to Orphans Coming to US.” *U.S. Department of State*.
- 2 Josephine Lee, “Asian America Is in the Heartland: Performing Korean Adoptee Experience,” 102.
- 3 Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 265.
- 4 Henceforth, when I discuss ‘Asian adoption,’ I am implicitly referring to transracial and transnational Asian adoption.
- 5 The film has also been marketed as *Chinjeolhan Geumjassi* in Korea, *Shed Tears for Lady Vengeance* in the Philippines and *Kind-Hearted Ms. Geum-Ja* or *Lady Vengeance* in the United States.
- 6 Anthologies such as Tanya Bishoff and Jo Rankin’s collection, *Seeds from a Silent Tree*, memoirs like Jane Jeong Trenka’s *The Language of Blood* and sociological texts like Sara Dorow’s *Transnational Adoption* prioritize the non-fictional representations of Asian adoption. Recently, fiction authors like Larissa Lai (*When Fox is a Thousand*), Gish Jen (*The Love Wife*), Chang Rae Lee (*A Gesture Life*) and Don Lee (*Country of Origin*) have shown an interest in employing the adoption motif in their novels.
- 7 In a conversation about the film with Sara Dorow, she discussed the significance of the global and transnational commentary that the film evokes—which is a very provocative idea—but one that exceed the circumstances of this particular essay.
- 8 Margaret Homans, “Adoption Narratives, Trauma and Origins,” *Narrative* 14.1 (2006): 8.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Sara Dorow, *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender and Kinship* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 167.
- 11 Tanya Bishoff, “Unnamed Blood,” in *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees*, ed. Tanya Bishoff and Jo Rankin (San Diego: Pandal Press, 1997), 37.
- 12 Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 167.
- 13 From this point on I will continue to use the feminine pronoun when referring to Asian adoptees, both for clarity’s sake and to recognize that the majority of Asian adoptees are infant girls.
- 14 Leah Sieck, “Homeless,” in *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees*, ed. Tanya Bishoff and Jo Rankin, (San Diego: Pandal Press, 1997), 95.
- 15 Kay Johnson, “Chaobao: The Plight of Chinese Adoptive Parents in the Era of the One-Child Policy,” in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 118.
- 16 Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 172.
- 17 Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1995), 8.

- 18 Barbara Yngvesson, "Going 'Home': Adoption, Loss of Bearings, and the Mythology of Roots," in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 25.
- 19 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 243. This is not complete, waiting for bibliography
- 20 Tammy Clewell, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss," *Journal of the American Psychological Association* 52.1 (Spring 2004), 44.
- 21 Melissa Lin Hanson, "Behind my Eyes," in *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees*, ed. Tanya Bishoff and Jo Rankin (San Diego: Pandal Press, 1997), 60.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 23 Hee Young 86.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Ann Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.
- 26 Josephine Lee, "Asian America Is in the Heartland," 113.
- 27 David Palumbio-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 5.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Larissa Lai, *When Fox is a Thousand* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004), 5.
- 30 Josephine Lee, 110.
- 31 Lai, *When Fox is a Thousand*, 50.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 115.
- 33 Kim, Eleana, "Do You Know How To Use Chopsticks? Transnational Korean Adoptees as a Spectacle of National Alterity," paper presented at the conference Bodies, Communities, Regions, Association of Asian American Studies, Atlanta, USA, March 22, 2006.
- 34 Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 169.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 170.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 172.
- 37 Toby Alice Volkman, "Introduction." In *Cultures of Transnational Adoption* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 7.
- 38 Sara Dorow, *I Wish for You a Beautiful Life: Letters from the Korean Birth Mothers of Ae Ran Won to Their Children* (St. Paul: Yeong and Yeong Book Company, 1999), 1.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 1-2.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 87.
- 41 *Ibid.*

- 42 Ibid., 106.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid., 60.
- 45 Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 166.
- 46 Homans, "Adoption Narratives, Trauma and Origins," 7.
- 47 Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), i.
- 48 Hanson, "Behind my Eyes," 63.
- 49 In this ambiguous moment, it is arguable that Jenny *did* write the letter to Guem-Ja, voicing her hatred over being put up for adoption. Conversely, it is possible that Guem-Ja fashioned the letter to herself from Jenny's perspective, articulating the presumed feelings of abandonment and vengeance that Jenny has (or should have) toward her.

SECTION III: BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

FACTORS INFLUENCING KOREAN ADULT ADOPTEES' ADAPTATION IN KOREA

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INTRODUCTION: OAK'S RETURNING TO KOREA

For over a decade, Korean adult adoptees have been returning to Korea to live for extended periods of time as adults, primarily during their 20s and 30s, seeking reconnections to their roots and birth families. Not only is this phenomenon complex and multi-faceted, but also, this remarkable reverse exodus of adoptees who return to Korea has yet to be deeply explored. After personally meeting many Korean adoptees in Korea, I was inspired to do research on Korean adoption, particularly from a psychological perspective. We may never regain what we have lost, but we can gain a better sense of who we are as "ethnic overseas Koreans" and take ownership and pride in it; this is just the beginning of a growing community of transracial adoptees worldwide whose presence and solidarity are gaining strength.

SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study is unique in that it examines Korean adoptees' adaptation as adults as well as their adaptation to living in Korea, which is contrary to past research studies that have mainly focused on child adjustment in their adoptive countries. Presently, there may not be a single universal style of adaptation but there are detectable variations. In this study, I chose to look at two strikingly significant adaptation styles, which were assessed in terms of how successful adoptees felt they had adjusted despite limitations of language and cultural acquisition, how accepted they felt, and how positive they felt their overall experience had been living in Korea. Unlike foreigners or other *kyopos* (Korean overseas emigrants) living in Korea, Korean adoptees are an estranged and enigmatic group because of the paradox of being non-Korean culturally, yet often identified as Korean based on their appearance alone, which makes it ambiguous and difficult to clearly define them. What kind of variables significantly influence as well as determine how well adoptees adjust to Korea and to the entirety of their lives?

THE ISSUE OF KOREAN ADOPTION

According to the South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, 156,242 Korean children have been sent to foreign countries between 1953 and 2004. However, according to the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice and Global Overseas Adoptees' Link, as many as 200,000 children may have been adopted overseas, if one includes thousands of undocumented private adoptions.¹ With these astronomical demographic figures, Korea can no longer ignore the issue of Korean adoption nor pretend that this issue is trivial, since many adoptees are now returning as adults. As this issue gets increasingly more media coverage domestically and abroad, Korea needs to confront this issue honestly and try to find better measures to improve the existing social welfare system in Korea, especially with overseas adoption, which has become a profitable business. Otherwise, Korea will continue to be regarded as a "baby-exporting country" where complacency will leave Korea blind to the compulsive need to change a social welfare system that considers overseas adoption to be the best solution to solving the problem of abandoned children in Korea. We still have a long way to go before this complex issue will be resolved, but if any progress is to be made, we must first confront our past and accept some stark facts. For adoptees, the decision to return to Korea leads to a courageous, if not personal journey, which delves into the unknown. We navigate through an unfamiliar land, trying to adjust and find answers to a past that is no longer exists, evoking raw emotions and inquisitive questions that may be unanswerable.

ADJUSTMENT

Adjustment, which "refers to the psychological processes through which people manage or cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life,"² has been one of the main focuses of adoption studies, which speculate upon the question, "How have adopted children fared in countries half way around the globe from their homeland?"³ Previous research studies have centered on aspects of initial and long-term adjustment from early childhood to adolescence. Studies conducted in the 1970s concentrated on internationally adopted children, showing generally positive outcomes⁴ but in terms of longitudinal studies, have adoptees continued to fare positively well into adulthood? How have they adjusted to Korea upon returning?

Korean Adoptees' Adjustment in Korea

Adaptation is a complex and dynamic process that is an inevitable part of intercultural interactions. When a sojourner is faced with diverse cultural practices and habits, his or her cultural knowledge and familiar rules are questioned, re-evaluated, and adapted to a new cultural environment. The process of learning new greetings, responses, or communication styles can give rise to some adaptive challenges for sojourners while they simultaneously unlearn previous interactive patterns.⁵

Thus, a discrepancy or contradiction between adoptees' bi-cultural identities—one related to nationality and the other related to ethnicity—may likely cause great amounts of frustration, stress, bewilderment, identity confusion, or conflict. Transracial adoption critics argue that cultural confusion and conflict connected to this unique adoption experience ultimately will undermine the adjustment of the transracial adoptee. However, despite many kinds of challenging barriers, Korean adoptees try to overcome and adjust to life in Korea as much as they can, with more or less success. I do not intend to compare whose adaptability is better, but, rather, to examine this striking difference in adjustment objectively and the factors that may be significant in influencing adoptees' adaptability. Here are two examples of Korean adoptees' adaptation to living in Korea:

Shockingly enough, I feel quite *accepted by Korea* but not so much accepted as tolerated by America. Even if many Koreans still harbor negative feelings about adoptees or women *who give up their babies for adoption*, *I can still feel that I am recognized and belong to them in some way.*

– Written by A.B.

In contrast,

It has been very *hard to feel accepted*. I felt more *discriminated here* than in my adoptive country (The Netherlands). I sometimes feel like an *outsider*. Mostly finding work has influenced me a lot in a *negative way*. Also the way Korean people behave on the street—staring at you and bumping into you.

–Written by I.D.

According to the above descriptions, some Korean adoptees tend to adjust well and others not. What could account for such a difference in their adjustment styles? Is the difference based on gender? Personality? How westernized adoptees have become? Or does the extent of exposure to and familiarity with one's ethnic identity play a role in adjustment or in how much they can identify with being Korean?

