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# Second International Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies

**International Korean Adoptees Associations (IKAA) Gathering 2010**

**Lotte Hotel Seoul, South Korea. 3 August, 2010**

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Introduction

KIM PARK NELSON
Minnesota State University, Moorhead, USA

Since the First International Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies in 2007, interest and production in Korean adoption studies has grown by leaps and bounds. Once strictly limited to empirical studies aimed at improving the adoption experiences of adoptive families, has now blossomed into a field of study relevant across many academic disciplines, including cultural and literary studies, ethnographic and social inquiries, legal scholarship, and behavioral sciences. As interest in Korean adoption studies has grown, so have the frames of study both widened and deepened. Contexts of understanding Korean adoption have multiplied, though we are probably still only beginning to comprehend the significance of the practice of transferring the legal, family, national and cultural membership of Korean children to Europe, North America and Australia. Our field is ever broadened by new voices, perspectives, and areas of inquiry; at the same time, it has also deepened as researchers have gone beyond gathering basic and preliminary and baseline data.

Issues of adoptee identity relative to birth country and adoptive family placement continue to receive much interest: Kim and Lee’s work on the adoptive process, places new emphasis on racial and ethnic awareness among adoptive families. In addition, many new areas of interest have emerged within the field. For the first time, members of the Second International Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies committee saw research in process focusing on language acquisition among Korean adoptees: Park presents her findings on Korean language acquisition among adoptees in Sweden; and Higgins and Stoker explore the social barriers to language learning faced by adoptee repatriates in Seoul by connecting adoptee language learning and use to the significance of Korean language as an element of Korean identity.

Other researchers also respond to the expansion of Korean adoptee experience back to Korea. Napier looks at adoptee place attachment after visits to Korea, and Prébin examines the culture of gift exchange between adoptees and their birth families by analyzing her interactions with her Korean family. As our understanding of Korean adoption experience deepens to include the experiences of birth families, there is also new and renewed interest in the Korean women who lose their children in the adoption process or who struggle as unwed mothers. Kim analyzes online expressions by Korean birth mothers. Yang and Han study the experience of single mothers who access services designed to support them in their choice to remain parents. McKee surveys the social and political positions of women within Korean society and connects these suppressed positions to the exploitation of Korean women in the global exchange of transnational adoption.

The current explosion of cultural production from within adoption communities, especially from Korean adoptees themselves, has generated new interest in analyzing cultural production related to adoption. Sorensen analyzes the Korean adoptee return narrative and Rasmussen distinguishes major and minor literatures in adoptee expressions, recognizing the diversity in adoptee expression and experience.

While some contexts in Korean adoption studies have deepened, others have broadened as Korean adoption becomes relevant in from new perspectives. In this volume, Catherine Ceniza Choy and Greg Choy write about adoptee narratives in film within a framework of Asian American cultural expression. Smolin examines the legal processes and social practices surrounding
Korean transnational adoption in relation to transnational adoption from other sending nations. These contributions help us see where Korean adoption fits within larger patterns and discourses of culture and society.

Not only does this collection of research extend the borders of Korean adoption studies, it also includes research representing a diversity of disciplines, positions, and locations. We are fortunate to present work by Korean, European, and American authors, and from adoptees, adoptive parents, and scholars outside the adoption triad. While these identities should not be understood to determine position, in this field, position remains important in light of the historical politicization of adoption research as a basis for social and political policy relevant to the practice of adoption.

In the course of my own research on Korean adoption, I consider some of the most important work to have been the presentation of Korean adoption studies research to Korean adoptees. As a community that has been written about extensively in academic discourse, we must also demand to be written to. As contemporaries of our researchers, we do well to remind them—and ourselves—of our many positions. We are both subjects and genitors of research about our community. We are minoritized Asians in our adoptive countries and empowered Westerners in our birth country. We are the elders in the greater community of transnational adoptees but newcomers in many of our ethnic and national communities in Korea and abroad. We know what it means to be White, and understand all too well what it means not to be White. Our experiences represent the best and the worst in transnational adoption practice. Our collective experience contains as many contradictions as continuities, and we seek somehow to build community among ourselves, and with those who study us. I hope the perspectives, insights, and findings about Korean adoption shared with you this day illuminate the significance, depth, and breadth of our very diverse experiences.

Minneapolis, Minnesota USA
June 2010
Silence, Citizenship, and Gender

The Status of Women and Intercountry Adoption in Korea

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Introduction

Following the Korean War (1950–53) and until the early 1990s, the Republic of Korea (henceforth ROK or Korea) sent upwards of 200,000 adoptees to the West. Not until the last decade of the twentieth century, did the world witness such an influx of intercountry adoptees from one country, when China surpassed Korea as the leading supplier of children in 1995. Initially, international adoption (ICA) presented itself as the only option to find permanent homes for Korean War orphans. However, intercountry adoption's humanitarian roots were slowly displaced as the practice entrenched itself as a mechanism to care for children of the state. As B.Y. Han aptly notes: "[Korea became] the 'Cadillac' of national adoption programs." Korea's economic growth to the tenth largest world economy alongside its ICA participation raises questions about the Asian Tiger's sustained involvement as a "sending" country.

Much emphasis is placed on the limited development of adoption policy, the role of Korean adoption agencies, and Western humanitarianism in discussions regarding why intercountry adoption remains a solidified Korean institution. However, the status of women, primarily as mothers, remains a key element to explaining the high degree of Korea's ICA participation. In order to understand Korea's continued participation I will explore the gendered nature of the Korean social welfare state and economy. The production of gender remains a site of struggle, which contests hegemonic constructions of knowledge. Acknowledging the male norm as the basis for citizenship and construction of the household, utilizing a gendered theoretical lens, I will critically examine the development of women's citizenship and economic participation within the public sphere—two key areas that impact a woman's ability to parent.

The intention of this inquiry is not to elide the agency of Korean women and the role of Korean women's organizations. Since Japanese occupation (1910–1945), Korean women have organized around numerous issues, including capitalism, worker exploitation, legislation, sexual violence, and sexual enslavement of Korean women in World War II. The first women's

organization, *Konkuk punyŏ tongmaeng*, established in August 1945, represented a broad spectrum of ideologies, but was banned “along with other left-wing organizations” by the American occupational military government in 1946. Middle class women formed the Korea National Council of Women’s Associations (KNCW) in 1959. Although the KNCW advocated women’s status, it did not challenge the government directly and was “vulnerable to government cooptation.” Less conservative than the KNCW, the Korean Women’s Associations United (KWAU) was established nearly thirty years later in 1987. The KWAU represents a hybrid of feminist organizations that work in a variety of fields: white- and blue-collar workers, farmers, housewives, violence prevention groups, peace promotion, environmental protection, and women’s health. As women’s organizations formed coalitions and umbrella groups, the Korean women’s movement did not stand out as a unique movement until after the 1980s. A feminist sub-culture is slowly emerging with the establishment of the Korean Unwed Mothers Support Network in 2007 and the Korean Unwed Mothers and Families Association in 2009 as well as the work of the organization, Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea in advocating for better support of unwed mothers as well as for adoption policy reform.

Working in coalitions, the Korean women’s movement has engendered change, including the establishment of the Korean Women’s Development Institute (KWDI) in 1983, which works “to improve conditions for women and end the formalized discrimination against women in Korea,” facilitating a relationship between women’s organizations and the government. In 1984, Korea entered the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW). Four years later, President Roh Tae Woo (1988–1993) provided formal recognition to gender policy in the establishment of the Second Ministry of Political Affairs to concentrate on women’s issues, which was previously covered under the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Presidential Commission on Women’s Affairs was launched in 1998 by President Kim Dae Jung. In 2001, the Ministry of Gender Equality was established. Legislation gains also occurred with the passage of the following laws: the revision of the Mother and Child Health Act (1986); Gender Equality Employment Act (1987); revision of the Family Law (1989); Infant Care Act (1991); Sexual Violence Special Act (1993); Domestic Violence Prevention Act (1998); revision of the People’s Pension Program (1998); the Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Women and Relief Act Revision (1998); Special Law for Supporting Women’s Business (1999); Gender Discrimination Prevention and Relief Act (1999); Revision of the Gender Equality Employment Act (1999); and Maternity Law Reform Bill (2001).

Despite these gains during the last twenty years of the twentieth century, Korean women remain disenfranchised as the Korean government from Roh Tae Woo onwards provided in-

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5. Yi, *Yŏsŏngundongkwa chŏngch’i iron*, 146.
adequate resources or personnel to support the newly enacted laws. N.A. Jones reflects on the disparity between policy and practice, noting: "Activists, academics, and femocrats alike lament the gap between de jure and de facto inequality: that is, women's formal rights are now comparatively comprehensive, but gender inequality remains pronounced in most spheres of life."9 Under President Roh Tae Woo, the government made overtures to promote gender equality as Korea entered the world stage during the 1988 Seoul Olympics, aiming to curtail intercountry adoption participation as part of the September 1989 government issued guidelines. These guidelines aimed to strengthen regulation of ICA and promote domestic adoption through changing the age requirements for domestic adoption prospective parents; economic incentives for domestic adoptive parents, such as tax breaks; and aiming to decrease ICA by 400–600 children annually after 1995.10 However, Korea fell short of the 1995 goal, extending their intercountry adoption participation into the twenty-first century. In 2008, the Korean government announced its new goal of terminating intercountry adoptions by 2012, which would mark the beginning of the country’s sixth decade as a "sending country."11 The country has yet to see the effects of this new goal, but the rates for children adopted to the United States in 2009 remained steady at 1,080 annually in comparison to 2007, when 938 children were adopted to the U.S.12 Therefore, supporting women as social actors remains critical to Korea’s ending of intercountry adoption participation. Marginalized economic inclusion as temporary or irregular workers severely hinders the ability of women to achieve the economic and social tools necessary to gain full independence as citizens. Examining the status of women will facilitate a deeper understanding of how gender roles overtly influence Korea’s continued participation in intercountry adoption. Understanding the social and economic factors fuelling female engagement with adoption will better position the Korean government and nongovernmental organizations to support single mothers. This paper will address the status of Korean women from 1948 to 2000 to include the peak period of Korean intercountry adoption—the 1970s and 1980s—alongside the development of social welfare policies and economic reforms. First I will explore the gendered aspects of Korean citizenship. Next, I will focus on the Korean social welfare state and how the economic sector is constructed to limit the ability of women to function as active participants in the economy. Finally, I will examine how citizenship, social welfare reforms, and the economy interact to inform the status of Korean women and, consequently, its impact on ICA.

The Gendered Nature of Korean Citizenship

Citizenship remains contested due to its multiple meanings and usages within different societies.13 The question over women’s citizenship in modern democracies emerged in Carole Pateman’s 1985 critique of T.H. Marshall’s (1950) theorization on citizenship for the absence of women as active participants, specifically as mothers, as his construction of citizenship was based “on the development of the rights of men.”14 Marshall’s theorization understands the concept as a guarantee of economic, political and social rights, which encompass individual rights to freedom, self-determination, political participation, and access to a minimum of social and economic welfare. Based on the “rights of men,” citizenship remains gendered, marginalizing

the attainment of the rights of women in its emphasis of the citizen-worker. The ability to participate as a worker is a critical criterion in shaping the social contract of citizenship. Such exclusion derived itself from the public/private sphere division found in modern democracies, characterized by the male breadwinner/female housewife dichotomy. Even as women have entered the workforce, until their economic participation results in widespread support of a female breadwinner model, gender equality and equity within institutions and to rights within the state will never be fully realized; thus, effecting a woman's ability to enter lone parenthood.

In the construction of the modern Korean state in 1948, the Constitution states: “All citizens are equal before the law and bars discrimination in political, economic, social, and cultural life on account of sex, religion, or social status. Nevertheless the Constitution only established formal gender equality as androcentric discourse shaped its implementation within Korean society. Korean androcentric discourse is rooted in the nation's historical Confucian values, which located women as daughters, wives and mothers. E. Koh notes: “Scholars of Confucianism therefore share a sense of ideological crisis: if Confucianism is incompatible with the idea of gender equality, it is difficult for most Koreans to accept Confucianism as a valuable tradition that should be preserved.” In 1999, the Korean Association of Confucianism brought together Confucian scholars and Korean feminists at “The Encounter of Confucianism and Feminism” conference to discuss the relative (in)commensurability of Confucianism and feminism in influencing gender equality and the position of women in society as social actors. By naming Confucianism as the sole source for gender inequality, one would look no further to understanding why Korea participates in intercountry adoption. However, conflating Confucianism with women's inequality is reductive because as an ideology gender equality is respected in Korea as seen in its inclusion within the 1948 Constitution. Moreover, as will be explored later in this paper, gender inequality extends beyond Confucianism in examining the marginalization of women in Korean social welfare and economic policies.

Androcentric discourse positioned women as bearers of the nation in their ability to beget children, rendering women second-class citizens in conjunction with their exclusion from military conscription. Military conscription symbolizes true citizenship and reinforces the concept of the citizen-worker. This is typified in the Nationality Law of 1948, which codified patrilineal and non-recognition of dual citizenship. Amendments to the Nationality Law oc-

curred in 1962, 1963, and 1976; however, the main tenets of the original law remained in place until 1997. Patrilineal *jus sanguinis* provided the precedent for continued patriarchal constructions of citizenship. For example, Korean men’s children obtained citizenship regardless of their natal mother’s nationality while “children born to Korean women and foreign men could not.”

The struggle to eliminate patrilineal *jus sanguinis* from the Nationality Law was unsuccessful until September 1997 when the National Assembly was petitioned by forty-seven women’s organizations to revise the law. Aided by Korea’s entry into the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1990, the Seoul High Court raised the constitutional question to the Constitutional Court and found “the gender discriminatory provisions in the 1948 Nationality Law might be unconstitutional,” which led to the passage of a new nationality law based on bilateral *jus sanguinis*.

In conjunction with the gendered discrimination of the Nationality Law for almost fifty years in Korea, the Family law, which regulates kinship and the inheritance of property, as established by Parts Four and Five of Korea’s Civil Code, curtailed women’s citizenship for over sixty years until its revision in 1991. From 1948 to 1991, the Family Law denoted the husband as family provider and granted a series of rights over family members within his *hoju* as part of the family registry. These rights included the ability to: accept or refuse an individual’s entry into the family register; expel a family member from the registry; decide a place of residence; exercise primary custody over children in the case of divorce; and admit an illegitimate child he begot with another woman into his family without his wife’s consent. The androcentric nature of the Civil Code had a negative impact on children of unwed mothers as a child born in wedlock was entered in the father’s family registry as well as an illegitimate child borne to the father. The importance of the family registry in providing legitimate status to the child underscores the way in which citizenship is gendered, operating as a function of the state in which androcentrism is furthered. Hence, children, regardless of gender, feel the effects of women’s gendered oppression.

In 1974, 1984, and 1987, women’s organizations worked in coalition to revise the Family Law. Women’s organizations achieved success in 1989, when substantial changes to the Family Law occurred. When the revised Family Law became effective 1 January 1991, differential inheritance provisions were eliminated, providing children other than the eldest son and the widow an equal inheritance share with the elder son, as well as the right of women to enter their children on their family registry without needing to petition their fathers or husbands. Not until 2005 was the *hoju* system considered incommensurable with the Constitution and abolished officially in 2008 as a result of cooperation between the Korean government, specifically the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, and non-governmental organizations with a feminist mission, including the Korean Women’s Associations United. Though a milestone, the simple act of allowing children to inherit the family name of their mothers, in addition to

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22. Ibid., 106.
24. For example, Koh writes: “When a father dies his first son inherits the position of family head while younger sons usually establish separate families on marriage. Daughters become members of their husbands’ families when they marry and women only inherit the position of family head when there are no surviving males” (“Gender Issues and Confucian Scriptures,” 346)
25. Moon, “Begetting the Nation.”
26. Ibid., 53.
their fathers, does not necessarily entail a shift in societal mores. Providing legal recognition to gender equality and recognizing the previous family registry system's androcentrism only illustrates the government's realization that the traditional law remained incommensurable with the gender equality ensured by the Constitution.

The Republic of Korea's Social Safety Net

Unlike the social welfare models seen in the West, scholars have coined the term “East Asian welfare model” to describe the unique system existing in the “Asian Tiger” countries as they entered modernization. The East Asian model is characterized by its reactive nature to economic conditions of the state, enacting welfare measures during times of economic distress. Confucian beliefs in conjunction with voluntary organization support limited the growth of state social welfare provision over time. For example, Confucian emphasis on filial piety was the basis for the Korean state's expectation that “individual families [should] be primarily responsible for health care, housing, education, child care, and care of the elderly.” Thus, the country positioned itself ill prepared for economic recession and high unemployment levels. Unemployed individuals were expected to utilize their savings, family support, or other outside support from voluntary organizations because of this negligible government assistance.

The Lack of a Social Safety Net

Since its earliest construction of the welfare state, the Korean government has operated as a regulator rather than a provider of the major social welfare programs. Composed of four main programs—National Health Insurance, National Pension Program, Public Assistance Program, and Industrial Accident Insurance—the Korean welfare system is mostly funded by contributions collected by the specific agency that operates each program. The beginnings of the Korean welfare state were implemented in the early 1960s under President Park Chung Hee (1961–1979), coinciding with the country's first modern industrialization efforts. The First Five-Year Economic Development Plan (1962–1966) laid the foundation for the modern Korean welfare state with the following laws: the Civil Servants Pension Law (1961); the Public Livelihood Protection Law (1961); Korean Social Security Law (1963); Industrial Accident Insurance Law (1963); the Health Insurance Law (1963); the Military Pension Law (1963); and the Medical Assistance Law (1963). These laws provided scant protection to the overall population. For example, the sole beneficiaries of the Civil Servants Pension Law (1961) were government employees and military personnel. Additionally, the Health Insurance Law (1963) covered only a small percentage of industrial workers and their dependents, excluding the self-employed and civil servants and soldiers, the latter group protected by the Civil Servants Pension Law and the Military Personnel Pension Law. Only an estimated 0.02 percent of the Korean population benefited from the Health Insurance Act by 1967.
As the country entered its second decade of rapid industrialization, the Korean welfare state continued its incremental growth and covered segments of the population unevenly. For example, even though limited coverage was provided by the Health Insurance Act (1963), the government did not seriously consider national health insurance outside of discussions within the health insurance government agency. Health insurance was only extended to government employees and private school teachers in 1977 as a part of the Civil Servants and Private School Teachers Health Insurance Act. Additionally, the Protection of the Livelihood Law was not enforced until 1969 and another social welfare program, the Medical Assistance Program, for the lower classes was not introduced until 1977.  

Increased attention was paid to the creation of a Korean social welfare state under President Chun Doo Hwan (1980–1988). In 1986, the government announced its plan to implement a national health care system, national pension system and enact a minimum wage law. Nevertheless, efforts to improve the Korean social welfare system remained more symbolic than tangible. Not until 1988, under President Roh Tae Woo (1988–1993), was a national pension system to cover a majority of the employed introduced. However, public pension programs only covered 40 percent of employed individuals up until the late 1990s. The government continued its work to enhance its image as a social welfare provider during the presidency of Kim Young Sam (1993–1998). The Employment Insurance Law (1993) was enacted to protect workers from unemployment as was the Social Welfare Basic Law (1995), which defined the content and form of social welfare. In 1995, the Employment Insurance Program was also introduced, covering: training grants to private and public institutions to train the unemployed; providing training allowances to unemployed enrolled at training institutions; job security grants for employers to retain employees rather than laying them off; and unemployment benefits. Even so, government expenditures on social welfare were limited. For example, social security expenditures only accounted for 2.3 percent of the 1993 GDP and central government spending on welfare and social security amounted to six percent in 1980, only increasing to 10.2 percent from 1992 to 1995. Social welfare expenditures continue to remain low. The Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs noted in 2008 only 10.9% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product was spent on social welfare, which makes Korea’s spending on welfare the second-lowest among OECD countries.

As the country entered the twenty-first century, the government of President Kim Dae Jung (1998–2003) continued efforts to strengthen the state’s welfare system with the Five-Year Social Security Development Plan (1998), which outlined the following vision: finalizing social insurance reform; institutionalizing a national minimum wage; and strengthening social welfare services. This plan was ambitious as the government lacked a cohesive strategy for building a large welfare state and businesses were neither required nor encouraged to contribute to the plan. Moreover, the year’s prior social welfare expenses composed only 10 percent of the government budget, raising questions of how the government planned to fund an expansive social welfare system.

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36. Ibid.
Social welfare reforms remained of mostly symbolic and formal significance as Korea strove to create a substantive welfare system. The small percentage of government funds dedicated to social welfare expenditures highlights the little importance placed on developing a strong welfare state. As long as sustained economic growth occurred, social welfare provisions were deemed unnecessary. Moreover, the uneven development of the social welfare system privileged certain segments of the population—civil servants, military officials, teachers, and employees of large corporations—in providing them with coverage first, while the self-employed, employees of small corporations, and irregular workers saw themselves covered last. Thus, even though welfare programs saw expansion to the broader population in the 1980s, this expansion did not universalize and democratize the social welfare system as, for example, self-employed and informal/irregular workers became covered under a separate health insurance program and only voluntary participants within the national pension program.44

Furthermore, aspects of the state’s social welfare programs are directly limited to employment in the formal sector. Korean industrial organizations also provide numerous non-wage benefits to full-time workers that function as a form of social welfare.45 Equitable access to benefits was not available on a wider level to women, who traditionally are excluded from the protected, full-time labor force.46 Additionally, access to some government programs remains contingent on a full time employee’s ability to contribute to social welfare schemes.47 For example, an estimated 70 percent of women are irregular workers excluded from industrial organization welfare systems, who receive limited health and safety protections.48 Women employed in the formal labor force also face additional barriers, even though in theory these policy measures were available to all, because “few enterprises [of five and fewer employers, where women workers are disproportionately concentrated] complied with the regulations, so very few women workers received the benefits of these legal employments”49 Moreover, women’s intermittent full-time employment in the formal labor force due to motherhood and marriage negatively affects their access to occupational pension schemes because overall, lifetime contributions will be less than their male counterparts.50

Korean Women as Economic Actors

With an economy constructed upon the male breadwinner/female housewife dichotomy, it is necessary to utilize a feminist approach to understand the inherently gendered nature of the public sphere. A feminist approach “illuminates ways that gender discrimination and occupational segregation contribute to the unfavorable labor market outcomes of women compared to men” will be used.51 Historically, a gendered economy, Korea’s entry to the global marketplace and the 1997 Asian financial crisis led to economic reforms that reinforced existing gendered hierarchies and contributed to the feminization of labor. I employ the definition utilized by Caren Grown, Diane Elson, and Nilufer Cagatay to describe the feminization of labor as “a dual process, first as a rapid and substantial increase in the share of women in paid employment; and second as a transformation of the conditions of paid work, such that more jobs are casual, irregular, flexible and precarious.”52 To understand the gendered effects of Korean economic reforms, I will

44. Woo, The Politics of Social Welfare Policy in South Korea, 137.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Walby, “Is Citizenship Gendered?”
contextualize Korea’s gendered economic reforms within a broader framework. This section focuses on Korea’s drive towards globalization, which coincided with the democratic government’s prioritization of women’s equality. By the 1990s, the government’s overtures to solidify gender equality in legislation began. Furthermore, as part of his 1997 presidential campaign, Kim Dae Jung employed the slogan: “Establish equal participation of men and women in society in order to realize gender equality.”

Kim’s gender policy aimed to promote gender equality via increasing women’s participation within the public sphere and to improve women’s welfare. Although Kim Dae Jung championed gender equality, women remain in limited positions as economic actors because of their lack of access to social welfare benefits contingent upon employment and subsequent contributions to occupational social welfare schemes. The lack of women in full-time employment remains representative of images in school textbooks that portray women as housewives and men in “all occupations except those of household manager and nurse,” reinforcing notions of men as the family provider. Buttressing the androcentric construction of employment is male conscription, which segregates the labor market by gender. For example, S. Moon writes: “The masculinization of skilled labor in the heavy industries was rigidly institutionalized through the mechanism of vocational training programs, the technical license system, and the economic use of male conscripts with such training or licenses.”

Government employment policies historically only engaged the “underprivileged or stigmatized categories of women”—single women and female heads of households—and focused on training in feminized occupations, such as embroidery, cooking, sewing, and other low-skill, low-technical professions. Even as the government works to support stigmatized categories of women, providing training for only low-skill, low-technical positions, it reinforces women’s economic marginalization and strengthens the male breadwinner/female housewife dichotomy as women’s wages remain fractional in comparison to men’s earnings. During the 1980s, studies found although 90% of single mothers participated in the workforce, the majority were irregular, unskilled or self-employed workers and their income remained “only 50% of that earned by married women” in the labor force. When looking at women in general, in 2000, women earned only 62.2% in wages compared to men. Moreover, stratified occupations provide limited opportunities for women’s professional development and economic mobility. Even women with high levels of education tend to be relegated to lesser paying and low prestige positions in comparison to men with less education.

The notion of women as the subordinate sex is furthered in the continuation of the marriage ban practice, where women leave employment upon marriage. L. K. Davis notes: “Many traditional employers feel uncomfortable having employees who are married or who have children...and some husbands still consider it an insult to their ability to provide for the family if

54. Ibid.
56. Moon, Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea, 58.
57. Ibid., 134.
58. Divorce and widowhood are common reasons for single motherhood versus the deployment of the term unwed motherhood to differentiate between the two types of lone parenthood experienced in Korea.
the wife works away from home." This patriarchal ideology ensured the time women spend in employment was limited, contributing to their relegation to low-skilled and low-wage professions. USAID has found that these types of social barriers crowd women “into some industries, foreclose entry into others, and generally push them onto the margins of economic life.”

As women gain access to paid employment, these opportunities operate against other constraints as women continually bear the burden of unpaid household labor. Lack of childcare, in particular, acts as a barrier to women’s entry into paid employment. As women began to make gainful entry into the paid economy in 1990, only 2,323 day-care centers were available, which accommodated a small fraction, less than nine percent, of children requiring childcare. In 1991, four accidental infant deaths occurred as a result of parents leaving children at home unattended in order to go to work. L.K. Davis notes: “Government or company subsidized child care is especially pressing for low-income workers, considering that the minimum wage in January 1991 was $1.15 per hour.” By not taking into account particular differences between men and women in the household division of labor, including the amount of unpaid labor performed by either sex and its affects on paid labor engagement, economic reforms remain gendered and will not benefit women until basic private sphere needs, such as childcare and elder-care, are addressed. However, it is noteworthy that beginning in March 2010 the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology will extend the government’s current policy to provide child care subsidies for households to cover households in the lowest 70 percent, an increase of ten percent. This policy will benefit an estimated 260,000 children.

The Drive Towards Globalization and the Economic Participation of Women

Embodying the drive towards globalization, Korea’s government-sponsored globalization program, segyehwa, became a tool for then President Kim Young Sam to transform the ROK economy in 1995 as the country sought admission to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). OECD requirements extended International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions and required chaebol regulation reform and improvement to workers’ conditions. The application for OECD membership also increased awareness that women’s rights are human rights and “gender equality [is] a measure of social progress.” Segyehwa facilitated a direct correlation to increasing the status of women to be equal with women in other developed, globalized nations. For example, the Women’s Policy Subcommittee to the Presidential Segye-hwa Promotion Committee announced “the Ten Tasks for the Expansion of Women’s Social Participation [with the goal to realize] the three major conditions for women’s participation in larger society— provision of accessible childcare, promotion of women’s employment, and elimination

67. Ibid.
70. A chaebol is a conglomerate, such as Samsung or Kia.
of sexism in convention and law." The government also implemented the Women’s Development Basic Law (1995). The law required “central and local governments to fund projects of women’s associations with the goal of promoting gender equality and women’s welfare.” Nevertheless, the insights regarding integrating women friendly social policy into economic reforms did not see quick implementation. In 1997, two years after the establishment of the Women’s Policy Subcommittee, the “women’s policy budget represented 0.23% of the total government budget.” Moreover, the 1997 Asian financial crisis aggravated the ability for monies to be directed specifically to fund the women’s development fund. The inability for the women’s policy budget and women’s development fund to gain financial traction highlights the discrepancies between de jure and de facto implementation of gender equality measures.

Gendering of the economic marketplace continued once the ROK gained OECD admission in 1997. Following OECD admission, the number of economically active Korean women was below average of OECD member countries and recent college graduates under 25 experienced a higher rate of unemployment in comparison to other member countries. Additionally, as part of estimated $57 million International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the implementation of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) negatively impacted segyehwa reforms. IMF reforms saw segyehwa policies designed to benefit women, such as increasing women in managerial positions and hiring more women in general, cease in existence. Former job practices, such as limiting women hires “to 20% of new recruits, despite the fact that as many women as men apply and that women are equally qualified” and the continued regulation of women to the informal sector, were reignited during this period. With traditional employment practices favoring men, discrimination towards women in the marketplace persisted in the years that following the economic crisis onset. For example, “the proportion of women in management dropped to 3% in 1997 [from being 4% in 1991], only to rise again to reach the 5% level in 2001.”

As women faced economic marginalization, the lack of a social safety net in Korea created a vacuum in society, whereby the more temporary and/or non-contract workers appeared in the labor market. Women, married as well as unmarried, entered the labor force because of inadequate government social welfare provisions as the male breadwinner model became defunct for many Korean families. For example, five years after the onset of the financial crisis, female workers composed 66.9% of day laborers or temporary workers. Even though the amount of women in the labor force increased, the existing tenuous situation for female workers contributed to the overall poor circumstances for women in the labor market. As women participate as day laborers and/or nonstandard workers, they operate at the economic margins. “The vast majority of irregular workers in Korea are denied statutory benefits such as bonuses, overtime pay, or retirement allowances and lack health and unemployment insurance coverage.” While a rise in temporary and non-contract workers occurred in correlation to the worsening of the economic climate, Korea’s social welfare spending “remained the lowest in the OECD” prior to the financial crisis and this lack of social protection left workers vulnerable as unemployment

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76. Ibid., 142.
80. Ibid., 230.
81. Ibid., 232.
skyrocketed to new heights following the financial crisis. The quality of life for the average Korean worker also deteriorated. With an unemployment rate of 6.8% in 1998, more than 1.4 million Koreans were unemployed. Furthermore, only one in nine of the unemployed received unemployment benefits, which last for three to eight months. The lack of a secure safety net created distress on Korean society.

The Status of Women and Its Implications in ICA Continuance

As Korea continues its participation as one of the top ten “sending” countries involved in intercountry adoption, an obvious place to look for answers is at Korean politicians and policy makers. Until we see the results of legislation changes that were not enacted until the first decade of the twenty-first century, it is too early to tell what the implications will be on a woman’s ability to gain equal citizenship since women lacked full citizenship due to the Nationality and Family Laws for over fifty years. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the gendered nature of Korean citizenship delegitimized the citizenship of the children of unwed mothers. Moreover, Korea’s citizenship model is based on the male breadwinner/female housewife dichotomy, rendering women second-class citizens due to their inability to become full economic actors as their participation was limited due to their short duration in the labor market. Women’s narrow employment in the labor market not only impacted their ability to contribute to employer related pension schemes, but also affected their wage earning capacity because of restricted economic mobility. For example, in 2007 women earned on average 63.6% in comparison to men, representing only a 5.6% increase from 1995. Even as women’s organizations continue to make strides towards gender equality, the Korean government must actively ensure policies and legislation are implemented and provide more than adequate financial and personnel support.

The discrepancies that exist between de jure and de facto gender equality inhibit a woman’s ability to contemplate unwed or single motherhood. During the peak period of Korea’s involvement in intercountry adoption, single women received little government and social support. Prior to the 1990s, policies on women focused on family planning and mobilizing women to aid economic development. Low-income mothers who are registered with the national basic livelihood protection program are eligible to receive an estimated 400,000 won (USD $430) per month. However, single motherhood is typically characterized by widowhood or divorce and is more socially accepted than unwed motherhood, which remains stigmatized in Korean society. Unwed mothers struggle financially, unless receiving familial support due to unequal government support, as government financial support only began in 2003. Nevertheless, in 2004, 78.6% of unwed mothers noted financial hardship placed a constraint on caring for their children. Moreover, only in 2009 did support for unwed mothers increase from 50,000 won (USD $44) to 100,000 won (USD $89) per month. As centers to support unwed mothers become more widespread throughout the nation, women gain access to temporary housing, education, and...
counseling and medical care. However, government support and support centers have yet to erase the stigma unwed mothers face living in Korea, even though more women are choosing unwed motherhood over adoption. As the government makes increased financial overtures in support of single and unwed motherhood, whether it is through increasing social welfare monetary supports or through working with centers to support unwed mothers, societal perceptions need to evolve in order to remove stigma against unwed motherhood and recognize that lone motherhood is only a different, not deviant, way to parent.

However, given the delay in government social welfare reforms to aid single and unwed mothers, it is also critical that the government work towards women's equality and equity within the workforce. Even though the first thirty years of the twentieth century saw women enter the paid labor force as temporary, contract, and/or full-time laborers as part of the government's efforts to fuel industrialization, women gained little due to the widespread marriage ban practice and feminization of labor. Government programs to aid underprivileged and stigmatized groups of women must also reflect gender equality and provide women training to enter high-skill, high-technical professions in order to increase their economic mobility as even when engaged in the formal labor force, women traditionally are limited to low-skill, low-technical positions that inhibit professional growth. Thus, as the country works to revise its adoption law and policies governing its intercountry adoption practices, the Korean government must also reexamine its treatment of women in the paid employment sector. During the first years of industrialization, young women were viewed as an asset, as industrial soldiers. This same thinking ought to be applied once more, but emphasizing gender equality reforms, including wage equity.

As Korea's involvement in intercountry adoption continues into its fifth decade, this essay has aimed to raise new questions regarding the status of women as bearers of the nation, citizens, and economic participants to understand the sociopolitical changes necessary to allow such a goal come to fruition. In rehistoricizing intercountry adoption to look past Korean adoption policy and Western humanitarianism, we must continue to examine the implication of women as mothers in the continuation of intercountry adoption. Understanding Korean women's access to power, whether political, social or economic, provides new perspective in locating how the status of women and their ability to single parent correlates to why Korean children continue to be sent abroad.

References


Gifts and Money Between Adoptees and Birth Families

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In this essay, I analyze the economic aspects of my ongoing relationship with my Korean birth family since 1999. By means of anecdotes, I show how feelings and ties within recomposed families are highly dependent on the members’ social and financial statuses, which fluctuate through their lives. I also illustrate how in East Asian societies, the exchange of gifts expresses, even materializes, feelings and ties, often more so than words or attitudes.

Gifts and money are delicate topics of conversation, but are nonetheless instrumental in establishing a long-term relationship. Engaging in a continued relationship implies the acceptance of a complex system of exchanges. South Koreans know what to offer each other on every occasion, as their society has set implicit norms when it comes to gift giving. But in the case of transnational adoptees, that system is unstable as adoptees themselves come from a different culture. Moreover, birth parents think they incurred a debt when transnational adoption took place, which further complicates the terms of the exchange.

In this article, I argue that the anthropological approach can shed light on adoptees’ experiences with their birth families by taking into account material parameters that are often discarded in an attempt to reduce this relationship just to psychological aspects.

Sustained Relationship, Sustained Economy of Time, Means, and Feelings

After I met my birth family for the first time in 1999, I understood that we all wanted to keep in touch, but I did not foresee how much effort and investment of all kinds would go into building this relationship. In the course of ten years, I lived a total of three years in South Korea, during which I spent many weekends and sometimes weeks together with my relatives. My three years in South Korea were, at first, partially financed by my adoptive parents and by my earnings from teaching French, and later on, by a three-year doctoral fellowship granted by the French Ministry of Education. When I look back, my life then was based on a strict economy of achieving high goals with little time and little money: I could not hire a private language tutor but had to learn Korean quickly; I had to study hard but I did not sleep well in the summer because I could not afford a room with air conditioning in a boarding house; I had to spend time with my respondents but could not afford to deepen our contacts into friendships; I wanted to know my relatives better but I lacked time since my official goal was to do fieldwork in order to write a dissertation. So, I was seeing them “on the side,” or at least I thought so.

For a while, I lived in my paternal aunt’s modest household, and she would give me so much of her time, energy and resources that I felt uncomfortable. I would have felt the same at my adoptive parents’ home because I had lived independently for years already. But I also felt that my aunt and I were still strangers to each other. My stay there coincided with her son’s second year of military service. As he was away, I could occupy his bedroom and his mother’s days. After several months during which she fed me when I was – and was not – hungry, cured me when I was sick, taught me Korean things, I moved out and stayed in the boarding house without air conditioning but then she, in turn, felt bad. Later, she lent me some money so that I could stay in a nice studio with air conditioning. So, this relationship that was peripheral to my fieldwork
in Korea grew in importance. In parallel, my relationship with my birth family was gradually becoming a subject of my research.

Perhaps because I grew up in a middle-class French family that dislikes talking about money in general, it was not my habit to count, calculate, and talk about what I gave and received from people. Despite my reluctance, I had to start doing that because of my budgetary restrictions and also because of what money and gifts meant to people around me. Money was much more than the trivial detail that provided me with what I strictly needed. Money became meaningful in the sense that it was imbued with symbolic value beyond its face value. The use and the exchange of money indicated relationships and status positions among my relatives. I quickly realized that the money my aunt lent me was not of the same nature as the money my uncle spent in an expensive restaurant to greet my periodic returns, or the little money my mother gave me with a grunt because I got married and she did not come to the wedding. There are categories of money; all money is not given or received the same way, in the same circumstances or with the same feelings. And there are categories of gifts that differ in significance; some call for a counter-gift and others do not.

I do not pretend that one personal example can extend to a general model in the Korean context, but I do think that my experience shows some characteristics of Korean culture that may be shared with other neighboring societies. I will provide a few Japanese examples. I also think that as a foreigner related to some South Korean people, I witnessed a wide range of situations where money and gifts were involved. And through my frequent – and ongoing – mistakes in this area, I was able to discover some of the rules of exchange that Koreans follow in their everyday lives. What I mean is that some of the rules may indeed apply to France or the United States as well for instance, but some others do not and are the object of my inquiry in this article.

Free Gifts?

Against a pervasive Western (and, to a certain extent, Christian) representation, the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss was the first social scientist to deconstruct the notion that gifts are free and result from the pure goodness of givers.1 After him, successors showed that exchanges of gifts—including objects and people—ensured the perpetuation of social ties among families and micro-societies and in a sense permeated all aspects of social life.2 By living with the people they study, anthropologists became aware of their participation in such systems of exchange as they were asked to give and receive gifts as well. Many monographs describe the conflicts, the resentment, and the establishment of rules between ethnographers and respondents regarding the sharing of resources that are especially marked in a context of scarcity and economic inequalities.3 Even with their more or less restricted research budgets, anthropologists-to-be often need to take into account the gifts they will buy for their respondents or informants. This aspect of fieldwork is more prevalent in some societies than others. I found it to be strongly present in South Korea.

Looking back, I think I received more gifts from South Korean relatives, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues in three years than in ten years in France. Here, I am not talking about very valuable gifts or the monetary value of the things I was given, but about their sheer number.

I am talking about objects that are neither the food that I was treated to in bars or restaurants or in private homes, nor even personal belongings offered in a surge of generosity. I am talking about particular objects that are bought on special occasions, wrapped with care, and given in a more solemn manner than usual. For example, the small green ceramic kettle my Korean-Japanese friend bought in Japan and brought back for me to Korea where she now lives with her Korean husband; or the wooden frame enclosing little figurines that reproduced a miniature traditional wedding scene which my French language students—mostly older women—gave me on the last day of class, wishing me to find a husband quickly; or the pretty Nina Ricci leather gloves a paternal aunt gave me wrapped in a beautiful paper from a well-known department store. She said she had chosen black because she had noticed that I liked black clothes, whereas she had chosen red for my sister who seemed to prefer that color. All these gifts are alike because they are chosen especially for the recipient and not because of their cost.

Once I made the mistake of evaluating the price of a cute Japanese key chain that the same Japanese friend gave me. We had established a regular exchange of small gifts, and I thought this was not a free gift and she probably expected a counter-gift. Running out of time before going back to Korea, I found a key chain at the airport and bought some chocolates. She was disappointed, and we were close enough friends so she could mumble to me: “Oh, you got that at the airport, didn’t you?” I was embarrassed because my key chain was not as pretty as hers—it did look like a souvenir for tourists—but I could not tell her that I had no money, that I thought the gifts were equal in terms of price, and that it was harder to find “cute” and cheap things in my country.

Many times, I also found myself going out with some acquaintances or friends before my departure and being given gifts. In such instances, I decided to pay for the meal or for the drinks but felt that a personalized gift, albeit small, would have been welcome and certainly more meaningful. These choices were a result of my perpetual lack of time, of the number of people I know, but also of personality and culture. It took me some time to actually appreciate the warm feeling or atmosphere generated by all these little presents. Instead, I first experienced this perpetual exchange of gifts as a burden.

The first summer I was back in South Korea, I planned to visit a friend in Japan. Upon our meeting, all my adult relatives gave me money as I was considered a child that they had not been able to treat and cajole for a long time. With that money, I bought several bigger gifts—Japanese dolls, earrings, and a scarf—for those who had given me the most. For the others, I brought food including some Japanese seaweed. The seaweed was tasted with caution and quickly put away in the refrigerator without a word. These gifts of money were not “free;” my mother told me to get gifts for each relative. But my trip to Japan was also mistaken for a sign of my personal wealth at the time; therefore, gifts were expected when I returned. Recently, I saw on the South Korean television a Japanese student who admitted she had gone to Korea by herself without telling anyone so that she did not have to bring back a gift for each of her friends. I could perfectly relate to her subterfuge.

One Christmas weekend, while I was staying with my paternal aunt, I heard in the kitchen sounds of paper being cut with scissors, unfolding tape, and excited murmurs: my paternal aunt and my cousin had decided to offer me presents like Western people do on Christmas Eve whereas I had decided to follow their own instructions of not buying anything because Koreans do not exchange gifts that day. They had reiterated this fact many times. That was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life in Korea since not only did they buy me presents but I was also staying at their house.

Lodging and food are never considered gifts when hosts can afford them and receivers are considered relatives. While staying at my paternal aunt’s house, I tried to contribute to the expenses of the house by buying some fruit, vegetables or drinks. I know these items are considered expensive, and visitors—strangers and relatives alike—bring them to their hosts’ house in spe-
cial packages. My contributions were not welcome as I did not know where to buy groceries at the best prices, and I was still a student. On the contrary, my paternal aunt loved an almond green shirt I sent her from France for Christmas the following year. She said I had picked the size, the color and the style perfectly. In saying so, she was asserting our close relationship.

So in general, gifts usually imply an exchange, and the giver of a gift usually expects a counter-gift. But gifts are also charged with meanings that do not correspond with their monetary value. Gifts have to be chosen carefully, and certain items are not considered as gifts at all. The appropriateness of gifts depends on who gives and who receives. When performed properly, the exchange of gifts initiates or fosters good relationships, and expresses tender feelings.

Exchanges of Money

Anthropologists observe that, in Korea, the use and handling of money is highly gendered, concern pure consumerism as well as demonstration, and that money is a topic of everyday conversation.⁴ Reportedly, the Confucian elite disliked talking about money, as only scholarly and administrative activities were deemed noble as opposed to trade, agriculture, and the like.⁵ The memories of postwar extreme poverty, the democratization of education, the deepening of social stratification, the privations of the industrialization period in the 1960 and 1970s, the evolution of import-export policies and the sudden prosperity of the 1980s and 1990s, all led to an extreme consumerist lifestyle that was attributed to women and gave rise to anti-consumerism campaigns in the 1990s.⁶ Broad statistics have shown that a very large part of the household budget is reserved for the education of children, for social events (marriages and funerals), and also for the demonstration of social status.⁷ Whereas—and perhaps because—men tend to spend inconsiderately as they want to show status by their generosity when meeting their peers, women of lower to middle-class households tend to be the household accountants and restrict men's pocket money.⁸ South Korean women are also expert in the investment of money, and many have generated their families' wealth through wise real estate investments, at least through the 1990s.⁹ During my stays in Korea, the economic state of my relatives' households became a frequent topic of conversation, which matched my growing familiarity with them as well as my perceived further financial independence. As long as they knew that my adoptive parents were providing me with money, my paternal family helped without counting but always knew of my financial situation since my aunt had helped me to set up my bank account. My paternal aunt felt responsible for my adoption abroad as her brother—my father—was the one who had taken my sister and me to an Inch'ŏn orphanage in the early 1980s. She also rationalized our relationship by saying that I was replacing her deceased infant daughter. However, by announcing in 2003 that I had been granted a doctoral scholarship, I was asserting my financial independence and we could have more balanced exchanges.

While staying with my paternal aunt, my attempts to pay her back for her generous hosting were unsuccessful. At the time, my adoptive parents gave me a little bit of money and I taught French at different places. As I saved money on lodging and I made enough pocket money for my

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⁵ Anti Leppänen, “Neighborhood Shopkeepers in Contemporary South Korea: Household, Work, and Locality” (PhD diss., Department of Anthropology, University of Helsinki, Finland, 2007).
⁸ Leppänen, “Neighborhood Shopkeepers.”
leisure time, I decided to send a check to a friend who was in Paris struggling with her daughter’s health issues and loneliness. The year before, I had been her babysitter and we had become close friends. I asked my aunt to accompany me to the bank so that I could transfer the money from my Korean account to my friend’s French account. My aunt accepted but was a bit appalled at the amount of money I was wiring, knowing that my friend was ten years older than me and had a profession. I explained that she had momentarily given up her profession to travel to Paris from Chile to treat her daughter’s neurological issues. I told her the money I was sending was to treat them to something nice while I was away. I think my aunt thought this gift of money was inappropriate if not foolish, but she was impressed by my generosity. She made a comment on my being a good Christian to make such free gifts. She also added that money should be truly given only to relatives, and that even among relatives, giving money was to be avoided.

Once my Korean improved, I was more and more “in the field,” meeting respondents and visiting places. I decided to stay in Seoul where most of my work took place. As mentioned earlier, I did not feel totally comfortable living for free at my paternal aunt’s house. So I left and settled in a cheap little room in a boarding house that had no air conditioning. One day, I felt very sick and the landlady called my aunt who came all the way from Inch’ŏn to check on me. When she saw the small stuffy room, her face darkened and she told me she was sad she could not afford to offer me a better room. She even asked me to come back to her own house. The following year, as I was expecting a visit from my boyfriend, I decided to spend a bit more and live in a studio. I had to pay a large sum of money in advance, but I did not have the money since the fellowship funding came every month. As soon as I found the appropriate studio, I called my aunt and asked her to lend me the money. She agreed at once, and I reimbursed her in cash every month. I was surprised by the meticulousness she exerted in counting all the bills. Not only had I already counted them on my own but that attitude was also hard to reconcile with her usual generosity. My impression probably had to do with my carefree handling of money at the time. She scolded me several times, saying that I was paying too much for that room and that I should have visited several studios before making a choice. Later, however, she realized that most studios cost the same.

More recently, my paternal aunt told me that she had been solicited by my mother and had lent her some money that was never being paid back. Knowing my aunt’s household was struggling with health and money issues, I was dismayed. When I offered to pay my mother’s debt to her, she refused and made me promise I would not mention it to my mother. She also added that it was a gift and there was no need to talk about it again. She said her situation was slightly better than my mother’s, and she did not mind helping her out. She was an old friend after all, and I was still the family’s child. It may also have been a way for her to justify her lesser generosity towards me.

Symbolic Gifts that Cannot Be Returned

As my stays in South Korea became more and more frequent, familiarity set in, the gifts of money and the outings in expensive restaurants diminished although they still take place at the very beginning and the very end of my stays. The first time I came back, my relatives hadn’t seen me in seventeen years and welcomed me as a child. They gave me a lot of money and many expensive presents to compensate for the time we hadn’t spent together. It was an obligation, but they were also genuinely happy and the gifts also marked the festivities. Meeting again was experienced as a special time in our life cycle, a little bit as if it was a rite of passage: the shape and the history of the family changed through this meeting; on their side, two family members were found again; on my side, my sister and I could reconstitute our past and reconsolidate our sense of identity.
One’s birth and hundredth day, one’s marriage, one’s sixtieth (and now seventeenth) birthday, and one’s death constitute the main stages of the South Korean life cycle. These crucial stages are occasions for the family to gather, share a banquet, reassert family ties and acknowledge additions and losses. Relatives share food and alcohol and exchange gifts and money.\(^\text{10}\) Except for two maternal uncles who were able to attend two prestigious universities, my other relatives were unable to attend college and their means are modest. They were all very excited when I announced I had gotten married in 2007 and would plan a wedding ceremony in France in 2008.\(^\text{11}\) None of them came, although I had promised to buy the plane tickets for my paternal aunt and my mother. Some apologized, some mentioned the fact I had picked the wrong date—the Harvest Moon Festival (Ch’usŏk)—and others admitted that financial issues had prevented them from coming. But when I was back in South Korea after the wedding, they all gave me money as belated wedding gifts. As their daughter, granddaughter, or niece, the money I received from them was symbolic. My mother said she wanted to pay for our wedding rings whereas other relatives said that they wanted me to buy something nice for my husband and me or for our future house. They said that they were sorry not to be able to give me more. I could not refuse that money from them.

When my sister visited Korea with her son last summer, they were welcomed with great joy. My sister had come to Korea only twice before and our family always wondered about her. She was also given money because she had given birth to a son four years earlier. My half-Korean nephew was clearly treated as a new addition to the family. My mother took some time off to take us to the beach and amusement parks, something she had never done in the past nine years. The feelings of guilt caused by obligation she felt towards my sister and me, the tension I often read on my mother’s face totally lifted around her grandson. She truly looked happy for the first time since I had met her.

Giving money to one’s children and grandchildren is considered a norm in South Korea. My mother always expressed her frustration and shame when meeting me, as she had no money to give me or to buy me things. I also surmise that as I came very often, she could not give me money every time she saw me although she may have liked to do so. As a consequence, she did not like receiving gifts from me.

**Unwelcome, Embarrassing, Rejected Gifts**

During my first long-time stay in Korea I was living with my paternal aunt, as I mentioned before. Every now and then, I would visit my mother’s house finding it deserted or only occupied by my grandmother or my maternal aunt’s children. I started to suspect that, in spite of what she said, while inviting me to come over, my mother was trying to avoid me. When I bought her nice clothes, I found them later worn by my grandmother. She would receive them with a grunt and put them aside. And she had nothing for me. She told me frankly one day: “You must think I am a disagreeable person. But I have no money, and it really makes me upset to see you when I have nothing for you...” As I still had the illusion that gifts were not an obligation and just expressed people’s feelings, I felt sorry over the fact that she saw me as a burden.

At the time, I had no idea of how my mother’s finances fitted within the economy of my grandmother’s house. I actually found out only recently that she does not contribute anything to the life of the household. My maternal aunt suspects that my mother, as a divorced older


woman who has not remarried, uses her salary for her own leisure. There was evidence that she had gone into debt. My mother is the older sister and refuses to give any explanation concerning her finances even to her own mother, so my maternal aunt asked me not to talk about it and not to do anything about it. For the first time since we knew each other, my aunt said I had no obligation to be part of this familial problem. She added that they my family owed me already due to my adoption abroad, and they would refuse any substantial help from me. My aunt never seemed to enjoy the presents I bought for her at the beginning of our relationship, but all the little gifts I bought over the years for her children—my younger cousins—were accepted with pleasure and ease. I think she wanted me to know why they would not treat me better and why they could not come to my wedding although they had expressed their enthusiasm beforehand. She may also have warned me against eventual requests from my mother.

My own status has changed throughout the years. I obtained a teaching position at a South Korean university in the summer of 2009. The news filled my relatives with pride, especially on the maternal side. My maternal grandmother evoked her sons’ academic successes and my maternal aunt’s youngest son taking part in national math competitions. In doing so, she asserts our blood ties. Being a scholar in Korea is considered one of the highest distinctions, bringing great prestige and commanding respect. On the paternal side, my relatives have been experiencing health and financial issues. They said they were proud of me but could not help comparing my situation to theirs. They quickly asked me about my salary and murmured: "Now, Woojung is rich…"

Although unemployed, my paternal uncle insisted in treating all of us to an expensive restaurant. I could not pay for it because of my status as a younger woman. Although his money comes from his wife’s salary, he is the one that opened his wallet at the end of the meals. This imbalance in our status and means was epitomized by a conflict that occurred last summer.

**Competition of Generosity**

In this section, drawing on ideas developed by anthropologists, I would like to show how the exchange of gifts can also imply antagonistic relationships and competition. In the Korean context, under certain circumstances, paying for meals or other commodities, is deemed inappropriate and provocative. The following anecdote provides an illustration to this.

Like usual, my stay in South Korea in 2009 was motivated by professional reasons but hearing that my sister and my five-year-old nephew had no vacation plans, I invited them to come and visit our Korean relatives and have some fun during the summer. Our adoptive parents paid for my nephew’s ticket. They could stay for a few days in my hotel room, and the rest of the time they would be in Incheon with our relatives. My paternal uncle and his wife have no children and live in a large apartment. They always want to host me and complained that I am always too busy to visit them. This time, I asked them if my sister, my nephew and I could stay at their place. They were very excited and started preparing for our arrival. They planned on taking a few days off so we could all go together to the beach with my paternal aunt as well. Suddenly, I remembered an appointment I had made with a very good friend of mine. With my approval, she had a reservation made earlier that summer at a resort on the East coast of Korea so that we could spend a few days in the mountains with another mutual friend. It fell at the end of my sister’s stay. I decided to go just for one day, but when I informed my uncle of the plans, he got very upset: "We don’t speak English well and your sister does not speak Korean. She comes only for ten days and you go away to the beach for one day with your friends?!” I tried to explain I had promised and that my friend counted on me. I also mentioned the fact that it would be good for my sister and I to spend a day apart after eight days together. I suggested that my maternal aunt’s

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oldest daughter could also maybe take my sister to shop that day. My uncle stopped talking, his wife and my paternal aunt were visibly embarrassed, and we quickly parted.

Two days before my sister and my nephew arrived, I called my paternal uncle to see if it was still fine for us to stay at his place. He announced that he was about to go on vacation and would not come back before the very last day of my sister’s stay so that we could have a meal together. He had obviously taken that decision as a reaction to our discussion. Seeing my dejected expression, my mother assured me that we could stay in her room and she would sleep on the couch. Then I paid a company to install air conditioning in her bedroom. The day after I bought the air conditioning online, my paternal aunt and her son called me. They knew I had found a solution through my own means, so they worried that my sister and my nephew would think of them as selfish and cheap, and not me. So, after our argument, they went out of their ways to demonstrate their generosity.

My sister came with numerous gifts that were received with embarrassment on the paternal side. My cousin traveled the long distance from the easternmost side of Seoul to the center of Seoul or even to Inch’ŏn to see us, even though he had announced many times that he would not have much time that summer. He bought extravagant toys for my nephew, which became a burden: my sister started to protest that she did not have enough suitcases and she would have to take a cab from the airport to her apartment when back in France. One evening, my sister, my nephew and I were relaxing and chatting in French in a coffee shop. We had planned to have dinner in a restaurant a bit later, when my cousin called and announced that he was coming with his girlfriend. So, again, I had to switch from French to Korean and my sister had to rely on me to translate. My cousin also chose a specific restaurant, which he had read about on a food blog. I objected, saying that my nephew was tired and that we were surrounded by good restaurants, but my cousin replied that, in that case, he would carry my nephew on his back. My sister did not dare say no, so we complied. We finally took a cab to the restaurant, only to find that it was closed. My cousin’s girlfriend apologized and stated that I certainly knew Seoul better than my cousin, as he had lived in Inch’ŏn most of his life. Everybody felt tired and irritated. We ate somewhere else and my cousin paid for the meal.

When he returned from his impromptu trip, my uncle treated us to a sumptuous lunch. He avoided looking at me in the eyes, but was happy when I thanked him and told him at the end of the meal that we all had had a good time. Out of the blue, my paternal aunt affirmed that my sister and my nephew were quite comfortable in my mother’s bedroom since I had bought the air conditioning. My paternal uncle’s wife looked sorry and murmured that it must have been expensive. I replied that it was fine, and my paternal aunt laughed: “She is rich now; she will be a professor!” I think what angered my uncle was the fact I was away for a day seemingly having fun with my friends while my sister was visiting. He did not understand or did not take into account that my sister was actually looking forward to having our Korean family for herself. Despite the language barrier, she was glad to be free and not to be dependent on me for one day. All these psychological considerations did not count for my uncle because he himself felt obligated in his relationship with us. The fact that I solved the air conditioning problem with my own money and thanked my young maternal cousin for taking my sister shopping with a substantial gift certificate also impressed my relatives. It revealed my independence, my economic standards, and my resoluteness. My uncle’s decision to go away on a vacation was to show me his disagreement but also his economic power. My cousin clearly took it as his duty to compensate his uncle’s attitude by spending much time and money on us. I have been back to Korea with my husband for a month now and I haven’t seen him yet.
Conclusion

As evidenced by all the anecdotes above, the improper exchange of gifts and money can generate vexation, hard feelings, and resentment. It can also lead one to wonder what kind of relationship one has with others. This is not only true in Korean society but in any society. Yet I argue that South Koreans especially invest gifts and money with symbolic value because their society is more stratified along age, gender, and class lines than French or American societies are, for example. For many different reasons, initially, I was careless in my handling of money and a bit negligent in my choices and distribution of gifts. In any case, I did not spend enough time thinking about these things that I deemed less important than others. I first tried to manage my budget rationally but what seemed rational to me seemed often inappropriate or foolish to my Korean relatives. The fact that they were my relatives and not just any host family allowed them to have a say in my spending and remind me of rights and duties which I would have rather avoided at times. On the other hand, the very fact that I argued with my Korean relatives indicates the closeness of our relationship. Things are back to normal.

Anthropologists often contribute to their host families' household chores or contribute monetarily for common expenses. They also offer gifts that are appreciated. I argue that in my case, as well as in the case of other adoptees who maintain a relationship with their birth families, these matters are furthermore complicated by the paradox that constitutes the meeting with strangers from a foreign culture that are also one's birth parents and close relatives. For example, the Christmas gift episode illustrates that the cultural trial and error process takes place on both sides. My other examples relate the misunderstandings and difficulties experienced by both sides in the perilous enterprise of building social ties between members of very different societies. The exchange of gifts and money is intrinsic to the production and reproduction of social life, and it starts within the family.

Objects that are given as presents aside from the main ceremonies of the life cycle (birth, certain significant birthdays, marriage, death) tend to express affection and reinforce friendship bonds and most often call for a counter-gift. I found out that from a simple financial transaction, as a symbolic gesture, or as an indicator of social standing and prestige, money operates between people in different modes. My use of money was not well accepted by my relatives as they thought money allowed me to indulge in my selfish lifestyle. To them it must have symbolized a lack of consideration for their opinions, a lack of reserve, and an excess of confidence in my rights and my abilities. My uncle had to reassert his authority by reneging on his invitation for my sister and I to stay with his family, but saved face by demonstrating his generosity when he treated all of us to lunch as usual. And the face of the paternal family was restored by my cousin's constant endeavors.

Additional resentment has accumulated because my relatives' financial situation has deteriorated in the past few years. Before the clash over my sister's visit, I had observed that my paternal aunt's affection seemed to have declined along with its means of expression: her hospitality. Two years ago, I walked over from my maternal grandmother's house to my paternal aunt's house and visited without warning. Shockingly, the light, clean, and tidy house I used to inhabit was dark, dusty, and messy. She was not pleased by my visit and apologized for the state of the rooms. She said she and her husband had been sick recently. I felt her hesitation in offering me even some watermelon, and I left quickly. If my mother had remarried and had had other children, all the resources of the household would be directed towards them and there would be nothing—or not much—left for my sister and me. Therefore, the concrete expressions of affection would then be restricted, affection itself would be difficult to perceive and the relationship would be experienced as a burden by my relatives. One's relationship to birth parents really depends on their social status and economic situation.
I am back in South Korea as a university professor. Recently, my paternal uncle treated us to a traditional meal in a nice restaurant. He was very pleased to meet and have drinks with my husband—who he now calls his friend. My husband and I brought a good bottle of wine and some Belgian chocolates, which everybody liked. My husband was happy to be able to have a real conversation with my uncle and his wife, who have by far the best conversational English among my relatives. They want to migrate to the United States and are hopeful we will meet often once we go back there. But this time, the tables may have turned. My paternal aunt marvels over the size of our apartment. All my paternal relatives are planning on visiting us and having a “house warming party” (chipdŭri). For once, I will be expected to treat them to my hospitality and they will bring little gifts such as toilet paper, tissues, soaps or shampoo.

My mother has been reserved with me recently, but has been calling more often than in the past. She asked recently for a secret meeting in Ansan—where we live—and I suspect she wants to ask me for money. It is possible that now, with my independence, my status, and my relocation, my role as relative will take on new meanings. If I comply with my mother’s wish, like a dutiful Korean daughter, I may become more of a relative because my acquiescence will signify that I accept familial obligations in addition to claiming familial rights. If I refuse, I will choose to remain at the margins of this familial reality, an eternal guest to whom they owe.

References


Unwed Child Rearing Korean Mothers and their Experiences with Social Welfare Services

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This study aims to understand the depth of unwed child rearing Korean mothers’ experiences with support services from social service agencies. To achieve this we will inquire into the experiences of the mothers during the course of receiving services, the method of the counseling they receive, and how the counseling influence their decisions for their children’s future.

In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted focusing on the issue of unwed mothers in Korea. However, in 2004, 70 percent of the children born to unwed mothers were relinquished for intercountry adoption or child welfare institutions within Korea, and these children made up 99.9 percent of the children sent for intercountry adoption. Thus, adoption can be seen as an unavoidable choice for new unwed mothers. However, research on the subjective experiences of the mothers and critical evaluation of the impact of adoption services have been insufficient. More research is needed to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of this issue.

Our research is based on in-depth interviews with seven unwed child rearing mothers, age 19–37. At the time of interview all of them were raising their own children, living in shared facilities, or independently. The interviews were conducted between October 2009 and February 2010.

The research began with the task of finding an answer to how the unwed mothers experienced the services they were offered. This was done with qualitative methodology, which allows sufficient data collection on the various experiences during the course of receiving such services from the perspective of the participating unwed mothers. The data was produced through in-depth interviewing and phenomenology was used as a theoretical and analytical framework.

Phenomenology is the examination of the essence of a phenomenon, as the researcher immerses her/himself in the daily lives and authentic experiences of the research participants. Phenomenological data analysis progresses through a methodology of reconstructing analysis of a concrete statement or topic and inquires into all possible meanings. The first step in the data analysis is for the researcher to put aside all preexisting biases. This is known as bracketing and allows the researcher to acquire an image of his/her own experiences enabling the researcher to see beyond these general structures of dependence.

As the data is analyzed horizontalization is achieved by highlighting significant statements. These statements form the foundation to clusters of meaning whereby and the researcher writes a textural description of what the participants have experienced. Added to the essences of these experiences is a structural description of the context and setting in which the phenomenon was experienced. Another layer of analyses can be added with the researcher description of his/her own experiences during the research and discussion of what may have influenced these experiences.

The study offers an inductive explanation of the unwed mothers’ experiences as service recipients and it presents significant basic material for further development of service interventions for unwed mothers. At this point of time, with a decreasing birth rate and increasing number of women who show strong intent to keep and raise their children regardless of their marital status, it is necessary to discuss the mismatch between existing legal standards and actual conditions. Policy changes are necessary along with the creation of a system to ensure support from the child’s father and the woman’s own family. The concept of unwed motherhood itself is another vital issue which needs attention. It is imperative that Korea recognizes the becoming of unwed motherhood as an issue for the society at large without marginalizing these women in the public discourse. This shift in perception would be a first step towards not only an improved quality of life for the parties involved, but also a step towards actual prevention of similar social issues in the future.

References


Since the 1990s, Korean adoption stories have become one of the most popular and enduring social issues that have been consistently turned into a variety of television show formats. Out of numerous media stories, a search and reunion narrative has developed, telling the adoption story in the following way: due to abject poverty back in postwar Korea, a child was put up for transnational adoption with a mother’s hope for better life opportunities in a Western developed country. The child, now a successful adult who has overcome a personal misfortune, returns to Korea and searches for the Korean family, often his or her mother. The search and reunion narrative presents a resolution to the losses and pains circumscribing adoption, suturing a long lost family connection instantly and celebrating family reunion.

This popular narrative flattens out the complexities involved in diverse individual circumstances such as domestic violence, divorce, and illegitimacy, by isolating a dire economic situation—not an uncommon reality among working class Koreans—as the sole cause for relinquishing children for adoption. In the narrative, the figure of the birthmother is portrayed as a middle-aged woman who sacrifices her mothering to offer a better life opportunity for her beloved child. Furthermore, it treats loss and trauma over the adoption process as if it is redeemable by the reunion. All of these elements in this master narrative serve as primary components of Korea’s adoption discourse that folds Korea’s ongoing involvement in transnational adoption as a sender into Korea’s shameful but inevitable past, a part and parcel of its rapid economic development.

Thus, this adoption discourse obliterates the ongoing contemporary Korean adoption practice and casts a dark shadow over today’s Korean birthmothers. This paper focuses on contemporary Korean birthmothers who are a glaringly absent in transnational adoption discourse, and examines how birthmothers use Internet technology to process their unspeakable past and to contain its subsequent loss—a baby and the act of mothering. The birthmothers’ entries on the Internet provide detailed accounts of the birthmothers’ circumstances before and after the adoption, and reveal tormenting moments long after the adoption took place. By reading the birthmothers’ postings over the years, I began to wonder whether this long and persistent practice of transnational adoption from Korea is a form of gendered violence.

The website—아이를 임양보낸 엄마들의 솔폰 사랑이야기—was created by a birthmother in 2001 for mothers whose babies had been sent away for adoption, and quickly became a place where women can share “The Sad Love Stories of Mothers who Sent Their Babies Away for Adoption,” as its translated title makes clear. These women, usually young and unmarried, are seen as transgressing both the social norms of feminine sexuality and middle-class, heterosexual and traditional ideals of Korean motherhood. The website is a place where they can gather, write about the unspeakable and share the complex feelings surrounding their losses.

