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Orphan, Adoptee, Nation: Tracing the Korean Orphan and Adoptee
through South Korean and American National Narratives

By

Kira Ann Donnell

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Elaine H. Kim, Chair
Professor Catherine Ceniza Choy
Professor Jinsoo An
Professor Grace J. Yoo

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Abstract

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Professor Elaine H. Kim, Chair

The transnational adoption industrial complex established between South Korea and the United States following the Korean War initiated what is sometimes called the “Quiet Migration.” Since then, over 200,000 Korean children have been sent abroad, and the transnational, transracial adoption industry has operations set up in dozens of developing countries worldwide which takes thousands of children annually from their natal homes and places them in adoptive families in Western countries. For the past seventy years, the figures of the Korean orphan and adoptee have held significant meaning in the imaginations of by South Korean and American citizens. The sentimental figure of the Korean orphan became the conduit through which both South Koreans and Americans defined their experiences in the Korean War. The transnational Korean adoptee has become an icon of the United States’ commitment to humanitarianism and diversity and South Korea’s modern branding as a sophisticated and internationally-networked nation.

This dissertation explores how United States and South Korean culture and society have used the figures of the Korean orphan and Korean adoptee to construct national identities that reflect its citizens as virtuous, cosmopolitan, and unified. I am interested in the ways in which U.S. and Korean media have appropriated the figure of the orphan to construct narratives of collective national pride. Through the analysis of popular film and media, I trace the evolving portrayals of Korean orphans in U.S. and South Korean culture and society to demonstrate how these two nations have appropriated the figure of the Korean orphan to engender feelings of patriotism and belonging in its citizens, and what such narratives consequently obscure.

This research is comparative, in that I explore representations of orphans and adoptees from number of different perspectives. First, I am looking at portrayals of orphans and adoptees in both American and South Korean cultural productions. I am interested in examining how each culture co-opts these figures, and for what use. Additionally, I am interested in looking at these representations over the *longue durée* in order to understand how these narratives have changed over time. I question what different uses the orphan or adoptee have served in these various narratives at various points in history, and how and why these representations have transformed over time. I also make inquiries into how representations of orphans differ from representations of adoptees. I examine how these identities differ in their portrayals in American and Korean film

and television and discuss how and why the transformation from portraying Korean children as orphans to adoptees transpires.

I begin by exploring representations of Korean orphans in Hollywood during the Cold War era. I argue that the presence of Korean orphans in film and television programs about the Korean War works to justify the United States' military involvement in the conflict. From there, I trace the transformation of the Korean orphan into the transnational Korean adoptee in American film and television. In analyzing these representations of transnational Korean adoptees, I explore how adoptees have continued to be used construct an exceptional and progressive U.S. national identity. In examining Korean War films from South Korea's Golden Age, I find that representations of Korean orphan reflect a postwar South Korean national identity informed by the conflation of nation and family and gendered subjecthood. In turn, I argue that representations of transnational Korean adoptees in the contemporary era of the Korean Wave are used to showcase South Korea as sophisticated and cosmopolitan while overlooking the complicity of the South Korean government in transnational Korean adoption's painful and traumatic history. Finally, I explore the ways in adult transnational Korean adoptees have used their cultural productions and creative expressions to challenge master narratives of Korean orphanhood and transnational adoption. I read these productions as statements of self-determination and a move toward adoptee decolonization.

In today's world where migrant children in the United States are separated from their families and detained and rural Korean bachelors import wives from Southeast Asia to create multicultural families, I argue that understanding the ways in which representations of Korean orphans and adoptees inform and are informed by U.S. and South Korean national identity help deepen and redefine our notions of community, citizenship, and national belonging.

To all my families.
In memory of Dr. J. Robert Bashore, Jr.

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Introduction

Growing up in West Michigan, I was a lonely sailor among a sea of corn fields, blonde hair, and hotdishes. Within my community, it was no secret that I was adopted, as my Korean features bore no resemblance to my Irish American parents' or siblings'. I recall a woman approached me at church one Sunday, rested her pale hand upon my shoulder, and said, "You should be so grateful to your parents for adopting you. Here, in America, you've got freedom!" Her hand pressed down on my shoulder, the burden of gratitude heavy as I nodded uncomfortably and inched away.

Years later, I met my biological sister who was raised by my birth mother. She told me she thought I was lucky. That as a child she had imagined herself adopted, whisked away to a different life. She was jealous of the fact that I got an American education, spoke English, took horseback riding lessons, and played the cello.

Reflecting on these moments, I think about where such attitudes come from. How do we learn that Asian children must be rescued by white America? That the land of the free and home of the brave is far superior to anything that land of the morning calm has to offer its children? That adoption stories always end with happily ever after? For me, part of the answer lies in the consumption of popular media. In what Christina Klein identifies as middlebrow culture, stories have the ability to unify an audience, to inform you of people and places you've never seen, allowing you to imagine yourself otherwise.¹ Paired with a desire to reflect the best qualities of a nation and the sentimentality evoked from the figure of an orphan child, visual cultures such as film and television have the potential of great power to generate a collective sense of national pride through the narratives they weave.

This project explores how United States and South Korean culture and society have used the figure of the Korean orphan to construct national identities that reflect its citizens as virtuous, cosmopolitan, and unified.² I am interested in the ways in which U.S. and Korean media have appropriated the figure of the orphan to shore up national pride.³ I trace the evolving portrayals of Korean orphans in U.S. and South Korean culture and society to demonstrate how the Korean orphan is presented in popular media to engender feelings of patriotism and belonging in citizens, and what such narratives concomitantly obscure.

In discussing the role of popular media in influencing American opinion and culture and reinforcing the Cold War consensus that it was imperative to expand the United States' influence of power beyond its borders to stop the global threat of communism, Christina Klein observes that "the family has long been used to represent the nation in microcosm. As a metaphor, the family reworks the abstract bonds that unite a community too large ever to be experienced directly into the intimate biological and emotional bonds that unite parents, children, and

¹ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 64.

² In my use of the terms "Korean orphan" and "Korean adoptee," I am referring to children from South Korea (Republic of Korea). The United States and North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) have limited diplomatic relations and North Korea has never been open to international adoption practices.

³ UNICEF and other global partners define an orphan as "a child under 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents to any cause of death." Under this definition, children who have lost one parent, but live with a surviving parent are considered orphans and contribute to the estimate of nearly 140 million orphans worldwide in 2015. My use of the term "orphan" aligns with more colloquial understandings of orphans as children who do not have any parents and often lack support or connections to extended family networks as well. United Nations Children's Fund, "Orphans," UNICEF, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/media/orphans>.

extended relatives.”⁴ With the notion that the entire nation should be as dear to one as family, this rhetoric justified military action in Asia against communist regimes in which “the family does not count anymore . . . [because] We provide all needs.”⁵ Additionally, this perspective minimizes the United States’ culpability in destroying the lives and families of those who were in the way of the U.S.’s military expansion. Such violence was acceptable because its victims did not value family anyway.

American narratives of Korean orphans and adoptees, like other representations of Asian women and children, including the Hiroshima Maidens project and the celebrated work of Pearl S. Buck, revolve around themes of rescue, altruism, and what Mimi Thi Nguyen describes as “the gift of freedom.”⁶ Recipients of this American gift of freedom are rendered permanently indebted to the benevolent, anti-racist United States. Thus, representations of Korean orphans and adoptees in the United States work to construct America and its relationship with South Korea since 1945 as altruistic and humanitarian. Adoption simultaneously rescues South Korean orphans from imminent death and from growing up and becoming morally-deficient communists. The American family serves as the antidote to the destitution and isolation of third world communism. The fact that the United States bears responsibility in creating these third world conditions in the first place is conveniently forgotten.

In terms of South Korea, Tobias Hübinette understands Korean adoptees to be “symbols of a fractured and fragmented nation,” following the Korean War.⁷ In a civil war that separated ten million families, the figure of the orphan seems an appropriate metonym for Korea. In examining the portrayals of orphans in South Korea media and culture, I point to the ambivalence of the figure the orphan has played throughout the nation’s history, and the roles it has played in the formation of the Korean national imaginary. From the plucky orphaned waif who brings a platoon together, to the insidious intruder into the familiar Korean family space, to the suave and privileged returnee to the motherland, the orphan in South Korean media has had multiple incarnations. Yet, even in these varied depictions of orphans, I argue that they all function to reflect a collective South Korean national narrative of survival and perseverance in the face of disaster and trauma. The orphan performs the dual work of representing both the fractured and the ethnonationalist identities of Korea. What is obscured are the thousands of mixed race children and illegitimate children born out of wedlock on whom South Korea turned its back, the reliance upon the international adoption industry to “take care” of its disenfranchised children rather than developing a domestic social welfare support system, and the gendered costs in physical and reproductive labor the nation wrung from its women in its efforts to become “Korea, Sparkling.” I argue that both American and Korean representations of Korean orphans and adoptees portray their respective countries in self-congratulatory terms that obscure the dark side of their histories.

Since the Korean War, over 200,000 Korean children have been sent abroad, and the transnational, transracial adoption industry has operations set up in dozens of developing countries worldwide that take thousands of children annually from their natal homes and place

⁴ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 147.

⁵ Klein, 147.

⁶ Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*, Next Wave: New Directions in Women’s Studies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), xii.

⁷ Tobias Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006), 160.

them in adoptive families in Western countries.⁸ Couched in terms of rescue, anti-racism, multiculturalism and more recently, a means by which gay couples can form families, U.S. narratives of Korean adoption are framed as celebratory and obscure the ways in which the United States is implicated in the traumas and violence that create the orphans that are supposedly in need of rescue in the first place.

With the trauma of the Korean War still very much present in the collective memory of South Koreans, the figure of the orphan has been included in many Korean cultural and historical narratives as well. As evident in its ubiquitous presence in South Korean film and television, the figure of the orphan pervades Korean popular culture to the point that Korean adoption studies scholar Tobias Hübinette reflects that there is a “Korean obsession with blood ties and biological roots, but also the actual presence of countless . . . orphans and abandoned children within the country.”⁹ Anthropologist Eleana Kim points out that South Korea as a nation has never not known the presence of orphans and transnational adoption.¹⁰ Thus, the Korean orphan is inextricably enmeshed in South Korea’s national history. By analyzing Korean films and television shows that feature orphans and adoptees, I wish to demonstrate the various ways in which representations of the orphan has been used in the construction of a Korean national identity. From the victim of war whose family is torn asunder, to the downtrodden proletariat who strives for a better tomorrow through developmentalism and American aid, to the cosmopolitan global citizen, the orphan/adoptee has been represented to further South Korean own national identity . Meanwhile, there has been no concern in the adequacy of the social welfare systems and institutions that have led to such marginalization.

This research is comparative in that I explore representations of orphans and adoptees from number of different perspectives. First, I compare them in both American and South Korean cultural productions. Then I critique them over the *longue durée* to understand how they differ at various points in history. Finally, I address the implications of the transformation from orphan to adoptee in both U.S. and South Korean popular cultural representations.

History of Transnational Korean Adoption

I follow the approaches of other adoption studies scholars who classify the practices and systems of transnational adoption as the transnational adoption industrial complex (TAIC) in order to reflect the ways in which reproductive labor and children’s bodies are commodified and to point to how the politics and mechanisms that drive the transnational adoption industry are connected to other international mechanisms of imperial control. Kimberly McKee explains,

As an assemblage formation, the TAIC reflects the intersections and connections of the Korean social welfare state, orphanages, adoption agencies, and American immigration legislation. These components facilitated the development of transnational adoption between the two nations. Assemblage theory exposes how the mechanisms forming the

⁸ Different scholars have used various terms to describe international, intercountry adoption. I use the terms “transnational adoption” and “transnational adoptee” to highlight the ways in which processes of globalization and transnationalism inform the transference of bodies as well as ideologies in such adoptions, and the ways in which adoptees themselves have become lines of transmission between their birth and adoptive countries.

⁹ Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*.

¹⁰ Eleana Kim, “Understanding Adoptions from South Korea to the U.S.: How an Emergency Situation Turned into a Permanent Solution” (Symposium Presentation, September 26, 2015).

TAIC remain directly and indirectly linked to multiple process of nation-state and nongovernmental organization (e.g., adoption agencies, orphanages) control.¹¹ That is, transnational adoption is not simply an isolated phenomenon that developed spontaneously through acts of love. Rather, it is a multi-million dollar global industry that must be contextualized in histories of social, political, and economic inequities, military imperialism, American exceptionalism, and violence.

The modern Korean transnational adoption industrial complex has its origins in the Korean War. Over its nearly seventy-year history, it has facilitated the transnational adoption of almost a quarter of a million Korean children. Its institutions and systems have been replicated in other countries all over the world, which has led to a global industry that has migrated hundreds of thousands of children from the Global South to wealthier countries in the Global North. Over its decades-long history, the motives, practices, and people involved in transnational adoption have changed because of historical events, changes in social climates, and the international political relationship between South Korea and the United States.

The Korean War left millions of Korean civilians and families displaced from their homes and communities. Casualties also numbered in the millions, and the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency estimates that in 1951, one hundred thousand Korean children were orphans.¹² Additionally, thousands of mixed-race children were fathered by U.N. soldiers and born to Korean mothers. In a country that prides itself on its racial homogeneity, these children and their mothers were stigmatized and shunned by Korean society, leading to over ten thousand mixed-race children being abandoned to live on the streets after the Korean War.¹³ With South Korea's government and administration unable to make provisions for its orphaned and abandoned children after the war devastation, transnational adoption became a solution to a South Korea's social welfare problem. Eleana Kim speculates that "Without the devastation wrought by the war and the subsequent U.S. military occupation, Korean adoption would probably not exist today."¹⁴

Many narratives about the origins of Korean transnational adoption identify Harry Holt as the founder of Korean adoption. While Eleana Kim concedes that Holt "played an instrumental role in helping intercountry adoption to 'flourish,'" she cautions against lionizing the evangelical American farmer and his efforts as the sole reason for the establishment of the Korean transnational adoption industry.¹⁵ Rather, Kim calls for "a historical analysis of adoption before the arrival of Holt [that] reveals how particular 'technologies of intimacy,' including those related to legislation, transportation, communications, and especially mass media and financial sponsorships, facilitated the transfer of children from Korea to the U.S., even before South Korea had an international adoption law in place."¹⁶ American soldiers stationed in Korea were the first to adopt Korean children and bring them back to the United States. Street children congregated near the U.S. military bases, and American soldiers often took children in, feeding and clothing them, and relegating them to roles as mascots and houseboys for the soldiers' units. Once their

¹¹ Kimberly D. McKee, *Disrupting Kinship: Transnational Politics of Korean Adoption in the United States*, The Asian American Experience (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 2.

¹² Tobias Hübinette, "Korean Adoption History," in *Community: Guide to Korea for Overseas Adopted Koreans*, ed. Eleana Kim (Seoul: Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2004), 27.

¹³ Hübinette, 27.

¹⁴ Eleana Kim, "The Origins of Korean Adoption: Cold War Geopolitics and Intimate Diplomacy," Working Paper Series (U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS, October 2009), 6–7.

¹⁵ Kim, 3.

¹⁶ Kim, 5.

tours of duty in Korea were complete, some soldiers elected to bring individual children home to the United States with them. Tobias Hübinette reckons that “The sheer chaos in war-torn Korea makes it possible to understand how easy and tempting it must have been for U.N. soldiers and other Westerners just to grab any Korean ‘parentless’ child roaming the streets and bring her or him out of the country.”¹⁷

In an effort to motivate Americans who were weary of supporting another war campaign after the completion of World War II just five years previously, media outlets framed the United States’ involvement in Korea as humanitarian in nature. Employing sentimentalism, newspapers and magazines featured photographs of Korean War orphans, solemn-faced and wearing rags, describing them as “the backwash of war, the outcasts of society.”¹⁸ Such representations “were especially influential in provoking sentimental responses among Americans, many of whom responded by . . . donat[ing] money, clothing, and toys to orphanages, or inquire[d] about how to adopt these children into their families.”¹⁹

The establishment of Harry Holts adoption agency, Holt International Children’s Services ensured transnational adoption from Korea continued long after the fighting of the Korean War had concluded. “Feverishly driven by a Christian fundamentalist zeal to rescue the children of Korea,” Harry Holt manipulated, restructured, and innovated adoption policies and practices that enabled Korean adoption to operate on a large scale.²⁰ Arissa Oh recognizes Holt as instrumental in the Christian Americanism movement that “recast Korean adoption on an imaginative level, as a new kind of missionary work for a new kind of world, and helped expand the notion of the American family to include interracial and international adoption.”²¹

Through the 1960s and 1970s, push and pull factors in South Korea and the Western world warranted the continuation of Korean adoption despite the fact that by this time, the population of war orphans had dwindled as they either aged out of institutional orphanages or were adopted. The demographics of Korean birth families and adoptees thus shifted from casualties and victims of war to working class laborers. South Korea’s efforts to industrialize, modernize, and rebuild from the war saw the dissolving of traditional family households as Koreans flocked from their rural hometowns to urban areas for work. Encouraged by government campaigns that prioritized the building of the nation’s economy rather than families, a new generation of “orphans” was created as “tens of thousands of Korean children often born to young factory workers (*yogong*) . . . were abandoned, and declared foundlings in the brutal turmoil of internal migration and urbanisation.”²²

Traditional patriarchal customs and practices including patrilineal family registry policies made it difficult for unmarried Korean women to consider options other than adoption for their children. Reflecting patriarchal beliefs that a woman’s worth is based on her chastity, “the figure of the birthmother initially was portrayed as a single mother whose sexual transgression indicated her inadequacy to be a mother” in Korean media.²³ While conception obviously

¹⁷ Hübinette, “Korean Adoption History,” 29–30.

¹⁸ Jae Ran Kim et al., “Scattered Seeds: The Christian Influence on Korean Adoption,” in *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006), 153.

¹⁹ Kim, “The Origins of Korean Adoption,” 4.

²⁰ Hübinette, “Korean Adoption History,” 31.

²¹ Arissa Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 81.

²² Hübinette, “Korean Adoption History,” 35.

²³ Hosu Kim, “Television Mothers: Korean Birthmothers Lost and Found in the Search-and-Reunion Narratives,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 12, no. 5 (2012): 439.

involves two parties, only the women's sexual promiscuity and parenting fitness is called into question. Further, with the patriarchal notion that a father should be a child's primary provider, a woman was considered to be "incapable of parenting a child without a husband."²⁴ Historically, "the patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal nature" of the Korean family registry system required a male head of household, forcing women and children to be registered with the government through their husbands or fathers.²⁵ Children born out of wedlock were unable to be registered in their *hoju* (family registry) and were thus ineligible to apply for government provisions including education, passports, and job applications.²⁶ Without access to these essential services, in addition to the public stigma and shunning single mothers and their children were subject to, it was difficult for single mothers to consider raising their children alone.

At the same time, children available for domestic adoption were becoming scarcer in the United States and Western Europe. The legalization of abortion, easier access to birth control, and the decreasing stigma of single motherhood meant that fewer American women were giving children up for adoption, which led to a greater reliance on transnational adoption as a method of family building. Cold War politics and the rise of the civil rights movement led to the framing of transnational adoption as "a progressive, anti-racist act of rescuing a destitute child from the 'miseries of the Third World' and a way to create a so-called rainbow family."²⁷

The increase in both supply and demand for adoptable Korean children led to the international adoption of over fifty thousand children from South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s, with three-quarters of those children going to the United States, and resulted in "international adoption [becoming] almost synonymous with adoption from Korea."²⁸

The 1980s saw the peak of transnational Korean adoption. South Korea abolished quota system that had previously regulated the number of adoptees sent abroad each year, and adoption agencies began operating more like entrepreneurial operations rather than humanitarian ones. Adoption agencies' missions shifted from rescuing children to manufacturing children eligible for transnational adoption. Driven by the rise in demand for adoptable children by white families in Western countries, "the agencies engaged themselves in profit-making activities, real estate investments, and were running their own delivery clinics, foster homes and temporary institutions."²⁹ Adoption agencies rendered tens of thousands of Korean children social orphans through questionably coercive strategies that encouraged birth families to relinquish their children and paperwork that revised and erased the children's histories and families. More than

²⁴ Hosu Kim, *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea: Virtual Mothering*, Critical Studies in Gender, Sexuality, and Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 446.

²⁵ Jaeun Kim, *Contested Embrace: Transborder Membership Politics in Twentieth-Century Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 106.

²⁶ The traditional *hoju* system was abolished in South Korea in March 2005, and a new registry system that defines family members as being the descendants of the mother *and* father to whom the child is born was implemented in 2008 (although issues have since arisen in recognizing the established kinship ties of stepparents). Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa, "Korea: The Family Registration System ('hoju'); Who Has Access to the System and Whether or Not Individuals Can Access Information on Other Families" (Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, February 15, 2007), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47d6545fc.html>; "New Family Registry System Causes Problems," *Hankyoreh*, March 19, 2008, digital edition, sec. National, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/276710.html.

²⁷ Hübinette, "Korean Adoption History," 35.

²⁸ Overseas Adopted Koreans Foundation, "Background of Adopted Koreans, 1958-2007," Ministry of Health and Welfare, Overseas Adopted Koreans, 2007, <http://oaks.korean.net>; Hübinette, "Korean Adoption History," 34, 36.

²⁹ Hübinette, "Korean Adoption History," 38.

sixty-six thousand Korean children were transnationally adopted in the 1980s, marking the largest number of international adoptions ever in one decade.³⁰

The previous decades' sacrifices resulted in the meteoric rise of South Korea's economy by the 1980s, widely recognized as the "Miracle on the Han." South Korea's hosting of the 1988 summer Olympics showcased the country's success but also brought increased international scrutiny. In his 1988 *Progressive* article that critiqued South Korea's adoption industry, Matthew Rothschild writes, "In South Korea . . . the adoption business is so efficient that it perpetuates itself. It serves as a sort of safety valve for the social problems of unwed mothers and abandoned children. Rather than address the discrimination against unwed mothers and orphans, the society simply strips the one and exports the other."³¹ This and other criticisms led South Korea to temporarily suspend transnational adoptions and establish new guidelines for its adoption practices and policies in 1989. The South Korean government announced plans to phase out transnational adoptions by 1996 by decreasing the number transnational adoptions each year and implementing economic incentives for domestic adoption. In 1994, the plan was revised to end transnational adoption by 2015, but the 1997 IMF crisis led to an increase in transnational adoptions indicating South Korea's reliance on and reluctance to end transnational adoption.

From the 1990s to today, the vast majority of the children sent abroad for adoption from Korea are from young, unwed mothers:

The relinquishing mothers are nowadays mostly teenagers or at least under the age of 25 years, often spending their pregnancies behind the secluded walls of the agencies' maternity homes, and the majority comes from a middle-class background where the stigma of pre-marital sexual activity or a former marriage has the potential to ruin future social advancement for both the parent and the child.³²

Contemporary birthmother demographics demonstrate that the country still relies on adoption (both domestic and transnational) as a solution to social issues like teen pregnancy and single parenthood.

The number of annual transnational adoptions from South Korea has drastically dropped in recent years. In 2018, only South Korean 303 children were adopted transnationally.³³ Demand for Korean children abroad has decreased with the establishment of transnational adoption programs in other countries which has given prospective adoptive parents a wider range of choice for adopting internationally. Recent studies have shown that transnational adoption trends in general are decreasing in the United States. Since 2004, transnational adoptions by Americans has dropped by 81%, and, at the current rates, is "projected to completely end international adoption in American by 2022."³⁴

In turn, growth in South Korea's domestic adoption program and adoption policy reform has led to a decreased in the number of children available for transnational adoption. South Korea's 2010 revisions of the Special Law on Adoption Promotion and Procedure includes a mandatory ten day waiting period between an infant's birth and a parent's relinquishment of

³⁰ Overseas Adopted Koreans Foundation, "Background of Adopted Koreans, 1958-2007."

³¹ Matthew Rothschild, "Babies for Sale: South Koreans Make Them, Americans Buy Them," *The Progressive* 52, no. 1 (1988): 18-23.

³² Hübinette, "Korean Adoption History," 40.

³³ Won So, "Number of Children Born in South Korea Who Were Adopted Domestically and Internationally from 2009 to 2018," Statista, May 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/647918/south-korea-children-adoption-number-region/>.

³⁴ Nathan Gwilliam et al., "How to Solve the U.S. International Adoption Crisis," *Adoption.Com* (blog), March 19, 2018, [adoption.com/how-to-solve-the-us-international-adoption-crisis](https://www.adoption.com/how-to-solve-the-us-international-adoption-crisis).

parental rights, and a restriction on only allowing children who were officially relinquished rather than abandoned by their parents eligible for transnational adoption. In April 2019, the South Korean Constitutional Court overturned the country's sixty-six year prohibition of abortion, mandating that the ban must be lifted by December 31, 2020. As the *Roe v. Wade* ruling did in the United States, I suspect that this landmark order in South Korea will decrease child relinquishments even further. While there is no official plan to formally end transnational adoption practices in South Korea at this time, the industry's nearly seventy-year history seems to be finally coming to a close.

Literature Review

As a transnational project in an interdisciplinary field, my work is informed by three bodies of literature. The first area of literature engages with questions of nationalism and national belonging. Benedict Anderson's seminal book, *Imagined Communities*³⁵ lays the foundation for thinking about nationhood as a constructed community. Anderson understands the nation as an imagined political community constructed by the people who consider themselves to be belonging to it. He posits it is imagined because most citizens will never meet the vast majority of their fellow-members, yet they still imagine themselves to be inherently connected to one another. Key to Anderson's understanding of the formation of modern nation-states is the advent of print-capitalism. Through the circulation of printed media—which has expanded today to include other forms of media such as television, film, and digital correspondence—the formation of common discourse, ideology and identity coalesce into notions of national belonging.

Gi-Wook Shin's *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea* provides an account of Korean modern history through the lens of nationalism. In it he identifies the historical processes by which “race, ethnicity, and nation came to be conflated in Korea to produce a strong sense of oneness based on shared bloodline and ancestry.”³⁶ He contends that rather than a natural or static alignment, the nation is a social and historical construction that is also dynamic in its definition and identity. Examining dual processes of contention—contention between national and transnational forces and contention over conceptions of nation—Shin traces the formation of nationalism in Korea and explains how and why ethnonationalism became the dominant source of identity for Koreans over other collective identity formations, including Pan-Asianism, colonial racism from Japanese imperialism, international and domestic socialism in North Korea, and capitalism and modernization in South Korea. He finds that Korea's ethnic nationalism is a modern construction that was shaped in response to Western exposure and imperialism. Shin's work is helpful in my own research for thinking about how transnational Korean adoptees, raised in Western cultures, may, in some ways, still be considered national subjects of Korea through ancestry and bloodline.

For an inquiry into the formation of a South Korean national identity that takes gender into account, I turn to Seungsook Moon, who specifically examines the case of “the politics of membership in the modern Korean nation” in her book, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*.³⁷ As my research looks at the ways in which gendered reproductive

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 2006).

³⁶ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, Studies of the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 223.

³⁷ Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1.

labor has been utilized in the making of a national image, Moon's research on Korean gendered citizenship is particularly interesting to me. Moon argues that male and female Koreans were mobilized to modernize the nation through different processes, which resulted in differences between men and women's citizenship trajectories. Using the notion of militarized modernity, Moon illuminates the three interrelated process of sociopolitical and economic formation: "the construction of the modern nation as an anti-communist polity, the making of its members as duty-bound 'nationals,' and the integration of the institution of male conscription into the organization of the industrialized economy."³⁸ Thus, for South Korean men, the military became an integral route through which they contribute to strengthening their nation into modernity. South Korean women, on the other hand, are called to implement birth control measures in order to help build a strong industrialized economy. Hence, women's civic contributions are framed through limiting reproductive labor—which extends their ability to work in industrial labor positions—and their economic contributions go unacknowledged and erased.

In terms of looking at U.S. notions of nationalism and exceptionalism, my work is significantly informed by Christina Klein's *Cold War Orientalism* which contextualizes American perceptions of Asia and the East within the Cold War international climate.³⁹ Klein notes that in the decades following World War II, American interest in Asia rose, which led to a proliferation of cultural productions dedicated to entertaining American audiences with the foibles of the East. Klein argues for the importance of recognizing what she identifies as "middlebrow culture" for its role in influencing and reflecting the issues and perspectives that American citizens considered important during the Cold War era. Producers of middlebrow culture, as Klein illustrates, "sought to replace the old nationalist map that Americans carried in their minds, in which the United States filled the frame, with a new internationalist one, in which the United States and 'free' Asia alike were embedded within a larger world system."⁴⁰

In an analysis of Cold War Era cultural productions, Klein demonstrates how representations of Asia reinforced the "Cold War consensus": the "domestic hegemonic bloc that supported the postwar expansion of U.S. power around the world."⁴¹ That is, Klein argues that American cultural texts that presented Asia as a subject matter performed a specific cultural work of helping the U.S. construct a national identity as a global power in an era of decolonization. Klein highlights the use of the sentimental in what she terms middlebrow depictions of Asia, which, she argues, reinforced hegemonic ideologies of Western superiority but couched them in terms of affective relations. I see transnational Korean adoption during the Cold War as falling into the paradigm Klein describes here. Families in the United States "rescued" Korean children by transforming them into American subjects through love and kinship.

Similarly, Anna McCarthy explains the political significance of television to U.S. national identity formation during the Cold War in her book, *The Citizen Machine*.⁴² McCarthy argues that during the Cold War, television was a major influence on how U.S. citizens saw their country and their world, and their roles in these settings. Television became the conduit through

³⁸ Moon, 2.

³⁹ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*.

⁴⁰ Klein, 13.

⁴¹ Klein, 7.

⁴² Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

which the governing classes of business, philanthropy, social reform, labor leadership, public intellectuals, and media imposed their agendas upon the American public.

Mark C. Jerng's *Claiming Others* considers how transracial adoption is connected to issues of race, family, and nationality in the United States. He contends that transracial and transnational adoption "highlights specific articulations of a familial nation-form throughout U.S. history as it is transformed through a set of historical crises around race relations."⁴³ That is, transracial and transnational adoption become relevant topics in American literature and public discourse at times when racial and national belonging are called into question on a national and/or global scale. Through a variety of texts, Jerng demonstrates "the ways in which the multiple meanings of race, kinship, and nation overlap to shape processes of identification and modes of being in a social subject."⁴⁴ Through his careful analysis of legal documents, novels, poetry, and documentary, Jerng highlights how transracial adoption both reifies and challenges normative assumptions about race, nation, and belonging.

The second body of literature I draw from takes transnational Korean adoption as its point of focus. Catherine Ceniza Choy's book, *Global Families* provides a history of Asian international adoption in America, drawing from extensive archival research.⁴⁵ The volume, *International Korean Adoption: A Fifty-Year History of Policy and Practice*, edited by Bergquist, Vonk, Kim, and Feit gives a multidisciplinary overview of history, issues, and perspectives relating to transnational Korean adoption.⁴⁶ Korean adoptions studies scholars such as Soojin Pate and Arissa Oh investigate how transnational adoption is framed in the American imaginary. These scholars examine how the notions of American benevolence and rescue that Klein identifies and are informed by American media and culture. Eleana Kim and Kim Park Nelson build upon this with their research which looks at Korean adoptee identity and community.⁴⁷ Kim and Park Nelson explore how the narratives of rescue that frame transnational adoption are received and interpreted by Korean adoptees themselves. Kim and Park Nelson's research works to shed light on the formation of an individual and collective Korean adoptee identity that oftentimes resists the labels and assumptions imposed upon adoptees by mainstream American culture and media.

The third area of literature from which my research draws is the field of Korean film studies. Theodore Hughes' *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea* framework of disavowal describes the ways in which a South Korean national identity was formed through its distancing from and disavowal of likeness to colonial Japan and North Korea. Through his examination of literature and films produced in South Korea during the postwar and Cold War eras, Hughes demonstrates how South Korean cultural productions sought to define a South Korean cultural identity that valued ethnonationalism, ethnodevelopmentalism, and the development of a South Korean national canon of literature.

⁴³ Mark C. Jerng, *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xii.

⁴⁴ Jerng, xx.

⁴⁵ Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America*, Nation of Newcomers (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

⁴⁶ Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist et al., eds., *International Korean Adoption: A Fifty-Year History of Policy and Practice*, Haworth Health and Social Policy (New York: Haworth Press, 2007).

⁴⁷ Eleana Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Kim Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016).

Looking at more contemporary film productions, Hyon Joo Yoo calls for conceptualizations of postcoloniality, subjectivity and the nation that take East Asia's unique experiences of colonialism into account. Yoo's reading of South Korean film sees the cinematic as being used "as means of cultural resistance to the postcolonial conditions" and the formation of a new national imaginary not dependent on Western imperialism.⁴⁸ That is, through film, South Korea is envisioning new notions of what it means to be a Korean subject. Korean media's recent inclusion of adoptee characters in its narratives is evidence of an evolving Korean national identity. Yoo notes that this process is highly gendered, and proposes the concepts of moribund masculinity and pathological femininity as ways to read resistance in Asian films that works to redefine legitimacy and subjecthood in a postcolonial age. Books such as *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama* and Kyung Hyun Kim's *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* have also been immensely helpful in thinking about the ways in which Korean cinema frames gender and national belonging, and help in thinking about tracing the genealogy of representations of gendered and marginalized subjects throughout the decades of Korean cinema.⁴⁹

Methodology

This project traces the genealogies of Korean orphanhood through American and Korean media. I am interested in tracking the ways in which the figure of the orphan has continually been used and has evolved in the effort to maintain their relevance in national narratives and discourse. In alignment with Christina Klein's observations of middlebrow cultural productions, my research relies on films, television shows, and other forms of media as primary sources that have circulated through American and Korean mainstream culture and society. I focus my analysis on visual media, as I am interested in how visual culture informs and is informed by personal and collective subjectivities. In *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell describes landscape as "a process by which social and subjective identities are formed," which I maintain is also applicable to the ways in which we experience other forms of visual culture as well.⁵⁰ Similarly, Peter Stupples asserts that "images have power for individuals, groups and even nations because they have become institutionalised, through social practices and discourses, as culturally canonical"⁵¹ I understand the visual media of film and television as "site[s] through which populations come into consciousness as members of a particular community," and am interested in investigating how images and representations of Korean orphans and adoptees are institutionalized as part of American and South Korean national narratives.⁵² I conduct close readings of select films that utilize Korean orphan or adoptee figures and focus on the genres, plots, character developments, and dialogues of the productions in order to understand how and why Korean orphans are represented in these narratives. In my selection of films television

⁴⁸ Hyon Joo Yoo, *Cinema at the Crossroads: Nation and the Subject in East Asian Cinema* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 23.

⁴⁹ Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann, eds., *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*, Contemporary Approaches to Film and Media Series (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Kyung Hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

⁵¹ Peter Stupples, "Visual Culture, Synthetic Memory and the Construction of National Identity," *Third Text* 17, no. 2 (June 2003): 132.

⁵² Lucy Curzon, "Introduction: Visual Culture and National Identity," *InVisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* 5 (January 1, 2003), <https://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/introduction-visual-culture-and-national-identity/>.

shows, I aim to present a diverse collection of productions in order to understand the different ways in which the orphan figure is utilized, and also in order to ascertain the similarities of representation across different forms and genres.⁵³ Each film or television program features at least one Korean orphan or adoptee character. While some feature these characters more prominently than others, I think it is important to also consider those productions that tangentially include orphans or adoptees, especially in relation to understanding the ways in which Korean adoptees are marginalized.

I also draw from secondary sources, building upon preexisting theoretical frameworks, and engage with scholarship from various disciplines including history, social work, and gender and queer studies. Positioned in an interdisciplinary department that emphasizes comparative analysis, I recognize the importance of allowing multiple perspectives, intersectionalities, and disciplines to inform and guide my project.

I recognize that there are, of course, limitations to my approach. As an English-speaking scholar at a university in the United States, my access to Korean film and texts is somewhat restricted. However, the growing global popularity of Korean culture has created a demand for vast collections of Korean television and movies that are easily viewable here in the United States through streaming services such as DramaFever and Netflix. Further, research trips to South Korea's film archive and the country's recent policy that all films produced in South Korea must include English subtitles have given me access to a large body of Korean film and television.⁵⁴

Historically, there has been limited material available that focuses on transnational Korean adoption in mainstream media forms and in academia. The resources that have been available have mostly been written by adoptive parents and focus on the experiences of parenting adoptees in their youth. However, while very little research had been done on transnational adoption through the latter half of the twentieth century, the twenty-first century has seen a growth of not only academic research on the Korean adoptee experience, but also the emergence of a distinct and agentive Korean adoptee community and identity. Adult Korean adoptees have begun challenging the hegemonic discourses of academia as experiential and authoritative experts on transnational adoption, shifting the focus of adoption research from that of the experiences of adoptive parents to issues identified by Korean adoptees themselves as significant to their lives and community.

I position my own work within this burgeoning and interdisciplinary field of Korean adoption studies. As a fairly new area of research, my contribution to this body of scholarship will be significant as a project that examines Korean adoption from a transnational perspective. I make a critical intervention in Korean adoption studies by conducting a comparative analysis of Korean and American representations of Korean orphans and adoptees. While several recent studies including Soojin Pate's *From Orphan to Adoptee* and Arissa Oh's *To Save the Children of Korea* have looked at how Korean children were employed to promote myths of American exceptionalism and benevolence during the Cold War, there have been no studies that have

⁵³ See Appendix for a list of the films and television shows I examine.

⁵⁴ Since 1997, the Promotion of Motion Pictures and Video Products Act of South Korea mandates the submission of all movie films produced in Korea to the Korean Film Archive. In recent years, in aligning with the Korean Film Council's mission to "further development international markets for Korean films and to promote inter-cultural understanding through film-based cultural exchanges," Korean Film Archive submissions must include English subtitles. Korean Film Archive, "Acquisition," Korean Film Archive, accessed November 8, 2019, https://eng.koreafilm.or.kr/pages/PC_00000107; Korean Film Council, "Companies Directory," Korean Film Biz Zone, 2017, <https://www.koreafilm.or.kr/eng/films/index/company.jsp?companyCd=20100548>.

comparatively examine the construction of Korean orphanhood from both a U.S. and Korean nationalist perspective.⁵⁵ The dual perspective that my research employs allows for a comparative analysis of how notions of Korean orphanhood are understood in both the United States and in South Korea. In a transnational world where ideologies, commodities, and people are exchanged across national borders, tracing the varying genealogies of orphanhood comparatively helps us understand these transnational flows of ideas and subjects more holistically.

Further, my research fills a disparity in Korean film studies by addressing the pervasive presence of orphans in Korean cinema. Aside from Tobias Hübinette's 2006 book, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, So Young Park's 2010 article on transnational adoption and the Hallyu phenomenon, and Jacob Nielsen's June 2015 article, "The Return of the Returnee," there are very few English language academic sources that address the continued use of the tropes of orphans and adoptees in Korean film.⁵⁶ Korean sources appear to be just as sparse, with only a handful of academic papers on orphans in film appearing in South Korea's national academic archive (RISS), all published within the past few years.⁵⁷ This dearth in acknowledging the presence of orphans in Korean film is significant. With films dating back to pre-Korean War production that feature orphans, such a long silence on such an enigmatic figure needs to be broken. Thus, my work sheds light on a much needed area in Korean film studies.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter of my dissertation focuses on the ways in which Korean orphans have been represented in American popular media. Through analyses of the 1951 film, *The Steel Helmet* and the 1957 film, *Battle Hymn*, and the television series, *M*A*S*H*, I discuss the notions of American benevolence and American exceptionalism. Here, I highlight how rescuing Korean orphans during the Korean War was framed as a patriotic endeavor that supported the national narrative of the United States as rescuers—bringers of freedom and vanquishers of communism. American soldiers' affective ties with Korea's most vulnerable subjects justifies the United States' military involvement in South Korea.

From there, I trace a path to how Korean adoptees have continued to be used to showcase the United States as exceptional and progressive during the Cold War and then into the twenty-first century. Chapter Two examines the transformation of Korean orphans into adoptees in American film and television. My reading of the made-for-television movie, *One Thousand Men and a Baby* highlights how a Korean orphan's mixed-race identity marks him as always already

⁵⁵ SooJin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee: U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*.

⁵⁶ Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*; So Young Park, "Transnational Adoption, Hallyu, and the Politics of Korean Popular Culture," *Biography* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 151–66; Jacob Ki Nielsen, "The Return of the Returnee: A Historicized Reading of Adult Overseas Adoptees 'Going Back' in South Korean Cinema," *The Review of Korean Studies* 18, no. 1 (June 2015): 153–78.

⁵⁷ Byung-seok Chae, "The Study of 'Third Space' in the Korean Films about Korean Overseas Adoptees: From the Perspective of Homi K Bhabha's Postcolonialism" (Master's Thesis, Dongguk University, 2005).

Ji Young Yoo and Keith Wagner, "소수자로서의 해외입양인 - 영화 <국가대표>의 해외입양인 재현을 중심으로," *영상예술연구* 22 (May 2013): 49–76.

Ji Young Yoo and Keith B. Wagner, "Transnational Adoption in Korean Cinema: Partial Citizens and Nationalism on Screen," *Third Text* 27, no. 5 (September 2013): 659–73.

Ji Young Yoo, "Mobilizing Others in Contemporary South Korean Cinema: Adoptees, Migrants, and Defectors in a Multicultural Era" (Doctoral Dissertation, Hongik University, 2014).

part of an American family. In my reading of recent American television series like *Arrested Development* and *Modern Family*, I point to how transracial adoptive “rainbow families” demonstrate the United States’ supposed transition into a postracial era in which, conflictually, “love is colorblind” and multiculturalism is embraced. I also delve into how transnational adoption has recently become a tool through which gay couples have been able to emulate heteronormative family structures, embodying a queer all-American family.

My third chapter turns to examining how orphans have been represented in Korean film. I am particularly interested in looking at films from South Korea’s Golden Age of cinema, a critical period of cultural production in which a Korean national cinema was constructed, which spanned from approximately 1953 to 1973. In this period, film became a medium through which South Koreans reflected upon, grieved, rebuilt from the devastating effects of civil war. The orphan became a frequently used figure in films, featured in popular films such as *The Money* (1958), *The Marines Who Never Returned* (1963), and *Kinship* (1963). Korean film also became a space in which collective experiences as Korean people bolstered a sense of national belonging and identity within the nascent nation-state of the Republic of Korea. I argue that the ubiquity with which orphaned characters appear in Korean films considered to be foundational to a South Korean national cinema canon merits further investigation, and I seek to explore how South Korean film has co-opted the figure of the orphan to promote patriotism and citizenship in its subjects. I consider the various ways the trope of the orphan is deployed in Korean Golden Age film and investigate how and why Korean orphans can be read as allegory for nation in South Korean film. My analysis in this chapter utilizes two theoretical frameworks: the conflation of family and nation in South Korean subjecthood, and Seungsook Moon’s theory of gendered citizenship. Within the overlap of these two lenses, I highlight how female orphan characters in Golden Age film are understood to be representative of a collective Korean national identity not in spite of their orphanhood, but rather, that their orphanhood becomes a pivotal means through which such inclusivity is attained.

While Chapter Three looks at orphans in Korean film, Chapter Four seeks to understand the transformation of orphans into transnational adoptees. This chapter addresses the trend in more recent Korean film and media of including transnational Korean adoptees in its national narratives. Once the banished and hidden shame of South Korea, Korean adoptees now are showcased as poster children for South Korea’s national narrative of becoming a dynamic international presence on the global stage. These narratives revise transnational adoption history by claiming adoptees have been part of the fabric of South Korean nationhood all along, erasing the state’s complicity with the adoption industry’s coercive child relinquishment strategies, forged identities, and the commodification of children and reproductive labor.

In this chapter, I trace the (re)integration of Korean adoptees into South Korea’s national identity by examining the 2003 Korean film, *Acacia* and the 2004 Korean drama, *Ireland*. Both of these productions include adoptee characters, who are perceived as outsiders. Although these adoptees are included in these Korean narratives, I highlight the fact that at the beginning of the 21st century, they have not yet been able to fully shake off the heavy mantle of orphanhood, which prevents them from fully integrating into South Korean society. I then read three contemporary Korean television dramas that include Korean transnational adoptee characters who have returned to their motherland in their plotlines. These include the romantic comedy, *Fated to Love You* (2014), the medical drama, *Doctor Stranger* (2014), and the police sci-fi thriller, *Tunnel* (2017). I demonstrate that across genres, representations of adoptees are

tokenized and stereotyped. And although they are showcased as the perfect cosmopolitan Korean subject, beneath the surface, these adoptees still occupy a place of unbelonging.

My final chapter departs from American and Korean national narratives to focus on the growing body of cultural productions created by adult transnational Korean adoptees. Through film, visual arts, writing, performance, and other modes of cultural production, Korean adoptees are sharing their own narratives that are oftentimes in opposition to “Western” and Korean representations of the Korean adoptee experience. Analyzing cultural texts created by Korean adoptees, including documentaries by Dan Matthews, Deann Borshay Liem, and Jane Jin Kaisen, and visual and performance art pieces from the 2007 Seoul art exhibit *Adoptee & Alien*, I argue that adoptees use creative cultural productions to express the diversity and precariousness in navigating multiple national identities. They lay bare the hidden histories of transnational Korean adoption and the processes of manufacturing “the perfect orphan.” Further, I read these productions as a move toward adoptee decolonization, and the creation of an individual and collective Korean adoptee identity that is not dependent upon belonging to either South Korea or the adoptive country.

Positionality

As a transnational Korean adoptee, I have a personal interest and investment in my research. Paolo Freire contends that “to deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic.”⁵⁸ I maintain that my subjective position strengthens my research rather than undermining it, as my analysis comes from a position of experiential expertise.

In the spirit of UC Berkeley’s Ethnic Studies department, which was born from the 1969 student strikes that demanded curricula that reflected the histories and experiences of communities of color and “value[s] the multiple forms of knowledge represented by diverse cultures and societies,” my research works to bridge the gaps between community and academia. My positionality as a Korean adoptee scholar enables me to apply the academic theories of the university to my community work, and conversely, bring awareness of the histories, experiences, and issues of the Korean adoptee community to academia.

⁵⁸ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 32.

Chapter One

Cold War, Warm Hearts: The Korean War, Orphanhood, and American Exceptionalism

A mere five years after the end of the Second World War, war broke out on the Korean peninsula. As the first hot conflict of the Cold War, the Korean War symbolized the global battle between democracy and communism. For many Americans in the McCarthy era, this amounted to a battle of good versus evil. Yet, even with such apparent high stakes, the American public found it difficult to support the war wholeheartedly. Fatigued from World War II, uninformed about the countries and the people where the fighting was taking place, and uncertain about the specific politics and ideologies that fueled the war, American soldiers and civilians alike struggled to understand their involvement in the Korean War.

At the close of the Pacific theater of World War II, the Korean peninsula was “liberated” from Japanese rule by Allied forces. The Soviet Union occupied the northern part of the peninsula while the United States occupied the south. The United States has maintained a military presence on the Korean peninsula since. By 1948, the American-backed Syngman Rhee had been elected as the first president of democratic South Korea while Kim Il-Sung became the leader of communist North Korea with the support of the Soviet Union. On June 25, 1950, after years of hostility between the two countries, North Korea crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea in an attempt to unify the peninsula under its communist regime. The United Nations condemned North Korea’s actions and approved the use of force to defend South Korea. Operating under the directives of the United Nations Security Council, the United States military along with fifteen other countries who supplied fighting units and five countries who sent medical aid entered the Korean War.

While most Western narratives about the Korean War frame the United States’ participation as “helping” and “rescuing” South Korea from the threat of communist takeover, the United States contributed to massive amounts of violence, destruction, and civilian death on the Korean peninsula. It is estimated that the U.S. Air Force “dropped 386,037 tons of bombs and 32,357 tons of napalm and fired 313,600 rockets and 166,853,100 rounds of machine-gun ammunition during the war.”¹ American soldiers have shared stories of firing indiscriminately at any civilian moving around in the combat zones, and complying with official Army directives to “strafe all civilian parties that are approaching our positions.”²

Perhaps the most infamous American violence against Korean civilians during the Korean War was the No Gun Ri massacre which occurred July 25-29, 1950. Concerned that North Korean spies had infiltrated the throngs of South Korean refugees in the small village of No Gun Ri southeast of Seoul, over the course of three days, the U.S. 7th Cavalry Regiment conducted air attacks along a railway bridge where refugees were taking shelter. The South Korea government has certified the names of 163 dead or missing and 55 wounded Korean civilians from the massacre, with the added caveat that many more unnamed and unidentified individuals perished in the attacks. South Korea’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission estimate that approximately 300 Koreans were killed at No Gun Ri, consisting of mostly women and children.³ The details of the No Gun Ri massacre were largely unknown to the American public

¹ B. C. Koh, “The War’s Impact on the Korean Peninsula,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 2, no. 1 (1993): 58.

² Tom Roberts, *Kill 'Em All: American War Crimes in Korea*, Documentary (October Films Productions, 2002).

³ Charles J. Hanley, “No Gun Ri: Official Narrative and Inconvenient Truths,” *Critical Asian Studies* 42, no. 4 (2010): 590.

until three Associated Press journalists brought the story to national attention in 1999. The U.S. government has since reluctantly conceded that it was “an unfortunate tragedy inherent to war and not a deliberate killing,” but further archival investigations and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests have found evidence that the U.S. Army had misreported and/or withheld information relating to the incident.⁴ The massacre at No Gun Ri was not an isolated incident. Following the exposure of the No Gun Ri incident, “more than sixty cases of mass killing committed by US troops, by shooting, bombing, strafing, or other means” were revealed.⁵

The irrefutable evidence of war crimes committed by the U.S. military during the Korean War blurs the lines between hero and villain. With the Americans fatigued from its efforts in World War II just five years earlier, civilians and soldiers alike found it difficult to back an ideological conflict on a relatively-unknown Asian peninsula in which soldiers fired indiscriminately at the local populations. Thus, U.S. media sought to reframe the Korean War to the American public as a humanitarian effort in order to bolster support for the war. Popular film and television programs became key sites through which this reframing took place.

Despite being popularly referred to as the Forgotten War, the Korean War has been a recurring subject of Hollywood from the beginning. From the first major film about the conflict being release just months after the war broke out to contemporary films like Clint Eastwood’s *Gran Torino*, the Korean War has maintained a presence in United States popular media and culture. Over the years, narratives about the Korean War have been altered and revised to represent the United States’ involvement as humanitarian and altruistic rather than imperialist and violent. Thus, through Hollywood’s lens, the Korean War could be considered the Remembered War rather than the Forgotten War, where bits and pieces of truth and history are reassembled into a more ideologically acceptable production.

Elisabeth Bronfen contends that “films engaged with representing war are particularly self-reflective.”⁶ She describes how reenactments of battle on the screen draw us in and engulfs us in a way that “helps understand it in the actual world.”⁷ I would also add war films that feature a palpable enemy force and the possibility of death and destruction all around force us as viewers to consider not only our mortality, but also our own positionality. War films, which are inherently premised upon contending with an enemy naturally lends itself to comparisons. We understand ourselves by differentiating ourselves from the enemy.

Present in many of these retellings is the figure of the Korean orphan. Youthful, apolitical, and impressionable, and always male, media representations of the Korean orphan as the object of American military concern shifts our perception of the United States’ responsibilities and culpability in the war. That is, through the use of the Korean orphan figure, U.S. film and television enable us to frame our presence in the Korean War as heroic and without guile. The United States’ role in Korea becomes that of a parent, guiding and protecting the country and its orphans who are militarized into miniature American soldiers: “U.S. military presence turns unproductive surplus (orphans) into productive citizen-subjects (Americans).”⁸ Susie Woo notes that U.S. media portrayed American servicemen as surrogate father figures to

⁴ Hanley, 593.

⁵ Dong Choon Kim, “Forgotten War, Forgotten Massacres—the Korean War (1950–1953) as Licensed Mass Killings,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 6, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 523, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462352042000320592>.

⁶ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Specters of War: Hollywood’s Engagement with Military Conflict* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 3.

⁷ Bronfen, 3.

⁸ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 52.

Korea and its orphans which worked to “reframe the unpopular war as a rescue mission in which the United States saved innocent children from the clutches of communism.”⁹ Through the consumption of these orphan tropes in popular media, American audiences define themselves, their values, and their country.

I place my argument in the frameworks of disavowal and American exceptionalism to show how Korean orphans have helped define a collective American identity through film and television. In *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea*, Theodore Hughes discusses how South Korea’s experiences with Japanese colonialism and ideological divergence from North Korea shaped the ways in which South Koreans formed a collective national identity which was often based not on affirmations, but disavowals of character and ideology as a way to differentiate between them and their Japanese colonizers as well as their North Korean communist brothers.¹⁰ This disavowal defines a national identity by determining what it is not. Hughes identifies three disavowals that shaped the boundaries of South Korean cultural production: “the ban (until 1988) on colonial-period proletarian works, the institutionalized forgetting of the late-colonial-period mass culture of mobilization and imperialization, and the effacement of contemporary North Korean cultural production.”¹¹ Eager to move past the traumas of imperialism and civil war, yet still profoundly haunted by them, postwar South Korean cultural productions, including films, strove to define a distinctive cultural identity through the increased importance of ethnonationalism, ethnodevelopmentalism, and the formation of *Han’guk munhak* (Korean literature), while ignoring the genealogies of colonial-era proletarianism and imperial belongingness and denying a shared connection to North Korea. Hughes argues that South Korea’s efforts to display “‘South Korea’ as a postcolonial developmentalist space at once oppos[es] and mirror[s] its northern counterpart in the global Cold War.”¹² Thus, while South Korean national identity is one that touts democracy and free trade, it is simultaneously defining itself as anti-imperialist and anti-communist—through disavowals that then distributed through national films, television, and media.

Similarly, I argue that American media also utilize this strategy of disavowal to construct national narratives. In films concerning the Korean War, North Korea becomes a popular identity against which to contrast American values and institutions. Like South Korea, the United States emphasizes its national commitment to anti-communism through its depictions of North Korea and its people. North Korea is an archetypal enemy, “a red tide infused with a yellow menace,” to which Americans can easily disavow any resemblance.¹³

Yet U.S. film also defines its national identity through comparisons with South Korea. While North Korea is a shared enemy, South Korea is an unknown quantity for most Americans. From a U.S. perspective, in some ways, South Koreans seem to share more in common with an enemy than they do with an ally. Essentially, while worthy of U.S. military protection, South Koreans are inherently foreign and unequivocally *not* American. Thus, classic Orientalism contributes to an American national identity in relation to cinematic depictions of the Korean War.

⁹ Susie Woo, *Framed by War: Korean Children and Women at the Crossroads of US Empire*, Nation of Nations: Immigrant History as American History (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 14.

¹⁰ Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom’s Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Hughes, 2.

¹² Hughes, 3.

¹³ Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture*, Film and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 7.

Concomitant with American definitions by disavowal are the constructions of the United States as not only exceptional, but superior to those against which it defines itself. As historian Ian Tyrrell describes,

American exceptionalism is not the same as saying the United States is “different” from other countries. It doesn’t just mean that the US is “unique.” Countries, like people, are all different and unique, even if many share some underlying characteristics.

Exceptionalism requires something far more: a belief that the US follows a path of history different from the laws or norms that govern other countries. That’s the essence of American exceptionalism: the US is not just a bigger and more powerful country – but an exception.¹⁴

In order to maintain this notion of superiority, the Other must remain inferior. Thus, Hollywood depictions of the Korean War portray the Korean peninsula as populated with the elderly, women, and children, or villainous adult enemies that are easily defeated. Enemies and allies can never be equals to the strength, bravery, or integrity of “Number 1” America.¹⁵ Key to maintaining the “state fantasy of American exceptionalism” for both Americans and Koreans was representing the presence of the U.S. military in Korea as charitable and altruistic.¹⁶ Unlike Japan or the Soviet Union or even Europe’s imperialist interest in the Korean peninsula, the United States’ interest was purely benevolent. At the center of many of these portrayals of exceptionalism was the Korean orphan: “By taking care of South Korea’s most vulnerable population the U.S. military advertised itself as a force of goodwill and humanitarianism that fostered an image of benevolence rather than imperialism, assistance rather than occupation.”¹⁷

“What a Fouled-Up Outfit I Got Myself Into”: Representations of Korean Orphanhood and American Diversity in *The Steel Helmet*

For nearly a century, the war film has endured as a popular and profitable product for Hollywood. As a genre, martial cinema tends to be formulaic: benevolent American soldiers fight for freedom and justice against an unreasonable enemy. Through violence and adventure, men risk their lives for a cause greater than themselves, which leads to profound male bonding, as brothers in arms become a surrogate family.¹⁸ Such representations became popular in the portrayal of American soldiers’ World War II experiences, and continued as U.S. military attention turned toward the Korean War.

In the milieu of Cold War McCarthyism, American audiences voraciously consumed films and television programs about war. These new visual media served not only as entertainment and escape from fear of the threat of Communism (which, it can be argued, was also effectively cultivated through broadcasting) but, as Anna McCarthy demonstrates in *The*

¹⁴ Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism, from Stalin with Love,” *Aeon*, October 10, 2016, <https://aeon.co/ideas/american-exceptionalism-from-stalin-with-love>.

¹⁵ Soojin Pate relates how “Number 1,” which is defined in “The Code of the Korean Conflict” as “the best,” was a common phrase of American soldiers during the Korean War used “to assert themselves as a new world power and leader after emerging from World War II victorious.” Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 37.

¹⁶ Pate, 38.

¹⁷ Pate, 38.

¹⁸ In her seminal work, *The World War II Combat Film*, Jeanine Basinger identifies the representation of the military unit as family as a conventional war film trope. Describing the storytelling process of constructing an American World War II film, Basinger narrates: “And if our families were separated and torn apart by war, this group could become our substitute family—a kind of big, national family of other Americans.” Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 79.

Citizen Machine, also informed its viewers about the ideals of democratic American citizenship.¹⁹ By equating American citizenship with principles of freedom, equality, rights, and responsibilities, film and television producers, corporate sponsors, and the U.S. government used film and television to shape the American public into the Cold War citizens who could navigate the complexities of the social, cultural, and geopolitical climates of the post-World War II era. Films about the Korean War were no exception, but were, as I describe above, replete with righteous messages about freedom, justice, and American exceptionalism.

In his identification of the Korean War as “*remembered as forgotten*,” Junghyun Hwang points to what he regards as symptomatic of the contradictions rife in Korean War discourse.²⁰ He argues that like other Hollywood productions in the war film genre, Korean War films projected and preserved a positive self-image of America by creating fictional and superficial contradictions that are then neatly resolved. The American viewer’s attention is directed away from the deeper and more complicated contradictions of this civil war that was simultaneously not worth fighting for and crucial to maintaining the balance of freedom and righteousness in the world. Hwang contends that the collective fantasy of American exceptionalism enabled the American public to deny culpability in committing Cold War violence and imperialism. That is, American imperialism was understood as “a nation-preserving measure that would prevent Soviet imperialism.”²¹ This enabled Americans to imagine themselves as “agents rather than victims of the cold war National Security State, willingly ceding their civic rights by identifying themselves with the state’s will.”²²

The first film on the Korean War, Samuel Fuller’s *The Steel Helmet* (1951), is indicative of the United States’ contradictory relationship with the Korean War.²³ Korean War film expert, Robert J. Lentz asserts that “The best Korean War films are the ones which pass beyond those familiar parameters [of the Hollywood war film] into uncharted territory.”²⁴ *The Steel Helmet* both pushes the boundaries of American cinema while simultaneously deploying familiar war film tropes in order to engender feelings of patriotism in its audiences. *The Steel Helmet* piques my interest because of its iconic sidekick character, the Korean orphan Short Round. The inclusion of this orphaned child in the first U.S. film about the Korean War sets a precedent for how Hollywood and American audiences consider the Korean War orphan. Through my reading of this film, I demonstrate that while Samuel Fuller’s work is, in some regards, progressive and avant-garde, his representations of Korean orphanhood in *The Steel Helmet* continue to deploy clichés that promote American exceptionalism in the United States’ history and relationship with South Korea.

The film begins with an epigraph dedicating the story to the United States Infantry, positioned over footage of weary American soldiers limping through the ruins of an entryway, their backs to us as they walk away. The opening credits roll over an image of the titular steel combat helmet. It is chipped and scarred, with a conspicuous off-center bullet hole. From this tableau, we infer the hazards of war—that U.S. troops are risking life and limb, a shot to the head for a yet-to-be-identified cause. As the credits close, the steel helmet rises from its resting place,

¹⁹ McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine*.

²⁰ Junghyun Hwang, “‘I’ve Got a Hunch We’re Going Around in Circles’: Exceptions to American Exceptionalism in Hollywood Korean War Films,” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 49, no. 1 (2017): 62. Emphasis in original.

²¹ Hwang, 68.

²² Hwang, 69.

²³ Samuel Fuller, *The Steel Helmet* (Lippert Pictures, Inc., 1951).

²⁴ Robert J. Lentz, *Korean War Filmography: 91 English Language Features through 2000* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), 2.

and we realize that it is actually sitting atop the head of soldier, and the U.S. military's duty to a foreign war is transformed from an abstract and anonymous cause to a personal and emotional story told from the perspective of a blue-eyed, auburn-haired infantryman. Gene Evans stars as Sergeant Zack, a cantankerous World War II retread who is the sole survivor of his unit in Korea after an encounter with North Korean soldiers. Tied up and left for dead, he is rescued by an orphaned South Korean boy whom he nicknames Short Round.²⁵ "You look more like a dogface than a gook," Zack growls at the boy, implying that with his survival skills and toting an American assault rifle, he resembles an American soldier rather than the Yellow Horde enemy.²⁶ With a scowl, the Korean boy retorts, "I am no gook. I am South Korean."

This exchange is reminiscent of stories from World War II when Chinese and Korean Americans wore pins and signs with phrases like "I am Chinese," "I am Korean," and "Me Chinese Please No Jap."²⁷ As Ji-Yeon Yuh confirms, "There are many reports of Koreans and Chinese in the U.S. being harassed and attacked by white Americans who mistook them for Japanese."²⁸ Such pins and badges were worn for the benefit of white Americans, to distinguish themselves as the *other* Other, and not a threat. Like the Korean Americans making a point to distance themselves from Japanese Americans, Short Round feels it is important to identify himself as a "Good Asian" (South Korean) to Zack by disavowing the "Bad Asian" classification of gook (North Korean).

