ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	LEAVING "HOME" IN SEARCH OF THE "HOMELAND": TRANSNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS AMONG ADOPTED KOREAN RETURNEES, ADOPTIVE MOTHERS, AND BIRTH MOTHERS
	Sina Lee, Doctor of Philosophy, 2019
Dissertation directed by:	Professor Seung-kyung Kim, Women's Studies

Leaving "Home" in Search of the "Homeland": Transnational Encounters among Adopted Korean Returnees, *Adoptive Mothers, and Birth Mothers* considers the relationships within adoption triads—returned adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers in South Korea and the U.S.—in order to expand the concept of, "the best interest of the child," under which transnational adoptions of Korean children were carried out in the mid-twentieth century.

The two primary research methods used in this study are participant observation and in-depth interviews. I conducted a pilot study by participating in formal Korean adoptees' conferences as well as informal gatherings of adoptees held in the northeastern United States. I then returned to South Korea to conduct my field work in 2015. By working as a translator for two motherland tours, I was able to both observe the intense, emotional reunions between the returned adoptees and their birth mothers and interview some of the participants. I also interviewed adoptive mothers,

birth fathers, siblings, and social workers. In addition, I volunteered for returned adoptees' political organizations and participated in their birth family search program.

By presenting birth mothers' stories, this study sheds light on the sending country, which has so far been left out within the field of transnational adoption studies. The complex relationship between adoptees and their adoptive mothers provides a window to understand the construction of normative motherhood in the U.S. This study argues that a primary motivation for adoptees' returning lies in how they conceptualize their relationships with their two mothers.

Careful listening to the stories of adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers, I argue, is needed in order to expand the concept of "the best interest of the child."

LEAVING "HOME" IN SEARCH OF THE "HOMELAND":
TRANSNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS AMONG ADOPTED KOREAN RETURNEES, ADOPTIVE MOTHERS, AND BIRTH MOTHERS

by

Sina Lee

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
[Doctor of Philosophy]
[2019]

Advisory Committee:
Professor Seung-Kyung Kim, Chair
Professor Ashwini Tambe
Professor Augusta Lynn Bolles
Professor Sahar Mohamed Khamis
Professor Sonya Alice Michel

© Copyright by
[Sina Lee]
[2019]

Dedication

For my beloved mother, Yeonok Choi

Table of Contents

Dedication ... ii
List of Abbreviations ... v
Introduction: Transnational Adoption from a Transnational Feminist Perspective ... 1
The History of Transnational Adoption ... 6
The International Law: The Best Interests of the Child ... 7
The History of Transnational Adoption from South Korea ... 11
Transnational Adoptees as Overseas Koreans ... 14
Conversation with Existing Literature ... 24
Adoption Studies ... 24
Family Studies ... 31
Transnational Feminism ... 37
Feminist Research Methods: Methods as Politics ... 40
Methods ... 40
Methods as Politics: The Dilemma of Feminist Research Methods ... 42
Insider/Outsider Dilemma ... 43
Flexible Identity of a Researcher ... 45
Power Dynamics: Should a Researcher Get Involved with Participants? ... 47
Chapter 2: Leaving "Home" in Search of the "Homeland": The Return of Korean Adoptees ... 50
Introduction: The Person Who Looks Like Me ... 50
Motherland Tours ... 52
Wandering between a Sense of Belonging and a Sense of Rejection for Ten Days ... 58
Why Do Korean Adoptees Return to the Motherland? ... 64
Finding My Roots: My Poor Country and My Poor Mother ... 67
Chapter Conclusion: To Reconcile with My Country and My Mother ... 78
Chapter 3: Ain't I a Mother? The Hidden Stories of Korean Transnational Adoptees' Birth Mothers ... 80
Birth Mothers as Melancholy Subjects ... 82
Mothers No One Wanted ... 92
Ain't I a Mother? ... 93
Kyungju ... 93
Narae ... 98
Enjong ... 101
Chapter Conclusion: Challenging the Concept of "Normal" Motherhood ... 105
Chapter 4: I Am a Privileged Woman but I Am Still Struggling: The Stories of Adoptive Mothers ... 108
Introduction: Who Is the Real Mother of an Adoptee? ... 108
The Struggles of Adoptive Mothers Beyond Class and Race Privilege ... 111
Sara ... 111
Katie ... 118
To Have a Complete Family ... 127
Chapter Conclusion: Resisting Patriarchal Motherhood ... 131

Chapter 5: Story with a Happy Ending? The Reunion of Adoptees, Birth Mothers, and Adoptive Mothers 139
Introduction: The Journey of Anna 139
Good Luck to You 144
The Case of Hans: Reunion via Facebook 144
The Case of Emma: I Just Got Lucky 147
The Case of Nancy: Documents, Information, and Help 152
Stories with Happy Endings? Post-Reunion Experiences 156
The Three Stories of Emma 156
Nancy: I Was as Always a Part of My Family 162
Hans: There Is No Room for Exclusion 169
Chapter Conclusion: Living in Fear 173
Chapter 6: Transnational Solidarity among Adoptees, Birth Mothers, and Adoptive Mothers 175
Is Transnational Solidarity Possible? 175
Appendices 182
Glossary 186
Bibliography 187

This Table of Contents is automatically generated by MS Word, linked to the Heading formats used within the Chapter text.

List of Abbreviations

ASK	Adoptee Solidarity Korea
GOA'L	Global Overseas Adoptees' Link
HOLT	Holt Children's Service
KAS	Korean Adoption Services
KCS	Korean Cultural School
KUMFA	Korean Unwed Mothers Families' Association
SWS	Social Welfare Society
TRACK	Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea

Introduction: Transnational Adoption from a Transnational Feminist Perspective

I was always surrounded by many aunties when I was a child. My parents had a small restaurant, and most of the employees were middle-aged women who I called my aunties. Many of them were divorced and unable to raise their children on their own. In the kitchen and dining rooms, they talked a lot about their lives and how much they missed their children. Oftentimes, I would be sitting in the middle of the room or wandering around the kitchen when they were having these conversations, so I was able to hear about these women's lived experiences. My childhood with these aunties led me to have a lifelong interest in reproductive rights and the meaning of motherhood. Therefore, I examined Korean women's abortion issues for my master's thesis in sociology since I wanted to know why certain women had to abort and what social circumstances make them to decide to do so.

When I moved to the United States in 2011 to pursue my Ph.D. in women's studies, I planned to conduct a comparative research project on abortion policies and women's experiences in South Korea and China. However, my plan changed when I took a qualitative methods course in 2012. This class required me to interview a certain group of people, and I choose Korean adoptees who lived in the D.C. area since I could not interview women in China or South Korea during my coursework. When I was in South Korea, I did not know much about adoption, and especially not transnational adoption, because I had not met any adoptees. However, I was able to meet many Korean adoptees at school (University of Maryland), in Korean

(American) communities, and through friends in the United States. I was curious why I had not met many adoptees in South Korea even though the number of Korean adoptees is more than 200,000, why their stories were hidden, and what stories they and their adoptive and birth mothers have. Therefore, I decided to interview Korean adoptees for conducting the assignment of my qualitative methods course.

When I began to interview Korean adoptees, I planned to ask questions regarding their identity formation, such as how they identify themselves as Korean American, American, and/or Korean adoptees, as well as about their relationships with their adoptive families and what they think about South Korea. However, it was hard to draw one simple conclusion because every adoptee has a different perspective on adoption and their identities. For example, I noticed that some adoptees avoided mentioning their adoptive parents and siblings because they did not have good relationships, whereas and others were willing to talk about their adoptive family members. In addition, some of adoptees showed interest in South Korea by asking me lots of questions about Korean society and culture. At the same time, however, they criticized South Korean culture, in particular the patriarchal aspects that might lead some women give up their children for adoption.

One participant contacted me because she wanted to help with my research. She was twenty-five years old and had visited South Korea a couple of times. She spoke Korean fluently and was very familiar with Korean culture since she had lived in South Korea for about two years. Since she was adopted internationally, she had to make a lot of effort to learn Korean language and culture. During our interview, she mentioned how she felt about her birth mother. While in South Korea, she wanted to

search for her birth mother because she thought that her birth mother must have had a reason to put her up for adoption. However, she did not instigate a search for her birth mother because she was afraid of being rejected again. Adoptees' ambivalent attitudes and emotions led me to realize that transnational adoption is a more complicated issue than I had expected and that adoption is an event that influences adoptees' entire lives.

Therefore, I started to look for previous research on Korean transnational adoption and found out that there have been 160,000-200,000 Korean children adopted by Western couples since the 1950s. [1] The number of adoption cases shows that transnational adoption is a social and historical phenomenon that could happen to anyone, not a unique phenomenon that has affected only certain groups of people within Korea. In addition, the number of transnational adoption cases demonstrates that there also many women who have lost their children to adoption and many women who have had children through adoption.

Adoption is a women's issue as it is connected with motherhood and reproductive rights. Adoption leads us to ask questions regarding these topics, such as: Why do some women have to give up their children for adoption? Why do other women adopt their children, especially from overseas? How do social and historical factors influence the women's decisions?

Realizing that transnational adoption is a complicated social and historical women's issue, as a feminist researcher, I felt a sense of responsibility to shed light

[1] According to South Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare, the number of overseas adoptions is 160,000. However, Korean adoptees' organizations assume that there are more than 200,000 Korean adopted children. These groups argue that there were many private adoptions that were not counted toward the Korean government's official statistics. This lower figure also omits many adoptees' testimony because they do not have official adoption files.

on this topic. Especially after looking into previous research, I felt frustrated by the lack of studies with a feminist perspective on adoption. In addition, as a transnational feminist, the hidden voices of birth mothers in South Korea as well as adoptive mothers in America matter to me.

Reflecting back, I see I had a biased perspective when I began this project. I considered transnational adoption to be a result of inequality between the global North and global South, an instance of American adoptive mothers "stealing" children from Korean birth mothers by using their power differences. Also, I stereotyped Korean birth mothers as victims of global power asymmetries and patriarchal culture in South Korea and perceived American adoptive mothers as privileged in terms of race, class, and nationality.

However, my perspective has been changed by meeting and conversing with adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers. They led me to see the grey areas instead of considering transnational adoption as solely good or bad. All of the adoptees I met had different experiences and opinions about adoption. Some of them believed that they had "better" lives as a result of being adopted, some even adopted children from Korea themselves, and others identified as having had to struggle their entire lives because of their adoptions.

Although some of the birth mothers I met were "victims," some of them did not identify themselves as such. In fact, they had been continuing to mother in their own ways even after sending their children for adoption. Many birth mothers tried to search for their children and/or build on their relationships after reuniting. Furthermore, adoptive mothers who had privilege in terms of race, class, and

nationality struggle to be the white mothers of Asian children on top of their adoptive motherhood due to the fact that they are not "traditional" or "normative" mothers. Therefore, this dissertation will explore how adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers accept, resist, challenge, and negotiate the situations that result from transnational adoption as well as the social and historical factors that influence their circumstances. Instead of arguing that transnational adoption is good or bad, I will describe its multi-layered complexity.

By approaching transnational adoption through a feminist lens rather than a binary perspective, my research contributes to academic adoption discourse in four ways. First, this research explains why adoption is a women's issue and critiques the socially constructed concept of normative motherhood by exploring the experiences of birth mothers as well as adoptive mothers. Second, whereas receiving regions—North America, Scandinavia, and Western Europe—have led the field of adoption studies, this dissertation considers the perspectives of both sending and receiving countries. Third, prior research rarely reflects all three voices in an adoption triad—adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers, but this dissertation seeks to understand how these stakeholders see transnational adoption similarly or differently. I will also explore how the members of this triad support each other or come into conflict, and how they handle misunderstandings. Finally, this study examines how individuals can challenge adoption policies and an public discourse influenced by macro-level stakeholders such as nations and adoption markets.

The History of Transnational Adoption

Transnational adoption from the global South to the global North shows how hierarchies of race, class, and gender operate via the movement of children across racial, cultural, and national boundaries. This movement of children has had a long history since World War II and the Cold War.

The history of transnational adoption to the United States began with the history of U.S. military occupation around the globe. After World War II, occupation officials relocated German and other European war orphans to the United States—primarily to military families, but also to some civilians. The first continuous flow of international adoptees to the U.S. began in the 1950s because of the Korean War. These adoptions mostly confined recruitment to U.S. military families, presenting the available children as war orphans, when in fact many were born as a result of sexual relationships between U.S. soldiers and Korean women. As Kristi Brian has found, one American religious adopter and entrepreneur established a virtual monopoly on Korean adoption in the United States during that era. [2]

According to Gailey, the adoption of Korean infants served as a laboratory for assimilationist beliefs in the redemptive qualities of capitalist culture and Christianity. [3] These children were going to become "real" Asian Americans because they would be reared by white, middle-class, conservative, patriots. For the next twenty years, international adoptions continued to draw from the sites of postwar U.S.

---

[2] "Kristi Brian: Reframing Transracial Adoption." Accessed February 8, 2018. http://www.temple.edu/tempress/titles/2068_reg.html.

[3] Christine Ward Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love: Race, Class, and Gender in U.S. Adoption Practice* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010), 81.

military occupation, but Korean adoption remained dominant in the "model minority" vision of adoption.

The number of international adoptions to the United States remained very low until the 1970s, when demographic changes—delayed childbearing among whites, greater acceptability for keeping children born outside of marriage, the legalization of abortion, and the rise of privately arranged adoptions—led to extended waiting periods for acquiring healthy infants through domestic public agency channels. In response, private adoption agencies expanded their services to include adoptions from other countries, initially through church networks and later through legal networks and agencies in other countries.

The International Law: The Best Interests of the Child

There are two international adoption laws that aim to reflect the principle of "the best interests of the child" on transnational adoption: 1) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and 2) The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. It is important to explore the aims as well as the limitations of these laws since transnational adoption has been facilitated by a belief in "the best interests of the child."

The UNCRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, with 196 countries signing on since 1989. The UNCRC attempts to focus on the whole child by treating them as individuals who can pursue their own best interests independently from their families and communities.[4] Article 3 indicates that, "[I]n all

[4] Hannah Loo, "In the Child's Best Interests: Examining International Child Abduction, Adoption, and Asylum," *Chicago Journal of International Law* 17, no. 2 (2016): 609-636, 612.

actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." To pursue these best interests of the child, Article 7 states, "[T]he child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents." Also, Article 8 mentions that, "[S]tates Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference." Article 9 adds that, "[S]tates parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence." Therefore, based on Article 21, signatory countries that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interests of the child are the paramount consideration.[5] The UNCRC is the first international law that indicates

[5]Article 21: (a) Ensure that the adoption of a child is authorized only by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counselling as may be necessary; (b) Recognize that inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of child's care, if the child cannot be placed in a foster or an adoptive family or cannot in any suitable manner be cared for in the child's country of origin; (c) Ensure that the child concerned by inter-country adoption enjoys safeguards and standards equivalent to those existing in the case of national adoption; (d) Take all appropriate measures to ensure that, in inter-country adoption, the placement does not result in improper financial gain for those involved in it; (e) Promote, where appropriate, the objectives of the present article by

principles to govern transnational adoption, however it does not indicate how to regulate transnational adoption or how to increase the best interests of the child through agreements between sending and receiving countries.

The Hague Convention is more attuned to processes of adoption than the UNCRC. The purpose of the Hague Convention is, "to establish safeguards to ensure that intercountry adoptions take place in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights as recognized in international law (Article 1, a)," and, "to establish a system of co-operation amongst Contracting States to ensure that those safeguards are respected and thereby prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children (Article 1, b)." Also, the Hague Convention aims to, "cover only adoptions which create a permanent parent-child relationship (Article 2, b)" and demands the consent of the birth mother.

Adoptees' organizations, such as TRACK, argue that the South Korean government should ratify the Hague Convention[6] in order to improve child welfare. According to Jane Trenka, the head of TRACK, the country becoming a signatory would benefit South Korean children in at least four different ways: First, the convention's principle of subsidiarity dictates that the best choice for a child is to stay within his/her own family. The second choice is domestic adoption, and the last choice should be inter-country adoption. The Hague Convention also dictates that there should be no improper financial gain by adoption agencies or others. In order to

---

concluding bilateral or multilateral arrangements or agreements, and endeavour, within this framework, to ensure that the placement of the child in another country is carried out by competent authorities or organs.

[6] The Korean Minister of Health and Welfare signed the Hague Convention in 2013, but the country still has not ratified the convention.

ensure this, Trenka argues, the Korean government should audit adoption agencies and publicize the results. If the Hague Convention is properly implemented, some long-standing problems with Korean adoption, such as adoption without the consent of birth parents and falsified documents, would be alleviated since the central authority must be satisfied that a child is adoptable and produce documentation about the child, including information on their identity. Finally, the Hague Convention stipulates that parents be counseled and informed about the effects of adoption.[7]

The Hague Convention has limitations, however, in its ability to effectively regulate transnational adoption. First, the Hague Convention and the UNCRC do not dictate the rights of adult adoptees, such as access to information when they want to search for their birth families. The current transnational adoption system causes adopted children to lose their original nationalities and makes it difficult to acquire any information about their birth parents. Neither the UNCRC or the Hague Convention indicate how to regulate the quality of potential adoptive parents or how to support them. Third, even though these two laws indicate that the purpose of these laws is to protect "the best interests of the child," they do not define the meaning of this concept, despite the fact that it has guided transnational adoption since the late twentieth century. In addition, these international laws do not consider the circumstances of birth mothers in sending countries, nor do these policies offer any guidance on how to improve their situations. Without increasing the social status of birth mothers, who are mostly unwed, it is hard to achieve these laws' stated purpose of encouraging that children stay within their own families. While these two laws aim

[7] Jane Trenck, "Signing Hague Convention: implication and challenges for Korea," *The Korean Times*, May 27, 2013, accessed by May 29, 2013. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinon/2013/05/197_136433.html

to protect the best interests of the child, it is impossible to achieve this goal without considering the experiences of adult adoptees as well as their adoptive and birth mothers. Therefore, the Hague Convention and the UNCRC need to consider the best interests of the child by reflecting the voices of adult adoptees and their two mothers.

The History of Transnational Adoption from South Korea

Adoption from South Korea to Western countries was led by humanitarian religious organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church Education Association, the Korean branches of which were both founded in 1955. In 1956, American farmer Harry Holt established the Holt Adoption Program (renamed Holt Children's Services in 1971), which has since led adoption from Third World countries, including from South Korea to Western nations.

Harry Holt, an Oregon farmer, played a particularly significant role in facilitating transnational adoption from the very beginning. In 1956, Holt and his wife Bertha adopted eight mixed-race children to "rescue" them from then-impoverished, war-torn Korean. Holt established Holt Children's Services, Inc., which still bears his name, and which rapidly developed into the dominant organization in the field of transnational adoption. Holt Children's Services, Inc. has been responsible for placing half of the adoptions from South Korea and, altogether, more than 100,000 children from various non-Western countries. It is likely that without the activities of Holt, transnational adoption from South Korea would never have grown to such a gigantic scale.

American, Christian ideals influenced the initiation of transnational adoption from South Korea. Holt Children's Services, Inc. was established based on the Holts'

Christian beliefs. In *The Seed from the East*, Bertha Holt explains how the flourishing of inter-country adoption is possible because God enhances the faith and determination of ordinary people, which motivates them to adopt homeless children.[8]

Following the Holts, more than 3,500 Korean children were sent for adoption between 1953 and 1960, most of whom were mixed-race. Adoption from South Korea to Western countries came about because of the large number of mixed-race children born to Korean women as a result of sexual relationships with U.S. soldiers stationed in South Korea during and after the Korean War. Americans adopted most of these children. Adoption expanded to include children of full Korean ethnicity in 1961, following the enactment of the Act on Special Cases Concerning Orphan Adoption.

Even though a large number of Korean children were sent for adoption prior to 1961, there were no regulations on the adoption of Korean children by foreigners during this period. It was laws in the United States, not South Korea, that regulated the adoption of Korean children. For instance, the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 was the first U.S. law to regulate Korean adoption. This law, primarily affecting Korean children, allowed large-scale adoption by permitting adoptive parents to appoint agencies to represent them and adopt children without meeting them beforehand. Proxy adoption was banned in the United States in 1968, and, after that, the number of adoptions of Korean children by Americans decreased. As a result, Korean adoption agencies expanded their adoption market for Korean children to include European countries.

The number of transnational adoptions rapidly increased during the 1970s, reflecting the professionalization of adoption due to the growth of adoption agencies

[8] Bertha Holt and David Wisner, *The Seed from the East.* (Literacy Licensing, LLC, 1956).

such as the Eastern Child Welfare Society (founded in 1972, renamed Eastern Social Welfare Society in 1997), Social Welfare Society (founded in 1971, hereafter SWS), as well as Holt Children's Service (hereafter Holt). North Korea and some European countries described South Korea's adoption practices as "orphan exports."[9] This political situation led to the temporary suspension of South Korean children being adopted to Northern European countries. In response, the South Korean government tried to increase domestic adoption by passing the Act on Special Cases Concerning the Promotion and Procedure of Adoption in 1976. According to this law, the government required adoption agencies to fulfill a quota of domestic adoptions before initiating international adoptions. The number of domestic adoptions did not increase during the 1970s, however, and the government withdrew this quota system in the 1980s. As a result, the number of transnational adoptions again increased.[10]

However, the South Korean government changed its policy again because of criticism from other countries during the 1986 Seoul Asian Games and the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games.[11] Due to negative reporting by the foreign press, the South Korean government tried to reduce transnational adoptions and promote domestic adoptions through the Adoption Project Improvement Guideline in June 1989. According to this law, the government aimed to increase domestic adoptions, with the exception of mixed-race and disabled children. Again, however, this project failed to

---

[9] Barbara Stark, "When Globalization Hits Home: International Family Law Comes of Age, *Vand J. Transnat'l L* 39, no. 1551 (2006), 1551-1604,1588.

[10]According to South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare (2014), about 46,000 children were adopted during 1970s and abour 66,000 children were adopted during 1980s.

[11] See Chira. S, Babies for Export: And Now the Painful Questions. *The New York Times*, April 21, 1988, accessed May 12, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/21/world/seoul-journal-babies-for-export-and-now-the-painful-questions.html; Matthew Rothschild, "Babies for Sale: South Koreans Make Them, Americans Buy Them." *The Progressive* 52 no. 1 (1988): 18-23.

increase the number of domestic adoptions, and it was withdrawn. Therefore, in 1995, the South Korean government tried a new approach to encourage domestic adoptions by offering to cover medical expenses, educational costs, and living expenses for domestic adoptive families under the revised Act on Special Cases Concerning Adoption Promotion and Procedures.

However, in 1997, South Korea faced serious financial difficulties due to the Asian Financial Crisis while it was under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During this period, from 1997 to 2001, the number of children in welfare facilities increased to 9,000, but the budget to support them was not increased. As a result, the government suspended their policy of promoting domestic adoptions and again began to encourage transnational adoptions.

These changes demonstrate that the shifting financial and political landscape in South Korea as well as its relations with foreign countries determined adoption laws. The groups of people who were influenced by these laws—adoptees and their birth families—were not considered. However, the returning movements of Korean adoptees have changed adoption laws to increase their rights as well as the rights of their birth parents, especially their birth mothers.

Transnational Adoptees as Overseas Koreans

State-led globalization policies enacted by the South Korean government affected the returning movement of Korean adoptees. The Kim Young Sam administration (1993-1998) encouraged globalization in South Korea and passed the Act on Overseas Korean Foundation (1997), the first law to focus on overseas Koreans. It was intended to, “promote better understanding of Korea within the international

community and to increase friendship and goodwill between Korea and the rest of the world through various exchange programs" (Article 1, Korea Foundation Act). According to Jun-Sun Park and Paul Y. Chang, scholars of Korean Studies, in the context of globalization discourse, the Kim Young-Sam government wanted to build a globalized ethnic Korean community. Then, on December 3, 1999, the Kim Dae-Jung government passed the Act of Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans, which legally defines the status of overseas Koreans in relation to the South Korean state. The law granted quasi-dual citizenship rights to selected groups of overseas Koreans, mostly Korean Americans.[12]

Under the 1997 Act, Korean adoptees are included in the category of "Overseas Koreans" who are able to obtain visa status to live, invest, and find employment in South Korea. The number of adult Korean adoptees who have returned to South Korea has increased since the late 1990s, and they have organized their own political groups: Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (hereafter GOA'L), established in 1999, Adoptee Solidarity Korea (hereafter ASK), founded in 2004, and Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea (hereafter, TRACK), started in 2007. Through the efforts of these groups, the Act on Special Cases Concerning Adoption was passed in 2012.

GOA'L was established in 1998 in order to help returned adoptees adjust to South Korean society and search for their birth families. One of the most important achievements of GOA'L was to secure F-4 visas for Korean adoptees that guaranteed them legalized economic activity starting in 1999. GOA'L focuses on "self-help"

[12] Jung-Sun Park and Paul Y. Chang, "Contention in the Construction of a Global Korean Community: The Case of the Overseas Korean Act," *Journal of Korean Studies* 10, no. 1, (2005), 1-27, 2.

among Korean adoptees and insists on the importance of "post-adoption services" as a way of guaranteeing them better, safer lives. ASK, established in 2004, advocates for the abolition of transnational adoption. In addition, ASK insists on empowering new voices to present the viewpoint of Korean adoptees by critiquing the fact that their adoption agencies and adoptive parents always speak for them. Instead of focusing on changing laws and policies, ASK conducts debates and leads educational programs for Korean adoptees in order to raise their own voices. TRACK was started in 2007 in order to investigate and reveal problems with the false documentation of adoption records by South Korean adoption agencies. TRACK emphasizes the significance of personal agency and self-realization.[13]

The enactment of the 2012 Act was a very meaningful event in the history of Korean adoption. It came about as a result of grassroots organizing efforts of those groups most affected by adoption policies: returned Korean adoptees, birth mothers, adoptive mothers, and single mothers. Thus, while previous adoption policies were influenced by the South Korean government, adoption agencies, and relations with foreign countries, the 2012 Act reflected the voices of adoptees on the frontlines of this issue.

The 2012 Act made fundamental changes to previous adoption policy, which was based on the Special Cases Concerning the Promotion and Procedure of Adoption of 1976. ASK, TRACK, KoRoot,[14] KUMFA,[15] and Dandelions[16] aimed to

---

[13] Ibid., 325.

[14] An NGO that addresses issues affecting transnational adoptees and which runs a guest house in Seoul for returning adoptees.

[15] Korean Unwed Mothers Families' Association.

change this law in order to protect birth families by decreasing the number of adoptions, especially transnational adoptions, increasing the rights of single and unwed mothers to raise their children, and expanding the rights of adoptees by allowing them to access their adoption documents. I explore how the law has changed based on the purposes, details, and unexpected results of the 2012 Act.

First, the 2012 Act changed the goal of adoption legislation from "*...promote the adoption* of children in need of protection and protect children to be adopted and promote their welfare (the Special Cases Concerning the Promotion and Procedure of Adoption of 1976, Article 1)," to "*...provide for special cases concerning the requirements, procedures*, etc. for the adoption of children in need of protection and matters necessary for the support thereof, thereby contributing *to the promotion of the rights, interests and welfare* of the children to be adopted" (the 2012 Act, Article 1, emphasis added). The purpose of South Korean adoption law changed from promoting adoption to providing suitable requirements and procedures for adoption.

The 2012 Act created a new article to indicate the state's responsibilities. According to Article 3, "[T]he state and local governments shall support that a child can be raised healthily in the household to *which he/she is born*…" and "[T]he State and local governments shall execute the following matters to establish a sound culture of adoption, *to encourage domestic adoptions of children* in need of protection, and to promote the rights, interests and welfare of adopted children…" (emphasis added). This article indicates that it is the responsibility of the state to encourage that children be raised by his/her own birth family and promote domestic rather than transnational adoptions. In addition, Article 7 (Preferential Promotion of Domestic Adoptions)

---

[16] An organization of Korean birth mothers.

directs the government to increase the number of domestic adoptions and Article 8 (Reduction of Overseas Adoption) directs the government to reduce overseas adoptions in order to protect children.

According to the 1976 law, adoption institutions only needed to report to the Minister of Health and Welfare. However, the 2012 law requires that adoption institutions must also obtain permission from the family court by submitting proper documents, including the birth certificate of the child and written consent to the adoption by the birth parents as well as criminal records and documents that prove the financial status of the potential adoptive parents. Also, the 2012 Act clearly states that consent from the child's birth parents is needed to process an adoption. In addition, Article 13 (Requirements, etc. for Consent to adoption) requires that consent must be obtained one week after the child's birth in order to give the parents time to reconsider whether they want to put the child up for adoption. Furthermore, the 2012 Act guarantees that birth parents can cancel the adoption within six months if they were unable to give consent for any reason outside of their control.

The 2012 Act also established Korea Adoption Services (KAS). According to Article 26 (Establishment of Korea Adoption Services), the Ministry of Health and Welfare establishes and operates KAS with the purposes of encouraging domestic adoptions and providing post-adoption services. It designates the following duties for KAS: 1) Operation of an integrated database necessary for searching information on adopted children, adoptive families and natural families[17]; 2) Establishment of, and linkage between, databases on adopted children; 3) Research and development on

[17] "Natural family" is used as legal term throughout Korean adoption law. However, I use "birth family" since "natural" might imply that adoptive parents are not real parents, which I discuss further in chapter 4.

domestic and foreign adoption policies and services; 4) International cooperation relating to adoption; 5) Other duties assigned by the Minister of Health and Welfare.

Based on Article 36, the 2012 Act also guarantees adoptees' rights to know about their own adoption histories, including information about their birth parents. According to this provision, "[A] person who has been adopted under this Act may request disclosure of information on his/her adoption which is held by Korea Adoption Services or the relevant adoption agency, provided that if a person who has been adopted under this Act is a minor, he/she shall obtain consent from his/her adoptive parents," and "[T]he president of Korea Adoption Services or the head of the relevant adoption agency shall disclose such information after obtaining consent from the natural parents of the adopted child, provided that where the natural parents refuse the disclosure of such information, he/she shall disclose such information other than the personal information of the natural parents."

The 2012 Act was intended to promote the rights of adoptees, birth mothers, and single mothers. However, after the enactment of this law, some media outlets reported that the abandonment of children has been increasing as a result.[18] According to their reports, since the 2012 Act requires registering children's family relationships under the name of at least one birth parent, single and unwed mothers abandon their children in order to hide their pregnancies. Before the 2012 Act, the head of an adoption agency could establish a child's family relationship without

---

[18] "Ibyangteungnyebeop gaejeong sanyeon beoryeojin ai deo neureotda," [An increased number of abandoned children after 4 years of the enactment of the 2012 act], *Busan Ilbo*, May 8, 2016, accessed August 2, 2016, http://news20.busan.com/controller/newsController.jsp?newsId=20160509000104; "Adong yugi geupjeungi ibyangteungnyebeop ttaemun," [Is the child abandonment because of the 2012 act?], *Pressian.com*, March 6, 2013, accessed August 2, 2016, http://www.pressian.com/news/article.html?no=5942.

registering the child under the names of his/her birth parents, which made it possible to falsify adoption documents. Therefore, organizations of adoptees, single mothers, and birth mothers demanded a change in the law to require registering children under their birth parents in order make for an easier and more transparent adoption process. However, some birth parents, especially single and unwed mothers, worry that registering these family relationships might violate their right to privacy.

In addition to this controversy about whether the Act led to an increased number of child abandonments, the parties involved also seemed dissatisfied with the results. First, some adoptees who went through the birth family search process argue that the 2012 Act is not helpful. As explained above, Article 36 indicates that adoption agency can disclose information about birth parents to adoptees only after obtaining consent from the birth parents. Adoptees insist that they have a right to know about their birth parents, but this conflicts with the birth parents' right to privacy. In addition, some adoptees do not trust the adoption agencies' processes, so they feel that they don't know whether their birth parents refused consent or whether the adoption agency failed to contact their birth parents at all. When I met with the members of Dandelions, they also mentioned that the 2012 Act does not fully reflect what they as mothers want for their children since they care more about knowing if their children are alive and where they are located than they do about maintaining their privacy.

The head of KUMFA, who is raising her own child by herself as a single mother, stated in our interview that the 2012 Act does not do enough to improve the circumstances that single and unwed mothers face in Korean society. According to

Article 13, the consent of birth parents must be obtained one week after the child's birth in order to give the birth parents time to consider whether they want to keep the child or give them up for adoption. However, she doubts that one week is enough time to weigh that decision. In addition, she argues that the $140 per month in government subsidies that single and unwed mothers receive is not enough to raise their children, so the government should more actively support the rights of single and unwed mothers by providing financial resources, enacting laws that guarantee them job opportunities, and revising the 2012 Act to encourage these women to keep their children.

One KAS staff member insisted that even though their agency was established by the 2012 Act and wants to help adoptees search for their birth families, KAS does not have enough authority to do so. She mentioned that while Article 21 clarifies that, "the head of an adoption agency shall provide Korea Adoption Services established under Article 26 with information on the adopted children and their families," adoption agencies are not that cooperative and there is no legal basis to punish them when they refuse to provide information. She adds that KAS does not have enough staff or a sufficient budget, so they cannot help adoptees in the way that they are supposed to.

Even though the 2012 Act was a meaningful adoption law that better reflected the voices of adoptees, birth mothers, and single mothers, there are still unresolved issues. When I interviewed adoptees who were involved with enacting the 2012 Act, they shared their difficulties. They worked with Korean lawyers and politicians, but adoptees struggled to express exactly what they wanted because of language

differences. In addition, they could not fully understand the Korean legislative process. The head of Dandelions also said that she missed several meetings about the 2012 law since she had to work and she lived in a city other than Seoul. Therefore, she thinks that the 2012 law only guarantees the rights of single mothers who are raising their children, not birth mothers who want to find their children. In addition, there are tensions between single mothers and birth mothers. When I met these groups of women together through adoptee events with KoRoot, I observed that they had different perspectives on adoption because single mothers are currently raising their children and birth mothers gave up their children. Some birth mothers considered themselves to be morally inferior since they could not keep their children. Lastly, the staff of KAS told me that they wanted to ally with adoptees in order to demand proper documents from adoption agencies, but now adoptees do not trust KAS and complain without understanding the difficulties that the agency faces. The lack of mutual understanding about the differences between adoptees, birth mothers, single mothers, and KAS has contributed to these unexpected results of the 2012 law.

The returning of adoptees to South Korea and their political movements have challenged the paradigm of transnational adoption. Ever since transnational adoption began after World War II and the Cold War, relations among countries and the adoption market have determined adoption laws and policies by influencing public adoption discourse through the media. However, the returning movement of Korean adoptees has changed this trend by challenging existing laws and producing their own discourse through the establishment of adoptees' organizations.

This dissertation examines the returning of Korean adoptees to their homeland of South Korea from their homes in the United States in order to demonstrate how individuals—micro-level stakeholders, including adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers—can challenge, resist, and change policies that are determined by macro-level stakeholders such as nations and the adoption market. To do this, my research explores the initial phase of adoptees' returning movement, their motives in going back to South Korea, their experiences, and stories of reunions with their birth families. I examine transnational adoption from the perspectives of birth mothers and adoptive mothers as well. Through in-depth interviews with both mothers, my research aims to convey the lived experiences of these women from when birth mothers send their children for adoption to the moment when they reunite. I also consider the experiences of adoptive mothers by exploring questions such as why they adopt children from overseas, how they deal with their unexpected circumstances as "non-natural mothers," and how they handle their emotions and situations when their children reunite with their birth mothers.

