PERCEPTIONS AND DECEPTIONS: PERSPECTIVES ON ADOPTIONS FROM SOUTH KOREA TO NORTH AMERICA

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Women’s and Gender Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

July 2012

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Abstract

This study provides a critical synthesis of existing research on adoptions from South Korea to the United States, and adds a comparison with adoptions from Korea to Canada. The focus is on the intersections of gender, race, class, and age, in Korea and the receiving countries. The first chapter provides an overview of debates on transnational, transracial adoption and justifies an interdisciplinary approach. The three central chapters look at adoptions from Korea to the US in three chronological stages. Each of these chapters begins with an examination of historical and sociological studies of adoptions from Korea, complemented by my own fieldwork there. This is followed by analyses of auto/bio/graphical texts in relation to the historical and socio-political background for that period. The focus in Chapter 2 is on the perspective of adopters, and analysis of the memoirs of Bertha Holt throws light on the origins of adoptions from Korea to the US. Chapter 3 conveys the perspective of Korean birthmothers, whose ‘letters’ to the relinquished child provide insight into the reasons for the continuation of adoptions from Korea. Chapter 4 moves to the perspective of adult adoptees who have returned to Korea and produced accounts representing a range of views on transnational, transracial adoption. The fifth chapter, dealing with Canada, adds the perspective of a Canadian adoption agency and would-be parents seeking to adopt from Korea, as adoptions from there are being phased out. Throughout the study terms borrowed from Foucault serve to highlight how collective and individual genealogies and power relations compete and intersect in the perceptions and interpretations of all those concerned. The central question is why and how perceptions of transnational adoptions from Korea have changed, in relation to institutional power (disciplines and biopower) and technologies of the self as means to enable adoptees and birthmothers to emerge from tutelage to care of/for the self. The Conclusion looks at the present situation in South Korea and an alternative heterotopic solution, the “children’s village.”
Preface

Approval of my fieldwork in South Korea was granted by The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board under a Certificate of Approval, Number HO6-03879 dated March 9, 2007, for a term of one year. I did not request a renewal or extension.

This research was funded in part by the Korea Foundation.
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Glossary of terms borrowed from Foucault

(Direct citations are from Clare O’Farrell’s “Key Concepts” list at michel-foucault.com/concepts; other sources are indicated below)

Archeology: “archeology is about examining the discursive traces . . . left by the past in order to write a ‘history of the present.’”

Archive: “designates the collection of all material traces left by a particular historical period and culture.”

Author: designates “a category or way of organizing texts which has a history and needs to be challenged”; not the same as “the psychological entity of the author.”

Confession: “the religious practice of confession was secularized in the 18th and 19th centuries. People were incited to confess their innermost desires and sexual practices. These confessions then became data for the social sciences which used the knowledge to construct mechanisms of social control.” Confession is a technique related to the exertion of pastoral power exercised first by the church and more recently by the ‘helping’ professions (see Derek Hook, Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power (2007), “Confessional subjects,” 35–7). Foucault also related confession to the type of truth-telling (parresia) which “speaks truth to power” as well as being self-accusatory: see Davidson ed. Government of the Self and Others (2010), 41–2).

Confinement: the establishment of institutions in Europe, beginning in the 17th century, to separate and contain those “deemed to be unreasonable,” including “not only mad people, but the unemployed, single mothers . . . prostitutes . . . anyone deemed to be socially unproductive or disruptive” (Discipline and Punish).
Culture: “a hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion.”

Discipline: “a mechanism of power which regulates the behaviour of individuals in the social body. . . . By regulating space . . . time . . . and people’s activity . . . enforced with the aid of complex systems of surveillance.” Conformity is never totally achieved: disciplinary measures are exerted because people resist (see power, below).

Ethics: “concerns the kind of relation one has to oneself. The essential condition for the practice of ethics is freedom, the ability to choose one action, not another.” The task of the ethical historian is to expose how certain “taken-for-granted exercises of power only remain tolerable by covering up its tracks.”

Genealogy: an approach to history that builds on archeology but pays attention to gaps and inconsistencies that reveal how “the grounds of the true and the false come to be distinguished via mechanisms of power,” see: ”Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in Rabinow ed., The Foucault Reader (1984).

Heterotopia: “a space which is outside everyday social and institutional space,” for example ‘in-between’ spaces or those designated for a special purpose, such as the simulation of another space (see Hook 2007, 178–205).

Institutions: “a way of freezing particular relations of power so that certain people are advantaged.”

Power: is relational and “not simply repressive but productive;” it is not “exclusively localized in government and the State” but “exercised throughout the social body.” Disciplinary power took over from sovereign power (obedience to a ruler) in the 18th and 19th centuries, but the latter still exists and they “remain in tension;” pastoral power, based on the model of a shepherd with his flock, is exerted by church and state through “politically organizing the day to day conduct of the population;” biopower is “a technology which
appeared in the late eighteenth century for managing populations. It incorporates certain aspects of disciplinary power. If disciplinary power is about training the actions of bodies, biopower is about managing the births, deaths, reproduction and illnesses of a population.” Foucault claims that whereas sovereign power condemns some to death and allows others to live, biopower ensures that the select live while ‘others’ are allowed to die or be excluded/marginalized (*The History of Sexuality*. Volume 1 (1990), 139–141).