INFLUENCING FACTORS

Identifying Factors

From close observations, personal interviews, literature reviews, and journal articles related to Korean adoption, a number of factors were identified and thought to be likely to have an influence on Korean adoptees' adjustment. Here is an accumulated list of the following factors:

1. Ethnic Identity
2. Western Assimilation
3. Personality (Big Five)
4. Prior Korean Cultural Exposure
5. Past Racism Experiences
6. Gender
7. Age
8. Education

IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS

1. Ethnic Identity

Korean adoptees' identities are questioned in almost every social interaction. This fact significantly affects their adaptation in positive and negative ways. Which group and where you belong are strongly linked to ethnic identity.

2. Western Assimilation

Environment and culture greatly shape a person. Berry suggested four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.⁶ Which strategy one chooses to adapt with can influence a person's perception of their self-identity.

3. Personality (Big Five)

Personality plays a crucial role when it comes to adjusting to a new environment and people. The **Big Five personality traits** are five broad factors or dimensions of personality: *Neuroticism*, *Extraversion*, *Agreeableness*, *Conscientiousness*, and *Openness to Experience*. They provide a representative and descriptive model of personality to assess adoptees' personalities and whether there is a correlation or not to their adjustment in Korea. I believe there is. For instance, openness influences the extent of adoptees' ability to be open-minded or imaginative and can affect their adaptation. Likewise, neuroticism can influence one's mental health and can also significantly affect adoptees' adaptation.

4. Prior Korean Cultural Exposure

Previous studies have suggested that if Korean adoptees are raised with more exposure to Korean culture they will naturally develop a more positive sense of cultural identity.⁷

5. Past Experiences with Racism

It is speculated that those who experienced high frequencies of racism in the past will most likely carry over negative feelings such as anger, prejudice, hatred, inferiority or superiority complex, and hostilities during their adaptation in Korea.

6. Gender

Both sexes are equally at an advantage in terms of gender: men may adjust well due to Korea's patriarchal society while women also may adjust well due to an interdependent society.

7. Age

Age is also an important factor to consider in relation to adjustment. Korean adult adoptees who are older may adjust better because of various experiences and over a longer period of time compared to younger adoptees. However, Korean adult adoptees who are younger in age may have more energy, be more agile and open-minded, more adventurous and can adapt easier and quicker.

8. Education

One's educational background is an important factor in Korea, considering the fact that Koreans highly value education, and this could possibly affect Korean adoptees' adjustment as well as their experiences in obtaining employment.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Fifty-eight Korean adult adoptees (27 males, 31 females, mean age = 28.5) who either had resided or were residing in Korea for at least 3 months at the time of the survey participated in the study. They were mainly from Europe (55%) and America (45%). Sixty-nine percent reported to be successful adjusters. Thirty-one percent reported to be unsuccessful adjusters.

Method

The main study consisted of a questionnaire survey which was designed based on data from the preliminary interviews and a collection of various literature on adoption, consisting of reviews, journals, dissertations, and reports.

Adaptation in Korea

Three questions ($\alpha=.80$) were coded to measure the degree of adaptation in Korea. Those questions were as follows: (on a scale of 0–6)

1. Overall how was your *experience* being in Korea?
2. Overall how *successful* has your adjustment been in Korea?
3. Overall how much do you feel that you *belong(ed)* or are/were *accepted* in Korea?

Ethnic Identity

Based on a modification of the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-Asia),⁸ a series of questions related to ethnic identity were initially used. However, the primary question eventually used for coding was:

Generally, how do you perceive yourself?

1. Western
2. Bicultural*
3. Korean**

Hypothesis

It was expected that successful adjustors would identify more with being Korean (choice #3) and that unsuccessful adjustors would identify more with being Western (choice #1).

* Here, *Bicultural* refers to feeling, thinking or perceiving one's self as being both Korean and another cultural or national identity group (i.e. Korean-European, Korean-American).

** Here, *Korean* refers to "native Koreans".

Western Assimilation

20 statement items ($\alpha=.82$) were designed to measure the degree of how assimilated Korean adoptees were to Western culture, such as mainstream ideology and values. Some were rated on an eleven-point scale (-5: strongly disagree; 5: strongly agree).

Sample Statements:

1. Individualism and autonomy are important values
2. Independence and freedom are important values
3. Age is not important
4. Equality, especially gender, is an important value

Hypothesis

The higher the score, the more assimilated Korean adoptees would be to Western culture and views.

The Big Five (Personality)

Using a modification from Goldberg's forty-item inventory, participants' personalities were assessed based on the dimensions of the Big Five. Participants were specifically asked to judge whether a given trait described them accurately or not. Some sample items are as follows:

Sample Traits:

Optimistic	Cooperative
Introverted	Jealous
Anxious	Temperamental
Shy	Easy-going
Curious	Pessimistic
Honest	Moody

Hypothesis

The higher the score of each given trait from the Big Five (except Neuroticism), the more successful an adjustment.

Prior Korean Cultural Exposure

Ten questions were designed to measure the extent of any prior exposure to Korean culture in one's adoptive country before coming to Korea ($\alpha=.86$), based on a six-point scale.

Sample Questions:

- How often had you enjoyed eating or cooking Korean food before coming to Korea?
- How often had you made friendly relations with Korean people before coming to Korea?
- How often had you been to particular places related to Korea culture or to Korean people (i.e. Korean Town, Korean affiliated churches, cultural camps)?

Hypothesis

The higher the exposure and familiarity to Korean culture, the better an adjustment to Korea.

Past Racism Experience

Participants were asked how often they had encountered racism in the past in their adoptive country based on a six-point scale.

Sample question:

- Overall, how often did you encounter racism or prejudice in the past in your adoptive country?

Hypothesis

Past racism experience or encounters would significantly affect Korean adoptees' adjustment in Korea, acting as carry-over effects.

RESULTS OF T-TEST ANALYSIS AND REGRESSION

All nine factors were analyzed together using regression to see the relative importance of each variable in relation to each other. Western Assimilation ($\beta=.365, p=.010$) and Neuroticism ($\beta=.264, p=.042$) were the most significant influencing factors for Korean adult adoptees' adaptation in Korea among the group of nine factors.

Table 1: The Regression of Variables of Korean Adoptees' Adaptation in Korea
R-square = .524

Regression Variables	Beta	T	Sig.
1. Ethnic Identity	.182	1.272	0.212
2. Western Assimilation	-.365	-2.722	0.01
3. Extraversion	.068	.422	.675
4. Agreeableness	.196	.940	.354
5. Openness	.061	.349	.729
6. Conscientiousness	.072	.514	.610
7. Neuroticism	-.264	2.117	.042
8. Prior Korean Cultural Exposure	.168	1.238	.224
9. Past Racism Experiences	-.144	-1.070	.292

FURTHER RESULTS OF STUDY

Results of Ethnic Identity

As expected, successful adjustors tended to see themselves as more Korean-like (i.e., Korean American, Korean European, Korean adoptee, native Korean) than unsuccessful adjustors, $t(47)=2.75, p=.01$ (see Figure 1).

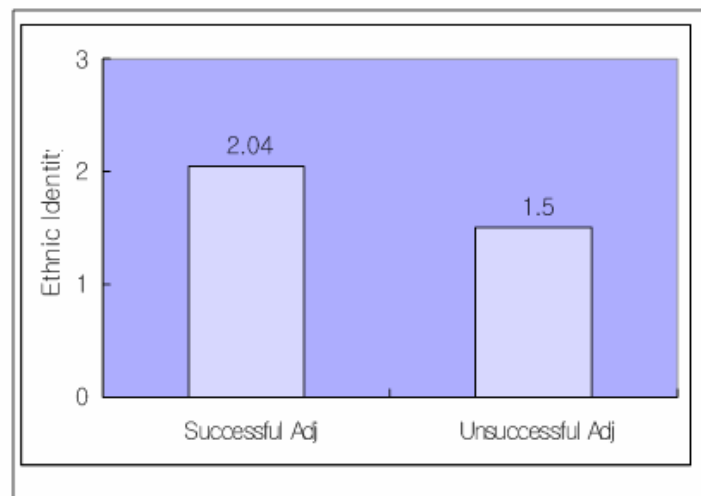


Figure 1: The mean of ethnic identity between successful and unsuccessful adjustors.

Results of Western Assimilation

For Western Assimilation, results indicated that unsuccessful adjustors were more assimilated to Western culture compared to successful adjustors, $t(45)=2.06, p=.05$. As expected, the higher score (maximum of 5), the stronger one's association with Western culture.

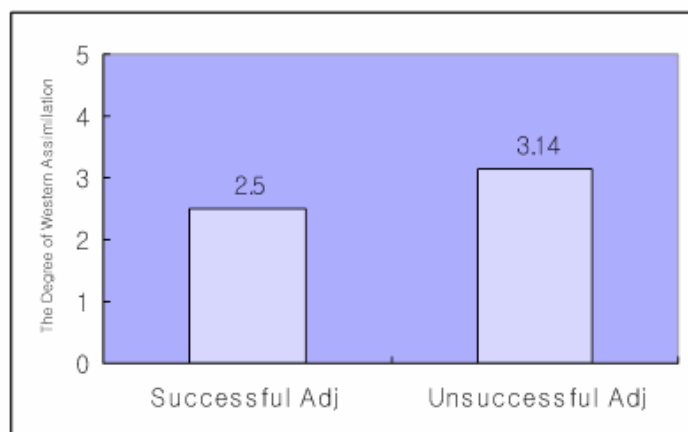


Figure 2: The mean of the degree of western assimilation between successful adjustors and unsuccessful adjustors

What is interesting to ask is why successful adjustors scored lower relative to unsuccessful adjustors. Were they more flexible and open in accepting new ideas and differences? It would be advantageous to test these speculations in further research to pursue an explanation.

Results of the Big Five

extraversion

Results indicated that successful adjustors were more extroverted than unsuccessful adjustors, $t(56)=1.98, p=.05$, suggesting the more extroverted one tends to be, the better one's adjustment in Korea.