Sergeant Zack demonstrates how little care and effort many Americans put into differentiating between Asians as individuals and as discrete ethnicities and nationalities when he casually jokes with his fellow infantrymen: "You know how to tell the difference? He's South Korean when he's running with ya, he's North Korean when he's running at ya." Though Zack and his associates are stationed in South Korea to aid and protect the country's people from the threat of North Korean communist violence, Sergeant Zack's quip reveals the fact that to them, there is no discernable difference between North and South Koreans. They are all part of the

²⁵ Sergeant Zack explains that short round is "a bullet that doesn't go all the way, and that's you bud. You're not going all the way with me. Just till we meet some goo--some South Koreans who'll take you off my neck." Referring to his young Asian companion as Short Round connotes the unequal relationship the United States has with South Korea. "Short round" implies a lack or deficiency and is also evocative of the emasculated Asian male stereotype, who can't "go all the way" in a sexual situation. A moniker so heavily laden with connotations of inferiority reinforces the assumed position of South Korea as a junior partner or sidekick, which has been "politically, militarily, and economically subordinated to the United States since before its inception in 1948." Thirty-four years later, Steven Spielberg resurrected the moniker, Short Round, to create the Chinese orphan character who acts as sidekick to Indiana Jones, again reinforcing the stereotype of Asians as inferior and/or sidekicks to American heroes. Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camp Town: Korean Military Brides in America*, Nation of Newcomers (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 3.

²⁶ Dogface refers to a U.S. Army foot soldier serving in the infantry. As veteran Phillip Leveque explains, "Perhaps I should explain the derivation of the term 'dogface.' He lived in 'pup tents' and foxholes. We were treated like dogs in training. We had dog tags for identification. The basic story is that wounded soldiers in the Civil War had tags tied to them with string indicating the nature of their wounds. The tags were like those put on a pet dog or horse, but I can't imagine anybody living in a horse tent or being called a horseface. Correctly speaking, only Infantrymen are called dogfaces. Much of the time we were filthy, cold and wet as a duck hunting dog and we were ordered around sternly and loudly like a half-trained dog." Phillip Leveque, "ASTP: Alchemy For A Foxhole-A Salute to the ASTP Men," 89th Infantry Division of World War II, accessed February 25, 2019, <http://www.89infdivww2.org/memories/levequeastp1.htm>.

²⁷ Los Angeles Examiner, *Howard Yip: "Me Chinese Please No Jap"*, 1942, 1942, Photograph, Los Angeles Examiner Prints Collection, late 1920's-1961, USC Libraries Special Collections, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll44/id/54535>.

²⁸ Ji-Yeon Yuh, "Koreans in Japanese Internment Camps in WW II?," *Korean Studies Discussion List*, October 21, 2004, http://koreanstudies.com/pipermail/koreanstudies_koreanstudies.com/2004-October/004422.html.

amorphous Yellow Horde, the inscrutable Other. They are different, they are peculiar, and regardless of what side of the battle lines they are on, they are inherently *not* American.

Yet, *The Steel Helmet* is groundbreaking in many ways and can be lauded for the way it challenged 1950s social, political, and cinematic boundaries. Rather than ignoring or skirting around uncomfortable topics like racism, inequality, and internment, the film's dialogue addresses these topics head-on, giving its 1950s audiences a preview of an America without racial discrimination. Fuller's film ushers in a new cultural perspective in America that renounces and disavows the past that condoned discrimination and prejudice. Indeed, many war film critics regard *The Steel Helmet* as an iconic and uniquely complex film about the Korean War.²⁹

Filmed in just ten days, *The Steel Helmet* was the first Hollywood film to bring American viewers' attention to the Korean War. It was released only six months after the outbreak of the conflict. It is significant that Fuller chose to center his story on American infantrymen. As foot soldiers, infantrymen are, as the French phrase suggests, the *avant-garde*. They are positioned on the front lines. Unlike so many earlier Hollywood productions, *The Steel Helmet* features Asian American actors in Asian and Asian American roles, eschewing the practice of yellowface.

Having survived a guerrilla attack by North Koreans disguised as female worshippers at a shrine, Zack and Short Round join a ragtag team of American foot soldiers who band together to defend an abandoned Buddhist temple against a fierce North Korean attack.³⁰ Sean Axmaker quips that "the classic American platoon film calls for a colorful cast of characters; Fuller obliges with a lumpy melting pot unlike anything audiences had seen on the screen."³¹ Besides the cantankerous sergeant and the eager orphan, there is an African American medic (Corporal Thompson), an arrogant and inexperienced patrol leader (Lieutenant Driscoll), a war-hardened Japanese American (Sergeant Tanaka), a conscientious objector (Private Bronte), a guileless private afflicted with alopecia (Private Baldy), and a mute (Joe). "What a fouled-up outfit I got myself into," Sergeant Zack grumbles. Unlike the Koreans who are, according to Zack, indistinguishable from one another, which makes differentiating between friend and villain difficult, each American is recognizably unique. Their idiosyncrasies are, in fact, an asset, as they humanize and personalize each soldier. Here, again, the film seems to be making a clear distinction between *us* and *them*.

By assembling a motley cast of characters, Fuller deals with sensitive issues in war and U.S. society. James Edwards' character, Corporal Thompson, makes a statement as an African American medic integrated into a multiracial platoon. The mere fact that he is a medic, in a role in which he saves lives, gives aid, and has medical training, departs from negative assumptions about African American soldiers. The Korean War was one of the first military events in which the U.S. military used integrated units, after President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 in 1948, which desegregated United States armed forces. Interestingly, Hollywood had been

²⁹ *Harrison's Reports* raved that the film was "destined to take its place among the best war pictures ever produced. It has been directed by Samuel Fuller so skillfully that the spectator's attention is held in a vice from the beginning to the end." The review also stated that "[t]here is nothing wrong with the picture, but nervous children may not be able to sleep after seeing it." "'The Steel Helmet' with Gene Evans, Robert Hutton and Steve Brodie," *Harrison's Reports*, January 6, 1951, XXXIII.1 edition, sec. 1, 2.

³⁰ The representation of the North Korean infiltrators works to uphold the American exceptionalism fantasy—Korea is populated by weak and defenseless women and children. When it is discovered that the women are actually male enemies, they are easily dispatched.

³¹ Sean Axmaker, "The Steel Helmet," Turner Classic Movies, accessed October 26, 2018, <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/240871%7C0/The-Steel-Helmet.html>.

depicting integrated companies in World War II films since 1943, even though such diverse units didn't yet exist in reality.³² *The Steel Helmet* gestures towards normalizing racial integration in the military. While Sergeant Zack seems unbothered to be fighting alongside an African American medic, racial politics is not ignored, as Marsha Gordon observes, "In the context of the war film it is unusual that Fuller opted to deal so directly and repeatedly with home front racial politics, a topic that had only recently and tentatively emerged in studio-made films."³³

Through the character of the captured North Korean spy, racism and social inequality in the United States are addressed. Like a devil on the shoulder, "Red" goads the American soldiers about racial discrimination in the hopes of sowing discontent and division among them. "I just don't understand ya. You can't eat with 'em unless there's a war. Even then, it's difficult, isn't that so?" he asks Corporal Thompson, as the medic tends to his wounds. "You pay for a ticket, but you even have to sit at the back of a public bus. Isn't that so?"

"That's right," Thompson agrees. "A hundred years ago, I couldn't even ride a bus. At least now I can sit in the back. Maybe in fifty years, I'll sit in the middle. Someday even up front. There are some things you just can't rush, buster." Through this exchange, the camera focuses closely on Thompson and Red's faces, tracking them back and forth in a circular motion, as if to emphasize the similarities and differences between the two figures. Both men are soldiers, battered and exhausted by war. Both are people of color. Yet one is a murderous and unscrupulous communist, and the other is an upright American who will try to heal even this backstabbing villain. He is proud to serve the great United States as he patiently waits for the slow progress toward racial equality. The camera tracking in tandem with the characters' dialogue artfully suggests that although there may be superficial similarities, in reality, Corporal Thompson and Red are diametrically opposed. Like Short Round, who protests "I am no gook," Thompson can say, "I am nothing like him."

The comparison between Red and the Japanese American soldier, Sergeant Tanaka, is more complex. "You have the same kind of eyes I have. They hate us because of our eyes," Red tells Tanaka, as they slouch side-by-side. Red uses first person plural here to align himself with Tanaka. Instead of the slow circular pan in the scene featuring Red and Thompson, here, the camera cuts back and forth between Red and Tanaka as they talk, zoomed in on their faces so closely that only their eyes fill the screen, emphasizing the similarities between the two. The fact that Red speaks English without an accent makes the two voices in the dialogue even more indistinguishable.³⁴ "Doesn't it make you feel like a traitor?" Red asks Tanaka, referring to the fact that he's fighting an enemy that looks like him, when "they [the United States government] threw Japanese Americans in prison camps in the last war, didn't they? Perhaps even your parents. Perhaps even you." Sean Axmaker notes that this is the first time that Japanese internment is acknowledged in American film.³⁵ Yet, like Corporal Thompson, Sergeant Tanaka remains loyal to the United States, even though "they call you dirty Jap rats." This gibe compels Tanaka to deny any resemblance to the label, and thus, to Red. As a combat enemy like the Japanese in World War II, and as a citizen of Korea which, until only six years prior, had been officially part of imperial Japan, Tanaka sees Red as being closer in likeness to the "dirty Jap

³² Elizabeth Reich, *Militant Visions: Black Soldiers, Internationalism, and the Transformation of American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 27.

³³ Marsha Gordon, *Film Is Like a Battleground: Sam Fuller's War Movies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 73.

³⁴ Harold Fong, born on February 8, 1911 in Sacramento, California plays Red in *The Steel Helmet*.

³⁵ Axmaker, "TCM."

rats” than himself. “I got some hot infantry news for you,” Tanaka informs Red. “I’m not a dirty Jap rat, I’m an American.” With his affirmation of Americanness, Tanaka becomes a trope himself: the exceptional Asian from America, the model minority.

While the uncomfortable truths of racism perhaps might have prompted white American audiences think more critically of the society in which they lived, instead, many focused on the character’s unwavering patriotism. Gordon highlights an excerpt from the *Hollywood Citizen-News* editorial to illustrate this point: “the GI’s behave like true Americans, refusing to be swayed by the shopworn communist propaganda. They realize that American democracy has not yet achieved perfection but that it has brought them more equality and justice than they could achieve under a communist dictatorship.”³⁶

Representations of race and racism in *The Steel Helmet* also attracted censure. As Gordon explains, “A culture of extreme caution pervaded Hollywood in the early 1950s, inspired largely by the hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (hereafter HUAC) that took place in the late 1940s; the blacklist of Hollywood writers, directors, producers, and stars that evolved out of those investigations; and the reactionary press and political groups that pointed fingers at any whiff of potentially ‘subversive’ representation or behavior.”³⁷ Fuller’s refusal to euphemize war and racism drew the ire of the FBI and the Department of Defense. The FBI investigated Fuller’s public and private life and went over *The Steel Helmet* with a fine-toothed comb, searching for “a picture a line, a scene, a sequence, conveying the Communist lesson.”³⁸ As was required of films about war at the time, Fuller secured stock footage through official channels in Washington. However, the Department of Defense, having reviewed the film, refused to endorse it or grant permission to use their footage because of “many features in the script which are considered objectionable, inaccurate, and not typical.”³⁹ Included in the list of objectionable and inaccurate content was Fuller’s presentation “the Red PW ha[ving] a better argument than the American soldier,” which cast the character, Tanaka and in turn the U.S. military as “weak and unconvincing.”⁴⁰

Despite its challenges the U.S. militarism, *The Steel Helmet* still reproduces some of Hollywood’s most common tropes and stereotypes about Asians. Sergeant Zack’s indifference to the distinction between North and South Koreans stems from the usual assumptions in the West about Asians as inscrutable and monolithic Others.

Gordon points out that Tanaka, the Japanese American character, actually contributes to the perpetuation of racist stereotypes of Asians. When the communist prisoner of war continues to goad him about his loyalty to a country that imprisoned him, Tanaka bids Red to “knock off before I forget the articles of war and slap those rabbit teeth of yours out one at a time.” Here, Tanaka alludes to the stereotype that Asians have unattractive buck teeth, and the simplistic categorization of Asians as either “good” or “bad.” Red the communist is the Bad Asian. And because Tanaka is not a communist, but an American, he is the Good Asian. Between Zack’s essentialism and Tanaka’s binaries, there is little space for representations of Asian characters with depth and complexity.

William Chun’s Short Round, the Korean orphan character is also one-dimensional. In terms of its portrayals of Asians, *The Steel Helmet* is unoriginal at best. It does not allow for

³⁶ Gordon, *Film Is Like a Battleground*, 78.

³⁷ Gordon, 80.

³⁸ Gordon, 84.

³⁹ Gordon, 81.

⁴⁰ Gordon, 82.

Korean orphans' humanity, but instead turns to tired orphan tropes that function to humanize and valorize the white male hero. The hero's sidekick, Short Round, serves as a foil to the pessimistic Sergeant Zack, who has been aged beyond his years by war. Short Round softens Zack, making an unlikeable anti-hero likeable, which, in turn, attempts to make an unpopular and complicated war easier to support as a simple humanitarian effort that is worth the emotional investment.

To begin, we know next to nothing about Short Round's past. When asked about his family, Short Round simply replies that they are "with Buddha." Like other mainstream Korean orphan and adoptee narratives, there is no interest in acknowledging the birth family or where he comes from, except to populate a thin backstory of tragedy that will ultimately be fixed by our white American hero. Rather, like Athena, orphans seem to spring into existence only at the moment of their encounter with Westerners. Short Round enters the cinematic world fully armed and battle-ready. His encounter with Sergeant Zack serves as his "birth," and he is christened with the name Short Round. Zack does not even bother to ask the boy his real name, dismissing the possibility that the orphan could have been *someone* before coming under the soldier's protection. With his new name, Short Round exists only in relation to Sergeant Zack. The person he was before ceases to exist, or rather, was never written into cinematic existence in the first place.

Short Round's relationship with Sergeant Zack and the other soldiers fulfills the fantasy of an orphan completing a family. In describing their first meeting with Corporal Thompson, Marsha Gordon suggests that "a military family is in the process of being *constructed* among these three."⁴¹ The gruff, white sergeant is the patriarch, prepared to defend his "family" from the communist threat. Conversely, Corporal Thompson, a person of color, assumes the emasculating caretaker role, performing domesticity as a medic. He even serves his companions a wholesome meal of tinned meat and MREs, as he "got away with beaucoup chow before I took off."⁴² Short Round completes the family as the son, perhaps ironically forecasting the future adoption of thousands of Korean orphans into U.S. military and civilian families. And although Short Round reverses the cliché of the white man rescuing the Asian child by freeing Zack from North Korean captivity, the boy nonetheless looks up to the soldier with worshipful adoration. The relationship among the three characters replicates the American nuclear family with its gendered and age-appropriate roles. Zack, Thompson, and Short Round simulate a nuclear family, the conventional family model in the West, rather than the Korean extended or stem family model.

Once battened down in an abandoned Buddhist temple with his motley crew, Sergeant Zack fashions a set of military dog tags for his small companion. The dog tags could indicate that Short Round has earned Zack's affection and acceptance as an honorary U.S. infantryman. But I also read the gesture as a mark of ownership over the orphaned boy. I can't help but be reminded of the ways in which dog tags are used to claim possession and proprietorship. In thinking about dog tags' original purpose of identifying the ownership and registration of pets, the bestowal of dog tags to Short Round by Sergeant Zack marks Short Round as Zack's property and recalls the perspective many U.S. soldiers had of Korean orphans attached to their units as novel pets or mascots.

Short Round's presence in the film, while considerable, is really only important in relation to Zack. The figure of the orphan serves to demonstrate the depth of Sergeant Zack's

⁴¹ Gordon, 74. My emphasis.

⁴² Meals ready to eat, or MREs are self-contained, individual field rations issued by the military for consumption by soldiers in the field.

character. There is little character development for Short Round. Indeed, “heartwarming orphans don't have to do anything to be heartwarming. It seems inherent to their orphaned state. They don't even have to appear on stage.”⁴³ The orphan could be anyone, as long as he evokes the same emotional responses from Sergeant Zack. The orphan is not important as an individual. When Fuller wrote the script for *The Steel Helmet*, the film was set during World War II, and Short Round was an Italian boy, Giacomo Borcellino. Gordon writes, “That he [Fuller] intended *The Steel Helmet* to be a World War II film and altered it so seamlessly into a Korean War film is also telling—the experiences of the foot soldier remain similar, regardless of the notable differences between conflicts.”⁴⁴ While this may be true—and the film’s closing postscript nods toward this—I also read the transposition of Giacomo to Short Round as a demonstration of the interchangeability of the orphan in the creator’s imagination.⁴⁵

Perhaps surprisingly, *The Steel Helmet* is not the typical “happily-ever-after” orphan narrative. Short Round succeeds in softening the heart of the curmudgeonly Sergeant Zack, fulfilling his cinematic purpose. His story ends when a North Korean sniper kills him. In death, Short Round finally cracks Sergeant Zack’s war-hardened apathy. Zack flies into a rage when he sees the child’s broken body and kills Red, the North Korean prisoner of war, in retaliation. Short Round remains forever a child, cementing the notion that orphans are perpetual children who require guidance and protection indefinitely.

Sean Axmaker notes that the Breen Office, which enforced the Production Code in Hollywood, objected especially to this scene, as the shooting of a prisoner of war in real life is a direct violation of the Geneva Convention.⁴⁶ However, Zack’s defiance of the rules and regulations of war can be understood as justified, even merited, because of his personal and emotional investment in Short Round’s well-being. Rather than villainizing him, his disobedience of military protocol humanizes him, as he takes revenge for Short Round’s death. This moment also compels us to consider the difference in value of human lives. While both the intentional killing of civilians and the execution of prisoners of war are violations of the Geneva Convention, *The Steel Helmet*’s valorization of Sergeant Zack’s act of vengeance suggests that the life of a South Korean orphan who had the potential to become a subject and supporter of American democracy and freedom has far more value than that of an enemy communist soldier.

Having defended the temple against the communists’ attack, the survivors pack up to join the next battle. The film ends with the same footage that opened it: battered soldiers limp through a broken threshold that opened the film now replays as the message, “THERE IS NO END TO THIS STORY,” fades in to overlay, alluding to the cyclical nature of war and violence. Humans will always wage war. All war is the same, regardless of place, time, or intent. Fuller’s message, broadcast merely six months into the Korean War inadvertently underscores the unique legacy of this this long conflict, which was suspended in armistice but has never officially ended by peace treaty.

In his review of *The Steel Helmet*, C.F. Robinson writes that “Any war movie produced about a war while it is still going on should be considered a work of propaganda. Indeed, it is

⁴³ “Heartwarming Orphan,” TV Tropes, accessed October 26, 2018, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HeartwarmingOrphan>.

⁴⁴ Gordon, *Film Is Like a Battleground*, 72.

⁴⁵ Incidentally, William Chun has two acting roles to his name: that of the orphaned Short Round in *The Steel Helmet*, and also as Clancy, an orphaned military base mascot in the 1953 Korean War film, *Mission Over Korea*.

⁴⁶ Axmaker, “TCM.”

likely that all war movies are propaganda in some way.”⁴⁷ I would agree, and I understand the film’s critique of racism and its clichés about war orphans and American political dominance as working toward the same goal of framing the United States’ involvement in the Korean War in a positive light and promoting certain civic ideal. Through its diverse cast and racially frank script, *The Steel Helmet* validates the United States’ albeit simplistic and superficial commitment to social justice and equality. In turn, the inclusion of the Korean orphan character represents America’s supposed altruism and goodwill.

War films like *The Steel Helmet* promote national interest in and justification of American intervention in cultures and countries that supposedly lack American virtues. Framing of this involvement as benevolent erases the United States’ culpability in the violence and casualties of war and reinforces the U.S.’s national identity as exceptional. Jasbir Puar recounts that “Discourses of American exceptionalism are embedded in the history of U.S. nation-state formation, from early immigration narratives to cold war ideologies to the rise of the age of terrorism.”⁴⁸ She explains that “exceptionalism gestures to narratives of excellence, excellent nationalism, a process whereby a national population comes to believe in its own superiority and its own singularity.”⁴⁹ This aggrandized self-identity creates divisions, as the United States places itself upon a pedestal, separating us from them, American from Korean, and even differentiating its imperial projects from other colonial powers’ agendas. With its ideological foundation based on what Seymour Martin Lipset identifies as the American Creed (liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire), narratives of American imperialism are framed as fighting on the side of good against evil rather than the oppression and exploitation of Europe’s colonial projects.⁵⁰ American exceptionalism justifies the United States’ involvement in foreign affairs, including the Korean War, as the U.S. military’s mission is to help the unexceptional become more like the U.S. Through its modeling of the American Creed, and fighting against the evils of communism, the U.S. military “saves” South Korea by Americanizing it. However, it is important to note that even with America’s help, *South Korea can never actually become the United States*. The superiority and singularity of the United States must be maintained.

As the first Hollywood film about the Korean War, *The Steel Helmet* set a precedent for representations of the first hot war of the Cold War. As protectors of orphans and defenders of freedom, Sergeant Zack and his squad are honorable American heroes despite (or perhaps because of) their idiosyncrasies and flaws. Junghyung Hwang observes that, “such liberal American subjects, ‘innocent, well-intentioned, and benevolent,’ often find apt illustrations in the heroes of Korean War films.”⁵¹

“How Can We be Free of Guilt?”: Absolving U.S. Military Violence through White Saviorhood in *Battle Hymn*

After the release of *The Steel Helmet*, the Korean War film genre expanded, with over 90 films produced during the latter half of the twentieth century. The trend of illustrating the heroes

⁴⁷ C.F. Robinson, “The First Neoconservative Propaganda: A Review of The Steel Helmet,” Counter-Currents Publishing, March 2017, <https://www.counter-currents.com/2017/03/the-first-neoconservative-propaganda/>.

⁴⁸ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Next Wave: New Directions in Women’s Studies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 5.

⁴⁹ Puar, 5.

⁵⁰ Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 31.

⁵¹ Hwang, “I’ve Got a Hunch,” 76.

of Korean War films as “innocent, well-intentioned, and benevolent” continues in subsequent Hollywood depictions of the Korean War.⁵² Robert Lentz notes that most of the films produced during the actual duration of the war were minor films (with the exception of Samuel Fuller’s two films, *The Steel Helmet* and *Fixed Bayonets!*⁵³). However, in the years that followed the war, “Hollywood’s big studios finally began to make truly major motion pictures about the war.”⁵⁴ Hollywood’s commercialization of the Korean War relies on formulaic plotlines that continue to sentimentalize and embellish U.S. involvement, thus replicating the disavowals already established in *The Steel Helmet*. Many of these films also utilize orphaned Korean characters to showcase the good intentions of its American heroes.

The 1957 biopic *Battle Hymn* attempts to make the Korean War movie into a blockbuster hit by featuring a popular Hollywood heartthrob.⁵⁵ As a 1957 review of the film remarks,

It follows religiously the line of mingled piety and pugnacity laid down for standard idealistic service films. What's more, it has Rock Hudson playing the big hero role. And it is in CinemaScope and color. Wrap them up and what have you got? The popular thing.⁵⁶

As I demonstrate, key to the film’s box office success is its strategic use of the Korean orphan narrative, which is where my interest in the film lies. Rather than simply the inclusion of a Korean orphan bit part, the entire premise of the film is based upon the circumstances of Korean War orphans. Despite the importance of orphans to the film’s plot and dramatic effect, *Battle Hymn* is not actually about Korean orphanhood, but the bravery and valor of Colonel Dean Hess and the U.S. Air Force.

The film begins with opening credits that remind viewers in some ways of *The Steel Helmet*. A lone fighter pilot’s helmet sits off-center, bathed in a spotlight. Moments later, the screen is illuminated by the appearance of an ecclesiastical stained glass windowpane, as the musical score chimes with church bells and a choral melody. The soundtrack soon transitions to a resounding rendition of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” as an epigraph gives “Our Appreciation to The Department of Defense, United States Air Force, United States Army, Texas Air National Guard, Arizona National Guard.”

Before delving into Hollywood’s constructed world of the Korean War, audience members are obliged to remain a moment longer in the real world with an opening word from General Earle F. Partridge, one of Colonel Hess’s commanding officers in Korea. General Partridge stands before Hess’s F-51 Mustang fighter plane, which is decorated with the Korean *taeguk* (flag) and bears Hess’s personal motto, “By Faith I Fly” in Korean characters.⁵⁷ Partridge looks directly at the camera to address the audience, his face serious:

The remarkable story of Colonel Hess, his poignant and often secret struggle with a problem peculiarly his own, his courage, resourcefulness and sacrifice, have long been a source of inspiration to me and to fighting men who have known him. But the story of Colonel Hess is more than a dramatic demonstration of one man’s capacity for good; it is

⁵² Hwang, 76.

⁵³ Samuel Fuller, *Fixed Bayonets!* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1951).

⁵⁴ Lentz, *Korean War Filmography*, 2.

⁵⁵ Douglas Sirk, *Battle Hymn* (Universal Pictures Co. Inc., 1957).

⁵⁶ Bosley Crowther, “Screen: All the Clichés; ‘Battle Hymn’ Is Usual Film About Service,” *The New York Times*, February 16, 1957, <https://www.nytimes.com/1957/02/16/archives/screen-all-the-cliches-battle-hymn-is-usual-film-about-service.html>.

⁵⁷ Don Bedwell, “Dean Hess: The Flying Parson,” *Aviation History Magazine*, November 7, 2018, <https://www.historynet.com/dean-hess-flying-parson.htm>.

an affirmation of the essential goodness of the human spirit. For this reason, I am happy it is told.

Partridge's address explicitly serves as an official endorsement, banishing any concern over controversy as *The Steel Helmet*'s dispute with the Department of Defense. More importantly, the opening monologue sets the tone for the film, highlighting the internal conflict Hess faces, and the "goodness of the human spirit." No mention is made of war or the bloodshed it brings. Viewers are primed to think of the United States' involvement in the Korean War as a nonviolent, humanitarian mission even before the actors appear on screen. According to film critic Bosley Crowther, "this picture . . . doesn't miss a single cliché as it makes a calculated circuit of the old militant sky-pilot plot. You know exactly what's coming."⁵⁸ In contrast to Samuel Fuller, who seems to make a point of attempting to "explore thorny issues that other films do not dare to suggest," it is apparent that *Battle Hymn*'s director, Douglas Sirk, toes the line.⁵⁹ *Battle Hymn* is "filled with . . . self-righteous platitudes and syrupy situations and dialogue."⁶⁰

Contributing to the film's popular appeal is the casting of Hollywood heartthrob Rock Hudson as Colonel Dean Hess—minister, fighter pilot, and rescuer of orphans. While both Colonel Hess and Sergeant Zack are World War II veterans who return to military service in Korea, Zack is literally in the trenches as a foot soldier, and Hess is in the sky as a pilot. With his strapping frame, pomaded hair, clean-shaven jaw, and impeccable uniform, Rock Hudson contrasts Gene Evans' burly, scruffy Sergeant Zack. Hudson's Hess seems to radiate refined masculinity and romantic charm.

Paul M. Edwards posits that one reason why war films have remained such a Hollywood staple is the male homosocial bonding they portray. Such bonding, Edwards acknowledges, "under any other conditions, would never have been acceptable, not only to others, but to the men themselves."⁶¹ Yet in 1957, the suggestion that this homosocial bonding could develop into something beyond "the deep personal bonding of combat, the unity of fear, and the lure of the common mission" in a mainstream blockbuster like *Battle Hymn* seemed unthinkable.⁶² Universal Pictures needed to ensure that the film's lead character was unquestionably straight. In the film then, perhaps to counterbalance the close relationships he establishes with his fellow soldiers, the character is a husband and father-to-be. To underscore his heterosexual desirability, a young, exotic Korean woman falls helplessly in love with him. Ironically, Rock Hudson was gay, making the analysis of his on-screen character even more complex. While Hudson always played straight characters in film, in real life, according to actress, Mamie Van Doren, "we all knew Rock was gay."⁶³

⁵⁸ Crowther, "All the Clichés."

⁵⁹ German American director, Douglas Sirk is best known for his contributions to the Hollywood melodrama genre during the 1950s. Appealing to emotions and sentimentality at the expense of complex character development, melodramas often revolve around issues of morality and personal strife. While Sirk's melodramas were highly successful commercially, film reviewers dismissed his "women's weepies" as philistine and immaterial. With his experience in directing melodramas, it is little surprise that Sirk's foray into war film relies heavily on predictable clichés and inner turmoil.

⁶⁰ Lentz, *Korean War Filmography*, 337, 49.

⁶¹ Paul M. Edwards, *A Guide to Films on the Korean War*, Bibliographies and Indexes in American History 35 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 3.

⁶² Edwards, 3.

⁶³ Jeff Yarbrough, "Rock Hudson: On Camera and Off," *People*, August 12, 1985, <https://people.com/archive/cover-story-rock-hudson-on-camera-and-off-vol-24-no-7/>.

Maintaining the integrity of the American heteronormative metanarrative was important for the film's mainstream success. Mamie Van Doren explains, "Universal [Pictures] invested a lot of money in Rock, and it was important for his image to remain that of a lady-killer."⁶⁴ Thus, homosociality and homosexuality must be unacknowledged and disavowed in the ideal masculine national subject.

Battle Hymn begins when decorated fighter pilot Dean Hess realizes that his role as a minister in a sleepy Ohio town after World War II is not his calling. From the pulpit, he asks his congregants, "How can we be free from guilt?" We learn this is not necessarily a rhetorical question, but a personal one, as he is haunted by his actions in World War II. In what German radio described as "a crime so despicable that even Hell won't have its perpetrator," Hess erroneously bombed a German orphanage (coincidentally, in his grandmother's ancestral hometown), which resulted in the death of thirty-seven orphans. Back home in the summer of 1950, a pillar of his community with his devoted wife at his side, Dean Hess cannot escape the guilt of his past actions. He decides to reenlist in a training program in Korea, teaching Korean soldiers how to operate American fighter jets. His role as an instructor in the Korean War creates a position through which his identity as a member of the U.S. military is defined through disavowal. Casting off the mantle of being known as "Killer Hess" in World War II, the Colonel now becomes the "Flying Parson," a brave American soldier stationed in Korea not to fight and kill, but to minister to and educate the Korean people.

In *Battle Hymn*, Koreans seem to be in dire need of assistance, reinforcing the notion of American exceptionalism and superiority. While the film does include minor roles for male South Korean soldiers, they are not peers to the American soldiers, but merely pupils who are there to learn from the U.S. Air Force's military expertise. The rest of *Battle Hymn*'s Korea seems to be populated exclusively with elderly men, women, and orphaned children—clearly not equals to the brave American fighter pilots, but ideal candidates for rescue. Hye Seung Chung notes that in contrast to many other Korean War films that "rarely foreground any ethnographic details of Korea's native populace," *Battle Hymn*'s Koreans are represented in an Orientalist framework.⁶⁵ Korea and Koreans in the film exist merely to foreground the white male hero: "Embodying Edward Said's concept of the 'Orient,' Korea becomes an 'imaginative geography,' a Western fantasy world constructed as 'a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.'"⁶⁶ Korea and its people become the means through which America constructs a positive national identity. In the introduction to his groundbreaking work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."⁶⁷ That is, through the imagining and construction of the Orient as different, as Other, the West is in turn defined. The West's identity is situated through a disavowal of resemblance to the Orient.

The difference between Korean civilians' and the U.S. military's treatment of orphans is an exemplary illustration of the film's Orientalist perspective. Hess's military base has been turned into a makeshift soup kitchen for hungry refugee children, who line up each day for handouts. The squad's American cook complains, "Sir, them chow hounds are multiplying like

⁶⁴ Yarbrough.

⁶⁵ Hye Seung Chung, *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross-Ethnic Performance* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 142.

⁶⁶ Hye Seung Chung, "From Saviors to Rapists: G.I.s, Women, and Children in Korean War Films," in *Heroism and Gender in War Films*, ed. Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Jakub Kazecki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 118.

⁶⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1–2.

rabbits! What am I going to do with ‘em?” Cookie’s characterization of the Korean orphans implies that he sees them not as people, but as something less—a dog, a rabbit, a nuisance. Hess, as the empathetic white savior, admonishes the cook, “Feed them.”

In the next instant, shots ring out, and the soldiers rush outside to the food line to find a Korean woman dressed in a *hanbok* lying sprawled on the ground. Crouching around her, they discover a grenade in her hand that she was “just about ready to throw . . . into the ammunition dump.” We learn that the woman is an enemy agent who had been accompanying the waifs to the soup line, looking for an opportunity to sabotage the U.S. military base. “She picked up those poor, starving kids to make her look good,” Hess tsk-tsks.⁶⁸ This scene characterizes North Koreans as deceitful and depraved, not above using violence and hungry children to advance their nefarious goals. Significantly, the North Korean spy is a woman, which emasculates the Oriental enemy and reinforces Rock Hudson’s masculinity. As if to further contrast North Korean immorality with the Americans integrity, Hess scoops up a sobbing Korean child who has watched the drama unfold. Hess holds the boy close, whispering comforting words into his ear. “Don’t cry, little baby,” Hess coos, cradling the child’s head against his shoulder. Contrasting the Korean woman’s hostile actions with Hess’ acts of unconditional kindness sends a clear message that the film’s white American hero is nothing like the Koreans.

Orientalism continues to pervade the film in its inclusion of Korean characters. As Chung discusses, in contrast to other Korean War films that only show fleeting B-roll footage of Koreans as nameless, faceless extras, *Battle Hymn* actually gives Korean characters speaking roles that marginally contribute to the film’s plotline. Yet these characters rare presented through an Orientalist lens.

Philip Ahn, a Korean American actor and son of the famed Korean freedom fighter, Dosan Ahn Chang-Ho, plays Lu Wan, a wizened and enigmatic Korean sage who carves religious symbols from ivory.⁶⁹ Lu Wan is a Far Eastern Orientalist fantasy in his flowing robes and his long, white beard, as he “emanates an aura of keen insight.”⁷⁰ He provides fortune cookie advice to the white hero: “Yes, war is evil. I see what is in your heart. . . . In order to save, at times we must destroy. And in destruction, create a new life.” Lu Wan’s otherworldly Oriental demeanor is a foil to Hess’s wholesome, firmly grounded American action hero. The grandfatherly Lu Wan is sexless and emasculated, and no match for Hess’ virile masculinity. Because Lu Wan is sexless, he can fraternize with the film’s other stereotypically Orientalist character, En Soon Yang, the demure young woman Hess encounters in his work with Korean orphans.⁷¹ Miss Yang is the stereotypical Lotus Blossom: delicate, docile, and submissive to the power of white masculinity. She is the exotic but forbidden love interest for Colonel Hess, the “sloe-eyed girl . . . , black-haired and amber-skinned.”⁷² Miss Yang assists Colonel Hess in his mission of rescuing Korean orphans, falling in love with the selfless colonel along the way—a plot device that “aligns itself with the political agenda of U.S. military expansionism in Asia by

⁶⁸ Hess apparently fails to see the irony in the fact that the U.S. military’s campaign of what Soojin Pate labels militarized humanitarianism has essentially the same objective.

⁶⁹ Coincidentally, Philip’s younger brother, Ralph Ahn also appears in *Battle Hymn*, as an uncredited ROK Officer.

⁷⁰ Chung, *Hollywood Asian*, 156.

⁷¹ Hye Sung Chung points out the fact that En Soon Yang’s character is based on “On Soon Hwang (Hwang On-sun), a well-respected social worker (now known as the ‘Korean Mother Theresa’).” While Mrs. Hwang’s real-life accomplishments far exceed the fictional Miss Yang’s, the fact that Hwang was twenty years older than Dean Hess made her unsuitable for *Battle Hymn*’s storyline. She is replaced by demure yet exotic Miss Yang who validates the American’s machismo through her unrequited love. Chung, 154.

⁷² Arno Johansen, “The Strange Case of Anna Kashfi,” *Parade*, July 12, 1959, 16.

rendering racial and sexual others as submissive and grateful colonial subjects in need of white rescuers.”⁷³

Hess establishes a safe haven for hundreds of orphaned Korean children in an abandoned Buddhist temple. Like in *The Steel Helmet*, the sacred (non-Christian) temple in *Battle Hymn* is a place of refuge that later becomes a site of danger and destruction by enemy North Koreans, subhuman monsters who, unlike the Flying Parson, have no regard for the sanctity of religion. The film juxtaposes the reverence and peace of Buddhism with the atrocities of war for dramatic effect while reminding American viewers of the foreignness of the creed and the people who practice it. The darkened and ornate shrine and Lu Wan’s voluminous robes contrast with Minister Hess’s naturally-lit and sparsely-decorated Ohio parish and his Sunday best attire at the beginning of the film.

In an apparent bid to make the film more authentic, Universal Pictures flew in twenty-five actual Korean orphans from the orphanage that Dean Hess established on Jeju Island. The film’s promotional material boasted:

[They] were not recruited from Central Casting in Hollywood. They were sent directly from Korea as “Ambassadors of Good Will” by President Syngman Rhee. They had no chance to be spoiled; they were just themselves.⁷⁴

Although these Korean children were traveling as “Ambassadors of Good Will,” I view the film’s use of them as problematic and exploitative. Rather than casting from an American talent agency from a pool of children who would be advocated for by their agents as well as their parents, Universal Pictures imported marginalized and vulnerable children who possessed no support system to speak of. Aside from the “lead” orphan character, Chu (played by Jung Kyoo Pyo), the Korea children are nameless, anonymous extras. They are not cast as characters, but as props.

And for being granted the privilege of being rescued by the benevolent Americans (rescued from indigence to the haven of the orphanage both in real life and in the fictional account, and then rescued from languishing in the aforementioned “haven” and brought to Hollywood), the Korean orphans must perform. The actual Korean orphans must perform orphanhood on film with songs and dances for the entertainment of their white saviors. Two girls dressed in *hanbok* perform a synchronized dance to the tune of “Arirang,” Korea’s beloved folk song, their movements doll-like and alien in front of a golden statue of Buddha in the darkened sanctum of the temple. At the close of the film, as if to demonstrate the how the American support of the orphanage programs has transformed uncivilized urchins into potential American citizens, the orphans sing an endearing rendition of “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” They are dressed in colorful pinafores, party dresses, denim jeans, and knickers in honor of a visit from Colonel Hess and his wife.⁷⁵ Here, in contrast to the darkly mysterious interior of the repurposed Buddhist temple, they perform in the bright sunlight, organized in tiers like a church choir.⁷⁶

⁷³ Chung, *Hollywood Asian*, 155–56.

⁷⁴ Chung, 143.

⁷⁵ Susie Woo notes the resemblance of this scene to the performances by the Korean Orphan Choir, troupe of Korean children that toured the United States from 1954 into the 1960s. The touring choirs were designed to “bring in postwar aid, but also figure Korea as distinctly on its way to becoming an independent nation” on the Korean side, and were “ideal representatives that evidenced the benefits of US democracy” for Americans. Woo, *Framed by War*, 79, 65, 67.

⁷⁶ At the conclusion of shooting *Battle Hymn*, twenty-four of the twenty-five children were sent back to the orphanage on Jeju Island. Only Jung Koo Pyo, the most gregarious and outgoing of the children, who played Chu in the film, remained in the United States. Jung adopted by the Friar family and renamed Sam. Hye Seung Chung

Despite the care with which Colonel Hess constructs his makeshift children's home in the Buddhist temple, our hero's work is never done. He discovers that the region where he has established his sanctuary is in danger of being taken over by enemy Communist forces. Naturally, this will spell certain death for his charges, as it is taken for granted that the barbaric and heartless Communists—in a crime so despicable that even Hell wouldn't have its perpetrators—would not spare the orphans. Colonel Hess appeals to the United States military to intervene, but his superiors see little reason to use military resources for Hess's pet project. "But these are orphans!" Hess implores, using the categorization to inspire an emotional investment, and thus, a call to action. "Dying ones!"

When the U.S. Navy refuses to help, Hess "goes rogue" and treks on foot with four hundred orphaned children across the country in hopes of finding refuge. Like Sergeant Zack who takes justice into his own hands following Short Round's death, Hess's defiance of his commanding officer's orders marks him as heroic rather than criminal. These scenes demonstrate that the sign of a "true" American hero lies not in his obedience to authority, but in his moral compass and his patriarchal role as a champion of orphans.

Battle Hymn also employs other racialized tropes designed to fortify the white hero's eminence. Like *The Steel Helmet*, *Battle Hymn* depicts an integrated unit where South Korean, white American, and African American soldiers work together. James Edwards, who also played the medic Corporal Thompson in *The Steel Helmet*, appears in *Battle Hymn* as Lieutenant Maples. However, while *The Steel Helmet* addressed controversial racial topics with its African American character, *Battle Hymn* reiterates problematic Black stereotypes. As the orphan convoy beds down by the side of the road for the night after an exhausting day of trudging through the Korean countryside, Maples holds a weary little girl on his lap and sings "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" in a low, mournful vibrato. He stares off into the distance while a handful of children sprawl sleeping around him, soothed by his lullaby. Chung suggests that Maples' singing thus equates the orphans' exodus with Black slaves' escape along the Underground Railroad.⁷⁷ Film reviewer Bosley Crowther is less impressed, and finds "a Negro lieutenant who sings 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' as a lullaby" obvious, mawkish, and contrived.⁷⁸ I would also suggest that the mise-en-scène of Maples as a sentry surrounded by sleeping children is suggestive of the history of slavery and the continued socio-economic structures in the United States that lends itself to the majority of domestic and care labor being performed by people of color.

Notably, James Edwards' character is the only American soldier who inflicts violence upon Korean civilians. In a plot development that mirrors Dean Hess's error of bombing the German orphanage in World War II, Lieutenant Maples accidentally dispatches a group of Korean men, women, and children, mistaking them for hostile enemy combatants. Here, *Battle Hymn* seems to deliberately rewrite American history of the Korean War, ignoring the fact that the U.S. military authorized if not encouraged civilian casualties by issuing directives such as "civilian refugees [in combat zones] . . . should be regarded as 'enemy troops' and fired on if

speculates that, "Ironically, the reason Chu is singled out as the focus of attention is that he, of the twenty-five orphans, is most 'American' (in a stereotypical sense): he is active, gregarious, funny, confident, and ever smiling." While American narratives want Korean orphans to be downcast and browbeaten for maximum cinematic effect, such demeanors ensure they remain orphans, unentitled to the love and security of an American family: "Regardless of their sympathy for the plight of war orphans, the Americans ultimately chose the most outwardly cheerful child as their beneficiary, the one who least bore traces of grief and pain." Chung, *Hollywood Asian*, 166, 167.

⁷⁷ Chung, "From Saviors to Rapists," 118–19.

⁷⁸ Crowther, "All the Clichés."

seen.”⁷⁹ Maples agonizes over his blunder, which gives Hess, the Flying Parson, a chance to exercise his ministerial skills. Thus, the African American soldier is “forced to shoulder the sole burden of slaughtering refugees” in Korea, allowing other (white) U.S. soldiers’ hands to remain clean.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Hess assumes the elevated position of cleric and consoler/counselor, designating the white man as mentor and absolver.

Like the Pied Piper, Hess continues to lead his young charges across a wasteland southward to the sea. Enemy fighter jets pursue them, strafing the dirt road with bullets and En Soon Yang sacrifices herself to save a wayward child who wanders into the path of the firing aircraft. This is the inevitable end for En Soon Yang, who must die for the story to resolve. A victim of enemy fire, Miss Yang’s death emphasizes the fact that Koreans—not Americans—kill Koreans.⁸¹ As a classic *Madame Butterfly* archetype, Miss Yang serves as the forbidden love interest to Colonel Hess:

The film walks a tightrope [with Miss Yang,] who could romantically match Hess, suggesting an allure of miscegenation and adultery—an unholy combination that would be strongly opposed by the PCA and religious censors. After a dose of melodramatic tension, such an intriguing possibility dissipates with Miss Yang’s premature death.⁸²

With the exotic temptation of the Asian fetish eliminated, Hess’s chivalry remains unmarred, and he is thus able to return to the conventional white American domestic embrace of his wife, Mary.

As they bury Miss Yang in a makeshift grave, planes whine once again in the distance. Five U.S. military transport planes arrive at the behest of General Cambridge has ordered them to carry the four hundred orphan children to the safety of Jeju Island. “Just call us Operation Kiddy Car!” the pilot grins. In reality, the U.S. military humanitarian intervention dubbed Operation Kiddy Car was the brainchild of Chaplain Lieutenant Colonel Russell Blaisdell. While stationed in Seoul in the fall of 1950, Blaisdell tended to Korean orphans that he encountered, much like Rock Hudson’s character does in *Battle Hymn*. In a 1951 letter, Blaisdell wrote: “It was estimated that there were 6,000 homeless children on the streets of Seoul in October 1950, about 4,000 of them legitimate orphans.”⁸³ When the threat of Chinese and North Korean forces initiated UN forces to evacuate the city in December 1950, Blaisdell arranged for a U.S. Navy ship to pick up the nearly one thousand children under his care at the Port of Incheon and transport them to Busan. When the evacuation plan failed, Blaisdell convinced Colonel T.C. Rogers to approve the use of sixteen C-54 transport planes to airlift the children to safety. Blaisdell pulled rank and commandeered a fleet of trucks loading cement into ships in Incheon Harbor in order to get the children from Incheon to Seoul’s Gimpo Airport. The U.S. Air Force planes flew the children to safety where they were greeted on Jeju Island by Colonel Dean Hess.

⁷⁹ Hanley, “No Gun Ri: Official Narrative and Inconvenient Truths,” 598.

⁸⁰ Chung, *Hollywood Asian*, 148.

⁸¹ Throughout the film, the “enemy” is unseen. The North Korean spy is a Korean woman dressed as a civilian, not a battle-hardened soldier who could prove to be a match for Hess’ military expertise and masculinity. Aside from the few Korean trainee pilots that make token appearances, *Battle Hymn*’s Korea is populated with women, children, and the elderly—those in need of being saved by American men.

⁸² Chung, *Hollywood Asian*, 155.

⁸³ It is unclear what Blaisdell specifically means with the rather problematic term, “legitimate orphans.” I would hazard he is referring to children whose parents had perished in the war, making a distinction from children who had parents but still faced destitution and scavenged on the streets. Kim Gamel, “Operation Kiddy Car: Keeping a Korean War Hero’s Memory Alive,” *Stars and Stripes*, June 30, 2017, <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/operation-kiddy-car-keeping-a-korean-war-hero-s-memory-alive-1.476030>.

Hess assisted in establishing an orphanage on Jeju Island which was later relocated to Seoul following the war.⁸⁴

George F. Drake writes a critical accounting of Hess's involvement in the actual Operation Kiddy Car effort, claiming that "Dean E. Hess stole credit for the Kiddy Car Airlift," and "had nothing to do with any of [evacuation arrangements] and was totally unaware of the exigencies faced by Blaisdell at every step of the way in effecting this rescue."⁸⁵ Characterizing Hess as a thief for his "grossly self serving distortion of the facts of the Kiddy Car Airlift," Drake calls into question Hess's "sense of commitment to his religious credentials," thus laying the fault of the inaccuracies in the filmic portrayal of Operation Kiddy Car not merely on the sensationalizing effect of Hollywood, but on Colonel Dean Hess and his ego.⁸⁶ Yet, for all his bluster about the distastefulness of Hess's embellishments, Dr. Drake does not call into question how these anecdotes of rescue, regardless of who helmed them, are themselves embellishments of the United States military involvement in the Korean War. *Battle Hymn* misrepresents Hess's participation in the rescue operation for the sake of drama, but it also omits the violence he himself inflicted during the war.⁸⁷ More importantly, such narratives omit the thousands of Korean casualties inflicted by American forces and misrepresent the tragedies and experiences of the thousands of Korean children orphaned by war by telling the tales from an American rescuer's perspective. That is, to encourage American citizens to support the war efforts in Korea, to maintain the façade of the United States' positive influence abroad, and to perpetuate the myth of American exceptionalism, film narratives like *The Steel Helmet* and *Battle Hymn* stretch and obscure the truth of war whether they are based on real events or not.

Further, these narratives erase the sexual exploitation of Korean women by American soldiers and the subsequent conception of mixed-race children who were often denied and abandoned by their American fathers. In *Battle Hymn*, Hess's relationship with Miss Yang remains chaste and unconsummated. While there is no evidence to suggest that the real Colonel Hess had any romantic interactions with Korean women during his time in Korea, *Battle Hymn's* inclusion of their relationship as the sole instance of American-Korean co-ed fraternization suggests that all interactions between American soldiers and Korean women were similarly modest. Rather, government-sanctioned and institutionalized prostitution in which native Korean women provide sexual services to American soldiers is a reality of the United States' military presence in South Korea. In the *kijichon* (camptowns) that sprung up around U.S. military bases in Korea, thousands of Korean women sold their bodies to American soldiers. It is estimated that in Gyonggi province, where the majority of the U.S. bases are located, "some 10,000 sex

⁸⁴ Of the one thousand Korean orphans who were given refuge at the Jeju orphanage during the Korean War, more than three hundred died of malnutrition and illness. Sangmok Shin, "Jeju Monument Honors Col. Dean Hess, Rescuer of 1,000 Korean War Orphans," *Kukmin Daily*, March 16, 2017, digital edition, sec. Mission Life, <http://www.kukmindaily.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=0011334614>.

⁸⁵ Interestingly, the Korean War Children's Memorial website, which "honors the American servicemen and women who, during the Korean War and the years following, rendered compassionate humanitarian aid to the children of that war torn nation" uses the slogan, "Dedicated to those we could not save," a phrase which also serves as a postscript at the end of *Battle Hymn*. Korean War National Museum, "Home," Korean War Children's Memorial, accessed April 3, 2019, <http://www.koreanchildren.org/index.html>. George F. Drake, "Hess: Fraudulent Hero," Korean War Children's Memorial, 2005, <http://www.koreanchildren.org/docs/Hess=%20Hero-Thief.htm>.

⁸⁶ Drake, "Fraudulent Hero."

⁸⁷ Among other casualties, Hess actually killed a young Korean girl during the war. In his memoir, *Battle Hymn*, which the film was based on, he recounts: "My finger leaped from the trigger as though shocked, and I turned quickly and looked again as I pulled away. A girl of ten or twelve lay on the road, obviously dead and mangled." Chung, *Hollywood Asian*, 148.

workers were registered every year from 1953 to the late 1980s.”⁸⁸ Ji-Yeon Yuh explains that “the United States, for its part, takes it for granted that its soldiers ‘need’ paid sexual companions for high morale,” and demands the South Korean government regulate and license Korean sex workers to keep them free of venereal disease.⁸⁹ Such one-sided regulation implies that the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is one-way. Korean women are carriers of disease, not American men. Violence against camptown women was common, but by and large, the male American instigators have remained out of the reach of the Korean judicial system and impervious to penalties. In terms of American exceptionalism, the soldiers’ identities as U.S. citizens excuse their behavior and places them above the law.

The conception and birth of mixed-race children is another result of the militarized prostitution established to service American soldiers in Korea. It is estimated that more than 40,000 mixed-race children were born in South Korea from 1955-1969.⁹⁰ The majority of the first wave of transnational Korean adoptees in the United States were mixed-race orphans who had been lost or abandoned by both their American fathers and Korean mothers. However, films such as *Steel Helmet* and *Battle Hymn* only depict full Korean orphans, erasing mixed-race Korean children from the narratives. This omission again removes the culpability of the United States in the creation of orphans in Korea. *Battle Hymn* and other Korean War films’ depiction of the rescue of full Korean orphans erases the U.S. military personnel’s responsibility in the violence that separates Korean children from their families as well as their part in the creation of these children in the first place.

Robert J. Lentz’s database of Korean War films rates the Patriotic Propaganda Level of *Battle Hymn* as “high.” Tongue-in-cheek, Lentz asks, “How can a film that concerns an American fighter pilot who is also a minister and saves hundreds of Korean orphans from death not be considered patriotic?”⁹¹ I maintain that key to this high level of patriotism and nationalism is the film’s engagement with Korean orphans and the ways in which these figures help shape the American image through the process of disavowal. Refuting the German radio announcer’s depiction, Hess proves Americans are not heartless monsters who bomb innocent civilians, but heroes who rescue orphans. Hess is not a fighter, but an educator and humanitarian. In going rogue, he demonstrates that American soldiers will not mindlessly follow orders to allow innocent lives to be lost, but will sacrifice title and position to “do the right thing.” While committing “a crime so despicable that even hell won’t have its perpetrator” eats away at him, Hess casts off the heavy chains of guilt through his rescue of the Korean orphans, essentially demonstrating that such heroism absolves Americans of their atrocities.

Robert Lentz states, “One of the many ways to gauge the social impact of the Korean War is to examine Hollywood’s various depictions of the conflict. Cinema can be seen as a mirror in which we are able to witness ourselves, our actions and our beliefs.”⁹² I would argue that in regards to the United States’ association with Korean orphans through Hollywood, the

⁸⁸ Tim Shorrock, “Welcome to the Monkey House: Confronting the Ugly Legacy of Military Prostitution,” *The New Republic*, December 2, 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/155707/united-states-military-prostitution-south-korea-monkey-house?fbclid=IwAR00EF9cHcrn2BksNnpfHrbAM4KfDpFzQkr6oSw6cRjg0Gr01662aYBwSbg>.

⁸⁹ Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Out of the Shadows: Camptown Women, Military Brides, and Korean (American) Communities,” in *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu and Thomas Chen (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 243.

⁹⁰ Claire Lee, “Hard Knock Lives of Koreans Born to U.S. Soldiers,” *Korean Herald*, April 27, 2016, digital edition, sec. Social Affairs, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160427000713>.

⁹¹ Lentz, *Korean War Filmography*, 46.

⁹² Lentz, 1.

mirror is more like a modern-day cell phone selfie filter, showing us the best of ourselves, how we want to be seen, without blemishes or imperfections to mar our smiles.

“Somebody Has to Protect this Child!”: M*A*S*H, American Benevolence, and the Silenced Child

Moving to the small screen, I now turn my attention to the television series, *M*A*S*H*. This CBS series aired from 1972 to 1983, and could arguably be considered one of the most popular situation comedies in American television history. James H. Wittebols describes *M*A*S*H* as “a show set in the 1950s that reflected the values of the 1960s for the audiences of the 1970s and 1980s.”⁹³ Set during the Korean War but used as a thinly-veiled social commentary on the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War, this television show outlasted the United States’ withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, the fall of Saigon, and, as David Scott Diffrient observes, “ran nearly four times longer than the Korean War.”⁹⁴ I include *M*A*S*H* in my analysis because of the show’s popularity and prominence in American popular culture. Over the course of the show’s eleven-year tenure, it was inevitable that the writers would include orphans in their representations of the Korean War, and I think it is important to consider the significance of these representations due to the fact that for many American viewers, *M*A*S*H* was the launching point for which they considered the history and the legacies of the Korean War.

Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals were a valuable military innovation, initially established in August 1945 and utilized extensively during the Korean War. Five Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals operated by the United States Army over the course of the conflict. Carl Freedman explains the ingenuity of the portable surgical unit: “The MASH was a considerable innovation in military medicine: a highly flexible medical unit that functioned only a few miles from the actual fighting and could be moved rapidly as the lines of battle shifted.”⁹⁵ In a conflict zone in where the capital city, Seoul, changed hands four times in the first two years of fighting, and racked up casualties in the millions, the movability of a fully-functional hospital was a literal life-saver.

Like *Battle Hymn*, the *M*A*S*H* television show was tangentially based on the real-life experiences of a Korean War veteran. Under the penname, Richard Hooker, Dr. H. Richard Hornberger wrote *MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors*, a semi-autobiographical account of the United States Mobile Army Surgical Hospital 8055 during the Korean War.⁹⁶ His 1968 novel combined his memories and experiences of being stationed in Korea with characters based on “composites of people [he] knew, met casually, worked with, or heard about,” who propelled the book’s plotline along and made for entertaining reading.⁹⁷ Two years later, Robert Altman directed the film adaptation of the book, *M*A*S*H*, which not only became a box office success but also garnered critical praise.⁹⁸ Riding the wave of success the film generated, CBS worked quickly to create a television series based on the film and Hooker’s book. Again, like *Battle*

⁹³ James H. Wittebols, *Watching M*A*S*H, Watching America: A Social History of the 1972-1983 Television Series* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), ix.

⁹⁴ David Scott Diffrient, *M*A*S*H, TV Milestones* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 11.

⁹⁵ Carl Freedman, “History, Fiction, Film, Television, Myth: The Ideology of MASH,” *Southern Review* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 89–106.

⁹⁶ Richard Hooker, *MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors* (New York: Pocket Books, 1969). Note the lack of asterisks in the book’s title.

⁹⁷ Hooker, i.

⁹⁸ Robert Altman, *M*A*S*H* (20th Century Fox, 1970).

Hymn, with each reiteration of the experiences of real-life American military personnel, the historical accuracy of the lives of the Korean War medical personnel, their patients, and the Korean civilians they encountered diminished.⁹⁹ As such, the wildly popular show, like its predecessors, relied upon stereotypical Asian characterizations that often aligned with Orientalist and Eurocentric perspectives. *M*A*S*H*'s television portrayals of Korean orphans are no exception.

While many have commented on the significance of *M*A*S*H*'s use of the Korean War setting as allegory for the Vietnam War, it also assumes a monolithic Asian identity.¹⁰⁰ The obvious interchangeability of these two foreign American military interventions conflates any Asian people, countries, and wars. The majority of the actors cast in the role of Koreans on the show were not actually Korean. For example, the series' most prominent and recurring Korean character, the houseboy Ho-Jon, was actually played by Filipino actor, Patrick Adiarte.¹⁰¹ David Scott Diffrient points out that "the use of non-Korean actors in the series conforms to Orientalist assumptions about physiognomic similarities and suggests an obliviousness to ethnic difference on the part of mainstream producers and consumers alike."¹⁰² In Hye Seung Chung's *Hollywood Asian*, Korean American commentator Philip W. Chung reminisced, "One of the worst experiences for [our family] was watching *M*A*S*H*. These supposedly Korean characters would appear and the non-Korean actors portraying them would mangle the Korean language beyond comprehension. This pissed off my parents and me."¹⁰³ Yet for the show's mainstream viewers, *M*A*S*H* provided an accessible portal to a country and a conflict the American public had little knowledge of or exposure to. Thus, *M*A*S*H* informed a generation of Americans about the United States' military engagement in Asian conflicts through dark humor, wit, and a "Kerouacian free spiritedness, individualistic and apolitical."¹⁰⁴

Budd and Steinman propose that "For at least many of its consumers, *M*A*S*H* provides unproblematic access to sincere, warm and humanistic people and to events such as the Korean

⁹⁹ However, in a move that was purported to be in the name of historical accuracy, the single African American cast member was phased out early in the first season with the claim that Black medical officers did not serve in MASH units during the Korean War despite the facts that Hooker included the Black neurosurgeon Oliver Wendell "Spearchucker" Jones in his original novel, and that there were a number of Black surgeons serving in the U.S. military at the time, including Alvin V. Blount Jr., MD who served during the Korean War and became the first African American chief of surgery in an integrated MASH unit. There has been much speculation about the show's decision to write out its only Black doctor, including conjectures that Spearchucker's nickname was too offensive, that there were too many characters in the ensemble cast, and that the writers felt that they wouldn't be able to create enough meaningful plotlines for the character if they were concentrating on developing Hawkeye's and Trapper's characters. Kenneth L. Wilson et al., "The Forgotten MASH Surgeon: The Story of Alvin Vincent Blount Jr, MD," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 104, no. 3 (March 1, 2012): 221–23, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0027-9684\(15\)30152-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0027-9684(15)30152-8).

¹⁰⁰ James H. Wittebols points to a March 1973 episode entitled "Cease Fire," which aired the same week that a cease-fire was declared in Vietnam. In the episode, the doctors and nurses of the 4077th prematurely begin to celebrate the end of the war, only to be inundated with casualties when the cease-fire is called off. Wittebols comments, "It might have seemed like a warning not to believe in the announced end of the fighting in Vietnam. Indeed, it would be over two years before the United States would finally withdraw from what was still a shooting war." Wittebols, *Watching M*A*S*H, Watching America*, 36.

¹⁰¹ Not only is the houseboy infantilized in his subservient role as a houseboy, his name, Ho-Jon is not actually a Korean name, but a non-Korean-speaker's approximation of a Korean name.

¹⁰² Diffrient, *M*A*S*H*, 117.

¹⁰³ Chung, *Hollywood Asian*, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Freedman, "Ideology of MASH."

War.”¹⁰⁵ Conversely, Elisabeth Bronfen understands Hollywood war media as “*the site where American culture thinks about its implication in the traumatic history of war by offering personalized narratives of rites of passage that reflect (and reflect on) the ever-shifting stakes in this collective conversation about national identity.*”¹⁰⁶ For me, the answer lies in a combination of the two perspectives. *M*A*S*H* and other film and television productions about war serve as a way for us to contemplate and process the United States’ military action from the safety and comfort of home. We “experience” war vicariously through personable fictional characters, which renders our need to be more physically or politically involved unnecessary.

A major factor in *M*A*S*H*’s unprecedented popularity was the show’s novel combination of previously separate generic styles (including drama, comedy, war story, and reality-based social critique) into a uniquely American genre, which enabled the series to address social, cultural, and political issues in an appealing and nonthreatening way. As James H. Wittebols asserts, “The situation comedy is as American as apple pie.” Wittebols argues that the generic form of the sitcom that *M*A*S*H* developed enabled the series to reflect the social changes of the American public over its 11-year tenure, giving us a unique window into how America understood herself and her changing values over the course of the Cold War.¹⁰⁷ Carl Freedman notes that *M*A*S*H* served “as the first weekly show successfully to mix comic with serious drama,” which he argues became a useful tool for the show’s directors, with its “politically useful flexibility: farce runs interference for political subversion, and the appealing distractions of humor help to create ideological space for the most left-wing—the most anti-anti-Communist—agenda in the history of network TV.”¹⁰⁸ *M*A*S*H*’s generic dexterity provided American television audiences with an accessible discourse of U.S. social and political issues abroad against mainstream and old-fashioned conservatism. However, this counter-positioning was superficial and individualistic, and in fact relied heavily upon the orders and structures it purported to defy.