**Resistance**: “as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance . . . no matter how oppressive the system.”

**Technologies of the self**: “those reflective and voluntary practices by which men [sic] not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.” Related to writing or verbally communicating one’s own ‘truth’ in resistance to the powers that deny it, and to the care of/for the self (“le souci de soi”) that accompanies care of/for others in an ethical life (Martin et al., eds. *Technologies of the Self* (1988); Rabinow, ed., *Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* (1994)).

**Tutelage**: the state of being considered a ‘minor’ in need of guardianship and protection or pastoral care, rather than a subject with the freedom to make decisions and speak for oneself, who “dares to know” (“What is Enlightenment?” in *Technologies of the Self*).
Acknowledgements

My three supervisory committee members all brought very different backgrounds and approaches to the topic of my dissertation, and I want to thank them all for making me think about it in different ways. Dr. Richard Sullivan made sure that I understood and took into account the perspective of social workers, and always responded promptly with suggestions, while Dr. Sunera Thobani pushed me to think more critically about the dimensions of gender, class, and race in the history of transnational adoptions. Dr. Thobani replaced Dr. Valerie Raoul when she retired as my official thesis director, but Dr. Raoul continued to work closely with me throughout the writing process. My heartfelt thanks are due to her for her unfailing support and mentorship, as well as her insight into auto/bio/graphical writing and encouragement to investigate the relevance of Foucault. Sincere thanks at the same time go to Professor R. Narayanan at Nehru University, for encouraging me to explore new avenues including my first steps in Korean studies. I was also fortunate to work as a Research Assistant for Dr. Veronica Strong-Boag, from whom I learned a great deal about the history of domestic and international adoptions in Canada.

Special thanks also go to my friend and fellow student Almas Zakiuddin, who introduced me to Women’s Studies, and to Dr. Sneja Gunew, who accepted me into the program. Faculty members in that program have been a great source of support and encouragement, and the staff (Jane Charles and Wynn Archibald) have always been very helpful. I have greatly appreciated the friendship and solidarity of fellow students at UBC and from all over the world (Sirijit Sunanta, Kaori Yoshida, Xin Huang, Itrath Syed, Naomi Lloyd, Ami Ihatsu, Galia Petkova, Swati Banerjee, Neelu Kang Dhaliwal, Sanzida Habib, and Hui Ling Lin), as we made this journey together. I would also like to convey my sincere
thanks to Leif Olsen, another fellow student at UBC, for helping me with Korean translations and proofreading Korean citations.

The fieldwork was made possible by support from the Korea Foundation in 2007, which enabled me to meet academics and adoption workers whose assistance was much appreciated. I am particularly indebted to Professor Kim Hyun Mee, of Yonsei University’s Department of Sociology, for her support and provision of assistance from her RA, Yewon Lee. My thanks also go to the adoption workers at the Social Welfare Society (SWS) and Holt Adoption Services in Seoul, to Mrs. Han Sang-soon at Ae Ran Won, to the Rev. Kim Do Hyun of KoRoot, and to the Director of the Seoul SOS Children’s Village, who all helped me to better understand the intricacies of adoptions in and from Korea. Dae Won Wenger, who was Secretary General of G.O.A.’L, generously shared his reflections on adoptee reunions in Korea, and introduced me to Molly Holt, a meeting that provided not only insight but access to many other contacts. Discussions over coffee and meals with Jane Jeong Trenka, Tammy Chu, Whitney Taejin Hwang, Kim Stoker, Jeannie Hong, Jee Youn Heather Kim, Karin Roest, Jenny Na, Jae Jin Hyun, Hilary Hahn, Yungil Paik, Yoon Kyung Shin, Kwon Ji Hyun, Gordon Black, Kyung Hong, Eunkyung Choi, and all those whose names I have not mentioned, enriched my understanding of the many perspectives on this topic. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Meenakshi Thapan, of Delhi University, for her invaluable friendship and introducing me to the SOS Village concept.

In Canada, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Sunrise Adoption Agency’s Asia Program Officer and staff for their assistance in answering my questions. Special thanks to Shelley Brownell, Melanie Ekman, and Cathy Loptson at Family Services of Greater Vancouver and Joan Ridsdel at Choices Adoption and Counselling Services in
Victoria, who helped me to understand the complicated process of transnational adoptions to Canada. Nina Sihota and Anne Clayton at the Ministry of Child and Family in Victoria were also very helpful, as were my meetings with Yvonne Devitt of the Adoptive Families Association of BC.