In order to understand the complicated and intertwined experiences of adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers, I pose the following research questions:

1. Why do Korean adoptees return to South Korea? What are the meanings of "Korean heritage" and "roots" for Korean adoptee returnees?
2. What circumstances make some women put their children up for adoption? How do they continue their identities as mothers after relinquishing their children?

3. What circumstances lead some women to adopt children from overseas? How do adoptive mothers perform, negotiate, and struggle with their motherhood in order to fulfill the concept of normative motherhood in the context of the United States?
4. How do adoptees and birth mothers build their relationships after reuniting? How do the relationships between adoptees and their adoptive mothers influence the processes and results of reunions?
5. How does the retuning movement of Korean adoptees and reunions with their birth mothers lead them to become involved with political movements focused on changing Korean adoption law and society as a whole?

To answer these research questions, this project employs an interdisciplinary approach, using sources from a number of academic disciplines, including anthropology, area studies, history, and sociology.

Conversation with Existing Literature

My research is mainly in conversation with three specific bodies of literature: adoption studies, family studies, and transnationalism. By connecting these bodies of literature, my project questions the rationale of "the best interests of the child" under which transnational adoptions have been carried out.

Adoption Studies

In the field of adoption studies, the dominant discourse on transnational adoption is constituted by a binary perspective: humanistic altruism (child rescue—the belief that

transnational adoption will save children) vs. cultural imperialism (child stealing—a focus on transnational adoption as the result of power differences between the First World and the Third World).

Novelist Pearl S. Buck is an example of the humanistic altruism viewpoint: she adopted seven children and promoted transnational adoption, especially for war orphans and children of mixed blood. Buck founded the Welcome House in 1949 to facilitate the adoption of Amerasian children from China, Japan, and South Korea. She also created the Pearl S. Buck Foundation in 1964, which helped mixed-race children in Asian countries, such as South Korea and Vietnam, which were affected by American military interventions. Buck asserted, "The real barrier to adoption of mixed-blood children was not that no one wanted them…but that adoption practice demanded child and adoptive parents to match…. Parenthood has nothing to do with color, race or religion. It has to do with far deeper likeness of mind and heart and soul."[19] Her perspective was also based on the idea of the United States' ethical responsibility.

Whether we call these examples of "love," humanistic altruism, or American paternalism, Buck's story demonstrates the "love" that American people, especially middle-class, white, heterosexual Christian families have for children in the Third World. Salvation narratives urged Americans to think of "children who will die without 'us'… who need the home and emotional investment that only 'we' can provide."[20]

---

[19] Pearl S. Buck, *Children for Adoption*. (New York: Random House, 1964), 115.

[20] Laura Briggs, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 130.

Scholars within the fields of psychology and social work held positive perspectives on transnational adoption throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Studies in these fields focused on measuring children's mental health, adjustment, and attachment to their adoptive families. Howard Alstein and Rita J. Simon's study was based on a developmentalist framework that measured adoptees' adjustment from the pre-adoption phase to the post-adoption phase.[21] These studies argued that adoptees benefit from the wealth and opportunities offered by the West, and that most adoptees' problems, such as identity formation and adaption to their adoptive families, were the result of their pre-adoption environments or genetic factors rather than problems with the adoption process itself.

In contrast to these positive perspectives, however, some scholars began to critique adoption, especially transnational adoption, as a manifestation of Cold War ideology. Christina Klein, for example, challenges the view of adoption as a practice of benign hegemony by pointing out that "white mothers," like Buck, were in fact part of a strategy to maintain the ideology of the United States.[22] According to her, adoption was promoted during the Cold War as a way to enhance the value of family, especially the nuclear and middle-class family in contrast to the "ruthless collectivism" said to be practiced in communist societies such as the Soviet Union and China.[23] This contrast was used in justifying transnational adoption as a means of saving children. This image of the United States as the savior of children and a sense

---

[21] Rita J Simon and Howard Altstein, *Transracial Adoption: A Follow-up. (Rowman and Littlefield),* 1981.

[22] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961,* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2003.

[23] Ibid., 151.

that U.S. citizens were helping to spread of liberal democracy were very important factors in establishing the practice of transnational adoption.

Laura Briggs, a historian and feminist scholar, points out that American participation in transnational adoption developed in the context of American empire-building during the Cold War. During that time, Americans' sense of greatness led them to develop a sense of obligation toward and longing to help children overseas.

Scholars of postcolonialism argue that transnational adoption is a result of the race and power differences between the First World and the Third World. The postcolonial perspective considers adoption, "as a colonial-style trade and trafficking in human commodities, and finally the adopted Koreans as subaltern subjects."[24] Anthony Shiu, a scholar of English, also looks at transnational adoption in terms of human objects, goods, and commodities exchanged for economic profit.[25] The adoption of thousands of non-Western children to Western countries is clear evidence of a global colonialism that works, to this day, through racial and power imbalances between the First World and the Third World.[26] Sociologist Natalie Cherot, in her study of Vietnamese adoption, explains transnational adoption as, "a unifying social force that seeks to transform Third World children into human subjects instilled with

---

[24] Tobias Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2005), 145.

[25] Anthony Shiu, "Flexible Production: International Adoption, Race, Whiteness," *Jouvert* 6, no. 1-2, (2001), https://legacy.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v6i1-2/shiu.htm

[26] Judith Masson, "Intercountry Adoption: A Global Problem or a Global Solution?" *Journal of International Affair* 55, no 1 (fall 2001), 141-166.

Western culture and values."[27] Similar to Cherot, Sandra Patton-Imani pays attention to, "the role of power in shaping the circumstances that lead to child relinquishment in countries with high poverty rates, and adoption by primarily white middle-class married couples in the United States and other Western countries."[28] These scholars argue that transnational adoption is considered to be a human transformation project, turning uncivilized non-Western bodies into Westernized ones by managing and controlling adoptees.

Several other researchers also critique transnational adoption in terms of the adoption market. Rosemary Sarri, Yeonoak Baik, and Marti Bombyk point out that even if the original intention of adopting South Korean children to the United States was humanitarian, it has since changed to serve different interests and developed into a highly profitable industry. They argue that the Korean government has taken economic advantage of transnational adoption, "by not having to develop a comprehensive child welfare system, as well as an adequate income support program for poor and single parent families. Child welfare policy to date in South Korea has been more of a 'quick fix' solution than any seriously considered social issue…[that treats] poor children and their parents as commodities or ignore[s] their existence and problems."[29] Kristi Brian, a professor of women's studies, also approaches the

---

[27] Natalie Cherot, "Transnational Adoptees: Global Biopolitical Orphans or an Activist Community? –The Biopolitics of Adoption," *Culture Machine* 9. (2006) Retrieved from http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/rt/printerFriendly/46/54

[28] Sandra Patton-Imani, "Orphan Sunday: Narratives of Salvation in Transnational Adoption," *A Journal of Theory* 51, no.1 (2012): 294-304, 295.

[29] Rosemary Sarri, Yeonoak Baik, and Marti Bombyk, "Goal Displacement and Dependency in South Korean - United States Intercountry Adoption," Children and Youth Services Review 20, no 1-2 (1998), 87-114, 108.

adoption system as an industry, explaining that the market, combined with American paternalism, white entitlement, anti-racism, and multiculturalism, conceals serious issues with transnational adoption related to race, class, gender, colonialism, and imperialism.[30]

Recently, scholars from women's studies, American studies, history, anthropology, and sociology have complicated their approaches to adoption issues. For example, American studies scholar Kim Ja Park Nelson critiques how racism against Korean adoptees is justified under the regime of multiculturalism.[31] In addition, ethnic studies scholar Eleana Kim explores the cultural citizenship of adopted Korean returnees and argues that they can challenge the traditional concept of national citizenship.[32]

Feminist scholar Karen Dubinsky points out different ways of thinking about transnational adoption.[33] She emphasizes that we have to consider both sides—the sending and the receiving countries—to fully understand transnational adoption issues. Like Dubinsky, Briggs also emphasizes the importance of complex perspectives on transnational adoption:

> We need to see that its practices do not resolve neatly into categories of coercive and innocent, good and bad. Adoption may sometimes be the best outcome in a bad situation, but it is always layered with pain,

---

[30] Kristi Brian, *Reframing Transracial Adoption: Adopted Koreans, White Parents, and the Politics of Kinship* (Temple University Press, 2012).

[31] Kim Ja Park Nelson, "Korean Looks, American Eyes: Korean American Adoptees, Race, Culture and Nation" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2009).

[32] Eleana Jean Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham [NC]; London: Duke University Press, 2010).

[33] Karen Dubinsky, "The Fantasy of the Global Cabbage Patch: Making Sense of Transnational Adoption," *Feminist Theory* 9, no 3 (2009): 339-345.

> coercion, and lack of access to necessary resources, with relatives (usually single mothers) who are vulnerable. Stranger adoption is a national and international system whereby the children of impoverished, or otherwise, disenfranchised mothers are transferred to middle-class, wealthy mothers.[34]

Briggs's research into adoption from Guatemala considers the politics of transnational and domestic adoption by focusing on differences in race, class, and nation. Specifically, she refers to how white, middle-class Americans from the 1920s to today have learned American paternalism, to "feel a sense of obligation for and longing to help children overseas,"[35] and how they practice this by choosing poor babies to adopt. Furthermore, Briggs shows who has to give up their children, examining the stories of how individual mothers outside the United States lost their children.[36]

Within the fields of psychology and social work, adoptees' lives are treated as if they began after arriving in the receiving countries; their stories and their birth parents' stories from the sending countries are minimized in public narratives, including academic research and media discourse. The participants in these studies are often adolescent adoptees and their adoptive parents. By contrast, my research considers the perspectives of adult adoptees as well as birth and adoptive mothers. In addition, instead of rushing to take one perspective of either humanistic altruism or cultural imperialism, I examine the social contexts of both the sending and receiving countries in order to challenge binary perspectives on transnational adoption.

---

[34] Briggs, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*, 4.

[35] Ibid., 130.

[36] Ibid., 10.

Family Studies

My research engages with studies of kinship in order to critique normative family ideologies. The desirable and legitimate family form in modern U.S. society has traditionally been, "the nuclear family with a breadwinner husband and a full-time wife and mother."[37] Feminist scholars have centered gender as a fundamental category of family analysis in order to challenge the traditional concept of the male-centered family.[38] Feminists of color also insist on treating race as a central category of social organization in order to create a more inclusive concept of family.[39] However, this feminist scholarship is limited by its assumption that family is based on blood and biological ties. Transnational adoption enables different ways of understanding family based on political, cultural, and economic contexts, rather than biology.

According to historians, adoption challenges the normative family ideology by suggesting variable ways of making a family. The historian Ellen Herman argues that forming a family through adoption questions the assumption that biological ties are the, "one best way to make a 'normal,' 'natural,' or 'ideal' family."[40] Historian Barbara Melosh also argues that "kinship among strangers" via adoption "suggests

---

[37] Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom, *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* (New York: Longman, 1982), 3.

[38] Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

[39] Maxine Baca Zinn, "FAMILY, FEMINISM, AND RACE IN AMERICA," *Gender & Society* 4, no. 1 (1990): 68-82; Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, *Women of Color in U.S. Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

[40] Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in Modern United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15.

the possibility of a more expansive community, of mutuality across the boundaries of blood. For if we trust that strangers can become kin, then maybe we can also forge families, communities, and nations that welcome the stranger."[41] Herman and Melosh insist that adoptive families and artificial kinship enable us to have a more diverse society in ways that challenge normative American family ideology.

Other scholars, like Herman and Melosh, assert that adoption and especially transnational or transracial adoption contributes to social change by promoting multiculturalism and alleviating racism. For example, the sociologist Pamela Anne Quiroz observed two online transnational adoption forums from 2006 to 2008 in order to research the discursive practices of adoptive parents. According to Quiroz, some parents believe that the act of adoption is their personal contribution to encouraging multiculturalism and social change.[42] Similarly, Susanne Bennett, a social work scholar, interviewed 15 lesbian couples that created multicultural families through transnational adoption. Based on these interviews, Bennett concludes that the complex diversity and identities of lesbian couples with transnational adoptee children offer, "an opportunity to transform the individuals and prepare the developing child for a culturally diverse world. Because family members interact intimately within a multicultural environment, their families may serve as models for living with human diversity in contemporary American society."[43] However, these

---

[41] Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 11.

[42] Pamela Anne Quiroz, "Cultural Tourism in Transnational Adoption: 'Staged Authnticity' and Its Implications for Adopted Children," *Journal of Family Issues* 33, no. 4 (2012): 527-555, 547.

[43] Susanne Bennett, "International Adoptive Lesbian Families: Parental Perceptions of the Influence of Diversity on Family Relationships in Early Childhood," *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 74, no. 1 (2003), 73-91, 89.

studies consider multiculturalism as simply an expansion of cultural pluralism; they see racism mostly as an individual issue rather than a systemic societal problem.

In contrast to the aforementioned positive aspects of multiculturalism, some scholars point out the limitations of this framework. Slavoj Žižek critiques multiculturalism by asserting that it "is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism' with a distance."[44] He explains that keeping distance from Others who constitute an "authentic" and "different" community maintains white privilege and racial superiority. This critique can be applied to the politics of transnational adoption: it would see adoption as a way to maintain and perpetuate dominant family ideologies instead of challenging them. Middle-class, white, heterosexual Christian adoptive parents often adopt children in order to have a "complete" family that fits into the American norm[45] and the parents absorb the "difference" of their transnational adoptee children into their intimate space under a regime of multiculturalism.[46]

Writing about adoption and queer diasporas, David Eng asks, "How are international and group histories of gender, race, poverty, and nation managed or erased within the 'privatized' sphere of the domestic?"[47] As Eng and anthropologist Ann Anagnost argue, the adoptive children's differences or "authenticity" are erased

---

[44] Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," *New Left Review* 225, no. 1 (September/October 1997), 44.

[45] Nicole Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail Order" Marriages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[46] Ann Anagnost, "Scenes of Misrecognition: Maternal Citizenship in the Age of Transnational Adoption," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critiques* 8, no. 2 (2001): 389-421.

[47] David Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," Social Text 21 no. 3 (2003): 1-37, 2.

in the privatized, domestic sphere. According to sociologist Indigo Willing, adoptive parents embrace the "cosmopolitan outlooks" of their children, but they allow these multicultural characteristics and identities only to the extent of maintaining their white, middle-class privilege.[48] Adoptive parents increase their cultural capital and cosmopolitan subjectivity through identification with their children's ethnicity.[49] As Willing and cultural studies scholar Katrien De Graeve assert, adopted children's cultural and racial differences are erased and, at the same time, their differences are encouraged to maintain the privileged social status of the white middle-class. Through a discussion of multiculturalism, we can identify how the social values of the white middle-class are (re)produced via transnational adoption.

In order to fully understand the politics of transnational adoption, we need to ask the fundamental question of why adoptive parents want to form a family. Eng insists that adoptive parents want to achieve a certain type of family: the "white heterosexual nuclear family."[50] Anagnost states that, for white middle-class subjects in the era of late capitalism, "the position of parent…has become increasingly marked as a measure of value, self-worth, and citizenship."[51] Thus, adoption is needed, "as a necessary 'completion' for becoming a fully realized subject in American life."[52]

---

[48] Indigo Willing, *Transnational Adoption and Constructions of Identity and Belonging: A Qualitative Study of Australian Parents of Children Adopted from Overseas* (University of Queensland Press, 2010).

[49] Katrien De Graeve, "Festive Gatherings and Culture Work in Flemish-Ethiopian Adoptive Families," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16 no. 5 (2013), 548-564, 557.

[50] Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," 11.

[51] Anagnost, "Scenes of Misrecognition.", 392.

[52] Ibid., 392.

Anthropologist and adoptive mother Christine Ward Gailey offers important insights about why adoptive parents want to have a family. According to her, even though middle-class adopters view adoption as an inferior substitute for childbirth, they believe themselves to be, "incomplete without children."[53] She refers to a "nursery ceiling" to explain what she observes for male adopters. To the middle-class, professional man, being a family man and being a father is an important asset in corporate environments. She adds that adoption is also a distinct asset for middle-class women to redress their infertility.

Eng, Anagnost, and Gailey collectively point out that adoptive parents adopt children to have a "complete" family that fits into American kinship norms. However, there still remains the question of why adoptive parents decide on transnational and transracial adoption instead of domestic adoption. To attempt to answer this question, we need to think more broadly about issues of race, class, nation, and gender. Transnational adoption must be considered not only in the domestic context of the United States, but also in relation to larger imperialist histories. Therefore, we must track why adoptive parents choose transnational adoption by tracing its social history.

Even though transnational adoption to the United States began with the arrival of European orphans from Germany and Poland after World War II, the largest number of transnational adoptions occurred after the Korean War (1950-1953). Education scholar Mia Tuan argues that the origin of transnational adoption lies in

---

[53] Christine Ward Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love: Race, Class, and Gender in U.S. Adoption Practice* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010), 84.

political and historical factors unrelated to the mission of humanitarianism.[54] Klein emphasizes that the adoption of Asian children has been framed as more desirable than the adoption of black children because average U.S. citizens thought they were contributing to the Cold War effort by rescuing poor Third World children or by liberating the children of communists.[55] Therefore, the large number of adoptions from South Korea reflect the fact that these adoptions were considered, "patriotic and in alignment with deeply held American values," and does not necessarily mean that the adoptive parents have more "racially progressive ideals." [56]

The other reason that white adoptive parents decide to adopt children from other countries is because of the shortage of white babies. The lack of white babies in developed countries resulted from, "contraceptive use, aborting, and the decreasing stigma of single motherhood."[57] Although adoptive parents have the option to adopt children of color in the United States, its racial hierarchy contributed to a reluctance to adopt black or Latino children.

Lastly, adoptive parents are fearful that domestic adoptions might lead to child custody battles, and they want to avoid the possibility that birth parents might try to reclaim their children.[58] Adoptive parents gain the opportunity to have their "own"

---

[54] Mia Tuan, "Domestic and International Transracial Adoption: A Synopsis of the Literature," *Sociology Compass* 2 no. 6 (2008): 1848-1859.

[55] Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*.

[56] Tuan, "Domestic and International Transracial Adoption: A Synopsis of the Literature," 1852.

[57] Jessica B. Leinaweaver and Linda J. Seligmann, "Introduction: Cultural and Political Economies of Transnational Adoption," Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology 14 no. 2 (2009): 1-19, 2.

[58] Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," 11; Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*, 85.

children through transnational adoption by blocking relationships between birth parents and adopted children by utilizing their racial, class, and national privileges.

In the field of family studies, especially adoption family studies, scholars have discussed how normative American family ideology has influenced transnational adoption. However, it is necessary to understand transnational adoption on a global scale, not just in the U.S. context, because transnational adoption has been influenced by the sending country's socio-economic situation as well as the receiving country's social, cultural, and political dynamics.

Transnational Feminism

By understanding adoption as a feminist issue, this study critiques how a global, patriarchal system leads to some women having the ability to become mothers while other women cannot. Only when we consider what circumstances (re)produce birth mothers and adoptive mothers as such can we reconsider what constitutes better lives for children and what are their best interests.

These two mothers—adoptive and birth mothers—are situated at opposite ends of global hierarches in terms of their race, class, and nationality. However, both women have struggled against the ideology of normative motherhood because both of them are considered "non-traditional" mothers. By using in-depth interview methods, I examine the lived experiences of these two mothers—how they accept, resist, and negotiate their "non-traditional" motherhood, how Korean birth mothers continue their motherhood after they put their children up for adoption, and how American adoptive mothers struggle to become the mothers of their adopted children despite their racial and class differences. Through this project, I seek to shed light on untold

and hidden stories by employing a transnational feminist perspective. There are three ways that this perspective is useful for research on Korean adoptees and their two mothers.

First, transnational feminism is useful for understanding how power works across national borders. Feminist scholar Julietta Hua argues that transnational feminism can offer a useful lens for conceptualizing how power works to shape social norms.[59] Transnational adoption from the global South to the global North shows how global hierarchies of race, class, gender, disability, and nation circulate via the movement of children across racial, cultural, and national boundaries. Therefore, the perspectives of transnational feminism can be useful in order to examine how power operates through adoption by asking several specific questions: What is the nature of the relationship between South Korea and the United States? How are government adoption policies oriented toward national interests? How has the adoption market determined who can or cannot be a mother or an "adoptable" child?

Second, according to Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, transnational feminism is, "a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces, rather than as *all* women across the world" (italics in original).[60] This study aims to understand the struggles of white, American adoptive mothers and Korean birth mothers who have different nationalities, races, and classes in order to explore how their motherhoods are socially constructed and how they are

[59] Julietta Hua, *Trafficking Women's Human Rights* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xxviii.

[60] Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures.* ed. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), xix.

influenced by patriarchal concepts of normative motherhood in different social contexts—South Korea and the United States. Therefore, the approach of transnational feminism is appropriate in order to examine how gender impacts different women's lives.

This research sheds light on Korean adoptees' retuning movements, including how they have impacted Korean society in order to change adoption laws through political organizations, and how they create solidarity with their adoptive mothers and birth mothers in order to raise their voices together. Before the political movements of Korean adoptees, adoption policies were determined by national needs and by the relations between two countries—South Korea and the United States. However, the social movements of Korean adoptees and their two mothers show the possibility of "globalization from below" by intervening in adoption discourses from bottom to top.[61]

This research uses the critical perspective of transnational feminism to intervene in complicated issues of transnational adoption that are entangled with race, class, gender, nationality, and global power inequalities. By doing so, this study aims to explore how we can reframe adoption as a feminist issue and how oppressed groups can establish solidarity in order to challenge the histories that have silenced their voices. Finally, this research contributes to current scholarly and political discourse on transnational adoption by this issue from the context of the sending as

[61] Chandra Mohanty, "Under Westernized Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary* 12, no. 3 (1986): 333-358, quoted in Jyotsna Agnihotri Gupta, "Towards Transnational Feminisms: Some Reflections and Concerns in Relation to the Globalization of Reproductive Technologies." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 23-38.

well as the receiving country as a means of deconstructing global hierarchies of race, gender, class, and nation.

Feminist Research Methods: Methods as Politics

What are feminist research methods? What makes for "good" feminist research methods? I argue that feminist research methods have to share the research processes with readers transparently in order to demonstrate how knowledge is produced and where the knowledge comes from. Second, feminist research methods should aim, "to document lost histories and histories of loss."[62] Much feminist research involves subjects who have historically been underrepresented. Therefore, it is significant to shed light on their hidden histories and silenced voices. Finally, feminist researchers have to examine the power dynamics and inequities between their research participants and themselves. Reflection about the researcher's own power and position is significant to feminist research. Hence, I explore the power dynamics that I had with my research participants and where these differences came from by examining my own race, gender, class, age, and nationality as well as the identities of my subjects. By exploring the process of my research in this way, I will discuss the dilemmas of feminist research methods.

Methods

I collected data using four main methods: 1) participant-observation, 2) in-depth interviews, 3) discourse analysis, and 4) archival research. First, from 2012 to 2015, I participated in formal Korean adoptees' conferences as well as informal gatherings

[62] Ann Cvetkovich 2013 cited in Hosu Kim, *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South* (Palgrave Macmilan, 2016), 190.

held in the northeastern United States between Boston and Washington, D.C. Many of the adoptees I met either had already visited or had made plans to visit South Korea. After observing these conferences and hearing adoptees' returning stories, I asked: Why do they return? To find the answers to this question, I conducted my fieldwork in South Korea in 2015 by volunteering for Korean adoptees' motherland tours as well as organizations for and of Korean adoptees and their birth mothers. I participated as a translator in two motherland tours between June and December of 2015. Both tours were ten days long. Tour A was in June and tour B was in September. I also volunteered to help with GOA'L's birth family search program. In addition, I volunteered for KoRoot, an NGO that addresses issues affecting transnational adoptees, and which runs a guest house in Seoul for returning adoptees. I worked on their newsletter and translated documents for adoptees overseas. By volunteering on the tours as well as with GOA'L and KoRoot, I was able to meet birth mothers and help out with Dandelions, an organization of birth mothers.

From 2015 to summer 2016, I interviewed triads of adoptees and their two mothers whom I met through adoptees' gatherings, motherland tours, GOA'L, KoRoot, and Dandelions. I was able to interview thirty-five adoptees, five birth mothers, and two adoptive mothers. I interviewed adoptees' birth fathers, siblings, and social workers as well. Each interview took about two hours. During my field work in South Korea in 2015, I realized that adoptees' relationships with their reunited birth families were influenced by their relationships with their adoptive mothers. Therefore, I decided to interview adoptive mothers as well. In 2016, I

interviewed two adoptive mothers who lived in the United States as well as adoptees whom I had met via motherland tours.

I also use discourse analysis of documentaries, films, and websites to consider how the motherhood of Korean birth mothers and American adoptive mothers is socially constructed and represented. I analyze autobiographical documentaries made by adoptees, films representing Korean birth mothers, and a website for adoptive mothers to share their concerns about adoption and their adoptive children.

Finally, I use archival methods to explain the socio-historical background of transnational adoption. I analyze national and congressional reports and treaties between the United States and South Korea to demonstrate how these two countries have encouraged and discouraged transnational adoption at different times based on national needs. I examine The Hague Adoption Convention (1993) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) to critique how the concept of "the best interests of the child" excludes the perspectives of adult adoptees and their two mothers.

Methods as Politics: The Dilemma of Feminist Research Methods

Anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran argues that ethnography is not inherently feminist.[63] Feminist researcher Diane Wolf further emphasizes that:

> Power is discernible three interrelated dimensions: (1) power difference stemming from different positionalities of the researcher and the researched (race, class, nationality, life chances, urban-rural background); (2) power exerted during the research process, such as defining the research relationship, unequal exchange, and exploitation;

[63] Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

and (3) power exerted during the post fieldwork period—writing and representing.[64]

Because of power differences between the researcher and participants, feminist ethnographic methods have inherent limits. However, feminist ethnographers cannot give up on pursuing these methods because feminist politics also aim to shed light on silenced voices. To overcome these limits, "feminist researchers use self-reflection about power as a tool to deepen ethnographic analysis and to highlight the dilemmas of fieldwork."[65] Therefore, I reflexively explore the research that I conducted with adoptees, adoptive mothers, and birth mothers.

Insider/Outsider Dilemma

When I started to participate in Korean adoptees' gatherings near Washington D.C in the fall of 2012, I joined them for lunch at a Chinese restaurant. One of the members found out that I am not a Korean adoptee, and he asked me, "Do you pity us?" Even though I answered, "No," I was very perplexed. I felt that most of them did not want to talk with me. I was able to join the lunch as a researcher and got approval from the leader of the group since they were friendly to Korean people.

Since, 2013, I have been volunteering for KCS (Korean Cultural School), an NGO in Maryland for Korean children adopted to the United States, by teaching Korean language and culture. When I first asked them if I could volunteer in the fall of 2012, I got rejected because they already had enough volunteers, according to the

---

[64] Wolf, Diane L., "Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork," in Wolf, ed., Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1996), pp. 1-55.

[65] Naples A, Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 41.

leader of KCS. It took forming personal relationships with the leaders of these organizations for me to gain access.

I also participated in a Korean adoptees' conference in Boston in the summer of 2013. When I submitted the participation form online, I got phone call from one of the conference's board members. He explained that they had an issue with my attending. Some of the board members did not want to allow me to participate in the conference since the adoptees might feel unsafe because of a non-adoptee researcher's presence. Other board members, however, wanted to open their conference to non-adoptees. Therefore, the board suggested that I should stay outside the conference room while they having discussions and sessions for adoptees, but that it would be fine for me to join them during lunch and dinner. I agreed to their decision. Therefore, I sat in the lobby while adoptees were having discussion time. After one session, an adoptee sat down next to me and we started to have a conversation. She lived in Washington D.C. and was the coordinator of KCS. After that, she helped me to join KCS and introduced me to many adoptees who live in the area. Since this person, who was already connected with the adoptee community, introduced me to adoptees' groups and their members, most of the adoptees I met through her were very friendly to me and wanted to help with my research.

Researchers often face insider/outsider dilemmas like I did. As a non-adoptee researcher, I got many questions from adoptees about why I wanted to "observe" and "research" them. Also, it was hard to join their community at first. However, some adoptees were interested in Korean culture and society, so I was able to join them later on. As a "non-adoptee" researcher, I am an "outsider" with respect to the

adoptee community, but at the same time I am an “insider” in some ways since I am Korean and thus connected to their community under a broader definition. If I were a white researcher, I would not have been considered an “insider.” My nationality, cultural background, and race gave me benefits in establishing rapport with my informants. This insider/outsider dichotomy is complicated by the fact that researchers have multiple identities based on gender, race, class, cultural background, and nationality. In particular, the researcher’s flexible position can give them benefits or can be an obstacle in conducting research.

Flexible Identity of a Researcher

While I experienced both benefits and obstacles when meeting Korean adoptees, I found my identity to be an asset when approaching Korean birth mothers. Most of these women are in their fifties, sixties, and seventies. Therefore, some of them wanted to help with my research because my age reminded them of their own children. To be honest, I might have unintentionally behaved like a daughter by calling them “mother”[66] and acting friendly to establish rapport. I talked about my relationship with my own mother to make them feel comfortable talking about their children. Because I am a woman, birth and adoptive mothers might more easily share with me about their relationships with their husbands or children’ fathers, pregnancy experiences, or infertility issues. While we were having interviews, some of them

[66] In Korean culture, it is considered very rude to call elders by their names. Therefore, it is common to refer to all elders using kinship terms such as “father,” “mother,” “grandfather,” or “grandmother.”

made comments such as, "Men never understand this."[67] Therefore, my research may have benefited from my gender and age.

However, I also had to handle some difficult situations because of my positionality. Some male Korean adoptees are interested in dating Korean women and asked me to go on dates with them. In these cases, I had to cancel scheduled interviews and explain my position as a researcher again. To prevent these situations, I wore a ring on my finger and pretended to be engaged when I was participating in the motherland tours. Also, when I was volunteering for KoRoot, there was a national holiday in Korea. Therefore, KoRoot held a big event for Korean adoptees who lived in South Korea. The staff of KoRoot wanted me to help with the event by cooking and cleaning. However, they did not ask another male researcher to do the same work. While he was having a beer with the leader of KoRoot, I was working in the kitchen. As a researcher, I could have rejected their requests for help with cooking and cleaning and instead joined the conversation between the male researcher and the leader. However, the staff and adoptees at the event recognized me more as a woman than as a researcher. I could not ignore their gendered expectations since I needed to build rapport with them.

During my participation in motherland tours, Korean adoptee participants asked me many things about Korean culture and society because I am Korean. Therefore, we were able to have conversations that helped to establish rapport. My nationality and cultural background helped me to connect with Korean adoptees who wanted to know about Korean culture and society.

---

[67] My female interviewees most often said this when they were explaining about the struggles they have had as women throughout their lives, especially when they were talking about pregnancy or experiences with infertility.

As a non-native English speaker, I had a hard time when interviewing Korean adoptees and their adoptive mothers. Sometimes, I had to repeat questions in order to make sure that I had correctly understood what they meant. When I interviewed Korean birth mothers, by contrast, I was able to catch their nuanced verbal and non-verbal expressions, including their silences. However, when I wrote about Korean birth mothers, I struggled with accurately translating what they said from Korean into English.

In terms of race, I shared some common experiences with Korean adoptees, including those who had unpleasant experiences because of racism against Asian Americans. Therefore, these similarities helped me to establish rapport with Korean adoptees. Similarly, the white adoptive mothers who I met at KCS wanted to ask me about Korean society because I am Korean like their adoptive children. However, when I interviewed them, it was hard to ask sensitive questions related to race since they are white and I am Asian.

The identity of a researcher is an intersection of race, gender, age, and nationality. These complicated, multiple, and flexible identities enable a researcher to conduct their research more easily by sharing similar experiences with some research participants. However, at the same time, the complicated nature of identity prevents researchers from building a rapport with other informants.

Power Dynamics: Should a Researcher Get Involved with Participants?

Part of my research involved translating when Korean adoptees reunited with their birth families. Translation was not the easy work that I had expected since adoptees and birth mothers were sharing their personal family issues and life experiences. Birth

mothers had to talk about the difficult circumstances that led them to give up their children and adoptees also needed to share about their lives with me, a stranger. Since I was the translator, adoptees and birth mothers talked to me instead of looking at each other. Therefore, it often seemed like they were having conversations with me rather than each other.

There were many awkward situations that arose when I was translating during reunions. For example, some birth mothers wanted to ask why their adoptee children had divorced, how much money they made, or why they got fat. Some adoptees understood that those questions came from affection and interest in them, but other adoptees considered these questions to be offensive. In order to prevent awkward situations, I had to explain why, in a Korean context, birth mothers would ask those questions even though I was not sure about the birth mother's intention. The leader of tour A told me that if birth families asked adoptees for support, to help them financially, or asked other "inappropriate" questions, I should not translate those parts. However, the staff of tour B wanted me to translate everything since they wanted to give the adoptees choices about continuing their relationships with their birth families. Therefore, as a translator, I was overwhelmed by the fact that I had the power to control these situations. Also, as a researcher, I had to consider what would be the most ethical behavior on my part and how much I could get involved in those situations. I decided to translate most of these reunions accurately, but I also tried to add explanations about why birth families or adoptees asked certain questions based on my knowledge of both the Korean and American contexts.

I also have helped adoptees and their birth families by translating their letters. Many adoptees asked me what would be "appropriate" behaviors in Korean contexts, what kinds of gifts Koreans like, and if it is okay to ask certain types of questions. Korean birth families asked me similar things in order to understand their children who were raised in the United States. When they reunited, some of them would not directly ask each other certain private questions since they did not want to be rude. Therefore, they asked me if I could ask the adoptees or birth family for them. Even though I could, I was worried because if I made a mistake, it might influence their lives and relationships. Therefore, I had to constantly think about how much I should intervene in their situations as a researcher and how much time I should spend "helping" them. I also wondered if a researcher could be friends with his or her research participants. Because I had the power to observe them and represent them in my research, it was hard for me to consider my interviewees as friends. I am not sure if a researcher can or should be a friend to their research participants. Therefore, when my research participants considered me to be their friend, I felt guilty since I felt like I misused their affection for me. To reduce these power differences, it is important for the researcher to communicate a lot with their participants in order to avoid misunderstanding what they intended to communicate during interviews. Also, I tried to share the process of my research with participants in order to be transparent with them. However, there is still a power inequality between the researcher and their participants since I observed and analyzed them. In the end, this unavoidable power inequality led me not to regard my research participants as friends.

Chapter 2: Leaving "Home" in Search of the "Homeland": The Return of Korean Adoptees

Introduction: The Person Who Looks Like Me

I met Sophia,[68] a Korean adoptee, through GOA'L in late October 2015 during my fieldwork in South Korea, where I volunteered for GOA'L's birth family search program. According to the adoption agency where Sophia had been sent in 1977, they guessed that she was nine to fifteen months old[69] at the time when she was found in front of a house occupied by Kim Jinhee. Kim Jinhee brought Sophia to Holt Children's Services.[70] Sophia has searched for her birth family steadily and enthusiastically. She returned to South Korea for the first time in 1997 after being adopted to Denmark as a baby.[71] Since then, she has visited South Korea several more times, in 2003, 2008, 2010, and 2015, in order to search for her birth family.

However, Sophia has little information about her birth family, so it is not easy to find them. According to her adoption documents, she was wearing white clothes with a blue vest, and she was found by Kim Jinhee. Sophia knows the address of the

[68] All names of participants are pseudonyms.