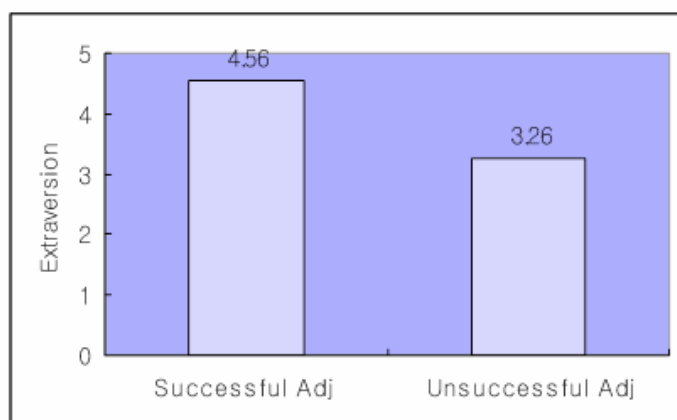


Figure 3: The mean of extraversion between successful adjustors

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is a tendency to be pleasant and accommodating in social situations. People who score high on this dimension are empathetic, considerate, friendly, generous, helpful, and likable. Agreeable people also have an optimistic view of human nature. They tend to believe that most people are honest and trustworthy. On the other hand, people scoring *low* on agreeableness place self-interest above getting along with others. They are generally less concerned with others' well-being, and therefore less likely to go out of their way to help others. Sometimes their scepticism about others' motives causes them to be suspicious and unfriendly. People who scored low on agreeableness have a tendency to be manipulative in their social relationships. They are more likely to compete than to cooperate.

Results indicated that successful adjustors tended to show more traits of agreeableness than unsuccessful adjustors, $t(56)=2.46$, $p=.02$, suggesting the more traits of agreeableness one tends to have, the better adjusted one will be in Korea.

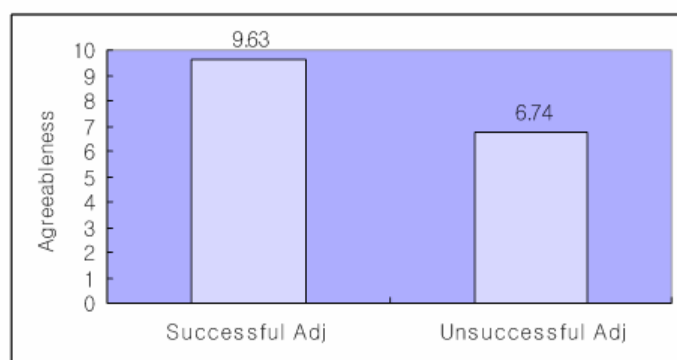


Figure 4: The Mean of agreeableness between successful adjustors and unsuccessful adjustors.

Conscientiousness

This is the trait of being painstaking and careful, or the quality of acting according to the dictates of one's conscience. It includes such things as self-discipline, carefulness, thoroughness, organization, deliberation, and the need for achievement. It is also related to emotional intelligence and impulse control, but it is not the same kind of impulsiveness found in neuroticism. People with high impulsive tendencies are unable to resist temptation or delay gratification. Individuals who measure low in self-discipline (conscientiousness) are unable to motivate themselves to perform a task that they would like to accomplish.

Conscientious individuals are generally hard working and reliable. Those who are extremely conscientious may be workaholics, perfectionists, and compulsive in their behaviour. People who are low on conscientiousness are not necessarily lazy or immoral, but they tend to be more laidback, less goal-oriented, and less driven by success.

Results indicated the higher the tendency for conscientiousness in an adjustor, the more successful their adjustment will be, $t(56)=1.89, p=.06$

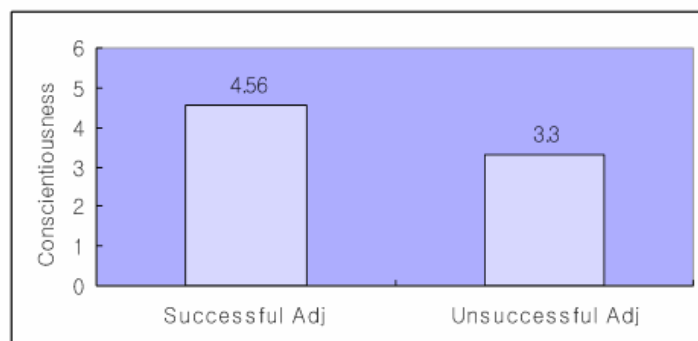


Figure 5: The Mean of conscientiousness between successful adjustor and unsuccessful adjustor.

Openness and Neuroticism

People with Openness to Experience are usually described as imaginative and creative compared to down-to-earth, conventional people. Open people are intellectually curious, appreciative of art, and sensitive to beauty. They also tend to be more aware of their feelings than closed people. They, therefore, tend to hold unconventional and individualistic beliefs, although their actions may be conforming. Those who score low on openness are considered to be closed to experience. They tend to be conventional and traditional in their outlook and behaviour. They prefer familiar routines to new experiences, and generally have a narrower range of interests. They could be considered practical and down-to-earth. People who are open to experience are not any healthier or well adjusted than people who are closed to experience.

The results show that there was very little difference between successful and unsuccessful adjustors for these two dimensions. *However, regression analysis shows a contrasting result for neuroticism.*

Results of Prior Korean Cultural Experiences

These results show a significant effect on Korean adoptees' adaptation in Korea. Namely, successful adjustors had more prior exposure to Korean culture than did unsuccessful adjustors, $t(46)=1.86, p=.07$.

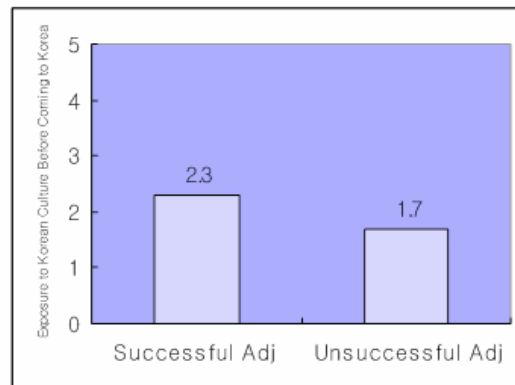


Figure 6: The mean of exposure to Korean culture before coming to Korea between successful adjusters and unsuccessful adjusters.

Results of Past Racism Experiences

Past experiences with racism had no significant effect on adaptation in Korea between successful and unsuccessful adjusters, *ns*, $t(52)=1.25$, $p=.22$. For successful adjusters, the average mean was 3.0 while for unsuccessful adjusters, it was 3.4, indicating that there was no significant carry-over effect of past racism on adaptation in Korea, although both groups had experienced similar amounts of racism.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Korean adult adoptees vary significantly in terms of their adaptation in Korea—ranging across different degrees of adaptation styles. To explain such contrasting differences, primarily between successful and unsuccessful adaptations, several influencing factors in this study were examined, and, among nine of them, two factors, western assimilation and neuroticism, were discovered as having the most significant influencing effect on Korean adult adoptees' adaptation using regression analysis. These findings suggest that Korean adoptees who are more westernized tend to have greater difficulty adjusting in Korea despite the usual culture and language differences experienced. Also, Korean adoptees showing a tendency towards neurotic behaviours as well seem to have a greater difficulty adjusting in Korea.

What could explain the reason why western assimilation has a significant influencing effect on Korean adult adoptees' adaptation in Korea? As an environmental factor, western assimilation can be modified and influenced more easily than personality factors such as neuroticism. When groups and individuals come into contact with another culture, they experience extensive changes in their attitudes, values, and behavioural patterns as well as socioeconomic and political situations, languages, customs, and foods. The concept of acculturation is widely used to refer to these changes.⁹ Berry defined acculturation as culture change that results

from continuous, firsthand contact between two distinct cultural groups. Just as there are many strategies for adaptation, there are a variety of ways that individuals can adopt to acculturation.¹⁰

So, for Korean adoptees who have assimilated into western culture, adjustment in Korea is much more difficult, especially for those with less exposure to and familiarity with Korean culture. They may be less willing or flexible to change their way of thinking and behaviour or conform to new set of rules and ideas in order to fit in. However, this is not to say that it is an impossible feat for them to adjust, but that they may likely feel somewhat foreign, alienated, and overwhelmed with culture shock, stress, frustration, and similar feelings as those of other foreigners in Korea, due to being in a new culture.

To give some explanation as to why neuroticism has a significant effect on Korean adoptees' adaptation in Korea, neuroticism can be seen as an enduring tendency to experience negative emotional states. Individuals who score high in this area are more likely than the average to experience such feelings as anxiety, anger, guilt, and depression, which could explain how it could affect one's adjustment to a new surrounding and culture. High scorers respond more poorly to environmental stress, and are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult. They are often self-conscious and shy, and they may have trouble controlling urges and delaying gratification.

However, individuals who scored low in neuroticism are more emotionally stable and less reactive to stress. They tend to be calm, even-tempered, and less likely to feel tense or nervous. Although they are low in negative emotion, they are not necessarily high on positive emotion. That is an element of the independent trait of extraversion. Neurotic extroverts, for example, would experience high levels of both positive and negative emotional states, a sort of emotional roller coaster. Individuals who scored low on neuroticism (particularly those who also scored high on extraversion) generally report more happiness and satisfaction with their lives.

STUDIES AND THE FUTURE OF KOREAN ADULT ADOPTEES

Further longitudinal research studies on Korean adoptees, especially on adult adoptees, are strongly needed since there is relatively little information on the well-being of Korean adult adoptees. A regional cross-cultural study on European and American adult adoptees would be valuable to explore issues on the variations of identity formation and the future of international adoption—what are the future issues we should be concerned about?

MORE LOSS THAN GAIN?