Since its inception, over 240 birthmothers have visited and posted messages on the website. A majority of these women, whose age range varies but most is in their late teens or early twenties, encounters unplanned pregnancy in a relationship. Only ten women have maintained their
membership since the establishment of this Internet community. The birthmothers’ postings peak in intensity and frequency at the beginning of their participation on the site, dwindling over time, and then the postings are replaced by painful entries written by new birthmothers. This high and steady turnover rate in the flow of the birthmothers’ entries over the past eight years may indicate that birthmothers are not offered a place to mourn their losses elsewhere for fear of the social stigma attached to a birthmother, as well as its incompatibility with an “ordinary” Korean woman’s life. However, this Internet community provides what Margaret Morse describes as liminal realms of transformation in a virtual landscape. Wendy Hui Kyung Chun discusses how Internet communication allows the marginalized to challenge social norms and, further, to develop a different meaning of a stigmatized identity. In this light, I regard the Korean birthmothers’ Internet community as a crucial apparatus, rather than a mere medium, through which the stigmatized group of birthmothers emerge and is transformed into a virtual mother. I argue that topics such as trauma, body, and subjectivity should be reconsidered at its engagement with information technologies.

Central to this article is how the birthmothers’ loss and trauma, mediated through digital technology, are rendered intelligible through the register of sense memory around the birthmothers’ accounts of body memory and their careful engagement with child photographs and artwork, all of which maintain the affective, spasmodic, flimsy, but infinite ties of a virtual mother to her baby. By treating digital technology as more than a mere tool of representation, this article explores the conditions of possibility for rendering birthmothers’ trauma intelligible and thus aims to develop an empathetic understanding of virtual mothering.

Virtual Mothering

My observation of Korean birthmothers’ online activities leads me to a careful consideration of the conditions under which this stigmatized group of women performs a forbidden identity as a birthmother. Such conditions are inseparable from the unspeakable losses - the loss of her baby and of her mothering—that Korean birthmothers experience as well as from the freedom that the Internet grants users, as Wendy Hui Kyung Chun discusses, namely from the social conventions that produce prejudice and stigma. Noting this liminal time and space through which birthmothers can engage their unspeakable losses, I borrow Margaret Morse’s description of the virtual landscape, which is, in her words, “not entirely imaginary nor entirely real, animate but neither living nor dead”⁵ The virtual aptly applies to the space-time of mothering over the Internet, but it also points to the birthmothers’ marginality in adoption discourse and in Korean society.

To understand the processes involved in becoming a virtual mother on the Internet, I draw upon Deleuze’s notion of a ‘machinic assemblage’, that informs a new notion of the body, one that is not delimited to a body of an organism, but includes both organic bodies and mechanical machines. The body, according to Gilles Deleuze, refers to a dynamism permeable and radically open to join and adapt to other bodies through machinic relationships, and therefore always in the process of, rather than fixed or given. In this vein, the virtual mother emerges as the organic bodies of birthmothers joined with digital technology, or vice versa. So does her subjectivity. Virtual mothering is a process as much as, if not rather than, an identity that emerges through an understanding of bodies and subjectivities within global information technologies. Virtual mothering is instantaneous, discontinuous, infinite and constitutive of its own process, which

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4. Ibid.
5. Morse, Virtualities, 185.
is viable and contingent upon a flow and logic of digital technologies, described at best as the virtual mothering’s potentials.

The past eight years of the birthmothers’ activities on the Internet are mostly, if not all, repetitive accounts charged with volatile emotions, recounting the pain and deep sadness over their unspeakable loss, the lost children and their unfulfilled motherhood. Once posted on the website, their unspeakable loss serves as a catalyst for inviting unknown birthmothers to become virtual mothers and an impetus for fostering a dialogue, thereby extending its own virtual life via circulation. A trauma which surfaces and moves through the logic of the global circuitry of tele-technology, as Patricia Clough⁶ poignantly observes, cannot only be explained in psychoanalytical terms as an unconscious repetition. In order to attend to the ways in which birthmothers’ emotions and trauma in cyber space turn into vitality and creativity that is grafted onto a virtual mothering through the birthmother’s online community, I therefore turn to an affect-driven analysis.

The affect-driven analysis begins with the unrepresentability of the trauma and its uninhibited transmission into a body. For instance, Jill Bennett⁷ argues that when words are not available for describing pain, the pain seeps into the fabrics of the body as a sense memory. Drawing upon the discussion on affectivity by scholars such as Brian Massumi⁸, Patricia Clough,⁹ and Kathleen Stewart,Ƭ⁰ affect-driven analysis recognizes trauma, feelings, and the body’s capacities to affect and to be affected, including its inactivated energies, in other words, potentials that can be aligned with the life of virtual mothering. Such affective qualities of emotions, according to Sara Ahmed,ƬƬ, shape the form of the body. In other words, recognizing the virtual mother’s body is about understanding the body as a locus of affectivity. The trauma and the emotions are not absorbed into a narrative. Affect-driven analysis points to a direction into which bodily residues of trauma and emotions work towards virtual mothering. Looking at the affective bodies that are shaped by emotions and trauma, I explore how such unspeakable losses experienced by birthmothers give contour and texture to virtual mothering, etched onto the skin of the Internet site.

Through a scrutiny of the topographical and sub-dermal features of the website, I aim to look at how the virtual mother produces and circulates affectivity that turns into a felt vitality in the process of its becoming. I focus on the birthmothers’ accounts of bodily memory, child photographs and their artwork – all of which maintain the affective, spasmodic ties of a virtual mother to her child. Of the various sensory contacts, I privilege vision and touch, the basic membranes of perception in Internet technology, in order to articulate how affective bodies are saturated and grafted as a felt quality onto the skin of the Internet community. In the following section, I examine the ways in which virtual mothering is made to flicker on this site through technological materialization.

**Bodily Memory**

Surprisingly, many birthmothers did not see their babies directly after delivery, sometimes by choice and other times by coercion. If adoption is decided before delivery, it takes anywhere from a few hours to a couple of days after delivery for an adoption agency professional to come

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and pick up the baby. According to the anecdotes of birthmothers whom I met in the summer of 2005, birthmothers are often advised not to see the baby because this would make it harder to separate from it. A birthmother, often much younger and more vulnerable than an adoption agency caseworker, and usually unmarried, in/voluntarily agrees to relinquish the baby without a glance, which becomes a source of pain for the rest of her life. This pain in turn engenders a different way of knowing and feeling the baby, although it is quite belated.

The absent knowledge of one’s own baby is a driving force for the birthmothers’ Internet discussions. Their accounts, or in other words, their efforts to remember their babies, often linger around the temporal site of pregnancy when a woman and baby are not yet differentiated and thus cannot be separated from each other. Another site that birthmothers’ accounts tend to emphasize is their own body after delivery, which becomes her most tangible record of the event that she was unable to witness. Thus, the body during pregnancy and after labor becomes a crucial site for a birthmother to carve out the body-text of her own baby without having an image. As the birthmother writes, she visualizes her baby by touching the keyboard.

Such memory without having an actual image is often kept in the form of visceral or sense memory. Massumi theorizes that “the body doesn’t just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds contexts, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated.” Birthmothers’ bodily memories of their own babies also need to be contextualized in terms of their immediate circumstances which can be described as social isolation and ostracism during and after pregnancy. Birthmothers, as unmarried pregnant women, then experience shame and guilt concerning their own bodies and their own babies.

In this community, slightly over ten women identified as pregnant share their feelings about pregnancy. The social stigma against an unmarried woman’s pregnancy isolates a pregnant woman, often a young adult, from society and puts her in a situation lacking economic, medical and emotional support whatsoever. Such social environments inflict injuries rather than provide support for pregnant women who are not protected by the privilege of the family. As a result, a sense of disgust and self-hatred is often observed in the postings.

ID: No name Date: 2002. 02.14 10:52

I hate the baby inside of me. I don’t know why. Maybe it’s because I wasn’t ready or because I might have been too immature. I hate the baby so much that I punched my stomach whenever it moved. I can’t even describe it in words. I wish I liked my baby.

12. The baby is taken care off at the private home of a foster mother, who works for an adoption agency. Before the baby is sent away for adoption, birthmothers can go to the agency where the baby is regularly brought into for check-ups. Some agencies set the maximum number of a birthmother’s visits, while others do not have such a regulation.
14. From August 2001 to October 2005, almost two hundred women passed through this community as birthmothers.
15. About ten women identified as pregnant women participated in the community.
In response to this posting, another woman replied under a subject titled 'I felt the same way at first'.

ID: No name Date: 2002. 05.02 10:07

I read your message. I am also only eighteen years old. You hate your baby? So you punched your stomach whenever it moved. I did the same thing. Because I really hated my baby, so I did not eat on purpose and made my body really tired, that caused my baby pain. I gave birth not so long ago. As soon as I heard my baby crying, I shed my tears because I felt so grateful to my baby who was born healthy (despite the given circumstances). After my baby was placed for adoption, I looked back and cried because I did not take good care of my baby when it was inside my body/me. Now the tears of regret are overflowing. Once you deliver your baby, everything will be different. Then you might also have a lot of regret (like me). My dear lovely baby, Ji Woo, I love you most of all in the world.

Over the past four years, numerous accounts indicate feelings of emptiness and regret after delivery. Many birthmothers showed their regret particularly around their pregnancy, the only time when they could perform a maternal act for their own children, without any discretion as a birthmother involved in adoption. However, the e-postings show that many women feel that they failed to appreciate their first and last opportunity of mothering during pregnancy, and the belated sense of regret left birthmothers more devastated after the baby was adopted.

Many women confessed that they abused themselves by abstaining from food during pregnancy. Others punished their bodies with alcohol, prescribed drugs, and cigarettes. The majority of women hid their swelling stomachs under layers of clothing or tight belts from neighbors, teachers, and their own family members. These acts of self-abuse and concealment starkly differ from the behavior of mothers experiencing ‘normal’ pregnancy. Upon giving birth, they belatedly regret that they did not take a good care of their babies. Yet they themselves, as pregnant women, must have been deeply in pain. Although birthmothers apologize to their babies for their lack of care and mothering during the pregnancy in the postings, they were actually attempting to punish themselves in the most visceral sense.

Such regret renders the pregnancy as a sacred and precious time that birthmothers would like to return to.

ID: 은비염마 Date: 2002.04.01 05:39

When I had you inside my body, I wanted you to come out quickly. … My happiest moment was when you kicked in my stomach as if you were saying, “mommy, I am here”. When you moved inside me, you always tried to inform me of your presence. (But from now on) I do not have the sense of movement from you any more. […] When I heard that you left the agency because you were placed for adoption, I felt as if a stranger had taken the candy that I was licking. I think the time when you were inside me was a good one. You were my first and secret one so I could not take good care of you, I could not talk to you much either. That made me really sad…

The birthmother who does not have a visual memory of her own baby still vividly remembers a muscular memory from the infant that once thrived inside her. The abrupt separation immediately after delivery does not allow a birthmother to unfold the bodily memory into a memory of her baby. Instead her bodily sensation authorizes the memory of her baby. In fact,

16. Their pain is well articulated in a birthmother’s extreme wish: “I wished I could put the baby inside of me once I knew I would have to send her away.” Someone forcibly chose adoption for her baby.
the very absence of her baby after birth invokes a belated appreciation for her baby’s movement within her body.

Traces of the baby are found not only in her belated memory of the pregnancy, but continue to be manifested on her very own body. After the baby leaves her body through delivery and is taken from her through the adoption process, her own body reminds her of what was once inside her. No mother’s body is just an emptied shell after her baby is delivered; it is rather a volatile site for the conception of her baby and her mothering.

ID: 里斯 Date: 2001.10.05 23:25

What if I could have nursed you even once?
I wish I could have hugged you even once ...

After delivery, my breasts were filled with flowing milk, they looked swollen. What if I had held your hand that you stretched out to me while I cut the umbilical cord …I would not have been as devastated as I am right now...

The pregnancy and delivery of a baby changes a woman’s body into a nursing mother’s body. But in the absence of their babies, many of the birthmothers reported suffering from inflammation in their breasts due to a lack of nursing. The mother’s milk flowing out of her body spills like a birthmother’s tears, well after the baby has been adopted away; it seeps into the Internet.

ID: 里斯 Date: 2003.03.18 03:16

Every year, around your birthday, I feel the pain in my stomach.
Always in March, the pain is all over, in my body and heart.
Someday, it will be fine. Someday, I will be okay.

On her baby’s birthday, this birthmother experiences the pain of separation. Her memory of the loss is embodied in her changed body as a rupture in both flesh and heart. During pregnancy, the skin is stretched suddenly as a result of rapid growth. With time, stretch marks fade and become less obvious, but they never go away completely. Rather, the stretch marks inscribe the fossilized memory of her baby. The pain caused by loss overflowing in the birthmothers’ bodies constitutes the skin of the virtual mother.

The sense of touch is integral to perception for people who have lost their eyesight. As indicated by Jablonski, “[T]heir hands become expert ‘observational instruments’, which can discern even tiny details of a surface or protuberance.”17 For birthmothers who do not have the visual memory of their own babies, a sense of touch embodying a partial memory of the baby produces a sense of visuality when the tactile information encounters other distributed perceptions. Thus, the absent baby’s body is formed through orchestrated efforts coordinating touch and vision into a machinic assemblage of a virtual baby. A woman’s partial, embodied knowledge of her baby is acknowledged through a meticulous combination of fingertips on a keyboard and eyes scanning digital texts. As her virtual baby becomes embodied, so does her virtual motherhood. Thus, the baby and the act of mothering, once two incompatible and absent objects for birthmothers, cohabitate in this virtual world through the circulation of affects.

**Child Photographs**

The memory of trauma is embedded not just in narrative but material artifacts, which can range from photographs to objects.\(^{18}\)

While the website is generally saturated by expressions of deep sorrow, there are occasional expressions of joy and pleasure in the e-postings. That is when the birthmothers receive their babies’ pictures from adoption agencies, or more accurately, from adoptive parents. For instance, several birthmothers write posts saying that they are about to go and pick up their baby’s picture at the adoption agency, written as if they are about to greet the actual child.

For the birthmother, who has lost sight of her own baby and simultaneously lost the opportunity to mother, the baby’s photograph means far more than just a photograph. The loss of the experience of seeing their baby is replaced with a photographic image, which for many birthmothers is the first embodiment of the child. For a birthmother, these photographs are evidence of the baby’s wellbeing and healthy adjustment to a new environment. They are also documents of the lost time during which she could not be with her baby. But more than anything, it is a constant reminder of the fact that there exists a baby who she gave birth to but does not mother.

On the website’s “photo room,” there are more than eighty photographs of seventeen adopted children. Birthmothers post their babies’ pictures as though they are mothers showing their children’s pictures to neighbors, relatives and friends, and sometimes even to strangers. By uploading pictures on the Internet, birthmothers perform virtual motherhood.

The collection of photographs can be divided into two categories: (1) pre-adoption photographs and (2) post-adoption photographs. Pre-adoption photographs are mostly of infants, and are presumably taken by the birthmother herself with her mobile phone or her digital camera at the hospital after the delivery or at the foster care facility of the adoption agency during a visit. Post-adoption photographs include a six-month-old baby, toddlers, and pre-teen adopted children from American and Swedish adoptive families. The backgrounds of these post-adoption pictures are often set in domestic spheres, such as a kitchen, a living room, or a playground, places that contextualize a child in relation to the Western adoptive family. The starkly different background of the pre-adoption photographs discloses the secrecy and isolation circumscribing such births, pointing to the social stigma surrounding unmarried women and their illegitimate children.

Quite interestingly, the majority of photographs before and after adoption appear to be portraits of the baby. If it is not a portrait, then there are photographs of a baby and his or her siblings. The birthmother or the adoptive parents are not included in any of the photographs.\(^{19}\) I do not know for sure whether this is the editing choice of birthmothers or adoptive parents, or an orchestrated effort by both. However, the absence of both parents, i.e. birth and adoptive parents from the photographs, renders visible the underlying condition in which a birthmother performs a virtual mothering via her engagement with Internet technology. The absence of the birthmother’s face from a baby’s picture is a manifestation of self-regulated behavior reflecting social stigma, although the birthmother’s face always already lurks behind the baby’s face. In addition, the absence of adoptive parents allows the baby to be imagined as if he or she was liv-

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19. Of those, there are two photos showing a young woman’s face and arms without any caption but I can’t help but remain haunted by the figure of a birthmother, identified a.k.a. 마지가 Z, despite a lack of evidence. In addition, there is a single picture showing an adoptive father present at a baby’s baptism. There are pictures with siblings who also appeared as transnational adoptees.
ing as a free floating being, and hence ready to be connected to a birthmother once he or she becomes virtual.

The disrupted temporality embodied in the photographs illuminates the simultaneous presence of life and death in a photograph. The baby is both present (implied in the photograph) and absent (it was there but is not here now) in the photograph. This dis/connection to the photographic referent on the part of the spectator parallels the birthmother’s flickering tie with her own baby. This sense of flickering not only captures the spatio-temporality of virtual mothering but also illustrates the birthmother’s ambivalence towards her baby and the act of mothering. Thus a baby’s photograph signifies the connection between a birthmother and her baby through its physicality, yet it simultaneously affirms the distance and the separation from the baby.

It is noteworthy that baby photographs may not appear traumatic in and of themselves. The rupture and loss between a birthmother and a baby is produced by the particular mediation of such photographs through the birthmothers’ online community. Therefore, those photographs transmit the trembling vestiges of the shock of unwed pregnancy, and the painful decision to give up the child for adoption. The background of the photograph is not limited to the inside of a frame. The photograph is situated within the birthmother’s Internet community where her grief and sadness is saturated and contextualized.

I draw on Barthes’s passage on the photograph and sense of touch in order to attend to the mediation of photography via Internet technology, which is the ground for virtual mothering.

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here … A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.

Viewing a photograph connects eyes with the sense of touch, as the eyes share their boundary with the surface of the subject being photographed. Marianne Hirsch brilliantly points out that “[W]ith the image of the umbilical cord, Barthes connects photography not just to life but to life-giving, to maternity.” Extending this life-giving quality of the photograph to the sphere of Internet technology, where photographs are virtually projected and infnitively circulated, allows me to envision numerous entangled global circuits of perception in vision and touch.

The birthmother’s severed ties from her baby are regenerated in the form of an umbilical cord which connects the baby’s body to the eyes of the mother; she becomes a virtual mother as the photo is seen and touched; there is a transmission between the skin of the photographed (the baby) and the skin of the onlooker (the birthmother as well as all other viewers). Just as photography is realized and mediated through light, I argue that its distribution and circulation over the Internet is mediated through a machinic assemblage that distributes perceptions. In the process, the sense of touch is as equally important as, if not more so, the sense of vision. Barthes writes, “the photographer’s organ is not his eye but his ĕnger: what is linked to the trigger of the lens.” Similarly, central organs of perception to virtual mothering are the fingers and eyes joining in haptic visuality. Thus, the senses of vision and touch are active and reactive organs of perception that work together as a “machinic vision” to inform and circulate virtual mothering and the creation of a virtual child.

While browsing the narratives on the website, I was almost paralyzed by the combination of sadness and imagination in some of the messages in relation to the photographs.

ID: 쩔범맘 (Hee Bum's mom) Date: 2001. 09. 16 12:59

Dear Hee Bum,

It is I. Your mother.

… I just looked up to the sky for a few days after you left. I thought it was a dream. I have never seen you, not to mention carried you. I wanted to dream of you but I couldn’t because I guess I never saw your figure. The other day (when I was reading a magazine) I saw a child’s picture that, according to my friend, looks like [you or me]. So I cut the photo out and now carry it with me in my wallet. You look much cuter and prettier than I could imagine…

This e-posting directs me to look for her ID and find her baby picture. So I found a photograph with the following caption:

ID: 쩔범맘 (Hee Bum's mom) Date: 2003.06.11 19:00

This is a photograph of a child who looks like my son, Hee Bum. The other day I saw this picture in a magazine in a waiting room of a hospital. My friend told me the child in this picture looks exactly likes my child, Heebum. I took it [the magazine picture] without telling a nurse at the hospital. The only picture that I have had is a sonogram and this. Isn’t my son cute? (italics are mine)
Due to multiple reproductions, the quality of the photograph is hampered. The light brown hair color makes the child look more like a Caucasian than a Korean child. But to this woman, it did not matter whether the child in the photograph was her real son or not. The baby photo is the site of the accumulation and absorption of affects where she can connect an umbilical cord back to her virtual child and thus perform virtual mothering. As long as this picture stirs a memory that there was a son and maintains the tension between the connecting and disconnecting to the baby, this photograph offers exactly that which virtual mothering needs.

In the process of Hee Bum’s mom’s becoming of a virtual mother, her active imagination deserves a careful analysis. Hirsch points out that a photograph is a visual space for postmemory, that is “a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.” As she interweaves her mothering with a photograph of a child who is in fact not her own son, Hee Bum’s mom appreciates how well her child has grown through her creative imagination and investment in the photograph. Hee Bum’s mom’s creative imagination and investment allows her to perform virtual mothering through the virtual quality of a photograph that has no connection to the reality of the referent. Like Hee Bum’s mom, many birthmothers who have lost an opportunity to observe a daily and mundane growing of her own child, creatively imagine and faithfully invest in the hope that their children are doing well, even better than otherwise. This flimsy and speculative mode sustains and constitutes a ground for virtual mothering.

A Mother’s Artwork

The e-postings suggest that many women in the community do cross-stitching. Jaewon, a moderator of the listserv, articulated that cross-stitching soothed her pain right after her daughter was sent away for adoption. Cross-stitching is also found in Layne’s work as an embodied practice of remembering and recovering the loss among American women who lost their babies during pregnancy or immediately after delivery in the U.S. For Korean birthmothers who relinquish their babies for adoption, they preferred to give something in which their hearts and love were embodied, so they made pillows, baby shoes and baby pictures, stitch after stitch, upon the baby’s departure. As a result, there were occasional e-postings regarding patterns for cross-stitching and a possible idea for the collective purchase of threads and needles appearing on the discussion board in the initial stages of forming this virtual community.

The off-line activity of women’s cross-stitching resonates as a form of Internet artwork on the website. The Internet transmits not only words but also parts of bodies. Shields argues that the “[...] simple technology of text on a computer screen has allowed the Internet to become a medium in which users may develop a palpable sense of others’ bodies...over the computer wires.” A sense of touch along with vision is saturated viscerally and physically in the birthmothers’ Internet community, not only via their texts full of emotions but also through artworks bringing forth a texture of loss to this virtual community. The following Internet artwork by A-Rang’s Umma animates the loss and love toward her child in this Internet community so that this virtual space is rendered sensible.

Dear baby who is born to be loved


Dear baby,
It has been more than a year and two months since you have been sent away
What shall I do when I miss you so much like today?
I hurt you because I (mother) made an irresponsible mistake.
I am sure that your good parents give you so much love
(I remember) the day that I had to let go of you without even hugging you once
I was so devastatingly sad to the extent that I would rather die
My baby, I always think of you
How can I forget your beautiful and serene eyes?
I wish with all my heart that you will lead your life happily
My strong A-Rang, can you do that?
I am only waiting for the day that you return
My love
From your mother.

When I first opened this message, I saw nothing but an empty white skin. As my eyes reached the bottom of the page, there was some text that I could not read because of its small font size and yellow color. As I scrolled down, I started to see a rose shape appearing that is composed of countless characters spelling “I love you” (“I love you”) and symbols from the computer keyboard. Thus, there were two different significations, one appearing to be an empty sheet, the other a patterned rose-like shape on its negative.

The double-ness of this digital artwork parallels the absence of birthmothers in contemporary adoption discourse. The birthmother is always there and not there at the same time. On the one hand, this image-text, which appears as a blank sheet at a first glance, reflects the underexposure of birthmothers often characterized in terms of their silence and absence. However, the presence of birthmothers, if not visible, is already there, just less exposed. On the other hand, the painstakingly delicate image of a rose visible only in the form of its negative texturizes the pain caused by loss and emerges like the mother’s blood from the pale white skin of the computer when the mouse is dragged across it.
Arang Umma's Artwork

♥️ 우리나라 아방아 사랑해 😻 😻 😻.

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A-Rang’s Umma’s artwork illustrates the trauma, but more accurately the space of trauma and its particular modes of transmission through sense memory, that is in and around the image. Reflection on sense memory is, according to Jill Bennett, “…not to move into the domain of representation … but to move into contact with it.” A-Rang’s Umma’s trauma and unspeakable pain still can neither be subsumed nor represented by words. However, her artwork renders her harrowing wound inside out and thus a point of contact erupts between trauma and representation, carving out the conditions for virtual mothering.

While maintaining the present absence, A-Rang’s Umma is virtually cross-stitching her rose with the numerous incantation of “I”; “I” “o” “v” “e”; “y” “o” “u” onto the skin of the computer, delivering a visceral sensibility to our eyes through an intricate web of communication. Such texiturization innervates the bodily impression of cross-stitching characters across different bodies on the Internet. A-Rang’s Umma’s rose makes the reader’s eyes sever from his or her body to touch the skin of the screen. As a result, one’s body folds the texture of the loss embodied in the rose as into one’s own skin. She bleeds as she gives birth to her rose, that is her love - her virtual child. You bleed as your eyes touch and graze over her unspeakable experience.

A-Rang’s Umma’s Internet artwork exemplifies how a new technology creates a shift in signification which leads to a new experience of embodiment and a new subjectivity. Kathryn Hayles considers a possibility of the condition which technologies of text production can enable different models of signification. She further argues that “the different models of signification […] initiate new experiences of embodiment” As a birthmother engages in ‘different technologies of text production’ via Internet technology, she illustrates new models of signification, which initiate a new way of creating and informing the body. Thus, the birthmother’s off-line activity of cross-stitching is transformed via her engagement in Internet technology into the virtual mother’s bodily manifestation of stitching the image of her feelings for her virtual baby.

**Conclusion**

So far, we have examined the processes involved in the configuration of a virtual mother by exploring the sites of affectivity wherein birthmothers’ bodily remembrance is invested and embodied. In this article, we have felt a virtual mothering in a birthmother’s attendance to her virtual baby. A birthmother materializes her virtual baby not only by sharing her baby’s photograph and her artwork, but also by surfacing her own bodily residues. Her bodily discharges, such as breast milk and phlegm from inflammation as well as her Internet artwork, surface on the Internet to constitute the exteriorization of loss, simultaneously giving shape to the virtual mother’s felt quality. Her innovative engagement with Internet technology gives the virtual space a maternal physicality, a virtual womb for the baby to inhabit.

This unprecedented website of contemporary Korean birthmothers reveals the birthmother’s ambivalent relationship toward the incompatible lost objects—the baby and the act of mothering—manifested as a tension between a desire to connect with and to disconnect from the baby at the same time. Such ambivalence harnessed as creative energy is illustrated by the way birthmothers remove themselves from the baby photographs but then attempt to connect with their babies through artwork. Thus, such tension facilitates rather than limits a virtual mother’s creative engagement and imaginative investment in each bodily register of loss.

In this Internet community, virtual mothering through the creation and nurturing of a virtual baby is not an isolated act by an individual birthmother. The birthmothers’ umbilical cord,
once severed from the baby, becomes virtually reassembled and connected to the baby’s body
through the contacts of numerous gazes, serving as machinic tentacles. Virtual mothering oper-
ates as part of a machinic assemblage. As John Johnston points out, “[W]ithin the social space of
these assemblages, the viewing or absorption of images constitutes a general form of machinic
vision.”31 It requires the active participation of others although they are scattered in terms of
time and space in order to render itself intelligible, and beyond this, in order to connect with
bodies on the level of sensation and affect. In other words, the variation in respective virtual
mothers’ degrees of exposure is contingent upon an orchestration of distributed perceptions in
contemporary telecommunication society. The ways in which the virtual mother is rendered
visible and palpable are intertwined with joined forces of perception that operate and are oper-
ated underneath and across the boundary of various bodies. A virtual mother is registered as
a felt maternal quality by orchestrated efforts of distributed perceptions on the Internet. Over
the past four years, birthmother’s e-postings and illustrations within the Internet community
not only reveal the pains and losses of contemporary birthmothers but also give shape to those
unclaimed experiences outside a disciplinary and discursive framework of heterosexual family
imaginary.

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To Acknowledge or Reject?
A Mixed-method Study Examining Cultural Socialization and Attitudes about Adoption in Transracial and Transnational Korean Adoptive Families

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Background
Transracial, transnational Korean adoptive families conceptualize and negotiate racial and ethnic difference in a variety of ways. Building upon Shared Fate theory, which proposes that adoptive parents respond to their children’s adoption status by either acknowledging inherent difference from biological kinship or rejecting of the notion of such a difference, some researchers have examined how transracial adoptive families handle more obvious racial and ethnic difference between parents and children. It is postulated that parents who are able to acknowledge racial and ethnic difference are more likely to have an adaptive level of family functioning. The purpose of this study was to further understand how transracial adoptive families discuss issues of race and ethnicity, and to examine whether the acknowledgement of racial and ethnic difference, rejection of racial and ethnic difference or discrepancy of views on race and ethnicity within these families affects the adopted individual’s attitudes about adoption and race.

Methodology
This study randomly sampled 30 U.S. adoptive families (out of a larger, ongoing longitudinal study of 342 adoptive families) in which one child (age 14–22 years old) was adopted from South Korea. Each family received a set of cards with questions on them that were designed to encourage reflection and conversation.

The three questions that were relevant to this study included:

1. How do our ethnic and racial backgrounds affect us as a family?
2. Provide an example of when your ethnicity or race has been an issue for you.
3. How well do we talk about ethnicity or race in our family?

Drawing on Kirk’s Shared Fate theory, these family conversations were coded as Acknowledgment of Racial and Ethnic Difference, Denial of Racial and Ethnic Difference or Discrepancy of Views (with one family member acknowledging racial and ethnic difference and the other family member denying racial and ethnic difference). Adopted individuals also completed a 30-item questionnaire that measured three constructs: Attitudes about Adoption (e.g., “It hurts to know I was adopted.”), Interest in Birth Background (e.g. “I would like to meet my birthmother”), and Racial Discomfort (e.g., “I often feel ashamed of or embarrassed about my racial background”).

Results

Based on these family conversations, six (20%) families were coded as rejection of difference, nine (30%) families as acknowledgement of difference and the remaining half, 15 (50%) families, as presenting a discrepancy of views. One-way ANOVAs were performed to determine if attitudes about adoption, interest in birth background, and racial discomfort varied among these three family categories. No significant group differences were found in adolescent self-reported attitudes about adoption, $F(2, 27) = 1.06, p = .36$, or interest in birth background, $F(2, 27) = .995, p = .42$, among families that categorically acknowledged, rejected, or held a discrepancy of views regarding racial and ethnic difference within the family. However, there were significant group differences in adolescent self-reported racial discomfort among families that categorically acknowledged, rejected or held a discrepancy of views regarding racial and ethnic difference within the family, $F(2, 27) = 6.47, p = .005$. Adolescents from families who rejected racial and ethnic difference had significantly more racial discomfort than adolescents from families who acknowledged or held a discrepancy of views regarding racial and ethnic differences.

Conclusion

This study does not support the hypothesis that adopted individuals in families that are coded as acknowledging racial and ethnic difference will hold more positive opinions about adoption than adopted individuals in which their family rejected racial and ethnic difference. However, adolescents’ amount of racial discomfort is affected by the way in which families engage in discussions regarding race and ethnicity. This may indicate that adolescents conceptualize their attitudes regarding adoption as qualitatively different than racial or ethnic issues. It may also indicate that White adoptive parents are able to promote positive attitudes about adoption while simultaneously either rejecting or acknowledging racial or ethnic difference within their family. These results complement a previous study with this dataset that found adolescents from families that either acknowledged or held a discrepancy of views regarding racial and ethnic difference perceived greater parental participation in ethnic socialization than adolescents from families that categorically rejected racial and ethnic difference within the family. The acknowledgment or denial of racial and ethnic background within a family does not appear to affect the adolescents’ attitudes about adoption or interest in birth background, but it does affect both the adolescents’ degree of racial discomfort and their views on ethnic socialization with the family. Future research should focus on interventions that will encourage the acknowledgement of racial and ethnic difference within transracial, transnational Korean adoptive families.

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Korean Adoptees’ First Trip Home
Toward an Understanding of Place in Relationship to Ethnic Identity

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In academic and professional research, the concept of place attachment is based on people’s emotional experiences with place, which may positively affect identity and enhance psychological well-being. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the topic of place attachment experiences among a sample of adult Korean adoptees by presenting the preliminary results of a larger study concerning adoptee place attachment experiences. Representing 11 countries, the original sample included 451 participants that were adopted from Korea at a young age by families in Westernized societies. Participants completed an online questionnaire that assessed their current socialization experiences as well as exposure to Korean culture during their formative years. From this sample, a total of 152 participants reported having visited Korea, and provided additional information regarding their attachment experiences in Korea and the influencing nature that these locations may have had on their ethnic identity. Based on correlational analyses, results suggest a positive and significant relationship between participants’ ethnic identity and feelings of place attachment toward their most memorable location in Korea. Implications regarding the importance of place attachment experiences are discussed, as well as recommendations for additional place experience and meaning research involving Korean adoptees’ and subsequent ethnic identity development.

The Concept of Place for Korean Adoptees

In 2007, the International Korean Adoptee Associations hosted the Gathering in Seoul, South Korea where adult Korean adoptees from approximately 14 countries came together to visit their place of birth and explore their heritage. At the Gathering, the following poem was distributed as part of a collection of literary works published by Korean adoptees:

The Journey
The plane touched down in the Land of the Morning Calm
With anticipation the young lady left the plane feeling anything, but calm
The sights and smells powerful her head was reeling from all of this
The people looked like her, is this possible, could it be, what place was this
Everywhere she went she felt that she belonged, but how could this be
For she could not remember visiting this place before
Young lady this is the place of your birth, this is your motherland
You see it was 21 years ago that you left, you have been here before
A peaceful calm came over her for she knew she had come home
To the place where her life had started, just 21 years ago¹

As represented in the poem above, Korean adoptees often describe their first visit to Korea as a highly emotional experience, feeling as though they “belong” and have “come home.” Specifically, Korean adoptee authors have described experiencing a heightened sense of pride and connection to a country that until their first visit, felt foreign and unknown. For adoptees, Korea can potentially represent an array of meanings, fantasies, and perceptions that may influence their experiences when they return to Korea. For some, physical and sensory experiences during their initial visit provide a tangible, yet often surreal feeling of attachment that they are discovering for the first time. According to Edward Relph, place is a multi-faceted phenomenon that is experienced by all and is maintained by one’s deep associations and consciousness of meaningful places (e.g. where we were born, where we grew up, or where we had significant life experiences). Similarly, Kang-Il Kim reports, it is this association with Korea as a place that constitutes a vital source of security as well as cultural identity. Therefore, the first visit back to Korea for some adoptees may provide them with an opportunity to find their place, culture, and ethnic identity, something which may have been missing until the return visit.

**Place Attachment**

Overall, many Korean adoptees tend to report having some feelings of attachment toward Korea. For some, this attachment may symbolically represent a repository for emotions and relationships that can also provide meaning and potential purpose to life. Equally important, developing attachment to a physical location can often evoke a range of feelings, thoughts, and beliefs that may serve as a positive function and satisfy emotional needs. According to Altman and Low, these feelings can be regarded as place attachment or an individual’s emotional connection to a physical location, formed from a connection or bond with a particular place. Although most Korean adoptees have little memory of their birth place, the idea of being naturally linked to Korea, may be overwhelming, unrealistic, or simply unimportant. Until adoptees become accustomed to Korea as a place, they may not fully recognize their connection or develop an emotional attachment. Place attachment can be conceptualized as two different, but related concepts. The first, place identity can be considered the degree to which a person identifies, connects, or develops associations toward a place. For example, if individuals experience a meaningful life event at certain locations, they may come to see this location as a representation of who they are. The second concept, place dependence refers to an ongoing emotional relationship with a particular setting. Some individuals may not have on-going access to these meaningful locations (e.g. house when growing up, vacation destinations, etc), while others can frequently visit places associated with significant memories. Because of these meaningful experience(s), place

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9. Giuliani and Feldman, “Place Attachment.”
dependency tends to represent the emotion and profound value that individuals hold toward certain locations.

Based on the underpinnings of personal construct theory, identity to place can be conceptualized by emphasizing the differences in which people define themselves and others, which often rests on processing one's emotional experience. Information is often filtered through how we understand and make sense of our experience and tends to shape how one interprets the world. From one's regularities of life, individuals tend to construct and re-synthesize definitions of one's self in order to form and understand a coherent identity in the present, past, and future orientations. Some individuals may interpret meaningful places as personal characterizations of themselves, influencing how they perceive others and define themselves. As discussed in a variety of narratives authored by Korean adoptees, identity construction can be an on-going struggle, enlightening experience, or at times, an unwanted process. Because of the contrasting cultural and racial realities in adoptive environments, Korean adoptees must navigate the meaning of who they are, according to their setting and context. Because these multiple identities are often forced upon adoptees, the coherence of their identity remains threatened, given the lack of resolution and continuity.

**Ethnic Identity**

For some adoptees, however, place experiences in Korea may not elicit an emotional or meaningful response or satisfy any emotional need. Adoptees that return to Korea, may have already developed place attachments to locations or settings within their adoptive environments that tend to represent Euro-Caucasian, Westernized culture. Based on surveys and published narratives, adult Korean adoptees report having had minimal exposure to Korean culture while growing up, often devaluing their Korean heritage or ethnic identity. Given the contrasting nature in racial phenotype between Korean adoptees and that of their parents, their out-of-place differences tend to be emphasized, often leaving adoptees feeling unaccepted by in-groups (i.e. Euro-Caucasian) as well as other out-groups (i.e. Korean Americans). As stated by one particular adoptee: “...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.” Given that families in Westernized societies represent the majority of Korean adoptive environments, it is not surprising that Korean adoptees often struggle with developing a coherent sense of Korean ethnic identity. Particularly, Korean adoptees that were raised in settings that did not represent or value Korean culture, are likely to experience feelings of confusion in formulating their identity. Without a positive sense of ethnic identity, adoptees tend to be at-risk for developing low self-esteem, diminished feelings of self-worth, and feelings of social isolation. Relentless reminders of difference and

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15. T. Cresswell, In Place Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996);
17. Hübinette, “Bodies Out-of-Place and Out-of-Control.”
18. Bishop and Rankin, Seeds from a Silent Tree; Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, Survey of Adult Korean Adoptees; Park Nelson, “Adoptees as ‘White’ Koreans.”
contrast with their adoptive family and peer group can lead to psychological stress, increasing an adoptee's risk for mental illness, social dysfunction, and suicide.¹⁹

According to Twigger-Ross and Uzell,²⁰ such feelings of social exclusion may serve as a conduit in developing strong attachments to relationships that serve as a significant factor in constructing self-identities. Particularly for Korean adoptees who have experienced feelings of exclusion within their adoptive environments, developing an attachment to Korea may initiate the exploration or reconstruction of their ethnic identity.²¹

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Design Research

Designers are often asked to create spaces that support the human condition and focus on enhancing the relationship between the person and the environment. By increasing our knowledge regarding how and why a person experiences place attachment, designers could direct their creativity to support attachment and thus psychological well-being. Similar to environmental psychology, design research promotes worldwide concern for the environment and ecological movement via interdisciplinary worldview taxonomies of person-environment relationships.²² These relationships of the human condition, most appropriately, are often reflected in architecture. According to Reyner Banham,

> Architecture must move with the times because it helps to create the times. It is more than a commentary on the human condition—along with war and peace and love and death and pestilence and birth, abundance, disaster and the air we breathe, it is the human condition.²³

If architecture can be considered the human condition, then design research should also focus on person-environment relationships, in order to describe and understand the human condition. Based on a contextualist approach, design research should support well-being by examining the changing relations among psychological and environmental aspects of holisticunities.²⁴ Emotional and sometimes life-changing, adoptees’ first visit back to Korea, can often be conceptualized as a holistic process that may speak to the relationship between place attachment and ethnic identity reconstruction.

Korean adoptees often describe themselves as living in an “in-between space,”²⁶ alienated from their culture, geographic origin, family heritage and Asian physiognomy association. Perhaps it is their association with “in-between place”²⁷ that heightens the experience to finally find their place. Qualitative studies examining the cultural and ethnic identity of Korean adoptees, have suggested that significant life experiences such as visiting Korea, are often transformative in contributing to the development of ethnic identity. Particularly, results suggest that events such as visiting Korea, contribute to a healing process of reconstructing ethnic identity. As a result, adoptees report the experience to Korea to be more meaningful than the relationship with

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20. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, "Place and Identity Process."
26. Hübinette, "Bodies Out-of-Place and Out-of-Control"; Park Nelson, 'Adoptees as 'White' Koreans.'
27. Cresswell, In Place Out of Place.
their birth family. Based on these results, there is a need for additional inquiry into the significance of place (i.e. adoptees' first visit to Korea) in their process of ethnicity development, particularly that which focuses on a relationship with Korea as a country.

**Study Purpose**

This paper presents a unique opportunity to address the paucity of research dedicated to place attachment and the connection with ethnicity and identity construction. For the purposes of this paper, place attachment is considered the degree to which a person identifies with a place (i.e. place identity), whereas place dependence refers to an ongoing relationship with a particular setting. Additionally, this paper addresses the experiences of adult Korean adoptees and the potential role that visiting Korea for the first time (since their adoption) may have had in their lives and ethnic identity reconstruction. Ethnic identity from previous research involving Korean adoptees and identity development refers to a sense of belonging and pride, group membership, and positive attitudes toward one's ethnic group. Based on a grounded theory approach, this paper presents the descriptive portion of a larger study that focuses on adoptees' exposure to Korean culture during childhood and how they identified themselves at the time. By presenting the preliminary findings I hope to introduce and illustrate the conceptual relationship between place identity and place attachment. Specifically, the intent of this study is to explore participants' emotions associated with memorable locations experienced during their first visit back to Korea and whether or not the feelings evoked from these locations are related to subsequent views toward their ethnic identity.

**Methods**

**Survey**

The electronic survey questionnaire is comprised of 29 items designed to assess participants' formative years pertaining to exposure to Korean culture and ethnic identity. The survey was designed such that participants, who reported having traveled to Korea, would complete all 29 items, whereas participants that did not travel to Korea only completed the first 12 items. Prior to administration, five adult Korean adoptees reviewed the survey, particularly evaluating for wording and clarity. Based on the reviewers' feedback, minor changes were made to eliminate ambiguity. An electronic version of the finalized survey was then posted online using Survey Monkey (Internet-based software to collect data).

The questionnaire was divided into nine sections beginning with informed consent and demographic questionnaire. The next section presented 11 yes/no items intended to reflect participants' ethnic identity and exposure to Korean culture during their formative years (i.e. “Did you

29. Ibid.
31. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, "Place and Identity Process."
socialize with other Korean ethnic families?”). Participants were asked to base their responses on their experiences between the ages of 8 to 14, a range suggested to be the most significant for children in developing their ethnic identity and articulating ethnic pride. The next section asked participants whether or not they have ever returned to Korea. Participants that responded: “no, I have never traveled to Korea” were presented with a new window thanking them for their participation, which indicated the end of the survey. Participants that responded: “yes, I have traveled to Korea” were presented with nine statements concerning their expectations and experiences with their first trip to Korea (e.g. I expected to find what was missing in my life when I went to Korea). Based on a five-point scale, participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with each statement, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Participants were first requested to designate all places visited from a dropdown list of 27 natural features and environments and urban and cultural environments (e.g. “Lake, Sea, Mountains, Public Garden, Sports Facility, Museum, etc). There was no limit to the number of features that participants could choose from. Participants were then instructed to rank - order their top - five most memorable places. Participants were then presented with a second dropdown list of 18 descriptions that they felt reflected these five locations (i.e. vibrant colors, food, landscape, patterns, etc). Descriptions were based on a diverse mix of locations discussed in adoptee - authored literature about their experiences when visiting Korea as well as predominant design characteristics of Korean architecture and interior design.

The final section of the survey presented 15 items intended to assess participants’ place attachment (place identity and place dependence), and ethnic identity as a result of the trip. For the first 10 items, participants were asked to rate their agreement based on the same five-point scale, with statements intended to represent the degree to which they were attached to a specified place (place identity) during their visit, (e.g. Visiting this location in Korea says a lot about who I am) as well as the emotional connection associated with the place (place dependence) (e.g. I get more satisfaction out of visiting Korea than any other location). The last five statements asked participants to rate the degree to which they felt their trip to Korea affected aspects of their ethnic identity (e.g. I feel a sense of pride in my ethnic history because of my trip to Korea). The entire 29-item survey was estimated to take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Participant Sample

Sample participants for this study were recruited by use of convenience (non-probability sampling). Specifically, adults adopted from Korea as infants or young children, were recruited from on-line, Korean adoptee associations and organizations, adoption services, adoptee support groups from numerous locations around the world, as well as snow-ball sampling through 12 selected Internet list-serves. Each organization was contacted via e-mail, and was provided a brief description of the study, and requested approval to recruit participants via email listserve. Upon receiving organization approval, potential participants received the Internet link to the survey in an email from their respective organization.

36. Bishop and Rankin, Seeds from a Silent Tree; Hong, I Didn’t Know Who I Was.
Preliminary Results

Total Participant Demographics

A total of 451 participants (female = 82%, male = 18%) took part in the on-line survey from 11 countries: the United States, Greece, South Korea, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Japan, Sweden, Antigua, Germany, Guam and the Netherlands. Ages ranged from 18 to 50 years, with the majority of participants between the ages of 20 and 29 (41%). Most participants reported having been adopted by Euro-Caucasian families (98%), and almost half (47%) had at least one sibling adopted from Korea, and 35% from other areas than Korea. High rates of education were found, with 89% of participants having attended some college, 68% earned college degrees, and 20% Master's, Law, and Doctorate degrees.

Formative Years Korean Ethnic Exposure and Identification

Overall, the majority of participants reported having had minimal exposure to Korean culture in their formative years. As presented in Table 1, 24% of participants reported having attended Korean culture camp and 30% indicated having grown up with Korean ethnic items in the home. Only 13% of participants reported having participated in Korean language lessons or school, and 38% reported having been familiarized to aspects of Korean culture (i.e. food, music, dress, etc) by their adoptive parents. When asked about peer socialization, 46% of participants reported having associated with other Korean adoptee families, and 24% with non-adopted Korean families. Despite these low rates of exposure to Korean culture, 46% reported that in their formative years, they considered themselves to be “Korean” compared to 53% that reported they did not identify as Korean (1% reported they did not remember). When asked specifically about their identity in relation to nationality, 72% reported having identified as an individual from the country of their adoptive families (e.g. American, Swedish, etc) and 58% viewed themselves as Korean and an individual from their adoptive parents’ country (e.g. Korean American); however, 71% indicated that they had considered themselves to be “just a person” while 44% reported they did not view themselves as part of any ethnic group.

Tab. 1: Self-reported Ethnic Exposure and Identification in Formative Years of Entire Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you view yourself as Korean?</td>
<td>46% (179)</td>
<td>53% (208)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you view yourself as adoptive parents’ nationality?</td>
<td>72% (279)</td>
<td>26% (101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you view yourself as Korean and adoptive parents’ nationality?</td>
<td>57% (229)</td>
<td>41% (161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you view yourself as “just a person”?</td>
<td>71% (279)</td>
<td>27% (104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you view yourself as part of any ethnic group?</td>
<td>53% (211)</td>
<td>44% (175)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic exposure</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korean culture camp</td>
<td>24% (95)</td>
<td>74% (292)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic items in the home</td>
<td>30% (120)</td>
<td>68% (270)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean lessons/school</td>
<td>13% (52)</td>
<td>86% (341)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean culture (i.e. food, dress, music)</td>
<td>38% (149)</td>
<td>61% (242)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate with other Korean adoptive families</td>
<td>46% (182)</td>
<td>51% (203)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *n* may not total to 397, as some participants skipped questions or responded “I don’t know.”
Characteristics of Participants who visited Korea

Of the 451 survey participants, 42% \((n = 152)\) reported having traveled back to Korea (female = 80.3%, male = 19.7%) between the ages of 3 to 50 years old \((M = 24.22, SD = 10.19)\). Over half of participants (59%) considered their first trip back to be a “vacation” and almost half (47%) reported that their adoptive parents encouraged their visits. In terms of participants’ emotional experiences, a small number indicated that their trip provided them with something they had been missing in life (24%) and most reported they did not consider their experiences as distressing and upsetting (63%); however, 20% indicated the trip was distressing. Even so, very few indicated that the trip was unemotional or non-memorable (1%). Overall, 64% of participants indicated that they wanted to visit Korea again as soon as possible, 11% did not, and 54% found the experience extremely emotional and poignant.

Memorable Place Locations and Characteristics

In terms of the types of places visited, participants reported visiting both natural settings as well as urban and cultural environments. As depicted in Figure 1, participants reported frequenting urban areas the most, rating street markets as the most commonly visited \((n = 124)\), followed by metropolitan cities \((n = 120)\), authentic Korean-type locations such as temples \((n = 115)\), folk villages \((n = 104)\), and palaces \((n = 96)\), and adoption agencies \((n = 106)\). Participants also reported that the common locations for them to encounter nature were the mountains \((n = 90)\), national parks \((n = 85)\), the ocean \((n = 69)\), and beaches \((n = 60)\).
From a list of 18 characteristics, participants were instructed to select and rank, in order of importance, five significant characteristics of their most memorable location. The most commonly reported characteristics were: food ($n=28$), landscape ($n=16$) and architecture ($n=15$) (see figure 2). The second set of memorable characteristics were landscape ($n=22$), sounds ($n=22$), and architecture ($n=15$); and somewhat memorable were smells ($n=17$), landscape ($n=13$), and patterns ($n=10$) and Interior Design and Materials ($n=10$).

Figure 2. Ranking of Most Memorable Characteristics

First Visit Toward Ethnic Identity Reconstruction and Place Attachment Variables

In order to determine whether an association or relationship existed between the variables of interest, correlational analyses were conducted to obtain correlation coefficients (see table 2). Only one relationship (positive) between ethnic identity reconstruction items (i.e. “I feel a sense of pride in my ethnic identity history because of my trip to Korea” and “My trip to Korea positively reinforced my Korean distinctiveness”) was significant. The relationship, however, with the reverse-worded item (i.e. “Before my trip to Korea, I did not view myself as possessing a Korean heritage”), was negative, and not statistically significant. This suggests that prior to the trip, how participants identified was not associated with any reinforcement of pride and Korean distinctiveness following their trip. Significant relationships were found between all three place identity variables (i.e. “This location in Korea says a lot about who I am”, “I am strongly attached to this place”, and “This location says a lot about me”) as well as place dependence variables (e.g. “I get the most satisfaction from visiting Korea than other place” and “It makes me feel sad to
think of never visiting Korea again, this place means a lot to me”). Positive and significant relationships between place identity items, suggests that participant responses on one item will be similar to that of the remaining two items. Similarly, as responses to place dependence variables increase, the responses to the remaining two items will also increase.

Additionally ethnic identity items (with the exception of the negative-worded item) were related with place identity items with the exception of one item (e.g. “I feel strongly attached to this place”). These same variables (e.g. pride and Korean distinctiveness) were significantly related to place dependence variables with the exception of one item (e.g. “This place means a great deal to me”). All nine relationships between place identity and place dependence variables were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, suggesting that as all place identity scores increase, so will place dependence scores. In terms of the negatively worded ethnic identity item, the only statistically significant relationship was found with one place dependence item (e.g. “I get more satisfaction from visiting Korea that any other place”).

Discussion

Entire Sample

Overall, the descriptive results of this paper appear to reflect previous literature that suggests adult Korean adoptees tend to report minimal exposure to Korean culture while growing up. Particularly, from the six indicators of ethnic socialization, the majority of participants reported having limited exposure to Korean culture camps, language lessons/school, ethnic items in the home, or general cultural socialization such as food, music or dress; however, socialization with adoptive families with Korean children appeared to be more common. Additionally, in terms of their ethnic identification during their formative years, participant responses appeared to be more evenly distributed (based on yes/no percentages) when asked if they identified as Korean only, any ethnic group, and identifying as Korean combined with their adoptive nationality (e.g. “Korean American”). However, the results were less evenly distributed when asked whether they identified with terms that did not include “Korean” (i.e. “just a person” and “adoptive parents’ nationality”). This may suggest that particularly during their formative years, participants identified with terminology that did not include ethnic or racial descriptors (e.g. Asian or Korean).

These results are not overly surprising given that previous research\(^{38}\) suggests that Korean adoptees often report experiencing racial discomfort while growing up in predominantly White, homogenous communities. This may be particularly applicable to the sample considering that participants also described a limited degree of ethnic exposure as children. Without natural immersion or contact with other individuals of Korean descent, adoptees are more likely to downplay their ethnic differences, and identify as American instead of Korean American.\(^{39}\)

Participants Who Visited Korea

The significance of place can be associated with the fact that individuals are always situated in place locations and that the context of our experiences contributes to our sense of identity and understanding of life.\(^ {40}\) The purpose of this paper was to present the concept of place attachment and ethnic identity among adult Korean adoptees’ concerning their first return trip to Korea. Bivariate correlations suggest a significant relationship between place identity and dependence

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39. Huh and Reid, “Intercountry, Transracial Adoption and Ethnic Identity.”
Tab. 2: Correlations between participant ratings of ethnic identity, place identity, and place dependence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Identity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of pride in ethnic identity from Korea</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—0.04</td>
<td>0.74**</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not possess Korean heritage prior to trip</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—0.04</td>
<td>—0.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>—0.08</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>—0.04</td>
<td>—0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positively reinforces Korean distinctiveness</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>—0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Place Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strongly identify with place</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.72**</td>
<td>0.73**</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.67**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong attachment to place</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.62**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Location says a lot about me</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>0.62**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Place dependence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>More satisfaction with Korea than any other location</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad to think about never visiting Korea again</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location has a great deal of meaning</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01
as indicators of place attachment as well as Korean distinctiveness and pride as indicators of ethnic identity.

Although formal analyses were not conducted, descriptive results illustrate the characteristics and locations that were most meaningful for participants. By including geographic context and sensory descriptors, contextual information is provided that may speak to participants' attachment to Korea. Although street vendors and metropolitan cities were described as the most commonly frequented locations in Korea, participants overwhelmingly chose food as the most memorable characteristic, and landscape as the second most memorable. Interestingly, food and landscape can certainly be found near street vendors and in metropolitan areas; however, it is also important to underscore that both characteristics can also be found in various other locations. It is not surprising that food was described as the most memorable, considering the range of sensory experiences involved with aspects of food. Various memories of locations, emotions, and interactions, may be ignited when adoptees re-experience the aroma of sesame oil, view an assortment of panchans on a table, taste fresh kimchi, and hear the crackling of stone pots. In addition, temples, palaces and museums as well as folk villages were among the most frequented locations and architecture and patterns, design and materials were selected among the most memorable characteristics; it is interesting to note that these locations and characteristics symbolize authentic Korean environments. Perhaps the uniqueness of these environments provides a newfound identity to a place previously known only in fantasy. Although some participants in the sample described having visited Korea on multiple occasions or when they were young, these associations may have been stronger for them after their initial visit, considering the likelihood of having minimal exposure to Korean culture prior to their trips.

Study Limitations

As stated earlier, the results of this study are preliminary and should be interpreted in the context of several limitations. As a population, adult Korean adoptees are not easily accessible especially in terms of obtaining a random sample. Although I am pleased with the original sample size (N = 451), these participants are likely to represent only a fraction of adults that were adopted from Korea when young. Particularly, sample participants that took part in this study were already affiliated with Korean adoptee organizations, adoption agencies, and/or Internet listserves specifically for Korean adoptees. It is possible that participants already involved with the Korean adoptee community, would be more likely to have access to research opportunities than adoptees with no involvement. Although it appears that there are a good range of responses, the results cannot be generalized to the population of adult Korean adoptees considering that the sample reflects selective participation. Additionally, when looking closely at the demographics of participants, the education levels are impressive. Almost three quarters of participants reported attaining college degrees (68%) and 20% of participants had graduate or professional levels of education, which could also reflect an increased likelihood for participation if there was professional interest in research.

Additionally, considering that participants were asked to reflect back on their formative years, it is possible that their memory recall became an issue in terms of providing accurate responses. Sample participants were asked to respond to items based on their experiences, feelings, and socialization particularly between the ages of 8 and 14; however, the majority of participants were at least six years older (20 to 29 years). It is very likely that participants were unable to recall the nuances of their experiences or may have skewed memories based on subsequent subjective experiences. Additionally, 22.5% (n = 34) of participants reported having returned to Korea for

41. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, “Place and Identity Process.”
the first time as a child. Similar to the previous statement, participants may have struggled in their attempts to remember childhood experiences or were not developmentally ready to understand or identify the meaning or significance of their visit. Several participants reported having made multiple trips to Korea since their original visit. Experiences during subsequent visits to Korea may have clouded recollections or may have been generalized to the memories of their initial visit. And finally, the measures used to assess the constructs of ethnic identity, place attachment, and place dependence have not undergone the rigor of testing to determine whether items were completely representative of the observed constructs among this particular sample. Additional psychometric inquiry into these constructs using aspects of this measure is needed.

Implications and Further Research

According to Christian Norberg-Schulz, places tend to become objects of human identification because they embody existential meanings related to belonging and relationships. By gaining an understanding of the locations and characteristics most memorable for participants, design researchers can identify tangible elements in relation to architecture and attachment to place to better support belonging. Additionally, because the survey allowed for open-ended responses, participants were able to share any information that they found relevant to describe their first visit experience. It will be imperative to conduct a thorough analysis of this data, which will hopefully provide additional qualitative understanding of adoptees’ place attachment experiences, subsequent trips to Korea, as well as other life experiences unique to adult Korean adoptees. Such exploration may potentially reveal and help contextualize our understanding of place attachment and how it informs the representation of place and ethnic identity reconstruction.

Overall, the findings presented in this paper are intended to introduce the potential significance that place attachment to Korea may have for adult Korean adoptees. From these experiences, design researchers, adoptive parents, and academic scholars should also consider the importance of place attachment within home environments as well as implications on identity. By maintaining a meaningful representation of their experiences from Korea in their everyday lives, their living space may serve as a new or different type of attachment to Korea and potentially begin to minimize feelings of displacement while enhancing psychological well-being.

References


Korean Adoptees in Sweden
Have They Lost their First Language, Korean, Completely?

HYEON-SOOK PARK
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea

Introduction

International adoptees constitute a notable part of the Swedish population, numbering over 47,000 out of about nine million people. Approximately 9000 (19%) have come from South Korea to Sweden (according to the statistics from Swedish National Office of International Adoptions (NIA)). It is not uncommon for international adoptees to think about their identity when they grow up: many take an interest in their biological background and their original country. Some of them try to learn their birth language as well, either in Sweden or in their country of origin.

Previous studies on international adoptees

According to the general view in studies of international adoptees, adoptees lose their first language completely. Some researchers argue that the adoptees lose their first language within just a few months after their arrival to a new homeland. The underlying reason for the view that adoptees lose their first language completely is that they are often completely isolated from their birth language, i.e. there are rarely people who can speak their language in the new environment.

In the literature of cognitive psychology, however, it is generally claimed that an individual's knowledge is never lost but that he/she can experience difficulty in regaining that knowledge if it is not used regularly.

For a long time, studies on international adoptees have mainly been aimed on their integration process, language switch, language learning, or growth conditions and living situations in the new environment. Vary rarely has language reactivation of international adoptees been a

2. e.g. Gardel, A Swedish Study on Intercountry Adoptions; Cederblad, Utländska adoptivbarn som kommit till Sverige efter tre års ålder. Anpassningsprocessen under det första året i familjen.
focus of the study. To my knowledge, there are just a few researchers that have addressed this issue.\(^8\)

By testing both Korean adoptees in France who were adopted at the ages between 3 and 8 and native Frenchmen, Pallier and his associates\(^9\) found that like the native Frenchmen who had no exposure to Korean at all, the Korean adoptees could not recognize Korean sentences, nor identify Korean words. In another study,\(^10\) they examined whether the Korean adoptees can differentiate between (pseudo)word pairs starting with Korean consonants that are difficult for foreign learners of Korean. With no statistically significant difference between the Korean adoptees and the non-adopted native French speakers, the study supports their previous finding that the Korean adoptees have no knowledge of their first language Korean.

**The Present Study**

This study reports some results from an extensive research project on language reactivation among Korean adoptees in Sweden. The main purpose of the study is to examine whether or not adoptees’ pre-existing knowledge of the first language has an impact when they are relearning the language as adults. The focus of the study is on whether or not adoptees learn Korean differently from other second language learners.

This section begins with a description of the informants and the linguistic material of the present study. Then follows some important results from the analysis of the two of the language tests performed in the research projects, i.e. the perception test and the grammaticality judgement (GJ) test. Appendix 1 and 2 provide detailed background information and test scores for the individual informants.

**Informants**

In total, 35 persons took part in the study; 21 adoptees (11 males and 10 females), 11 native Swedes (7 males and 4 females) and 3 native Koreans (2 males and 1 female), see table 1. The three native Koreans were included in the study as a Korean language control group. They were all exchange students at Stockholm University and had only been in Sweden for a couple of months at the time of the data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Adoptees</th>
<th>Native Swedes</th>
<th>Native Koreans</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the adoptees, their ages upon arrival in Sweden ranged from 3 months to 10 years, the average age upon arrival being about 2.5 years. Six came to Sweden before they were a year old, eight came between 1 and 2 years old and the remaining seven beyond age 2.

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8. Pallier et al., “Brain Imaging of Language Plasticity in Adopted Adults.”
9. Ibid.
Prior to studying Korean at Stockholm University, the adoptees had had no exposure to Korean. The length of time since their arrival in Sweden ranged from 19 to 28 years, the mean length being 22 years.

With the exception of the native Koreans, all other participants were current or former students of Korean at Stockholm University. All but one adoptee had studied Korean for at least one year. The average length of time the main informants had studied Korean was about 3 years, but the variation was great: while some (one) had completed only their first semester, others (two) had doctoral degrees in Korean language and culture and were teachers of Korean at the university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean age at testing (years)</th>
<th>Mean age at which informant began to study Korean</th>
<th>Mean years of language study in Sweden</th>
<th>Mean years of time in Korea</th>
<th>Mean years of language study in Korea</th>
<th>Mean years without exposure to Korean since language study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adoptees</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedes</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koreans</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in table 2, the average age at testing was 31 years for both the adoptees and the native Swedes, and 25 years for the native Koreans. The table also shows the main informants’ average age when they started studying Korean.

As table 2 illustrates, the two informant groups are different in several important respects. First of all, the length of Korean language study in Sweden for the adoptees was considerably shorter than for the native Swedes. The average length of Korean study was 2.1 years for the adoptees but 4.1 years for the native Swedes. This means that the native Swedes had studied Korean for twice as long as the adoptees had.

Most informants had visited or revisited Korea, for example, for further study or to travel around in the country. However, as table 2 shows, the adoptees had spent an average of 6 to 7 months in the country, while the native Swedes had spent 12 to 13 months, about twice as long as the adoptees. Furthermore, the native Swedes had spent on average a few more months than had the adoptees on university studies of Korean in Korea. An additional difference between the groups was that for the adoptees an average of three years had passed since their Korean studies, while only one year had passed for the native Swedes.

Another difference between groups was that more native Swedes than adoptees had also studied Korean in Korea (see table 3). These informants had therefore learned Korean in a more natural learning context than those who had only studied Korean in Sweden. The table shows that 7 of the 11 native Swedes (i.e. 64%) had studied in Korea, as opposed to only 8 out of the 21 adoptees (i.e. only 38%).

Only 2 of the 21 adoptees (10%) had been regularly exposed to Korean input following their language studies, whereas 7 of the 11 native Swedes (64%) had had input on a regular basis (see table 4). By “input on a regular basis”, I am referring to the informants’ exposure to Korean.

11. Some participants were enrolled in Korean language study at the university at the time of the data collection, but the majority were approached twice through advertising about the research on the homepage for the Adopted Korean Association and once by sending out a letter to those who had studied Korean from the 1990s to 2002. Some participants contacted the researcher after they heard of the research through their friends or acquaintances who had already taken part in the study.
### Tab. 3: Learning contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adoptees</th>
<th>Native Swedes</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden &amp; Korea</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tab. 4: Daily input since language study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adoptees</th>
<th>Native Swedes</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no daily input</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily input</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for example, through speaking with a native Korean spouse in Sweden, a boyfriend/girlfriend in Korea and/or professional Korean-speaking contacts.

### Tab. 5: Motivations to study Korean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adoptees</th>
<th>Native Swedes</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental and/or integrative motivation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation connected to origin or identity</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, all of the native Swedes had strong instrumental and/or integrative motivation for studying Korean; they were very interested in languages in general, and/or had taken great interest in Korean or East Asian culture, and/or had ambitions to use the language professionally in their future careers. In contrast with the native Swedes, only two adoptees had such motivation for studying Korean. The remaining 19 adoptees’ motivation for learning Korean was strongly connected to their origin and identity: The following are some of their reasons from the questionnaire: (1) to be able to speak with my biological mother and/or Korean family, (2) to learn more about my home country and language, (3) to be able to travel around in my home country in the future, (4) to strengthen my Korean identity, and (5) to feel more Korean. It is interesting to note that according to the course administrators, Korean adoptees tend more often than native Swedes to drop out after the first semester. One of the reasons for this might be that because the native Swedes have more instrumental and/or integrative reasons for studying
Korean, they are more prepared for the persistent and hard work that language study usually requires, especially for Korean because it is so dissimilar to Swedish.12

Taking all of these differences between groups into account, we can reasonably conclude that the native Swedes generally had better learning circumstances than the adoptees.