[69] Many adoptees did not know their "real" date of birth or the "real" name given to them by their birth parents. The adoption agencies or orphanages had given most of them their names and birth dates. Therefore, it was impossible for Sophia to know her actual date of birth until she reunites with her birth family. Her adoption agency assumed she was nine months old and her orphanage assumed she was fifteen months old.

[70] Holt Children's Services has been responsible for placing half of the adoptions from South Korea. It is likely that without the activities of this organization, transnational adoption from South Korea would never have grown to such a large scale.

[71] This research focuses on the cases of Korean adoptees sent to the United States because transnational adoption between South Korea and the United States has a different historical and socio-political background than transnational adoptions to other receiving countries such as Denmark, France, Sweden, etc. Therefore, I only interviewed Korean adoptee returnees from the United States. However, I decided to include conversations with and participant-observation of adoptees from other Western counties because what they experience and feel in South Korea as adoptees is similar to adoptee returnees from the United States.

house where she was found, which we visited, however it no longer exists after having been converted into apartment buildings. Therefore, Sophia and I visited a community center in the area and asked them if there was a way to search for information about Kim Jinhee. However, they could not provide us information because of privacy rules. We asked people who have lived in the area for a long time if they knew Kim Jinhee, but no one remembered her.

The process of the birth family search was a physically exhausting experience. I usually met with Korean adoptees in the early morning since the search would take several hours.[72] We visited the places where they were found or the hospitals where they were born. If these no longer existed, we went to community centers to confirm how the area had changed or asked somebody who had lived in the area for a long time. We also handed out pamphlets with the adoptees' information and pictures to people in the streets. Some people looked at us with pity or curiosity, and some women got angry because they thought we considered them to be mothers who had "abandoned" their babies. In such cases, I explained the adoptee's situation, answered questions people asked about the adoptees, and translated for the adoptees.

When Sophia and I came back to Seoul from a nearby city by metro, I was physically very tired since she and I had spent the whole day on the street searching for her birth family. So, I had not paid attention to her feelings and emotions before she told me about her experience of the day. Sophia shared how "emotionally" as well as physically tired she was since she always tried to find someone who looks like her whenever she visits the city where she was found in case they might be part of her

[72] If adoptees had one or two addresses within Seoul and the places had not changed a lot, the birth family search only took three to five hours. But if adoptees had more information and the addresses were not in Seoul, it took at least eight to twelve hours.

birth family. When I met her next time,[73] Sophia was planning to move to South Korea for a longer stay, not just a visit.

While the birth family search process is not easy, many adoptees explain that they return to South Korea to look for their heritage. Therefore, the motives that stimulate them to initiate this difficult process of discovering their roots needs to be explored with complicated and multi-layered perspectives. To examine the implications of adoptees' returning movement, I explore their motives for returning to South Korea, how they learn, acquire/resist, experience, and perform "Koreanness" while visiting their motherland. I used participant-observation of motherland tours and birth family searches in order to assess the meanings of "roots" and "heritage" for Korean adoptees. My findings suggest that a primary motivation lies in Korean adoptees' conceptualization of their Korean birth mothers and I consider how images of Korean birth mothers are (re)produced and reinforced through motherland tours.

Motherland Tours

In October 1998, South Korean President Kim Dae Jung invited twenty-nine transnational adoptees to the Blue House,[74] where he issued an apology:

> Some 200,000 Korean children have been adopted to the United States, Canada, and many European countries over the years. I am pained to think that we could not raise you ourselves, and had to give you away for foreign adoption.... The world is becoming a single sphere. Globalization is the trend of the times. No nation can live by itself. Cultural exchanges are important. So nurture your cultural roots,

[73] Sophia and I met three more times during my fieldwork since she needed a translator who could help when she met other Korean people.

[74] The Blue House is the executive office and official residence of the President of the Republic of Korea.

> and try to harmonize that with your national identities, wherever you are from.[75]

President Kim Dae Jung and his wife Lee Hee Ho supported Korean adoptees' gatherings, conferences, and events during his administration. His deep interest in Korean adoption issues had been sparked in 1989 when, after giving a speech in Stockholm, Sweden as a renowned Korean politician, an audience member asked him the following question: "I am an orphan from South Korea. South Korea sold me to make money. And even though the economic situation is getting better now, South Korea is still selling babies. What do you think about this as a politician of South Korea?"[76]

After being elected as president in 1998, Kim Dae Jung and his wife invited Korean adoptees to the Blue House, economically supported them by offering funds for free tours, and opened the semi-governmental organization Global Adoption Information and Post-Service Center (later the Adoption Information Center, and then Korean Adoption Services beginning in July 2009) to help adoptees search for their birth families. Recognizing the efforts of the government, the media started to focus on transnational Korean adoptees by calling them, "cultural ambassadors and bridges," "civil diplomats," and "diversity mascots."

Since 1998, more than two thousand transnational Korean adoptees have returned to South Korea each year via tours,[77] study abroad programs, and language

---

[75] Kim Dae Jung, 1999 cited in Miller, "Heritage Tourism and Return Journeys.", 1.

[76] "Geuneun ibyanginui jonjaereul cheoeum injeonghan jeongchiinieossda," [He was the first politician who recognized the issues of Korean adoptees], August 24, 2009, accessed July 17, 2016, http://www.pressian.com/news/article.html?no=96525.

[77] The first motherland tour was started in 1975 by Holt Children's Services. But the tours were offered only sporadically until the late 1990s.

immersion courses.[78] According to the South Korean government's Overseas Korean Foundation, 38,712 Korean adoptees visited South Korea between 1982 and 2005.[79] However, it is difficult to find reliable data because, "Korean immigration records track entry by nationality and do not treat adoptees as a separate category."[80] The sources for the data given above are the four main adoption agencies in South Korea: Social Welfare Society, Eastern Social Welfare Society, Korean Social Services, and Holt Children's Services, which provide post-adoption services to transnational adoptees; thus, the number does not count adoptees who visited South Korea individually without making contact with their adoption agencies.[81] However, the fact that members of returned Korean adoptees' organizations are increasing in number provides evidence that the number of returned adoptees as a whole is increasing.

This study is based on fieldwork I conducted in South Korea from June to December 2015, especially participant-observation of the motherland tours in which I participated. In June 2015, I participated in "motherland tour A" for Korean adoptees. The organization that hosts the tour is an NGO (non-governmental organization) in the United States that aims to provide opportunities and assistance to Korean adoptees to learn about their roots, culture, and history. I joined the tour as a researcher and volunteer to help with translation and participants' adjustment to Korean culture.

---

[78] Miller, "Heritage Tourism and Return Journeys," 2.

[79] Kim Ja Park Nelson, "Korean Looks, American Eyes: Korean American Adoptees, Race, Culture and Nation" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2009), 241.

[80] Eleana Jean Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham [NC]; London: Duke University Press, 2010), 283.

[81] Park Nelson, "Korean Looks, American Eyes," 241.

In September 2015, I volunteered with “motherland tour B,” which was hosted by an organization established by adopted Korean returnees that helps adoptees returning to South Korea to adjust to South Korean society and to search for their birth families. Both tours lasted for ten days and nine nights. I was able to attend nine days of tour A but only able to participate in tour B for about three days, due to the tours’ different policies.

Even though most motherland tours have similar programs, they have different atmospheres and characteristics depending on tour members and especially the organizers of the tours. Tours A and B had mostly similar programs, from visiting traditional cultural sites to taking Korean cooking classes. Even though they had many similarities, the tours also had a lot of differences. First of all, most of the twenty-two participants of tour A were from the United States, except for one from Demark. In contrast, the members of tour B were more diverse, with six participants from Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany, and fourteen participants from the United States.

In total, tour A was comprised of twenty-two Korean adoptee participants, two Korean adoptee staff members, the leader/organizer of the tour, the spouse of the organizer, a translator, and me as a researcher and volunteer. Due to the relatively small size of the tour, it was comparatively easy to establish rapport with participants. The organizer was a middle-aged native Korean woman who currently lives in the United States and who had volunteered for a U.S. adoption agency. She arranged the entire program schedule herself and also helped participants search for their birth families. Most participants expressed their gratitude to her, and they contributed their

own money to support the work of the organization after participating in the tour. They called her "saint" or "angel" due to her endless efforts for Korean adoptees. Some of them called me "*Dong-saeng*" (younger sibling) to show their intimacy with me. Tour A was more like a "Korean traditional family" constituted by the head of the family and children. One of the participants of the tour said, "Korean adoptees are treated like children again in their motherland" to critique the atmosphere of the tour that infantilized Korean adoptee participants.

In comparison to tour A, tour B was larger, with twenty Korean adoptee participants, about ten staff members (some were native Koreans and others were Korean adoptees from Western countries, such as the United States, Norway, and France), and about twenty native Korean volunteers.[82] The programs were organized by various staff members, rather than led by one or two people. Tour B was established by and for Korean adoptee returnees, so the atmosphere of the tour felt more like a group of friends or peers, because they were able to share their "adopteeness" with each other. Tour B also had mental health discussion times with a psychotherapist for the adoptee attendees.

The tours' sponsors also influenced their atmosphere. For instance, tour B received funds from the Ministry of Health and Welfare as well as KAS (Korean

[82] Most of the volunteers were in their 20s or 30s. Their reasons for volunteering included helping Korean adoptees, learning English, or getting a volunteer certificate required by their colleges. Some of the volunteers of tour B felt they were separated from adoptees. The size of the group did not allow a lot of conversations between volunteers and adoptees, and volunteers did not participate in all ten days of the tour. Volunteers only took part in some of the activities over a few days of the tour, a point of difference from tour A, which I was able to join for nine days. Eleana Kim discusses the issue of the exclusion of Korean volunteers from adoptee-only spaces. See E. Kim, *Adopted Territory,* 212.

Adoption Services, hereafter KAS).[83] Thus, they had to prove to the South Korean government that a certain number of people had joined the tour, that they had provided a variety of services, and thus that they needed more volunteers. Tour A, on the other hand, received funds from several private companies, organizations, and individuals. On the last day, tour A had a banquet to which they invited sponsors. During the banquet, I observed that many sponsors took pictures of the Korean adoptee tour members without first asking for permission.

Korean adoptee tour members are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, it is not surprising that tour A and tour B would have differences related to dynamics among members and hosts of the tours, even if their programs were very similar. My research suggests that the differences between the tours were highly influenced by the size of the tours, how diverse they were, their staff structure, and their financial sponsors.

In addition to participating in the motherland tours, I also volunteered for GOA'L and KoRoot, organizations serving Korean adoptees to get more information regarding adoptees' birth family search process. GOA'L was established in 1999 by and for Korean adoptee returnees. It helps Korean adoptees who returned to South Korea to adjust to South Korean society and to search for their birth families. I assisted adoptees who were searching for their birth families and translated for adoptees who were reunited with them. I also volunteered for KoRoot by working on their newsletter and translating documents for adoptees during my fieldwork. I was

---

[83] The South Korean government implemented the Special Adoption Act of 2012, which transformed KCARE (Korea Central Adoption Resources) into KAS to systematize post-adoption services and encourage domestic adoption.

able to meet Korean adoptee returnees who stayed in the guest house and birth mothers who visited there during this period.

Through my involvement in tour A, tour B, GOA'L, and KoRoot, I was able to observe as well as interview Korean adoptees, their birth mothers, NGO staff members, and social workers with adoption agencies.

Wandering between a Sense of Belonging and a Sense of Rejection for Ten Days

"I feel Danish but people see me as Korean."[84]

A Korean adoptee from Denmark, who was a member of tour B, felt confused about his identity and whether he is Danish or Korean during his motherland tour. He cried while talking about this struggle. Most tour members were visiting South Korea for the first time since their adoptions,[85] and their reactions varied. While some struggled with their Korean identity, others really enjoyed visiting their motherland. In comparison to their adopted homelands, some felt a sense of relief from their racial invisibility in South Korea, enjoying how "everyone looks like them."[86] I met one member of tour A in March 2016, eight months after the tour. He shared with me what he felt during the tour:

---

[84] This Korean adoptee from Denmark on tour B did not spend a lot of time with me or other volunteers. It seemed like he wanted to be on his own. Although I did not have many opportunities to talk with him, I was able to learn from another tour member about a comment he made during discussion time among adoptees and staff.

[85] Do-Hyen Kim, the head of KoRoot, told me during a conversation that many adoptees hesitate to visit South Korea. They often travel to and get interested in other Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Vietnam, but struggle with the idea of visiting South Korea. He said it takes a long time for adoptees to make a decision about visiting their motherland.

[86] During interviews or conversations with Korean adoptees, when they described their impressions of South Korea, they often said, "everyone looks like me," whether they felt comfortable about it or not.

> I grew up in a very white area.[87] Even though I had white friends, there were always some parts I missed.... I met other Asian American friends in college; it was good, but there was always one percent in my mind that never filled up. Even when I hung out with Korean American friends, they made fun of me by saying, "You are white." Then I moved to DC for work, and was able to join a Korean adoptees' group. They understood me and I did not need to explain about what I feel.... I felt like the one percent I missed had been filled.... During the tour last year, the last night, on the streets of Seoul, I thought every adoptee should come here, they should come to visit this county.

Through the tour programs, Korean adoptees were able to experience and perform "Koreanness" by learning how to cook Korean food or wearing traditional Korean clothes. Some of them enjoyed learning about and acquiring "Koreanness," but others did not want to be treated as Korean. Some Korean adoptees from the United States identify themselves as American, as Korean American, as both, or as none of these identities. Korean adoptees and tour members are not a homogeneous group, so it is to be expected that they would have different attitudes and feelings about South Korea. However, regardless of what they feel and how they identify themselves, somehow they share a feeling of not being a "real Korean," even though "they look like a Korean."

For example, tour B went to Chuncheon, a city in northern South Korea, for a one-day trip. When tour members were waiting to check-in at their hotel, other Korean guests who were staying there recognized our group as a Korean adoptees because the word *Ibyang-in* (adoptee) was printed on the t-shirts we were wearing. One person pulled on an adoptee's t-shirt to show the inscription to the other guests. Then they asked us, "Are you an adoptee? Where are you from? The United States? I'm glad that you came to Korea." They asked in Korean, so the adoptees did not

[87] I met this participant at a restaurant in his hometown in the United States. While we having this conversation, the only people of color in the restaurant were us.

understand and were staring at me wanting to know what had happened. I did not know how to react and explain the situation either, so I just stood there with a very awkward expression on my face.

Narae,[88] one of the Korean birth mothers whom I interviewed, asked me to translate during her meeting with two Korean adoptees from the United States, Emma and Olivia.[89] Emma and Olivia's experiences show how adoptees struggle between being and being treated as both "Korean" and "not Korean enough." Narae had first met Emma and Olivia in 2013 when they visited a shelter for single mothers during a motherland tour. Narae, a birth mother herself, was volunteering at the shelter and shared her story with the tour participants, including Emma and Olivia.

In November 2015, Emma and Olivia were travelling around South Korea by themselves. I met them on a rainy day when Narae's husband drove us to KoRoot's office because she wanted them to visit KoRoot and there were not many places we could go due to the weather. On the way to KoRoot, Narae asked if their trip was going well. They had visited many places, and Emma said they went to a well-known amusement park several days earlier and suddenly she started to cry. Emma said that when she and Olivia were waiting for a bus near the amusement park to go back to Seoul, Korean girls behind them began whispering to each other because they noticed that Emma and Olivia were "not Korean." According to Emma, the girls tried to guess where Emma and Olivia were from and what their nationality was. Even though Emma and Olivia are Asian, they were speaking in English and Emma had tanned skin, so the girls behind them began discussing where they were from. The girls

---

[88] See chapter three for more information about Narae's experience as a Korean birth mother.

[89] Narae is neither Emma nor Olivia's birth mother.

might have thought that Emma and Olivia could not understand them, but Emma and Olivia had studied Korean since 2013, so they were able to follow the girls' conversation somewhat. Therefore, when I met them, Emma cried because she did not want to be treated like a non-Korean.

When I interviewed Korean adoptees for my preliminary research in 2012, Isabella[90] said that when she told people "I am an adoptee," Koreans changed their faces into pitiful expressions and said "Oh! I am so sorry." However, Isabella felt that the Korean people only focused on one side of her, the fact that she is a Korean adoptee, but did not know the other side, about her life in the United States, her family, friends, and dreams.

> I am always excited to go back to Korea, I mean Korea is so much fun but…but…but… I think one thing that I don't like when I go to Korea is sometimes dealing with people, when I tell them I am an adoptee…. I don't like that…if you are in a taxi randomly, *a-jŏ-ssi* (it means middle-aged man, but it indicates a taxi driver in this context) tries to talk about your life. If I say that I am an adoptee not just *Kyop'o* (overseas Korean), I mean, I'm adopted then…people's conception is completely changed, and you can see that in their face, and it really bothers me how people think that…Korean adoptees are *bul-ssang-han* (pitiful)…so like…(sigh)…I don't even know them and then "Oh! I am sorry for my country," you know, I grew up so well and I want to have job opportunities in Korea, but it really bothers me. So a lot of times I don't even tell people that I am adopted. I just tell them I am *Kyop'o* (overseas Korean) because I am *Kyop'o* (overseas Korean).[91]

[90] Isabella was adopted by a couple in Minnesota in 1990 when she was four months old. She visited South Korea when she was ten years old with her adoptive parents, and she was able to reunite with her birth family. Since then, she has visited South Korea several times.

[91] Interview with Isabella, December 2012.

Writer Maggie Jones asked why a generation of adoptees is returning to South Korea in her article, a cover story in *The New York Times*.[92] In this article, adoptees she interviewed referred to their "in-betweenness."

> For many adoptees, those cultural divides—coupled with the fact that they can't speak the language, a frustrating and often heart-wrenching obstacle in their own birth country—solidifies the feeling that they hover in between: not fully American, not fully Korean. Instead, they lived in a third space: Asian, Western, white, adopted, other. It's a complicated place but not always a bad one. "I am, maybe, in a way, proud of my in-betweenness," Lovell recently wrote me in an email.[93]

As this interviewee stated, betweenness does not always mean living in confusion or complication. Kim Ja Park Nelson explains that Korean adoptees' return to South Korea is an important experience to develop or further their adoptee identities by experiencing the double-edged sword of relief and anxiety in South Korea.[94]

Betweenness can also create alternative locations for and by Korean adoptees. Anthropologist E. Kim argues that Korean adoptees can establish "adopted territory,"[95] which is created by their wills and voices to act as a counterpublic to challenge the dominant discourse through disidentification.[96] E. Kim argues that Korean adoptees have created their organizations for and by adoptees and NGOs by

---

[92] Maggie Jones, "Why a Generation of Adoptees Is Returning to South Korea," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2015, accessed January 14, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/magazine/why-a-generation-of-adoptees-is-returning-to-south-korea.html.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Park Nelson, "Korean Looks, American Eyes," 250.

[95] Kim, "Wedding Citizenship and Culture."

[96] E. Kim (2003) defines the concept of disidentification as "a strategy of cultural survival in which subaltern performances of difference become 'rituals of transformation' that render visible the boundaries of symbolic meaning and the constructedness of naturalized social categories." 60.

developing a counterpublic through disidentification. E. Kim considers that these returning Korean adoptees resist and negotiate the granting of "Koreanness" through disidentification. According to her, "Korean adoptees' disidentification from the construction of Koreanness produces a counterhegemonic production of Korean adopteeness, and the proliferation of 'sites of collective articulation'—activity in cities around the world and on the Internet—constitutes alternative locations for the production of Koreanness, Korean adopteeness, and for the emergence of a collective history."[97] Even though in-betweenness can enable the creation of alternative spaces for Korean adoptees and the development of their adoptee identities, they still need to endure the process of identity negotiation/formation and being treated as "other" in their everyday lives when they visit South Korea. Although they look Korean, the way they speak as well as their makeup and dress reveal that they are not a "real Korean." Like Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry, the Korean adoptee is, "a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."[98]

One of the participants in tour A mentioned that they were treated like children because they did not have enough knowledge about Korea but, in contrast to other foreigners, adoptees are expected to learn Korean customs and to understand Korean culture. Therefore, she mentioned that adoptees are infantilized and treated as "not Korean enough" and have to acquire "Koreanness" by leaning Korean manners, cooking, and language during the tours.

When Emma came back to the United States, she messaged me that she is saving money to go back to South Korea again. When she returns next time, Emma

[97] Ibid., 60.

[98] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

expects to stay for more than a year. Through our conversations, I was able to observe Emma's struggles with being "not enough Korean." Her messages led me wonder why Emma wants to return to South Korea again despite the many obstacles she would face. Therefore, the next part of this chapter explores Korean adoptees' motivations for returning.

Why Do Korean Adoptees Return to the Motherland?

> As I talked to dozens of adoptees in Seoul about what drew them back, the conversation, inevitably, shifted to what might push them to leave. For many, the experience of living in Seoul veers between warm familiarity and occasional alienation (a different version of growing up as an Asian adoptee in a white family in the United States). "Korea is home," Amanda Eunha Lovell, told me. "But it's not one I'm completely comfortable in."[99]

It is important to understand the return of Korean adoptees in terms of their identity formation and sense of "homelessness."[100]Jones refers to "[adoptees'] sense of connection"[101] to their home country as one of their motives to return even though their home is not a completely comfortable place. According to Park Nelson, the trip is transformative and enables them to experience "reconnection to Korean identity."[102]

---

[99] Jones, "Why a Generation of Adoptees Is Returning to South Korea."

[100] Dani Isaac Meier, "Loss and Reclaimed Lives: Cultural Identity and Place in Korean American Intercountry Adoptees," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1998). Cited in Park Nelson, "Korean Looks, American Eyes," 250.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Park Nelson, "Korean Looks, American Eyes," 242.

E. Kim explains that socio-political, cultural, and economic factors are also significant motives for the returning of Korean adoptees.[103] Globalization led by the South Korean government since the early 1990s has affected the return of Korean adoptees. The Kim Young Sam administration (1993-1998) encouraged globalization in South Korea and passed the Overseas Korean Act of 1997 to, "promote better understanding of Korea within the international community and to increase friendship and goodwill between Korea and the rest of the world through various exchange programs."[104] Under the 1997 Act, Korean adoptees are included in the category of "Overseas Koreans" and are thus able to obtain visa status to live, invest, and find employment in South Korea.

The state also invites adoptees back as human capital to assist in further developing the country for successful globalization because many Korean adoptees are American citizens.[105] E. Kim understands that the neoliberal Korean government uses Korean adoptees due to its, "proactive globalization policies and the rise of 'English fever.'"[106] Adoptees from the United States are native English speakers, which gives them market competitiveness because of the expansion of the English-language teaching market in South Korea.

---

[103] E. Kim, *Adopted Territory*.

[104] Article 1, Korea Foundation Act.

[105] Eleana Kim, "Human Capital: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Neoliberal Logic of Return," *Journal of Korean Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 299–327.

[106] Ibid., 299.

The Korean government also encourages Korean adoptees to return to Korea through state-sponsored programs such as heritage tours for Korean adoptees.[107] These state-sponsored tours stimulate returning Korean adoptees' sense of belonging to a nation by introducing them to "traditional" and "authentic" Korean culture through camps and programs geared towards reincorporating the adoptees into the nation-building and globalization projects.

Anthropologist Elise M. Prébin argues that Korean adoptees are expected to represent South Korea appropriately when they return to their adopted countries after attending these cultural programs and tours. Prébin also demonstrates how the adoptees are "re-educated" to discover their national identity as "Koreans," with the hope that this will lead them to contribute to Korea's successful globalization by including them in the network of overseas Korean in various social, economical, educational, cultural, and professional fields. She analyzes three purposes of those tours: First, the tours provide the fundamental knowledges that Koreans are expected to have, such as music, language, history, cuisine, and martial arts. Second, the tours arrange for attendance at ceremonies or cultural experience programs. Prébin believes that, by acquiring this knowledge and experiencing these ceremonies, adoptees advance from the state of "an incomplete being" (a child) to an adult. Lastly, the tours lead adoptees to support international adoption by visiting welfare facilities for single mothers or orphanages managed by adoption agencies.[108]

---

[107] Since the 1990s, more than 2,000 Korean adoptees have returned to South Korea each year for short trips or longer stays due to the globalization policies led by the Korean government (E. Kim, 2012; Miller, 2013).

[108] Elise Prébin, "Three-Week Re-Education to Koreanness," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 7, no. 2 (2008): 332.

Like Prébin,[109] Park Nelson uses the term "rite of passage" to explain that the return of Korean adoptees to South Korea is a way to legitimize Korean adoptees' identities,[110] even though they do not feel like "real Koreans"[111] while visiting due to language and cultural barriers. Motherland tours expect participants to acquire "Koreanness" by moving through these rites of passage in only ten days.

Finding My Roots: My Poor Country and My Poor Mother

As previous scholars have mentioned, adoptees seeking a sense of connection to their home country as well as socio-political, cultural, and economic factors are significant motivators for returning Korean adoptees. Building on this research, I add another reason for their returning based on what it means for adoptees to seek after their roots and heritage.

Miller understands the return of Korean adoptees as one form of "existential tourism," similar to African Americans traveling to Ghana and Jewish tourists visiting Holocaust sites in Europe. Existential tourism differs from "leisure tourism" because it is intended to enhance adoptees' identity and sense of belonging to their motherland.[112] On a brochure from tour A, which introduces the 2015 tour members, some Korean adoptees mentioned that they applied for the tour in order to seek out their Korean heritage and roots:

---

[109] Ibid., 323.

[110] Park Nelson, "Korean Looks, American Eyes," 240.

[111] Ibid., 242.

[112] Miller, "Heritage Tourism and Return Journeys," 3.

> This opportunity will allow me to know Korea. It will allow me to fill a void that lies within me. It will allow me to know my heritage and have it not feel so foreign to me.[113]

> Now, fully immersed in American culture, I seek a deeper understanding of my identity as a Korean adoptee.... I hope to come away from the tour with a newfound pride in my Korean heritage.[114]

Korean adoptee returnees are different from other tourists in terms of seeking their heritage and roots, which does not mean just experiencing and performing Koreanness by visiting historical places or cooking Korean foods, which can be consumed by other tourists too. Emily, who joined tour A in 2014 and participated in the tour again in June 2015 as a staff member, posted her thoughts about the tour on the virtual space for tour group members:

> It gives us proof that we existed before we were adopted.... We don't have birth stories, pictures, family memories; none of that exists for us.... To be able to come back to places that were meaningful to our earlier lives reaffirms that we did exist before adoption.[115]

To reaffirm their existence before adoption, adoptees travel to places where they were found, born, and lived, visit adoption agencies to review their files, and search for their birth families.[116] A Korean adoptee contributed to *The New York Times'* opinion page with a piece called, "Tracing My Roots Back to Korea."[117] She decided to return in 1997, "to confront the most basic

[113] Evelyn, Tour A brochure.

[114] Oliver, Tour A brochure.

[115] Emily, Post to Tour A's Facebook page, June 9, 2015.

[116] Korean adoptees return in order to find their birth families or just to see South Korea. All the members of tour A and tour B tried to find their birth families, even though many of them were not sure that they were ready to meet their birth families or even really wanted to meet them. However, all of them at least started to search for their birth families.

[117] "Tracing My Roots Back to Korea," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2007, accessed June 15, 2016, http://relativechoices.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/11/06/tracing-my-roots-back-to-korea/.

of questions: Who am I? Where did I come from?" and she decided to "travel alone … and search for my birth family."

I began this chapter with Sophia's story about searching for her birth mother. She asked a local newspaper in the city where she was found to help her find her birth mother by printing her story. Sophia wrote an essay on why she wanted to search for her birth family:

> I always wanted to search for my family in Korea. Who is my birth mother? What would she be? Where does she live? What had happened to her before sending me for adoption? It might be hard to understand what I said, if you are a non-adoptee. I always dreamed of meeting my mother again…. Even though we have been separated for a long time, I still consider her my mother, and I really want to meet her again…. Knowing the erased roots and memories of Korean adoptees by reuniting birth families will be a fundamental piece of knowledge to completely understand who I am.

During my fieldwork, I realized that most returned Korean adoptees, like Sophia, wanted to search for their birth mothers more than other family members. Why do they want to meet their birth mothers rather than other birth relatives?

During a media interview,[118] one adoptee who had lived in Korea for more than two years said that she decided to return after graduating from college in order to explore her Korean identity. Another adoptee stated that she was able to get an English teaching position in South Korea after graduating college, so she just packed her bags and went. Both of them said that they had the intention of looking for their birth mothers and that this motive was always in the back of their minds.

---

[118] Upper Room #317 KA Adoption: "Adoption as a Social Justice Issue," July 14, 2011, accessed June 14, 2017, https://vimeo.com/26441970.

However, both adoptees found that finding their birth mothers was not easy. The news articles on transnational adoptees searching for their birth mothers reflect the difficulty of this process: "I want to see my birth mother. Please, find her...Wish of Korean adoptees from the United States"[119] "Coming to Korea to find their birth mother...Only 2.7% of adoptees are able to reunite with their birth family."[120] As the latter news article reported, only a small percentage of adoptees are successful in reuniting with their families.[121]

As researcher, volunteer, and translator for Korean adoptees, I was able to observe exactly how hard it is to search for one's birth family. I accompanied Julie, an adoptee participant in motherland tour A, when she visited Gwangju in June 2015. According to her adoption documents, she was left on the steps of an orphanage the day she was born in April, 1978 and spent the first nine months of her life at the orphanage. When she was found, Julie was wrapped in a blanket and her date of birth was written on a note inside. When we visited the orphanage, the director wanted to help us to find any documents or records of her time at the orphanage. However, we only found one sentence about her on a list of children who the orphanage had decided to move to adoption agencies or other orphanages. Most of the children on the list were supposed to be moved to adoption agencies, but children who had

---

[119] Gil-Hwan Wang, "Saengmoga bogo sipeoyo chajajuseyo mi ibyanginui hoso," [I want to see my birth mother. Please, find her...Wish of Korean adoptees from the United States], *Yeonhap News*, August 4, 2015, accessed August 4, 2015, http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2015/08/04/0200000000AKR20150804109900371.HTML.

[120] "Eomma chajeureo hangugeuro…chinbumo chajneun ibyangin," [Coming to Korea to find their birth mother...Only 2.7% of adoptees are able to reunite with their birth family], *KBS News*, August 1, 2016, accessed August 2, 2016, http://tvpot.daum.net/v/vc2a68w4Qaa2Xe3QKX6a26m.

[121] Jeannie Hong, *International Korean Adoptee Resource Book: Guide to Korea for Korean Adoptee[s]* (Seoul, Korea: Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2006).

disabilities were transferred to orphanages for children with special needs because they were not “adoptable healthy.” The list indicated the numbers given to the children (Julie’s number was 486), their date of birth, sex, and the institutions where they were sent. There was one more piece of information on the list and Julie asked me what it meant. It indicated whether the child had been abandoned or lost. I hesitated to answer because it was hard to say, “you are an abandoned child.” Instead, I answered, “this information says if children had a disability, were lost or abandoned.” She did not ask anything further.

Julie had understood that the orphanage named her and that her name, meaning “richness of spring,” was not a common Korean name. However, the director did not think her name was given to her by the orphanage because most children were given the family name of the orphanage’s founder, whereas Julie’s family name was different. Because of this lack of information, we could not confirm anything regarding her birth or her birth family. The orphanage had relocated in 1986, and Julie wanted to see the place where she stayed for nine months, so we went to its previous location. The director gave us a ride, and she told us that it might be hard to find anything because the location had changed a lot. Indeed, we found that the orphanage had become a college dormitory, so we could not go inside. We just walked around the place, and Julie wanted to ask neighbors who had lived there for a long time if they remembered the orphanage, any children who lived there, or a woman who was pregnant in 1978. We found people who had lived there for decades and explained to them why we were asking those questions. Many of them

remembered where the orphanage was, but none of them remembered a pregnant woman in 1978.

I accompanied Rachel, one of the participants in tour B, during her search for her birth family in September, 2015. According to her adoption documents, Rachel was born in December, 1977 in a hospital in northern Seoul. Her mother, Kim Nam Ja, was forty-two year-old street vendor in the market near the hospital, and her father was forty-seven year-old day laborer. They already had five children, so they decided to give her up for adoption.

When we got to northern Seoul, the area was bustling with shoppers, street vendors, and cars, but the hospital was not there anymore. It had been replaced by a barbeque restaurant. We asked people on the street if they remembered Kim Nam Ja or anyone who had worked for the hospital, but we could not get any helpful information. After a few hours of searching, we decided to have lunch at the barbeque restaurant. The owner of the restaurant was sympathetic but unable to help us. After lunch, we handed out flyers with Rachel's personal information to passers-by on the street and people in the shops. The flyer had a big heading in red ink that stated, "Transnational Korean Adoptee Looking for Her Family (Her Birth Mother)," and included Rachel's personal information, her current picture and the picture that was taken when she was at the adoption agency, her date of birth, the name that was given to her by the adoption agency, her mother's name, and the name of the hospital.

Then we went to the market, and we explained to the vendors who were selling vegetables, fish, fruit, clothes, and other products that Rachel was looking for her birth mother. One woman who looked to be in her mid-thirties really wanted to

help us and she almost cried after listening to Rachel's story. She told us that as a mother of two daughters, she felt really sorry for Rachel. Her own mother had been working in the market for decades, so she asked her if she knew Kim Nam Ja, but she did not remember her. The woman introduced us to other vendors. They asked us if we knew what Kim Nam Ja sold because they called each other by what they sold or by their children's names, such as fish seller, vegetable seller, or Rachel's mom, instead of by name. Most of the vendors were middle-aged or older women, so many of them expressed sympathy for Rachel, saying, "Thank you for coming to Korea to find your mother. We hope you can find her." However, one vendor got angry and yelled, "Is there any mother who abandoned her baby here? How can you ask those things to us? Get out!" Most of the time when we passed out the flyers, Rachel just smiled and said "*gomapseupnida*" (thank you) because she doesn't understand Korean. When the seller yelled at us, Rachel wondered why she was angry, but I did not want to translate exactly what she said because the words she used were so harsh. I just said, "She told us she did not give up her child and this weather makes all the people get upset!" The seller who had really tried to help us apologized for not being able to do more, and suggested that we visit a pharmacy near the market because the pharmacist had been living in the area for several decades.

Right after we left the restaurant, the owner called us to let us know that he found the name and phone number of the doctor who used to work at the hospital. Since he was the only doctor there, he was probably the same person who delivered Rachel. Rachel really wanted to meet him, so I called him and explained who we were, but he was not interested in talking to us. He said, "I don't remember anything.

At that time, adoption agencies visited hospitals to advertise themselves, get adoptable babies for their agency, and to convince mothers who were poor or already had many children. I am not living in Seoul anymore so I can't meet you." I knew the doctor was lying because the owner of the restaurant had told us that he still lived across the street. Even though we did not find any information about her birth family, Rachel said she was pleased because the people we met that day were really nice and tried to help us.

As the cases of Julie and Rachel illustrate, adoptees face difficulties because of inadequate information about the circumstances of their birth as well as limited post-adoption services from the Korean government and adoption agencies. Although it is such an emotionally draining process, many Korean adoptees are willing to undertake the challenge of searching for their birth mothers because they believe that finding their birth mothers would validate the reality of their births.

James, a Korean adoptee member of tour A, wrote a letter to his mom for the brochure:

> Dear Mother...Deciding to look back and face my adoption was a difficult choice. I've blocked those thoughts for so long. I was afraid of them. I was afraid of being hurt.... The process has been sad, exciting, tense, frustrating, and more. Most importantly the journey has been rewarding. And so, I decided to search for you.[122]

After the tour, he told me the reason why he wanted to find his birth family: "It is about me. It is to find myself."