With great concern for the future of other adoptees, especially the younger generation, we as a society need to consider whether or not sending Korean babies and/or children overseas to be adopted is really the best alternative and ask what the consequences will be in the long

term. International adoption fills a need of parents who cannot bear children and who opt to adopt cross-culturally. So long as there is this need and there are children available to fill this need, international adoption will continue to exist. However, international adoption has grave consequences which we, especially those who play a role in the adoption system, must be aware of and take more responsibility for.

International adoption has become a big business that perpetuates capitalism and imperialistic ambitions, thereby continuing to give advanced countries powerful leverage over other countries. This situation feeds the notion that these advanced countries are far more superior to developing countries and, in turn, economically-deficient or developing countries come to think this notion is true. This fact doesn't make the choice to release one's child for adoption any easier but may give the birth parents stronger validation for sending their child to an advanced country, simply believing that these countries have better educational, medical, social welfare, and political systems and can supply sufficient resources and opportunities that are lacking in their own country. Most often, birth parents believe that international adoption will offer their children a better life than the one presently available in their native country, which may often be filled with strife and despair. With this notion, that adoptees will be better off and much happier being adopted abroad, this, in some ways, relieves the birth parents' burden, guilt, and responsibility of their decisions. This leaves us with a seemingly irresolvable question: who is then responsible? Should responsibility rest on the shoulder of the government or on the parents or both?

To abandon a child can be quite traumatic, but to uproot a child from his or her native country is not only a tragedy but, I believe, is also a modernized form of colonization as well as cultural genocide, which eradicates a person's origins, naturally causing some psychological imbalance. Because of this potential loss of culture and ethnic identity, this paper would like to strongly suggest that more exposure to Korean culture and involvement among adoptive families and the Korean community at large are needed for the sake of not only preserving an adoptee's origins and maintaining continuity with affiliations to Korea but for improving Korean adoptees' overall adjustment and well-being. It is important to make continual efforts from all sides if we want to see any change or progress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research study is dedicated to all adoptees. May this shed some insight and be of help for those looking for answers to their questions about identity and being adopted. My very deep gratitude goes to all my research participants who contributed their time and efforts to share their personal experiences and perspectives on being adopted. Without their assistance as well as that of Professor Choi Incheol and my school colleagues' guidance, this research study would not have come into existence. I have been moved by the wonderful support, friendship, kindness, and generous help shown by the community of adoptees abroad and in Korea. My own adjustment in Korea has a lot to do with the solidarity and community of Korean adoptees and native Koreans in Korea who have shown interest and concern in this issue as well as for me. Thank you!

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CULTURE MATTERS EVEN AFTER ADOPTION: POST-ADOPTION PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS FOR KOREAN CHILDREN ADOPTED INTERNATIONALLY

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ABSTRACT

A longstanding interest to researchers in child welfare, social work, psychology, and medicine has been the pre-adoption experiences of children adopted internationally and its consequences on children's development and well-being. This line of research takes advantage of adoption as a *natural experiment* to study the interplay of biology, family, and environment on child development and has led to significant scientific discoveries about the deleterious effects of early adversity on child development and the tremendous resilience and strength of children to overcome adversity and to succeed in life. In this presentation, I argue that an unintended consequence of this line of inquiry is the tendency to attribute cognitive, emotional and behavioral problems solely to the adverse pre-adoption experiences of the children. It also supports the popular view of adoption as a *natural intervention* that is in the best interest of the child. Adoption removes children from harsh, adverse conditions and provides them with a stable, nurturing, enriched family environment in which to grow and flourish.

By viewing adoption as a natural intervention, the post-adoption factors that also contribute to the development and well-being of children are largely overlooked. Yet transnationally and transracially adopted children from South Korea are confronted with a myriad of cultural, ethnic, and racial opportunities and challenges that can affect development and well-being. In fact, I argue that these post-adoption experiences exert as powerful an influence on development as pre-adoption adversity. Previously, I identified two specific paradoxes that confront Korean adopted children as they go through their cultural socialization as adoptees, Koreans, and racial minorities. The *transnational adoption paradox* reflects the conflicting realities of needing to lose one's birth culture and family in order to gain a family and assimilate into a new culture and society. The *transracial adoption paradox* reflects the experiences of being raised with White privilege, but being perceived as a racial minority in society. These adoption paradoxes and the ways in which adopted children and their families negotiate them reflect salient post-adoption protective and risk factors that are associated with mental health and well-being. However, there have been few empirical studies that examine these post-adoption issues related to culture, ethnicity, and race.

In this presentation, I articulate the cultural, ethnic, and racial issues at the heart of the transnational and transracial adoption paradoxes in international adoption and provide an overview of current theory and research on the process and outcome of cultural socialization and its relevance to identity development and mental health. I report preliminary results from ongoing cross-sectional and longitudinal survey studies of Korean adolescents and their adoptive parents that test the following research questions: the role of discrimination as a post-adoption risk factor, the role of culture-specific parenting in promoting a positive Korean identity, and ethnic identity as a post-adoption protective factor against discrimination. These quantitative, empirical studies are currently funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health. They are unique from past quantitative studies in that they are drawn from large, representative samples of Korean adopted children from the Midwest, employ psychometrically sound measures, multiple informants, and multivariate statistics. The preliminary results from these studies support the contention that culture does matter after adoption.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF KOREAN ADOPTEES: PREDOMINANT THEMES, PERSPECTIVES ON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT IMPLICATIONS (PRELIMINARY RESULTS)

Beth Kyong Lo, Minnesota School of Professional Psychology, USA

I think that's the perception people really had—If you adopt earlier, if you adopt a baby, it's like a clean slate. And I've come to realize now that that's bullshit and I didn't come as a clean slate. I came as the baby who was attached to a woman for nine months. I knew her for ten days of my life. I don't remember her, but I did, like she's still there, like she's still in me. You know, at every birthday that I've ever had since I can remember I've always felt a horrible sense of depression and loneliness that will wash over me. Like, it'll just hit me; like I might be in the middle of a birthday party and I'd just feel horribly alone. And then it would go away. And I never...and I still don't know what it really...what it is, or why it happened. Is it her remembering me?

—Participant

LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of adoption and its psychological and psychiatric implications have been studied throughout the decades. Whether described through developmental models, psychodynamic theories, or attachment theories based in behavioral and natural sciences, adopted individuals and their psychological adjustment have gained much attention, and theories about them have been tested, debated and hypothesized upon. It appears that the debate is even more complicated with the emergence of transracial and international adoptions.

Transracial adoption remains a controversial issue, particularly pertaining to psychological adjustment and the loss of cultural identity. The controversy grew out of concern for the significant number of African American children from poor backgrounds being adopted by white families in the 1960s. Likewise, there was concern for Native American children adopted between 1958 and 1967 as part of the Indian Adoption Project, a collaboration between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) that removed Indian children from their families on reservations in order to assimilate them into mainstream

society.¹ During the 1970s, resistance from the communities, claiming transracial adoptions were forms of cultural genocide, grew, which in turn sprouted social policy. This resulted in the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and a resolution that was passed by The National Association of Black Social Workers in 1972. These policies and resolutions pressed for same-race adoption preferences, leading to a sharp decrease in the number of transracial adoptees in the United States.

Critics of transracial adoptions argue that cultural confusion and conflict surrounding adoption issues in general may undermine the adjustment of the transracial adoptee. The proponents for transracial adoption point to the impressive amounts of research, from the 1970s to the present, establishing that transracial adoptees are no more in danger of developing maladaptive psychological issues than same-race adoptees.² The problem with these studies, however, is that they were either conducted while adoptees were young and at an age when racial identification issues were not a problem or they focused predominantly on White adoptive parents' perspectives on their children, sometimes as a joint family activity, rather than surveying adult adoptees themselves. Quantitative studies have failed to mention in their critiques of methodology that the effect of insecure attachment may alter the adoptee's response. For instance, adoptees may not always reveal themselves in an honest and authentic manner for fear of hurting their adoptive parents' feelings or because it functions as an internal working model, such as a survival mechanism to avoid being re-abandoned. In other words, children may sometimes resort to conventional behaviors to please others and avoid criticism. In order to establish a confident measure of transracial adoptees' psychological adjustment, assessment of adolescents, young adults, and older adults is also needed to assess broader lifespan perceptions.

Issues of White privilege and "colorblindness" have also affected sampling in certain studies, particularly in parents' perceptions of racial discrimination and prejudice towards their children. Many studies have indicated that White adoptive parents tend to report their children have not struggled with racial prejudice or discrimination.³ Adoptive parents may also be responding in a socially acceptable manner.⁴ Although the researchers do point out the limitation of these perspectives, they still go on to generalize their results. In addition, many of the studies are not controlled for covert, subtle, and implicit forms of racism that influence parenting behaviors.

International adoptions have generated similar criticisms and ethical problems as transracial adoptions in the United States, generating concerns that international adoptions are a form of colonialism, cultural imperialism, and child trafficking.⁵ In addition, there is speculation that international adoptions embody psychological and social adjustment problems relating to race and ethnicity. Hjern, Lindblad, and Vinnerljung discovered that as a group, international adoptees exhibited higher tendencies of struggling with mental health disorders in comparison to non-adopted immigrant children, but were no more likely to experience psychological distress than other adoptees.⁶ In a later study, they discussed in further detail how immigration factors, including extreme poverty and malnutrition (which are fairly common in many third world nations), orphanages, war, and violent destruction, and racial/ethnic discrimination and

prejudice contributed more to the psychological adjustment of international adoptees than being internationally adopted.⁷

Psychological Studies on Adopted Koreans

Given that there have been an estimated 110,000 Korean adoptions in the United States during the past fifty-year period, with the population peaking in the mid-80s at 6,000 annual adoptions, psychological research has been drawn to conducting assessments of the effect of transracial adoption on the psychological adjustment of Korean adoptees.⁸ The research on adopted Koreans is, however, still in its infancy, but the findings have concurred with most of the studies on domestic transracial adoptions in their assumptions that these individuals are not more likely to suffer psychological adjustment problems than same-race adoptees.⁹

Most of the early studies on Korean adoptees found them to be well adjusted to their adoptive homes. Although adopted Koreans have “done better than other adoptees within the United States and from other foreign countries, they are still at higher risk than other average children and adolescents,”¹⁰ particularly with regard to regressive features and learning disabilities among those placed after three years of age. Additional risk factors such number of institutional/foster placements, gender, and pre-adoptive and post-adoptive influences are also considered major predictors of psychological adjustment.

