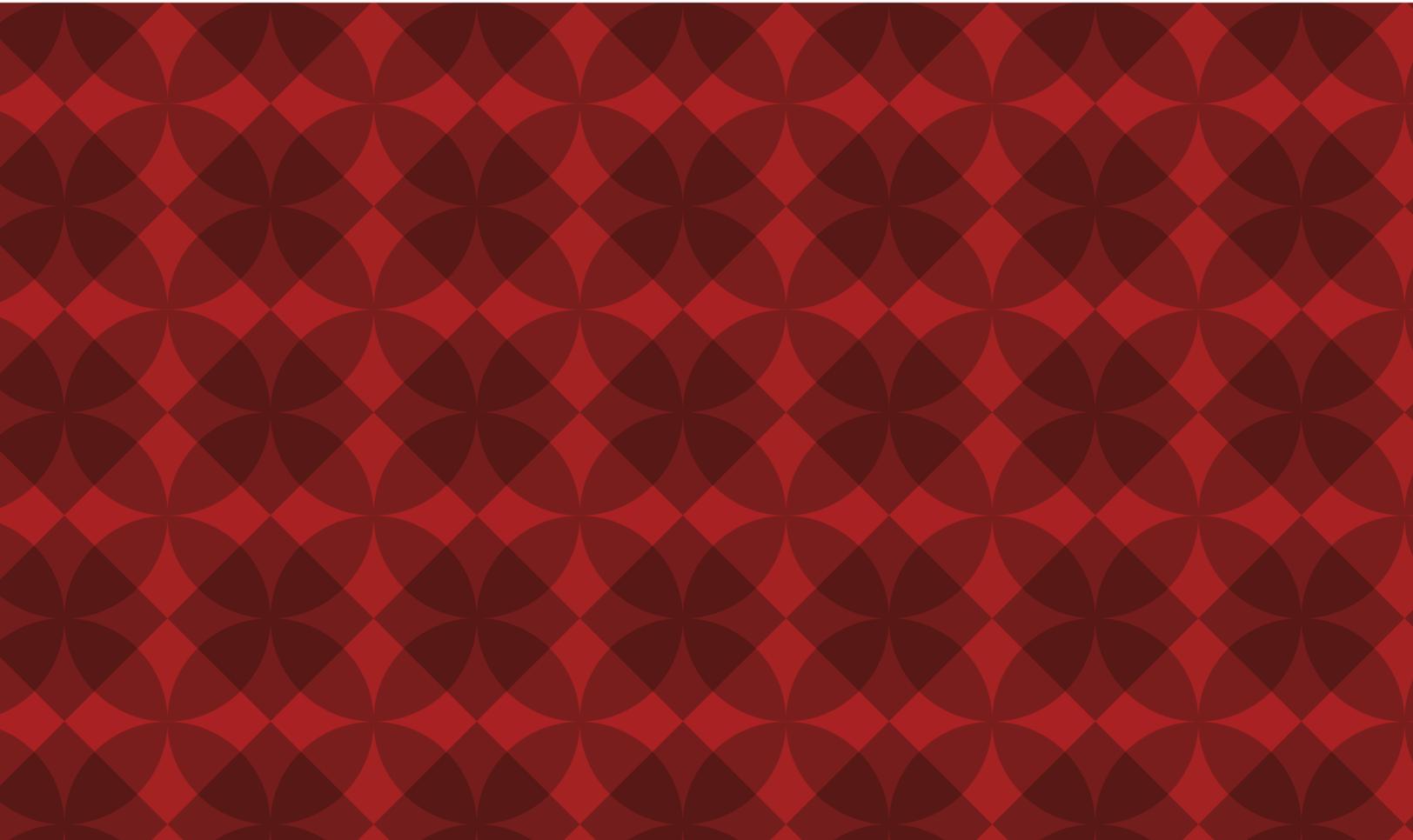




Proceedings of the Fourth International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium

Seoul, South Korea | 3 August, 2016

Edited by Sara Docan-Morgan, Tobias Hübinette,
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Introduction to the Symposium

The Fourth International Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies will bring together scholars from around the world who conduct research in the fields of Korean and Chinese adoption studies. Papers explore themes including the emotional labor of adoptees and birth parents in various moments of the adoption experience, adoptee negotiation of what it means to be “Korean” and adoptees’ broader racial, ethnic, and cultural identities and adoptees’ deployment of language and use of performance (e.g. Marissa Lichwick’s *The Yellow Dress* and Sun Mee Chomet’s *How to be a Korean Woman*) as a means to investigate the adopted experience. We invite all G16 participants to attend and engage in the vibrant discussions about scholarship that is relevant to adoptees, their family members, and significant others. In addition, Dr. Kim Park Nelson will give the keynote address, where she will discuss her new book, *Invisible Asians: Korean Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (Rutgers University Press, 2016).