I could not have completed this project without the financial and moral support of my aunt, Suman Bagga, and other family members. My mother, Uma Bagga, has been a constant source of strength and consolation in moments of distress through her love and prayers, and I am grateful for the support of my brothers, Sanjay and Ajay Bagga, and sisters, Suparna Sharma and Manu Sawhney, and their families. The blessings of my late father, Chander Prakash Bagga, and my grandmother, Soni Devi, have helped me to achieve my dreams, including completing this dissertation and having a family. Special thanks are also due to my lifelong friend Priti Singh for her moral support and friendship, and the love I received over the years from my extended family in Las Cruces. My apologies to my spouse, Benoît Raoulx, and our children, Félix Raghav and Anouk Tara, for having had to compete for my attention with this project, and thanks for putting up cheerfully with my frustrations. Thanks also to Sarah Traii and Lamia Elbahri in Algeria and Elena Manolachi in France, for caring for the children while I was preoccupied with writing, and to Jennifer and Cédric Potier and their family for making us welcome in Caen. Special thanks to Cameron Duder for his invaluable technical assistance in formatting this dissertation.
To
Korean Adoptees and Birthmothers
Introduction: “Where Are You From?”

The final trait of effective history is its affirmation of knowledge as perspective.
–Michel Foucault, in Rabinow, Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth (1984, 90).

An Outsider Perspective

The adoption of children from Korea in North America has been studied a good deal over the last decade. Most researchers in this area are adopters, adoptees, social workers in the adoption field, or Korean Americans. The first perspective I wish to introduce here is my own, as an outsider. Like many Korean adoptees living in the West I am often asked, “Where are you from?” Unlike them I do not hesitate before answering, since I was both born and raised in India. My home country has a history that blends into legend, as did my own family’s story. I came of age in surroundings where my parents, themselves “displaced persons” as Hindus from the part of the Punjab which ended up in Pakistan, were nursing the wounds of the partition of the Indian sub-continent. I know what it is to have a real but imagined and inaccessible homeland. The desire to understand my family’s roots and the impact of colonialism on our lives gave me the urge to devote myself to the study of history—ancient and modern. It was during my graduate studies in Delhi that I developed an interest in Asian affairs beyond India, and especially in South Korea (the Republic of Korea), which I will refer to simply as Korea from now on. That “Korea” currently represents only South Korea for those of us living in the West is significant, as it is the direct result of a Western perception of the division of that country and displacement of its people.

Some similarities to the trauma inflicted on India by partition aroused my curiosity and I seized the opportunity to further my studies with a focus on Korea, including taking language courses in Seoul. Korea’s transformation from a pastoral and impoverished third-
world country in the past into a modernizing economic power in the present has parallels with India, as does its resilience in adopting or adapting Western values and customs without diluting its Asian identity and traditions. As part of an M. Phil. program in East Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi (1994–6) I completed a dissertation on “The Globalization of the South Korean Economy and its Impact on Korea-India Economic Relations.”

While in Korea for language training I noticed many students in the courses at Yonsei University’s Korean Language Institute (1996–7 and 2002–3) who were Korean in appearance, although they did not speak the language. Some were second-generation Korean Americans, whose parents had emigrated to the US. These often understood Korean although they could not speak it fluently or read and write well. Others, not only from the States but also from Canada and Scandinavia, appeared to have no language skills at all, and relatively little familiarity with Korean culture. These, I learned, were individuals who had been adopted abroad as infants or young children. This was my first exposure to the issues surrounding transnational adoption. On learning more about their personal backgrounds, I realized that many of them had come to Korea in the hope of finding out about their birth family. They were not simply learning Korean, they were trying to discover and understand in what sense they themselves were Korean, although they had grown up in white, Western families, and in some cases had had little or no contact previously with other people who looked like them.

In hearing about their origins, I learned more about the long-term effects of the Korean War and the socio-economic conditions in Korea that had led their birthmothers to give them up for adoption. Many were embarking on an intense and emotional quest to find
the answer to the question, “Why did she not keep me?” While some considered their Western childhood to have been relatively happy, and realized that their education had led them to identify with Western values and culture, those I came to know better had all been traumatized by the loss of a sense of belonging to their birth family and country. Most of them struggled to deal with racial, ethnic, and identity conflicts both in Korea and in their country of adoption.

Even the Korean-looking students with Korean names who were not adopted and had never been abandoned, whose families had voluntarily migrated to the West, discussed experiences of racism and discrimination in both Korean and Western contexts. Although they had had more exposure to Korean food and customs at home than the returning adoptees or myself, my situation in Korea was easier in many ways since I was obviously not Korean. My desire to study Korean came as a surprise to Koreans and was seen as a compliment. Having grown up in the West, it was more difficult for the adoptees than for me to adjust to traditional Korean customs based on hierarchy and obedience. They also had to deal with the expectation from others that they would be able to understand the language and traditional rituals, and their own embarrassment on admitting to ignorance. When I subsequently moved to the US to undertake further graduate study, I was able to identify more closely with their experiences of alienation when surrounded by white people in what was, for the adoptees, their homeland. While enrolled in a Master’s program in History at the New Mexico State University (1998–2000) I made friends with others who were adoptees from Korea (as well as some of their adoptive parents) and shared my interest in that country and culture. I realized just how many Korean children had been adopted in North America, and began to delve more deeply into the causes and effects of that phenomenon.
As part of that program I completed a thesis on “Tradition and Modernity in the Republic of Korea” and undertook some initial research for one course into the complex history of international adoptions from South Korea. I began exploring websites providing information from government sources and adoption agencies, seeking to find out more about why, how, and in what circumstances “war orphans” and other Korean children were removed from their family and country of origin and transplanted into strange families in a strange land. At that time some of the children adopted by American families in the 1960s and 1970s, now young adults like those I had met in Korea, began telling and publishing their own stories. Researchers from various disciplines were also beginning to look more closely at the motivations, implications, and long-term effects of large-scale transnational and trans-racial adoptions in a rapidly globalizing context.