Linguistic Material

All of the informants, including the native Korean controls, were required to pass a hearing test with an OSCILLA SM910 screening audiometer. Since the informants had to have high enough linguistic competence in Korean to participate in the subsequent tests, they were also asked to carry out a relatively simple task where they read a short text in Korean and then translated it into Swedish. Once this was done, they answered a questionnaire in Swedish to provide information about when they had started studying Korean, why and for how long, and so on. All of the informants were then tested individually in a sound-proof room. The whole testing session took about two to three hours per informant. After the session, the informants were given SEK 300 (approximately USD 45 or EUR 30) for their participation in the study. The author as experiment leader and investigator speaks the standard Seoul Korean and is also fluent in Swedish. Instructions were given in Swedish to all except for the three native Koreans.

The informants were tested for perception of Korean obstruents (i.e. stops, affricates and fricatives), production of these obstruents, global accents, grammaticality judgements, retelling of a series of pictures and written production, all during the single testing session. This presentation focuses only on two tests: perception and grammaticality judgement (GJ).

### Tab. 6: Obstruents in Korean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Lenis</th>
<th>Aspirated</th>
<th>Glottalized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stops</td>
<td>p, t, k</td>
<td>pʰ, tʰ, kʰ</td>
<td>p', t', k'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affricates</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>cʰ</td>
<td>c'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricatives</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>s'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the perception test, each informant listened to and differentiated between word pairs that included the word-initial Korean obstruents that are most difficult for Swedish learners of Korean. The test items in this study were all real words and included Korean stops, affricates and also fricatives. Swedish (as well as English) stops are characterized by two-way contrast (e.g. aspirated/unaspirated, voiceless/voiced). Korean stops and affricates, however, are characterized by three-way contrast (i.e. lenis (unaspirated=slightly aspirated)/aspirated/glottalized).13 Along with stops and affricates, Korean also has two-way contrast in fricatives.14 Another interesting thing about Korean obstruents is that they are all voiceless in the word-initial position.15

12. One adoptee commented on the frequent drop-outs among adoptees. According to him, many adoptees choose to study Korean in hopes of learning the language easily because of their origin, but when they come to realize that the language is not as easy to learn as they thought, they become disappointed and leave.
13. Korean glottalized (fortis) obstruents are produced with a partially constricted glottis and additional subglottal pressure.e.g. Kwang Soo Pyun, “Korean-Swedish Interlanguage Phonology” (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 1987); Ventureyra, Pallier, and Yoo, “Loss of First Language Phonetic Perception in Adopted Koreans.”
15. One of the important features that distinguish Korean obstruents (especially stops and affricates) is voice onset time (VOT). In general, VOT for obstruents in the word-initial position is the longest for aspirated consonants and the shortest for glottalized consonants. VOT for the lenis consonants is in-between.
However, when these obstruents, particularly the lenis obstruents (except /s/), occur in the intervocalic position, they become voiced. Swedish learners of Korean are not expected to have any problem with aspirated obstruents in Korean, but they need a great deal of practice to master the lenis and glottalized obstruents.

Table 7: Minimal contrasts for Korean obstruents in word-initial position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lenis</th>
<th>Aspirated</th>
<th>Glottalized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pul ‘fire’</td>
<td>(p^b)ul ‘grass’</td>
<td>(p^l) ‘horn’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tal ‘moon’</td>
<td>(t^b)al ‘mask’</td>
<td>(t^l) ‘daughter’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kæta ‘to fold up’</td>
<td>(k^b)æta ‘to dig up’</td>
<td>(k^l)æta ‘to break; to wake up’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cata ‘to sleep’</td>
<td>(c^b)ata ‘to kick’</td>
<td>(c^l)ata ‘to squeeze; to be salt’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sata ‘to buy’</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(s^l)ata ‘to wrap; to be cheap’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The perception test consisted of 40 word pairs. Of the 40, 26 were minimal pairs that differed only in the quality of the first consonant, for example /pul/-/p\(\)ul/ meaning ‘fire-grass’, /pul/-/p\(\)ul/ ‘fire-horn’ or /p\(\)ul/-/p\(\)ul/ ‘grass-horn’ (see table 7). The word pairs were presented to the informants through earphones in random order, one pair at a time. Every word pair appeared twice in the material, but never in succession.

Altogether, the test had 80 word pairs. Twenty pairs in the test contained a lenis-glottalized contrast while 16 pairs included a lenis-aspirated contrast and another 16 pairs involved an aspirated-glottalized contrast. The remaining 28 pairs were the same. The informants were asked to decide if the two words in a given pair were the same or different. The two words in each pair were read by two different native Korean women in the standard Seoul Korean. Decisions were made by pressing one of two keys on a computer keyboard.

The GJ test was a paper-and-pencil task which consisted of 40 written Korean sentences in Korean. Each question was presented on one sheet of paper. The Korean grammatical phenomena tested here were case morphology (including allomorphic variation), verb morphology and adverb placement. Half of the sentences were grammatically correct and half contained one grammatical error, and the informants’ task was to tick one of two boxes marked CORRECT or INCORRECT.

Results

In this section I will briefly present some important results from the analysis of the two above-mentioned language tests, i.e. the perception test and the grammaticality judgement (GJ) test.

16. The reason for not using the same reader for both words in a pair was to prevent intra-speaker variation from causing judgments based on features other than the VOT of the initial consonant (e.g. different voice qualities, reading rates or pitch levels for identical words).

17. In Korean, the grammatical relations are indicated by different nominal case endings. Many nominal endings have allomorphs. The choice between different allomorphic variants depends on the previous syllable ends in a consonant or a vowel.
Perception Test

Figure 1 shows the results of the perception test. Not surprisingly, the native Koreans scored at the ceiling (\(M=79.0\), out of 80).\(^\text{18}\) There was no statistically significant difference between the adoptees and the native Swedes; the mean score was 48.5 for the adoptees and 51.6 for the native Swedes, \(t(2, 32) = -0.78, p = 0.44\). In other words, the native Swedes performed a little better than the adoptees but the difference was not significant.

As seen in figure 1, the native Swedes could differentiate between Korean obstruents a little better than the adoptees. If we look at the results at individual level, however, we see that the adoptees were generally better than the native Swedes in the perceptual ability; yet, some adoptees had the worst scores. To put it another way, the adoptees varied in their perceptual ability to a greater extent than the native Swedes. As the figure shows, the variation was much greater among the adoptees (SD=12.6, range = 30-71) than among the native Swedes, who performed more homogeneously (SD=4.55, range=44-57).

Figure 2 shows the test results within different subgroups of adoptees divided according to their ages of adoption. The results for the adoptees with age of adoption younger than 1 and over 2 were better than those for the adoptees who came to Sweden between 1 and 2 years old. However, no statistically significant difference was found among the three different adoptee groups.

\(^{18}\) It often happens that several people have the same results. When this happens, we see only one circle in the figure.
Given the wide variety of the characteristics of the adoptees, however, it would not be reasonable to claim any relationship between age of adoption and perceptual ability among the adoptees in the study based only on the results of this test.

As is shown in Figure 1, the adoptees demonstrated higher perceptual ability than the native Swedes, meaning their perceptions were closer to being native-like.\textsuperscript{19} Seven of the 21 adoptees (i.e. 33\%) got higher scores than the top-performing native Swede, who got 57 points. The best performing adoptee, with a score of 71, came to Sweden at the age of 10, i.e. she had the highest age of adoption. The second best performer, with a score of 67, was 9 years old at adoption, i.e. she had the second highest age of adoption. These two learners were both 36 years old at the time of testing, which means that they had spent 26 or 27 years in Sweden since adoption. They had studied Korean in Sweden for 1.5 and 2 years, respectively. They had both been in Korea but their visits had been relatively short and touristic and they had never studied Korean there.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Results of the perception test according to the adoptees' age of adoption}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{19} According to the perception test, it was also adoptees that had the worst scores. In total, 14 persons (i.e. 10 adoptees and 4 native Swedes) had test scores, which were lower than the average score (i.e. 49.5) on the test. With the exception of one native Swede, all three others had been exposed to Korean regularly after their Korean studies, but only three of the 10 adoptees (i.e. 30\%) had Korean input on a regular basis and the remaining 7 (i.e. 70\%) had had no exposure to Korean at all after their language study. The length of unexposed time after these adoptees' language study ranged from 3 to 8 years. The reason why some adoptees performed worse than the native Swedes might be that they had had no exposure to Korean after their Korean studies.
Two to three years had passed since their language study in Sweden. After their language study they had virtually no contact with Korean.

Three of the remaining five adoptees left Korea before the age of 1, while two came to Sweden between 1 and 2. Of this group, the first three are of special interest because they came to Sweden before they started producing Korean phonemes. When they were tested, two were 32 and other was 27. They had had no exposure to Korean since their arrival in Sweden 19 to 25 years before. Their length of Korean language study in Sweden was 1.5, 2 and 6 years, respectively. One of them was a doctoral student at the Korean department. Except for this adoptee, the others had each studied in Korea for one year. One of them had also worked at a Korean company for three and a half years in Korea and was married to a Korean woman, thus, was exposed to daily input. This informant is very interesting in that he had the lowest age of adoption (he was adopted when he was only three months old) and was one of the few adoptees that had instrumental and/or integrative motivation for studying Korean. This adoptee was actually the third best performer on the whole perception test. Now let us go through the results from the different categories in detail:

**Contrast Between Lenis and Glottalized Obstruents**  Nine of the 21 adoptees (i.e. 43%) had higher scores in this category than the native Swede who got the highest score of her group (12 points). The same two adoptees who performed best on the whole test also got the best results here. The adoptee who was adopted at the age of 10 got 18 points (i.e. 90% correct).

**Contrast Between Lenis and Aspirated Obstruents**  All of the informants had difficulty with this category; however, here also the best results were obtained by the adoptees. Eight of the 21 adoptees (i.e. 38%) got higher scores than the best Swedish performer who got 8 points (i.e. 50% correct). The adoptee who performed best in this category got 11 points (i.e. 69% correct).

**Contrast Between Aspirated and Glottalized Obstruents**  This contrast seemed to be easier to distinguish than the others. Not surprisingly, many adoptees also showed better ability in this category than the native Koreans. Six of the 21 adoptees (i.e. 29%) scored within the range of the native Koreans, whereas only one native Swede did (i.e. 9%).

**The Same Pairs**  Many informants were more successful in this category than in other categories. Here again, the best results were obtained by the adoptees. Two adoptees had all items correct whereas no Swede did.

In sum, the perception test (at least at individual level) revealed that the adoptees were better at perceiving Korean obstruents than the native Swedes were.

**Grammaticality Judgement (GJ) test**

Figure 3 shows the results on the GJ test. Like they did on the perception test, the native Koreans scored almost at the ceiling, $M=37.0$ (out of 40). On this test, the native Swedes scored significantly better than the adoptees, $M=30.5$ and 25.4, respectively, $t(2,32) = -2.78$, $p<.01$. We can also see that the variation was only marginally greater among the adoptees ($SD=4.94$, range=15-33) than among the native Swedes ($SD=4.84$, range = 22-36). Two of the native Swedes scored at the same level as the native Koreans, whereas none of the adoptees did.

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20. This informant had received his doctoral degree at the Korean Department, has taught Korean there for many years up to present and is married to a Korean woman.
As we will recall regarding the perception test, there were 7 (of 21) adoptees (i.e. one-third of the adoptees) who performed better than the best performing Swede. These 7 adoptees’ results on the GJ test ranged from 22 to 33 (M=27.5). Recalling the perception test again, the two best performing adoptees had the highest ages of adoption, 9 and 10 years, respectively. It is interesting to see how well they did on the GJ test; their scores were 26 and 22, respectively, which were lower than the native Swedes’ average score on the test.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the perception test, the native Swedes performed a little better than the adoptees as a group. This result can lead us to believe that adoptees have no advantage over native Swedes when they are learning Korean. If we remember the individual results from the test, however, it was actually Korean adoptees that had better test results: one-third of the adoptees, regardless of their grammatical proficiency, had higher results on the perception test than the best performing Swedish learner.

It is important to remember that the native Swedes were in circumstances that would suggest they would manage the test better than the adoptees. First, almost all of the native Swedes had instrumental and/or integrative motivation behind their study of Korean. Second, as a group they had greater length of study both in Sweden and Korea, greater daily input, and less unexposed time since their language study. Lastly, their knowledge of Korean grammar was signif-
icantly higher than that of the adoptees'. Taking all of this into account, it could reasonably be assumed that the native Swedish learners, not the adoptees, would have been more committed and successful learners of Korean. However, the reality is that the adoptees were more successful learners in terms of perceiving Korean obstruents.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning that according to the students as well as the university course administrators, very few class hours are spent on Korean phonetics and pronunciation. Throughout their language study, the emphasis is on developing skills in grammar, lexicon and translation.

In this light, what are the reasons behind the fact that seven adoptees had better results than the best performing native Swede on the perception test? There are several explanations available. First, they could have acquired their high perceptual skills through their own intensive study and/or training. Alternatively, they could have acquired their skills thanks to an extraordinary aptitude for phonetic perception in general. Another possibility is that they could have been incredibly lucky in guessing the correct answers on the test. Finally, they could have retrieved Korean phonetic remnants from their memories. The most reasonable option seems to be the last one.

If this is correct, the results from this study show that the adoptees have not completely lost their first language. According to the study, there are remnants or traces of the adoptees’ L1 Korean and there are indications that their (early) experience of Korean actually did play a facilitating role in perceiving Korean obstruents. The adoptees who were experienced with Korean obstruents outperformed the native Swedes who were not. This finding would be consistent with the claim in cognitive psychology that an individual’s knowledge is never lost but that he/she can experience difficulty in retrieving that knowledge if it is not used regularly. This finding is also consistent with the results of other studies of language relearning that relearning is faster than first-time learning.21

It is also significant that the two adoptees with the best results on the perception test had the highest ages of adoption. It suggests that the higher the age of adoption, the greater the (early) exposure to the L1, and the greater the chances of accessing the remnants of the L1.

The finding that the adoptees demonstrated higher competence in perception than in grammar indicates that the remnants or traces of the adoptees’ once-lost (or -forgotten) Korean seem to consist mostly of phonetic and phonological features rather than of more complex, higher-order grammatical features. The majority (14 out of 21) of the adoptees arrived in Sweden before they were 2 years old, which is well before their Korean grammatical competence could have matured.

The adoptees from Korea had been completely isolated for an average of 22 years from their original linguistic environment and had had no exposure to Korean at all since their arrival in Sweden. Even so, the findings from this study suggest that the adoptees’ early experience with their L1 Korean has left traces of the language, and that these traces have an effect on their phonetic perception, when they relearn the language as adults.

These findings raise an interesting question about whether or not early language experience has lasting benefits for the adoptees’ productive ability as well. It will be very revealing if the adoptees also have higher productive skills in pronouncing words that begin with the Korean obstruents tested in the present study. These test results will be presented in the near future.

References


### Appendix 1: Personal Data on the Korean Adoptees (A)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age of adoption (y:m)</th>
<th>Age at testing</th>
<th>Years without exposure to Korean since adoption</th>
<th>Years of language study in Sweden</th>
<th>Years spent in Korea</th>
<th>Years of language study in Korea</th>
<th>Years without exposure to Korean since language study</th>
<th>Daily input</th>
<th>PA (Max. 80)</th>
<th>GJT (Max. 40)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(0:7)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Doctoral student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(1:3)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(1:6)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(1:9)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>(1:6)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>52</td>
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## Appendix 2: Personal Data on the Native Swedes (S)

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<th>Years of language study in Korea</th>
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Searching for Belonging
Korean Adoptee Returnees’ Use of Korean as a Heritage Language

CHRISTINA HIGGINS
University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, USA

KIM STOKER
Duksung Women’s University, South Korea

Introduction

In this paper, we explore whether Korean adoptee-returnees (KADs) are able to use their heritage language (HL) as an avenue for social inclusion and cultural belonging in the context of South Korea. KADs are individuals who were born in South Korea, adopted by foreigners at a very young age, and then chose to return to South Korea as adults, typically to pursue birth search and/or educational and employment opportunities. In this article, we focus specifically on how the narratives of four KAD women illustrate opportunities to establish a sense of belonging as ‘legitimate’ Koreans and to participate more deeply in Korean social networks, despite the cultural and linguistic gaps that were established as a result of their adoption.

This study contributes to the growing body of narrative research on identity formation and cultural belonging among transnational and dislocated/relocated peoples. Much of this research has explored the life stories and narratives of refugees, migrants, and (both legal and illegal) border-crossers in an effort to understand how people experience shifting social spaces and identities in a world that is increasingly characterized by change and flow. This research also seeks to provide those on the margins with an opportunity to voice their own experiences, and to provide an alternative representation to negative accounts of immigration that frequently blame migrants and refugees for failing to acquire the language and cultural practices of the larger community quickly and efficiently. The present study explores KADs efforts to acquire and use Korean as a heritage language (HL), and in the process it reveals the emotional, cultural, and interactional issues that KAD heritage learners experience when attempting to learn and use their HL. Finally, in focusing on a transnational population that may be categorized as a “victim diaspora,” we seek to illustrate how a dislocated/relocated population is forging new forms of cultural identification that call for authentication and recognition by the mainstream.


Research on Heritage Language Identities and Cultural Inclusion

Most sociolinguistic research on heritage language (HL) shows a strong link between learners' cultural identities and their success in learning and using their HLs. In a survey of narratives produced by heritage learners from various backgrounds in the United States, Tse reports that ethnic minorities who express ambivalence towards their ethnic identity typically evade HL learning opportunities entirely. On the other hand, several studies have found that learners who have enrolled in HL classes and who have high degrees of proficiency in their HLs not only explicitly affiliate with their HL ethnolinguistic identity, but also have greater cultural knowledge of values, ethics and manners of the heritage culture. Korean Americans who have become proficient in Korean have enjoyed more social inclusion in their communities at church, in interactions with Korean international students, and in sharing interests in Korean television dramas and other forms of popular culture.

While HL studies generally show that most learners study their languages to maintain cultural identity and to more fully participate in heritage/ethnic communities, there has yet been little research that examines the ways that transnational and dislocated/relocated people may experience social inclusion through maintaining or (re)learning their HLs. Given the increasing numbers of individuals who cross borders as immigrants, refugees, and transnationals, and yet who retain ties to their countries of origin, such research is essential for understanding how people who live in between cultures, languages and national boundaries might negotiate their identities through language.

Belonging and Participation as Social Inclusion

We conceptualize social inclusion as cultural belonging, and we use the tools of narrative analysis to examine how people express their sense of belonging in the world. We find the sociocultural perspective of language learning as participation to be particularly relevant to our study, as we conceive of cultural belonging as equivalent to participation in communities and recognition through engagement with others. Both concepts are highly compatible with narrative approaches, which rely on learners' accounts, for they allow us to delve into participants' perceptions of their own positionalities in Korean society with Koreans as well as with other members of the KAD community.

Fougère's discussion of identity as a spatial metaphor in identity construction is also useful for situating our study theoretically. He provides a framework for examining narrative constructions of identity through notions of “insideness,” “outsideness” and “being in-between.” Taking

6. “Effects of Ethnic Identity Formation”
the narratives of four male French university graduates who worked abroad in Finland, Fougère examines how the men positioned themselves in their narratives with reference to space. After experiencing the positionality of “outsider,” some of the men reverted to their “origin” identity, articulating a strong sense of belonging that was firmly tied to their home cultures. However, others were able to experience outsideness and then “hybridize” their identities, thus finding a comfort zone in a place somewhere between insideness and outsideness. One participant, David, expressed an evolving sense of self in his experiences outside of his French home culture.

To sum up Finnish culture, I think that... pragmatism, that’s something they really have. Whether in their organization, in time, or whatever... even the way they see things. That’s a quality I appreciate. Now there are other things in French culture that are also... nice. I’m not a lover of Finnish culture more than of French culture, I enjoy them both. I try to take the best from each, from all the things I know, and with a little bit of Spanish features too, since I’ve lived there for a little while.¹¹

David’s excerpt is a good illustration of the numerous cultural flows the “global citizen” now encounters in an increasingly borderless world. Citing Hall,¹² Fougère explains David’s acceptance of an in-between identity as a result of his trajectory through various cultures and languages, an identity that is “better represented by ‘routes’ than by ‘roots’.”¹³ In focusing on the social inclusion and sense of belonging among KADs, we seek to explore how they negotiate both their “roots” and their “routes” in stories about their experiences living and working in South Korea.

Narrative Analysis of Social Inclusion

We employ narrative analysis¹⁴ to explore how adoptee-returnees discuss their learning and use of Korean in their narratives with reference to their social recognition as Koreans and their sense of ethnic and cultural belonging. We make use of tools from narrative analysis that help us to investigate how they position themselves vis-à-vis insideness, outsideness, and being in-between. We focus on shifts between the storied world and the storytelling world,¹⁵ that is, moments in the interviews where the participants move from retelling a series of events (in which they are one of the characters) to commenting on the story that they are telling in the here-and-now of the interview.

To focus our analysis, we looked for retellings of experience that were surrounded by or interrupted with evaluative comments that revealed the women’s positioning toward their identity negotiation. Here, we draw on work by other narrative researchers who have developed clear analytical tools for identifying narrators’ positionalities. Taking the work of Labov and Waletzky¹⁶ as a starting point, we view the evaluation of a narrative as “that part of the narrative that reveals the attitude of the narrator by emphasizing the relative importance of some units as opposed to others.”¹⁷ To contend with the discursive aspects of evaluation in narrative data, we draw

¹¹. Ibid., 199.
¹⁷. Ibid., 32.
specifically on Goffman’s work on footing\textsuperscript{18} to identify moments in talk where narrators move from their role as storytellers to evaluators of actions in stories. Specifically, we examine how the women express their stances towards their HL and towards Koreans when they shift their footing from authors and/or animators to principals. The women’s discursive moves between the act of narrating what happened (author) to reported speech (animator) to an aside wherein some evaluative comment is made (principal) are moments in talk where evaluative stances are expressed. Evaluative comments were often voiced through reported speech, constructed dialogue or inner dialogue as the narrators “ventriloquated” themselves or other characters in their retellings of events.\textsuperscript{19} Evaluative comments also occurred in the form of asides, mitigations, and concessions after events were recounted.

Much of the time, the women narrate stories of social exclusion, and they often highlight their own lack of Korean linguistic competence or shared cultural models. The narratives show that a frequent obstacle to achieving a sense of cultural belonging is Koreans’ lack of acceptance of KADs as authentically Korean. In response to the lack of social inclusion afforded to them, the narratives reveal a strong sense of belonging with the KAD community in Seoul, rather than with “Korean Koreans.” Rather than interpreting these narratives as evidence of failure to belong, we argue that KADs claim belonging through their participation in the “third place”\textsuperscript{20} of the KAD social network in a myriad of ways, thereby producing a new, and legitimate, ethnic identity of the “in-between” Korean.

**Data Collection**

The second author of this article, Kim Stoker, who is a member of the KAD community living and working in Seoul, used her contacts with her KAD friends and colleagues as a starting point for the data collection. Due to the personal nature of our research interests, we chose to select participants whom Kim knew rather well in order to encourage open and honest discussion of their lives. Kim invited eight women to participate in the interviews, all of whom are active participants in either adoptee organizations in Korea or informally in the adoptee community. The women share a fair amount in common: they are all in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, they have studied Korean in intensive language programs in Korea, and they teach or work in English to make a living. We also chose to limit the data collection to KADs who had been living in Korea for at least two years in order to see whether long-term residence in Korea had an effect on language abilities and the development of a sense of cultural belonging. Due to the limits of space in this article, we narrow our analysis to three focal participants. We include Kim Stoker as a fourth participant due to the nature of the data collection, which was carried out in the framework of active interviews.\textsuperscript{21} In contrast with more positivist and objectivist approaches, active interviewing is characterized by postmodern sensibilities wherein the boundaries between the interviewer and the interviewee are blurred, and the interview itself is more of a conversation than a fact-finding activity.\textsuperscript{22} In this way, Kim was free to draw on her own experiences and stories as a HL speaker of Korean as a means of encouraging the participants to share their own thoughts and memories. Table 1 summarizes key biographical information of the four participants.

---

\textsuperscript{18.} Forms of Talk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981)


Tab. 1: Information about the four participants

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years in Korea as a returnee</th>
<th>Age of adoption</th>
<th>Study of Korean</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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<td>Kelly*</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Basic study in college; irregular study at a Korean university</td>
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<td>Lori*</td>
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<td>Student and English tutor</td>
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<td>Anne*</td>
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<td>Infant</td>
<td>Irregular coursework at a Korean university; private tutor</td>
<td>English editor and artist</td>
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</table>

* Indicates pseudonym

Narratives were collected in the form of face-to-face interviews that lasted between one to three hours. The interviews were recorded with an audio digital recorder and later transcribed. Both authors of the study contributed to the analysis of themes and shifts between the storied and storytelling world.

Analysis

In our analysis, we first explore what opportunities the women narrated for participation in conversations with Koreans, and for experiencing cultural belonging. Overall, these accounts demonstrate that the women did not find the subjectivities that Koreans offered to them to be appealing. Hence, the women had to find alternative ways of belonging in Korean society.

The excerpts of narratives below all focus on being positioned by Koreans (sometimes referred to as “Korean Koreans” by the women). These narrative accounts demonstrate how the women perceived the positionings afforded to them by Koreans, who are considered to be the cultural “insiders” of their communities, with reference to Korean language use. To highlight the opportunities for belonging given by Koreans, reported speech in the voice of Koreans is put in quotes. Bold text is used to highlight the evaluative comments of the interviewees, and single quotes are used to bracket the inner speech they produce in the narratives.

Responses to Spaces for Belonging Given by Koreans

A major theme that emerged from the data was the frustration the women felt as a result of the rather high expectations that Koreans had for their ‘innate’ language ability. According to the women, many Koreans expected them to have a strong desire to acculturate while learning Korean, which produced a mismatch with the identities the women projected for themselves. Moreover, Koreans often expressed a lack of patience with them if their Korean was still developing. In (1), Lori discusses how non-Korean foreigners are treated differently than KADs with regard to language and opportunities for belonging, and it shows her displeasure at being
expected to behave in accordance with her ethnic appearance. As her narrative shows, Koreans treat her ethnicity as a common-sense basis for her language proficiency, and they fully expect her to have a deep desire to speak Korean fluently and to take on Korean behaviors because of it. In fact, Lori spends most of her time studying Korean at a university, but she evaluates this expectation in clearly negative ways. Similarly, in (2), Kelly describes Koreans as lacking sympathy for KADs’ unique circumstances. Both women’s evaluative comments indicate that they want to be understood as having special histories and distinctive motivations for living in Korea, but they say that Koreans often do not express this sort of nuanced understanding of their lives.

(1) “I look Korean, I look like I should speak Korean”

Lori: But coming here—I look Korean, I look like I should speak Korean, and even though if people know that I’m adopted it’s not just that, okay they understand that I can’t speak Korean. They expect me to really, really want to speak Korean or really, really want to learn Korean, which is sometimes so fucking annoying. That I should be expected to really want to learn Korean. But other foreigners, it’s like a free pass— they never have to learn Korean and Korean people never care. Korean people don’t expect foreigners to learn Korean at all. In fact, they say to foreigners— they say “Why do you need to learn Korean? Why study Korean? You don’t need to learn Korean.” But they expect Kor-like adoptees to not just be Korean, but to want to learn Korean. Sometimes it’s really, I mean somedays it’s totally fine and I’m like yes, and other days it just really pisses me off.

(2) “Become more Korean or act more Korean!”

Kelly: At that that time [2001], Koreans were much less understanding about Korean Americans, overseas Koreans and adoptees coming back. And they had this expectation that being of Korean descent you should know your language and you should learn it, and quote-unquote become more Korean or act more Korean!

The women’s own status as KADs was a significant reason for resisting the subjectivities offered by Koreans and for asserting alternative identities. In (3), Anne expresses a lack of desire to take on a “Korean Korean” identity, which she explains by highlighting her investment in her identity as an activist adoptee. Though she is aware of the ‘rules’ of Korean society, her purpose in living in Korea is not necessarily to connect with other Koreans, but to change aspects of Korean society linked to social welfare and adoption practices. Anne’s main reasons for learning Korean were to communicate with her Korean family members and to work with various Korean organizations and government agencies to make changes in adoption law. Given these very personal motivations, she does not respond to the expectations of “Korean Koreans.”

(3) “I want to change the whole fucking society”

Kim: When can you pass as a real Korean, as a Korean Korean? Do you want to?
Anne: Oh I don’t care anymore. I think I’m just beyond caring. I mean I think um, it has to do with [an adoptee activist organization] and what I want to accomplish in Korea which is—I want to change the whole fucking society. I think there are certain rules like if I would really try to pass, I should not tell anyone I’m divorced, I shouldn’t tell people that…but that’s not conducive to changing Korean society. It’s just to like fit into the mold that everybody else wants to fit into the mold of.
Kelly also referred to her adopted status in voicing her subjectivity as a KAD who resisted identifying strongly with Korean language and culture. She expressed why she had lost her motivation to study Korean after having numerous experiences such as those in which Koreans placed high expectations on her. Though she made an effort in the beginning of her time in Korea, multiple experiences such as the one she narrates in (4) left her with resentment and hostility toward Koreans, and a lack of commitment to learning the Korean language.

(4) “It’s not good enough”

Kelly: I remember one time…this cab driver started yelling at me because I didn't speak Korean. He was just, y’know furious at me. And I don’t think I was trying to speak English to him…So it was probably a few words to explain where to go and he just exploded at me, and I remember thinking “geez, y’know why are Koreans like this? Why is it that I come back to this country and I’m trying to make an effort to live here and learn the language and all I get is ‘you’re not good enough’ and ‘it’s not good enough?’” Like blaming me cause I don’t speak the language and because I’m not Korean enough when in fact I felt like all along that there was something wrong with Korean society for sending so many children abroad in the first place. So it was like this resentment towards society from the get-go because as soon as I felt those negative expectations on me. I felt that they didn’t have any right. So that also prevented me from learning the language because I was like “shit, why should I even try to even bother learning this language”?

Like the other adoptees, Kelly connected her resistance to the loss that she experienced as a result of her adoption. Since she was eight years old when she was adopted, she had clear memories of being told not to speak Korean in the United States by her adoptive parents. In fact, she and her sister, who was also adopted into the same family, were beaten if they were caught speaking Korean together. In her interview, she evaluates her current study of Korean as painful when describing how she has to force herself to learn Korean to communicate with her Korean brothers.

(5) “I feel like that part of me was taken”

Kelly: It’s revisiting this place of loss every time you’re sitting in the classroom. It’s a reminder that something. For me, it’s extremely sad—not that I want to make it sound like I had it hard or anything but because I was old enough to remember that happening and because I felt I feel such a deep sense of injustice in the fact that I was forbidden to speak my own language. I feel like it was taken from me I feel like that part of me was taken and stolen from me not by my choice and here I am as an adult, and I’m unable to speak this language and communicate with my family. And even though I really want to it’s just hard. And I think that when it comes down to it I think I have to sit down and force myself to study.

Similarly, Anne describes her relationship with Korean as a painful one, though she does so with an activist-oriented defiance. For Anne, speaking what she calls “broken Korean” is a political act that can draw Koreans’ attention to the loss faced by adopted children and can shatter any illusions about adoption as a form of salvation.

(6) “The broken Korean that comes out of my mouth”

Anne: So I want Korean people to hear the broken Korean that comes out of my mouth because I don't want them to have some fantasy that it was so wonderful
and good to separate them from their families and send them to a place where, for instance, my sister was four and a half years old at the time of adoption and she could not speak to anybody. For like six to nine months she didn’t have a single word…I think that’s like cruel and tragic.

Alternative Ways to Belong: In the Margins and In the KAD Community

Next, we examine some of the discursive identifications that the women articulate where they do feel a sense of belonging. Interestingly, rather than showing strong affiliations with passing as Korean or striving to achieve cultural and linguistic nativeness, the women’s narratives point to an alternative set of identity options that can be described as transnational, in-between, and liminal. Despite their non-mainstream identifications, the narratives show that the women still wish for Koreans to recognize them as having a legitimate place in Korean society.

In (7), Kim tells a story in which this alternative sense of belonging is expressed clearly and evaluated very positively. In telling about a time when she visited a shoe shining kiosk that was run by a Korean worker, she notes that she was clearly marked as an English speaker by way of her English newspaper and English mobile phone conversation in English. Nevertheless, the worker identified Kim as an “overseas Korean”—rather than pointing out her weaknesses in Korean or her lack of attention to Korean culture and behaviors. Kim’s evaluative language indicates how rare such an interaction is for the KAD community:

(7) “She treated me normally”

Kim: It’s this rare experience but I was getting my shoes shined and I went into the little booth on the street. And when I went in-- I was talking to somebody on the phone in English-- and I went in, and I was reading also an English newspaper at the time. But when I was done I asked how much and paid, and the woman looked at me and said “oh you must be an overseas Korean” in Korean. I was amazed […] And I was like “wow, she was so” she was nice, she didn’t look at me like I was a freak. . . . But she was just like “oh you must be an overseas Korean” [soft, sweet voice] and kind of smiled and I was like “yeah I am” [same voice]. And I was like wow, that’s very nice. And that was it. She treated me normally, like a normal person.

Kim’s narrative and her very positive evaluation of her treatment by Koreans as “an overseas Korean” shows the possibility of expanding the concept of “Korean” to include KADs, overseas Koreans, and second generation Korean Americans. This expansion of identity options in Korean society is precisely what the interviewees generally spoke of when talking about greater degrees of social inclusion in Korea.

In a similar vein, Lori expressed a desire to expand the linguistic options that she faces in her everyday life to her ‘ideal’ situation. Rather than learn Korean to speak with Koreans on their terms, Lori imagines a world in which both she and her Korean interlocutors can feel entirely comfortable in expressing themselves in their first languages.

(8) “If I could have an ideal situation”

Lori: The truth is that when I first started studying Korean—this would be interesting for you I don’t know why but maybe—the goal was to be able to speak Korean, now—

Kim: You can speak Korean.
Lori: Yeah, And speak Korean easily, well. But now the goal is more if I could have an ideal situation it would be that Korean people would speak to me in Korean that I could understand, and I could speak to them in English and they could understand me.

Because most interactions with Koreans do not allow for Lori’s “ideal situation,” and because it is a “rare experience” to be treated well as an ‘overseas Korean’ by Koreans, one way the women found comfortable places to belong was through making connections with ‘non-mainstream’ Koreans. In (9), Lori describes her Korean boyfriend as an atypical Korean by describing a behavior many Koreans would be too self-conscious to do, which she evaluates as a “cute” personality trait. Interestingly, Lori’s boyfriend is also unusual in that he has expressed no interest in practicing his spoken English with Lori, despite his access to the all-important “native speaker,” an invaluable commodity in the eyes of many mainstream Koreans.

(9) “Most people do not do that”

Lori: He'll just like be walking down the street and he'll just jump on [a concrete block] and then leap off of it as if there's nobody around him, you know what I mean? Most people do not do that because they're too concerned about what people think y'know. He just does that he'll be holding my hand and then he'll suddenly go dashing off to jump on this thing and then like leap off.

Kim: It's kind of endearing.

Lori: That's why I first started liking (him) cause he's cute like that.

Similarly, in (10), Kelly describes the Korean people she knows best, and with whom she feels most comfortable using Korean, as being “on the fringe,” and hence, more open to accepting a range of difference. Since Kelly works in the arts, she is in frequent contact with filmmakers, artists, and writers.

(10) “The fringe of Korean society”

Kelly: Um, I've built some closer relationships actually with um [an art project] that I'm working on about international adoption from Korea and birth mothers…Um, and those relationships have been really meaningful because I've been able to meet Koreans outside of um outside of the normal um segment of society…They're not your typical Korean in the sense that they're artists and they um are kind of on the fringe more on the fringe of Korean society so they tend to think differently.

Through her art, Kelly is able to feel comfortable acting as a translator for adoptee returnee children when they speak with their birth mothers. Because the birth mothers and their returnee children can sympathize with her life history, she feels most linguistically capable when communicating with them. In (11), she describes the KADs and the birth mothers involved in her project as people who “know her” and are “extremely patient” and “accommodating,” evaluative language that stands in stark contrast with her descriptions of other Koreans in earlier excerpts.

(11) “The emotional energy”

Kelly: And y'know I think that's really I mean I don't think I have the emotional energy to do it with just anybody but I think I can do it with them because I know them and they know me and they're both extremely patient. So even though my
Korean really sucks sometimes and sometimes I say “Well actually I don’t know how to explain that in Korean” or vice versa they’re both pretty understanding about it. And you know they’ve also given me so much…I mean they’ve been extremely patient and accommodating…just giving their time and so I’ve been more than happy to help them I feel like it’s the least that I can do.

Rather than making connections with Koreans on a personal level, Anne ends her comfort zone to be in the realm of adoption activism. She is a founding member of an organization that seeks acknowledgment of the past and present adoption practices in Korea, and she spends a great deal of time networking with others in her organization. In (12), she describes her reaction to being othered in Korea as an outsider because of her nonnative speech. Though she is Korean by birth, many people ask her if she is Japanese upon hearing her speak Korean. Rather than getting upset, Anne channels her energy into talking about adoption with anyone who asks her about her identity and uses it as an opportunity to practice her Korean.

(12) “A chance to proselytize about adoption”

Anne: Well everybody’s, “Hey like are you Japanese?” Wollye hanguk saram indae haewae ro ibyang desseoyo [“I’m originally Korean but I was sent for overseas adoption”] it’s like boom, I give them my sentence and I give it to them and they’re like okay. And then you see where it goes from there and some people are curious about “Where did you get sent?” and other people are like “Did you find your family?” And so actually all of those conversations, I view taxi drivers as free language tutors. It’s fine I don’t have to be emotional about that. And it’s like a little bit of a chance for me to proselytize about adoption.

Interestingly, in discussing her own “ideal” Korean language learning situation, Anne selects a Korean member of her adoption organization as a “dream” teacher. In describing his characteristics, she focuses on his willingness to understand her and to accept her, no matter what. His connection with her adoption organization is likely the key factor in his ability to be patient and understanding of her emotional needs as she struggles to acquire Korean.

(13) “My dream situation”

Anne: I think my dream situation is our guy from [our adoption organization], I really love him. He’s so patient with me. He will—I get so irritated sometimes because I just don’t feel like speaking Korean and it’s probably obvious that I’m irritated—but he never gets irritated back at me.

Similarly, Kelly finds that she belongs in Korea as a member of the KAD community, “in her own way,” and not in a way that is necessarily appreciated by most Koreans. Importantly, her identity is a choice, rather than a subjectivity provided for her, and she asserts a confidence in rejecting the idea of ever being “Korean” yet still claiming a legitimate place for herself in Korea as a KAD. In her interview, it is clear that her life trajectory, and especially, the loss of her cultural heritage through her adoption, have strongly influenced her choices and have given her a great sense of resilience.

(14) “I belong here in my own way”

Kelly: I choose not to integrate myself into Korean society because I know that I will never be quote-unquote Korean.
Kim: Why not?
Kelly: No matter how hard I try I will never become like another typical Korean because I didn't grow up here. I don't understand the nuances or just the culture. I mean I think I can understand it to a certain degree. I also don't want to because I am who I am and why should I, and I am living in a country which is a part of me and it's a really important part of me but it doesn't mean that I have to integrate myself or assimilate myself in order to feel like I belong here. I belong here in my own way, which is sometimes I think a bit sheltered in the adoptee or foreign community but why chase something that I'm not? I mean I spent all of my life in America doing that, all of my childhood.

**Alternative Identity Zones and Cultural Multiplicity As a Site for Belonging**

The narratives examined above challenge the conceptualization of a monolithic Korean cultural and ethnolinguistic identity. Through their talk, the KAD women resist Korean norms for linguistic and cultural practices, and they assert their right to be seen as legitimate members of Korean society. Their liminality resonates quite strongly with the marginalized positions of other populations who have been studied in applied linguistics and related fields, including many immigrants and refugees, Japanese kikokushijo (‘returnees’), 1.5 generation students caught in-between literacies, cultures, and education systems, heritage learners struggling with ethnic and cultural identity, and international students who live and study in “global contact zones.” Rather than imposing acculturation to a particular monolithic version of culture as the only possibility, these researchers have increasingly been recognizing the multiplicity involved in identity formation in the modern era. At the same time, they recognize the difficulty encountered in trying to challenge fixed notions of cultural and ethnic identity.

The narratives of the KAD women expose the possibility of opening up the identity options for members of Korean society, which would lead to greater sense of cultural belonging. The interviews provide suggestions for new ways of thinking of KADs simultaneously as HL speakers and as part of Korean society. Lori explains that through “being Korean” is part of her, her trajectory of having lived as a Korean adoptee in the United States is a more significant aspect of her identity.

(15) “Being Korean in America”

Lori: You know I lived here for four years and maybe there is some element of me of being Korean that I’ve lost that I can that’s still part of my identity or whatever. I mean I definitely think that being Korean [that] is part of my identity but it’s being Korean in America that is more probably my identity than being Korean actually. Do you know what I mean? So I guess being Korean in America sort of made me who I am.

Similarly, Kelly describes herself as someone who is a product of her dislocation and (agentive) relocation to the country of her birth.

Kelly: I’m not a foreigner in the sense of what the word foreigner means. Like I don’t really think I’m a different person from another place—I felt like that when I first came here. I consider myself as a gyopo—overseas Korean and I consider myself as an adoptee who is a member of society, but not in, not a part of mainstream society.

Finally, Anne considers the question that she gets asked by people who she encounters in everyday life. Rather than feeling othered by the constant categorization of herself as an “outsider” through this question, she explains her roots/routes to choose an identity option. She asserts her legitimacy as an authentic Korean, and by acknowledging others’ reluctance to do the same, she feels comfortable in her own sense of belonging.

Anne: “What country are you from?” […] I can have this conversation with any taxi driver. “I’m originally a Korean person but I was adopted to the United States” […] I think this idea of like who’s a real Korean or whatever, I view that as other people’s problem, like if other people don’t see me as Korean. I guess I view myself as Korean and if other people can’t see that it’s like what’s wrong with you. It’s not what’s wrong with me, it’s what’s wrong with you.

Conclusion

This study has endeavored to explore the identities that KAD women experience and the role of their HL in their identity negotiation as ‘authentic’ Koreans in Korean society. Though KADs have not yet been given the same status as Korean nationals on their passports, it is clear that they strongly identify as legitimate Koreans. They are fighting for increased recognition through activism, filmmaking, writing, and other forms of expression that draw attention to their status in Korean society. In the meanwhile, they are finding spaces for belonging in the liminal spaces of the non-mainstream and the KAD community, where hybrid and in-between forms of cultural identification and linguistic production are more accepted. The following text messages shared among members of the KAD community illustrate this hybridity:

U just made cut off b4u got2c crabby [GG] I HATE getting 문자 after bedtime aka 11
(You just made [the] cut off before you got to see crabby [GG] I HATE getting munja [text messages] after bedtime aka 11 kk kk [indicates a laughing sound])

Happy New Year! 새해 복 많이 받으세요!!*yay* YIPPEE!? 와후!!?
(Happy New Year! Happy New Year. Yay. YIPPEE!? Waa-hoo!!?)

Other forms of expression are taking place in KAD art exhibits such as the 2007 exhibit Adoptee & Alien: Visions from the Periphery (Seoul) and films like Resilience (2009) by Tammy Chu, which tells the story of an adopted son and his birth mother trying to reconnect after 30
years of separation. Similarly, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* (2009) by Deann Borshay Liem follows the story of the filmmaker as she seeks to find the truth about her mistaken identity while revealing the questionable ethics around international adoption. Finally, Jane Jeong Trenka’s autobiographic narratives form the basis of *Fugitive Visions*, a memoir that reveals the complexity of being a returnee to a nation that does not necessarily embrace those who return. These artforms are drawing attention to KAD issues and concerns, and they are acting as spaces for KADs to express liminal, yet authentic, identities.

**References**


South Korean Adoptions in Global Perspective

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This essay responds to the growing field of Korean adoption studies by challenging scholars, adoptees, and others active in the field to place Korean adoptions within the larger context of the changing intercountry adoption system. This may seem obvious: intercountry adoption intrinsically involves international and comparative perspectives, and Korean adoptions played a foundational role in the modern intercountry adoption system. The field of Korean adoption studies has incorporated various critical and international perspectives, such as postcolonialist and feminist perspectives, in a way that highlights not only the complex and conflicted situation of international adoptees, but also the complex relationships of Korea to the West. However, the larger context that is sometimes omitted is the relationship of Korean adoptions to the larger intercountry adoption system as it has developed in the last several decades, a period in which Korea has become much less significant to the intercountry adoption system. As Korea has become less significant to the intercountry adoption system practically and statistically, the situation of Korean adoptions has diverged significantly from developments in the broader intercountry adoption system. This divergence has occurred during a time when Korean adoptees have come of age and become the largest and most vocal group of adoptees, playing major roles in criticizing as well as supporting intercountry adoption. There is a significant danger that Korean adoption studies and Korean adoptee discourses will provide a distorted lens for viewing and impacting more recent developments in the overall intercountry adoption system.

A thesis of this essay is that the themes of identity, race, culture, and nationality, which often dominate Korean adoption discourse, can have the unintended consequence of obscuring significant flaws and abusive practices in the current intercountry adoption system, thereby facilitating a discourse in which those flaws are neither addressed nor remedied. These core identity and racial issues, which are certainly important and legitimate in themselves, have produced a polarizing pro-intercountry adoption (IA) vs. anti-intercountry adoption discourse, while also producing an agency discourse that claims to be sensitized to racial identity issues and supportive of adult adoptees. The effect of this race and identity focus has been to lock adoption discourse into a loop that legitimates the current intercountry adoption system in the eyes of many, while avoiding many of the fundamental issues in current intercountry adoption practice. To avoid this loop, I argue, Korean adoption discourse should open itself to concerns and themes that have increasingly predominated in the larger intercountry adoption system. This essay finds hopeful signs that such openings have already begun, and encourages these developments in Korean adoption discourse.

Despite my call to consider Korean adoption discourse in the light of the contemporary intercountry adoption system, certain features of current intercountry adoption practice and discourse are themselves problematic. Thus, several lessons that might be taken from current intercountry adoption discourse, if applied to South Korean adoptions, could inhibit reform of Korean adoptions, or push reform in the wrong direction. First, current intercountry adoption discourse could lead many to conclude that South Korea needs to focus primarily on replacing international adoption with domestic adoption. Second, current intercountry adoption discourse could lead to the conclusion that, so long as the adoption system is well-organized and
there is little evidence of children being obtained through purchase, fraud, or force, there is no need for further reform. I argue, by contrast, that the contemporary Korean adoption system, both international and domestic, must be seen in light of the development of domestic adoption, in the United States and elsewhere. The United States developed a closed-record system of adoption that created a legal fiction that the adopted child had been born to the adoptive parents, in large part as a response to the social situation of the single pregnant (unwed) woman. Since the Korean adoption system also is primarily focused on the single pregnant woman, amidst a cultural context of both strong social stigmas and a cultural emphasis on bloodlines, it is not surprising that Korean adoptions would develop in a similar fashion to that which occurred in the United States. My suggestion is that Korean adoption discourse be informed by critiques of the United States system of domestic adoption. It would be a terrible loss if Korea, as a leading nation in adoption practice and discourse, were to “reform” adoptions simply by replacing their international adoption program with a harsh and backward system of domestic adoption. I therefore argue that recent efforts in South Korean adoption discourse to open up a cultural space for single mothers to raise their children and to access the voice of past and present generations of Korean mothers who relinquished their children for adoption constitute perhaps the single most important and positive development in Korean adoption discourse.

My argument is not intended to diminish the significance of the dominant themes of Korean adoption discourse, such as race, culture, nationality, and identity. For each generation of transracial, international adoptees coming of age, there will necessarily have to be a discourse based around these issues, since they are so central to adopted persons. Nonetheless, such discourse, as necessary and central as it is for each generation of adoptees, is not the most central discourse for reforming either intercountry or Korean adoption. Reform of both intercountry and domestic adoption instead must turn itself to the question of how children become separated from their parents and families in the first instance, which is an issue that requires recovery of the voices of not only adoptees, but also of original (first) families/mothers/fathers. As Korean adoption discourse concentrates on the historical and contemporary contexts for this original separation between child and family, it will make itself more relevant to reform of both the Korean adoption system and the global intercountry adoption system.

Adoption discourse for too many generations has been dominated by the concerns of agencies, adoptive parents, and prospective adoptive parents, with the voices of adoptees heard only faintly. Adult adoptees are now successfully shaping a new discourse based on their concerns, in large part due to the large numbers of adult Korean adoptees. I realize that adoptees have been silenced too long, and their concerns, which certainly include that of identity and race, must be central. My argument is a logical extension of the adoptee right to their own family history and story, as well as the adoptee right to search for and reunite with their original families. As adoptees exercise these rights, hopefully with increasing success, they are increasingly accessing the voices and situations of original families, and increasingly concerned with the situation of vulnerable single mothers. The resulting new forms of adoption discourse will, I hope, be the foundation of a future in which yet-to-be-born generations can escape some of the pain, tragedy, loss, and alienation experienced by so many over the past generations.

Child Laundering, Child Trafficking, and Korean Adoption Discourse

It may be helpful if I state my thesis directly in terms of the ambiguous relationship between my own prior work, and Korean adoption discourse. For these purposes, I am using my own work as a reflection of the kinds of concerns that are particularly significant in contemporary intercountry adoption discourse, and yet which have been secondary, or absent, in many forms
of Korean adoption discourse. Using this mode of first person discourse may be less academic than objective, third-person, writing, but I think it will help make the point in a more direct way.

My prior work on adoption has focused primarily on child trafficking in the intercountry adoption system. I have appropriated the term “child laundering” to refer to obtaining children illicitly through force, fraud, or funds, providing falsified paperwork that identifies the child as an “orphan” eligible for adoption, and then processing the child through the intercountry adoption system. In this work I have sought to document and describe the various illicit methods of obtaining children, which I argue have recurred in a number of different sending countries over a substantial period of time. Thus, obtaining children by “force” usually means literally kidnapping children from their families. “Fraud” involves obtaining children under various false pretenses, such as for an education and room/board, or only for a temporary period, or without cutting off parental rights, when the intent in fact is to fully terminate parental rights and process the child for intercountry adoption. Such fraud is particularly effective in societies where it is common for poor parents to send children to “hostels,” “orphanages,” or “schools” as a social safety net for provision of an education, food, and housing, without terminating parental rights. Such fraud also flourishes in cultural settings where it is common to “add” family members, or for children to have multiple parental figures, but the concept of terminating parental rights is not well understood. The practice of buying children, usually from desperately poor parents, and often for very small sums, is obviously illicit; it also underscores the inherent ethical issues involved in intercountry adoption between rich and poor countries. In particular, I have argued that the common practice of accepting relinquishments of children primarily on the basis of extreme poverty in developing countries, without making any family preservation efforts or attempts at aid, and then placing such children for international adoption, should also be considered a violation of international human rights law. It is inhumane and illegal, I have argued, to spend thousands of dollars on an international adoption, when the child could have been maintained with their original family with an intervention of a few hundred dollars or less.

The term adoption trafficking reflects the fact that in child laundering schemes children are often passed through various intermediaries with a financial motivation. Children, however obtained from the original family, are often in effect sold by a child finder, or “scout,” to the orphanage director, with both intending to benefit financially from the intercountry adoption.

The motivations involved in adoption trafficking schemes include financial gain for facilitators, orphanage directors, and various intermediaries operating in the sending nations. These profits usually are generated from purportedly legitimate adoption fees and donations, which unfortunately are often much too high in relationship to the normal pay scale for humanitarian

1. I would like to acknowledge and thank Desiree Smolin, Jane Jeong Trenka, and Eleana Kim for their review of, and comments upon, prior drafts of this essay. I also want to acknowledge and thank Zachary K. LaFleur for his research assistance. The article, including the viewpoints expressed, remain the sole responsibility of the author. Most of my published and draft adoption articles are available online here: http://works.bepress.com/david_smolin/.
3. See, e.g., ibid.
6. See, e.g., The Two Faces of Intercountry Adoption: The Significance of the Indian Adoption Scandals, 35 Seton Hall Law Review 403, 457 (2005); Child Laundering, supra note 2, 52 Wayne Law Review at 139.
or social service work within the sending nation. Sometimes financial gain is also a significant motivation for adoption workers in the United States, who often can obtain much higher compensation in international adoption than are otherwise available in social service work. Indeed, a significant number of adoption agency workers have no formal education or qualifications in social service or child welfare, and some have apparently earned exorbitant profits in international adoption. For many agency workers, however, a belief in the good of intercountry adoption, rather than financial gain, is the primary motivation for their involvement. The United States adoption community is generally suffused with a sometimes messianic belief in the capacity of intercountry adoption to save children.

Prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) and adoptive parents have a variety of motivations. There is a very large unmet desire for children in the United States, based on infertility and the desire of gay couples and single persons to parent. In addition, many adoptive parents are answering a religious or idealistic call to care for “orphans.”

Given this complex of motivations, it has proven very difficult to reform intercountry adoption. The illicit conduct of obtaining children improperly and providing falsified paperwork is done in the sending country, often with no direct knowledge by the Western adoption agencies. Adoptive parents, prospective adoptive parents, and adoption agencies have the motivation to ignore, dismiss, and minimize any indications of illicit acts performed in the sending countries. Most adoptees were too young when they were taken from their families to have usable knowledge of what was done wrong, and young adoptees usually are developmentally invested in bonding with their adoptive families. Some original families are induced by desperate circumstances to participate in their own exploitation, leaving them in an ethically ambiguous situation, with overtones of shame that make it unlikely that they can bring their cases to public note. The vast majority of original families are anyway far too limited in money, power, language, and literacy to challenge the far more powerful people in their own societies who have exploited them. In such circumstances, child laundering is often the perfect crime, in the sense that the chances of profits are high and the odds of being punished are very, very small.

My work has sought to demonstrate and document, through my work and that of many others, an ongoing pattern of adoption trafficking and child laundering practices in many sending countries over the past fifteen years, including Cambodia, Vietnam, China, India, Nepal, Guatemala, Haiti, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Samoa. I have also argued that the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption was in significant part a response to such adoption trafficking practices as found in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, particularly in Latin America. I argue that the intercountry adoption system has failed over several decades to implement effective reforms that would prevent or minimize adoption trafficking. The failure of reform efforts and the chronic pattern of abusive practices have been significant factors in the choice of most prospective sending nations to be largely closed to intercountry adoption.

Prominent proponents of intercountry adoption, as exemplified by Professor Elizabeth Bartholet, have generally minimized the significance of trafficking and corruption in the intercountry adoption system. Professor Bartholet has essentially argued that adoption trafficking is occasional or sporadic, and therefore of no real significance to the intercountry adoption system. Instead, she has argued that some forms of adoption corruption do only minor harm. Under

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7. See Child Laundering, Wayne Law Review, supra note 2, at 149-51; Two Faces of Intercountry Adoption, supra note 6, at 435-37, 449-50.
8. See, e.g., Child Laundering, supra note 2, at 140.
9. See, e.g., Mairizio Macaluso, Tracie J. Wright-Schnapp, Anjani Chandra, Robert Johnson, Catherine L. Satterwhite, Amy Pulver, Stuart M. Berman, Richard Y. Wang, Sherry L. Farr and Lori A. Pollack, A Public Health Focus on Infertility Prevention, Detection, and Management, Fertility and Sterility 2008 (an estimated two million couples in the United States were infertile, and an estimated 7.3 American women aged 15–44 years had impaired fecundity).
these circumstances, a focus on adoption trafficking and corruption is perceived as a distraction from the real issue, which for Professor Bartholet is the need to increase the numbers of intercountry adoptions so that more children can benefit. Indeed, a focus on adoption trafficking and corruption is seen by Professor Bartholet as largely a tactic by those who are intrinsically opposed to intercountry adoption. Thus, for Professor Bartholet the primary debate is between those who are intrinsically opposed to intercountry adoption, and those who favor intercountry adoption.12

Within this supposed debate between those opposing, and those favoring intercountry adoption, the significance of national, racial, ethnic, and economic categories is in dispute. Professor Bartholet perceives that some are opposed to intercountry adoption as a generally exploitative, neo-colonialist act that removes children from poor Asian, Hispanic, or Black mothers and gives them to wealthy white parents in the West. Professor Bartholet also perceives that some are generally opposed to trans-racial adoption, particularly in the context of white families adopting Asian, Hispanic, or Black children. The grounds given for opposing such adoptions, Professor Bartholet understands, include viewing such adoptions as neo-colonialist acts, concerns that white parents cannot prepare the child to live as a racial minority in a white society, and issues of personal, national, and racial identity.13

Professor Bartholet's description of the anti-intercountry adoption, anti-trans-racial adoption position is, in significant ways, descriptive of some of the critical voices among Korean adoptees and found within contemporary Korean adoption discourse. Of course these anti-international adoption voices are not limited to Korean adoption discourse, but nonetheless Korean adoption discourse provides verification of Professor Bartholet's viewpoint that there is a position sharply critical of intercountry adoption, apart from the existence of adoption trafficking, child laundering, or other abusive practices. From this perspective, intercountry adoption is in itself already a form of exploitation, trafficking, kidnapping, or slavery, due to the power imbalances involved and history of exploitation between Western and sending nations.14

Professor Bartholet counters this anti-intercountry adoption position with a viewpoint that claims to focus on the best interests and human rights of children.15 As a participant in the debate over trans-racial adoption within the United States, Professor Bartholet knows that most Americans (and most American political and legal leaders) reject the position that white people should not be permitted to adopt across racial, ethnic, and national boundaries.16 Professor Bartholet argues that those who oppose intercountry adoption on such grounds deny children the opportunity to grow up in a family. Professor Bartholet in effect argues that those opposed to trans-racial or intercountry adoption are willing to relegate a child to life in foster care, an institution, the streets, or with a dangerously neglectful or abusive family, merely for the sake of their own ideological beliefs. Professor Bartholet and others portray this position as reducing children to the property or sovereignty of their nation or racial, ethnic, or cultural group, even when the nation or group claiming such ownership is unwilling or unable to provide the child with the fundamental love, nurture, and goods children require.17

13. See id.
14. Cf. id (Professor Bartholet's writings) with, e.g., Tobias Hubinette, Comforting an Orphaned Nation 16 (2005)(acknowledging that he is "totally against any kind of continuation of international adoption from Korea"); http://www.transracialabductees.org/; (referring to adoption as "abduction" and referring to "abduction industry").
15. See Elizabeth Bartholet sources, supra note 12.
17. See Elizabeth Bartholet sources, supra notes 12, 16.
Americans, schooled in an integrationist vision of race, in a society with an increasing proportion of inter-racial, bi-racial, and trans-national families and children, and most recently a bi-racial President, tend to perceive the anti-transracial position as a regressive form of racial essentialism. Most white Americans are naturally unsympathetic with the position that they should leave children to rot on the streets or in the institutions of other countries, rather than adopting them, merely because the children are Asian, Latino, or Black. Most Americans do not view America as a colonizing, exploiting power in the world. Viewed on this gut level, Professor Bartholet can appear to have the winning argument in regard to the pro-IA vs. anti-AI debate (or corollary debate over domestic trans-racial adoption), at least in an American context.

Korean adoption discourse, as I describe it below, thus tends to legitimate, in an American context, the pro-intercountry adoption position, even when it documents the difficult issues of identity, power, race, culture, and nationality posed by Korean adoptions. The discourse traditionally has said little about obtaining children illicitly, abusive adoption practices, and corruption. Instead, Korean adoption discourse has focused primarily on the difficulties of being adopted into white families in the West, the ensuing issues of identity, race, nationality, and discrimination, and the complex relationships of Korean adoptees to Korea. The academic discourse tends to use social science methods to validate the racial and identity concerns of the memoir and essay style adoptee discourse, focuses on the complex historical and cultural contexts of Korean adoption, or else analyzes issues of race, culture, and nationality through left-critical forms of discourse (postcolonial, feminist, and deconstructionist forms of discourse derived from left and Marxist intellectual traditions.) These forms of discourse play a positive role in producing a greater sensitivity to the issues faced by trans-racial, trans-national adoptees and creating a validation and voice for adoptee experiences and concerns, but in the context of the United States do not constitute a persuasive argument for limiting, closely regulating, or stopping intercountry adoption.

A new generation of adoption agency and pro-intercountry adoption discourse, sometimes led by Korean adoptees who have taken up leadership positions in the intercountry adoption community, have claimed to absorb the lessons of Korean adoption discourse and integrate them into contemporary adoption practice. These forms of positive Korean adoption discourse may imply that intercountry adoptions are done today with more sensitivity and concern for racial, national, and cultural identity, but otherwise tend to ratify the pro-intercountry position typified by Professor Bartholet. The message here is that trans-racial, international adoption does create real challenges for adoptees, but that the benefits of intercountry adoption are worth the challenges, particularly if adoptees are nurtured in developing their complex multi-national, Asian identities. These pro-intercountry adoption Korean adoptees succeed in largely canceling out the voices of the critical Korean adoptees, making it possible for some to dismiss the critical Korean adoption discourse as representing a vocal and dysfunctional minority.

From my perspective, this discourse of pro-I.A. vs. anti-I.A. and of the life-course difficulties of being a Korean adoptee adopted by white, Western parents, threatens to drown out the

most significant developments in intercountry adoption over the last fifteen years. So long as
international adoption discourse is locked into an apparently ideological pro-I.A. vs. anti-I.A.
debate, the pro-I.A. side can ignore the real and widespread evidence of child laundering and
adoption trafficking.

My work to date thus has an odd relationship to anti-I.A. Korean adoption discourse. For ex-
ample, adoption discourse that labels intercountry adoption as inherently an act of abduction or
enslavement\(^\text{20}\) has an uneasy relationship to work that documents literal abduction cases. On the
one hand, anti-I.A. writers may welcome further confirmation of what is wrong with intercoun-
try adoption, and further evidence that intercountry adoption is indeed a form of abduction. On
the other hand, however, calling all intercountry adoptions by definition a form of abduction
can trivialize the literal cases of abduction that have occurred, and calling intercountry adoption
a form of slavery can trivialize the literal trafficking cases that exist.

Broad and encompassing condemnations of all intercountry adoption or all trans-racial
adoption ironically can have the same effect as the broadly pro-I.A. work of Professor Bartholet
and others: it makes irrelevant the details of the actual working of the intercountry adoption
system. After all, if intercountry adoption is inherently evil, it hardly matters whether it is done
well or badly; similarly, if intercountry adoption is an inherent good that has the capacity to
save large numbers of children, it becomes imperative to defend it in broad terms against the
anti-I.A. activists, by minimizing any abuses or scandals. In this ideological struggle, the mech-
anism of how intercountry adoptions are actually done becomes either irrelevant, or else merely
a rhetorical tool within the broader ideological debate.

One goal of my work is to contest the reduction of adoption trafficking to a merely rhetorical
tool within the broader ideological debate over I.A. I refuse to take a position on the anti.-I.A.
vs. pro-I.A. debate and corollary issues related to race and nationality in adoption in order to
be in a position to call attention to adoption trafficking and the systemic vulnerabilities of the
system that have repeatedly allowed it to flourish. I call for specific reforms to the intercountry
adoption that might minimize or reduce adoption trafficking, because I believe that until and
unless they are adopted the intercountry adoption system will be rife with such trafficking. I
write about the human cost of adoption trafficking and other specific abusive practices\(^\text{21}\) because
there are in fact tens of thousands of adoptions overshadowed by the possibility or actuality of
such practices, and hence hundreds of thousands of persons personally impacted as adoptees,
original family members, or adoptive parents.

Under these circumstances, my concern with Korean adoption discourse is that it can con-
tribute to the continuing exploitation found in adoption trafficking by maintaining attention on
a pro-I.A. vs. anti-I.A. debate that, at least in the context of the United States, tends to both legiti-
mate intercountry adoption while insulating it from scrutiny and reform. While I understand
that Korean adoption discourse necessarily must be responsive to the needs of Korean adoptees
and to the history and situation of Korean adoption, that discourse could be enriched and made
more credible by being more responsive to the developing situation of the larger intercountry
adoption system.

The next section further analyzes Korean adoption discourse, suggesting that it both repre-
sents and reinforces the experience of alienation and isolation of many Korean adoptees. Doc-
umenting this alienation and isolation continues to be a necessary and important task. The
following section then examines some recent trends in Korean adoption studies and discourse
that may have the potential to offer a deep critique of both intercountry adoption and domestic
adoption.

\(^\text{20}\) See, e.g., \text{http://www.transracialabductees.org/index.html}.

\(^\text{21}\) See \text{Child Laundering as Exploitation: Applying Anti-Trafficking Norms to Intercountry Adoption Under the
Traditional Korean Adoption Discourse as a Rhetoric and Study of Alienation and Isolation

The thesis of this section is that the critical voices of Korean adoption discourse both represent and reinforce the alienation and isolation of many Korean adoptees from both Korea and their Western adoptive families and nations. This discourse, I argue, should be seen in the context of the closed-records, “full” adoption system predominant in the United States and elsewhere, which exacerbates this alienation and isolation. This discourse of alienation and isolation is met by positive Korean adoption discourse, which explicitly or by implication views the critical discourse as exaggerated and dysfunctional. Both positive and critical forms of discourse focus primarily on issues of race, nationality, ethnicity, and culture, amidst the context of identity and other issues typically faced by adoptees over their lifespan.

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Korean adoption discourse is focused on identity, culture, race, and nationality, based on the experiences of Korean adoptees who have overwhelmingly been adopted into white families in the United States, Europe, and Australia. Thus, the common adoption issue of identity is overlaid with the complexities of being raised with white families and white communities while being “Asian” in genetic inheritance and physical appearance. For some adoptees, identity issues are complicated even further by being biracial children, generally of Korean mothers and Western soldiers.

The common adoption issues of rejection, abandonment, loss, and grief share a wider stage in Korean adoption discourse, as adoptees struggle to understand not only the actions of their birth parents in relinquishing them for adoption, but also of an entire nation and culture for sending them, and indeed close to 200,000 children overall, overseas for adoption. The role of Western nations in constructing the Korean adoption system and receiving large numbers of Korean adoptees, can be seen variously as a positive humanitarian project or as complicity in facilitating Korea’s act of sending away the nation’s children.