Symposium Schedule

(Please note that this schedule is subject to change)

- 9:00–9:15am: Opening remarks**
- 9:15–11:00am: The Affective Labor of Adoptees and Birth Parents**
Hosu Kim: Virtual Mothering: Birthmothers’ Invisible Labor in the Circuit of Transnational Adoption Practice
Steve Kalb: Examining Photographs on International Adoption Websites: A Qualitative Content Analysis Approach to Adoption Agencies’ Visual Discourse
Kira Donnell: Subjects of Nationalism and Nationalist Subjects: Representations of Korean Orphans and Adoptees in American Popular Media
Jenna Cook: Domestic Adoption in China: Birth Parent and Adoptee Perspectives
- 11:00–11:15am: Break**
- 11:15–12:30pm: Keynote Address: Kim Park Nelson, PhD, American Multicultural Studies Program, Minnesota State University, Moorhead**
- 12:30–1:45pm: Lunch on your own**
- 1:45–3:30pm: Consuming Korea, Becoming Korean: The Politics of Adoptee Identity**
Anders Riel Müller: Kimchi Identities: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Food
Oh Myo Kim, and Richard M. Lee: Writing It Out: “Adoption Preoccupation” and Search Behavior
Haley C. Vellinga: What Do We Say When We Know You Are Unaware? Korean Adoptees’ Discourse of Identity
Jason D. Reynolds (Choi Taewon): Transracial Identities: The Meaning of Names and the Process of Name Reclamation for Korean American Adoptees
- 3:30–3:45: Break**
- 3:45–4:45: Roundtable Discussion: Critical Reflections on Performance as Discourse in Korean Adoption Studies**
Katelyn Hemmeke: Views from the Other Side: A Positive Discourse Analysis of Korean Adoptee Narratives
Jieun Lee: In-Betweenness Revisited: Performing Transnational Adoption
Eunha Na: Feeling at Home with Strangers: Plays on Adoption and Creating Public Spaces Beyond the Stage
- 4:45–5:00: Closing remarks**

The Affective Labor of Adoptees and Birth Parents

Virtual Mothering: Birthmothers' Invisible Labor in the Circuit of Transnational Adoption Practice

Hosu Kim, PhD

College of Staten Island, City University of New York, New York, NY, USA

This paper examines Korean birth mothers engaged in transnational adoption practice in light of their labor. While birth mothers often are erased in the transnational adoption discourse, they have performed and continued to perform crucial labor for both the transnational adoption market, as well as for South Korea's national economy via the dispossession of their reproduction. Evaluating the birth mothers' labor at the intersection of market and nation, this paper examines (1) the three dimensions of the birth mothers' maternal labor, i.e., corporeal, reproductive, and affective; and (2) how the birth mothers' maternal labor is rendered legible and valuable, only through the renunciation of motherhood. In the conclusion, I argue that numerous working-class birth mothers have performed "transnational surrogate labor," borrowing Jin-Kyung Lee's phrase, to highlight how both South Korea's modern nation-building and transnational adoption practice over the past sixty years are benefitted from birth mothers' reproductive dispossession and their silence.

Examining Photographs on International Adoption Websites: A Qualitative Content Analysis Approach to Adoption Agencies' Visual Discourse

Steve Kalb, MSW, ABD

Social Work and Social Research, Portland State University and Holt International Children's Services, Eugene, OR, USA

A challenge many international adoptees face is the stigma of being "saved" or "rescued", which pressure some adoptees to express gratitude for their adoption and omit stories of struggle or challenge when discussing their adoption experience. In order to support international adoptees to become better advocates for policies that will more accurately reflect their true experiences with adoption, it is necessary to empirically identify the extent to which this narrative is perpetuated through adoption discourse, specifically through visual discourse on adoption agency websites. If the international adoption environment were more conducive to discussing the range of adoption experience, it may lead to a more sophisticated vernacular that could contribute to better support and training for adoptive families. This study will closely examine the photographs and captions of all the public pages of Hague accredited adoption agency websites. Findings from this study may help to inform marketing strategies for international adoption agencies that counter the pressure adoptees feel about expressing gratitude.