Rather than remaining in the US, I chose to move to Canada to pursue doctoral studies at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. My interest shifted from a purely historical and sociological curiosity about this topic to a desire to address the complex issues raised when one examines more closely the intersecting gender, class, race, and age dimensions of this exchange of children between what was a relatively poor country and a very rich one. Living in Vancouver, a city with a fairly large immigrant and second-generation Korean population, I realized that, while adoptions from China became common in Canada over the last two decades and have been much debated, there have been few adoptions from Korea compared with the US. There is very little documentation of those that did and still do occur. I began to investigate the different contexts and motivations involved. A closer look at the evolution of policies and attitudes related to international adoptions in Canada and the US relates to broader issues about how state policies, including militarization
and population control, have intersected with personal or familial relations between Asia and both countries in North America.

Having enrolled in a doctoral program in Women’s and Gender Studies at UBC I was able to benefit from courses that enabled me to better understand the global and local political and social conditions behind the adoptions. Gender, class, race, and age intersect in attempts to explain why so many Korean women did, and still do, relinquish their children. Global power relations enter into the equation when their situation is compared with that of the women in North America who are eager to adopt them. The absence of well developed, universally available social services and the continuing prevalence of extreme poverty, class distinctions, and overt gender discrimination in Korea, in spite of economic development and legal changes achieved through the efforts of women’s organizations, appear to present a sharp contrast with Canada, which is known internationally as a supposedly model Welfare State. Yet Canada has many children “in care,” many of them from an indigenous population suffering from poverty. Korea’s little noticed continuing export of apparently unwanted children also contrasts with China, which replaced Korea as the main source of adoptable children until recently. Efforts there to control the size of the population by the “single-child” policy are often deemed excessive in the West, but they serve to justify the availability of “superfluous” children. Korea, in contrast, is now concerned because the population is aging and the birthrate is exceptionally low. The long history of international adoptions from Korea provides a useful example of what other countries exporting children may expect in the future, and raises political, economic, and ethical issues that continue to dominate debates over more recent waves of international adoptions from Latin America and Africa.
Shifting Focus

When I began this project I intended to compare adoptions in Canada from Korea and India. Both have been little studied, and I thought my familiarity with the language and culture of India would be valuable in undertaking research on adoption there. I suspected that there would be significant similarities as well as differences. Although no war was involved in India, the partition of the Indian subcontinent along religious lines, on August 15, 1947, left a deep impact on children born of mixed parentage (between Hindus and Muslims), and on women from both sides who were abducted and raped, some of whom bore children. Many children were also orphaned by the murder of their parents, or abandoned after the recovery project initiated by the two nations (Butalia 2000, 213). With this comparative project in mind, I conducted fieldwork research with adoption agencies and orphanages in both India and Korea, as well as with adoption agencies in Canada.¹ As I began to attempt to bring my research findings together, I realized that the points of comparison between the situations that led to children needing homes in Korea and India are extremely complex. While Christian missionaries played a significant role in both countries, Indians did not convert to Christianity in large numbers, as occurred in Korea. The role of British colonialism in India is comparable in some ways to American influence and occupation in Korea, but in terms of transnational adoption the effects were very different. It is impossible to analyze the current situation of Korean adoptees in either the United States or Canada without re-engaging with the after-effects of the Korean War and the US and UN military occupation that followed. Ultimately, I had to admit that I needed to examine the US situation more closely in order to understand adoptions from Korea to Canada, and that I had enough material for a dissertation

¹ I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Shastri Foundation and the Korea Foundation for this research.
dealing with adoptions to North America (the US and Canada) from Korea alone.

Consequently, this study is only part of a larger comparative project including India that I intend to continue in the future. As I now have close family connections to France, where Korean children have also been adopted, my future research will extend to look at the situation in Europe as well. This dissertation represents the first stage in an on-going process of discovery and re-thinking of assumptions. I have conducted interviews, researched adoption websites, and contacted and visited adoption agencies and social welfare departments in the United States, Canada, Korea, and India, as well as talking to many adoptees. This background certainly colours my discussion of the past and present conditions of adoptions from Korea to the US and Canada. It has enriched my understanding of the socio-economic and cultural dimensions that have facilitated, regulated, complicated, promoted, and condemned international adoptions from Asia to North America, and the ethical dilemmas these adoptions represent.