Many researchers stress the importance of parental involvement in supporting children’s exploration of an ethnic identity. Ethnic identity has been found to correlate with psychological adjustment and distress, where those who had established negative ethnic identities had more difficulties than those who had established positive ethnic identities.¹¹

Children who participated in cultural activities, particularly with parental involvement, encouragement, and co-participation, had better identity scores than those who were not exposed to Korean culture.¹² They were more likely to have a more integrated American identity as well and had an easier time discussing their identity and adoption with their parents. Korean adopted children in the high participator subgroup were also found to start processing ethnic identity around seven to eight years of age and to have established this identity by the beginning of adolescence, whereas the low participators did not develop a sense of ethnic identity or else their development became arrested before an integration of self could be reached.¹³ When parental involvement was lacking, children seemed less likely to develop a Korean identity, which may have been a response to a subtle cue of their parents discouraging its development in the first place. Many parents appeared to “downplay the racial distinctiveness of their Korean children and this tendency increased over time.”¹⁴ Most of the participants understood that their children looked Korean but did not think their children identified with being Korean. They also tended to possessively refer to their family as “Caucasian with Korean children”¹⁵ rather than as a multicultural or multiracial family, bringing into question parents’ ability to prepare their children with survival skills to manage racism and discrimination.

Being immersed in a new culture and uprooted without being prepared, Korean adopted children's inner world as described by Hei Sook Wilkinson is marked by their status as outsiders who need to figure out the rules and assimilate in harmony with their new environment.¹⁶ Establishing coping mechanisms in a world they mistrusted, most kept negative feelings to themselves in order not to alienate others, exemplified selflessness or conformity, and demonstrated a need for approval at the expense of individuality and ethnicity. Adopted Korean children seem to have considerable difficulties maintaining their birth culture; in fact, "The stronger the desire for acculturation, the faster is the erosion of one's cultural heritage."¹⁷

Thus, currently, the issue has become less about whether transracially adopted children differ from intraracial adopted children, or even non-adopted children, and more focus has been placed on racial and ethnic identity in relation to psychological issues such as self-esteem, self-concepts, and interpersonal functioning.

Analysis of Personal Narratives by Korean Adoptees

Adopted Koreans have traditionally had silent voices, and often are not included as Korean American immigrants. Only recently have published memoirs and anthologies, ranging from memories and imagined stories to searches for identity and birthparents, provided a means for Korean adoptees to express the wide variety of their experiences. Prior to this development, there were relatively few voices that captured Korean adoption experiences beyond adoptive parents' and non-adopted Korean perceptions, attitudes, and romanticized stories. Over the past few years, the Korean adopted community has finally set out to break its silence in order to re-pave a path for the next generation of Korean adoptees and other transracial or international adoptees through narratives and other creative means. As stated in the introduction of *Seeds From a Silent Tree*, the first anthology about Korean adoptees by Korean adoptees, the mission was the following:

We seek to break a certain silence—silence from our land of origin, silence from the lands we now inhabit—tongues tied by racism, some external, some painfully internal; tongues tied by social norms, codes, and contradictions; tongues tied by colonialist myths of rescue missions and smooth assimilations.¹⁸

Narratives of Korean adoptees have played an important role in dispelling stereotypes of the model minority and added complexity to the recent pro-international adoption atmosphere. Korean adoptees' narratives give rise to individual and collective empowerment, embodying the complex examination of race, culture, ethnicity, kinship, and the dilemmas of cultural belonging. Korean adoptees have not always found themselves in places where they can openly and safely share their stories, yet they are currently building solidarity and a community in which they can articulate their untold stories, including common "stories of isolation, assimilation, and loss."¹⁹ Other themes that appear in adoptees' narratives are: fitting in, gaps in identity, rootlessness, and lack of a Korean identity. Korean adoptees tend to attempt to fill in

those gaps by looking to the past and examining family photographs that hold a reported “falseness” to them—like masks one possesses to aid in assimilation practices.

Most of the published narratives focus on identity and the effects that being transracially adopted has on identity. There are not many texts exclusively discussing mental health difficulties, possibly due to issues of stigmatization, distrust of the mental health system, over-pathologizing, or simple discomfort with that level of personal exposure. On a community level, there has been some disclosure by adoptive parents and Korean adoptees of a multitude of psychological diagnoses that focus more on the conceptualization of DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) criteria and symptoms rather than on the psychological affects of racial trauma, identity confusion, attachment and abandonment issues.

Within the community, there has also been some exploration of the Korean ethno-psychological concept of *han*. *Han* is a difficult concept to explain, but on a very simple level, it can entail grudges, lamenting, regret, grief, and angst. It can also be conceived as an ailment of the mind and heart, an inconsolable state of mind. There is individual *han*—psychological suffering with a personal component—and collective *han*, which concerns a group emotion that arises because of socio-cultural oppression like patriarchy, colonialism, classism, and war.²⁰ What one does with it depends on the individual. Some start movements and are inspired to fight oppressive forces through activism, art, and social policy, whereas others may spend their life caught in the negativity of suffering, sometimes developing *Hwa-byung*, a culture-bound syndrome that consists of depressive, anxious, and psychosomatic symptoms due to repressed anger.²¹ Through *han*, a reconnection to biological and cultural roots and a reunified sense of being Korean has opened adoptees to make sense of their suffering and their existence.

Whether or not one believes *han* can be applied to Korean adoptees, some adoptees have indeed embraced the concept. The sense of feeling like “paper orphans”—having no family, no history—and the deep connectedness to the impact of war and the unveiling of the lies and betrayals of the adoption business has left a sinking feeling of loss in the pit of many stomachs. Through personal narrative, psychologists, and therapists can recognize and should respect this powerful information as providing important clues to the inner experience of their Korean adopted clients.²² In addition, the personal narrative can be used as a way to break through trust barriers by helping adoptees to make sense of their lives, stories, and suffering.

METHOD SECTION

This study was a phenomenological qualitative study of adopted Koreans who have experienced mental health problems. Guided by current research and personal experience, the author wanted to explore adopted Koreans psychological issues, the meaning they placed on their suffering, common themes that arose in their stories, and recovery from their psychological difficulties.

The interviews were conducted in the fall of 2006 with nine adopted Korean females and one adopted Korean male from all over the world. The participants ranged in ages from twenty-seven to thirty-two years old. They were gathered using the snowball effect, in which a *Call for Participants* was posted on the internet and via mass email. Given the long distances between researcher and certain participants and some participants' discomfort with providing oral accounts, written answers, narratives, and instant messaging via the internet were alternative methods employed aside from standard oral interviews. The majority of the participants opted for written or instant messaging interviews (6 out of 10). Follow-up interviews or emails structured to clarify narratives, points, and meanings were also conducted. Summaries of participants' narratives were sent to each of them for verification and validity purposes.

Inspired by Clark Moustaka's phenomenological research methods, specific data reduction procedures were used.²³ The researcher read and re-read the narratives, extracted statements relevant to the topic, listed meanings and extracted themes from the data that were later audited by a committee member. Textual descriptions or summaries were then constructed for each participant's experience, and then were integrated with overall structural descriptions in order to capture the essence of mental health struggles among adopted Korean adults.

The researcher of the study is a Korean adopted female doctoral student who served as the interviewer and as the main analyst of the study, which will be used as her Clinical Research Project (CRP). Given that the focus of the study was mainly phenomenological, there was no established hypothesis or many preconceived notions of what participants would reveal. Biases that arose from the researcher being Korean and adopted were always factored into the process—in particular, how the researcher's personal reactions might affect the data collection and analysis process. The researcher was ultimately responsible for monitoring her own responses and reactions as well as those of the participants. Support from the CRP chair and local members were utilized to talk through any countertransference and emotional reactions that arose during the interviewing process.

RESULTS

Consistent with the phenomenological approach, the analysis focused on the subjective experience and meaning adopted Koreans place on their mental health issues, revealing nine main themes. They include: specific mental health issues, socio-familial issues, displacement, identity, birthmother fantasies, loss and grief, *han*, coping mechanisms, and attitudes towards the mental health system and recovery. Among the major themes, racial/cultural aspects as well as attachment explanations also arose, reinforcing the complexity of Korean adoption experiences.

Mental Health Issues

Given that one of the requirements of the study was the discussion of mental health experiences, all of the participants discussed experiences with psychological problems they had had at least a few times throughout their life, if not chronically. The most common problems that were reported include: depression, anxiety, bulimia, self-esteem and identity issues, attachment issues, anger, substance abuse or dependence, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and bereavement. Less common, but mentioned, problems among participants include: mood swings, Borderline Personality Disorder, self mutilation, insomnia, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

Many of the participants stated that their first years at college were when they experienced their first major depressive episodes, whereas others spoke about acting out or feeling alone as children. One participant summarized her struggles in the following manner:

I experienced some mental issues, which I define as not feeling well with oneself (myself) at a psychological level. This goes from just feeling uneasy about my appearance, to not wanting to leave my home, to hating everybody, to being outright depressed... I would go through ups and downs, periods when I felt elated, and periods when everything seemed a tragedy.

Whereas another described it in terms of:

For the most part, I feel worn out...just tired of everything. I don't really get enthusiastic about anything and I feel like I have no feelings sometimes. But I've realized the biggest problem I have is that I cannot love.