Subjects of Nationalism and Nationalist Subjects: Representations of Korean Orphans and Adoptees in American Popular Media

Kira Donnell

PhD Candidate, Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California–Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, USA

This paper analyzes the ways in which Korean orphans and adoptees have been portrayed in American popular media, and focuses on how American media's representations of Korean orphans promote nationalist sentiments through notions of American benevolence and exceptionalism. I argue that through the United States' sixty-year history of engaging in transnational Korean adoption, Korean orphans and adoptees have continuously been used by American popular media and society to construct nationalist narratives of rescue, benevolence, and neoliberalism that obscure a history of American imperialism, violence, and military occupation in South Korea. From the 1957 Korean War film, *Battle Hymn*, to the popular 1970s television series, *M*A*S*H*, to more contemporary renderings of adoptees in the satirical television series, *Arrested Development*, I trace the transformation of Korean orphans into adoptees in popular American media and highlight how each of these representations works to promote a unifying sense of Americanism in its audiences.

Domestic Adoption in China: Birth Parent and Adoptee Perspectives

Jenna Cook

MA Student, China Studies, Peking University, Beijing, PRC

American media portrayals of the Chinese international adoption program often sketch two possible outcomes: Either Chinese children are adopted internationally or they “languish” in orphanages. Yet, this overly simplistic picture ignores a third population—the population of Chinese children who were adopted locally within China by Chinese citizens. Based on 10 months of fieldwork in central China, this research examines the voices of Chinese domestic adult adoptees: Do Chinese domestic adoptees view their adoption as an important part of their identity? Do they conceptualize gender as a driving force in their abandonment? Are they interested in searching for birth family? Furthermore, how are their experiences as adopted people within China both similar to and different from the experiences of international Chinese adoptees living in North America and Europe? The answers to these questions provide revealing insights into Chinese conceptions of kinship and family, as well as inform policy debates about the subsidiary principle.

Consuming Korea, Becoming Korean: The Politics of Adoptee Identity

Kimchi Identities: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Food

Anders Riel Müller, MSc Sociology, PhD

Research Associate, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen, DEN

In the past decade a number of Korean adoptees have risen to prominence as cookbook authors, chefs, and Korean food experts in Europe, Korea, and the United States. Based on qualitative interviews with some of these adoptee Korean food ambassadors, this talk will present some preliminary reflections on how these promoters of Korean food can be regarded as engaging in a (perhaps subtle) kind of Politics of Belonging in which their identity as Korean adoptees and approach to Korean cuisine signal complex desires of approaching and distancing themselves from other collectivities based on nation, ethnicity, indigeneity and migration. In doing so, this paper argues that adoptees ambassadors engage in a political arena in which hierarchies of taste, class, race, and nation are embraced, contested, and resisted.

Writing It Out: “Adoption Preoccupation” and Search Behavior

Oh Myo Kim, PhD

Assistant Professor of the Practice, Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology Department, Boston College, Boston, MA, USA

Richard M. Lee, PhD

Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA

This talk will present results from an expressive writing study with 84 Korean American adopted adults and focus on searching behavior. In this sample, 43 participants (51.2%) had searched for their birth family and 41 (48.8%) had never formally searched. Of the participants that searched for birth family, 20 (46.5%) had met a member of their birth family. Though birth searching behavior is sometimes pathologized by researchers, and at times thinking and fantasizing about one’s birth family becomes a type of maladaptive rumination, it is more consistent with identity research to frame thinking about birth family and searching for birth family as a normative process in the development of identity (Brodzinsky, et al., 1992; Wroebel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004). This talk will focus on the differences between searchers and non-searchers, and differences between those participants that reunited with birth family versus those that did not reunite with birth family.