Similarly, while *M*A*S*H* provided American audiences with a palatable yet flawed introduction to liberal ideas such as racial tolerance, multiculturalism, and transnationalism, it also exposed its viewers to a fictionalized version of Korea, featuring a more diverse cast than was customary at the time. For the first time, Asian Americans saw characters that looked like them on mainstream network television. David Scott Diffrient states that “one cannot ignore the fact that—over the course of its eleven seasons—*M*A*S*H* did more to inscribe the idea of ‘Korea’ in America’s collective unconscious than any other cultural production of the twentieth century.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, he continues by observing that “[i]t also did more than most to perpetuate stereotypes of Koreans.”¹¹⁰ In *American Society, Stereotypical Roles, and Asian Characters in M*A*S*H*, Ashley Stevens identifies seven archetypal Asian characters that are prevalent throughout the 256 episodes of *M*A*S*H*. Through her examination of Asian characters—houseboy/housekeeper, prostitute/”moose,” war bride, farmer/villager, peddler/hustler, orphan, and enemy—Stevens argues that the television program utilized these stereotypes because “[w]eak Asian characters ensured the need for strong, benevolent American characters to come to the rescue, convincing viewers of American superiority while reinforcing Cold War ideologies

¹⁰⁵ Mike Budd and Clay Steinman, “M*A*S*H Mystified: Capitalization, Dematerialization, Idealization,” *Cultural Critique* Popular Narrative, Popular Images, no. 10 (Autumn 1988): 61.

¹⁰⁶ Bronfen, *Specters of War*, 2. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁷ Wittebols, *Watching M*A*S*H, Watching America*, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Freedman, “Ideology of MASH.”

¹⁰⁹ Diffrient, *M*A*S*H*, 104.

¹¹⁰ Diffrient, 104.

of America as a policing force aimed towards creating peace.”¹¹¹ Such depictions echo the characterizations of Asians and American military personnel in *Battle Hymn*: like the “Flying Parson,” the doctors of the 4077th MASH unit are stationed in Korea to provide aid to the country’s elderly, women, and children rather than engaging in combat.

As Ashley Stevens documents, Korean orphanhood is a common and ubiquitous stereotype *M*A*S*H* uses to characterize Korea. She observes that “[t]he narrative of ‘saving’ orphans through adoption was strongly established during the Korean War” and describes how orphans in the *M*A*S*H* television series are used to demonstrate the charitability of the U.S. medical officers: “The GI is presented as a hero because he not only gives aid, but gives aid regardless of the obstacles he faces by doing so.”¹¹²

James Wittebols argues that over its eleven-season run the main characters of *M*A*S*H* evolve as the moral compass of America shifts. In particular, Wittebols highlights how “the rise of the women’s movement was reflected in the show’s decreased reliance on sexist jokes and situations” which led to “a more feminist view of the world.”¹¹³ Similarly, Stevens observes that the representation of Asian characters also transform over time, becoming more complex and independent. She demonstrates how Asian characters, especially female roles such as the “moose” (a GI slang for a prostitute, deriving from the Japanese word, *musume*, meaning “daughter,” or “young lady”), and the war bride “began to be presented as assertive decision-makers, capable of making their own choices, and as leaders who could be followed even when in opposition to authority.”¹¹⁴ In later seasons, Asian characters on *M*A*S*H* interact more often with its main characters, speak English, and have more complex back stories. Despite the growing agency and empowerment of many of *M*A*S*H*’s Asian roles, the orphan remains static throughout—infantile and helpless, in need of a White American savior. As Stevens describes:

The orphan stereotype remains similar to previous seasons following the shift after season five. Americans retain the role as “savior,” but problematize the American government’s approach, and restrictive policies, regarding the adoption of war orphans. Orphans continue to be presented as pitiful and abandoned, with mothers happy to see their children sent to the U.S. and an assumed “better life.”¹¹⁵

With this in mind, I focus on single episode from the series’ second season, entitled “Kim,” which originally aired on October 20, 1973, in which a young Korean boy being treated for a minor injury, charms the camp.¹¹⁶ I highlight how the episode uses a Korean orphan character to reflect an American national self-identity, especially in regards to how we understand and interact with “those less fortunate than us.” That is, the orphan trope is used to uphold the series’ male white stars as “good guys,” which Elisabeth Weis defines as: “1) their competence as doctors, 2) their tolerance toward the Other (usually a Korean peasant or a black soldier), and 3) their sense of humor.”¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Ashley Marie Stevens, “American Society, Stereotypical Roles, and Asian Characters in *M*A*S*H*” (Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2016), 23.

¹¹² Stevens, 48, 53.

¹¹³ Wittebols, *Watching M*A*S*H, Watching America*, x.

¹¹⁴ Stevens, “Asian Characters in *M*A*S*H*,” 60.

¹¹⁵ Stevens, 81.

¹¹⁶ William Wiard, “Kim,” *M*A*S*H* (CBS, October 20, 1973).

¹¹⁷ Elisabeth Weis, “*M*A*S*H* Notes,” in *Play It Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*, ed. Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 315,

The episode opens in the surgical theater where the “Swampmen,” Captain “Trapper” John McIntyre (played by Wayne Rogers) and Captain “Hawkeye” Benjamin Franklin Pierce (played by Alan Alda) exchange their signature witty repartee with their nemesis, Lieutenant Frank Burns (Larry Linville). The camera cuts to a Korean boy lying on a hospital bed, eyes closed and still, and instantly the doctors turn serious and introspective. “Oh no, not another one,” Hawkeye laments. “He can’t be more than five years old.”

“I’ve got a five-year-old at home,” offers Trapper. This exchange sets the tone for how the army medical doctors, and in turn, we as viewers, consider the Korean child. He reminds us of own children and families, which evokes sympathy and sentiment. However, the fact that the first interaction with the boy occurs when he is unconscious must also be noted—these initial behaviors by the doctors remain even after the child wakes up. They talk above him and about him, but not to him, even when conscious.

Once the boy has recovered, Trapper decides that the best course of action is to adopt him. In “The Swamp,” the Quonset hut he shares with Hawkeye, Trapper John writes home to his wife:

At first I thought it was the war and this stinking place that made me . . . well, love him, I guess. But now I know it’s more than that. The reasons aren’t important. We think his parents are dead. Henry Blake wants to send him to an orphanage, and I hate the idea so much I can’t stand it. I want us to adopt him, honey. He’d be the son we never had. I know the girls would be out of their little minds to have a brother. This is a decision we both have to make. Think about it carefully. You know my feelings, now it’s really in your hands.¹¹⁸

Trapper’s letter to his wife parallels the United States’ approach to the adoption of Korean orphans.¹¹⁹ Trapper talks about how the boy lightens the ugliness of war, how they assume his parents are dead, how he would fill a void in the family and “be the son we never had.” All of his arguments are based on what the boy can give his white American family. It’s the right thing to do, and he’s entitled to the boy because he saved his life. Hawkeye applauds Trapper’s decision to adopt the boy by calling him “Hero Daddy.”

Yet nowhere in the letter, nor indeed in the entire episode, is there any consideration for the boy’s thoughts and feelings. Trapper emphasizes that adopting him is “a decision we both have to make,” but he’s referring only to his wife. He doesn’t deem it necessary to ask the boy himself if he would like to be adopted. The boy remains voiceless and nameless. He is assumed to be an orphan because no one bothers asking him about his name or his family. He does not utter a single word during the entire episode. He only smiles winsomely at his caretakers as officers and doctors at the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital impose their wants and opinions on him in the name of knowing what’s best. For, as Nurse Houlihan exclaims, “Somebody has to

<https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft1j49n6d3&chunk.id=d0e11167&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e11167&brand=ucpress>.

¹¹⁸ David Scott Diffrient notes that this epistolary act is a common device used throughout the show, which “provides the doctor an opportunity to get things off his chest, to gather his thoughts, [. . .] while also reminding us that the home front—while invisibly offscreen—is as much a part of this series as is the battlefield.” Diffrient, *M*A*S*H*, 34.

¹¹⁹ Like Colonel Dean Hess’s wife in *Battle Hymn*, Trapper’s wife waits patiently at home while her husband rescues pitiable Korean orphans, reinforcing notions of the gendered roles of American citizens. That is, a woman’s proper place is safe in the domestic sphere of her home while the man braves the battlefield (but as a giver of aid, not an instigator of violence).

protect this child!” They read aloud to him from English books, dazzle him with sleight-of-hand magic, and teach him the all-American sport of baseball.

The plot of the episode rises to a climax when the Korean boy wanders into a nearby minefield.¹²⁰ Predictably, the doctors and nurses put aside their differences and work together to rescue the boy who is not even aware that he needs rescuing. The crisis is resolved when a medical helicopter is brought in to carry to safety the young boy and Trapper, who has picked his way through the minefield to get to him. Safe on stable ground, the boy has been saved once again white American benefactors.

In terms of disavowals that define an American national identity, this episode of *M*A*S*H* is similar to *Battle Hymn* in that *M*A*S*H* features a military unit that doesn’t engage in combat, but rather saves lives. Reflecting the Cold War milieu of which *M*A*S*H* is a product, this episode also reiterates to American audiences that the U.S. military’s involvement in Asia isn’t an imperialist endeavor, but is actually benevolent. Through their care of the little boy, the doctors of the 4077th MASH demonstrate that the United States military knows what’s best for Korea and Koreans and are there to protect those who can’t protect themselves. As David Scott Diffrient observes, the portrayal of Korean people in *M*A*S*H* as refugees and orphans “becomes a means for the white male protagonists to exert their authority and benevolence in spaces where Korean masculinity is either severely undermined or conspicuously absent.”¹²¹

Finally, Trapper’s willingness to adopt transnationally and transracially reflects a shift in the nation’s perspectives on international relations with Asian countries. Articulating what Christina Klein calls “a global imaginary of integration,” middlebrow productions proposed a model of sentimental education, which encouraged Americans to “look outward” and “forge intellectual and emotional bonds with the people of Asia[.]”¹²² As a result, multiracial, multinational families created through adoption became a common narrative in the postwar Cold War period in American media. Klein explains,

These families offered a way to imagine U.S.-Asian integration in terms of voluntary affiliation: they presented international bonds formed by choice (at least on the part of the American parents), rather than by biology. . . . These mixed-race families also offered a way to imagine Americans overcoming the ingrained racism that so threatened U.S. foreign policy goals in Asia.¹²³

The adoption of a Korean child by white Americans symbolized and reinforced the United States’ supposed superiority over the East while simultaneously affirming that “Americans, despite their nation’s history and their own prejudices, were not irredeemably racist or imperialist.”¹²⁴

The episode concludes when Sister Theresa, who runs the local orphanage, arrives with a Korean woman who turns out to be the boy’s mother. We learn the boy’s name is Kim, and his family has been frantically searching for him.¹²⁵ In the moment of reunion, the boy’s mother

¹²⁰ Ironically, the child’s straying into danger occurs while under the watch of Nurse Houlihan with her superior feminine parenting skills.

¹²¹ Diffrient, *M*A*S*H*, 109.

¹²² Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 23.

¹²³ Klein, 146.

¹²⁴ Klein, 190.

¹²⁵ Like the name Ho-Jon, the child’s name is a non-Korean speaker’s approximation of a Korean name. While “Kim” is a common Korean surname, and in Korean culture, a person’s surname is stated first, followed by their given name, it is not used as a given name by Koreans.

utters the single line granted to a Korean character in the episode, calling her son's name: "Kim!" Kim is whisked away, back to the loving embrace of his birth family. Trapper scoffs, "who needs a kid who wanders off anyway?" hiding his disappointment that his plans to rescue Kim through adoption have fallen through. Although Trapper implies that a "kid who wanders off" is not good enough to be adopted by a white family in the United States, I would suggest that this final scene is actually a nuanced and conscious understanding on the producers' part of the American urge to "save" orphans. Reflecting the "initial wild years of international adoption from Korea when foreign individuals and voluntary agencies considered themselves to be guardians of the country's children" and the wartime chaos that Tobias Hübinette says "makes it possible to understand how easy and tempting it must have been for U.N. soldiers and other Westerners just to grab any Korean 'parentless' child roaming the streets and bring her or him out of the country," the closing scene is perhaps a reminder to viewers that while the United States' military aid in Asia may be well-intentioned, it is not always necessary.

The opening scene of *M*A*S*H*'s first episode begins with on-screen text that enigmatically sets the time and place as "KOREA, 1950 a hundred years ago." David Scott Diffrient reads this introductory caption as a suggestion that the audience understand the series not as historical fiction, but as a fantasy realm in which we witness events unfold from a place in the future in 2050.¹²⁶ For me, the long span of time from which we are supposedly looking back brings up questions of progress, change, and national identity. How much has changed from 1950 to now? How much more do we expect will have changed by 2050? How much has remained the same? I surmise that even if we have flying cars and robot laborers in the future, notions of race, nationality, war, and, of course, orphan tropes, will still be as relevant as they were in 1950, the 1970s, and today.

Conclusion

In her monograph on Hollywood's engagement with military conflict, Elisabeth Bronfen maintains that "cinema functions as a privileged site of recollection, where American culture continually renegotiates the traumatic traces of its historical past, reconceiving current social and political concerns in the light of previous military conflicts."¹²⁷ That is, the magic of Hollywood enables the rewriting of American history, memory, and war. With a few embellishments—an unrequited love subplot, the insertion of humor, a well-timed close-up shot—the Korean War is remembered (or, forgotten) in the national memory as a humanitarian effort, a goodwill endeavor to rescue the innocent from the evil clutches of communism. Our military men are not war machines, but righteous heroes. The Korean orphan is frequently used as a dramatic device.

The representation of Korean orphans in U.S. popular film and television serve to define and justify the United States' military involvement in Asian conflict. And while some productions, such as *The Steel Helmet* and *M*A*S*H* seem take a liberal stance on issues of race, politics, and critiquing aspects of American history, they still rely on the same predictable stereotypes when it comes to representations of Korean orphans. Orphans are infantile, destitute, and grateful for the attention and protection bestowed upon them by white Americans.

Korean orphans are represented as male in Hollywood depictions, which demonstrates how racial stereotypes often go hand-in-hand with sexism and other problematic essentialist perspectives. Perhaps this is because within the assumed masculinity of a military or wartime environment, there is no place for delicate fragility or a female presence. Ji-Yeon Yuh asserts

¹²⁶ Diffrient, *M*A*S*H*, 34.

¹²⁷ Bronfen, *Specters of War*, 2.

that “[t]he relationship between Korea and the United States is itself gendered, with Korea inscribed as the feminine other in need of protection and the United States playing the role of the masculine superior and guardian.”¹²⁸ If Korea and its citizens are *already* feminine, rendering Korean orphans as solely male may be a way for the ultra-masculine U.S. soldiers to relate to their young charges. Orphans become, as Trapper John describes, “the son[s] we never had,” junior partners that American soldiers can parent and mentor with their worldly knowledge of war and valor. Male orphans are the next generation of Americans, who will carry on the fight for freedom.¹²⁹

Soojin Pate argues that processes of U.S. militarization in South Korea configure male orphans as American soldiers. Reviewing archival Armed Forces Assistance to Korea (AFAK) film reels, she describes the ways in which the U.S. military is present in every aspect of the Korean orphan’s life, from his rendering as an orphan, to his care and institutionalization in military-constructed orphanages. Male orphans are groomed to become American soldiers, encouraged to “mimic . . . the very activities that caused them to become orphaned in the first place” through play with toy guns.¹³⁰ Pate makes the connection that “the figure of the Korean male orphan turned American soldier comes to symbolize America’s hopes and dreams for the Korean nation itself. . . . South Korea—treated by the United States as if it too is an orphan—has also been adopted by the American military government.”¹³¹ Framing the relationship between the United States and South Korea as an adoption legitimizes the United States’ authority as a parent figure and decontextualizes the United States’ military presence in South Korea from previous genealogies of U.S. military imperialism.

I would argue that the sexualization of Korean women in the U.S. military perspective also contributes to the depiction of Korean orphans only as male in American film and television. In Hollywood, Korean women are exotic objects of white male desire. Ji-Yeon Yuh states that “[t]he women are seen by the soldiers as innately sexual, even depraved, and doing what they do for fun and money.”¹³² Thus, to differentiate the United States’ relationship with Korean orphans as parents from its relationship with Korean women as bedmates, Korean orphans are male. This ensures that the protective role Americans plays in the lives of Korean orphans remains purely benevolent without the hint of an ulterior motive. A male Korean orphan can thus remain a perpetual child and beneficiary of protection who will not grow up or transform into a potential sexual partner, which would change the power dynamics between the two parties. The marked absence of female orphan characters in these productions removes any chance for the white masculine hero to tarnish his image by acting in an inappropriate manner with an underage girl.¹³³ Further, the absence of female orphans assumes the heterosexuality of the white male hero, disavowing any notion of sexual deviancy that would put an orphan boy in harm’s way.

¹²⁸ Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 10.

¹²⁹ Indeed, in the Vietnam War, South Korean soldiers fought alongside U.S. troops and were alleged to have committed atrocities and war crimes against Vietnamese civilians including “dozens of other massacres of twenty or more unarmed civilians, plus innumerable isolated killings, robberies, rapes, tortures, and devastation of land and personal property,” replicating many of the acts U.S. soldiers committed against Koreans during the Korean War. Noam Chomsky and Edward S Herman, *Counter-Revolutionary Violence: Bloodbaths in Fact and Propaganda*, Module 57 (Andover: Warner Modular Publications, Inc., 1973), 29.

¹³⁰ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 49.

¹³¹ Pate, 53.

¹³² Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 14.

¹³³ An episode in season 8 of *M*A*S*H* entitled “Yessir, That’s Our Baby” does feature an abandoned female Korean infant, whom the 4077th attempt to send to the United States for adoption. The baby’s mixed-race status, however, marks her as American rather than Korean, as the first person possessive pronoun in the episode’s title

Despite the fact that the inclusion of Korean orphan characters in American film and television gives exposure to a foreign and marginalized population, the representations are simplistic and one-dimensional. Orphaned characters such as Short Round in *The Steel Helmet*, Chu in *Battle Hymn*, and Kim in *M*A*S*H* are not complex and developed characters on their own. They function as mere props used to create depth of character for the white male hero.

In turn, these narratives work to promote a positive image of the United States. Through their treatment of pitiable Korean waifs, Americans define themselves in comparisons to other countries and people. The United States is good because it doesn't bomb abandoned temples filled with orphans seeking refuge like Chinese and North Korean communists do. Rather, they rescue them. The United States' involvement in the Korean War is humanitarian, educational, or medical in nature.

While it has been over sixty-five years since the Korean Armistice Agreement brought about the cessation of hostilities on the Korean peninsula, the Korean War has not yet officially ended. Samuel Fuller's closing message at the end of *The Steel Helmet*, "there is no end to this war," is poignantly a poignant reminder that this specific war has not yet ended, and other wars in places like Vietnam and the Middle East continue where the last war left off. Similarly, while Korea's war orphans in reality have grown up, carried on with their lives, and have children and grandchildren of their own, in America's imagination, they must remain unchanged—perpetual children, helpless, and in need of rescue in order to mitigate our own insecurities. This perspective rings of imperialist nostalgia, which Renato Rosaldo describes as a phenomenon often found under imperialism in which "someone deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his or her intervention."¹³⁴ For South Korea and its orphans, this means navigating a tenuous position as recipients of United States' brand of freedom. They must perform the American ideal of self-sufficiency while simultaneously remaining reliant on America's benevolent aid or risk being undeserving of their white saviors' love and abandonment.

indicates. Thus, the child is understood and treated as daughter figure to the American staff of the field hospital rather than an Asian female figure that could be sexualized. I elaborate further on the imposition of an American identity on mixed-race orphans in the next chapter. Alan Alda, "Yessir, That's Our Baby," *M*A*S*H* (CBS, December 31, 1979).

¹³⁴ Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations*, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 26 (Spring 1989): 108.

Chapter Two

Korean by Birth, American at Heart: Transnational Adoption and the Normalizing of Alternative Family-Making

The Grand Rapids Public Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan is home to a permanent exhibit entitled, “Newcomers: The People of this Place,” which showcases the stories of West Michigan’s immigrant populations.¹ Among artifacts that include a popcorn truck improvised by an Armenian cabinet maker and an ornate ornamental canopy commissioned by Sicilian immigrants is a small display case dedicated to Korean international adoption, which points out that “by 2006, the number of Korean adoptees in Grand Rapids was greater than the number of Koreans who emigrated with their own families.” The exhibit’s narrative focuses on the Behrendt family, who adopted two children (Christopher and Carly) from South Korea in the 1990s, and features artifacts donated by the Behrendts that are supposedly representative of the Korean adoptee experience. Among the articles that include a child’s *hanbok*, children’s books on Korean language and culture, and a copy of *Grand Rapids Family* magazine with Mrs. Behrendt holding two Asian infants on the cover is a Behrendt family photo album, full of pictures of Christopher and Carly Behrendt. One photograph shows the two adoptee children perched on bicycles, bedecked in colorful patriotic trappings. Wearing baseball caps with stars and stripes and trailing red, white, and blue Mylar balloons behind their Huffy bicycles, Christopher and Carly grin happily at the camera. The caption beside the photograph reads, “4th of July: Korean by birth—American at heart!” This photograph is illustrative of the way the adoption process transforms Korean children into American subjects. Through the transnational adoption process, these Korean children go from being poor orphans in need of rescue to family members who are American through and through.

Although Korean adoptees were the first cohort of children to be adopted internationally on a large scale, the United States already had many preexisting perspectives on the ties between family and nation and the infantilization and rescue of Asian bodies that primed the ways in which American transnational adoption was approached. Gina Marchetti elaborates on how the Japanese were portrayed as “passive, childlike, and servile” in 1950s Hollywood films such as *Sayonara*.² She reads these stereotypes as a metaphor for the defeated Japan, and notes how even when anti-Japanese sentiments shifted to pro-Japanese representations after the war, the childishness remained, and merely changed from representations of Japanese as “irrational” and “unthinking” during wartime to the Japanese as “‘good little ally,’ ‘faithful imitator,’ and ‘dependent trading partner’ in the postwar era.”³

Christina Klein describes how after World War II, Americans imagined “the family, and especially its love” as extending “beyond the borders of the nation.”⁴ These “family frames” according to Susie Woo, “were symbolic, aspirational, and illusory representations that prescribed for Americans everything from how to behave at home to how they should see themselves in relation to the world.”⁵ The Hiroshima Maidens project was founded upon these ideals and demonstrate how the American public assumed a parental role over infantilized Asian

¹ Grand Rapids Public Museum, “Newcomers: The People of This Place,” Grand Rapids Public Museum, accessed September 29, 2016, <http://www.grpm.org/current-exhibits/newcomers-the-people-of-this-place/>.

² Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”: Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 134.

³ Marchetti, 134.

⁴ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 147.

⁵ Woo, *Framed by War*, 14.

bodies. Launched in 1953, the Hiroshima Maiden was a humanitarian aid effort conceived by journalist Norman Cousins to “reconstruct” American opinions of Japan after World War II. The philanthropic endeavor worked to bring twenty-five young Japanese women who had been disfigured by the atom bomb to the United States where they received medical treatment and plastic surgery while being hosted in American homes. Klein remarks that “their wounds marked them as human beings with whom Americans could identify and feel sympathy . . . and also clearly cast the Maidens as subordinate figures dependent on American generosity.”⁶ Although the Japanese female participants ranged in age from sixteen to twenty-one, being labeled “Maidens” rather than women rendered them childlike and maintained the American paternalistic perspective of its exceptionalism and superiority over Asia.

The Maidens’ visit was framed in terms of family and domesticity and emphasized the relationship between the American host “mothers” and their Japanese “daughters” who were welcomed into the regenerative haven of the American home through the Moral Adoption Plan. Rendering the Maidens into “daughters” who were “adopted” by “mothers” in the United States was key in maintaining the impression that they were children in need of rescue. This childlike image ensured the Maidens were depoliticized and desexualized—nonthreatening to U.S. postwar ideology or white American heterosexuality, and thus, worthy of American benevolence. Like the narratives of Korean transracial adoption, the United States military’s culpability in creating the “brokenness,” as Caroline Chung Simpson terms it, in which these Asian victims found themselves is unacknowledged. Maidens and orphans were rescued by Americans not because they were atoning for the brokenness they caused, but because “as victors in the war Americans should adopt moral responsibility for those less fortunate.”⁷

The centering of family and the United States’ new interest in Asia is evident in middlebrow productions of the post-World War II era, as Christina Klein describes in reading of the celebrated Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific*. Klein demonstrates how American exceptionalism and the national turn to viewing Asian foreign policy through the lens of the family informed cultural productions of the time. *South Pacific*’s appeal in the post-World War II era reflects the United States expansionist agenda in the Pacific region. Through “tropes of family formation and adoption,” the Rogers and Hammerstein musical brings together “themes of antiracism and global expansion.”⁸ While “formerly based on military strength,” American power in the Pacific is now demonstrated “through maternal values of nurture and protection.”⁹ Reflecting exceptionalist presumptions of American superiority and uniqueness, the United States divorced itself from its previous military violence and distinguished itself from previous European colonial projects in the region by “cast[ing] the problem of political obligation to Asia as a problem of the family.”¹⁰ In *South Pacific*, the white American female protagonist, Nellie, overcomes her revulsion of her French lover’s mixed-race Pacific Islander children and becomes their adoptive mother, living on their Pacific plantation as a mixed-race family. The story peddles the notion that love is the antidote to racism while simultaneously rationalizing the United States’ permanent presence in Asia and the South Pacific. Nellie’s acceptance of Emile’s children as their step-/adoptive mother also marks the hierarchies of

⁶ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 150.

⁷ Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960*, New Americanists (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 115.

⁸ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 163.

⁹ Klein, 165.

¹⁰ Klein, 145.

power in the United States' involvement in Asia. Nellie and the mixed-race children become a family, but in a structure that enables Nellie to exercise her "maternal claim to authority" over the children.¹¹ Thus, constructing U.S.-Asian relations as familial enabled Americans imagine themselves personally connected to Asia while also reinforcing the United States' dominant position in the region.

These post-World War II projects and productions demonstrate that even before the advent of the Korean transnational adoption industry, Americans were being prepared to think about the nation's involvement in Asia in terms of family and adoption. In tracing the genealogy of Korean adoptee representations from earlier American representations of Asia and Asians, it is not difficult to understand transnational Korean adoption as an extension of the United States' Cold War political objectives regarding race and political interests in Asia. That is, while the transnational Korean adoption industry may be considered the starting point for the growth of other transnational adoption programs worldwide, the Korean adoption model itself is a product of previously-articulated notions of race, family, and nation.

In *From Orphan to Adoptee* Soojin Pate explores how "Korean children (orphans and adoptees) were used by the U.S. nation-state to promote the myth of American exceptionalism; to expand U.S. empire during the burgeoning Cold War era; and to solidify notions of the American family as white and heteronormative during an era of non-white racial integration."¹² She argues that "The Korean orphan and adoptee are actually two distinct entities, each shaped by different political, economic, and social conditions, and each serving the purpose of American and South Korean national interests in different ways."¹³ That is, via her advancement through "a highly organized adoption industry," the foreign Korean orphan, who is a figure to be pitied by benevolent Americans transforms into "our" Korean adoptee, the child who simultaneously represents American racial diversity and tolerance and color-blind love.¹⁴ Pate argues that this transformation "takes ongoing work, time, energy, and resources to construct an adoptee-to turn an orphan into an adoptee."¹⁵ Through a process of normalization that disciplined the children's bodies and souls, Holt Adoption Program and other adoption agencies shape Korean orphans into appealing and adoptable subjects for prospective American adoptive parents. From medical examinations, to acclimatizing the orphan's palate to American food, to the indoctrination of Christianity, orphanages and adoption agencies strive to "create an adoptee who will become a proper American citizen who integrates and assimilates seamlessly into American society and homes."¹⁶

Yet, the normalization of the transnational adoptee as a proper American subject does not occur by only shaping the adoptee. The adoptive countries and families must be primed as well. Mark C. Jerng uses transracial adoption to highlight the intersectionalities of familial, national, and racial logics, which can be understood on both a metaphoric level as well as an institutional and structural level.¹⁷ That is, transracial adoptees become naturalized American citizens and family members through ideological and legal manipulations. From a legal standpoint, as Arissa Oh explains, the 1961 amendment of the Immigration and Nationality Act was a watershed moment for the institutionalization and normalization of transnational adoption in the United

¹¹ Klein, 165.

¹² Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 12.

¹³ Pate, 3–4.

¹⁴ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 15.

¹⁵ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 101.

¹⁶ Pate, 125.

¹⁷ Jerng, *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging*, xi.

States, as it made non-quota visas permanently available to foreign-born adoptees. Thus, “[t]he 1961 act definitively marked the Korean child’s legal transformation from refugee to immigrant by elevating foreign-born adopted children from the legal status of ‘eligible orphan’ to the more privileged category of ‘immediate relative.’”¹⁸ Culturally and socially, the conflation of the heteronormative nuclear family with the nation put pressure on U.S. citizens to build their families and raise the next generation of U.S. citizens. In the 1960s and 1970s with the availability of domestic adoptees becoming scarce, transnational adoption “verified . . . adoptive parents’ worthiness for inclusion in the nation at a time when status as a parent was equated with citizenship.”¹⁹ By making Korean children U.S. citizens, adoptive parents sought to legitimize their own belongingness in the United States. At the same time, notions of American exceptionalism and progressivism motivated U.S. citizens to adopt transnationally as a way to demonstrate their commitment to racial tolerance. As Tobias Hübinette writes, “adoption was legitimised by a left-liberal ideology that framed it as a progressive, anti-racist act of rescuing a destitute child from the ‘miseries of the Third World,’ and a way to create a so-called rainbow family.”²⁰ Hence, the Korean orphan is rendered into an adoptee, an American who has always belonged.

However, this rigorous conditioning and disciplining of the adoptee subject is meant to be obscured and hidden “behind the scenes.” The transnational adoption industrial complex conceals this transformation of the adoptee and the adoption process behind sentimentality and narratives that frame adoptees as always already belonging within the nation and the family. The transnational adoptive family “reinvents normative conceptualizations of Korean American and white families, which are traditionally conceived as same-race, genetically related units.”²¹ This normalization and understanding of adoption as an apparatus for building families and productive American subjects, however, obscures the fact that every adoption is fraught with loss and trauma. As Kimberly McKee maintains, “adoption cannot be seen as only a benevolent act of saving because it is a form of family making and unmaking.”²²

Nevertheless, popular media portrayals of transnational adoption in the United States reflect this naturalization, focusing on adoptees as American subjects and members of their white adoptive families. They are happy, well-adjusted individuals grateful for the opportunities adoption has bestowed upon them, indicating an acceptance of the “narrative of adoption promulgated by mainstream adoption discourse—the notion that adoption is the best option.”²³ Buying into this discourse, Arissa Oh explains, “Ordinary American participated in national politics through mainstream media, imagining a new relationship with Asia through the trope of adoption. By adopting Korean children, thousands of American families made the imagined family relationship concrete.”²⁴

My examination of U.S. film and television portrayals of Korean adoptees highlights how adoption simultaneously and illogically both rescues South Korean orphans from imminent death and from growing up and becoming morally-deficient communists. The American family serves as the antidote to the destitution and isolation of the third world. The fact that the United States bears responsibility in creating these third world conditions in the first place is conveniently

¹⁸ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 150.

¹⁹ Oh, 152.

²⁰ Hübinette, “Korean Adoption History,” 35.

²¹ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 15.

²² McKee, 3.

²³ McKee, 9.

²⁴ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 10.

forgotten in these narratives. I also point to how these media representations render the adoptee subject simultaneously inherently American and perpetually foreign, demonstrating that “as a nonnormative subject, the adoptee—as she is being normalized and Americanized—transgresses the very heteronormative boundaries of race, nation, and family. As a result, the adoptee’s presence in a Western adoptive family will always disrupt the heteronormative ideal of the nuclear family,” even as she is purported to be the solution.²⁵

Like with U.S. media portrayals of Korean orphans, representations of Korean adoptees promote notions of American exceptionalism. Rather than reflecting the complexities of the Korean adoptee identity and experience, I observe that mainstream media narratives utilize the figure of the Korean adoptee to develop adoptive parents’ identities as husbands, wives, parents, and U.S. citizens.

“Among His Own Kind”: Amerasian Transformations in *A Thousand Men and a Baby*

A film that portrays but also sentimentalizes the transformation of a Korean orphan into an adoptee is the 1997 CBS holiday television movie, *A Thousand Men and a Baby*.²⁶ Based on a true story, this made-for-television movie dramatically portrays the rescue of an abandoned Amerasian child by a U.S. Navy medical doctor and his crewmates aboard the *U.S.S. Point Cruz* at the end of the Korean War.²⁷ Though *A Thousand Men and a Baby* did not enjoy particular success, I discuss it here because it deals with the theme of the transformation of a Korean orphan into an adoptee. It also imagines the orphan as mixed-race, while previous productions about orphans in the Korean War did not. *A Thousand Men and a Baby* is significant for its acknowledgement of the existence of mixed-race children in South Korea due to the United States’ military presence in the country.

It seems somehow fitting that a story about the transitional process of rendering a mixed-race orphan into an adoptee occupies the hybridized media format of the made-for-television movie. Often seen as a way for the television-watching American public to consume and process the current events and contemporary social issues, Laurie Jane Schulze observes that, “In broadcast television practice, the made-for-TV movie has emerged as a preferred site for the acknowledgment and negotiation of current problems in the culture.”²⁸ And while this 1997 picture recreates a story from over forty years ago, the issues of race, citizenship, family, and U.S. military intervention in foreign affairs that the film invokes remain relevant at the close of the twentieth century.

The release of *A Thousand Men and a Baby* in 1997 reminds us of the continued U.S. military presence in South Korea decades after the Korean War ceasefire agreement was signed. Additionally, in the post-Cold War era, even with the threat of communism vanquished, the U.S. military remained involved in foreign conflict around the world. While the U.S. military continued to engage in combat in unfamiliar places such as the Middle East, Africa, and former

²⁵ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 125.

²⁶ Marcus Cole, *A Thousand Men and a Baby*, Television Movie (Finnegan/Pinchuk Productions, 1997). The film was also sometimes marketed as *Narrow Escape*, perhaps to appeal to audiences in search of a suspenseful, dramatic narrative rather than the mawkishness the title *A Thousand Men and a Baby* implies.

²⁷ Here, I follow Sue-Je Lee Gage’s usage the term, “Amerasian” to denote individuals born to Asian mothers and U.S. fathers within the context of a U.S. military presence in Asia. Sue-Je Lee Gage, “The Amerasian Problem: Blood, Duty, and Race,” *International Relations* 21, no. 1 (2007): 86–102.

²⁸ Laurie Jane Schulze, “‘Getting Physical’: Text/Context/Reading and the Made-for-Television Movie,” *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1986): 35.

Soviet bloc countries, domestic media reminded American civilians of the just and moral work their soldiers performed as global defenders of freedom and democracy.

Additionally, while the peak of transnational Korean adoption in the 1980s had dissipated, over two thousand Korean children were still sent abroad for transnational adoption each year in the 1990s.²⁹ In the wake of the 1997 IMF financial crisis that sent the South Korean economy plummeting, the annual rates of transnational adoption from South Korea experienced a sharp increase “as financial woes created desperate situations for families, and increasing rates of divorce, domestic violence and bankruptcy coincided with thousands of children being relinquished to the state.”³⁰ The nine percent increase in adoptions between 1997 and 1998 demonstrates that the South Korean government once again relied on the transnational adoption industry as a replacement for domestic social welfare support infrastructure, despite its pledge to phase out transnational adoption altogether following international criticism during the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics.³¹ Jennifer Kwon Dobbs reports that “South Korea spends only 6.9 percent of its GDP on social welfare – the least among OECD nations. It allocated only 0.09 percent of its 2009 fiscal budget to support its children,” indicating South Korea’s ambivalence to investing in the welfare of its youngest subjects.³²

Despite Korea’s lack of commitment to investing in its children, the transnational adoption trends following the IMF crisis also serve to remind us of how transnational adoption is tied to the flow of money. The total revenue South Korea has garnered from its participation in the transnational adoption industry is estimated to be roughly \$3.3 billion, and in 2011, it was reported that transnational adoptions generated \$35 million annually for the country.³³ The exchange of tens of thousands of dollars for the adoption of each child makes it clear that transnational adoption is a financially transactional practice despite Western narratives that frame it in terms of family building.

The genre of the television movie is an ideal conduit for sentimentalizing transnational adoption. Douglas Gomery maintains that “[t]he made-for-TV movie has formed its own genre since 1966. This form seems to have fulfilled a particular cultural need: topical entertainment reaffirming basic values and beliefs.”³⁴ In the post-Civil Rights era as Americans continued to grapple with notions of multiculturalism, color-blindness, and anti-racism, films such as *A Thousand Men and a Baby* provided feel-good entertainment that celebrated the multiracial family and normalized and naturalized transnational and transracial adoption as a normative process of family making. As a television movie, which Hollywood marketed as the equivalent of a first-run theatrical film, but viewed in the comfort of one’s one home, *A Thousand Men and a Baby* also reifies the importance and sanctity of the domestic sphere.

In contrast with the warm security of the American home, the film begins with the discovery of an abandoned baby in the trash heap of a U.S. military base in Korea. The soldier

²⁹ Eleana Kim, ed., *Community 2004: Guide to Korea for Overseas Adopted Koreans* (Seoul: Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2004), 14.

³⁰ Eleana Kim, “Adoption in Korea, Then and Now,” in *Community: Guide to Korea for Overseas Adopted Koreans*, ed. Eleana Kim (Seoul: Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2004), 22.

³¹ Kim, 22.

³² Jennifer Kwon Dobbs, “Ending South Korea’s Child Export Shame,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, June 23, 2011), http://www.fpiif.org/articles/ending_south_koreas_child_export_shame.

³³ Dobbs.

³⁴ Douglas Gomery, “*Brian’s Song*: Television, Hollywood, and the Evolution of the Movie Made for TV,” in *Why Docudrama?: Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 87.

who finds the child wrapped in rags marvels, “I don’t understand who would do such a thing, who would just leave him like that.” Within three minutes of the movie, the Otherizing portrayals of Koreans begin, without a Korean character even appearing on set. Like in previous productions, such representations function to define Americans by highlighting how compassionate they are in comparison. U.S. soldiers are moral subjects because they can’t fathom abandoning an innocent child, a family member.

This decontextualizes traditional Korean child “abandonment” practices, in which a child’s birth parent leaves their child in a safe or public place, where they are sure the child will be found and cared for. Korean adoption studies researcher, Joel L. A. Peterson maintains that “[t]he fact that all ‘abandoned’ children were by definition found abandoned (e.g., by police at their station or passersby in a public space) may be evidence that the mother truly did not ‘abandon’ the child—she took efforts to ensure her child would be found, at risk to herself.”³⁵ Coupled with the fact that due to the patrilineal birth registry system in Korea, many “abandoned” children were ineligible for citizenship due to their parents’ unmarried status and/or the fact that with the U.S. military’s presence in South Korea, many children actually had American fathers who did not acknowledge them or did not know of their existence, these “abandoned” children “were wanted and their mothers went through a horrendous, agonizing process to reach a decision that showed that their mothers cared for their welfare and did the only thing they could to give some advantage to their child by at least conferring Korean citizenship.”³⁶ Further, in the case of Amerasian children, they (and their Korean birth mothers) had already been abandoned by their American fathers, both personally and officially, as the United States was the only country involved in the Korean War that did not take responsibility for the children fathered by their soldiers.³⁷ Thus, the guileless soldier’s comment distancing and defining Americans from Koreans in their treatment of their children is naïve, uninformed, and ultimately, misleading.

We soon learn that the abandoned child is mixed-race: his mother who left him at the U.S. army base is Korean, it is assumed that his father was an American G.I. However, this is as far as the film goes in addressing the relations between male American soldiers and Korean women. The soldiers take the child to the Star of the Sea Orphanage, where he is taken in by the orphanage director, Sister Philomena who names the baby Danny after the soldier who found him.³⁸ The program continues to use the young orphan’s plight to continue Orientalist representations of Koreans and frame its American characters in a brighter and opposing light. The film’s central character, Dr. Hugh “Bud” Keenan, the *USS Point Cruz*’s medical doctor, visits the Star of the Sea Orphanage at the behest of the ship’s chaplain, Father O’Riley, who finds the baby in poor health among 400 other children being cared for at the center. Like the Korean War film *Battle Hymn* and the television series *M*A*S*H*, *A Thousand Men and a Baby*’s U.S. military protagonists find themselves in the thick of the Korean War not to engage in combat, but to minister, educate, provide medical care, and save lives. Further, in the case of *A Thousand Men and a Baby*, the story begins just as the cease fire is announced. Thus, the film rendering of the Korean War is premised upon the United States’ contributions to establishing

³⁵ Joel L. A. Peterson, “The Surprising Facts Behind Korean Child Abandonment,” *Huffington Post*, October 10, 2017, sec. HuffPost Contributor, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-surprising-facts-behind-korean-child-abandonment_b_59dc0516e4b0b48cd8e0a5be.

³⁶ Peterson.

³⁷ Wittebols, *Watching M*A*S*H*, *Watching America*, 220.

³⁸ Interestingly, the role of the orphaned infant, Danny was played by Bianca, Madison, Tiffany, and Paris Lucci, a set of quadruplet sisters, who, at age eleven, were institutionalized in the domestic foster care system in California.

and keeping peace, and overseeing the involved parties disengage from combat. Such narratives obscure the casualties and destruction inflicted upon the Korean people by the United States' military involvement.

Upon inspecting the baby, Dr. Keenan diagnoses the child with hypothermia, malnutrition and superficial burns from being left unattended on the heated *ondol* floor. As Dr. Keenan picks up Danny from his cradle, the child immediately ceases his fussing and soft music begins to play, indicating that this is a significant moment. "Oh, lordy be!" Sister Philomena exclaims as the baby begins to suckle from the bottle in Bud's hand, "Why, you're the only one that's been able to feed him!" Based on popular Western notions of relationships and love between a parent and a child, we infer that the instant Hugh Keenan holds little Danny in his arms, an intrinsic and unbreakable bond is established. This naturalizes the transracial, transnational relationship as familial and intimate, and suggests that Bud, a white American citizen, is a more suitable caretaker for the infant than the Korean orphanage employees. Thus, Bud and Father O'Riley advocate for the removal of Danny from the orphanage so that he can be taken care of properly in the sick bay of the *Point Cruz*.

Dr. Keenan's diagnoses also imply the child lacks proper care at the hands of the female Korean orphanage workers. While it has already been established that the boy's Korean mother is unfit to parent, the mistreatment at the hands of the orphanage employees casts the net wider, suggesting that perhaps Korean women in general are inadequate at caring for and raising a child. The child's condition is perhaps understandable considering the fact that the center is caring for 400 children during wartime. However, the orphanage workers' interactions with (or lack thereof) Baby Danny reveal the child's condition is actually a result of intentional neglect. Once on board the *Point Cruz*, Danny flourishes, and it is understood that sending Danny back to the Star of the Sea Orphanage means certain death for the orphan: "He's half Korean, half American, the Koreans won't stand for it. . . The Korean nurses won't bathe him, they won't change him, won't hold him, won't feed him. . . If we send Danny back to the orphanage, he will die."

While *A Thousand Men and a Baby* does not depict physical or enemy conflict as part of its Korean War narrative, the film is rife with the inner, personal conflicts of its white male heroes. Captain Hayward struggles with the question of whether his duty lies in protecting a mixed-race Korean orphan or in following the proper protocols and conduct of running a U.S. aircraft carrier that forbids having the child on board. Dr. Keenan also struggles with his inner demons. We learn that he and his wife, Genevieve, have had two stillborn sons in three years. Bud finds himself becoming attached to baby Danny despite his efforts to distance himself. He has experienced parental loss, and wants to protect his heart from his inevitable parting from the orphan.

When the possibility of adopting Danny arises, Bud is still conflicted. As a third-generation naval officer and physician, his position in the U.S. military comprises a major part of his self-identity that he is unwilling to part with. However, military regulation insists that "no active duty officer or listed soldier or sailor can adopt a foreign baby." Although pressured to adopt Danny, Bud resists giving up his commission. "This is my life. This is who I am," he argues. "If I'm not a naval surgeon, then who am I?" As a "career Navy man from a distinguished family of career Navy men," he is unwilling to give up his career and identity as a naval officer to adopt Danny. Yet, with the future of Danny's life at stake, the orphan becomes simply a device to showcase the white male hero's inner turmoil. The film frames Danny's adoption not around Danny himself, but around his prospective adoptive parents' sacrifices,

losses, and identity. Because the film's narrative revolves around Dr. Keenan, drama is fabricated to establish his depth of character, and thus, the adoptee's own losses and identity remain unacknowledged.

Like so many Korean War films before it, including *Battle Hymn* and *M*A*S*H, A Thousand Men and a Baby* draws its plot from the real lived experiences of U.S. Korean War veterans. The real-life adoptee, whose story this television movie is based on was actually taken to the Star of the Sea Children's Home after being "abandoned at the dispensary of the Army Service Command at Ascom City, halfway between Inchon and Seoul while the shooting war was at its peak."³⁹ Originally named George C. Ascom, the "tiny blue-eyed, blond foundling" was discovered by *USS Point Cruz* Chaplain Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Edward O. Riley languishing "among the all-brunette ménage of the orphanage."⁴⁰ "Knowing that the chances of survival for a half blood Caucasian baby were slim," Riley was determined to send "Baby George" to the United States to an orphanage in Dubuque, Iowa.⁴¹ The baby was cared for on board the *USS Point Cruz* and was welcomed by its "1,000 plus man crew, who treated him as a 'member' of the families they were so far away from and to whom they longed to return."⁴² Lieutenant Hugh C. Keenan, a doctor from the nearby hospital ship, *USS Consolation* expressed interest in adopting "Baby-san" himself. The child, renamed Daniel Edward Keenan, was thus escorted by Chaplain Riley on a Navy transport ship to the United States where he was greeted by his new adoptive mother, Genevieve Keenan in San Diego.

However, as one 1997 review of the television movie points out, "As miraculous as [Daniel Keenan's story] is, Hollywood felt the need to improve it. Artistic license is exercised on several key points in Sunday's movie."⁴³ While in the film, Dr. Keenan agonizes over sacrificing his military career to adopt the infant, in real life, he had no problem resigning his commission, as "[h]is goal all along was to come back to the U.S. and have a private practice. . . . He was essentially drafted when the Korean conflict broke out."⁴⁴ Further, Hollywood's versions of Hugh and Genevieve Keenan are childless and suffer the loss of two stillborn sons before adopting Danny. In reality, the couple had a nine-year-old daughter, Coleen who was ecstatic by her adoptive brother's arrival, exclaiming, "He's my nicest Christmas present!"⁴⁵ The problematics of classifying a Korean orphan as a child's holiday gift aside, it is evident that Hollywood's revisions of the Keenans' story are designed to make the adoption of Danny even more poignant and romanticize Western notions of family and parenthood. Creating tension around the prospect of losing his military career emphasizes the importance of parenthood. That the film's version of Dr. Keenan would sacrifice his identity and livelihood as a naval officer to become a father marks the role of fatherhood as the utmost of importance. And the omission of Coleen Keenan from the narrative works to naturalize the act of transnational Korean adoption as

³⁹ "Tot Sails for U.S. Home with Officer," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, December 2, 1953, Tokyo-Yokohama edition, 6.

⁴⁰ "Tot Sails for U.S.," 6.

⁴¹ Gary Groman, "USS Point Cruz Reunion Remembers 'The Navy's Baby,'" Branson Tourism Center, *The Branson Blog* (blog), September 17, 2012, <https://www.bransontourismcenter.com/info/2012/09/18/uss-point-cruz-reunion-remembers-the-navys-baby/>.

⁴² Groman.

⁴³ Jim Kershner, "Baby on Board: Tale of a Spokane Sailor Who Finds and Adopts an Abandoned Baby During Korean War Becomes a TV Movie," *The Spokesman-Review*, December 6, 1997, sec. Features, <http://www.spokesman.com/stories/1997/dec/06/baby-on-board-tale-of-a-spokane-sailor-who-finds/>.

⁴⁴ Kershner.

⁴⁵ Kershner.

a legitimate form of heteronormative family building. Placing baby Danny in a childless home emphasizes transnational adoption as a method of *creating* family rather than simply adding to an already established one. This embellishment thus also works to reinforce to its viewers that American families are not complete without the inclusion of a (male) child to continue the family line. A family without a child is not a family at all, but incomplete, defective, unnatural. Thus, while *A Thousand Men and a Baby* uses the figure of the orphan for its predictable rescue narrative, the orphan is also integral in portraying the protagonist as a heteronormative family man, who does his patriotic duty not only through his career, but through his role as a father as well, creating a new generation of American citizens.

The U.S. media coverage of the real Daniel Keenan's rescue and adoption also adheres to conventional narratives of orphan rescue, with the added twist of the half-Korean adoptee presenting as white. In an interview, Keenan recalls learning he was adopted at the age of seven. "It was like a fairy tale," Keenan remarks, understanding his adoption story as dramatic and fantastical.⁴⁶ I would argue that the fact that Keenan did not know he was adopted until the age of seven, and the fact that so many accounts of his rescue highlight his fair features frames his story in terms of him as being *always already* an American subject. Thus, Keenan's story simultaneously promotes the narrative of American military benevolence in rescuing helpless, Asian orphans and also advances the notion that the United States of America is a family unit, and anyone born to a U.S. citizen (whose physical characteristics resemble "American" features) is automatically part of the family and will be taken care of. Indeed, a news story about young Keenan published by the U.S. military newspaper, the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, expressed relief that the "little boy whose blond hair and blue eyes made him the 'black sheep' among a race of black-haired, black-eyed people, is going to a land where he can grow up *among his own kind*."⁴⁷

Such language implying the child is inherently American permeates the film as well. Characters talk about Danny going "back home" to the United States although he was born in Korea to a Korean mother. The sailors dress him in miniature U.S. Navy uniforms, reinforcing Soojin Pate's argument that male Korean orphans are imagined as and militarized into American soldiers. They call him "our little mascot" and he becomes a "surrogate son" to the sailors onboard, demonstrating the sailors' possession of the infant and the construction of the *Point Cruz*'s inhabitants as akin to an American family.⁴⁸

The portrayal of a mixed-race Korean orphan as a legitimate American subject is not a new narrative. In 1979, the television series, *M*A*S*H* broadcast an episode tellingly entitled, "Yessir, That's Our Baby," in which an Amerasian baby is left on the doorstep of the doctors' hut.⁴⁹ The doctors of the 4077th attempt to arrange for the child to be sent to the United States for adoption, only to find their efforts stymied through official U.S. military and government channels. Like Danny, the infant in *M*A*S*H* is fair-skinned, implying her father is a white American G.I. These portrayals suggest that not all Korean orphans are created equal in the eyes of American rescuers. Both the sailors aboard the *Point Cruz* and the doctors of the 4077th MASH unit go to great lengths to ensure their young charges' safety and passage "home" to the United States: a place, as Sue-Je Lee Gage describes, "where he can express his true self and no

⁴⁶ Michael A. Lipton, "Baby on Board," *People*, December 8, 1997, <https://people.com/archive/baby-on-board-vol-48-no-23/>.

⁴⁷ "Tot Sails for U.S.," 6. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Lipton, "Baby on Board."

⁴⁹ The use of the first person plural in the episode's title reinforces the notion that the mixed-race child is American rather than Korean. Alan Alda, "Yessir, That's Our Baby," *M*A*S*H* (CBS, December 31, 1979).

longer be an orphan, ‘orphan’ being defined in terms of abandoned paternity and defined by his ‘whiteness.’”⁵⁰ While American imperial benevolence compels American soldiers abroad to visit the local orphanages at Christmastime to distribute toys and chocolates, in these Hollywood narratives, it is the whiteness of the Amerasian orphans that makes the children “ours,” and motivates the American servicemen to bring the children “back” into the fold of U.S. protection. Meanwhile, four hundred other full Korean orphans remain in Sister Philomena’s orphanage and narratives about Black Amerasian children are notably absent. Perhaps these portrayals are in line with catering to the demographics of these productions’ audiences, however, I would argue that the representation of Amerasian orphans in American film and media as *only* white and Asian is significant.⁵¹ The racial hierarchy in the United States ensures white citizens occupy positions of wealth, power, and authority. In order for Amerasian orphans to pass as legitimate American citizens, to be worthy of rescue, they must resemble those with the most privilege.

Kimberly D. McKee describes how “international adoption provided individual Americans a chance to participate in spreading democracy abroad,” and explores how although adoptive families “unsettle the standard paradigm of biological and monoracial family, they reify the notion that a ‘family’ is comprised of married, heterosexual parents.”⁵² *A Thousand Men and a Baby* reflects McKee’s observations on conceptualizations of family and adoption through the introduction of the character, Genevieve Keenan, Bud Keenan’s wife. The perfect military wife, Gen is blonde and pretty, and despite the tragedy of losing two stillborn sons, she is supportive of her husband’s professional career even though it takes him far from home. Unlike previous Korean orphan narratives like the *M*A*S*H* episode, “Kim” in which adoption plans fall through, the Keenans’ bid to adopt Danny has the possibility of being actualized, despite the plot embellishments that heighten the plotline’s suspense and drama. It should be noted that in *A Thousand Men and a Baby*, when a family is actually created through adoption, the presence of a mother figure is included. Narratives such as these normalize and naturalize transnational adoption as a way to build an American family. Longing to fulfill her role as a mother, Gen visits Bud on the *Point Cruz* and inevitably falls in love with Danny. She changes his diaper, sings him lullabies, and she claims that “he knows my voice, he looks around whenever he hears it.” In short, Danny’s orphaned status enables Genevieve to assume the role of mother. While Danny’s adoption creates a family, the family unit is not complete without both its heterosexual parental figures. Despite its title, *A Thousand Men and a Baby* actually requires the presence of a woman in order to reinforce the American heteronormative family unit.

A Thousand Men and a Baby utilizes the figure of the Korean orphan to define two very weighty American institutions. Firstly, the orphan helps delineate the scope of the United States military industrial complex. Rather than an impassive war machine, the figure of the orphan provides the U.S. military with a benevolent and affective purpose for its presence on the Korean peninsula. Danny gives meaning to the *Point Cruz*’s shipmen’s assignment in the Korean conflict. As one sailor voices, “It’s like he’s the reason we fought the war in the first place!”⁵³

Secondly, the Korean orphan works to redefine the concept of family in the United States. While the transnational adoptee (whose former identity was that of the orphan) redraws

⁵⁰ Sue-Je Lee Gage also points to the 1988 film, *Braddock: Missing in Action III* starring Chuck Norris as another instance where “the stereotypical US image of the Amerasian is “a pitiful, thin, blond-haired child in tattered clothing with blue almond-shaped eyes and speaking broken English.” Gage, “The Amerasian Problem,” 88.

⁵¹ Gage, 88.

⁵² McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 8, 15–16.

⁵³ On the television series, *M*A*S*H*, “Trapper” John McIntyre expresses similar sentiments in the episode, “Kim.” Contemplating the adoption of a supposed Korean orphan, he muses, “Maybe this is why we were sent to Korea.”

the boundaries of kin, it does so within specific parameters. That is, despite his transracial and transnational identity, the Korean orphan reinforces the heterosexual nuclear family as a fundamental American institution. When Bud Keenan finally decides to resign his commission in the U.S. Navy to adopt Danny, he tells Captain Hayward that the relinquishment of his military career is “not just for Danny. It’s for Gen. And it’s for me.” Bud’s statement reveals that Danny’s adoption is less about Danny himself, and more about how it affects Keenan and his wife and their identities. Danny’s transition from orphan to adoptee is inconsequential compared to Dr. Keenan’s conversion from Navy doctor to a civilian and a father, and Genevieve’s transformation into a mother.

The film concludes in the present as Grandpa Bud Keenan finishes the story about Danny’s adoption for his grandchildren. Responding to Bud’s assertion that the story is “about being a family,” adult Danny addresses his parents: “Thank you. Both of you.” The film comes to a close, and a voiceover by Gerald McRaney who played Captain Hayward provides an afterword: “In September 1995, Daniel Keenan was guest of honor for a reunion of the crew of the *USS Point Cruz*. Danny paid tribute to the men who saved his life.” In the final minutes of the film, Danny the adoptee performs the requisite gratitude to his saviors. While Danny’s adoption enables the Keenans to become a family, his contribution is not seen as “payment” for the cost and sacrifice of his adoption and rescue. Thus, drawing on Erin Khuê Ninh’s frameworks of gratitude and filial duty, Kimberly McKee argues, “Adoption cannot in this sense be conceived as a ‘gift’ when premised on the notion that the child is in perpetual debt to one’s parents.”⁵⁴ Rather, the adoptee is compelled to continually attempt to repay this debt by performing the role of the “grateful, happy, and well-adjusted” adoptee.⁵⁵

A Thousand Men and a Baby portrays the transformation of the Korean orphan into the Korean adoptee. As an orphan, the Korean child enables the white male protagonists to assume the role of the savior. The orphan’s treatment at the hands of Korean caretakers work to contrast the benevolent and competent care of the Americans. Rescuing Orphan Danny gives the U.S. military an altruistic purpose for their assignment in Korea. Danny’s Amerasian identity makes his transition to adoptee unique. In that that transitional period, which Danny occupies for the majority of the movie, the infant is simultaneously the downtrodden Other and “one of our own.” As an adoptee, the child enables the white heterosexual American couple to become a heteronormative nuclear family unit. Once fully ensconced within the circle of adoptive kin, Danny’s Koreanness vanishes completely. As an adoptee, Danny is always already American. Concerns over assimilation, racism, and cultural conflict from being raised in a (white) American household are nonexistent because Danny is inherently the same as his adoptive parents and country. Yet, for all the roles and identities this Amerasian child assumes, his ultimate role in the film is to support the white male protagonist’s narrative and identity. *A Thousand Men and a Baby* is not a story about Danny and his transformation from orphan to adoptee. It is a story about Dr. Hugh “Bud” Keenan and his transformation from U.S. Navy doctor to all-American dad.

“Your Father Thought it Would Make Us Look Charitable”: The Neoliberal Adoptee Subject in *Arrested Development*

I now turn to a contemporary example of how American television represents Korean adoptees. Here, I explore more in depth how American society’s perspectives on Korean

⁵⁴ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 10.

⁵⁵ McKee, 9.

adoption have evolved since the Korean War. These portrayals are set solidly on American soil and depict their Korean characters as transnational adoptees being raised in white American homes. I examine the critically-acclaimed, satirical comedy, *Arrested Development*, which aired from 2003-2006 on Fox.⁵⁶ While *A Thousand Men and a Baby* was broadcast in 1997, it portrays events of the 1950s. *Arrested Development*, on the other hand, employs a Korean adoptee character in the present time of the twenty-first century. Set in Newport Beach, the show follows the Bluths, a privileged and dysfunctional family riding the ebbs and swells of American neoliberalism. I include *Arrested Development* for the way it employs satire. I am interested in understanding how a television program whose intention is to humorously critique American society and culture looks at transnational adoption. Despite its reputation for having liberal and progressive perspectives, I find that *Arrested Development* continues to utilize conventional orphan and adoptee tropes.

During its run in the early 2000s, *Arrested Development* was lauded for its unique approach to comedy on television. The series relies heavily on satire and exaggerated personas that highlight and reflect social and political issues in contemporary America. In her thesis, *Mocking the Documentary*, Mia Pepler categorizes the series as a mockumentary, and notes that despite the fact that *Arrested Development* tells a fictional narrative with fictional characters, it is styled like a documentary that provides a social critique of American society. She argues that “rather than mockumentary undermining documentary, it provides a critical reflection on documentary aesthetics.”⁵⁷ In terms of production design, in some ways *Arrested Development* transcends conventional sitcom techniques and devices: “rather than the usual multiple-camera sitcom format with canned laughter and stereotypical characters in predictable yet still entirely unlikely situations, *Arrested Development* features a highly unusual mixture of techniques and properties found in a host of different TV genres.”⁵⁸ In short, much of *Arrested Development*’s popularity and success is due to the series’ ability to reflect and highlight social issues and institutions in the United States in a unique way. *Arrested Development* critiques American society with the juxtaposition of exaggerated but familiar circumstances and personalities gift-wrapped in a “real life” documentary package. Unsurprisingly, *Arrested Development* thus invokes a number of stereotypes and tropes, including the Korean orphan, as a way to highlight problematic perspective often held in mainstream American culture.

Arrested Development centers on the Bluths, an upper-class white family in the real estate industry who have used questionable means to attain the socioeconomic position that they enjoy. One of the recurring characters on the show is an adolescent Korean boy adopted by the family’s patriarch and matriarch, George and Lucille Bluth. Annyong Bluth (so named by Lucille because that seems to be the only thing he says) is introduced to us in the fourteenth episode of the first season, titled “Shock and Aww.”⁵⁹ The title of the episode itself is worth mentioning: referencing the Shock and Awe campaign in Iraq in 2003, the phrase calls to mind the George W. Bush administration’s War on Terror against the countries Bush identified in his Axis of Evil speech on January 29, 2002, which included North Korea. The fact that a Korean character is introduced

⁵⁶ A fourth season was released through the online media platform, Netflix in 2013, seven years after the series was cancelled on Fox. Netflix then released a fifth season in 2018 and 2019.

⁵⁷ Mia Pepler, “Mocking the Documentary: An Exploration of Aesthetic and Production Elements in *Arrested Development* as Intersectional Cross-Genre” (Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2017), 16.

⁵⁸ Patrick Alasdair Gill, “‘I Swore I’d Not Go Reality’: The Bluths Through the Lens of Genre,” in *A State of Arrested Development: Critical Essays on the Innovative Television Comedy*, ed. Kristin M. Barton (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), 197.

⁵⁹ Joe Russo, “Shock and Aww,” *Arrested Development* (Los Angeles: Fox, March 7, 2004).

in this episode thus suggests that Annyong's entrance into the Bluth family is insidious, playing on Yellow Peril stereotypes as well as antiquated notions that bringing an orphan into one's home is dangerous and ill-advised.⁶⁰ Contrasting the sinister potential of the Korean orphan, but still playing on orphan stereotypes is the fact that the title uses the homophone "aww," which implies the adoptee is a spectacle to be cooed and fussed over. Despite the fact that Annyong is a teenager, the title implies that adoptees are always and forever infants.

Throughout the episode, the Bluths use Annyong for their own selfish agendas. We learn that Annyong's adoption was not motivated by altruism or George and Lucille's desire to parent another child. Kristin M. Distel observes that "There is a consistent correlation between charitable actions and criminal behavior throughout the series, and indeed, this relationship is at the center of the series itself and serves as the premise of the show."⁶¹ Highlighting this, Annyong's adoption is a ploy to divert attention away from the family business's corrupt practices and a means to punish Lucille's youngest son, the man-child Buster. Lucille blusters into the model home in the aborted Sudden Valley residential development site which has become family headquarters for the family. She makes a beeline for her son Michael, who is seen as the family's rational voice and problem solver. She hands Michael a letter from the Korean Consulate of Child Services. The camera cuts away from Lucille and Michael to a close-up of the letter, which reads:

Dear Mrs. Bluth,

Congratulations new parent! As you know, each state has its own pre-adoption requirements. Some states may only require an approved home study, whereas others have additional requirements. **Your adoption has finally been approved.** Requirements within a state may vary depending on the circumstances surrounding each prospective adoption such as preliminary court hearings, whether or not the child has been seen prior to the adoption being completed, when the legal order being granted in the foreign country is not a final adoption decree, etc. It is essential families know what the requirements are and meet them prior to travel in order to avoid difficulties once in the foreign country.