The classic adoption issues of belonging and identity have been exacerbated by the legal model (predominant in the United States) of full, closed-records adoption, in which the original family bond is legally eliminated and completely replaced by the adoptive family, with “birth” certificates issued purporting to list adoptive parents as having biologically produced the child. Under this model, the price of acceptance in the adoptive family, particularly for many of the earlier generations of adoptees, and still for some today, is an exclusive loyalty to the adoptive family that rejects and negates any tie or interest in the original family. This price of acceptance has required Korean adoptees to identify as completely as possible with white, American (or European or Australian) culture: to be as “white” as possible, despite being embodied within a manifestly Asian body. Further, in an adoption system based on viewing adoption itself as a secret so shameful that it must be legally hidden from the world, there is an added incentive to maintain the pretense that one really belongs only to the white adoptive parent. Of course such a pretense, whether maintained by the law, adoptive parents, or adoptee, is an obvious sham in the context of trans-racial intercountry adoption, where it is inescapably obvious to both adoptee

23. See sources cited supra note 18; see also Jane Jeong Trenka, The Language of Blood (2005); Outsiders Within, Writings on Transracial Adoption (ed. Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah & Sun Yung Shin 2006).
and the wider world that the adoptee is not white and is not genetically related to his or her white “parents.”

Of course cultural changes in the United States and West have significantly altered the social context of adoption. Adoption is no longer viewed as shameful in the United States, but instead is viewed sentimentally as a virtuous act that furthers the social good. Transracial adoption is viewed in some circles as exemplifying racial and international progress, with celebrities and others visibly proud of their “mini U.N.” families. Adoptive parents are now encouraged to assist trans-racial intercountry adoptees in maintaining ties to their birth nation and culture through “culture camps” and other means. Oddly, these new messages about adoption occur in a legal context in the United States where most states still maintain secret, closed records, and still issue officially falsified “birth certificates” showing the adoptive parents as the biological parents of the adoptee. Within the West the full adoption model which completely cuts off the original family relationships as a “price” or legal premise for adoption remains heavily favored, despite countervailing trends toward so-called open adoption and birth searches. Transracial adoptees now grow up within a halfway house of ambivalent and confused messages about their identity and family relationships, sometimes being urged to embrace their genetic racial identity even as they grow up in white families and communities. In a context where only a small percentage of adoptees find their original families, and generally do so only after they reach adulthood, the adoptee search for identity generally occurs without any concrete familial context to help them evaluate their Korean identity. Under these circumstances, and given the normal developmental desire to belong to and identify with the family and community with whom one lives, it is not surprising that many adoptees resist culture camps and other such activities for much of their childhood. Further, even families that emphasize the adoptee’s original racial/ethnic/national identity, likely are emotionally unprepared to share their parental and family roles with anyone else. It is one thing to acknowledge the obvious, that one’s adoptive child is Korean in origin; and hence may want to have some exposure to the culture of their country of origin; it is quite another to view the child as having a Korean family. A significant percentage of adoptions are, for the adoptive parent, a replacement for an originally hoped for biological child. The continuing predominance of the full, closed adoption system under those circumstances may reinforce the reluctance of adoptive parents to think of their adoptive children as belonging to any other family. It is a long way from culture camp to concrete sharing of the child with a Korean family. Many adoptees thus most likely still receive the message, as they grow up, that full loyalty to the adoptive family involves disinterest in finding and pursuing a relationship with their original family.

The overlay of postcolonial, feminist, and other critical academic approaches to Korean adoption studies, I would argue, represents and reinforces the alienation and isolation of the Korean adoptee. The substance, voice, and perspective of these approaches imply a critical position of isolation for Korean adoptees. Substantively, these critiques of intercountry adoption find significant fault with both the Western societies that have adopted Korean children, and the Korean nation that has continued to send away children in significant numbers for more than a half century, while greeting adoptees with impossible cultural and language expectations when they return to Korea. From this perspective, Korea has abandoned and betrayed the children sent away for adoption, while the Western receiving nations are complicit in Korea’s wrong and also are guilty of exploiting both Korea and Korea’s children in order to satisfy the Western desire for children. The picture that emerges is of Korean adoptees alienated from both their birth and adoptive cultures and nations. This picture is reinforced by the voice and per-

25. See, e.g., Tobias Hubinette, Comforting an Orphaned Nation, supra note 18, at 13-22.
spective of these critical forms of Korean adoption discourse. The postcolonial, feminist, and other critical perspectives that inform many of these critiques sound like left-critical, Western, academic perspectives, even when they analyze Korean cultural materials and attitudes. Such a voice underscores the apparent isolation of both Korean adoption and Korean adoptees, who appear to speak in a Western accent even when they attempt to speak about the wrongs done to their birth nation. (I should add that such is not necessarily a criticism of this discourse, but rather an observation about its voice and impact. It is probably inevitable that adoptees raised in the West employ Western critical forms of discourse, which anyway have attained, at least in academic circles, various degrees of international legitimacy.)

An additional complication for this voice of postcolonial studies is that historically most of Korea’s difficulties with foreign invasion or control have stemmed from Japan and China, which are not the nations adopting Korean children over the last fifty years. Japan is the primary modern colonizer of Korea. This of course does not invalidate the use of postcolonial voice and methodology for Korean studies, for the impacts upon Korea of its experiences of colonization and foreign control must be profound, and such is certainly relevant to Korea’s experience as a sending nation in adoption. However, it does complicate the usual storyline in which Western nations secure children for adoption from the nations they had previously colonized.

The role of the United States, Soviet Union, and China in the Korean War, and the modern division of Korea, which is the setting for the opening of South Korea to intercountry adoption, could be seen in some ways as analogous to a postcolonial situation, because it rendered South Korea vulnerable to the influence and will of the United States. The continuing role of the Unites States military in Korea over many decades is certainly a significant exercise of American power. From that perspective, even if the United States is not a literal colonizer of Korea, it can be seen as taking advantage of a vulnerability its actions helped create. (Of course from another point of view, both the military and adoption interventions of the United States in Korea could be seen as beneficial, rather than merely imperial.) In any event, the question of whether to view Korea as a “victim” of the West is highly complex, and overlays the use of postcolonial studies for adoption with thick and complex political overtones, whether viewed as Western or Korean in orientation.

Thus, critical Korean adoption discourse presents adoptees and others taking up certain apparently Western forms of discourse, and applying them critically against both Korea and the West. Such discourse leaves the large body of Korean adoptees with no apparent place to be or stand, having used some of the intellectual tools of their adopted nations to deconstruct and critique their ties to both their birth and adoptive nations. The critiques generated by critical Korean adoption discourse must be evaluated intellectually on their own terms, and can be intellectually or personally viable or persuasive regardless of whether they are considered Western, non-Western, or hybrid forms of discourse. The point here is not their persuasive value or intellectual legitimacy, which are beyond the scope of this article, but simply the manner in which they represent and reinforce a trans-national position of alienation and isolation.

Korean adoptee discourse focusing on the difficulties of establishing marital/intimate relationships further reflects, and sometimes reinforces, this alienation and isolation. Some of this discourse is personal in nature, and is primarily a reflection of such personal difficulties. When academic, postcolonial discourse moves into analyzing how Korean adult adoptees, as East Asians, are viewed as exotic “others” by white persons in terms of their adult marital/sexual/intimate relationships, it seems to reinforce the difficulties that such adoptees have in forming their own families. Should marriages between white men and Asian women be viewed, like intercountry adoption, as just another form of postcolonial exploitation?

Reducing adult intimate relationships to the power relationships found amidst the racial, national, or cultural groups to which the individuals belong may miss the capacity of human beings to form meaningful relationships in which they meet one another as whole persons, in-
cluding but not limited to their group identities. Such discourse once again suggests the Korean adoptee as incapable of breaking out of a personal isolation, and suggests Korean adoptees as themselves a kind of third race, neither Korean nor white, and isolated from both sets of racial/cultural/familial parents.

Critical Korean adoption discourse, whether academic, literary, or popular is only a part of a much larger world of Korean adoption discourse, much of which takes a much more positive and optimistic view of adoption. A significant context for such discourse is the leadership role some Korean adoptees are taking within the larger adoption community. Significantly, Holt International, the agency most responsible for the beginnings of Korean adoption, one of only four agencies approved by the Korean government, and among the elite of intercountry adoption agencies, is now led in significant part by Korean adoptees: Holt's C.E.O./President, Chairman of the Board of Directors, and Vice President of Public Policy and Administration, are all Korean adoptees.\(^{26}\) Holt's website proclaims that the “understanding and commitment to the adoptee experience” by Holt's adult adoptee leadership “is profound and deeply felt and acknowledged.”\(^{27}\) The Holt website further proclaims that the agency has “placed more than 40,000 children with adoptive families.”\(^{28}\) Holt's website exhibits a range of services to adoptees, including camps for children/adolescents and various outreach programs for adult adoptees.\(^{29}\) The discourse of Holt's website suggests solidarity among adoptees, support of adult adoptee rights to information and to conduct birth searches, and sensitivity toward race and identity issues, all within a broader framework that embraces adoption as a fundamental good. This purportedly sensitive, adoptee-run discourse implicitly suggests that the legitimate concerns of the critical discourse toward issues of race, identity, and information are being incorporated into Holt's positive discourse and current practices. At the same time, the implication is that the critical voices represent a vocal minority who are either victims of the “bad old days” in which such concerns were not taken account of, or else are simply dysfunctional. The road to a stance of integration, connection, and health, rather than alienation and separation, these discourses imply, is found in positive, rather than negative, Korean adoption discourse. This, at any rate, is how it is likely to appear to an outsider or visitor perusing the literature. Thus, the alienation and anger exemplified by critical Korean adoption discourse can appear unnecessarily or arbitrarily negative in light of these more positive forms of adoptee discourse. Critical and negative adoptee discourse is thus in danger of becoming marginalized.

Such a marginalization would be highly unfortunate, for current adoption practices, and positive adoption discourse, respond only partially and sometimes superficially to the legitimate concerns of adoptees. The basic injustices in past and contemporary adoption practices remain unaddressed by much positive, purportedly “sensitive” Korean adoption discourse, being papered over (in my view) by an overly psychological approach. Perhaps I can illustrate this point with a brief reference to our family's experience as adoptive parents of literally stolen much older children from India. (This story has been very partially told in the media; telling the full story is not necessary for the point that follows.) At one point our purportedly excellent United States placement agency assigned us a social worker to discuss the psychological ramifications of adopting possibly trafficked daughters, all of the while refusing to take any concrete steps to find the original family and determine whether they were in fact stolen children. (At this point it was likely that the children were stolen, but confirmation was needed to verify the story and determine the critically important details.) As our adoptive daughters suffered enormously from the wrongful manner of their separation from their family and the uncertainties over the details, the


\(^{28}\) See id.

\(^{29}\) See id.
social worker suggested to us that they (and we) did not need to know whether they were stolen children—the truth did not matter, but rather only what they thought about the truth mattered. The social worker suggested our adoptive daughters write letters to their mother—letters the agency would make no effort to send or deliver, despite having supposedly obtained a second consent for the adoption from the mother about three years prior to these conversations. Hence, the approach of the agency was to do nothing about the wrong of the children being stolen from their parents, nor to take any responsibility for their own role in facilitating the adoption of possibly stolen children, but instead to offer and propose counseling to help all of us adjust to this fundamentally unjust situation. It is this effort to make persons psychologically “adjust” to intolerably unjust situations, while concrete steps toward truth, accountability, and reunion are neglected, that can make anyone “crazy” and “angry.” Perhaps I am wrong, but I perceive a certain analogy to the current practice of adoption agencies in promulgating a sensitive discourse toward race, loss, and identity issues, while neglecting the concrete steps that would provide reliable and truthful information and accountability for the past, and more humane treatment of first mothers and families in the present.

The next section looks at what I perceive to be critical forms of adoptee discourse that more fully address the legitimate grievances of adoptees, while sometimes incorporating themes important to current developments in the broader intercountry adoption system.

A Way Forward: The Future of Korean Adoption Discourse

Make Korean Adoption Discourse Include and Relevant to Developments in the Broader Intercountry Adoption System

Much contemporary intercountry adoption discourse, including the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, the discourse the Convention influences, and an increasing amount of media and academic discourse, concerns adoption trafficking, corruption, abusive adoption practices, and monetary incentives toward such misconduct. Korea of course has never ratified the Hague Convention. 30 In addition, it is possible that these concerns with trafficking, corruption, and abusive adoption practices are not as applicable to how the Korean adoption system has operated over the last two decades. In the absence of substantial evidence that Korean children are being obtained illicitly from birth parents, or that corruption is evident in the contemporary adoption system, there is a question of how Korean adoption discourse relates to these larger trends in the intercountry adoption system.

Contemporary critical Korean adoption discourse provides several important means by which Korean adoption research is becoming reflective of, and relevant to, the concerns prominent in global adoption discourse. For example, research on Korean adoption records, generally instituted by adult adoptees, has uncovered significant inaccuracies and misconduct in past Korean adoption. 31 This research suggests that Korean adoptions over the first several decades did in fact suffer from a significant degree of misconduct and abusive adoption practices. This research is opening an important window into the history of Korean adoptions and needs to be continued, as the extent, nature, and human impacts of these practices have not yet been brought fully into view.

The research conducted thus far suggests that Korean adoptions share a similar history to that of many sending nations. It has been common that each sending nation experience an initial, pioneer stage, as that nation is opened up to significant participation in intercountry

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adoption. Generally, intercountry adoptions are opened by a group of receiving country individuals and agencies with a humanitarian or pro-adoption motivation, or a financial/business motivation, or perhaps sometimes both. It is characteristic of the early stage that the pioneering leaders perceive an overwhelming human need (or financial opportunity) amidst a context of chaos and low governmental capacity. During the pioneering stage, often little attention is paid to issues like recordkeeping, lawfulness, or ensuring that children are truly adoptable “orphans.” The overwhelming concern is to process as many adoptions as possible, and the time and care that would be required for careful recordkeeping, investigating the child’s status, or alternatives to intercountry adoption are seen as unnecessary or counterproductive. There may be a willingness to falsify records or obtain permissions in questionable ways in order to push adoptions forward. The laws of the sending or receiving country may be viewed as corrupt or needless impediments to the overwhelming good of adoption.

Under these circumstances, it should not be surprising that during such pioneer stages a good deal of damage can be done in the name of the good of adoption. (Whether the good accomplished outweighs the bad is a complex question beyond the scope of this article.) It is an important part of Korean adoption discourse to research Korea’s “pioneer” stages, and to document and seek accountability for the errors that were made and the damage that was done. Examination of the pioneer stages of Korean adoption would also reveal the commonalities, at least in its origins, between Korean adoptions and those from other sending nations.

In the instance of Korea, it appears likely the transition to a more institutionalized system did not initially succeed in producing accuracy in records. Instead, a combination of humanitarian, ideological, and financial inducements toward international placement may have led to frequently falsified or inaccurate records, and a failure to seek options for children and families within Korea. Thus, years after the emergencies of war and extreme poverty had been alleviated, the system still failed to routinize and internalize norms of accuracy and subsidiarity. (Subsidiarity is the norm that alternatives for the child within their own country, beginning with family preservation efforts, should be considered prior to an international placement.) These failures also should be scrutinized and examined. These difficulties also illustrate another commonality between Korean adoptions and those from other sending nations, as adoption trafficking has flourished in other nations, such as India, with an institutionalized and bureaucratic system.

The Contemporary Korean Adoption System in Global Perspective

The Korean adoption system may have eventually transitioned to a system where the specific kinds of abusive adoption practices found today in many sending nations became rare. Korea by that point had become a highly developed and comparatively wealthy nation. International adoption became a routinized way of handling the situation of single pregnant women who chose not to abort. In a society with no cultural space for single mothers, and cultural obstacles to state-processed domestic adoption, international placement functioned in a way roughly analogous to how domestic adoption had functioned in the United States during portions of the twentieth century: as a way to handle the culturally shameful situation of the pregnant single woman. Within this context, there was a reliable supply of children available to the limited number of adoption agencies permitted to participate and an apparently reliable means of securing appropriate consents and keeping the necessary records. Under these circumstances, the Korean adoption system became unique among prominent sending nations. By contrast, many

34. See, e.g., The Two Faces of Intercountry Adoption, supra note 6; Child Laundering, supra note 2, at pages 146-163.
sending nations are developing economies where extreme poverty and government corruption form a primary context for intercountry adoption issues; hence, the situation in sending nations such as Guatemala, India, Nepal, and Vietnam bears little resemblance to that in contemporary South Korea. Although China’s system shared for a time a similar reputation, with Korea, as a well-run, centrally-controlled system, China’s adoption system was driven by the combination of a coercive population control system and a cultural need to have a son, which caused for a time a large-scale abandonment of baby girls, rather than being primarily a routinized means of handling unwed pregnancies, as it is in South Korea.\(^{35}\) The Eastern European sending nations, as exemplified by Russia, were similar to modern South Korea in the sense of representing wealthier sending nations, but in Eastern Europe the system was driven by the heritage of communist-era policies encouraging the institutionalization of significant numbers of children.\(^{36}\)

Under the unique circumstances of contemporary South Korea, some are urging the development of domestic adoption as an alternative to intercountry adoption. The argument is made that a wealthy and advanced nation should be able to take care of its own children, and that domestic adoption is the best way to do so. The development of domestic adoption in preference to intercountry adoption is fully consistent with the principle of subsidiarity, as articulated in the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.\(^{37}\) The attempt to develop domestic adoption suggests the influence of international standards on the Korean adoption system, despite South Korea’s failure to ratify the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption.

Others within South Korea, however, are working to assist single mothers in keeping and raising their children, and thereby attempting to open up a new cultural space for single mothers. I would suggest that this work reflects an important critical perspective on both intercountry adoption, and also adoption generally. The legal paradigm in which parents “voluntarily” relinquish their children for adoption often fails to capture cultural, societal, and family contexts which make such “choices” all but inevitable. The choices of original parents have thus been systematically constricted.\(^{38}\)

Similarly, some are working with mothers who have previously relinquished their children for adoption. This, also, is important, and often previously neglected, work, both in South Korea and elsewhere. The adoption and cultural systems that pushed such mothers to relinquish their children also effectively silenced them, since these mothers paradoxically are subject to a double-shaming: once for becoming pregnant while single, a second time for relinquishing their children. It is not easy for a mother anywhere in the world to identify herself as someone who relinquished her child, even in contexts where other social stigmas are substantially relaxed.

It may be helpful to make a comment on social stigmas. It is easy for an academic or commentator to give the impression that all social stigmas are backward and wrong. Such an impression would be incorrect. First, in every social group, there are social stigmas; for example, so-called “progressive” groups and supposedly “neutral” academics have their own social stigmas, for example against racist words or actions. Thus, traditional cultural groups probably have no more social stigmas than other social groups; the stigmas are simply different. Second, some

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36. See, e.g., Smolin, Child Laundering and the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, supra note 5.


behavior that has been stigmatized in so-called “traditional” societies, such as single parenthood, may in fact produce, at least on a statistical level, in particular societal settings, real harms and vulnerabilities. (For example, the situation of children of non-marital parents in the United States is statistically more vulnerable and subject to a range of negative outcomes.) Thus, stigmas may possess a certain rationality in providing a disincentive to risky or damaging behavior. The difficulties with stigmas, then, is not simply that they exist, but that they may lay the weight of stigma and blame inequitably, and may lead to dehumanizing responses. In the case of single parenthood, stigmas generally have inequitably targeted the mother and child, and in some cultural settings have occasioned a dehumanizing separation of parents and children. In addition, stigmas in some cultural settings overwhelm everything else about the individual, forming a comprehensive, stigmatic judgment against the individual which is itself dehumanizing.

The stigma against parents relinquishing or abandoning their children may be at least partially appropriate, or at least understandable. An imaginary world in which there was no social stigma against parents abandoning or relinquishing their children would not necessarily be a better world. The very significance of the parent child bond suggests that a seemingly “voluntary” parental severance of that bond necessarily invites some social judgment. At the same time, that social stigma has been applied in discriminatory and unfair ways, and likely has some negative effects. One negative impact of this stigma is the silencing of original parents, especially original mothers. An adoption and cultural system that shames original mothers into giving up their children also shames them into silence. This silence creates a lack of relevant information about how adoption systems should be structured. The silence is also dehumanizing in itself.

Adoption systems have a tendency to make original mothers complicit in their own victimization, which further silences them. Once an individual is made to feel (or be socially understood as) complicit in a wrongful act, they lose their capacity to complain about their victimization. In effect, adoption systems have escaped the social stigma that arguably should belong to them, due to their complicity in facilitating and encouraging the breaking of the parent-child bond, and have transferred that stigma entirely (and hence unfairly) upon vulnerable and comparatively powerless original mothers. Recovering the voices and narratives of original mothers is hence an important step toward their potential social rehabilitation, and toward constructing a more accurate narrative in which the responsibility for the separation of parent and child is shared among multiple actors and the broader society. If there is to be shame, let it fall where it belongs, among those who were more powerful and benefited most.

A (controversial) analogy to the United States may be helpful. In the United States, elective abortion is, by United States Supreme Court decree, legal. Yet, a substantial social stigma remains, both in regard to women who choose abortion, and perhaps even more so against medical providers who specialize in performing abortions. By analogy, it is odd that in the United States and many nations, a social stigma still remains against mothers who have relinquished their children for adoption, while the adoption agencies who have “aborted their motherhood” by facilitating and encouraging adoption are socially praised as humanitarians.

As a “pro-life” or “anti-abortion” advocate, I do not consider adoption to be the same as abortion, for the life of the child is protected and sustained in adoption. Yet, I also do not think the lack of any social stigma or social consequence for adoption agencies for their role in separating

children from parents is fair or rational, particularly in a context where the original mother is left silenced and stigmatized. This is an imbalance that needs to be corrected.

Thus, it would be significant to seek the voices of the hundreds of thousands of Korean parents and family members who have lost children to intercountry adoption over the past twenty years. Reclaiming their voices would help the broader adoption community, and even society, access a more complete and accurate narrative of the choices, circumstances, and actors involved in an “adoption choice.” The vulnerable position of original family members may make accessing their voices, let alone making them a public voice, difficult. Nonetheless, such work is fundamental to adoption discourse generally, and Korean adoption discourse in particular.

The nascent work of creating a cultural space for single mothers and accessing the voices of original mothers who lost their children to adoption is potentially in tension with the traditional critiques of intercountry adoption based on subsidiarity, postcolonialist power relationships, or concerns with transracial adoptions. Much of the force of the latter critiques of intercountry adoption can be satisfied by replacing intercountry adoptions with domestic adoptions. The position of original mothers and original families, however, is just as disadvantaged in domestic adoption as in intercountry adoption; perhaps even more so, if the model of domestic adoption is that of a strict, full, secret, closed-records adoption, and the trail that might enable a later birth search is more effectively hidden in domestic adoptions.

There may be an unfortunate tendency to meet the objections to domestic adoption found in a bloodline-focused society by emphasizing the most dehumanizing features of the full, secret, closed-records model of adoption. Those concerned with bloodlines can be told that they will be permitted to employ the central legal fiction of mid-twentieth-century adoptions in the United States: the legal and societal pretense that it will be “as if” the child had been born to the adoptive parents. It is precisely such a pretense, however, that most dehumanizes original mothers, whose motherhood is, I would argue, “aborted” under such a system. Thus, acceptance of domestic adoption becomes predicated on a complete denial of the relationships between the child and her original family, with dehumanizing effects on both adoptees and their original families. Under this strategy, the “subsidiarity” principle wins a partial victory in favoring domestic adoption over intercountry adoption, but only at the very high cost of an enforced legal pretense that aborts the motherhood of the mother while treating the child’s own bloodlines as completely meaningless to his/her personal identity.

From this perspective, I believe that the efforts currently being made to work with Korean mothers, past and present, represent a more profound critique of intercountry adoption, than the focus (however significant) on the trans-racial, cultural, and national nature of intercountry adoption. More fundamental than the question of why the adoptee was sent away from Korea, or into a white family in Europe, Australia, Canada, or the United States, is that of why the child was ever separated from her mother (and father) in the first place. This critique, moreover, could be enormously helpful to an intercountry adoption system that, outside of Korea, has not yet fully reflected on why it has generally favored the “full” adoption model over that of other kinds of adoptive relationships less destructive to original family relationships.

My premise is that work with original families will reveal three things: 1. That a social space can and should be opened for non-marital parents to parent their children, despite the very real disadvantages non-marital families face; 2. That no real choice has been given to many women who have relinquished their children for adoption, and that in many instances agency and government behavior has been harsh and abusive toward single pregnant women; 3. That where original parents cannot, will not, or should not parent their children, it is more humane to construct a more transparent adoption system that acknowledges and approves adoptive relationships as adoptive relationships, without pretending that they are the same thing as (and therefore must denigrate), birth relationships.
The third point is built upon the premise that a humane adoption system requires understanding the differences between birth and adoptive parent-child relationships. Birth parent-child relationships are naturally exclusivist, in the sense that the child does not have family ties outside of the biological family, whether nuclear or extended. Adoptees, however, have two sets of family ties, to both birth and adoptive families. When adoption systems are built around the premise that an adoptive relationship is exactly like a birth relationship, this premise requires and invites adoptive parents to seek the same kind of exclusivism practiced by birth parents who raise their children. Such exclusivism, in the context of adoption, can only be built upon an exclusion of the original family, a suppression so deep that it suppresses the adoptee’s own interest in their genetic and original family roots while suppressing the motherhood of the woman who carried the child to term and gave her birth. How else can the adoptive parents be the “only” parents than to deny that the child has, ever had, and ever will have, any other parents? An adoption system that so thoroughly seeks to exterminate and suppress the family ties of the child to their original family and so thoroughly denigrates the parental and family ties of original family members to the child, is (I argue) inhumane in significant degree. By contrast, an adoption system that acknowledges the non-exclusivist nature of the adoption relationship removes the necessity of denying the child’s ties to their original family, making it possible to treat the child and original family with greater dignity and humanity. Freeing adoption from the false premise that it is “the same as” a biological parent-child relationship makes it possible to actualize the benefits of, and minimize the harms of, adoptive relationships. The fact that adoptive relationships are different in certain important ways from biological relationships does not have to make them lesser, but can lead to them being celebrated and practiced in their own way.

Conclusion: Two Paths for Korean Adoption Discourse

In simplified form, then, I propose that there are two ways forward for Korean adoption discourse. The better, preferable path, would enable Korean adoption discourse to be a positive influence on the broader intercountry adoption system, as well as provide the premises for fully reforming Korean adoptions. Under this system, research into the past stages of Korean adoption, through researching records and accessing the voices of original families as well as adoptees and adoptive families, would document the harms caused by adoption systems subject to misconduct and abusive practices. (This is not to say that the system was only harmful, but rather that a responsible system is aware of errors and harms from the past and provides accountability for such, for otherwise there is no incentive to improve the system and remedy wrongs.) The knowledge of the harms and wrongs done in the past could inform other nations with less experience in the intercountry adoption system. At the same time, Korean adoption discourse would refocus attention on the most neglected members of the adoption triad, the original mother and original family. Such a focus would reveal the fundamental flaws with all adoption systems, intercountry or domestic, that rest upon a legal fiction that the child was “born” to the adoptive family. While there are circumstances in every society where a child cannot be parented day to day by their original mother and father and those children need a loving, present and permanent, family, the attempt to act “as if” the child was born to the substitute or adoptive family, I would argue, both facilitates abusive practices while dehumanizing everyone involved in adoption. Honoring and practicing adoption, I would argue, means honoring and practicing adoption, rather than pretending it is something it is not. Thus, South Korea would reform its entire adoption system, domestic and international, in a way that treated all members of the adoption triad with humanity and honor.

I realize that this model of Korean adoption reform and discourse is impossibly idealistic and faces opposition at multiple levels to current stake-holders in the past and present of Korean
adoption. Nonetheless, it is better, I would argue, to have clear goals to move toward, rather than to live within the straightjackets and constraints of the current discourse and much of modern adoption discourse.

The alternative, more negative path for Korean adoptions would be to remain locked within the most negative features of current discourse. Under this discourse, the necessary and important discourse on race, culture, and nationality will predominate, with the result that adoption discourse remains primarily about whether children should ever be adopted across those lines. This pro-IA vs. anti-IA discourse will continue to drown out concerns with the actual operation of the system, with adoption proponents able to hide past and present abusive practices behind the mask of a newly “sensitive” discourse and understanding of the complex identities of Korean adoptees. At the same time, the debate on trans-racial, trans-national adoption, the subsidiarity principle of the Hague Convention and Convention on the Rights of the Child, and concerns with a declining population, will push South Korea to replace international placements with domestic adoptions. In a cultural and legal context in which single pregnant women are systematically pressured toward abortion or adoption, consents are valid from birth with no mandatory waiting period, and domestic adoptions are practiced according to the legal fiction that the child was born to the adoptive parents, South Korea will simply have substituted a harsh and backward domestic system for their present mix of intercountry and domestic adoptions. Such would be a bittersweet, at best, legacy, for Korean adoption discourse. Yet, under current conditions, it may be the most likely result, absent extraordinary efforts and creativity.

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Minor Adoptee Literature
On Maja Lee Langvad’s Find Holger Danske

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Abstract
This essay discusses Maja Lee Langvad’s Find Holger Danske as an example of “minor adoptee literature.” The notion of minor literature, as proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is not only a surprisingly accurate description of the politicized modernism in Find Holger Danske, it also invites us to rethink the experiences of minor transnational subjects. The notion of minor adoptee literature aims at establishing a conceptual framework for a broader discussion of the small, but growing literature written by transnationally adopted Koreans.

There is an American-centric tendency in much of the writing on international adoption from Korea, which runs the risk of ignoring or even marginalizing the non-American adoptee experience. Of all the international adoptions from Korea, roughly two out of three went to the United States, while the remaining third went to Western Europe. However, reading Dong Soo Kim’s article on adoption from Korea, we get the impression that international adoption is exclusively a phenomenon involving Korea and the United States. “In the past fifty years since the first wave of Korean adoptions, about 160,000 Korean children, plus an unknown number of privately arranged, have been placed for adoption in the United States.” The ignorance of the multiplicity of receiving countries is symptomatic of a widespread American-centric tendency in the literature on adoption from Korea. While adoptees are marginalized in Korean society, there is a double marginalization of the non-American adoptees insofar as their distinctive experiences are forgotten or simply ignored in accounts of the history of international adoption from Korea.

Unfortunately, the double marginalization of non-American adoptees is occasionally reinforced from within the adoptee community. We find a perplexing example of this phenomenon in the introduction to the anthology Outsiders Within. On the one hand, the writers maintain that they “seek to embrace the heterogeneity and multiplicity of the global transracial adoptee community.” On the other hand, the writers distinguish between two dominant discourses on race and adoption: a defense of transracial adoption based on colorblind multiculturalism; a critique of transracial adoption based on racial awareness and same-race preference. Transracial adoptees, the authors claim, “swim in the murky waters between these conflicting accounts.” While this may be true in contemporary USA, it is certainly untrue in contemporary Scandinavia. While the first discourse of colorblind multiculturalism is to be found in various disguises in many Western European countries, the second discourse, and therefore the alternative itself, is rarely found in a continental European context. For example, what would it mean to criticize

4. Ibid.
adoption by arguing for same-race placement of children of color in a Scandinavian or a French context? Who would argue for such a position?

The heterogeneous experience of the international adoptee community is effectively replaced by a discursive either-or, which in fact pertains only to the majority of Korean-American adoptees. In other words, the majority generalizes its experience as representative of the totality while marginalizing the different experiences of the various linguistic and cultural minorities. Such a marginalization of the minority of non-American adoptees within the international adoptee community is the more perplexing because it occurs in a text that claims to be a “corrective action” to “the traumatic experiences of racism, marginalization, and discrimination, both systematically and on the personal level, within our adoptive communities.” The performative contradiction found in this text is just one among many examples of the American-centric tendency in much of the literature on international adoption from Korea.

Through a discussion of Maja Lee Langvad’s *Find Holger Danske*, this essay proposes the notion of minor adoptee literature as an alternative to American-centric accounts of international adoption. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari develop the notion of minor literature from a famous entry in Kafka’s diaries in which he reflects on the literature of the Jewish community in Warsaw and Prague. The literature of such minoritarian communities, Kafka notes, reconnects the isolated members of the community, continually reintegrates the multiplicity of individuals in a totality, and mediates the generational antagonism between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. Minor or small literatures (kleine Literaturen), according to Kafka, create a whole that is more than the sum of its members by establishing a unifying narrative; they are like “the diary-writing” (Tagebuchführen) of a community rather than “the history-writing” (Geschichtsschreibung) of a nation. Insofar as it has an immediate political impact on the ongoing development of the community, minor literature is primarily a concern of the people rather than scholars.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, three main characteristics define minor literature: a strong coefficient of deterritorialization affects the language of minor literature; everything concerning the individual and the oedipal triangle is eminently political; and the literary works, rather than being expressions of individual subjects, are primarily collective enunciations. Minor literature, they maintain, is not merely written in a small or minor language; rather, it is what a minority constructs within a major language. The literary works belonging to such a minor literature employ a language that is “affected by a high coefficient of deterritorialization.” In a different context, Deleuze describes minor literature and its linguistic deterritorialization as an invention of a strange language within language, a becoming-other of language, or a minor usage of major language.

Instead of generalizing the characteristics of the majority as the symbolic representation of the totality, the notion of minor literature invites us to look for the absent or fragmented totality in the marginalized particularities of the minority. The notion of minor literature, as Deleuze and Guattari articulate it, emerges from an unorthodox form of Freudo-Spinozist Marxism. Although the notion of minor literature largely circumscribes the classical debate between realism versus modernism, it does share the goal of what Jameson calls a new realism, namely “to resist the power of reification in consumer society” and to reinvent the “category of totality.” In the context of minor adoptee literature, we might add, the notion of totality refers to the commu-

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7. Ibid., 152.
9. Ibid., 29.
nity of adopted Koreans rather than mankind in general. In other words, the function of minor adoptee literature is to counter the processes of reification inherent in the adoption system and to provide a model for a genuine community to come.

The notion of minor literature, as proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is not only a surprisingly accurate description of the politicized modernism in *Find Holger Danske*, it also invites us to rethink the experiences of “minor transnational subjects”. Langvad’s texts display a high coefficient of linguistic deterritorialization, they have an immediate ethico-political significance for the community of transnational adoptees, and they invoke a collective assemblage of enunciation that gestures toward a community to come. In short, the notion of minor adoptee literature aims at establishing a conceptual framework for a broader discussion of the small, but growing literature written by transnationally adopted Koreans.

**Linguistic Deterritorialization**

The opening of *Find Holger Danske* is a simple, yet powerful articulation of linguistic deterritorialization:

- blod er tykkere end vand
- blæk er tykkere end vand
- mælk er tykkere end vand
- tykmælk er tykkere end vand
  - blood is thicker than water
  - ink is thicker than water
  - milk is thicker than water
  - junket is thicker than water

The simple substitution of nouns (*blod, blæk, mælk, tykmælk*) emphasizes the literal meaning, blood as a liquid, while simultaneously debunking the traditional organic metaphor of ethno-nationalism. The use of alliteration (*blod, blæk*) and synecdoche (*mælk, tykmælk*) accentuate Langvad’s belonging to a particular modernist tradition of conceptual poetry that includes, among others, Max Frisch, concretism, and the Italian futurists. One of the unique qualities of her conceptual poetry and prose is a combination of a sophisticated formal experimentation and an intense political engagement that circumscribes the traditional pitfalls of high modernism and the historical avantgarde.

- blodets bånd
- blækkets bånd
- mælkens bånd
- tykmælkekns bånd
  - blood ties
  - ink ties
  - milk ties
  - junket ties

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14. For example, Langvad explicitly revealed the source of inspiration for her “Questionnaires” when she translated Max Frisch’s *Fragebogen* from German to Danish. See Max Frisch, *Spørgeskemaer*, trans. Maja Lee Langvad (Copenhagen: Basilisk, 2007).
The repetitions and slight interventions expose the cliché, the dead metaphor, and emphasize instead the absurd literality of the initial expression. Langvad effectively uses repetitions and substitutions to deflate the metaphoric language of ethno-nationalist ideology and reveal its literal absurdity.

pæreredansk
æbledansk
blommedansk
banandansk

peardanish
appledanish
plumdanish
bananadanish16

The initial expression *pæreredansk*, which literally means “peardanish,” is an idiom and a dead metaphor that roughly means “essentially Danish” or “native Danish.”17 As Langvad explains in an interview, “Language is for me about meaning. When ‘pæreredansk’ (‘peardanish’) becomes ‘banandansk’ (‘bananadanish’), the meaning of ‘pæreredansk’ is changed. The word suddenly becomes literal and thereby assumes a different meaning.”18 Such interventions in language constitute aesthetico-political acts of resistance against ethno-nationalist and xenophobic discourses.

Other adoptee writers, notably Astrid Trotzig in *Blod är tjockare än vatten* and Jane Jeong Trenka in *The Language of Blood*, likewise grapple with the metaphor of blood.19 Trotzig spends her entire book denying the importance of blood, thereby ironically affirming its haunting significance in her writing. The kernel of Trotzig’s ambivalent denial is the notion of blood, which she in perfect conformity with her Scandinavian surroundings manages to reinvoke and repress during the writing of her book. Trenka, on the other hand, invokes a more affirmative position vis-à-vis the notion of blood. Her insistence on the importance of blood is to be read in a specific American context in which the birth parents have been silenced or erased from the family picture. In such a context, insisting on the significance of blood spells a gesture of resistance against erasure. However, insofar as Trenka’s book is read in a Korean context, the author’s insistence on the metaphoric blood might easily be interpreted as a tacit support of Korean ethno-nationalism. Occupying a distinct position among the adoptee writers, Langvad employs humor and irony in deconstructing the metaphoric language of xenophobic ethno-nationalism in Scandinavia. While agreeing with Trenka’s critique of the silenced birth parents, instead of affirming the metaphor of blood and primordial connectedness she focuses her critique on airports, what Marc Auge has described as “non-places” of contemporary society, as the metaphoric birthplace of the adoptee.20

The deterritorialization of language in *Find Holger Danske* functions as an immediate political intervention in a contemporary European context dominated by the politics of xenophobic ethno-nationalism and anti-intellectual populism. As Langvad states in an interview with Gitte Fangel, “I would like to emphasize the racism active in language.”21 In addition, her criticism

of xenophobia in Europe is extended to an aesthetico-political critique of the pro-adoption discourses that legitimize the continued commodification and forced migration of children from the global periphery to the center.

**Ethico-Political Immediacy**

Maja Lee Langvad writes about adoption from a personal point of view, yet everything in her book is immediately political. This becomes evident when we look at her treatment of Adoption Center, one of two official adoption agencies in Denmark, which facilitated the adoption of Langvad from Korea to Denmark in 1980. Adoption Center, today known as AC International Child Support, sent out an annual report to adoptive families and prospective adoptive families. Langvad, with an acute sense of discursive reification, recycles the annual reports from Adoption Center as textual readymades.

"Korean children are light-skinned, have black hair and large almond-shaped eyes. The Koreans are one of the tallest people in Asia, and the children, therefore, are not particularly small compared to Danish children." 22

The textual readymade from Adoption Center describes the children as simple commodities awaiting consumption by would-be adoptive parents. 23 Similarly, Katy Robinson (who was adopted to the U.S. through Korea Social Service in 1977) describes her impression of reading her adoption file: "It was like reading about a stranger who was being put up for sale." 24 The textual strategy employed by Langvad exposes the reification and dehumanization of children in pro-adoption discourses.

The annual reports distributed by Adoption Center are revealing examples of the pro-adoption discourse since the foundation of the organization in 1969 until the late 1980s. The annual reports were distributed at the end of the year containing a summary of the adoption agency’s activities during the previous twelve months. The reports provided the reader with some key numbers, and they contained visions of the near future in terms of transnational adoption to Denmark. The report from 1980 begins with the proclamation that it has been "the best year in Adoption Center's history." 25 The simple reason is that 1980 saw the highest number of international adoptions to Denmark facilitated by Adoption Center since the foundation of the organization. Four hundred and ten children, to be precise, were placed for adoption in Denmark (in 1980, the total number of international adoptions from Korea was 4,144). Previously, the highest number had been 408 adoptions in 1974. When prospective adoptive families wanted to register with Adoption Center they were placed on a waiting list. The registration fee, as the annual report states, was 3,000.00 Dkr. In addition, there was a so-called "homebringing fee" (hjemtagelsesgebyr), which varied slightly depending on the country of origin. In 1980, this fee amounted to 16,000.00 Dkr. for a child from Korea or India, while the fee was 20,000.00 Dkr. for a child from South America (the exchange rate was 6 Dkr. per US$ in 1980). The report announces that these fees will increase during the following year due to "world-wide inflation, rising costs, etc." 26

The following section of the annual report goes into detail with every sending country. The report describes Korea first, mainly because it accounts for the largest number of international

22. Langvad, *Find Holger Danske*.
26. Ibid., 4.
adoptions to Denmark. Adoption Center had established a long-standing relationship with Korea Social Service (KSS). The director of KSS, Paik Kun-Chil, and the director of Adoption Center strengthened the relationship between the two institutions through mutual visits. According to the report, KSS is a modern and well-equipped institution with good facilities and properly educated staff. This is due to financial support from abroad, not least from Denmark. KSS does not need any further financial assistance, the report maintains, but instead Adoption Center has helped finance the development of a social institution called Greenhill, located south of Seoul. According to the report, financial support to KSS in 1980 amounted to 972,000.00 Dkr. in total. Of this amount, 432,000.00 Dkr. were used for the maintenance of a hospital, and 540,000.00 Dkr. went to the development of the social institution Greenhill.27

Both horrifying and fascinating, the annual reports from Adoption Center provide invaluable insights into the discourse of pro-adoption while simultaneously revealing the hard economic interests and transactions involved in the procedure of international adoption from Korea to Denmark during the 1970s and 1980s.

The savior narrative, which portrays adoption as a means to rescue a child from poverty or life in an institution, is still one of the dominant motifs in international adoption. It is a way to assure oneself that adoption is an ethically responsible procedure. In reality, however, the low fertility rate in Western countries is the main reason to adopt. The Danish adoption agency AC Child Support might as well be renamed to AC Parent Support. […] By now, it is common knowledge that the adoption agencies earn huge profits on international adoption. An adoption agency in South Korea earns four times as much on an international adoption as on a domestic adoption. International adoption has become an industry propelled by the laws of supply and demand.28

International adoption severely compromises the organizations and states involved by compounding socio-economic inequality and generating human misery. The core of international adoption and the main reason for the alienated adoptee subjectivity is a systematical commodification of human beings.

In an interview, Maja Lee Langvad describes one of the motives behind her book: “To a large extent I write on anger and indignation. That is the driving force. In Find Holger Danske I would like to rebuff some of the clichés surrounding adoption.”29 Many people, she continues, repress the fact that adoptees have a biological family at all. “It is a myth that orphaned children are lining up to be adopted. […] The rising demand for adoptive children, which is not being met by the number of children released for adoption, is the fundamental reason for the increase in trafficking. It is hardly surprising that trafficking occurs when the demand is much higher than the supply and when the buyers are willing to pay absorbitant amounts for the good in demand. The difference between the adoption industry and other industries is that the adoption industry deals in human beings.”30 The adoption industry produces the personal as always already political.

27. Adoption Center, Aarsrapport, 6.
29. Fangel, Fra pære til banan.
Collective Assemblage of Enunciation

The collective assemblage of enunciation is an important characteristic of adoptee literature. As Langvad states, “I do not experience my book as autobiographic in the sense that it is about me as a person. I have used of my autobiography in order to focus on adoption on a more philosophical and ethical level. At least that was my intention. I am not interested in the play between fiction and reality as we see in other writers.”

Transnational adoption is perhaps one of the most radical attempts at socially constructing a new subjectivity. In this sense, we might understand the constructedness of adoptee subjectivity as emblematic of postmodern subjectivity in general. “We might say that postmodernism is what you have when the modern theory of social constructivism is taken to its extreme and all subjectivity is recognized as artificial.”

In adoptee writing, airports function as the symbolical place of birth that represent the socially constructed identity. As Katy Robinson writes, “I became convinced my life simple began the moment I stepped off the airplane on the other side of the world. One day I was Kim Ji-yun growing up in Seoul, Korea; the next day I was Catherine Jeanne Robinson living in Salt Lake City, Utah.”

The new identity, as Robinson describes it, emerges the moment she steps off the airplane as a clean break between before and after. Maja Lee Langvad expresses a similar idea in her book. Instead of narrating the experience, however, she includes her adoption documents as textual readymades. The documents have undergone a slight intervention. The first document states “Lee Chun Bok” is “Presumed to be born in Seoul City, Korea” on “21 January 1980” (see figure 1).

The second document states that “Copenhagen Airport” (Kastrup Lufthavn) was the place of birth of “Maja Lee Langvad” on “27 March 1980” (see figure 2). The second document, which has been slightly manipulated by the author, is an assisted readymade in the tradition of Marcel Duchamp. The slight intervention in the readymade produces a crystalline sign, to use a Deleuzian concept, in which the virtual infiltrates the actual.

The manipulated readymade is not simply a deconstruction of origins; rather, it is an ideological critique of pro-adoption discourse and its legitimation of human commodification.

As Langvad explains in an interview: “People assume that the adoptee will neither return to the country of birth nor search for the birth family. In other words, it is an expression of the view that the adoptee was born in Copenhagen Airport and has never had any parents before she was adopted to Denmark.”

Langvad, treating her birth certificate and other personal documents as ready-mades in the tradition from Duchamp, resorts to a form of ultra-documentarism in which she reproduces the original texts with a slight intervention. Instead of simply opposing the deterritorialization of capitalist commodification, Langvad radicalizes the process of deterritorialization, gesturing towards an absolute deterritorialization, in order to reveal the dehumanizing core of transnational adoption.

A Community to Come

Find Holger Danske is the first example of what I term minor adoptee literature. In reading her book, it becomes clear that in a Danish or Scandinavian context the main discursive contenders are xenophobic ethno-nationalism and multicultural colorblindness. In such a situation, it is understandable that the main object of Langvad’s poetico-linguistic critique is the

31. Fangel, Fra pære til banan.
35. Glaffey, ”Red en voksen, køb en spæd kineser.”
Medical and social report for ADOPTION in Denmark of a foreign child is evaluating the preliminary matching and advising the prospective adoptive parents. It is of value to have as much as possible of following information.

**Part A** should be filled in by the person in charge of the institution or by the local social welfare authority, as the case may be, if appropriate after interrogation of the mother, prior to the medical examination. If some of the information is not available, please state "unknown".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the child</th>
<th>Lieh Chun Sok, K-31362</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Date and year of birth</th>
<th>1/21/1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td>Presumed to be born in Seoul City, Korea.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the child been examined?</td>
<td>Not yet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the mother</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the father</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in institution</td>
<td>The K.S.S. Receiving Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight at birth</td>
<td>3.2 kg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length at birth</td>
<td>50 cm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Where has the child been staying?
   - a. with mother from birth to 3rd day of life
   - b. with relatives from to months of life
   - c. in private care from to months of life
   - d. in institution or hospital from 3rd day to 6th month of life

Since January 23, 1980 the baby has been under the custody of the K.S.S. Receiving Home.

2. Has the child had any diseases during the past time?
   - Ordinary children’s diseases (e.g., cough, measles, chickenpox, etc., mumps)
   - Tuberculosis
   - Cerebrovascular (e.g., febrile convulsions)
   - Any other disease
   - Excretion to contagious disease

*Fig. 1: Find Holger Danske, p. 8.*
Medical and social report for ADOPTION in Denmark of a foreign child for evaluating the preliminary matching and advising the prospective adoptive parent. It is of value to have as much as possible of following information.

**Part A** should be filled in by the person in charge of the institution or by the local social welfare authority, as the case may be, if appropriate after interrogation of the mother, prior to the medical examination. If some of the information is not available, please state “unknown.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the child</th>
<th>Maja Lee Langvad, 6-5135zl Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of birth</td>
<td>5/12/50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td>Kastrup Luft Haven, Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Dansk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the child been churned?</td>
<td>Nej</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the mother</td>
<td>Inge-Lise Langvad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the father</td>
<td>Anton Jeppe Langvad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passport number</td>
<td>Nygådterrasse 282 E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height at birth</td>
<td>152 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight at birth</td>
<td>5.2 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length at birth</td>
<td>90 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the pregnancy and delivery normal?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1. Where has the child been staying?**

| a. With mother from birth to day month of life |  
| b. With relatives from |  
| c. In private care from to month of life |  
| d. In institution or hospital from day to day of month of life |  

Since January 1950 the baby has been under the custody of A.A.A.S. Receiving Home.

**2. Has the child had any diseases during the past time?**

| a. Ordinary children’s diseases (including cough, measles, chickenpox, rubella, meningitis) |  
| b. Tuberculosis |  
| c. Convulsions (febrile convulsions) |  
| d. Any other disease |  
| e. Exposure to contagious diseases |  

She has not had any particular children’s diseases since placement to Nygådterrasse 282 E.

Fig. 2: *Find Holger Danske*, p. 13.
discourse of xenophobic ethno-nationalism incarnated in the Danish People’s Party. Her writing is equally concerned with the collective experience of transnationally adopted subjects, the discursive racialization of ethnic minorities, and the potential resistance of racialized minorities against xenophobic ethno-nationalism in Scandinavia and elsewhere. However, one of the few things I miss in the book is a more pronounced critique of colorblind multiculturalism, which serves to legitimize the system of international adoption.

In addition to being the main proponent of colorblind assimilation into the adoptive countries, multiculturalism engenders a number of ambiguities that play an important role in contemporary adoption discourses. As Slavoj Zizek has suggested, we need to understand multiculturalism as an ideology of late multinational capitalism.

[Contemporary ‘postmodern’ racism is the symptom of multiculturalist late capitalism, bringing to light the inherent contradiction of the liberal-democratic ideological project. Liberal ‘tolerance’ condones the folklorist Other deprived of its substance—like the multitude of ‘ethnic cuisines’ in a contemporary megalopolis; however, any ‘real’ Other is instantly denounced for its ‘fundamentalism’, since the kernel of Otherness resides in the regulation of its jouissance: the ‘real Other’ is by definition ‘patriarchal’, ‘violent’, never the Other of ethereal wisdom and charming customs.]

Multiculturalism emphasizes tolerance of a folklorist or “sparkling” Korea and simultaneous intolerance of a patriarchal or backward Korea. Patriarchal Korea continues to produce unwanted children by single unwed mothers, while folklorist Korea is the celebrated fetish object of so-called Motherland tours. The discursive complexities of multicultural ideology should not blind us to the fact that the adoption system is tailored to suit the neoliberal conception of the state: the adopting families and their agents relieve the Korean state of a social welfare burden, while single unwed mothers are portrayed as immoral parasites that waste the money of hard-working taxpayers.

Minor adoptee literature, as we see it in Maja Lee Langvad’s Find Holger Danske, resists the production of reified or molar subjectivity by deconstructing the dead metaphors of ethno-nationalist and pro-adoption discourses. It is not an expression of isolated individual experiences, but attempts to politicize the adoptee community by inventing a new language in which to articulate the impersonal core of our personal experiences. One of the most important aspects of minor adoptee literature is that it involves a process of healing from the traumatic experience of reification. As Deleuze writes, “Health as literature, as writing, consists of inventing a people that is missing.” Minor adoptee literature is precisely a creation of a model of a community to come, a yet-to-be-established community conceptualized as a rhizomatic assemblage.


Memory Works

Re-imagining Loss in *First Person Plural, Bontoc Eulogy,* and *History and Memory*

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While some sociologists have characterized international adoption as a "quiet migration" and while some Asian American adoptees have referred to themselves as "seeds from a silent tree," by the late twentieth century, those seeds had taken root and produced a collective cultural critique of Asian international and transracial adoption through memoir and creative nonfiction.

In order to fully comprehend the history of Asian international and transracial adoption, we must engage with this body of work because it shows that adoptees are not solely the "precious objects" of rescue and affection they have often been imagined to be by media news reports. Rather, like international social service workers, independent adoption agencies, and adoptive parents, they too are historical actors in the making of international adoption history. And they narrate this history differently.

Many of these cultural productions challenge the celebratory portrayal of Asian international and transracial adoption as a privileged form of re-birth in a progressive and prosperous United States by presenting a more ambivalent picture of the phenomenon. The documentation of Asian adoptees experience through film is major part of this emergent collective expression.

Perhaps the most well-known of these documentary films is Deann Borshay Liem’s *First Person Plural* (1999). Its distribution through the Center for Asian American Media has made it accessible to many university and college classes, and its PBS broadcast through the P.O.V. program (documentaries with a point of view) has garnered a broader general audience.

This paper seeks to extend the discussion and critical analysis of the film in two major directions: first, we argue that a major contribution of *First Person Plural* is that it makes visible the racial hierarchies and social costs associated with U.S. assimilation. We read *First Person Plural* as a critique of what some observers have called our “post-racial society” in which racial

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3. The Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) is formerly known as the National Asian American Telecommunications Association or NAATA.

differences have been overcome and no longer matter. The significance of this critique is magni-
fied when one considers that current media representations of international and transracial adoption—for example the public admiration of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt’s international and transracial family—have been used as evidence of our increasingly progressive, multicultural sensibilities.

Second, *First Person Plural* is an important work for Asian American history, and not solely for adoption studies. When *First Person Plural* is read critically with other Asian American documentary films such as Marlon Fuentes’ *Bontoc Eulogy* and Rea Tajiri’s *History and Memory*, these films convey a powerful message about loss—of a Korean birth mother and siblings, an Igorot grandfather’s whereabouts, and the lived experience of Japanese American internment respectively—on multiple levels. Loss is an intensely personal experience, but it is also a collective one shared by other Korean adoptees, indigenous Filipinos, and Japanese American internees and their descendants.

Furthermore, these films illuminate that loss goes beyond the specific spatial and temporal experience of the death, disappearance, or relocation of persons. It also signifies the loss of knowledge of this collective experience. The films are a poignant meditation on how the histories of Korean international and transracial adoption, of the display of Bontoc Igorots at the 1904 St. Louis world’s fair, and of Japanese American internment during World War II are suppressed by the dominant narratives of U.S. humanitarianism and benevolent assimilation in Asia and America. Viewers learn through these filmmakers’ attempts to recover history that the past cannot be completely recuperated through the traditional historical method of archival research because archival documents, photographs, and film footage privilege some perspectives and exclude others. In these films, the narrators’ memories present viewers with a different lens to imagine and to examine the Asian American experience.

**How Memory Works in *First Person Plural***

While many of us juggle multiple roles and identities, the unique premise of *First Person Plural* is that, by the time of her adoption at age nine, filmmaker and narrator Deann Borshay Liem had three distinct identities and histories. She is Kang Ok Jin, born on June 14, 1957 and placed in a South Korean orphanage by her biological mother for international adoption. But she is also Cha Jung Hee, born on November 5, 1956, because the orphanage gave her Jung Hee’s identification papers before being sent abroad. Finally, she is also Deann Borshay, born upon her arrival in the San Francisco International Airport on March 3, 1966, and her subsequent adoption by the Borshay family.

The United States branch of the International Social Service (ISS-USA) facilitated the adoption, and the Borshays’ Christian and middle-class background was similar to other white American parents who adopted Asian children during the 1950s and 1960s through the ISS-USA. Arnild and Alveen Borshay’s Christian ethic as well as economic success in real estate motivated them to help others. Like other potential American adoptive parents of Asian children during that time period, the Borshays became knowledgeable of international adoption through news reports. An NBC television announcement about helping children abroad through the Foster Parents Plan for only fifteen dollars a month influenced Alveen to sponsor a Korean child, Cha Jung Hee, at the Sun Duk Orphanage. Alveen became emotionally attached to Jung Hee over their two and a half years of correspondence under the auspices of the sponsorship program. This attachment fueled her desire for formal adoption.

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ISS-USA archival records at the University of Minnesota’s Social Welfare History Archives contain documents that present the perspectives of some American adoptive parents, but they do not preserve the critical insights of the Asian adoptive children. Thus, First Person Plural is an historically significant work that presents the point of view of a Korean international and transracial adoptee. The Borshays believed that they were adopting Cha Jung Hee in 1966. Deann did not tell the Borshays the truth about her identity at first because the director of the Sun Duk orphanage warned her not to tell them who she really was until she was old enough to take care of herself. And, as a nine-year-old girl, fluent only in Korean language, and fearful of never seeing her birth family again, she was desperate to fit in with her new American family and community.

The Borshay family—brother Duncan and sister Denise as well as parents Alveen and Arnold—enthusiastically embrace Deann as a full member of their family. In the film, this acceptance is expressed verbally. Denise explains, “From the moment you came here, you were my sister and we were your family. And that was it.” Their acceptance of Deann is also expressed visually through the many excerpts of Arnold’s home movies, which feature a smiling and playful Deann during Halloween and Christmas holidays and family vacations that are interspersed throughout this first part of the film’s narrative. These moments might be interpreted as “color-blind” love and as evidence of America’s increasingly post-racial society. Denise states matter-of-factly that “even though we look different, and different nationality or whatever, we’re your family.” And Duncan acknowledges Deann as a sister “as much as Denise is.”

The acceptance of Deann into the all-American Borshay family is on one important level a radical and progressive departure from late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century vehement anti-Asian sentiment expressed through anti-Asian race riots, immigration restriction and exclusion, and anti-miscegenation laws. Yet First Person Plural also illuminates how the specter of anti-Asian racism haunts Deann’s integration into her new American family and community. Although Duncan tells Deann, “You didn’t have the family eyes, but I don’t care. You got the family smile,” the film points out that physical appearances do matter. A panoramic shot of Deann’s second and third grade class from her elementary school yearbook presents Deann as one of no more than a handful of Asian American students in a sea of white American faces. Her attempt to “fit in” is about becoming part of the Borshay family, but it is also about assimilating to social norms of white American beauty and physicality.

While Denise reminisces, “People would see us and ask, ‘Is that your sister?’ You guys look just alike,” the film exposes the fallacy in this statement by illustrating the difficulty and hard work invested by Deann to look like her white American sister and peers. A major part of Deann’s American childhood is trying to “look like everyone else” by perming her naturally straight hair, wearing makeup to make her eyes look bigger, and even having cosmetic surgery done on her ears. After Deann had complained to her parents that her ears stuck out too much, Alveen suggested, “Honey, that can be fixed if you want.” Arnold recalls, however, that after they took off her bandages, Deann cried. Deann reflects upon this time period of her life wistfully: “Somehow I had created a collage of things and made myself over to fit all the things I had seen.” Thus, the slow-motion family film footage of a smiling, Deann cheering for a college football team belies the strain of physically as well as culturally trying to become an all-American girl.6

6. Frustrated attempts of corporeal assimilation are part of the collective experience of being Korean and adopted in the United States. In our analysis of the pioneering 1997 anthology by and about Korean adoptees, Seeds from a Silent Tree, we argued that despite having been raised in white adoptive families, many of the Korean adoptee authors emphasized the ways in which the racialized foreignness inscribed on their bodies, and in particular their faces, negated their Americanness. For example, in the creative non-fiction piece “New Beginnings,” Sherilyn Cockroft reflects on the ways in which her facial differences prevented her from having a “normal” American childhood: “...I didn’t have a ‘normal’ childhood. Not that I had a bad childhood, but I always felt different and inferior. ...Even going to the mall, people would sometimes stare at me because I looked different. On one occasion in my early teens, I remember an innocent child said to me, ‘How come your face is so flat?’ Even though the child asked an innocent question, I felt very uncomfortable with my appearance.” Catherine Ceniza Choy and Gregory Paul Choy,
In *First Person Plural*, Deann’s physical transformation to look and act American does not signify a complete break with her Korean past. Deann’s memory of Korea, her effort to “picture the road from the orphanage to the house,” works in the film as a silent strategy of resistance to the identities and histories given to her by the Sun Duk orphanage and the Borshay family. As a child, she promised herself to never forget Korea though it was becoming increasingly difficult to “remember how to get home.” When she becomes fluent enough in English, she breaks her silence by trying to tell Alveen that she is not Cha Jung Hee and that she has a mother and a brother and sisters in Korea. Alveen, however, referring to Deann’s (switched and falsified) adoption documents, insists that Deann’s memories are “just bad dreams” and “a natural part of getting used to living in a new country.” As time goes by, Deann’s memories of Korea—her birth family, the Korean language, her real name—are “beginning to fade.” In their place, Arnold’s home movies begin to constitute Deann’s memories. And her Korean memories become relegated to dreams.

As a young adult living away from her American home for the first time, those memories come back later to haunt her, however, and Deann experiences a downward spiral of depression. Her devastation leads her to search for her Korean family in 1981 and she is able to locate them in part because her birth family has been searching for her too. Six weeks after contacting the Sun Duk Orphanage, Deann receives a letter from her Korean brother Ho Jin. “My dear sister, Ok Jin, you don’t know how happy I am to be writing a letter to you now. I’m your second brother and my name is Ho Jin. Your mother who used to think of you day and night is so happy to read the letter you wrote.” He explains to her that she is from a family of five brothers and sisters and that he is certain that she is Kang Ok Jin, the fourth child in the family.

This intensely personal moment of the film is also the point at which Deann connects her unique individual histories and identities to the broader, post-Korean War history of international and transracial adoption. She explains that the phenomenon began as a short-term humanitarian effort, popularized initially by the efforts of Oregon farmer Harry Holt to rescue Korean War orphans vis a vis international adoption by American families. However, Deann continues that without a South Korean plan to deal with post-war poverty and Korean families in need, Korean international adoption transformed into a global market steeped in unequal relations between nations. “The more children orphanages had, the more money they received from abroad. . . . South Korea became the largest supplier of children to developed countries in the world, causing some to argue that the country’s economic miracle was due in part to its export of its most precious natural resource, its children.”

In the presentation of this larger history, the film’s title speaks to the highly individual, but also collective experience of international and transracial adoptees: *First Person Plural* signifies the multiple identities of Ok Jin Kang/Cha Jung Hee/Deann Borshay, but it also insists that viewers pay attention to the significant diaspora of Korean adoptees in the Western world in the second half of the twentieth century. Since the end of the Korean War, approximately 200,000 Korean children have been sent to the United States for adoption. An additional 50,000 children have been sent to Europe, where, according to historian Ji-yeon Yuh, they make up the largest ethnic community in that region.7

The visual and narrative juxtaposition of this broader history of war, market forces, and Korean diaspora with Deann’s depression signals an important critique of the highly positive portrayal of international and transracial adoption as humanitarian rescue and as love. In addition to the heroic portrayal of Harry Holt’s adoption program in news media, these positive repre-

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sentations have become popularized through Hollywood films such as Universal Studios’ *Battle Hymn* (1957); television episodes such as Armstrong Circle Theatre’s *Have Jacket, Will Travel* (1957), and other numerous news media reports and photographs from the 1950s through the 1970s. In *First Person Plural*, viewers see how a 1966 news article featured Deann’s adoption by the Borshay family, proclaiming that in this new American world for a Korean orphan, her adoptive parents have assured her that “her world was now safe.” Viewers also see images of love and of commodification of Korean children—images that are often discussed separately—placed alongside one another. For example, the archival film footage of a white military serviceman embracing a young Korean girl with fondness follows the many images of the growing number of children in South Korean orphanages, while Deann narrates the inextricable link between the Cold War origins of Korean international adoption and its transformation into a global industry.

After establishing this broader historical context, *First Person Plural* reveals more details about the falsification of Kang Ok Jin’s identity and history. One month before Cha Jung Hee was scheduled to go the United States for adoption by the Borshay family, her father found her at the Sun Duk Orphanage and brought her home. The booming business of Korean international adoption led the adoption agency to assume that no one would notice if it falsified Kang Ok Jin’s paperwork and sent her in Cha Jung Hee’s place. This market-driven assumption of the interchangeability of Korean children contrasts sharply with the story of Jung Hee’s father removing her from the orphanage at the last moment. The story suggests the strength of the emotional attachment between them and the difficulty of relinquishing one’s child even in dire economic circumstances, intimate ties between Korean family members that, in contrast to the political intimacy between the United States and Korea and the familial intimacy between Korean orphans and their adoptive families, are rarely revealed in traditional archival collections and news media reports, and that are excluded from adoption paperwork.

It is this absent presence of the birth family and the suppression of the concomitant history of Korean international adoption as love and as global market that makes the subsequent interaction between Deann, Alveen, and Denise in *First Person Plural* awkward and uncomfortable. As Deann grapples with her falsified identity in the context of the complex individual and collective experiences of Korean international adoption, Alveen and Denise approach the falsification of Kang Ok Jin’s identity primarily through their insistence of their love of Deann Borshay, while disavowing her other identities and histories. Alveen insists, “Well, I didn’t care that they had switched a child on us. You couldn’t be loved more. And just because suddenly you weren’t Cha Jung Hee, you were Ok Chin Kang . . . Kong . . . whatever, it didn’t matter to me. You were Deann and you were mine.” And Denise ponders, “What was your other name, your real name?” When Deann tells her that it is Kang Ok Jin, Denise responds, “See, that doesn’t mean nothing to me. You’re still Cha Jung Hee.”