As will be explained in more detail in my first chapter, the shift in focus for my research and the length of time it has taken to complete this dissertation have also influenced my methodology and theoretical framework. The qualitative fieldwork research completed with adoption agency workers that was a central part of my original project now occupies a relatively small proportion of the overall result, while larger issues regarding the political and ethical issues raised by transnational and transracial adoption have gained more attention. Recent changes in Korean policies regarding transnational adoption mean that it is probably about to be phased out completely. Tracing the history and background of adoptions from Korea to North America may now be of interest primarily as a preview of what may be expected to occur in other countries that are currently exporting children, as well as a point of
comparison that brings out the specificities of the relations between South Korea and the US or Canada.

Since beginning this project I have become a mother myself, to a son and a daughter who have a mixed racial and cultural inheritance as their father is from France. Our son was born in Algeria, where we were living temporarily for employment reasons, at a time when I was in the process of becoming a Canadian citizen. This personal situation brought home to me the relevance of family ties to immigration law, and to individual feelings of belonging. Currently I am living in France, where our daughter was born, and immigrants from India or Korea are less common than those from the Maghreb and other parts of Africa. I am faced daily with evidence of the intersecting influences of genetics and culture on my own family members’ identities. These elements make me in some ways an insider-outsider, where “adoption” as displacement and transformation of identity is concerned. My own experiences as a mother have also made me more aware of the centrality of gender in issues related to reproduction, of both bodies and culture. It is clear to me that this topic is extremely relevant to a program in Women’s and Gender Studies.

**Framing the Study: Gendered Experiences**

Transnational, transracial adoption is of interest to women, whether they be childless and relatively affluent would-be adopters, desperate birthmothers, or homeless Asian children, the majority of whom have been female. As the chapters to come will show, many of the latter now grow up in North America, with innumerable unanswered questions. Accounts by

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2 While many researchers working on transnational adoption take care to situate themselves in relation to the “adoption triangle,” the only one I came across who situates herself in relation to becoming a biological mother during her research is Nora Rose Moosnick, author of *Adopting Maternity: White Women Who Adopt Transracially and Transnationally* (2004).
female adult adoptees reveal that they often begin their search for their origins when they reach the age to consider having children of their own. As they re-cross national, racial, and cultural borders on a journey of return that is also one of discovery, they become aware of complex relationships between race/ethnicity, gender, class, and age, in terms of both individual entitlement and resources and collective, national ones. My meetings with adoption workers in several countries, as well as the stories of birthmothers who relinquish their child, confirmed that the adoption process is feminized. Both birth and adoptive fathers usually remain in the wings, whether they are supportive or not. While the majority of social workers and counsellors are women (even more so in the past than now3), the government bodies that pronounce laws and policies controlling the movement of people, on both sides of these international transactions, are often perceived by various stakeholders as masculine and distanced from women’s painful realities of single motherhood or the inability to bear a child.

The reason why a child is available for adoption in Asia is frequently related to the child’s gender, as well as to poverty and the stigma attached to being an unmarried mother. In Korea, adoption is usually associated with relinquishment or abandonment of the child by the birth family or parent, rather than with being orphaned. It is rarely due to the “protective removal” of vulnerable minors on the part of the State, as often occurs in Canada. Such differing norms stem from the way in which gender difference and family genealogy are constructed and perceived in many Asian contexts, where girl children are still often seen as a burden whereas sons are a resource. This view has been as prevalent in India as in Korea, 

where, as in China, the patriarchal male lineage has been culturally constructed as especially important because of the significance of rites of respect for the ancestors being carried out by male heirs. The surprising shift behind an increase in domestic adoptions of girls and international adoptions of boys in recent times in Korea will be one issue raised towards the end of this study.

On the other hand, gender also plays a large role in motivating the demand for children from abroad to adopt in North America. Western women who are unable to bear children themselves may experience a sense of being devalued, or frustration at not being able to experience raising children, having prioritized career goals. Some have sons and would like a daughter. As will be discussed later, stereotypes related to racialization in the West intersect with gender issues, when Asian girl children are assumed to be more easily integrated into a white North American family (and the society in general) than, for example, Afro-American boys. The reasons why few healthy white babies are available for adoption in the US or Canada include relatively easy access to contraception and abortion, as well as social and financial support for single mothers—all changes hard-won by feminist activism. But the assumption that children are not available for adoption in North America camouflages the presence of many children needing homes who are considered “unsuitable” for reasons involving race, class, health, and age. The fact that non-white children, or older children, siblings, or those with disabilities, have difficulty finding homes in their own countries in North America is indicative of broader issues within the Western context

Laura Briggs (2005) challenges the assumption that international adoption is due to the lack of available children in the US, in an article discussing the existence of a “bio-underclass” whose children are not considered suitable to become members of the respectable middle class.
concerning entitlement, privilege, and economic oppression, as well as disparities between North America and the Global South where most international adoptees are born.