As you requested, a **young boy from Korea** has been selected and arrives at your home tomorrow. We will deliver him. **Please be home between 9:00 and 5:00.** Most countries require proof of a non-criminal history on official letterhead which is usually different from the clearance obtained for the homestudy. In many states, this clearance can not be obtained through the local police, but through another agency. For example, in New York, this document is called a "Good Conduct Certificate" and in Maryland, it is a "Gold Seal Letter."

Key phrases from the letter are highlighted and magnified momentarily before the screen cuts back to Lucille and Michael.⁶² "Did you and Dad adopt a child?" Michael asks in disbelief.

"The SEC [U.S. Securities and Exchange Committee] was on to us," Lucille explains. "Your father thought it would make us look charitable. He must have forged my signature." The camera cuts away again, this time to a flashback one year earlier. George and Lucille's son Buster pouts in a chair and the camera zooms out to Lucille who storms and rages about the

⁶⁰ See Rachel Lynde's caution against orphans in Chapter 1 of *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery.

⁶¹ Kristin M. Distel, "The Meaning of Charity: Depictions of Corruption and Altruism," in *A State of Arrested Development: Critical Essays on the Innovative Television Comedy*, ed. Kristin M. Barton (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), 23.

⁶² These phrases appear in bold above.

living room. “Well, maybe I’ll get a son who *will* finish his cottage cheese!” Lucille yells, angrily signing her name on the adoption papers. As Lucille signs, the camera zooms out even further to reveal her husband, George, who is sprawled across the sofa, open-mouthed and fast asleep. This flashback gives us more context on the circumstances of Annyong’s adoption as well as the Bluths’ family dynamic. Despite the fact that Lucille claims her husband forged her signature, it is clear that she personally signed the adoption papers in a fit of anger. Her motive for doing so is not charitable or well-intentioned, but is purely a move to punish her adult son, Buster for the trivial transgression of not finishing his cottage cheese. George, asleep on the couch, is absolved of forging Lucille’s signature and initiating the adoption process, but his napping through Lucille and Buster’s heated argument also demonstrates his negligence as a parent. Under such domestic circumstances, one would think that the Bluth household would not be an ideal placement for an adoptee. The fact that Annyong’s adoption is approved may be *Arrested Development*’s way of pointing to the commercial nature of the transnational adoption industry. As Buster explains, “My mom bought him.” Rather than prioritizing the welfare of the child, the adoption agencies commodify them. The passage in the Korean Consulate of Child Services’ letter, which reads, “As you requested, a young boy from Korea has been selected and arrives at your home tomorrow. We will deliver him. Please be home between 9:00 and 5:00,” treats Annyong’s arrival into the Bluth family not as a sentimental “Gotcha Day,” but as a mundane delivery within conventional business hours.⁶³

Returning to the present moment, Lucille looks desperately into Michael’s eyes. “You’ve got to get me out of this,” she begs. Looking off into the distance, she muses, “I don’t have the milk of mother’s kindness in me anymore.” While Lucille’s statement is humorous (and a little bit gross), it emphasizes the fact that her adoption of a Korean child is not an act of love. Lucille blatantly admits she is unwilling to make an effort to parent anymore. This, combined with the fact that the Bluths’ motivation to adopt is a move to cover up their corruptive business practices, and Lucille’s signing of the adoption papers occurring in a moment of anger and punishment demonstrates that George and Lucille do not see Korean adoption as a lifelong commitment or a way to expand their hearts and family. Rather, the Korean child is used as a bargaining chip for their own selfish gains.

As it turns out, upon his arrival, Lucille decides to keep Annyong as a way to make Buster jealous. And although Buster introduces Annyong as his new brother, the Bluths’ treatment of Annyong is fraught with ignorance and cultural insensitivity, making it obvious that they do not really consider him a part of their family. They are unwilling to put the effort into making him feel welcome in his new home, or even make nominal steps to bridging the cultural and linguistic divides that separate them. In Annyong’s introductory scene, Buster meets his niece and nephew, Maeby and George Michael, at their middle school as Annyong, played by Korean American actor, Justin Lee, tags along. “Hello,” Buster greets them. Following suit, the Korean boy greets Maeby and George Michael as well, saying “hello” in Korean. Unaware that *annyeong* is Korean for hello, Buster becomes exasperated with his new brother: “Yes, Annyong. Your name’s Annyong. We all know you’re Annyong. Annyong, Annyong, Annyong!”

⁶³ Kimberly McKee writes, “Families may celebrate or commemorate the adoptees’ arrival with little to no acknowledgement of how this day marks the time when adoptees also left behind their country of birth, birth families, and orphanage communities. . . . Representing arrival to the United States, ‘Airplane Day’ or ‘Gotcha Day,’ obscures one of the many losses adoptees encounter as children. . . . However, if we overlook the significance of these celebrations in the lives of adult adoptees, we run the risk of delegitimizing their role in shaping adoptee identity.” McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 86.

As a transracial, transnational adoptee, Annyong becomes a stylish accessory for the Bluths, a way in which they can visually project their carefully-constructed self-images. Lucille literally uses Annyong as a purse, as his supposedly traditional Korean clothing has many pockets. Further, as J. Jeremy Wisniewski observes, the Bluths not only operate with stereotypes, but for the Bluths, “stereotypes are taken to be models for how people must behave. The Bluths want others to be their stereotypes, and they continuously attempt to make this happen. The Bluths seem hell-bent on making people live out their social identities.”⁶⁴ Maeby takes Annyong to her school’s Spring Diversity Dance (where it seems he’s the only person of color in attendance) as an act of rebellion, and soapboxes the evils of racial prejudice on Annyong’s behalf only to ditch him moments later when the popular white football star asks her to dance. Alluding to essentialized notions of child labor and exploitation in Asia, Lucille has Annyong, whose “work ethic is unbelievable,” work ten-hour shifts at the family’s boardwalk banana stand.⁶⁵ Annyong’s identity as a transracial, transnational adoptee is flaunted by the Bluths, who revel in their supposed position as anti-racist white saviors. In contrast, the Bluths’ blonde-haired daughter, Lindsay, is fully included in the family. In a season three plot twist, it is revealed that Lindsay was adopted by the Bluths at age three, and is actually not, as she had assumed her entire life, her brother Michael’s biological twin sister.⁶⁶ While Annyong’s Asianness and adoption status are used to visibly construct a progressive and neoliberal image for the Bluths, those characteristics, in addition to his age, also prevent him from being integrated into his adoptive family. Lindsay, on the other hand, who was adopted as a toddler, and shares the same racial background as her adoptive parents, is undeniably a Bluth, and her adoption was kept a secret.

Like Kim in *M*A*S*H*, Annyong has very little agency or voice. Until the season three finale, the only thing Annyong says is “*annyeong*.” In season two, Lucille sends Annyong, to Milford School to teach him a lesson. Despite the fact that Lucille cannot remember what lesson she was trying to teach Annyong, he remains at the boarding school, whose founder built the school upon the premise that “Children should be neither seen nor heard.”⁶⁷ At Milford, Annyong returns to an institutionalized setting (having presumably lived in a Korean orphanage before his adoption by the Bluths) and his presence there plays into the stereotype that Asians are docile, submissive, and insignificant—a model minority. He remains the perpetual foreigner, a generic token Asian with his rice bowl haircut and drab homespun clothes, which more closely resemble a Chinese *changshan* rather than a Korean *hanbok* who is silent and invisible.

As the series progresses, Annyong’s character shifts from him being represented as a passive Asian entity to one who plays into more nefarious Asian stereotypes. We discover that Annyong is actually 18 years old, and thus, technically, an adult. This changes our perception of Annyong from a poor, helpless child to a competent and capable Asian man—scheming and inscrutable with an ulterior motive. Hollywood has a long history of such depictions, in which

⁶⁴ J. Jeremy Wisniewski, “What Whitey Isn’t Ready to Hear: Social Identity in Arrested Development,” in *Arrested Development and Philosophy: They’ve Made a Huge Mistake*, ed. Kristopher G. Phillips, Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture 27 (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 105–6.

⁶⁵ Brett Gaul, “Family First: How Not to Run a Business,” in *Arrested Development and Philosophy: They’ve Made a Huge Mistake*, ed. Kristopher G. Phillips, Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture 27 (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 79.

⁶⁶ Lindsay’s adoption by the Bluths was motivated by their business rival, Stan Sitwell’s desire to adopt the little girl, then called Nellie. Lucille and George adopted her first, “just to stick it to a competitor,” demonstrating that they have a history of using adoption as a tool for commercial manipulation.

⁶⁷ Lee Shallat-Chemel, “Public Relations,” *Arrested Development* (Los Angeles: Fox, January 25, 2004).

the West faces the threat of the “yellow peril.” As Gina Marchetti expounds, the yellow peril “combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East.”⁶⁸ Conforming to such anxieties, Annyong’s character leaves Milford and lives in the walls of George and Lucille’s apartment, surveilling them without their knowledge. Echoing both the reservations of bringing an orphan into the home as well as yellow peril tropes in which Asians cunningly threaten invasion, Annyong’s infiltration of the Bluths’ domestic space certainly does not cast this Korean adoptee character in a positive or accurate light.

Annyong’s story arc comes to a climax in the season three finale, the last *Arrested Development* episode broadcast on Fox television network.⁶⁹ Aboard luxury ocean liner, the *RMS Queen Mary*, the Bluth family celebrates George’s release from prison after the treason charges against him are dropped. Just when it seems that the Bluths are home free and the family business is poised to recover, SEC police boats approach the ocean liner. Lucille deduces that someone must have betrayed them, declaring, “Well, I know it was someone in this family. Off camera, a voice parries, “Or someone who used to be!” in a stereotypical Asian accent. This revelation is accompanied by generic Asian gong music, and the camera cuts away to reveal Annyong, still sporting his rice bowl haircut and wearing his traditional clothing, despite having lived in the United States for nearly three years. “Annyong?” Lucille gasps in disbelief. “*Annyeong!*” Annyong replies automatically. Buster, in turn, expresses his incredulity: “Annyong?” On cue, Annyong returns the greeting genially, turning the Korean adoptee character’s dramatic moment into a farce.

Striding forward to stand face-to-face with Lucille, though standing a good head shorter than his adoptive mother, Annyong divulges that “my real name is Hello!” On-screen subtitles inform viewers that “hello” in Korean means “one day.”⁷⁰ “Hello?” Buster inquires, and the on-screen subtitles translate this to “One day.” “*Annyeong!*” Annyong replies, as the subtitles display “Hello.” Annyong turns back to Lucille with a glare, and explains why snitched on her: “My grandfather vowed one day he would get even for banana stand you stole from him!” As the series’ narrator explains that Annyong gathered information against Lucille to avenge his grandfather, an infrared filter shows Annyong transmitting covert messages on anachronistic transmitting devices in between the walls of Lucille’s apartment. On screen, an old photograph of Annyong’s grandfather as a young man standing on the Newport Beach boardwalk replaces Annyong. He is unsmiling and stands behind an ice chest on wheels, holding a chocolate-covered banana on a stick. A sign on the ice chest touts “Cold Banana in Delicious Brown Taste!” Thus, we are to understand that the Bluth’s hobby business of selling frozen bananas on Newport Beach’s boardwalk was actually the brainchild of Annyong’s grandfather. In typical Bluth underhanded business dealings fashion, Lucille stole Annyong’s grandfather’s business idea in 1953 (the year the Korean War ended) and had Annyong’s grandfather deported, leading the Korean family to ruin while the Bluths prospered. This final scene with Annyong once again plays into Asian and adoptee tropes. His motive for revenge reveals that like the majority of Korean adoptees, Annyong is not actually an orphan, but has biological relatives. Thus, like so many Korean adoptees, including myself, Annyong’s orphanhood is manufactured through the “social death” of his biological family, rendering him a “social orphan,”: “they have living

⁶⁸ Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril,”* 2.

⁶⁹ John Fortenberry, “Development Arrested,” *Arrested Development* (Los Angeles: Fox, February 10, 2006).

⁷⁰ *Arrested Development* takes some artistic liberties with this translation. “One day” in Korean is 하루, which is actually pronounced closer to *haru* than “hello.”

parents but have been relinquished by them or taken by the state and declared legally abandoned; they are only legally ‘orphans.’”⁷¹ Annyong’s betrayal also builds on the yellow peril stereotype that characterizes Asians as “physically and intellectually inferior, morally suspect, heathen, licentious, disease-ridden, feral, violent, uncivilized, infantile, and in need of the guidance of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants.”⁷²

Finally, the fact that Annyong’s revenge is for the banana stand is also significant. Transnational, transracial Asian adoptees are often disdainfully characterized as “bananas” who are “yellow on the outside and white on the inside.”⁷³ Pressured to integrate into white American culture and their white families, Korean adoptees often find it difficult to relate to and identify with Korean and Korean American culture. Yet their physical features mark them as Asian to others and to themselves when they look in the mirror. As Christina Yang writes, “It is no secret that Korean adoptees often feel caught between their birth and adoptive cultures and identities. In the most classic sense of the word, they are immigrants, having been born in one country and transported to live in another. In spite of this, they do not undergo the typical Asian American immigrant experience.”⁷⁴ This disconnect and layering of identities, of feeling the “push and pull of assimilation into American society,” is a fundamental aspect of the Korean adoptee experience.⁷⁵

Throughout *Arrested Development*, the disavowals that the Bluths demonstrate through Annyong are fairly straightforward. Their adoption of Annyong is an attempt to show that despite their upper-class socioeconomic status, they aren’t greedy or corrupt. They aren’t racist or prejudiced. Rather, they are good and wholesome people, altruistic members of American society. I would also argue that *Arrested Development* as a series also uses Annyong for its own disavowals. *Arrested Development* attempts to reflect a collective American cultural perspective through satire. While the Bluths disavow their greed and racism, the ironic tone of the series makes it obvious to audiences that, really, they are greedy and corrupt. But as satire, or, what Mia Pepler identifies as mockumentary, which “create a fictional world as a non-fictional world” in order to “ridicule the ‘truth claim’ of documentary” and/or real life, *Arrested Development* claims that we, as a progressive American audience, aren’t like the Bluths.⁷⁶ While the Bluths may claim they aren’t racist, we *really* aren’t racist.

However, I wonder, really, how progressive a popular comedy on Fox can be. James Rocha insists that “*Arrested Development* does not support the racialized views of its main characters; in fact, it uses these views to undermine its audience’s own racial comfort zones.”⁷⁷ I argue that *Arrested Development* relies on the same old tropes, stereotypes, even as it satirizes them instead of actually transcending them, especially when it comes to its representation of a Korean adoptee. While *Arrested Development* may employ satire to poke fun at situations in

⁷¹ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 27; Diana Marre and Laura Briggs, eds., *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 12.

⁷² Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril,”* 3.

⁷³ Kathryn Eileen Goldstein, “Birth Family Searching and Meaning: A Korean Transracial Adoptee Perspective” (Thesis, St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas, 2013), 57.

⁷⁴ Christina Yang, “Redefining and Reclaiming Korean Adoptee Identity: Grassroots Internet Communities and the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption,” *Asian American Law Journal* 16, no. 1 (January 2009): 157.

⁷⁵ Yang, 157.

⁷⁶ Pepler, “Mocking the Documentary,” 24.

⁷⁷ James Rocha, “It Ain’t Easy Being -Race-Sensitive: Things Whitey and -African-Americany Aren’t Ready to Hear,” in *A State of Arrested Development: Critical Essays on the Innovative Television Comedy*, ed. Kristin M. Barton (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), 53.

which racism, privilege, and prejudice arise, the series does not critically demonstrate to its audiences why and how it's problematic or make any attempt at offering solutions that would change the systems and institutions that have created such perspective and inequalities in American society. On that topic, like *Annyong*, Ron Howard's narrator voice of reason remains noticeably silent.

Homonationalism in the Twenty-First Century: Asian Adoption in *Modern Family*

In the twenty-first century, Asian transnational, transracial adoption is a popular media topic. The coverage of high-profile celebrity adoptions and the inclusion of Asian adoptee characters in popular network television series have made it clear that transnational, transracial adoption has become an acceptably American way of building families. Additionally, modern international adoption practices, while founded and perfected in the South Korean context, have expanded and have been replicated at other global sites. From Eastern Europe to South America to Africa, Harry Holt's legacy, Holt International Children's Services, currently operates in thirteen different countries and facilitated the adoption of over 600 children in 2018.⁷⁸

This chapter expands its perspective by looking beyond the Korean adoptee experience to understand the new ways in which transnational adoption and transracial families are being imagined and how "the discrete arms of Korea's adoption program laid the groundwork for the rise of the transnational adoption industrial complex" worldwide.⁷⁹ As Kimberly McKee expounds, South Korea's "persistent involvement in adoption results in Korea's centrality in shaping contemporary adoption practices. Instrumental to this positioning is the rise of the TAIC, which offered methods of standardization to be replicated in other countries."⁸⁰ While transnational Korean adoption inaugurated and popularized the notion of transracial transnational family-building in the United States, the increasing demand and waning supply of adoptable Korean children has prompted the transnational adoption industrial complex to expand and replicate to other sending countries. This is reflected in the representations of transnational adoptions in contemporary American film, television, and media. Catherine Ceniza Choy highlights how in *Sex and the City*, Charlotte York's adoption of a daughter from China punctuates a happy end for Kristin Davis's character in the HBO series' final episode.⁸¹ From gossip magazines discussing the latest additions to Angelina Jolie's family, to the trendy clothing store, Urban Outfitters releasing a yellow tee shirt emblazoned with the slogan, "Adopting is the New Black," it is apparent that transnational, transracial adoption, particularly from Asia, has become a solid fixture in popular American culture.⁸²

Yet, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the contemporary trendiness and popularity of Asian adoption, representations of adoptees still remain problematic. Although the increased presence of adoptee figures in American film and television indicates a growing racial tolerance and diversity in American mainstream culture, adoptee representations still continue to adhere to conventional and stereotypical tropes, albeit framed in millennial progressive liberalism. Exemplifying this perspective is the ABC mockumentary sitcom, *Modern Family*. Premiering in 2007 to critical acclaim, *Modern Family* follows the lives of the Pritchett family, who are bound

⁷⁸ Holt International Children's Services, "About Us," Holt International, 2019, <https://www.holtinternational.org/about/>.

⁷⁹ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 22.

⁸⁰ McKee, 5.

⁸¹ Choy, *Global Families*, 3.

⁸² JaeRan Kim, "What Does My T Say About Me?," *Harlow's Monkey* (blog), May 9, 2007, https://harlows-monkey.com/2007/05/09/what_does_my_t_/.

together through a diverse arrangement of family structures, which include nuclear, step-, same-sex, and adoptive kinship ties. One such alternative kinship family member is Lily Tucker-Pritchett, the Vietnamese adoptee daughter of Mitchell Pritchett and his husband, Cameron Tucker.

Previous American media representations of Korean orphans and adoptees were almost exclusively of male children, which, as I have previously argued, was to ensure that there would be no confusion that the Asian waifs the heterosexual adult males rescued were differentiated from the young Asian female characters that became tragic love interests for the American heroes. Here, in *Modern Family*, we see the emergence of the female adoptee character. This shift to female adoptee figures is actually a more accurate representation of Asian adoptee demographics. Historically, Americans have overwhelmingly adopted more girls than boys transnationally. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service data indicates that 64% of transnational adoptees in adopted to the United States are female.⁸³ Adoption studies scholar Kimberly McKee estimates that 80% of the Korean adoptees in the United States are female.⁸⁴ Recent policy and gender preference changes in Asian sending countries including China and South Korea resulted in 2016 being the first time the international adoption of boys surpassed girls in the United States.⁸⁵ However, survey evidence suggests that prospective American adoptive parents consistently express preference to adopt girls over boys regardless of a sending country's gender availability of adoptable children.⁸⁶ Yet, I argue that *Modern Family's* decision to include a female Asian adoptee character in the ensemble is not motivated by a desire to showcase more accurate adoptee representations, but in fact, is driven by assumptions and stereotypes about homosexuality. As a gay male couple, Mitchell and Cameron would have no romantic interest in females, thus making it "safe" to add a female adoptee in their family. Further, deciding to make the gay couple's adopted child a girl contributes to common stereotypes of gay men which portray them as feminine. Already assumed to be emasculated by their sexual preference, the adoption of a female child further feminizes the same-sex couple. It suggests that as gay parents, Cameron and Mitchell are better able to relate to and parent a daughter than a son.

Despite these assumptions about their masculinity, Mitchell and Cameron still occupy a place of privilege and belonging in American society. I argue that they epitomize what Jasbir Puar identifies as homonationalism: "the emergence of national homosexuality" which "operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects."⁸⁷ Through this emergence, one's queerness becomes an attribute to one's national identity rather than a concession. Puar observes that "there is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families)."⁸⁸ Thus, while this shift

⁸³ John Gravois, "Bringing Up Babes: Why Do Adoptive Parents Prefer Girls?," *Slate Magazine*, January 14, 2004, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2004/01/why-do-adoptive-parents-prefer-girls.html>.

⁸⁴ Philip Gowman, "Life as a Banana – Korean Adoptees Speak at Cambridge," *London Korean Links* (blog), February 25, 2010, <https://londonkoreanlinks.net/2010/02/25/life-as-a-banana-korean-adoptees-speak-at-cambridge/>.

⁸⁵ Zola Ray, "For the First Time, Americans Who Adopt Children Overseas Are Now More Likely to Bring Home Boys than Girls," *Newsweek*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.newsweek.com/international-adoption-gender-shift-china-688096>.

⁸⁶ Gravois, "Bringing Up Babes."

⁸⁷ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2.

⁸⁸ Puar, xii.

seems to suggest American society has become tolerant and even welcoming of gayness, this acceptance is conditional and highly regulative: “U.S. nation-state formations, historically reliant on heteronormative ideologies, are now accompanied by...homonormative ideologies that replicate narrow racial, class, and gender national ideals.”⁸⁹

As a white, middle-class, married couple, Mitchell Pritchett and Cameron Tucker reproduce the typical American gendered family ideal, embodying the “access to the heteronormative nuclear family and the rights, recognition, and privileges associated with it” that David Eng identifies.⁹⁰ Mitchell, a graduate of Cornell University and Columbia University, is a successful attorney, which allows his partner, Cameron, to act as a stay-at-home partner and pursue his hobbies which include antique fountain pen collecting and Japanese flower arrangement. In the very first episode of the series, the two men adopt a child from Vietnam, thus becoming a nuclear family unit.⁹¹ David Eng, building on anthropologist Ann Anagnost’s observation that “for white middle-class subjects in the era of late capitalism, the position of parent has become increasingly a measure of value, self-worth, and ‘completion,’” argues that “the possession of a child, whether biological or adopted, has today become the sign of guarantee not only for family but also for full and robust citizenship—for being a fully realized political, economic, and social subject in American life.”⁹² That is, through Asian transnational adoption, Mitch and Cam are able to fully participate in and demonstrate their commitment to American patriotism, emulating a heterosexual family unit and raising the next generation of American citizens.

In *The Feeling of Kinship*, David Eng uses the term, “queer liberalism” to describe the ways in which gays and lesbians are included in American mainstream politics, culture, and economies here in the twenty-first century. Eng also notes that “Queerness has come out of the closet, as it were, becoming in the process a mass-mediated commodity, a culture of beautiful objects (bodies, fashions, food, and furniture) to be consumed.”⁹³ Queer liberalism allows the LGBTQ+ community to exercise their Americanness through their consumerism. And transnational adoption, which carries the price tag of tens of thousands of dollars, enables gay and lesbian partners to become a nuclear family unit, a homonormative American family. Thus, transnational adoption, queer liberalism, and consumerism triangulate to enable gays and lesbians participate and prove their inclusion as “proper U.S. citizen-subjects of the capitalist nation-state.”⁹⁴

As proper (and queer) U.S. citizen-subjects, same-sex adoptive parents then participate in shaping the next generation of queer U.S. citizen-subjects, whose kinship and citizenship ties to the United States are established not through conventional practices of familymaking and citizenship principles of *jus soli* or *jus sanguinis*, but through what Eng describes as “queer

⁸⁹ Puar, xxv.

⁹⁰ David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University of Press, 2010), 27.

⁹¹ *Modern Family* takes some artistic liberties here, as Vietnamese law actually forbids same-sex couples from adopting. U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Vietnam Intercountry Adoption Information,” Travel.State.Gov, January 2, 2019, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/Intercountry-Adoption-Country-Information/VietNam.html>.

⁹² David L. Eng, “Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas,” *Social Text* 21, no. 3 (October 1, 2003): 7–8.

⁹³ Eng, *Feeling of Kinship*, 29–30.

⁹⁴ Eng, 30.

diasporas” (“the unpredictable and unsettled migrations of queer Asian bodies in the global system”) and unconventional family and kinship formations.⁹⁵

However, it is important to note that despite the queer processes through which these adoptees become a part of American families and society, these processes simultaneously solidify the adoptees’ identities as American subjects. Mitchell and Cameron’s adoptive daughter, Lily, is a prime example of this phenomenon. David Eng states that “queer liberalism does not resist, but abets, the forgetting of race and the denial of racial difference.”⁹⁶ I would argue that queer liberalism also erases and disavows racial mixedness as well. In *Modern Family*, much is made of Lily’s transnational adoption and arrival into the Pritchett family. Her fathers travel to Vietnam to adopt her, and echoing mainstream adoptee origin narratives, explain to her that her Vietnamese birthmother “loved you very very much. And she knew that she couldn't take care of you, so she made sure she went with the most loving family she could find.”⁹⁷ Yet throughout the series, Lily’s birthfather and the fact that she is clearly mixed race is never mentioned. Lily’s character has always been played by mixed race Asian American actresses, whose mothers are Asian American, and whose fathers are white American.⁹⁸ Despite this, the characters on *Modern Family* always refer to Lily’s ethnicity as Vietnamese. Here, I want to contextualize Lily’s ethnic identity as a mixed-race Vietnamese adoptee in the ongoing American military presence in Asia. While the United States does not currently have a military base in Vietnam, mixed race Asian adoptees are a literal product of the United States’ Cold War history of military intervention in Asian conflicts, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the secret war in Laos and its continued military presence in South Korea, Okinawa, and the Philippines. Lily’s representation on *Modern Family* erases this context, and, in fact, erases any indication of her pre-existing and biological American heritage. Rather, through her adoption by her two white American fathers, Lily’s Americanness is (re)inscribed. Contrary to the presumed inherent Americanness that the sailors see in Danny in *A Thousand Men and a Baby*, it is only through the adoption process that Lily’s American identity becomes legitimized. As the show’s patriarch, Jay, states in the series’ first episode following Lily’s adoption, “She’s one of us now,” implying that her belongingness has only just materialized.⁹⁹ Even so, the divide between American and Other still lingers, for Jay follows up his statement of inclusion by referring to his granddaughter as a “potsticker.”

Critical mixed race studies scholar, Wei Ming Dariotis uses the assemblage “war baby / love child” to conceptualize the presumptions and problematic binary of mixed race Asians being either “brought into existence through U.S. Wars in Asia, illicit relationships, or the free love of the post-Civil Rights, post-hippie era.”¹⁰⁰ I argue that Lily transcends the dualistic boundary of war baby / love child and actually embodies *all* aspects of this term. As a mixed race Vietnamese adoptee, her birth is predicated upon a U.S. military presence in Asia. Further, Lily’s parents’ relationships—both her biological parents and her adoptive parents—can be seen as “illicit” in some regard. The assumed circumstances of Lily’s conception are tinged with

⁹⁵ Eng, xi.

⁹⁶ Eng, 4.

⁹⁷ James Bagdonas, “Open House of Horrors,” *Modern Family* (Los Angeles: ABC, October 24, 2012).

⁹⁸ In the first two seasons of *Modern Family*, Jaden and Ella Hiller played the role of infant Lily. The twins’ mother, Michelle, is from the Philippines. From the third season onward, Aubrey Anderson-Emmons has played Lily’s character on the show. Aubrey’s mother, is a well-known Korean adoptee comedienne, Amy Anderson.

⁹⁹ Jason Winer, “Pilot,” *Modern Family* (Los Angeles: ABC, September 23, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Laura Kina and Wei Ming Dariotis, eds., *War Baby / Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), xi.

miscegenation and unequal gender and political power dynamics. Conversely, her adoptive parents' homosexual relationship, once considered verboten in American society, has been naturalized through homonormativity. Queer liberalism has thus marked Lily's place in the Tucker-Pritchett family as a statement of love that transcends borders, a modern-day iteration of the principles of the free love era.

Despite the seemingly progressive representations *Modern Family* presents of family, kinship, and the domestic sphere, the representation of transnational adoption via Lily's character remains problematic and centered around the adoptive parents' perspective rather than the adoptee's. One episode that illustrates the ways in which the representation of Asian adoptee narratives lack depth, cultural sensitivity, and adoptee agency is the second season episode, entitled "Two Monkeys and a Panda."¹⁰¹ The episode's title comes from a project Cameron undertakes to document Lily's adoption experience. Worried that Lily will have unpleasant associations with adoption, Cameron endeavors to "take the negative charge out of adoption" by conditioning Lily to clap and cheer every time she hears the word "adoption." In the episode's cold open, Mitchell returns home from the farmer's market with news that kale is "the new spinach."¹⁰² With Lily sitting on his lap, Cameron tells Mitchell that "we're going to have to adopt—yay!—a new attitude towards kale. Maybe we'll even adopt a new vinaigrette. Adopt, yay!" This exchange, while perhaps well-intentioned and written for comedic effect, is deeply problematic in its handling of the issue of adoption. Firstly, it equates Lily's adoption to the introduction of a vegetable into the household, belittling her adoption journey and experience. Secondly, training Lily to clap whenever she hears the word adoption dehumanizes her, degrading her to something akin to a pet that can be conditioned to a single stimulated response, bypassing the necessity to delve into the complexities, let alone the concept itself of transnational adoption. That is, encouraging Lily to cheer each time the word adoption is used does not contribute towards her understanding of transnational adoption as an institution, nor her identity as an adoptee, but, like Pavlov's canine subjects, simply triggers a reaction to a designated stimulus. Finally, convincing Lily to only have a positive reaction to adoption dismisses the real grief and trauma that is inherent to the adoptee experience. Adoption therapist Nancy Newton Verrier describes this as the primal wound: "a wound which is physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual, a wound which causes pain so profound as to have been described as cellular by those adoptees who allowed themselves to go that deeply into their pain," which is "caused by the separation of the child from his biological mother, the connection to whom seems mystical, mysterious, spiritual, and everlasting."¹⁰³ It is important to acknowledge that even the most successful adoptions are founded upon momentous losses which include the loss of biological family and native culture, history, and language. Only focusing on the celebratory aspects of adoption ignores its intricacies, inaccurately portraying adoption as simple and one-dimensional, and centers the adoption narrative on the adoptive parents and their perspectives and experiences rather than the adoptees'.

¹⁰¹ Beth McCarthy-Miller, "Two Monkeys and a Panda," *Modern Family* (Los Angeles: ABC, March 2, 2011).

¹⁰² This moment of returning from the farmer's market, is indicative of Cameron and Mitchell's homonormative position. The act of grocery shopping for the family is both exceedingly domestic and consumerist. Jumping on the bandwagon of the newest trend in leafy greens purchased at the local artisan market indicates the Tucker-Pritchett's bourgeoisie status which enables them to occupy a cultural identity on par with other white, heterosexual American families.

¹⁰³ Nancy Newton Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc., 1993), xvi.

As the episode progresses, the way in which *Modern Family* handles Lily's transnational adoption narrative becomes even more mired in stereotypes, assumptions, and prioritizing comfort and convenience for the adoptive parents. We return to Cameron and Mitchell's storyline as Cameron sits at the kitchen table, surrounded by arts and crafts supplies, wearing a tiny *nón lá*, the ubiquitous conical Asian rice hat that serves as a popular souvenir among tourists. Cameron explains to Mitchell that he's "putting together a little scrapbook of how Lily became ours. You know, her adoption certificate, some pictures of her from her village. All out in the open, so she has nothing to be ashamed of." While the project is perhaps well-intentioned and includes history about Lily's life before adoption, Cameron's phrasing of Lily's adoption as "how [she] became ours" objectifies Lily as a possession or commodity that was exchanged rather than a human being with agency or emotions. Cameron continues, "I'm also gonna write a little storybook. You know, something I can read her at bedtime. It's called *Two Monkeys and a Panda*." Again, while ensuring Lily's adoption is an open topic of discussion in the Tucker-Pritchett household is commendable, the execution of Cameron's storybook centers on the adoptive parents' needs, wants, and perspectives. Cameron explains that the book, *Two Monkeys and a Panda* refers to their family: "She's the panda because she's Asian." "And we're monkeys because...?" Mitchell inquires. Cameron responds that, "I can draw monkeys." The construction of the storybook hinges on its convenience for the white adoptive parent. It portrays transracial adoption as interspecies adoption, but with little regard for the species that represent each family member.¹⁰⁴ The parents are characterized as monkeys (Coco and Miko) only because Cameron can draw monkeys. There is no meaning or significance behind the characterization. Further, Lily is characterized as a panda "because she's Asian." This designation is essentialist and stereotypical. Despite the fact that the continent Asia consists of thousands of ethnicities, languages, identities, and animal species, the choice to use a quintessentially Chinese mascot, whose natural habitat does not extend past the Chinese political borders, to represent a Vietnamese adoptee indicates an essentialist perspective that ignores the diversity of Asia and the individuality of the adoptee. Further, using a panda to portray a Vietnamese adoptee also speaks to the ways in which Asian adoptees are often understood as interchangeable and indistinguishable from one another.

The storybook's plot relies on conventional adoption tropes that focus on the adoptive parents' perspective and discount the adoptee's life, identity, and history before her adoption:

Once upon a time, there were two monkeys. They loved each other very much, but there was something missing. They wanted a baby. And they heard that there was a very special baby in a faraway land who needed a family. She was a panda named Lily. One of the monkeys was scared. They'd never had a panda before. But they held Lily in their arms, and the scared monkey became the brave one. And the two monkeys . . . traveled all the way home with the perfect panda that they adopted.

When Mitchell finishes reading the story to Lily and Cameron, Lily perfunctorily claps her hands, her face expressionless, proving that she has learned to respond to hearing the word "adopt" but still has no concept of its meaning or significance. The storybook's plot itself is not even Lily's adoption story, but rather Cameron and Mitchell's story about adopting Lily. Even in the story's title, the adoptee is secondary to the adoptive parents. The panda (Lily) becomes a

¹⁰⁴ "Two Monkeys and a Panda" is also reminiscent of the popular DreamWorks animated film, *Kung Fu Panda*, which portrays the interspecies adoption of a panda by a goose father. Reinforcing Asian stereotypes, the panda adoptee, Po, aspires to become a kung fu master. John Stevenson and Mark Osborne, *Kung Fu Panda* (Paramount Pictures, 2008).

prop for the adoptive parents' plotline's rising action and resolution. Lily's past, identity (apart from the generic description of her being "a very special baby"), and agency are absent from the storybook's content. Like so many adoption narratives, things happen *to* the adoptee, who remains a passive object.

As a result of Cameron's adoption scrapbook project, he uncovers an anomaly on Lily's adoption certificate. Instead of Lily Tucker-Pritchett, their child's official name is Lily Tucker Pritchett, which relegates Cameron's surname to Lily's middle name instead of her hyphenated last name.¹⁰⁵ I find it interesting that this subplot to the family's story arc for the episode centers on naming, which can be a topic fraught with mixed emotions for some adoptees. Illustrating the complexities and contradictions of adoptees' names is Deann Borshay Liem's celebrated documentary, *First Person Plural*, which documents her Korean adoptee experience. She opens her film with a voiceover that states, "My name is Kang Ok Jin. I was born on June 14th, 1957. I feel like I've been several different people in one life. My name is Cha Jung Hee. I was born on November 5th, 1956. I've had three names, three different sets of histories. My name is Deann Borshay. I was born on March 3rd, 1966, the moment I stepped off the airplane in San Francisco."¹⁰⁶ As Deann discusses her names and identities, the camera remains trained on her face as she oscillates between practicing wide-open grins for the camera and staring somberly into the lens. Filters and color contrast distort the appearance of her face, and then cuts to the LCD screen of a small, handheld video camera, through which, again, Deann's face is shown, as the larger camera records the smaller camera recording Deann. The manipulation of focus, color, and the multiple lenses through which Deann's face is recorded and played back to us, the audience, emphasizes the layers and distortions of identity the adoptee faces through the history of her names.

In contrast, the issues surrounding Lily's name again have to do with Cameron and Mitchell's insecurities rather than Lily's identity as an adoptee. Cameron accuses Mitchell of deliberately omitting the hyphen "So your [Mitchell's] name could have top billing," which, in recalling that Cameron chooses to title his storybook *Two Monkeys and a Panda*, prioritizing the adoptive parents over the adoptee in the title, strikes me as rather ironic. And while some adoptees have described their identities as hyphenated, reflecting the fact that "many times, Korean adoptees experience different and often times, flexible identities" and "may even construct an identity that does not fall in the expected categories of what we might think," in the case of this *Modern Family* episode, the hyphen indicates possession of Lily and the adoptive parents' anxieties over who is the child's "real" parent rather than the adoptee's grappling with identity and belonging.¹⁰⁷ Mitchell admits that he left the hyphen out of Lily's name because he was afraid that fatherhood would be too much for Cameron and he would end up leaving, "and then I would be the one taking care of a baby and half of her last name would belong to the guy who left us." Mitchell's admission emphasizes the fact that although the "Two Monkeys and a Panda" episode seems to revolve around Lily's adoption narrative, it actually is about Cameron and Mitchell's relationship. In fact, Lily does not even appear on scene as Mitchell bares his soul to Cameron. Her absence makes it clear that Lily's name is not an issue because of her self-

¹⁰⁵ According to the series canon, Lily is named after the adopted Chinese daughter of Charlotte from the HBO series *Sex and the City*, and Cameron's pet pig, "Aunt Lily."

¹⁰⁶ Deann Borshay Liem, *First Person Plural*, Documentary (National Asian American Telecommunications Association, 2000).

¹⁰⁷ Barbara Hammersberg, "Embodying the Hyphen: An Ethnography on Korean Adoptees" (Master's Thesis, Central Washington University, 2018), 110.

identity or who she is as an adoptee. Rather, it is an issue because it has the potential to serve as a reminder of Mitchell and Cameron's failed relationship.

The episode is resolved through the parents' admission of their insecurities to one another, not through the empowerment of the adoptee or even the parents' interactions with their adopted daughter. The episode's post-credits depicts Cameron and Mitchell following their reconciliation. Appearing on a set arranged for an interview or confessional, Mitchell and Cameron sit side-by-side, smiling at the camera.¹⁰⁸ "Once we finished writing the book, we realized something," Mitchell says with a grin. Jumping in, Cameron explains, "We're not the only two monkeys with a panda. Gay parents are a huge market, and no one's writing for them. We thought we were sitting on a gold mine." "But," Mitchell informs the television viewing audience with a flippant eye-roll and a shake of his head, "we weren't." As the credits roll, the scene changes to the interior of a bookstore. Mitchell and Cameron wander into the scene and hone in on the "Gay Parenting" section. Next comes "Gay Adoptive Parenting," followed by "Gay Adoption: Foreign Children," "Gay Adoption: Asian Children," "Bisexual Adoption: Asian Children," and finally, "Transgendered Adoption." As Mitchell reads aloud each genre, he and Cameron become more and more indignant. With an exclamation of "Oh, come on! Let's go, Miko," Cameron and Mitchell march off-screen. This end-credit scene is again illustrative of popular and problematic perspectives on transnational adoption. Once again, the episode approaches adoption from the adoptive parents' point-of-view. Lily does not even make an appearance on-screen. Highlighting the commercial nature of both transnational adoption as well as the modern gay lifestyle, Mitchell and Cameron endeavor to capitalize on their "expertise" on transnational Asian adoption as gay parents. Instead of their expertise being overshadowed by adoptees, who are first-hand experts of their own experiences, Cameron and Mitchell discover that other adoptive parents have already saturated the market with adoption knowledge and literature. Their indignation at being overshadowed demonstrates the sense of entitlement and privilege they possess as adoptive parents. Transnational adoption is about what they gain and what they know rather than what is gained, lost, or otherwise by adoptees, birthfamilies, and others in the adoption triad.

While *Modern Family* has been lauded for its "progressive" representation of American domestic life with its diverse cast and representations of gay and nonconventional family structures, it still relies on both gay stereotypes and problematic adoption tropes and narratives that privilege the adoptive parents' perspectives and relegates adoptees to token roles that silence their agency and bolster the adoptive parent's position. Episodes like *Two Monkeys and a Panda* bring light to topics like gay families and transnational adoption, but in a topical fashion that only approach these important issues from a positive angle or with a posed dilemma that is easily resolvable. As such, *Modern Family*'s portrayals of a twenty-first century American family continue to align with homonormative notions of gay family-making that parrot heterosexual conventions and frame transnational adoption in terms of white saviorhood (Coco and Miki

¹⁰⁸ Capitalizing on the recent trend in sitcom television, *Modern Family*, like *Arrested Development*, employs a mockumentary format. Commenting on the mockumentary's popularity, Jane Harkness writes that in these humorous and flawed characters, "We see exaggerated versions of ourselves." Yet despite the fact that mockumentaries are often influenced by current cultural, political, and social commentaries, they generally have a "feel good" nature where "trials are low stakes and typically resolved easily." As such, while mockumentaries like *Modern Family* may address current and relevant issues like transnational adoption and gay marriage, the coverage is only superficial and does not delve into the deeper complexities of these topics. Jane Harkness, "The Mockumentary Sitcom: A Closer Look at Form," *The Artifice* (blog), June 19, 2014, <https://the-artifice.com/mockumentary-sitcom/>.

adopt “a very special baby in a faraway land who needed a family”) and adoptive parents’ wants and desires. While the Asian adoptee population has changed and grown (in number and in age) over the past sixty years since its establishment, from my perspective, popular media representations remain unoriginal and outdated.

Conclusion

While transnational Asian adoptee characters have gained more of a presence in U.S. film and television, these representations still appear as stereotypical figures that conform to master narratives about adoption. These popular narratives promote American exceptionalism, benevolence, and color-blind love and fail to represent the intricacies of adoptee identity-formation.

For one, these depictions ignore the contexts of U.S. militarization in Asia that are responsible for the birth and subsequent orphaning of children. Even in productions like *A Thousand Men and a Baby* in which the story is premised upon the United States military’s presence in Korea, the narrative fails to acknowledge the culpability of U.S. soldiers in creating the conditions that result in Korean children becoming eligible for adoption. That is, the story overlooks the fact that a U.S. soldier’s sexual exploits with a native Korean woman while stationed in South Korea results in the conception and birth of an Amerasian child. The film also fails to hold the United States military accountable for the child’s subsequent orphaned status, whether it is the result of the military’s and the soldier’s violence, abandonment, or ambivalence. Rather, Danny, the American baby becomes part of the Keenan family due to his Korean birth mother’s discarding of a burden. Similarly, *Modern Family* overlooks the context of U.S. militarism in Vietnam to the point that Lily’s identity as mixed-race is completely ignored.

Despite the fact that American narratives of transnational adoption are premised on notions of unconditional colorblind love and inclusion, adoptees occupy a precarious space in which their adoptive families and nation both continue to Otherize and disavow themselves from their children’s Asian origins while also claiming and possessing the adoptees as fully and seamlessly belonging to them. Or, conversely, these adoption narratives ignore the racial difference within the adoptive family while simultaneously flaunting it to demonstrate the United States’ dedication to anti-racism. These contradictions attest to the fact that “the adoptee, while accessorized to look like a heteronormative subject is in fact a nonnormative subject. Even though the adoptee is made to perform like a white American subject, she will never be completely consolidated into the white heteronormative family” nor, I would add, in the case of *Modern Family*, the homonormative family.¹⁰⁹

Such imprecisions in the representations of the transnational Asian adoptee experience reveal that these narratives are not actually about the adoptee, but about the adoptive parents, family, and nation. In the case of *A Thousand Men and a Baby*, Baby Danny is simply a means through which Hugh Keenan negotiates his own identity as a doctor, a Navy officer, and a father. *Arrested Development* satirically uses Annyong to demonstrate the selfishness of the Bluth family. And in *Modern Family*, Lily symbolizes the explorations of a new homonormative American subjecthood for her adoptive parents. While the Korean orphan’s transition into adoptee entails “a profound legal and cultural transformation,” her representations on screen seem to have undergone very little metamorphosis, continuing to demonstrate America’s status as exceptional and superior to the Global South.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 125.

¹¹⁰ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 14.

Chapter Three

“It’s All Because She’s Not from My Own Womb”: Orphans, Gender, and the Notion of Family as Nation in Golden Age Korean Film

In the aftermath of the civil war that ravaged the Korean Peninsula from 1950 to 1953, over 100,000 South Korean children were left orphaned or permanently separated from their families. Within this historical context, this paper seeks to analyze how orphans have been represented in South Korea’s Golden Age of cinema, a critical period of cultural production in which a Korean national cinema was constructed, which spanned from 1955 to 1972. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which Korean media has appropriated the figure of the orphan to construct narratives of South Korean nationalism. In the decades following the Korean War, film became a medium through which South Koreans reflected upon, grieved, and even criticized the civil war that caused so many casualties and tore so many families asunder. Korean film also became a space in which collective experiences as Korean people bolstered a sense of nationalist belonging and identity within the nascent nation-state of the Republic of Korea.

The orphan became a frequently-used figure in postwar and Golden Age cinema productions, featured in popular films such as *The Marines Who Never Returned* (1963), *Money* (1958), and *Kinship* (1963).¹ I argue that the ubiquity with which orphaned characters appear in Korean films considered to be foundational to a South Korean national cinema canon merits further investigation. Thus, this chapter seeks to explore how South Korean film has co-opted the figure of the orphan to promote patriotism, nationalism, and citizenship in its subjects. I consider the ways the trope of the orphan is deployed in Korean Golden Age film and investigate how and why the orphan—as an individual in isolation (with no family or kin) is used to generate a sentiment of collective national “oneness” in South Korean audiences.

Dust of the Streets: Orphans of the Korean War

The Korean War has been characterized as a conflict that not only divided the Korean Peninsula, but tore families asunder. “Brothers at arms” faced one another across the battlefield: where once the peninsula and its families were united by a common blood, now they were divided by bloodshed and war. Yet, the Korean War divided families not only through ideological conflict, through brothers fighting brothers, but also through the violence and destruction war leaves in its wake. The civilian casualties of the Korean War were massive, and millions of South Koreans were displaced, injured, and killed in the crossfire. Some estimate the war left between three and four million Koreans dead, missing, or wounded, amounting to approximately 10% of the peninsula’s prewar population.¹

Grace Yoo calls attention to the fact that while (mostly male) historians, political scientists, and soldiers have documented the Korean War from big-picture political, ideological, and military perspectives, there has been little discussion of the war’s impact on the lives of Korea’s civilians. She finds that for Korean women, the war was not about politics and ideology, but about keeping their children and families safe. She describes how women “resisted the war by being caretakers of their spouse and children” and how “mothering under extreme conditions

¹ Man-hee Lee, *The Marines Who Never Returned* (돌아오지 않는 해병) (Dae Won Films, 1963); Sodong Kim, *Money* (돈) (Kim Production, 1958); Soo-yong Kim, *Kinship* (혈맥) (Hanyang Films, 1963).

¹ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 21–22.

often meant accommodating to and accepting an untimely, violent death.”² Yoo’s research reveals the fact that “No Korean family was untouched by this war” and on an individual level, its impacts were devastating.³

Korean adoption studies scholar Tobias Hübinette observes that the children of Korea in particular suffered the consequences of war most heavily. It is estimated that over two million of the approximately five million Korean War refugees displaced from their homes were children. One hundred thousand Korean children were orphaned as a result of the Korean War, and with only five hundred shelters and orphanages in operation in South Korea, ten thousand of those orphans roamed the streets, homeless and alone.⁴ Thomas Park Clement, a mixed-race child who was abandoned by his Korean mother after the war, recalls the bleakness of living as “dust of the streets” in postwar Korea: “Life on the streets was very harsh—a matter of survival. We were a small group of miniature survivalists. We ate anything we could find, including garbage, and I soon contracted worms. We’d beg anyone we could for anything they would give us.”⁵

Most of the English language sources that discuss Korean War orphans use such statistics and narratives to contextualize the formation of South Korea’s transnational adoption industry, a multi-billion dollar institution that, over the past sixty years, has sent over 250,000 Korean children overseas to be raised by Western families. Yet, while so many Western narratives repeat stories of rescue, assimilation, and the transformation of desolate war orphans into vivacious adoptees placed in new families, this was only a “happily ever after” for a very small fraction of the thousands of South Korean youth who were left bereft of kin following the Korean War. Between 1953 and 1963, South Korea’s Ministry of Health and Welfare reports that 4,893 children were sent abroad for adoption.⁶ The majority of Korea’s orphans were “left behind,” never adopted, never whisked away from the cold desolation of war-torn Korea so depicted in Western portrayals.

Interestingly, while nearly all discussions and representations of Korean orphans in Western contexts inevitably leads to transnational adoption, despite the comparatively small number of children who were sent through the transnational adoption system, such narratives have been absent in Korean film and media until quite recently.

In Golden Age Korean films that include orphanhood as part of their storyline, adoption is not part of the narrative. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that in the years immediately following the Korean War, most of the children sent abroad were Amerasian: mixed-race children whose mothers were Korean and whose fathers were UN soldiers. For many Koreans, these mixed-race children were a shameful blight on the “purity” of Korea’s ancestry. Their existence contradicted the nationally-unifying myth of South Korea as “‘single-ethnic nation’ (*tanil minjok*).”⁷ And perhaps, more importantly, the presence of mixed-race children in Korean society were a constant reminder of South Korea’s dependence on American military aid and “symboliz[ed] the unequal racial relations between America and Korea following the Korean

² Grace Yoo, “A Not So Forgotten War,” *Peace Review* 16, no. 2 (June 2004): 178.

³ Yoo, 169.

⁴ Bergquist et al., *International Korean Adoption*, 5; Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 38–39.

⁵ Thomas Park Clement, *Dust of the Streets: The Journey of a Biracial Orphan of the Korean War* (Bloomfield: Truepeny Publishing Company, 2012), 12. Clement was later brought to an orphanage and eventually sent to the United States when he was adopted by a white American family.

⁶ Bergquist et al., *International Korean Adoption*, 8.

⁷ Ji-Hyun Ahn, *Mixed-Race Politics and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in South Korean Media*, East Asia Popular Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 2.

War.”⁸ Indeed, as Grace M. Cho relates, Syngman Rhee, South Korea’s inaugural president was reported to have ordered it necessary to “get these children out of Korea. I don’t care if you have to dump them in the ocean.”⁹ Thus, as Sue-je Lee Gage explains, “emigration via adoption was seen as the answer to the state’s problem population, wiping the slate clean.”¹⁰ Such sentiments imply that Koreans were loath to include the experiences of Amerasian orphans as part of Korean society or its national narrative. Rather, they expunged Amerasians from the country through transnational adoption and wiped them from the national narratives and memory.¹¹

Yet a certain shade of shame seems to shadow the transnational adoption even of full-blooded Korean children, especially after Western news media shone a bright light on it to global viewers of the 1988 Seoul Olympics. In a 1990 interview with *Asia Week*, South Korean President Kim Dae Jung lamented, “We [South Koreans] should be ashamed of ourselves and put a stop to this [transnational adoption] immediately... In Europe, in the United States, wherever I’ve been, I’ve seen our children. I am ashamed.”¹² Eleana Kim observes that this rhetoric of shame is common in South Korea’s public dialogue on transnational adoption, as a “heartbreaking but necessary solution” to the tragedy and poverty of the Korean War.¹³ I would also point out, however, that such apologies and acknowledgements of adoption only become part of the public narrative of South Korea in the 1990s—over thirty years after the establishment of its transnational adoption industry. Before time and economic success could break modern Korea free from its humble past, transnational adoption, despite bringing in tens of thousands of foreign dollars into South Korea’s economy annually, is glaringly absent from popular South Korean media, film, and narratives. My speculation on this absence is that in the years following the Korean War, as South Korea strove to define itself as an autonomous and legitimate nation, the perception that the country was unable to care for its own children was not useful in the formation of a positive national narrative and identity. That is, while orphans were included in Korean national cinema of the Golden Age, adoption—as proof of South Korean inadequacy—was not.

The Silver Screen and the Golden Age: Disavowals in Postwar Korean Cinema

Korea’s film history began in the 1920s, a decade into the peninsula’s thirty-five year occupation by the Japanese imperial state. While there is debate on what constitutes the first “authentically” Korean film, the state of occupation, of being colonized subjects had a profound effect on the formation of a national Korean cinema. Dong Hoon Kim analyzes the colonial era of Korean filmmaking, and observes that the ethnic segregation imposed upon Seoul during that time drastically impacted Korea’s urban modernity and film culture. I would also argue that the practice in South Korean national identity-making of disavowing resemblance to Japan could be in part traced to the policies and practices of ethnic segregation during the colonial era, as “Japan saw Korea simultaneously as part of Japan and ‘other.’”¹⁴ Kim finds that While Koreans and

⁸ Ahn, 14.

⁹ Grace M. Cho, “Birth and Death in the Camptown” (Symposium Presentation, September 26, 2015).

¹⁰ Gage, “The Amerasian Problem,” 90.

¹¹ It wasn’t until 1982 that a black Amerasian character was featured in Korean film. Kang Dae-seon’s *Black Woman* starred Amerasian R&B icon Insooni. In the film, her Korean lover abandons her, which leads her to a life of prostitution. Dae-seon Kang, *Black Woman (흑녀)* (Sam Young Films Co., Ltd., 1982).

¹² Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, iii.

¹³ Kim, *Adopted Territory*, 172.

¹⁴ Dong Hoon Kim, “Segregated Cinemas, Intertwined Histories: The Ethnically Segregated Film Cultures in 1920s Korea Under Japanese Colonial Rule,” *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 11.

Japanese living in Korea both had rich but separate film cultures during the colonial era, they were interrelated and informed film practice as a whole in colonial Korea.

Arguments over whether *Loyal Vengeance* (1919), *The Border* (1923), or *The Vow Made Under the Moon* (1923) are deserving of the honor of being the first Korean film demonstrate how intertwined nationalism and Korean film have been, even from the beginning.¹⁵ Some argue that *Loyal Vengeance* is technically not a film, but a hybrid production of both film and stage film, and thus, should not be considered Korea's first film. The debate between *The Border* and *The Vow Made Under the Moon*, on the other hand, stems from more nationalist discussions. While *The Border* was created in Korea for Korean audiences (and some evidence exists that it was released three months before *The Vow Made Under the Moon*), it was produced by a Japanese film company using a crew and staff that was entirely Japanese. Film scholars criticize Japanese influence on *The Border*, arguing that it mars the "purity" of its "Koreanness," and renders it ineligible for the placeholder of the beginning of a Korean national cinema. While Japanese cinema certainly influenced Korean filmmaking, as Kim argues, "Japanese film culture did not simply impact upon colonial film cultures externally, but instead it was tightly interwoven within colonial film cultures, exercising its influences on them from within."¹⁶ He argues that Korean film critics' refusal to acknowledge the impact of Japanese film on Korea "not only verifies problematically manipulative efforts in nationalist film historiography that attempt to keep the carefully constructed historiographical paradigm intact, but displays the ways in which this specific historical writing thwarts a critical engagement with the concepts and boundaries of Korean national cinema."¹⁷

Regardless of what signifies Korea's first film, Kim's analysis of the debate reveals specific qualities that continue to be held as standard criteria when discussing the construction of a Korean national cinema. The ethnic segregation Kim highlights between Koreans and their Japanese colonizers remains an important way of imagining a distinct Korean identity in film, as it reflects the lived urban experiences of Koreans and their colonizers: "This intricate coexistence of Japanese and Korean film cultures corresponds to the ways in which Koreans and Japanese divided urban spaces and pursued separate everyday lives. Every social sector in colonial Korea was segregated along ethnicity, and it spawned the film cultures specific to each ethnic group."¹⁸ Further, Kim's discourse evinces how Japanese colonization became a shared experience that compelled individual Koreans to form a collective Korean identity. As Koreans collectively identified specific attributes of Japanese colonization, these became important points of contrast to what a Korean identity was *not*.

Thomas Doherty argues that the development of a Korean national cinema coincides with two major events in in Korean modern history: Japan's thirty-five year occupation of the peninsula, which spanned from 1910 to 1945, and the Korean War.¹⁹ Transitioning from being an occupied territory to a newly-formed nation missing its "other half," South Korea's cultural productions (including cinema) became spaces in which a national identity could be developed

¹⁵ Do-san Kim, *Loyal Vengeance* (의리적 구토), Kinodrama, Action (Danseongsa Theater, 1919); Do-san Kim, *The Border* (국경), Melodrama (New Theater, 1923); Baek-nam Yun, *The Vow Made Under the Moon* (월하의 맹서), Drama (Government-General of Korea, 1923).

¹⁶ Kim, "Segregated Cinemas," 7.

¹⁷ Kim, 11.

¹⁸ Kim, 20.

¹⁹ Thomas Doherty, "Creating a National Cinema: The South Korean Experience," *Asian Survey* 24, no. 8 (August 1, 1984): 840–51.

and articulated. And, in defining the vision of South Korea as a nation, looking back on a recent history of conflict with Japan and North Korea, South Korean artists, writers, and film producers also delineated what a South Korean identity was *not*. South Korean cultural producers sought to distinguish South Korean culture and society as autonomous and distinct from Japanese imperialism and North Korean communism. Expanding upon this, Theodore Hughes identifies three disavowals that shaped the boundaries of South Korean cultural production: “the ban (until 1988) on colonial-period proletarian works, the institutionalized forgetting of the late-colonial-period mass culture of mobilization and imperialization, and the effacement of contemporary North Korean cultural production.”²⁰ Eager to move past the traumas of imperialism and civil war, yet still profoundly haunted by them, postwar South Korean cultural productions, including films, strove to define a distinctive cultural identity through the increased importance of ethnonationalism (*minjok*—the nation shares a collective ethnicity or culture), ethnodevelopmentalism (the linking of the health of the nation to the health of the economy), and the formation of *Han’guk munhak* (a distinctly South Korean literature), while ignoring the genealogies of colonial-era proletarianism and imperial belongingness, and denying a shared connection to North Korea. Hughes argues that South Korea’s efforts to display “‘South Korea’ as a postcolonial developmentalist space at once oppos[es] and mirror[s] its northern counterpart in the global Cold War.”²¹

These complex avowals and disavowals are reflected in South Korea’s Golden Age of cinema, which spanned from 1955 to 1972. The Golden Age was a period of flourishing film production that solidified a concept of a national cinema in South Korea. That is, through film, South Koreans explored what it meant to be South Korean. I take the view that Korean films present its audiences with cues on Korea’s national and moral values, and serve as instructors on how to be productive Korean citizens. Yi Un-gok’s 1937 article, entitled “Cinema and the People,” points to the pedagogic capacity of the media: “We should not fail to recognize the social power that film possesses. Thus it is necessary to examine, from a position of the people, the impact a film’s contents and functions can have on culture and everyday practices.”²² From the necessary sacrifices individuals must make for the good of the nation to how to navigate increasing influence and consumerism from western society, mass culture productions “ha[d] a crucial national-political dimension” as enlightenment films “act[ed] as shorthand for mainstream propaganda: politically motivated and underwritten work that mobilize[d] stock narrative and thematic tropes in a commercial feature film format.”²³ Through state-sanctioned films that promoted patriotic messages, film producers of the Golden Age strove not only to entertain Korean audiences, but educate them. As Steven Chung explains, “The cinema was seen as an important means through which to prepare ethnic Koreans . . . for full civilizational realization.”²⁴

In South Korea’s Golden Age era of filmmaking, notions of disavowal carry over from *Han’guk munhak* to this new medium. Jinsoo An discusses how Golden Age film reflected (and distanced itself from) Korea’s colonial history which worked to develop a distinct South Korean national identity. Through the Manchurian action film, the *kisaeng* and gangster archetypes, and

²⁰ Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom’s Frontier*, 2.

²¹ Hughes, 3.

²² Steven Chung, *Split Screen Korea: Shin Sang-Ok and Postwar Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 32.

²³ Chung, 12, 23–24.

²⁴ Chung, 32.

narratives of heroism and vengeance, An demonstrates how film operated to naturalize “the essential difference of Koreans, as a collectivity, from the Japanese.”²⁵ An focuses on films created during the Golden Age that depicted the colonial era, and his analysis reveals how Korean filmmakers reimagined, reinterpreted, or represented the lives, actions, and environments of Koreans that clearly and inherently set them apart from their colonial oppressors.

Similar to Hughes’ and An’s notions of disavowal, Kathleen McHugh understands South Korean national cinema as “complex and contradictory, identified and affirmed in encounters with and negations of that which it is not.”²⁶ She identifies several ways in which the Golden Age exemplifies the formation of a national cinema:

1. Golden Age Korean cinema was self-consciously engaged in imagining and narrating South Korea as a (divided) nation and one now dominated by a Western power; 2. the claims of the State ultimately curtailed, for a time, this national imagining; 3. the divided nation of Korea was embedded in Cold War politics, out of which the West’s contemporary sense of the nation emerged; and finally, this historical period was also the one in which film studies, including the study of national cinemas, emerged as a viable scholarly discipline in U.S. universities.²⁷

In particular, McHugh argues that the melodrama genre, so popular in the Golden Age, worked to inform South Koreans of a distinct national identity through its construction of femininity. By comparing how feminine depictions differ in Korean films from their Hollywood counterparts, McHugh determines “a yardstick by which national cinematic difference is measured.”²⁸ Indeed, the proper comportment of Korea’s citizens—women, in particular—becomes a common theme in so many of Korea’s classic films. From *Madame Freedom* (1956), to *Flower in Hell* (1958), to *The Housemaid* (1960), each takes on the task of demonstrating the consequences of women’s actions in a newly-modern Korean society that is influenced by Western values and commodities.²⁹ Such films emphasize the fact that while the nation strives to embrace a modern and “Westernized” profile, “traditional” Korean sensibilities, in which individual efforts and actions are seen as a contribution to and a reflection of the whole nation and society, still prevail.