---

[122] James, Tour A brochure.

Jessica,[123] another returned Korean adoptee, told me that she knows the "images" she has about her birth mother are "fantasies" and not reality. Literary scholar Margaret Homans explains that it is common for transnational adoptees to go back to their country of origin in order to, "come to terms with their severance from originary homeland and maternal attachment. What they long for from their biological mothers is perhaps the fantasy of every daughter, biological or adopted: to be embraced, accepted, seen, and understood, even beyond language."[124] Korean adoptees believe their birth mothers can help them understand who they are, and they have certain images and/or fantasies about them. In the next section, I examine the fantasies adoptees have about their birth mothers and how these are reinforced while they are visiting Korea.

During motherland tours A and B, I saw how some of the participants tried to connect with older Korean women who appeared to be working class or poor when they visited the traditional markets and tourist areas. Sometimes, they wanted to pay the women sellers more than the regular prices. I asked one participant why she paid extra and she explained, "That woman could be my mom." During the tour, the participants often said, "That woman might be my mom."

Tour A included a conversation with a birth mother in their program. She explained why she had to give up her son for adoption under pressure from her son's father and his family, how hard it was to live in South Korea as a single mother, and how hard it was for her after sending him away. Some of the participants cried during

[123] Jessica was born in March, 1978.

[124] As discussed in Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 9.

the conversation with the birth mother. After the talk, she hugged all the members there, and some of the adoptees said they were now able to understand why their mothers had sent them for adoption. After meeting her, the tour members asked me many questions ranging from how difficult it was to live as a woman in South Korea to how patriarchal Korea's society was.

One birth father told me that his biological daughter who had been adopted twenty-five years ago rejected any contact with him. Another adoptee explained that perhaps his daughter might not want to contact him because most Korean adoptees want to reunite with their birth mothers and do not have an interest in their birth fathers because they assume their birth fathers forced their birth mothers to give them up for adoption.

Tour A brought its group to one of the main adoption agencies in South Korea. While visiting, the group was shown a video about the history of the adoption agency. It showed how poor Korea was in the past and what the agency did to help poor children and their mothers. After watching the video, the director explained why and how the agency has been doing important work for Korean society and why international adoption was needed in the past and is still needed. In addition, the director explained that Korean society is patriarchal, so culturally it does not support single mothers. The director of the agency emphasized several times how conservative Korean society is and how hard it is for single mothers to live in Korea. Furthermore, she stressed the lack of a social welfare system to provide for single mothers and children in foster care. Finally, she ended her remarks by emphasizing that transnational adoption is still needed for Korean children and single mothers so

the agency needed donations and contributions from us to continue doing their job, sending children for adoption and providing shelter for single mothers. Then her assistant distributed pamphlets with their bank account number and ways to contribute to their agency.

One of the sponsors of tour A was a big church[125] in South Korea, and all participants including staff attended Sunday worship. We were guided to seats in the middle of the first floor, and then a pastor stood on the stage. The pastor of the church spoke about how poor and miserable Korean society was and that, due to economic difficulty, it was hard for Korea to keep the children who were up for adoption. After his speech, we watched performances by the church choir, including a performance of *Arirang*, the most famous Korean folk song. While the choir sang, images of South Korea from around the 1950s to 1970s were projected on a screen behind the stage. The images showed the country as extremely poor, however, most of the adoptees in our group left Korea in the 1980s when South Korea was already economically developed.

After visiting adoption agencies, the church, orphanages and after meeting a birth mother, many tour members began to embrace their mother country. They had seen that their home country was once a miserable, very poor place, and its population had experienced colonialism, the Korean War, and struggled under a military dictatorship. Their ideas about how their birth mothers had been victimized by poverty and patriarchy in Korean society had been reinforced by their experiences

[125] One of the adoptee participants was the executive director of an LGBT community center in the United States. She included her job title on a letter of self-introduction for a brochure that was distributed to tour members and sponsors. However, “LGBT” was deleted without her consent, which she assumed was because a church was one of the tour’s sponsors.

on the tour.

Chapter Conclusion: To Reconcile with My Country and My Mother

A Korean adoptee from France who has been living in South Korea for eight years explained that he does not know how to respond whenever Korean people say to him, "you have become almost a real Korean" in praise his fluent Korean language skills. He identifies himself as French and says that he still does not understand "Koreanness" or the meaning of being a "real Korean."[126]

Many Korean adoptees struggle with the fact that they were "abandoned" children rejected by their birth family and their mother country. They decide to come back to South Korea to confirm the stories they were told throughout their entire lives and to search for their roots, meaning their birth families and especially their birth mothers. Even though they can pursue their Korean identity and have a sense of belonging through their visits, at the same time, adoptees have to deal with a sense of rejection because they are treated as "not Korean enough."

On the last day of tour A in both 2015 and 2016,[127] the tour had a banquet with adoptee participants, staff, and sponsors. Some adoptees spoke on the stage during the banquet, and common phrases spoken by them included "I forgive you, mother," "I don't hate you, mother," "Do not feel sorry for me, mother, I know how hard your life was." They can forgive their birth mothers by understanding them as victims of Korean society. Through motherland tours or individual returns to South

---

[126] "Haeoeibyang 65nyeon-gal gil meon ppurichatgi…hanguge dungji teun haeoeibyangin…yeojeonhi ibangi," [The history of 65 years of Korean transnational adoption…Korean adoptees returning to Korea…they are still aliens], *Segye-Ilbo*, July 19, 2017, accessed July 19, 2017, http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=022&aid=0003193320.

[127] I volunteered one day for tour A's 2016 tour and was able to attend their banquet.

Korea, Korean adoptees try to “understand” their motherland, not just “perform” or “experience” it like other tourists. Korean adoptee returnees try to understand their motherland and birth mothers in order to reconcile with them and with their pasts as adoptees. Their images and fantasies allow them to reconcile with their birth mothers by (mis)understanding and victimizing them while also trying to embrace their miserable, patriarchal mother country.

Chapter 3: Ain't I a Mother? The Hidden Stories of Korean Transnational Adoptees' Birth Mothers

According to previous scholars, birth mothers in the 1960s and 1970s were mostly lower-class or unmarried women who were likely poor factory workers; by the 1980s, birth mothers were also assumed to include unmarried women of the middle class.[128] I requested statistics on Korean birth mothers from the Korean Statistical Information Service run by Statistics Korea, a central government organization, but they answered that they do not have any data on Korean birth mothers or Korean adoptees. Therefore, I could not find evidence to support previous scholars' assumptions.

However, I was able to get statistics from KAS on how many adoptees were children of unwed mothers. According to their data, about sixty percent of adoptees were children of unwed mothers from 1958 to 1990, and more than eighty percent were born to unwed mothers from 1991 to 2008. However, KAS does not reveal how they gathered this data. KAS reports that these statistics are from the Ministry of Health and Welfare of South Korea; however, I was not able to find these statistics on their webpage. According to Lee Mi Jeong, a researcher at the Korean Women's Development Institute, there are no accurate data or statistics about unwed mothers in South Korea because the Korean government did not consider it important, and unwed mothers did not want to expose themselves as such.[129]

---

[128] Arissa H. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

[129] Mi Jeong Lee. "Sahoejeok pyeongyeongwa mihonmo gwallyeon tonggye" [Social Prejudice against Unwed Mothers and Related Statistics] (Presentation, The 60th Women's Policy Forum-Reality of Unwed Mothers and Support for Self-Reliance, Seoul, South Korea, February 24, 2010).

I heard some reunion stories from Korean adoptees, including some of my research participants who were able to reunite with their birth families. After they got in touch with their birth parents, many of them realized that the account of their adoption given in their adoption documents differed from their parents' real stories. For example, Emma was adopted in 1987 when she was five months old. She had always been worried about having an unwanted pregnancy like her birth mother did. Emma's adoptive mother told her when she was a teenager that her birth mother abandoned her due to an unplanned pregnancy when she was young, so Emma's wish was not to be like her birth mother. However, when she reunited with her birth mother in 2014, she realized that the story was not true—her birth mother was not unwed or a teenage mother. Stories like Emma's are not uncommon.[130] Adoption agencies in South Korea often fabricated adoption documents to make children more adoptable and to effectively increase the number of children put up for adoption.[131] Therefore, even though many birth mothers were described as teen moms or unwed mothers, many reunions have proven that in reality, the birth mothers are different than how they are portrayed in the adoption documents.

Birth mothers do not exist in the discourse of adoption; their identities are assumed and their stories are invented. Sara K. Dorow interviewed adoptive parents who adopted Chinese girls, explaining that "birth mothers become both victims and heroes who did the best thing for their child in difficult circumstances" in the

---

[130] See chapter five.

[131] In Deann Borshay Liem's autobiographical documentary film *First Person Plural,* she reveals that, in the past, adoption agencies often falsified adoption documents in order to send more children for adoption. See Deann Borshay Liem, Michael Chin, and Mark Adler, *First Person Plural* (Film, Berkeley, CA; San Francisco, CA: Mu Films; Center for Asian American Media, 2000).

imaginary of adoptive parents.[132] For Laurel Kendall, a feminist anthropologist and adoptive mother of a Korean adoptee, the Korean birth mother's identity remains an act of imagination for both her adopted son and herself.[133] As Dorow and Kendall insist, birth mothers' identities and stories are often imagined by adoptees, adoptive parents, and in public discourse.

This chapter uses media analysis to examine how Korean adoptees' birth mothers are imagined and how images of them are (re)produced through public discourse, especially in the media. Employing the method of in-depth interviews, I explore how birth mothers continue their identity as mothers in their everyday lives. Finally, I argue that even though birth mothers of Korean adoptees might have been victims of a patriarchal society in the past and are still depicted as victims in the media, many birth mothers have been continuing their roles in ways that can challenge the concept of "normal" motherhood.

Birth Mothers as Melancholy Subjects

The first generation of Korean adoptees was comprised of mixed-race children born in the 1950s. The United States military occupation of South Korea led to sexual relations between American soldiers and Korean women. Many mixed-race children were the children of Korean prostitutes and American soldiers. The women who had sexual relationships with American soldiers were called *Yanggongju* (Western

[132] Sara K. Dorow, *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 184.

[133] Laurel Kendall, "Birth Mothers and Imaginary Lives." In *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, edited by Toby Alice Volkman. Durham (NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 164.

princess) and were considered "fallen women"[134] and a "necessary evil."[135] As these terms imply, there was a social stigma against those women who sold sex to foreign males.

Even though it is hard to confirm the reliability of information gathered by KAS, their data suggest that most birth mothers are unwed mothers. Lee argues that unwed mothers in Korean society have been morally stigmatized because they are seen as illegitimate mothers who have illegitimate children. She insists that the lack of statistics and data on birth mothers and unwed mothers reflects the prejudice and social stigma that Korean society has against these women.[136] Since they cannot offer a "normal" family to their children, putting their children up for adoption has been considered the best option that birth mothers can choose. Even though the high number of adoptions proves the existence of birth mothers, these women are invisible in social discourse.

Since the 1990s, Korean adoptees have been returning to South Korea through "motherland tours" hosted by the Korean government, adoption agencies, and non-governmental organizations, as well as visiting on their own to recover their heritage and search for their birth families. Their stories are dealt with via newspapers, television shows, and films. The media has thus expanded its interest to include their birth mothers as well.

---

[134] Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*: Korean Military Brides in America (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 5.

[135] Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 39.

[136] Mi Jeong Lee. "Sahoejeok pyeongyeongwa mihonmo gwallyeon tonggye" [Social Prejudice against Unwed Mothers and Related Statistics].

Hosu Kim, a professor of sociology and anthropology, analyzes the Korean television search-and-reunion show *Ach'im madang: ku sarami pogosip'a* (Morning talk show: I want to see the person).[137] The show features people who have lost their families as a result of the Korean War, accidents, or adoption. From 1996 to 2011, more than 470 Korean adoptees appeared on the show. Transnational adoptees have appeared on the show in hopes of a reunion with their birth families. H. Kim describes "the processes through which the figure of the Korean birthmother emerges as a biogenetic, affective, and developmental maternal figure that is central to South Korea's nationalistic narrative of its long involvement in the transnational adoption."[138]

H. Kim shows the irony in how Korean birth mothers are represented. As an initial response to international criticism from U.S. and European media that criticized South Korea as a baby-exporting country, early depictions during the late 1980s cast birth mothers as sexually promiscuous single women who were inadequate to be mothers. Since society assumed they were sex workers and unwed mothers, birth mothers were considered "a figure of national shame."[139]

However, over the next two decades, as adoptees began to return to Korea, another image of the birth mother emerged: "the poor, self-sacrificing and devoted mother who relinquishes her baby so he or she could have a brighter future."[140] Thus, the returning of Korean adoptees leads to a new, more socially acceptable image of

---

[137] Hosu Kim, "Television Mothers: Korean Birth Mothers Lost and Found in the Search-and-Reunion Narratives," *Cultural Studies-Critical Methodologies* 12, no. 5 (2012): 438-49.

[138] Ibid., 439.

[139] Ibid., 439.

[140] Ibid., 439.

birth mothers as victims of poverty and/or patriarchy. This image of birth mothers as victims who had no other option but to sacrifice themselves is (re)produced and reinforced through diverse media.

For example, in the movie *The Bacchus Lady*,[141] the main character, So-Young, works as an elderly prostitute for an elderly male. Such women are called "Bacchus ladies" since they ask their potential customers if they want to drink Bacchus, a type of Korean bottled energy drink, which implies the question of whether they want to buy sex. So-Young was a sex worker for U.S. soldiers when she was young. She met a black U.S. soldier, and they lived together. She had a son with him, but he returned to the States and she gave up her son for adoption.

Throughout this movie, all men—old and young, Korean and American—exploit So-Young. Via So-Young's character, director E J-Young shows how gender violence has occurred against working-class and uneducated women in Korean society since the 1960s. In the movie, a young Korean documentary filmmaker keeps asking So-Young to have an interview with him. So-Young denies him at first, but later she decides to have the interview. She narrates, "I might have had bad karma in my previous life since I had to make a living myself my whole life. I worked as a domestic servant when I was little, then worked at a factory, and then heard that I could make money working as a prostitute in Dongducheon[142] so I worked there." Then the filmmaker asks her, "So you became a *Yanggongju* (Western princess), and

[141] E J-Young, *The Bacchus Lady* (Film, 2016).

[142] *Dongducheon* is a city in Gyeonggi Province, South Korea. The city is strategically significant for the defense of the Korean capital from North Korea. Camp Casey, the main camp of the United States Second Infantry Division, is in the city.

worked for U.S. soldiers?" She answers, "Do you think I was working for Japanese soldiers? (Laugh) I am not that old."[143]

So-Young goes to a burger restaurant similar to Burger King with the money she got from the filmmaker in order to buy a burger for a child she is taking care of temporarily.[144] She sees a young American soldier in the restaurant, approaches him, and then sits next to him. Below is their conversation:

> Soldier: Hi, how are you?
> So-Young: Hello.
> Solider: Something wrong?
> So-Young: You very handsome.
> Soldier: Ha-ha, thank you.
> So-Young: You American, right?
> Solider: Of course, I am American, American solider…um…*Migug Kuin* (American solider in Korean).
> So-Young: I see.
> Solider: Yes, I am half black and half Korean. I am mixed…*Tuigi Saram*.[145]
> So-Young: Your mom, Korean?
> Solider: Yes, Yes.
> So-Young: Where your mom?
> Solider: I don't know…she is…. I was adopted when I was a baby.
> So-Young: Really?
> Solider: Yes, my father left when I was a baby and…my mom, she couldn't take care of me so she put me up for adoption. At least, that's what I was told. Why? (He grabs his hat to prepare to leave.)
> (So-Young does not say anything. She just looks at him.)
> Soldier: Ma'am, are you okay?
> Worker at the restaurant: Your order is here.

[143] This line shows the long history of sexual exploitation of Korean women, from comfort women for the Japanese army before and during World War II to sex workers for the U.S. army, which continues today.

[144] In the beginning of the movie, So-Young goes to a hospital because she contracted an STD (sexually transmitted disease). At the hospital, a woman who looks like she is from South Asia has an argument with a doctor and then stabs him with a knife. She yells at her child to run. The child runs, and So-Young follows him and takes care of him while the mother is in jail. The mother stabbed the doctor because he denied the child is his and did not want to take responsibility for him. In this movie, U.S. men exploit local Korean women and Korean men exploit women from less economically affluent countries in South Asia. So-Young wants to take care of the child because she wants to fulfill the motherhood role that she could not with her own child.

[145] *Saram* means person in Korean. *Tuigi* is a derogatory term for a mixed-race person.

Solider: I think your chicken is ready.

While she is getting the chicken, the solider leaves and she follows him, but he is already in a taxi. He waves to her, and So-Young stares at him until the taxi disappears. In a later part of the movie, So-Young says to an elderly man:

> Actually, I had a son. Even before his first birthday, I sent him for adoption. He was still breastfeeding…. He was such a baby…. (The elderly man: I see.) He was a baby from a black soldier who I had lived with for a while. I am such a bitch…. (The elderly man: Everyone has their own stories.) I am unforgivable even though I pray and pray throughout my whole life. Never ever. (Short sigh) I will go to hell.

So-Young has been selling sex throughout her entire life, and she is the birth mother of a Korean adoptee. Through this movie, the director depicts So-Young as a victim of poverty and as a subject who is sexually exploited by American and Korean males.

Other movies depict birth mothers as victims of poverty and a patriarchal Korean society, such as the animated film *Approved for Adoption*.[146] The film is based on the true story of director Jung Henin, who was adopted to Belgium in 1971 when he was five years old. In the film, Jung asks, "Mother, why did you abandon me?" and he always dreamed about his Korean birth mother. Jung visits his adoption agency. However, the social worker there cannot give him any answers on whether his Korean name and birth date are real or were given to him by the adoption agency. Since he cannot get any information about his family or himself, he thinks that he was not a lost child, but an abandoned one. Then he narrates:

---

[146] Boileau, Laurent, and Jung Henin. *Approved for Adoption* (Animated Film. 2012).

> After the Korean War, children were abandoned because of poverty and also because of race. Many children were born of American or European soldiers. And Korea doesn't like illegitimate children much. When I was born, it was the husband who decided everything for the family. A divorced woman had no rights to the child. And having children out of wedlock was a shameful act. A single mother was left with no money and had only one option: abandonment.

This narration is paralleled with old visual scenes that show the plight of the Korean people, such as starved children in orphanages and poor Korean women in the streets. In the last part of the movie, Jung says he forgives his birth mom and he hopes she does not live in difficulty, sadness, or guilt anymore. He is able to forgive his mother because he considers her to be a victim of Korean society.

Another movie dealing with a Korean adoptee's story is *Take Off*.[147] The movie was released in 2009 and was based on the true story of Toby Dawson,[148] who was adopted to the United States. The movie was one of the most popular movies of the year in South Korea.[149] The film was about the Korean national ski jump team that was formed in preparation for South Korea's bid for the 2002 Winter Olympics. Former American junior alpine athlete Bob, a Korean adoptee based on Toby Dawson, came to Korea to help form the team and search for his birth mother.

In reality, Toby Dawson reunited with his biological father, and the process of their reunion became a topic of interest in South Korea. The media focused on the touching story of the reunion between a father and his successful son. However,

---

[147] Youg-hwa Kim, *Take Off* (Film, 2009).

[148] Toby Dawson was an American mogul skier who won a bronze medal at the 2006 Winter Olympics as a representative of the United States. He had been adopted by a couple who were ski instructors in Vail, Colorado when he was five years old.

[149] Although there have been several films that considered Korean adoptees' stories since the 1990s, *Take Off* has significant meaning because it was the first movie considering adoptees' stories to achieve commercial success at the box office.

interestingly, in *Take Off*, Bob came to South Korea to search for his birth mother rather than his father. Bob's birth mother is represented as a very poor domestic worker. In the last scene of the movie, Bob comes back to the airport in South Korea after attending the Olympic Games as a member of the Korean national team. At the airport, Bob finally meets his birth mother, and the movie ends with his smile.

Adoptee scholar Elise Prébin shares her story of reuniting with her birth family and also analyzes *Ach'im madang: ku sarami pogosip'a* (Morning talk show: I want to see the person) in her book. She describes the moment when she saw the show for the first time.[150]

> At the beginning of my visit, Korean social workers played a recorded tape of *Ach'im madang* in the living room of the Holt guesthouse, where the group stayed. One scene in particular struck me: rebroadcast in slow motion, a Korean mother was shown bursting into tears and rushing toward her twenty-year-old son, who had been adopted in the United States. The palpable tension of the moment was heightened by a tragic melody played in the background, a song redolent of South Korean televised melodrama.[151]

Based on her observations of the show as an audience member and interviews with the show's staff, Prébin explains how the television crew creates "a melodrama" using adoptees and their families' stories. For example, the crew does not allow birth mothers and adoptees to meet in advance before they start shooting, even though they stay in adjacent rooms.

When I attended the volunteers' orientation at GOA'L, one of the staff said that although using a television show to search for birth families can be effective, he did not recommend appearing because television crews prefer adoptees who have

[150] Elise Prébin, *Meeting Once More the Korean Side of Transnational Adoption* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[151] Ibid., 1.

more dramatic stories. Prébin argues, "transnational adoptees effectively enter a system of representations that clearly classifies people in terms of degrees of marginality (as opposed to full Koreanness)."[152] In order to broadcast more "dramatic" episodes, the media consumes the uniqueness that distinguishes adoptees from full Koreans, along with their "special" stories and their mothers who have "dramatic" lives.

I also had a chance to interview the birth sibling of a Korean adoptee. They were reunited in 1995, and a popular Korean television show asked to televise their story in 2015.[153]

> The staff told us, especially my mom, not to wear short pants, not to wear any earrings, rings...and not to wear make-up. The day before shooting the show, the staff required me to take a picture of what my mom would wear the next day and then send it to them. They told us not to have my mom wear vivid color clothes such as red or yellow. And they said they gave those guidelines for us, to protect us from the harsh criticism from people [the audience of the show] …. We went to the States with the crew and started shooting with my sister. And he [one of the most famous entertainers in South Korea] asked my sister how hard her life was as a Korean adoptee, but my sister just answered like Americans do, "I am fine, it was okay." Then he seemed very perplexed and tried to ask my sister about it again, but he did not get the answer that he wanted. Then the crew team seemed upset with me, since when I had a preliminary interview with them, I said that my sister struggled a little bit when she was a teenager. So they wanted to hear that and asked me to make her talk about that again. But I couldn't and didn't want to.

The sibling asked me to speak or write about her unpleasant experience with the television crew, because she was disappointed and upset about their attitudes in this situation. She and her mother are not poor, but their paternal grandmother sent

---

[152] Ibid., 69.

[153] The television show also contacted me, asking to be introduced to adoptees who have "special and more dramatic" stories.

her granddaughter for adoption without the mother's consent because a shaman advised her to give up one daughter so that a son would be born next. They already had two daughters, and the adoptee was their third daughter, so the mother-in-law, who desperately wanted to have a grandson, decided to send her for adoption. However, the television show wanted to represent birth mothers as poor, self-sacrificing, devoted mothers. The television show staff told the birth sibling that they provided the clothing guidelines to protect them, because audiences would blame the mother if she seemed like a wealthy and happy woman.[154]

To make a more melodramatic story, the media creates and reinforces these limited images of birth mothers as victims but devoted mothers. In the movie *The Bacchus Lady,* the young documentary filmmaker says, "I'd like to listen to a truthful story of an *Imo*."[155] Then So-Young answers, "What a joke, huh? People do not have an interest in truth, they just listen to what they want to listen to. And don't call me *Imo*, I hate it." Reflecting So-Young's words, representations of birth mothers depict these women as "unusual"—as sex workers or extremely poor—since by doing so, people can accept their stories as "special" and "unique" events that only can happen to certain individuals, rather than as revealing the social structures that encourage mothers to give up their children.

---

[154] Despite the television crew's intentions, this birth mother and her family suffered due to malicious comments on the Internet after the show was televised. People criticized her because they did not believe the story about her mother-in-law and thought she abandoned her child. I could not have interview this birth mother because she was in shock at that time due to people's malicious responses.

[155] *Imo* means "aunt" in Korean. People call old women *Imo* when they want to show their intimacy with them even though they are not "biologically" or "legally" related.

Mothers No One Wanted

> Adoption is not about unwanted babies—it is about unwanted mothers (Cuthbert et al. 2009, 395).[156]

Historian Julie Berebitsky asks a provocative question: "Who at any given time determines who and what a mother is?"[157] To answer this question, she shows how the concept of adoptive motherhood has been socially constructed in relation to the historical formation of the "traditional" American nuclear family and social changes since the mid-nineteenth century. Kendall insists that "adoption was not a personal issue"[158] if we understand it in relation to gender and women's status in society. Like Berebitsky and Kendall, I approach adoption issues as gendered and women's issues, wondering who birth mothers are and what makes them unwanted mothers. However, the more I researched, the more I realized that these women are not a separate category of individuals because adoption is not a unique social phenomenon that can happen only to certain groups. Adoption, especially transnational adoption between the United States and South Korea, is a prevalent and common phenomenon that can happen to anyone.

Adoption affects adoptees' entire lives. Many adoptees say that adoption does not end when they arrive in the United States; adoption is an open-ended, on-going, and unfinished process that influences adoptees' whole lives. Just as adoption influences adoptees' whole lives, adoption affects birth mothers' entire lives too.

---

[156] Denise Cuthbert, Kate Murphy, and Marian Quartly, "Adoption and Feminism," *Australian Feminist Studies* 24, no. 62 (2008): 295-419, 395.

[157] Julie Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*: *Adoption and the Changing Culture of Motherhood, 1851-1950* (University Press of Kansas, 2001), 73.

[158] Laurel Kendall, "Birth Mothers and Imaginary Lives," 165.

Therefore, my research question about birth mothers changed from "who are they?" and "what circumstances influenced them to put their children up for adoption?" to "how have birth mothers lived their lives and continued their motherhood after sending their children for adoption?" in order to consider their entire lives and to reflect the complexity of their motherhood. My previous question, "why did they send them?" was ahistorical since it only concerned birth mothers at the moment, several decades ago, when they sent their children away. This question did not consider how these mothers have changed, managed their lives, or continued their motherhood because it regarded their identities as "fixed" rather than "fluid." Therefore, I employed the method of in-depth interviews to explore the complex side of motherhood, focusing on how birth mothers continue and negotiate their motherhood.

Ain't I a Mother?

I conducted my field work in South Korea in 2015 by volunteering for Korean adoptees' motherland tours and organizations for and by Korean adoptees and birth mothers such as GOA'L and KoRoot. I observed the process reuniting Korean adoptees and their birth families, especially their birth mothers, and also interviewed the birth mothers of Korean adoptees. I was able to meet about ten birth mothers and interview some of them, including Kyungju, Narae, and Enjong.

Kyungju

Kyungju was born in 1963 and was the youngest daughter among six siblings. When she was twenty-two years old, she got pregnant. When the baby's father found out, he

did not believe that the child was his. They went to a hospital for a paternity test, but it was expensive at that time, so they decided not to go through with it.

> I still can't believe why he told me like that… "the child is not my son." When I heard that, I could not think anything…. From that moment, I could not think anything. Then we [Kyungju, her sisters and brothers] and his family met several times after that for several days…. It was maybe two days before my baby was sent for adoption…. They [his family] told me they would raise the child because he is blood-related to them. They said the father's aunt did not have a child so she would raise my son. I and my sisters and brothers, we truly believed it…. But it was not true. It was a lie…. But we didn't know that and my brother said to me if I really had wanted to raise my child they have would helped me…. But they convinced me it would be the best for the child to be named in his father's family register…. And his family said to me, "you are only twenty-three years old and you will get married in the future and your son would be an obstacle to your future, so give the child to us."
>
> So I decided to give my child to them…. And I gave him to them but the very next day, I got a phone call from Holt. I went to Holt's office. I guess we arrived around 11:00 am and they made us wait, because they needed to have their lunch break. So we went to a coffee shop and had a conversation. I guess we asked why the baby is in Holt…. I could not talk at all…. I guess I was just crying. (Researcher: Who was there?) The baby's grandmother, aunt, and his father's brother, I guess. And I went there with my sister and sister-in-law….
>
> If Holt had asked me to think about one more time if I really wanted to send the baby for adoption or not, I would not have sent him…. They told me, "you already decided not to raise him yourself, and America is a great country, and there are adoptive parents…." The social worker kept saying things like that to force me…. After that, the social worker, he was a man in his early forties, took me aside to another room and told me that when I give birth again in the future, I should go to a university hospital. I didn't understand what he meant at that time…. Can you guess what he meant? (Researcher: Hmm… why….) Anyway….[159]

---

[159] Many birth mothers who I have met had a similar experience. When they gave birth, doctors or social workers advised them to go to a big hospital if they got married and had a baby again. This is because if they went to a small hospital in their neighborhood, the obstetrician might be a neighbor or friend of these women's in-laws and would not keep it a secret that she had a baby in the past. These women's experiences show the stigma of being an illegitimate and unwed mother.

When I told Korean people whom I encountered that I was studying Korean adoption, many said "even though the children were adopted, at least they could have better lives and opportunities in America than if they lived here, since America is an advanced country." The belief that Korean people have held about the United States since the Korean War, that the United States is a great country, has facilitated transnational adoption from South Korea to the United States. The adoption agencies used this belief to convince mothers to put up their babies for adoption and to justify transnational adoption as a good thing for children.

Kyungju was a young unwed mother. She told me, "I thought I was a sinner, because I had a baby out of wedlock and could not raise him." She deeply internalized the social stigma against unwed and illegitimate mothers. Therefore, she did not have any sense of personal agency when her son was adopted. Birth mothers lose even more agency throughout the "legal" process and paperwork that accompany adoption. They become a "legal stranger"[160] to their children by signing a paper. Even though they try to continue their motherhood by contacting and/or searching for their children after sending them for adoption, oftentimes they are discouraged from doing so by adoption agencies.

> I signed a disclaimer that relinquished my parental rights to my son…. But I visited Holt again the hundredth day after my son was born, and when he turned one years old…I brought a Bible and I was told that the potential adoptive parents had decided to adopt him and they lived in Texas.[161] And I brought *Hanbok*[162] and they promised to send it to my baby but when I reunited with him and met his adoptive mother, I

---

[160] Barbara Yngvesson, "Negotiating Motherhood: Identity and Difference in 'Open' Adoptions," *Law & Society* 31, no. 67 (1997): 31-80, 38.

[161] The adoptive parents were living in Indiana, not Texas.

[162] *Hanbok* is Korean traditional clothes.

> found out they did not receive the *Hanbok*.[163] But the social worker told me not to visit them again, because if I kept sending gifts to them, the adoptive parents would not like it and it would not be good for my son. What kind of parent would keep doing that when they heard their behavior might influence their children in a bad way? So I didn't visit again.

Four years after sending him for adoption, Kyungju got married and she had two children with her husband.

> I thought I might forget about him if I got married…. But it reminded me of him more. When my children [with her current husband] entered school, I thought of him…if he entered school, how it went, and what kind of student he is…. It made me keep thinking about him.

I first met Kyungju in June during my fieldwork in South Korea, and then we met at least biweekly. I was a friend of her son, Hans, who was adopted by American parents, and I had been translating their messages via Facebook since summer 2014. Therefore, Kyungju told me that she did not need to hide anything about the adoption from me, and I was the only person she could talk to about her situation because she could not talk about it with Hans or her husband and other children.

For my first and second meetings with Kyungju, I met her with Hans in order to translate their conversation. Then Hans went back to the United States, so just the two of us met for our third meeting, and we had beer. The next time, we went to a café located in a scenic area. She told me that she visited Holt Children's Services again recently to ask what had happened when she sent Hans for adoption and demanded that they share his adoption files with her, since she wanted to understand the situation that she could not control at all three decades ago. Then Kyungju found out that the adoption was not a spontaneous decision, but had been planned for a long time. She was able to see in the records that the father's family visited the adoption

[163] The adoptive parents received the Bible but did not receive the *Hanbok*.

agency's office several times to consult and set up the adoption before they suggested that the aunt would raise her son.

Many birth mothers cannot remember the details of their adoption situations exactly, because most of the time they put their children up for adoption involuntarily. Many people—fathers of children, other family members, and social workers—are involved in adoption and birth mothers cannot control or understand the situations. The experience is also traumatic, so unconsciously they might not want to remember the situation.

The next time I met Kyungju, she shared with me that she told her sisters and brothers that they should not interfere with her and Hans. After she reunited with Hans, Kyungju's brothers and sisters advised her often not to talk about Hans with her husband because her current family is more important than him.

> I told them not to impose and force their opinions on me and my mind would not get disturbed whatever they said. Hans is most important to me now and my current family's opinion [her husband and two other children] is more important to me.

The next time I met her, Kyungju said that she told her daughter about Hans. Her daughter did not say much about it, so Kyungju wanted me to talk with her daughter. Therefore, I met her daughter, but she did not want to bring up the issue of Hans, so we drank beer together and had a casual conversation. But about one year later, after finishing my fieldwork, I heard from Hans that he and his half-sister had started to talk via Facebook messenger. And Kyungju was thinking that she had to talk to her husband about Hans, since she did not want to keep Hans a secret in her life and from her family.

> I was an unwed mother, so I have been living in my past with my sin and punishing myself. However, I realized that I have to stop punishing myself and have to stand up in order to have a good relationship with Hans.

Kyungju was not the person who decided to send Hans for adoption nor was she in control of the situation. However, she is trying to understand a part of her past that she wanted to forget and bury, and she is struggling to act in the best interests of Hans, her current family, and herself. Since reuniting with Hans in 2015, Kyungju has been struggling to regain her agency as a mother that she could not have in the past.

Narae

Narae was an unwed mother like Kyungju. She was twenty-three years old when she had her son, but the father and his family did not want to raise him. Narae's parents divorced when she was little, and her mother was living by herself in Seoul. Therefore, when she realized that she was pregnant, Narae went to see her mother.

> First of all, the reason I gave up my child for adoption was my mother encouraged me to do it…. My mother met the baby's father and his family and she knew that they would never accept me and the baby as their family…and I never could get married to him. I was more important than the baby to my mother…. Then she convinced me to relinquish the child….

Similar to Kyungju, Narae also internalized social stigma against unwed mothers and, as a result, they gave up control of the adoption process. People involved in the process, such as social workers or doctors, made these young women feel more shame about having a baby outside of marriage and scared about their future since they could not let anyone know what they had done.

> I knew that I was pregnant at five months…. I felt like I was really stupid and foolish…. When I told my mother, she felt guilty because she thought I was pregnant because she did not raise me after divorcing my father…. My mother and I met his family together and

they had already found a hospital and set up an abortion surgery. I was in my eighth month at that time…. The doctor said he would induce with a drug and then he would pull the baby out like a cesarean…. It would be a stillbirth…. I cannot remember that time exactly…. All the memories were broken into pieces…. I was able to understand when I studied counseling later…it was almost dissociative amnesia…. But I remember one thing exactly…. The doctor told me that "you will get married later and if anybody asks why you have a scar in your womb, just answer you had surgery because of an ovarian tumor…. Don't tell anyone you had a baby." … Now I think about his attitude…. Aww… (laugh and sigh) ….