Issues related to patriarchal social structures and rigid or changing attitudes to women’s sexuality are also central to understanding why so many Korean women have reluctantly relinquished their children. Economic class-based conditions resulting from a combination of tradition and globalization, as well as media images of the West, are central factors in the reasons why so many have chosen to allow their child to be adopted abroad. A feminist approach, including a closer look at the evolving situation of women in Korea and in North America, provides insight into a phenomenon that remains in many ways perplexing.

Questions and Dilemmas

Many existing studies deal with the problems surrounding adoption in general and trans-racial adoption in particular, in various contexts. In comparing policies on adoption across space and time, and general accounts with individual experiences, this study will adopt an interdisciplinary perspective within a feminist framework. Archival research on the past and web-based research on the present situation will be juxtaposed with personal accounts, from the different perspectives of various participants in what is often referred to as the adoption triangle (birthmother/parents, child, adoptive mother/parents) or circle (including extended family on both sides, as well as social workers from adoption agencies and other government officials). Questions addressed include the reasons for both “supply” and “demand” in international adoption. Why have these children not been able to remain in Korea? What role do national policies related to (im)migration and population control play on both sides of the transactions? What kinds of experiences, positive or negative, have the adoptees and their
adoptive families had? How have attitudes changed over time, in both Korea and in North America?

The most striking and controversial paradox, in reviewing past and present accounts of international adoption, is the general shift from its favourable perception as a heroic act of rescue and generosity on the part of receiving families, to suspicion or accusations of commodification and even theft of children, exploitation of the reproductive labour of poor Majority World women, and perpetuation of imperialist practices of expropriation of resources. Apparently contradictory and irreconcilable perspectives co-exist, and are multiplied when variations in individual experiences are taken into account. What is told, how, to what audience, and with what effects, determines the impression left by both supposedly objective research results and emotional personal stories. Perceptions, in this area, are often based on deliberate or unintended deceptions or wishful thinking, on the part of any or all of the participants.

The disciplines represented in terms of the theoretical framework and methodologies brought together here include history (archival research), qualitative sociological research (participant observation, interviews, questionnaires), textual analysis (of various written records, including personal autobiographical texts and websites), and critical attention to the intersectionality of gender, race, class, (dis)ability, and age. The chapter headings reflect a series of shifts in perspective and focus: from researchers to adopters, from adopters to birthmothers, from birthmothers to adoptees, and from adoptees as children to accounts by some of them as adults. The last chapter, which focuses on Canada, moves to the perspective of agencies currently catering to the demand for children from Korea, as they become less available. The chapter titles and epigraphs reflect the relevance of some concepts borrowed
from Michel Foucault, as will be explained in Chapter 1. As I sought to clarify the connections and tensions between the various perspectives on adoptions from Korea to North America, I discovered that these terms, though inserted late in the research process and used out of their Foucauldian context, helped me to pinpoint some of the central themes and issues involved. I use them in relation specifically to the field of adoption, which evokes the concepts of “genealogy” or “biopower” in particular ways, even as it may bring them into question. The terms “confinement,” “tutelage,” “pastoral supervision,” “care” of the self or others, and “heterotopias” resonate with this topic in sometimes surprising ways. They serve to provide a conceptual framework to bring a range of perspectives together and allow a critical view of the result, as outlined below.

The Shape of this Study

Having explained in this Introduction my own perspective and some of the central issues to be addressed, in the first chapter I will continue the discussion broached here by justifying what I term an “undisciplined” approach. Academic “disciplines” exemplify the type of regulation of thought and action through discourse that Foucault described as typical of organizational structures. His own work was criticized for not conforming to the expectations of any one academic discipline. In my view, attempts to be cross-or inter-disciplinary illustrate the resistance to discipline that is, according to Foucault, to be expected. Women’s and Gender Studies are areas of counter-disciplinary inquiry, characterized by critical thinking rather than strict adherence to disciplinary expectations. In this case, my approach

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5 See the glossary of terms from Foucault on pp. xi–xii.
crosses boundaries between historical research and qualitative methods associated with the social sciences, between humanistic studies of self-construction through auto/bio/graphy and polemical or therapeutic personal writings with less literary merit, between academic studies of adoption and informal exchanges among the individuals concerned. By bringing these together I hope to elucidate the ways in which the aspects emphasized reflect the assumptions and priorities of that perspective. Looked at in juxtaposition, the reasons for contradictions and controversy become clearer.

In Chapter 1 I will situate this study in relation to relevant scholarship from different disciplines, and justify my combination of various methodologies. In each of the following chapters I will focus first on the role of archival and factual research by myself and by others, as I attempt to synthesize and assess the wealth of often biased information available from multiple sources. This “archeological excavation” (in Foucault’s sense) dealing with war, diplomacy, and bio-politics, is complemented by my own personal observations in various settings and qualitative research interviews with a range of stakeholders. In the second part of each chapter, with the exception of the one on Canada, analysis of published memoirs and letters reveals the relevance of what Foucault calls “technologies of the self.” These personal writings are juxtaposed with the historical and sociological material, as evidence of the resistance inherent in power relations. They illustrate what Foucault terms “le souci de soi” the care of (or concern for) the self that becomes evident when identities are manipulated, threatened, and reconfirmed or transformed in conscious ways. Anxiety about who the adoptee or the birthmother “really is” may be experienced from many points in the adoption circle, and solved only when the individuals in question decide to take control of their own life story. However, the concept of the individual subject as exerting agency, even while
subjected to various types of governmentality and external discipline, has to be reassessed in contexts where collective identities based on gender roles in relation to race/nationality and age come into play.