Like McHugh (and Hughes, in his discussion of the ban on colonial-period proletarian works until 1988), Doherty also highlights the fact that the State was fundamentally involved in the development and operations of South Korea’s film industry following the Korean War. He writes: “Beginning in 1955 and continuing to the present, various South Korean administrations have adopted measures to encourage the domestic industry. The relationship between the government and the motion picture industry, more than any demands the audience or filmmaker might make, thus determines the nature of modern South Korean cinema. Like much else in the Republic, it is under strict government control.”³⁰ Using policy and law in addition to a system of incentives that promoted domestic production, the South Korean government was able to rein in

²⁵ Jinsoo An, *Parameters of Disavowal: Colonial Representation in South Korean Cinema*, Global Korea 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 8.

²⁶ Kathleen McHugh, “South Korean Film Melodrama and the Question of National Cinema,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 18, no. 1 (2001): 1.

²⁷ McHugh, 2.

²⁸ McHugh, 2.

²⁹ Hyeong-Mo Han, *Madame Freedom (자유부인)*, Melodrama (SamSeong Film, 1956); Sang-Ok Shin, *Flower in Hell (사육화)*, Melodrama (Seoul Films Co., Ltd., 1958); Ki-Young Kim, *The Housemaid (댁님)*, Thriller (Korean Literature Films, Co., Ltd., 1960).

³⁰ Doherty, “Creating a National Cinema,” 841.

South Korea's film industry very effectively, ensuring that only films that contained "acceptable" content and themes were produced. Doherty points out that these films "celebrate the progress and proclaim the advantages of life in the Republic. Their thematic thrust is solidly supportive of the status quo, although the narrative itself may be a cautionary tale warning against moral or political failings."³¹ While South Korea's Golden Age was a period of unprecedented domestic film production, it was not necessarily a period during which social critique, experimentation, or controversy in film were welcomed.³²

Indeed, Seung Hyun Park argues that the political regulation of South Korea's film industry during the latter part of the Golden Age was the "greatest barrier to the development of Korean cinema since its inception in the early twentieth century."³³ Such regulation, according to Park, led to the development of "wholesome" movies as a filmic genre. These films "promote[d] such fundamental human virtues, most of which were based on Confucian norms as solidarity, self-sacrifice, patriotic loyalty, ancestor reverence and filial duty."³⁴

Film scholar Darcy Paquet observes, "Asian cinema, and melodrama in particular, tends to portray the family as the most basic building block of society."³⁵ And, in fractal-like fashion, the family unit can be interpreted as a representation of the larger nation. Broad usage of this nation-as-family metaphor in postwar Korean film has a few significant implications. Firstly, in films in which the family unit is interpreted as a stand-in for the nation as a whole, one is encouraged to think of the nation as a familiar and intimate unit. You have intimate and inherent belonging to the nation as you do to family. Relatedly, you have similar obligations and responsibilities to the overall well-being of the nation as you would to your immediate family unit. Individual wants and desires must be sacrificed for the needs and priorities of the family/nation. Additionally, with nation and family being so synonymous, your role as a family member also reflects your role as a citizen. That is, in shirking your responsibilities as a dutiful daughter, you are also shirking your responsibilities as a Korean citizen. In order to be a good citizen, you must be a good family member.

In many of Korea's Golden Age melodramas and wholesome films, these values, which stress family and collectivity, and the convolution of family and nation also recognizably incorporate themes of orphanhood into their plotlines. Surprisingly, despite orphanhood's connotations of solitude and disconnectedness, the use of orphan characters in these films actually serve to reinforce these Confucian values rather than conflict with them. The inclusion of orphaned characters in these films is perhaps a reflection of the familial losses so many Koreans experienced, and coupled with the notion of the nation as family, could be read as an assurance that even without an immediate family, South Koreans citizens are still members of the national family. In the following sections, I highlight three Golden Age films that include orphaned characters: Young-hui in *The Marines Who Never Returned*, Ok-gyeong in *The Money*, and Bok-soon in *Kinship*. In my analyses, I look at how each film works to elicit feelings of

³¹ Doherty, 847.

³² Doherty notes that for a time, for every foreign film (which were wildly popular among Korean audiences) released in theaters in South Korea, three domestic films were required to be released. This led to a peak in the 1960s of over 200 domestic films being produced and shown in Korean theaters per year. Doherty, 842.

³³ Seung Hyun Park, "Establishing a National Identity from Above: Film Production and Wholesome Movies in South Korea, 1966–1979," *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 4, no. 1 (November 5, 2012): 53.

³⁴ Park, 54.

³⁵ Darcy Paquet, "1960-1969," Film Review Database, Korean Film Archive, April 29, 2014, <http://www.koreanfilm.org/kfilm60s.html>.

collective nationalism from its audiences, and how the orphaned characters in these films are deployed to help promote such sentiments.

My Military Uncles: Constructions of Family and Militarized Masculinity in *The Marines Who Never Returned*

In *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, Seungsook Moon argues that the different ways in which males and females were mobilized to modernize the nation resulted in differences between men and women's citizenship trajectories. Further, men's and women's citizenship was defined through processes that differed based on their socioeconomic class. As Moon relates, "In the context of the Cold War rivalry and military confrontation with North Korea, Park Chung Hee's regime pursued . . . modernity as a nation-building process."³⁶ Using the notion of militarized modernity, Moon illuminates the three interrelated process of sociopolitical and economic formation: "the construction of the modern nation as an anti-communist polity, the making of its members as duty-bound 'nationals,' and the integration of the institution of male conscription into the organization of the industrialized economy."³⁷ Thus, for South Korean men, the military become an integral route through which they contribute to strengthening their nation into modernity.³⁸

Examples of the gender-differentiated trajectories of citizenship appear in Korean films produced during the Cold War era. The 1963 film, *The Marines Who Never Returned* exemplifies the way in which military service was conflated with masculine South Korean citizenship. I include *The Marines Who Never Returned* in order to facilitate comparisons between how the United States and South Korea represent the Korean War and approach the war film genre. Film scholar David Scott Diffrient notes that "military enlightenment" films such as *The Marines Who Never Returned* "turned time and time again to the perennial themes of familial division, civic reconstruction, and heroic self-sacrifice *pro patria*," which "formed the emotional backbone of the anticommunist film, and ostensibly conservative 'umbrella genre' predisposed . . . to the governing ideals put forth by the authoritarian administrations of Presidents Syngman Rhee and Park Chung Hee."³⁹

Connected through the affection for war orphan Young-hui, a troop of young, virile marines establish the close bonds of brotherhood and family in the face of the destruction of war. Deployed to battle the North Korean and Chinese communist soldiers, "so we can live in a war-free world," the film portrays the soldiers both as happy-go-lucky young men on an adventure in the prime of life, as well as deeply moved by the ugliness of war. Between these two poles of life and death that comprise the military experience, the film paints these marines as ideal masculine South Korean subjects, who can at once embody a wholesome *joie de vivre* and willingly shoulder the heavy mantle of wartime sacrifice for the good of the country. However, the film simultaneously engages with the trope of family member as citizen as well, using the young orphan character as the means through which the young men can perform their citizenship as soldiers as well as family members.

³⁶ Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, 2.

³⁷ Moon, 2.

³⁸ I continue this discussion of gendered citizenship and women's civic contributions further down in my analysis of *Kinship*.

³⁹ David Scott Diffrient, "'Military Enlightenment' for the Masses: Genre and Cultural Intermixing in South Korea's Golden Age War Films," *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 23.

The opening credits bring us into the thick of war. As a chorus of hearty male voices sings an upbeat patriotic song, we are transported with South Korean soldiers, who wait patiently, guns at their sides, within the bowels of massive amphibious tanks that cut confidently through the water. As the tanks reach shore, the patriotic music abruptly ceases and the camera gives us close-up shots of the tanks' heavy-metal treads as bullets and mortars explode all around, emphasizing the cold, mechanical nature of war. The camera then switches to a wide lens as the tanks open their hatches, spewing out their soldier cargo into the fray. The soldiers slowly advance up the shore until they reach the safety of a muddy trench.

At this point, the camera begins to cover close-up shots of individual soldiers' faces, introducing us to the film's characters, distinguishing our heroes from the nameless, faceless masses. Hunched down in the trench, a commanding officer calls for the signalman, Private Kim. A nearby marine observes that Private Kim has been hit. Another soldier quips that "You're a widower now, sir!" Within this initial dialogue, *The Marines Who Never Returned* discloses that although (or perhaps, because) this legion of soldiers is engaged in life-or-death combat, they have formed bonds with one another that are akin to family. Losing Private Kim is like losing a family member. The comment also hints at the ways in which power and rank are conflated with masculinity. The commanding officer is characterized as a widower, implying that the lower-ranking Private Kim has assumed the feminine role of his wife.

The scene changes abruptly, and we are transported to a derelict and abandoned cityscape, its stillness and silence a marked difference from the deafening chaos of the battlefield on the shore. The small squad of marines hurry into the frame and take cover behind the urban rubble. They carefully make their way to the interior of the city center as the commanding officer attempts to draw the enemy Chinese forces into revealing their position. As the Korean and Chinese soldier engage in an exchange of gunfire, the figures of a woman and a small child emerge from the skeleton of a ruined building. As they sprint across the treacherous open space, the hidden enemy shoots and incapacitates the mother. She tumbles to the ground with a cry, and her young daughter reverses her trajectory to safety and returns to her mother's side. The Korean marines decide to save the girl and cooperate to whisk the child out of harm's way and secure the destroyed building from which the enemy Chinese have been shooting. Once the building has been secured, the film's protagonist, Korean marine Jeong-ik discovers the body of his own sister, who was apparently slain by his fellow platoon member, Private Choi's brother, who had defected to the North Korean side.

These opening minutes of the film lay out some significant messages South Korean audiences. Firstly, the scene reiterates how the war methodically and mercilessly separated families. A young girl's mother is literally torn away from her by a bullet to the stomach. Jeong-ik loses his younger sister. Private Choi has lost his brother to the communist North. These cinematic renderings of familial loss reaffirm the collective losses South Korea's citizens suffered from the war. Secondly, this scene works define the South Korean soldiers by juxtaposing them against an unseen enemy. Here, Theodore Hughes' concept of disavowal comes into play, as the definition of the marines' characters relies not only on their qualities, but also on what they are *not*. They are *not* a nameless, faceless dark presence that lurks in the shadows of ruined buildings. They are *not* cold-blooded killers that would gun down a pregnant mother and her young daughter. They are *not* monsters who would torture and murder someone's innocent sister. These disavowals work to humanize the South Korean marines, and, by extension, define what it means to be a South Korean marine.

The film progresses and we find the marines have adopted the orphaned girl named Young-hui as their platoon's mascot. However, unlike American films in which their rescue of an orphan would be glorified and their moral fortitude lauded, the soldiers in *The Marines Who Never Return* are not valorized for saving Young-hui. I argue that this is because the conditions of South Korea's fighting in the war need not be justified like the United States'. Their "adoption" of Young-hui is not atoning for the violence they have inflicted in this or previous wars. This is not to say that the South Korean military and government were not guilty of inflicting violence. Government-mandated mass-executions including the Bodo League massacre and massacres in Jeju, Goyang, and Ganghwa leading up to and during the Korean resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Korean civilians. What I mean is that South Korea did not need to use film to rally support of the Korean public for its participation in the conflict. In the conflation of family and nation, South Korean soldiers were fighting to protect their mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers, and so the rescue of a Korean girl in their duty to the nation could also be seen as a familial duty of caring for a younger sister, rather than a heroic feat of self-sacrifice.

Young-hui's characterization as a war orphan also differs from her counterparts' roles in American films. While still simply a supporting role to the male soldier protagonists, Young-hui's character has depth and personality. Unlike the orphans in *Battle Hymn* and *M*A*S*H*, Young-hui has a voice and even assumes the role of narrator of the film at times. As the marines march north, Young-hui narrates that "they keep me in an army bag. It's so stuffy I could die. But it's much better than going to an orphanage." Despite this statement, Young-hui sees no need to express gratefulness to the soldiers for keeping her out of an orphanage. The soldiers treat Young-hui as a member of the unit rather than a pet or a novelty. They salute her in greeting as they would a superior officer. Her inclusion is valued and naturalized and does not require a performance of gratitude or cultural exoticness from her in return. The men dote upon the little girl, and she refers to them in terms of family: "my military uncles," "Older Brother," "Older Sister," "Daddy Battalion Commander." In the wake of familial loss, the marine platoon becomes a surrogate family for Young-hui as well as for themselves. Correspondingly, David Scott Diffrient observes, "As the marines' individual identities are submerged under nicknames or familial appellations, the group's unity is conversely solidified."⁴⁰ Yet, unlike the nuclear family trio that Sergeant Zack, Corporal Thompson, and Short Round form in Samuel Fuller's Korean War film, *Steel Helmet*, these Korean marines form a family structure that more closely reflects the traditional Korean family formation known as the "stem family," in which extended family members live together in the same household.⁴¹ All of the members of the company are also members of the family who form relationships with Young-hui and with each other. Significantly, it is through Young-hui's orphan status that the marines are able to bond as family members and perform their masculine citizenship duties as soldiers. Rather than orphanhood being a *hindrance* to familial bonding and civic belonging, it is the *catalyst*.

As the film's title suggests, the marines make the ultimate sacrifice on the battlefield, dying to protect an idealized Korean way of life. And while soldierdom is the way in which these men exercise their South Korean subjecthood, they do not internalize a militarized identity or agonize over leaving it behind like Sergeant Zack or Hugh Keenan. Rather they see themselves

⁴⁰ David Scott Diffrient, "Han 'guk Heroism: Cinematic Spectacle and the Postwar Cultural Politics of *Red Muffler*," in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 181.

⁴¹ Ki-Soo Eun, "Changes in Population and Family in Korea," in *Korean Families: Continuity and Changes*, ed. Korea Family Studies Association (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2011), 112.

in terms of their membership to their families. In an impassioned battlefield speech, the marines' commanding officer states, "Killing people isn't a pastime for me. . . . I, too, have parents and a wife and kids. Rather than take up arms and fight with people, I want to take up a shovel and fight with the earth. I want to be a good son, a good husband and father." These marines fight because it is their duty as South Koreans and as men. Or, as one soldier reminds Jeong-ik, in a quote that seems to perfectly combine the militarized and familial aspects of South Korean citizenship, "In order that our younger siblings may live in peace, we must fight."

All but one of the marines do not return. But it is through the single returning soldier that the boundaries of masculine subjecthood are reinforced, and also, perhaps, the endurance of family (and thus, nation) even through the trauma of war. Seungsook Moon reminds us, "[M]en are the protectors who leave home for the barracks, and women are the protected who stay behind and watch their men leave."⁴² The "milquetoast radio operator nicknamed Unni, or Sister," however, does not make the vital sacrifice of his life for his nation, but returns to base camp where Young-hui is fulfilling her the gendered expectation of staying behind to be protected.⁴³ Diffrient points out that the fact that the radio operator has been "explicitly and pejoratively linked to an enfeebled form of male femininity" suggests that he does not count as a true marine, and thus indicates that he does not conform to the militarized modernity standard of the male South Korean subject.⁴⁴ The operator himself identifies himself as "a man like a girl, not brave or strong." Yet, his return ensures that a shred of Young-hui's marine family is salvaged. She is not orphaned yet again because her Unni has come back to her.

In his parting words to Unni, his commanding officer tells him, "If you make it alive, find Young-hui. And find your girlfriend and take care of Young-hui with her." That is, he entreats the radio operator to establish a family with Young-hui in their stead. Interestingly, the family the commanding officer suggests resembles the Western nuclear family structure more than the traditional Korean stem family model that the marines had previously been organized in. Perhaps this suggests that recovering from war means adapting to Western practices and cultural norms. Indeed, in the postwar years of rebuilding after the war, thousands of men and women migrated from their rural family homesteads to provide labor in the country's urban industrial centers. This migration has led to the decline of stem family networks and the increased nuclearization and decrease in size of Korean families.⁴⁵

While Young-hui is humanized in the film, *The Marines Who Never Returned* is not her story, but the marines'. *The Marines Who Never Returned* is not Young-hui's story, but the marines'. Young-hui's orphanhood is used to define the marines' experiences, identities, and citizenships. Further, like Hollywood representations of Korean orphans, Young-hui's previous family history is erased. No context is provided about her background before she joins the marines. We do not know how her traumatic orphaning affects her psyche. Instead she is portrayed as adapting cheerfully and seamlessly into her adoptive military family. In fact, she grieves the loss of her military uncles, brothers, and parents far more dramatically than she does the loss of her birthmother despite the fact that she witnesses firsthand the violent death of her mother at the beginning of the film. The greater value put upon Young-hui's constructed military family over her birth family implies like Western transnational adoption narratives, that her adoptive family is her "real" family.

⁴² Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, 44.

⁴³ Diffrient, "'Military Enlightenment' for the Masses," 41.

⁴⁴ Diffrient, 41.

⁴⁵ Eun, "Changes in Population and Family in Korea," 112.

The Marines Who Never Returned demonstrates how notions of both gendered and familial citizenship are deployed in Golden Age film. On the one hand, men give tribute to the nation as soldiers, as killers. On the other, they perform filial and national piety as sons, brothers, and fathers. And while these two different notions of demonstrating national allegiance may seem somewhat incompatible with each other, the use of the figure of the female orphan works to suture these two aspects of nationalism together. She is the vulnerable and fractured nation in need of protection and she is the surrogate family member who loves unconditionally. And thus, in her caretaking, the marines are formed into ideal, masculine, South Korean subjects.

(Re)Productive Labor in *Kinship*

Kim Soo-yong's 1963 film, *Kinship* also addresses family and gendered citizenship through the use of an orphan character. However, unlike Young-hui, Bok-soon is not a young girl, but a teenager right on the cusp of womanhood. While *The Marines Who Never Returned* demonstrates Seungsook Moon's trajectory of masculine militarized modernity, *Kinship* reveals the feminine path of citizenship for modern South Koreans. According to Moon, while Korean men become citizens through military service, South Korean women's civic responsibilities rest on the implementation of birth control measures in order to help build a strong industrialized economy following the Korean War. That is, South Korean women contribute to building a strong nation through their participation in the industrial labor force. However, during the 1960s through the 1980s, "traditional" feminine gender expectations in which women contribute to the domestic sphere and create new citizens through their reproductive labor remained so that while South Korea relied on women's industrial labor, their civic contributions were still framed in terms of domestic and reproductive labor, marginalizing their economic and industrial contributions. Thus, women's new responsibilities of population control and limiting reproduction—which extended their ability to work in industrial labor positions—were addressed using euphemistic terms such as "family planning" and seen as an extension of their domestic duties as a housewives rather than as a vocational obligation. As Moon states, "women's membership in the modern national being built hinged on their roles as reproducers despite their significant contribution to the economy as producers."⁴⁶ The varying needs and expectations of Korean women's contributions as well as the familial obligations and burdens that are placed on the shoulders of Korea's young and vital subjects are evident as *Kinship*'s plotline unfolds. Thus, I include *Kinship* in my study to demonstrate how representations of orphans in Korean films promote feminine citizenship ideals.

Further, it is important to consider how *Kinship* represents North Koreans. Unlike Hollywood films that depict North Koreans merely as evil if incompetent soldiers or spies, South Korean Golden Age films take a more nuanced approach to portraying the people of North Korea. Like *Kinship*, the popular 1961 melodrama, *The Stray Bullet* follows a family that has fled from North Korea and now struggles to make a living and find a home in South Korea.⁴⁷ The 1955 film *Piagol*, which was highly controversial at the time of its release due to its depiction of North Korean guerilla fighters, humanized and personalized its North Korean characters.⁴⁸ The film was famously banned by the Korean government for its sympathetic portrayals of North Koreans despite its overarching anticommunist message. It wasn't until the

⁴⁶ Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, 69.

⁴⁷ Hyun-Mok Yu, *Stray Bullet* (오발탄), Melodrama (Cinema Epoch, 1960).

⁴⁸ Kang-cheon Lee, *Piagol* (피아골) (Baek Ho Production, 1955).

director edited the final scene of the film to include an overlay of the South Korean flag to imply the heroine was “walking into the ‘arms of free Korea’” that the film was approved for screening.⁴⁹ While the Ministry of Culture and Education’s regulation of *Piagol*’s release demonstrates there is a “right” way to depict anticommunism, the Golden Age films’ multifaceted representations of North Koreans suggests that South Korean filmmakers make a distinction between the North Korean government’s ideologies and the people of North Korea. Perhaps it is due to the thousands of years of shared history and the notion *minjok* that transcends national borders on the Korean peninsula that these South Korean films humanize its North Korean characters rather than Othering them.⁵⁰ I am interested in exploring whether Bok-sun’s North Korean refugee identity intersects and informs her orphan identity in *Kinship*.

Kinship takes place in a small mountainside community made up of North Korean defectors who are barely managing to get by in the postwar years as South Korea struggles to recover from civil war. While the film follows the lives of three or four of the community’s households, the two main protagonists are Geo-buk and Bok-sun. Geo-buk is a young man in the prime of life who lives with his widowed father. He barely makes a living for the two of them by selling fountain pens on the street. Geo-buk’s father has high hopes for his son and wants him to pull them out of poverty by getting a job at the U.S. army base working for American soldiers. Geo-buk’s neighbor, Bok-sun, is an orphaned young woman who has been adopted by an older husband and wife. Bok-sun sells socks on the street, but, despite Bok-sun’s reluctance, her adoptive mother is grooming her to become a *kisaeng*.⁵¹

Even in this short synopsis, it is clear that family obligation and filial piety are of great significance to the characters in the film. Indeed, the film’s title itself, *Kinship*, immediately signals the importance of familial ties. It might seem ironic that a film entitled *Kinship* features an orphan protagonist. However, I would argue that the title also reinforces the notion of *minjok* as universal across the Korean peninsula. This prompts us to think about how North and South Koreans are differentiated. And how an orphan with no family can be included in the South Korean family-nation. The history and ancestry that Koreans in the north and the south share binds them. A survey by Gi Wook Shin in 2000 in South Korea found that 93% of respondents felt that “Our nation has a single bloodline,” and 95% agreed that “North Korean people are of the same Korean ethnic-nation.”⁵² Thus, even a North Korean orphan is still kin and has a place of belonging within the collective Korean national identity.

In addition to the importance of family ties, the distinct gendered trajectories of Korean citizenship, or, the differences between how men and women are expected to fulfill their familial obligations, are also evident in the film’s plot outline. Additionally, evidence of Theodore Hughes’ theory of disavowal are apparent in the film’s storyline as well. As defectors from North Korea, these families are actively rejecting their North Koreanness. Relegated to the margins of South Korean society, these families are desperate to ascend to South Korean social belonging, and use the gendered paths of South Korean citizenship to attempt to attain respectability.

As a man, Geo-buk is expected to serve his family by associating himself with the U.S. military. Geo-buk’s father, Deok-sam, claims that “once you get a job there, you are set for life.”

⁴⁹ KOFA, “What Is the First Korean Movie Banned for Violating the National Security Law?,” Korean Film Archive, accessed December 10, 2019, https://eng.koreafilm.or.kr/kmdb/trivia/funfacts/BC_0000005076.

⁵⁰ *Minjok*, which has been translated as “people,” “nation,” “race-nation” is a concept that Koreans are a race and a nation of people who share the same bloodline and culture.

⁵¹ *Kisaeng* were female Korean courtesans who were trained in the arts of entertainment.

⁵² Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 2.

When Geo-buk expresses distaste at having to “live on their [U.S. military’s] scraps,” his father reprimands him. “Don’t you know it’s all for your own good?” Deok-sam blusters. “Hey, aren’t you sick of living in this dump?” Like the soldiers in *The Marines Who Never Returned*, militarized masculinity is the route through which Geo-buk is expected to fulfill his responsibilities and transport his family into the circle of South Korean citizenship belongingness.

Conversely, Bok-sun is expected to contribute to her adoptive family through her sexual/reproductive labor as a *kisaeng*. Further, Bok-sun’s training as a *kisaeng* entails her learning traditional *p’ansori* songs and *buchaechum* dances, which aligns with the assumed gender roles of women as curators of culture in society.⁵³ Bok-sun’s duties are framed in terms of self-sacrifice for the good of the family, even though it is implied that Bok-sun’s training as a *kisaeng* is acceptable because she’s not “really” a family member. Thus, Bok-sun’s adoptive mother grumbles, “Geez, it’s no use. It’s all because she’s not from my own womb” while simultaneously admonishing Bok-sun to stoically endure for the good of the family: “Why are you crying? Did I kill your mother? We want you to sing and dance so we can all have a better life. . . . The future of our family is in your hands. You know that, right?” While Bok-sun’s adoptive parents hope to use Bok-sun for economic gain, her economic value is inherently tied to her potential sexual and reproductive labor. That is, even though as a *kisaeng*, Bok-sun technically is not a prostitute, her success in their field is predicated on her ability to seem romantically available to her male patrons. Further, Bok-sun’s status as an orphan does not hinder her from participating in the family’s aspirations, but actually is foundational to her familial contribution.

The film further highlights the expectations of women as reproductive and domestic laborers when Geo-buk’s father, Deok-sam, takes a new wife. Deok-sam muses at his good fortune at having obtained a good wife: “It’s good to have a wife. She never smiles or speaks but she’s a good worker around the house.” In a demonstration of patriarchal authority, Deok-sam relishes ordering his new wife about in her housekeeping tasks and admonishing her on proper comportment within the home as she silently obeys. “Don’t you worry about a thing,” Deok-sam assures her. “As long as you do what I say, we’ll be happy together. You and I are a family now.” Here, it is clear Deok-sam’s wife’s value to the household lies in her capacity as a domestic laborer and her submission to patriarchy.

Yet, in the continuing storyline, I also see *Kinship* gently critiquing the conformity to gendered subjecthood and “traditional” civic and familial expectations. Despite her apparent dedication to the running of his household, Deok-sam’s “good wife” is revealed to be “bad” when she runs off with all his money in the middle of the night. And rather than following the career paths expected of them by their parents, Geo-buk and Bok-sun run away and find jobs at a textile factory in the city.

Here is where *Kinship*’s most important message about South Korean citizenship comes into play. In the reconstruction era after war, the film highlights industrialization as the pathway to success. Having received a letter from their son and daughter informing them of their new and happy lives as factory workers, Geo-buk and Bok-sun’s fathers come to the realization that their aspirations for their children’s economic prosperity cannot compare to the merits of industrial labor. The letter reads:

⁵³ *P’ansori* is a Korean folk opera musical storytelling tradition in which a female vocalist narrates a song cycle to the accompaniment of a double-headed barrel drum. *Buchaechum* is a traditional form of Korean dance in which female dancers perform synchronized formations while wielding brightly-colored fans.

Dear Father and Bok-sun's father and mother,
I hope you are well. Now that I'm far away from home, I can't help but worry about how you are managing on your own. I hope that my new mother is settling in well. Bok-sun and I are working at the textile factory in Yeongdeungpo. We find ourselves in a new world but we have each other. If you saw us, I know that you would be proud of us. I hope that you can come and visit us soon.

A short montage of Geo-buk and Bok-sun in their “new world,” happily working in their respective jobs at the factory plays as the letter is read. They wear clean, modern clothes and the factory floor is bright and orderly. The factory machinery hums and whirs efficiently and with purpose around them. While Geo-buk acknowledges regret at not being able to fulfill his filial duty of taking care of his father, his position as a contributor to South Korean economic prosperity through his industrial labor makes up for his absence in his father’s household. At the expense of being able to care for their parents and obediently following their wishes, these children of North Korean refugees make up for it by elevating their family’s status in South Korea through their participation in the industrial labor force.

However, for Bok-sun, a career change from *kisaeng* to *yogong* is perhaps not as effortless and liberating as the cheerful montage suggests. Seungsook Moon maintains that the Factory New Village Movement, which encouraged young women to enter the industrial labor force was extremely exploitative and “involved the manipulation of reproductive and domestic femininity to make women docile and productive for the sake of building the industrial economy.”⁵⁴ Factories were sites where women’s bodies were used for manual labor while being simultaneously disciplined through state-mandated domesticating programs that trained the “mothers of future generations” in “sex education for population control, feminine etiquette, and basic skills for home management and child rearing, as well as propagandistic messages concerning anticommunism, the urgency of economic growth, and ‘industrial peace.’”⁵⁵ Not unlike the labor of a *kisaeng* or sex worker, the labor of the *yogong* is predicated upon the training of a woman’s body in distinctly gendered disciplines and the (re)productive potential of her body. Thus, while orphan Bok-sun may have exercised agency in her “escape” from her adoptive parents’ exploitation of her body through her training as a *kisaeng*, she is still a manipulated and marginalized subject as a *yogong*. Her identity as orphan and *yogong* work together to embody what Ruth Barraclough describes as an “aesthetic fixation on female suffering” in Korean literature.⁵⁶ Yet, through the marginalization her orphan and proletarian identities create, as a *yogong*, Bok-sun and other factory girls become “cultural figures of immense political significance in modern Korean literature and its industrializing society.”⁵⁷ The sentimentalization of Bok-sun’s orphan-factory girl identity works to include her in the scope of South Korean national belonging, as she symbolizes the exploitation and marginalization Koreans feel; at an individual and as a nation.⁵⁸

Geo-buk and Bok-sun’s fathers visit them, meeting them on the factory’s extensive grounds beside a white picket fence and a carefully-manicured pond. In the bright sunlight, rows of electrical and telephone poles stand as straight as soldiers in the background beyond the pond.

⁵⁴ Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, 75.

⁵⁵ Moon, 75, 76.

⁵⁶ Ruth Barraclough, *Factory Girl Literature: Sexuality, Violence, and Representation in Industrializing Korea*, Seoul-California Series in Korean Studies 4 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 2.

⁵⁷ Barraclough, 2.

⁵⁸ The tragic female figure in Kim Ki-Young’s iconic *The Housemaid* (1960) also begins as an orphaned factory girl before assuming the domestic role of housemaid.

Connecting the factory to the rest of the world, strands of wires stretch out across the poles. The *mise en scène* suggests that industry has altered the landscape into a new and modern Eden for South Koreans in the postwar period. The traditional picturesque aesthetic ideal of an untamed and natural respite has been replaced by a landscape that is pruned, ordered, and confined, and perpetually connected to the churning progress and production of industry. As Geo-buk and Bok-sun rush forward to greet their visitors with respectful bows, the fathers exclaim, “You’ve done well. You did good. Aren’t you proud of them?” The film concludes with a wide-angle shot of the two young proletariats and their fathers walking hand in hand toward the promise of a bright future symbolized by the factory smokestacks merrily puffing away—a figurative industrial sunset.

Due to her age, the orphaned Bok-sun becomes a participant in South Korea’s feminized industrial-reproductive subjectmaking rather than a victim of it. Unlike Korean orphans in Hollywood, Bok-sun is not a child, but a young woman who has agency, but more importantly, has the maturity to enter the labor force. Rather than the perspective many Korean adoption scholars take of orphans and adoptees as infants who became “victims of South Korea’s hypermodernization and uneven development,” Bok-sun is a willing and active adult contributor to South Korea’s meteoric industrial growth.⁵⁹ This brings attention to the fact that while Korean orphanhood and transnational adoption historically developed in “waves,” the historical events and processes of rendering children orphans are intertwined, and overlapping. A Korean War orphan can grow up to produce industrial revolution orphans of her own. Korean familial and national belonging is generational, and so is Korean orphanhood.

Bok-sun’s role as diligent industrial laborer also leads me to think about the conditions of her belonging as a North Korean orphan in the South Korean capitalist state. I would argue that her belonging is conditional upon shared bloodline, but also ideology, which, in the South Korean developmentalist era, is intertwined with gendered labor and performativity. Thus, Bok-sun is included in the collective South Korean national identity not only because of her Koreanness, but because of her rejection of communism as demonstrated through her gendered industrial labor for the state.

In the last moments of the film, even as Bok-sun’s adoptive father gushes in pride over her success in her factory job, he is simultaneously negotiating her marriage to Geo-buk with Deok-sam. “I was going to marry my daughter off to a nice family,” her Bok-sun’s father says to Geo-buk’s father with a wink. “But I’ll let you have her.” Here, I read Bok-sun’s industrial labor as the key to her release from orphanhood. As a successful proletariat, Bok-sun is finally worthy of her adoptive father’s pride, which allows her to marry Geo-buk. Bok-sun independently achieves the upward mobility her marriage into a “nice family” would have otherwise granted her adoptive father. Thus, Bok-sun gains family on two fronts: paternal acknowledgement as well as the chance to start a new family unit with Geo-buk. Perhaps then, Seungsook Moon’s feminine trajectory to modern citizenship is still applicable here in *Kinship*’s closing moments. That is, though industrial labor is important to the building of the nation, it is really only a means for South Korean women to step into their “real” role as wife and domestic steward.

Belongingness through Lack: The Orphan as Idealized Nation in *Money*

Kim So-dong’s popular 1958 film, *Money*, based on a play by Son Ki-hyun, is another place in which notions of family, nation, and gendered citizenship are explored through the use of an orphan character. In contrast to *Kinship* which celebrates the development of South Korea

⁵⁹ Kim, *Adopted Territory*, 301.

as a capitalist and industrial nation, *Money* serves as a cautionary tale to the dangerous allure of capitalism. Here, like Bok-sun in *Kinship*, the orphan character, Ok-gyeong is blossoming into womanhood and uncomfortable with how her maturation has also led to her sexualization. Despite the film being a critique of capitalist society, in contrast to U.S. film and television productions which commodify the Korean orphan, in *Money*, the orphan figure serves as a foil to the corruption of capitalism.

I include *Money* in my research to demonstrate how Golden Age melodramas utilized Korean orphans in their narratives. As discussed previously, the melodrama genre was extremely popular during South Korea's Golden Age film era, particularly for female audiences. In thinking about why the genre resonated with many Koreans, Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann observe that "melodramatic narration conveys the force of a specific historical trauma."⁶⁰ Thus, these films reflected South Korean women's Cold War experiences recovering from the traumas of war and their new roles as citizens of a modernizing nation. In identifying the qualities of melodramatic film, Linda Williams finds five key aspects:

1. Melodrama begins, and wants to end, in a space of innocence. . . .
2. Melodrama focuses on victim-heroes and the recognition of their virtue. . . .
3. Melodrama appears modern by borrowing from realism, but realism serves the melodramatic passion and action. . . .
4. Melodrama involves a dialectic of passion and action – a give and take of "too late" and "in the nick of time" . . .
5. Melodrama presents characters who embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichaeian conflicts between good and evil. . . .⁶¹

South Korean women's "weepies" (*ch'oerumul*) employ many of these qualities, and *Money*, in particular, implements the female orphan figure to further sentimentalize the narrative. However, unlike sentimental Hollywood portrayals of orphans, which are used to valorize the white male hero, South Korean melodramas' use of the orphan humanizes the female protagonist, further invoking a sense of "shared victimization" for South Korean female viewers.⁶² In contrast to the ways in which the orphan highlights the exceptional and the individual in American representations, in Korean melodramas, the orphan figure comes to stand for the injuries, inequities, and oppressions all Korean women experience in the tenuous and transitional reconstruction period.

The film takes place in a rural village and follows the rise and fall of two neighboring families connected through money, debt, and the orphan, Ok-gyeong. Played by Choi Eun-hee, Ok-gyeong, is an orphan raised in farmer Bong-su's household. Portrayed as demure, virtuous and hardworking, Ok-gyeong is the epitome of Korean self-sacrifice and feminine purity. In the film, times have become difficult for the peasant family following the Korean War, and Ok-gyeong has taken it upon herself to move out Bong-su's house in order to relieve some of the financial burden on the household. She has taken a housekeeping and serving position in the house of neighbor, Eok-jo, who is a loan shark and runs the local pub. Opposite Choi Eun-hee's character is the male lead, Kim Jin-gyu, who plays Bong-su's son, Yeong-ho, a young man

⁶⁰ McHugh and Abelmann, *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama*, 2.

⁶¹ Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 65–77.

⁶² Kathleen McHugh, "South Korean Film Melodrama: State, Nation, Woman, and the Transnational Familiar," in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*, Contemporary Approaches to Film and Media Series (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 24.

recently returned from his military service. Here, again, in the occupations of the film's two protagonists, we see the gendered pathways of Korean citizenship. While Ok-gyeong works outside her adoptive family's home to "lift a burden from our shoulders," her labor is still framed in terms of domesticity as she works as a helpmate for Eok-jo's wife, doing household chores and serving patrons in the pub located within Eok-jo's house. Yeong-ho, on the other hand, serves his family and his country through his military service. He returns to his village as a hometown hero, lauded for his willingness to risk his life for the safety and security of family and nation.

In addition to reflecting the gendered aspects of South Korean citizenship, Golden Age films like *Money* also address the emerging class stratifications in Korea's modern society and the reception of Western influence. Films set during the Korean War draw Western commodities into their plots, reflecting the ways in which American goods were crucial to the Korean wartime economy. As gift-givers and liberators, U.N. soldiers were thus seen as "Santa Clauses, . . . handing out chocolate bars, Chuckles candy, and c-ration cans, sacrificing their own lives to fight the Reds for us, showering us with DDT to save us from the infesting army of lice, and teaching us how [to] run a democratic government."⁶³ For their role in "saving" Koreans, Western goods are thus held in great value. Western goods become the means through which wartime Korean civilians establish a working economy and potentially earn their fortunes.⁶⁴ The allure of Western influence remains in films in the postwar period, as they come to represent Korea's emergence from its status of war-torn third-world country to a modern democratic nation, aligned with Western ideals, aesthetics, and economic operations. David Scott Diffrient reads "the best" commercial and cultural items depicted in Korean film as "implicitly linked to European culture, which is transvalued as either a sophisticated throwback to antiquity or a mark of modernity and upward mobility."⁶⁵ Thus, in many Golden Age films, Western objects indicate sophistication, wealth, and social mobility, as "status based on land gave way to class distinctions" as land became devalued and peasants became farmers after the land reforms following the Korean War.⁶⁶ In *Money*, Eok-jo's Western dress (*yangjang*) and wealth indicate his high status in the village is due to his adoption of Western business practices. Bong-su attempts to reverse his fortunes and climb the socio-economic ladder by starting a used-goods business circulating black market items from the U.S. military bases. While the film warns against the trappings of capitalism, it does still acknowledge the value and allure of Western goods and principles.

While the influences of capitalism inevitably corrupt Eok-jo and Bong-su, Ok-gyeong remains the paragon of innocence and self-sacrifice, a young orphan girl who serves others without complaint and is oblivious to the evil trappings of money and greed. Her passive and

⁶³ Junghyo Ahn, "A Double Exposure to the War," in *America's Wars in Asia: A Cultural Approach to History and Memory*, ed. Philip West, Steven I. Levine, and Jackie Hiltz, An East Gate Book (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 163.

⁶⁴ Additionally, Western pop culture, especially music, becomes a way in which Koreans can demonstrate their trendiness. David Scott Diffrient points to a crucial moment of comic relief in *The Marines Who Never Returned* when the soldiers break from the gravity of war to dance to Chubby Checkers' "Twist." "Ten years from now, this foreign dance will be incredibly popular!" marine Ku Pong-sŏ, predicts. Diffrient identifies several other instances in Korean War films where Western music is deliberately included, and concludes that these musical intervals can be seen as representing "South Korea's sometimes rocky oscillation between contiguous postcolonial forces." Diffrient, "'Military Enlightenment' for the Masses," 34.

⁶⁵ Diffrient, 34.

⁶⁶ John Lie, *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 16.

melancholic air marks her as appropriately sobered (but not broken) by the nation's losses in the war. Korean film critic, Darcy Paquet notes that the film's director, Kim So-dong "adopts an unhurried pace to tell his story, and his tendency to move the camera up close into the actor's space heightens the intimacy we feel for the characters. He often shoots his actors speaking straight ahead into the camera, which in this case makes them appear more vulnerable."⁶⁷ Using Kim So-dong's camera techniques, we get a glimpse into Ok-gyeong's psyche early in the film as she harvests squash from the kitchen garden to prepare dinner for Eok-jo and his wife. The scene opens to focus on a stalk of chamomile flowers, which sway lazily in the evening breeze. Chamomile, a common herb used in traditional medicine to calm anxiety and settle stomachs, seems an appropriate reflection of Ok-gyeong's character: calm and unassuming, with a fresh-faced, country loveliness as opposed to an exotic, hot-house flower's splendor. After resting on the unassuming blossoms for several seconds, the camera tracks along the ground and upward to close in and focus on Ok-gyeong's pensive face as she sits alone in thought among the foliage of the garden. Here, surrounded by nature, the scene epitomizes Renato Rosaldo's notion of imperialist nostalgia, the sense of loss for the rural landscape and lifestyle that urbanization, modernization, and imperialism has destroyed.⁶⁸ Ok-gyeong faces the camera, but with her eyes down-turned, a reflection of "the sacred, uncontaminated, that is, undeveloped and perhaps virgin land."⁶⁹ A voice-over, revealing the young woman's internal thoughts, states, "You're already twenty years old. When you feel lonely, look at the clouds in the sky." With the camera steady on her face, Ok-gyeong sighs and slowly turns her eyes skyward. Her melancholy expression and solitude evinces the loneliness she feels as an orphan.

In *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, Tobias Hübinette argues that the transnational Korean adoptee in popular Korean culture can be read as a metaphor for the division of the Korean peninsula, as "symbols of a fractured and fragmented nation."⁷⁰ Removed from her natal family, the adoptee's situation reflects those of "so many other ethnic Koreans [who] also harbour a longing for a return to some kind of a lost home, a wish to reunite with lost and many times unknown family members, and a general feeling of identity confusion and wanting to be healed psychologically and spiritually."⁷¹ Similar sentiments can be seen in Ok-gyeong's loneliness and loss. Yet, while Ok-gyeong has no family of her own and believes she must distance herself from Bong-su's household, it is apparent they consider her a part of the family. As Yeong-ho and Ok-gyeong sit side by side under the intimate darkness of the night sky, Kim So-dong's cinematic techniques emphasize the sentimentality of the moment through unhurried close-ups that alternate among Ok-gyeong, Yeong-ho and frames that capture them together. Grasping Ok-gyeong's face between his hands, forcing her to stare straight into his face, Yeong-ho assures Ok-gyeong, "You don't owe anything. Why do you think like that? You are like my sister and my lover and my wife. I always think of you that way." In wooing her, Yeong-ho compliments Ok-gyeong by comparing her to the most intimate of familial roles. In a culture where family is considered the most essential building block of the nation, Yeong-ho attempts to convince Ok-gyeong that despite her orphan status, she still belongs. She is not alone, but a valued member of the family-nation.

⁶⁷ Darcy Paquet, "1945-1959," Film Database, Koreanfilm.org, November 15, 2014, <https://koreanfilm.org/kfilm45-59.html#don>.

⁶⁸ Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia."

⁶⁹ Chungmoo Choi, "Nationalism and the Construction of Gender in Korea," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 22.

⁷⁰ Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 160.

⁷¹ Hübinette, 164.

Yet, Ok-gyeong's orphan status still leaves her vulnerable, especially against those with more power and capital. Kyung Hyun Kim ascertains that Golden Age melodramas "centrally frame a tragic heroine who is betrayed by men."⁷² In *Money*, the tragic Ok-gyeong is similarly betrayed: the film's rising action comes to a head when Ok-gyeong becomes the victim of unwanted sexual advances by her employer, loan shark Eok-jo, whose shady business practices and questionable morality warn audience members of the dangers of money, power, and greed. Ok-gyeong's orphanhood, which has deprived her of the support and protection of a "real" family (that is, had she been a true member of Bong-su's family, or had her biological family remained intact, she would not have felt the pressure to leave the household on her own), has made her a vulnerable victim, easily taken advantage of and ill-prepared to ward off Eok-jo's advances. In turn, the male betrayer, Eok-jo, comes to represent the dangers that Westernization and capitalism pose.

Highlighting Ok-gyeong's status as virtuous and thus, a victim of Eok-jo's sexual assault is her costume: the fact that she wears a traditional Korean *hanbok* emphasizes her status as a proper feminine Korean subject. Designed for modesty and practicality, the *hanbok*'s long sleeves and billowing skirts hide a woman's figure and works to de-emphasize any suggestion of womanly curves that could threaten her modesty. Unlike Steven Chung's observations of Madame Yi in the 1961 film *The Houseguest and My Mother* who, "despite the fact that she is dressed in the traditional *hanbok* and sports conservatively parted hair in every scene," is "in fact, firmly embedded in the modern," Ok-gyeong's dress, and her placement in the pastoral rural village designates her character as yet untouched by the "sweeping transformations of capitalist modernity."⁷³ Further the white color of Ok-gyeong's *hanbok* reinforces her purity, innocence, and virginity. She is unsullied by neither sex nor modernity.

In comparison, Eok-jo's clothing emphasizes his worldly, capitalist, and corrupt nature. In sharp contrast to Ok-gyeong's luminous white *hanbok*, Eok-jo wears a dark trench coat and fedora (the stereotypical preferred headwear of gangsters and unscrupulous businessmen) over his *hanbok*. Rather than utility, Eok-jo wears his Western clothing for style and status, with the thick shoulder pads of his coat make him appear larger and more robust, and the fine fabric of his trench coat indicate its foreign, manufactured, and commercialized origins. In her analysis of the construction of gendered nationalism in Korean films, Chungmoo Choi posits that "the capitalistic development destroys a national body in the name of nationalism, while the spiritual essence of a nation is believed to be maintained only through the destroyed body."⁷⁴ Thus, Ok-gyeong is clearly positioned as a victim in the film's climax—despite her behavior as a "good" and selfless feminine Korean subject, it is necessary for her to be pulled into a dark situation with dire consequences by forces more powerful than her in order for the feminized "spiritual essence of the nation" to endure.

Money follows the triangulated archetypal formula of colonial films presented by Kyung Hyun Kim. Diagramming the main characters of several popular Korean films from the Japanese colonial era, Kim places the colonized male at the apex of the triangle and connects him to the

⁷² Kim, *Remasculization*, 32.

⁷³ Sang-Ok Shin, *The Houseguest and My Mother*, Melodrama (Shin Films Co., Ltd, 1961); Chung, *Split Screen Korea*, 73–74, 68.

⁷⁴ Choi, "Nationalism," 22.

lecherous opponent and the vulnerable young woman (who often oscillates between love interest and/or younger sister) at the lower vertices of the triangle.⁷⁵ As Kim explains,

The triangle shows the relationship of the remasculinized colonial subject of the peasant class (A) who has risen to power to protect prelapsarian Korea, represented by the beautiful, yet endangered young woman (C), and to combat the degenerate figure of the corrupt official or the declined *yangban* genealogy (also of Korean origin) (B) who threatens what is metaphorically equivalent to the natural pristine body of Korea.⁷⁶

While *Money* is a Golden Age film rather than a colonial era film, these archetypes remain true with a few minor postwar modifications. Yeong-ho, is not a colonial subject, but a Korean national subject, who enters the film already masculinized by his military duty in the Korean War. Here, as in the colonial films, the naïve sister/girlfriend Ok-gyeong represents the nation. Her orphaned status marks her character as a postwar protagonist rather than a colonial one. Her lack of family reflects the losses of loved ones so many Korean civilians experienced during the war. Finally, Eok-jo represents the threat of corruption from the neocolonial influence of the West rather than complicity with Japanese colonialism. Rather than “struggling against the tide of *naisen ittai*,” *Money* presents the protagonists as battling against the corruption from American materialism and capitalism in order to keep the purity of the South Korean nation intact.⁷⁷

I argue that Ok-gyeong’s tragic and vulnerable identity as an orphan is key to reading *Money* as a post/neo-colonial national narrative. Her physical and symbolic lack of family ties, agency of her body, and an understanding of the complexities of money and commerce represent South Korea’s postwar national identity. Ok-gyeong’s impairments become especially important in representing the nation in this postcolonial period as the “impaired body as colonial trope” of the male protagonist is no longer applicable.⁷⁸ Yeong-ho’s militarized masculinity renders him infallible, meaning the trauma and victimization Koreans still feel in the postcolonial period must be manifested elsewhere. Thus, rather than ostracizing her from a collective Korean national identity, Ok-gyeong’s orphanhood makes her a relatable protagonist, as she reflects the lack and losses of Koreans not only on an individual scale, but also as a nation following the Korean War. Indeed, it is her naiveté and victimization, her tragic condemnation as a misidentified murderer that makes her such an appealing female protagonist. She is valorized for her suffering and victimization, reflecting the collective trauma of the nation’s history.

Conclusion

This chapter draws connections between family, nation, and orphanhood in South Korean postwar film. I highlight how Golden Age film conflates notions of family and nation to suggest proper comportment of its Korean citizen audiences. More importantly, I point to how these films use orphaned figures to reinforce notions of collective nationalism. I find it significant that characters such as Young-hui, Bok-soon, and Ok-gyeong are understood to be representative of a collective Korean national identity not in spite of their orphanhood, but rather, that their orphanhood becomes a pivotal means through which such inclusivity is attained.

⁷⁵ Kyung Hyun Kim, *Virtual Hallyu: Korean Cinema of the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 62–63.

⁷⁶ Kim, 63–64.

⁷⁷ *Naisen ittai*, which translates in Japanese to “Japan and Korea as one body,” was the Japanese colonial policy of cultural ideological assimilation in Korea. Kim, 70.

⁷⁸ Kim, 61.

In all three films, the orphaned figure has been female. I recognize that, obviously, not all orphans are female, and that my use of three films that contain three female orphan characters could very much be due to my own personal biases as a researcher. I am a female Korean adoptee scholar, and I am very much aware of the gender disparity between female and male transnational Korean adoptees, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, when transnational adoption from South Korea was at its peak.⁷⁹ These factors may have certainly, if unconsciously, influenced my perception of only female orphan characters in the films I viewed.

However, I would also like to suggest that perhaps there is more of an abundance of female orphan characters in Korean films due to other larger cultural assumptions. Perhaps orphans in Korean films are more “predisposed” to being female because culturally, females are always already apart from their natal family, even when they are biologically related. Rosa Kim argues that historically, because the foundations of Confucian family structure are based on patrilineal descent, “In a traditional family system, only the paternal line relatives were regarded as relatives.”⁸⁰ Kim continues with a discussion of Korea’s family register system, describing how upon marriage, women become wholly part of their husbands’ family: “The wife abandons her family register and is transferred to the husband’s family register upon marriage. The wife’s identity literally merges into that of the husband’s family.”⁸¹ In a discussion of the changing identities of Korean women from daughters to daughters-in-law, Lee SoonGu highlights nuances of the term *U-gwi*, in which the bride “returns” to the groom’s house after marriage. Lee argues that “the nuance of ‘returning’ reflects an attitude that the husband’s house was the rightful place for the woman, so a woman’s moving to the husband’s house was considered an act of ‘returning.’”⁸²

Yet, even though women legally are considered completely part of their husband’s family’s household, it would not be a stretch consider that many women still feel like outsiders in their new family arrangement. In contrast to the Western tradition of married women taking on their husband’s surname, Korean women generally retain their father’s surname after marriage. Further, because daughters-in-law are very low on the family hierarchy totem pole, Daughters-in-law “are all expected, or at least they feel obligated, to take care of domestic chores, ‘being a good mother and a wife,’” occupying a position closer to a live-in maid rather than a family member.⁸³ Thus, with the knowledge that daughters are only temporary members of the natal family, and newcomers to the connubial household, I suggest that the uncertainty of Korean women’s family belonging lends itself to the portrayal of many orphans as women in Korean film.

Additionally, following the period of colonization by Japan and the ravages wrought on the nation by the Korean War, it is not uncommon to characterize South Korea as feminine. Chungmoo Choi observes that “[t]he West has constructed the Orient and the non-West as a

⁷⁹ The South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare reports that from 1954-1999, 42% of the Korean adoptees sent abroad were male and 58% female. Madelyn Freudlich and Joy Kim Lieberthal, “The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees: Adoptees’ Perceptions of International Adoption,” Survey (New York: Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, June 2000), <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/proed/korfindings.html>.

⁸⁰ Rosa Kim, “The Legacy of Institutionalized Gender Inequality in South Korea: The Family Law,” *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 14, no. 1 (1994): 147.

⁸¹ Kim, 149.

⁸² SoonGu Lee, “From a Daughter to Daughter-in-Law,” in *Korean Families: Continuity and Change*, ed. Korea Family Studies Association (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2011), 63.

⁸³ Eun-byel Im, “Seeing Family Through Eyes of Daughter-in-Law,” *Korea Herald*, April 11, 2018, digital edition, sec. Entertainment, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20180411000785>.

feminine or primitive Other to define the West as a center of masculine civilization.”⁸⁴ The fact that, as my colleague, Kristen Sun highlights, “[t]he symbol of the violated women’s body, particularly by U.S. soldiers, as embodiment of the traumatized Korean nation is a common trope within South Korean films about the Korean War and its aftermath,” and the emasculation of so many male protagonists in Korean films, as demonstrated by Kyung Hyun Kim, indicate that South Koreans themselves, have internalized this gendered perspective.⁸⁵ Thus, the prevalence of female orphan characters in Korean Golden Age films as representative of the South Korean state seems appropriate.

In Western culture, the orphan is a romanticized figure often at the heart of popular rags-to-riches narratives. From Cinderella to Little Orphan Annie to Harry Potter, in Western narratives, the orphan seems to represent Western cultural values of individuality and meritocracy. That is, in the face of adversity, an individual can succeed by his strengths, merits, and moral compass alone. I argue, however, that in Korean narratives, the orphan serves a different role. As I’ve discussed, in Korean culture, rather than symbolizing individuality, the orphan represents the unifying losses of the Korean people. Orphanhood in Korean films promotes notions of collectivity and familial and national belonging, and orphans become the glue that binds the bruised and fractured nation together.

⁸⁴ Choi, “Nationalism,” 14.

⁸⁵ Kristen Sun, “The Politics of Memory and Gender in Memorializing the Korean War,” Center for Race & Gender, 2013, <https://www.crg.berkeley.edu/grant-recipient/kristen-sun/>; Kim, *Remasculization*.

Chapter Four

Always Already Ours: The Repatriation of Korean Adoptees in South Korean Narratives

In 2005, a *New York Times* article title announced, “Roll Over, Godzilla: Korea Rules.”¹ Poised to become an international soft power superpower in the new millennium, Norimitsu Onishi marvelled that “South Korea, historically more worried about fending off cultural domination by China and Japan than spreading its own culture abroad, is emerging as the pop culture leader of Asia.”² The advent of “South Korean cinema . . . finding its place in the sun,” has also seen the subsequent introduction of the transnational Korean adoptee character in South Korean film and television.³ Representations of Korean transnational adoptees in South Korean film and television have undergone a transformation that has taken them from being considered inherent outsiders of the Korean national identity to global ambassadors of South Korea’s international image. Despite the variance in the representation of adoptees’ degree of belonging, each portrayal operates to promote a unified South Korean national narrative.

Like Chapter Two, this chapter seeks to understand the transformation of orphans into transnational adoptees—this time in a South Korean media context. A 2005 article by Park Chung-a observes that “Recently there has been an increasing number of adoptee characters in Korean dramas. . . . Other than TV dramas, the adoption issue has been consistently featured in Korean pop culture from film, musicals to music because of its emotional nature.”⁴ Thus, this chapter explores the inclusion of transnational Korean adoptees in contemporary Korean media narratives. The formerly unacknowledged “Quiet Migration” of children are now embraced as model citizens of South Korea’s campaign to promote the country as cosmopolitan and transnationally relevant. Yet this inclusion is hollow, as it overlooks the trauma and stigma of adoptees’ banishment from the Land of the Morning Calm. Claiming adoptees have always already been South Korean national subjects erases and revises a history of rendering children social orphans through paperwork and a national approach to social welfare designed weed undesirable and illegitimate children from the national population, “hinder[ing] the development of alternative approaches for dealing with the needs of women and children.”⁵

Yet, as (re)-appropriated citizens of the South Korean state, adoptees have come to symbolize Korea’s perception of itself as having shaken off its war-torn past to arrive at modernity. In contrast to their North Korean kin, who remain perpetually out of reach, and whose rare reunions last mere hours, adoptees fill the void as family members whose reunions have permanence, a future. Such depictions are available and widely-consumed through Korean media such as the long-running and perennially-popular KBS talk show *Achim Madang*’s segment, “I Miss that Person,” which reconnects its guests with long-lost friends and family in tearful and highly public reunions. With the onset of the *Hallyu* phenomenon, Korean film and television dramas are also riding the adoptee popularity wave by including Korean American adoptee characters (played by native South Korean actors who more often than not have limited English language aptitude) in their plotlines. In the K-drama universe, transnational adoptees are

¹ Norimitsu Onishi, “Roll Over, Godzilla: Korea Rules,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2005, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/28/world/asia/roll-over-godzilla-korea-rules.html>.

² Onishi.

³ Julian Stringer, “Introduction,” in *New Korean Cinema*, ed. Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1.

⁴ Chung-a Park, “Adoptee Life Portrayed as Tragic by Pop Culture,” database, Hancinema, August 21, 2005, <https://www.hancinema.net/adoptee-life-portrayed-as-tragic-by-pop-culture-3739.html>.

⁵ Kim, “Adoption in Korea, Then and Now,” 22.

portrayed as global and cosmopolitan, Western-educated and socioeconomically successful. Through these media depictions, the transnational Korean adoptee functions in South Korean media to reflect a modern nation who is still solidly connected to its inherent cultural roots.

In this chapter, I explore the transformation process of Korean orphans to adoptees by examining first providing a brief history of the development of the contemporary Korean film and television industry. From there, I discuss the 2003 Korean film, *Acacia* and the 2004 Korean drama, *Ireland*.⁶ Both of these productions include adoptee characters, who are perceived as outsiders. Although these adoptees are included in these Korean narratives, I highlight the fact that at the beginning of the 21st century, they have not yet been able to fully shake off the heavy mantle of orphanhood, which prevents them from fully integrating into South Korean society. I then read several contemporary Korean television dramas that include Korean transnational adoptee characters who have returned to their motherland in their plotlines. These include the romantic comedy, *Fated to Love You* (2014), the medical drama, *Doctor Stranger* (2014), and the police sci-fi thriller, *Tunnel* (2017).⁷ I demonstrate that across genres, representations of adoptees are tokenized and stereotyped. And although they are showcased as the perfect cosmopolitan Korean subject, beneath the surface, these adoptees still occupy a place of unbelonging.

From Golden Age to the Korean Wave: The Development of a New Korean Cinema

While the Golden Age of Korean film is rife with orphaned Korean characters, several films additionally include transnational Korean adoptee characters. The 1959 derogatorily-titled film, *The Negro Whom I Bore*, is considered the first Korean film to address transnational adoption.⁸ The film tells the story of Nam-ju, a young Korean woman who falls in love with an African American GI named Sack. Sack returns to the United States when he completes his tour of duty, leaving Nam-ju to bear and raise their mixed-race daughter alone. Mother and child face ostracism and destitution, which leads Nam-ju to place her daughter in an orphanage where she is subsequently adopted to the United States. In his analysis of Cold War era Korean films that depict the return of mixed-race transnational Korean adoptees to the motherland, Jacob Ki Nielsen observes that “returnees are narrated as majority Korean” and “remigration and permanent resettlement and prosperous livelihood in South Korea is not an option for the adoptee returnee.”⁹ The adoptees’ exclusion, Nielsen argues, reinforces the Korean notion of ethnonationalism, in which a South Korean national identity is conflated with the notion of a monoracial, ethnoracial homogenization that idealizes the purity of blood. The inherent and permanent separation of mixed-race adoptees from their country of birth suggests that to truly belong, South Korean national subjects must be genetically fully Korean.

Emerging from what has been labelled the “Dark Age” of Korean film during the 1970s and 1980s, Korean film from the 1990s through the new millennium has experienced a revival that has taken the world by storm. While some scholars disagree on the temporal boundaries of

⁶ Ki-hyung Park, *Acacia (아카시아)*, Horror (Show East, 2003); Jin-man Kim, *Ireland (아일랜드)* (South Korea: MBC, 2004).

⁷ Dong-yoon Lee and Hee-won Kim, *Fated to Love You (운명처럼 널 사랑해)* (South Korea: MBC, 2014); Hyuk Jin and Jong-chan Hong, *Doctor Stranger (닥터 이방인)* (South Korea: SBS, 2014); Yong-hwi Shin, *Tunnel (터널)* (South Korea: OCN, 2017).

⁸ Han-il Kim, *The Negro Whom I Bore (내가 낳은 검둥이)* (Kim Production, 1959).

⁹ Nielsen, “Return of the Returnee,” 158.

what has been labelled the “New Cinema” era, and whether it remains distinct from a “New Wave” of the 1980s, there is little doubt that drastic change in the Korean filmmaking process as well as in Korean society as a whole has been the driving force behind Korea’s film renaissance.¹⁰ Frances Gateward attributes the turnaround to a complex number of developments: “changes in trade laws that led to a loosening of censorship, the movement toward a democratic form of government, rapid industrialization and the growth of the middle-class, a shift in finance laws that altered the funding process, and the legacy of the 1980s Korean New Wave.”¹¹ Seung Hyun Park recognizes that these changes are reflected in New Cinema films, as films addressed the concerns of “the changing lives of Korean people in an increasingly modernized and industrialized society.”¹²

Jinhee Choi situates these changes in South Korea’s film industry and its popularity on the world film scene within the context of globalization. In *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, Choi focuses on how the South Korean film industry “adapted to regional and global demands by modernizing industry practices and elevating film production value,” emphasizing that “the South Korean film renaissance underscores the complex nexus of globalization.”¹³ That is, South Korea’s film industry, both in production process and content, evolved around and with the nation’s rapid modernization and entry into the international capitalist market. Yet Choi cautions, “Globalization is not, as previously construed by some cultural theorists, a totalizing, homogenizing process that erases the local specificity.”¹⁴ Rather, globalization expands and informs notions of national identity for South Korean moviegoers, as they situate themselves and their nation within a larger global perspective. Choi concludes that “contemporary Korean cinema creates, adopts, borrows, and transforms film practices and aesthetic norms as it addresses issues that are of immediate concern to Korean audiences, such as national identity, class mobility, gender, and sexuality.”¹⁵ Thus, Korean filmmakers take advantage of foreign cinema tropes and techniques and adapt them to a specific Korean sensibility.