Anyway, I had to be forced by everyone…so I was preparing for the surgery by getting a drug, but I got shocked at the moment. My body started to shake and feel like I was going to vomit…. I guess God wanted to save this child…. So the doctor ran away because he got scared…. Even though my mom agreed to the surgery for me, after watching everything…she told his family not to be involved in our decision anymore…. It was like being pulled and forced by everyone…. Everyone considered my child to be someone who had to be solved, removed, and gotten rid of.

Then we came back to Seoul and my mom made me enter Ae Ran Won,[164] since somebody she knew introduced her to the institution. I had my baby at a midwifery service center near Ae Ran Won. I still visit there sometimes, even though it is not there anymore. The center was on the second or third floor…. I remember it was the second or third floor because…in the room, there was no one and I was feeling like I was almost dying because of the birth pains. They came in intervals, so I crawled when I got the pain and when the pain stopped, I looked outside through a window…. But I did not scream because I guess I thought I should not scream…. In general, if mothers had their baby during the day, the staff of Holt took the babies right away after the birth, but I had my baby at nighttime. So thankfully I was able to spend one night with my baby…. But the midwife told me to try not to get attached to my baby by holding, hugging, and feeding him, since I couldn't raise my child.… So the baby cried all night and I cried all night. When I tried to hug him, the advice of the midwife made me not do it…. *I was a mother but I should not be a mother*…. So the next

[164] Ae Ran Won is "a not-for-profit organization located in Seoul that supports Korean women who are unmarried and pregnant and in need of help. Ae Ran Won has grown from a single maternity home and now also helps, in separate facilities, women who are raising their children alone, women who may have placed their babies for adoption but need further support, and women who live nearby but need a safe and nurturing place to help adjust to their new lives." Cited from Ae Ran Won, accessed June 10, 2017, http://aeranwon.com/.

> morning, two staff members from Holt came to the center and they took the baby and it was the last time I saw him. (Emphasis added)

In both Kyungju's and Narae's cases, these young and unwed mothers did not have any agency. They had no choice about the process of adoption. Most birth mothers thought they could not have any say because they had made a mistake and it was their fault. Kyungju has been struggling for agency to understand and reconcile with her past in order to have a better future for herself and Hans. Similarly, Narae has also been trying to fix the past.

> I relinquished my child in 1990. I got married in November 1996 and have four children now. I told my husband everything, and he really understood everything. So I visited Holt with my husband to demand that they search for my child and I have always upgraded my profile, such as with my children's pictures and changes to my address or phone number…. My husband never changed his number just in case my child contacts us. Next year is our twenty-year anniversary, so we are planning to visit America…. *I want to be a mother who searches for her child, not a mother who sent her baby for adoption.* I'd like to meet other Korean adoptees in the United States who want to search for their birth mother. (Emphasis added)

When she gave birth in the center, Narae was the mother of the baby but, as she mentioned, she could not do what mothers do, such as holding and breastfeeding her child. However, Narae wants to identify herself as a mother who searches for her child by breaking with her past identity as someone who had to relinquish her child in silence.

Both Kyungju and Narae testified about their experiences as unwed birth mothers in front of returning Korean adoptees when they visited Korea as part of motherland tours. Kyungju testified once in 2015 when she reunited with Hans. The other participants on Hans' tour and I met her for the first time there. After testifying,

she hugged all twenty-one adoptees and me as well. Kyungju still wants to meet other adoptees whenever she has the chance. Narae is now a board member of Ae Ran Won, and she also testifies when tour groups visit Ae Ran Won. She also likes to meet other adoptees individually.

When we were walking on the street, Kyungju mentioned, "I want to be a person like a tree stump where other adoptees can rest." When I asked why, she said:

> The story about a tree stump is also from the Bible. If we cut a tree, we would think the tree is dead, but if the root of the tree is still alive, a new life will appear. It is like pruning. We need to prune our wrong past, then we need to begin again…. I'd like to welcome, communicate, and hold adoptees' hands whenever they visit Korea.

Most birth mothers I met want to meet and embrace other adoptees whether they reunite with their own children or not. These mothers want to explain why they had to give up their children, heal adoptees' pain, and reconcile with their pasts as well as with the adoptees themselves. In this way, these women expand their motherhood to other adoptees.

Enjong

Enjong was the oldest daughter among four siblings, and her parents were farmers who worked for other farmers. Her brother had a serious physical disability because of side effects from acupuncture. Enjong was only able to finish elementary school before she started to work in a factory, where she she was raped by her coworker's cousin when she was seventeen years old. As a result, Enjong had a son, Minsoo. Even though the man had raped her, Enjong tried to live with him since he was the father of her son. He was poor, he lost all their money on turf races and gambling, and he forced Enjong to sell her blood for money. Enjong thought she might die if she

continued to live with this man, so she ran away with Minsoo for a month. She asked her parents to take care of him while she was working as a domestic servant, but her parents could not because they were extremely poor and they already had a son with a serious disability. They brought Minsoo to a hospital, where a staff member from Korea Social Service[165] took him and sent him for adoption to the United States. After working for a month as a domestic servant, Enjong came back to her parents' house and found out that her son had been adopted. Minsoo was eleven months old when he was adopted, and Enjong struggled to find him, but no one would tell her where Minsoo was.

After losing her child, Enjong had a very rough life, and she described herself as living like a "bitch." She drank a lot and worked as a tearoom hostess.[166] She got married in 1983 and raised her husband's three children because she hoped that if she cared for these three children well, then somebody would take care of her lost child too. Her husband had an affair, so they divorced in 1998, but she is still in contact with the three children she raised for fifteen years. After her divorce, Enjong worked as a tearoom hostess again, met a guy and got pregnant, but the guy was married and had four daughters. She did not want to break up his family, so Enjong decided to be a single mother. After having her daughter, she stopped working as a hostess and became an insurance planner. Now she is a care worker for patients.

Enjong got a phone call in November 2004 from an adoption agency, Korea Social Service. Her reunion experience with her son Minsoo awakened her to the

---

[165] There are four adoption agencies in South Korea—Social Welfare Society, Eastern Social Welfare Society, Korean Social Services, and Holt Children's Services.

[166] A tearoom hostess sells coffee or tea and they sometimes sell sex to male customers as well.

issues of transnational adoption. Therefore, Enjong established Dandelions in August 2007 with help from the head of KoRoot. I met her around 11:00 am on December 18, 2015 at KoRoot. Enjong was taking a break since she worked overtime at night, and she visited KoRoot to participate in an event for Korean adoptees that was planned for that afternoon.

> The reason I organized Dandelions was…my child could not even eat Korean foods and didn't know anything about Korea…. So I didn't know what I had to do for him…. I felt a pressure on my mind. So I thought it would be good if mothers could share information with each other, such as things I did for my child and he or she liked it…. So I started this organization. Dandelions means…we discussed the name…. The term 'dandelion flower' means missing someone. And it represents a mother's wish that their children, like dandelion seeds that are blown by the wind and germinate in a distant soil, can thrive even though they were sent to foreign countries like dandelion seeds. They have strong powers. So we decided to name the group Dandelions.
>
> We had a good start…. We had around twenty members in the past. (Researcher: How did you find them?) I looked for all of them. I stayed in KoRoot with my son. And I met Pastor Kim [the head of KoRoot, as well as a pastor]. Pastor Kim told us we needed to testify at the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, so I and Sunhee's mother [another birth mother of a Korean adoptee] went there. I stood out in the open because there was nothing to hide. I didn't even care if I was televised. Sunhee's mother was wearing a scarf and sunglasses…. Mothers do not like to be exposed. So I met Sunhee's mother…. Then I met Hansun's mother who was on the television show, *Chikum Mannaroe Gamida* (Now I am on my way to see you),[167] and her children, two brothers who were adopted to America. And then Mirim…her child was adopted to France…. Four of us began our organization…. I really hope that our Dandelions can thrive so people know what has happened before we die. Our nation should change, and politicians should have more interest in this issue.

Even though Enjong had worked hard developing Dandelions, it was not easy for the organization to progress. Dandelions was disbanded in 2009. About two years later, an adoptee activist convinced her to start Dandelions again. Enjong told me that

[167] Another Korean television search-and-reunion show that is similar to *Ach'im madang: ku sarami pogosip'a* (Morning talk show: I want to see the person).

she started Dandelions again for adoptees, not for the mothers themselves. She and other mothers always emphasized that their organization and movement were for their adopted children, not for themselves.

However, the issues among members that led Dandelions to disband in the past continue. There are internal conflicts among birth mothers, since they have different perspectives on adoption and other issues. Enjong has tried to lead other birth mothers to join their movement and to make them aware of how they were victimized—how the government, adoption agencies, and fathers forced them to give up their children. However, many birth mothers do not want to be involved with a political movement to challenge society, because many of them still keep the adoption secret from their family or friends. It is also difficult to face the social stigma that considers these women as bad mothers who gave up their children.

In addition, birth mothers are not a homogeneous group. Based on their age, class, and marital status when their children were adopted as well as their current status, they have different points of view about adoption issues. Narae did not want to be involved with Dandelions, because she believed that the mothers of Dandelions always dwelled on their own misfortunes. Narae was much younger than Enjong, and her education level and social class were also different. One of birth mothers I met also told me that even though she participated in Dandelions to get help searching for her child, she did not like the gathering that much because the mothers who are reunited are in a different position than those who, like her, have not been able to reunite. Whenever the mothers who are reunited talk about their children, the other mothers could not join in, and they felt their sadness deeply. Enjong mentioned that

mothers who have been reunited with their children also had different positions, because some birth mothers with very successful children did not attend the gatherings anymore. These mothers do not think the current adoption law needs to be changed—they believe their children were successful due to transnational adoption, so they do not want to support the Dandelions' movement.

Enjong has done her best to encourage birth mothers to join Dandelions and support its movement to challenge current trends of transnational adoption and bring about the best interests of Korean adoptees. However, many birth mothers do not want to show themselves in public because of the social stigma that considers them as inappropriate mothers who cannot raise their children. Also, the different situations and views of birth mothers make it difficult to ally with each other.

Chapter Conclusion: Challenging the Concept of "Normal" Motherhood

> Adoption, like motherhood, has always been a woman's issue. It is women who give birth, and women have had their birth children taken from them because of cultural, political or economic forces; and it is women who sometimes feel they must relinquish their birth child in order to protect that child. It is women who choose or agree to take on the work of mothering.[168]

Christine Ward Gailey begins her book with this quote from *The Adoption Reader*, edited by writer and adoptive mother Susan Wadia-Ells.[169] As Wadia-Ells says, adoption is a woman's issue. However, many times, birth mothers do not have the right to choose adoption or to agree to the process of adoption. Even though some of them sign adoption papers, they do not control the situation and do not understand

---

[168] Susan Wadia-Ells, *The Adoption Reader: Birth Mothers, Adoptive Mothers, and Adopted Daughters Tell Their Stories* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1995), ix.

[169] Ibid., 1.

what rights they are giving up or what consequences could result from their actions. Birth mothers without financial resources or emotional support from their families or friends were discouraged from being mothers. Instead, they were encouraged to transfer their children to wealthier heterosexual couples in Western countries.

Narae said, "While people think adoptive parents are very great people who have lots of love, they consider birth mothers to be immoral and so they have to relinquish all rights as mothers." A birth mother's struggles "to be a 'mother' to the child she has placed for adoption are shaped by the exclusions and silences of a patriarchal discourse of family in which there is no place for an emotionally charged connection of mother to child that is not already prefigured by a 'moral' law in which a woman's husband has a key place."[170] Unwed mothers or mothers who do not have husbands for various reasons, such as divorce or death, are considered inadequate mothers and thus unwanted by a patriarchal society.

However, ever since Korean adoptees have been returning to their motherland, the media has been dealing with the melancholy stories of Korean adoptees and their birth mothers. To make birth mothers more acceptable in public discourse, the media has been changing images of birth mothers from inappropriate women to self-sacrificing mothers. Therefore, birth mothers are depicted as victims of poverty and/or the patriarchal culture of Korean society.

Indeed, many birth mothers I met were victims of poverty and a patriarchal society. However, their identity does not end with their victimhood. In the past, they did not have agency in the process of adoption and had to give up their children and their motherhood. But they have also been continuing their motherhood in their own

[170] Yngvesson, "Negotiating Motherhood: Identity and Difference in 'open' Adoptions," 66.

ways by searching for their children, embracing other adoptees, and supporting adoptees' social and political movements.

Kyungju and Narae were unwed and powerless mothers when they gave up their sons for adoption, but they each have been struggling to gain agency for themselves as well as their children. Kyungju, Narae, and Enjong embrace other adoptees in order to reconcile with their pasts and their children. Enjong has been trying to make political progress regarding transnational adoption issues by running Dandelions with other birth mothers.

Due to social stigma in a patriarchal society, birth mothers are forced to relinquish their children for adoption and thus their motherhood. However, these mothers have also been challenging the patriarchal concept of "normal" motherhood by continuing their motherhood in based on their own circumstances. As a result, these mothers lead to a new understanding of motherhood that is different, but not abnormal, and that can challenge patriarchal definitions of motherhood.

Chapter 4: I Am a Privileged Woman but I Am Still Struggling: The Stories of Adoptive Mothers

Introduction: Who Is the Real Mother of an Adoptee?

Mike was adopted in 1987 by a white middle-class couple who lived in Superior, Wisconsin. When he turned fifteen, Mike traveled to South Korea with his adoptive parents and was able to reunite with his birth mother through Holt Children's Services, which had sent him to the United States for adoption. He met his birth mother in a hotel room with his adoptive parents, and the birth mother kept saying to his adoptive mother, "Thank you so much." After his birth mother left, his adoptive mother asked him, "Why did she say 'thank you' to me? You are my child so she doesn't need to thank me."

Different versions of this story also play out in the media. Angelina Jolie adopted her first daughter, Zahara, from Ethiopia in July of 2005 when Zahara was six months old. The media reported when she was adopted that she was an "AIDS orphan" and that her birth mother was dead. Twelve years later, however, Zahara's birth mother, Mentewab Dawit Lebiso, is asking to reconnect with Zahara through interviews with the U.S. media,[171] claiming she was raped and then forced to give up her daughter for adoption. According to Lebiso:

> Angelina has been *more of a mother* to her than I have ever been. She has been with her since she was a baby, but that does not mean I do not miss her…. I just want her to know that I am alive and here and

[171] Paul Thompson, "Angelina Jolie's Adopted Daughter's Mum Seeks Access," *Daily Mail Online*, January 17, 2017, accessed January 17, 2017, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4124360/Angelina-Jolie-s-adopted-Ethiopian-daughter-Zahara.html.

> long to be able to speak with her. I do not want *my daughter* back but just to be in contact with her and be able to call her up and talk with her…. I want *my daughter* to stay with Angelina. She is a good mother and all children should stay with *their mother.* (Emphasis added)

In her interview, Mentewab says Zahara is her daughter but at the same time she repeats that Angelina is her daughter's "good mother." This heartbreaking interview evokes complicated questions: Who is the "real mother" of Zahara? Who are the real mothers of adoptees?

In her documentary film *First Person Plural*,[172] which is based on her own adoption story, Deann Borshay Liem tries to find the answer to who her real mother is. She was adopted in 1966 by a white couple in Fremont, California and then reunited with her birth mother about twenty years later. Throughout the film, Borshay Liem tries to figure out whether her real mother is her adoptive mother or her birth mother. She met with her birth mother and adoptive mother together in one room and finally narrated, "there wasn't room in my mind for two mothers." She concludes that her real mother is her adoptive mother, not her birth mother. Similarly, Jung Henin, who was adopted in 1971 by a Belgian family when he was five years old, narrates in his animated film *Approved for Adoption*[173] that his mother is his adoptive mother, not his birth mother, even though he forgives her.

Since 2013, I have been volunteering for KCS[174] by teaching Korean language and culture. For the fall 2017 semester, I was assigned to the class for ten- to twelve-year-old children. In September, we were having class and talking about the symbols

---

[172] Deann Borshay Liem et al., *First Person Plural,* (Film, 2000), accessed May 2016.

[173] Laurent Boileau and Jung, *Approved for Adoption,* (Film, 2014), accessed May 2016.

[174] Korean Cultural School, an NGO in Maryland for Korean children adopted in the United States.

of South Korea, such as the national anthem and the national flower, Hibiscus Syracuse. One of the children began to talk about his experiences in South Korea. He mentioned:

> I was with three different foster mommies before I was adopted since my real mother could not take care of me because she divorced. And I want to meet my real mother.

One of the other teachers, who was an adoptee herself,[175] asked the children how many of them wanted to meet their "real" mothers. Six out of the ten children present raised their hands, and one of the children said, "I already met my real mother." The teacher asked him if he was able to reunite with his birth mother, but he did not answer. The other teacher questioned him if he meant that his adoptive mother "here" is his real mother. He nodded his head and said, "Yes, she is my real mother."

All of these adoptees' stories of adoptees lead to complicated questions: Who are the "real" mothers of adoptees? What makes a woman a "real" mother? Is motherhood socially constructed or is there an "essential" motherhood? This chapter explores how adoptive mothers perform, struggle, and negotiate their motherhood in order to become their adopted children's "real" mothers. In addition, this chapter aims to understand the definition of motherhood, how this definition is constituted, and how the concept of normative motherhood in the context of the United States influences women's lives and womanhood.

[175] There were three teachers in the class, including me, and the other two teachers were Korean adoptees.

The Struggles of Adoptive Mothers Beyond Class and Race Privilege

I met Hans, whose birth mother is Kyungju,[176] in the summer of 2014. Hans was a member of Adoption Links, a group for Korean adoptees who live near the Washington, DC area. I have been participating in their informal gatherings since 2013. When I met him for the first time, Hans asked me to translate a Facebook message from his birth mother that was written in Korean. Since then, I have helped him to translate messages between them. I also joined the same motherland tour as Hans in 2015 when I was conducting my fieldwork in South Korea. During the tour, Hans was able to meet his birth mother, and I joined them to help with communication. After the tour, I asked Hans if he could introduce me to his adoptive mother, who lives in Indiana, and he agreed. Adam was another member of the same motherland tour. Adam's adoptive mother also lives in Indiana, and he introduced me to her for an interview as well.

Sara

Sara is Hans's adoptive mother. I met her for the first time with Hans in February 2016, and we had dinner together. I did not conduct an interview that day since it is hard to ask private questions when I meet a person for the first time. I explained to Sara about myself and my research: why I am doing this project, what I have done so far, why I want to interview adoptive mothers, and what kinds of questions I would like to ask during the interview. After having dinner together, she agreed to an interview with me. I visited Sara again in March and interviewed her for about one hour at a small café near her house.

[176] See chapter three.

Sara was born in 1955. She and Ken, her husband, decided to adopt a baby because he has type 1 diabetes and did not feel comfortable having a biological child due to his disease. Therefore, they adopted Hans in June 1985 when he was four months old. Then, two years later, they adopted biological siblings Julia and Daniel. Julia was seven years old and Daniel was three years old when they were adopted. Hans was the youngest child in the family, but at the same time, he was Sara's first. Sara and Ken decided to adopt internationally because she had seen some domestic adoption cases in which birth parents took their children back.

> They [the adoption agency] were first sending over a girl but they had to change it to another boy so they had to change all the paperwork and then…. But the boy…he had problems...mental problems…and that we just weren't the right family for him since we had no experience with that or anything. They didn't think it would be a good fit so the director [of the agency in Indianapolis] at that time pretty well handpicked Hans. Some people considered him *unadoptable* because he was missing his finger.... I don't remember what hands...you know (light laugh) so that wasn't important at all. I felt like he was handpicked for us. (Emphasis added)

As Sara mentioned some children are seen as "desirable" and "adoptable" but others are not because of their race, gender, and physical or mental condition. In her book, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*, Christine Ward Gailey, a professor of women's studies and anthropology, examines Americans' preferences for healthy (white) infants rather than a special needs child or an older child through her book,.[177] In addition, Gailey argues that white, middle-class, and heterosexual adopters prefer white infants the most, but black children the least, which makes them "unadoptable,"

[177] "According to Betty Mandell, 'blue-ribbon baby' was a term used in the 1970s as an adoption 'trade euphemism for a white, healthy infant'" (Mandell, 1984, 43, cited in Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*, 104).

especially those who have dark skin.[178] Gailey also insists that when the adopters cannot obtain white babies, many of them prefer international adoption over adopting a child of color domestically. Sara K. Dorow argues that children are adopted according to the racial imaginary of their adoptive parents.[179] Based on her research on Chinese to American adoption, she adds that these white adopters prefer Asian girls over boys because they believe Asian girls are docile, like "a Chinese doll." This is because many adoptive parents believe that Asian children will "turn out smart, a good student, and go on to college and a career."[180] Sociologist Pamela Quiroz adds that "Hispanic" children are less preferred because they become embedded in negative racial stereotypes toward U.S. Latinos.[181] White parents are reluctant to adopt black children in the United States because of the negative racial images of blacks[182], so the "Asian transnational adoptee serves to triangulate the domestic landscape of black-white race relations."[183] E.J. Graff, a well-known journalist, critiques international adoption since the children who most need to be adopted are "sick, disabled, traumatized, or older than five…. There are simply not enough

---

[178] Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*.

[179] Sara K. Dorow, *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship* (New York: New York University Press, 2006). 48.

[180] Pamela Quiroz, "Cultural Tourism in Transnational Adoption: 'Staged Authenticity' and Its Implications for Adopted Children," *Journal of Family Issues* 33 no. 4 (2012): 527-555, 541.

[181] Ibid., 541.

[182] Racism occurs among black adoptive parents as well as whites. Apparently, many African American families are aware of color prejudice, so many of them prefer "a child whose hair is less African (blacker, kinkier, shorter) and more Caucasian (finer, straighter, lighter, longer), [which] is seen as more beautiful" (Marlene Watson, 1999, 53, cited in Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*, 42).

[183] David L. Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," *Social Context* 21 no. 2 (2003): 1-37, 11.

healthy, adoptable infants to meet Western demand – and there's too much Western money in search of children. As a result, many international adoption agencies work not to find homes for needy children but to find children for Western homes."[184] These scholars show that adoption is not just the result of love and humanitarianism. Adoption results from racial hierarchies, along with ableism and gender stereotypes.

Sara had to face many uncomfortable situations as a white mother of Asian children. For example, when Hans was a baby, nuns came over to Sara and Hans on the street and asked her, "Is he gonna call you 'mother'?" In particular, when they lived in Alabama due to Ken's work, Sara had to handle unwanted attention from people who said, "Oh, look at the cute Asian kids."

Many other adoptive parents, especially those who adopt children transracially and/or internationally, have experiences similar to Sara's. I observed adoption forums that offer adoptive parents viewpoints on a variety of issues since, "adoption forums present intimate personal experiences to an imagined community of adoptive parents without the interference of the researcher."[185] In this cyberspace, potential adoptive and adoptive parents share their questions, concerns, and experiences with other parents. Each forum—adoptive parent support, before adoption, after adoption, international adoption, parenting, etc —has thousands of archived pages. One mother with the username Faulkner99 adopted her son transracially.

> We were in the elevator this weekend going into the local Target. It was me, the baby, the baby's dad, my dad, and about five other people. My husband was holding the baby…One of the women kept talking about how cute he was, and the other said, "He looks mixed." Then

[184] E.J. Graff, "The Lie We Love," *Foreign Policy*, October 6, 2009, accessed January 14, 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/06/the-lie-we-love/

[185] Quiroz, "Cultural Tourism in Transnational Adoption," 541.

> she looked to me and raised an eyebrow, so I said, "Yes, he's biracial." Of course, rather than smile, or say nothing, she said, "How'd that happen since neither of you two is black?" She was almost accusatory, and the other woman, said, "Ooooh!" and laughed as if to imply I cheated and conceived someone else's child. Elevator doors open. I said, "He's adopted," and smiled. The women then seemed pleased and happy, and we all walked out onto our floor and in our separate ways…. How to handle this in the future, if it happens again? I don't understand why strangers feel as though they can engage into a dialogue with other strangers about parentage this way. Am I overreacting? How can I handle this next time that doesn't either end in me hating myself for how I handled the situation or me physically hurting someone?[186]

Visible racial differences between adoptive parents and their adopted children make them hyper-visible in their neighborhood and community, which leads them to face unwanted attention from people they know as well as strangers. As an adoptive mother, Sara had to struggle in her neighborhood. After adopting her other two children, Sara had to struggle even with herself.

> Ken wanted to adopt another one and I wanted to have another baby but he didn't want to go through the baby stage again. I mean it was fun but you know.... So we decided to get Julia and Daniel and they were [biological] siblings and well matched up with us.
>
> He [her husband] did really help me a lot but he worked a lot so he came home and he was tired. And he got sick before Hans graduated and ended up on disability in a wheelchair when Hans graduated in 2003, when he started going to college, and Ken died in 2006.... But my parents came to see Hans's graduation. My mom and my stepfather…cause my dad died after we got Hans...and Hans was like touching base with everything and the other two were too. But Daniel was not so much, but I understand cause his whole world and life were away and Julia was busy with boys...but everybody, you know we still managed to touch base on that. But Hans tends to do it a little bit more (laugh).
>
> I tended to favor Hans growing up cause I felt like I was close to him. And that in retrospect, I would've done many, many things differently…I just had times that I can't handle it but eventually we

[186] Adoption.com, "Comments from Strangers," Accessed August 14, 2016, https://adoption.com/forums/thread/226128/comments-from-strangers/.

> moved up here [Indiana] and eventually we got all worked out, everybody got…you know. A lot of things that I can't take back that I wish I could but still good things I did too.

Hans told me that his adoptive parents adopted Julia and Daniel out of concern for Hans's "best interests" because they wanted him to have siblings. However, Hans said that this was not for the best interests of Julia and Daniel. I was learned through Hans that Sara has had many issues with her other two children. Even though she has had a good relationship with Julia since Julia got married and had children herself, she still has issues with Daniel. When she mentioned their relationship, Sara's welled up with tears. Answers to most of my questions ended with stories about Hans even when I asked about Julia and Daniel. This might have been because I am Hans's friend, or it might be because Sara feels closer to him than she does to her other children. Sara seems to feel guilty that she is not a good or fair mother for Julia and Daniel and regrets that.

On "the adoptive parents' post-adoption emotional issues" forum, many adoptive parents, especially adoptive mothers, confess their guilt and fear because they think they do not like or love their children enough and it is hard to form the emotional attachment and bond that they think they are supposed to have.

> I don't know if I just cannot attach to my child or I just don't want to be a mother. I have always loved children…. I am single and finally made the decision to adopt in my early 40s. So now I have this beautiful, sweet and adorable little boy who was mine 24 hours after he was born. I was in the delivery room and cut the cord. The second they placed that baby in my arms, I felt absolutely nothing. He would lay on me and sleep and everyone around me would say 'isn't that the best feeling?' And in my head I would think 'no.' I truly felt nothing. I started reading about PAD [Post Adoption Depression] and assumed I had that. I wanted nothing to do with him and I hired a baby nurse for

> the first 3 months because I just didn't want to deal. Well now he is almost 14 months old and nothing has changed. I love him and want what's best for him, but I have zero desire to take care of him. I find that all he does is irritate me and I want him to leave me alone. I never feel the urge to hug him or kiss him. I don't know if it's him or I have realized after all of this that I just don't want to be a mom. I feel like I have someone's else's child living in my house. Anyone out there experience this and does it ever get better?? I never felt depressed or like crying about this, but lately I have because I thought it would have been better by now. I literally feel like I could go on vacation for a week and I wouldn't miss him for 5 minutes. People don't understand and say 'oh I doubt that.' It's very isolating. Hoping others have some wise words to help. Thanks so much (by Dana Green).[187]

Angelkisses0102 posted her emotional struggles as an adoptive mother who adopted two children.

> As we prepared for our international adoptions (Russia), I read all sorts of information regarding teaching my newly adopted infant or toddler how to attach to us as their new parents. How great attachment parenting was for my new child...how the child would benefit from me being the primary caregiver...blah, blah, blah! But no one really talks about how hard it can be for ME to attach to my new baby. For our first adoption I fell in love instantly with Arianna on our first trip to Russia. Plus, she was very sick and needed major kidney surgery shortly after she came home...so I became her 'mama bear.' For our second adoption...it was far from love at first sight.... I actually felt sorry for him...but I knew I could love him.... However once he was home it took me many months to fall in love with him. So, I began to research this and found out it was completely normal to not fall in love with this little stranger right away...it takes time. This is another thing that is not talked about often enough...so of course...let's talk about it here.[188]

And the posting got sixty-nine replies from other adoptive mothers who had similar issues. Below are two replies out of the sixty-nine comments.

---

[187] Adoption.com, "Major Attachment Issues. Please Help!" Accessed August 15, 2016, https://adoption.com/forums/thread/481929/major-attachment-issues-please-help/.

[188] Adoption.com, "Any Moms/Dads Have Trouble Attaching to Their Newly Adopted Child?" Accessed August 15, 2016. https://adoption.com/forums/thread/217446/any-moms-dads-have-trouble-attaching-to-their-newly-adopted-child/

> I never thought I would be 6 years into our adoption and still have many, many days when I feel unbonded to my daughter. Some days are fine but to be honest, I am doubting we will ever have the same kind of bond as I have with my bio-kids. I feel like a piece of crap for saying that aloud but it is the truth. I love her, I protect her...but it isn't the same…(by TN 3970).
>
> When I came to this thread earlier I had the other problem, i.e. I liked the child but didn't love him yet. I am now almost 5 months into it and I am much closer to "love." He has some difficult behaviors and I might actually "like" him less than I did before. He's got some anxious attachment issues and the extended family is pretty critical about it and it is very tiring for me, but I am now attaching to him well, even though I now see that he has some difficult behaviors. I was mainly concerned as to why I didn't feel love and attachment for this normal, healthy, loving baby, when I did feel it with the first child I adopted. Part of the reason, I believe was that he was older (10 months), while the first was less than three months, and he was a boy, when I had been secretly hoping for a girl. I think that's why it wasn't instant, but it has been developing alright…. My first is about as perfect as an healthy (not-hypervigilant or hyper-pleaser) almost three-year-old can be. The younger has his anxiety stuff, but that is one of the more endearing difficult behaviors. So, if you are saying you don't like your child because you enjoy breaks away from him/her, I wouldn't say that makes you bad or your child overly weird…(by GrmblersRidge).

Many adoptive mothers are worried about their depression and guilt after adopting their children because they cannot attach to their children "naturally." In particular, some adoptive mothers who already had biological and/or adopted children have other concerns since they feel like they do not even love their newly adopted child. These feelings—guilt, depression, and insecurity—make them consider themselves to be "unnatural," "not real," and "not normal" mothers.

Katie

Katie is Adam's mother; she was born in 1955 and got married in 1976. I met her for the first time at her house in an affluent suburban area of Indiana in March 2016. She and her husband Brandon welcomed me by serving cookies and coffee. We talked

together in their living room as the afternoon sunlight shone in through their big windows. Katie showed me her family albums full of happy pictures of Adam and Brian, his younger adoptive brother. According to Dorow, adoptive mothers, not fathers, make "life books, plan culture camps."[189] Gailey insists that adoption is a heavily gendered issue. According to her, most male adopters are less involved in the adoption process than the female adopters since "adoption remains primarily a domain defined by a gender division of labor that makes women primarily responsible for kinship creation and maintenance."[190] During our first visit, Katie agreed to have an interview with me, and I visited her again in April 2016.

Sara and Katie both answered that they had initiated their family's adoptions, reflecting Gailey's assertion that "women initiate the vast majority of adoptions."[191] Even though both Sara and Katie's husbands helped take care of their children, these mothers took care of their children most of the time since their husbands were busy with work. Katie decided to adopt children because of her infertility.

> We tried to get pregnant for a long time, for probably five years, and it never worked and I never got pregnant and one day I just said I can't do this anymore. (Researcher: Must be hard.) Very hard...very hard...every month...very hard…. (Researcher: Did you suggest and decide on adoption?) Yes. And Brandon said, "Yes that's fine, let's do that." So we talked about adopting locally, and we just heard [it would take] so, so, so long, like three years, five years to get a baby and I didn't want to wait that long and then uncertainty with that. We heard

---

[189] Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 174.

[190] Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*, 120. However, the ideology of the "normal" American family influences male adopters too. One of male adopters said, "if you're in your mid-thirties and on your way up, people expect you to be a 'family man.' If you don't have kids, you're left out of a lot of the talk at company picnics." Gailey calls this motive behind adoption a "nursery ceiling." According to her, most adopters believed they were incomplete without children (84).

[191] Ibid., 1.

> about B[192] [adoption agency] and we went and talked to them and they interviewed us and we met up with the other people who were wanting to adopt and met the families who already had their babies. That did it. That did it right there. So anyway they were very sweet.

Katie is a middle-class woman with a college degree who worked for the human resources departments of an insurance company and a hospital for three years each before she stopped working to prepare for pregnancy. She quit her job two years before she decided to adopt. Katie repeated how hard it was to struggle with her infertility. Gailey identifies "their [infertile women's] infertility as a kind of betray[al] by their bodies or, in some cases, gender failure."[193] Katie had suffered because of her reproductive issues, but she still wanted to be a mother, so she decided to adopt children. Katie and Brandon adopted Adam in 1985 when he was only two months old, and they adopted Brian two years later when he was an infant as well. I asked her about the adoption process.

> It took about nine months to get Adam between when we applied and when he showed up in Chicago, and Brian took about one year, a little bit longer but anyway just wonderful...just like a...*normal pregnancy*, nine months to one year. Actually the nine months started after we finished all the paperwork. So we had to do all the paperwork first, and we had to fill out all kinds of forms…. We had to register with the FBI and they did our fingerprints to see if we were criminals or not. They do a background check. Then we waited nine months. (Emphasis added)

Adoptive mothers go through a different process than biological pregnancy to have babies, and they have to deal with unique preparations. Katie compared her experiences as an adoptive mother to "normal" pregnancy and "normal" motherhood,

---

[192] Sara and Katie adopted through the same adoption agency in Indianapolis, which works with Holt Children's Services in South Korea.

[193] Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*, 85.

and she emphasized many times throughout our interview that her experiences are "normal."

When they decided to adopt one more child, Katie and Brandon had a chance to choose the sex.

> I've got three sisters and there were four of us and I didn't need four babies (laugh). Two babies are enough. That's busy enough. We called and we got on the list and then they.... We waited several months and they did a home study, interviewed us, and talked to Adam, the same person and the same process. Did all the paperwork and waited for Brian to come. And they said for the second child, you can pick boy or girl. We said we don't wanna pick *like real life*. We don't wanna pick. You know, whatever you choose for us, that would be fine, then we have two boys. Very lucky. (Emphasis added)

Katie kept repeating phrases like "normal" pregnancy, "normal" family, "natural" and "real" life, indicating that she does not see her family as "abnormal" or inferior to those who are connected biologically.

> They [Adam and Brian] knew very early that they were adopted. And we were so involved in an adoption support group, it was very clear to them that's how you could make a family because you and your group knew babies would come [through adoption] and that's how you get a baby. You adopt a baby. So to us, that was a very *normal* thing they have.... That was very helpful…. And my sisters, two sisters, had babies via pregnancy…. To us adoption was the *normal, the normal way to make a family*. It is the way to make a family other ways. So it's like blended families too…. That's another way to make a family so...it's a family. (Emphasis added)

Generally, the concepts of motherhood and being a mother are associated with "biology, not nurturance,"[194] so the motherhood of adoptive mothers is considered to

---

[194] Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 76.

be “different” than “normal” motherhood, meaning that adoptive mothers are “inferior” to biological mothers.[195]

> (Researcher: What is the meaning of being parents to you?) To be a parent? It’s to love another person unconditionally and enjoy time with them and nurture and raise the child to be the best person that they can be as an adult. It’s a wonderful experience. I hope you get to. When you have a child sometime it is so nice and rewarding. Then you have them forever and they are yours forever…love bond…. It’s wonderful being a parent. It’s a wonderful thing, it’s a real gift, it’s a real blessing. I thank the birth mothers for allowing us to have the opportunity to be parents. It’s...it would be a very, very hard thing to give up the child, very hard and I appreciate the sacrifice of our two birth mothers. They gave us the experience to be parents so...brave women...loving women.