In *First Person Plural*, viewers see that their attachment to Deann, whether or not she was Cha Jung Hee, is on one level an expression of love. Yet, on another level, the love is based on the condition or assumption that Deann belongs only to her adoptive family. In his psychoanalytical reading of the film, scholar David Eng emphasizes the inability of Deann to psychologically and emotionally have two mothers. This inability partly stems from U.S. laws regarding international adoption: legal ties to the adoptive family are predicated upon the dissolution of ties to the birth family. These legal codes also have social ramifications. Deann characterizes this

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10. Scholar Jodi Kim argues that when the adoptee has at least one living birth parent, the production of the adoptee as a legal orphan creates a “conjoined ‘social death’ of the adoptee and the birth mother.” Kim analyzes representations of international and transracial adoption in *First Person Plural* and *Daughter from Danang* in Jodi
absent presence of her birth family as “an unspoken contract” between her and her adoptive family: “I belonged only to my American parents. It meant that I didn’t have a Korean history or a Korean identity.” She recollects that she could not talk to her American parents about her Korean family for a long time because she felt that she was somehow being disloyal to them. Since they had provided her with opportunities and loved her, to talk to them about her Korean mother “was like putting dirt” in her mouth. One wonders if anxieties on the part of adoptive families when the adopted sibling from a similar racial group reunites with a birth mother run as high as they do in transracial adoption situations. The anxiety on the part of the siblings and parents can clearly be read as racial anxiety about “losing” Deann to another culture/country, about which they know virtually nothing, regardless of the reassurances of unbreakable parental and sibling bonds through enculturation into a family. Such anxieties about loss are often at the heart of the adoptee’s search, yet there is rarely a reciprocal fear that the adoptee will abandon his/her relationship to the adopted family. To Deann’s siblings, a sister simply wouldn’t go in search, or even entertain notions, of another mother.

Unlike other documentary films about international adoption in which the reunion with the birth family is the climax of the narrative, First Person Plural importantly features the coming together of Deann’s adoptive parents and her birth mother and siblings in Korea after Deann has already reunited with her birth family. The film’s gaze is focused on the bringing together of the adoption triad of adoptee, birth family, and adoptive family. And the perspectives and critical insights of the birth family regarding Deann’s international adoption, and the poignant self-reflections of Deann and her adoptive parents’ understanding of their past create a more complex understanding of international and transracial adoption.

Deann has seen her Korean family twice in the last thirty years and these return visits are a mixture of familiarity and strangeness for her. On the one hand, the difficulty of corporeal assimilation in the United States starkly contrasts with her experience in Korea and with her Korean family: “What struck me when I was with my Korean family was the physical similarity, the amazing feeling of looking at somebody’s face that one resembles because for so many years I had looked into blue eyes, blonde hair, and all of a sudden there were these people in the room who when I looked at them, I could see parts of myself in them. There is sort of a physical closeness as if my body remembers something but my mind is resistant.” Deann’s revelations about her physical family resemblance make for an interesting rejoinder to her adoptive siblings’ claims about the lack of significance of physical resemblance. Deann’s revelations themselves belie the truth—or at least beg the question—of her adoptive siblings’ insistence that physical resemblance (in this case, read racial resemblance) meant little to them. At what point were her adoptive siblings able to see beyond Deann’s raced subjectivity? Immediately? After the first year? Did they ever really? How much of that aspect of race and otherness still resides in their regard of Deann and how much of that aspect underlies their discomfort with Deann’s return to Korea to meet her birth mother, especially given her brother’s claims about the superiority of Americans in everything—an extraordinarily ethnocentric claim and one that Borshay, the filmmaker, certainly wanted to call our attention to?

On the other hand, her loss of fluency in the Korean language creates a painful distance between her and her Korean family. One scene features her Korean mother talking to Deann in Korean while Deann is tearfully hunched over a thick book, most probably a Korean-English language dictionary. “I don’t understand a word that you’re saying, but I get the gist of it . . . I guess,” Deann says tearfully. She reflects, “I know that language is a barrier between me and my Korean family. There is something about Korean that I cannot get access to. I’ve tried to learn it

since I was in college. It's not just words and it's not just sounds or letters. I think learning the Korean language is about emotion, and about memory.”

As an adult international and transracial adoptee, Deann also articulates the emotional distance between her and her American parents, stemming from racial differences and family hierarchies. During the formative Cold War period of Asian international adoption, International Social Service workers expressed critical concerns for these differences and hierarchies and their potential impact on the welfare of the adoptive children. Deann's reflexive narrative in this section of First Person Plural points out that those concerns were and are valid:

There's a way in which I see my parents as my parents. But sometimes I look at them and I see two white American people that are so different from me that I can't fathom how we are related to each other, and how it could be possible that these two people could be my parents. When they adopted me they really accepted me as their child and I really became a part of their family. Even though I wasn't related to them by blood it was as if I had been born to them somehow. As a child, I accepted them as my parents because I depended on them for survival but as an adult I think that I haven't accepted them as my parents and I think that's part of the distance I've been feeling with them for a lot of years.

While the build up to the encounter between Deann's Korean and American families is emotionally tense, the eventual reunion is cordial and the families interact with one another graciously and respectfully. First Person Plural presents viewers with the possibility of dialogue between family members about incredibly difficult issues of estrangement and relinquishment. But it also encourages viewers to confront and think more deeply about the unequal political economy of international adoption.

The memories of Deann's older Korean brother Ho Jin and her Korean mother provide a social, economic, and political context for their family's relinquishment of Deann to an orphanage for adoption. Ho Jin emphasizes the significance of economic hardship in Korea as well as the powerful allure of opportunities abroad: “At the time she may have wondered why she was sent away when the rest of our family stayed together. Families should stay together but we were hard-pressed financially. By sending her away we thought she might have better opportunities than us . . . We thought it would be better than living with us.” He relates their family's story to the broader phenomenon of Korea's adopted children overseas: “All of the adopted children suffered equally in some way. It's not that they were abandoned. The children were sent for a better life.”

Deann's Korean mother elaborates this larger history while importantly placing a human face and birth mother’s perspective on the story of abandonment:

For five years after her father died, I made just enough to feed my children but not enough to send them to school. Next door there was this man who worked at an orphanage. And he said to me you can barely feed these five children. Why don't you put the three youngest into the orphanage where I work? I had no idea about such things. So I just followed his suggestion and sent them to the orphanage. After a while the orphanage asked me to give up Ok Jin for adoption. They asked me on three separate occasions, and each time I refused. At the time I was going to church and the deacon at the church said since I already have three daughters I should send one to the U.S. to get a better life.

After the adoption agency sent Deann abroad for adoption sooner than scheduled, she lamented, “I have no words to describe the agonizing years after that.” Through her words, tears, and facial
expressions, film viewers learn that Deann’s emotional devastation was not singular. Rather it was deeply felt on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

Although the film might be interpreted as a very individual story—even Deann characterizes the film as a “personal story of my experiences being adopted and growing up in America”—the birth mother’s memory of the institutional pressure of the orphanage harkens back to the earlier narrative part of *First Person Plural* on the history of international and transracial adoption in the post-Korean War period: its transformation from humanitarian rescue efforts of Korean War orphans into a global industry marked by South Korean families’ and orphanages’ increasing dependency on Western aid and international adoption to alleviate poverty.

Thus, while Deann professes a closer connection to her adoptive parents at the conclusion of *First Person Plural*, she also leaves viewers with ambivalent feelings about international adoption. She reflects that while adoption brought her and her American family much happiness, it also engendered a lot of sadness that “we couldn’t deal with as a family.” That sadness had to do with loss. Her family connection to the Borshays in the “new world” of the United States was inextricably linked to her family separation from her birth family. And it was a grief that was exacerbated because it could not be articulated nor acknowledged: “I was never able to mourn what I had lost with my American parents.” *First Person Plural* reclaims that inability. It is a profound visual and narrative expression of mourning the loss of family, history, and memory in international and transracial adoption.

*First Person Plural* as Asian American History and Memory

The history of Korean international adoption, especially white American families’ embrace of Korean adoptive children in the United States, contrasts dramatically with current Asian American historiography about the Cold War period in which immigration exclusion and family dissolution are prominent themes. In the 1950s and 1960s, anti-Communist scapegoating threatened Filipino American labor organizers with deportation as did the Chinese Confession Program, which attempted to compel illegal Chinese immigrants to declare their illegal status and to name those persons—often family members—who had helped them in the process.

However, when *First Person Plural* is analyzed closely alongside the documentary films *Bontoc Eulogy* and *History and Memory*, they illuminate discrete themes in the Asian American experience: the “absent presence” of specific persons in history; the suppression of their histories through American popular culture; and the loss of their histories through the absence of traditional historical evidence. The three films criticize these absences in two major ways: first, by creating images that make visible the violence of loss; and second, by presenting a different way of documenting and understanding the past. The filmmakers point out in their work that one of the main impacts of loss (loss of persons, knowledge, traditional historical evidence) is their (as well as our) inability to recover history in its entirety. Only partial stories can be told. Yet, in doing so, their documentation of Asian American history is both an act of mourning and of defiance. By highlighting the misconceptions of master narratives of American history and by offering alternative stories, they are expressions of historical agency.

In Marlon Fuentes’ experimental film, *Bontoc Eulogy*, the celebration of U.S. global power in the 1904 St. Louis world’s fair is the historical gateway into a family history featuring two personal narratives: the narrator, a Filipino immigrant who is searching for the whereabouts of his grandfather, and the grandfather Markod, a Bontoc Igorot who was among the approximately 1100 Filipinos brought to the United States to be displayed at the fair’s “Philippine Reservation.”
Markod's fate after the fair is unknown because he never returned to his home in the Philippine mountains.

The narrator poses the following questions: “Why did we leave our home? Why did we come to America? Why have we chosen to stay?” In addition to the narrator and his grandfather, the “we” refers to the sizeable presence of Filipinos in America in the late twentieth century. The narrator is one of over one million Filipino immigrants in the United States who, along with the displayed Bontoc Igorots, constitute an “absent presence” in the landscape of U.S. history and contemporary society, an effect of the lack of scholarly attention devoted to this group as well as the coercive process of U.S. assimilation: “We Filipinos wear this cloak of silence to render us invisible from one another. . . . To survive in this new land, we have to forget.”

The personal narratives featured in Bontoc Eulogy are, on one level, fictional. Since there are no known surviving records from the perspective of the indigenous Filipino people on display at this fair, such questions are partly unanswerable. Furthermore, what might remain to give us a lens with which to view their past is unrecognizable. According to historian Robert Rydell, the renowned physical anthropologist Ales Hrdlicka performed autopsies on three Igorots who died at the St. Louis world’s fair, removing and storing their brains. Thus, in Bontoc Eulogy, the narrator attempts to follow Markod’s trail by visiting anthropology museums (Hrdlicka had worked for the Smithsonian). But these searches yield unusable pasts because the remaining traces of bones, brains, and skulls defy individuality and subjectivity. The narrator surmises that his grandfather’s brain may lie on a “musty shelf waiting to be discovered,” but he astutely concludes that, even if the discovery was made, it would be part of “so many objects, identities unknown, labeled, but nameless, anonymous stories permanently preserved in a language that can never be understood.”

Furthermore, popular memories of the 1904 St. Louis world’s fair continue to permeate American national consciousness. For example, the 1994 documentary film A World on Display discusses how the 1904 St. Louis world’s fair had a profound, educational impact on the fairgoers even many decades later. And, even if Americans were not physically present at the fair, the popularity of the 1944 movie musical Meet Me In St. Louis popularized a nostalgic and romantic vision of the fair from the perspective of a white, affluent American family. Starring Judy Garland, Meet Me In St. Louis was nominated for four Oscars. It would become the second most successful MGM film (second only to Gone With the Wind) and be remembered as “one of the greatest musicals ever made.” In Bontoc Eulogy, Fuentes juxtaposes the sweet lyrics and happy melodies from one of the film’s popular songs—“Meet me in St. Louis, Louis/Meet me at the fair . . .”—with the troubling stories of the narrator and Markod. In doing so, he compels viewers to grapple with the complexity of history and memory: Americans’ popular sugar-coated memories of the fair suppress the fair’s hidden truths of racism and the dissolution of Filipino families.

Fuentes addresses the gaps of our historical knowledge by using imagination and conjecture to construct Markod’s perspective. Viewers learn that upon listening to American recruiters in the Philippines working on behalf of the fair organizers, Markod was intrigued by the opportunity to go to the United States and to show Americans his way of life. He hesitated initially, however, because his wife was expecting and he wanted to be at home for the birth of their child. But he kept in touch with his family by writing letters about his voyage to America. When the fair

13. As Victor Bascara writes, “An object’s having been ‘labeled but nameless’ means that it has been categorized, but not individuated. Fuentes articulates a liminal category that is not really invisible, but not quite functional either.” See Victor Bascara, Model Minority Imperialism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 110.
finally opens, Markod spends most of his time in his Philippine Reservation village where he and other Bontoc Igorots are required to perform rituals of marriage, birth, death “endlessly, devoid of any connection to what inspired them.” He receives a few dollars each month for his participation, but he eventually longs to return home to the Philippines. Markod laments, “There are few things I have seen that we would want in the mountains.” He becomes preoccupied with two Bontoc men who died at the fair because he never saw their bodies again. Fair festivities continue with gawking fair-goers ignorant of the grief before them. Markod is increasingly fearful of disappearing like these two men.

Markod is a fictional composite of Bontoc Igorots at the fair based on Fuentes’ historical research. However, the seemingly incredible “living exhibit” of Filipinos at the 1904 St. Louis world’s fair; the popularity of their scantily-dressed bodies and dog-eating rituals among American fair-goers; the death and dismemberment of some Bontoc Igorots during the fair; and at least one American university official’s interest in the purchase of their body parts are historical truths. Fuentes rejects their depiction as sideshow savages who confirmed white American racial and national superiority or as colonialism’s victims, the unfortunate casualties of U.S. westward expansionism. In Bontoc Eulogy, viewers confront Bontoc Igorot humanity. Markod is a seeker of adventure. He is a member of a family.

The recollection of this imperial history, Fuentes suggests, is foundational knowledge for understanding the rise of the United States as a world power at the beginning of the twentieth century. But it also enables him to come to terms with his ambivalence about being a Filipino immigrant in America in more recent times. In ways similar to Deann Borshay Liem, Fuentes uses his film as a vehicle to explore historical issues of racial, familial, and national hierarchies and how they continue to haunt the formation of Asian immigrant, and specifically Filipino American, identity. The beginning of Bontoc Eulogy echoes First Person Plural’s opening narrative in its focus on the narrator’s displacement from his Philippine homeland, and the resultant multiplicity of the worlds inhabited by the Filipino immigrant. He recalls, “I left Manila for America more than twenty years ago carrying dreams from a past I now barely recognize…. In the beginning I lived in two worlds: the sights and sounds of my new life and then the flickering after-images of the place I once called home.” The seemingly mundane and ordinary nature of his assimilation in America reveals, however, a privileging of the new American world over his Philippine life history because it results in the loss of his ability to inhabit multiple places and to equally acknowledge multiple identities. Like the young, but coming-of-age Deann Borshay, it becomes harder for the narrator to remember his way home in the Philippines. He muses, “The years pass, the urgency of my youthful dreams muted by the dailiness of life’s events. Now my memories of life back home have faded to the point where it is sometimes difficult to know when reality ends and imagination begins.” All that remains are “remnant dreams” and “recurring landscapes.”

Similar to Deann Borshay’s attempt to understand her multiple identities, the narrator’s decision to confront what has become relegated to dreams results in a personal search that is inextricably linked to a collective struggle shared by Filipinos in the diaspora. After learning to forget their Philippine past, the narrator claims that “the stream changes course and slowly our ghost catches up. Now we must remember in order to survive.” (emphasis mine) For the narrator, memory is an individual, collective, and generational imperative. He believes that his fading memories cannot be transmitted to the next generation of Filipino Americans, such as his children, who are U.S.-born and for whom the United States is the only home they have known. Thus, a sense of urgency defines his quest for knowledge about his grandfather and about his complex Philippine-American heritage: “One day I will be gone and these memories will be lost. Yet questions will remain…. What are the stories that define us as a people? What has made us the way we are?” The narrator explains that, after all, “home is what you try to remem-
ber not what you try to forget…. In the Philippines there is a saying … he who does not look back from whence he came from will never ever reach his destination.”

Like First Person Plural and Bontoc Eulogy, Rea Tajiri’s 1991 documentary, History and Memory, seeks to rehabilitate fragmented familial and personal pasts from the forgotten ruins of national tragedy. Tajiri’s family was part of the 120,000 Japanese Americans interned during World War Two, and though Tajiri herself was born after the camps closed, she is haunted by what she refers to as an “absence that is presence” whose origins lie within her family’s fading memories of the internment camps. The focal image of the film is intensely personal: an image of her mother’s face as she fills her cupped hands with water on a dry, hot day, presumably from a spigot at an internment camp. It is an image Tajiri has internalized, yet of which she has no memory—where it came from, what story might have compelled it, nor the reason for its recurrence. She can only vaguely associate it with her family’s internment camp experience.

Tajiri begins her rehabilitation with the seemingly innocuous thought, “I wondered how movies influenced our lives.” World War Two has been scored onto the nation’s memory through the enduring scenes and images of popular movies, themselves either reflective of or based on propaganda spread by recreated images of the bombing of Pearl Harbor produced by the War Authority. Movies such as “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” “From Here to Eternity,” “December 7th,” and “Teahouse of the August Moon” bespeak stories of the popular imagination about the war, overriding and overwriteing the memories of internees. Even those few popular movies that tried to sensitively depict internment managed either to leave Japanese Americans out of the movie (as in the absent presence of the sympathetic character Komoko in the 1954 movie “Bad Day at Black Rock”) or focused the impact of internment upon a sympathetic White protagonist (as in the 1990 movie “Come See the Paradise”). As Tajiri narrates, “I had known all along that the stories I had heard weren’t true and parts had been left out.” The stories she refers to are the accumulation of the grand narrative about the happy Japanese American internees as depicted in War Relocation Authority archival footage which either justified or softened internment to the public eye, the partial stories or vague memories of her relatives who could not or would not recall humiliating aspects of internment, the absence of Japanese Americans in wartime movies and the war’s impact on Japanese American communities which none the less fanned flames of hatred, fear and ignorance about Japanese Americans because those movies inadvertently conflated Japanese Americans and Japanese as enemies.

Further contemplation leads Tajiri to discover the paucity of images in the national memory of the internment camps and their impact upon the lives of the survivors. Her mother’s memories of camp are for the most part sketchy at best, as if she were attempting to remember for the first time, but also, in the context of the narrative, as if those memories were buried beneath the monolithic density of national memory, as created and carried through those popular movies about the war which depicted Japanese only as enemies. Tajiri’s challenge, then, as she proclaims in the film, is in “creating an image where there are so few” in order to “forgive mother her loss of memory” and to “make the image for her.”

As in Borshay’s and Fuentes’ works, coerced movement, uprootedness, displacement, and loss of memory are the operative tropes in History and Memory. Inchoate memories of her relatives’ experiences in camp are juxtaposed and at moments conjoined to popular movies about World War II that stoked nationalist sentiments about how to represent and remember the war. In attempting to redeem her own mother’s receding memories of camp, Tajiri collects “images without the story.” In the accumulation of these images, or fragments of memory, Tajiri at times discovers that one fragment provides the back-story to another fragment. For example, the photograph of her grandmother in a bird carving class at camp explains what Tajiri’s mother cannot

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when shown one of the birds her own mother had likely carved there: “I don’t know where this came from,” is her mother’s refrain. Her mother cannot remember the existence of a canteen store in camp as she looks at a picture of internee children, one of whom might be herself, in the store. Her mother’s memory is sketchy as she tries to direct Rea to the assembly center in Salinas where the family gathered before being sent off to the internment camps. As she ages, the quotidian aspects of camp life fade, distanced because of a lack of concrete images or surviving narrative. Tajiri’s provision of the images or the questions that prompt remembering begin the processes of counter-memory and then counter-narrative. A lack of images compels the desire to create them, just as the existence of an unfounded memory produces the desire to uncover its source.

History and Memory defamiliarizes the production of historical memory and its preservation in popular culture. The modes of narration in the film are silent, discursive, aural, visual, at times less a combination or juxtaposition of different narratives than a filmic technique that sets counter-narrative upon (such as a poem or other discursive text scrolled over a scene from a movie) or in collision with (such as a recording of a relative’s recollections played simultaneously with the soundtrack from a movie) grand narrative. The result for the viewer is an intentional confusion, or cacophony, of narratives, competing and diglossic.

The film opens with scrolling text:

View from above, then down through treetops to street to street lamp shining a light focusing on two people, the tops of whose heads (with black hair) move in an animated fashion. Then: “The spirit of my grandfather witnesses my father and mother as they have an argument about the unexplained nightmares their daughter has been having on the twentieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor…

There is more than one audience for History and Memory: the living (viewers) and the watchful eye of the spirits, presumably to whom Tajiri hopes to give voice. Her parents’ inability to explain their daughter’s nightmares reflect their own shame of the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the camps. “Kodomo no tame” became a cultural directive to not speak of the camps “for the sake of the children” to shield them from the deepness of the shame, or loss of face, surrounding the internment experience. That their child experiences nightmares on the twentieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor speaks to the internalization of the experience by the children as an effect of the silence about the camps by the previous generation. That the story is told discursively, through a scrolling text down the screen, is a foreshadowing that Tajiri will employs various narrative techniques to engage the storytelling process.

As Fuentes says of the making of Bontoc Eulogy, “I believe that history is really an art of memory. The gaps and ellipses are just as important as the materials we have in our hands. They are missing for certain reasons, whether by accident or force of omission, but they function as an irregularity or bump in an otherwise smooth surface of history.” Whereas Fuentes resolves the contradiction of having a memory of a place to which he had never been through the creation of what he calls “the oscillation between the ‘fictionality’ of the story. . . and the historical authenticity of what was transpiring,” the formal tension in Tajiri’s narrative is foregrounded as a minefield of contradictory experiences of her relatives to the national memory of both the war and internment, as represented in popular movies and archival film footage. One of the central anxieties in the film is that when memory fails her relatives, fragmenting Tajiri’s search further, “official” memory seeps in—that is, a national memory in which Japanese Americans are either absent or misrepresented. To the extent that History and Memory is a counter-narrative to the Grand Narrative of the necessity and fluidity of internment, it is also an acknowledgement of its,

and perhaps the inability to displace the Grand Narrative of internment, which states that it was a necessary evil, that Japanese Americans simply could not be trusted, that internment occurred for their own protection, or, simply, that “a Jap's a Jap.” In that regard, History and Memory is part of a large extant body of works, personal and scholarly, that speak against the necessity, constitutionality, prevailing and seemingly implacable mainstream attitudes about internment (cf., esp. Michi Weglyn’s Years of Infamy [1976], works of Peter T. Suzuki, esp. The University of California Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study: A Prolegomenon [1986]). But just as Fuentes admits of his aim “to engage the viewer into the process of storytelling itself” through what he calls the “oscillation between implausibility and authenticity,” Tajiri also does not, inasmuch as she cannot, rely on an oppositional exchange of facts to “correct” history. Rather, she focuses on the narratives that have imprinted the ways we romanticize and glorify warfare, and thus rationalize internment, on a nation’s memory, and wonders “how movies influenced our lives.” This subtle personal inquiry begins the rehabilitation of her mother’s forgotten memories of life in the internment camps.

As Fuentes wants to call our attention to the “seams and sutures” and “gaps and ellipses” in history, Tajiri wants, first, to call our attention to the ways that seamlessness, fluidity, and unity have become foregrounded in the nation’s memory of war, as an act of national closure on the war. Archival footage from “History” (1941) and John Ford’s “December 7th” (1943) conjoin with scenes from “Yankee Doodle Dandy” (1942) and “From Here to Eternity” (1953) to lay the foundation that effectively fragments, if not collectively silences, Tajiri’s family’s memories of internment—a necessary consequence of victory. Similar to the ways Borshay and Fuentes use cameras as an ironic tool for restaging constructions of truth, as record of documented history, Tajiri also calls attention to the world behind the “documenters” of history:

There are things which have happened in the world which there were cameras watching, things we have images for…. There are other things which have happened while there were no cameras watching which we restage in front of cameras to have images of. There are things which have happened which the only images that exist are in the minds of the observers present at the time, while there are things which have happened for which there have been no observers except for the spirits of the dead …

such as her grandfather’s spirit watching Rea’s parents arguing over the source of her nightmares. Rea must peel away layers of grand narrative fortified by Hollywood movies and government lies to get to the memory that underlies the lasting image of her mother in camp. The movies and archival footage serve only to confuse her and obfuscate any alternative history, thus denying any other kind of memory except that of the nation state. What’s left are virtually no camera images of internment from the perspective of the internees, or else camera images without accompanying narrative. Owning cameras in the internment camps so as to document their own experiences was prohibited, as opposed to those White Americans such as Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange whose WRA-sanctioned photographs of internees are revered as the highest aesthetic in the documenting of camp life. What exists of the images taken by internees come from contraband cameras. Like Fuentes, then, Tajiri can only imagine those things that have happened “for which there have been no observers except for the spirits of the dead.”

By the end of History and Memory, the tangible fragments from camp such as Tajiri’s grandmother’s wooden bird, her father’s carved heart, a piece of tarpaper from the barracks are tantamount not just to fragments of memory, but, rather, ethnographic fragments out of which Tajiri, to use Fuentes’ description of his in situ approach to the making of Bontoc Eulogy, expands their boundaries “to include more of what was left behind.”

17. Ibid., 82, 80.
18. Ibid., 85.
mother is exposed to, the stronger is her compulsion to remember, so that toward the end of the film, she recalls the exact address of her family's barrack among a sea of barracks in the camps. Tajiri's father also seems to articulate the compulsion for his children's internalization of the camp experience: "The resentment [on the part of the children] must have been there because it is impossible to accept being placed behind barbed wire for no reason at all." The excerpt from "The Way Ahead," showing smiling Japanese Americans walking toward the camera and into a world of possibility during the period immediately after the closing of the internment camps belies the harsh resettlement realities that many of them faced upon returning to their old neighborhoods to see banners, some of them hanging from the eaves of the very homes they lived in, admonishing "Japs Keep Moving."

Tajiri's nephew's voiceover of his review of Alan Parker's 1990 film, "Come See the Paradise," included as part of the film's resolution, is less a panning of the movie itself than a reading of the cultural seams that reveal the movies' emplotment within a legacy of Hollywood movies that continue to silence and skewer the experiences of Japanese Americans during the years of internment. Movies, Tajiri seems to intone, no longer influence us in the ways they once did. Inasmuch as History and Memory is a push back against national memory and Hollywood movies, however, Tajiri makes us aware that it is a push that forecloses neither History nor Memory, as the final scroll narrates the attempt by Representative Gil Ferguson, a Republican from Orange County in 1990, to pass a bill authorizing that schools teach that Japanese Americans were not sent to internment camps.

In her seminal essay, The Power of Culture (1998), Lisa Lowe makes the following claim about Asian American culture:

Asian American culture “re-members” the “past” in and through the fragmentation, loss, violences and dispersal that constitutes the “past.” Asian American culture is the site of more than critical negation of the nation—it is a site that shifts and marks alternatives to the national terrain by occupying other spaces, imagining different narratives and critical historiographies, and enacting practices that give rise to new forms of subjectivity and new ways of questioning the government of human life by the national state.19

Borshay Liem's, Fuentes', and Tajiri's struggles to remember and reclaim resonate with what Lowe terms the "national memory" which "haunts the conception of the Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of laws prohibiting Asians from citizenship from 1943–1952 and sustained by wars in Asia, in which the Asian is always seen as an immigrant, as the 'foreigner-within,' even when born in the United States and the descendant of generations born here before."20 Lowe uses Jeannie Barroga's play, Walls, about the racialized controversy that arose from Maya Lin's selection in a blind contest to design the Vietnam Veteran's War memorial, as her test text in her essay. The national memory of the Vietnam War, according to Lowe, desired—required—representational sentimental images and icons reflective of the way the nation remembers its wars nostalgically. Not only was Lin's memorial a non-representative work of art, but the focus of the controversy soon turned to Lin's own "Americanness"—one that was unrecognizable from her Asian face, though born and raised in Ohio. As hard as Lin tried to keep her race a non-issue in the memorial controversy, the marking of race on her body was simply too contradictory to the national imagery of Americanness for critics not to foreground it. Unsurprisingly, now that the memorial has withstood the test of time and become a standard by which other memorials are now measured, the back story of Maya Lin has receded to a remote corner of the nation's memory, remembered less for the racism through which she struggled than as merely the designer of the

20. Ibid., 9.
memorial. As Jeannie Barroga's play re-instantiates a collective (i.e., Asian American) memory of Maya Lin's construction of a national war monument, so, too, do Borshay Liem, Fuentes, and Tajiri "re-member" collective pasts, heretofore forgotten, silenced, or mistaken, through acts of re-staging, re-framing, and re-articulating. 21

The three films analyzed here, in line with Lowe's paradigm, do not so much offer redemption in the face of past legislation and continuing cultural pressure to keep Asian American subjects and history separate from national culture as much as they are expressions of the consequence of the very formation of national culture. "United States national culture," Lowe contends,

— the collectively forged images, histories, and narratives that place, displace, and replace individuals in relation to the national polity—powerfully shapes who the citizenry is, where they dwell, what they remember, and what they forget. 22

As articulations of counter-narrative, these films offer not just oppositional stories and historical fact, but also counter received venues of knowledge such as government sponsored reportage and record, ethnographic spectacle, authoritative talking heads, and history textbooks—venues that gird national memory and through which cultural rigidity is solidified through the likes of Hollywood movies and nationalist sentimentalism such as rescue narratives, programs of benevolent assimilation, and legislating the re-naming of the internment of Japanese Americans as mere "relocation." Against the backdrop of this rigidity, it is not enough, as Gloria Anzaldua has averred, "to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions." 23 Armed only with a cache of memories, Tajiri's Aunt Helen experiences this futility when, during a visit to the city in which she was interned, asks of a nonbeliever, "What proof do you want?" The answer, of course, is that no amount of "proof" can by now fill in the gaps and ellipses where national memory has seeped in to smoothen them seemingly out of existence. Over and against "official documentation," these three filmmakers engage Lowe's concept of "re-membering" their pasts through subverting received forms of "truth-telling" that have served to silence their histories. In this regard, First Person Plural, Bontoc Eulogy, and History and Memory engage approaches to Asian American historical narrative that cast a pall of irony over nationalist discourse.

The "gaps and ellipsis" in national memory that Borshay Liem, Fuentes, and Tajiri call attention to in their films effectively displaces nationalist discourse from the terrain of the political to the stage of cultural production. "Where the political terrain can neither resolve nor suppress inequality," Lowe writes, "it erupts in culture." The verb "erupts" seems apropos to the immediacy of response felt in these three films, not so much in the vein of the romance of a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings as the stitching of counter-memory—fragmented and repressed—to national memory, and articulating through different forms of subjectivity different forms of agency to recuperate, to tell, and to make historical their own stories.

References


21. Similarly, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha both interrogates and deconstructs journalistic reportage, historical document, the West's reliance upon singular narrative and a unified voice, even linear narrative in her seminal work Dictee. See Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dictee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).


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Korean Adoption Literature and the Anxiety of Returning

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Introduction
During the last two decades, a growing number of Korean adoptee autobiographies have emerged, such as Astrid Trotzig’s Blod är tjockare än vatten (1996), Katy Robinson’s A Single Square Picture (2002), Jane Trenka’s The Language of Blood (2003), Sunny Jo’s From Morning Calm to Midnight Sun (2005), and Miriam Yung Stein’s Berlin Seoul Berlin: Auf der Reise Zu Mir Selbst (2008).1 These autobiographies collectively form an important alternative voice in a debate that so far has generally been dominated by politicians, journalists, social workers, adoptive parents, adoption agencies and academics, eager to speak on behalf of adoptees.

Many, if not most, of these Korean adoptee autobiographies focus on the return trip to Korea.2 Nowadays, thousands of adoptees return to Korea every year for short-term visits—usually to seek information about their birth families—while approximately two hundred live in Korea for a longer period of time, some even permanently.3 In the following, I will attempt to trace an ambiguous design of anxiety and desire encoded in Korean adoptee autobiographies’ narrative trajectories of returning—using Astrid Trotzig’s Blod är tjockare än vatten as an example. Within the field of adoption studies, there is a tendency to read adoptee narratives as celebrations of anti-essentialist subject-positions, illustrating the impossibility of returning—of going back to one’s roots. At the same time, I argue that this figure of impossibility may also be read as an ambiguous sign of anxiety—an anxiety which ultimately reveals a haunting desire for a de-alienated, unimaginable space of emancipation. This haunting desire is powerfully explored in Jane Jeong Trenka’s second book Fugitive Visions,4 which I discuss in my conclusion; I argue that Trenka’s narrative of returning can be read as an aesthetic endeavour to imagine—to embody and give voice to—an impossible desire for a de-alienated space, which at the same time becomes an occasion for collective remembering.

**Blod är tjockare än vatten**

Astrid Trotzig’s 1996 memoir, *Blod är tjockare än vatten*, in English *Blood is Thicker Than Water*, which has also been translated into Korean, tells the story of the author’s Western upbringing and her journey back to Korea. Trotzig was born in Pusan, South Korea, in 1970, and grew up in a white upper middle-class family in Sweden. Her book is divided into three parts, the first set in Sweden, the second in Korea, and the third back in Sweden. The tripartite structure of the book gives the form a kind of roundedness, as well as creating a sense of progress; it is as if the home-away-home narrative dynamic leads the author to a more solidified, insightful position at the end of her book. In the first part, Trotzig writes meditatively on her desire to find information about the circumstances of her adoption, experiences of cultural and racial isolation alienation and sexualised racism, thoughts about her birth mother—on whom she might have become. She speculates on what she might expect from the journey back to Korea, the reasons why she decides to go back—evoking some of the difficult moments during her teenage years, a period of confusion and uncertainty; about questions of belonging, loyalty, nationality, and ultimately about her own sense of self. Among the most imminent reasons, Trotzig tells us, for going back is the fact that she for many years tried very hard to forget her Koreaness, the fact that she was adopted, as well as being racially different from the people surrounding her; and yet in the end failed to fully embrace her Swedish identity, to become properly integrated in Swedish society.

**Going Back**

The frailty and uncertainty of the bond that connects most Korean adoptees—separated from their biological family while they were infants—to their birth country is one of the reasons why the idea of going back is typically fraught with tension for all parties of the adoption triad. In the literal sense, the notion of “going back” is often problematic to many scholars within the field of adoption studies; to literally go back (for example, to some prior state of being, a self preceding that of the adopted self) is seen as an essentialist, and ultimately impossible, gesture. Vincent Cheng, for example, argues that “the notion that your birth certificate and your birth records constitute ‘your identity’ … [is] one of the myths of authenticity we often take for granted.” Instead, Cheng argues that “identity is a constantly shifting, progressively accumulating, individually varying thing, based on the lived experience of live individuals in live and growing communities.”

This perspective also frames Barbara Yngvesson and Maureen Mahoney’s interpretation of Trotzig’s *Blod är tjockare än vatten*. To Yngvesson and Mahoney, adoptees returning to their country of birth are often “caught in the pursuit of ‘realness.’” Elsewhere, Yngvesson observes that the “search for roots assumes a past that is there, if we can just find the right file, the right papers, or the right person.” Adoption agencies, files, and photos—the “realness” of going back—suggest that something might be, if not retrieved, then at least identified and confirmed. But finding the right file, or perhaps even finding one’s biological family, does not lead to a more stable sense of identity, the authors argue, because there will inevitably remain a series of gaps: “These gaps are not simply the unknowns of a date or a place of birth, the absence of a proven fa-

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ther, or the lack of any record naming a mother ... Rather, the gaps produced in adoption stories are moments of revelation when the 'might-have-been-otherwise'...are suddenly exposed.”

Whereas the first part of Trotzig's memoir contains a series of unpleasant and difficult memories of racial misrecognition during her life in Sweden, the second part of the text, the return to Pusan, reads like a supplement to the first part. The trip to Pusan brings back no memories at all. In fact, it consists of a long list of misfortunes, cultural misunderstandings, and miscommunication, which leaves the reader with the impression that Trotzig's return is ultimately a failure. This sense of failure is even more pronounced by the fact that she does not find her biological family. In Yngvesson's and Mahoney's view, Trotzig ends up confirming her permanently inauthentic identity-position: "Her profound experience of constantly negotiating her own sense of inauthenticity is what emerges most strongly in this text, providing a story of living between identities that sets in question the very authenticity she longs for.”

It is as if the journey to Korea merely proves that going back in fact means nothing except confirmation of the fact that she will never become Korean again, that returning to a place of origin has no determining significance.

Irony

Yngvesson's and Mahoney's reading of Trotzig's text is representative of the ways in which Korean adoptee autobiographies typically have been interpreted, understood, and used within the field of adoption studies. At the same time, it is a reading that leaves out another level in the text, which to some extent contradicts or at least disturbs the narrative line Yngvesson and Mahoney pursue. In Trotzig's book, the notion of "blood" figures prominently, yet the text also constantly seeks to circumscribe its meaning. This ambiguity is above all expressed in the fact that the book ends by dismissing the notion that "blood is thicker than water"—a notion which nonetheless becomes the title of her book. And there are other examples of irony in the book: at one point she looses the travel notebook that should have been used in the writing process of her autobiography, but insists that it does not matter because language does not disappear—and yet her book is also about the loss of a language, and a language that remembers nothing, that cannot contain or express her Koreanness. She writes about her biological mother, wishing her dead, yet also alive. It is as if the author wants to maintain an ambiguity in the text—a desire that cannot be articulated directly but only indirectly; as if the text performs a struggle—rational, perhaps rationalising, words opposing, contradicting, perhaps exorcising, events, actions, daydreams, and imaginations. It is a struggle that reveals an uncertain desire for the prohibited, forbidden; as though going back to Korea, Koreanness, involves a threat but also something promising, alluring, at one and the same time.

It would be a mistake to relate this ironic force to a poststructuralist discourse of ambiguity and permanent inauthenticity, because it would miss a crucial aspect in the text. The equation of "origins" and "identity," Margaret Homans argues, holds a unique significance for the transnational adoptee, precisely because of the lack of tangible and verifiable information about origins. Adoptees, she goes on, "are haunted by the conviction that there is an origin"—which, however, in Homans' view should be understood in a performative sense; "They do not necessarily find the 'absence at the origin' intellectually or personally liberatory. Instead, adoption narratives are generally about the work of making an origin.”

But Homans—like Yngvesson and Mahoney—also

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10. Yngvesson and Mahoney, "'As One Should, Ought, and Wants to Be,'” 80.
11. Ibid., 97–98.
unnecessarily complicates this notion of a haunting conviction that an origin exists, because for adoptees there is in fact something that can be called “prior,” an antecedent moment, which is very different from what they identify as a mere projective-imaginative dimension. However, this antecedent moment should not be understood in terms of an essentialising concept like “roots” or “origins.” To interpret the desire to return as an essentialist desire to return to one's origins, one's roots—is perhaps in itself an act that testifies to a symptomatic blindness, perhaps a desire for the lack of an origin. To go one step further, one might even say that such readings—promoting anti-essentialism—involves a kind of ideological short-circuit, which ultimately reveals “parental” anxiety over the possibility of returning to one's roots. And I say “parental” here—so as to suggest that it may be no coincidence that Vincent Cheng, Margaret Homans, and Barbara Yngvesson are all adoptive parents—arguing, perhaps understandably so, that when adoptees go back to their country of birth they will find very little, perhaps nothing at all.

### Narrative Design: Inhibitions and Formal Resolutions

Aesthetic texts—literary texts, memoirs, autobiographies—are not merely inert, passive “reflections” of a given discourse of reality; they are also responses, reactions to particular historical phenomena—interventions. It is important to keep this dialectics of textual dynamics in mind when we approach the contradictory narrative lines that we find in a book like that of Trotzig's—and thus avoid reading the text in a straight-forward literal sense, as mere factual-descriptive writing. But what are the discursive conditions and coordinates that promote this dialectic textual dynamics as a specific, time-bound, and contextually determined form? One way of thinking about the formal dynamic of the aesthetic text is to compare it to Sigmund Freud's method of dream interpretation. For Freud, it is crucial to avoid the fetishistic obsession with a dream’s “content”; what must be revealed or unveiled through analysis is not some kernel of the content which is hidden by the form, but rather the secret of the form as such. Dream-interpretation, as Freud points out, is about investigating the process by which latent dream-thoughts have assumed a particular form in the first place; an inherent interpretive mechanism at work at the level of form, which the hermeneutical practice must recuperate or re-translate. By comparison, in interpreting and understanding aesthetic texts one must recover and retrace the process by which certain themes and motives work their way into a particular formation, and the reasons why they do so. Within the Freudian framework, this process is basically a negotiation of anxieties and desires—individual as well as collective—and how these are staged, displayed, imagined, but also censored and prohibited in the dream work.

The emergence of a genre of Korean adoptee autobiography coincides with the fact that far more than half of the adopted Koreans sent abroad ever since 1953 have now become adults. This in itself, however, does not explain why these texts emerge—or why the particular form of autobiography has become the dominant modality. One might assume that aesthetic genres in general emerge and disappear, fascinate readers and gradually lose popularity, according to the actuality, relevance, of the “work” they perform; how well they respond to the concerns, needs, interests of a particular group—for whom they are written—but also how well they exhibit as well as censor, prohibit, and contain, desires and anxieties. Approaching the genre of

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Korean adoptee autobiography—and its emergence as well as possible transformation or even disappearance—would thus necessarily have to take into account the whole discursive field and its conflicting interests; that is to say, the way in which a genre comes into existence—why a particular narrative design, a specific formal technique, is chosen, preferred and survives among others—has to do with the process by which it is able to perform its work for a particular field, as well as the field’s social antagonisms. All texts participating in a given genre discourse are characterised by specific markers or genre features—thematic or formal—that distinguish them from other genre discourses. In the case of Korean adoptee autobiographies, one might think of a number of thematically recurrent genre tableaux—such as the specific descriptions of racial and cultural alienation, search narratives, scenes of reunion (or failures of reunion), and crucially, in most cases, the teleological formal drive towards a post-reunion phase which usually signifies a moment of stability, containment, balance—typically a liberal-multicultural position which functions as a final destination, however provisional it might seem. According to Fredric Jameson, “the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions.”

Trotzig’s text, I argue, provides such a formal “solution” to an otherwise unresolvable social contradiction. The text evokes a constellation of anxiety and desire in connection with the figure of returning; it evokes a radical desire which at the same time provokes anxiety because it poses a threat, a potential to undermine and destabilise the coordinates that form the basis of the author’s Swedish adoptee identity. That is to say, a yearning desire for the recovering, restoration, of a state of being that is prior to her present state of being; and, by implication, the intimidating, albeit imaginary, possibility of reconnecting, taking back, of undoing that which has already been done. Thus, it becomes a prohibited, censored desire, one which the text is unwilling or unable to work through; instead the text seems to reach a kind of compromise—a solution—embodied in the tripartite “home-away-home” structure. In this structure, desire is on the one hand displayed, performed, lived out, but also, on the other hand, neutralised, pacified and contained. Near the end of the book, after having returned to Sweden, Trotzig concludes: “In Sweden I can never become fully integrated. I have my appearance against me. In South Korea it is the opposite. I disappear in the crowd, people who look at me believe that I am Korean, but inside I am something else, Swedish. I can never feel solely Swedish in Sweden. I could never feel solely Korean in South Korea.”

A little later she adds: “Perhaps blood is thicker than water. But love is thicker than blood.” This stands as the final motto of the book, as though the entire text is one sustained effort to rebut its title. The ending of Trotzig’s text gives the impression of transformation, progress—of someone who has reached a state of heightened awareness, a deeper understanding, a level of stability; an acceptance of her situation—that she will never find the information that she, at the outset of her text, yearned for, and that returning, ultimately, is impossible. At the same time, the ending also suggests the exact opposite; that nothing in fact has been achieved or changed, that no progress has been made in between the beginning and ending of her writing, and that the sense of transformation is largely illusory.

Trotzig’s text, I argue, includes this alternative perspective as a way of displaying and exhibiting a haunting desire that is never quite eliminated, and therefore remains dangerous, potentially threatening, but whose presence nonetheless becomes acceptable precisely because it has been contained, neutralised, repressed, and above all managed within and by the tripartite structure. More generally, one might argue that the reason why this tripartite formal dynamic has become the preferred mode of expression among Korean adoptees is precisely because it enables the writers to articulate a paradoxical design of desire, and hence anxiety, but one which is crucially...
contained within a restrictive structure. It is a structure which allows, if not encourages, multiple readings—or rather, allows readers with widely different political convictions to pursue the narrative line they prefer, without alienating anyone. In Trotzig’s text, one might identify two competing narrative lines—the first, perhaps dominant, line is a multicultural, anti-essentialist perspective (in accordance with which returning is fundamentally impossible), while the second, prohibited, perspective is one that precisely challenges and contradicts the first. The tripartite formal dynamic makes the co-existence of these two antagonistic narrative lines possible. What is thus achieved by this narrative formula is a way of approaching and formulating a censored, utopian desire—that is, a desire censored by the dominant discourse of adoption as a “clean break”—and which is precisely masked by the multiple readings that the formula allows. Multiplicity here—like in the Freudian dream work—is both a dimension that enables the text to transgress as well one that acquits it of having committed a transgressive act. As such, the narrative formula can also be seen as an examination of the ideology of the reader; what the reader desires to read, what line of perspective she chooses to pursue.

**Fugitive Visions and De-Alienation**

The tripartite formal dynamic articulates, at one and the same time, a transgressive element as well as functioning as a censoring device, a defence mechanism. But the question remains as to why this transgressive element apparently cannot find another way of articulation—that it is only through this indirect formal way that the transgressive may be displayed. Here, it might be relevant to evoke that old, and by now largely forgotten, concept *Entfremdung*, alienation, and argue that these texts (perhaps the very fact that they exist) are on the one hand symptoms of alienation, but also, on the other hand, aesthetic imaginations of a de-alienated, albeit non-existent and therefore impossible space—hence the lack of, and search for, authentic formal representation.

It would be relatively easy to list a number of instances in connection with Korean adoptee subjectivity where the concept of alienation might seem apt; first of all, there is the race issue, which, for Korean adoptees brought up by white parents in predominantly white segregated societies, is often a constant source of isolation, alienation and confusion. Secondly, there is the socio-cultural alienation, from one’s birth country and birth family, as well as the alienating experience of being associated with—stereotyped as—“the other,” even within the most intimate spheres of the adoptee’s social life. And thirdly, being an adoptee is typically an isolating experience which is all the more profound because there is no immediate, natural or given community with which one might seamlessly merge. However, all these instances of alienation can at the same time be, and often is, interpreted as the negative exceptions within what is perceived to be an overall benevolent and progressive adoption discourse of color-blindness, post-nationalism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and anti-essentialism.

The concept of alienation has become a rather disregarded word in academia today, in part because of its truth-claim—that is to say, the concept of alienation is only possible to grasp and conceptualise insofar as it, at least in theory, involves a non-alienated space, however infinitesimally minuscule and invisible it might appear, because if everything is inescapably located within an all-inclusive alienating discourse, if there is nothing outside the alienated realm, this would essentially be equivalent to saying that nothing is in fact alienated. Within the adoption triad, the concept of alienation might appear even more offensive. The metaphoric power of the concept stems in large part from the fascinating, yet highly contentious, distinction between what is authentic and what is inauthentic. A false life; but what is an authentic life for adopted Koreans? And who, or what, occupies this privileged position from which such a sharp distinction between falsehood and truth can be made? The obvious problem involved in claiming or indeed
locating such a position is probably one of the main reasons as to why few, if any, use the notion of alienation in today’s debates on international adoption.

Within the adoption discourse of color-blindness and multiculturalism, Korean adoptees’ alienating experiences may be recognised as negative exceptions; but hardly as experiences that testify to a more general systemic problematic. Alienation is, however, also a hauntingly reflexive concept which not only implies alienation from something (for example, from the real conditions of life), but also, perhaps above all, implies alienation from the very discursive mechanisms and ideological processes by which an alienated subject has in fact been alienated in the first place. This is the kind of alienating process after which it would be near-impossible to conceptualise a non-alienated space because the distinction between what is alienated, and what is not, has been ideologically hidden, repressed. It is the kind of alienating process that turns all subsequent experiences of alienation into negative exceptions, rather than expressions of a general problematic, because a non-alienated space cannot be conceptualised. It is also, one might argue, one of the reasons why the transgressive desire we find in a text like Trotzig’s Blod är tjockare än vatten apparently cannot find another way of articulation than in a restrictive, ambiguous formal structure.

Precisely this problematic, I argue, is explored in Jane Jeong Trenka’s second memoir Fugitive Visions from 2009. While the structure of Trenka’s first book—The Language of Blood from 2003—follows the one that has become so characteristic of first-time Korean adoptee memoirs, that is, the tripartite formal dynamic of home-away-home, Fugitive Visions, perhaps because this is the author’s second book (and because the author’s permanent location is Korea), radically reverses it, and hence enables a very different design of desire and anxiety to emerge. By fusing personal anecdotes with extensive political reflections on the history of Korean international adoption, Fugitive Visions seeks to transcend the individual-atomised and self-centred perspective of the autobiographical genre, and to inscribe the author’s own private narrative into that of a larger collective discourse. Whereas Trotzig’s journey to Korea lasts only two weeks during which she rarely, if ever, abandons the secure, narcissistic role of a tourist, there is a real, sustained, at times feverishly desperate and painful, attempt to engage with Korea, Koreanness, in Trenka’s text. Her book offers an insight into the life and existence of a small but growing community of adoptees who have decided to return to and settle down in Korea on a more or less permanent basis. It describes the everyday life of people who have abandoned their Western lives, their Western family, Western comfort, struggling—despite innumerable difficulties, disappointments and hardships—to adapt to and survive in a country to which they once belonged; as a gesture of defiance, a living testimony, a way of reclaiming what was taken away from them. Not to become Korean again, but to bear witness—as Trenka writes: “I have consciously decided not to try to assimilate; I cannot do it twice in one lifetime. During my time on the margins of Korean society, I have lived among others who also cannot undo what has already been done to them. I have lived among the bravest of people who also found no reason to pass for anyone but who they already are. Of these people, I wish to bear witness.”

Fugitive Visions embodies the yearning to recuperate antecedent traces of the discursive mechanisms and ideological pro-

22. Ibid., 89.
cesses by which alienated subjectivities became alienated in the first place. It is an attempt to reaffirm, to give credence to, the kind of utopian desire contained in Trotzig’s text—and hence, to testify to the realness of that desire. Thus, the book is a sustained attempt to rebut the argument that adoptees who go back are, say, “caught in a pursuit of ‘realness’”—a quest which in Yngvesson’s and Mahoney’s view is impossible since what they are searching for is basically unknowable. But the way in which Yngvesson and Mahoney use the notion of unknowability blurs the fact that there is at the same time something which is precisely not unknowable, but rather absent, inaccurate, perhaps repressed and concealed: and which thus may be retrieved, at least potentially. To denounce the desire to return as a hallucinating search for a phantasmagorical-sublime dimension, a misplaced and deluded nostalgia for something that never existed in the first place, is in itself an ideological gesture. It is one that equates unknowability, as a rhetorical figure of speech, signifying that which can never be retrieved, with lack of knowledge, and inaccuracies about—as well as distortions of—historical circumstances, the truth of which would constitute an important part of a testimonial project, a process of re-remembering, and hence de-alienation, as Fugitive Visions painstakingly and poetically demonstrates.

Conclusion

Near the end her book, Trotzig reflects on the meaning of her country of birth—after she has returned to Sweden; “Nowadays, all I hear about South Korea is a few, small announcements in the papers, a handful of short reports on television […] It is so far away. But I have been there, I know where the country is.”24 One is left to wonder what exactly this knowledge signifies, what it implies—and for whom. Ultimately, it appears to be a negative knowledge, a knowledge of defeat—one by which Trotzig convinces herself that the connection to Korea means very little, perhaps nothing at all. Connectivity is, in contrast, what Trenka stresses in the final pages of her memoir; “I have lived in Korea for a thousand days, and I would like to live in Korea for at least a thousand more […] In the landscape of piano keys, the fugitive visions of the present become the past, reflected again into the reality of the present. But no matter what our past, our differences, our failures or achievements, we will all arrive alone and together at the end.”25 Together, Trotzig and Trenka’s narratives of returning, each in their own distinctive and contrasting ways, constitute a trajectory of the genre of Korean adoptee autobiographical writing that reflects the ideological landscape of the adoption discourse—as it has developed over the thirteen years separating their texts. It is almost as if Fugitive Visions becomes the witness, the interpretant of Trotzig’s book (and, by implication, Trenka’s first book), which, in turn, can be seen as a “primal scene” to Trenka’s second book: just as one might imagine that Fugitive Visions itself constitutes a primal event, awaiting its sequel, its witness. And this, I believe, is perhaps one of the defining characteristics of Korean adoptee autobiographical writing; an awareness of coming-after-the-fact, a lateness inscribed in each individual text and which each text struggles to cope with. Collectively, these texts, as a genre, testify to the ongoing recording and documentation of the marginalized history of the Korean adoptees—in their own words.

References


23. Yngvesson and Mahoney, “As One Should, Ought, and Wants to Be,” 82.
24. Trotzig, Blod är tjockare än vatten, 282, translated from the Swedish.


Right to Define Family
Equality under Immigration Law for U.S. Inter-Country Adoptees

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Introduction

The placement of children from overseas into U.S. homes historically has been in response to military conflicts, economic crises, and other social upheaval in sending countries.1 The earliest practice involved the adoption of German, Italian, Japanese, and Chinese children following World War II.2 “From 1948 through 1962 American families adopted 1,845 German and Japanese children. Eight hundred and forty Chinese children were also adopted in this period…”3 Similarly, following both the Vietnam and Korean Wars, U.S. families opened their homes to displaced children. In 1974, hundreds of Vietnamese children, thought to be abandoned or orphaned, were airlifted out of Saigon during Operation Babylift.4 Over the past four decades Americans have adopted more than 7,000 Vietnamese children.5 The orphan flights at the end of the Korean War marked the beginning of a half-century practice of children being placed into predominantly white homes throughout Europe and North America.6 In particular, following both wars, there was social and political emphasis on the needs of children fathered by U.S. service members. Concerns about the stigmatization of Amerasian children spawned preferences in immigration legislation. Immediate family preferences were extended to children whose fathers were thought to be U.S. military personnel,7 men who had served in south-east Asia were able to sponsor their Amerasian children as immediate relatives,8 priority was placed on those children who were lost or abandoned in receiving orphan visas; i.e. “Operation Babylift,”9 and Amerasian families were extended visas as refugees.10 More recently, international adoption practices have arisen largely from economic, political, and social factors rather

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2. Ibid., 2.
6. Ibid.
8. ibid. A U.S. citizen may petition to classify an Amerasian child as his son or daughter. Petitioner must agree to provide financial support for a five year period for an Amerasian or to petition a court for legal custody of an Amerasian under 18 years of age.
10. “Vietnamese Amerasians in America,” Amerasian Citizen Initiative, 2005, http://www.amerasianusa.org ("As America recovered from the turmoil and bitterness resulting from the Vietnam War, there was a growing sentiment across the nation to take care of America’s ‘forgotten sons and daughters’ left behind in Vietnam. During his speech to a Senate sub-committee in 1980, Senator Stewart B. McKinney spoke of the Amerasian issue as "a national embarrassment" and called on America’s patriotic duty to take full responsibility for Amerasians. As a result, the Homecoming Act was written in 1987, passed by Congress in 1988 and implemented in 1989. Under the Vietnamese Amerasian
than major conflicts. The three top sending countries in 2006 were Mainland China (6,493), Russia (4,135) and Guatemala (3,706).\textsuperscript{11} Conditions in these countries including poverty, restrictive family planning policies, and economic instability have been juxtaposed against decreasing fertility rates, increased availability of birth control, and legalized abortion in the U.S.\textsuperscript{12}

According to Catherine Barry, the U.S. Department of State Deputy Assistant Secretary for Overseas Citizens Services, U.S. citizens adopted almost 23,000 children globally in 2005.\textsuperscript{13} Despite assertions that, “There is only one viable solution to the problem of an overabundance of children who need families in some countries and families who need children in other countries—that solution is international adoption,”\textsuperscript{14} scholars, practitioners and adoptive parents disagree about whether international adoption is in the best interests of children and question whose interests the practice serves.\textsuperscript{15}

This article examines (a) the legislative and legal history of international adoption, (b) the definition of “family” in family-based immigration law and (c) the merits of the Equality under Immigration Law petition. The article posits that foreign-born adoptees should have the right to petition for and sponsor “natural” family under the family-based immigration laws.

**Legislative and Legal History of International Adoption**

International adoption legislation continues to evolve, despite the fact it has been an institutionalized child welfare practice in the United States for almost a decade. Adoption regulations and policies have traditionally fallen under the purview of state legislatures and courts.\textsuperscript{16} However, the placement of children across national borders necessitated oversight from not only the state governments but also U.S. federal government, birth countries, and more recently, international law. The various aspects of the adoption process are controlled by one or more of the several governmental or legislative bodies, creating a formidable bureaucratic morass for adoptive parents and professionals to navigate.

**State Law**

As a function of their Constitutionally-reserved police powers, individual states have exclusive jurisdiction over family law and child welfare, including adoption.\textsuperscript{17} In domestic adoptions, state regulations control how parental rights are terminated, children’s adoption-eligibility, home study criteria, eligibility requirements for adoptive parents, and the process of finalizing adoption.\textsuperscript{18} Adoption practice and policies vary from state to state.

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\textsuperscript{11} Homecoming Act, approximately 25,000 Amerasians have arrived in America with their immediate relatives. Altogether they number 77,000 according to a national survey conducted by Ohio State University.


\textsuperscript{15} Hubing, “International Child Adoptions,” 655.


\textsuperscript{17} See Kahan, “Put Up’ On Platforms,” 51.


In the case of children whose birth parents are non-U.S. citizens, pre- and post-adoption services typically are managed by agencies in the adoptive parents’ state of residence although federal and other national laws may control certain aspects of the process. Inter-country adoptions are facilitated by both non-profit and for-profit private agencies. If a placement disrupts, the child’s welfare becomes a domestic matter wherein local state or county child welfare agencies will intervene and look for an alternative placement.

Additionally, most children enter the U.S. with orphan visas for purposes of adoption. Their adoptions are finalized in their parents’ state of residence. More recently, however, countries, including China and Russia, have been requiring that the adoption be finalized under their national law. Parents therefore are advised to have the child re-adopted in the U.S. to ensure that she receives the full protections of her status as an adoptee. Elizabeth Bartholet cautions that a foreign adoption decree may not be afforded “the same ‘full faith and credit’ accorded a decree issued by courts within the United States.”

Federal Law

National legislation and policies impact international adoptive families primarily in two arenas: immigration and the interpretation of international conventions. First, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) governs the issuance of visas required to legally enter the U.S. Although states have the authority to approve foreign adoption, the federal government, through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), makes administrative judgments about the adoptability of the child.

The INA specifies two categories: (a) children adopted by U.S. citizens while overseas and (b) children coming to the U.S. for purposes of adoption. INA § 101(b)(1)(E) permits the former category of children to immigrate if they were adopted before they were 16 years old and had already resided with the adoptive parent(s) in their legal custody for two years. The "two-year provision" generally applies to U.S. citizens temporarily residing abroad who have adopted under the laws of the foreign state or an adoption that occurred before the adoptive parents became U.S. citizens. However, this category is less common because few adoptive parents are able to spend two years residing with the child outside the U.S. Therefore, the majority of international adoptions falls in the latter category, with children traveling from countries in Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe entering as “orphans.” An orphan is defined for the purposes of immigration in INA § 101(b)(1)(F)(i) as:

… [A] child, under the age of sixteen at the time a petition is filed in his behalf to accord a classification as an immediate relative under section 201(b), who is an orphan because of the death or disappearance of, abandonment or desertion by, or separation or loss from, both parents, or for whom the sole or surviving parent is incapable of providing the proper care and has in writing irrevocably released the child for emigration and adoption.

24. Ibid.
As indicated above, there are six ways in which a child may be orphaned. First, both “natural” parents are deceased and another family member has not adopted the child. Second, both parents have disappeared or are inexplicably absent, and their reappearance is not reasonably anticipated because efforts have been made to locate them. Third, the parents abandoned the child, where there is both an intention to relinquish parental rights to the child and the act of actually surrendering those rights. Desertion and separation are virtually the same; both are a matter of parental inaction that result in the child becoming a ward of the state and the state terminating parental rights. However, with separation, parents must be afforded the opportunity to contest the termination. Finally, loss often occurs following natural or man-made disasters where the child and parent are involuntarily separated. As a result, the child becomes a ward of the state. If the child qualifies as an orphan, she may enter the U.S. under the immediate relative preference as a child of a citizen of the United States.26

The Child Citizenship Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-395) has allowed adopted children of U.S. citizens to automatically acquire citizenship when they enter the U.S. as lawful permanent residents (LPRs) and as soon as the adoption decree is final.27 This is significant because children whose adoptions are finalized overseas can now enter as U.S. citizens. Previously, parents who did not have their children naturalized left the adoptees vulnerable to deportation. Two notable separate cases involved male adoptees in their 20s—one who committed a crime of moral turpitude and the other who was convicted of a drug offense. Both were ordered deported, despite the fact each had lived with his adoptive parents since he was young, that neither knew anyone in their birth countries of Brazil and Thailand, and that neither spoke the native language.28

Second, international child welfare laws and conventions are implemented at the national level through federal legislation. The Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (IAA), enacted to lay the groundwork for the ratification of the Hague Convention, designated the Department of State as the Central Authority to monitor and regulate intercountry adoptions both to and from the U.S.29 The IAA mandated the development of both an accreditation process for service providers that seek to facilitate Convention adoptions and a certification process that would provide “conclusive evidence of the relationship between the adopted child and the adoptive

28. Holt International Children's Services, House of Representatives Passes Delahunt Child Citizenship Bill, Press release, September 19, 2000, http://holtintl.org/update091900bpr.html John Gaul was adopted by a Florida family at the age of four. Though born in Thailand, he speaks no Thai, has no Thai relatives, knows nothing of Thai culture and had never been back to Thailand until the federal government deported him at the age of 25 as a criminal alien for a car theft and credit card fraud conviction as a juvenile. The Gauls had obtained an American birth certificate for John shortly after adopting him, and didn't realize until he applied for a passport at age 17 that he had never been naturalized. They immediately filed the papers, but due to INS delays his application wasn't processed before he turned 18. An immigration judge ruled that the agency had taken too long to process the application, but that the 1996 law allowed him no discretion to halt the deportation. “In another recent instance, Joao Herbert, a twenty-two-year-old Ohioan adopted as a young boy from Brazil, was ordered deported because he had sold 7.5 ounces of marijuana while in his teens. It was his first criminal offense, for which he was sentenced only to probation and community treatment. But because he had never been naturalized, he was considered an aggravated felony subject to deportation. He has been in detention for a year-and-a-half because the Brazilians consider his adoption irrevocable and refuse to accept him. Were they to do so, it is unclear how he would manage. He knows no one in his native country and no longer understands his native tongue. No one condones criminal acts,” Delahunt said. “But the terrible price these young people and their families have paid is out of all proportion to their misdeeds. Whatever they did, they should be treated like any other American kid.”
Also, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) was amended to expand the definition of "child" to reflect the Hague Convention's broader definition.

Previous to the transnational movement of children as a form of child welfare practice, adoption law fell almost exclusively under the jurisdiction of the states. The role of the federal government is purportedly to protect a legitimate government interest in immigration and to create a process and structure for the implementation of international treaties such as the Hague Convention.

**Birth Countries' Law**

Regulations and laws that shape adoption practices vary greatly among birth countries. South Korea and China provide instructive comparisons: Korea has the most well-established and longstanding practice of intercountry adoption with over 200,000 foreign adoptions. The majority of children adopted internationally are from China however.

The year 1985 marked the height of the emigration of children from Korea for adoption; but following unwelcomed media attention during the 1988 Olympics in Seoul the Korean Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (MHSA) initiated a process of phasing out overseas adoptions. The stated goal was to "only continue Korea's special adoption for a small number of mixed race children and children with serious medical problems" by 1996. Although the number of Korean children entering the U.S. with orphan visas dramatically decreased from a peak of 8,837 in 1985 to an average of 1,782 orphan visas per annum between 2001 and 2005, not all were special needs placements. The MHSA further requires that orphans be referred to Seoul City Children's Guidance Clinic to first make them available to Korean families for adoption. Additionally, "abandoned" children can only be adopted (domestically or internationally) after they have been registered with the national registry maintained by the Korean Children's Fund (KCF) to enable parents to locate missing children. These regulations reflect the Hague Convention's assertion that "appropriate measures" should be taken to ensure that children remain with their birth families whenever possible, and that intercountry adoption becomes an option only when "a suitable family cannot be found in his or her State of origin." Unlike the U.S., South Korea designated a Central Authority prior to the Hague Convention. Korea's Special Adoption Law No. 2977, Section 9(A), requires that adoptions be processed through one of the

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31. INA §101(b)(1)(G), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(b)(1) (West 2007). A child, under the age of sixteen at the time a petition is filed on the child's behalf to accord a classification as an immediate relative under section 201(b), who has been adopted in a foreign state that is a party to the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption done at The Hague on May 29, 1993, or who is emigrating from such a foreign state to be adopted in the United States, by a United States citizen and spouse jointly, or by an unmarried United States citizen at least 25 years of age.
32. See "Adoptions from South Korea," Supplemental material to the film First Person Plural, Public Broadcasting Service, http://www.pbs.org/pov/archive/firstpersonplural/historical/skadoptions.html; "Immigrant Visas Issued to Orphans Coming to the U.S."
36. "International Adoption – Korea.
37. "International Adoption – South Korea," Adoption.com, http://korea.adoption.com (Stating that the rule is at least six months if the child is under 18 months and 12 months if the child is over 18 months).
four Ministry of Health and Social Affairs-approved adoption agencies, and the MHSA has set eligibility criteria for adoptive parents (see Table 1).

The Adoption Law of the People's Republic of China went into force April 1, 1992 and was amended in 1999. The Adoption Law allows foreigners to adopt Chinese children in China. Unlike Korea, China requires that adoptions be fully completed in China; therefore, adoptive parents are required to travel to pick up their child. The designated Central Authority is the China Centre of Adoption Affairs (CCAA), a branch of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The CCAA oversees the adoption process, eligibility criteria for adoptive parents (see Table 1), and licensing of U.S. adoption agencies to place Chinese children.