Socio-Familial Issues

One of the most salient themes that emerged was the quality of the adoptive family environment. All of the participants spoke about their adoptive family and the types of environments they were raised in. Typical experiences that factored into the quality of care were abuse, parental mental health issues, unmet emotional needs, and expressed racial/cultural attitudes.

The first typical experience was abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual). Two participants were sexually abused by an adoptive father or brother, and four of the ten participants were physically and/or emotionally abused, one case of which is included in the sexually abused category. Narratives included mothers hitting them with "wooden spanking devices," subjecting them to racial slurs and hateful names, and forcing one to "eat my dinner while kneeling in front of the toilet." One participant said her mother would inform her, "I will love you because I have to as a Christian, but I will never like you." Participants generally expressed great resentment, anger, and sadness about their upbringing, attributing much of their mental health difficulties to these experiences. Two of the participants are currently estranged from their adoptive families.

Another variant of adoptive family care was parental mental health issues. Although few participants could name a formal diagnosis for their parents, many mentioned parents who struggled with depression, anxiety, attachment issues, eating disorders, rage and anger, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and Bipolar Disorder. For instance, one participant stated that her mother, “was extremely hostile and angry, taking it out on myself and my father...anything could trigger it and so we were always on pins and needles. I was a very obedient child because I was afraid of her.” Another participant’s adoptive mother struggled with bulimia and extensive psychiatric problems that eventually lead to her suicide when the participant was six years old.

The importance of meeting emotional needs was another topic participants discussed. Mainly they described their adoptive parents as well intentioned and as meeting all their basic physical needs. However, one participant spoke about how that was not enough and recalled how, when she was three years old, her mother told her she was adopted, asked if she had any questions, gave her a little hug, and then left. She talked about the incident like it was as clear as yesterday, teary-eyed, in a soft voice. She spoke of how “all these questions formed” and how “from then on [that] really shaped a big part of how we interacted, or my relationship with them. I always felt like I had to harbor that on my own...like I couldn’t even share my own pain with my adoptive family.” Another participant described her mother’s inability to discuss her hospitalizations for self-injurious behaviors as “chitchat, small talk, like I wasn’t even in the room.”

Finally, parents’ attitudes and messages towards their children’s Korean identity were identified as being a big part of how these adoptees functioned in their adoptive homes. Most of the participants reported that they were raised in “color-blind” homes, where their racial and cultural origins were either ignored or minimized, and parents possessed the attitude of “we will love you like our own,” or, “we don’t see you as Asian, you’re just our daughter. You’re beautiful.” The participants varied in how this thinking may have affected them and to what extent they believed it. Many of the participants who were emotionally or physically abused reported parents making belittling and shaming remarks about their Korean ethnicity. Two of the participants did not take issue with this upbringing, whereas others felt it definitely contributed to their identity struggles. One participant said her parents’ color-blind attitude was, “helpful.” Some participants had positive experiences with their exposure to Korean culture, and they did not blame their adoptive parents for their identity process, although they indicated that their positive experiences did not take away the feelings of displacement.

Displacement

All of the participants discussed feelings of displacement, though it took on different forms for the participants. Most of them explained their feelings as a sense of not belonging in various contexts, including an inability to mirror their adoptive parents, issues of discrimination, lack of a support system, comparisons with biological siblings, and an inability to fit in with

Korean or Caucasian communities. Most of the participants described displacement as an uncomfortable feeling, whereas only one participant denied the effect it had at all.

Feelings of being different and of being isolated were a main attribute of the participants' hardships. One participant summed up her feelings in the following manner, "Up until this day I still feel like an outsider. I've always felt like an outsider."

Whereas another participant stated:

I felt different and strange, so first I reacted by isolating myself from the outside world...It [adoption] has influenced my life from the very start, it has taught me all about differences and being different and, especially, about being on the 'wrong' side of this difference. It has taught me how it feels to be an outcast...All my important relationships, with friends, family, and strangers, have been influenced by the perception of myself being different.

Participants also shared how feelings of displacement affected their family systems, sometimes acknowledging notions of being a commodity or ruining the family system. One participant shared, "I was considered the black sheep of my family. ...my parents had waited over a decade for a little girl, and they had gotten stuck with me. Theirs was a rather large case of buyers' remorse." Whereas another said, "I was the family scapegoat. I was the one preventing my mother from having the picture-perfect life."

Displacement was also discussed in terms of racial displacement. This included having difficulty feeling like they fit in any particular community, including the Korean adopted community. Some of the participants seemed to grapple with this realization and appeared to accept the sadness of the situation. One participant claimed, "Not to sound ridiculously melodramatic, but sometimes I feel as though I am an orphan without a country to call home." Many of the participants further examined aspects of racial trauma and racial differences in connection to their sadness and frustration:

Being surrounded by sameness fosters a sense of security...I think about getting bumped around and coming over here and walking off the plane with all these Caucasian faces around you...I look back at pictures and stuff like that and I'm seeming very stoic in my expression.

I know there's always been a need to feel liked, or fit in, and I've come to the conclusion that I'm sort of in a displaced category—because here in the U.S. people still look at me and think, immigrant, not US or American, and when I go to Korea, I'm not Korean either...

Identity

One of the pains of being displaced from the birth family and Korea is that I've never met anyone that looks remotely like me. Oh, how I envy people when I see family pictures, how the kids' noses are a blend of both parents, of how so has lips like the mom, but eyes like the dad. Such a foreign thought to me, to be able to grow up seeing, every day, a mirror of oneself.

What strikes me is the lack of substance adoptees have—so many of them—it's like they're mere ghosts. Like I could put my hand out and they would vanish. There's a collective sense of lost-ness, and I think the ghostlike quality and lost-ness comes from just not having a sense of self, from not having the luxury of knowing where... and who we came from.

As demonstrated above, an interconnected theme of displacement is identity, in which participants alluded to the effects of displacement on their self-esteem and to their forming, or not forming, a core sense of self. Participants spoke about how their racial identity and sense of self definitely were major parts of their mental health experiences.

The first and most universal identity issue among the participants was the misalignment of their external or racial identity with their adoptive Caucasian cultural upbringing. The metaphor of the mirror was powerfully used to demonstrate this confusion. "I still feel weird when I look in the mirror and an Asian woman is looking back," one participant said. Another said, "I really hated myself. I would look into the mirror and see this person who wasn't the epitome of white beauty, and then, to hear my parents say, 'we don't see you as Asian.' But, yet, every time I looked into the mirror, I was." Another participant shared that in sixth grade she was puzzled by a boy's racial taunting, but did not blame him because "I didn't remember I was Asian until I saw my reflection in the mirror." There was one participant who did not talk about the misalignment she felt by looking at herself in the mirror. Rather, she talked about the mirroring that does occur and how her adoptive mother's weight caused anxiety and raised fear within her. She first described her as a "Standard Midwestern, overweight, middle aged woman." And continued with, "I grew up thinking I was overweight...my mother, whose body did not look anything like mine, but, yet...you can't deny you have those images of connections no matter what."

Another aspect of the identity theme was a lack of a core sense of self or a lost self. Perfectionism, people pleasing, and pretending to be someone who they were not were all strategies used to deal with insecurities and fears of not being loved. As one participant said, "Acting is something I have always been good at." Another participant discussed her façade in the following terms:

I think the big theme is the whole displacement that I feel as a human being in the world... I feel like I was pretending to be somebody that I wasn't, but I didn't even know it. I [was] just succumbing [to] the familial/societal pressures and adoptee stuff, just responding to my environment.

Participants also described feelings of emptiness in relation to a lost sense of self, which sometimes contributed to not caring whether they lived or died or contributed to the lack of connection between mind and body. Many of the participants struggled with this disconnection through eating disorders, self-mutilation, substance abuse and dependence, nightmares, and distorted body image.

Loss and Grief

In relation to identity, participants reported various experiences and meanings surrounding grief and loss. Descriptions included intense emotions of loneliness and yearnings to die; emptiness or grief over lost self and lost parents; abandonment; loss of culture and language; and the inability to grieve these losses within their adoptive family and society. One participant explored the meaning of her abandonment in her narrative:

It's a very sad piece for me. And I would try to search for answers why I was like this and that was the one thing I felt I failed to grasp onto, even though I don't know what happened, if anything happened; if I was loved or even [if that was] the question. I grew up with that thought in my head...that I'm not lovable. Because [of] someone giving me up and not knowing why. My thing is, I was basically abandoned three times—by my birth mother, my foster mother, and now my adoptive mother.

Although aspects of finding birth parents or receiving a letter from birth mothers were identified by some of the participants as aiding them in working towards the resolution of their grief, one participant who reunited with birth family described the reunification in the following terms: "I can say that I neither felt happy or sad meeting them. Sometimes I wonder why I can't express or feel emotions, especially at times like this."

Han

A few participants described feelings of *han* in their narratives. One participant said, "Even during my youngest years I can still remember occasional feelings of loneliness or longing, *han*. When I was in second grade I drew a picture of some long black-haired lady with brown skin and wrote that I wished to one day meet my birth mother and go to Korea to be with her." Another explained, "I think *han* is in me in the sense that I feel like I am always struggling to some extent and that I'm a survivor with a tendency to lean towards depression." Although other participants did not specifically talk about *han*, they endorsed or demonstrated an overall feeling of melancholy and loneliness from deep within themselves, and feelings of abandonment, oppression, helplessness, anger, bitterness, and both negative and positive aspects of "letting go," all of which Andrew Sung Park discusses in his explanation of *han*.²⁴

Birthmother/Birth Family Fantasies

Fantasies and conceptualizations of their birth origins—in particular regarding their birthmothers—were discussed by many of the participants. Four main aspects to this theme arose: adoptive parents' explanations and attitudes about the birthmother; how fantasies affected their behaviors and connections to their birthmothers; finding out concrete information about their adoption circumstances or reuniting with biological family; and the inability to fantasize or verbalize birthmother fantasies.