As Katie mentioned that being parents means to give unconditional love to their children and nurture them, adoptive mothers argued their motherhood was “a spiritual, not a physical status”[196] in order to deny that the concept that motherhood is associated only with biology.

Berebitsky investigates the “Child-Rescue Campaign” in the *Delineator* (one of the largest women’s magazines in the United States that ran from 1907 to 1911), which promoted adoption to save children. According to her, the campaign convinced its million subscribers that “adoption [is] part of a woman’s civic duty[197] and [is] a

---

[195] Ibid., 76.

[196] Ibid., 76.

[197] The magazine’s writers penned several articles that appealed to women’s “maternal instinct,” and they also provoked a sense of patriotic and civic responsibility in these women (Berebitsky 2001, 54-55) to save society from the potential threat posed by poor and/or immigrant children in the future (Berebitsky 2001, 52) by helping these children to overcome their “evil heredity” with “an atmosphere of mother-love” to be “manly and womanly, honorable citizens” (Berebitsky 2001, 57). The magazine’s editors believed that the way to save the country was to place these children with Christian, native-born, middle-class mothers to reduce “a fear of ethnic difference” (Berebitsky 2001, 58) that resulted from a massive incoming of new immigrants. In addition, Berebitsky argues “the connection between adoption and a woman’s civic duty also exposes an important aspect of the relationship between motherhood and citizenship. Mothers had the power to make children into ideal

form of rescue."[198] She explains that the campaign promoted "an expanded definition of motherhood."[199] The magazine series defined motherhood based on "a woman's capacity to love and nurture a child, not on blood ties" by extolling motherhood as "their highest achievement, a 'holy task' and 'privilege.'"[200]

The romanticizing of motherhood as a "holy task" justifies the "extra" work of adoptive mothers. For example, adoptive mothers have to figure out how to maintain their children's Korean and Asian identity[201] or assimilate them to American culture. They come up with ways to do this by finding Korean restaurants, Korean cultural centers, and Korean cultural camps. All of the adoptive mothers I have met through KCS are white and middle-class and most of them try to learn about Korea through Korean language, songs, and history. Some of them read books regarding Korean adoption, history, and culture.

I was able to join adoptive mothers' conversations at KCS several times and hear their difficulties in raising their adopted children. The hardest part of being an adoptive mother is handling the emotional work as well as the physical and mental work involved with planning cultural camps and learning Korean. For example, when people ask who their children are because of their racial difference, adoptive mothers have to be ready to answer. They also have to deal with their children's identity

---

citizens, but just as important, being a mother also made a woman a better citizen" (Berebitsky 2001, 79-80).

[198] Ibid., 51.

[199] Ibid., 51.

[200] Ibid., 55-56.

[201] Dorow (2006) researches the experiences of adoptive parents with Chinese children, categorizing their children's relationship to Chinese culture into four different types: assimilation, celebrating plurality, balancing act, and immersion (216).

struggles. I shared some stories with Katie about Korean adoptees who have struggled with identifying as American, Korean, and/or as a Korean adoptee. Katie responded:

> I think they [Adam and Brian] identify as American. I don't think they would say, "I am a Korean adoptee" …. Brian doesn't [have any interest in Korea]. And honestly, Adam didn't either till about three years ago. He really had no interest in Korea, or his birth mother.... And it wasn't...it wasn't that he was mad at his birth mother or mad at Korea. I think he just didn't have an interest and Brian is not interested, and Adam talked about it. "Oh you need to go to Korea with me," and Brian is like "No, I am pretty happy at home so…." He is just not interested. And it's been surprising to us that Adam has been so interested in it, from nothing to one hundred percent.
> (Researcher: What do you think makes Adam have an interest in Korea? Is it because he moved to the Washington, DC area?)
> That's exactly it. He got more involved. And the Asian environment and... there are more Korean restaurants and Korean churches that are available to him...not so much here. I think he picked up those interests from learning about that…. [There] are lots more people than here…so many people who are international. That was good for him, that was a good time.

However, Adam's change was not just because of the international environment of DC. Before I interviewed Katie that day, I had a chance to have lunch with Adam. He said:

> I grew up in a very white area. Even though I had white friends, there were always some parts I missed.... I met other Asian American friends in college [in Michigan]; it was good but there was always one percent in my mind that never filled up. Then I moved to DC for work, then was able to join a Korean adoptees' group. They understood me and I did not need to explain about what I feel.... I felt like the one percent I missed had been filled.... During the tour last year, the last night, on the streets of Seoul, I thought every adoptee should come here, they should come to visit this county.

Even though Katie expected her sons would identify themselves as "American," Adam has identified himself as a Korean adoptee since taking a motherland tour in 2015. Adam has been dealing with identity issues his

whole life. Being an Asian boy was not easy, especially in Indiana, which remains a predominately white state, with the white population comprising eighty-four percent of the total.[202] When I had lunch with Adam in Indiana, there were more than one hundred people in the restaurant, but the only people of color were Adam and me. I was able to imagine how hard it would be to live there as a person of color or as a white mother with children of color.

In contrast to Katie's understanding of the reason Adam became interested in Korea, Adam said that he had always wanted to fill the empty space inside of him. Adam had a difficult time when he was in high school. He was bullied and had drug issues, and he said that many of these difficulties resulted from his racial identity, which made him "hyper-visible" in the community. However, when I asked Katie about race issues, she answered that their family had no difficulties because of race. Adam and Katie might have different perspectives on their experiences, and/or Katie might not want to share difficult and sensitive issues with a researcher, since they stem from racial differences in the family and thus might make them seem "abnormal."

Sara was similarly reluctant to answer two of my questions that were about the international adoption process and race issues. When I asked her how much she had to pay to adopt her three children, Sara kept saying, "I don't remember…maybe three thousand for each? ... I don't know." I asked her how she had handled it when race came up as an issue with her Asian children; Sara stated, "I don't know. It seems

[202] Rachel Justis, "Indiana's Minority Population Is Growing," *In Context* 12, no. 6 (November-December 2011), Accessed September 21, 2017, http://www.incontext.indiana.edu/2011/nov-dec/article3.asp.

a straightforward question." My asking about the cost of having her kids as well as her racial difference from them could have made Sara feel like an "unnatural" mother.

Even though adoptive mothers try to deal with their children's Korean and Asian heritage, there are always issues, misunderstandings, and tensions between these mothers and their children due to their racial differences. Hans and Adam did bring up their racial difference from their adoptive parents because they knew it was a sensitive issue. Both felt that there were always tensions regarding race issues between them and their white parents.

In *First Person Plural*,[203] a girl named Cha Jung Hee was supposed to be adopted to the filmmaker Deann Borshay Liem's family. The adoption procedure was completed in 1965 when Borshay Liem's adoptive parents signed the adoption papers and sent money to the adoption agency. However, Cha Jung Hee's father came to the orphanage where she was staying and took her home. Thus, Cha Jung Hee was no longer available for adoption, so the adoption agency falsified her adoption files. They sent a girl named Kang Ok Jin in her place, but presented her as Cha Jung Hee. Borshay Liem and her adoptive family found out about the switch about twenty years later. Her adoptive mother responded to the situation:

> Well, I don't care that they had switched the child on us. You couldn't be loved more, and just because suddenly you weren't Cha Jung Hee or you were Ok Jin Kang, Kong, or whatever. It didn't matter to me, you were Deann and you were mine.

And Borshay Liem's adoptive sister said:

> What was your other name? Your real name? (Deann Borshay Liem: You don't remember?) No. (Deann Borshay Liem: Kang Ok Jin.) See, that doesn't mean nothing to me. You're still Cha Jung Hee.

[203] Borshay Liem et al., *First Person Plural*.

For her entire life, Borshay Liem had struggled to learn who she is: Deann Borshay Liem, Kang Ok Jin, or Cha Jung Hee? When she found out she was Kang Ok Jin, not Cha Jung Hee, it was more than surprising, but she could begin the journey to search for her Korean heritage, her birth family, and who she is using her real name and adoption documents. However, whether she was Kang Ok Jin or Cha Jung Hee did not matter to her adoptive family. Deann Borsha Liem's national, cultural, and racial origins mattered to her but not to her adoptive family.

Another example is the case of Laura Klunder, a Korean adoptee and adoptee activist, who felt frustrated and hopeless in her adoptive family because she felt they did not understand her. She says, "I knew that I was the only person of color in their [adoptive parents'] life, and it was too easy for them to invalidate my point of view as another 'anger issue'…. I felt hopeless to create change in my adoptive family."[204]

Sara and Katie love their children, but there is a boundary between them that they cannot easily cross because of their different positions. These relationships are complicated by their different racial identities, but also because adoptive mothers "chose" to adopt, whereas their children did not have any choice. Even though these difficulties might be somewhat expected when a family is considering adoption, they raise the question of what leads families to decide on adopting transnationally.

To Have a Complete Family

Katie adopted two children because she wanted to have "a complete family."

> We called them [the adoption agency] and said we want one more baby. (Researcher: Why?) Oh, I wanted two babies. I wanted Adam to have a brother or sister…. It could be a girl but we wanted to have two and have *a complete family* with two.

[204] Jones, "Why a Generation of Adoptees Is Returning to South Korea."

The desirable, legitimate family form in current U.S. society is the nuclear family with a breadwinner husband, a stay-at-home wife, and children. Professor of English David Eng,[205] anthropologist Ann Anagnost,[206] and Gailey collectively point out that adoptive parents adopt children to have a "complete" family that fits into the American norm. Gailey explains that even though middle-class adopters view adoption as an inferior substitute for childbirth, they also believe "they were incomplete without children."[207]

Nicole Constable asks a more fundamental and provocative question regarding "white middle-class rights to have a 'complete' family."[208] Many adoptive parents can choose to have a complete family due to the privileges that come from their race, class, and nationality. This means that adoptive mothers can choose to be mothers. As historian Rickie Solinger[209] points out, modern womanhood is associated with the concept of choice. According to her, while middle-class women have the "right to choose" their motherhood, whereas poor women are often encouraged not to choose motherhood.

As discussed so far, Sara, Katie, and other adoptive mothers exercise a right to choose that many birth mothers cannot have. However, it is important to ask what

---

[205] Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas."

[206] Ann Anagnost, "Scenes of Misrecognition: Maternal Citizenship in the Age of Transnational Adoption," *Positions: East Asia Culture Critiques* 8, no. 2 (2001): 389-421.

[207] Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*, 84.

[208] Nicole Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail Order" Marriages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). 498.

[209] Rickie Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

makes adoptive mothers choose to become mothers? Do they want to be mothers because of their maternal instincts, or does society influence their choice to be mothers?

Transnational adoption has had a long history since World War II and the Cold War. Humanitarian gestures by American Christians was one of the motivations for transnational adoption, as Harry Holt and his wife Bertha Holt decided to go to South Korea and establish an adoption agency in order to save children after seeing pictures of Korean war orphans. However, feminist and postcolonial scholars demonstrate that there are also other motives for transnational adoption behind this humanitarian gesture.

Feminist historian Laura Briggs[210] argues that American participation in transnational adoption developed in the context of American empire-building during the Cold War. During that time, Americans' sense of greatness led them to feel an obligation, even a longing, to help children overseas. Sandra Patton-Imani also pays attention to "the role of power in shaping the circumstances that lead to child relinquishment in countries with high poverty rates, and adoption by primarily white middle-class married couples in the United States and other Western countries."[211]

Christina Klein,[212] who focuses on Cold War ideology, challenges the view of transnational adoption as a practice of benign hegemony. According to Klein, adoption was promoted during the Cold War as a way to enhance the value of family,

---

[210] Laura Briggs, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

[211] Sandra Patton-Imani, "Orphan Sunday: Narratives of Salvation in Transnational Adoption," *A Journal of Theory: Dialogue* 51, no. 14 (2012): 294-304, 295.

[212] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 151.

especially the middle-class nuclear family, in contrast to the "ruthless collectivism" said to be practiced in communist societies such as the Soviet Union and China. This contrast was used in justifying transnational adoption as a means of saving children. The image of the United States as the savior of children and the sense of U.S. citizens participating in the spread of liberal democracy were very important factors in establishing the practice of transnational adoption.

Deann Borshay Liem's adoptive mother decided to adopt a child from South Korea after watching a short film about Korean children in orphanages. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, many churches in the United States played short films that showed the miserable conditions of orphanages in South Korea and war orphans who needed the help of Americans. Scholars such as Briggs and Klein argue that these films and pictures stimulated Americans' sense of morality. They argue that it was this perception of themselves as saviors that led Americans to try and save foreign children as a reflection of their patriotic greatness.

While such scholars explore how white middle-class motherhood was used to facilitate transnational adoption by examining Cold War ideology, other scholars like Berebitsky focus on the social construction of motherhood based on domestic circumstances in the United States. As described earlier, adoption was encouraged as a civic duty, and the adoption advertisements in women's magazines stimulated women's sense of patriotic and civic responsibility to raise future citizens. She argues that "motherhood and maternal sacrifice generally were glorified and romanticized."[213] In addition, Berebitsky delves into representations of adoptive

---

[213] Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 75.

mothers from 1900 to 1950 to understand how "real" motherhood was (re)defined through this time. According to her, throughout the period, "most Americans assumed that all 'normal' women were or wanted to be mothers."[214] Women who were not mothers were often blamed for their selfishness and immaturity, and their womanhood was questioned.

Womanhood, as associated with motherhood, was valid not only for the period that Berebitsky studied, since many women still choose to adopt their children transnationally today. As Solinger indicates, white middle-class adoptive mothers have the right to choose because of their race and class privilege. Only women who can take care of their children as housewives and who can afford to adopt internationally are able make this choice. They make the humanitarian decision to adopt in order to save children and to raise them into good, patriotic citizens. However, these women still raise these children as their "mothers." Even though they have the right to choose because of the privilege that comes from their class, race, and nationality, their gender limits their choices. As Gailey insists, many women who cannot have biological children feel that their bodies have betrayed them. In addition, adoption is still considered to be an alternative option for women who cannot complete their families biologically. Therefore, many adoptive mothers who choose adoption still struggle to prove that their motherhood is not inferior to biological motherhood and that they are "normal" and "real" mothers.

Chapter Conclusion: Resisting Patriarchal Motherhood

> Adoption, like motherhood, has always been a woman's issue. It is women who give birth, and women have had their birth children taken

---

[214] Ibid., 75.

> from them because of cultural, political or economic forces; and it is women who sometimes feel they must relinquish their birth child in order to protect that child. It is women who choose or agree to take on the work of mothering.
> -Susan Wadia-Ells, *The Adoption Reader*.

Gailey begins her book with a quote from *The Adoption Reader*[215], edited by writer and adoptive mother Susan Wadia-Ells.[216] As Wadia-Ells emphasizes, it is significant to explore adoption as a woman's issue since because of adoption, some women can have children and others cannot. However, it is imperative to ask what makes women choose to relinquish children or to adopt them.

In terms of global hierarchies, American adoptive mothers and Korean birth mothers are located at opposite ends. Adoptive mothers have privileges related to race, class, and nationality, so they can afford the choice to be mothers. Solinger argues that the concept of motherhood in America is based on class and heterosexual privilege. According to her, throughout the era of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, "the majority of white, middle-class Americans believed that women who had resources had won the 'right to choose' whether and when to become mothers… 'Choice' also became a symbol of middle-class women's arrival as independent consumers. Middle-class could afford to choose. They had earned the right to choose motherhood, if they liked."[217] However, birth mothers without resources—African American mothers, poor, illegitimate mothers, and single and/or

---

[215] Susan Wadia-Ells, *The Adoption Reader: Birth Mothers, Adoptive Mothers, and Adopted Daughters Tell Their Stories* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1995), 1.

[216] Gailey, *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love*, 1.

[217] Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers*, 199.

poor Korean mothers—were discouraged from being mothers. Instead, they were encouraged to transfer their children to wealthier heterosexual couples.

After choosing to be mothers, adoptive mothers can expand the definition of U.S. motherhood from the traditional concept associated with blood-ties and biological connection to instead focus on providing nurturance and unconditional love. Katie may have emphasized adoptive motherhood as constituted by normalcy and unconditional love several times during our interview as a way of resisting the social perceptions that adoption is a second-rate way of completing one's family and that adoptive mothers are not real mothers. If these adoptive mothers make the choice to benefit themselves, why are they still struggling with the ambiguous identities of "real mothers" and "not-mothers"?

According to Barbara Yngvesson, a professor of anthropology and an adoptive mother herself, "all the birth and adoptive mothers with whom [she has] spoken live (or have lived) this ambiguity, an ambiguity located in the implicit (and sometimes explicit) presence of an 'other' mother in the life of their common child."[218] In addition, she adds that "motherhood as 'a state of almost mystical commonality and identity' is a central fantasy of patriarchy."[219]

Within patriarchal society, the womanhood and morality of women who decide not to have children is questioned due to their perceived selfishness. However, poor, disabled, illegitimate, unmarried women, and women of color are often discouraged from having children. Women who are married and who have class and

---

[218] Barbara Yngvesson, "Negotiating Motherhood: Identity and Difference in 'Open' Adoptions," *Law & Society* 31, no. 67 (1997): 31-80, 67.

[219] Ibid., 68.

race privilege can fulfill their complete identity as women. However, if they cannot have children because of infertility, then they are considered to have failed as women. Thus, desire to have a complete, normal American family are strong motives that encourage these women to decide to adopt. However, after adopting, they have to deal with the difficulties that arise from being of a different race than their children and their ambiguous identities as mothers. Under these conditions of male dominance, it seems almost impossible to imagine womanhood beyond motherhood.

The uses of the term patriarchy to describe oppressive circumstances for women is contested among feminists. According to feminist scholar Deniz Kandiyoti, the term patriarchy is "overused" and "often evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders."[220] Vrushali Patil critiques "the term 'patriarchy' as a convenient designation of not only the particular concept of patriarchy but homogenous, monolithic accounts of gender oppression more broadly."[221] As these scholars point out, a simple understanding of patriarchy cannot explain the dynamics of oppression that operate differently across gender, race, and, class. These dynamics oppress women in different ways. The aim of feminist scholars is to examine closely and sharply how patriarchy intersects with other social factors and how it influences

---

[220] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (September, 1998): 274-290, 274.

[221] Vrushali Patil, "From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We've Really Come," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 847-867, 847.

different women in variable ways. When it comes to adoptive mothers, it is therefore important to look at differences in women's social location.

While American adoptive mothers and Korean birth mothers are located at opposite ends in terms of global hierarchies, patriarchal concepts of normative motherhood influence these two mothers in both similar and different ways. The motherhood of Korean birth mothers is discouraged because they are considered "inappropriate" mothers due to their marital status and social class. Furthermore, even though they have been continuing their motherhood after relinquishing their children for adoption, their motherhood is invisible and hidden in Korean society. Since American adoptive mothers have more class and race privilege, they can fulfill the "essence of womanhood" that can be achieved by becoming mothers.[222] Indeed, becoming a mother is the only choice available to white middle-class American women in order to have a complete and normal family,.

According to historians Ellen Herman and Barbara Melosh, adoption challenges normative family ideology by suggesting that there are variable ways to make a family. Herman argues that forming a family through adoption disrupts the notion that the "one best way to make a 'normal,' 'natural,' or 'ideal' family"[223] is through biological ties. Melosh also argues that kinship among strangers via adoption "suggests the possibility of a more expansive community, of mutuality across the boundaries of blood. For if we trust that strangers can become kin, then maybe we

---

[222] Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own*, 76.

[223] Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15.

can also forge families, communities, and nations that welcome the stranger."[224] Herman and Melosh insist that adoptive families and artificial kinship enable us to have a more diverse society that challenges normative American family ideology.

Adoption can be an alternative way to make a family, but it can also be another way of confining and limiting the essence of womanhood to the concept of motherhood. In addition, both the traditional concept of biological family as well as the alternative of family via adoption can justify adoptive mothers' gendered labor and hide their struggles to be a real mother. Normal American family ideology and the concept of motherhood influence the choices of adoptive mothers. Even though they can afford to be mothers and to exercise choice, it is hard to say that their choice is made completely independently if we consider the social construction of motherhood. In addition, the rhetoric of choice cannot encompass the struggles and emotional labor that adoptive mothers carry out in order to be real mothers for their adopted children.

I began my research on birth mothers and adoptive mothers with the question, who is the real mother of adoptees? However, this initial question changed to an exploration of the following: What is the meaning of being a real mother? Why should women try to be (real) mothers? As Yngvesson insists, the patriarchal concept of normal motherhood confines the real choices of women and makes both mothers—adoptive and birth mothers—struggle ambiguity in their identities as "real mothers." Under the concept of patriarchal motherhood, adoptive and birth mothers cannot be

[224] Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 11.

“real” mothers. To ask who the real mother is makes these two mothers compete with each other and stigmatizes both mothers as “not enough.”

My adoptee friend, Jaime, recently finalized the adoption of her own daughter, Blake. Blake is eight years old and her birth mother gave up Blake along with her brother. Blake and her brother had been staying in a foster home in California, and their foster mother wanted to adopt them both, but a therapist advised that it would be better for Blake to be an only child in order to heal from the trauma that she experienced in the process of separating from her birth mother. Therefore, Jaime decided to adopt Blake, and they still do regular video chats with the foster mother. Blake calls her foster mother her “California mom,” and she is still in contact with her birth mother as well. Therefore, Blake has three mothers, all of whom love and care for their common child in their own ways.

Instead of simply comparing adoptive mothers to birth mothers, who less privileged in terms of race and class, I have explained how adoptive mothers struggle with their sense of guilt, gender failure, race issues with their children, and insecurity over being real mothers. Both mothers are struggling to be mothers in their own ways in order to deal with the “traditional” and patriarchal concept of motherhood. Therefore, it is important to understand how patriarchy influences these two women in different ways and to imagine another form of motherhood that goes beyond the patriarchal and normative versions of this concept—like my friend Jaime, who do not try to be a “real” mother or compete with their child’s other mothers. By doing so, we can reframe the concept of motherhood to include different forms that are not seen as

abnormal, but that can challenge patriarchal definitions of motherhood and womanhood.

Story with a Happy Ending? The Reunion of Adoptees, Birth Mothers, and Adoptive Mothers

Introduction: The Journey of Anna

On the afternoon of October 29, 2015, hundreds of Korean adoptees gathered at South Korea's National Assembly in Seoul to attend a policy forum aimed at changing South Korean adoption policy. Anna Kim was one of the speakers that day. As a Korean adoptee and member of Adopted Solidarity Korea (hereafter, ASK),[225] Anna shared her experience of reuniting with her birth mother.

> Hello, good afternoon. My name is Anna. My Korean name is Kim Hyeon-A… I'm here today to talk a little bit about my own personal experience with a birth family search, in the hope that it will help improve the search process and access to birth records for other adoptees like myself. I was born in 1988 and was sent to the United States in 1989. I grew up in Sacramento, a small city in Northern California. Growing up, I knew nothing about Korea, being Korean, or who I was before I was sent to the United States… I moved to Korea last November after graduating from college and working for a few years. I studied Korean because I wanted to speak Korean with any family I was able to find here. I opened up a case at KAS[226] to start searching. In May, a social worker at KAS contacted me to let me know that she had found my mother's name, ID number, and address at the time of my adoption. She said that she would try to locate her. After two months of no word, I called KAS and asked for an appointment to see whatever was in my adoption file. I was told that it was unnecessary for me to come in, since KAS wouldn't give me any

---

[225] ASK, established in 2004, advocates for the abolition of transnational adoption. ASK insists on empowering new voices to present the viewpoint of Korean adoptees by critiquing the fact that adoption agencies and adoptive parents always speak for them. Instead of focusing on changing laws and policies, ASK conducts debates and leads educational programs for Korean adoptees in order to raise their own voices.

[226] Korea Adoption Services (KAS) was established by the Act on Special Cases Concerning Adoption in 2012. According to Article 26 (Establishment of Korea Adoption Services), the Ministry of Health and Welfare establishes and operates KAS with the purposes of encouraging domestic adoptions and providing post-adoption services. It designates the following duties for KAS: 1) Operation of an integrated database necessary for searching information on adopted children, adoptive families and natural families; 2) Establishment of, and linkage between, databases on adopted children; 3) Research and development on domestic and foreign adoption policies and services; 4) International cooperation relating to adoption; 5) Other duties assigned by the Minister of Health and Welfare.

identifying information about my mother, but I insisted. I had never seen my adoption file before, and wanted to see firsthand anything that was available to me. I wanted to know basic things like where I was born, what time I was born, how much I weighed—any information about who I was…

At KAS, I was allowed to see my adoption file…I wasn't allowed to see any information about my mother or other family members. The KAS social worker told me that she had sent a telegram to my mother a week or so earlier, and all I could do was wait for a response from her that she wanted to meet me. Someone had signed for the letter, so someone had read it...hopefully it was my mother. I asked for a copy of my file and a copy of the receipt from the telegram. I received both, with the tracking number on the receipt obscured by a black pen. On the bus ride home from KAS, I noticed that the tracking number wasn't fully covered by the black pen. I held the paper receipt up to the window of the bus, and saw a 16-digit tracking code. Using my cell phone and a short call to the local post office, I had a name and address. I was shocked. I didn't know what to do. That afternoon, I had plans to meet a friend, who's also adopted…I asked her what I should do—should I visit the address? Wait to see if my mom would reply to the telegram, if she even actually received it? Would it be bad to go? What if my mom didn't want to meet me? What if she'd forgotten about me? What if she didn't like me? My friend told me to do whatever I wanted. "It's your life," she said. "Do whatever you want to do." … I felt like everything up until that point had been out of my control—I had no control over being adopted, no control over not speaking Korean or understanding Korean culture, and no say even in my own birth family search. Others still controlled whether or not I was even allowed to meet my own mother. I decided to drive to the address and see what happened. Even if KAS and Holt wouldn't let me know my mother, and even if she rejected me, I decided that I had the right to know who I was and where I came from. I had waited my entire life to find out where I came from, and I even returned to Korea to search. With the help of a friend, I rented a car and drove to the address...

I remember it was raining hard that day. I parked alongside a nondescript apartment building. I knocked on the apartment door and said the name of my mother. After ten minutes, a woman came. I saw her face, and I knew instantly she was my mother. I introduced myself and we both began to cry. It was the strangest feeling—I felt both uncomfortable because the situation was so surreal, and so comforted because she looked so familiar. I think it was because we have a similar face, so it felt like I was looking at a version of myself, wearing an apron and house slippers…We sat and talked for a few

> hours—she told me that she had been looking for me too. She had received a letter from Holt about four months prior, but the letter had my name wrong. Holt told her that they would look into the mix-up and call her back, but they never did. She had also received a letter from KAS two weeks prior, and she called KAS and told them about the previous Holt letter and asked them to help her find me. This was different from what I had been told at KAS that very morning—I guess they hadn't made the connection between me, and my mom's phone call...Over the next few months, we got to know each other. I saw photos of my aunt, grandfather, and cousins. I met my mom's new husband, who said I am now one of his daughters too. We are all working on building and navigating a relationship with each other. KAS contacted me a month ago and told me that there was still no response from my mother. KAS also finally called my mother back, who told them we had already found each other. Holt never called her back. I moved to Korea to find my mother, and because I held a telegram tracking receipt up to the bus window, I was able to. Without this accident and a bit of luck, we would not have been able to find each other. I have friends who have been searching for years with no results, and friends who have been told their parents have been found only to find out that there was no DNA match—twice. Finding our families and knowing our histories shouldn't depend on accidents or luck, when we have the opportunity to fix the Special Adoption Law so that it works better…Please, help us change this law so that we can find each other, and so that adoptees can have access to whatever information is available. Everyone has the right to know who they are. Thank you.

Even though Anna's story is long, I decided to recount it in detail to give readers context about the complicated issues around the process of searching for birth families. Since the early 1990s, many transnational Korean adoptees have been returning to their homeland of South Korea with a strong desire to know who they are and where they come from. To learn the answers to these questions, they search for their birth families, especially their birth mothers. However, as Anna's story shows us, it is not easy to reunite with their birth families.

This chapter examines the obstacles adoptees face by following their journeys from the moment they decide to initiate a search for their birth families. In addition, I

explore post-reunion experiences by considering the different perspectives of adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers. When adoptees reunite with their birth mothers, I ask what challenges they encounter, where these issues come from, and how they handle them. It is important to explore transnational reunion processes in studies of adoption since most research on reunions is based on domestic adoption cases. Also, most research comes from psychology and thus aims to demonstrate psychological processes and emotional responses. By contrast, this study examines the social factors that influence reunion events. Lastly, there has been less research on reunion experiences, especially studies that include adoption triads—adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers. This study proposes to consider how adoptees and their two mothers think through the reunion process, what struggles they have, and how they handle the difficulties that arise based on their different social positions.

The Beginnings of Reunion Stories: How Adoptees Can Reunite with Their Birth Mothers

The chance of a reunion is only 2.7 percent.[227] This number includes the early generation of adoptees who were adopted during the 1950s and 1960s. Since adoptees only began returning to South Korea via motherland tours in the 1990s, the earlier generation of adoptees had fewer chances to search for their birth families. Therefore, the possibility of reunion for those adopted after the 1970s might be higher than 2.7 percent. In fact, six out of the twenty-three participants in Tour A and four out of twenty participants in Tour B were able to reunite with their birth families. However, most adoptees have difficulties finding their birth families. Why is it not easy to

[227] Jeannie Hong. *International Korean Adoptee Resource Book: Guide to Korea for Korean Adoptee[s]* (Seoul, Korea: Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2006).

search for adoptees' birth families? What happens after adoptees reunite with their birth families? I explore the process of reuniting as well as post-reunion stories via the cases of Hans, Emma, and Nancy.

Hans is the birth son of Kyungju and adoptive son of Sara. He was able to reunite with his birth mother in 2015 during motherland Tour A. Emma visited South Korea for the first time since being adopted as part of a motherland tour[228] in 2013 and visited again in 2014 when she was able to reunite with her birth mother. I met Nancy when I was participating in Tour B in 2015. She was able to reunite with her birth family on the second day of her trip. I translated their conversation when they met the second time, and I also interviewed her birth sister and her birth mother.

While I have observed other reunion cases during my field work and helped adoptees by translating when they reunited with their birth mothers, I choose to focus on Hans's, Emma's, and Nancy's cases. This is because I have been involved with Hans and Nancy from the initial phases of their reunions, so I can describe the reunion process more fully than other cases. I also decided to analyze Emma's reunion case since she was in a later stage of the process than Nancy and Hans, and thus her case can illustrate the different phases of post-reunion experiences. I was able to interview Emma in 2015 when she was visiting South Korea for the third time. Emma and I met seven times during my field work, and she talked a lot about her struggles to build a relationship with her birth mother. We had two interviews, each of which took about two and a half hours. Emma was a self-reflective person, so she thought a lot about her experiences as an adoptee and her relationship with her birth

[228] The motherland tour that Emma joined was hosted by the organization that ran Tour A.

mother as well. Therefore, the interviews with Emma provided particularly rich description of adoptees' reunion experiences.

Good Luck to You

When starting to search for their birth families, many adoptees hear, "good luck to you." While Anna said that, "finding our families and knowing our histories shouldn't depend on accidents or luck," many cases demonstrate that the possibility of adoptees finding their birth families does rely on luck or individual effort rather than institutional, professional, or official support from adoption agencies or the government. Hans, Emma, and Nancy were able to reunite with their birth families due to a combination of luck and individual effort.

The Case of Hans: Reunion via Facebook

Hans decided to initiate his birth family search when he turned twenty-eight years old in 2013. When people learned that he was adopted, the common question he always heard was, "Do you want to meet your real parents?" He would answer, "maybe one day," but he actually never thought about it because he was not emotionally prepared to search for his birth family. However, once he got a job in Washington, D.C. as a policy maker, Hans felt he was ready to meet his birth family, especially his birth mother.

> Honestly, [I started] being more thoughtful about my mother's perspective as well [when I turned twenty-eight]. Giving birth to a child as a woman is something that you really can't forget, and I think it's natural human curiosity to think about as a mother. What happened to that child? Did I do the right thing? Did I make the right decision? At that time, I didn't really know what to expect, but I felt like I have an obligation at least to try because I would be the only person who

> could reach out to her. My parents, my adoptive parents, wouldn't do it. My friends wouldn't do it, my brother and sister wouldn't do it. I don't know if she [birth mother] would do it on her own. I felt responsibility for her to at least try. (Parentheses added)

With this sense of obligation to his birth mother, Hans started to search for his birth family. First, he did a lot of online research about adoption, such as YouTube videos about reunion experiences, adoption web-forums, and on Facebook. He also was able to find local adoptees' groups near Washington, D.C., members of which provided him with useful information about searching for birth families. After gathering information about the process on- and offline, Hans asked his adoptive mother for his adoption file. Then, he contacted Adoption Agency B in Indiana, which was partnered with Holt Children's Services in South Korea.

> I called them to ask for information and asked them what it would look like to do a birth family search for an adult adoptee...so they sent a bunch of forms and asked me [to pay a processing fee] …I think it was about $160 something.[229] I filled out all the forms and gave them copies and other records my [adoptive] mom had. And they told me they would talk to Holt Korea, which is the agency they partnered with at that time. And then I was just sort of waiting for them and they were really, really slow to respond to me. I always felt like I was the only one who was trying to find information. I called again and again and never heard from the social worker…In terms of timeline, probably like the spring of 2013, February or March, they said they sent my information to Holt Korea. And then actually I got a message from them [Adoption Agency B] again, probably in June, that they had translated a letter from my mother…It was very exciting, but it was so hard to get more information from my biological family. The process was like…I would write a letter to Adoption Agency B, then they would give it to Holt, then they would translate and give it to my biological mother. And they were waiting for her to respond...so my communication was only able to be through Adoption Agency B. I think over two years, I was able to exchange maybe three letters with her. And once I would write a letter, I would wait a couple of months... It was very frustrating. (Parentheses added)

---

[229] The processing fee for birth family searches varies by adoption agency, ranging from $150 to $400.

Even though Hans was able to find his birth mother, it was very hard to keep in touch with her. While he was waiting for her responses, he sometimes got caught up in worry because of fearful thoughts, such as: What if she isn't responding because she doesn't want to talk with me anymore? What if I said something wrong in my last letter and upset her or made her situation worse? When I interviewed her, Hans's birth mother Kyungju told me that she had the same worries while she was waiting for his responses. However, they became better able to contact each other after 2014 because they started to communicate directly via Facebook.

> She [birth mother] found me through Facebook. She sent me an emoji and I remember the first message she sent went into my inbox. Since we were not Facebook friends, I couldn't see it at first and she sent more messages on my birthday in 2014. Then I knew it was her since she sent me her picture when we made contact through the adoption agency, but I didn't know her name at that time. It was very confusing for a while, but I finally figured out she was my birth mother. (Parentheses added)

Kyungju sent Hans an emoji because she did not know what to say to him, and there was also a language barrier between them. After that, Kyungju sent her messages in Korean and then Hans asked his Korean friends[230] to translate her messages. He then wrote his own messages in English and then again asked his Korean friends to translate so he could send those to her. Even though it took some time, Facebook was a much faster way for Hans to communicate with his birth mother, rather than depending on adoption agencies. The sense of obligation that

---

[230] I was one of Hans's Korean friends who helped translate his letters. Therefore, I easily became involved with Hans and Kyungju. When I met Kyungju, she probably felt comfortable with me since I already knew some about her situation, such as that she married after sending Hans for adoption, she has two children from the marriage, and she did not tell her husband about Hans. Therefore, Kyungju did not need to explain all about her situation to me.