"Intercountry Adoption – China" The eligibility requirements for China initially made it possible for prospective parents to adopt, despite being precluded from other country programs due to age and marital status restrictions. These less stringent requirements contributed to the popularity of China adoptions.

Significantly, China ratified the Hague Convention in September 2005 and recently announced another amendment to its Adoption Law effective May 1, 2007, which will impose age and health restrictions, and exclude single applicants. The CCAA draft amendment asserts that the changes in criteria "answer better to the spirit of Hague Adoption Convention and the provisions of adoption law in both China and your country, and are able to offer the Chinese children adopted the best possible environment to grow in."

International Law

Several multilateral declarations and conventions, both non-binding and binding, were created to promote the “best interests” of children in relation to international adoption. One of the earliest, the Convention on International Child Abduction (1980), largely sought to establish protections for children from exploitation and reflected concerns of child trafficking in adoption. However, later instruments such as the 1986 UN Declaration on the Social and Legal Principles Relating to the Protection and the Welfare of Children (the UN Declaration), the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (the Hague Convention), established rights and assurances for children. The Hague Convention "established a legal framework for the arrangement and formalization" of intercountry adoptions for ratifying states.

43. See “Intercountry Adoption – China” (new restrictions have been added including no single parents, additional health restrictions, age of both parents is 30-49, and clarifications of income and criminal record status), China Center for Adoption Affairs, Draft Regulations Effective May 1, 2007, http://www.fwcc.org/previous_site/ccalaws.htm
44. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children Available</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8–36 months for standard process.</td>
<td>9–20 months at time of placement.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Parent’s Age</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Couples 30–49. The Waiting Child program is open to couples 30–54.</td>
<td>• Couples 25–42 (See 'Additional Information'). No more than 10 years age difference between husband and wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If younger parent is under 45 at referral, child age averages 10–14 months at time of placement.</td>
<td>Branch Office states: Parents through age 42 at time of application may apply for a child with no known special health needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If both spouses are over 45, child referrals tend to be over 18 months, depending on the age of available children.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Length of Marriage</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Minimum 2 yrs marriage.</td>
<td>Minimum 3 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Minimum 5 yrs if previously married.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Marriage/Divorce</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 2 divorces per spouse considered on a case-by-case basis.</td>
<td>• Minimum 3 yrs. marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1–2 divorces total for applicants.</td>
<td>• 1–2 divorces total for applicants.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children in Family</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 4 children in a home.</td>
<td>Up to 4.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Single Applicant</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single Applicants not accepted.</td>
<td>Single applicants not accepted.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Travel in Country</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Required for one parent; travel by both parents strongly encouraged; 12 days average</td>
<td>Optional (escorts available); 3 business days – one or both parents may travel.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>How Long</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current dossier sent to match timeframe is approximately 16+ months.</td>
<td>Due to new regulations, timeframes are expected to lengthen. Timeframe from application to placement may increase to 21 months.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Waiting Child Program</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Open to couples 30-54.</td>
<td>• Family’s residence accepted in an additional 18 states (see below).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Boys and girls 8 months to 6 years available.</td>
<td>• Children up to 3 years with special needs may be available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Families may select gender.</td>
<td>• If home study completed, assignment process may be quicker; travel processing time frame remains the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Families needed for boys.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expedited process. May be flexible regarding children in the home.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Additional Information</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Korea</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Income requirements: $30,000 minimum annual income plus an additional $10,000 per child currently in the home (not including the child to be adopted), and minimum $80,000 net worth (total assets-total liabilities)</td>
<td>Branch Office states: Parents up to age 42 at time of application may be assigned children without known medical conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Primarily girls available for standard process.</td>
<td>• Families must be open to a child of either gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Branch Office states: Parents up to age 42 at time of application may be assigned children without known medical conditions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
The U.S. incorporated the Convention on International Child Abduction in July 1988. Within three years the multilateral Convention had 50 signatories in addition to the U.S.\textsuperscript{47} The Convention created legal mechanisms within civil law for parents that made parents party to the legal action instead of the governments.\textsuperscript{48} Although the intent of the Convention was primarily to address issues of custody and abduction, it also applies to children wrongfully removed or retained for the purposes of international adoption.\textsuperscript{49} The UN Declaration and the CRC served to legitimize international adoption.\textsuperscript{50} The UN declared in Article 17 that intercountry adoption “may be considered as an alternative means of providing the child with a family,”\textsuperscript{51} while the CRC further conditioned the foreign placement of children in the absence of “suitable [alternatives]...in the child’s country of origin.”\textsuperscript{52} Both documents articulated basic principles and the need for safeguards to protect children. The Hague Convention represented an attempt to create a legal framework, through multilateral agreement, that would “get beyond” the general principles laid out in the UN Declaration and CRC.\textsuperscript{53} The Convention was approved by sixty-six nations in 1993.\textsuperscript{54} The United States signed the Convention in 1994, the U.S. instrument of ratification was signed on November 16, 2007 and the instrument of ratification is expected to be deposited on December 12, 2007.\textsuperscript{55} In 2000, Congress passed the Intercountry Adoption Act (IAA) in response to the requirement that each contracting state designate a Central Authority to discharge the duties imposed by the Convention and in anticipation of its ratification once federal regulations for implementation have been finalized.\textsuperscript{56}

**Definition of “Family” in Family-Based Immigration Law**

Immigration to the U.S. is available to family members of citizens who qualify as either an immediate relative or under one of the four family-based preferences.\textsuperscript{57} Family members defined as “immediate relatives” for the purposes of immigration are not subject to worldwide levels or numerical limitations and include “children, spouses, and parents of a citizen of the United States, except that, in the case of parents, such citizens shall be at least 21 years of age.”\textsuperscript{58} Relevant to this paper is the definition of “child” and “parent” for purposes of an immediate relative designation. The INA defines a child as an unmarried person under the age of 21, and includes:\textsuperscript{59}

- An adopted child if the child was adopted before the age of 16 and has lived with the adoptive parent(s) in their legal custody for at least two years

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} See Bartholet, “International Adoption,” 95.
\textsuperscript{53} Bartholet, “International Adoption,” 95.
\textsuperscript{54} Hague Conference on Private International Law, *Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*.
An orphan under the age of 16 when an adoptive or prospective adoptive parent files a visa petition on his or her behalf, who has been adopted abroad by a U.S. citizen or is coming to the U.S. for adoption by a U.S. citizen, or

A child adopted who is under the age of 18 and the natural sibling of an orphan or adopted child under the age of 16, if adopted with or after the sibling. The child must also otherwise fit the definition of orphan or adopted child.

Therefore, for purposes of immigration, a child must have been adopted before the age of 16 in order to qualify as an immediate relative, whereas a biological child is considered a child without restrictions up until age 21. Also notable is the new provision allowing “natural” siblings (up to 18-years-old) to enter as long as they are adopted “with or after the sibling.”

A clear definition of parent is conspicuously absent from international law. INA §101(b)(1)(E) defines “parent,” “father,” or “mother” in a circular manner by referencing the definition of child. Although the definition of a parent includes a woman who had a child born out of wedlock, it only includes a similarly situated man if he legitimates the relationship before the child turns eighteen or he ”has or had a bona fide parent-child relationship with the [child].” Stepparents and adoptive parents are considered parents under the immediate relative designation. However, birth parents are not considered “parents” under INA. Immigration law specifies that birth parents may never receive immigration benefits by virtue of a child to whom their rights have irrevocably been released. This exclusion purportedly reflects concerns that international adoption could be used fraudulently to gain immigration preferences.

The four family-based preferences subject to worldwide levels or numerical limitations include: (1) unmarried sons and daughters (21 years or older) of U.S. citizens; (2) spouses, children, and unmarried sons and daughters of permanent resident aliens; (3) married sons and daughters of U.S. citizens and their unmarried children under 21; (4) brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens, if citizens are at least 21 years of age, and their unmarried children under 21. Preference categories are weighted by priority, with the first preference category given highest consideration. For purposes of this paper, the definitions of “brother” and “sister” for family-based preferences are considered.

In Young v. Reno, the petitioner came to the U.S. with her adoptive parents as a young child and sought to sponsor her biological siblings under the fourth family-based preference. The Court pointed out that immigration law does not explicitly define brother or sister. Nevertheless, the Court determined that absent an explicit definition, the INS defines the sibling relationship “by their relationship to a common parent.” Therefore, “siblings” must share at least one parent. Based on the INA’s definition of child and parent, siblings would necessarily include natural brothers or sisters, stepbrothers or stepsisters, and adopted brothers or sisters. The Young

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60. INS, “INS Issues Instructions on New Law Allowing Immigraion of Older Adopted Siblings,” Immigrants Rights Update, June 6, 2000, no. 3. Under Pub. L. No. 106-139, an adoptee who was adopted between the ages of 16 and 18 may immigrate as long as he or she is accompanying a sibling younger than age 16 who is immigrating under the traditional immigration law requirements for an “adopted child” or “orphan.”


64. INA § 101(b)(1)(G)(iv), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(b)(1) (West 2007). The Attorney General is satisfied that the purpose of the adoption is to form a bona fide parent-child relationship, and the parent-child relationship of the child and the natural parents has been terminated (and in carrying out both obligations under this subclause the Attorney General may consider whether there is a petition pending to confer immigrant status on one or both of such natural parents).

65. Young v. Reno, 114 F.3d 879 (9th Cir. 1997).

66. Ibid., 83.
Court found that Congress did not specifically address the legal relationship between natural siblings because their relationship to the “common parent(s)” is severed with adoption.\textsuperscript{68} The Court held that if adoptees were allowed to sponsor natural siblings, those siblings could then sponsor natural parents, thereby “eviscerating” the prohibition against natural parents being “accorded any right, privilege, or status.”\textsuperscript{69}

Despite the reluctance of Congress and the courts to acknowledge natural sibling relationships, the USCIS amended the INA in 2000 to create an exception. Public Law No. 106-139 recognizes natural brothers and sisters for the purposes of facilitating adoption.\textsuperscript{70} A child who fits the traditional criteria for adoption under immigration law may be accompanied by a natural sibling as long as the same U.S. parents adopt both children. In summary, although family-based immigration is arguably intended to preserve family relationships, Congress was unconcerned with adoptees’ rights to preserve relationships with natural family members.\textsuperscript{71}

### Adoptees’ Right to Petition for “Natural” Family

Family-based immigration law purportedly aims to keep families intact through reunification.\textsuperscript{72} Accordingly, U.S. citizens or permanent residents may petition for alien family members for purposes of immigration.\textsuperscript{73} Yet, while international adoptees may petition for biologically unrelated foreign spouses and fiancées, the INA stipulates that adoptees, as U.S. citizens, are not allowed to sponsor the immigration of birth family.\textsuperscript{74} Nonetheless, international adoptees are returning to their countries of birth in record numbers.\textsuperscript{75} All of the major international adoption agencies sponsor birth country or homeland tours to address this need as part of their post-adopt services. They are trying to understand their geographical and cultural roots, and to seek out “natural” or birth family – often with the intention of reuniting and re-establishing familial relationships.\textsuperscript{76} This growing phenomenon is reflected in the Equality under Immigration Law Petition (the Petition), authored September 8, 2006 by Jane Jeong Trenka, which asserts:

> We [intercountry adoptees] believe that the current federal law pertaining to family-based immigration for the natural families [of] American intercountry adoptees is unjust. We would like the law reformed so that American intercountry adoptees can sponsor their natural relatives through lawful family-based immigration, just as all other U.S. citizens can. Intercountry adoptees of legal age would like to be treated as equal citizens under the law.\textsuperscript{77}

The Petition is premised on two major assumptions. First, that U.S. immigration law largely reflects the interests of adoptive parents and international adoption agencies. Second, that citizens of legal age should be able to petition for and/or sponsor aliens if there is reason to believe

\textsuperscript{68} Young v. Reno, 886.
\textsuperscript{70} INS Memo HQADN 70/1 (Dec. 28, 1999), reprinted at 77 Interpr. Rel. 484–485 (Apr. 10, 2000).
\textsuperscript{71} Young, 114 F.3d at 886.
\textsuperscript{75} “Motherland and Heritage Tours,” Holt International Children’s Services, http://www.holtintl.org/tours/.
that the beneficiary is a member of their natural family. The petition calls for U.S. law to recognize the same civil rights for adult foreign-born adoptees as it does for other U.S. citizens. The underlying presumption of sovereignty – the United States’ right to police its borders and extend preferences to “immediate relatives” – is not in question. Rather the Petition seeks to illuminate the race and class privilege that is at the foundation of adoption, as evidenced by current immigration law.

First, the Petition asserts that current immigration law codifies the privilege of adoptive parents and the interests of powerful adoption agencies. More specifically, immigration law confers benefits on alien orphans conditioned solely on their relationship to their predominantly white U.S. adoptive parents. All adoptions, domestic or international, are predicated on exchanges between people who are in disparate, and usually unequal, positions. Michelle Kahan posits that adoption is inextricably connected to “welfare and poverty, race and class, and gender” in the U.S. Historically, social workers and others have routinely pressured unwed young mothers to let their infants go to “better” families, a thinly veiled proxy for more financially stable married couples. Similarly, Pascall observes that “poor countries export children to rich ones, black parents to white, poor parents to better off.” Just as in domestic adoption, children from countries that are impoverished or have restrictive policies or social mores that limit women’s reproductive rights, gain privileges from middle-class adoptive families.

Arguably, the bestowing of immigration preferences to orphaned children reflects less a judgment that parentless children truly deserve the economic and social benefits of U.S. citizenship, but is rather a response to western desires for healthy infants cloaked in “the myth that the United States benevolently educates and welcomes the world…” While the well-intended humanitarian impulses of adoptive parents characterized early adoption practice, intercountry adoption has evolved from being child-centered to parent-centered. Motivations to adopt internationally have increasingly centered on infertility, preferences for foreign children (often imbued in romanticized or exoticized notions of “foreignness”), and desires to circumvent issues of race inherent in domestic adoption. Adoptive parents assume that children from Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe have fewer problems and less complicated pre-placement histories. These include birth mothers or fathers who are presumptively unable to reassert parental rights and national or ethnic identities that are severed from U.S. racial politics. However, other commentators point to market variables. Bartholet concludes that many parents choose intercountry adoption rather than “fight over” the few available healthy infants in the U.S. Furthermore, despite “politics . . . similar to those involved in the debate about transracial adoption in this

79. Ibid., 18.
86. Lovelock, “Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice”; Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist, Mary E. Campbell, and Yvonne A. Unrau, “Caucasian Parents and Korean Adoptees: A Survey of Parents’ Perceptions,” Adoption Quarterly 6 (2003): 41–58. Adoptive parents often cite an affinity for the child’s birth country, which has been experienced solely through consumption, rather than real knowledge; Szejner, “Intercountry Adoptions”
88. Bartholet, “International Adoption.”
country,” Bartholet argues that international adoption benefits everyone because families must learn to appreciate racial and cultural differences. The discourse about U.S. immigration policies must consider the motivations of adoptive parents in order to ensure that the interests of adoptive children, not just those of adoptive parents and adoption agencies, are taken seriously.

International adoptive parents are notoriously well-organized and politically sophisticated. Adoptive parents have developed local, national, and international self-help, advocacy, and educational organizations based on their children’s countries of origin, as well as pan-national organizations which include all intercountry adoptions. They have also established child welfare organizations in their children’s birth countries, authored books, established publication companies, developed adoption-related journals and magazines, provided testimony at congressional hearings, have positions of influence on boards of adoption agencies, and are active in adoption research. Parents of internationally adopted children, due to eligibility requirements set by sending countries, are disproportionately middle to upper-middle class and well-educated. Their influence is integral to the development of national policies on adoption. For example, Holt International Children’s Services’ Hague Convention Policy Coordinator, Susan Freivalds, is the mother of a Korean adoptee. Similarly, the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 was sponsored by Rep. William Delahunt (D-MA), who has a Vietnamese adopted daughter.

Currently a petition for further immigration policy, the Intercountry Adoption Reform Act of 2006 (ICARE), proposed by adoptive parents, states:

[The Act]…makes clear that American citizens who adopt children abroad should have the same rights as those whose biological children are born abroad. We as constituents and adoptive families, feel that it is imperative that the United States step forward as a leader in international adoption and reform the manner in which it currently processes adoptions of children from other countries by citizens of the United States.

ICARE calls for Congress to create an Office of Inter-Country Adoptions within the Department of State that purportedly will streamline the adoption process by centralizing functions that currently fall under the purview of three separate federal agencies: the Department of Health

89. Bartholet, “International Adoption.”
90. See, e.g., the Korean Adoptive and Adoptive Family Network (KAAN), http://www.kaanet.com/ (sponsors annual conferences, motherland tours, and summer camps); Families with Children from China (FWCC), http://www.fwcc.org/ (has chapters throughout North America, Europe, and China).
and Human Services, the Department of State, and the Department of Homeland Security. This proposed act clearly states the interests of adoptive parents. Sara Dorow argues that it "goes further than previous legislation in eradicating legal conditions on an adopted child's permanent belonging." At the heart of ICARE are both adoptive parents' belief that their adoptive children are not immigrants and the goal of securing U.S. citizenship before entering the United States, which Dorow cautions is, "... making citizenship conditional on the elision of particular histories—not only of birth but also of immigration."

Thus, the Equality under Immigration Petition's assertion regarding the role of class privilege in shaping immigration policy seems to at least facially have some merit. Perhaps more significant is the implication that the adoptee's federally-bestowed immigration privilege is not so much tied to his or her "best interests" as it is to the adoptive parents' ability to influence the definition of family for the purpose of immigration, which entails the subjugation of the adoptees' right to define family. Sara Dorow further explains, "The child's citizenship [and immigration] is conditional not only on her attachment to good American citizens, but simultaneously on her detachment from her birth family."

The Child Citizenship Act of 2000 and the proposed ICARE reflect adoptive parents' desires to bestow citizenship on their children, "as if born to American parents." However, even if ICARE is enacted and through the "erasures of belonging," international adoptees are able to become citizens prior to entering the U.S., they will still be barred from the full privileges of citizenship. Adoptees would remain unable to confer an immigration benefit to their natural family, a privilege their adoptive parents' biological children enjoy by virtue of their status as natural-born U.S. citizens.

The courts have struggled with the full effect of INA § 101(b)(1)(E) as petitioners have tested the plain meaning of the law. In considering whether adoption terminated the relationship between adoptees and their natural siblings in Gee v. INS, the district court concluded that the plaintiff's brothers and sisters were entitled to fourth family-based preferences. Plaintiff became a U.S. citizen in 1974, after emigrating from Hong Kong in 1968 to join her adoptive family. Gee was able to successfully sponsor three of her five biological siblings, but INS denied admission for the remaining two siblings because her "adoption nullified the relationship between [her] and the beneficiaries... Therefore, [plaintiff] and the beneficiaries [did] not qualify as 'children' of a common parent." The court confirmed that natural parents are precluded from gaining immigration benefits by virtue of the petitioner's adoptive status. However, because the Act did not directly address the question with regard to siblings, the court sought to ascertain Congressional intent. Using rules of statutory construction, the Court found that it would be unfair to deny natural siblings family-based preferences because Congress did not expressly exclude them. However, in Young the court rejected the finding in Gee, citing concerns of fraud and arguing that "there is no indication that [the Congressional intent to preserve the family unit] extended to natural siblings of adopted children."

In Matter of Li the Board of Immigration Appeals considered whether a U.S. citizen could petition for his natural daughter whose domestic adoption in China was terminated under Chi-
nese adoption law. The Board found for Li by applying a four-part test. First, no immigration benefit was obtained or conferred as a result of the adoptive relationship. Second, a natural parent-child relationship once existed. Third, the adoption was legally terminated. Finally, the natural relationship has been legally reestablished. The Board concluded that “after the abrogation of adoptive relationships, the rights and obligations... between the adopted child and its biological parents or other close relatives shall resume.” The courts clearly have struggled with interpretation and application of INA § 101(b)(1)(E) and have subjugated adoptees to second-class citizenship with fewer rights under immigration law than U.S.-born citizens, other naturalized citizens, or even permanent residents.

The Petition further asserts that the family-based preferences extended under Public Law 97-359 illustrate inequity in immigration law. While Amerasian children believed to have been fathered by U.S. military veterans may petition for immigration by virtue of their natural parent-child relationship, intercountry adoptees are denied the same benefit. That is, they are barred from legally sponsoring beneficiaries who are reasonably believed to be members of their natural family.

The intention of the Hague Convention is to establish protections for children by developing much-needed legal and procedural safeguards. Hidden in the shadows of the humanitarian heroism of Operation Babylift is the fact that many of the “orphans” were not truly orphaned, but rather temporarily separated from their parents. A class action lawsuit representing the interests of the Vietnamese parents and children named Secretary of State Kissinger, the U.S. government, and the adoption agencies as defendants. The case was dismissed, however, and the records were sealed. Similarly, following the tsunami that hit Southeast Asia and the eastern coast of Africa in 2004, thousands of well-intended families inquired about the adoptability of the “tsunami orphans.” Both Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the hardest-hit countries, immediately responded by banning intercountry adoption. The impact of the Hague Convention was evidenced by the U.S. State Department’s announcement, reflecting the agreement of other international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to oppose intercountry adoptions until countries were stabilized, families reunited, and children’s status verified.

Conclusion

Despite the increased protections, the Convention and subsequent immigration law continue to further commodify children by memorializing and institutionalizing the privilege of adoptive parents, while dismissing adoptees’ legal rights to claim natural family. The Equality under Immigration Petition reflects international adoptees’ refusal to accept definitions of family which position them in a subclass of citizenship. Scholars and practitioners challenge the polarized paradigm of children lingering in orphanages or being “saved” through international adoption. The U.S. and most developed countries provide birth parents an array of alternatives that include open adoption, governmental subsidies to promote family preservation, and kin adoptions. The primacy of birth relationships are increasingly being reflected in child welfare “best practices,” and intercountry adoptees calling for reform in immigration law are simply reclaiming a right that is afforded to all other U.S. citizens. The legitimate governmental interest that the existing immigration law is purported to protect – the prevention of immigration fraud in im-

107. Ibid.
108. Ibid.
110. McGinnis and Pertman, Intercountry Adoption in Emergencies.
111. Ibid.
mediate family and family-based preferences – is based on unsubstantiated fear. It infantilizes adult adoptees with the assumption that they will be inordinately vulnerable to Exploitation compared to those who seek to marry foreign spouses or veterans who seek to sponsor their Amerasian children. Intercountry adoptees are increasingly insisting that they be included in shaping legislation that is intended to protect their “best interests.” The Equality under Immigration Petition is significant. It is the first grass-roots effort by intercountry adoptees to challenge legislation that protects adoptive parents’ interests.

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Constructing a Global Koreanness
Representations of Adopted Koreans and the Korean Diaspora

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For many years, diaspora studies scholars more or less took it for granted that the vast majority of diasporas continue to harbor hope of return to their homelands in some distant future. Moreover, it was said that they maintain their collective group identity and hold an isolated attitude, or, at best, a polite relationship with their host societies. This old meaning of how a diaspora is defined and conceptualized was influenced by the most ancient and generic diaspora, considered by many to represent the ideal type of diaspora—namely, the Jewish diaspora before the foundation of the state of Israel. However, since the implosion of the European colonial world order after World War II, and the refugee crisis, which coincided with the end of the Cold War, and the turn to globalization in Western academia, the field of diaspora studies exploded with buzzwords such as cosmopolitanism, networking, travelling, exile, and migrancy. It has now become commonplace to argue that diasporic groups, with their hybrid conditions and multilocational subjectivities, pose a serious challenge to nationalist identities based on cultural stability and territorial unity.1 While many scholars have focused on the inevitable tension between a homeland and its diaspora as well as the immensely complicated relationship between a diaspora and its host country, others have highlighted various diasporas that lack a clearly defined homeland, including the Armenians, the descendants of African slaves in the Americas and Europe, Kurdish and Sikh refugees and ethnic Asians in the US, among whom a new pan-Asian diasporic consciousness and awareness is said to have emerged.2

Not surprisingly, given the sheer number of diaspora studies and diaspora scholars, there are many different definitions of diaspora. Despite an antagonism between old and new conceptions of diaspora and different ideas among researchers of what a diaspora consists of beyond a “homing desire” and a collective identity, all are likely to agree that in the age of the erosion of the nation state, the expansion of global capital, capitalist crises, massive refugee movements, and transnational electronic mediation, diasporas matter and play an important role in the international political arena. For example, members of various diasporas send remittances back to

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their families and extended kin (this phenomenon is associated most with “Third World” diasporas), invest in the economy of their countries of origin (e.g., the Indian and Chinese diasporas), support various political struggles and agendas in the “old country” (e.g., the Irish diaspora), and create militant and revolutionary networks (e.g., the Islamist diaspora). Lastly, while many like to see a clearly discernable liberatory potential in diasporas that contest the boundaries of nation states, others argue that the asymmetric power relations among a diaspora, a homeland and a host country are easily overlooked and ignored. For these observers, the concept of diaspora instead functions to revitalize essentialist identities and fails to transcend social categories of ethnicity, race, gender, or class. In her examination of uncritical valorizations of the term diaspora, Floya Anthias concludes by warning:

“Diaspora” has turned the gaze to broader social relations that can encompass politics, economy and culture at the global, rather than national level. It pays attention to the dynamic nature of ethnic bonds, and to the possibilities of selective and contextual cultural translation and negotiation. However, the lack of attention to issues of gender, class and generation, and to other inter-group and intra-group divisions, is one important shortcoming. Secondly, a critique of ethnic bonds is absent within diaspora discourse, and there does not exist any account of the ways in which diaspora may indeed have a tendency to reinforce absolutist notions of “origin” and “true belonging.”

As I will show, Anthias’s cautious comment has a direct bearing on the South Korean case. The main focus of this study is the specific view of a homeland’s conception of its diaspora, and as such it differs from the majority of works in diaspora studies which most often take the perspective of the diaspora and its relationship to the country of origin. Among the case studies that have a homeland perspective and thus are relevant to this study is Hans-Åke Persson’s discussion of Germany and Israel, two classic examples of homelands with conscious policies toward their diasporas. Both states apply jus sanguinis, the right of blood, as the way to define who is a German and who is a Jew and who can gain citizenship of the respective nation-state. During the Nazi regime the mobilization of the Volksdeutschen (ethnic Germans living outside the Reich) was a vital part of Hitler’s nationalist policy, and in the case of Israel, immigration has been the raison d’être of the state’s nation-building project. This Blut und Boden (blood and soil) ideology is also a strong component in Korean nationalism.

Bengt Kummel analyzes how the pan-Swedish (allsvensk) movement a century ago tried to create a worldwide Swedish community based on common race and language, comprised of ethnic Swedes in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and North America. The movement, which initially received a lot of attention and support from elite nationalist circles in Sweden, died out in the 1920s as a consequence of changed conditions in Finland and Estonia after World War I and the rapid assimilation of Swedes in America. Such a vision of a worldwide pan-ethnic community is highly present in the Korean case as well. Aihwa Ong studies how globalization is changing the concept of Chineseness among Chinese overseas communities (huaren) in the USA and Southeast Asia. Ong scrutinizes China’s diaspora policy and the construction of a disembedded global Chinese public in cyberspace, which she interprets as being based on race as well as being

4. The present study is limited solely to the context of the Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea, and any references to its northern neighbor, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, will be stated explicitly as North Korea, North Korean, or North Koreans as appropriate.
5. “Homecoming and the End of the Diaspora: The case of Israel and Germany,” in Migrants and the Homeland: Images, Symbols and Realities (Uppsala University Centre for Multiethnic research, 2000), 220–253
principally driven by economic interests. The notion of Greater China (Da Zhonghua), which includes a global Chinese community that has evolved since the late 1980s, was the blueprint for the Korean diaspora policy. Similarly, Giles Mohan and A.B. Zack-Williams have tried to understand the potential that diasporized Africans have for the economic development of those who remain on the continent, linking this phenomenon to the process of globalization and the evolution of racialized capitalism. The hope of receiving investments from emigrants and economic expansion overseas are also important incentives for Korea's plan for globalization.

Yuh Ji-Yeon's treatise on Korean military brides in the United States examines how a homeland imagines a specific part of its diaspora. Yuh looks at images of Korean military wives in Korean television documentaries and newspaper articles. The women are simultaneously seen as victims of the American dream, suffering from acculturation problems and isolated from the mainstream Korean-American community, and, at the same time, overly Westernized, having almost forgotten their first language and culture. Another pertinent work is Arnold Barton's study of representations of Swedish-Americans in Swedish films, fiction and popular culture. Barton examines how the countrymen in exile were portrayed and imagined as self-important and pompous, which, according to his interpretation, is a reflection of a mixture of jealousy and contempt on the part of the Swedish producers as well as the general public of its time. Another study worth mentioning in this context is Zeynep Kilic Özgen's work on representations of diasporic Turks in Europe in Turkish newspapers. Kilic Özgen observes how these images have changed over time, and how newspapers belonging to different interest groups in Turkish society represent the diaspora in different ways, while at the same time nationalism is ever-present, regardless of political leanings.

Regarding the Korean nation and its diaspora, the modern exodus of Korean people began in 1860 when the Chosôn Dynasty began to crumble, caused by the outbreak of famine and impoverished conditions in the northern provinces. Emigrants of the first wave of migration found their way to the Russian Far East, bordering present-day North Korea, and from 1869 Koreans started to pour into northeastern China in great numbers. From the 1880s, Korean students started to go to Japan, and in 1903 emigration to the United States was initiated in the form of indentured labor. These four countries, Russia (later the Soviet Union and Central Asia), China, Japan, and the United States, still remain the most important host countries, where 90 percent of the Korean diaspora is located.

Emigration continued during the colonial period and the period of authoritarian regimes in South Korea, creating a diaspora which today numbers more than five million people located in 151 different countries: two million Chosôn-jok (in Chinese, Chaoxianzu) in China, 1.5 million Korean-Americans (chaemi kyop'o) in the United States, 700,000 Zainichi Koreans in Japan, 500,000 Koryô saram in Central Asia, 200,000 adopted Koreans, and tens of thousands of others located in Canada, Russia, South America, West and Southeast Asia, and Europe.

Several of the various ethnic Korean diasporic groups, such as the thousands of Korean workers who were conscripted to work in the mines of Sakhalin and the forcefully relocated Soviet Koreans who ended up in Central Asia in 1937, may well fit into Robin Cohen's category of a victim diaspora, which he defines as an involuntary dispersal caused by catastrophic and traumatic

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14. Other sources cite close to seven million.
events, including mass poverty, labor mobilization, forced transportation, severe persecution, and refugee movements. Cohen uses the Jewish, African, Armenian, and Palestinian diasporas as case studies and ideal types of victim diasporas. Even if many Koreans undoubtedly left their country voluntarily, as Song Changzoo reminds us, if any part of the Korean diaspora qualifies as being a victim diaspora, it would have to be the adopted Koreans. The Korean diaspora is comparable in scale and substance to the Chinese, Indian, Jewish, Italian, Armenian, or Irish diasporas, as it accounts for eight percent of the entire global Korean population.

According to Yi Hyông-kyu and Yoon In-Jin, both of whom have studied the history of the South Korean and North Korean diaspora policies, the issue of overseas Koreans was raised for the first time on at the government level in South Korea in 1971. However, during the Cold War, the South Korean state was arguably even more caught up in a siege mentality than its northern neighbor, accusing emigrants of being unpatriotic traitors. Consequently, the North Korean diaspora policy and its vision of a Koryô federation encompassing all ethnic Koreans worldwide (who are still officially eligible for citizenship under North Korean law) was much more pronounced in the 1970s and 1980s, and was particularly well received among ethnic Koreans in Japan, China and the Soviet Union and among exiled dissidents in North America and Western Europe. Nevertheless, after the end of the Cold War and from the mid-1990s, the huge and widely dispersed Korean diaspora has come to play a part in South Korea’s globalization drive. In 1995, president Kim Young Sam launched South Korea’s globalization drive (segye-hwa) and announced a blueprint for how it was to be achieved:

Globalization must be underpinned by Koreanization. We cannot be global citizens without a good understanding of our own culture and tradition. Globalization in the proper sense of the word means that we should march out in the world on the strength of our unique culture and traditional values. Only when we maintain our national identity and uphold our intrinsic national spirit will we be able to successfully globalize.

Shin Gi-wook calls this development the paradox of Korean globalization in his attempt to understand how globalization is strengthening nationalism in the country. Others argue that this phenomenon is an international feature for postcolonial nation states in particular as a politics of identity and a strategy of resistance against Westernization. One important aspect of this Korean version of globalization, which shares commonalities with the Chinese, Indian, Jewish, and Irish examples, is the formulation of a conscious diaspora policy toward ethnic Koreans.
oversese who were, for many years, despised and discarded by the military regime as some kind of disloyal traitors who left the country at a time when it was impoverished. In 1997, the Overseas Koreans Foundation (Chaeoe tongp'o chaedan) was inaugurated as the government body for dealing with overseas brethren (chaeoe tongp'o), who are officially defined as human resources and national assets in the country’s globalization plan. This recently initiated project of international Korean community building and ethnic mobilization includes activities such as conferences and events such as the World Ethnic Korean Festival (Segye hanminjok ch'ukchôn) (from 1989); the publication of newsletters and magazines; organizing visits and educational programs; putting together information databases and directories; networking among businessmen and community leaders, artists, film-makers, and authors; the creation of a cyber community on the Internet (Hanminjok Network); and financing immigrant Korean schools and associations.

The Korean Experience of Globalization

The aim of this article is to examine how the above-mentioned diaspora context is articulated in two popular cultural representations of overseas adopted Koreans, namely the rock band Sky’s song *Eternity* (1999) and Lee Jang-soo’s feature film *Love* (1999). Considering the ethnic character of Korean nationalism, with its notion of the nation as family and its strong emphasis on homogeneity, the point of departure is the very existence of adopted Koreans as a delicate threat to nationalist ideology, causing anxieties about disruptions to a supposedly homogenous national identity, and calling into question what it means to be Korean and who belongs to the Korean nation. What are the implications for a nation depicting itself as one extended family and which has sent away so many of its own children, and what are the reactions from a culture emphasizing homogeneity when encountering and dealing with the adopted Koreans?

The happy and beautiful memories together with you
Are not only the time that has passed by chance
(break down)
The master of my empty place which already has widened
Was you, who is the only one existing in the world
(it is you)
It was always as it has been
Just because I waited for you to approach me
In a world without you
To wake up in the morning alone is too hard
Until now there is only one reason for me to breathe
As the path that I have been walking was not easy
As my love that always has been
Only tears are left
It seems that it can only be achieved if I owe much
Now I know the way of living, what the world hopes
For me to change my life again to be able to meet you
I will not forget
I will always wait
When the sky is calling
I will take with me the memory of our eternal love
If we meet again in this world where only seduction exists

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I will say that I did not know because I was born the first time
I promise.\footnote{Song lyrics translated by the author, and taken from Sky's music album Final Fantasy: The Best Is Yet To Come, Doremi Records, 1999.}

The most famous adoption song performed by a Korean music group to date is without doubt Sky's *Eternity* from the group's 1999 debut album *Final Fantasy: The Best is Yet to Come*. The extremely costly music video was voted Korea's best music video of the year in 1999, and includes some of Korean cinema's most popular and talented actors in its cast. Produced by film director Cho Seung Woo, the music video uses the form of an action film to tell the dramatic story of how two brothers are separated and adopted by two different families in Canada, and how their lives become fatally intertwined with each other some 20 years later. The famous actors Jang Dong Gun and Cha In-pyo star as the two brothers, and Kim Kyu-ri, known from several horror films, plays an immigrant Korean woman who is the girlfriend of one of the brothers. Jeong Jun Ho plays another immigrant Korean in the film. Given its extraordinary star-studded cast, music critics had problems categorizing the blockbuster video into any genre. When the album was released at the end of 1999, the film was screened repeatedly on Korean television. Sky had a big hit with *Eternity*, but disbanded in the following year without producing another album.

*Eternity*'s lyrics first appear to tell the ordinary story of a relationship that has broken down, an almost compulsory element for any sort of popular music. In relation to this music video, however, it quickly becomes obvious that this must be some kind of final message from a man to his girlfriend just before he dies. The rock ballad *Eternity*'s sad melody is beautifully introduced by an orchestra consisting of 30 musicians, and the song skilfully blends hardcore, heavy metal and rap in order to illustrate the rapidly changing events taking place during the seven dramatic minutes of the film. After brief footage of the notorious 1988 cover of the American left-liberal journal *The Progressive* portraying an adopted Korean baby bathing in dollar bills, to remind the Korean audience of the nation's shameful and humiliating adoption industry, *Eternity* starts at Vancouver International Airport with two newly arrived children adopted from Korea at the age of approximately four or five. The biological brothers are holding Canadian flags in their hands and are accompanied by a female Korean escort and a female white Canadian adoption agency worker affiliated with the Holt adoption agency. Against their will and violently resisting, the brothers are separated and sent to two different adoptive families.

Approximately 20 years later, as young adults, one brother has become a depressed criminal belonging to an ethnic Korean gang, while the other is an aspiring police agent. The criminal brother is implicated in a series of contract killings related to illegal trade in weapons, while the other brother is investigating these events. In the beginning, two other ethnic Koreans are introduced: a Korean immigrant woman working at a Korean restaurant in Vancouver's Koreatown, and one of the gang members who is the best friend of the criminal brother. The gang member is captured at an early stage by the police officer brother, and questioned about the contract killer's whereabouts, but even though he is beaten up he remains silent and loyal to the criminal brother. Between the interrogations, the police officer brother sits in his office looking at the adoption photo on his desk of himself and his unknown brother. He decides to try to locate him, and puts up posters on the streets. By chance, the criminal brother passes by without noticing the message on the posters.

After the criminal brother has executed yet another contract killing, flashbacks from his childhood occur from the time when his Canadian adoptive father was killed in a robbery at a gas station. He has a nervous breakdown caused by the painful memories and his ruined life, and tries to commit suicide by shooting himself in Vancouver's Stanley Park. At this point the Korean immigrant woman turns up and saves him at the last minute, discovers that he is a Korean adoptee, starts to take care of him and tries to make him stop his self-destructive life
course. She also finds the adoption photo of him and his brother in his wallet. At the same time, the police officer brother continues to put up posters around the city, searching for his lost biological brother. The criminal brother carries out yet another murder, and the police officer brother, who is visiting the Korean girlfriend, is closing in on him. The criminal brother drives by, sees the police car and is able to escape. Believing that he has been betrayed by his friend in the gang, he tries to take revenge by killing him, but fails. Throughout the course of the film, with his disloyal, violent and uncontrollable behaviour, the criminal brother appears to be exemplary of what could be called a Barthesian-like myth of the orphan, namely the classical trope of the destroyed and disturbed abandoned child, illegitimate bastard, foster child, or adoptee, who sows madness, misery and mystery around him or her—frequently found in literary texts.24

When the girlfriend is under interrogation, she sees the same adoption photo that she found in the criminal brother’s wallet on the police officer brother’s desk and immediately realizes the terrible tragedy that is about to unfold. Upon her release, her boyfriend’s former friend abducts her, as he, in his turn, is seeking revenge after the murder attempt. Together with another gang member, he demands a ransom from the criminal brother to secure her release. They meet at an appointed place, but the meeting degenerates into a quarrel and they end up pointing guns at one another. The police are called in and arrive in full force, including the police officer brother who tries to intervene in the deadlocked situation. In a final dramatic shooting, the police officer brother unknowingly kills his own sibling, and when the girlfriend arrives on the scene and shows him the adoption photo he suddenly understands what he has done. In the next scene, the police officer brother and the Korean immigrant woman stand at the grave of the criminal brother, and the video ends at the same airport where the siblings first arrived as adoptive children, showing the surviving brother departing for Korea. The very last sequence shows a small girl arriving from Korea for adoption and holding a Canadian flag. She smiles at first and then starts to cry. Through this last shot, Sky’s music video Eternity becomes an openly political, anti-adoption statement, conveying the message that more miserable fates and fatal misunderstandings await Korea’s numerous, unfortunate adoptees.

The appearance of adopted Koreans in this work and in Korean popular culture in general can be interpreted as a reflection of the existence of Arjun Appadurai’s ethnoscape,25 one of several transcultural flows in his theory of global cultural politics in late modernity. Appadurai grounds his theory on the interconnection between electronic mediation and mass migration, which produce what he calls a diasporic public sphere known as the global ethnoscape. The global ethnoscape is defined as the shifting and translocal landscape of deterritorialized diasporas, exiles and displaced migrants, who have become the building blocks of imagined worlds and communities, as national identities are constructed and extend across a worldwide level. Media and popular culture today are not only used to imagine a nation but also the wider space beyond its borders, and thus they have become vehicles for global identity politics and community-building projects. This is especially true for non-Western nations which often seem to experience globalization and the outside world through mediated images of their own diasporas.

From the 1990s, overseas as well as adopted Koreans have also undoubtedly turned up more frequently in Korean media and popular culture compared to earlier decades. Two concrete examples are the sports icons Park Chan Ho and Michelle Wie. Park is a Korean national who plays for professional American baseball teams, and whose image, according to Rachel Miyoung Joo, has become a site for the constitution of Korean-American subjectivity as well as a


mass-mediated spectacle for imagining a diasporic Korean nation in his homeland.\textsuperscript{26} Golf star Michelle Wie is a second-generation Korean-American whose different media portrayals in Korea and in the United States reflect the differences between Korean ethnic nationalism and American civic nationalism.\textsuperscript{27} Korea’s leading playwright Oh Tae-sok’s play \textit{Love with Foxes} (1996) is another example of a representation of ethnic Koreans in Korean popular culture. In this play, Chinese, Japanese, North Koreans and South Koreans interact together and, according to feminist theatre critic Shim Jung-Soon, create an imagined community of pan-Koreanness.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, in \textit{Eternity}, it is not white Canada and Vancouver that is the main focus, but Koreatown and the ethnic Koreans who inhabit it, including adoptees. In other words, Sky’s \textit{Eternity} is a perfect example of the Korean style of globalization as it is experienced and imagined through mediated representations of its diaspora, a phenomenon which is even more accentuated in the film \textit{Love}.

\textbf{Visiting the Overseas Brethren}

Lee Jang-soo’s romantic melodrama \textit{Love}, a feature film set entirely in Los Angeles’ Koreatown, premiered in September 1999.\textsuperscript{29} The director came from the glamorous world of Korean television dramas with productions such as \textit{Beautiful Days} (\textit{Arûmdaun naldûl}) (2001) in which two orphans play leading roles, \textit{Shoot for the Stars} (\textit{Pyôrûl ssoda}) (2002), and \textit{Stairway to Heaven} (\textit{Ch’ôngugûi kyêdan}) (2003). \textit{Love} is still his first and only feature film. The adoption issue frames the narrative, and scriptwriter Song Chi-na explains in the special feature section of the DVD version that she wanted to convey a meaningful message about an urgent social problem through the film. The release of the film coincided with the beginning of the so-called Korean wave (\textit{hallyu}) of Korean feature films and television dramas, which hit the East and Southeast Asian region with full force in approximately the year 2000, when Korean popular culture suddenly became fashionable among non-Korean audiences. The phenomenon of the Korean wave has been exploited to the fullest extent by the Korean government to bolster trade, tourism and even political relations, and the Korean popular culture industry has therefore received strong support from the Korean nation state when it comes to producing and disseminating films and dramas in particular.

The leading character of \textit{Love} is Myông–su, a professional Korean marathon runner and former Olympic gold medal winner, played by the tall and athletic Jung Woo-sung who comes to Los Angeles to take part in the city’s famous marathon race. Suddenly he drops out of his team and goes to Koreatown where he has a relative named Brad, played by Park Cheol. There he meets Jenny, an adopted Korean played by the television drama actress Ko So-young, who at an early age had run away from her adoptive parents and has grown up as a foster child of Brad. In the end, Myông–su and Jenny fall in love, and even if \textit{Love} is nothing other than an ordinary and somewhat pathetic romantic fable, the film received a lot of attention in the media before and after its release due to its original musical compositions, unusual location, and expensive budget with several high-paid Korean-Americans and Americans in the cast, and most of all because of the two leading actors’ enormous popularity in Korea. Yet beyond its simple story, \textit{Love} turns the relationship and love between South Korean Myông–su and adopted Korean Jenny into an allegory for a global community of ethnic Koreans.


At the moment when Myông–su leaves the exit gate at the airport in Los Angeles, he is met by a welcoming party consisting of Korean-Americans, white Anglos, non-white Hispanics, and representatives from other ethnic groups, causing him to feel instantly confused as he is used to the much more racially and ethnically homogenous Korea. This confusion follows Myông–su during his stay in Los Angeles, probably the most "thirdworldized" city in the Western hemisphere due to global capitalism. The Korean team members are immediately subjected to a ruthless regimentation and training program, and forced to run alongside galloping horses in the deserts of California. Myông–su and his best team-mate Kyông-chôl, played by Lee Beom Su, both come from poor backgrounds and they regard their careers as marathon runners as their only viable future. However, in the foreign setting Myông–su starts to doubt his own capability and loses self-confidence. Above all, he questions his choice in life as up until then he had given up everything for his sports career, including having friends and creating his own family. At night, ignoring the desperate protests coming from his friend who has placed all his hopes for a better future on their comradeship, Myông–su promptly leaves the camp and flees.

Alone in the big city, Myông–su remembers that he has a distant cousin in Los Angeles, Ki-ch'ôl, and decides to call him. The cousin, who prefers to be called Brad, invites him to his house in Koreatown, and his foster daughter Jenny goes to pick up Myông–su. In the evening, when they share “real Korean food” cooked by Brad, he is introduced to Jenny who, Brad says mysteriously, is adopted just like himself. Whether he is alluding to his adoption of American culture or the fact that he, too, is an overseas adoptee remains unclear. The director does not reveal Brad’s true state as the character acts as a kind of mystical intermediary among all of the different ethnic groups in the film—Korean-Americans and other immigrants, adopted Koreans, and South Koreans. Given his angelic, kind-hearted and totally altruistic personality, one gets the impression that he is an otherworldly, or even an imaginary figure.

Hereafter, the film narrative is almost overly concerned with highlighting the ambiguous differences and contradictory similarities between Myông–su and Jenny. On the other hand, all three speak Korean with each other, and it is therefore impossible to discern from speech alone who is a “Korean” and who is an adopted Korean. Their common physical characteristics are, of course, apparent, especially in the context of L.A., but this obvious fact serves also to highlight their equally obvious cultural differences in this hybrid space of Koreatown.

The appearance of overseas and adopted Koreans in Love reflects a newly awakened interest in the Korean diaspora, which is closely connected to the South Korean globalization project. Terming the 21st century the “diaspora age,” the aforementioned Overseas Koreans Foundation also includes adopted Koreans as a part of the Korean diaspora. From the mid-1990s, adoptees have also been increasingly perceived and treated as ethnic Koreans overseas, as they are regularly mentioned and included in works dealing with the worldwide diasporic community of Koreans, something that was seldom the case during the preceding decades.

In 1996, the Ministry of Unification published the encyclopedic 10-volume *Koreans in the World* (*Sêgyêûi hanminjok*), a complete guide to overseas Koreans for Korean politicians, diplomats and officials, and, again, adopted Koreans were included. Even if this new attitude indicates that Korea has not forgotten adoptees, and acknowledges them as having a visible place in Korea’s modern and troublesome history, it is important to point out that this way of conceptualizing adopted Koreans is clearly in

opposition to Western theorists who most probably would object to defining the group as either a diaspora or an ethnic group in a strict sense, as they lack everything from a myth of return to the homeland, to a common language, to any serious attempts at endogamy. Instead, in the West, international adoptees from non-Western countries are generally regarded as having left behind any traces of their cultural origin, as well as being cut off from both “their” homelands and diasporas.

The Korean approach rather appears to reject the classical conception of a diaspora modelled on the Jewish example, and instead relies on the broadest and perhaps most crude and popular definition at hand, namely those populations who have ended up outside their traditional home territories, whether as individuals or as collectives, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. With this wide and inclusive approach, it also becomes obvious that earlier notions of ethnic or racial minorities, exiles or migrants are, today, often summed up by, supplemented with or even replaced by the notion of diaspora. Through this Korean interpretation of a diaspora, the adopted Koreans are automatically essentialized into overseas brethren, thereby disregarding the fact that they normally do not have any connection at all with Korea, things Korean, or any overseas Korean community.

The Transnational Korean Community

In the film Love, Brad manages his own private laundry business, and Myông–su assists him and Jenny in the hot and steaming store. At the laundry, to his amazement he finds a Latin American couple (employed by Brad) who speak fluent Spanish to the Koreans, and, furthermore, the customers represent a wide variety of ethnicities. Even more puzzling for Myông–su is that Brad runs his own birth family search service for adopted Koreans, contacting police departments and adoption agencies in Korea from his office. One day at the laundry, Myông–su overhears Jenny speaking to an unknown woman in Korea and discovers that she is also searching for her Korean mother. She has learned by heart how to describe her appearance, including scars and birthmarks, as well as her adoption story – that she was adopted at the age of four years from a place called Pyonghwa orphanage – and this is repeated throughout the film as a kind of a mantra to remind viewers of her yearning for Korea and her Korean mother.

Myông–su is fascinated by Jenny’s enigmatic personality, and moved by her longing as he finds her crying alone at night, and soon he deeply falls in love with her. Jenny, on the other hand, simply ignores his existence and prefers to stay in her own reclusive world. Like so many other adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture, Jenny is a lonely, asocial and cold person bordering on the autistic, and seemingly unable to feel affection towards other people. When Jenny and Myông–su go shopping together, and Myông–su is unable to understand what the cashier is saying and causes irritation among the other customers, Jenny does not even come to his help and could not care less about him. She likes to sing melancholic and sad Korean pop ballads, always looking sour and barely speaking a word, and stays up alone at night, obsessed with nurturing a small Rose of Sharon (mugunghwa) plant, which is planted in Korean soil and was given to her as a gift from Korea. As this is Korea’s official national flower, the symbolic power of an adopted Korean taking care of and cultivating a Rose of Sharon plant is, of course, enormous. The small plant signifies Jenny's hope of finding her Korean mother and reconnecting to Korea, but also the development of her Koreanization process accomplished by Brad’s gentle upbringing.

Brad takes Myông–su out to share a picnic in one of Los Angeles’ public parks, and it is revealed that Brad runs a whole network for adopted Koreans living in the city who have run away from their adoptive parents. The picnic is a social gathering for the adoptees, where Brad provides Korean food, informs the adoptees about the state of their searches, and encourages them and takes care of them in all possible ways. He also introduces Myông–su as his “real
blood brother” and asks the adoptees to note their physical resemblance, further underscoring the adoption context. Jenny is also present at the picnic, where she takes care of the youngest children. Myông–su does not seem to be aware of the strange and bizarre situation as they all look Korean and have learned to speak Korean even if at least one of them is clearly of mixed origin, although he does notice that no parents are present at all, only children, teenagers and young adults. During the picnic, Jenny realizes Myông–su's genuine, innocent and naïve character and slowly starts to respond to his attempts to connect with her. One afternoon, Kyông-chół turns up at the laundry after he has managed to track down Myông–su's whereabouts. Drinking together in the evening, Kyông-chół tells Brad and Jenny why he came to Los Angeles in the first place. Kyông-chół, who wants to persuade Myông–su to return to training, challenges him to a race, and the two Korean marathon runners run together through the empty streets of Los Angeles. However, Kyông-chół has to leave for the training camp, seemingly without having succeeded in bringing his friend back.

After Kyông-chół's visit, Jenny develops a new respect for Myông–su as she now knows everything about his background and life story. On American Independence Day, Brad, in his concern about Myông–su feeling at home in Los Angeles, proposes that all three of them go out to a party, and he dresses them in the customers’ clothes from the laundry. In the end, they are not able to make it to the party as Brad's car breaks down. Instead, they have their own party, playing music from the radio on the road in the middle of the night. During this celebration all differences between Myông–su and Jenny suddenly disappear as they dance and have fun together. Some days later, when the car breaks down for a second time and it starts to rain, Myông–su and Jenny again connect with each other by singing Korean pop songs together, and slowly but steadily she opens up her heart to him. Jenny also gives Myông–su back his training outfit, which he had thrown away, urging him to start training again, and henceforth Myông–su starts to run again, now determined to participate in the Los Angeles marathon. From there on, Myông–su undergoes a process of Americanization, driven by a desire for American values of individualism and self-fulfilment, and reflecting a general Korean ambivalence towards America as both an oppressor and a liberator.

One day at the laundry, Brad is finally able to announce to everybody that he has found Jenny's Korean mother. Jenny calls the woman who confirms her motherhood and reveals that Jenny's real name is Myông-ja, but also that she (the mother) is married and has three children, and is unable to keep in contact with Jenny. Hence, the good news quickly turns into a disaster, and Jenny is so disappointed in being rejected a second time that she crushes the flowerpot containing the Rose of Sharon on the floor. Brad is devastated as he understands the symbolic meaning of her act, but Myông-su replants the flower and promises her that if it dies he will get new seeds and soil from Korea. Little by little, Jenny and Myông-su grow closer to one another, and Brad feels jealous and irritated, due to his over-protectiveness as her foster father. Thereafter, Brad leaves for a trip to Korea and arranges for Myông-su to stay at a motel while Jenny remains alone in the house. During this brief separation, Jenny and Myông-su realize their mutual love and phone each other repeatedly. Jenny becomes Myông-su's training partner, cycling beside him and sharing his efforts and burdens as he trains harder to be able to overcome the 35-kilometer barrier. At this point when Jenny and Myông–su at last become a real couple, Los Angeles’ Koreatown is transformed into a place for envisioning a transnational Korean community.

A useful analytical tool when discussing the interactions between a homeland and its diaspora is transnationalism or long-distance nationalism.

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ipino migrants in America and their relationships to their respective homelands, anthropologists Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc interpret transnationalism as a new form of a deterritorialized community-building that aims to overcome the tension between a homeland and its diaspora, and that can be used as a counter-hegemonic resistance strategy for postcolonial societies against globalization and Westernization:

Deterritorialized nation-state building is something new and significant, a form of post-colonial nationalism, that reflects and reinforces the division of the entire globe into nation-states. To conceive of a nation-state that stretches beyond its geographic boundaries involves a social fabrication different from diasporic imaginations. To see oneself in a diaspora is to imagine oneself as being outside a territory, part of a population exiled from a homeland … In counterdistinction is the deterritorialized nation-state, in which the nation's people may live anywhere in the world and still not live outside the state.  

A Korean transnationalism would be the vision of a global community of ethnic Koreans encompassing South Koreans, North Koreans, overseas Koreans and adopted Koreans, as a way of overcoming the limitations of being a politically divided, culturally diversified and geographically dispersed nation. In this way, it could be said that the Korean nation state is reterritorializing its deterritorialized compatriots. This is also what is suggested by Park Hyun Ok, who characterizes Korean diaspora politics, fuelled by globalization and growing anti-Western sentiments, as a new nationalism of a worldwide community of ethnic Koreans underpinned by colonial experiences and postcolonial developments. For Gabriel Sheffer, in his theory of diasporism, the Korean diaspora is also a concrete example of how an ethnie is in the process of being transformed into an incipient diaspora using a communalist strategy to keep together and mobilize itself in the age of transnational networks and ethno-national diasporas. Furthermore, in the light of Thomas Faist’s model of three different stages of transnational social spaces divided among kinship groups (contract workers), circuits (business people) and communities (ethnic diasporas), the Korean version must definitely be said to belong to the last category.

The new transnational character of Korean nationalism is clearly manifested in the question of citizenship and who is to be included in and excluded from the Korean nation. In 1999, a special F-4 visa resembling dual citizenship was introduced through the Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans. Due to a successful lobbying campaign by adopted returnees in Korea, the F-4 visa came to include adopted Koreans as well. Despite diplomatic protests from China, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the two main host countries for ethnic Koreans in Central Asia, the law excluded the Koreans living there as well as the pro-North Korea ethnic Koreans in Japan. The first version of the Act only encompassed those who had left the country since the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948. However in 2001, the Korean Constitutional Court ruled the original legislation unconstitutional and the government was forced to extend the limit to 1922 when the Korean family registry system (hojuje) was established, meaning that today the great majority of the Korean diaspora is eligible to have the visa. The F-4 visa practically gives all the rights of a Korean citizen to its holder except the right to vote in elections, while at the same time it exempts male holders from otherwise mandatory

33. Ibid., 269.
35. Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*.
military service. Through the legislation, which is labelled hypernationalistic by Samuel Kim, the Korean nation state has instated a new model of Korean citizenship based on a global *jus sanguinis* (the right of blood), and re-demarcated its borders, thus turning all ethnic Koreans worldwide into potential Korean subjects. At the time of this writing, there are discussions underway in the South Korean legislature to introduce dual citizenship to overseas Koreans, which would also be granted to adoptees.

This ethnopolitical diaspora policy of welcoming back overseas Koreans has also resulted in several related developments such as the arrival of tens of thousands of Korean-Chinese, some as migrant workers, and others as brides, filling the shortage of women created by sex-selective abortion; economic contributions from wealthy Korean-Americans at the time of the 1997-98 financial crisis; improved relationships with Japan, mediated by ethnic Korean-Japanese; the employment of overseas Koreans by transnational Korean companies; and the enrollment of the Korean minority in Central Asia as intermediaries for Korean investment in the region. On the other hand, while the project of building a transnational Korean community may seem successful on the surface, there are also reports of widespread discrimination against Korean-Chinese in Korea reflecting the hierarchical character of the Korean diaspora in which its affluent members are much more valued than its poor ones. In addition, there have been reports of serious conflicts between Westernized Koreans and Korean nationals working together in Korean companies and embassies abroad, as well as strongly negative reactions among Koreans in Central Asia against dispatched domestic Koreans using their dominant economic position to impose their way of being Korean on their “overseas brethren.” In this way, Korea’s policy towards overseas Koreans also becomes a question of disciplining, policing, and homogenizing its diaspora according to the logics of social engineering and modernist development.

Today, the Overseas Koreans Foundation and its civic counterpart, the NGO Korean Sharing Movement (*Uri minjok sôro topki undong*), together with researchers, intellectuals, and activists, are engaged in trying to formulate how to achieve such a worldwide Korean community, conceptualized as a higher and broader form of national reunification. All agree that there is an urgent need for reassembling the nation, and maintaining and recovering unity, continuity and homogeneity before it is too late and domestic Koreans become too Westernized and individualistic, while overseas Koreans become too assimilated and integrated into their host cultures. The latter aspect especially applies to adopted Koreans, and efforts must be made for them to learn the Korean language and culture and reunite with their Korean families to be able to reincorporate them into the Korean nation, according to Soh Kyung-Suk of Korean Sharing Movement. It is this utopian vision of a global ethnic community of 75 million Koreans that the minjung ideologist Paik Nak-chung scrutinizes in such a poignant way. Paik points out that this so-called homogenous community, if it is to be achieved, has to be not only transnational, considering the

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fact that the majority of the overseas Koreans have changed their citizenship, but also multilingual, as Korean is no longer the mother tongue for so many exiled countrymen. Another sceptic is Kim Woong-ki, who doubts that the Korean government will ever succeed in achieving its goal given the aggressive implementation of its diaspora policy and the hierarchical and even rude attitude held by some South Koreans towards overseas Koreans. Serious mistrust exists among various members of the transnational Korean population, even if there may be potential on the civic side as demonstrated by the South Korean national team’s success in the 2002 World Cup, which united ethnic Koreans from all over the world including North Koreans who also cheered for the South’s team.

To return to the film narrative, when Brad returns home and discovers that Jenny and Myôngsu are a couple, he becomes deeply disappointed. He reveals the fact that he went to Korea to meet Jenny’s mother, who he says was a fine woman, but that “Koreans just do not understand adoption or adoptees.” Because of this, he could not ask her to meet Jenny and was only able to bring Jenny a photo of her mother. Brad expels Myông-su, who returns to his team, but Brad still has to cope with the fact that Jenny has become an adult and will soon leave him to start her own life. He continues to cook Korean food for her and shortly thereafter, Brad and Jenny discover that the Rose of Sharon is blossoming, thereby signifying that she has now matured and become an adult, and that Brad’s project of re-Koreanizing her has been accomplished to its fullest extent. Brad bids farewell by telling Jenny that she has made him so happy for the whole time they have lived together.

Myông-su and his friend Kyông-chôl participate in the Los Angeles marathon, running side by side with each other. Just before the critical 35-kilometer mark, Jenny suddenly turns up on her bicycle just as she did during the training. Myông-su supports Kyông-chôl until the end of the race and deliberately allows him to become the gold medal winner. Through this noble and selfless act on Myông-su’s part, his process of Americanization is completed, and American culture triumphs and becomes fetishized. (Another way of interpreting the end of the film is that Myông-su is, of course, simply strengthening and reproducing the Korean style of male bonding.) The film ends with Jenny picking up Myông-su after the race, and while driving she remembers how she first came to Brad and his laundry in Koreatown some 10 years previously, at the age of nine or ten. In a flashback, Brad sits alone outside his laundry in the evening after closing time, and Jenny, who is on the run from her adoptive parents, comes up to him and asks whether he is Mr. Oh, who helps adoptees to find their Korean parents. Brad scolds her for having run away from her adoptive home, and closes the door but then comes out again and to ask whether she has had dinner. He tells her that he will teach her to eat Korean food, and allows her into the house. Through this memory, Jenny becomes reconciled with her past and understands that she can now leave her adopted Koreanness behind her as she has finally become a “real Korean” and is now able to start her own independent life together with Americanized Myông-su.

In Love, except for in the initial scenes, Jenny’s different identifications and loyalties are no more problematic or threatening than that of most Koreans. On the contrary, by having learned to speak Korean and by eating Korean food, she has been turned into a “real Korean” and been reclaimed and incorporated into the larger space of the worldwide Korean diaspora according to the wishes and dreams of the Korean government and its diaspora policy. Jenny, who once was a shunned and rejected adoptee and who in the course of the film is re-Koreanized, has therefore gained a new value not just as a reminder of a shameful past but also a living guarantee of a common future for a global Korean community. Thus, Floya Anthias’ warning in the introduction, that the concept of diaspora often has a tendency to reinforce and reify ideas and dreams

of roots and origins rather than questioning and problematizing them, is definitely applicable to the emergence of a transnational Korean diaspora. Furthermore, the film Love also overlooks the fact that Jenny once was forcefully and involuntarily uprooted and dispatched overseas by the Korean state itself and that international adoption still continues, thereby covering up Koreans’ culpability. The film also refuses to acknowledge any kind of difference, whether among domestic, overseas or adopted Koreans, or in terms of gender, age, class, culture, language and the like. Moreover, the film ignores power asymmetries and hierarchies within the Korean diaspora, which position adoptees such as Jenny on the lower rungs, as they usually are despised and frowned upon as social pariahs lacking proper bloodlines by diasporized Koreans who feel a strong urge to distance themselves from a group which symbolizes national humiliation. In the end, the film turns the relationship between Jenny and Myông-su into an allegory for the reconciliation between Korea and its exiled children and a utopian vision of a transnational community embracing all ethnic Koreans around the world.

Despite their various differences, Sky’s music video Eternity and Lee Jang-soo’s feature film Love both have in common a message that wherever they live and whatever their living conditions are, adopted Koreans suffer from having been abandoned and exiled, and are more or less maladjusted, ostracized and alienated from their adoptive families, their host cultures, and Korean and East Asian expatriate and diasporic communities. Above all, adopted Koreans desperately yearn to be reunited with their Korean families and mothers and also to be reconnected with Korea, Korean culture and Korean people. They just wait passively to be helped and be taken care of by the resolute intervention of Koreans and Korean nationalism, as they are completely victimized, infantilized and lack agency. In the song and film, a clear-cut binary opposition is set up, as Whiteness and the West comes to stand for disease and decadence, while Koreaness and the East is made to stand for solidarity and safety, and, even more importantly, for unity and homogeneity. However, to be rescued and saved by, above all, domestic, diasporic or expatriate Koreans, the adoptees need first to be decontaminated, de-Westernized, disciplined and regulated according to Korean norms and ideals, and re-Koreanized before they are able to rejoin the Korean nation and enjoy the secure protection of Korean male power and be warmly and fully embraced by Mother Korea.

Finally, it cannot be denied that adopted Koreans also are heavily exploited in the two popular cultural works in order to project and articulate internal Korean insecurities, fears, worries, repressed feelings and social taboos, arousing forbidden desires for Whiteness and creating numerous possibilities for scopophilic pleasures. These representations are also produced, disseminated and consumed by Korean people beyond the control, without the consent and awareness and, most probably, even without the knowledge of the absolute majority of adopted Koreans, ignoring their actual situations and conditions as well as their complex loyalties, dependencies, their real desires and dreams, whatever they may be. Given the enormous power of representations, they homogenize the fate of all adopted Koreans into one stereotypical narrative, instead of acknowledging the group’s multiple and diverse experiences and subjectivities and the fact that there are numerous different ways of being an overseas Korean adoptee.

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Adoptees’ Return From Korea
Post-Travel Transition and Relational Dynamics

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the relational dynamics of adult Korean adoptees as they transition back from their initial trip to Korea since being adopted as infants or young children. More specifically, I am interested in how adoptees’ intersubjective experiences with other adoptees and their primary relationships in the U.S., shape their emotional processes during their transition. A total of 11 adult Korean adoptees participated in 60-minute phone interviews approximately 6 weeks following an 18-day adoption agency-affiliated tour coordinated specifically for adult adoptees. Using consensual qualitative research methods, five domains emerged: intersubjective experiences with adoptees; experiences with the tour; processing post-travel emotional and affective experiences; worldview modifications; and primary relational support. Study implications are provided for the further research on issues across the lifespan for Korean adoptees, emphasizing the contextual and relational factors in their development and mental health.