Such practices have proven to be wildly popular. Frances Gateward observes that “Korean cinema is enjoying an unprecedented success, in many ways surpassing the achievements of its Golden Age,” citing increased box-office earnings, the construction of hundreds of new theaters, and increased funding and recognition given to organizations and festivals to promote Korea’s film culture.¹⁶ Jinhee Choi identifies “consumer nationalism” as contributing to the popularity of Korean film domestically. Drawing from Laura Nelson’s discussions of South Korean consumer patterns from the 1970s to the 1990s, in which “consumers bas[e] their decisions on the best interests of the nation and not on the interests of

¹⁰ See Shin, Chi-Yun, and Julian Stringer, eds. *New Korean Cinema 2005*, “Introduction,” 6.; Choi, Jinhee, *The South Korean Film Renaissance 2010*, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 6.; Gateward, Frances K., ed. *Seoul Searching 2007*, *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, SUNY Series, Horizons of Cinema (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 22.

¹¹ Gateward, *Seoul Searching*, 5.

¹² Seung Hyun Park, “Korean Cinema after Liberation: Production, Industry, and Regulatory Trends,” in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, ed. Frances K. Gateward, SUNY Series, Horizons of Cinema (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 23.

¹³ Choi, *South Korean Film Renaissance*, 2.

¹⁴ Choi, 8.

¹⁵ Choi, 11.

¹⁶ Gateward, *Seoul Searching*, 4–5.

individuals,” Choi maintains that Korean audiences are encouraged to consume and support domestic cinema productions¹⁷

In *Virtual Hallyu*, Kyung Hyun Kim seeks to understand Korean cinema’s rapid rise to popularity through textual analyses of contemporary Korean films. Kim invokes Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the “virtual-actual” to explore themes in Korea film. He argues that, “since the present is always a fleeting peak composed of multilayered sheets of the past and can never be fully grasped without the past, while the past can never completely sever itself from the present, the virtual is always realized within a fragment of memory that is both solid and transient.”¹⁸ Kim works from the premise Korean cinema cannot represent actual truth, but “reinvents an affective visual and auditory landscape,” and explores contemporary Korean film’s relations to time and history.¹⁹ Within his examination of the virtuality of contemporary Korean film, Kim observes the various ways in which history, landscape, and the colonial era are remembered and re-membered on the screen. Both Kyung Hyun Kim and Theodore Hughes propose ways in which to engage with reconstructions of South Korean history and identity in film that do not depend on determining exactly what those histories and identities are, per se, but are instead interested in filling in the negative space, as it were, to determine their shapes and definitions. Hughes’ notion of disavowal understands what it means to be South Korean through a determination of what it is not. Kim, on the other hand, uses virtuality to understand how a South Korean subjectivity extends *beyond* the nation’s actual, temporal, and geographical boundaries. Like Jinhee Choi, Kyung Hyun Kim concludes that Korean filmmakers’ borrowing from Hollywood and other western film traditions “display hybridity that equally engages both national identity and global aesthetics, art and commercialism, conformity and subversion, and narrative coherence and stylistic flair.”²⁰ The fact that Kim uses western theorist Deleuze’s conceptual frameworks and points out how the Korean films he analyzes conform to western notions of realism, modernism, and postmodernism perhaps speaks to the unique hybridity of Korean contemporary film that simultaneously speaks to a local Korean audience as well as a global viewership.

One of the first films of the new Korean film era to depict the experiences of a transnational Korean adoptee is *Susanne Brink’s Arirang*, directed by Jang Gil-su, and released in 1991.²¹ As Ji Young Yoo and Keith Wagner relate, *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* “is one of the first films to popularize, or ‘spectacularize’ the distinctive image of the adoptee, and thus provides an opportunity for Koreans to empathize with the personal agony of its most famous adoptee—Susan Brink.”²² It also marks a turning point in the Korean public’s perception of one adoptee’s complex situation.”²³ Based on the true story of Swedish Korean adoptee, Susanne Brink, the film presents Korean viewers with a bleak picture of the consequences of transnational adoption for one of its relinquished daughters. Interestingly, the Korean feature film is set wholly in a Swedish setting with the exception of the opening and closing scenes, when Susanne departs and returns to South Korea, respectively. The film recounts the hardships Susanne encounters as

¹⁷ Choi, *South Korean Film Renaissance*, 8.

¹⁸ Kim, *Virtual Hallyu*, 7.

¹⁹ Kim, 8.

²⁰ Kim, 13.

²¹ Gil-su Jang, *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* (수잔브링크의 아리랑) (Starmax, 1991).

²² Varying sources translate the adoptee’s name from Korean and Swedish as Susan or Susanne into English. I choose to use the spelling of *Susanne*, based on how fellow Korean adoptees who were close to the real Susanne Brink refer to her.

²³ Yoo and Wagner, “Transnational Adoption in Korean Cinema,” 667.

an adoptee in Sweden “with an abusive adoptive family, two suicide attempts, and endless misery, and ends with the reunion with her Korean family some 20 years later.”²⁴ In his important work on the representations of transnational Korean adoptees in Korean popular culture, Tobias Hübinette posits that the female Korean adoptee character, Susanne is representative of the South Korean nation. Abused and separated from her biological family, Susanne embodies the nation, which is “heavily gendered and can also be interpreted as being infantilised as it performs and is materialised as a passive and victimized female adopted child who has to be taken care of.”²⁵ While *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* was pivotal in bringing awareness to Korean audiences of transnational Korean adoptees and shedding light on the negative aspects of the transnational adoption industry, the film’s assumption of the adoptee character as embodiment of a nation that relinquished its custody of her when she was at her most vulnerable is indicative of South Korea’s (re)claiming of adoptees only when their narratives are beneficial to the national image. Further, Yoo and Wagner point out that the casting of a big name celebrity in the starring role (Jin-Sil Choi) drew large audiences to the film, “but the important social issue of adoption was reduced to a commodifiable subject. Anything beyond the star power of Choi was reduced to an ancillary concern by the director, who ultimately appropriated and commodified a newsworthy and true life adoptee’s story.”²⁶ Thus, like Hollywood portrayals of transnational adoptees, Korean film depictions decontextualize and commodify the transnational Korean adoptee experience.

Korea continues to develop a global presence through its pop culture, which has been labelled *hallyu*, or, the Korean Wave.²⁷ *Hallyu*’s rise coincides with Korea’s liberal sociopolitical shift in the first decade of the twenty-first century. And, as Kyun Hyun Kim argues, *hallyu*-era films “stylistically and thematically address ‘values that belong to a bourgeois world on the wane.’”²⁸ Combining blockbuster cinematic techniques borrowed from Hollywood with content motivated by a legacy of populist reform into films that address current social issues through representations such as chemically-mutated monsters or a pathetic salaryman mysteriously held hostage in a hotel room for fifteen years, contemporary Korean film “has produced subjects that extend far beyond standard models of semiotics or Cold War political allegories.”²⁹ Such endeavors have bestowed global audiences with films that are concurrently vastly entertaining, and, as Martin Scorsese pronounces, “extremely subtle and emotionally complex.”³⁰

The notion of hybridity seems to characterize *hallyu* from its filmic techniques to its content to its intended audiences. Sun Jung argues that the hybridity of *hallyu* contributes to *mugukjeok*, the “culturally odorless” qualities of Korean cultural products that make their consumption palatable to global audiences.³¹ Jung uses *mugukjeok* to refer to how “popular cultural flows enable the mixing of particular cultural elements (national, traditional, and specific) with globally popular cultural elements, which then causes those particular cultural

²⁴ Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 112.

²⁵ Hübinette, 127.

²⁶ Yoo and Wagner, “Transnational Adoption in Korean Cinema,” 667–68.

²⁷ The term was first used by Beijing journalists in the mid-1990s to describe the burgeoning global popularity of Korean media and pop-culture. Elite Asia Marketing Team, “Hallyu Wave: How It All Started,” *Elite Asia Resource Centre* (blog), January 4, 2017, <https://resources.elitetranslations.asia/2017/01/04/hallyu-wave-started/>.

²⁸ Kim, *Virtual Hallyu*, 3.

²⁹ Kim, 5.

³⁰ Kim, x.

³¹ Sun Jung, *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption: Yonsama, Rain, Oldboy, K-Pop Idols*, TransAsia: Screen Cultures (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 3.

elements to become less culturally specific.”³² She attributes these cultural mixings to advanced media technology and globalization and further explains her concept of *mugukjeok* “implies the transcultural hybridity of popular culture, which is not only influenced by odorless global elements, but also by traditional (national) elements.”³³ So Young Park also seems to pick up on the mixing of modern, global elements with traditional and national in Korean popular culture. In speculating *hallyu*’s popularity in the context of transnational Korean adoption, Park observes how this new age of Korean culture is a “curious blend of the new and the traditional.”³⁴ Park traces the figure of the transnational adoptee in *hallyu* era television shows and films in order to explore the ways in which adoptees and reunions marry notions of modern, transnational cosmopolitanism and traditional Korean family kinships. She demonstrates how *hallyu* film and television programs that feature transnational Korean adoptees gestures toward a globally-networked future for Korea and simultaneously reminds us of the peninsula’s traumatic history of war and division. Park argues that unlike Korea’s Cold War era identity formation that Theodore Hughes highlights, which depended on disavowal, *hallyu* attempts to reinvent a South Korean identity that “no longer hinges on its political difference from the communist North.”³⁵ Rather, personal and political trauma as embodied by transnational adoptee narratives are transformed into new forms of cultural commodity, as they are “translated into watchable, popular media through a process of melodramatization that in turn attempts to occlude the painful historical past of war and diaspora” in favor of an image of South Korea as “an open, cosmopolitan, multi-lingual nation ready for global capital.”³⁶ In short, the cultural productions of *hallyu* as embodying multiple hybridities that simultaneously speak to both a local and a global audience through its rearticulation of traditional tropes and Korean values in a way that detaches them from their politicized histories and repackages them as commodities that are urbane, universal, and fit for global consumption. Tracing the adoptee characters in Korean film and television of the *hallyu* era, we are able to see how Korean popular culture has repackaged and transformed the Korean adoptee from social outcast to global citizen, demonstrating to mainstream audiences what it means to be a South Korean citizen in the twenty-first century.

Domestic Horror in *Acacia*

Released during the early period of *hallyu*’s meteoric rise, the 2003 Korean horror film, *Acacia* addresses how attempting to bring an orphan into the household can result in devastating consequences.³⁷ While the film centers around a “modern” South Korean family that is firmly established in the privileged and materialistic middle-class, the themes of adoptee unbelonging and the importance of blood lineage suggest that more “traditional” notions about family and the domestic sphere prevail in the early years of the new millennium.

Set in modern day, *Acacia* centers on Jin-sung, a six-year-old boy who is adopted into the household of a well-to-do but childless couple. While Jin-sung is a Korean adoptee, he is actually a *domestic* adoptee, born in South Korea and adopted by South Korean parents. This is reflective of South Korea’s push to fortify the country’s domestic adoption program in response to international criticism of the government’s continued reliance on transnational adoption. I

³² Jung, 3.

³³ Jung, 3.

³⁴ Park, “Transnational Adoption,” 151.

³⁵ Park, 151.

³⁶ Park, 159.

³⁷ Park, *Acacia*. The film was re-released in 2011 with a new title, *Root of Evil*.

include *Acacia* in this research project to highlight the evolution of the global transnational adoption industry. Like the United States which has turned to other sources to meet the demand for healthy, adoptable infants (as reflected in representations of other Asian adoptees such as Lily in *Modern Family*), South Korea's adoption agendas have also changed.

The "Miracle on the Han," South Korea's rapid economic, developmental, and industrial growth, placed South Korea in the international spotlight as a showcase nation, touting its miraculous recovery from the devastation of civil war. Koreans saw the Seoul 1988 Summer Olympics as their opportunity to show the rest of the world South Korea's relevance and modernity on the international stage. However, with the increased international attention came increased international scrutiny, and foreign journalists began to question why a nation that was hosting the Summer Olympics and was ranked the sixteenth richest country in the world by Gross Domestic Product in 1988 still sent thousands of children abroad each year through the transnational adoption industrial complex.³⁸ Matthew Rothchild, in his 1988 exposé of South Korea's adoption industry found that "[i]n 1986, South Korea had 18,700 orphaned or abandoned children. Almost half were sent abroad for adoption, 70 per cent of these to the United States, the rest to Canada, Australia, and eight European nations."³⁹ Facing criticisms of profiting off of its orphaned and abandoned children, South Korea has repeatedly resolved to phase out and eventually end transnational adoption.⁴⁰

Rather than fortify its social welfare systems that might prevent birth families from being separated, South Korea has resolved to increase domestic adoptions so that its abandoned and relinquished children remained within the nation's borders. However, cultural and social stigma against non-kin adoptions has made it difficult for South Korean domestic adoption programs to become popular. In a *New York Times* article entitled, "Korea Aims to End Stigma of Adoption and Stop 'Exporting' Babies," Norimitsu Onishi interviewed a Korean couple that opted to tell family members that their daughter was the result of the husband having an affair rather than admit the child was adopted.⁴¹ Katharine H.S. Moon reports that, "Despite decades of government efforts, Korea's domestic adoption rate has been miniscule at 4% of total adoption," reflecting the South Korean public's reluctance to embrace domestic adoption.⁴² In an effort to destigmatize domestic adoption, South Korea has incentivized and commercialized domestic adoption through government subsidies for adoptive families, the designation of May 11 as national Adoption Day, and a star-studded campaign that features Korean celebrities and adorable, adoptable Korean infants.

The Letters from Angels project is a photography campaign established in 2003 by photographer Cho Seihon and run by Korea's Social Welfare Society that encourages domestic Korean adoption by displaying adoptable infants in portraits with some of Korea's most popular

³⁸ World Bank, "Ranking of the World's Richest Countries by GDP (1988) - Classora Knowledge Base," Classora, accessed September 24, 2019, <http://en.classora.com/reports/t24369/general/ranking-of-the-worlds-richest-countries-by-gdp?edition=1988&fields=>.

³⁹ Rothchild, "Babies for Sale."

⁴⁰ South Korea faced similar criticisms to their transnational adoption policies in 2002 when they co-hosted the FIFA World Cup with Japan.

⁴¹ Norimitsu Onishi, "Korea Aims to End Stigma of Adoption and Stop 'Exporting' Babies," *The New York Times*, October 8, 2008, digital edition, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/09/world/asia/09adopt.html>.

⁴² Katharine H. S. Moon, "The Past and Future of International Adoption," *Brookings Institution* (blog), November 30, 2001, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-past-and-future-of-international-adoption/>.

celebrities.⁴³ The minimalist black and white photographs depict celebrities in white tee shirts holding infants clad only in diapers. Talking about his gallery exhibit in 2018, Cho proclaimed, “I believe we have to create a culture of adoption such that there is no longer a need for these kinds of exhibits and promotions, and I think we are close to seeing that come true.”⁴⁴ Highly publicized and given accolades for its humanitarian message, the photographs from this campaign have appeared in publications such as *Vogue* and *Marie Claire*. However, the commercialized quality of the Letters from Angels campaign seems to echo Western perspectives of adoptees as consumable products, and is reminiscent of American celebrities’ high-profile adoption of children of color. Intimate photographs of vulnerable children with beautiful, smiling celebrities infantilizes, romanticizes, and commodifies adoption. As one critique of Cho Seihon’s exhibit asserts, “a child is not a pair of headphones, a skincare line or a water purifier and Cho’s campaign is a charity exhibition with a forOne license as a social enterprise.”⁴⁵ In using Korea’s rich and famous K-pop stars for his campaign, Cho’s photographs promoting domestic adoption seem to suggest that adopting is simply a trendy move one can make to increase one’s social status.

Echoing this, socioeconomic status plays an important role in *Acacia*. Gynecologist Do-il and his wife, Mi-sook live in a spacious multi-storied house in a well-manicured subdivision.⁴⁶ Mi-sook is a creative artist who works with textile and fiber media.⁴⁷ Do-il drives a flashy European luxury car, and his father, who lives with them (in a traditional Confucian family arrangement) while away his time playing golf. The only thing that seems to mar the Kim family’s attainment of the social expectations of middle-class domestic bliss is the absence of a child. Thus, much like how transnational adoption in the context of the United States “verified . . . adoptive parents’ worthiness for inclusion in the nation at a time when status as a parent was equated with citizenship,” Do-il and Mi-sook use domestic adoption in order to more fully participate as Korean citizens as parents raising the next generation of South Korean citizens.⁴⁸

Yet unlike Cho Seihon’s sentimentalization of adoption, *Acacia* utilizes the orphan-adoptee figure as a means to evoke fear in its viewers. As a film that is categorized as horror, *Acacia* employs familiar conventions of the genre. Robin Wood proposes a basic formula that nearly all horror films are structured upon: “normality is threatened by Monster.”⁴⁹ For Wood,

⁴³ Cho concluded his project in 2018 after sixteen years, during which he photographed 350 celebrities with infants for the campaign.

⁴⁴ Nithya Kamakshi, “‘Letters from Angels’ Campaign to Adopt Orphans Ends After 16 Years,” *International Business Times, India Edition*, November 14, 2018, digital edition, sec. Celebrity, <https://www.ibtimes.co.in/letters-angels-campaign-adopt-orphans-ends-after-16-years-785510>.

⁴⁵ Guest, “‘Letters From Angels’: A Matter of Korean Pride and Prejudice,” *Seoulbeats* (blog), December 13, 2011, <https://seoulbeats.com/2011/12/letters-from-angels-a-matter-of-korean-pride-and-prejudice/>.

⁴⁶ Do-il’s occupation as a gynecologist is certainly symbolic. While there is perhaps irony in the fact that a doctor who assists people in fertility, birth, and reproductive health adopts to build his own family, I see the significance of Do-il’s occupation going even further. Much like how the adoption industrial complex profits off of the reproductive labor of women, Do-il and Mi-sook are able to sustain their affluent lifestyle through Do-il’s supervision of women’s reproductive labor at his gynecology practice.

⁴⁷ I would like to also call attention to the uses of textiles and the gendered labor of sewing by the mother figure in *Acacia*. While Do-il’s gynecology practice seems to earn enough income for Mi-sook to not have to work, she is a textile artist, an occupation that probably does not earn very much money, but is a symbol of social status, nonetheless. The fact that Mi-sook has the luxury of dabbling in an aesthetic and cultured trade reinforces Do-il and Mi-sook’s social and economic affluence.

⁴⁸ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 152.

⁴⁹ Robin Wood, “Return of the Repressed,” *Film Comment; New York* 14, no. 4 (August 1978): 26.

normality in horror films remains constant: “the heterosexual monogamous couple, the family, and the social institutions (police, church, armed forces) that support and defend it,” which Do-il and Mi-sook epitomize.⁵⁰ Jin-sung becomes the “Monster” for his embodiment of Do-il and Mi-sook’s deviation from normality. Rather than building their family through conventional means, they adopt an orphaned child and bring the foreign presence into their sphere of normality.

Acacia also features “a strong streak of melodrama” that Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin identify as one of the Korean horror genre’s defining characteristics.⁵¹ Like many films from the genre, the “Monster”/orphan Jin-sung is a figure that elicits sadness rather than true fear. Similarly, Hye Seung Chung reads the orphan child as both a victim and a threat in contemporary Korean horror films. She traces this construction to the 1997 IMF crisis which “compromised the myth of the model childhood and ‘its promise of a seamless trajectory that led to become a responsible adult-citizen and effective worker/consumer.’”⁵² She maintains that “the failure of the nation was projected on to its weakest population: children, whose immaturity, moral inadequacy and penchant for rebellion and aggression were increasingly being perceived as a threat to the already troubled society.”⁵³ The narrative of *Acacia* reflects these anxieties, as Jin-sung functions as both a victim and a threat within the family: otherized and unassimilable.

Within the first few minutes of the film, the notion that an orphan cannot truly become part of the family begins to be insinuated. When Do-il suggests they consider adopting a child, Mi-sook balks, stating angrily, “My job in this family is to raise a kid that you and your father bring home and that makes me a nanny of your heir!” Mi-sook refuses to consider an adopted child as a legitimate member of the family, and thus rejects the role of motherhood. Jin-sung’s gender as male seems to be intentional here, as Do-il and Mi-sook’s reasons for adopting appear to be motivated by motivation traditional Confucian notions of patrilineage, in which sons carry on the family legacy through their blood and through their name. Although Mi-sook seems to change her perspective when orphan Jin-sung is brought into the family, his reticence in assuming the family’s surname suggests that even he feels somehow excluded from the family dynamic. The family portraits Jin-sung draws contain Mi-sook, Do-il, and the barren acacia tree that grows in the back yard, but he conspicuously leaves himself absent from the pictures. Thus, while Jin-sung is a domestic rather than a foreign adoptee, he still symbolizes a foreign presence in the household. When Mi-sook does eventually give birth to a son, her mother remarks on the bond between Mi-sook and baby Hae-sung, saying, “You can’t deny that blood is thicker than water,” implying that Hae-sung is her “real” son, and Jin-sung is not.

Not only is Jin-sung unable to truly become part of the Kim family, but he is seen to possess strange characteristics that are interpreted as threatening to the family. Jin-sung seems obsessed with insects.⁵⁴ He carries around the bodies of dead beetles or cockroaches and watches the ants that climb up and down the acacia tree in the back yard for hours. In Jin-sung’s

⁵⁰ Wood, 26.

⁵¹ Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin, “Introduction,” in *Korean Horror Cinema*, ed. Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 5.

⁵² Hye Seung Chung, “Acacia and Adoption Anxiety in Korean Horror Cinema,” in *Korean Horror Cinema*, ed. Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 91.

⁵³ Chung, 91.

⁵⁴ I find many parallels between *Acacia* and the classic 1960 Korean film, *The Housemaid*, despite the forty-year difference in their productions. Like *Acacia*, socioeconomic status and the image of middle-class respectability factor into both films’ plots. Myeong-ja, the antagonist of *The Housemaid* is a foreign and orphaned intrusion into the household like Jin-sung, and like Jin-sung’s affinity for insects, Myeong-ja has a fascination with rats. Kim, *Housemaid*.

fascination with vermin seems to foreshadow the threat to the peace and safety of the household. He unsettles his adoptive parents with his attachment to the acacia tree with its thorny branches and poisonous leaves, which he believes is his birth mother.⁵⁵ The threat the orphan poses comes to a head in the film when Mi-sook gives birth to a newborn son, Hae-sung, which changes the family dynamic in the household. The arrival of a “legitimate” male heir sees Jin-sung’s status in the family deteriorate as his adoptee status isolates him from the rest of the family. The adults treat Jin-sung with suspicion, and misinterpret Jin-sung’s too-rowdy play with his new baby brother as malicious. “What a rotten boy!” Mi-sook’s mother exclaims. “Look at his eyes. He’s got some evil look in his eyes! He’s not a normal boy.”

In the film’s denouement, Jin-sung is found to be innocent of malicious intent. Yet, his introduction into the household still initiates the unraveling of the family’s domestic bliss. We learn that Jin-sung is killed in a freak accident and buried at the base of the acacia tree by his adoptive parents, reinforcing the notion of adoptees remaining perpetual children. Mi-sook’s guilt eats away at her until she finally snaps and kills her husband and then herself. Her actions incidentally render baby Hae-sung an orphan, and thus, the specter of the orphan continues to haunt Korean society.

Adoptee Unhuman: The Partial Integration of the Transnational Adoptee into Korean Subjecthood in *Ireland*

Like Jin-sung in *Acacia*, the adoptee in the 2004 MBC Korean television series, *Ireland*, demonstrates that while the rise of the Korean wave in the early 2000s increased the visibility of adoptees to Korean (and global) audiences, Korean society had not fully embraced adoptees as model citizens of South Korean subjecthood. In *Ireland*, Lee Na-young stars as Georgia Shaw, an adult transnational adoptee who returns to Korea from Ireland after the traumatic death of her adoptive family in the violence of The Troubles in Northern Ireland.⁵⁶

I include *Ireland* in my analysis for two reasons. First of all, I consider *Ireland* as representative of the burgeoning trend of including transnational adoptee characters in Korean television productions in the early 2000s. In addition to *Ireland*, dramas such as *My Lovely Sam Soon* (2005) and *I’m Sorry, I Love You* (2004) feature transnational adoption as part of their storyline.⁵⁷ In each of these dramas, the character’s connection to transnational adoption becomes a barrier to their integration in Korean society. More importantly, however, I highlight *Ireland* because of its inclusion of a birthmother’s experiences. Unlike American programs in which an adoptee’s narrative is only portrayed in relation to their adoptive family, *Ireland* ties the adoptee’s experiences (albeit superficially) to both her adoptive family as well as her (assumed) birth family. Moreover, as Hosu Kim points out, “the figure of the birthmother . . . has

⁵⁵ Interestingly, Dr. Kim D. Coder, a professor of tree biology and health care, notes that “[i]n Korea, spirits of women who died in childbirth were thought to live in trees.” Kim D. Coder, “Cultural Aspects of Trees: Traditions & Myths,” Outreach: Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources (Athens: University of Georgia, March 2017), 1, <https://www.warnell.uga.edu/sites/default/files/publications/WSFNR-17-15%20Coder.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Reminiscent of phenomenon in which Western countries are confused by the difference between North and South Korea, the South Korean drama seems to conflate the Republic of Ireland with Northern Ireland. Adoptee Georgia Shaw’s passport states that she’s from simply “Ireland,” and the title of the series would imply that Georgia comes from the Republic of Ireland. However, her brother becomes involved with the IRA and the death of her adoptive family in The Troubles more accurately place her in Northern Ireland.

⁵⁷ Yoon-cheol Kim, *My Lovely Sam Soon* (*내 이름은 김삼순*) (Seoul: MBC, 2005); Hyung-min Lee, *I’m Sorry, I Love You* (*미안하다, 사랑한다*) (Seoul: KBS, 2004).

been utterly erased from Korea's official history and adoption discourse" until relatively recently.⁵⁸ *Ireland's* portrayal of a Korean birthmother is particularly significant, as it represents the emergence and acceptance of the Korean birthmother in South Korean popular discourse. Reinforcing notions of South Korean resilience in the face of tragedy, *Ireland's* birthmother character balances the seemingly contradictory processes of moving on with her life following the relinquishment of her child while simultaneously honoring and acknowledging the daughter's place and absence in the family. Hosu Kim explains that with the initial international criticism South Korea received in regards to its transnational adoption practices, Korean birthmothers were villainized for their sexual promiscuity and unfitness for motherhood. However, as more adult Korean adoptees returned and used Korean media as a tool to search for their birth families, the figure of the birthmother began to shift in transform in South Korean culture. Kim states, "Over the next two decades, this image of a young, inadequate birthmother troublingly coexisted with, if not was effaced by, another figure of the birthmother, that is the poor, self-sacrificing and devoted mother who relinquishes her baby so he or she could have a brighter future."⁵⁹ While *Ireland's* portrayal of a Korean birthmother romanticizes her grief and heartache, her inclusion in the popular show works toward destigmatizing the experiences of birthmothers in a society where single motherhood and having children out of wedlock are denounced and shamed.⁶⁰

The first few episode of the show take us through a series of intermittent but dramatic flashbacks that provides the audience with Georgia's tragic backstory in Ireland. One scene presents us with Georgia staring in horror at the prone figures of her mother, father, and brother strewn across a road, their eyes open and unseeing, blood marring their unmoving features. A revolver falls from Georgia's hand and clatters to the ground, and we are made to wonder if this will be another "evil orphan" narrative in which the adoptee coldheartedly murders her adoptive family. It isn't until a later episode, when we return to earlier in the flashback, triggered by Georgia throwing herself into the Han River in an attempt to end her life, that we understand Georgia's brother, Peter, is involved with the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and gives the revolver to Georgia for protection. A car with three strange men pulls up to Georgia's family and states, "We've heard that you're IRA." As Georgia's family members fall to the ground from gunshot wounds, one of the men approaches Georgia, points a gun at her face, and asks, "Are you the terrorists' friend, Asian?" In a Korean voiceover, Georgia disavows her kinship ties to her family, disavows her Irishness: "No, I don't know those people. I'm not Irish. I'm from nowhere, I'm in no family, I'm no friend of nobody." Through the use of her foreign appearance and the reversion to her orphan identity, in which she has no family, Georgia survives the encounter. And although she has a revolver, Georgia does not use the weapon. Instead she stands frozen and passively watches as her family members scream, struggle, and subsequently die around her, reinforces the notion of adoptees as helpless, passive, and without agency.

Despite the fact that the Republic of Ireland does not recognize the adoption laws of South Korea, and thus, have never established an intercountry adoption program with South Korea, and the United Kingdom's (to which Northern Ireland belongs) reluctance to engage in intercountry adoption, I believe it was a deliberate decision on the part of the show's writers to

⁵⁸ Kim, "Television Mothers," 440.

⁵⁹ Kim, 439.

⁶⁰ My own birthmother kept my existence a secret from her daughters for over twenty-five years and to this day, I remain a secret from my birthmother's husband, ten years after reuniting.

specifically place the adoptee's past within an Irish context.⁶¹ The intra-country fighting in *The Troubles* seems to, in some ways, parallel the Korean peninsula's history of civil war. An adoptee returning to Korea to heal and potentially reunited with her Korean birth family after losing her adoptive family to civil-warlike conflict is symbolic.

Tobias Hübinette draws connections between Korean adoptee narratives of reunion and return with the "healing [of] a fractured nation."⁶² Hübinette posits that if transnational Korean adoptees separated from their birth country is metonymy for the millions of Korean families separated across the 38th parallel, then adoptees' return and reunion "can be interpreted as a promising possibility of and fervent wish for the reunification of the two Koreas."⁶³ Although North and South Korea have hosted family reunions intermittently since 1985, "71,000 South Koreans—more than half of them 80 or older—remain on a waiting list for a chance to meet with relatives in the North" through a lottery system.⁶⁴ Further since the state-sanctioned reunions between North and South Korean family members are heavily monitored and supervised and last a few days at best, adoptees returning to South Korea permanently to reestablish their lives with their birthfamilies indefinitely, is, in some ways, a more satisfying example of the healing of the fractured nation. With this in mind, Georgia's healing from her experience in the "fractured nation" of Northern Ireland by returning to South Korea in *Ireland* makes the trope of adoptee return even more powerful.

Haunted by her past, Georgia Shaw casts off her Irish identity and strives to start anew in Korea by reassuming her Korean name, Lee Joong-ah. Highlighting this new start is the fact that the color green appears prominently in Joong-ah's wardrobe throughout the series. While the color green is recognizably a nod to Joong-ah's Irish past, Korean tradition demarcates green as part of the *ogangsaek* color set—secondary colors created by combining primary *obangsaek* colors that symbolize the five compass directions and five elements.⁶⁵ As an *ogangsaek* color, green represents "a fresh start, youth, and young energy" in Korean tradition.⁶⁶

Although *Ireland* portrays Joong-ah as an adult, her characterization still follows many adoptee tropes. Her penchant for green simultaneously symbolizes a fresh start and youth, highlighting the notion of adoptees as perpetual children in need of assistance. She meets a Korean bodyguard, Gook (whose name could be interpreted to mean "nation" in Korean), who

⁶¹ The show's writers seems to get around this inaccuracy by creating a backstory that Georgia Shaw's adoptive parents lived in the United States at the time of her adoption and subsequently moved to Ireland. This information is gleaned from a hastily-scrawled sign that a character holds up briefly that states (in Korean) that Georgia was adopted to the United States and then moved to Northern Ireland. However, this fact is never explicitly stated by any of the characters, and the English subtitles that I used did not translate the sign's text. The Adoption Board, "Information Booklet on the Intercountry Adoption Process for Prospective Adoptive Parents: Booklet No. 1" (Lenus, 2006), 21; Jean-François Mignot, "Will International Adoption Be Replaced by Surrogacy?," digital news magazine, N-IUSSP (International Union for the Scientific Study of Population), March 20, 2017, <http://www.niussp.org/article/will-international-adoption-be-replaced-by-surrogacyla-gestation-pour-autrui-va-t-elle-replacer-ladoption-internationale/?print=print>.

⁶² Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 172.

⁶³ Hübinette, 174.

⁶⁴ Sang-Hun Choe, "Amid Hugs and Tears, Korean Families Divided by War Reunite," *New York Times*, February 20, 2014, digital edition, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/21/world/asia/north-and-south-koreans-meet-in-emotional-family-reunions.html>.

⁶⁵ Soo-hyun Jang, "Korean Traditional Colors: The Basis for Korean Design in the Past," Hanyang University, October 3, 2016, <http://www.hanyang.ac.kr/surl/ApvB>.

⁶⁶ Maria Saad, "Of Hanbok Fashion and History: The Truth Behind Each Color," *Leesle* (blog), October 19, 2018, <https://leesle.kr/of-hanbok-colors-fashion-and-history/>.

vows to help and protect her, again portraying adoptees as helpless and in need of rescue.⁶⁷ Reinforcing the stereotype of adoptees as troubled, Joong-ah flouts Korean social niceties, acts erratically (for example, she stomps in freshly-laid wet cement in Seoul's City Hall plaza for seemingly no reason), and struggles with depression and mental illness.

On the other hand, *Ireland* also shows the slow acceptance of transnational adoptees into Korean society, and the beginnings of the cosmopolitan, well-educated transnational adoptee stereotype. We learn that Joong-ah is a trained medical doctor, suggesting that transnational adoptees are well-educated and hold prestigious professions. She marries Gook, putting down roots in South Korea, and further establishing her place as a Korean subject rather than a foreign visitor.⁶⁸

Joong-ah is reluctant to search for her birthfamily, still grieving for the loss of her adoptive family. She likens her adoptive status to being unhuman, telling Gook she is “not human yet to meet [her] parents,” and snaps, “Do you want me to continue living as an adopted child and not a human?” when Gook pressures her to search. However, with Gook's help and urging, Joong-ah reunites with her birthmother, Kim Bu-ja, who relinquished her at age three, and cautiously begins to establish a relationship with her.

Bu-ja is characterized as a woman who was forced to relinquish her daughter due to poverty after the death of her husband. She keeps and raises her firstborn son and eventually remarries a man who knows about her past and supports Bu-ja in her search for her lost daughter. She embodies the figure of the “elderly, sacrificing mother who awaits her adopted child's eventual return in order to reclaim her motherhood,” and watches the Korean family search and reunion television show religiously in hopes of reuniting with her daughter.⁶⁹ She reassumes the role of mother to Joong-ah upon reunion, performed through the holding Joong-ah's hand, feeding her slices of fruit, and comparing their similarities (“There's one thing we share. You speak very slowly. So do I!”). These fragmented acts of mothering constitute what Hosu Kim terms “virtual mothering,” which she describes as “the performative, ephemeral, fragmented, and technologically enacted qualities of mothering that birth mothers engage in beyond the domain of the normative family.”⁷⁰ While these small acts of affection and superficial resemblances are meant to demonstrate Joong-ah's (re)acceptance into the family and Bu-ja's atonement for previously being a “bad mother” who could not provide for her child, they do little to mend the deep scars that transnational adoption has inscribed on both the child and the birthmother.

As Joong-ah slowly works to rebuild her life in Korea, she meets Jae-bok, “a drifter with no sense of fashion or morality, [who] talks much but does little” to whom she finds herself attracted.⁷¹ The opposite of dependable Gook, who embodies the epitome of masculinity, as his bodyguard profession demonstrates, Jae-bok seems to waver along the line between masculinity

⁶⁷ The role is played by Korean heartthrob, Hyun Bin, who also stars in the 2005 Korean drama, *My Name is Sam-soon*. This drama also includes a reference to transnational adoption through the character, Henry Kim, a mixed race Korean American doctor whose mother is a transnational Korean adoptee. Henry Kim is played by Daniel Henney, who, in real life, is also a mixed race Korean American whose mother is a transnational Korean adoptee.

⁶⁸ Coincidentally, Gook, too, is an orphan. His parents died in a car accident when he was a child, and Gook was raised by his godfather, Pastor Moon Jae-seok. This leads the questions as to whether an adoptee's helplessness stems from her transnational adoption rather than the loss of her birth family.

⁶⁹ Kim, *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea*, 3.

⁷⁰ Kim, 5.

⁷¹ Munhwa Broadcasting Company, “Ireland,” MBC Global, 2004, http://content.mbc.co.kr/english/drama/04/1670426_56053.html.

and femininity.⁷² He unironically wears a bow in hair to keep his long hair out of his eyes. He wears a flowery tank top, calls older women *unni*, and takes on the traditional role of “housewife,” doing laundry, cooking, and housework, while his girlfriend serves as breadwinner, earning her living as a soft porn actress.⁷³ He marvels that his girlfriend brother’s lips are amazing: “I didn’t know that guys’ lips taste good.” When Gook agrees to “make me a proper man like you,” and teach Jae-bok martial arts and how to bodyguard, Jae-bok impulsively kisses him and comments that Gook looks pretty.

I attribute Jae-bok’s seemingly-effeminate proclivities to a combination of what Kyung Hyun Kim identifies as the remasculinization of Korean film and emerging phenomenon that Sun Jung calls “soft masculinity.”⁷⁴ In *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, Kyung Hyun Kim relates, “The emasculation and alienation of male characters offered strong political, economic, and cultural implications for both the intense industrialization and the harsh rule of military dictators from the 1960s to the 1980s. . . . [T]he films that featured the transformation of aimless and anxious men undergoing the process of maturity through violent, introspective searches were ubiquitous.”⁷⁵ Kim notes that these characters are often “physically handicapped or psychologically traumatized (sometimes both)” embodying the “symbolic lack” of the South Korean male, “promulgated by the colonial experience, a destructive war, and repressive military rule.”⁷⁶ In modern Korean popular culture, those that possess soft masculinity characteristics are known as *kkonminam*, or “flower boys.” *Kkonminam*, which is an amalgamation of the words, flower, beautiful, and man in Korean, refers to men who are appealing due to their “pretty boy” appearance and gentle personalities. Although the rising popularity of the *kkonminam* may seem like a recent development in Korean culture, it actually has its origins in traditional the Confucian scholar class in Korea, the *seonbi*, who valued mental attainment (*wen*) over physical prowess (*wu*).⁷⁷ Jae-bok, who later in the series actually obtains a permanent physical handicap when his leg is broken, reflecting the archetype of Kyung Hyun Kim’s emasculated Korean male, desires remasculinization, evident through his aspirations to become “a proper man” like Gook and bodyguard. However, when his physical disability prevents him from attaining physical fitness (*wu*), he instead concentrates on intellectual attainment (*wen*) by studying orthopedics—a somewhat ironic subject of study, considering the failure of orthopedic medicine to heal his leg—in order to become worthy of Joong-ah’s attention.

While Jae-bok’s steps toward self-improvement see him becoming a more productive South Korean citizen, Joong-ah’s adoptee status seems to prevent her from fully integrating into a true South Korean subjecthood. Although Joong-ah studied medicine abroad, she is reluctant to practice in Korea, and instead takes a low-ranking job at a small private clinic where she performs menial duties like cleaning bedpans and changing sheets. Joong-ah’s marriage to Gook falls apart due to the fact that she was never really in love with him, but rather, married him for the safety and protection he provided. Most significantly, Joong-ah discovers through a DNA test

⁷² In addition to Jae-bok’s unconventional gender expression, a subplot of the drama develops due to the fact that Jae-bok is actually Bu-ja’s son. Thus, the questions arise as to whether Joong-ah’s attraction to Jae-bok borders on incest.

⁷³ In Korean, the terms for older sister and brother are different depending on the gender of the speaker. Men call older sisters *nuna* while women refer to older sisters as *unni*. Jae-bok using the term *unni* instead of *nuna* implies femininity.

⁷⁴ Jung, *Korean Masculinities*, 39.

⁷⁵ Kim, *Remasculization*, 5.

⁷⁶ Kim, 5, 11, 15.

⁷⁷ Jung, *Korean Masculinities*, 53–54.

that Bu-ja, the woman she believed was her birthmother, and whom she had formed a relationship with, is not actually biologically related to her.

Sadly, Joong-ah and Bu-ja's story is not simply a far-fetched fictional plot twist. There have been a number of real-life cases in which transnational adoptees have reunited with birthfamilies only to learn later that they are not biologically related. One of the most well-known cases is Vietnamese adoptee My Huong Le, who was removed from Vietnam as a child through Operation Babylift and adopted to Australia with her younger brother. Nearly thirty years later, My Huong reunited with the woman she thought was her birthmother. The reunion prompted My Huong to move to Vietnam, where she lived for fourteen years before a random text message was sent to her one day that read, "Ho Thi Ich is your mother."⁷⁸ Upon meeting with Ho Thi Ich, My Huong learned that Ho Thi was actually her biological mother. Ho Thi became gravely ill after giving birth to My Huong, and asked a friend to care for the newborn while she recovered. The friend took baby My Huong and fled. She raised My Huong as her own for five years until she was sent to Australia at age five during Operation Babylift.

Korean adoptees, Michaela Dietz and Robyn Joy Park have similar stories of reuniting with birthfamilies only to later discover through DNA that they were not actually biologically related. Michaela reunited with the Korean family whose names she had always known, as they appeared on her adoption records in 2011. "I did have a gut feeling," Michaela recalls. "My initial reaction was, 'Wow, they look nothing like me.' They're not how I pictured them."⁷⁹ Despite her reservations, Michaela became close with the Korean family and spent twelve days in Korea with them before returning to the United States. Several months later, however, Michaela learned through DNA tests that they were not actually her biological birth family. "I was switched with another girl who was on the same day and transported from the hospital to the orphanage," Michaela explains. "Somehow our paperwork got switched."⁸⁰

Robyn, who was adopted by the Shultz family in 1982, reunited with her birthmother in 2006. While Robyn established a close relationship with her birthmother, her birthmother was reluctant to divulge information about Robyn's birthfather, which prompted Robyn and her mother to submit DNA samples to the commercial biotechnology company, 23andMe, in hopes of connecting to someone who might be able to provide her with information about her birthfather.⁸¹ The DNA test results determined that Robyn and her birthmother, who had been in reunion for six years, were not actually biologically related. She speculates that at some point, she and the "real" Park Joo Young (the Korean name that appears on Robyn's adoption papers) were swapped, or somehow her paperwork was mismatched.⁸² In addition to realizing that the woman with whom Robyn had bonded with as her birthmother was not actually related to her, the realization that all of the information about the circumstances of her birth and relinquishment

⁷⁸ Zoe Osborne, "My Huong Thought She'd Finally Found Her Mother. She Was Wrong," *ABC News*, October 12, 2018, digital edition, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-13/operation-babylift-vietnam-war-adoptee-finds-false-birth-mother/10359158>.

⁷⁹ Caroline Eunkyung Choo, *aka DAN: Adoption After Story*, documentary (theSeoulite, 2014).

⁸⁰ Choo.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Kopacz, *Who Is Park Joo Young?*, MA Capstone, documentary (UCLA Asian American Studies, 2014).

⁸² Korean transnational adoptee filmmaker, Deann Borshay Liem's documentary, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* delves into Borshay Liem's personal journey in trying to locate the Korean child she was intentionally switched with in the Korean orphanage in 1966. Borshay Liem, who was actually Kang Ok Jin, was sent to the US for adoption in place of Cha Jung Hee, when Cha Jung Hee's Korean family took her out of the orphanage right before she was scheduled to be adopted by the Borshay family. Deann Borshay Liem, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, documentary (Mu Films, 2010).

was invalid was a heavy blow. “My own personal narrative has always been around the paperwork, the information of Joo Young, who was born on August 22, 1982, who was three months old when she was relinquished,” Robyn relates. “And now, at this point, I have no idea how old I am, where I was born. I no longer have a narrative that was around information with biological family members that I thought I had been reunited with.”⁸³ Robyn has since become an advocate for establishing DNA testing as a mandatory part of adoptees’ search and reunion process: “It is important for us all to understand the significance of how it can help empower individuals to search on their own (separate from the adoption agencies). It can also open up information that like in my case, shows inadequate information.”⁸⁴

In addition to verifying birth search results for adoptees, in recent years, the role of DNA testing has become a tool that many adoptees use in their search for information about their birthfamilies. With the access to at-home DNA testing kits becoming easier through several commercial databases, “many South Korean adoptees . . . are turning to DNA testing to circumvent what has long been a tortuous and often fruitless process” as “DNA testing offers a way around the bureaucratic hurdles and flawed records.”⁸⁵ One such organization, 325Kamra founded in 2015 by five mixed-race Korean adoptees, has made it the organization’s mission “to reunite Korean families separated by war, adoption, death and tragedy by DNA testing Korean adoptees, armed forces personnel who served in Korea, and anyone of Korean descent to expand the worldwide database.”⁸⁶ As of October 2018, sixty-seven matches to immediate biological family members have resulted as an outcome of 325Kamra’s efforts, and over one hundred automatic DNA matches to biological relatives have been found through global DNA databases with 325Kamra-provided DNA kits.⁸⁷

For Joong-ah, her “unmatching” with Bu-ja shows another way in which Joong-ah is unable to fully become a “real” Korean subject. Although Joong-ah expresses to Bu-ja that despite the DNA results indicating they aren’t biologically related that “I’d like to be your daughter,” Bu-ja rejects Joong-ah. Pulling her hand out of Joong-ah’s grasp and turning away, Bu-ja says sadly, “I should keep on searching for Jung-ah again. I thought I had found her. Where and what’s my Jung-ah doing now?” Hosu Kim argues that the figure of the birthmother and her reunion and reconciliation with her lost child in Korean television work to “avert attention from [transnational Korean adoption’s] ongoing practice, thus successfully folding its contemporary enactment into Korea’s past.”⁸⁸ With this in mind, I read the dissolution of Joong-ah and Bu-ja’s reunion in *Ireland* as subtly challenging the relegation of transnational Korean adoption to the past. Joong-ah and Bu-ja re-experience the trauma and uncertainty of separation. Bu-ja’s heartache of losing her daughter continues, as does South Korea’s participation in the transnational adoption industry. Transnational adoption and its traumas cannot be dismissed as relics of South Korea’s past. They remain contemporary issues that continue to wound the nation’s most vulnerable subjects.

⁸³ Kopacz, *Who Is Park Joo Young?*

⁸⁴ Joy Lieberthal Rho, “DNA I - Robyn Joy Park,” *IAMAdoptee* (blog), June 27, 2019, <https://iamadoptee.org/dna-i-robyn-joy-park/>.

⁸⁵ Marie Tae McDermott, “Trying to Fill In Blanks, Adopted Koreans Find Hope in a Cotton Swab,” *New York Times*, August 28, 2016, digital edition, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/world/asia/south-korea-adoptees-325kamra.html?ref=world>.

⁸⁶ 325Kamra, “Reuniting Families Through DNA,” 325KAMRA, accessed October 4, 2019, <https://www.325kamra.org>.

⁸⁷ 325Kamra, “DNA Matches to Date,” *Facebook*, October 3, 2018.

⁸⁸ Kim, “Television Mothers,” 439.

Reflecting the ambiguous position transnational adoptees occupy in Korean society, *Ireland's* ending leaves many questions unanswered. It is left unclear as to whether Joong-ah and Bu-ja are actually mother and daughter or not. The series ends as Joong-ah prepares to welcome her own child into the world as a single mother. Joong-ah unravels the green scarf that she had so meticulously knitted for Bu-ja, which Bu-ja returned after learning the DNA results. But instead of discarding the yarn, Joong-ah repurposes it, using the verdant yarn to knit socks for her unborn daughter, perhaps symbolizing a hopeful new chapter for single mothers, birthmothers, and adoptees in Korea.

Representations of Transnational Adoptees in Contemporary Korean Dramas

In the trailer to his documentary entitled *Lost and Found*, Olympic bronze medal skier and Korean adoptee, Toby Dawson states, “Although I knew my Olympic triumph would be celebrated across the United States, I never could have imagined the impact it would have in Korea. As if I had never left, the people embraced me as their own.”⁸⁹ Greeted with a hero’s welcome in South Korea, Dawson returns to “a home, a family, and a culture I believed lost forever.” Dawson’s experience of being embraced with open arms, as if he had never left is reflective of South Korea’s more contemporary representations of transnational Korean adoptees, two decades in to the twenty-first century.

Kim Park Nelson maintains that transnational Korean adoptees are considered exceptional subjects within the context of American race relations and government policies. Their racial difference within their adoptive families is erased through the myth of colorblind love. Immigration policies designed to exclude Asians from the United States did not apply to Korea adoptees, as “the symbolic value of the rescued Korean war waif outstripped the value of racist exclusion policies designed to ‘keep America American.’”⁹⁰ However this exceptional identity is conditional, and requires the performativity of filial love and well-adjustment: “to be a filial adopted child, a presumption of automatic gratitude persists and shapes adoptees’ experiences.”⁹¹

Similarly, the celebration of adoptees’ return to South Korea is conditional upon the assumption of and their expression of success. Toby Dawson’s return into the arms of South Korea occurs only after his demonstration of athletic exceptionalism, echoing the reception of football star, Hines Ward. While Ward is not a transnational adoptee, comparing his experience to those of Korean adoptees is useful in revealing how and why formerly outcast Korean subjects (including adoptees and mixed-race GI babies, in the case of Hines Ward) are reincorporated into South Korean society. Their successes prove that South Korea did the “right thing” in sending them away, absolving the nation from the transgression of refusing responsibility for the child.

For transnational adoptees who are not necessarily Olympic medal winners, Kim Park Nelson reminds us that “travel abroad to Korea, like travel to other parts of the world, is a marker of American privilege.”⁹² That is, the social, cultural, and monetary capital accrued from simply being raised in the Global North demonstrates adoptees’ success. South Korea welcomes adoptees back not only because they prove the decision to send them away resulted in them being “better off,” but because with their return, adoptees infuse the South Korean economy with Western capital. Adoptees are a new type of consumer: “From buying pottery in Insadong and

⁸⁹ Jay Jalbert, *Toby Dawson: Lost and Found*, Documentary (Jalbert Productions, 2011).

⁹⁰ Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians*, 45.

⁹¹ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 150.

⁹² Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians*, 170.

clothes in Myeongdong to drinking in Hongdae and wandering around Namdaemun and Dongdaemun markets, adoptees consume Korea while exploring Seoul.”⁹³ Adoptees’ initial adoption was an economic boom to the country, and their return in adulthood brings additional monies into the South Korean economy.

Due to these factors, Koreans’ attitudes toward transnational adoptees seem to be more accepting these days than the films and dramas of 2003 and 2004 demonstrate. With the viral nature of the *hallyu* phenomenon on a global scale, Korean television dramas are riding the adoptee popularity wave by including transnational adoptee characters, portraying them as global and cosmopolitan, Western-educated and socioeconomically successful. Through these media depictions, the transnational Korean adoptee functions in South Korean media to reflect a modern nation that is still solidly connected to its inherent cultural roots.

Indeed, the now-defunct online Korean drama streaming service, Dramafever, included tags such as “orphan,” “adoption,” and “birth secrets” to categorize its libraries in addition to more conventional tags like “melodrama,” “comedy,” and “romance.”⁹⁴ These niche category tags indicate the current popularity of adoptee narratives. With a large enough body of films and television series to warrant such labels (especially when read along with the other classifying markers such as “melodrama,” “comedy,” and “romance”), one could argue that these offerings comprise a genre, in which similar sentimental narratives about transnational adoption are told in a modern South Korean context. Yet, while representations of adoptees in Korean media may initially seem to portray them as Korean “super-citizens”—affluent and successful, fluent in Korean, able to navigate Korean culture and society flawlessly, with the added perks of English proficiency and an Ivy League degree—a closer inspection reveals an unravelling at the edges where the pieces don’t quite align. Examining several recent Korean dramas that feature transnational adoptee characters, my analysis intentionally spans a diverse selection of Korean television shows from different genres (romantic comedy, medical drama, science fiction police thriller) that provide a variety of transnational Korean adoptee representations. In contemporary Korean dramas, adoptees are heroes, villains, male, and female. Within these diverse portrayals, I critique the representations of inclusion and point to how underneath the shining exterior of success that Korea wants to tout for its prodigal children, adoptees still intrinsically occupy a state of unbelonging in the South Korean national narrative.

“He has Amazing Spec”: The Korean Adoptee as Privileged Korean Subject in *Fated to Love You*

In the summer of 2014, MBC aired the drama, *Fated to Love You*, a Korean remake of the popular 2008 Taiwanese television series of the same name.⁹⁵ The Korean version features a Korean adoptee character: Daniel Pitt. Played by Choi Jin-hyuk, Daniel Pitt is an internationally famous artist and designer who has come back to Korea in search of his long lost biological sister. Like most portrayals of transnational adoptees in Korean film and television, Daniel is fluent in Korean and seems to have an inherent grasp of the intricacies of Korean business negotiation and etiquette. And unlike previous depictions of adoptees in productions like

⁹³ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 148.

⁹⁴ Owned by Warner Bros., the online, on-demand video streaming service abruptly closed its doors on October 18, 2016. The observations on Dramafever’s category tags come from screenshots I took from the website on August 24, 2017. Warner Bros., “Dramafever,” streaming service, Dramafever, August 24, 2017, <http://www.dramafever.com>.

⁹⁵ The series’ title in Korean literally translates to *You are My Destiny*, but was marketed as *Fated to Love You* for English-speaking audiences.

Susanne Brink's Arirang and Ireland, information and history about Daniel's adoptive family are notably absent. That is, Daniel's identity and background as an adoptee is only relevant in a Korean context. Much like U.S. portrayals of transnational adoptees that erase the birthfamilies from the adoptees' narratives, in Korean dramas, the adoptees' adoptive families are similarly absent.

We are introduced to Daniel as he flies first class from the United States to Korea. The plane's interior is dark and the narrow beam from an overhead reading light illuminates a pair of hands sketching the portrait a beautiful young lady in a sketchbook. A young woman walking down the aisle pauses to admire the artwork. "Oh how cute," the woman in the aisle comments. "Who is it?" Looking up from his sketch, Daniel replies, "It's my younger sister." "She's so pretty!" the young woman exclaims, eager to keep the artist engaged in conversation. "And you're so handsome. You both look alike." Unexpectedly, Daniel expresses hope to his admirer that he and his sister do actually look alike. "I lost her when I was young, so I forgot her face," he explains with a somber expression. "This is how I imagine her to be. . . More than anything, I know that even if I meet her, I probably won't recognize her." Encouraged by the young woman's obvious interest in him and his maudlin story, he continues, "I lost my sister when I was in the 1st grade. I lived in the orphanage until I was adopted to the United States. I look for her every time I come back to Korea, but it's not easy." In contrast to earlier depictions of transnational adoptees in Korean film and television in which adoption is an insurmountable obstacle that prevents the adoptee from leading a full and complete life, here, Daniel seems to use the tragic narrative of adoption to his advantage. He actually appears to use it as a flirting tactic in a move to evoke sympathy from the woman.

In addition to Daniel's agentive utilization of his adoptee identity in this scene, I believe it is significant that in our first glimpses of this adoptee character, the dim lighting of the plane's interior and the large aviator sunglasses he wears obscure his features. His anonymity seems to mimic Daniel's commentary of his search for his sister. As a child sent away from Korea, the adoptee's adult features are unknown to his birth country. He could be anyone's child and represents the 250,000 children "lost" to South Korea by way of transnational adoption.

Upon his return to Korea, Daniel visits the orphanage he stayed at before he was adopted by an American family. He is searching for information about his sister. The scene opens to a view of sunlit tree branches waving in the breeze, accompanied by the peaceful sounds of nature. The camera pans down to Daniel and a habit-clad nun as they walk leisurely side-by-side along a tree-shaded path. In stark contrast to American depictions of Korean orphanages as cold, institutional setting of desolation and melancholy, *Fated to Love You's* orphanage is a site of peace and tranquility, a haven from the urban busyness of modern Seoul. Both depictions are probably inaccurate to some degree, and the realities of living in a Korean orphanage lie somewhere in between these two polemic depictions. Yet like the two countries' different uses of the orphan figure to promote their own practices and perspectives, the differing depictions of the Korean orphanage operate to highlight the superiority of each country's care and treatment of Korean orphans. Whereas American depictions indicate that orphans would be far better treated in American homes and families, this Korean depiction suggests that the children cared for in this group care institution have happy, healthy, and fulfilling childhoods.

In a dialogue that reflects the difficulty many adoptees have in gaining access to information regarding their adoptions, the nun informs Daniel that "I'm looking into it [information about Daniel's sister], but it's been so long, it's not proving to be easy. When it

comes to adoption, we are not supposed to share the information. It's difficult to track them down."

Daniel seems to take this lack of information in stride. "I'm sorry for the difficult request" he tells the nun, framing his request for information as an off-hand favor rather than an entitlement or a priority. The nun dismisses Daniel's apology, because "you've helped our orphanage so much over the years," implying that because of his elevated socioeconomic status, Daniel has been a financial benefactor of the orphanage. A soccer ball flies into the frame, interrupting their conversation, and the camera trains its focus on a nearby pitch where a group of laughing and smiling children (presumably orphans) call for Daniel to return their ball. With a closing remark to the nun to "contact me if you find anything," Daniel leaves the nun to join the children's game, seemingly more interested in playing a pickup game of soccer than tracking down his sister's adoption paperwork. Despite his success as an adult, Daniel's prioritizing of play reinforces the portrayal of adoptees as perpetual children.

At the orphanage, Daniel encounters the series' female protagonist, Mi-young, who mistakes him for a priest and confesses her unplanned pregnancy to him. Still at play with the orphanage's children, Daniel sneaks into the orphanage's chapel and hides in the confessional booth. From above, we see Mi-young enter the adjacent confessional booth. As she addresses Daniel, whom she presumes to be a priest, the camera angle changes to Daniel's perspective within his side of the confessional, as he turns to face the direction of Mi-young's voice. The two characters' introduction thus occurs through a literal screen of anonymity as Daniel's face (and Mi-young's face on the other side of the confessional screen) is again obscured while discussing the loss and/or relinquishment of Korean children. "Father, I think I may be pregnant," Mi-young tells him from within the confines of the stall. "But to be honest, I'm scared. I'm scared about having this baby, but when I think about not keeping this baby, I get very sad."

Daniel's lack of reaction to Mi-young's confession strikes me as a moment in which the inaccuracies of adoptee representation in Korean television are especially apparent. Having just found out that his search for his biological sister has met a dead end, and encountering a woman who tells him of her unplanned pregnancy in the very orphanage in which he stayed as a child, Daniel is unfazed and doesn't seem to make a connection between an unwed Korean mother and the transnational Korean adoption industry. For many adoptees (including myself), pregnancy out of wedlock is a common beginning of our adoption stories, and yet, in Korean television, most adoptee characters' backstories hinge on parental death that tragically destroys a happy and intact family. While we aren't privy to all of Daniel's backstory, the fact that he has a biological sister that he remembers from childhood implies that the circumstances of his adoption didn't include an unexpected pregnancy, and that he spent at least some time being raised by his birth family. Although Daniel's personal backstory does not necessarily hinge on a pregnancy out of wedlock, his apparent inability to connect the situation to his own experiences as an adoptee underscores the fact that contemporary representations of adoptees in Korean media only portray certain perspectives of the Korean adoptee experience. Designating a character as a transnational adoptee is trendy in order to create a character with Western influence and cultural capital, however, such depictions conveniently rewrites and erases the psychological and emotional baggage that is inherent to the transnational adoptee experience in reality. That is, representations of Korean adoptees are used only to demonstrate their positive contributions to the South Korean state, image, and economy.

Subsequently, Daniel's adoptee identity seems to become less important in lieu of highlighting how his reputation and entrepreneurial skills will benefit Jangin Chemicals, the

Korean conglomerate that has hired him to revive the company's image. In one scene, Lee Yong, the feckless younger half-brother of the *chaebol's* heir apparent, scrambles to identify Daniel Pitt, in order to understand who he is in relation to him the *chaebol's* social hierarchy.⁹⁶ "He's almost as good looking as I am, and he's tall too," Yong tells his mother, who, in a demonstration of the dexterity of South Korea's technological advancement and digital connectedness, navigates her state-of-the-art tablet with ease to pull up the designer's profile (which just so happens to be adjacent to movie star, Daniel Craig's profile, suggesting an equivalent social standing). "Name: Daniel Pitt. Age: 32," Yong's mother rattles off. "Recently arrived from America. He's an industrial designer often referred to as 'the next Philippe Starck.' His visits to Korea aren't public and he has limited official activity. His designs are known to revive even the most troubled companies. He's a friend of Chairman Wang, despite their age difference." As Yong's mother pants from reading off Daniel's impressive résumé, Yong concedes that "he has amazing spec." As Hae-joang Cho elaborates,

the term spec (an abbreviation of the word specifications—the detailed list of features describing the various components of a consumer product) pertains to résumé-building activities and to the salient desire to attain long-term, secure employment. Upon entering a prestigious college with a lucrative major, students continue studying for the English Proficiency Test, aim for a high grade point average (GPA), prepare for various contests and qualification tests, and participate in study-abroad and internship programs. The activities involved in accumulating specs entail a heavy labor investment, and the results are commensurate with the amount of time and energy invested, just like activities involved in preparation for the college entrance examination.⁹⁷

In short, Daniel Pitt's accumulation of spec symbolizes an incredible investment of time, labor, and money that his transnational adoptee status enabled him to access. The skills he accumulated as an adoptee in the United States has placed him in a privileged class upon his return to South Korea. With his "amazing spec," Daniel, like other adult adoptees, "in the context of South Korea's self-conscious globalization drive," are being "optimistically revalued as successful, model citizens of their adoptive countries, who, it is hoped, will take on roles as cultural ambassadors or civil diplomats between the West and Korea."⁹⁸

Daniel assumes this role with ease as he slips seamlessly into the upper echelons of the South Korean business world with his fluent Korean, custom tailored suits, and his ability revive floundering corporations with his creative design. In a reversal of the poor orphan in need of rescue stereotype, Daniel actually becomes Mi-young's "daddy-long-legs," helping her establish a successful career as an artist.⁹⁹

Yet, for as much as Daniel appears to be a winning Korean package, he ultimately remains a lonely outsider. After three years, Daniel falls in love with Mi-young and even

⁹⁶ A *chaebol* is a large family-owned and operated commercial conglomerate, often consisting of many diversified affiliates. Well-known examples of Korean *chaebols* include Samsung, Hyundai, Lotte, and LG.

⁹⁷ Hae-joang Cho, "The Spec Generation Who Can't Say 'No': Overeducated and Underemployed Youth in Contemporary South Korea," *Positions* 23, no. 3 (August 2015): 445–46, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-3125823>.

⁹⁸ Kim, *Adopted Territory*, 173.