Hans had to his birth mother led him to start his birth family search, and Kyungju's messages through Facebook easily facilitated their conversations.

The more he talked with his birth mother, the more Hans wanted to meet her. Therefore, Hans started looking for a way to reunite with Kyungju in person, since he did not know how or when he should meet her on his own. He mentioned that he wanted to do it as soon as possible. Hans asked his adoptee friends, and they recommended that he apply to participate in Tour A. He applied for Tour A and was accepted. Kim,[231] the founder and leader of the organization that runs Tour A, volunteered to help organize his meeting with Kyungju. Therefore, Hans was able to reunite with his birth mother in the summer of 2015 while he was on the tour.

The Case of Emma: I Just Got Lucky

Emma was born in 1986 and adopted in March 1987 by a couple who lived in Iowa. Her adoptive mother could not bear a child, so they first adopted a son from South Korea and then Emma two years later. When she turned eight years old, the family moved to Sacramento, California. Growing up, Emma always felt like she was alone and that she was not close to anyone else, including her adoptive parents and friends. According to her, while her adoptive mother was close with her adoptive brother, she always criticized Emma about her appearance and her friends, especially her Asian friends. When she was in high school, Emma tried to get along with her Korean

[231] Kim is a middle-aged, native Korean woman who currently lives in the United States and who had previously volunteered for a U.S. adoption agency. She arranged the entire program schedule herself and also helped participants search for their birth families.

American friends, but she could not fit into Korean culture and she felt that she was an alien among them.

When she was nineteen years old, Emma got together with her first boyfriend and it was the first time she felt close to anyone. After they broke up when she was twenty-three years old, Emma started to see a therapist because she felt alone again. The therapist told her that she had abandonment issues because she was adopted. When Emma first heard this, she thought, “This lady is crazy since I don’t even remember anything about my adoption.” However, Emma could not stop thinking about her adoption, and she started wanting to know where she came from. Her ex-boyfriend was Chinese American and she observed that he knew where he came from and was connected to his own culture. Like him, Emma also wanted to know about her Korean heritage. Therefore, she asked her adoptive mother to support her in finding her birth family and learning about Korea. However, her adoptive mother was very defensive and could not understand Emma’s request because her brother had never asked those things.

Therefore, Emma started to learn about South Korea by herself. She contacted Holt and they said that she needed about $4,000 to arrange a visit, which she could not afford. Therefore, Emma searched for information about motherland tours. She heard about the organization that ran Tour A from other Korean adoptees and found out that by participating in a tour, she would only need to pay for her plane tickets. Therefore, Emma applied and was able to visit South Korea in 2013 through the tour. During the tour, however, she visited Holt and was very disappointed about the social

workers' attitudes toward adoptees and that she could not get any information from them. As a result, Emma was not able to reunite with her birth mother in 2013.

> During the tour, we got to Holt, and Holt was not helpful at all. Actually, it was a terrible experience. All of us felt that way because we got there and all of us were very nervous because we were hoping to find out information about our birth mothers…A social worker greeted us…The woman that greeted us in a conference room made a two-minute speech, like "Welcome to Korea and welcome to Holt"...And then she said, basically, "We're sorry we failed you, we failed all of you" ...and we were like, "What? What are you talking about?" ... They failed at helping us find any new information…We just got here and you are telling us within the first two minutes, that is not exactly the best way to start conversations, especially for people who came half way around the world to find out our history...After that, she was like, "Okay, now we are going to watch a video for Holt and then we will take each of you to a room to talk about your files." So we sat and watched the five-minute promotion video for Holt about how Holt is wonderful and how Holt helps children. Each of us met different social workers...We were going into the room and... "I was wondering if you [social worker] would tell me if there was extra information there," and she [social worker] was like, "We do have more information, but we can't give it to you," and I said, "Why can't you give it to me?" and she was like, "We need your birth mother's permission"…I was so frustrated…(Parentheses added)

After coming back to America following the tour in summer 2013, Emma was not told anything about her birth family, but she began getting ready to go back again in 2014. However, Kim had been searching for Emma's birth mother on her own since 2013.

> Kim was able to get some extra information from Holt, that my mother is from Jeju Island in Korea. Because my birth mother is from Jeju and Jeju is small...there can't be many schools in Jeju, especially since she is not from mainland Jeju. She is from a small island near Jeju...Kim decided to call schools on the island. She called elementary schools and she asked them, "I am looking for more information about this person, can you confirm this person was a student here?" and they confirmed that the name was familiar...because my birth mother's name is very uncommon and so they confirmed that there was a student there…so it's surprising that they gave the information over the phone, so I just got lucky that Kim was able to do that. After Kim

took that information...she gave it to Lee[232] and he found her…So Kim asked me if I was okay to meet my birth mother, but I was terrified because she obviously didn't know that I was coming to Korea...I didn't know what to expect. I just assumed that she gave me up for a reason…what if she doesn't want to meet me? What if she already remarried? You know, what if, what if, what if I caused issues in her life and made it difficult for her? I definitely don't want to do that... and so I had to make a decision two weeks before I left America and I knew that if I didn't do it, I would feel guilty about her and myself, so I decided that [I am going to search for my birth mother] …but I was terrified... (Parentheses added)

On June 24, 2014, Emma arrived in Seoul and called Kim. On June 25, Emma met Kim and Lee together. Lee drove somewhere that Emma didn't recognize and Kim explained that they were heading to her birth mother's house. When they arrived, Lee went to the house while Kim and Emma waited in the car. Her birth mother was not there, but there were a young kid and a man. To protect Emma's birth mother, Lee just mentioned that there was somebody from America who was looking for their birth family—not necessary related to her birth mother, but maybe someone the birth mother knew. The man gave them the birth mother's phone number and Lee came back to the car and called her.

When he called, Emma's birth mother did not respond at first, but later she answered the phone. Emma was not able to understand what Lee said, but she could hear that he referred to her Korean name several times. About five minutes later, Lee looked at Emma and said, "Congratulations." Emma's birth mother agreed to meet her about twenty minutes later at a metro station near the birth mother's house.

I was just nervous...We get to the station where we're supposed to meet her and Kim called my birth mother and she said she is inside the station…They [Lee and Kim] told me that because she remarried, we should be cautious because we don't know what kind of man he [her

[232] Lee is a police officer who has been helping adoptees search for their birth families.

> husband] is... We go to the escalator and Lee is in front of me and Kim was behind me and I was nervous...When we got up the escalator, there was a woman standing…she just looked like a random old Korean lady and she was standing at the top of the escalator…She looked at me, then I froze and she kept asking me in Korean, "Do you know who I am?" I just said, "*Annyeonghaseyo*,"[233] "*Arayo*."[234] She just looked at me and said, "How do you know who I am? How do you know my name?" I was just like, this is not good, this is not good at all...I didn't call her "*Umma*,"[235] I didn't say anything like that and I was happy that I didn't, because at that time, I realized that her husband was there and he came over to the side and introduced himself to Kim… I was scared...We went to a coffee bar near there and she just cried and hugged me and kept saying, "I am sorry, I am sorry." It was nothing like I expected... At that moment, I really didn't know what to say. I decided to say, "Thank you"…She started to explain the story to Kim. It was all in Korean and Kim realized that she needed to translate it for me. (Parentheses added)

Emma was able to reunite with her birth mother thanks to the individual efforts of Kim and Lee, not due to the adoption agency's official processes. If Emma had not joined the tour and had not met Kim, she probably would not have met her birth mother. As Emma's case shows us, many adoptees have to rely on individual luck to reunite with their birth families rather than official processes offered by adoption agencies or the government. This lack of institutional support makes it hard to search for birth families and often makes adoptees frustrated. Many adoptees I met told me that they do not believe in the Korean government or adoption agencies. Therefore, they prefer to search for their birth families through individual channels using adoptees' networks or motherland tours.

---

[233] *Annyeonghaseyo* means "hello" in Korean. Emma had been learning Korean since 2012 so she was able to speak basic Korean words.

[234] *Arayo* means "I know" in Korean.

[235] *Umma* means "mother" in Korean.

The Case of Nancy: Documents, Information, and Help

Nancy was born in 1974 and was adopted in 1975 by an American couple who lived in Minnesota. She heard about GOA'L when she was twenty-four or twenty-five years old, but she was not mentally ready to visit South Korea at that time. Like some other female adoptees, however, Nancy started to think about her birth mother when she had her first daughter in 2004. Ten years later, she felt prepared to search for her birth family. She applied to Tour B in 2014 and was able to visit South Korea in 2015.

Nancy was adopted through an individual facilitator rather than an adoption agency. Her adoptive mother had fertility issues and had several miscarriages. Her adoptive parents heard that there were many adoptable children from South Korea. Nancy's adoptive aunt was living in South Korea at that time with the U.S. army. They asked the aunt, "Hey, can you bring us a kid?" According to Nancy, it was almost like a joke. One day, her aunt was in a bar in South Korea when a Korean guy approached her and suggested that he could bring her anything she wanted. She answered, "I need a baby," and a few days later, he contacted her again and said, "I have a baby for you." She went to the house where the baby was and brought Nancy to America. This description of Nancy's adoption is based on what she heard from her aunt. I interviewed Nancy, Nancy's birth mother (Hyerim), and her birth sister (Minji). Nancy's birth mother was not involved with her adoption since she was in another town. Minji was only two years old at the time, so neither of them knew much about the process of Nancy's adoption.

According to Hyerim and Minji, Nancy's birth father was diagnosed with cancer when he was twenty-nine years old. They already had Minji, and Hyerim was

pregnant with Nancy at that time. After Nancy was born, Hyerim's husband decided to stay with Nancy in his older brother's house in a small town near Seoul. Hyerim moved far from her husband to Busan,[236] since her parents lived there and she thought she could get a job to make money for her husband and babies. She only brought Minji because her parents could not take care of both babies. Hyerim learned that her husband had passed away several days after his death, since in the 1970s, they only could use telegrams to communicate. She got the telegram late and when she arrived at her brother-in-law's house, Hyerim found out that Nancy had been adopted. Her husband's brother did not explain to Hyerim where Nancy was adopted to or by whom.

Several years later, Hyerim remarried and Minji was raised by the uncle that had put Nancy up for adoption. The brother-in-law always said to Minji, "You have your younger sister and she will find you when she turns eighteen years old, so you should keep your *Hojeok*[237] rather than switching to your husband's in order to help her find you more easily." Even though Minji did not remember her sister, she always

---

[236] Busan is South Korea's second largest city, located on the southeastern coast of South Korea.

[237] *Hojeok* is the Korean Family Registry, governed by Korea's "Act on the Registration etc. of Family Relationships." The purpose of the Act, as defined in Article 1, is "to prescribe matters concerning the registration of establishment and changes in family relations such as the birth, marriage, death, etc. of people and matters concerning certification thereof." The purpose of the Korean registry was to provide for national control of the identity of citizens of the country, to permit clear identification of each citizen as a part of a specific family unit under the control of a specified male family head who had clear authority over and responsibility for all listed family members, and to facilitate government administration, specifically including the collection of taxes. Under the "*Hoju*" system, when a daughter married, she was removed from her father's "*Hojeok*" (family register) and transferred to her husband's. In 2005, the system was modified to abolish the authority of the male family head over individual family members (Jeremy D. Morley. "The Korean Family Relations Registry and Korean Passports for Children," last modified July 27, 2016. http://www.internationalfamilylawfirm.com/2016/07/the-korean-family-relations-registry.html [accessed December 12, 2017]).

thought, "My sister will find me when she turns eighteen." However, Minji did not hear from Nancy until she turned forty.

According to Minji, her uncle had four children and they were so poor that it was hard to take care of Nancy. While he was thinking about how he could raise Nancy, a guy who worked near the U.S. army base visited his house and offered to send Nancy for adoption to the United States. He said that the potential adoptive father was a doctor[238] and the potential adoptive parents were rich. Minji's uncle thought that Nancy could have a better life in the United States with her adoptive parents. Therefore, he decided to put her up for adoption. The guy came back to Nancy's aunt and took her from them a few days later. However, the uncle felt guilty that he was not able to raise Nancy, so he often talked about her to Minji and emphasized that she should be ready when Nancy returns. The man who arranged the adoption told the uncle, "Adoptees can search for and contact their birth families when they turn eighteen years old if they want, because America is an advanced and free country."

Because of Nancy, even though Minji got married, she kept her *Hojeok* instead of changing it to her husband's *Hojeok*. Therefore, Nancy was easily able to reach out to her birth family on the second day of her trip to South Korea in September 2015. According to the staff of Tour B, who help with birth family searches, it was easier to find Nancy's birth family because Nancy's name was still on their *Hojeok*. Therefore, a police officer was able to find where Minji lived and went to Minji's house, but she was not there. Her husband was at home, and he called

[238] This was not correct information. Nancy's aunt was working as a doctor in the army, but Nancy's adoptive father was not a doctor.

Minji to ask if there was someone from America who wanted to meet her. Minji was driving at that time and according to her, she thought, "Finally!" When she arrived home, Minji called the police station. The police officer she spoke with knew that Nancy was coming to visit the police station with other tour members to find information. The police officer called the tour staff who were with them and said, "We got a phone call from Nancy's sister, could you please hurry?" The police officer told Minji, who was still on the phone, "Your sister is coming now, could you please hold for a little bit longer?" Finally, Nancy arrived at the police station, but she could not talk with Minji over the phone because of their language barrier. Instead, the tour staff talked with Minji to arrange a meeting. A few days later, Hyerim, Minji, Minji's daughter, and other relatives who remembered Nancy from when she was a baby came to Seoul to reunite with her.

When they met for the first time, Nancy's birth family asked her, "Why did it take so long? We were waiting for you to find us. You were supposed to find us when you became an adult." They believed that Nancy would find them as soon as she became an adult. However, Nancy was more prepared to be rejected by her birth family than to find and meet up with them because her adoptive parents and aunt had always told her that her birth family could not raise her because they were too poor. Therefore, Nancy thought that they might still not want her. However, when they asked this question, Nancy thought, "I had no idea—I had no idea they were waiting for me. Actually it was really hard and overwhelming."

Unlike adoptees who were adopted through agencies, Nancy's case was a private adoption. Luckily, Nancy's birth family kept her on their *Hojeok*, so they were

able to reunite quickly. Nancy's case demonstrates that the search process can be easier if there are reliable documents, access to information, and help from institutions such as the police.

Stories with Happy Endings? Post-Reunion Experiences

The perspectives of receiving regions—North America, Scandinavia, and Western Europe—have dominated the field of adoption studies. In particular, researchers from social work and psychology focus on adoptees' adjustment and attachment to their adoptive families as well as assimilation to the receiving countries. The informants for these studies are mainly adolescent adoptees and their adoptive parents. In this research, adoptees are considered as if they did not exist before adoption, and the lives of adult adoptees are given little attention. However, adoption is an event that influences adoptees' entire lives as well as the lives of birth mothers and adoptive mothers—adoption is an open-ended and unfinished process. In addition, reunions of adoptees and their birth families do not mean the end of adoption processes, but rather, that adoptees and their two mothers begin another phase of their lives. Therefore, I will explore how adult adoptees and their birth and adoptive mothers manage the issues that arise after reuniting.

The Three Stories of Emma

Throughout her life, Emma never felt that she fit in with certain groups of people, including her adoptive family, neighborhood, white friends, and Korean American friends. When she participated in a motherland tour in 2013, Emma felt that she

connected with the other adoptee members and wanted to belong to her own Korean culture. Therefore, Emma decided to return to Korea on her own in 2014, and she reunited with her birth mother. After reuniting with her mom, Emma felt that she found some of the pieces of herself that she had been missing throughout her entire life.

> The longing that I had, probably through my whole life, has gone…I finally found peace…By the next day [after meeting my birth mother], I felt at peace, so that was good… (Parentheses added)

However, Emma only had peace for one day. When she visited Jeju Island to meet her grandparents, uncles, cousins, and other relatives who lived there, Emma started to feel nervous since she thought she would not fit into her biological family either.

> It [the reunion] wasn't over, my struggle. There will be a whole other set of challenges just...I was nervous when she [birth mother] took me to Jeju, it was just me and her...She took me to Jeju to meet her parents, like my grandmother and grandfather. I think she was one of five children, and I met her second brother and his sons...I couldn't sleep that night...There were whole family dynamics because it was so different [from her American family]... A Korean family seems very close, but I have been living by myself, not dependent on my American family. (Parentheses added)

Even though Emma thought she was different from Korean people, including her birth family, she still wanted to be Korean and wanted to be included in Korean family and society. Therefore, Emma visited Korea again in 2015 in order to build her relationship with her birth family and become more "Korean." However, when I met Emma for the first time, she was still frustrated about being "not Korean enough," and she had challenges in building her relationship with her birth mother. Therefore, I

explore what difficulties Emma had in building a relationship with her birth mother and what factors made her feel "not Korean enough."

The first difficulty that Emma had with her birth mother came from her sense of guilt. Emma had been worried about having an unwanted teenage pregnancy because her adoptive parents told her that her birth mother became pregnant at sixteen years old. However, she found out that this was not true. Emma felt guilty because she had been blaming her birth mother throughout her entire life up until that point.

> So growing up, it was never a secret that I was adopted, and when I asked why, they [adoptive parents] said that my birth mother was sixteen when she had me and couldn't take care of me because she didn't have any family...so she wanted to give me a better life. Because of that story, two things came to mind, that I was an accident or possibly the result of rape or prostitution...There was no reason to search because I was probably unwanted...So that's why I've never felt connected to my adoption when I was growing up... (Parentheses added)
>
> I got my file for the first time when I was twenty-five years old, and in my file there was another story. There was identifying information for both my birth father and birth mother. My birth father was twenty-four years old and my birth mother was twenty-two years old. They met at night school and they dated for years...My birth mother got pregnant and she told my birth father about it and he left her...Because she didn't have enough money to take care of me and she couldn't tell her family about me…she decided to give me up to give me a better life...I was shocked because I was lied to throughout my whole life, whether it was intentional or unintentional. I just knew that I needed to at least make an attempt to search for her because she could be out there...

The story that her adoptive parents had told Emma influenced her life until she got the adoption files. Emma always wished not to have a baby when she was a teenager like her birth mother, who might have been raped or been a prostitute. However, when she found the file, Emma decided to initiate a search for her birth

mother since she thought that her birth mother might be waiting for her. However, after reuniting, Emma realized that there was a third story about her adoption.

> There was exactly a third story there...My birth father didn't leave her…Right after she gave birth to me, I was taken from her...She never even got to see my face, like literally right after she gave birth to me. And she thinks it was my birth father who took me away and gave me to the adoption agency...For two or three days she kept asking, "Where is my child? Where is my child?'...and nobody [people in the hospital such as doctors and nurses] told her anything. Nobody told her. My birth mother and father weren't married when they had me, but they were still together and then a couple years later they had another child. They had a son, and then they got married, and then a couple years after that they had another son, so they have two. I have two brothers...but then they [the birth parents] separated...and he took the boys with him. She still had contact with them, but when the youngest was in fifth grade, my birth father changed their phone numbers and she couldn't contact them again. (Parentheses added)
>
> When I heard that…I was twenty-eight years old at that time, for twenty-eight years, I was thinking that she didn't want me or she gave me away for a reason... I felt guilty, I felt extremely guilty... She must have had a harder time...everything she had to go through was just because of my existence...I can't imagine what that would feel like to lose a child or be thinking of a lost child...So, she lost three children to my birth father, one she thought died and two were taken away from her…When I found out, I felt terrible because she had much more difficulty than I did…

The sense of guilt that she had as a result of being misled her entire life prevented Emma from getting close to her birth mother. Emma had a bunch of questions about her adoption, including what kind of man her birth father was, what her birth brothers looked like, and if her birth mother's life was hard. However, she could not ask any of these things because it might hurt her birth mother's feelings. For instance, Emma thought that her birth father and brothers could fill in another part of her life so she wanted to know about them. However, Emma decided not to ask her birth mother about them.

Second, Emma and her birth mother could not find a way to resolve their misunderstandings because of the language barrier. Emma knew that her date of birth was November 16, but her birth mother told her that this was not accurate. The date of birth was important to Emma since she had been thinking that this information was the only accurate thing about her from her adoption files. Therefore, when her birth mother told Emma that, she was very upset, but she could not express her feelings since she did not want to ruin their relationship. In addition, Emma could not explain why the date was so significant to her and she could not understand why her birth mother said her birth date was not correct. It might be because Emma's birth mother did not remember or the information was written incorrectly in the adoption file. However, they could not communicate at all about the date of birth.

> I think she feels guilty, and I think the fact that we can't communicate makes her feel more guilty because, not that she did anything wrong…But she feels extremely guilty because I don't know my language, and I don't know my culture, and we can't communicate.

Emma and her birth mother each felt guilty toward one another. Both of them wanted to build their new relationship, but their language barrier made it hard for them to communicate. The miscommunication built misunderstanding instead of a relationship.

Third, Emma did not want to spend much time with her birth mother and her husband since they infantilized Emma and did not treat her like an adult. This made Emma feel that she was "not Korean enough" and that she always had to learn about Korean culture and adapt to Korean society. In particular, Emma was having issues with her birth mother's husband. Her birth mother remarried and was raising his son

from a previous marriage. Her husband liked Emma a lot and even wanted to change her Korean family name to his family name.

> Here [in South Korea], I do not feel like an adult at all. I feel like a child because they [birth mother and her husband] do everything for me. Maybe they are worried about me; they kept asking me who I'm going to meet, what's their number, where I will meet them...If I go somewhere, she asks, "Can you do it?" I am staying in a separate apartment, not their house. When I visit their house, they do not want me to take a bus or the metro. I argue that I will take a bus…And he [birth mother's husband] was waiting for me at the bus stop... I feel embarrassed…I feel like I can't do anything by myself, but in the States doing things for myself is very normal. (Parentheses added)

Even though Emma had met her birth mother and visited Korea three times, she still felt that she was "not Korean enough" in her family as well as in Korean society. In addition, it was not easy for Emma to build her relationship with her birth mother because each of them had a sense of guilt about the other, so they could not talk honestly about what they felt, what they thought, or what they wanted to know. Also, they were often frustrated because of the language barrier that meant they kept misunderstanding each other.

Emma thought her struggles related to the birth family search and reunion process were because of Holt. She wondered, "What if Holt had not falsified the story about my birth mother? Then I would not have thought she might have been a prostitute and then I wouldn't have blamed her throughout my entire life. Why did Holt not give me information about my mother? Why couldn't they contact my mother? Even individuals like Kim and Lee could do that…"

As Emma argues, adoption agencies in the past have falsified many adoption documents in order to have more "adoptable" children. The Korean government also bears responsibility for not regulating these agencies. One of the social workers

employed by an orphanage in South Korea told me that she felt so sorry whenever adult adoptees visited the institution to see their files since the orphanage had few records for them. She confessed that adoption agencies and the Korean government had sold babies in order to make U.S. dollars. It was more important to quickly put children up for adoption than it was to keep accurate documents.

Transnational adoptees and their birth families are a peculiar example of parents and children who are unable to communicate with each other. Because many adoptees do not have accurate adoption files, they might have incorrect information about their birth parents and might find it hard to reunite with them. In addition, when they are adopted to another country, adoptees often lose their own roots, culture, and language (or form new, culture, and language). When they return to their home country and reunite with their birth families, adoptees' miscommunication and misunderstanding can continue because of linguistic and cultural barriers.

Nancy: I Was as Always a Part of My Family

On September 23, 2015, I was having dental surgery in the morning when I got a phone call from GOA'L. They asked me to interpret for an adoptee and her recently reunited birth family. Since I was still under anesthesia, I told them it would be better to find another interpreter. However, they asked me again because even though the other interpreter, a Korean adoptee and staff member at GOA'L, speaks Korean fluently, he was not able to understand Hyerim's Gyeongsang[239] dialect when he tried

[239] Gyeongsang is located in the southeastern part of South Korea.

to help them the first time. I was the only interpreter they knew from Gyeongsang province, so I went to Insa-dong[240] to meet them.

When I met Hyerim, Minji, and Nancy for the first time in Insa-dong, none of them smiled or laughed. All of them looked so nervous and they did not talk much. We went to a Korean restaurant and Hyerim kept telling Nancy, "Why don't you eat more? Eat this fish and seafood." However, Nancy did not like seafood, and she asked me why Hyerim kept saying, "Eat more." I had to explain to Nancy that feeding their children is very important to most Korean mothers, and Hyerim lives near the seashore so she likes seafood a lot and probably wanted Nancy to enjoy it as well.

After having lunch, we moved on to shops around Insa-dong that sell traditional Korean accessories, goods, and foods. Hyerim wanted to buy a traditional Korean hair accessory for Nancy, but Minji paid for it since Minji did not like her mother spending money. After shopping for about an hour, we went to a café to have tea. They still did not talk a lot, instead Hyerim asked Nancy when she could meet her again and what she wanted to do next. Nancy whispered to me, "I want to go home right now and I want to spend the rest of the trip days with other tour members." I did not know how to say this to Hyerim and Minji, so I just said to them, "Nancy has to go soon since the tour members have their schedule and she is not sure about her schedule the rest of the days." Hyerim and Minji seemed very disappointed, and Hyerim said, "I want to cook for you; it would be better if you could stay with me for

[240] Insa-dong is a neighborhood of the Jongno-gu district of Seoul. Insa-dong is famous for its historical atmosphere, so there are always lots of travelers and foreigners in this area who want to experience a traditional Korean environment.

more days before you leave." However, Nancy did not want to and she wanted to leave the café as soon as possible. Nancy and I hailed a taxi and we said goodbye to Hyerim and Minji. Minji gave me about ten dollars for the taxi fare, and Minji and Hyerim watched us through the window until we left.

I had interviews with Minji, Hyerim, and Nancy after the meeting, and I was able to learn what they felt when they met together, what they had been struggling with, and why they did not talk a lot when they met. I was able to interview Nancy in 2016 in Minnesota where she lives. Nancy was having a hard time after the reunion since she realized that she had misunderstood her birth mother her entire life.

> When I was growing up, I'd always heard from my adoptive parents that, "They [birth family] didn't want you, they couldn't afford you, they sent you away for a better life." …My birth mother had nothing to do with [my adoption], she really had nothing to do with it. She was in Busan and the decision was made without her…They [birth family] did want me, they always wanted me. That they still considered me part of their family was one of the hardest things for me to hear. I heard that whenever my family gathered they talked about me like how I was a cute child, and just two weeks before I went to Korea, all of the relatives met together and talked about me again, such as when I was going to reach out to them (Nancy was crying). (Parentheses added)

Nancy was expecting to be rejected by her birth family when she started searching. However, when she reunited with them, she realized that she was always a part of the family and that they had been waiting for her for a long time. Like Emma, Nancy felt a sense of guilt toward her birth family since they had waited for her, particularly when she found out that her birth mother was not involved in her adoption. While having the interview, Nancy told me several times that "it was overwhelming." She found her birth family so quickly, which she did not expect. In

addition, Nancy had considered herself an "unwanted child" throughout her entire life, but she was not. All of the facts that she found out through the reunion with her birth family made Nancy feel overwhelmed.

I interviewed Minji in November 2015 at a hospital because she had to have checkups regularly since she had a kidney transplant several years ago.[241]

> When I got diagnosed, I was twenty-eight years old. My dad died when he was twenty-nine, so my mom started to worry about me a lot. I thought I had to find my sister for my mother since I might die. I did everything I could to find her, but it didn't work. The guy who facilitated the adoption told my uncle that she could find us whenever she wants when she becomes an adult, but she didn't. I was worried about her…What if she was dead, had an accident, had difficulties, or was very poor. Or, I thought she didn't want to meet us.

Transnational adoption leads adoptees and their birth families to live "what if" lives. Nancy had thought, "What if they do not want to meet me?" Minji had also lived a "what if" life by thinking, "What if something happened to Nancy, or what if Nancy did not want to reach out to us?" Minji felt complicated and ambivalent emotions after meeting her sister.

> When I met Nancy, I had mixed feelings so I couldn't hug her. I was raised by my uncle since I was seven years old. My mom remarried and I couldn't even call her "mom." I had to call her "aunt." I was a secret to her new husband until I went to middle school. So, when I met Nancy for the first time, I thought that like her, I wasn't raised by my mother…But at least, I know my roots and I lived with family, so I felt sorry for her…After meeting her, I had a hard time for several days since I was thinking that I had another responsibility. I had to take care of my daughter, husband, his family, my mother, and my aunt too. To have another responsibility was too heavy for me and it would be a burden…Considering my sister as another burden was the hardest thing for me.

[241] Minji had a serious issue with her kidneys when she was twenty-eight years old, so her mother, Hyerim, donated a kidney to Minji.

When I met them all together, Minji paid for everything, such as food, gifts for Nancy, tea, and the taxi fare. Minji thought it was her responsibility. Nancy was able to pay it, but she did not want to be rude since she heard from other adoptee friends that elders usually pay in Korean culture. When I met Minji and Nancy separately, both of them asked about their sister's culture. For example, Minji asked me what Americans like or do not like, and Nancy asked what kinds of behaviors are rude in Korean culture. Minji and Nancy did not know each other's pasts, how they were raised, or how they lived. These sisters also could not share enough about their present lives because of language barriers and cultural ignorance.

On November 10, 2015, Minji and I visited the rural area where Hyerim lives in order to help her video chat with Nancy. After Nancy returned to the States, Hyerim wanted to contact Nancy every day, but it was hard. Since she did not have a smartphone or speak English, Hyerim could not text Nancy, so Minji and I visited her house together. Hyerim is a farmer and November is a busy season with the harvest. Her house was filled with rice, sesame, and other grains. She did not have internet in her house, so we used Minji's cell phone data. Before we started to video chat with Nancy, Hyerim and Minji put makeup on their faces. It was morning in Korea and late at night in the United States. Hyerim was able to see Nancy's husband, and she kept saying "thank you, thank you" to him for loving and taking care of her daughter. She also repeated, "I am so sorry because I could not keep and raise you. I really appreciate my son-in-law, and he looks like a nice person." Most of the time she asked what Nancy needed from Korea and what she wanted to eat. Nancy told her the brand name of Korean cookies that she liked. They had a casual conversation about

how Nancy's two daughters are doing even though she had not yet told her children about her reunion. They also planned Nancy's next trip. After having around thirty minutes to video chat with Nancy, I was able to talk with Hyerim.

> When I had a phone call from Minji about Nancy wanting to reunite, I couldn't say anything to her and I couldn't cry in front of Minji. I just called my sister and cried a lot. My husband was perplexed when I started to cry after getting the call. I hadn't talked about Nancy to my husband since I already abandoned Minji to get remarried. Minji and Nancy, both of them are *Han*[242] to me…When I met Nancy, I did not know what I could say, what I could do for her since I don't know anything about her and we could not communicate. When she asked me, "Why did you leave my father who was sick and me, who was only an infant?" I could not answer enough to explain the situation. Everything was like an excuse. Even though I didn't know about her adoption, I couldn't keep her and couldn't raise my two daughters…I am not even a mother…I am not a mother… After she returned to America, every day I missed her but I couldn't call or text her. I wanted to ask Minji if Nancy is doing well, but I can't because I couldn't raise Minji either…

After getting remarried, Hyerim had a son and daughter. She could not talk about Minji to her husband for a while because remarriage was a kind of shame for women in the 1970s. Since her husband found out about Minji's existence, however, Minji and Hyerim's new husband have had a good relationship. In addition, when Hyerim told her husband about Nancy after getting the phone call about her, he understood the situation. However, her youngest daughter blamed Hyerim, saying, "You are spiteful, how could you abandon two children?"

Hyerim did not "abandon" Nancy, and she worked to send money for Minji. Even though she hid Minji from her husband for a while, Hyerim took care of Minji financially and tried to visit her regularly. She always wanted to search for Nancy, but

---

[242] It is hard to find an adequate translation for *Han* in English. *Han* is a very deep feeling that is a mixture of resentment, regret, bitterness, rancor, and deep sorrow.

she did not know how to do it since she did not have any clues about Nancy's adoption. Hyerim asked Minji to search for Nancy, but she tried not to ask often because she felt guilty toward Minji as well.

Hyerim continued her motherhood for Minji and Nancy under the circumstances she faced. However, Hyerim did not tell Nancy that she did not abandon her until other relatives explained the situation. Hyerim thought that since she could not keep her children, she did not deserve to make excuses. While I was interviewing her, most times Hyerim just repeated, "I am not a mother, I am sorry for both of them." After helping them as a translator when they met all together and for their video chat, I thought it might be hard for these women to develop their relationships since Hyerim, Minji, and Nancy all had complicated, mixed feelings about each other that they did not want to share for fear of hurting one another. However, when I met them the next time, I thought they might be able to build their relationships in a positive way.

On December 14, 2015, I visited the city where Minji lives and Hyerim visited Minji's house as well so we could video chat with Nancy a second time. Again, Hyerim and Minji put on makeup before the call since they wanted to show Nancy their happy faces. Minji's husband also joined the chat. They made a detailed plan for Nancy's next trip. This time, Hyerim said, "I am sorry" less than before. Instead, she said, "thank you for having a good life." Hyerim promised Nancy that she would learn English because she was not that busy in the winter time. Nancy's husband joined the chat again. All of them—Hyerim, Minji, Minji's husband, Nancy, and Nancy's husband—laughed a lot while talking about the gifts they exchanged via

international mail and planning for Nancy's next trip. Minji told me that she decided to save money little by little to prepare for Nancy's visit rather than just feeling burdened. Nancy visited her birth family in 2016 and 2017 as well. I had phone calls with Nancy before she visited in 2016 since she was so nervous, but she texted me when she visited Korea again in 2017 and she seemed very happy and not nervous anymore. I did not hear detailed stories about her 2016 and 2017 visits, but I talked with Minji and Nancy briefly and heard that they had a good time and have been growing close.

Just as adoption is an open-ended and unfinished process, reunion is an open-ended story too. The case of transnational adoption is different from domestic adoption because there are issues of language and cultural differences, and most families have been separated for decades. With complicated feelings for one another, it is not easy for adoptees and their birth families to fill in the time gap. However, Nancy, Hyerim, and Minji's case shows that there is the possibility of building up relationships by negotiating and learning about each other.

Hans: There Is No Room for Exclusion

Hans went to South Korea with his adoptive mother, Sara, in order to reunite with his birth mother, Kyungju. Hans's adoptive siblings had reunited with their birth mother about three years prior.[243] Hans recalled that their reunion process was hurtful for him and their adoptive mother.

---

[243] Sara and her husband adopted Hans in June 1985 when he was four months old. Then, two years later, they adopted biological siblings Julia and Daniel. Julia was seven years old and Daniel was three years old when they were adopted. Hans was the youngest child of the family, but at the same time, he was Sara's first child.

> I can tell my mom was hurt by the whole thing [his adoptive sister's birth family search] and for me too. I definitely felt like my mom and I were outside of the whole experience for my sister. (Parentheses added)

Sara told me that she could understand and accept her adoptive daughter's birth family search because her daughter was an adult, but she was wondering about the process and wanted to know more about it. However, she did not have many chances to talk about it with her daughter.