Introduction

In the U.S., Asian Americans have been absent in the discourse about race and racism, perpetuating the traditional black/white dichotomy that has dominated empirical research concerning mental health.1 Within the last decade, studies on Asian American mental health have emerged, addressing topics such as racial stress and coping,2 racial stereotypes and microaggressions,3 and acculturation.4 Results from these studies have been promising, lending to further empirical inquiry and clinical understanding unique to Asian American mental health. The populace considered Asian Americans, however represents a variety of cultural backgrounds that present different needs based on (but not limited to): generational level, and degree of acculturation, and adoption status.5

Severely underrepresented, adult Korean and other Asian adoptees have rarely been addressed in research devoted to Asian American mental health. Particularly, the developmental

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experiences of Korean adoptees have often been represented in the context of selective research,\(^6\) with limited attention to family and post-adoption factors.\(^7\) In addition, American society continues to associate the practice of adoption with benevolence on behalf of adoptive parents, particularly when children of color are involved. Having been placed or admitted into White American families, adoptees are expected to feel grateful for their good fortune,\(^8\) while adoptive parents are surveyed about their degree of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their adopted children.\(^9\) However, adoptees of color having been “raised by White people,” face stigma, based on the assumption that their development is not within a normative context.\(^10\)

As described by R.M. Lee,\(^{11}\) Korean adoptees are subject to the transracial adoption paradox; such that adoption into White American families, affords privileges that are often perceived as equating majority group membership. Despite this common assumption, transracial adoptees are faced with the realities and of racism, based on the greater society’s perception of their racial and ethnic group membership. Undoubtedly, these experiences transmit conflicting messages that are likely to cause feelings of dissonance, leaving adoptees to feel misunderstood and isolated.\(^12\) If feelings remain unacknowledged or invalidated, dissonance will become dysregulated emotion, and manifest into affective functioning.\(^13\) Behaviors demonstrated by minority group members are often perceived as abnormal or dysfunctional which are attributed to the salient factor(s) that differentiates them from normal majority group members.\(^14\) For Korean adoptees, their physical disparities are overt and demonstrate the transparency of transracial adoption.\(^15\) If perceived as dysfunctional or maladjusted, it is likely the behaviors of Korean adoptees will be judged on the basis of their adoption from Korea, as opposed to understanding behaviors within the context of their family, culture, and race.

Medical and Self-Models

Similar to other marginalized groups, Korean adoptees, tend to undergo many experiences in isolation, often feeling misunderstood by dominant group family members and friends. Historically, dominant group members have failed to appropriately conceptualize psychological functioning outside of their own experiences, which speaks to the on-going underutilization of mental health services by ethnic minority groups.\(^16\) Such ethnocentric approaches to men-

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12. Samuels, “‘Being Raised by White People.”
tal health have perpetuated the narrow view of normalized experiences and normalized mental health and reflect traditional medical treatment models. Based on these ethnocentric and medical models combined, behaviors of socially marginalized groups are often interpreted within a self-framework, which suggests the collapse in emotional regulation is based on the inherent dysfunction of the individual. Historically, adoption research has followed this framework, by using language that continues to focus on treating the disease, disorder, and/or dysfunction, paying minimal attention to the other post-adoption relational and contextual factors. As evidenced in early transnational adoption research, dysfunction outcomes were of primary interest given the contentious debate about whether transnational adoption was detrimental or beneficial to children of color. Most studies were interested in childhood outcomes, comparing adopted and non-adopted children, often using combined samples of Korean and other adoptees of color.

Recent research that included Korean and Asian adoptees, has continued to focus on child and adolescent samples; however, has also introduced socio-cultural frameworks, examining the role of adoptive families in promoting the racial and cultural experiences of transracial and transnational adoptees. Results from these studies suggest that adoptive parents must have a good understanding of their own beliefs and attitudes toward race and racism, in order to effectively promote the cultural and racial socialization their children of color.

17. Sue, "In Search of Cultural Competence in Psychotherapy and Counseling."
Although limited, the research on adult transnational adoptees tend to reflect earlier adoption studies on childhood outcomes, primarily comparing the behavioral outcomes of African American and White adult adoptees. Although limited, the research on adult transnational adoptees tend to reflect earlier adoption studies on childhood outcomes, primarily comparing the behavioral outcomes of African American and White adult adoptees. Studies focusing on adult Korean adoptees have been retrospective in nature, basing study results on government and hospital data or on longitudinal reports of adoptive parents, even after adoptees reached adulthood.

**Returning to Korea**

As the first wave of transnational adoptions, Korean adoptees represent the largest population of adult international adoptees. Despite this prevalence, their experiences across the lifespan have rarely been addressed in mental health literature, given the focus on child, adolescent, and family concerns. As adults, Korean adoptees can potentially experience a range of encounters specific to transnational adoption, some of which involve returning to Korea. For example, adoptees are able to visit, make multiple trips, and temporarily relocate to Korea, having several opportunities for academic study, teaching, and cultural exposure. In one of the only studies that specifically addresses organized birth country travel among Korean adoptees, Bergquist used a mixed methods approach of examining adoptees pre and post travel ethnic-identities. Of the 18 participants, however, only three were adults and the remaining 15 participants were under the age of 18 and traveled with their adoptive families. Based on the qualitative interviews, younger participants reported that the presence of their adoptive families provided a sense of comfort, but they also described that developing peer relationships with other adoptees was central to their travel experience, reflecting the developmental stage of most participants. Overall, at four to six months post - travel, participants reported no differences in behaviors, denying increased association with Korean cultural activities or Korean identity.

In contrast, adult Korean adoptees have reported mixed experiences regarding their initial return to Korea. Of the adults surveyed at the Gathering in 1999, Korean adoptees described their experiences in the context of interacting with non-adopted Koreans, some describing feelings of kindness and warmth, while others reporting feelings of judgment. Certainly, depending on the structure in which adoptees return to Korea will certainly determine various aspects of their experiences. Adolescent adoptees that travel with their adoptive families may be less affected by the perceptions of others particularly if their families make efforts to insulate them from negative experiences. In general, returning to Korea is suggested to serve as a positive function for adoptees, facilitating their interest and identity as a Korean, Korean American,

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32. Ibid.


34. Bergquist, “Exploring the Impact of Birth Country Travel on Korean Adoptees.”
Adoption agencies have capitalized upon this assumption, offering organized tours specifically developed for adult Korean adoptees to experience their initial return to Korea. Of the adults surveyed at the 1999 Gathering, about 45% reported their first return to Korea was part of an organized agency-sponsored trip. Ten years later, it appears that Korean adoptees have even more opportunities to participate in organized travel to Korea. Many tours often require that tour members pay a fee that often includes airfare, residence, meals, and sightseeing activities. For their first return back to Korea, organized tours are often appealing, given that all arrangements are coordinated by the tour agency, having participants follow a day-by-day itinerary with other tour members. Additionally some tours affiliated with adoption agencies also involve visits to orphanages, home-stays with Korean families, and the potential to search for birth family members.

While on the tour, some adoptees may be presented with unanticipated relational dynamics given that most adoptee-specific tours have been prearranged such that the experiences of tour members’ are often collective in nature. A communal environment combined with the salience surrounding their commonalities as Korean adoptees, may enable a mutual engagement, activating a heightened sense of emotional stimulation. Although returning to Korea espouses different meanings for each adoptee; Korea is inherently connected to their relinquishment as part of Korea’s cultural, social, and political history. For adoptees, the salience of this connection can range anywhere from significant to suppression or denial, which may be addressed or challenged as they collectively experience Korea, which could ignite a range of intersubjective reactions.

Intersubjectivity and Recognition

In emotionally charged settings, encounters with other Korean adoptees may serve as the precipice for communication and attachment in a context that cannot be recreated in their adoptive country. Adoptees may significantly impact one another’s experiences based on the meaning of their communication and whether they reciprocate each other’s emotional processes. According to relational theories, this process is considered recognition; an intersubjective experience involving strong emotional processing that is confirmed by an other. As opposed to the process of simply identifying with the experiences of an other, recognition demonstrates a mutual understanding and acting influence between two individuals. Although relational theory deemphasizes the individual’s inner psychic self, a sense of personal history, feelings, and internal representations of self and others remain. The more individuals experience recognition throughout their development in stable everyday relationships, a nurturance and strengthening of the individual sense of self occurs. For adoptees if this attunement is lacking or hindered by others’ unrecognition, experiences can be overwhelming and lead to unmet emotional needs. Adoptees’ return to Korea can be a powerful tool to facilitate recognition and make meaningful connections with others.

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sponsiveness, they are likely to internalize their inability to be understood, which often leads to overcompensation and fragmentation of their individual self. If the individual has previously internalized feelings of marginalization, their fragmentation often transpires into manifesting symptoms, that others may judge as dysfunction.

Based on relational frameworks, it is difficult, if not impossible to conceptualize an adoptee's functioning without the context of others, challenging the stigma and suggested inherent dysfunction of adoptees. Although adoptees have already experienced varying degrees of recognition in other relationships, their intersubjective experiences that surround the combination of Korea and their adoption history may uncover a novelized dimension of recognition. Some adoptees are initially discovering that others are able to validate their often, misunderstood experiences, that have been paramount in shaping their individual sense of self. The collective nature of adoptee-specific tours often heightens the intensity that adoptees experience together, which may over-saturate their ability to emotionally process their experiences. As they transition back to their adoptive countries, adoptees forego this companionship partially responsible for their new intersubjective experiences and must readjust back to their adoptive culture.

The Reacculturation Process

Although international travel tends to be an exhausting process, Korean adoptees may be subjected to additional stress as they reflect upon their experiences in Korea. If incongruent with aspects of their readjustment, the presence of their new emotional experiences may affect their transition. For example, the degree to which adoptees become accustomed to Korean culture (often depending on the length of their stay), may determine their reacculturation process back in their adoptive culture. As they transition back, adoptees that have experienced a novel degree of recognition with others, may make efforts to maintain these feelings, by emphasizing the value of their new relationships and connection with Korea. In order to do so, adoptees may attempt to recreate certain characteristics associated with Korean culture or maintain contact with other tour members. Additionally, adoptees that find value in their experiences with other tour members, may encounter frustration with family members or friends, based on the dramatic shift in relational dynamics. Depending on their relationships and the ease of their general transition, may determine whether adoptees begin to idealize their experiences in Korea and devalue aspects of their adoptive culture. According to acculturation theory, individuals that often sustain their cultural values and beliefs, tend to make concerted efforts to separate themselves from majority group members, often devaluing the assimilation process into the majority culture. In contrast, some adoptees may easily assimilate back into American culture, particularly if they find less value in their return to Korea, in relation to their American culture. Others may be unable to maintain their connection, having limited access to Korean culture or other adoptees, due to their demographical region. Despite the nature and degree to which they readjust, adoptees must ultimately re-negotiate a certain sense of comfort within their adoptive culture.

Although acculturation concepts may be helpful in conceptualizing the transition process for Korean adoptees, the theoretical framework is not fully applicable, considering adoptees

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46. Galinsky, Stone, and Cooper, “The Reinstatement of Dissonance and Psychological Discomfort Following Failed Affirmations.”
have undoubtedly achieved a strong degree of acculturation to their adoptive American culture prior to returning to Korea. However, given the condensed nature of the tour, combined with the potential to engage in emotionally intersubjective experiences, adoptees' transition or re-acculturation back to American culture may be more challenging than originally imagined. In order to gain a better understanding of this process of transition, it is necessary to dialogue with Korean adoptees as they transition back and reflect on their initial return to Korea. Particularly, it is important to recognize their intersubjective experiences in Korea, and how these experiences may impact their worldviews and their primary relationships as they transition return back into their adoptive country.

Methods

Study Participants

A convenience sample was recruited from participant involvement in an American-based adoption-agency related tour to Korea that ended 2 weeks prior to initial recruitment efforts. Potential participants were identified by the Principal Investigator’s (PI) knowledge and communication with the coordinating adoption agency. Request for participation was sent through electronic mail to the 25 members of the tour. The only selection criteria was that participants had not previously returned Korea, since being adopted. Twelve individuals responded to the e-mail; however, one had traveled to Korea approximately 2 years prior and was not interviewed. The PI contacted the remaining 11 members, via e-mail, providing additional information about the purpose of the study and informed consent. Participants ages ranged from 18 to 39 (M=24.90, SD = 6.28) and the gender makeup was semi-balanced (six female, five male). All reported having been adopted by White, American families before the age of 4, and were raised in a predominantly Euro-American communities. One participant reported being married with children and the remaining participants had never married. Seven participants were currently pursuing undergraduate degrees, two graduate degrees, and two participants worked professionally full-time. Of the 11, four reported growing up in the Midwest, three on the East Coast, two in the South, and two on the West coast. Four reported having been adopted and raised with other Korean children and two participants reported being raised with children adopted from Asian countries other than Korea. All participants had registered for the tour eight months in advance paying a fee that included travel arrangements, housing and hotel accommodations, most meals, and tourist activities in Korea.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In this study, the PI developed the initial interview questions based on the previous literature in psychology, social work, and counseling-related fields that focused on Korean adoptees. Additionally, questions were informed by relational theory and the PI’s knowledge as a member of the Korean adoptee community. The semi-structured interview consisted of four sets of items, each containing several specific, but open-ended questions, covering the following topics: (a) intersubjective experiences in Korea, (b) general experiences in Korea, (c) post-travel transition, (d) primary relationships upon return.

Two faculty members of a counseling psychology program with knowledge in acculturation, immigration, and race relations, reviewed the initial interview questions and provided minor suggestions to clarify wording, which the PI followed. The PI conducted all 11 interviews via phone, and recruited two graduate students in counseling psychology to assist with the primary data analysis.
Data Collection Procedures

The 11 participants responded to the recruitment e-mail, providing their contact number and list of recommended days and times for the interview to take place. All interviews were scheduled approximately four weeks following the end of the tour. After receiving confirmation from participants, the PI contacted each participant by phone on the date agreed upon, described the purpose of the study, and explained the voluntary, confidential nature of participation. The PI followed the sequencing of questions in the semi-structured interview, and would request that participants elaborate or say more if their responses were significantly brief or unclear. The PI manually recorded participant responses by hand and transferred the written responses into 11 electronic transcripts for data analysis. Any identifying information was removed and each transcript was marked with a number 1–11, representing the interview of each participant.

Procedures for Data Analysis

The data analysis team consisted of the PI, two graduate students in counseling psychology, well-versed in Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methods, and the supervising faculty member that also served as the external auditor. The PI and graduate students each downloaded TAMS Analyzer, a qualitative data software program, to individually and simultaneously code transcripts. TAMS Analyzer allows researchers to color code documents according to words, sentences, and paragraphs, permitting as many multiple codes needed. Based on the methods of CQR, transcripts were analyzed using three steps: coding of domains, core ideas, and cross-analysis. Domains are considered the clustering of data according to the main topics, whereas core ideas are intended to capture the essence of each response with fewer words, but with greater clarity. Cross-analysis involves constructing categories that reflect common themes across participants. The research team analyzed the transcripts individually and collectively, discussing their findings following each step to reach consensus. The external reviewer independently reviewed the codes to ensure the primary analysis was a sufficient reflection of the data and provided suggestions, which were incorporated into the final analysis.

Coding of Domains, Core Ideas, & Cross-Analysis

The PI constructed a start-list and color-coded the four themes and definitions in TAMs Analyzer. As the analysis proceeded, domains were further specified through color-codes to organize the quantity of data and reflect the emerging themes. The PI and the two graduate students separated the transcripts for individual coding and then exchanged their respective digitally coded transcripts on two occasions, allowing each member to code the core ideas of all 11 transcripts. Any discrepancies were identified and discussed until the analysis team reached consensus regarding the content and wording. Each analysis team member conducted a cross-analysis, generating color-coded categories and definitions, based on the common themes across cases. One member generated an exhaustive list of 42 categories, tracking the frequency of each one, while the remaining two members identified salient themes. The analysis team discussed their findings and originally finalized six domains based on the identified core ideas. The external auditor

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54. Ibid.
reviewed the data, and suggested that two of the domains (reasons for travel and experiences with organized tour) be eliminated, given the limited relevance to the study topic at hand. After the analysis team and external auditor discussed the reasons for retaining or eliminating the two domains, it was determined and agreed upon that reasons for travel be eliminated for the final results section, but presented in the discussion section of the final manuscript, if applicable. The second domain, experiences with organized tour, was retained, given the significant nature of the responses, which the analysis team felt contributed to participants’ transitional experiences. After dropping one of the categories, a total of five domains represented participant responses.

Results

The remaining five domains emerged from the data analysis: (1) intersubjective experiences with adoptees; (2) experiences with the organized tour; (3) processing post-travel emotional and affective experiences; (4) worldview adjustment; and (5) primary relational supports. Domains with the respective categories are described below, along with participant quotes that provide an accurate representation(s) of the core ideas.

**Intersubjective Experiences with Adoptees**

When asked about their emotional processes with other tour members in Korea, participants described experiences ranging from positive intersubjectivity to negative encounters. Participant responses are represented by the following four categories: collective catharsis, validation, non-verbal support, and contention. Several participants described having emotional processes similar to recognition as they shared each other's life experiences. Some adoptees described non-verbal, intersubjectivity, reporting that they became tearful as they collectively experienced intense moments, such as when they first learned of their individual circumstances surrounding their adoption. Following the review of her adoption records with an agency social worker, one participant stated:

> It was weird for me to cry…cause I think I made some of the others cry…Usually, I’d be really embarrassed, cause, I haven’t cried in a long time…they [another adoptees] didn’t make me feel stupid, because some of them actually started crying. I could tell they wanted to cry…but they didn’t want to be the first to admit they were unsettled with what they found out.

In addition to positive experiences, some participants reported feelings of contention toward other tour members, particularly as their views about adoption and race began to emerge. According to one participant:

> We all grew up in different areas of the States and had a variety of upbringings. Some tour members were really young, so I can see how they were naïve to some things, but it was hard to be around other adoptees that had no consciousness at all about being a person of color adopted by White parents…let’s just say that I’m happy to have made a few good friends, but I was definitely ready to part ways with some by the end of the tour.

**Experiences with Organized Tours**

As participants described their experiences with other tour members, several reported having similar reactions to tour activities and sentiments made on behalf of the adoption agency that
they felt overtly promoted the agency’s values. Some of these participants described how these messages impacted their transition back into their adoptive country. Overall, five main categories emerged: endorsement of adoption agency values; promotion of Korean nationality; limited access to emotional support; general overall satisfaction; and rigidity in tour structure. Some participants reported feeling pressure to engage in certain religious activities and described their discomfort with statements made by adoption agency staff regarding the agency’s values. One participant stated:

It was uncomfortable when we had to pray at every dinner. It felt like they were agenda pushing…based on some of the words they used and some of the speakers that presented. I remember a couple times they told us we had been saved and that we should be proud to be Korean…is that supposed to make us feel good?

Some participants reported they would have liked to speak with a professional counselor to process some of their emotional experiences during the tour. According to some participants, they reported feeling uncomfortable, however, with sharing their feelings with agency staff, based on their value systems evidenced throughout the tour. According to one participant:

I wish there had been opportunities to talk to someone more objective about some of the more heavy tour activities, like after spending time with the kids in the orphanages…I had some personal things that I would have liked to address afterwards, but I thought they wouldn’t be completely straight with me.

And finally, although several participants described the tour’s itinerary as tiresome and rigid, most reported general feelings of satisfaction with the tour, based on the number and range of activities provided, as well as their positive experiences with other tour members.

At the time, I thought we didn’t have enough downtime to just chill out, but in looking back, I’m glad that our schedules were packed each day, so we did as much as we could…I’m not sure if or when I’ll go back, but…yeah…for going back the first time, the tour was fine.

*Processing Post-Travel Emotional & Affective Experiences*

In terms of their self-reported emotional experiences as they transitioned back to American culture, participant responses reflected four main categories: feelings of general isolation; contact maintenance with tour members; feelings of longing; and psycho/somatic complaints. Several participants attributed their general feelings of isolation to the abrupt detachment from other tour members and Korea. A few participants reported that by maintaining phone contact with other tour members helped alleviate some feelings of separateness, allowing them to maintain some connection to their experiences in Korea: One adoptee reported:

It was difficult to leave, because I think I’ve always fantasized about Korea and wanted to like it…so I already miss it. Especially having spent everyday with other adoptees, for over two weeks, you miss it more…it’s hard to think that everyone else is scattered all over the country…but talking with some of the tour members that I grew close to, helps me see what they’re up to and that some have been going through the same thing, which made me feel better…cause then it seemed pretty normal.

Several participants described a feeling of longing for different aspects of Korean culture, such as eating Korean food, seeing Korean people, and a general feeling of presence in Korea As stated by one participant:
It’s weird how I started to become so used to the food. I’ve been thinking about it lately, like the smell of Korean food...something about it has been hard for me to describe, so I went out for Korean food the other day...and it was weird how familiar the smell was and that I really missed Korea when I saw Korean faces.

Some adoptees reported experiencing mild to no feelings of isolation but described somatic symptoms upon return, despite feeling they had fully recuperated. Other participants described similar symptoms as being more psychosomatic combined with feelings of isolation and sadness. One participant reported:

I’ve been fine, except I’ve had these stomachaches and tension-type headaches that happen at the same time...it reminds me of what I use to go through as a little kid. I’ve traveled internationally before, and I know this isn't jetlag. I’m wondering whether it’s something to do with going back...who knows.

Modified Worldviews

Participants provided a variety of responses when asked what aspects of their lives had changed, since their return. Six categories emerged: heightened racial awareness; confidence about Korea; incongruence with family; desire to engage in and learn more Korean culture; sociopolitical awareness; and a better grasp of their adoption circumstances. About half of the participants described making concerted efforts to preserve feelings associated with Korean culture, engaging in activities such as making Korean food, signing up for Korean language classes, and watching Korean movies. A few participants also described a shift in their personal and familial relationships, expressing feelings of incongruence and distance from majority group family members and friends. According to one participant:

I feel like I stick out even more, but not in a bad way...I’ve guess I’ve been viewing myself as all things Korean since I’ve been back....It’s started to bridge a gap between me and some of my family members because they’re not Korean, you know, they wouldn’t understand...

A few participants also reported having a better understanding of the political nature of adoption in Korea, which has pushed them to delineate themselves from non-adopted Koreans:

I know more about Korean people and how they view adoptees and adoption in general...it definitely helps me understand how I ended up being adopted.... Even if they tell us to be proud of our Korean culture, I know I’ll never be Korean enough...it’s just how things work there...I definitely see myself as being separate.

Primary Relational Support

Participants were asked to describe their primary relationships with majority group family members and friends, in relation to their trip and return from Korea. Responses are represented by the following four categories: verbal encouragement; well-intentioned, yet misguided support; minimization of their experiences; and poor to negative reactions. Most participants reported receiving some degree of verbal encouragement by majority group family members and friends; however, some described their efforts as well intentioned, yet somewhat misguided. One participant stated:
They can say they are really happy for me that I got so much out of the trip, but I can tell that it’s hard for them to understand…if I talk to them about it, they’ll listen to me…and I can tell that they really do care, but still…they don’t get it…and they’ll never be able to fully get it…

In addition, a few participants reported they felt that White family members and friends minimized their feelings about returning to Korea, particularly those that expressed feelings of detachment from other tour members. According to one participant:

I have a good relationship with my sister, but I get mad at her when we talk because she’ll compare my experiences with Korea to something that’s happened to her…like with her friends or something. I’m like how can you even compare the two?

A couple of participants reported that at least one friend/family member refused to acknowledge their connection to Korea or expressed negative feelings toward their efforts to maintain a connection with Korean culture and other tour members.

I’ve wanted to show my pictures of Korea to my parents, but my mother can’t handle it….She put it off for a while, but then told me later that she wasn’t interested…when I confronted her about it, she got really defensive and said something about not having any consideration for her feelings…yeah…I totally didn’t expect that.

Discussion

Adult Korean adoptees may face a myriad of experiences related to the complexities of race, cultural diaspora, and their adoptive status. Returning to the country of one’s birth, illustrates one of many potential events, exclusive to Korean and other transnational adoptees. The results of this study provide some insight into the relational dynamics and post-travel experiences among a small group of adoptees that participated in an organized tour specifically for Korean adoptees. Overall, several participants described their time with other adoptees as one of the most fulfilling aspects of the tour, but also described their transition back as emotionally straining as they attempted to maintain their connection with other tour members and Korean culture. Although some participants described their desire to recreate or build upon their cultural experiences, they also described such efforts as challenging without the sustenance of on-going exposure to other adoptees and access to Korean culture. This re-isolation may create an entirely new sense of loss that cannot truly be reclaimed through alternative relationships or socialization experiences in their adoptive country.

Additionally, it is also important to acknowledge the intragroup differences in participant experiences. Although most participants reported having affirmative experiences with others on the tour, some stated they did not foresee any continual involvement or future connection with the Korean adoptee community. One stated he did not make the emotional connection to the degree of others, feeling as though he had little in common with most tour members. He stated:

Yeah, we’re all adopted from Korea, but I it would be a lot of work for me to stay in touch with people that I’m not sure I could picture in my day-to-day life anyway.

Similarly, another adoptee reported that she too, enjoyed the tour but by the end of the trip, she was looking forward to returning home, and did not anticipate future contact with tour members or further connection with adoptee. She stated:
At first, it was really energizing to be around people who I thought were like me, but then by the end of two weeks, you see how different everyone is and that just because you’re all adopted doesn’t mean that you are going to like everyone. I’ve been forced to like certain people and different things all my life, I think it would really hypocritical, if adoptees made feel guilty about not wanting to hang out with them.

Although not identified as an original theme for the interview, it was evident that most of the participants interviewed, felt the agency’s values were integrated into the tour’s general activities and were emphasized in several statements made on behalf of the adoption agency. According to one participant, witnessing the varying reactions from tour members allowed her to delineate individuals that she perceived as sharing similar beliefs to hers. She described this process as helpful, enabling her to facilitate authentic friendships and enjoy the remaining time on the tour by spending time with like-minded people. Another adoptee described the agency’s efforts to promote their views as self-congratulatory and problematic, which she felt polarized tour members into the stereotypical dichotomy of angry versus happy adoptees. She reported becoming irritated with tour members that openly accommodated the agency’s statements and values to the degree that she avoided further interaction with them. From this experience, however, both participants reported that the tour’s promotion efforts actually inspired them to take a critical look at the history of adoption in Korea, becoming more familiar with the literature and commentaries published by other adult Korean adoptees. According to both participants, their socio-political perspectives were becoming more salient, which has helped them address and start working through some unresolved feelings regarding their personal adoption histories.

Study Limitations

The results of this study should be interpreted in the context of certain methodological limitations. In general, findings are limited based on inevitable participant response bias. The sample was limited to 11, young participants from the U.S. Age may have reflected a particular degree of life experiences or coping abilities that may have influenced the degree of intersubjectivity in Korea as well as their experiences with transition. Additionally, because of the voluntary nature of the study, participants may have had more encouraging experiences in Korea, than those that did not volunteer, since most described general satisfaction with the overall tour. The self-reports of a convenience sample cannot represent the population of Korean adoptees, especially considering the varying experiences of Korean adoptees throughout the lifespan, as evidenced by the intragroup differences within this small sample of adoptees. And finally, given the interviewer’s personal involvement with the Korean adoptee community, participant responses may have been influenced by the interviewer. Participants may have refrained from sharing information; however, they could have also felt more comfortable with discussing their experiences with a member of the community.

Clinical Implications

Overall, the implications drawn from this study demonstrate one of many experiences unique to Korean adoptees that are likely to become more common as Korean and other transnational adoptees reach adulthood. Although these tours offer experienced tour guides, it is questionable, whether any tour staff, are licensed professionals trained to help manage the complexities of attachment, loss, and recognition. Additionally, even if tour guides are considered licensed clinical professionals, it is questionable whether they are trained to help adoptees process their feelings surrounding topics that conflict with the values of the adoption agency. Without this
objective - degree of support, the dynamics of the tour are likely to dichotomize or fragment the
tour experiences for adoptees.

Overall, given the limited degree of mental health research concerning adult Korean adoptees,
clinical professionals are restricted in terms of their awareness concerning the immediate and
residual effects concerning birth country travel and other adult-specific experiences, leaving
them unprepared for upcoming populations of transnational adoptees. Additionally, because of
the feelings of isolation experienced by many social marginalized individuals, process groups
intended to help adult adoptees address their experiences with transition may be helpful with
providing additional support.

Implications for Future Research

The implications from this study will hopefully lead to further investigation into the experiences
specific to adult Korean adoptees, particularly focusing on their processes versus outcomes only.
It is during the process that which individuals need support. Adult Korean adoptees have
various opportunities unique to their adoption and Korea that introduce new experiences and
processes that mental health research has yet to address. Many adoptees have engaged in birth
searches and some have found family members, making multiple trips back to Korea. Those that
meet and spend time with birth family members are likely to experience different challenges
upon their transition back given the implications on their relationships with family members.
Adoptees may develop a closer, more complex, or even become distanced from Korea based on
their experiences. Additionally, other adoptees may choose to temporarily relocate and some
continuously return for their career and other professional opportunities. Each return may in-
roduce new experiences that can impact post-travel transition including their emotional pro-
cessing, worldviews, and primary relationships. These types of concerns are likely to become
increasingly relevant, considering the large number of Korean and other transnational adoptees
reaching young adulthood.

In summary, adult Korean adoptees remain an underrepresented subgroup within ethnic
minority and Asian American mental health. The sociopolitical history of adoption and race
relations has perpetuated the assumption that dysfunction is inherent to adoption as opposed
to conceptualizing their developmental experiences based on contextual and relational dynam-
ics. Adult specific experiences of Korean adoptees must be addressed within the framework of
alternative mental health approaches that steer away from ethnocentric interpretations of func-
tioning. Scholars in mental health and clinical professionals must do their part to demystify the
pathologized nature of adoption, while normalizing the concept of behavior and mental health
in the context of cultural, relational, and sociopolitical factors.

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Ethnic Ambiguity and Adoptee Identities in Children’s Picture Books

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I was adopted, so I look just like…me!

In the picture book *My Family is Forever,* an unnamed adopted Asian protagonist tells the reader that because she was adopted, she looks like herself. Implicit in this statement is that she does not look like the people in her family or her community. An opposite case can be found in one of the most well-known and earliest children’s books featuring Asian characters, *The Five Chinese Brothers* (1938), written by Claire Hutchet Bishop and illustrated by Kurt Weise. This picture book tells the story of five identical Chinese brothers who stand in for one another in order to outwit their captors and avoid death. However, the illustrations depict not just the five brothers as identical (which is necessary for the story to work), but each Chinese character looks almost entirely and stereotypically identical to the others. Unlike the Asian adoptee who looks like no one, the five Chinese brothers look like everyone. Yet the Asian adoptee, because her ethnicity and national origin remain unspecified and therefore ambiguous throughout the picture book, suggests the interchangeability of Asians for other Asians. Thus, ironically, both situations depict the stereotype that all Asians look alike and may stand in for one another.

Asian Americans have repeatedly criticized the ways in which American mainstream media lumps them together into the same category, as if one Asian can represent all Asian cultures. Ono and Pham investigate the historical and contemporary yellow peril discourses that “[refer] abstractly to the threat of Asian takeover and therefore does not allow for distinctions among groups,” and which are used to “make all Asians and Asian Americans the ‘other’.” Throughout various media such as films, books, and cartoons, representations of ambiguous Asians reinforce the notion that the Asian body can be neatly categorized and understood as a closed entity. By doing so, the creators of these images maintain and assert their authority over not only the images, but also the bodies represented by those images. Despite media attempts to lump Asian groups together, each Asian country, and its attendant people, cultures, traditions, and so on, is obviously distinct; foregrounding those distinctions is one way of asserting agency and discursively countering those colonizing attempts.

One of the major distinctions among Asian countries is the ways that transnational adoption has flowed from, impacted and shaped the different countries, adoptees’ experiences in both their birth and adoptive countries, and the representations of those experiences in children’s literature. Some picture books suggest that adoptions from Korea and China are sim-

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1. This quote is from Nancy Carlson’s picture book *My Family is Forever* (New York: Viking, 2004), which will be discussed in more detail later.
2. Ibid.
5. Ono and Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media*, 44.
ilar enough that an ambiguously Asian character can represent Chinese, Korean and possibly Japanese adoptees (and thus attract a larger purchasing market). By analyzing these picture books, this paper reveals the challenges, limitations, and opportunities of transracial adoption stories.

Writing an Adoption Story

One of the main contradictions of children’s literature is that outsiders are usually authors of the stories; that is, children do not write stories for other children. Adults write stories for children. Children’s literature scholars Perry Nodelman⁸ and Jacqueline Rose⁹ question how adults try to represent and speak for children through children’s literature. They argue that although adults were once children, they are still removed from childhood experiences and rather than reflect actual contemporary childhoods, present more nostalgic and idealized childhoods in children’s stories. Authors of children’s stories depicting transracial adoptees tend to be outsiders of that experience as well. They are adults, not adopted, and usually white, whereas the protagonist of the story is usually a young person of color who has been transracially adopted by white parents.

This issue of being spoken for is especially complicated for Korean and Chinese adoptees—both as children and even after they have grown into adulthood—because they are spoken for in particular situations and in multiple ways throughout their lives. Adoptive parents, social workers, psychologists and others working with adoption typically imagine adoptees (of all ages) as childlike and unable to make their own decisions, assert their own agency, or tell their own stories. This perpetual infantilization is best captured by Korean adoptee Susan Soon-Keum Cox: “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.”¹⁰ However, in many cases adults make major decisions and speak for adopted persons: adults transform a child from being a daughter or son to an orphan (relinquishment/abandonment); from being an orphan to a son or daughter of a different set of parents (adoption); from a citizen of one country to that of another (nationalization/naturalization); transport the child from one country to another (escorting); narrate the path and nature of the transition (storytelling); and share and consume those narratives (publishing and purchasing). That non-adopted adults typically control every step of this process should change as more adopted persons come of age into adulthood and begin writing their stories, but this shift has not yet materialized in children’s literature.¹¹

The adoption triad includes birth parents, adoptive parents, and an adopted person, yet adopted childhood stories are most often narrated by adoptive parents, effectively silencing the voices of the other two. Adoption scholar and former social worker Sara Dorow observes the

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7. My research is representative rather than exhaustive, so this is not a comprehensive survey of all existing children’s and young adult books regarding Korean and Chinese adoption. Since I am not able to discuss each book in great detail, I discuss those that portray representative issues relevant to my argument about transracially/transnationally adoptive Korean and Chinese experiences. For a more comprehensive reading of Korean transracial adoption in children’s and young adult literature, see Sarah Park, *Representations of Transracial Korean Adoption in Children’s Literature*, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009


11. Koreans adopted as infants and children in the 1950s through 1980s are now adults and producing their own narratives about their experiences, but almost none of these texts are addressed explicitly to children or young adults.
impossibility of “narrating adoption to the satisfaction of all whom it affects” and adoptive mother Cheri Register notes that she learned that “children’s experiences of being adopted internationally is their exclusive property, theirs to tell or not, theirs to interpret.” Some adoptees criticize that “Over the past fifty years, white adoptive parents, academics, psychiatrists, and social workers...have been the ones to tell the public—including adoptees—what it’s like and how we turn out.” Dr. John Raible, a biracial black and white scholar who was adopted by white parents, is among those who are critical of the way transracial adoption has been studied, especially because the scholarship has been dominated by non-adoptees. Contending that research will remain incomplete and inadequate until the voices of mature adoptees and family members are included, he points out that the generations of transracial adoptees from the 1960s onward have come of age, and their emergent scholarship disrupts the infantilization of adoptees as perpetual children in research. Similarly, I contend that the subgenres of Korean American and Chinese American children’s literature will remain incomplete and inadequate until the voices of Korean and Chinese adoptees are included. Until those voices emerge, the current authors need to write from an awareness of adult adoptee voices. However, the analyses stated below reflect a lack of such consciousness on the part of existing authors, particularly in regards to race and ethnic ambiguity.

Adoption from Korea and China

An understanding of the history and sociopolitical contexts regarding adoption from China and Korea is essential to analyzing the stories depicting experiences of adoption from those countries. While transnational and transracial adoptees from different countries of origin (and inversely, sent to different destination countries) may have some similar experiences, each national origin group and its attendant issues are unique. For example, Korea has the oldest systematized transnational adoption process, beginning in the 1950s, whereas adoption from China began on a really large scale in the 1990s.

Adoption from Korea is largely a post-Korean War phenomenon. Due to the war, approximately 100,000 Korean children were “lost, abandoned, neglected, and orphaned,” and many of them were biracial children birthed by a Korean mother and non-Korean (mostly white American) military father. In many cases, the father abandoned the woman and baby, and the woman in turn relinquished the child out of fear or coercion because she thought a mixed child could

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not survive in a country “obsessed with... pure bloodlines and clan genealogies.”

Indeed, these biracial children were social outcasts in a Korean society that stressed (and continues to stress) family kinship and pure bloodlines.

Organizations such as Save the Children’s Fund, World Vision, Compassion, and Church World Services sent supplies to Korea and asked Americans to support these biracial children. It was through this type of outreach that wealthy Oregonian Harry Holt and his wife Bertha came to know the plight of orphaned biracial children in Korea. After lobbying for special visas and other permissions, in 1955 Harry Holt brought eight children from Korea to his home in Oregon; he also escorted four additional children for other families. The Holts’ struggles to legally adopt those eight children were “highly publicized,” invoking sympathy for Korean orphans in American people across the nation, and as a result “the Holts received a flood of correspondence from prospective parents.” The Holts started Holt International, which is now the largest international adoption agency in the world.

Holt conveniently removed these biracial fatherless and stateless children from Korean society, and created a very systematic and efficient adoption industry. In the 1960s and 1970s, in a massive thrust to modernize Korea and bring her into the world economy, President Park established a military dictatorship and nurtured relations with outside countries (particularly the United States and Japan), encouraging them to invest foreign money into Korea’s economy and build up technology and heavy industries. As a result, there was massive population movement as more and more people flocked to the cities in search of work, and by the 1980s a substantial middle class had emerged. Previously rigid gender roles began to shift as more women entered the workforce; divorce rates rose and the births of out-of-wedlock babies rose as well, especially among young female factory workers and unmarried college-age women. Single mothers who felt unable to care for their children in a still highly structured, patriarchal society often turned to or were forced to give up their children. Even in 2008, Korea ranked fairly low in the United Nations Gender Empowerment Measure and still the majority of babies given up for adoption today are full Korean children relinquished by single mothers.

In the US, the 1960s and 1970s were marked by the declining availability of healthy white babies as more single women chose to keep their children, and as public repudiations by the National Association of Black Social Workers (1972) and the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978) made it difficult for white prospective parents to adopt Black or American Indian babies on the basis that it was a kind of cultural “genocide.” Thus, prospective adopters turned to Asia, and specifically to Korea.

For several decades Korea was the top exporter of babies to other countries. More recently, Korea has slipped behind China, Russia, Guatemala and Ethiopia. Currently, about 1,000 babies are still sent abroad each year (U.S. Department of State website; Adoptive Families website).

19. Hübinette, Comforting an Orphaned Nation, 42. In the introduction to Sara Dorow, I Wish for You a Beautiful Life: Letters from the Korean Birth Mothers of Ae Ran Won to Their Children (St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book Company, 1999), Mrs. Han Sang-soon, the director of Ae Ran Won (a home for unwed mothers in Seoul), writes, “In Korea, there is much misunderstanding of birth mothers, as well as prejudice against them. They are often criticized for not showing responsibility for their babies and for being concerned only about their own well-being...I would like to emphasize that such behavior by birth mothers is a sign of even deeper conflicts...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” (1–2).

20. Park Nelson, Mapping Multiple Histories of Korean Transnational Adoption, 3.


Ironically, Korea boasts of having the fifteenth largest economy in the world, yet is still one of the top five major “suppliers” of children for transracial/transnational adoption.

China’s adoption history is distinct from that of Korea. China implemented a one-child policy in 1979 to curb overpopulation, and because historically “women had no property rights and had had little education,” a preference for sons (who also carry on the family name) has resulted in more females being abandoned and then made available for adoption. Adoption from China exploded in the 1990s and approximately 95–98 percent of adopted babies are female, but in 2002 the Chinese government revised the one-child policy; one change regarded allowing rural families to have another child if their first born is a girl. In the early 1990s, fewer than one thousand Chinese children were adopted into the United States each year; between 2001 and 2007, however, over 5,000 children were adopted annually, with a total of 74,752 from 1985–2009. Since 1953, more than 110,000 children have been adopted from Korea to the United States. Thus, although Chinese adoption is now occurring at a higher rate than adoption from Korea (3,001 from China and 1,080 from Korea in 2009), because of its shorter history there are still about 30,000 more Korean adoptees than Chinese adoptees in the United States, and a significant generation gap.

China’s late entry into the world of transnational adoption occurred on the heels of the multiculturalism movement in the United States, a time in which the first generation of adopted Koreans had grown into adulthood, found each other through the Internet and other forums, and begun to speak out against the assimilationist attitudes with which they were raised. Thus, the Chinese government is more cognizant of and sensitive to the transnational adoption process and post-adoption services, and deliberately structures adoption in such a way as to create a “bond” between the adoptive family and the Chinese nation. For example, in contrast to the Korean model of adoption “delivery” where adoptive parents did not have to travel to Korea at all and instead could wait for their child at the American airport, the legal adoptions of Chinese babies must take place in China, at least one parent must travel to China and spend about two weeks to finalize paperwork and receive the child, and the parents and child must participate in a ritual Chinese ceremony in which the government encourages the parents to honor the child’s Chinese heritage.

Criticism from Chinese adoptees has been relatively quiet compared to criticism from Korean adoptees. However, Chinese adoptees are coming of age and beginning to voice their concerns, and their activities model those begun by Korean adoptees; for example, fall 2010 will...
see the first international Chinese adoptee reunion conference. This conference is similar to the multiple Korean adoptee Gatherings that have taken place since 1999 and will allow adopted Chinese persons to share stories, bond, support each other and provide mentors for younger adoptees. Korean adoption has a longer history, and there is a relatively more vocal cohort of some adult Korean adoptees, birth mothers and allies who call for a more critical examination of international adoption and reform of the current Korean adoption law; they also promote efforts for family preservation and more support for unwed mothers. Some of these criticisms are based on the trauma of transnational adoptees being cut off from their birth families, culture and nation and growing up in all white families (and often in all white communities), as well as the gendered violence that perpetuates the stigmatization and disenfranchisement of unwed mothers in Korea. One example of this activism occurred on August 4, 2007, when Korean adoptees, birth mothers, and their allies organized a one-hour peaceful protest and petition at the Dongguk University subway station. These tensions underscore the importance of providing resources and support to explore issues such as race and culture, identity politics, origin and birth families, and so on. Children’s literature is one medium through which such topics can be discussed.

Storying Adoption

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.

Although the history of adoption from Korea is longer than the history of adoption from China, there are about the same number of children’s books about adoption from both countries, and nearly all are driven by experiences of being transnationally/transracially adopted. Since 1955, at least one book about Korean adoption has been published every two to three years. The earliest children’s books about contemporary adoption from China to the United States were published in 1997: When You were Born in China and Our Baby from China. Most authors of Chinese adoption stories are adoptive parents (mostly female but at least seven are male authors), whereas approximately half of the Korean adoption stories are authored by adoptive mothers. Adoptive parents of Chinese girls tend to be wealthier, more educated, and more “progressive” than those who adopted from Korea, so they may be more inclined and have time to write children’s stories. As well, they may be more invested in “keeping” their child’s culture as a major part of the

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34. See the conference website for more information: http://www.caawr.com/
35. The birth mothers group, Mindulae, is now defunct, and a more recent group has emerged – the Korean Unwed Mothers Support Network (KUMSN). See adoptee/author/activist Jane Jeong Trenka’s August 6th and 8th, 2007, blog entries (Jane Jeong Trenka, Jane’s Blog: Korean birthparents against international adoption, August 6, 2007) and the KUMSN website, http://www.kumsn.org/
37. Park, Representations of Transracial Korean Adoption in Children’s Literature.
38. Eleanor Frances Lattimore’s The Chinese Daughter (New York: William Morrow, 1960) portrays white missionaries adopting a Chinese girl in China. I omit this title because it is not about overseas adoption as it is currently understood and practiced.
41. Park, Representations of Transracial Korean Adoption in Children’s Literature.
42. Dorow, Transnational Adoption; Volkman, “Embodying Chinese Culture,” 84.
adoptive family given the training from their adoption agencies and the Chinese government's directive.\textsuperscript{43}

While some of the authors of Korean adoption stories state briefly in an author's note or jacket flap that they adopted a child from Korea, most authors of the stories from China include more detailed explanations of their families' experiential bases for the narratives. For example, prolific children's book author and illustrator Ed Young outlines his family's adoptive journey in an author's note.\textsuperscript{44} He describes the path he and his partner took to adopt and speculates upon the paths of the birth mother's separation and "the infant's loneliness and uncertainty as she was passed from one caregiver to the next in the first six months of her life." These detailed explanations straddle the stories between fiction and auto/biography, using memory as well as imagination. The ambiguities of genre and reconstructions of stories may be extensions of the lack of knowledge and awareness that results in the ambiguity of ethnic distinction in some of the picture books as discussed below.

Because China requires at least one parent to come to China to pick up the child, some children's books (especially those written by adoptive parents) include the pre-adoption period, which many consider an essential part of the story. An Mei's Strange and Wondrous Journey (1998), I Love You Like Crazy Cakes (2000), The Red Blanket (2004), Just Add One Chinese Sister (2005), Waiting for May (2005) and My Mei Mei (2006) are examples of stories based on authorial experiences that show and explain the adoption process mostly from the adoptive family's perspective. Adoptive parents strive to describe, as imaginatively as possible, the pre-adoptive parts of the story as a way to give adopted children more complete images of their lives.\textsuperscript{45}

One particular adoptive parent imagines how her daughter makes sense of who she is in Three Names of Me (2006),\textsuperscript{46} a sensitive and nuanced portrayal of a young Chinese adoptee's understanding of her three names – Ada Lorane, given by her adoptive parents; Wang Bin, given by the orphanage workers; and a third name. She explains Ada Lorane and Wang Bin, and then says:

\begin{quote}
But there is another name of me that I don't know. So I take glue and glitter and my red marker. I make a beautiful star for the name I only heard once, the name before my remembering. My first name is a bright red star wrapped in my heart. I heard it long ago, with love, so it is still there.
\end{quote}

This story sensitively and lyrically acknowledges Ada Lorane's pre-adoptive life and the reality of its unknowability, rather than erasing or simplifying it.

Some of the Korean adoption stories are more simplistic about or play with names and identities. In I am Jungle Soup (1967), Jung Sook's name is distorted by her white American father who instead calls her "Jungle Soup." Jin Woo's (2001) parents do not say whether or not they will give him a more Anglicized name, and the adoptee in My Family is Forever is both ambiguously Asian and nameless, even as her best friend Jeffrey is given a name and thus a more complete identity.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Heather Jacobson, Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and the Negotiation of Family Difference (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008).

\textsuperscript{44} Ed Young, My Mei Mei (New York: Philomel Books, 2006).


\textsuperscript{46} Mary Cummings, Three Names of Me (Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co., 2006).

\textsuperscript{47} Ronnie Levine Schindel, I Am Jungle Soup (Syracuse, NY: LW Singer, 1967); Eve Bunting, Jin Woo (New York: Clarion Books, 2001); Carlson, My Family is Forever.
While earlier Korean adoption stories, such as *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John* (1966), *I Am Jungle Soup* (1967), and *Su An* (1968) begin pre-adoption, some of the recent stories about Korean adoptees begin at or after the airport arrival, a metaphor for a stork delivery which serves to emphasize the adoptee’s place within its adoptive family. For example, *Chinese Eyes* (1974), *Brian Was Adopted* (1989), *Jin Woo* (2001), *Families are Different* (1991), and *An American Face* (2000) all begin at the airport or after. Unlike the mandatory China trips taken by adoptive parents of Chinese children as described earlier, adoptive parents of Korean children are not required to go to Korea and therefore have to make a bigger imaginary leap as to what a pre-adoptive life may have been like for a young Korean; this naturally lends itself either to narratives that imaginatively construct pre-adoptive experiences, or to the complete erasure of such. Stories that begin post-arrival may simplify or avoid the pre-adoption period, suggesting that it does not exist, so reading a number of adoption stories could provide a more complete picture that includes pre-adoption experiences.

Some children’s books about Korean adoptees tend to portray overtly stereotypical illustrations and colorblind or assimilationist attitudes, a reflection and extension of the attitudes of the earlier generations of adoptive parents. The lack of post-adoption services to those adopters resulted in “color-blind” approaches to parenting and less sensitivity towards racial issues. In the first half of the twentieth century, the most desirable adoptive family formation was the one that looked “as if” it were a biological family, so when white adoptive parents first began adopting from Korea in the 1950s, they were told to treat their child “as if” they were no different, “as if” they were white. Early scholarship regarding transracial and transnational adoption is filled with outcome studies where white adoptive parents reported that their Korean children were adjusting well. Thus, until Korean adoptees came of age and began talking back, it was generally thought that they happily assimilated and became white. This attitude is reflected in the children’s books where the authors of Korean adoptee stories more easily bypass issues of race and racism. By disentangling issues of race and ethnicity from issues of adoption, these authors construct an adoptive identity that is deracialized altogether; adoption is okay to discuss, but race and ethnicity are not. This is problematic because a deracialized adoptee identity is then presumed to be representative of Chinese, Korean and Japanese adoptees, once again neatly lumping Asians into a single category and erasing the socio-political contexts in which their adoptions and life experiences take place.

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However, scholars have long recognized the importance of children seeing accurate reflections of themselves in the books they read.\(^5^4\) Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer\(^5^5\) note that “the pleasure of finding a mirror for oneself – of identifying with fictional characters” is one of the pleasures of children's literature, and in children's books the mirror, often a painful site for adopted Koreans, is also paradoxically utilized for pleasure. Many adopted Koreans, especially of the earlier generations who grew up in rural communities, or areas without other Korean people, may have never met or read about children who “looked like” them when they were growing up, often until they went away to college.\(^5^6\) These picture books serve the important function of helping adoptees see literary and visual reflections of themselves in their literature, thus validating their existence and experiences, even for the contemporary adopted Koreans who grow up with other adopted Koreans in urban and suburban neighborhoods. Because the mirror often “denies” what Terry Eagleton calls “a satisfying unified image of selfhood” through identification with the reflected image\(^5^7\), the following picture books are artistically and conceptually intriguing and compelling.

*Chinese Eyes* (1974), a picture book by adoptive mother Marjorie Ann Waybill, is an interesting case study of lumping and racial ambiguity. A third-grade boy has teased first-grader Becky, saying, “Hey look! There's little Chinese eyes!”, making Becky want to “hide her face.” She is upset the rest of the school day and confused because “Mother had said she had Korean eyes.” After school she plays with Laura, who is “her very best friend.” The narrator says, “Sometimes kids called Laura ugly names,” and the illustrations depict Laura as black; readers can deduce that Laura is also a victim of racialized name-calling. Once home, Becky tells her mother about “Chinese eyes,” and her mother “didn't seem shocked.” Instead, she says, “He was pretty close, wasn't he? Let's go look at ourselves in the big mirror… can you see that my eyes are different from yours?” Becky observes that she and her mother have different colored and shaped eyes, and her mother adds, “But the children in China have eyes shaped like yours.”

The accompanying illustration shows Becky and her mother looking slightly past the reader's left shoulder, as if the mirror is outside of the page. The opposite page portrays what appears to be a map of China, denoted by a small sailboat off the southwest border. If this image does indeed purport to depict China, the sailboat should be in the southeast, as numerous countries - Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam – border China on the southwest. It may be that adorning China's shore with a sailboat reveals the illustrator's perspective on China in relation to Becky's adoptive country, which depicts its material and

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\(^5^7\) Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 150.
technological superiority when Becky plays with the record player in her classroom; technology is used for entertainment in the United States, but China merits only a low-tech sailboat. Also problematic is what is depicted on the map: decapitated Chinese children's heads, almost identical to Becky's in their eye shape, head shape, and haircut. These images suggest that Becky's difference from her mother is also her sameness with the Chinese children; she would see her reflection in them. Since Becky looks the same as the children in China, even though she is herself Korean, being called "Chinese eyes" is "pretty close," and no judgment is cast upon the third-grader's name calling. Neither does her mother reinforce that she is actually Korean, not Chinese.

*My Family is Forever* offers another ambiguously Asian adoptee with stereotypical illustrations. Within its thirty-two pages, the unnamed Asian protagonist tells readers what makes her adoptive family a “forever family.” In the first few pages, the protagonist introduces herself simply by saying, “Hi. This is me. And this is my best friend Jeffrey. My family was formed by adoption, so I look just like…me! (And I’m pretty cute.)” Immediately one notices that the protagonist “me” does not have a name (although Jeffrey does), and that the illustrations betray the text because she is not cute. The simplistic, garish, cartoon illustrations portray the protagonist with two black, slanted lines as eyes, one of the most obvious, offensive and derogatory markers used to racially label and mimic Asian facial features. In this scene, the adopted protagonist has her back to the mirror and faces the reader; she does not stare into the mirror and wonder about her difference so she cannot see herself or her difference. Thus far the text defines her identity as an adoptee, while the illustrations reveal she is transracially adopted, therefore promoting an adoptive identity that alludes to but is discursively separated from her ethnic or racial identity.

The statement, “I’m pretty cute,” deflects attention away from her adoptive identity and instead focuses the reader’s gaze on her cuteness rather than her difference. However, the text and illustrations betray each other because they depict the protagonist with stereotypical traits, which may not appear “cute” to readers. On every page, the repeated depictions of the character’s Orientalist, slanted, black eyes are reminiscent of “historical representations of Asians and Asian Americans,” such as the exclusionary political cartoons and offensive stereotypes that “have residual effects that continue to this day.” Moreover, this female adoptee does not look at herself in the mirror behind her; if she was really cute, she might admire herself in the mirror, and invite the reader to gaze at her image in the mirror as well. Thus, according to Nodelman and Reimer’s assertion that a third story emerges “from the contradictions between the other two stories,” the contradictory evidence in the text (suggesting that she is cute) and the illustrations (she is drawn with Orientalist stereotypes) tells a different story from both the text and illustrations on their own.

Another problem with this picture book is the broad space that it purports to fill because the text is silent about the adoptee’s specific ethnicity and national origin. Carlson writes, “Once I told Jeffrey 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” (emphasis in original). She has no earthly origin in the first comment, making her a real alien Other, and she has a distant, undefinable origin in her second comment—“far away,” but reachable by an airplane. Moreover, without the illustrations, the adoptee could have been adopted from Russia or the Ukraine. The undefined origin suggests that first, the author does not distinguish between Chinese and Korean adoptees, and second, that one may substitute any East Asian identity for another. This may be a reflection of the efforts of the

58. Ono and Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media*, 2. In 1977, Albert Schwartz ("The Five Chinese Brothers: Time to Retire," *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin* 8, no. 3 (1977): 3–7) pointed out that the illustrations in *The Five Chinese Brothers* were particularly offensive because all the Chinese characters were drawn stereotypically with Orientalist “slit and slanted eyes.” The use of slit and slanted eyes on Asian faces is an ongoing issue in children's books as well as in pop culture in general.


60. Carlson, *My Family is Forever*. 
author or publisher to appeal to a broader audience; the more adoptees’ experiences it reflects, the more books might be sold. The use of a spaceship to initially designate her foreign origin recalls the uncomfortable and xenophobic notion that Asians are aliens outside the normative white landscape of the United States, exemplified in 2003 when the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel published a cartoon depicting Chinese girls marching towards a spaceship, with the caption, “Ah, Space! It not only enhances our image, it solves the problem of what to do with all these excess females.”

The phrase, “I look just like…me!” suggests that the adoptee does not see mirror images of herself in her community, either. Because she is most likely isolated in her adoptive experience, she has accepted that she will look like herself, and not like anyone else. Later, the adoptee looks into the mirror and wonders about her birth parents; opposite from an image in which she looks into the bathroom mirror, she asks, “Does my birth mother’s hair stick up like mine?” The following image of her reading books is accompanied by the text, “Is my birth father a good reader like me?” The extent to which she wonders about her birth parents is limited to how much they are like her in terms of one physical attribute (hair) and one skill (reading). She wonders if they are like her, not if she is like them, even though she was born of them. Here she begins to conceptualize that her birth parents might mirror her, but this wonderment quickly subsides as she continues, “One thing I know for sure is that they wanted me to have a family to love—and I do!”

My Family is Forever casts too wide a net to mirror the experiences of Korean or Chinese adoptees. The author does not define the adoptee’s origin explicitly in the text or illustrations, but her note provides a clue; Carlson says, “Our good friends adopted a baby girl, Anna, from Korea, and we were at the airport when she arrived…” Based on that experience, as well as the fact that she resides in Minnesota, home to the highest concentration of adopted Koreans per capita, one may assume that Carlson knows that adoptive parents are not required to go to Korea to pick up their children. They can choose to have their child “delivered” by an escort, or they may travel to Korea to pick up the child. In contrast, going to China for at least ten days is required of adoptive parents of Chinese children. Thus, showing the adoptee character’s parents flying to the birth country could suggest that the adoptee is from China, Korea or another Asian country. Perhaps Carlson deliberately left her origin unknown so that adoptees from any Asian country could see themselves in the story. However, because the picture book can mirror children adopted from multiple Asian countries, it denies adoptees the specificity of their adoptive circumstances.

In Chinese Eyes, the mirror is a site for affirmation of racial difference, but not in My Family is Forever. The nameless adoptee does not look at herself on the third page, and when she does look into the mirror later, she wonders not about explicit racial difference but if her birth mother’s hair might stick up like her own – a physical trait unrelated to race. Adoption historians Catherine Choy and Gregory Choy observe that a major theme of Seeds From a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees is “the confirmation of racialized physical otherness through one’s reflection in the mirror.” In this anthology, adoptees repeatedly speak of their ambivalence with the mirror.

61. Marianne Novy notes that “immigrants have often been referred to as America’s adopted children” (Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004)).
62. Quoted from Dorow, Transnational Adoption, 134.
64. The day when Korean babies first meet their adoptive parents at the American airport is commonly known as an “airport arrival,” “arrival day,” “Gotcha day,” or “adoption day.” Although calling it “delivery day” instead of “arrival day” might be more accurate for families who adopt this way because someone is escorting and delivering a child to the parents, “arrival” suggests agency whereas “delivery” suggests passivity for the adoptee.
Adoptee Rebecca Smith says, “I had no idea I didn’t fit that description (of being white) until I saw my reflection in the mirror. I thought of myself as Caucasian. What a shock to find out that I wasn’t,”66 and adoptee Ellwyn Kauffman asks, “Who was this Korean in the mirror? The mirror was the inescapable reminder of where I had come from.”67 The adoptees in these two picture books do not experience such ambivalent relationships with mirrors.

Critically acclaimed author and illustrator Allen Say offers a different perspective on transracial Asian adoption in Allison, published in 1997.68 This picture book is clearly about a transracially adopted Asian girl, but her specific ethnic background and national origin are ambiguous. At the beginning of the story, the reader sees Allison with her doll, “Mei Mei,” which means “younger sister” in Chinese. However, Mei Mei wears a Japanese kimono and Allison also receives a kimono as a gift from her grandmother, thus confusing the reader as to whether Allison is Chinese or Japanese—or both. It is also possible that her grandmother mistakenly sent a Japanese kimono to her Chinese granddaughter. Regardless, the reader is unsure as to Allison’s specific ethnicity and national origin. For this reason, Asian American children’s literature scholar Junko Yokota opposed the book before it went to press, and suggested changing the text by omitting “Mei Mei,” but for some reason Say was unwilling to make changes.69

Regardless of the ambiguity regarding Allison’s ethnicity and national origin, the story is an important contribution to transracial adoption children’s literature because it is from the perspective of a transracially adopted child, and actually portrays her confusion, bafflement, and anger when she realizes she looks different from her adoptive parents. “Children do, to the great chagrin of many parents, resist or subvert parental socialization efforts.”70 Allison reacts by mutilating her adoptive father’s baseball mitt and her adoptive mother’s Raggedy Andy and Barbie dolls, saying that their hair color was different from Mei Mei’s. In their anger, both parents recall their own American childhoods, marked by the Americanness of the dolls and baseball (which is of course “America’s favorite pastime”): her father shouts, “My dad gave me that mitt…” and her mother cries, “I’ve had him since I was a little girl.” By destroying items that represent her parents’ American childhoods, Allison rebels against her inability to identify with those American symbols in her own childhood and rejects her adoptive parents’ culture and country by destroying their most beloved national symbols.

Say makes Allison’s ethnic and national origin ambiguous, thereby forcing the reader to focus on Allison’s reaction to her racial difference, rather than focus on her race. Race, however, is not separated from adoption; rather, Say asks the reader to consider how racial difference troubles the idea that adoption can be disentangled from race as suggested by the previous two picture books. Even so, given the problems of ethnic ambiguity in stories such as My Family is Forever, the ethnic ambiguity in Allison still may distract rather than ask the reader to focus on other aspects of the story.

Looking Forward

While there are significant differences in the experiences of Chinese and Korean adoptees, picture books have been less concerned with explicating or contextualizing those differences. The picture books discussed here suggest that ethnic specificity is less necessary for young children;

69. Junko Yokota shared this information with me at the International Research Society for Children’s Literature Congress in August 2007 after attending my presentation on the topic. I thank her for helping me expand my understanding of Say’s book.
70. Jacobson, Culture Keeping, 59.
even Allen Say’s Allison employs ethnic ambiguity to foreground the very issues caused by racial difference. Deracializing an adoptive identity prevents adoptees from seeing specific representations of themselves in children’s books, and collapses Asian adoptive experiences into a single, linear storyline that begins post-adoption. By disengaging with issues of race and ethnicity, these authors ask readers to ignore the realities and specificities of adoptive experiences and the particular systems of oppression and violence that sustain the adoptions of children from different Asian countries. In so doing, they disallow the possibility of considering how one might go about dismantling and reforming those systems.

One way to rectify the racial and ethnic ambiguity of picture books is to encourage more adoptees to write about their specific experiences – for all age groups. Elizabeth Alice Honig writes, “The story that works for the adolescent…may no longer work for the young adult constructing an identity…and this again may change when that adoptee becomes the parent of biological children.” Very few adult adoptees have written for children or young adults, although some have illustrated children’s picture books. Critically reviewed adoptee writers Sun Yung Shin and Jane Jeong Trenka have both attempted to write children’s books about their adoptive experiences, but found it difficult to do so. Instead, Shin’s picture book Cooper’s Lesson (2004) is a broader commentary on “what can be gained or lost as different generations adapt to and influence their adopted cultures.” She draws from her personal background as a transracial adoptee who is often misunderstood and prescribed a particular identity to explore how some children attempt to understand the complexity of being Korean American.

The stories that are told about transracial Chinese and Korean adoption will change in the near future as the previously silent and silenced members of the adoption triad begin to participate in the conversation. Picture books will probably be more specific and nuanced, and young adult novels depicting Korean and Chinese adoptees may depict sensitive issues, such as birth searching, with more complexity. In cultural productions for older audiences, Korean birth parents (mostly mothers) have already begun to voice their stories, and many adult adoptees across multiple generations and at varying levels of politicization have produced documentaries, memoirs and other works based on their experiences—real or imagined.

Additionally, the first cohort of Chinese adoptees is now reaching adulthood, and their voices will no doubt make interesting and important contributions to the discourse and cultural productions of transracial adoptions, perhaps for children as well as for adults. The dialogue is already moving in that direction, with Ying Ying Fry’s Kids Like Me in China (2001), a photo essay in which an eight-year old adopted Chinese girl returns to her orphanage and spends time

72. In 2008, adoptee and writer Laura E. Williams published a young adult novel about an adopted Korean girl named Lauren who wants to have double eyelid surgery so some boys at school will stop calling her “slant” and “gook” (Slant (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2008)); the focus is on her physical features and name-calling, and not on her adoption. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only young adult novel that is both written by an adoptee, and depicts an adoptee. (Beth) Hei Kyong Lo, a Korean adoptive/writer/activist in Minnesota, is working on a young adult novel titled, Kimchi, Wild Girl, about an adopted Korean girl in Minnesota.
73. Chris Soentpiet has illustrated some of Eve Bunting’s books, such as Bunting, Jin Woo, which depicts a transnationally and transracially adopted Korean boy, and Kim Cogan illustrated adoptee Sun Yung Shin’s Cooper’s Lesson (San Francisco: Children’s Book Press, 2004), which depicts a mixed race Korean/white boy.
74. Personal conversation, August 2007.
75. Shin, Cooper’s Lesson, author’s note.
with the children still there. Written in the first person, and almost entirely from her perspective, this book is a major breakthrough in terms of its specificity, scope and perspective. And finally, adoptive parents will likely continue to produce narratives based on their experiences, and these too may change as they listen to the voices of both child and adult adoptees:

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?280

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“Loss is more than sadness”
Reading Dissent in Transracial Adoption Melodrama in The Language of Blood and First Person Plural

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Somehow, I felt that the American adoptive parents didn’t quite see the orphans and the mothers as people but rather as interesting specimens, a menagerie of personified sorrow.¹

Korean adoptee author Jane Jeong Trenka writes the words “Loss is more than sadness,” in her 2003 memoir The Language of Blood.² She is describing her life at a crossroads of grief after the death of her birth mother, estrangement from her adoptive parents, and administrative runaround from her adoption agency. Recently produced narrative works by transracial and transnational adoptees focus on sadness, loss, and trauma as central experiences. This idea of sadness as an integral part of the transracial adoption experience stands in contrast to the other, more dominant representation of transracial adoption as an overwhelmingly positive experience marked by familial fulfillment, generosity, and unconditional, colorblind love.³ However, within recent transracial adoptee-centered and/or authored works, a different characterization of the adoptee as a tragic survivor of adoption-related family and social trauma has taken shape. These works include the written memoirs (such as The Unforgotten War: Dust of the Streets by Korean adoptee Thomas Park Clement,⁴ The Book of Sarahs by African American-White biracial adoptee Catherine McKinley,⁵ A Single Square Picture by Korean adoptee Katy Robinson,⁶ Ten Thousand Sorrows by Korean adoptee Elizabeth Kim,⁷ and The Language of Blood by Korean adoptee Jane Jeong Trenka, and documentary or documentary memoir on film, such as Daughter from Danang (on Vietnamese adoptee Heidi Bub) directed by Gail Dolgin and Vicente Franco,⁸ Passing Through by Korean adoptee Nathan Adolfson,⁹ and First Person Plural, directed by Korean adoptee Deann Borshay.¹⁰ Like many other memoirs, each of these stories

². Ibid., 160.
³. See adoptive parent memoirs such as The Seed from the East by Bertha Holt, Family Nobody Wanted by Helen Grigsby Doss and international adoption “how to” guides such as How to Adopt Internationally: A Guide for Agency-Directed and Independent Adoptions by Jean Nelson Erichsen and Heino R Erichsen, International Adoption: Sensitive Advice for Prospective Parents by Jean Knoll and The International Adoption Handbook: How to Make an Overseas Adoption Work for You by Myra Alperson Murphy.
has primary elements of tragedy and sadness at the core of its narrative, but in these memoirs, tragic elements are directly related to adoption experiences, either as causal or consequential of each subject’s adoption status.