⁹⁹ The term, daddy long legs comes from the 1912 epistolary novel, *Daddy Long Legs* by American novelist, Jean Webster. The novel tells the story of Jerusha "Judy" Abbott, an orphan whose college education is paid for by an unknown benefactor. A 2005 Korean film of the same name popularized the term in Korean culture to denote a woman's secret admirer or benefactor. Jean Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1912); Jeong-shik Gong, *Daddy-Long-Legs* (재미/다들/아저씨) (CJ Entertainment, 2005).

proposes marriage. In the proposal scene, Mi-young enters a darkened and empty auditorium, to find Daniel standing on stage behind a podium, his face in shadows cast by the illumination of a projector. As an emotional ballad plays, Daniel begins a sand animation performance which is projected on the screen behind him. As his hands manipulate the sand, the animation transforms from a landscape of Seoul to the portrait of a man and woman holding each other close. Through the visual performance, a voiceover of Daniel's voice narrates: "A lonely man who lost his little sister met a lonely woman who lost her baby. Those two people decided to share in that loneliness together. Amazingly, even though it was hard bearing it alone, it wasn't hard at all bearing it together. Like that, those two people will not tire until the end. They'll build a strong house and live happily ever after."¹⁰⁰ Presenting Mi-young with a bouquet of flowers, Daniel gets down on one knee before her and asks, "Will you become my real family?"

While the intention of Daniel's proposal is to frame it as a grand romantic gesture, in some ways, I think that it also speaks to Daniel's adoptee status as well. Throughout the dramatic scene, Daniel's face is again obscured, shrouded in shadows, and downcast as he concentrates on moving the sand along the surface of the projector. The term "real family" is a loaded one for adoptees, who often face questions about loyalty to their adoptive families versus their birthfamilies. In response to Daniel's question, Mi-young tells him that "I still don't know if I'm thankful to you, or if I really love you." This statement resonates with notions of adoption as a "gift" of love for which adoptees are expected to express "a particular affect conveying their joy" and gratitude.¹⁰¹

Alas, the strong house Daniel envisions is not meant to be. Mi-young leaves Daniel sitting alone in the vast auditorium, the bouquet of flowers in the seat beside him, staring stoically at his sand creation projected and illuminated before him. In the love triangle between himself, Mi-young, and Lee Gun, Jangin Chemicals' heir and the father of Mi-young's lost baby, Daniel loses despite his efforts to be the perfect supportive partner, the perfect Korean.¹⁰² I argue that although Daniel Pitt appears to be the ideal modern South Korean citizen, his adoptee-ness prevents him from fully incorporating into Korean society. His adoptee-ness renders him a lonely man despite his charm, good looks, and business acumen. For Lee Gun and Mi-young, their families offer them an inherent place of belonging despite their expressed exasperation at the meddling and inconveniences of their family members. Daniel, on the other hand, remains outside the intimacies of Korean family. Even after reuniting with his sister, a "real family" for Daniel Pitt remains elusive. And in a culture where family and nation go hand-in-hand, Daniel's incorporation into the family-nation remains incomplete.

"I Only Built this Castle so I Could Destroy It": The Sophisticated Adoptee Villain in *Doctor Stranger*

2014 also saw the airing of the Korean medical drama, *Doctor Stranger*, in which a Korean adoptee character is featured. The drama centers on Park Hoon, who is the son of a surgeon who was abducted to North Korea. Raised in North Korea, Hoon becomes a gifted surgeon like his father and flees back to South Korea. This series is interesting in that in addition

¹⁰⁰ A dramatic turning point in the plot occurs when Mi-young is the victim of a car accident. While she survives, her unborn baby is lost when Lee Gun, the father of the baby, must make the decision to save either Mi-young or their unborn child.

¹⁰¹ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 11.

¹⁰² Lee Gun's character is also technically an orphan—both of his parents have passed away. However, his extended family and the socioeconomic privilege the family's *chaebol* grants him presumably prevents him from being a candidate for transnational adoption like Daniel was.

to the family divisions that orphanhood and adoption create, *Doctor Stranger* also addresses the geopolitical divisions of the Korean peninsula. The alignment of these two themes within the show allow for some interesting analyses of the intersectionalities of family and nation.

In one of the first scenes of the series, Park Hoon and his father discover that after having saved Kim Il-Sung's life and prevented a revival of the Korean War, the South Korean government has washed its hands of them, and they are left stranded in North Korea. "Those pigs in South Korea are cold-blooded bastards," a North Korean officer sneers, as he "tsk[s] over how cruel the South Koreans are to abandon their own."¹⁰³ "From now on, Professor Park Cheol of South Korea is dead," the North Korean officer, Cha Jin-Soo announces. "From now on, you'll live as a proud citizen of our dear leader, Comrade Park." The way in which *Doctor Stranger* frames this abandonment is reminiscent of the North Korean administration's criticisms of South Korea's engagement in transnational adoption. North Korea has long criticized South Korea for its "export" and "selling" of its children internationally. While North Korea had the similar task as its southern counterpart of figuring out what to do with the thousands of orphaned children following the Korean War, the DPRK officially opted to keep its orphans within its borders rather than send them away for international adoption.¹⁰⁴ Tobias Hübinette relates that in North Korea, "orphaned children were designated as children of national heroes, and domestic adoption was encouraged, while model orphanages were built and exposed in the propaganda, and grant systems made it possible to receive higher education."¹⁰⁵ As Professor Park Cheol is welcomed "as a proud citizen of our dear leader," orphaned children of fallen North Korean soldiers were embraced as the children of Kim Il-Sung, who is quoted as saying, "You are not orphans anymore. General Kim Il Sung takes care of you, he is your father."¹⁰⁶

The circumstances and consequences of transnational adoption also become a subplot in *Doctor Stranger*. One of the supporting roles in the drama is that of Han Jae-joon, played by Park Hae-jin, a Harvard-trained cardiothoracic surgeon who, we find out, as the series unfolds, is a transnational Korean adoptee. The first inkling we, as audience members, get that transnational adoption plays into *Doctors Stranger's* storyline comes in episode seven when we discover that a medical malpractice suit troubled Park Hoon's father just before they departed for North Korea. A man died on the operating table at Myungwoo Hospital, leaving the patient's son, a teenager named Lee Seung-hoon, an orphan, who was sent to the United States. Here, I read Myungwoo Hospital as metaphor for the nation. Like so many adoptees from the 1960s through the 1980s, when South Korea industrialized with "an astonishing speed and a horrifying efficiency," Lee Seung-hoon is sent abroad, sacrificed in the name of development.¹⁰⁷ In order for Myungwoo Hospital to rise to become the best hospital in South Korea, corners are cut, dirt swept under the rug, and "loose ends," in the form of a child who could stand in the way of Myungwoo's ascension, are dealt with not by an internal system of social welfare support, but by sending him

¹⁰³ gummimochi, "Doctor Stranger: Episode 1," *Dramabeans* (blog), May 6, 2014, www.dramabeans.com.

¹⁰⁴ Despite North Korea's "official" policy for its war orphans, the DPRK sent nearly 6,000 children to Eastern European orphanages during and after the war. Over 1,200 children were sent to orphanages in Plakowice, Poland, including, some speculate, South Korean orphans who were (re)patriated to North Korea in 1959 when the DPRK recalled the children to participate in the post-war reconstruction of the country. Hyun-kyung Kang, "Untold Stories about Korean War Orphans in Europe," *Korea Times*, February 28, 2019, digital edition, sec. Diplomacy, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2019/10/120_264570.html.

¹⁰⁵ Tobias Hübinette, "North Korea and Adoption," *Korean Quarterly*, 2003 2002, Winter edition.

¹⁰⁶ Tobias Hübinette.

¹⁰⁷ Hübinette, "Korean Adoption History," 35.

across the ocean to America through adoption. Such children are “victims in a pursuit of greater national economic prosperity.”¹⁰⁸

The former hospital Director Choi, now in his twilight years, has made it his mission to right the wrongs of his past and is in search of this child—now a man—in America. Later in the episode, we find Han Jae-joon alone in his office with a grim look on his face—bathed in shadows, he towers over an intricate model castle. “Mother, Father,” he whispers, “I’m almost there. Please wait a bit more.” Low, ominous music plays in the background and the audience is left to make the connection that Lee Seung-hoon, orphaned by the surgeon’s negligence all those year ago, is none other than Myungwoo Hospital’s ace surgeon, Han Jae-joon. From the moment we are privy to the fact that Jae-joon is an adoptee, we are also clued in to the fact that he has something nefarious planned. That is, while Han Jae-joon seems to shine as a brilliant surgeon, is engaged to the hospital Chairman’s beautiful daughter (who also happens to be a surgeon), and lives the life of an ambitious and successful élite, below the surface, something darker and more sinister, something related to his identity as an orphan, lurks. Reminiscent of the orphan-outsider status that Jin-sung represents in *Acacia*, *Doctor Stranger* similarly portrays Jae-joon as the series’ antagonist, implying that despite his appearance as an integrated, respectable Korean citizen, he is dangerous outsider. Further, rather than simply being a negative, but ineffectual force, Han Jae-joon’s years abroad and foreign education as a transnational adoptee have made him a complex and conniving villain.

We learn Han Jae-joon’s intentions for Myungwoo Hospital in episode eight. Someone claiming to be Mr. Jang, a caseworker from Holt Children’s Services, contacts Director Choi, and in a telephone conversation that is conducted in stilted English by both sides, informs him that the orphan he has been looking for, Lee Seung-hoon, was adopted to America twenty years ago, but has recently returned to Korea. However, in a display of dramatic irony, we find out that Mr. Jang is not from Holt. As Director Choi stands in the hospital corridor taking the call, a man in a dark business suit walks past him in the background. As the telephone conversation continues, the camera leaves Director Choi and follows the unknown man, who leads us to the Chief of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery’s office as he concludes his call with Director Choi. Entering the office “Mr. Jang” addresses a figure in a lab coat whose back is turned to the door, identifying him as Lee Seung-hoon, the lost adoptee. As Lee Seung-hoon turns around to face his visitor, his face is revealed, confirming that Lee Seung-hoon and Han Jae-joon are one and the same. The camera angle widens so that Mr. Jang and Han Jae-joon stand symmetrically on either side of the frame, but then close the gap to meet in the center in a friendly embrace.

Surprisingly, Mr. Jang and Han Jae-joon converse not in English or Korean, but in Mandarin Chinese. Mr. Jang, referring to the irony of Myungwoo Hospital’s lost orphan being the hospital’s chief of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery, comments, “There’s a proverb saying that you look for a donkey on a donkey’s back. Over here, do they say, ‘it’s dark under the candle stick?’” Thus, we realize that Mr. Jang and Jae-joon are in cahoots, conspiring together toward some ominous plan. The mysterious background music and the fact that Mr. Jang is a clearly foreign presence contribute to the suspicious nature of the two men’s relationship. For context, in the past, South Korea and the People’s Republic of China have had a precarious relationship. From the 1950s through the 1980s, China only recognized North Korea, while South Korea only recognized the Republic of China in Taiwan. On August 24, 1992, the People’s Republic of China and South Korea formally established diplomatic relations. Recently,

¹⁰⁸ In Sun Park, *People Who Search for Roots (뿌리를 찾는 사람들)* (Seoul: Hana University, 1998), 229.

the two countries' relationship deteriorated with South Korea's cooperation with the United States to deploy THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) in Korea in 2016, but since October 2017, the two countries have endeavored to cooperate and mend their relationship. Given the international political climate between the two countries, Mr. Jang's ties to Beijing in *Dr. Stranger* imply that Han Jae-Joon's dealings with the foreigner are suspect.

It is also interesting that *Doctor Stranger* has Mr. Jang impersonate a representative from Holt Children's Services, a real-life adoption agency that essentially created the modern transnational adoption industry, originating in South Korea. Perhaps the reference to Holt Children's Services in the drama in relation to such a suspicious character is an acknowledgement of the adoption agency's reputation for sometimes less-than-truthful means of procuring children and rendering them available for adoption to Western receiving countries. Like Myungwoo Hospital and the Republic of Korea, Holt Children's Services (now Holt International) capitalized on the export of Korean children to build its empire.

As the series progresses, we find Han Jae-joon to be single-minded in his mission of revenge against the hospital that killed his birth father. In the same scene, Mr. Jang wanders around the office, he stops to admire Jae-joon's model castle. "You're almost finished building it," he observes. "What are you going to do when you finish building it?" Stone-faced, Han Jae-joon replies in Mandarin, "I'm going to destroy it." Switching to Korean, he continues, "From the beginning, I only built this castle so I could destroy it." Clearly, the model castle is a metaphor for Myungwoo Hospital, and Han Jae-joon's declaration foreshadows the destruction he intends to initiate upon the medical center. His switching from Mandarin to Korean, his native tongue, emphasizes how personal this vendetta is.

Throughout the series, *Doctor Stranger* features two family reunions. In the second episode, supporting character, Lee Chang-yi reunites with her mother in a tearful and emotional meeting. Park Hoon's friend, Chang-yi is a fellow North Korean defector who has been working tirelessly for years to earn enough money to extricate her mother out of North Korea. Using the services of a human smuggler (who only accepts payment in U.S. dollars), Chang-yi "frees" her mother from the oppressive bonds of North Korean communism.

Park Hoon, in turn, experiences his own reunion with his mother later in the series. Divorced from Hoon's father and estranged from her son, Hoon's mother lived in the United States at the time of Hoon and Professor Park Cheol's abduction to North Korea. Hoon grew up resenting his mother, thinking that she had abandoned him all those year ago, but when, on a whim, Hoon dials his mother's last known phone number in the United States, he discovers that she returned to Korea to look for him twenty years ago when he and his father disappeared. Since then, she had been living as a captive in a care facility in South Korea under the orders of Prime Minister Jang, who authorized Professor Park's abduction to North Korea. Thus, Hoon learns that his mother isn't the "bad mother" who abandoned him like he thought for so many years. Instead, she, too, was the victim of underhanded power plays by an unscrupulous politician. Hoon's mother is eventually rescued from Prime Minister Jang's evil clutches and is reunited with Hoon.

Despite the fact that family reunion is a mainstay in dramatized transnational adoptee narratives, there is no reunion for Han Jae-joon.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps in the neoliberal world built upon the myth of meritocracy, his dark machinations make him too undeserving of a reunion. Thus, Han

¹⁰⁹ Han Jae-joon's mother died of a heart attack soon after her husband's death, as she was fighting for a malpractice suit to be filed against Myungwoo Hospital.

Jae-joon, even once he turns down the path toward redemption, remains alone, bereft of family despite the filial fervor of his quest for atonement.

I find it significant that both the main character, Park Hoon, and his rival, Han Jae-joon, are raised outside South Korea's borders. Despite the parallels in the two characters' back stories as diasporic Koreans with medical training, Park Hoon and Han Jae-joon do not seem to acknowledge their similarities or bond over their shared experiences of returning to South Korea from abroad. Han Jae-joon climbs through the hospital ranks with ease. Like Daniel Pitt, his identity as an adoptee raised abroad does not seem to hinder him from being successful in Korean society. Rather, like Daniel, Jae-joon's time spent in America appears to give him prestige and sophistication.

In contrast, Park Hoon, the North Korean refugee struggles to fit in. He is an appealing protagonist because his flaws make him more relatable. Echoing Elaine Kim and Hannah Michell's observation that "[i]n vivid contrast with what we commonly encounter in most Western media, representations of North Korea and North Koreans in contemporary South Korean films and television dramas are complex and nuanced," Park Hoon is a multi-dimensional character that provides audiences with a humanized perspective of North Korea and its people.¹¹⁰ Yet, in following the conventional storytelling formulas, an obvious protagonist and antagonist are required. The difference in *Doctor Stranger* seems to be the character's ties to family. Thus, it is the orphan who was sent to America that becomes the villain in the tale, and Park Hoon, who grew up in North Korea with his father, who becomes the hero.

Undoing Adoptee Unbelonging: Time Travel and Alternate Realities in *Tunnel*

The third Korean drama I examine is the science-fiction police thriller, *Tunnel*. Airing on cable network OCN in the spring of 2017, *Tunnel* focuses on a Korean detective who is transported from 1985 to present day in his pursuit of a serial killer through a time-traveling tunnel. Desperately trying to piece together the puzzle of this serial killer's motive and identity so that he can return home to his own time, Detective Park Kwang-ho (coincidentally played by Choi Jin-hyuk who portrayed Daniel Pitt in *Fated to Love You*) befriends a young university professor who is a British-trained psychologist that specializes in studying female serial killers. With her blunt speaking, expressionless face, and the morbidly detached but detailed way in which she describes a killer's thoughts, Shin Jae-yi, played by Lee Yoo-young, is eccentric and standoffish to say the least. However, her psychoanalytic brilliance has made her a coveted addition to the university's faculty, despite the discomfort she puts her students and acquaintances in during social situations.

We learn early on that Jae-yi is an adoptee, sent to England when she was six years old.¹¹¹ Thus, like Daniel Pitt and Han Jae-joon, Shin Jae-yi was not adopted as an infant, but spent considerable time with her birth family before her adoption. In actuality, the vast majority of transnational Korean adoptees are adopted at a very young age. A survey of 166 Korean adoptees in 2000 found that for children adopted during the time period of 1954 to 1985, the

¹¹⁰ Elaine H. Kim and Hannah Michell, "Other as Brother or Lover: North Koreans in South Korean Visual Media," in *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea*, ed. Youna Kim (London: Routledge, 2019), 135, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781351104128>.

¹¹¹ Similar to *Ireland*, the United Kingdom's limited participation in transnational adoption practices make the accuracy of Shin Jae-yi's adoption to England unlikely. South Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare report that between 1953 and 2004, of the 156,272 transnational adoptions recorded, only 72 children were sent to England from Korea. Tobias Hübinette, "Korean Adoptions/Adoptees Statistics 1953-2004" (Stockholm, 2004), 2, http://www.tobiashubinette.se/korean_adoptions.pdf.

median age at time of adoption was two years old, and 72.3% of respondents were three years or younger at the time of their adoption.¹¹² Similarly, Tobias Hübinette's analysis of South Korea's National Medical Center data found that children relinquished to the adoption agencies for international adoption in South Korea in 1986 were overwhelmingly infants, with 76.7% of the children between the ages of one day and one month old at the time of relinquishment. Children under the age of two comprised 89.5% of the relinquishments, whereas children over the age of six comprised just .9%.¹¹³ American adoptive families generally prefer to adopt infants transnationally, and Hollywood portrayals reflect this. The molding of transnational adoptees into model American citizens is far easier when they are infants without agency or opinions on their subjecthood. Conversely, South Korean media depictions of transnational adoptees often portray them as older orphans, who have spent enough time in South Korean society to retain their "essential Koreanness" that will not be erased when they are sent abroad.¹¹⁴ With this Koreanness intact (as evident by their Korean language fluency), these adoptee characters are able to rejoin Korean society seamlessly upon their return from their adoptive countries.

For Jae-yi, her older adoptee status seems to have hindered her integration into British society. Jae-yi's friend relates, "Professor Shin's adoptive parents—it would have been great if they were nice people, but they weren't." A flashback reveals an adolescent Jae-yi sitting alone, face downcast in a darkened British police interrogation room. Such a scene accentuates the isolating nature of her adoptee status. It turns out that her adoptive parents perished in a house fire in which Jae-yi was the sole survivor. "Some people thought that I started the fire. Because all I did was watch it burn," Jae-yi relates. "For a long time, there were rumors that I was a murderer." Orphaned for a second time, Jae-yi is rendered an outsider as her adoptive community in England views her with mistrust. Yet despite the abuse Jae-yi sustains at the hands of her adoptive family, *she* is the one viewed as a menace to society, an insidious outsider.

The storyline of teenage Jae-yi doing harm to her adoptive family is similar to a sensational news story that has recently been developing about a Ukrainian-born adoptee who displayed sociopathic and violent tendencies. According to Kristine Barnett, Natalia's adoptive mother, the girl, who has a rare form of dwarfism, was actually a 23-year-old woman posing as a child. "She was standing over people in the middle of the night," Barnett claims in a sensationally-titled *Daily Mail* exclusive. "You couldn't go to sleep. We had to hide all the sharp objects. I saw her putting chemicals, bleach, Windex something like that, in my coffee."¹¹⁵ Perhaps such stories hold the public's interest because they disrupt the expectations of the "grateful adoptee" to an extreme degree. Jae-yi and Natalia are "unfaithful betrayers of the nation for *failing and refusing to embrace humanitarian narratives of adoption,*" for refusing to "engage an affective performance of gratitude."¹¹⁶

¹¹² Freudlich and Lieberthal, "The Gathering," 9.

¹¹³ Hübinette, "Korean Adoptions/Adoptees Statistics 1953-2004," 4.

¹¹⁴ Evidence of adoptees' retention of their Korean identity are limited to superficial cultural markers, however. For the most part, adoptee characters prove their Koreanness through their Korean language proficiency. Their fluency and also their ability to use the appropriate speech levels and honorifics demonstrate their understanding of Korean culture and social etiquettes.

¹¹⁵ Ben Ashford, "EXCLUSIVE: 'She Tried to Kill Us!' Indiana Mother Who Adopted 6-Year-Old Ukrainian Girl with Dwarfism Has Been Charged with Abandonment but Claims Her 'Daughter' Was Found to Be a 22-Year Old 'Sociopath' Masquerading as a Child," *Daily Mail*, September 23, 2019, digital edition, sec. News, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7479061/Mom-claims-Ukrainian-daughter-9-adopted-really-22-year-old-dwarfism.html>.

¹¹⁶ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 11. Emphasis in original.

An outsider in England, Jae-yi struggles to find belonging in South Korea as well, despite her prestigious education Korean language fluency. Unlike Daniel Pitt and Han Jae-joon, Jae-yi does not appear to easily integrate into Korean society upon her return. “Am I scary?” Jae-yi asks her academic mentor after two students drop out of her class. Like Jin-sung in *Acacia*, Jae-yi’s seriousness, intensity, and fascination with macabre and unsettling subjects seem to unnerve others around them. While Jae-yi’s affectations and eccentricities seem overly-dramatic, the fact that she remains an outsider here in her birth country resonates with transnational adoptees’ experiences of often feeling like they do not fully belong in neither their adoptive country nor their nation of birth. Tobias Hübinette argues that “the adopted Korean existence is characterized by painful and contradictory subjectivities and identifications, unstable and repeated passings and transgressions, and a never-ending negotiation and navigation between whiteness, Orientalism, immigrantism, Koreanness and Asianness.”¹¹⁷ Similarly, Eleana Kim identifies “self-consciousness about not fitting into dominant categories of race, family, and nation” as an important aspect of Korean adoptee social practices.¹¹⁸ That is, while most Korean adoptees do not possess a morbid fascination with serial killers that excludes them from polite society, many Korean adoptees do experience a sense of unbelonging and unconnectedness in both their adoptive countries as well as their birth country.

In a dramatic plot twist, it is revealed that Detective Park Kwang-ho is actually Jae-yi’s birth father. When Kwang-ho disappeared in 1985, Jae-yi’s birthmother, Yeon-sook, was pregnant and raised their daughter, Yeon-ho, alone for six years, but was killed in a car accident. Yeon-ho was then sent abroad through transnational adoption and renamed Jae-yi. In the present day, Jae-yi visits the orphanage where she stayed before being sent overseas, and reviews her adoption file. The building front of the fictional Sarang Adoption Center bears striking resemblance to the real-life adoption agency, Eastern Social Welfare Society’s Seoul office building, with its red brick front and gold lettering.¹¹⁹ The file review room is Spartan and uninviting, with only a small table and a set of chairs within. Jae-yi sits primly in a chair against the wall, and the scene is reminiscent of the scene earlier in which young Jae-yi sat huddled in a chair in the British police interrogation room. Indeed, there are parallels between an adoption file review and a police interrogation. Often, the subject is reduced to a number, their humanity stripped away.¹²⁰ Both operate as truth-finding missions, while authority figures dictate what information the subject is privy to.

Clearly, there are some inaccuracies in *Tunnel*’s portrayal of an adoption file review session. The case worker gives Jae-yi access to *all* her information, including the names and

¹¹⁷ Tobias Hübinette, “Disembedded and Free-Floating Bodies Out of Place and Out of Control: Examining the Borderline Existence of Adopted Koreans,” *Adoption & Culture* 1, no. 1 (2007): 130.

¹¹⁸ Kim, *Adopted Territory*, 85.

¹¹⁹ Eastern Social Welfare Society is one of the “big four” adoption agencies that operate in South Korea along with Social Welfare Society, Korean Social Services, and Holt Children’s Services.

¹²⁰ Korean adoptees’ case numbers often become symbolic reminders of one’s losses in being processed through the transnational adoption industrial complex. The 2015 *New York Times Magazine* article, “The Returned,” that shed light on these experiences for the first time for many general public readers who were not familiar with the complexities of transnational adoption opens with the lines, “Laura Klunder’s newest tattoo runs down the inside of her left forearm and reads ‘K85-160,’ a number that dates to her infancy. . . . The police brought her to Holt Children’s Services, a local adoption agency, where a worker assigned Klunder the case number K85-160. It was only two weeks into 1985, but she was already the 160th child to come to the agency that month, and she would go on to be one of 8,800 children sent overseas from South Korea that year.” My own case number from Holt, assigned to me on March 1, 1983 is K83-873. Maggie Jones, “The Returned: Why a Generation of Adoptees Is Returning to South Korea,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 18, 2015, 30.

addresses of her previous guardians. Further, the fact that Jae-yi can read Korean and is thus not beholden to the caseworker to act as translator, who may screen certain sensitive details from the adoptee is not typical. Rather, most adoptees do not have enough Korean language fluency to navigate the intricacies of such documents and paperwork to be able to identify discrepancies. Despite these inaccuracies, this scene does capture the hazy half-truths that are rife in many adoptees' paperwork. As Jae-yi scans the paperwork that is all written in Korean, she notices that her parent/guardian is listed as a woman named Shin Mi-hee, even though she knows her parents are named Park Kwang-ho and Shin Yeon-sook. "Were both of your parents dead when you went abroad?" the caseworker asks. "Yes, that's what I heard," Jae-yi confirms. "Sending a child abroad for international adoption requires the child's parental consent," the caseworker explains. "But, back then, a relative or a social worker would sometimes register the child under his or her family before sending them abroad." The caseworker's explanation reflects the practices some of the adoption agencies utilized to render thousands of Korean children "social orphans," and thus, eligible for transnational adoption. By altering names, dates, and personal details on children's intake records, and by creating new family registries under which the child was the only family member, adoption agencies manufactured orphans that on paper, were unattached to any Korean family or kin in order to meet the overseas demand for adoptable children.

Throughout the series, Jae-yi demonstrates the "lonely and tough" life she lives as an adoptee. I believe it is important to note that while the majority of the portrayals of Korean adoptees in contemporary Korean dramas are of male adoptees, *Tunnel* employs a female adoptee in its storyline. I read this as a reflection of what Ji-Yeon Yuh identifies as the gendered quality of South Korea's relationship with Western nations, including the United States. In the context of Korean camptown women, Yuh explains, "The projection of camptown women as an other who then affirms the self-identity of the Korean nation follows a gendered pattern. . . . The self-identity as a sovereign nation is a distinctly masculine one. To keep itself masculine and sovereign, it must banish the feminine and the subordinate."¹²¹ Similar to camptown women, female orphans and adoptees represent South Korea's history as a victim, a subordinate to stronger sovereign powers. Jae-yi's position as other in both South Korea as well as the United Kingdom (of which, it was said, that the sun never set on the British Empire) is symbolic of South Korea's desire to distance itself from its reliance on support from Western imperial powers. However, perhaps the fact that the writers of *Susanne Brink's Arirang*, *Ireland*, and *Tunnel* chose to have their feminine, victimized adoptee characters adopted to Western countries *other than* the United States shows how beholden South Korea still is as the blame of adoptees' issues is focused away from the United States, so as not to offend South Korea's "big brother" protector. In contrast to these feminine outsiders, Daniel Pitt and Han Jae-joon's masculine characters represent the modern South Korean national identity as independent, sovereign, and successful. The ease with which Daniel Pitt and Han Jae-joon navigate the social, political and economic spheres of and between the West and Korea represent South Korea's desire to appear cosmopolitan (and thus, masculine) on the international stage.

Unlike Daniel Pitt and Han Jae-joon, who seem to pass as insiders within South Korean society, but ultimately find they do not belong due to their adoptee identity, Jae-yi begins her narrative as an outsider and slowly works her way into acceptance by her Korean peers, even finding the romantic love that so eluded Daniel. I argue that the difference in Jae-yi's trajectory lies in the fact that she turns out to not really be an adoptee. While time travel renders Jae-yi an orphan, in separating her from her birth father, it also works to reunite them. Further, time travel

¹²¹ Yuh, "Out of the Shadows: Camptown Women, Military Brides, and Korean (American) Communities," 246.

ultimately works to render Jae-yi's orphanhood nonexistent. Having solved the serial murderer case in the present, Detective Kwang-ho returns to his wife in 1985. With his return to his proper time, the present (or rather, future) is altered. Kwang-ho is there for the birth of his daughter, the car accident that killed Yeon-sook never occurs, and Yeon-ho grows up in South Korea within the embrace of her two birth parents and her love interest in present day growing up with her as the boy next door. The trauma of orphanhood and adoption which led to Jae-yi's loneliness and unbelonging never occurs.

The exploration of temporality and time travel are not new to the Korean film industry. Anthony Leong identifies "True Love and Time Travel-Romance Films" as an emergent hybrid genre of Korean cinema.¹²² He finds the theme of "separat[ion] by insurmountable barriers" which is popular in Korean romantic melodramas to carry over to time travel-romance films, reflecting "the country's psyche that has been divided by ideology and war into the democratic South and the communist North."¹²³ David Martin-Jones posits that time travel in Korean cinema serves as a means of "decompress[ing] the process through which national identity was rapidly formed under 'compressed modernity'" in South Korea.¹²⁴ He notes that the shift focus in time travel films from a national to an international time travel narrative reflects the "shifting position of the South Korean film industry over the past decade, from national growth to international prominence."¹²⁵ The prominence of the transnational Korean adoptee character in the time travel narrative of *Tunnel* similarly reflects the recent international scope of Korean film and culture as well as its social makeup. The unexpected return of thousands of transnational Korean adoptees to their homeland since the 1990s has certainly altered the ways in which South Koreans understand transnationality and the Korean diaspora. Time travel in relation to adoption in *Tunnel* thus becomes a means through which new notions of Korean subjecthood can be negotiated and explored.¹²⁶

Conclusion

These days, with hundreds of adult Korean transnational adoptees returning to Korea each year, Kimberly McKee argues that "it is clear that they are being reincorporated into the neoliberal nation-state."¹²⁷ The increased visibility of transracial adoptees in South Korea has led to the observation that "the Korean adoption issue has left several marks upon contemporary Korean popular culture figuring into a wide range of genres."¹²⁸ While the inclusion of transnational adoptee characters seems to be a step toward the acknowledgement and acceptance of Korean adoptees in South Korean culture and society, close readings of these narratives reveal

¹²² Anthony C.Y. Leong, *Korean Cinema: The New Hong Kong* (Victoria: Trafford, 2002), 117.

¹²³ Leong, 117.

¹²⁴ David Martin-Jones, "Decompressing Modernity: South Korean Time Travel Narratives and the IMF Crisis," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 4 (Summer 2007): 46.

¹²⁵ Martin-Jones, 47.

¹²⁶ I would also add that the adoptee experience in general lends itself to the speculative nature of time travel and alternate reality narratives. Every adoptee imagines what their lives might have been like had they not been adopted.

¹²⁷ Tobias Hübinette's analysis of South Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare data indicates that between 1993 and 2001, between 1,236 and 2,760 adult adoptees visited their Korean adoption agencies each year. The centralized Korean Adoption Services agency reports that 4,790 adoptees visited the office to request their records from the agency's inception in 2012 to 2015. Hübinette, "Korean Adoptions/Adoptees Statistics 1953-2004," 4; Claire Lee, "Korean Adoptees Struggle for Records Access," *Korean Herald*, November 3, 2015, digital edition, sec. Social Affairs, <https://www.adoptioninstitute.org/news/korean-adoptees-struggle-for-records-access/>; McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 148.

¹²⁸ Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 92.

tokenizing and stereotyping of adoptee representations. Such representations are consistent across Korean media genres: from a romantic comedy, to a medical drama, to a sci-fi police thriller, common patterns are evident in the depiction of transnational adoptee characters.¹²⁹ Adoptees are either showcased as the perfect cosmopolitan Korean subject with no acknowledgement of the personal trauma transnational adoption renders on its subjects nor the problematic social inequalities that drive the transnational adoption industry, or they are portrayed as inherent outsiders incompatible with integration into Korean society. Both depictions, I argue, work to promote a unified Korean nationalist narrative. The successful adoptee appropriated into Korean society demonstrates South Korea's commitment to its future as a capable global partner on the international stage. In contrast, the ostracized outsider demonstrates the close connection South Korea maintains with its past as a unified entity that has survived the millennia by way of ethnic nationalism. Which leaves Korean adoptees here, in the present, in a position they've always occupied: somewhere caught in the middle, not quite anywhere at all. Such a space can be precarious to navigate. In the next chapter, I discuss how adoptees have made this marginalized space their own.

¹²⁹ The highly-anticipated 2018 drama, *Mr. Sunshine*, starring Lee Byung-hun and Kim Tae-ri also features a transnational Korean adoptee character. The series is set in the time period immediately before Japanese occupation in Korea, thus expanding the recent generic reach of Korean adoptee representations to *sageuk* (historical period drama) as well. Eung-bok Lee, *Mr. Sunshine* (*미스터 션샤인*) (South Korea: tvN, 2018).

Chapter Five

Uncovering the Hidden and Untold: Transnational Korean Adoptees Telling Their Own Stories

While previous chapters have examined how mainstream media have understood and represented transnational Korean orphans and adoptees, this chapter seeks to explore how Korean orphans and adoptees themselves understand and express their identities, histories, and experiences. I maintain that while it is important to be critical of mainstream representations of transnational Korean adoption, it is perhaps even more important to see how Korean adoptees represent themselves. Catherine Ceniza Choy affirms that

In order to fully comprehend the history of Asian international and transnational adoption, we must engage with this body of work because it shows that adoptees are not solely the “precious objects” of rescue and affection. . . . Rather, like international social service workers, independent adoption agencies, and adoptive parents, they, too, are historical actors in the making of international adoption history. And, as adult adoptees, they narrate this history differently.¹

Examining the histories and legacies of transnational adoption from an adoptee-centered position reveal far more complex, nuanced, and contradictory perspectives of transnational adoption than American and Korean popular representations provide.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the formation of a distinct Korean adoptee identity and community. Understanding how adoptees identify themselves and connect and organize with other adoptees is important for reading how and why adoptees represent and express their experiences. I use Dan Matthews’ docu-series *aka SEOUL* to illustrate the intricacies and intersectionalities of Korean adoptee identities and communities. Rather than the infantilized representations of adoptees in American popular media or the Korean portrayals of adoptees as affluent, refined, and existing only as a reflection of South Korea’s global image, *aka SEOUL* reveals the diversity of the Korean adoptee community and the ways in which adoptees’ multiple identities intersect and inform the ways in which they navigate the world. From there, I consider adoptee-created documentaries that challenge the nationalist narratives of transnational Korean adoption by exposing the problematic mechanisms of the transnational adoption industrial complex that popular narratives work to obscure. Examining Deann Borshay Liem’s *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* and Jane Jin Kaisen’s *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger*, I highlight how the narratives of these documentaries deliberately uncover the genealogies of militarism, capitalism, and the exploitation of reproductive labor that are inherently intertwined with South Korea’s transnational adoption industry. Finally, I propose how adoptee-created entries from the *Adoptee & Alien* art exhibit can be read as acts of adoptee decolonization.

Susie Woo celebrates the fact that

Through oral history, documentary film, memoir, novels, and art, Korean adoptees are telling their own stories that critique the work of US and South Korean states, while offering new forms of kinship that extend beyond staid notions of family. Their interventions show the other side of public representations that tout the rapidly assimilating Korean adoptee.²

Thus, I select these productions as representative of the spectrum of Korean adoptee cultural productions. While Kaisen and Borshay Liem’s films are representative of the rich

¹ Choy, *Global Families*, 131.

² Woo, *Framed by War*, 25.

documentarian tradition of Korean adoptee culture, Matthews' work symbolizes the new generation of media produced by adoptees. The art pieces that comprise the *Adoptee & Alien* exhibit demonstrate that beyond film, adoptees are utilizing a diversity of platforms and disciplines of creative expression as a means to resist the hegemonic identities and expectations imposed upon them.

KAD Nation: The Formation of Korean Adoptee Identities and Communities

With the history of transnational Korean adoption spanning nearly seventy years and comprising a population of over 200,000 adoptees globally, the formation of a distinct Korean adoptee identity and community has grown and has been validated as Korean adoptees have come of age, found themselves, and found one another. Tobias Hübinette argues that both Western and Korean perspectives on Korean adoptees fail to fully encompass the Korean adoptee experience:

Governed by left-liberalism, the dominant Western view on international adoption has been designated as the "liberal paradigm" by Kirton. Its clear message is that life in the West is best, and that people in the West have the right to adopt children from non-Western countries in the name of paternalistic humanism and developmental thinking. . . . The unequal situation is loaded with demands of loyalty, guilt and gratitude as the wealthiest of the rich in the receiving countries adopt the most shunned and unwanted in the "Third World."³

Conversely, from a South Korean standpoint, Hübinette argues that:

By automatically including adopted Koreans as an integrated part of a global Korean community, the Korean government ignores the fact that the group would not be considered as an ethnic group or a diaspora in the classical Western sense because they lack everything from a common language to any traces of endogamy or a myth of a homeland. Furthermore, the fact that the adopted Koreans have lived most of their lives in a non-Korean setting is simply overlooked."⁴

Instead of these one-dimensional characterizations of the transnational Korean adoptee experience, Hübinette proposes understanding the Korean adoptee identity as occupying a "third space." Expanding on Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concept of the "third space," where "culture has no unity, purity or fixity, and where primordial notions of race and nation have been replaced by a floating and hybrid existence," Hübinette argues that transnational Korean adoptees occupy a space "between their birth country's utopian dream of a global ethnic Korean community, where the adoptees are essentialised as Korean brethren, and a Western culture demanding assimilation and loyalty."⁵

This notion of existing in a liminal, in-between space is a common theme in adoptee narratives. Wendy Marie Laybourn's survey of the experiences of transnational Korean adoptees found that "Korean adoptees often report feeling in-between races, cultures, and identities," and "articulate feeling in-between the Whiteness of their adoptive families and the Korean-ness of

³ Tobias Hübinette, "Adopted Koreans and the Development of Identity in the 'Third Space,'" *Adoption & Fostering* 28, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 20. Derek Kirton frames the adoption of black and minority ethnic (BME) children in the United Kingdom in three paradigms: liberalism, black radicalism, and post-modernism. Derek Kirton, "Race", *Ethnicity and Adoption* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2000).

⁴ Hübinette, "Adopted Koreans and the Development of Identity in the 'Third Space,'" 21.

⁵ Hübinette, 23.

their heritage culture.”⁶ Raised in transracial families in predominately-white communities, many Korean adoptees struggle to find spaces of belonging in their adoptive countries and communities, but also feel disconnected from their Korean heritage. In the first anthology of writing by Korean adoptees, David Miller’s poem, “Tightrope” describes the precariousness the Korean adoptee experience:

Walking a tightrope
Pulled on both sides
Korea
America
For if I fall either way
I lose a part of me.⁷

Miller likens his identity as a transnational Korean adoptee to balancing on a tightrope as expectations about Koreanness and Americanness pull him in opposite directions, threatening to unbalance him. However, Miller feels unable to align himself with either a Korean or American identity, as choosing one over another would negate an essential aspect of himself.

Such an existence can be isolating. Thomas Park Clement relates, “I had lived here [in the United States] for so long, and I had never met [another Korean adoptee], and you get the feeling that you’re the only one.”⁸ Connecting with other adoptees, despite differences in age, upbringing, and even language and nationality, is a powerful affirmation of legitimacy. One adoptee likens meeting other adoptees to “taking off rose-colored glasses, seeing how the world really is. . . . Maybe people really do think I’m Korean!”⁹

While large-scale transnational adoption from South Korea started in the 1950s, it wasn’t until the late-1980s and early-1990s that adoptees began networking and establishing groups and organizations that centered on their shared adoptee identity. Although the majority of transnational Korean adoptees were placed in the United States, and Korean adoptees from the U.S. have historically had more visibility, the first organization created for and by transnational Korean adoptees was formed in Sweden in 1986. Adopterade Koreaners Föening (Association of Adopted Koreans, AKF) was originally founded through informal networks between adoptee acquaintances and word-of-mouth. Within a year, the group had grown to one hundred members, and AKF’s founder, Mattias Tjeder estimates that more than nine hundred adoptees have passed through the organization since its establishment in 1986.¹⁰ Tjeder recounts that it was important that AKF remain an adoptees-only space: “We didn’t want anyone else to decide what we should do; we wanted to be free.”¹¹ With the founding of AKF, the creation of subsequent adoptee associations and organizations followed in Europe, the United States, and even South Korea. Eleana Kim finds that like AKF, many other groups similarly made membership exclusive to Korean adoptees. Pioneering Korean adoptee advocate Sunny Jo asserts, “KADs were making a

⁶ Wendy Marie Laybourn, “Being a Transnational Korean Adoptee, Becoming Asian American,” *Contexts* 17, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 31, 34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504218812866>.

⁷ David Miller, “Tightrope,” in *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees*, ed. Tonya Bishoff and Jo Rankin (San Diego: Pandal Press, 1997), 107.

⁸ Kim, *Adopted Territory*, 84.

⁹ Kim, 94.

¹⁰ Kim, 107.

¹¹ Kim, 107.

statement both to ourselves and to the public: We are no longer children, but independent adults with our own unique concerns and issues.”¹²

Eleana Kim identifies these adoptee spaces and organizations as “adopted territories” which she defines as “networks of adoptees and their activities, situated in a range of virtual and actual locations, that comprise the transnational Korean adoptee counterpublic.”¹³ Within these adopted territories, Korean adoptees have constructed distinct identities and communities that are not necessarily contingent on a Korean or adoptive country identity. Sunny Jo states that “based on discrimination and feelings of alienation both in Korea and in our adoptive societies, KADs have increasingly started seeing our culture as separate and different from the cultures of both Korea and our adoptive countries.”¹⁴ In the shared histories of being transnational, transracial adoptees raised in the white Global North, Korean adoptee culture enables adoptees to “realiz[e] that we are not inferior to the culture into which we were born nor the mainstream culture and society seen as ‘saving us.’”¹⁵ By connecting with one another, Korean adoptees are legitimizing their occupancy of a space that exists outside of the constructed East-West binary. As Eleana Kim observes, “A public face of ‘Korean adopteeness’ is being constructed, registering a growing presence and self-conscious building of ‘community’ among Korean-born people adopted by families in the West.”¹⁶ Korean adoptees are connecting and creating communities in which their experiences as transnational adoptees are shared and affirmed. Rather than allowing themselves to be defined by hegemonic notions of race, ethnicity, and culture, Korean adoptees strive to establish their own self-determined identities and communities.

The formation of these collective Korean adoptee identities and communities reflects the non-normative subjecthood that Korean adoptees embody in that these community spaces often do not necessarily occupy physical spaces. Sunny Jo describes the importance the internet has played in developing a feeling of collectiveness among Korean adoptees worldwide: “Dispersed out across the globe, numerous KADs have attempted to create a unity and find commonalities on the Internet. Cyberspace has been used as a meeting place for an ethnic community which is separated by linguistic, cultural and geographical boundaries.”¹⁷ That is, while many adoptees are raised in relatively isolated pockets from one another across the globe, the advent of the digital age has enabled transnational Korean adoptees to connect, share their thoughts and experiences, and find a sense of community and belonging. Sunny Jo relates how websites, mailing lists, online forums, and social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook have created networks among Korean adoptees across the world. She emphasizes the importance the internet has played in connecting Korean adoptees and creating a distinct ethnogenesis—the creation or evolution of a new ethnic group through the blending of other cultures with subsequent creation of a new and distinct culture—of Korean adopteeness. She explains that “cyberspace is vital in reimagining identity...it is an especially important medium for Korean

¹² KAD is common abbreviation of Korean ADoptee used by adoptees in referring to themselves and their adoptee communities. My own initials also happen to spell KAD. Sunny Jo, “The Making of KAD Nation,” in *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption*, ed. Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006), 287.

¹³ Kim, *Adopted Territory*, 9.

¹⁴ Sunny Jo, “Scattered Seeds,” 287.

¹⁵ Sunny Jo, 289.

¹⁶ Eleana Kim, “Korean Adoptee Auto-Ethnography: Refashioning Self, Family and Finding Community,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 16, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2001): 43.

¹⁷ Kim, “Adoption in Korea, Then and Now,” 64.

adoptees. . . .KADs are making use of the Internet to transmit their own stories, with the result that these accounts become part of the established ‘knowledge’ in the area.”¹⁸

Kimberly McKee observes that Korean adoptees use the internet not only to connect, but to create cultural productions in nontraditional, innovative ways. She highlights Korean adoptee Dan Matthews’ docu-series, *aka DAN* as a cultural production that utilizes a virtual platform to explore and negotiate multiple identities.¹⁹ Released on YouTube in a series of nine segments that document Dan Matthews’ return to South Korea for the 2013 IKAA Gathering and his reunion with his birthfamily, *aka DAN* “reflects a broader cultural shift in how Asian Americans engage with popular culture. This dissemination method reflects how the site provides Asian Americans, including adoptees, the opportunity to create and carve out a space for themselves to be seen and heard.”²⁰

Matthews’ follow-up online docu-series, *aka SEOUL* returns to Korea three years later conjunction with the 2016 IKAA Gathering.²¹ Produced by Matthews in association with the Asian American YouTube channel ISAtv and NBC Asian America, *aka SEOUL* provides an update on Matthews’ reunion with his birthfamily and presents the diverse experiences and identities of five other adult transnational Korean adoptees who accompany him to the 2016 IKAA Gathering in Seoul. Reflecting on the viewership of his documentaries, Matthews shares that “there are a lot of people that are able to relate to it just because we come from weird family situations. . . . Maybe they’re not necessarily adopted, but they’re living with their aunt or the uncle.” Kimberly McKee argues that Matthews and other Korean adoptees who use digital platforms like YouTube “strategically use new technologies, increasing their audience reach to individuals who might otherwise not engage in these conversations.”²² Through the stories of Dan Matthews and his Korean adoptee companions, *aka SEOUL* works to connect a broad virtual audience to the Korean adoptee experience through its exploration of how transnational Korean adoption intersects with other aspects of social, political, and self-identity, encouraging viewers to reflect on the meanings and impacts of transnational Korean adoption.

In the first chapter of the docu-series, entitled “When My Mothers Met,” Dan Matthews reflects on the past three years since his reunion with his birthfamily.²³ “It’s tragic but it’s also really hilarious to me,” he says, referring to the fact that the barriers of language, space, and time make connecting with this birthfamily on a meaningful level difficult. Staying in contact through the Korean messenger app, Kakao, Matthews’ birthfather sends Matthews messages in Korean. Even with the assistance of Google Translate, “I still have no idea what he’s saying to me and so . . . then I’ll send him like an emoji of like a duck with a thumbs up.” Matthews video chats with his Korean family every few months, but all their communication is facilitated through a third party (usually one of Matthews’ friends) who translates their conversation from Korean to

¹⁸ Kim, 66.

¹⁹ Jon Maxwell, *aka DAN* (Mayrock Media, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzGHY6enzDs>.

²⁰ Kimberly McKee, “Gendered Adoptee Identities: Performing Trans-Pacific Masculinity in the 21st Century,” in *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World: Diaspora, Empire, and Race*, ed. Catherine Ceniza Choy and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, vol. 1, *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World* (Leiden, 2017), 231.

²¹ Jon Maxwell, *aka SEOUL* (NBC Asian America, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBtbIsNyykM>.

²² McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 80.

²³ This first chapter of *aka SEOUL* is entitled, “When My Mothers Met.” In scenes that are reminiscent of Deann Borshay Liem’s foundational documentary, *First Person Plural*, *aka SEOUL* shows Dan Matthews’ adoptive mother traveling to South Korea to meet her son’s birth mother. Lynn Matthews talks about being connected to Matthews’ birth mother through their shared love of him, demonstrating another way in which transnational adoption redefines notions of family and kinship.

English and back. In sharing the difficulties he has in communicating with his birthfamily, Matthews challenges the contemporary South Korean representations of adoptees who return seamlessly into the folds of Korean society. Although in some ways he resembles the sophisticated adoptee archetype as a successful musical artist and filmmaker with a significant fanbase, his Korean language skills are nonexistent, blocking him from “passing” as a native Korean and navigating Korean society with ease.

Prompted by Dan Matthews’ question of “How many other untold adoptee stories are there?” which demonstrates Matthews’ recognition of the privileging of some adoption narratives over others, the film transitions from his story to those of five other Korean adoptees. Seated around a table in a Korean bar, Matthews and the other adoptees play Korean drinking games. They smile, laugh, and appear comfortable around each other as they literally consume Korean culture in the form of soju bombs and traditional Korean snacks. The narrative arc of the documentary is arranged around the contrivance of the drinking game—passing a soju bottle around, the adoptees take turns pouring soju into a shot glass floating in a glass of beer. When the shot glass inevitably sinks into the beer, the adoptee who poured the shot downs the soju bomb and segues into the telling of their story.

This lighthearted scene of adoptee camaraderie can be read as an example of the Korean adoptee counterpublic that Eleana Kim explores in *Adopted Territory*. Kim observes that the “creation of social spaces of authentic belonging” are “a key part of claiming cultural citizenship and social legitimacy” for adoptees.²⁴ It is significant that the adoptees choose to congregate at an anonymous Seoul bar in order to share their adoption experiences, rather than a more ceremonial or “official” space, especially with the knowledge that the global Korean adoptee community’s largest conference, The Gathering, is taking place in Seoul during the documentary’s filming. *aka SEOUL*’s participants’ decision to meet “offsite” shows how “identifying as a Korean adoptee has become a politically engaged choice that is tied to contemporary politics of recognition and the production and circulation of counterimages and counternarratives”—and, I would add, counterspaces—“to the dominant trope of the Korean adoptee.”²⁵ The bar scenes demonstrate that even within designated Korean adoptee spaces, the creation of spaces *counter* to the adoptee counterpublic is also a legitimate expression and embodiment of Korean adopteehood.

In the segment entitled “As White as Possible,” Siri Szemenkar shares that she is a Korean adoptee who was raised in Sweden. Her experiences reveal how the adoption rhetoric of colorblind love is problematic and actually a form of racism. “I guess that growing up as an adoptee in Sweden was quite difficult,” Siri states, as family photos of her surrounded by her blond-haired, blue-eyed Scandinavian family appear on screen. “I didn’t have anyone else I could really relate to whether it was being adopted or even just being Asian.”

Kim Park Nelson notes that “Paradoxically, two of the main problems facing racialized groups of people are hypervisibility and total invisibility.”²⁶ She argues that these two racisms are linked and operate in tandem. In terms of hypervisibility, negative racial stereotypes are imposed upon people of color. Invisibility “discriminates through ignorance by not noticing difference at all, and by ignoring the needs of communities with culture-specific practices, desires, and requirements.”²⁷ Park Nelson shows how the deployment of these racisms contribute

²⁴ Kim, *Adopted Territory*, 139.

²⁵ Kim, 137.

²⁶ Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians*, 123.

²⁷ Park Nelson, 123.

to the construction of an (impossible) White identity for Korean adoptees. In describing how she strove to be “as White as possible,” Siri states that “My parents really just wanted me to feel Swedish and feel fully [included in] the family by almost not allowing me to even see that I looked different or just completely ignored it.” Siri continues by describing how she internalized the prejudices about Korea her parents voiced to her as a child about their visit to South Korea: “What they told me never sounded like good things. People didn’t understand them and they couldn’t get a fork. They couldn’t eat anything, everything was strange . . . it was just this weird culture where . . . nothing worked the way it should work.” Her parents’ ignoring of their daughter’s racial difference in conjunction with their perspectives of Korea and Koreans as uncivilized (forkless) and incompetent shaped Siri’s rejection of her Koreanness. Such racial performativity works to prove the adoptee and adoptive family’s “normalcy within broader negotiations of whiteness and Asianness.”²⁸ That is, the construction of a White adoptee identity works to erase the “unnaturalness” of transracial, transnational adoption as a means of familymaking.

Yet the transnational adoption industrial complex is not a “natural” mode of reproduction. It is an assemblage that is informed and driven by militarism, imperialism, citizenship, and the commodification of children under the guise of rescue and love. *aka SEOUL*’s featuring of Peter Boskey and his creative projects uncovers the “unnaturalness” of transnational adoption. An adoptee artist who works with textiles, textures, and packaging, Peter describes his approach as an artist:

My artwork is an expression of the adoptee experience in a weird way. It's taking one thing and putting it into a context that isn't sort of native to it. So taking the small Korean child and putting them in the suburbs of Boston isn't necessarily like their natural habitat and then kind of seeing what comes from it, what kind of meaning comes from it.

Peter’s perspective as an adoptee artist in *aka SEOUL* also highlights the ways in which consumerism and transnational adoption are intertwined. Considering a Korean face cream—a product of the multi-billion-dollar Korean beauty industry—made from volcanic clay, he likens its production to the practice of transnational adoption in which the clay is taken out of its natural context “and put into this cute little bottle and this little packaging, and being like, ‘have this for your face!’”

The emerging industry of adoptee homeland or return tourism highlights the ways in which transnational adoption continues to revolve around consumerism. Peter’s entire segment is filmed following him around the shops and markets of Seoul. Seated at a *hanbok* stall, surrounded by bolts of colorful fabric, Peter smiles at the stall’s proprietor, stretching his arms wide, and with a nod, confirms his intention to purchase “all of it.” His perusal of the shops and stalls of Dongdaemun is indicative of the purchasing power of adult Korean adoptees that Kimberly McKee highlights and also speaks to the ways in which Korean adoptees purchase and consume their heritage. Patrick G. Miller observes that “the Korean government and cultural and tourist organizations have seized upon this lucrative opportunity to appeal to the global Korean adoptee diaspora to participate in return journeys” and describes how adoptee return tourism relies upon the commodification of culture.²⁹ Capitalizing on adoptees’ desires to connect with

²⁸ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 62.

²⁹ Patrick G. Miller, “Heritage Tourism and Return Journeys: Place and Identity Construction in Korean Adoptees” (Master’s Thesis, University of Oregon, 2013), 4.

their birthcountry's culture and history, "the motherland and its associated cultural heritage performances are branded, commercialized and marketed to inter-country adoptees."³⁰

Dan Matthews' documentary also shows that Korean adoptee experiences aren't just about being a Korean adoptee. When he introduces himself, the first thing Peter tells us viewers is not the circumstances of his adoption, nor how his adopteehood informs his identity, but that he is gay. Peter's identity as a gay man holds more weight for him than his identity as an adoptee. While he acknowledges that there is certainly overlap and intertwining of these two identities, he divulges that his prioritization of developing and claiming his identity as gay was strategic: "the public's idea of a gay person is much stronger than society's idea of an adopted person."

For Min Matson, another subject of *aka SEOUL*, coming to terms with his gender identity was what enabled him to accept his identity as a Korean and find belonging in the Korean adoptee community. A trans man, he relates that on his first trip back to Korea in 2004 for the Gathering, "not physically matching" his gender identity prevented him from connecting with other adoptees. As a masculine presenting woman, Min found that "there was a lot things about being a female who did not fit in here that made it really hard for me to feel really connected." Min's experience is a reminder that hegemonic assumptions and gatekeeping occur even in adoptee counterpublic spaces that resist orphan and adoptee stereotypes. It wasn't until Min transitioned and explored his adoptee identity as a man that he felt a sense of belonging in the Korean adoptee community.

Yet, as Chelsea Katsaros's narrative reveals, allowing the hegemonically-constructed identities and expectations based on race, gender, and sexuality that are imposed upon Korean adoptees to fall away can result in the dissolution of those kinship ties that adoption assembles. Chelsea shares that when she came out to her adoptive family at nineteen, "that just kind of started the chain of events that led to us not really having a relationship now." Through Chelsea's experience, *aka SEOUL* calls attention to the conditionality of adoptees' acceptance into their adoptive families. I read Chelsea's adoptive family's rejection of her coming out through the lens of gratitude that permeates transnational adoption. Raised in a very religious family, I propose that Chelsea's coming out was viewed as a betrayal of her family's faith, which, in turn, marked her as ungrateful for their love and care. Kim Park Nelson elucidates how performance of gratitude is expected of transnational adoptees for the privilege of their adoption. Ingratitude—as demonstrated through an adoptees' unwillingness or inability to conform to the expectations imposed upon them—"potentially threatens adoptive family systems and relationships, the multimillion-dollar transnational adoption industry, and paternalistic relations between the United States and the nations that supply adoptable children."³¹ "Ungrateful" adoptees are thus deemed unworthy of love and kinship. Their transformation from orphan to adoptee is revoked which refigures them as Other, casting them outside the boundaries of family belonging.

Kim Park Nelson calls for an approach to transnational Korean adoptees that understands them as "people who navigate multiple identities and engage in complicated conversations with the dominant discourses that would seek to categorize them neatly within their so-called real identities."³² *aka SEOUL*'s engagement with how the intersectionalities of race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status converge and intertwine with Korean adopteehood offers a window into the diversity of the Korean adoptee experience. The film reveals the adopted

³⁰ Miller, 5.

³¹ Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians*, 148.

³² Park Nelson, 126.

territories that Korean adoptees have carved out as spaces and identities that transcend the binaries of birth- and adoptive-country nationality.

“What is New About Your Erasable Korean Mother?”: Uncovering the Genealogies of Transnational Korean Adoption

While many Korean adoptees use creative expression to explore, claim, and expand Korean adoptee identities, cultural productions are also used to critique the systems and histories of transnational adoption. Popular media representations in the United States and South Korea showcase adoptees as proof of the nations’ progressivism, multiculturalism, and modernity. Such representations pull transnational Korean adoption from its social and historical contexts of militarism, capitalism, and the exploitation of gendered reproductive labor. Jodi Kim explicitly links transnational adoption to Cold War imperialist agendas:

This intersection, or conjoined genealogies of cold war imperialisms in Asia and transracial adoptions out of Asia, impels us to reckon with the complex politics and affects of transracial adoption as not simply or solely an individual private matter motivated by altruistic desires to form new kinships and to provide better lives for orphaned and abandoned children. It is also a highly racialized and gendered process implicated in the United States’ imperialist, capitalist modernity and indeed its foundational or constitutive projects of racial formation and “nation building” both domestically and internationally.³³

Documentarians Deann Borshay Liem and Jane Jin Kaisen grapple with the complex politics and affects of transnational adoption in their works by tracing how what Ann Laura Stoler names the “intimate domains—sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and child rearing” are strategically used as tools for the management of imperial rule.³⁴ Thus, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee and The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger* uncover the ways in which imperialism and commercialism drive the TAIC under the shroud of sentimentalism and connect the TAIC to other imperialist strategies that have employed the domains of intimacy and domesticity to manage the empire.³⁵

Deann Borshay Liem’s *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* opens with the image of a child’s bare feet being traced with a pencil on a piece of paper. As the pencil progresses around the child’s feet, documenting their dimensions, the scene is interspersed with archival footage of Korean families and children, at play, at leisure. The scene is dreamlike in quality. The grainy and overexposed filter seems to remove these images from a present reality, and the way in which the camera flickers and switches abruptly between the child’s feet and the candid family footage makes it difficult to follow a logical, linear progression of time. The child’s feet accentuate this feeling of disconnectedness. The camera focuses closely on the toes and arches, but the feet remain removed from the context of the body.

We hear Borshay Liem’s voiceover narrating the scene: “I wish I could call this memory. My memory. Of my sisters and friends playing together. I wish I had a picture for all the lost moments of the past so that I could string them together into one unbroken history. Instead, I

³³ Jodi Kim, “An ‘Orphan’ with Two Mothers: Transnational and Transracial Adoption, the Cold War, and Contemporary Asian American Cultural Politics,” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (December 2009): 856.

³⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 23.

³⁵ Borshay Liem, *Cha Jung Hee*; Jane Jin Kaisen and Guston Sondin-Kung, *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger*, PAL 16:9, documentary (itinerant_sends_for_itinerant, 2010).

invent stories of what might have been, inserting myself into spaces I never occupied.” As she speaks, scissors cut the traced footprints from the paper. The paper is held up to the sky where the sun fills the negative space where the child’s feet had been. Borshay Liem orchestrates a sense of loss and incompleteness in her opening scene. As Catherine Ceniza Choy writes, “One of the film’s major contributions that should not be overlooked . . . is its meditation on loss.”³⁶ Borshay Liem’s reference to inventing stories resonates with adoptees trying to fill in the blanks of their lost histories and speculating on how their lives might have been different had they remained in Korea. However, I also read Borshay Liem’s tableau in terms of the ways in which the United States has rewritten its history in Korea. The U.S. military has inserted itself into Korean spaces which has led to the severing and re-suturing of family histories that start and end abruptly in atypical ways. And like the child’s feet, removed from the context of her body, transnational Korean adoption is removed from the context of war and imperialism.

Borshay Liem is quick to reconnect adoption’s history to Cold War geopolitics, however. The next scene presents us with Korean War archival footage of war planes flying above the clouds. Thatched-roofed huts explode, and Korean women and children hurry away from the destruction. She recounts the narrative her adoptive parents had told her about her adoption over the scenes of war and violence: “Your real mother died while giving birth to you, and your father was killed during the Korean War. That’s why we adopted you.” Although she never questioned the story as a child, in adulthood, Borshay Liem realizes this story cannot be true: born in 1957 and adopted in 1966, Borshay Liem’s birth places her several years removed from the Korean War.

Kimberly McKee explains, “this fictional story went unchallenged because it fit within a particular narrative celebrating child rescue. A war orphan is much more appealing than a child placed in an orphanage by loving biological parents because they lacked the economic means. . . . The trope of the war orphan was so engrained in society that it was accepted even though it defied historical and biological reality.”³⁷ Despite its historical and biological impossibility, this story became fact through its inscription in Cha Jung Hee’s official documents and its continued retelling by Borshay Liem’s adoptive parents.