Many adoptees hesitate or postpone their birth family search because they fear hurting their adoptive parents and they feel disloyal or that they might be betraying their adoptive families.[244] When Hans initiated his birth family search, he thought it might negatively influence his adoptive mother and did not want to make her feel bad. So, he did not tell her before making his decision to go to South Korea. However, once he made up his mind to go, Hans asked his adoptive mother to reunite with his birth mother as well.

> I wanted to be sure that she [adoptive mother] knew that it [reunion] wasn't something against her…To me, she is a part of this whole experience as well... Actually seeing my moms together, my adoptive mom and my biological mom, was really meaningful for me and for them, too. They both have a genuine love and appreciation for each other as well, through me, and I thought it was special. (Parentheses added)

Kyungju told me that she and Hans are lucky that he was adopted by "such a great woman." Kyungju, Hans, and a translator all met together when they reunited. When they met the first time, Kyungju was able to explain the circumstances

---

[244] Robert Anderson. "The nature of adoptee search: Adventure, cure or growth," *Child Welfare* 68 (1989): 623-632; Lee Campbell, Phyllis Silverman and Patricia Patti. "Reunions between adoptees and birth parents: The adoptees' experience," *Social Work* 36 (1991): 329-335; Paul Sachdev. "Adoption reunion and after: A study of the search process and experience of adoptees," *Child Welfare* 71 (1992): 53-67; Jean A. Strauss. *Birthright: The guide to search and reunion for adoptees, birthparents, and adoptive parents* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

regarding Hans's adoption and how she had lived. The next day, Sara, Kyungju, Hans, and a translator met together. Kyungju remembered that she did not talk much, but she kept saying, "thank you, thank you" to Sara because Sara raised "their child"[245] very well.

When I interviewed Sara in 2016, she told me that Kyungju approved of her as a good mother.

> He [Hans] really wanted me to go. I felt I needed to meet her, and I am glad I did. Even though I can't speak Korean, I could fill in a lot of things about Hans's early days for his mom [Kyungju] …Otherwise, I think his mother would be feeling restricted about him…She must have had a burden on her shoulders for her entire life, but when she met Hans again, she was just happier…I tried to talk to her about when he was little and how I raised her kid to be an independent person…I feel like she approved of me…So, we both enjoyed our time. Nobody was excluded and there was no room for excluding anybody. (Parentheses added)

Sara was happy because she and Kyungju can share about their "special baby" in the future. However, she was not actively involved in the reunion processes of her other children. When she visited Korea, she was able to meet their birth mother, but her children did not want to include Sara in the process.[246] Sara felt guilty toward her other adoptive children since Hans was always the priority for her and her husband and thus she was not as close to the other siblings. I assume that this is why Sara's

---

[245] During my field work, I had met Kyungju several times and she talked about the reunion experiences often. Sometimes, she mentioned Hans as "my son," but most times she called Hans "our son."

[246] Hans told me that his adoptive parents adopted Julia and Daniel for Hans's "best interest" because they wanted him to have siblings, but he said it was not for the best interests of Julia and Daniel. I was able to learn through Hans that Sara has had many issues with Julia and Daniel. Even though she has had a good relationship with Julia since Julia got married and had children, she still has issues with Daniel. When she mentioned her relationship with Daniel, Sara showed her tears a little bit. Answers to most of my questions ended with stories about Hans even if I had asked about Julia and Daniel. This might be because I am a friend of Hans, or it might be because Sara feels closer to Hans than to Julia and Daniel. Sara seems to feel guilty that she is not a good or fair mother for Julia and Daniel and regrets that.

other children did not share their search processes with her, and this exclusion from the search hurt Hans and Sara.

In contrast to Hans's successful reunion story, Emma and Nancy did not get support from their adoptive mothers, so they also did not share their reunions with their adoptive mothers for a while. Emma's and Nancy's adoptive mothers did not understand why they wanted to go to Korea and search for their birth families. According to Emma, when she told her adoptive parents about her reunion, they were terrified and her adoptive mother said, "Your birth mother doesn't look like you." When Nancy told her adoptive mother that she was going to visit Korea, she kept asking her, "Why are you going…why are you going?" Nancy did not tell her adoptive mother that she met her birth mother because Nancy thought that her adoptive mother wanted Nancy to be her daughter only. Many adoptive mothers have a fear of losing their children and feel insecure since they think they cannot be the real mother if their children reunite with their birth mothers. In addition, adoptive mothers often struggle with a sense of competition with their children's birth mothers, feeling threatened, and feeling judged about their ability as parents.[247]

As the case of Hans demonstrates, when adoptees, adoptive mothers, and birth mothers prepare to reunite and support each other, the reunion can be a healing and reconciling event for all of them. For example, Hans could feel unconditional love from two mothers, Kyungju did not need to worry anymore about whether Hans was alive or doing well, and she was able to forgive herself after their reunion. Also, Sara was happy because she felt like Kyungju approved of her as a real mother and she

---

[247] Gabrielle A. Petta and Lyndall G. Steed. "The Experience of Adoptive Parents in Adoption Reunion Relationships," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 75, no. 2 (2005): 230-241.

enjoyed finding someone with whom she can share about Hans. However, as the cases of Nancy and Emma show, many adoptees and adoptive mothers struggle if adoptees initiate birth family searches because of the fear that adoptees' new relationships with their birth parents might negatively influence the relationships between adoptees and their adoptive parents.

Conclusion: Living in Fear

Through this study, I explored why birth family searches are difficult and discussed the reunion experiences of Korean transnational adoptees. First, many adoption documents do not have correct information since, in the past, adoption agencies were pressured to provide more "adoptable" children and the Korean government did not regulate these agencies. Second, when adoptees return to South Korea and initiate their birth family searches, there is a lack of institutional, professional, and official support from adoption agencies and the government. Because of these deficits in the official process, many adoptees do not believe the information obtained through adoption agencies and government channels. Instead, they have to or prefer to rely on individual effort and luck. Third, when adoptees reunite with their birth families, it is hard to build a "real parent-child relationship"[248] due to language barriers and cultural ignorance. Through transnational adoption, children and parents are separated for a long time. When they reunite, it is hard to communicate and become close with one another because the children were adopted to a different place and culture. This is a unique and sad phenomenon that happens only between transnational adoptees and their birth families.

[248] Hans told me that sometimes he felt that it was hard to have a real mother-son relationship with Kyungju because of the language barrier.

Finally, adoptees, adoptive mothers, and birth mothers have fear from the moment of adoption that continues throughout the reunion process. This fear comes from the uncertainty related to adoption and leads them to live "what if" lives. For example, adoptees ask themselves, "What if I had not been adopted? What if my birth parents do not want me back? What if I hurt my adoptive parents' feelings? What if I ruin my birth mother's life by reaching out to her?" Adoptive mothers live "what if" lives by asking, "What if I am not a good enough mother? What if I lose my child?" and birth mothers also ask, "What if my child is not alive? What if my child was having a bad life? What if my child is disappointed with me when we reunite?" These "what if" questions can be solved after reuniting by having conversations and getting to know each other. But again, the sense of guilt that adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers have toward each other as well as the misunderstandings that result from a non-transparent adoption process prevent them from reconciling with each other and with their pasts. The non-transparency of past adoptions and the lack of official support for birth family searches in the present influence the futures of adoptees and their two mothers.

Chapter 6: Transnational Solidarity among Adoptees, Birth Mothers, and Adoptive Mothers

Is Transnational Solidarity Possible?

When I began this project in 2012, I had a binary perspective on adoption: it was either humanistic altruism or cultural imperialism. Because I was aware of some of the problems created by adoption, I mostly saw it as the latter. In my research, I planned to critique global inequality in terms of race, class, and nationality by comparing the circumstances of Korean birth mothers and American adoptive mothers in order to demonstrate who has more privilege and who has less. However, the more I interviewed Korean adoptees and their two mothers, the more I could see complexity of transnational adoption. In addition, by listening to the lived experiences of adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers, I was better able to understand their struggles.

I began this project by following the journeys of adoptee returnees by participating in their motherland tours and volunteering to help with their birth family searches during my fieldwork in 2015. In chapter two, I examined the motives for their returning movement and experiences in their homeland of South Korea. In contrast to other scholars who have explained the returning of Korean adoptees in terms of socio-political, cultural, and economic reasons such as globalization and neoliberalism led by the Korean government, I argue that one significant reason for adoptees' returning is their conceptualizations of their Korean birth mothers. Many adoptees return to South Korea to find their "roots" and "heritage," which they seek to achieve by searching for their birth parents, especially their birth mothers. This is because many Korean adoptees have certain preconceived notions about their birth

mothers. In particular, I argue that during visits to adoption agencies, orphanages, and conversations with birth mothers, Korean adoptees' tours reinforce images of Korean birth mothers as victims of a patriarchal society through social stereotypes about the hardships that unwed and single mothers face.

Using media analysis in chapter three, I examine how Korean adoptees imagine their birth mothers and how these images are (re)produced through public discourse. Even though Korean birth mothers may have been victimized by a patriarchal society and poverty in the past, many are now reclaiming their identities beyond victimhood by trying to search for their children and organizing their own groups, such as Dandelions. Therefore, the ways in which birth mothers continue their motherhood after voluntarily or involuntarily putting their children up for adoption can challenge the concept of "normal" motherhood.

When I interviewed returned Korean adoptees, many of them mentioned how their relationships with their adoptive mothers influenced their birth family search processes. For example, while some adoptees complained that their adoptive mothers did not want them to contact their birth mothers, others were afraid of betraying their adoptive mothers. Through these conversations, I realized that adoptees' relationships with their adoptive mothers affected their decisions about returning, their processes of searching for birth families, and their situations after reuniting. Therefore, after coming back to the United States, I interviewed adoptive mothers in order to understand the issues of transnational adoption from their perspectives.

In chapter four, I explore how American adoptive mothers struggle with their sense of guilt, gender failure, race issues with their children, and their insecurity

about being “non-traditional” mothers. I also critique how ideologies of “normal” family and motherhood influence these women’s decisions to adopt children and their identities as mothers. Even though adoptive mothers can fulfill the “essence of womanhood” by becoming mothers as a result of their class and racial privileges, they still struggle with their ambiguous identities as “real mothers.” Finally, I argue that Korean birth mothers and American adoptive mothers both have to deal with “traditional” and patriarchal notions of motherhood.

In my last chapter, I examine birth family search processes and post-reunion experiences by considering the different perspectives of adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers. Through this chapter, I argue that it is difficult for adoptees to reunite with their birth parents since many adoption documents do not have correct information. This is because adoption agencies often falsified adoption documents in order to provide more “adoptable” children and also because there is a lack of institutional, professional, and official support from adoption agencies as well as the Korean government. When adoptees reunite with their birth families, it is hard for them to build good relationships due to language barriers and cultural ignorance. In addition, all of them—adoptees, adoptive mothers, and birth mothers—have a sense of guilt toward each other as well as struggling with the misunderstandings that result from non-transparent adoption processes and long-term separations. These feelings of guilt and misunderstanding prevent them from establishing relationships.

Returning movements of Korean adoptees and their political efforts to change an adoption paradigm, formerly dominated by the Korean government and adoption agencies, led to the passage of the 2012 Act. However, a lack of mutual

understanding about the differences between adoptees, birth mothers, single mothers, and KAS has led to unexpected results. When I began this project, I read articles about the enactment of the 2012 Act and wondered whether the enactment of this law might have resulted from solidarity among adoption triads. Indeed, the 2012 Act was made possible by alliances among adoptees and birth mothers. The case of Hans in chapter five shows that mutual understanding and caring are possible among adoptees, Korean birth mothers, and American adoptive mothers. However, after finishing my fieldwork, I worried that my observations about the difficulties in these relationships had somehow led me to romanticize the possibility of building solidarity.

These experiences led me to new questions: Is transnational solidarity among different groups of people possible? Is transnational solidarity among adoptees, Korean birth mothers, and American adoptive mothers possible? What is transnational solidarity, in this context?

E. Kim regards returning Korean adoptees' organizations as an "imagined community"[249] that resists and negotiates the granting of "Koreanness" by the South Korean government through disidentification.[250] According to her:

> Korean adoptees' disidentification from the construction of Koreanness offered by the South Korean state produces a counterhegemonic production of Korean adopteeness, and the proliferation of 'sites of collective articulation'—activity in cities around the world and on the Internet—constitutes alternative locations

[249] E. Kim, "Wedding Citizenship and Culture: Korean Adoptees and the Global Family of Korea," *Social Text* 21, no. 1 (2003): 57–81.

[250] E. Kim (2003) defines the concept of disidentification as "a strategy of cultural survival in which subaltern performances of difference become 'rituals of transformation' that render visible the boundaries of symbolic meaning and the constructedness of naturalized social categories" (p. 60).

> for the production of Koreanness, Korean adopteeness, and for the emergence of a collective history.[251]

Kim argues that their movement has been a community-building project[252] that can challenge the nation-building project. E. Kim suggests that retuning Korean adoptees offer a "counterhegemony"[253] within their political and economic movement. Finally, she emphasizes the importance of "adopted territory," which adoptees create by force of will. Together, their voices act as a counterpublic capable of challenging dominant categories of belonging, such as kinship and citizenship, in the context of globalization.[254]

However, based on my observations, adoptees are not homogeneous group—neither in their degree of satisfaction nor in how integrated they are with their "adopted territory" or the "imagined community" of adoptees. Although it is obvious that adoptees have a political community, Kim's work tends to emphasizes the homogeneity of this group.

Anthropologist Elise M. Prébin slightly disagrees with Kim's suggestion about the possibilities for a "third space" or "counterhegemony." In her observations of cultural programs for adoptees offered by Holt and the Korean government, all the participants ignored the political nature of their gathering and focused on the experience as three weeks of discovery. None of them claimed to belong to any

---

[251] Ibid., 62.

[252] Ibid., 67.

[253] Antonio Gramsci, Hoare, and Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1972).

[254] E. Kim, "Wedding Citizenship and Culture: Korean Adoptees and the Global Family of Korea," 5.

community and several were angered by ideological statements, both on the part of agents from the Korean government and adoptee activists who aim to stop international adoption from Korea. While some adoptees think international adoption should stop, others adopt babies from South Korea themselves.[255]

The movement of children via transnational adoption from the global South to the global North shows global inequalities of race, class, gender, and nationality. However, the reverse movement of adult Korean adoptees and their political organizations demonstrate how individuals can deconstruct the boundaries of the nation. In particular, the "betweenness" of Korean adoptees and their "ambiguous" identities enable them to experience and intervene in both societies—South Korea as well as the United States. However, I am still questioning the possibility of solidarity among adoptees, birth mothers, and adoptive mothers.

Gupta, who researches the relationships between infertile women, egg donors, and surrogate mothers, asks: "can the need of infertile women for donor eggs or surrogacy services and the financial need of women that drives them to offer the same, thus creating a relationship of mutual dependency, be a basis for mutual solidarity?" [256] Gupta wonders whether transnational solidarity is possible under the

---

[255] Elise Prébin, "Three-Week Re-Education to Koreanness," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 7, no. 2 (2008): 331.

[256] Jyotsna Agnihotri Gupta, "Towards Transnational Feminisms: Some Reflections and Concerns in Relation to the Globalization of Reproductive Technologies," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006); 23-38, 31.

conditions of transnational capitalism,[257] and between the fertile/infertile, first world/third world, and rich/poor.[258]

While transnational solidarity is useful in challenging global hierarchies, it is hard to achieve among groups of people who have different social statuses in terms of race, class, gender, and nationality. As I demonstrate through this project, adoptees (mis)conceptualize their birth mothers, and due to cultural and language differences, birth mothers do not know how to treat their children when they reunite. Adoptive mothers also struggle with being the white mothers of Asian children and many of them are afraid of losing their children when adoptees search for their birth mothers. As confirmed in chapter five, adoptees, adoptive mothers, and birth mothers misunderstand each other because of non-transparent adoption processes, including incorrect adoption documents, long-term separations, and their different positions. Even after they reunite, it is hard to resolve their misunderstandings and to build their relationships because of feelings of guilt as well as the language barriers and cultural ignorance that result from transnational adoption. Differences among them prevent the individuals in an adoption triad from establishing transnational solidarity. Although I argue that the current scope for transnational solidarity is limited, I'll close by noting that since adoptees' movements are only two decades old, there is still the future possibility of transnational solidarity.

[257] Ibid., 24.

[258] Ibid., 31.

Appendices

Questionnaire for Korean adoptees

My interview will be processed as a semi-structured interview, so I have attached a few questions for my interview and the questions are generally open-ended.

Do you agree to participate? If yes, continue. If no, stop.
The interview will last about 1 hour, and I would like to ask your permission to record this interview for accuracy. The recording will be available only to me and my advisor, Dr. Seung-Kyung Kim, and your identity will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any report. If your words are included in the results, any identifying information will be removed.

Do you agree for me to record this interview? If yes, turn on the recorder.

Basic Questions
1. Can you tell me your age, preferred gender orientation, nationality and job?
2. Where do you live now? And, where have you lived in the past?

<Interview Question 1 >
What are your experiences as a Korean adoptee?
1.Tell me about yourself.
2.How old were you when you were adopted?
3.Do you have any memories or experiences that made you aware of your status as a Korean adoptee? Have you ever felt not 'American' or perhaps not 'American enough'?"

<Interview Question 2>
What is your relationship with your adoptive families?
1. Tell me about your parents.
2. Do you have brothers or sisters? If you have siblings, please tell about them. Additionally, are your siblings adoptees as well, or biological children, and has that ever had any impact on your relationship or feelings of belonging within your family

<Interview Question 3>
What are your attitudes toward Korea and you birth family?
1.Have you ever visited Korea after being adopted and brought to America? If so, when did you visit Korea and why did you visit? Also, could you tell me about your travels in Korea? What did you do and were there any specific memories or experiences that stood out to you?
2.Do you want to find your birth family? Or, do you have memories about you birth family?
(*Following questions*: Growing up, how racially and ethnically diverse was your school, neighborhood, or town? Did that affect your own sense of self-perception? Do

you have any particular memories growing up in which others outside of your family may have affected the way in which you perceived yourself? How would you describe your family's socio-economic class growing up? Did your parents attempt to include anything distinctively "Korean" into daily life, like food, household decorations, language, pop culture (music, dramas, cartoons, etc.)? Do you remember how/if your parents ever had a conversation regarding your adoption?)

Conclusion
1.These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences?
2.Lastly, if I have questions regarding your answers, may I contact you in the future?
Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your experiences, I very much appreciate it.

Questionnaire for adoptive parents

My interview will be processed as a semi-structured interview, so I have attached a few questions for my interview and the questions are generally open-ended.

Do you agree to participate? If yes, continue. If no, stop.
The interview will last about 1 hour, and I would like to ask your permission to record this interview for accuracy. The recording will be available only to me and my advisor, Dr. Seung-Kyung Kim, and your identity will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any report. If your words are included in the results, any identifying information will be removed.

Do you agree for me to record this interview? If yes, turn on the recorder.

Basic Questions
1. Can you tell me your age, gender, nationality and job?
2. Where do you live now? Where have you lived in the past?

<Interview Question 1 >
What are your experiences as a Korean adoptee's parent?
1.Tell me about yourself.
2. How many children do you have? Additionally, are all of them adoptees?
3. Why did you decide to adopt and why did you want to adopt Korean children? Why did you decide on an interracial and transnational adoption?
4. Could you please tell me about the process of your adoption.

<Interview Question 2>
What are the relations with your adoptive children?
1. Tell me about your children. If you have any specific/special memories/experiences regarding your children, could you please tell me about it?
2. Do you try to help your children adapt to American culture? Why and how?
3. Do you try to help your children have Korean identities through exposing them to Korean culture such as Korean foods and language?
4. How do you deal with race when it comes up in the household and in public?

Conclusion
1.These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences?
2.Lastly, if I have questions regarding your answers, may I contact you in the future?
Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your experiences, I very much appreciate it.

Questionnaire for birth parents

My interview will be processed as a semi-structured interview, so I have attached a few questions for my interview and the questions are generally open-ended.

Do you agree to participate? If yes, continue. If no, stop.
The interview will last about 1 hour, and I would like to ask your permission to record this interview for accuracy. The recording will be available only to me and my advisor, Dr. Seung-Kyung Kim, and your identity will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any report. If your words are included in the results, any identifying information will be removed.

Do you agree for me to record this interview? If yes, turn on the recorder.

Basic Questions
1. Can you tell me your age, gender, nationality and job?
2. Where do you live now? And, where did you live?
3.Tell me about yourself and your family.
4. Do you have children?

<Interview Question 1 >
What were the reasons for adoption and the process?
1.Why did you decide to have your child adopted?
2.Did you make the decision yourself or with your husband/wife?
3.Could you tell me about the process of adoption? Did you contact the adoption agency?

<Interview Question 2>
What is the relationship with your adoptee children?
1.Do you want to meet them?
2.If you've already met them, would you please explain about the experiences and the relationships with your children? If you could speak to them right now, what might you say?

Conclusion
1.These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences?
2.Last, if I have questions regarding your answers, could I contact you in the future?
Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your experiences, I very much appreciate it.

Glossary

Bibliography

Books and Articles

Alexander, Jacqui, and Chandra Mohanty. "Introduction, Geneologies, Legacies, Movements." In *Feminist Genealogies*. Routledge, 1997.

Anagnost, Ann. "Scenes of Misrecognition: Maternal Citizenship in the Age of Transnational Adoption." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 8, no. 2 (2001): 389–421.

Anderson, R.S., "The nature of adoptee search: Adventure, cure or growth," *Child Welfare* 68 (1989): 623-632.

Arissa H. Oh. To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption. Stanford University Press. 2015.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Bennett, Susanne Ph.D. "International Adoptive Lesbian Families: Parental Perceptions of the Influence of Diversity on Family Relationships in Early Childhood*." *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 74, no. 1 (2003): 73–91.

Berebitsky, Julie. *Like Our Very Own: Adoption and the Changing Culture of Motherhood, 1851-1950*. Lawrence, Kan: Univ Pr of Kansas, 2001.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Briggs, Laura. *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012.

———. *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Briggs, Laura, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way. "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis." *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 18, 2008): 625–48. https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.0.0038.

Buck, Pearl S. *Children for Adoption*. New York: Random House, 1965.

Cherot, Natalie. "Transnational Adoptees: Global Biopolitical Orphans or an Activist Community? –The Biopolitics of Adoption." *Culture Machine* 8 (2006). http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/rt/printerFriendly/46/54.

Cho, Grace M. *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Constable, Nicole. *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail-Order" Marriages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Cuthbert, Denise, Kate Murphy, and Marian Quartly. "Adoption and Feminism." *Australian Feminist Studies* 24, no. 62 (December 1, 2009): 395–419. doi:10.1080/08164640903289302.

De Genova, Nicholas. *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005.

De Graeve, K. "Festive Gatherings and Culture Work in Flemish-Ethiopian Adoptive Families." *European Journal of Cultural Studies European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 5 (2013): 548–64.

Dorow, Sara K. *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Dubinsky K. "The Fantasy of the Global Cabbage Patch: Making Sense of Transnational Adoption." *Fem. Theory Feminist Theory* 9, no. 3 (2008): 339–45.

Ehrenreich, Barbara., and Arlie Russell Hochschild. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003.

Eng, David L. "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas." *Social Text* 21, no. 3 (2003): 1–37.

Erel, U., and H. Lutz. "Gender and Transnationalism." *European Journal of Women's Studies European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 4 (2012): 409–12.

Fajardo, Kale Bantigue. *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies--Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57.

Gailey, Christine Ward. *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love: Race, Class, and Gender in U.S. Adoption Practice*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010.

Giroux, Henry. “Utopian Thinking Under the Sign of Neoliberalism: Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Educated Hope.” *Democracy & Nature* 9, no. 1 (2003): 91–105.

Gramsci, Antonio, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers, 1972.

Guevarra, Anna Romina. *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes the Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010. http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=871440.

Gupta, Jyotsna. “Towards Transnational Feminisms: : Some Reflections and Concerns in Relation to the Globalization of Reproductive Technologie.” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 23–38.

Harvey, David. “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, no. 1 (2007): 21–44.

Herman, Ellen. *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008.

Hirsch, Marianne, and Nancy K. Miller. *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*. Columbia University Press, 2011.

Holt, Bertha., and David. Wisner. *The Seed from the East*. Eugene, Ore.: Industrial Pub. Co., 1979.

Hong, Jeannie. *International Korean Adoptee Resource Book: Guide to Korea for Korean Adoptee[S]*. Seoul, Korea: Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2006.

Howell, Signe. “Kinning: The creation of life trajectories in transnational adoptive families,” *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) no 9 (2003): 465-484.

Hua, Julietta. *Trafficking Women’s Human Rights*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Hübinette, Tobias. *Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture*. Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006.

Jones, Maggie. “Why a Generation of Adoptees Is Returning to South Korea.” *The New York Times*, January 14, 2015.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/magazine/why-a-generation-of-adoptees-is-returning-to-south-korea.html.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. “Bargaining with Patriarchy.” *Gender & Society* 2, no. 3 (1988): 274–90.

Kendall, Laurel. “Birth Mothers and Imaginary Lives.” In *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, edited by Toby Alice Volkman. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Kim, Eleana. “Human Capital: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Neoliberal Logic of Return.” *Journal of Korean Studies Journal of Korean Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 299–327.

———. “Wedding Citizenship and Culture: Korean Adoptees and the Global Family of Korea.” *Social Text* 21, no. 1 (2003): 57–81.

Kim, Eleana Jean. *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging*. Durham [NC]; London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Kim, Hosu. “Television Mothers: Korean Birthmothers Lost and Found in the Search-and-Reunion Narratives.” *Cult. Stud. Crit. Methodol. Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies* 12, no. 5 (2012): 438–49.

Klein, Christina. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

“Kristi Brian: Reframing Transracial Adoption.” Accessed February 8, 2018. http://www.temple.edu/tempress/titles/2068_reg.html.

Lee, Mi Jeong. “Sahoejeok pyeongyeongwa mihonmo gwallyeon tonggye” [Social Prejudice against Unwed Mothers and Related Statistics]. Paper presented at The 60th Women’s Policy Forum-Reality of Unwed Mothers and Support for Self-Reliance, Seoul, Korea, February 24, 2010.

Leinaweaver, Jessaca B., and Linda J. Seligmann. “Introduction: Cultural and Political Economies of Adoption in Latin America.” *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (2009): 1–19.

Loo, Hannah, “In the Child’s Best Interests: Examining International Child Abduction, Adoption, and Asylum," *Chicago Journal of International Law* 17, no. 2 (2016): 609-636.

Mahmood, Saba. “The Subject of Freedom.” In *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 1–17. Princeton U Press, 2005.

Masson, Judith. “Intercountry Adoption: A Global Problem or a Global Solution?” *Journal of International Affairs.* 55, no. 1 (2001).

Meier, Dani Isaac. “Loss and Reclaimed Lives Cultural Identity and Place in Korean American Intercountry Adoptees,” 1998.

Melosh, Barbara. *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Miller, Patrick G. “Heritage Tourism and Return Journeys: Place and Identity Construction in Korean Adoptees.” M.A., University of Oregon, 2013. http://search.proquest.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/docview/1426819457/abstract/8F9B649C0E6E4632PQ/1.

Mirchandani, Kiran. *Phone Clones: Authenticity Work in the Transnational Service Economy*. Ithaca: ILR Press, 2012.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Moon, Katharine H. S. *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Naples, Nancy A. *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Oh, Arissa H. *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*. Stanford University Press, 2015.

Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2006.

Park, Jung-Sun, and Paul Y. Chang. “Contention in the Construction of a Global Korean Community: The Case of the Overseas Korean Act.” *Journal of Korean Studies* 10, no. 1 (2005): 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2005.0002.

Park Nelson, Kim Ja. “Korean Looks, American Eyes: Korean American Adoptees, Race, Culture and Nation,” 2008.

Park Nelson, Kim Ja . “Korean Looks, American Eyes: Korean American Adoptees, Race, Culture and Nation,” 2008.

Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Patil, Vrushali. “From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We’ve Really Come.” *Signs Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2013).

Patterson, Rubin. “Transnationalism: Diaspora-Homeland Development.” *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (2006): 1891–1907.

Patton-Imani, Sandra. “Orphan Sunday: Narratives of Salvation in Transnational Adoption.” *A Journal of Theory* 51, no. 14 (December 2012): 294–304.

Petta, Gabrielle A., and Lyndall G. Steed. “The Experience of Adoptive Parents in Adoption Reunion Relationships: A Qualitative Study.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 75, no. 2 (2005): 230–41.

Prébin, Elise. *Meeting Once More the Korean Side of Transnational Adoption*. 1 online resource (230 pages) vols. New York: New York University Press, 2012. Ebook Library http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1165009.

Prébin, Elise. “Three-Week Re-Education to Koreanness.” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 7, no. 2 (2008): 323–55.

Quiroz, P.A. “Cultural Tourism in Transnational Adoption: ``Staged Authenticity’’ and Its Implications for Adopted Children.” *JOURNAL OF FAMILY ISSUES* 33, no. 4 (2012): 527–55.

Ramamurthy, Priti. “Why Is Buying a ‘Madras’ Cotton Shirt a Political Act? A Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis.” *Feminist Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004): 734–69.

Rothschild, Matthew. "Babies for Sale: South Koreans Make Them, Americans Buy Them." *The Progressive* 52 no. 1 (1988): 18-23.

Sarri, Rosemary C, Yenoak Baik, and Marti Bombyk. “Goal Displacement and Dependency in South Korean - United States Intercountry Adoption.” *Children and Youth Services Review.* 20, no. 1–2 (1998): 87.

Sassen, Saskia. *Losing Control?: Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Shiu, Anthony. “Flexible Production: International Adoption, Race, Whiteness.” *Jouvert* 6, no. I-2 (2001).

Simon, Rita J., and Howard Altstein. *Transracial Adoption: A Follow-Up*. Lexington, Mass: Rowman & Littlefield, 1981.

Solinger, Rickie. *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001.

Stacey, Judith. *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late-Twentieth-Century America*. Reprint edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Stark, Barbara. “When Globalization Hits Home: International Family Law Comes of Age,” June 20, 2006.

Telfer, Jon. “The Imagined Child: Ambiguity and Agency in Australian Intercountry Adoption.” *TAJA The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (2003): 72–79.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Tuan, Mia. “Domestic and International Transracial Adoption: A Synopsis of the Literature.” *SOC4 Sociology Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1848–59.

Visweswaran, Kamala. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Volkman, Toby Alice. *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005.

Wadia-Ells, Susan. *The Adoption Reader: Birth Mothers, Adoptive Mothers, and Adopted Daughters Tell Their Stories*. Seattle, Wash.: Seal Press ;, 1995.

Waters, Johanna. “Flexible Citizens? Transnationalism and Citizenship amongst Economic Immigrants in Vancouver.” *CAG Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe Canadien* 47, no. 3 (2003): 219–34.

Willing, Indigo. *Transnational Adoption and Constructions of Identity and Belonging: A Qualitative Study of Australian Parents of Children Adopted from Overseas*. University of Queensland, 2010. http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:216141.

Wolf, Diane L. *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996.

Yalom, Marilyn. *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*. Edited by Barrie Thorne. New York: Longman, 1982.

Yngvesson, Barbara. "Negotiating Motherhood: Identity and Difference in 'Open' Adoptions." *Law & Society Review* 31, no. 1 (January 1, 1997): 31–80. https://doi.org/10.2307/3054094.

Yu, Henry. "Los Angeles and American Studies in a Pacific World of Migrations." *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2004): 531–43.

Yuh, Ji-Yeon. *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America*. New York: New York University Press, 2002.

Zavella, Patricia. *I'm Neither Here nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Zinn, M. B. "FAMILY, FEMINISM, AND RACE IN AMERICA." *Gender & Society Gender & Society* 4, no. 1 (1990): 68–82.

Zinn, Maxine Baca, and Bonnie Thornton. Dill. *Women of Color in U.S. Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

Zizek, S. "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." *New Left Review.*, no. 225 (1997): 28.

Films

Boileau, Laurent, and Jung. *Approved for Adoption*. Animation, Biography, Family, 2012

E J-Young, *The Bacchus Lady* (Film, 2016).

Kim, Yong-hwa. *Take Off*, 2009.

Liem, Deann Borshay., Michael. Chin, Mark. Adler, Center for Independent Documentary., Independent Television Service., National Asian American Telecommunications Association., Center for Asian American Media., and Mu Films. *First Person Plural*. Berkeley, CA; San Francisco, CA: Mu Films; Center for Asian American Media, 2000.

Websites and News

Ae Ran Won. Accessed June 10, 2017. http://www.aeranwon.org/.

Adoption.com, "Comments from Strangers," Accessed August 14, 2016, https://adoption.com/forums/thread/226128/comments-from-strangers/.

Adoption.com, “Major Attachment Issues. Please Help!” Accessed August 15, 2016, https://adoption.com/forums/thread/481929/major-attachment-issues-please-help/.

Adoption.com, “Any Moms/Dads Have Trouble Attaching to Their Newly Adopted Child?” Accessed August 15, 2016. https://adoption.com/forums/thread/217446/any-moms-dads-have-trouble-attaching-to-their-newly-adopted-child/

“Adong yugi geupjeungi ibyangteungnyebeop ttaemun," [Is the child abandonment because of the 2012 act?], *Pressian.com*, March 6, 2013, accessed August 2, 2016, http://www.pressian.com/news/article.html?no=5942.

Chira. S, Babies for Export: And Now the Painful Questions. *The New York Times*, April 21, 1988, accessed May 12, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/21/world/seoul-journal-babies-for-export-and-now-the-painful-questions.html;

“Eomma chajeureo hangugeuro…chinbumo chajneun ibyangin,” [Coming to Korea to find their birth mother...Only 2.7% of adoptees are able to reunite with their birth family], *KBS News*, August 1, 2016, accessed August 2, 2016, http://tvpot.daum.net/v/vc2a68w4Qaa2Xe3QKX6a26m.

“Geuneun ibyanginui jonjaereul cheoeum injeonghan jeongchiinieotda
,” [He is the first politician who recognizes the issue of adoptees], Pressian, August 24, 2009, accessed August 24, 2009. http://www.pressian.com/news/article.html?no=96525.

Gil-Hwan Wang, “Saengmoga bogo sipeoyo chajajuseyo mi ibyanginui hoso,” [I want to see my birth mother. Please, find her...Wish of Korean adoptees from the United States], *Yeonhap News*, August 4, 2015, accessed August 4, 2015, http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2015/08/04/0200000000AKR20150804109900371.HTML

“Ibyangteungnyebeop gaejeong sanyeon beoryeojin ai deo neureotda," [An increased number of abandoned children after 4 years of the enactment of the 2012 act], *Busan Ilbo*, May 8, 2016, accessed August 2, 2016, http://news20.busan.com/controller/newsController.jsp?newsId=20160509000104

Jane Trenck, “Signing Hague Convention: implication and challenges for Korea," *The Korean Times*, May 27, 2013, accessed by May 29, 2013. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinon/2013/05/197_136433.html

Rachel Justis, “Indiana's Minority Population Is Growing,” *InContext* 12, no. 6 (November-December 2011), Accessed September 21, 2017, http://www.incontext.indiana.edu/2011/nov-dec/article3.asp.

“The Lie We Love | Foreign Policy.” Accessed January 14, 2015. http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/06/the-lie-we-love/.

“Tracing My Roots Back to Korea,” 1194400801. http://relativechoices.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/11/06/tracing-my-roots-back-to-korea/.