Chapter 2 focuses on early adoptions from Korea to the US in the aftermath of the Korean War. Media coverage played an important part, as did one American family, the Holts, whose “agency” still occupies a prominent role in current adoptions and assisted me in my research. “Relations” are central from two perspectives: between the two nations, in economic, military, and diplomatic terms during the Cold War, and at the level of one family, representing the many American families who adopted mixed-race or Korean “waifs and orphans” in the 1950s and 1960s. History overlaps with genealogy, as family trees and national heritages mingle and are redistributed. Foucault’s “genealogical” method of inquiry is particularly relevant to this specific situation, with its focus on both origins and subsequent developments (which he refers to as “upbringing” or “growing up/out”). Bertha Holt’s memoirs *The Seed from the East* (1956/1979) and *Bring My Sons from Afar* (1986/1992), and an extensive interview I conducted in 2007 with her daughter, Molly Holt, contribute personal gendered perspectives on a situation that was unique yet illustrates dominant paradigms of race and gender relations. The “rescue” meta-narrative prevails, with its Christian overtones, as American GIs were perceived in the media as “saving” children, who ironically may well have been their own abandoned offspring.

The Holts themselves adopted eight Korean-born children assumed to be of mixed race, and Bertha Holt’s writings reveal a great deal about the construction of femininity and maternity in North America at that time, as well as the colonizing camouflaged by efforts to “save” children from Communism as well as dire material circumstances. “Grandma Holt”
became a venerated figure in Korea, which she considered her adopted land. The agency now known as Holt Children’s Services (HCS) runs one of the numerous homes for unwed mothers in Korea, similar to Ae Ran Won, another non-profit home providing shelter and security for young unwed mothers where I was able to conduct fieldwork in 2007. Both are still functioning as places for young mothers to give birth and decide whether to keep or “give up” their child for domestic or transnational adoption. Chapter 3 focuses on the birthmothers, looking at changes in the origins of children adopted from Korea, from the post-war period up to the present. Adoption law and attitudes to adoption (and to transracial adoption in particular) changed in the US, with the expansion of social work as a profession and the Black Civil Rights Movement. Whereas in the first phase Korean children were seen as desperately needing homes, and Westerners as generous, the desire of Americans to adopt became acknowledged as an important motivation and the exchange was re-coded as a “win-win” situation of benefit to both sides (Berebitsky 2000).

Both official records and personal accounts indicate that poverty, social stigma, gender-based domestic violence, and the lack of social services, rather than war, have for many years been the main reasons why Korean children have still been available. The existence of foreign adoption agencies and the perception of continuing adoption as a means to maintain good relations with the West are seen by some of the sources that will be cited as in fact contributing to the continuing transfer of children. In Korea, domestic adoptions and support for unmarried mothers have not increased as much as was hoped, nor has the number of children whose mothers are not able to raise them decreased dramatically, in spite of a high abortion rate. As many adoptees have returned to Korea in search of information about their original family, previously secret records have become more open, and the
birthmothers’ perspective has become more accessible. Many unwed or abandoned young mothers give birth in maternity homes like those I visited, where some of their “letters” to their unknown child have been collected in three anthologies that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

These accounts convey not only the desperation that drove them to relinquish their child, but also pressure from the agencies running the homes to have faith in a Christian God to ensure that their child will have “a beautiful life.” Guilt, remorse, and resentment at the conditions that have led to their plight mingle in these letters, where fathers play only minor roles. While the maternity homes serve as a refuge and hiding place for many young women with unwelcome pregnancies, from a Foucauldian perspective the birthmothers are literally “confined” for their “confinement”: they give birth in seclusion and are marginalized and mostly ultimately dispossessed of their child. They are subjected to “biopower,” in Foucault’s terms, as state efforts to regulate population by exporting or importing infants overlap with medical inspections of children, who are classified according to assumed desirability by gender, age, and physical health. The birthmothers’ letters will be discussed as also illustrating Foucault’s concept of “confession,” in relation to the Korean concept of han, as well as constituting a new variation on “testimonial” auto/bio/graphy representing a collective and relational rather than individualized self.

The situation of birthmothers has changed considerably over the years, as factory work resulting from industrialization and the IMF crisis both affected gender roles in Korean families. Attitudes to sexuality have changed rapidly in the younger generation as a result of modernization and globalization, while access to contraception and legal abortion has lagged behind. Although some improvements have been made in support for single mothers in
Korea and in promoting domestic adoptions, international adoption may, paradoxically, now be seen as a better option, even as it is supposed to be phased out. Birthmothers may accept their loss, not because of dire poverty or social stigma, but because the child may acquire the Western education and English language skills coveted by Korea’s upwardly mobile middle class. They presume that the child will be less stigmatized in the west than in Korea for being adopted (and therefore assumed to be “illegitimate”), and many believe that racism in North America is a thing of the past. They may also still prefer to relinquish their child for international rather than domestic adoption because it is now, ironically, more likely that contact may be reestablished in the future if the child is sent abroad.