Still, Borshay Liem recognizes that “Although I was adopted after the Korean War, in many ways, the war still shaped my destiny. . . . What Americans saw and heard about the war led to a large-scale relief effort. . . . And eventually, planeloads of orphans were sent to America and Europe for adoption.” Here, again, Borshay Liem draws a direct connection between the United States’ involvement in the Korean War and the formation of the transnational adoption industry. During her voiceover, archival footage plays of U.S. battleships cutting through the waves, American soldiers parachuting out of airplanes, and U.S. tanks crawling across a ruined landscape. Images of fleeing Korean refugees, prone bodies of civilian casualties, and scruffy Korean children being lifted into the arms of American soldiers add to the montage. Transnational Korean adoption continues today, sixty-six years after the end of war, using the same practices of rendering Korean children social orphans through paperwork and incomplete stories as they did during the war and during Borshay Liem’s adoption thirteen years after the war. This, along with the continued U.S. presence on the Korean peninsula since the Korea War suggests the legacies of American militarism continue to shape transnational adoption to this

³⁶ Choy, *Global Families*, 143.

³⁷ Kimberly McKee, “Rewriting History: Adoptee Documentaries as a Site of Truth-Telling,” in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American Media*, ed. Lori Kido Lopez and Vincent Pham (New York: Routledge, 2017), 124.

day. The continuation of these stories and practices prompts Borshay Liem to “wonde[r] how many others had hidden histories like my own.”

Eun Kyung Min argues that “transnational adoption is fundamentally about women’s bodies and their reproductive labor, about the social and economic value not only of children but also of maternity.” Quoting Eleana Kim, who notes, “Birth mothers — often working-class women, teen mothers, abandoned single mothers, sex workers, and victims of rape — represent the most subordinated groups,” Min asks, “What does it mean that the mother must give up, and be given up, and how is this related to the increasingly globalized ‘traffic of women?’”³⁸ In *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger*, Jane Jin Kaisen draws connections through the shared histories of gendered reproductive violence and exploitation between “comfort women” during Japanese colonialism, the contemporary Korean sex work industry that serves American soldiers, and transnational Korean adoption.

Throughout the film, Kaisen critiques how Western imperialism has disciplined and erased the female body. In scenes of Korea’s contemporary chic metropolitan areas, the camera focuses on subway ads for the ubiquitous plastic surgery clinics, which is juxtaposed with commentary on the “contaminated” bodies of Korean sex workers who service U.S. soldiers, which are relegated to isolated spaces “where you can be dirty and we’re not going to acknowledge it.” As the faceless commentator that accompanies the images of double-folded eyelids and heart-shaped faces remarks: “Looking at the discourse around the *yanggongju*, it’s always that she’s a dirty woman. A contaminated woman. She’s contaminated because she’s had sex with an American. And therefore, her *Koreanness* is contaminated.” America’s influence in South Korea altered the identities of the *yanggongju* as Koreans. Using metaphors of damaged and imperfect bodies, Grace M. Cho connects the “personal illness” that renders sex workers unfit for a Korean identity to social illness. On screen, Cho is interviewed facing away from the camera, shrouded in shadows so that only her silhouette is visible, as if to hide a hideous disfigurement from the camera. She credits the trauma borne by these women and their erasure from Korean society to Korea’s legacy of militarism.

Similarly, the Korean child is erased from Korean society through the social death that renders her an orphan, and thus, eligible for adoption to the West. She is stripped bare “of prior history, kinship, identity, and sociality” through the legal processes that “naturally alienat[e] her and seve[r] her from any recognizable form of social personhood.”³⁹ It is not a stretch to imagine that some of these adoptees are the children of Korean sex workers whose presence has been erased from Korean society, which opens the possibility to consider the generational erasure of Korean bodies that can trace its origins to American military imperialism. Yet, Kaisen’s film enacts “ethnographic refusal” in resisting erasure by bringing the issue into the public discourse and documenting and humanizing the personal narratives of these silenced women. In this way, Kaisen makes clear that the stories of these women cannot be so easily dismissed as a skin blemish or an imperfect nose, and gives credence to Jodi Kim’s contention that the “ends” of empire are “incomplete, full of contradictions, impossibilities, and at times certain failures.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Eun Kyung Min, “The Daughter’s Exchange in Jane Jeong Trenka’s *The Language of Blood*,” *Social Text* 26, no. 1 (2008): 118, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2007-022>.

³⁹ Jodi Kim, “‘The Ending Is Not an Ending At All’: On the Militarized and Gendered Diasporas of Korean Transnational Adoption and the Korean War,” *Positions* 23, no. 4 (November 2015): 818, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-3148418>.

⁴⁰ Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*, Critical American Studies (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 5.

In the Feeling of Kinship, David Eng describes how collective historical traumatic events are “transformed into unspeakable private emotion and grief.”⁴¹ Like Grace M. Cho who connects the personal illness to the larger social illness, Eng shows how private issues of gendered conflict “become the displaced sites of national history, serving to obscure the politics of race and nation.”⁴² Kaisen’s film reframes such traumas and shows how Japanese comfort women have resisted bearing the silencing individualized grief of World War II sexual violence by exposing the trauma and making it public again. In one scene, former comfort women protest outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. An elderly woman yells passionately into a microphone, addressing the crowd:

Because they are false, they don’t reveal the truth. . . I travel around the world telling people about the wrongdoings that happened in the past. . . Like us, no country can get through war without horrifying pain. Whenever a country is at war, women go through hard times. Let’s get the truth out right and then enjoy life in the world without war until we pass away.

By bringing the personal shame of being used by the Japanese for sexual slavery literally out to the public, *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger* shows how the former comfort women begin to heal from the trauma that has haunted them and are made visible again.

However, Tammy Chu points out that the whole history of sexual slavery has yet to be revealed. Some secrets are still silenced. The cooperation of Korea in the abduction and rape of its women is a part of history that remains unacknowledged. Chu argues, “Korea’s role actually hasn’t been talked about too much. Koreans also played a part in these women being abducted or being forced into prostitution.” Chu recognizes that in a colonial setting, at least parts of the colonized population have to be compliant with the colonizers’ agenda. In order for Korea to recover and prosper after the war, this aspect of the history of Korean comfort women was silenced from public discourse. And it is not until recently that Korea’s international standing has been strong enough that it no longer has to depend on cultivating diplomatic ties with Japan to ensure its economic and political security. In footage of the International Tribunal on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, one former comfort woman tearfully testifies, “Making it public was too much for me. I couldn’t tell anyone.” Thus, it has taken fifty years for the plight of comfort women to be unsilenced.

In addition to Korea’s contribution to the comfort women’s circumstances, Kaisen points to how the troubling structure of the transnational adoption industry has been obscured from view as well. Jennifer Kwon Dobbs explains that oftentimes, when adoptees begin searching for answers about their past, “what is uncovered in the process of the search itself is the modes of producing adoptees. It is the apparatus of the adoption industry itself that one ends up uncovering through the process searching.” Rather than the trope of western nations rescuing war-torn orphans, what is revealed is “the way in which information has been immobilized. The way in which records have been reclassified, suppressed, rewritten—altered in some way. . . . The way in which the birthmother’s body is immobilized to produce adoptees.” Upon discovering what has been uncovered in the search, Danish adoptee Maja Lee Langvad reflects,

I have simply been so angry. . . for instance suddenly no longer believing that international adoption is a good thing, no longer to believe in the rescue motif and all the things my adoptive parents have believed in and that I myself also have believed in for many years. . . . I hear stories in Korea from other adoptees who tell me that they were

⁴¹ Eng, *Feeling of Kinship*, 168.

⁴² Eng, 168.

not adopted on a basis that was ethically justifiable. Things like that make me really furious.

The visuals that accompany this commentary certainly suggest a commercial and mechanized process of mass producing adoptable babies. Rows of nameless newborns sway in mechanical rockers and nurse from glass bottles propped up by towels. They are not held or cuddled, breastfed, or given individual attention. In another scene, a hand pages through the contents of a photo album filled with the faces of Korean children, identifiable only by the placards pinned to their chests with their case numbers scrawled across—as if they are posing for a prison mugshot. As if adoption were as uncomplicated as leafing through a catalog, picking out a child to accessorize your family.

In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee speaks to the commodification and manufacturing of adoptees as well. Borshay Liem relates that “news of the plight of orphans after the war reached my parents in the form of ads in newspapers and television. They started supporting Cha Jung Hee through a sponsorship program called the Foster Parents’ Plan. They sent her \$15 a month and in return, received letters from Cha Jung Hee.” While the Borshay’s sponsorship is framed as charity, there is an exchange of services for payment. Like a monthly magazine subscription, the Borshays expected letters from Cha Jung Hee, expressions of gratitude for their donation, and evidence that she was “a true orphan who needs and is worth saving.” Yet, these letters were not even actually from Cha Jung Hee. Instead, they were written by the orphanage’s social worker on Cha Jung Hee’s behalf. As Borshay Liem interviews Hyo-sun Park, the social worker divulges that Cha Jung Hee’s father unexpectedly arrived at the orphanage and took the girl away. However, the Borshays’ donations continued, as did the letters describing the absent Cha Jung Hee’s life at the orphanage. In order to maintain the deception of Cha Jung Hee’s identity as “a true orphan who needs and is worth saving,” when the Borshays decided to adopt the girl, Kang Ok Jin (Deann Borshay Liem) was sent in her place.

“The switch with Cha Jung Hee was born out of a desire to save yet another child from poverty,” Borshay Liem narrates. “And at the same time, it was a business transaction.” The words “Accounting of Adoption Expenses” appear on the screen, followed by descriptions of the costs involved in adopting a child from Korea:

Application Fee \$5.00
Home Study \$100.00
Adoption Services \$200.00
Processing Costs \$300.00
Transportation Costs \$286.00
Attorneys Fees \$200.00.

The ledger breaks down the cost of an orphan’s transformation to an adoptee, belying the fantasy of adoption as purely driven by love. Significantly, in the detailed accounting, no money goes to “the loving biological parents” who placed their child in the orphanage because they “lacked the economic means to effectively feed, clothe, and educate the child.”⁴³ Instead, the fees and costs feed back into the system that manufactures more orphans than an American’s love and money can transform into adoptees, “loop[ing] back in disturbing and unending proliferations.”⁴⁴

Kimberly McKee points to how “adoption is a process of commodification based on the selling of fetishized objects—children,” as evinced in *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*.⁴⁵ Borshay

⁴³ McKee, “Rewriting History: Adoptee Documentaries as a Site of Truth-Telling,” 124.

⁴⁴ Kim, “The Ending Is Not an Ending At All,” 809.

⁴⁵ McKee, “Rewriting History: Adoptee Documentaries as a Site of Truth-Telling,” 124.

Liem plots out the steps it took to transform her from Kang Ok Jin, a girl within an intact birthfamily, to Cha Jung Hee, an orphan eligible (but not really) for adoption: “The first step was to take my picture and simply write Cha Jung Hee's name on the back. Then I was given a guardian who certified that I was an orphan. He, rather than my birth mother, gave his consent to my migration and adoption. The shoes [sent by the Borshays for Cha Jung Hee] completed the deception.” As Borshay Liem takes us through the steps of manufacturing orphanhood, images of her adoption paperwork illustrate the process. Her unsmiling portrait is flipped over to reveal Cha Jung Hee’s name on the back. The camera then pans across a document entitled “CERTIFICATE OF ORPHANHOOD” that lists Song Ki-Sub as Cha Jung Hee’s guardian and who states, “This is to certify that the following described child is a legal orphan abandoned by its parents. . . . I hereby irrevocably consent to her emigration to the United States and her adoption by suitable adoptive parents.” This construction of Cha Jung Hee through papers and documents becomes “a template for a perfect orphan. Once the template existed, any girl could step into it.”

Catherine Ceniza Choy notes that “in our bureaucratic society, documents have the power to simultaneously erase our personal histories and identities and create new ones, especially when they are stacked against a child’s memories.”⁴⁶ *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* shows how the “official” narratives and adoptive parents’ assumptions of the adoptee’s helplessness and naïveté delegitimize, erase, and rewrite the adoptee’s history and experiences. Borshay Liem relates how she told her adoptive parents she was not Cha Jung Hee, but Kang Ok Jin. Her assertions that she was not an orphan, but had a mother and a family back in Korea were dismissed: “No, honey, that part is just a dream. You're a war orphan and both your parents are dead.” When it is revealed that she wasn’t Cha Jung Hee, Borshay Liem’s family “behaved as if nothing had happened,” further invalidating and disempowering her memory and agency as a custodian of her own history and identity.

However, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* also shows how Borshay Liem utilizes the false narratives that erased her original identity to reclaim her agency as an adoptee. In her quest to find the “real” Cha Jung Hee, she visits the Jeonju Police Station to see if they can find any information on Cha Jung Hee’s father. Before they enter the police station, Borshay Liem and her translator discuss their strategy in the parking lot. “So you need to pretend,” her translator coaches her. Borshay Liem agrees “I’m gonna pretend like I am the real Cha Jung Hee and ask for the father.” Because privacy policies would prohibit non-relatives from inquiring at the police station about a person’s whereabouts, Borshay Liem subversively uses the interchangeability of Cha Jung Hee’s identity to her own advantage. After all, “There was no proof I had ever been anyone else.”

The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger also critiques the interchangeability of orphan identities that the TAIC constructs. In one scene, adult adoptees sit in front of a Korean adoption agency, huddled in black shrouds and white papier-mâché *hahoe* masks.⁴⁷ Their difference is only discernable through the adoption case numbers inscribed across the foreheads of the masks in thick, black permanent marker. The adoptees’ individual identities are reduced to numbers, thingifying them and erasing their individuality. Jane Jeong Trenka’s voice recites the following: “What is new about your erasable Korean mother? What is new about the disaster combination of our faces and our speech? Our inability to be identified by Koreans as anything?”⁴⁸ This

⁴⁶ Choy, *Global Families*, 145.

⁴⁷ *Hahoe* masks are traditional Korean masks used in ceremonial dance rituals.

⁴⁸ Jane Jeong Trenka, *Fugitive Visions: An Adoptee’s Return to Korea* (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 2009), 131–32.

segment highlights the anonymity of international adoption, the ways in which the international adoption industry has rendered adoptees as nameless, faceless case numbers, whose history in Korea is erasable, and whose Korean identity is unrecognizable.

However, Trenka's narration continues, changing the way in which we understand the masked, cloaked figures:

Nearly unrecognizable, we pull the batteries out of the clock, tear down the calendar, disregard measurements of time and decide, for once, upon a time that is purely our own. . . . If we have been damaged from violence and the fact that our lives and bodies handed over for a price to complete strangers, why wouldn't we try to salvage what remains of our precious humanity?⁴⁹

Trenka's passage turns expectations of Koreanness and adopteehood upside down. Rather than representing forlorn shapes removed from their humanity, these adoptee activists are reclaiming their Korean identity (as represented by the *hahoe* masks) by branding it with their case numbers. Traditionally, *hahoe* masks were used in intricately-prescribed ritual dance ceremonies. However, the masks were also used in plays that critiqued the hegemonic Yangban ruling class. The adoptees' donning of the masks in the context of the latter half of Trenka's passage can be read as adoptees disregarding how Korean culture is supposed to be performed by embodying it in a way "that is purely our own" to critique the hegemonic structures of the TAIC. Unapologetically rejecting their commodification, their performance in front of the adoption agency claims the space of their orphaning their own.

Despite the explicit critiques of the standardization and sanitation of comfort women's, sex workers', and adoptees' experiences, *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger* embodies what David Eng calls a "documentary of affect." The film "proposes an alternative historical understanding in which, as Janet Sternburg observes, the 'primacy of truths claimed by facticity yields to the equally pressing claims of interior life.'"⁵⁰ That is, by rewriting the suppressed histories of the three generations of Korean women and "how they have been affected by a combination of militarism, colonialism, and patriarchy," Kaisen is able to trace genealogical lines of kinship and affect between the women.⁵¹ As Jane Jeong Trenka walks through in the film: "One step away from a Korean American woman married to a white man, one more or the same step away from a Korean military wife with a soldier husband. Another step away from a war bride. Another step. War booty. Step. Comfort woman. Step again. Comfort child." With this passage, Kaisen traces the steps of transformation that erases Korean women's autonomy and renders them exploitable imperial subjects.

In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee and *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger* position the transnational adoption industrial complex within Cold War imperial contexts. These documentaries uncover the genealogies of imperialism, capitalism, and the disciplining of female bodies that inform transnational Korean adoption which are obscured by the sentimental adoption narratives of love and rescue. *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* points to the legacies of the Korean War and how they continue to shape transnational adoption experiences and narratives. *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger* connects the silencing and erasure of "contaminated" women's bodies to the expulsion and social death of Korean orphans from South

⁴⁹ Trenka, 131–32.

⁵⁰ Eng, *Feeling of Kinship*, 167.

⁵¹ Jane Jin Kaisen and Guston Sondin-Kung, Videonale 13 Artist Interviews: Jane Jin Kaisen & Guston Sondin-Kung, interview by Olena Chervonik, March 28, 2011, <http://v13.videonale.org/en/artist/452-jin-kaisen-jane-sondin-kung-guston>.

Korean society. Uncovering these mechanisms of social control reveals how the TAIC manufactures and commodifies orphanhood. However, Deann Borshay Liem and Jane Jin Kaisen also demonstrate how adoptees contest these hegemonic identity constructions through the reclaiming and manipulation of their constructed orphan identities. The recognition of adoptees' claiming of these identities as an act of resistance relegitimizes adoptees' memories and experiences and recognizes them as knowledge producers and agents of their own histories and identities.

Crossing the Borderlands: Adoptee Decolonization in *Adoptee & Alien*

While Deann Borshay Liem and Jane Jin Kaisen's films connect histories of imperialism to transnational Korean adoption and ties those histories to those of other marginalized Korean populations, I argue that other adoptee artists' work can be interpreted as a resistance of Western epistemologies and a motion toward adoptee decolonization. One such example of adoptee decolonization through cultural production is the art exhibition, *Adoptee & Alien: Visions from the Periphery*. Displayed at the Kyung Hee University Museum of Fine Arts, *Adoptee & Alien* coincided with the 2007 ICAA Gathering. The exhibit featured the works of twenty-five adoptee visual artists, and included media ranging from film and photographic pieces to paintings, drawings, and sculpture. While these adoptee-created cultural productions expand our understanding of the transnational adoption industrial complex and the experiences of those who have navigated the system, here, I, too, expand my lens from looking solely at cinematic productions to other forms of creative expression. The exhibit sought to bring adoptee artists "From the Periphery to the Fore," and while the exhibit did not attempt to thematically categorize the contributors' pieces, the exhibit's curator, Kim Stoker, is not hesitant to express that "[w]ithout exception, each of the 25 participating adoptee artists in this show cite that their artwork has been influenced by the nature of being a Korean adoptee."⁵²

I Too Was Colonised by Denmark

Transnational and transracial adoption is inevitably a visual display of Western imperialism, as the phenotypic dissonance adoptees have from their adoptive families and communities serves as a constant visual reminder of the unequal relationships core nation-states have with the corresponding peripheral and semi-peripheral countries. As visual studies scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff explains, "visuality has effectively been used as an imperial tool for maintaining hegemony, which operates by classifying and separating, and making these divisions seem right and aesthetic."⁵³ Yet, the visual arts have especially served many Korean adoptees' needs as a medium in which compose counternarratives and countervisualities that resist popular tropes of rescue and happily-ever-after that pervade discussions of overseas adoption.

In one of the visual pieces featured in the *Adoptee & Alien* exhibition, Danish Korean adoptee Trine Mee Sook Glerup challenges Denmark's colonial history that "in some people's minds . . . is still worth protecting." Glerup speaks to the ways in which Danish nationalism has naturalized and glorified its colonial history, upholding Mirzoeff's argument that "visuality makes imperialism seem right and aesthetic." Glerup explicitly includes overseas adoption in her censure of Danish imperialism, and situates her perspective as one shaped by post- and neocolonialism.

⁵² Taeho Lee, ed., *Adoptee & Alien: Visions from the Periphery* (Seoul: Kyung Hee University College of Fine Arts, 2007), 15, 16.

⁵³ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

Gleerup not only questions the “rightness” of Denmark’s touted history, but endeavors to reconfigure the narrative by providing a visual image of her own that “is not only outside authority’s process but antagonistic to it.”⁵⁴ Gleerup’s piece is a photographic self-portrait, taken on the streets of Copenhagen.⁵⁵ She explains the approach she took in creating this image:

This social intervention in a public space was done during one afternoon in May 2006. . . . I went to different spots in Copenhagen selected from a post-colonial, nationalistic, and Danish representative context. In each place I had my photo taken holding a small piece of paper, with [“I Too Was Colonised by Denmark”] written almost on the spot to keep the notion of demonstration and spontaneity in mind.⁵⁶

In the photograph, the artist stands before an awning that reads “Korean Restaurant of 비원: Korean Palace.”⁵⁷ She peers at the camera from behind the thick slash of her bangs across her forehead, her face devoid of expression. In her hands, Gleerup holds a hand-lettered sign which states, “I TOO WAS COLONISED BY DENMARK” in red marker.

Gleerup emphasizes the importance of the public aspect of her piece, which, if placed within Mirzoeff’s concept of countervisuality, speaks to this adoptee artist’s insistence on “the right to look.” To Mirzoeff, countervisuality challenges hegemonic authority to determine what is rendered visible and who has the right to look. Those that imperial visibility deem insignificant and invisible assert themselves as seeing and seeable entities, refusing to allow hegemonic authority to “suture its interpretation of the sensible to power, first as law and then as aesthetic.”⁵⁸ That is, by claiming the right to look as well as the right to be seen, the subaltern assert their autonomy from imperial authority.

By posing in front of well-known public spaces in Copenhagen that, to Gleerup, speak to Denmark’s colonial past, Gleerup asserts her right to be seen as a casualty of imperialism, but also as an entity with agency who rejects the rightness and aesthetic of that imperialism. Stylistically reflecting the ways in which public demonstrations and protests are often used to express the public’s discontent with social conditions, Gleerup’s photograph exhibits her malcontent, and suggests that this is a situation that is not unique to her, but affects other members of the general public as well. As Gleerup explicitly positions her photography in a context of colonial critique, it is clear that Gleerup is using visual forms of cultural production as a means of expressing self-determination and decolonization.

Passé Manipulé

In another installation on display in the *Adoptee & Alien* exhibit, one artist collective shows how not only the visual, but the archive can be a site of decolonization. Orientity was founded by long-time Belgian adoptee “artist,” Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, and is comprised of three women who are European Korean adoptees: Lemoine, Jane Jin Kaisen, and Adel Kim Gouillon. The group’s cleverly-portmanteau’ed name alludes to the ways in which Orientalism has been used to highlight difference in Europe between the civilized and the savage, the cultured and the primitive, the legitimate and the illegitimate. But Orientity also declares its

⁵⁴ Mirzoeff, 25.

⁵⁵ Trine Mee Sook Gleerup, *I Too Was Colonised by Denmark*, 2006, Photograph, 100 cm x 120 cm, Adoptee & Alien: Visions from the Periphery.

⁵⁶ Lee, *Adoptee & Alien*, 34.

⁵⁷ *Bi Won*: Korean for “secret garden”

⁵⁸ Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 25.

members as autonomous entities that operate together and independently against such classifications and hegemonies.

Orientity's installation, entitled *Passé Manipulé (Past Manipulations)* is comprised of six photographs, which depict the three artists in front of their adoption agencies in Korea and in front of the Korean consulate general in their adoptive countries.⁵⁹ In each photograph, the subject holds a placard in front of her which displays the identification numbers used by adoption agencies to process the children through the international adoption system.

In "Reframing the Colonial Gaze," Karina Eileraas explores how "colonial fantasies of 'otherness' are photographically conceived." By examining the archive of Marc Garanger's wartime identity card portraits of Algerian women, Eileraas argues that the women "both participate in and misrecognize the melancholic racial and sexual fantasies at play within nationalist and colonial imaginaries."⁶⁰ In the same vein as Mirzoeff's visuality, Eileraas understands the identity cards as well as the actual act of taking the photographs as a reinforcement of France's "fantasy of empire."⁶¹ Yet, she also sees resistance in these mandatory portraits. In the women's posture and gestures, facial expression, and eyes, Eileraas reads the subjects' attempts to undermine the exploitative nature of these identity card photographs. Thus, Eileraas concludes that "[c]olonial representation and identification, in particular, need to be rethought in terms of the negotiations between fantasy and identity that they may permit relative to visual stagings of race, gender, and ethnicity."⁶²

The photographs in *Passé Manipulé* mimic the identification intake photos adoption agencies take of all the children that are processed through their system. With over 200,000 children sent abroad, many of whom have fabricated or incomplete histories that their adoptive families choose to obliterate anyway, it is far more efficient for adoption agencies to identify its charges by a string of numbers rather than see them as individuals. While dehumanizing, for many adoptees, these photographs with their accompanying identification numbers represent the only tie they have to their Korean past. The artists of Orientity reenacting their intake photographs with their corresponding identification numbers as adults suggests that the adoptees feel that they are still perceived as agentless children. The fact that the women pose in front of their Korean adoption agencies as well as their adoptive country's embassies indicate that it is not just Western society that classifies them as less than human, but Korean society as well.

While the photographs taken in front of the adoption agencies appear relatively free of digital edits, the embassy images are tinted with bold primary colors that are oversaturated and unrealistically shaded. The distorted colors can perhaps be read as a critique of the ways in which the narratives of transnational adoption have been distorted into something unrealistic and fantastical. The oversaturation of color stresses the absurdity of Western society's overemphasis of a multicultural liberalism that paradoxically highlights race as an attempt to claim that in a post-colonial, post-racial world, color doesn't matter.

Below the identification numbers in the consulate photographs, the adoptees' placards read "*Je me souviens*."⁶³ While these artists most likely do not literally remember much, if any, of their life before being adopted, their sign broadcasts their commitment "to recall and

⁵⁹ Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, Jane Jin Kaisen, and Adel Kim Gouillon, *Passé Manipulé* Digital Prints, 2005, Adoptee & Alien: Visions from the Periphery.

⁶⁰ Karina Eileraas, "Reframing the Colonial Gaze: Photography, Ownership, and Feminist Resistance," *MLN* 118, no. 4 (September 2003): 810.

⁶¹ Eileraas, 812.

⁶² Eileraas, 813.

⁶³ French: "I remember"

reconstruct a ‘whitened’ and erased identity.”⁶⁴ They are re-membling and reconstructing their Korean past, and their statement, “*Je me souviens*,” which accompanies their identification numbers, serves as a reminder to Korean society, Western European societies, and other Korean adoptees that this history will not be dismissed and rendered nonexistent. The identification photograph is something that all adoptees share, which acts as a marker for the shared experience of trauma and erasure.

Diana Taylor argues that “performance works in the transmission of traumatic memory, drawing from and transforming a shared archive and repertoire of cultural images.”⁶⁵ She explains that the photographic archive can become a site of remembrance and protest through display. The archive so publically on display forces us to acknowledge a history of trauma and loss that would otherwise remain hidden. Yet, Taylor also argues for the need to read the repertoire alongside the archive. For Taylor, repertoire enacts embodied memory, and consists of “all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge.”⁶⁶ For, when there are “no photograph, no documents, when even the bones lay scattered by the wayside. . . the repertoire, for them, holds the tales of the survivors, their gestures, the traumatic flashbacks, repeats, and hallucinations.”⁶⁷ For the adoptee artists then, standing in front of symbolic public spaces is invoking the repertoire alongside the archive. While the identification photo is a shared experience of Korean adoptees, the history it represents has oftentimes been altered or obliterated. Thus, the repertoire supplements what the archive lacks. Standing witness as adults with political messages before gates, doorways, and overhangs, these adoptee artists’ bodies literally serve as reminders of the trauma and erasure of transnational adoption that would render its subjects perpetual children in need of Western rescue and intervention.

Find Holger Danske

A third piece included in the *Adoptee & Alien* collection navigates the marginal space between territories, cultures, languages, sexualities, and identities: the space that Gloria Anzaldúa identifies as the “Borderlands.” For Anzaldúa, the Borderlands are present “wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.”⁶⁸ In *Find Holger Danske*, *Adoptee & Alien*’s single literary inclusion, Maja Lee Langvad explores the significance of the spaces her adoption has created through a series of questions she constructs to address to her birthmother, adoptive parents, and herself.⁶⁹ With these questions, Langvad maps the Borderlands of the Korean adoptee experience, highlighting the ways in which territories, cultures, races, and epistemologies overlap in the Korean adoptee identity.

⁶⁴ Lee, *Adoptee & Alien*, 76.

⁶⁵ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, John Hope Franklin Center (Durham: Duke University of Press, 2003), 187.

⁶⁶ Taylor, 20.

⁶⁷ Taylor, 193.

⁶⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), Preface.

⁶⁹ Holger Danske is a legendary Danish hero, characterized as a knight of Charlemagne who is featured as the protagonist in the 13th century epic, *La Chevalerie Ogier*. Maja Lee Langvad, *Find Holger Danske*, 2007, Text and Performance, *Adoptee & Alien: Visions from the Periphery*.

Langvad's piece in *Adoptee & Alien* is actually a short excerpt from her book-length project also entitled *Find Holger Danske*, published in Denmark in 2006.⁷⁰ Langvad's book is itself a multi-media, multi-disciplinary work, comprised of an assortment of images and texts including her questionnaires, poetry, and readymade or found texts. In his analysis of *Find Holger Danske*, Kim Su Rasmussen finds that "Maja Lee Langvad writes about adoption from a personal point of view, yet everything in her book is immediately political."⁷¹ This strange juxtaposition of the personal and political is evident in the structure and content of Langvad's questions series. Langvad's questions are presented as multiple choice—resembling an application, questionnaire, or survey—perhaps in a nod to the significant amount of paperwork one must submit to various agencies in order to apply to adopt a child. While the questions are highly structured, requiring a single already-determined response which lends itself to a certain clinical detachment, the content of the questions is intimately, uncomfortably personal. Though bluntly asked, Langvad's questions require a great deal of introspection and soul searching of its intended responders. For example, in a question to her adoptive mother, Langvad asks:

1. Why did you choose to adopt:
 - a. Because you could not get pregnant?
 - b. Because you did not want to get pregnant?
 - c. Because you wanted to do a good deed?
 - d. Because you did not want to risk passing on your genes with regard to looks, character traits, hereditary diseases or other?
 - e. Because it seemed exotic to you?
 - f. Other reasons?⁷²

The nature of Langvad's questions lends itself to a certain unreliability. Like so many aspects of the adoptee experience, Langvad's questions carry complex contextual frameworks, which are difficult to accurately respond to with single, uncontextualized statements. And while the multiple-choice responses are provided, in Langvad's production, there is no move to hone in on what the answers might be. Her questions remain unanswered. Thus, while Langvad's questionnaire mimics the quantitative knowledge-gathering of the bureaucratic archive, it also points to the ways in which such transmissions of knowledge fail.

Like the other artists participating in the exhibition, Maja Lee Langvad's work artfully sutures the archive to the repertoire. As part of the *Adoptee & Alien* exhibit, Langvad's contribution consisted of a textual display of her book and questions as well as a performed reading of the questions series in both English and Korean at the exhibition's opening ceremony.⁷³ Interestingly, for the performance and visual installation, *Find Holger Danske* had to be translated from its original Danish to English and Korean.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes of the importance of the "language of the Borderlands." Through various tongues, she is able to articulate a "new *mestiza* consciousness," which is flexible and inclusive: "nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned."⁷⁴ With her many tongues, Anzaldúa creates a space for her fluid, plural, and hybridized identity. She declares: "I will no longer be made to feel

⁷⁰ Maja Lee Langvad, *Find Holger Danske* (Copenhagen: Borgen, 2006).

⁷¹ Kim Su Rasmussen, "Minor Adoptee Literature: On Maja Lee Langvad's *Find Holger Danske* (2006)," *Journal of Korean Adoption Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 175.

⁷² Lee, *Adoptee & Alien*, 49.

⁷³ Lee, 18.

⁷⁴ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 79.

ashamed of existing. I will have my voice...I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence."⁷⁵

Similarly, Langvad's use of multiple languages in her performance speaks to the multiple cultures, languages, and identities that intersect and comprise the Korean adoptee experience. *Find Holger Danske* "[i]s not an expression of isolated individual adoption experiences, but attempts to politicize the adoptee community by inventing a new language in which to articulate the impersonal core of our personal experiences."⁷⁶ Anzaldúa maintains that Borderlands theory is not just representative of her own experiences as a Chicana, but is applicable to anyone who holds multiple consciousnesses: "Borderlands is also a metaphor for all types of crossings—geopolitical boundaries, sexual transgressions, social dislocations, and the crossing necessary to exist in multiple linguistic and cultural contexts."⁷⁷ Langvad allows the multiple agentive aspects of her identity to overlap and speak in all the languages and creative genres that reside within her, and acknowledges that transnational adoption has dispersed its children like the Tower of Babel, who all speak the of the same trauma and loss in different tongues.

Kim Su Rasmussen, also a Danish adoptee, draws attention to the fact that within an already marginalized population, European Korean adoptees' narratives are often overlooked in the larger Korean adoptee community: "While adoptees are marginalized in Korean society, there is a double marginalization of the non-American adoptees insofar as their distinctive experiences are forgotten or simply ignored in accounts of the history of international adoption from Korea."⁷⁸ Rasmussen proposes the notion of minor adoptee literature, with *Find Holger Danske* as the first inclusion in its canon, "as an alternative to the Americacentric accounts of international adoption."⁷⁹ Like Borderlands writing and thinking, minor adoptee literature "reconnects the isolated members of the community, continually reintegrates the multiplicity of individuals in a totality," and "creates a whole that is more than the sum of its members by establishing a unifying narrative."⁸⁰ Akin to Anzaldúa's language of the Borderlands, according to Deleuze, minor literature operates through linguistic deterritorialization, which becomes "an invention of a strange language within a language, a becoming-other of language, or a minor usage of major language."⁸¹ Thus, Langvad's performance of *Find Holger Danske* in English and Korean translated from its original Danish deterritorializes and decolonizes by using the languages of the colonizers to stake claim to a minoritarian/Borderland space within the colony or neo-colony.

Conclusion

Ann Sasa List-Jensen laments that, "Only a few critical studies of the Korean economic development experience seem to have focused on the incalculable human cost and the sacrifice of human values such as social justice [and] human rights . . . under the banner of rapid growth."⁸² To that extent, I see the practice of transnational Korean adoption as an epitome of the

⁷⁵ Anzaldúa, 59.

⁷⁶ Rasmussen, "Minor Adoptee Literature," 183.

⁷⁷ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 6, 4th Edition.

⁷⁸ Rasmussen, "Minor Adoptee Literature," 170.

⁷⁹ Rasmussen, 171.

⁸⁰ Rasmussen, 171.

⁸¹ Rasmussen, 171.

⁸² Ana Sasa List-Jensen, "Economic Development and Authoritarianism: A Case Study on the Korean Developmental State," DIIPER Research Series (Aalborg, Denmark: Development, Innovation and International Political Economy Research, 2008), 1.

human cost List-Jensen identifies. Over the past sixty years, hundreds of thousands of individuals have been uprooted from their natal heritages, families, and cultures and “transported to the West to satisfy the needs of infertile white middle-class couples.”⁸³ And while this has perhaps granted adoptees fortuitous lives of relative privilege, one must remember that with every gain, something is invariably lost. It is through various modes of cultural production that Korean adoptees are now articulating this loss, and rejecting the hegemonic narratives that would keep the colonial nature and the trauma and loss that is inherent to transnational adoption obscured.

Kimberly McKee argues for the importance of “privileging adoptees’ retelling of their histories” and understanding them as “acts of refusal to maintain the status quo of the happy, grateful adoptee.”⁸⁴ She maintains that “[i]t is vital that adoptees have the autonomy over when and where they discuss their adoption experiences.”⁸⁵ Within the archive, visual media, literature, performance, and demonstration, adult Korean adoptees have begun the individual and collective process of rearticulating the histories of transnational Korean adoption and adoptees’ belongingness in the world.

Through film and other forms of creative expression, adoptees are not only claiming a distinct Korean adoptee identity and community, but demonstrating the diversity and intersectionalities of Korean adoptee identities and communities. Adoptees are questioning why and how processes and narratives of transnational Korean adoption are constructed, and what those constructions work to obscure. Finally, adoptees are using creative expression as a platform for activism and decolonization. Adoptee cultural productions like *aka SEOUL*, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, and *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger*, and the *Adoptee & Alien* exhibit are thus examples of how adoptees are exercising their autonomy and self-determination, and redefining and resisting the histories, nationalities, and identities imposed upon them.

In the twenty questions Maja Lee Langvad asks herself in *Find Holger Danske*, she begins with this query:

1. In your opinion which nationality are you?
 - a. Danish?
 - b. Korean?
 - c. Both Danish and Korean?
 - d. Neither Danish nor Korean?⁸⁶

Like the rest of her questions, this one is not accompanied by a response. Yet in reading the various cultural expression produced by Korean adoptees and witnessing the formations of a Korean adoptee communities and identities, I would argue that adoptees occupy a Borderlands space that is somewhere between all of the above and none of the above. At least, that’s where you’ll find me.

⁸³ Tobias Hübinette, “A Critique of Intercountry Adoption,” *Transracial Abductees*, 2008, <http://www.transracialabductees.org/politics/samdolcritique.html>.

⁸⁴ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 18.

⁸⁵ McKee, 18.

⁸⁶ Lee, *Adoptee & Alien*, 49.

Conclusion

The Korean orphan and adoptee remain popular figures in both American and South Korean film and television despite a nearly seventy-year progression of time from the origins of these figures in Korean War. While the representations have evolved over time, as the narratives have shifted from using orphans to adoptees in their productions, both the Korean and American film industries have remained constant in their utilization of these representations to promote a positive collective national identity.

In American popular media, filmmakers have used the Korean orphan to persuade American viewers to invest emotionally and monetarily in the Korean War. The sentimental figure of the Korean waif, bereft of home or family was ideal for constructing narratives of rescue by American soldiers. In this way, the United States' involvement in the Korean War is framed as a humanitarian effort. These narratives feature American soldiers as kindhearted heroes and disregard the culpability of the United States in its contributions to the war's violence and destruction.

Despite the fact that large-scale transnational adoption from Korea had not yet been fully established in this postwar period, Hollywood already frames these Korean orphan narratives in terms of the nuclear American family. In *The Steel Helmet*, Sergeant Zack assumes the patriarchal role while the African American medic, Colonel Thompson, and the Korean orphan, Short Round, represent maternal and child figures, respectively. In *Battle Hymn*, The Flying Parson, Dean Hess, and his exotic, mixed-race love interest, Miss Yang become "parents" to four hundred indigent Korean children whom they rescue from certain death. In the *M*A*S*H* episode, "Kim," Trapper makes arrangements to bring a displaced Korean boy home with him to "be the son we never had." The constructions of family in these productions reflect the sentiments that one way for Americans to exercise their civic duty is to construct heteronormative family units and raise the next generation of American citizens who will carry on the American mission of defending democracy and freedom. Yet, in order to preserve the sanctity of the familial roles, Korean orphans in these productions are male so as to ensure that there would be no mistaking them as sexual or romantic partners for their white male saviors.

On the other hand, South Korean representations of orphans in postwar productions are predominately female. Reflecting the femininity of South Korea in relation to the United States' assumed masculinity, female orphans in South Korean films represent the vulnerability of the nation after the war. In films like *The Marines Who Never Returned*, *Money*, and *Kinship* orphaned girls become representative of South Korea not in spite of their orphanhood, but *because* of it. In a country rebuilding from a civil war that literally decimated its prewar population, Korean audience members could relate to a female protagonist who had lost her family. Like their American counterparts, South Korean films use orphan figures in constructions of family. Young-hui in *The Marines Who Never Returned* becomes the heart of a marine unit's bonding as a family. In *Kinship*, Bok-sun's status as an orphan enables her to support her adoptive parents through her reproductive labor. In *Money*, Yeong-ho assures orphaned Ok-gyeong that she belongs within his family by comparing her to a sister, a lover, and a wife. Orphans in these constructions of family in South Korean films demonstrate the conflation of family and nation in terms of South Korean nation building and highlight the gendered paths of South Korean citizenship.

Representations of transnational Korean adoptees in U.S. film and television normalize transnational adoption as a legitimate form of family making in the United States. Yet, Korean

adoptees' belongingness in their American families does not grant their characters depth and agency. Despite greater visibility, representations of Asian adoptees remain problematic and stereotypical. Adoptee narratives in American film and television are used to highlight the adoptive family's subjecthood and belongingness in the nation. Baby Danny's rescue and adoption in *One Thousand Men and a Baby* is not a narrative of his experience, but of his adoptive father's search for identity. The Bluths in *Arrested Development* adopt Annyong for their own personal and commercial gain and literally use him as an accessory rather than a member of the family. Lily's adoption in *Modern Family* enables her gay fathers to emulate a heterosexual nuclear family unit, thus securing their "full and robust citizenship" as "fully realized political, economic, and social subject[s] in American life."¹

Korean media productions rewrite adoptee narratives to showcase Korean adoptees as ideal South Korean subjects. In contemporary Korean dramas such as *Fated to Love You* and *Doctor Stranger*, and *Tunnel*, adoptee characters are showcased as wealthy, successful, and Western-educated. The skills and capital they have accrued are not a testament of their individual resilience in enduring the grief and trauma inherent to adoption. Rather, their assets are solely considered in how they contribute to South Korea's prosperity. Daniel Pitt's "amazing spec" enables him to revive a struggling *chaebol* in *Fated to Love You*. In *Doctor Stranger*, Han Jae-joon's education at Harvard has made him a skilled surgeon which contributes to the success and reputation of Myungwoo Hospital. Shin Jae-yi's skills as a psychoanalyst, which she acquired in her adoptive country of the United Kingdom, allows her to solve a Korean serial killer case and ensure the safety of Korean women. Contemporary Korean media's representations of adoptees depict them as successful, cosmopolitan, and seamlessly fitting into Korean society, which ignores and erases the dark history of trauma and stigma associated with transnational adoption in Korea. Like American representations of Korean adoptees, Korean portrayals operate to promote a positive national image. Despite the growing popularity of including Korean adoptee characters in film and television, these portrayals fail to capture the multi-faceted nature of transnational adoptee histories, identities, and experiences.

Addressing these inaccuracies, Korean adoptees are flipping the script and have begun creating cultural productions of their own that emphasizes adoptee self-determinism, identity, and community. Glenn Morey's *Side by Side* project tells the Korean adoptee experience from one hundred different perspectives. Morey strives to present a holistic and unbiased picture of Korean adoption. In contrast, Korean adoptee artists in the *Adoptee & Alien* exhibit make explicit political statements about transnational adoption through their cultural productions. Understanding transnational adoption as a colonial project, adoptee artists and writers like Trine Mee Sook Glerup and Maja Lee Langvad decolonize their experiences as transnational adoptees by challenging the hegemonic master narratives that permeate popular media and culture. Similarly, Jane Jin Kaisen connects transnational adoption to a shared history of military imperialism by juxtaposing the transnational adoption narratives with the histories of Korean comfort women and experiences of sex workers in Korea whose patrons are U.S. military personnel. These adoptee-created cultural productions are important in challenging the inaccuracies of popular representations of Korean orphans and adoptees and situating the transnational adoption industrial complex within and among other social, historical, political, and economic conditions.

Korean Transnational Adoptees and Questions of Citizenship and National Belonging

¹ Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," 7–8.

I maintain that understanding and critiquing the representations of Korean orphans and adoptees is important in helping us more fully understand the actualities of adoptee national belonging in today's world. While cinematic representations of orphan and adoptee belonging are simplified to perpetual foreigner stereotypes or inherent belongingness in family and nation, in the real world, questions of adoptee citizenship and national belonging are far more complex. Recent citizenship policy developments in South Korea and the United States have spurred the transnational Korean adoptee community to consider how cultural and social citizenship to a nation differ from official national belonging through citizenship.

2010 Nationality Law Revision

An integral part of the transnational Korean adoptee experience is the disconnection from South Korean culture and society. Historically, adoptees' South Korean citizenship was irrevocably lost with their adoption. Article 12 of South Korea's 1997 Nationality Act states that:

A person who has acquired the nationality of an adoptive father or mother through an adoption by a foreigner . . . shall lose the nationality of the Republic of Korea retroactively at the time of the acquisition of the foreign nationality, if he does not report the willingness to keep the nationality of the Republic of Korea.²

As Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOA'L) points out, due to their lack of agency at the time of their adoption, transnational Korean adoptees "have unknowingly and without their consent forfeited Korean citizenship and taken on their adoptive country's nationality."³ In a move to place the agency of citizenship choice back in the hands of adoptees, in 2007, GOA'L and others in the global Korean adoptee community began a campaign for South Korean dual citizenship.⁴

On April 22, 2010, the Nationality Law Revision was passed by the Korean National Assembly, and went into effect on January 1, 2011. This policy revision enabled transnational Korean adoptees to reclaim their South Korean citizenship without renouncing the citizenship of their adoptive country.⁵ On April 19, 2011, thirteen individuals became the first adoptees to gain dual citizenship with dozens more adoptees subsequently undergoing the process.⁶

There are certainly concrete benefits of navigating Korean society with Korean citizenship.⁷ Adoptees with dual citizenship have easier access to Korean internet resources and credit cards. They are protected against policies targeted at foreigners in South Korea, and are

² Global Overseas Adoptees' Link, *Dual Citizenship: Guidebook to Dual Citizenship for Korean Adoptees*, digital (Seoul: GOA'L, 2010).

³ Global Overseas Adoptees' Link.

⁴ Previous work by transnational Korean adoptee advocates secured F-4 visa status for adoptees living in Korea in 1999. The F-4 status classifies Korean adoptees as overseas Koreans, and was a first step in getting the South Korean government to recognize adoptees as Koreans rather than foreigners.

⁵ Transnational Korean adoptees who hold citizenship in Norway or Denmark are ineligible to apply for dual citizenship, as per the policies on dual citizenship established by those countries.

⁶ The first cohort of dual citizen adoptees consisted of ten men and three women. Their adoptive countries included Canada (1), France (1), Germany (1), Netherlands (2), Switzerland (2), and the United States (6). Korean Adoption Services, "F4 Visa & Dual Citizenship," Ministry of Health and Welfare, Korean Adoption Services, 2013, <https://www.kadoption.or.kr/en/info/citizenship.jsp>.

⁷ A disadvantage to dual citizenship for male adoptees is the possibility of being required to serve South Korea's mandatory military conscription, which can last between 21 to 25 months. While orphans are not required to serve in the military (80% of transnational Korean adoptees are classified as orphans on their family registry), adoptees whose birth parents and siblings appear on their family registry are required to serve in the military. All male adoptees under the age of 40 who apply for military exemption must participate in annual in National Civil Defense exercises and training. These military requirements and stipulations again reflect the gendered citizenship trajectories in South Korea. Korean Adoption Services.

eligible to vote and run for political office.⁸ However, for most adoptees who apply for dual citizenship, there is more importance in the simply being officially recognized as part of the Korean national collective. Having two passports reflects the hybrid identity Korean adoptees navigate. Former Secretary General of GOA'L, Dae-Won Wenger was one of the first thirteen adoptees to reclaim their South Korean nationality. He remarks that, "In the past I embraced a Korean identity but wasn't able to 'prove' it by showing a passport or ID. . . That's not an issue any longer."⁹

Korean adoptees also recognize the larger effects their campaign for dual citizenship could have for other cohorts of transnational adoptees. Many countries replicated the transnational Korean adoption industry's model in establishing their own transnational adoption practices. Korean adoptees also recognize that as the oldest and largest population of transnational adoptees, they have the power to set precedents for younger populations of transnational adoptees in establishing their own identities, communities, and activist efforts. A statement by GOA'L on the benefits of passing the Nationality Law Revision asserts that:

By granting the right to dual citizenship status to Korean adoptees the Korean government could set a new and very important precedence affecting hundreds of thousands of international adoptees worldwide. Korea was the pioneer in creating the international adoption program and setting the standards for such a successful program. It can retain and improve upon such status now, in the present day, by changing its laws to consider adoptees as legal national Koreans. Korean adoptees represent a new type of Global Korean by speaking many different languages and having the cultural knowledge of the countries they were adopted to. Consequently, the introduction of dual citizenship for Korean adoptees would benefit Korean society by greatly increasing the level of Korea on a global level and in terms of multiculturalism.¹⁰

While GOA'L's statement in some ways echoes the Korean drama stereotypical profiles of adoptees as cosmopolitan global citizens whose networks and skills exist only to benefit South Korea, I read GOA'L's statement as strategic and agentic. Adoptees campaigning for dual citizenship are using the labels and assumptions imposed upon them to advance their own agenda of self-determination.

GOA'L also recognizes that not all adoptee experiences are the same, and many adoptees may not feel the need to go through the dual citizenship process: "G.O.A.'L does not feel that every Korean adoptee has to restore their Korean citizenship. It is important for the community to recognize it is an additional choice, and a basic right of an individual."¹¹ What is most important about the passing of the dual citizenship revision is that adoptees are given the agency of *choice*. Dual citizenship contributes to adult adoptees' ability to choose how they identify and align with the nationalities of their birth and adoptive countries.

Adoptee Citizenship Act

In the United States, issues surrounding adoptee citizenship have much greater stakes than an adoptee's ability to choose their nationality. Thousands of transnational adoptees whose

⁸ Global Overseas Adoptees' Link, *Dual Citizenship*.

⁹ Elizabeth Woyke, "More Korean Adoptees Apply for Dual Citizenship," *Hyphen Magazine*, August 15, 2012, <https://hyphenmagazine.com/blog/2012/8/15/more-korean-adoptees-apply-dual-citizenship>.

¹⁰ Global Overseas Adoptees' Link, "Campaign & Timeline," GOA'L, December 12, 2010, <https://www.goal.or.kr/citizenship/timeline>.

¹¹ Global Overseas Adoptees' Link, *Dual Citizenship*.

adoptive parents neglected to follow through with the naturalization process after adopting are undocumented and essentially stateless. It is estimated that between 25,000 and 49,000 transnational adoptees in the United States live without citizenship.¹² The South Korean Health Ministry estimates that over 18,000 transnational Korean adoptees in the United States lack citizenship.¹³ Like the relinquishment of their South Korean citizenship without consent, transnational Korean adoptees' lack of U.S. citizenship is a through no fault of their own. Rather, it is a result of neglect and oversight by those who swore to protect and care for them when they were at their most vulnerable.

Before 2000, a transnational adoptee's adoption and naturalization process were separate. Adoptive parents were expected to follow through with their child's naturalization process once their adoption was finalized.¹⁴ For thousands of transnational adoptees, their process of becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen was arrested due to their adoptive parents' failure to file the necessary paperwork and the adoption agencies' failure to follow up with families regarding this issue after their adoption. The HR2883: Child Citizenship Act of 2000 worked to address this issue by providing "automatic citizenship to certain intercountry adoptees, specifically to those who were born on or after February 27, 1983."¹⁵ The passage of the Child Citizenship Act grants transnational adoptees automatic U.S. citizenship with the finalization of their adoption.

However, a loophole in the law made adoptees born before February 27, 1983 ineligible for citizenship through this avenue, leaving them without official belonging in United States and vulnerable to deportation. There have been several known cases of Korean adoptees being deported to South Korea from the United States including Adam Crapser, whose story gained international attention in 2016. Crapser was adopted by an American family at age three who never completed his naturalization process. His adoptive family eventually relinquished their parental rights to him and Crapser was sent through the domestic foster system where he was placed in another abusive family. His unstable childhood led to confrontations with law enforcement including a conviction of burglary when he broke into his second family's home to reclaim the rubber Korean shoes and Korean Bible he had kept with him since his adoption from Korea. In 2013, when he realized his U.S. citizenship had never been completed, Adam Crapser applied for a green card, but his criminal record a red flag for U.S. immigration which resulted in his deportation order. Crapser was deported to South Korea in 2016 where "he is isolated by language and culture, navigating alone a place he's been expelled to four decades after being sent to adoptive parents in Michigan."¹⁶

Crapser's case highlights the ways in which transnational adoptees are often considered exceptional subjects. Kim Park Nelson describes how the fact that transnational Korean adoptees were exempted from exclusionary immigration policies of the Cold War era and media coverage of early Korean adoptees showcased them as "a Cold War success story" influenced "the trope of

¹² Daniel A. Medina, "Some Adoptees Are Undocumented Because Their Parents Forgot to Fill Out a Form. Now Congress Is Taking Action.," *The Intercept*, May 14, 2019, digital edition, <https://theintercept.com/2019/05/14/adoption-citizenship-bill/>.

¹³ Min-joo Kim, "26,000 Korean Adoptees without Citizenship: Data," *Korea Herald*, October 31, 2017, digital edition, sec. Social Affairs, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20171031000935>.

¹⁴ I personally remember the day my naturalization became official when I was in third grade.

¹⁵ Adoptee Rights Law Center, "Federal Legislation," Adoptee Rights Law, 2019, <https://adopteerightslaw.com/bills/federal/>.

¹⁶ Tong-Hyung Kim, "Adam Crapser, Adoptee Deported by U.S., Sues South Korea, Agency," *The Washington Times*, January 23, 2019, digital edition, sec. World, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jan/23/adam-crapser-adoptee-deported-us-sues-south-korea-/>.

the Korean adoptee as exceptional (in terms of cultural assimilation, psychological adjustment, and/or social success) among American peoples of color and/or among immigration populations.”¹⁷ The exceptional adoptee trope along with the naturalization of family making through transnational adoption thus obscures the transnational adoptee’s immigrant identity and the connotations and assumptions that accompany being an immigrant of color in the United States.

However, this exceptional subjecthood only applies to those adoptees who play the role of the good and grateful adoptee. For those who do not conform to the role of the happy and well-adjusted adoptee, their status as an immigrant or “guest” in the country rematerializes. Quoting Sara Ahmed, Kimberly McKee highlights the fact that “to be a guest is to experience a moral obligation to be on your best behavior, such that to refuse to fulfill this obligation would threaten your right to coexistence.”¹⁸ For Adam Crapser and other deported Korean adoptees, their identity as American family member shifted to that of undesirable immigrant Other when they did not fulfill the expectations imposed upon them as transnational adoptees.

The Adoptee Citizen Act is a piece of legislation that aims to close the loophole for undocumented adoptees who are not eligible for citizenship through the Child Citizenship Act of 2000. It would grant undocumented adoptees who were born before February 27, 1983 U.S. citizenship and give adoptees like Adam Crapser who have been deported a chance to return to the United States. On May 21, 2019, Senators Roy Blunt (MO), Mazie Hirono (HI), Susan Collins (ME), and Amy Klobuchar (MN) introduced the bipartisan bill to Congress. Adoptee activists continue to organize and gain support for adoptee citizenship by working with members of Congress to help advance the bill through the legislative process.

There has been widespread support of the bill in the transnational adoptee community, but I have reservations about the ways in which the Adoptee Citizenship Act furthers the exceptional adoptee narrative that is so prevalent in American film, television, and social consciousness. The Adoptee Rights Campaign (ARC), an organization that has been integral in garnering both public and congressional support for the Adoptee Citizenship Act explicitly asserts in their Position on Legislation statement that:

- ARC maintains that children brought into the U.S. at the request of their American parents or whose adoptions were facilitated by the federal government *are not immigrants* and should be treated the same as biological children who are born abroad to Americans.
- ARC views the conflation of international adoption, national immigration, and criminal law a convulsion of International Hague Adoption Conventions which are founded on family permanency for all internationally adopted children.
- ARC opposes solutions that comingle U.S. foreign adoption and standard immigration policies or delegitimizes intercountry adoptees’ rights as Americans.¹⁹

There is a clear distancing from and disavowal of an immigrant identity for these adoptee organizers. While the ARC concedes that their “position on policy solutions reflects the expressed values and goals of our community and therefore may change according to the consensus of the impacted American adoptees we serve,” I think it is significant that the

¹⁷ Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians*, 13.

¹⁸ McKee, *Disrupting Kinship*, 13.

¹⁹ ARC, “Adoptee Rights Campaign,” Adoptee Rights Campaign, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://adopteerightscampaign.org/>. Emphasis in original.

organization does not choose to align and ally itself with larger undocumented immigrant movements currently in place in the United States.

Future Directions

My research examines a small portion of the transnational Korean adoptee experience. The growing interdisciplinary field of Korean adoption studies attests to the fact that transnational Korean adoption history, culture, and identity are multifaceted and deep wells of material for further research. My sampling of films and television programs with representations of transnational Korean adoptees is relatively small; there is certainly the possibility for far more research into the ways in which these representations are used in film, television, and other media. Additionally, my research opens the gate to critically consider representations of other transnational and/or transracial adoptee populations. Comparative analyses of representations of different adoptee populations would be generative.

Additionally, study of the transnational Korean adoptee can help us connect and contextualize today's social, cultural, and political issues. In the United States, immigration policy under the administration of Donald Trump has forcefully separated thousands of children from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border. Efforts to reunite children with their parents have been discouraged by White House officials who claim "it would require extraordinary effort to reunite what may be thousands of migrant children who have been separated from their parents, and even if it could, the children would likely be emotionally harmed."²⁰ Instead, it is recommended that these children remain in their "sponsor" homes—American homes around the country where children were placed in foster care under the management of adoption agencies like Bethany Children's Services in Michigan that specialize in transnational adoptions. Reading these developments in conversation with the mechanism and technologies that drive the transnational adoption industrial complex allows us to think about the migration of children from the Global South from a larger perspective and highlights how American families and households are assumed to be the best option for the welfare of a child.

In South Korea, men in rural areas who struggle to find local women to marry import foreign brides with the assistance of municipal subsidies. While the majority of foreign brides come to South Korea from Southeast Asia, there are price differences for marriage depending on what country the woman comes from. A 2017 study by the South Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family found that "Marrying women from Uzbekistan is the most expensive, costing an average 18.3 million won a person, followed by the Philippines at 15.2 million won, Cambodia 14.4 million won, Vietnam 14.2 million won and China 10.7 million won."²¹ There are certainly parallels between the practices of "bride buying" and transnational adoption. Both institutions rely on the reproductive labor of women in marginalized socioeconomic positions and are built on the commodification of people for the means of family making.

In a country developed under the assumptions of ethnonationalism, this multicultural shift has been slow to gain social acceptance, as South Koreans come to terms with the changing demographics of Korean citizenship. While foreign-born brides and mixed-heritage children are

²⁰ Elliot Spagat, "US Sees Limitations on Reuniting Migrant Families," *Associated Press*, February 3, 2019, digital edition, <https://apnews.com/48210bbf243e423ea151ff04e4878ce6>.

²¹ Current exchange rates list 1 million KRW as equivalent to 856.65 USD. "South Korea's Local Subsidies Encourage Foreign 'Bride Buying'; Brides from Uzbekistan 'Most Expensive,'" *The Straits Times*, February 19, 2019, digital edition, sec. Asia, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/south-koreas-local-subsidies-encourage-foreign-bride-buying-brides-from-uzbekistan>.

the actual majority of new global Korean subjecthood, Korean film and media feature transnational adoptees from wealthy and powerful Western countries as examples of the nation's cosmopolitan citizenship.

Advocates for transnational adoption lament the implementation of “sweeping and crippling new reinterpretations of policies and practices that are projected to completely end international adoption in America by 2022.”²² Characterizing the falling trend of transnational adoption in the United States in recent years as a crisis, some proponents of transnational adoption propose a federal adoption policy that would call for the completion of “at least 25,000 international adoptions per year by 2022, and at least 50,000 international adoptions per year by 2026, and then to grow those levels if possible.”²³

Tobias Hübinette, on the other hand, has a different perspective. He sees the decline of transnational adoption in the modern world as inevitable. “We are not witnessing the end of transnational adoption, but we are witnessing the demise of the practice,” he speculates. “It will never ever be like it was before.”²⁴ He predicts that adult adoptees in the future will have very different experiences than current transnational adoptee populations.

Whether this recent downward trend in transnational adoption practices signals the collapse of the transnational adoption industrial complex or not, research and critiques of the systems must continue. The ends of transnational adoption does not mean the end of the transnational adoptee experience or identity. On the contrary, it reflects the need for continued contemplation of new notions of community, citizenship, and adoptee belongingness.

²² Gwilliam et al., “How to Solve the U.S. International Adoption Crisis.”

²³ Gwilliam et al.

²⁴ Jane Jin Kaisen, *Loving Belinda* (Denmark: forlaget *[asterisk], 2015), 76.

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**Appendix
Filmography**

Chapter One				
Title	Year	Format	Director	Distributor/Network
<i>The Steel Helmet</i>	1951	Film	Samuel Fuller	Lippert Pictures, Inc.
<i>Battle Hymn</i>	1957	Film	Douglas Sirk	Universal Pictures Co. Inc.
<i>M*A*S*H</i> “Kim”	1973	Television Episode (S2E6)	William Wiard	CBS
Chapter Two				
Title	Year	Format	Director	Distributor/Network
<i>A Thousand Men and a Baby</i>	1997	Television Movie	Marcus Cole	Finnegan/Pinchuk Productions CBS
<i>Arrested Development</i> “Shock and Aww”	2004	Television Episode (S1E14)	Joe Russo	Fox
<i>Modern Family</i> “Two Monkeys and a Panda”	2011	Television Episode (S2E17)	Beth McCarthy- Miller	ABC
Chapter Three				
Title	Year	Format	Director	Distributor/Network
<i>The Marines Who Never Returned</i> (돌아오지 않는 해병)	1963	Film	Lee Man-hee	Dae Won Films
<i>Kinship (혈맥)</i>	1963	Film	Kim Soo-yong	Hanyang Films
<i>Money (돈)</i>	1958	Film	Kim Sodong	Kim Production
Chapter Four				
Title	Year	Format	Director	Distributor/Network
<i>Acacia</i> (아카시아)	2003	Film	Park Ki-hyung	Show East
<i>Ireland</i> (아일랜드)	2004	Television Series	Kim Jin-man	MBC
<i>Fated to Love You</i> (운명처럼 널 사랑해)	2014	Television Series	Lee Dong-yoon & Kim Hee- won	MBC
<i>Doctor Stranger</i> (닥터 이방인)	2014	Television Series	Jin Hyuk & Hong Jong-chan	SBS

<i>Tunnel (터널)</i>	2017	Television Series	Shin Yong-hwi	OCN
Chapter Five				
Title	Year	Format	Director	Distributor/Network
<i>aka SEOUL</i>	2016	Documentary Film	Jon Maxwell	ISAtv and NBC Asian America
<i>In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee</i>	2010	Documentary Film	Deann Borshay Liem	Mu Films
<i>The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger</i>	2010	Documentary Film	Jane Jin Kaisen & Guston Sondin-Kung	itinerant_sends_for_itinerant
<i>Adoptee & Alien: Visions from the Periphery</i>	2007	Art Exhibit	Lee Taeho	Kyung Hee University College of Fine Arts