Two participants disclosed that their adoptive mothers told them their birthmothers were either unwed teenagers and/or prostitutes. In other instances, birth parents were presented as breeders. For example, one participant disclosed, "When talking about my birth parents, all they [my parents] would say was that they were meant to give me up so that they could be my adoptive parents. In a word, they could only conceive my birth parents as functional to their becoming my new parents."

Another participant talked about her fantasies about her birth mother and how it contributed to her trying to find a connection:

I always had an intuitive sense that a mother would never give up her child unless she was coerced or in a very desperate situation, such as being unwed, poor, in an abusive relationship, brainwashed by social workers, etc. I think the only situation where I would feel resentful towards my birth mom is if I found out she gave me up to "save face." Like, if she was a middle-class woman who got pregnant by a lower-class guy and her family disapproved of the relationship... I think I would be devastated in a situation like that. I prefer to think of my birth mom as a victim, as someone who struggles against harsh odds. From age 22–30, I was a prostitute. I think this was an unconscious way of trying to connect with my birthmother. Cognitively, I have no idea what her situation was, but I think there's something about "suffering" and being scorned and being treated poorly by men that I've inherited psychically from her.

Specific fantasies of birthmothers/families stories were also described in terms of wanting to go back to their lost cultures in any way they could. One participant described it as having "a mission" to surround herself with Asian culture and people, even to sometimes humiliating extents.

Most of the participants' fantasies were intellectualized images that reflected sociological and political critique rather than personal and emotional experiences of fantasizing about a birthmother. Other participants completely denied having fantasies of their birth families, whereas others became quiet and indicated they could not verbalize the experience and indicated wanting to move on. The circumstances surrounding adoption were also a part of participants' narratives. As mentioned earlier, two of the participants had reunited with their biological parents and one participant had a letter from her birthmother. The participant who possessed the letter mentioned that it helped her move towards resolving her grief, whereas the parti-

participants who had located their families indicated more ambivalence. One disclosed, "I didn't know what to think. I always assumed my parents were dead." The other participant spoke more about her foster mother than fantasies about her birthmother.

Coping Skills

All the participants used some form(s) of defense mechanisms or coping skills that either helped with resiliency, contributed to their mental health problems, or functioned to do both. Although there was one participant who tended to be more guarded and withdrawn than the rest, most of the participants indicated positive consequences of utilizing coping strategies. For example, one participant who related her suicidal ideation to feelings of hopelessness, racial identity, and cultural displacement utilized her anger and sought out knowledge, activism, acceptance of biculturalism, and support networks to combat her depression. Another participant who once used assimilation and emotional numbing in her family used assimilation as a means to learn and melt into Korean culture, which, in the end, contributed to her biculturalism and finding her core sense of self. Others confronted childhood defense mechanisms and found that acceptance, balance, understanding, or challenging their coping strategies were the most helpful. As one woman stated:

I tend to attach very quickly to people and then...the only way I knew how to detach was to just cut it off. And you know, never walk back, [or] look back. And I felt like I've changed; just learning to deal with the hardships.

Most of the participants offered mainly intellectual narratives of their experiences. Many could not give in-depth, visceral memories, and became either choked up or unable to verbalize questions that might have induced these types of narratives. A sense of emotional control, stability, and intellectualism was almost always present with the participants. When one woman recounted the first time she was told she was adopted, she became tearful and silent. She re-grouped and then went back to delivering her insights about adoption issues in general. Other common defenses that were observed or reported as occurring at some point in the participants' lives included: protectiveness of adoptive parents, gratitude for being adopted, superiority/grandiosity, denial, assimilation, social and emotional withdrawal, and emotional numbing.

Attitudes Toward Mental Health Services and Recovery

The participants generally fell on a continuum regarding the usefulness of therapy or psychological services. Most of the participants were not opposed to it and had a history of utilizing it, but voiced their opinions on what was not helpful. A few participants swore by the effectiveness of therapy, whereas a few participants did not find therapy as helpful. The instances in which they found psychological services and treatment helpful tended to depend on a therapist's competency (cultural, adoption, skills), ability to help participants externalize shame

and problems, and treatment of specific psychiatric issues with particular therapies (e.g. Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)). For example, one participant said:

I started to go to this therapist. She was the first one to diagnose me with Borderline Personality Disorder, which fit very well...for me. I think it gave me a sense of security. I went through my whole life wondering *god, what the hell is wrong with me*, and *why am I going through all this stuff?* And I felt like I really needed something concrete. And I think that also helped me try to begin to work on coping mechanisms.

Participants who did not find psychological services useful believed they were not appropriate for them because past experiences had taught them that therapists are not competent in treating them. For example, participants commonly complained that they were put on medications, adoption issues were either over explored or under explored, therapists did not understand the transracial component to their struggles, or they explained that they themselves were too analytic and that therapy would not gain them more insight than they already had.

The participants also indicated alternative ways they have maintained mental health beyond therapy and psychological services. The most common strategies were finding balance and biculturalism, accepting their fate, engaging in spirituality or activism, and, as one participant said, “regaining culture back.” Learning about history or language, taking back Korean names, and immersion into Korean communities were all noted as helpful in getting them through their psychological disruptions, particularly feelings of displacement.

DISCUSSION

The psychological literature on Korean adoptees has documented that Korean adoptees are not more psychologically maladjusted than other adoptees, but it has identified some difficulties with racial identity in relation to their psychological adjustment. The aim of this particular study was to go beyond the question of whether Korean adoptees are more or less psychologically maladjusted and to ask adoptees to conceptualize their mental health experiences in their own words in order to understand the complexity of treating adopted Koreans.

Despite differences among the participants—age, gender, pre-adoptive factors, and post-adoptive factors—the participants described similar experiences of mental health difficulties, attributions to what caused the problems, and how they worked towards resolving them. The narratives unveiled common themes of displacement, negative socio-familial experiences in adoptive homes, feelings of loss and abandonment, racial identity, *han*, birthmother fantasies, defense mechanisms, and their views on mental health treatment. For the participants, the cultural and racial differences in their adoptive homes were not by themselves the cause of their psychological struggles. The quality of the adoptive environment had just as large of an impact in the participants’ mental health issues. Rarely did participants blame only racial dynamics on their psychological health. In fact, most attributed a balance of familial, societal, and personal difficulties to their struggles with issues such as displacement, identity, and self-

esteem. Participants with more severe forms of psychiatric problems had experienced more socio-familial issues within their adoptive homes, such as abuse, parental mental illness, or unmet attachment needs, which led to unresolved grief and great feelings of loss and abandonment.

Adopted Koreans' mental health issues seem to be interconnected with identity. Although numerous themes were identified from the narratives, many of the themes interact with one another. For example, participants' racial identity also appeared to be an overt example of displacement that the participants could not escape, regardless of whether or not it was fostered well by the adoptive parents. The metaphor of the mirror and lack of feeling "mirrored" was felt by many of the participants through self-esteem, feelings of displacement, and feelings of loneliness. And fantasies or images of birth mothers presented by adoptive parents also had subtle or not so subtle effects on self-esteem and identity for the female participants.

There are several limitations to this study. Consistent with the nature of phenomenological designs, the small sample size was intentional and thus precludes generalization. The study also consisted of narratives from mainly adopted Korean females, therefore further research on adopted Korean males' experiences with mental health issues and differences or similarities between males and females in a gender-stratified society would be beneficial. Although the participants mainly came from the United States, two of them were from other countries, which may bring up cultural differences in conceptualizing mental health and racial identity issues. Finally, this dissertation project is still a work-in-process. This paper does not include the deepest or most exhaustive interpretation of the results, but rather is a summary of the data analysis at this point in time.

Despite the above limitations, this study represents new research exploring the meanings adult Korean adoptees invest in their mental health and how they have made sense of their struggles. The preliminary findings highlight the complexity of the experiences of Korean adoption and the intersections among the personal, familial, social, and cultural contexts in mental health. The constantly dichotomized worlds adopted Koreans manage appear to be consciously or unconsciously present in their lives—questions of who they are and where they belong (Korean community or White community); why they struggle (adoption issues or racial/cultural misalignment); and how to make sense of their struggles have had a great impact on Korean adoptees' mental health. Through actively moving towards change, whether through psychological services, spirituality, cultural exposure, or a quest for balance of the many worlds they simultaneously exist within, healing is possible for the participants. Mental health professionals would do best by giving voice to their stories, helping to make sense of coping mechanisms, finding balance in negotiating the worlds adoptees tend to straddle, and validating grief, all of which are essential in the healing process.

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BEYOND CULTURE CAMP: PROMOTING HEALTHY IDENTITY FORMATION IN ADOPTION

ABSTRACT

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This research reflects an effort to identify those factors that contribute to the formation of healthy identities for people who have been adopted internationally and raised in transcultural families. Specifically, the researchers sought to address the following questions: What constitutes a healthy identity for adopted people raised in transcultural families? How do racial, ethnic and adoptive identities change over time and at different developmental stages? Do racial and adoptive identities affect one's satisfaction with life and ability to achieve? How does transcultural adoption change the family, community and society? And, most important, what can be done—within families, communities and society—to help transcultural adoptees achieve a positive identification that incorporate the realities of racial, adoptive and cultural heritage? In order to address these questions the research team conducted a national internet-based survey of adult adopted people and two focus groups.

The questions we included in the national survey concentrated on two aspects of identity salient to transcultural adoptees: adoptive identity and racial/ethnic identity. We also focused on two specific time frames in the adoptees' lives: as children and as adults. We had 533 adopted adults (intercountry and domestic) respond to the survey, of whom 47.4 percent were Asian, 37.9 percent were Caucasian, and 14.7 percent were "other." The mean age of participants was 36, and 80 percent were women. In addition, we conducted two focus groups to explore factors specific to transracial intercountry placements. One focus group was of adult Korean adoptees because they represent the largest number of intercountry adoptees in the U.S. and have been organizing as a community for longer than any other group of intercountry adoptees. We formed the second focus group of researchers who have been examining issues of ethnicity, race, adoption, identity and multicultural families, as well as adoptive parents, adult adoptees, and other individuals who have been providing services to ICA families for a minimum of five years. We sought participation by this group in order to widen the perspective beyond just adopted adults, and were interested in whether there would be similarities between the two groups in terms of factors they identified as being helpful for transracially adopted individuals.