What Do We Say When We Know You Are Unaware? Korean Adoptees’ Discourse of Identity

Haley C. Vellinga

PhD Student, Communication Studies Department, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA

On October 23, 2015, ABC aired the *20/20* adoption special, “The Forever Family” covering the Harris’ family adoption and rehomeing. Although centered on the family’s adoption related trauma, subsequent sources revealed that ABC’s coverage was an inaccurate portrayal of adoption. ABC serves as one example in which disseminating information related to adoption can perpetuate false realities/truths. Therefore, it is even more vital that adoptees’ voices are heard because members of the adoptive family can provide insight, but it is adoptees that must make sense of this throughout their lives. In learning from Korean adoptees about what it means for them to be adopted, we can provide insight that changes and sheds light on archaic adoption stereotypes and incorrect perceptions.

Transracial Identities: The Meaning of Names and the Process of Name Reclamation for Korean American Adoptees

Jason D. Reynolds (Choi Taewon)

PhD Candidate, Counseling Psychology, Fordham University, New York, NY, USA

Names are of interest to social scientists, as names can impact an individual's identity, life outcome, educational attainment/income, sense of belonging, group membership, and may provide others with descriptive social information (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, race, class). Limited research exists on the experiences of individuals who bear a name that others may believe does not accurately reflect one's perceived race and ethnicity (ascribed identity). Transracial adoptees, specifically Korean adoptees (KADs) raised in White families, are given a name in their country of birth, but then experience a legal name change through adoption. Continuous looks of disbelief and questions regarding the legitimacy of one's name may lead to a threatened sense of identity starting very early in life. The present study qualitatively explored reasons KADs decided to reclaim some or all of their Korean birth name, and how the name change affected interpersonal relationships, racial/ethnic identity, and one's sense of self.

Roundtable Discussion: Critical Reflections on Performance as Discourse in Korean Adoption Studies

Views from the Other Side: A Positive Discourse Analysis of Korean Adoptee Narratives

Katelyn Hemmeke

Junior Researcher, U.S. Fulbright Program

Since the beginning of Korean transnational adoption in the 1950s, the language used to publicly discuss adoption has been shaped and controlled by adoption agencies and adoptive parents. The resulting dominant adoption narrative privileges adoptive parents, but silences adoptees and their birth families. However, increasing numbers of adoptees are “flipping the script” by publishing their own accounts that challenge the dominant narrative and/or critically examine it. Using Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) and the Discourse Historical Approach, we examined 16 published pieces by Korean adoptees in order to answer the research question: How do Korean adoptees describe adoption and those involved in the process? These approaches incorporate the historical context of international adoption in order to better understand the language adoptees use to describe adoption. The findings reveal that adoptees use active verbs to represent their centralized role and the ways they make meaning of it. In doing so, adoptees break the silence and reclaim agency in the adoption narrative.

In-Betweenness Revisited: Performing Transnational Adoption

Jieun Lee

PhD Student, University of Georgia

My paper will engage with Korean American women adoptees’ autobiographical solo performance which embodies the experience of the artists’ return journey to their biological families in South Korea. Through two selected contemporary solo performance pieces: Marissa Lichwick’s *Yellow Dress* (2015) and Sun Mee Chomet’s *How to Be a Korean Woman* (2012), I will argue that these two Korean American women adoptees’ works formulate a feminist epistemological realm of in-betweenness, complicating the politics of race and gender. Theorizing the idea of performer’s body as critical knower, I will also discuss Chomet and Lichwick’s bodies as not only the theatrical medium of expressing the fluidity of their multiple selves but also the interpretative witnesses of race and gender in the traffic of transnational adoption. Therefore, the two performers’ gain of power in their performances over the multiple voices and autobiographical narratives is their total expression of autonomy over given knowledge and subjectivity.

Feeling at Home with Strangers: Plays on Adoption and Creating Public Spaces Beyond the Stage

Eunha Na

PhD Candidate, University of Minnesota

This presentation will consider how recent stage productions on transnational adoption help us to rethink cultural narratives around adoption and the mutual relationship between identity formation and artistic/social performance. As an example, I look at Sun Mee Chomet’s one-woman show *How To be a Korean Woman: A Memoir in Performance* (which was presented at IKAA in 2013). The play features familiar themes that surface in the memoirs written from the adoptee perspective—ranging from one’s struggle with racial/cultural identity to one’s yearning for mother/land, followed by a new sense of belonging (or, disillusionment). But, what happens to these stories when they are told through the body to live audiences? What emotions—alienation as well as empathy—does such a performance environment arouse in the viewer? How do these emotions potentially create a sense of community?