Though other transracial adoptee narratives have been produced in English and other languages, the listing I’ve noted here represents a majority of the currently available creative works by (or about, in the case of *Daughter from Danang*) adoptees. In this light, it appears that the genre of memoir, both filmed and written, has emerged as the predominant form within transracial adoptee cultural production, in a body of work that has been growing since the mid-1990s. Most adoptees who publish work on the adoption experience do so using autobiographical, not fictional, forms, in step with the rise of the memoir as a highly marketable genre within the U.S. publishing industry during the 1990s. While a handful of films, television shows and novels have been produced that focus on transracial adoptee characters, the novelists, screenwriters and directors who produce these works are not themselves transracially adopted (most recently, see the novels *Somebody’s Daughter* by Marie Myung-Ok Lee and *Digging to America* by Anne Tyler). The genre choice of memoir and the overarching themes of trauma and sadness are related in that popular contemporary works of memoir—especially if they are authored by individuals who are not already famous—often have melodramatic narratives that focus on traumatic events and melancholic outcomes. The popularity of nonfiction forms other than memoir, such as “reality” television and television talk shows, further reflects the current popular public interest in the extraordinary (and often tragic) dramas of ordinary individuals.

While studies about transracial adoption date to the late 1960s, adoptee narrative accounts of the transracial adoption experience have only recently become available. This is probably partly because the adoptees who carry these experiences have also recently come of age, and partly because interest in transracial adoption in America has grown in the last thirty years as the practice of transracial adoption has continued and expanded. Because a surge in transracial and intercountry adoptions began to take place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the first visible generation of transracial adoptees came of age in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Before this time, the subjects of most transracial adoption studies were still children. Today there is yet a general lack of academic and analytical narrative material on transracial adoption; most narrative accounts were not intended for use as academic or analytical texts, but to create community or awareness around the issues that transracial adoptees face.

### Multiracial Family, Colorblind Family, Normative Family: The Landscapes of Transracial Adoption Dominant Discourses

Autobiographical texts are filled with choices that their authors make; when I examined transracial adoptee memoirs, I wondered, why so many of these stories were marked by trauma, sadness and melodrama? One reason may be that adoptee authors feel compelled to stand in opposition to and contestation of the dominant narrative of transracial adoption that focuses on adoptive parents instead of transracial adoptees. I argue that dominant discourses about transracial and transnational adoption in the United State are also controlled by parents and adoption agencies, who are for the most part, White (often using the U.S. publishing industry as an apparatus, a mostly White industry geared to predominantly White audiences). For parents, the experience of adoption often includes frustration with the bureaucratic and legal processes of adoption—of which most adoptees are unaware—but is overwhelmingly focused on the joy and fulfillment of becoming parents through adoption. For their part, adoption agencies and related businesses are the suppliers to this huge demand for adoptees and are responsible for much of the material designed to educate parents about adoption. While adoptees and potential adoptees might be one type of client for adoption agencies, parents and prospective parents are
definitely the consumers. As the consumers in the multi-million dollar industry of adoption, parents (or prospective parents) pay for the publications, the travel packages, the culture camp experiences, and the adoption expenses themselves. So in our consumer-based society, it comes as no surprise that adoptive parents are seen and see themselves at the center of the adoption experience.

The parent-dominated discourse supports and is supported by a more broadly neo-liberal ideal of colorblindness, that is, the refusal to see race as socially meaningful. Transracial adoption—the creation of successful multiracial families through legal (rather than biological) means—is seen, in this context, as the ultimate proof that colorblindness works. The oft-repeated, and very sincerely expressed, parental rhetoric, “I love you unconditionally and I see you as my child, not as an adopted person or a person of color,” while certainly well-intentioned, does not reflect the experience of the children who are generally unable to escape experiences of racialization outside, and sometimes inside, the home. These parental sentiments tend to be interpreted within the popular “love conquers all” trope without an acknowledgement of the very complex work of managing a White-dominated but polycultural society and a White-parented but multiracial home. Partly due to the general stigma around adoption, adoptive parents are broadly understood as saints and saviors willing to take in strangers as their own, and thus valorized in relation to adoptees who are become the charitable project upon which parental good deeds are bestowed. So even beyond the experiences of those immediately involved in adoption (adoptive parents, adoptees, birth parents, and adoption agencies), adoptive parents remain at the center of transracial adoption experience.

Furthermore, social welfare research generally corroborates popular depictions of transracial adoption as unproblematic. Early empirical studies of the transracial adoption experience in the late 1970s and early 1980s focused on the experience of adoptive parents and their assessment of their children’s experience (as opposed to sampling adoptees directly). At the time, a sizable group of adult adoptees was, of course, unavailable for study and consideration. Most researchers concluded that parents were satisfied with their adoption experience, and were even surprised that parents were having fewer problems than anticipated; parents generally gauged their children to be normally adjusted.11

Interviews with parents and children in transracially adoptive families were used in the Simon-Altstein Twenty-Year Study to assess the adoption experience. In a related study, Simon and Altstein also used their 1991 Twenty-Year Study interviews with Korean adoptees and their parents. Summarizing their findings, they noted that “Korean transracial adoptees are aware of their backgrounds but are not particularly interested in making them the center of their lives. They feel good about having grown up with the families they did. They are committed to maintaining close ties with their adopted families and are supportive of policies that promote transracial adoptions.”12 This well characterizes most of the results of social welfare-oriented transracial or international adoption studies. Finding after finding confirms that the adjustment of transracially adopted children is equal to or better than that of in-race adoptees; that they have acceptable self esteem; and that they relate well to their families. That most of this social welfare-based work functions to support transracial adoption as a continuing and growing practice is not noted as a foundational research assumption in most studies.13

12. Simon and Altstein, Adoption Across Borders, 106.
The U.S. federal government has also significantly contributed to the public perception of transracial adoption. The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 mandate that transracial adoptions be handled the same way as all other adoptions, and forbids the consideration of race as the sole factor to delay adoption placement. MEPA also defined terms under which transracial adoptions can take place, including language that bars adoption agencies from considering a prospective parent’s refusal to attend cultural awareness training as a factor in a transracial adoption, as this would be considered a delay to placement. Rita Simon, a prominent transracial adoption researcher and supporter (cited above), was a key witness at the congressional hearings in support of MEPA. The passage of these acts sent a clear message of popular and political support for the practice of transracial adoption by the 1990s.

In Europe, where transracial and transnational adoption are virtually synonymous and socialized medicine makes it possible to track the health problems of transracial adoptees over time, problems among adoptees have been more identifiable. Studies in Sweden headed by Anders Hjern, Frank Lindblad and Bo Vinnerljung concluded that transnational adoptees in Sweden, despite being raised by middle- and upper-class Swedish parents, are at the highest risk for alcohol-related hospitalization and drug-related hospitalization of any immigrant group, and are also at high risk for suicide compared to other Swedes. In the Netherlands, Tieman, van der Ende, and Verhulst found transnational adoptees to be at higher risk of severe mental health problems than non-adopted Dutch of the same age. None of these findings have been corroborated in the United States, the country with the largest population of transnational and transracial adoptees in the world—and it may not be possible to recreate these European studies in the U.S. because of a lack of nationalized medical records.

Despite these recent findings in adult transracial adoptee research, dominant public discourses have yet to change much from views developed during the earlier history of transracial and transnational adoption in the 1950s (when transracial and transnational adoption to the United States began) and in the 1970s. The dominant adoptive-parent-focused view of transracial and transnational adoption obscures the losses inherent in the adoption process for adoptees and birth parents (often, the birth parents’ very existence is erased). In light of the terms under which transracial and transnational adoption is popularly understood, adult adoptees who do not have the experience of “love conquering all” to provide them with emotional, familial, and community fulfillment face a social dilemma; adoptees who critique transracial and/or transnational adoption—even on the basis of their own experiences—are seen as bitter, unjustifiably angry, and ungrateful. Even so, I argue that the themes of sadness and isolation so present in transracial adoptee memoirs are attempts to do just that; transracial adoptees who produce memoirs of their adoption experience are attempting to take control of a discourse that intimately involves them, but which, so far, has tended to ignore their voices.

Because the dominant view of transracial adoption emphasizes the fulfillment, happiness, and success of the experience and excludes adoptee voices, I argue that transracial adoptees have great motivation to contest dominant narratives by sharing the “true stories” of their own

experiences of loss, sadness, and tragedy. Transracial adoptee stories of discontent, especially those focused on the racial dissonance they experience as a result of being isolated as people of color in largely White family and (sometimes) community settings, also critique the ideal of an American colorblind society that holds sway in many adoptive families and in popular discourses of contemporary multiculturalism. Specific to transracial and transnational adoption, the idea that transracial adoption could be a “cure for racism” by creating colorblind kinship ties is caught in the paradox of the current configuration of these adoptions, where mostly White, middle class parents from Western nations adopt from racial and/or national groups in economically depressed or politically oppressed socioeconomic positions. The specifics of transnational adoption practice place an unmistakable neo-imperial and neo-colonial stamp on these adoptions, both currently and throughout historically. Christina Klein points out that the trope of American adoption in Asia was born out of a Cold War anxiety that spurred Americans to acts of symbolic “adoption” through charitable sponsoring of starving Asian children. She writes that “[t]his representation of the Cold War as a sentimental project of family formation served a doubly hegemonic function. These families created an avenue through which Americans excluded from other discourses of nationhood could find ways to identify with the nation as it undertook its world-ordering projects of containing communism and expanding American influence.” The practice of today’s transracial and transnational adoptions only highlight the extreme power differentials between parents and children, institutions and individuals, Whites and people of color, and rich and poor nations. The stories of pain, trauma, and discontent told by adult transracial adoptees serve as solemn evidence of the human toll of these practices.

Transracial Adoptee Melodrama as the Voice of Dissent: The Language of Blood and First Person Plural

In this essay, I want to focus on two works from the adoptee memoirs listed above: the written memoir The Language of Blood and the documentary film memoir First Person Plural. Both are autobiographical works by adult Korean American adoptees. These two works have enjoyed, arguably, the widest distribution and greatest acclaim of any of the Korean adoptee-centered memoirs. The Language of Blood has a high public profile as the result of numerous reviews. It was included in the Barnes and Noble Discover New Great Writers Series, won Minnesota Book Awards in the “Autobiography and Memoir” and “New Voice” categories, was voted best new book by a Minnesota writer in 2004 by the Twin Cities weekly City Pages, and has been a Minnesota Library Association Selection. First Person Plural has been released at limited theatrical screenings but has aired several times on public television as part of the Public Broadcast System’s POV documentary film series. The film has a companion website with copious additional information, including an education guide for use in the classroom. Both works have been widely recommended in transracial adoption circles, within adoptive parent, adoption agency and adoptee settings. First Person Plural is regularly screened at transracial and/or transnational adoption conferences, gatherings and meetings, and The Language of Blood is often for sale at book tables at these events. Trenka’s follow-up memoir, Fugitive Visions about her experiences repatriating to Korea, and Borshay’s follow-up film were both hotly anticipated in transnational adoptee communities.

Trenka’s and Borshay’s accounts are not the first examples of transracial adoptee voices standing in opposition to dominant images of happy adoptions. Early works on transracial and

21. Ibid., 159.
transnational adoption include several narrative accounts of the transracial adoption experience. These works were focused on or including accounts from adolescents or adults, or from adoptees as children with the accounts of their adoptive parents as well. Five of these publications—Adoption and Race: Black, Asian and Mixed Race Children in White Families by Owen Gill and Barbara Jackson, Transracial Adoption: Children and Parents Speak by Constance Pohl and Kathy Harris, Adopted from Asia: How it Feels to Grow up in America by Frances M. Koh, “Self and Alma Mater: A Study of Adopted College Students” by Sandra Kryder, and In Their Own Voices: Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories by Rita J. Simon and Rhonda M. Roorda—use or appear to use accounts based on interviews. Two others, Seeds from a Silent Tree, edited by Tonya Bishoff and Jo Rankin and Voices from Another Place, edited by Susan Soon-Keum Cox, contain accounts that have been collected as anthologies of work submitted by adoptees for the publication. Perceptions of self, family and racial identity are typical parts of adoptee accounts. The narratives also contain common elements that are not mentioned in other social welfare research findings, such as adoptees’ feelings of loneliness and sense of alienation from their birth race groups. These stand in contrast to the majority of social welfare research studies, which have largely failed to document adoptees’ feelings of loneliness, alienation from both adoptive and birth cultures, and loss of birth culture.

A core element of my research work on Korean adoptees has been the collection of oral life-course histories from adult Korean adoptees. While the experiences (and demographic backgrounds) of my informant group vary greatly, I can draw some generalizations from their stories with respect to feelings of isolation. While most adoptees do seem to cope with these feelings successfully, these details are important parts of the transracial adoptee experience. Most adoptees relay experiences of feeling alone and feeling misunderstood, as if they were and are the only ones in their situations. Being different, and in the absence of transracially adopted siblings, being the only one different also led to feelings of loneliness not reducible to typical adolescent angst. Many transracial adoptees also discuss alienation from others of their birth race as well. Adoptees in my study describe not fitting in or not meeting expectations placed on them by others of the same race. Many say others of the same race could tell they were different, which led to their rejection. Some say they themselves could pick transracial adoptees out of a room by appearance and manner. Other adoptees, mostly Korean, describe feelings of loss and grief about their birth culture. This is more understandable for adoptees who remember their birth parents, but this feeling is present even for adoptees who have no memories of their birth country. So, experiences of loneliness and isolation, usually absent in social welfare research, are prominent in both oral histories and in published narratives from adult Korean adoptees.

Trenka and Borshay, both Korean adoptees to the United States, reveal the sadness of their experiences with great intimacy and in great detail. The results are melodramatic narratives with heightened emotional impact; both works can be accurately characterized as “tearjerkers.” I use the term melodrama as defined by Harmon and Holman in A Handbook to Literature: specifically, melodrama is “A work...based on a romantic plot and developed sensationaly, with little regard for motivation and with an excessive appeal to the emotions of the audience. The

25. Frances M. Koh, Adopted from Asia: How It Feels to Grow Up in America (Minneapolis: East West Press, 1993).
object is to keep the audience thrilled by the arousal anyhow of strong feelings of pity, horror, or joy. [...] Though typically a melodrama has a happy ending, tragedies that use much of the same technique are sometimes referred to as melodramatic.”

Although there has historically been some disregard for the quality of melodramas as literary work because of their emphasis on emotional sensationalism, that judgment does not apply here. While I read Trenka’s and Borshay’s works as necessarily melodramatic, my sense of both pieces is that neither author intended to produce a sad narrative solely for emotional effect, but rather that both felt it necessary to truthfully cover sad events that were central to their adoption experiences. In a lecture presenting her film, Borshay emphasized the autobiographical nature of the work and the importance of personal truth in its content for her; personal conversations with Trenka also support this interpretation of authorial intent. Although both Trenka and Borshay have become recognized and celebrated figures within Korean adoptee communities, both were largely unknown when they were working on their respective projects. However, Borshay’s screenings and Trenka’s readings are well attended by other adoptees, and in this context, their personal truths operate within Korean adoptee communities as dissenting voices, validating the difficulties of being raised Korean in White families and communities amid the din of dominant representations of adoption as unproblematic and of adoptees as fortunate chosen children.

Transracial adoptee memoir is a sub-genre ripe for Oprah-style melodrama: two mothers, two races and/or nations (in the case of Korea and Vietnam, nations involved in military conflicts with the United States), identity crisis, racial confusion, and testaments to the power of a mother’s love and/or ultimate betrayal. Even this listing reads like a description of a made-for-TV movie of the week. More specific literary conventions for adoptees place them “between worlds,” either as lost and confused characters with fractured identities or, conversely, as characters who act as bridges between two cultures, nations, races, and (most dramatically), mothers. This is also noted by David Eng, who strategically asks, “How might a transnational adoptee come to have psychic space for two mothers? And what, in turn, would such an expansion of the psychic mean for the sociopolitical domain of contemporary family and kinship relations and the politics of diaspora?”

Both First Person Plural and The Language of Blood make use of the conventions of melodrama with emotional cliffhangers and releases. Certainly the use of these conventions makes both First Person Plural and The Language of Blood more marketable to popular audiences. However, these melodramatic expressions about Korean adoption also operate as conversational responses to the long history of Orientalist sentimentalism between the United States and Asia. Klein’s Cold War Orientalism details the power of American imperial domination through sentimental cultural production. In examples from film and literature, Klein describes how the United States pursued imperial expansion during the Cold War era through U.S.-Asia integration by engaging with popular American sentimental and emotional senses. The integrationist objective required the embrace of a common humanity over racial difference and sentimental appeals made this possible. In making just two of four points about sentimental narratives of the early nineteenth century that she then applies to Cold War era Orientalism, Klein writes: “the sentimental text explores how [human] bonds are forged across a divide of difference—of race, class sex, nation, religion, and so on; the sentimental is thus a universalizing mode that imagines the possibility of transcending particularity by recognizing a common and shared humanity... emotions serve as the means by achieving and maintaining [these bonds]; the sentimental mode values the intensity of the individual’s felt experience, and holds up sympathy—the ability to feel what another person is feeling, especially his suffering—as the most prized. . . . the violation

32. Klein, Cold War Orientalism.
of these affective bonds, through the loss of a member of the community or the rupture of communal ties, represents the greatest trauma within the sentimental universe.\textsuperscript{33}

While Trenka and Borshay work against the dominant narrative characterization of Korean adoption that suggests “bonds forged across a divide of difference,” they both use melodrama to make their case. In this way, both authors become active in the war of sentiment over Korean adoption. In Klein’s terms, this is a war fought over who owns the greatest trauma: childlessness on the part of adoptive parents, or familial, racial and cultural displacement on the part of adoptees.

**Racism and the Racial Melancholy of Transnational Adoption**

The expression of racialized experiences is critically important in literary transracial adoptee interventions. That transracial adoptees, as people of color, are subject to racialization and experience racism might seem obvious, but these assertions of experiences with race and racism underline the differences between adoptees and their (usually White) families, and therefore have been suppressed.

Borshay’s and Trenka’s texts take on an almost confessional tone; familial duty to colorblindness as an antiracist moral imperative creates social and emotional settings where the acknowledgement of race—and by association, racism—represents a moral failure. This failure falls on the shoulders of the adoptee, and often on the shoulders of the White parents as well, as they are found guilty of the charge put forward by the National Association of Black Social Workers: that White parents are incapable of raising a Black (or by extension, non-White) child because they cannot adequately prepare that child to deal with racism in our racist society. In her film, Borshay states: “For a long time I couldn’t talk to my American parents about my Korean family. I felt I was somehow being disloyal to them. That here they had done all these wonderful things for me and provided opportunities for me and loved me a lot.” For Trenka, the denial of race, nationality and adoption in the family is more strongly mandated. “The a-word, adoption, was not mentioned in our house. Neither was the K-word, Korea,” she writes.\textsuperscript{34} Borshay’s decision to take her parents to meet her Korean family, and Trenka’s decision to embrace her Korean mother, totally disrupts the colorblind ideals of their adoptive parents. By doing so, both demonstrate that they come from a family and a people that are biologically, culturally and racially related to them. In these conflicts, Borshay and Trenka show how the admission of racial, cultural and biological difference has the potential to hurt both the transracial adoptee and the adoptive parent. The implications of racial difference for parents are reabsorbed by adoptees, who seek to shield parents from race-related allegations in order to satisfy the colorblindness contract in force within many adoptive families.

In classical psychology, melancholy is a disorder better known as depression; in its Freudian use, melancholy is one possible response to loss in which the mourner is trapped in a cycle of depression. Literary scholar Anne Anlin Cheng outlines the concept of “racial melancholy” as a response to living in a racist society willing to apologize for racism, but unwilling to change. A melancholic cycle is endlessly re-enacted as race-based traumas are recognized as grievances and remedied but not prevented. For Cheng, the melancholic subject who becomes dependent on the remedy as the sole redress for recurring racial grievance is effectively unable to break the cycle of melancholia and is doomed to remain in a state of racial grief.\textsuperscript{35} Cheng is specific in her assignment of racial melancholy not only to the identities of racialized “others,” but also to dominant White identities. She writes:

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{34} Trenka, The Language of Blood, 35.
Dominant white identity in America operates melancholically—as an elaborate identificatory system based on psychical and social consumption-and-denial…. Both racist and white liberal discourses participate in this dynamic, albeit out of different motivations. The racists need to develop elaborate ideologies in order to accommodate their actions with official American ideals, while white liberals need to keep burying the racial others in order to memorialize them. Those who do not see the racial problem or those who call themselves nonideological are the most melancholic of all, because in today’s political climate…it requires hard work not to see.\(^{36}\)

I apply Cheng’s theory of racial melancholy to the case of transracial and transnational adoption, where White adoptive parents, non-White adoptees, and non-White birth parents are locked in a melancholic state created by the imperialist and racist foundations of transracial and transnational adoption. In this application, adoptees operate as subjects with race-in-hiding as they are called into action to embrace what Cheng has termed “White liberal discourse” by burying their own racial otherness. When transracial adoptees do make claims to racial grievances within family and social structures, apologies are made, but the foundational structures of racist society and the imperial structures of transnational and transracial adoption do not change.

**Competing Racial Realities: “Real” Memory and Family in *First Person Plural***

*First Person Plural* documents the personal journey of the film’s director, Deann Borshay, to South Korea to meet her birth family, including her mother. Adopted at the age of eight, Borshay gradually forgets her experiences in Korea and assimilates to life as an American living as part of a White family. As she grows older, she makes the choice to research her adoption and finds that, just before coming to the United States, her identity was switched with that of another Korean girl at the orphanage. She then learns that her actual birth family is alive and well and willing to meet her. Her adoptive family, including parents and siblings, are also included in the film. Her adoptive parents travel with Borshay to Korea and meet her birth mother and siblings. The film is critical of adoption processes that changed Borshay’s Korean identity to facilitate her adoption and focuses on the difficult navigation of adoptees with two families, two countries, and two identities.

Borshay opens her film by speaking the three names of her triple identity: Deann Borshay, her adopted American identity; the Cha Jung Hee, the switched-at-adoption Korean identity given to her by orphanage staff in order to provide a child to the Borshays when the one they had been originally assigned was reclaimed by her birth father; and Kang Ok Jin, her actual Korean birth identity. The highlighting of Borshay’s triple identity introduces the melodrama to come: a story that will attempt to resolve the identity crisis of subject/director Borshay. In her narrative, Borshay remarks: “I forgot everything. I forgot how to speak Korean. I forgot any memory of ever having had a family. And I forgot my real name…[t]here wasn’t room in my mind for two mothers” and “I felt like I was supposed to choose one family over the other.”\(^{37}\)

These statements underline the pressure on Borshay to resolve her identity crisis by choosing one of her identities over the other(s). Borshay addresses this crisis by asking her American parents to travel to Korea to meet her Korean family. In *First Person Plural*, the peak action is the emotionally charged meeting of Borshay’s two mothers; the film’s resolution hinges on Borshay’s ability to decide which is her “real” mother.

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37. Borshay, *First Person Plural*. 
In the case of Deann Borshay, the sentimental appeal to “save starving children” is literally realized by her adoptive parents who participate in a program through which they sent $15 each month to sponsor Cha Jung Hee for two and a half years before making the decision to adopt their imagined ward. In *First Person Plural*, Borshay’s sister remembers her arrival, “From the moment you came here, you were my sister and we were your family and that was it. Even though maybe we looked different, and had a different nationality and whatever, we were your family,” and her mother reflects, “I realize now that you were terrified. But because we were so happy, you know, we just didn't think about that.” The early part of *First Person Plural* is loaded with sentimental stories from family on how they accepted Borshay unconditionally and see her as just like others in the family.

The conflict between adoptive parents’ and adoptees’ versions of the adoption experience is raised repeatedly throughout Borshay’s work, and highlights the question, “what is real?” when recounting these experiences. Borshay reveals that, when she was young, her parents’ version of her experience prevailed. She states, “I think as a child, I made a decision that I would never forget Korea. Every now and then I would stop whatever I was doing, close my eyes, and picture the road from the orphanage to the house.” But eventually, she admits, “The only memories I have of my childhood are the images my father filmed while I was growing up. I relegated my real memories into the category of dreams.” After she becomes an adult, she is able to take back control of the memories of her life in Korea, but the incompatibility of her perception of her identity with that held by her parents creates emotional rupture. “My parents have no idea…this entire period…that I would say I was depressed,” she says, acknowledging the stress of having two realities: Korean, adoptee and Asian in contrast with her parents’ version, American, familial and White.

Even after Borshay discovers that her identity was switched before she left Korea, her adoptive family tries to dismiss the significance of this finding in an effort to reinforce their acceptance of her as American Deann, part of the Borshay family, without realizing that their remarks are insensitive to Borshay’s identity as also Korean. Her mother responds, “I didn't care that they had switched children on us. You couldn't be loved more…just because you weren't Cha Jung Hee, you were Ok Jin Kang, Kong, whatever, it didn't matter to me…you were Deann and you were mine.” The supposed familial utopia of inclusive colorblindness fractures in this well-intentioned remark; while Mrs. Borshay surely intends to include her daughter in the family, in doing so, she minimizes the pain felt by Deann as a result of living with switched and missing identities, effectively erasing Borshay’s Korean identity. Near the end of her film, Borshay tearfully explains, “There's a way then, which I see my parents as my parents, but sometimes I look at them, and I see two White American people that are so different from me that I can't fathom how we are related to each other and how these two people are my parents…as a child I accepted them as my parents because I depended on them for survival…as an adult, I think that I haven't accepted them as my parents and that is part of the distance I have been feeling from them for a lot of years.”

Borshay’s focus on this difference in perception between herself and her parents works as dissent by augmenting and correcting the dominant perspectives of transracial adoption (that her parents also share) with the story of her own loss, trauma, and sadness.

When Borshay’s own stories counter family narratives with her memories of her Korean family and that her identity had been switched, her mother will not believe her. Only when

38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
Borshay is an adult is she able to more fully consider her past: “I moved away from my American family and started living by myself. Dreams started coming to me…over the course of a year or so, I started realizing that these must be memories coming back from Korea. That they weren’t just dreams, that there had to be something about them that was real.” In this exploration of her personal history, Borshay also makes political connections that question the very processes of adoption. In a section of the film that gives a history of Korean adoption, Borshay narrates: “[T]he more children orphanages had, the more money was sent from abroad…what Harry Holt started as a humanitarian gesture right after the war became big business in the decades to follow. South Korea became the largest supplier of children to developed countries in the world, causing some to argue that the country’s economic miracle was due in part to the export of its most precious natural resource, its children.”

Borshay’s dissent in reaction to her adoptive family’s inability to see her outside the limited confines of their family is transformed into questioning and dissent towards the larger-scale processes of transnational adoption and becomes a key moment in *First Person Plural*. In grounding her own story by relating a short history of Korean adoption, Borshay uses the language of economy (i.e. “big business,” “supplier,” “export,” and “natural resource”) and chooses to underscore critiques of the practice of transnational adoption as an unethical trade of children for economic prosperity. This is certainly not a depiction of fulfillment of the family that currently dominates mainstream transnational adoption discourses.

The experience of racism, especially within adoptive families, often comes not in the form of direct race-based confrontations, but instead in the form of ignorance of subtler and more complex forms of racialization. This is how Borshay approaches these experiences in *First Person Plural*. The Borshays’ ignorance of the problematic Orientalization of Asian Americans is revealed when a photographic portrait of Borshay as a child in a sailor outfit with an oriental parasol is prominently featured in the beginning of the film. Though Borshay never discusses the significance of the portrait, I suspect that the Borshays’ White children were not photographed in similar settings. Later in the film, the Borshay’s American parents present a copy of the portrait to Borshay’s birth mother as a gift, presumably to give Borshay’s Korean mother a document of the lost middle childhood of her daughter, but perhaps also to prove their embrace of Borshay’s Asianness, albeit in an Orientalized configuration.

The inability of Borshay’s adoptive family to detect the switching of the child they adopted from Cha Jung Hee to Kang Ok Jin, despite a two-and-a-half-year correspondence that included letters and pictures, underlines the White stereotype that all Asians look alike. Borshay’s adopted sister remarks about the family’s inability to tell which child was destined for their family when they pick up Borshay at the airport. Her sister remarks, “I think mother went up to the wrong person. I think we didn’t know until we checked your nametag or somebody told us who you were. It didn’t matter…I mean, one of you was ours!” This stands in stark contrast to Borshay’s Korean brother, who seemed to know right away, despite her switched identity, that she is his lost sister, Kang Ok Jin.

The emotional trauma Borshay experiences also demonstrates why there might be more general silence among transracial adoptees on the topic of racial and national difference. Borshay states, “I think being adopted into my family brought me a lot of happiness…but there was also a lot of sadness, and a lot of that sadness had to do with loss. I was never able to mourn what I had lost with my American parents.”

Borshay describes the difficult decision of her Korean mother as she contemplated giving her daughter up for adoption. Ultimately, under pressure from her Christian church and the or-

44. Borshay, *First Person Plural*.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
phanage where Borshay and two of her sisters had been temporarily placed for financial reasons, Borshay's Korean mother decided to give her up for adoption. This is an example of the Korean birth parents in a state of racial melancholy as they believe that giving their Asian children up for adoption into White American families is better for them than keeping them in the birth family; this belief implies the superiority of White American societies, reinforced by local social welfare and religious structures.

First Person Plural has been thoroughly analyzed as a text of “psychic diaspora” by Asian American literary scholar David Eng. Eng’s literary psychoanalysis of Borshay also focuses on the melancholy of transnational adoption, supported by examples of unresolved heartache between Borshay and her adoptive family, who refuse to see her pain, which he describes as “the strict management of the adoptee’s affect.” He usefully connects the long threads of Asian immigration, and the racial grief held within them, to Borshay’s adoptee grief. In addition, his work does well to examine transracial adoption as a White act, indeed an act of “Whitening” for gays and lesbians who seek to create normative families through adoption. Eng identifies the rejection of Borshay’s Korean identity by her White adoptive family as problematic; he writes, “What is especially disturbing…is not just the fact that the family…cannot easily conceive of her adoption as involving loss [or]…imagine her arrival in the United States as anything but a gain…[e]qually distressing is the fact that Borshay[‘s]…sadness…is read by many involved as ingratitude.” Here, Eng suggests the injustice of the familial negation of Borshay’s adoption-related trauma.

My analysis of First Person Plural and The Language of Blood expands on Eng’s in an effort to explain the work of dissent done by transnational adoptee narratives in dialogue with an existing melodramatic popular discourse on transnational adoption. By publicly bearing witness to transnational adoptees’ personal pain and trauma, these narratives correct the erasure of difference in the family and in society. While Eng explains the “communal nature of racial melancholia” as a rejection by parents of the adoptees’ racial awareness and experience, I instead understand birth and adoptive parents not only as causes of of racial melancholy, but also necessarily as affected by it through societal demands for normative family formations that are, in turn, linked to capitalist interests between poor nations that supply send children for adoption and rich nations with demand for adoptable infants. In other words, both transracial adoptees and adoptive parents are enmeshed in the racial melancholy of transracial adoption, though the relative power of the two groups determines their different roles within this melancholic formation. White parents, called into action through sentimental discourses of “common humanity” and “colorblind love,” enforce the social conditions of racelessness for their adopted children. In so doing, without acknowledging that the act of burying racial difference is a uniquely White privilege, adoptive parents also participate in subsuming the identity of transracial adoptees as racial others in order to create racial and cultural identities within the family that are consistent with dominant (and normative) images of the family as biologically, culturally, and racially homogeneous.

Korean Adoptee Memoir as a Corrective Action in The Language of Blood

The Language of Blood is the life story of author Jane Jeong Trenka, who was adopted from Korea as an infant into a small rural community in Minnesota. She describes a childhood filled with emotional and cultural neglect at the hands of her adoptive parents before entering college in Minneapolis, where she encounters a violent stalker who threatens her life and brings her to the

49. Ibid., 21.
50. Ibid., 20.
brink of emotional breakdown. Eventually, Trenka travels to South Korea to reunite with her birth mother and learns the story of her relinquishment forced by her birth father, an abusive alcoholic, who denies his paternity to his infant daughter. Trenka's reconnection with her birth mother and sisters effectively ends her relationship with her adoptive parents, which is only more completely severed when her birth mother dies of cancer. In contrast to Borshay, who spends her film reconnecting with her two mothers, the peak action in this story is the loss of both mothers, one to cancer, one through a bitter falling out.

Like Borshay, Trenka introduces herself more than once in her book. "My name is Jeong Kyong-Ah. My family register states the date of my birth, the lunar date January 24, 1972," she writes, "My name is Jane Marie Brauer, created September 26, 1972, when I was carried off an airplane onto American soil." Also like Borshay, Trenka finds that the cohabitation of her two identities within her is all but impossible; she writes: "In Minnesota…Jane Brauer is missing. She is gone—only a memory in the minds of those who imagine her. Meanwhile, in the mountains of Korea, Jeong Kyong-Ah…blinks hard in the sunlight, as if awakened from a deep sleep, or perhaps a very long fugue." The absence of Kyong-Ah in the presence of Jane and vice-versa sets the stage in *The Language of Blood* for a melodramatic story of loss, neglect, violence, and abandonment to come. *The Language of Blood* opens with a letter from Trenka's Korean birth mother to her and her biological sister with whom she was adopted. The immediate focus on Trenka's Korean family represents a major shift from dominant adoptive-parent focused discourses of transracial adoption. Throughout the work, Trenka identifies and attempts to understand her Korean mother's life, further reappropriating the story of adoption to focus on birth parents, who are virtually non-existent in popular conceptions of transracial adoption. The publication of her memoir alone had the potential to bring adoptee voices of dissent to the White-dominated discourse of transnational adoption; that Trenka's memoir has strong overtones of loss and recounts memories of childhood discrimination in family and community makes the work of dissent in her book even more plain.

Trenka is much less subtle than Borshay in recounting experiences of racism, both in her hometown and within her family. In a satirical single-act play within the memoir, Trenka details a barrage of racist slurs from her youth focused into a single response from generalized community members: "Rice-picker! I don't my kids to play with those girls! Go back where you came from! Can they speak English? Roses are red, violets are bigger, you got the lips of an African nigger! […] All you people are good at math. Frog-eyed chink! Boat person! How much did they cost? Where did you learn to speak English so well? I know someone who adopted Korean girls. Do you know them? Gook!" Trenka also describes her father's racist response to her dating Asian men: "He mocked their faces, as if they were not human, but dark, stupid monkeys. He mutilated their long names, which he could not and did not want to pronounce correctly."

Trenka internalizes her father's racist response to Asian men as racial shame and secrecy. In relation to this incident, Trenka writes, "It was during those years that I took down the bulletin board in my bedroom and scratched my Korean name (which I had cunningly memorized years before) into the paint on the wall and them replaced the bulletin board so I would not be found out." This is also a prime example of "burying racial otherness" which Anne Anlin Cheng suggests is a key element of racial melancholy. Though it begins as an act of shame, I suggest that it operates as an act of dissent towards her parents' silence, and is then powerful transformed into dissent towards rosier depictions of transnational adoption as a published "true story" of pain and loss within the practice of Korean American

52. Ibid., 15.
53. Ibid., 31.
54. Ibid., 59.
55. Ibid.
adoption. Later in the book, she reveals, “I had checked ‘White’ in the box of all my college forms… I didn’t want to be Korean. Korea was a place that couldn’t be talked about at home; it made other children leer at me in school. Korea was the reason why my face was mutated, why my glasses wouldn’t quite stay on my nose, why it was so hard to find clothes that fit. It was the reason why some children weren’t allowed to play with me, some felt compelled to call me a chink or a rice-picker, and adults didn’t feel compelled to defend me.” Here, Trenka’s admission of her own internalized racism serves as its own correction; by the time she wrote the book, she is aware that checking “White” is not the right choice for her, but lists reasons why she would feel compelled to do so as a younger adult. Here, she also connects her internalized racism to external racism she faced as a child when she identifies the discrimination against her, and the tragedy of growing up in a racist society where the adults in her life failed to protect her.

The Language of Blood has also gained some notoriety as an “angry adoptee” publication in adoption circles; letters and emails to Trenka as well as posts on her book weblog attest to the work’s controversial handling of the experience of adoption. Much of the controversy surrounding the book stems from its critical depiction of Trenka’s adoptive family and its disparaging view of life and society in small-town America. Trenka’s eventual break with her adoptive family is probably also anxiety-inducing for prospective parents of transracial adoptees who read the book. Because of her more overt opposition to the current practice of transnational adoption (embedded in her story of her adoption, which probably never should have taken place), the perception of the book as “angry” is unsurprising. While Trenka’s political beliefs about the wrongs in transnational adoption as expressed in her book are certainly self-empowering and are potentially empowering to other adoptees who have had problems in their adoption experiences, they are controversial in the context of dominant discourses on transnational adoption. This is evidence that the use (or even the perception) of anger as a form of direct dissent (as opposed to the depiction of sadness as less direct dissent) can actually be less effective in the “war of sentiment”; as noted by Eng, anger can appear as ingratitude in light of dominant discourses of transnational adoption, where adoptees are reduced into lucky recipients of “a better life.”

Korean Adoptee Memoir as Community Voice

Although I have identified as a Korean adoptee since childhood, I began my research work on the Korean American adoptee experience as an adult: informally in 1999 and more formally in 2002. The project I have been working on for the last decade focuses on Korean American adoptee experiences, and how the sociopolitical narratives of belonging, rescue, race, and nation have been incorporated into their everyday lives. Likewise, I am also interested in what Korean adoptee experiences tell us about the current state of American race relations, migration and transmigration, family construction, and Asian American subjectivity. While I tried to consider as many facets as possible of current Korean adoptee experience, I worked mostly as an ethnographer, interviewing as many Korean American adopted adults as possible, and taking note of the sociocultural environments that adoptees created and inhabited. During the course of my ethnographic work, I met hundreds of Korean adoptees in the United States, Europe and Korea and was became quite immersed in Korean adoptee communities, organizations, and networks.

It was early in my research that I first met Trenka, when she visited the local Minnesota Korean adoptee networking organization, AKConnection, for which I was a volunteer. This was shortly after her first memoir, The Language of Blood, was published in 2003. Though The Language of Blood was not the first Korean adoptee memoir, the leadership of AKConnection quickly realized that this new memoir was an event of major significance for our community, both because Jane grew up in Minnesota, where we all lived (and which, incidentally, which

56. Ibid., 113.
has the highest concentration of Korean adoptees of any place in the country), but also because this book so poetically addressed many difficult themes of isolation, racism, and family divide central to Korean adoptee experience.

The release of *The Language of Blood* roughly coincided with the emergence of new culture-based approaches to research on Korean adoptee communities and the beginnings of networking efforts among Korean adopted adults in the United States. I now wonder if the first decade of the twenty-first century will come to be regarded as a golden age for Korean adoptees, a result of the peak transnational adoption years from Korea, but before the demise of the practice, which has already been predicted by many. Demographically, the past ten years have witnessed a critical mass of Korean adoptees reaching adulthood and gaining visibility as artists, activists, authors, and researchers—not only to the general public, but just as significantly, to one another. In my ethnographic work on Korean adoptee communities, the theme of isolation seems ever-present, explained perhaps by the tendency of Korean adoptees to be the only (or one of the only) adoptees, Koreans, Asian Americans and/or people of color in their families, schools, and communities. The synergy among members of this burgeoning community should not be underestimated, as the voice of one adoptee inspires, encourages and otherwise amplifies another.

*The Language of Blood* was preceded by a handful of other memoirs by and about Korean American adoptees. Each has an important place in raising awareness about issues related to Korean adoption and building Korean adoptee community. However, it is *The Language of Blood* and *First Person Plural* that captured the imagination of both Korean adoptees and the general public most meaningfully. This is certainly because of the artistic and literary merits of each work, but I would argue that it is also because these works both endeavored to complicate the adoption story. Within the constant cycle of “what if?” questioning in which adoptees so often find themselves, Trenka points to her own displacement in her American family and in the United States, questioning at once the primacy of the United States over “poor” countries that send children to be adopted and the long-held American trope of adoption as an act of salvation. Her work is especially effective to this end because Trenka shares her most painful experiences of racial ostracism, family estrangement, and emotional isolation and trauma. Though her memoir is hers alone, the work resonates with many other Korean and other transnational adoptees around the world, and *The Language of Blood* remains seminal reading for initiates to the worlds of transracial and transnational adoptees.

In this way, Trenka has become a standard-bearer of sorts within Korean adoptee communities, a voice that incites both action and reaction. The response to *The Language of Blood*, both in academic circles, in which the memoir is probably more written about than any other Korean adoptee creative work, and in greater communities, adoption-related, or not, makes possible its influence as a sociopolitical document of note. Trenka’s works have become touchstones within adoptee communities as documents of dissent about what is wrong with current practices of transnational and transracial adoption.

As return migration to Korea has become more commonplace among Korean adoptees, Trenka has followed up *The Language of Blood* with another memoir, *Fugitive Visions: An Adoptee’s Return to Korea*, about her own repatriation to Korea. Meanwhile, more academic attention is being paid to patterns and cultures of transmigration among Asian Americans, and new interest in adoptees in Korea is part of this shift. Trenka’s shift of focus from America to Korea opens the repatriate experience to Korean American adoptees, normalizing what has been largely uncharted terrain and refiguring Korea as a space in which a Korean adoptee subjectivity might expand.

Trenka’s reconnection with her Korean family positions *The Language of Blood* within the genre of search narrative. The adoptee search narrative, rife with conflicts of identity arising from

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57. Trenka, *Fugitive Visions*. 
the complications of searching for and finding another family, has become a memoir subgenre that entertains with melodrama as much as it connects to adoptee readers. Even though most adoptees do not search the possibility of search may well be the most interesting quality adoptees have to offer to the public eye. Thus, according to published memoirs, it would seem that we all search, and I have often wondered if an adoptee memoir without a search narrative would even be publishable. Within these constraints, Trenka has complicated the search narrative in *Fugitive Visions*; the object of her search shifts from the family to the self, particularly the lost Korean self that so many adoptees wonder about as we consider our possible alternate pasts, presents and futures. Trenka marks her legitimacy in Korean society by claiming Korea, whether it embraces or rejects her, just as she claimed her Korean mother in *The Language of Blood*. The possibility of claiming Korea, a nation so long lost to most Korean adoptees, is at once shocking and reassuring.

Though I am wary of the essentializing influence memoirs can exert upon a community (both in terms of external perceptions of the community and the community’s internal discourse, as a scholar of Korean adoption, I am often struck by the parallels between adoptee memoir and adoptee culture; *Fugitive Visions* is no exception. The work is an exploration of Korean adoptee repatriate life, and of the difficult, often painful process of negotiating the Korean language and Korean society as an adoptee. Trenka describes her reaction as she encounters her “people”: Korean nationals and a fractured international community of Korean adoptees, the so-called “KAD nation.” In *Fugitive Visions*, Trenka gestures toward a future for Korean adoptees; a position that will be inhabited by relatively few adoptees in practice, but which may well become a model of the imagined transnational adoptee in the minds of academic researchers and the general public.

Key themes in *Fugitive Visions* have particular resonance in the transplanted repatriate community, and reach back to communities of Korean adoptees living in their adoptive countries. Trenka’s poignant description of her struggles learning the Korean language is one of the first literary representations of that trial faced by Korean adoptees the world over. While many adoptees never elect to learn Korean, for many who do attempt it, difficulty with learning birth language underlines the many losses connected to birth culture that Korean adoptees suffer. Difficulties with learning or re-learning the Korean language poses a particular psychological obstacle for adoptees wishing to integrate into Korean society, both because it is a painful reminder that their life histories were disrupted by adoption, and also because there is such a high expectation in Korean society that anyone who looks Korean should speak Korean. Many adoptees have remarked to me, “I feel I can pass as Korean until I open my mouth.” Lack of fluency in the Korean language is the primary barrier to reconnecting with Korean culture cited by adoptee return migrants, and could therefore be used as a strong argument against the practice of transnational/transcultural adoptions that are also translingual.

Trenka also paints a tragic picture of a Korean adoptee community of made up of transplants, self-seekers, and lost souls. Her depiction of the ramshackle KAD nation looking for their Korean identities in a Korea obsessed with American culture, is an example of a central paradox of globalization: transnationals who travel globally to seek nationalized identity and the cultural belonging that goes with it can never fit neatly into nations, because nations so often define themselves by rejecting foreignness. Though transnational adoptees might be held up as the ultimate global citizens, the ideal of a borderless global future is complicated by very real problems of immigration status, cultural competence, and mistaken identity.

As the Korean adoptee community matures, it experiences growing pains. Is there really such a thing as a “Korean adoptee community” in the sense that there are unifying qualities for all Korean adoptees? Is it possible to make a community from a group of persons who are distinguished only by their separation from one nation and family and an envelopment by another? If we are a community, and we find an identity, what do we do with it? In *Fugitive Visions*, Trenka makes a resolution for an adoptee activism by detailing how her own outrage was awakened. Her work
in *Fugitive Visions*, as well as in *The Language of Blood*, documents the many emotional, societal, political, and procedural pitfalls inherent in the current practice of transnational adoption. Because public perceptions of transnational adoption are overwhelmingly positive, Trenka’s work brings to light some of the seldom-heard truths about the many problems adoptees face as they attempt to integrate their often-split identities in a “check-one-box-only” world.

**Conclusion**

That transracial adoptees would be present in discussions about transracial adoption is seemingly self-evident. “After all,” they can argue, “this discussion is about us.” However, most public discussions about transracial adoption are still not framed this way. In a November, 2004, talk radio broadcast about transracial adoption in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota—the state with the highest per-capita population of Korean adoptees in the country and home to a variety of institutions that pioneered the facilitation of transracial adoption—White transracial adoptive parents/adoption service providers Joe Kroll, executive director of the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), and Gloria Hochman, director of communications and marketing at the National Adoption Center, were the featured guests. Most of the broadcast callers to the show were also White parents. The comments of only one transracial adoptee caller, Amalia, were aired in the hour-long program. Amalia stated that, “[M]y concern with the conversation today is that…it is largely bookended by those who have adopted and not by those who have been adopted. The perspective is very different…. Past the age of fourteen or fifteen, my parents did not have skills that they could share with me in terms of helping me develop my own racial and ethnic identity. Those are areas where I had to go out and develop my own skills and tools…if you are person of color in the United States, you need to develop the skills and tools to deal with White supremacy and racism. You can’t get those from White parents.”

Amalia also made objections to minimization of racist experiences for adoptees who are not African American and connected the imperial relationships between the U.S. and third world countries to the practice of transnational adoption. Her criticisms of adoption discourse as dismissive of adoptee voices was noted by host and guests before they moved quickly to continue discussion among adoptive parents. In reference to training sessions that NACAC provides to prospective transracial adoptive parents, Joe Kroll, in an effort to acknowledge the Amalia’s concerns remarked, “we consciously have transracial adoptive parents and transracial adoptees doing the trainings together…to get their voices…parents hear almost better from the young people that have experienced it, than they do from their peers, other parents.” However, Kroll’s remarks ignore the reality that transracial adoptees are not necessarily youth or “young people”; all of the authors/directors referenced in this piece are of parenting age themselves, and could very easily be older than the prospective adoptive parents to whom Kroll refers. Complaints about infantilization among transracial adoptees are common; an adult identity for an adoptee is all but erased by popular and scholarly parent-focused depictions of adoption.

In order to develop and express experiences of adoption apart from dominant parent-focused narratives and to be heard, the most effective choice transracial adoptees can make is to engage in sentimentalist conversations. In Amalia’s case, the articulate and logical presentation of her grievances was virtually ignored in the face of the multitude of parents wishing make their own stories heard. I argue that instead, melodramatic stories that engage in the sentimental terms defined in dominant discourses of transracial and transnational adoption are far more effective in bringing transracial adoptee perspectives into public discussion. While these are not the only

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59. Ibid.
60. This finding is present in my current oral history research with adult Korean adoptees; it is also documented by Eleana Kim.
stories about the transracial adoption experience, they are the ones that are currently most visible as the stories many adoptees have to tell. This intervention on the part of transracial adoptees is particularly crucial because their stories also do the important work of disrupting popular notions of transracial and transnational adoption as unproblematic, apolitical experiences of love, fulfillment and happiness. These disruptions often appear as ruptures in the happy American rhetoric of colorblind love for Korean adoptees who would choose to assert a racial identity, whether it be part of a Korean Adoptee or Asian American community, or a part of the White American community in which most were raised.

References


Notes on Contributors

Though all our Symposium participants were able to supply us with either a paper or abstract by our press deadline, some of the contributors to the proceedings are not Symposium presenters. We had extremely limited capacity for speakers for the August 3rd Symposium, and could only invite twelve 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 twelve papers or abstracts from our Symposium participants, as well as five additional papers (written by one invited guest who could not attend the Symposium, one alternate, and three editors). The contributors’ biographical notes include all proceedings authors, whether or not they presented their work at the Symposium.

Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Nevada–Las Vegas. She is a Korean adoptee, Korean adoptive parent, and has researched extensively on intercountry adoption to include exploring issues of identity, the impact/efficacy of post-adopt services, and more recently the sociopolitical context of intercountry adoption and best interests. She is the co-editor of International Korean Adoption: A Fifty-year History of Policy and Practice. She earned her Ph.D. at the College of William and Mary in Counselor Education, and Juris Doctorate at UNLV.

Catherine Ceniza Choy is an associate professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of the award-winning book, Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History, which was published by Duke University Press and co-published by Ateneo de Manila University Press in 2003. Her current book, project “Global Families,” on the history of Asian international adoption in the United States, is under contract with New York University Press. She has published essays on international adoption history in the Journal of American-East Asian Relations and in the anthology International Korean Adoption: A Fifty-Year History of Policy and Practice. She has also co-authored essays on international adoption with her husband, Gregory Paul Choy, that have been published in The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader and Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption. Prior to her appointment at UC Berkeley, Catherine was an assistant professor of American Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. She received her Ph.D. in History from UCLA.

Greg Choy is a lecturer in the Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley. He received his B.A. in Liberal Studies from UC Santa Barbara, his MA in English from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and his Ph.D. in English from the University of Washington with a focus on Asian American literature. His scholarly work has focused on Asian American literature, works by and about transracial Asian adoptees, and developmental education pedagogy. At Cal, he teaches courses in Asian American literature and comparative multiethnic American literature.
Boonyoung Han grew up in Denmark but has been living in Korea on and off since 2002. After receiving her MA in Korean studies from Yonsei GSIS, she is currently pursuing a MSW degree at Soongsil University. With her interest and passion for social justice in general, and for the adoption community in particular, her current work focuses on the conditions for Korean women.

Christina Higgins is an associate professor at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa where she teaches in the Department of Second Language Studies. Since 2001, she has explored language and identity links in Kenya and Tanzania, where she has researched contexts including beauty pageants, HIV/AIDS education, hip hop culture, and workplace interactions. More recently, she has turned her attention to the sociolinguistics of Hawai‘i Creole (Pidgin) and has enjoyed working with high school students in Hawai‘i to produce several arts-based research projects, including a documentary film. Her interest in exploring the prospect of developing an additional self through the process of acquiring an additional language has long fascinated her, and this idea led her to research the interplay of language and identity with heritage and traditional learners of Swahili and with heritage/KAD learners of Korean. She is grateful to have had the opportunity to finally work with her close friend Kim Stoker to explore the language and identity links among KADs and to create another space for KAD voices to be heard. Professor Higgins is a coauthor of a presented paper, but will not appear at the Symposium. Contact: cmhiggin@hawaii.edu.

Tobias Hübinette is a researcher at the Multicultural Centre, Sweden. He has a Ph.D. in Korean Studies from Stockholm University, and his research has focused on adoption cultural studies, Korean adoption studies, postcolonial theory and critical race theory. His present research concerns representations and images of East Asians in contemporary visual culture. http://www.tobiahubinette.se

Eleana Kim is an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Rochester. Her research since 1999 has examined the political, economic and cultural dimensions of transnational adoption from South Korea, and she has published articles based upon this research in Visual Anthropology Review, Social Text, and Anthropological Quarterly, as well as in a number of collected volumes. Her book on Korean transnational adoption, Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging, is forthcoming from Duke University Press in November 2010. She received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from New York University.

Hosu Kim (Ph.D., Sociology, City University of New York, The Graduate Center) is an assistant professor in the department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, at The College of Staten Island, City University of New York. She is currently working on an oral history project that will be part of her book manuscript, Virtual Mothering: The Cultural Critique of Emergent Figure of Korean Birthmothers in the Transnational adoption. By focusing on birthmothers’ stories and experiences not subsumed by a popular discourse of Korean transnational adoption over the past fifty years, Kim’s work illuminates the unofficial roles of transnational adoption practice, such as the regulation of women’s sexuality and maintenance of a traditional family imaginary. In addition to a traditional publication, she plans to create a performance piece based on her oral history collection. She is also a contributing performance artist for “Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans and “The Forgotten War,” a collaborative art project based on the oral histories of Korean War survivors.

Oh Myo Kim was born in Seoul, South Korea and was adopted when she was 8 months old. She is a graduate student in Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Her research interests include issues of race and discrimination in transracial adoptive families, orphanage care, and conversations about racial differences. She received her B.A. in English from Rutgers College and her M. Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary. She is currently researching the way in which transracial adoptive families discuss racial differences and how this affects the behavioural...
outcomes for adopted children. She is also interested in poetry, identity exploration and multicultural counseling.

Jennifer Kwon Dobbs is the author of Paper Pavilion, which received the White Pine Press Poetry Prize and The New England Poetry Club’s Sheila Motton Book Award. Her essays, journalism, and poetry have been published in North America, Europe, and Asia; featured on radio and in film; and translated into Greek, Korean, and Turkish. She is assistant professor of English and creative writing at St. Olaf College and core staff of Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea (TRACK). Currently, Jennifer is working on a researched essay collection about adoptee birth search geographies.

Kimberly Langrehr MS., LCPC., CRC. is a Doctoral Candidate in Counseling Psychology at Loyola University Chicago and received her undergraduate and masters degrees from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Kim’s current research interests focus on the role of race in attributional bias, the initiating factors in critical consciousness, and the developmental implications based on the intersection of race and adoption for Korean adoptees across the lifespan. Kim is currently practicing as a licensed clinical professional counselor in Illinois and is also a co-founder of Korean Adoptees of Chicago (KATCH).

Richard M. Lee, Ph.D., L.P. is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Asian American Studies at the University of Minnesota. His research focuses on the psychological correlates of race, ethnicity, and migration in Asian American individuals and families. His current work examines the role and relevance of cultural socialization in the behavioral development of Korean children reared in White adoptive families in the United States. Professor Lee is a coauthor of a presented paper, but will not appear at the Symposium.

Kimberly McKee is a Ph.D. Candidate in Women’s Studies at the Ohio State University. She obtained her MSc Gender and Social Policy degree from the London School Economics, where she studied the gendered nature of the Republic of Korea’s intercountry adoption practices. Her current research examines the racial, ethnic and cultural identities of Korean American adoptees.

Lene Myong, Ph.D., is currently Assistant Professor at Department of Learning, Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus. Her dissertation “Becoming Adoptee: On Transnational and Racial Subjectification” (2009) is a qualitative study of adult Korean adoptees raised in Denmark. Her current research focus is race and affect.

Deborah S. Napier, B.A. Geography, M.S. Architecture, is a Doctoral Candidate in Interdisciplinary Design Studies at Washington State University. As a Korean adoptee, having grown up in an environment with no ethnic identification, Deborah contemplated, is there an event in adoptees’ lives which encourages Korean ethnic pride? With this in mind, she is currently completing her dissertation research to support preliminary findings from her thesis in which adoptees experienced a positive and significant relationship between feelings of place attachment to Korea and ethnic identity during their first return visit. Her ongoing research intends to explain and describe how the first visit experience informs representation of place, specifically, how do places, objects and characteristics, and their assigned meaning support ethnic identity development to enhance feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, and social inclusion? Previous to returning to graduate studies, Deborah presented the Keynote Speech in Korea and additional presentations in the US at International Geographic Information Systems conferences. In addition to Deborah’s research, she teaches Physical Geography at Eastern Washington University with a specific emphasis toward human interconnectedness to the physical environment. She is also involved in development of EWU’s Online GIS Certificate Program, scheduled to launch September 2011. Deborah is active in adoptee and adoptive parent networks, specifically as an

Hyeon-Sook Park (Ph.D., Uppsala University, Sweden) is currently an Associate Professor at the Dept. of Scandinavian Languages at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea. Prior to this she was a researcher at the Centre for Research on Bilingualism at Stockholm University, Sweden, on a project “Language reactivation among Korean adoptees in Sweden.” Her research interests include bilingualism (in particular code-switching), first language reactivation and second language acquisition.

Sarah Park is an Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota. She received a BA in History and Asian American Studies, and an MA in Asian American Studies from UCLA, and a PhD and MS in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. Her research interests include representations of the Korean diaspora in children’s and young adult literature, youth services librarianship, social justice, transracial adoption, and Korean diasporic history. She teaches courses on children’s and young adult literature, social justice, web design, and library and information science. Her dissertation research was a critical analysis of representations of transracially adopted Koreans in children's literature, and her current project investigates the information seeking behaviours of transnationally adopted Koreans. (http://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. Her 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. She was the lead organizer and proceedings editor for the First International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium in 2007. She is department chair and an assistant professor of American Multicultural Studies at the Minnesota State University at Moorhead. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota.

Elise Prébin obtained her Ph.D. in social anthropology at Université Paris Ouest-Nanterre (France) in December 2006. She was a Korea Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow at Harvard University-Korea Institute in 2007–2008 and served as a lecturer at Harvard University Department of Anthropology 2009. She is currently an assistant professor at Hanyang University Department of Cultural Anthropology (South Korea). Her past research has focused on the South Korean side of transnational adoption and her current research is concerned with the contemporary funerary culture of South Korea.


David M. Smolin is Professor of Law, Cumberland Law School, Samford University, and Director of the Center for Biotechnology, Law, and Ethics. He teaches in the areas of constitutional law, juvenile and family law, international human rights, bioethics, wills and trusts, and intellectual property. He has published over thirty academic articles on a variety of subjects, including children's issues (intercountry adoption, child labor, and children's rights), constitutional reproductive issues, bioethics, energy policy, and law and religion. Most of his academic articles
in the area of intercountry adoption are available at: http://works.bepress.com/david_smolin/.

Professor Smolin has co-organized symposia on a diverse set of subjects, including Children as Research Subjects, the United States Health Care System, Reforming Intercountry Adoption, The Baby Market, Bioethics, Energy Policy, The Missing Girls of China and India, and Children's Rights. Professor Smolin is a frequent symposium and conference speaker, and frequently speaks, writes, or provides background information for the press/media. In recent years he has written extensively on child laundering/trafficking in the intercountry adoption system, working particularly with Desiree Smolin on analysis and reform of the intercountry adoption system.

Eli Park Sorensen is a stipendiary junior research fellow at University of Cambridge (English Department), specializing in postcolonial studies. He received his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from University College London in 2007. His work has been published in various book collections and journals, including Paragraph, Peer English, Journal of Narrative Theory, NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction and Research in African Literatures. His forthcoming book, entitled Postcolonial Studies and the Literary, will be published by Palgrave Macmillan. Currently, he is working on a book project about Korean international adoption, ideology and postcolonialism, and a monograph on the British-Caribbean writer Caryl Phillips. (Contact: Clare Hall, Herschel Road, Cambridge CB3 9AL, UK. Email: spark7257@gmail.com)

Kim Stoker is a full-time lecturer (전임 강사) at Duksung Women's University in Seoul. She received her MA from the University of Hawai'i in Asian Studies and has been living in Korea on and off since 1995.

Min-Ok Yang is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in social welfare at Soongsil University, Korea. After receiving her MSW, she has more than 10 years of field experience working for various institutions and facilities, including a community rehabilitation center, a community center, the community chest, and Soongsil University Student Counseling Center. A particular interest in the solution-focused approach has emerged from her experience with clinical social work and she has built a strong interest in issues of adoption and unwed motherhood through personal relationships and professional research.
THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON KOREAN ADOPTION STUDIES: CALL FOR PAPERS

Symposium Date: August 3, 2010
Submissions Due by: September 15, 2009
Submit to: SISKAS2010@gmail.com
Questions? Contact Kim Park Nelson, greg0051@umn.edu
If selected, your complete, full-length paper (up to 15 single-spaced pages) will be due January 1, 2010. Submission of a full-length paper by the due date is a requirement for participation in the Symposium. You may also be invited to participate in a research panel at the Gathering the week following the Symposium.

Submission Deadline and Instructions
Complete submissions (cover sheet, paper proposal and CV) must be received by September 15, 2009 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. Selection notifications will be made by e-mail by the end of November.

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

The International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) plans to convene the Second International Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies as part of the 2010 Korean Adoptee Gathering 2010.

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 bring together scholars from around the world who are conducting research in the field of Korean adoption studies. These scholars 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 multidisciplinary symposium will take place in Seoul, South Korea, and will be comprised of paper presentations and open discussions. The papers will be published as a volume of collected proceedings, which will be distributed at the Symposium and also made available to university libraries. The First Symposium in 2007 laid the foundation for the growing network of Korean Adoption Studies scholars, and the 2010 Symposium will be an opportunity to continue expanding the network, to include a wider range of scholarship and to incorporate work being done by scholars in Korea.

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, almost 200,000 Korean children have been sent for adoption to 15 principal host countries in the Western world. Of those children, over 120,000 were sent to the United States, 60,000 to Europe (with half in Scandinavia of which 10,000 arrived in Sweden alone), and the remaining 10,000 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, still around 1,500 children leave Korea every year for adoption to eight 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 generation and 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 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, as well as cultural studies oriented textual analyses of adopted Korean self-narratives.

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. There is also a growing body of research on adoptees’ language detrition and attrition and their cultural output of art, film, and literature.

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 interdisciplinary perspectives. Suggested topics include (but are not limited to):

- The Korean state and international adoption policy /adoption and Korea’s image in the world. We especially encourage the submission of papers that focus on Korean adoption as a social, cultural or political phenomenon within the nation of South Korea including research that originates from within South Korea.

- Korean adoptees as part of Korean diaspora and/or Korean adoption as a part of Asian North American, Asian European, or Asian Australian experience.

- Comparative projects that examine Korean adoption and adoption from other countries.

- In-between identities and familial relations and the impact of Korean adoption on the adoption triad members.

- Empirical research that examines a specific question or salient issue within the Korean adoptee community, including the behavioural adjustment and emotional development of Korean adoptees from normative standpoints as opposed to pathologized approaches. We also encourage work that can detail the logic of inquiry or research methods, and that provides sufficient evidence to support and interpret results.

- Projects that explore the social phenomenon of multiple group status held by Korean adoptees and their relative experiences in North America, Australia, and Europe.

- Korean adoptees as subjects of cultural production including literature, fine arts, or blogs. We especially encourage work that examines Korean adoption in documentary or cinema.
The Second International Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies
Paper Proposal Submission Cover Sheet
(Please Complete One Cover Sheet per Presenter)

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 the conference 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
SISKAS2010@gmail.com
WITH
“SISKAS 2010 PROPOSAL SUBMISSION” IN THE SUBJECT LINE.
History of 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 has been established to better serve the Korean adoptee community, create a strong communication forum, build global relationships and provide a location where Korean adoptees can turn when in need of a resource.

Common for all the IKAA associations is that they have demonstrated long-term stability, some who have been in existence for over 20 years, with organizational structure and membership is comprised overwhelmingly of adult adoptees, long experience working with adoptees, and organization of activities and events for their members on a regular basis. The IKAA network reaches out to thousands of adoptees worldwide.

The mission of the IKAA network is to enrich the global adoption community, promote the sharing of information and resources between adult adoptee associations, strengthen cross-cultural relations and innovate post-adoption services for the broader international adoptee community.

IKAA will continue to look for opportunities for our members to help them with business and government internships and jobs in North America, Europe, Scandinavia, Australia and Korea, through our ever-growing network of adoptee associations and other adoptee service-providers.

Now that IKAA has incorporated as a non-profit, it is moving towards the expansion and inclusion of the many adoptee organizations that exist throughout the world. If you are part of an adoptee organization and are interested in learning more about becoming part of the IKAA network, please contact the Board of Directors: info@ikaa.org

IKAA – Europe

Adopted Koreans’ Association (Sweden):
http://www.akf.nu
Arierang (The Netherlands):
http://www.arierang.nl
Korea Klubben (Denmark):
http://www.koreaklubben.dk
Racines Coreennes (France):
http://www.racinescoreennes.org
IKAA – U.S.A.

AKConnection:
http://www.akconnection.com

Also-Known-As, Inc.:
http://www.alsoknownas.org

Asian Adult Adoptees of Washington:
http://www.aaawashington.org

IKAA Gathering 2010 Supporting Organizations

Korean Adoptees of Hawai‘i (USA):
http://www.kahawaii.org

Asian Adult Adoptees of British Columbia (Canada):
http://www.aaabritishcolumbia.ca

Boston Korean Adoptees (Massachusetts, USA):
http://www.bkadoptee.org

Forum for Korean Adoptees (Norway):
http://www.fkanorway.org

Korean Adoptees of Chicago (USA):
http://www.katchicago.com

To Contact IKAA

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