Overall, our initial findings support earlier studies that conclude transracial and transcultural adopted people are faring well as a group, but we add an important caveat to the research: Their accomplishments are not without significant effort to reconcile their complex identities. One seemingly vivid insight into the needs and desires of this population derives from this statistic: 70 percent of the survey respondents described their current communities as being more diverse than those in which they were raised as children. Although there may be many reasons for this shift—including economic opportunities associated with large urban areas or an influx of immigrants into a suburban area—it evidently also reflects some adopted people's embrace of their racial/ethnic identity and a conscious decision to live in places where more residents look more like them. Indeed, in both focus groups as well in other areas of this research, living in a diverse community or a community that was open-minded was cited as being important in facilitating positive racial identification. Our research unequivocally supports the need for post-adoption services for adopted individuals throughout the lifespan. There is a dearth of resources for older adopted people—and a dearth of knowledge about the particular needs of adoptees at this age; more must be accumulated.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON KOREAN ADOPTION STUDIES: CALL FOR PAPERS

Symposium Date: July 31, 2007

Planned location: IKAA Korean Adoptee Gathering, Seoul, Korea (for more information about the Gathering, see <http://ikaa.info/page/88>)

Symposium Sponsor: Asian Adult Adoptees of Washington State and Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (for more information about AAWW and G.O.A.L., see www.aaawashington.org and www.goal.or.kr, respectively).

Submissions Due by: December 31, 2006

Submit to: koreanadoptionstudies@yahoogroups.com

Questions? Contact Kim Park Nelson, greg0051@umn.edu

If selected, your complete paper will be due May 15, 2007. You may also be invited to participate in a research panel at the Gathering later in the week.

Submission Deadline and Instructions

Complete submissions (cover sheet, paper proposal and CV) must be received by December 31, 2006 by 5:00 PM (U.S.A. Central Time). No late proposals will be accepted. We will accept proposals via email only. A cover page submitted without attached proposal or CV is NOT considered complete. We will not accept or consider submissions that are lacking information. All notifications and announcements will be made by e-mail by the end of January.

Criteria for selection

While we encourage submissions from everyone, we will prioritize papers from academics who have completed a terminal degree or who are currently enrolled in terminal master's or Ph.D. programs. We also seek presentations/papers on a range of topics (some of which are outlined below) that represent as many of the current research approaches on Korean adoption as possible.

INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION

Asian Adult Adoptees of Washington State (AAAW) and Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.L.) plan to convene the first international symposium on Korean adoption studies as a part of the International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) Gathering 2007.

The aim of the symposium is to establish and explore this new and rapidly expanding academic field. The field of Korean adoption studies is specifically concerned with international adoption from Korea, as well as with overseas adopted Koreans. It has recently emerged as an area of study both in Korea, the country of origin, and in the Western receiving countries to which Korean children have been sent for adoption. This symposium will, for the first time ever, bring together scholars from around the world who are conducting research in the field of Korean adoption studies. These scholars, from Sweden, Denmark, Korea, the United States, the Netherlands, and France, are working at the multidisciplinary intersections of Asian and Korean studies, postcolonial and cultural studies, and social and behavioural sciences. Their work is also engaged with issues of ethnicity, migration and diaspora, and globalization and transnationalism.

This day long and multi-disciplinary symposium will take place in Seoul, South Korea, and will be comprised of paper presentations and open discussions. There are plans to publish the papers from the symposium and some additional submitted papers as symposium proceedings. Moreover, the symposium will lay the foundation for creating an academic network for the field, and for future symposiums.

Background and purpose

South Korea's history of over half a century of continuous and uninterrupted international adoption provides the background for this symposium. Since the 1953 armistice that suspended the Korean War, over 200,000 Korean children have been sent for adoption to 15 principal host countries in the Western world. Of those children, over 100,000 were sent to the United States, 50,000 to Europe (with half in Scandinavia, and 9,000 in Sweden alone), and the remaining 5,000 were sent to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In its significant demographic scope, its lengthy time span, and its wide-ranging geographic spread, international adoption from Korea is unprecedented in modern history as the largest global transfer of children in the world. Today, more than 2,000 children leave Korea every year for adoption to nine different Western countries. The child welfare practice commonly known as international adoption, i.e., the transnational/transcontinental, and, often, transracial/transcultural adoption, of predominantly non-Western children to primarily Western parents, was carried out in Korea directly following the war. As such, Korean adoption has become a model for understanding subsequent waves of international adoption. Furthermore, adopted Koreans are not only the most numerous, diverse and widespread of the world's child migrants, but also constitute the first population of transnational and transracial adoptees. The field of Korean adoption studies thus provides a foundation for understanding international adoption and internationally adopted people as a whole.

Past and Current Research

For many years, the subject of international adoption from Korea and adopted Koreans was an under-researched area in academia. The field, as it existed then, was dominated by professionals in child welfare policy, social work, psychology, and medicine. The first academic studies on Korean adoption started to come out in the mid-1970s, both in Korea and in the West, but it was not until the mid-1990s that one could begin to talk about a full-fledged field of Korean adoption studies.

In Korean academia, the majority of adoption studies discuss international adoption in terms of social welfare or legislation, and primarily from the perspectives of social work and family law. But Korean research interest in adult adopted Koreans has grown in recent years, with studies focusing on the life consequences for adoptees who have revisited Korea and/or reunited with their Korean family members.

On the other side of the world, adoption scholarship in the leading adopting regions of North America, Scandinavia and Western Europe mainly focus on the behavioral and emotional adjustment of adoptees, including their attachment and adjustment to the adoptive family and assimilation and acculturation to the host culture. In addition, a growing number of studies have started to look at Korean international adoption from a comparative historical perspective and others have conceptualized it as a migratory practice linked to globalization and transnational processes.

Finally, a new research trend that has emerged both in Korea and in the West deals with the question of an identity and community specific to adopted Koreans, in the context of existing theories of ethnicity, migration and diaspora.

This symposium aims to bring together researchers who focus either on international adoption from Korea or on overseas adopted Koreans from these different perspectives and approaches.

Themes and topics

We welcome submissions from any academic background or perspective, and especially welcome work with multi-or-inter-disciplinary perspectives. Suggested topics include (but are not limited to):

The Korean State and International Adoption Policy

- The relationship between the international adoption program and Korea's modernization and development, especially during the post-war authoritarian period (1953–87), in the context of that period's population and emigration policies.

- The future of international adoption from Korea in the context of Korea's development, its current status as the world's 12th largest economy, and its looming demographic crises related to the declining birth rate.
- The potential effects that an end to Korea's international adoption program might have on domestic family and gender politics, specifically with respect to the abolition of the patriarchal family system and the reform of the social welfare system.

The Orphan Exporting Nation: Adoption and Korea's Image in the World

- The impact of Korean adoption on the image of Korea in the world, and on national self-image at home.
- The influence of adopted Koreans on Korea's political, economic and cultural relations with Western receiving countries, where adopted Koreans often constitute the largest population of ethnic Korean residents.
- The Korean government's current policy towards overseas Koreans and adopted Koreans.

Global Flows, Internationalism and Korean Adoption

- Theoretical and empirical connections between Korean adoption and other contemporary migration flows.
- The imbrications of Korean patriarchy and nationalism, on the one hand, and Western altruism, colonialism and race hierarchy, on the other, in international adoption.
- Possible connections between international adoption and the contemporary politics of international relations and global security.
- Mapping the economic adoption structure in Korea and western receiver counties, and the role economy plays in determining adoption as a continuing model in Korea.

In-between Identities and Familial Relations: The Impact of Adoption on the Triad

- Differences and similarities between adopted Koreans and other populations, either in terms of family background (e.g., domestic adoptees, foster children, unaccompanied refugee children) or, from an ethnic formation perspective (e.g., mixed-race people, children of first-generation immigrants).
- The formation and articulation of an international network and movement of adopted Koreans, and the collective adopted Korean identity and subjectivity.
- The psychosocial and socio-economic outcomes of adopted Koreans.
- The effects of abandonment and separation, as well as reunion and reconnection, on biological parents and families.

- The impact of Korean international adoption on adoptive parents and families.
- The narration of adoption—the theoretical perspective on adult adoptees' re-creation of heritage and memories.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON KOREAN ADOPTION STUDIES

PAPER PROPOSAL SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Name:

Paper Title:

Academic Affiliation/Department:

Position (Master's or Ph. D. status or current academic title):

Address (include street address, city, state and/or country):

Email:

Adoption Status (please **bold** your status):

- Korean Adoptee
- Adoptive Parent
- Adoptee, Non-Korean
- Not Adopted

Will you be available to travel to Korea to participate in the symposium? (please **bold** your response) Yes No

Would you be interested in publishing your paper in a proceedings even if you cannot attend the symposium? (please **bold** your response) Yes No

Are you able to procure your own funding to travel to Korea to participate in the symposium? (please **bold** your response) Yes No

If so, please identify your funding source: Please attach your brief CV (two pages or less) and paper proposal of not more than 500 words.

PLEASE ATTACH

- YOUR BRIEF CV (TWO PAGES OR LESS) AND
- A PAPER PROPOSAL OF NOT MORE THAN 500 WORDS.

EMAIL THIS COMPLETED COVER SHEET AND YOUR ATTACHMENTS TO
Koreanadoptionstudies@yahoogroups.com
WITH "IKAA GATHERING RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM" IN THE SUBJECT LINE.