In Chapter 4 the perspective shifts to that of adult adoptees, raised in the West, who have returned to Korea and provided accounts of their experience. It includes my own investigation of various Korean adoptee networks, associations, websites, and events, some of which I witnessed first-hand in Korea, along with references to Eleana Kim’s (2010) extensive in-depth analysis in Adopted Territories. Some of the returning adoptees, reversing the Holts’ struggle to obtain American citizenship for Korean adoptees in the 1950s, are fighting to reclaim Korean citizenship. While the published accounts do not claim to be representative of all adoptees’ lives, they do put into question the results of many earlier studies on how well the children adopted from Korea “adjusted” to life in America. They provide more detailed accounts that add to the results of recent qualitative research studies on adult Korean-born adoptees undertaken by Mia Tuan and Jiannbin Lee Shiao (2011) and John Palmer (2011).

Memoirs by two adoptees, Katy Robinson (2002) and Jane Jeong Trenka (2003; 2009), will be analyzed to bring out the disjuncture between the Korean child that took the
plane to the US and the adult returning imbued with Western culture and attitudes. The facts that Trenka’s sister, who was adopted by the same family, disassociates herself from this account, and that Robinson discovered her birthfather rather than birthmother, remind us that every case is unique. As in the case of Bertha Holt’s memoirs and the birthmothers’ solicited letters, the way the stories are framed and directed at an implied audience must be taken into consideration. Foucault used the term “tutelage” to show how individuals are constrained in dependent child-like roles. This is relevant to the fact that many adoptees resent the way in which accounts of their lives turn them into eternal children. In producing their own versions of their lives, these and other adoptees are engaging in a form of resistance, by constructing their own identity through narratives that illustrate what Foucault calls “technologies of the self” (Foucault, in Martin 1988). Trenka’s writings, in particular, belong to another category of “testimony” representing an attempt to recover from personal and collective trauma through collective action. Kim (2010) points out, however, that the new adoptee community that provides a refuge and a sense of belonging to many also excludes those who do not conform to a narrative of self-recovery and empowerment through membership in a “counterpublic” with a shared counterdiscourse.

Gender issues intersect once more with issues related to age and racialization in these accounts, as the female narrators are often considering maternity themselves and rethinking the nature/nurture debate. Several had good relationships with their adoptive mother, less good ones with the adoptive father. They fear appearing disloyal and ungrateful if they also wish to know their birthmother, or point out the underlying imperialism inherent in the conditions that produce transracial international adoptions. Some adoptive mothers have shared their own fears of finding themselves childless, after having spent so much effort on
acquiring a child. As adoptions become more open, there will be more exchanges between
birthmothers and adoptive mothers, like the one included in one of the anthologies, *To My
Beloved Baby*, published by Holt Children’s Services (2004). The dynamics of the adoption
triangle change, when all three poles are represented in dialogue with each other, rather than
spoken about by “experts.” Exchanges between adoptees, birthmothers, and American
adoptive mothers also raise questions about what is specifically American, or North
American, about their experience. Comparison with Canada serves to highlight some
particular aspects of adoptions from Korea in these two nations with different historical
relationships to that country.

Chapter 5 concentrates on Canada. State apparatus, in the form of rigorously applied
immigration and adoption laws, represents a significant aspect of biopower in the Canadian
context. The history of transracial adoption in Canada is different from that in the US, as the
focus of controversy regarding domestic adoptions has been on First Nations children, rather
than on Afro-Americans. The scandalous history of their treatment in residential schools and
the identity crises experienced by many of those adopted by white families pinpoint the
frequent failure of both governments and families to know or do what is “in the best interests
of the child” (Strong-Boag 2006, 173). Many were also sent for adoption in other countries,
before the First Nations expressed objections similar to those of Black social workers in the
US in the 1970s. Canadian adoption records are a provincial concern, and documentation
varies across the country. The illegal export of many white Roman Catholic babies from
Quebec, born to unmarried mothers before the “Quiet Revolution” of the 1960s, to Jewish
families in New York (Balcom 2011) provides a reversed foreshadowing of the import of

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7 See Cheri Register, “Are Those Kids Yours?” *American Families with Children Adopted
foreign children to that province over the last twenty years. Quebec has had the most
international adoptions from Korea (British Columbia and Ontario having begun such
adoptions only in the late 1990s) and from elsewhere, and one of the highest per capita rates
of international adoptions in the world (Ouellette in Marre and Briggs 2009). Since the
adoptive parents are mostly francophone, the encouragement of such adoptions may be
related to a particular aspect of bio-politics in Canada, Quebec’s desire to raise more
francophone children now that the birthrate there is very low.

One of the obvious reasons for fewer adoptions from Korea to Canada than to the US
was Canada’s relatively minor role in the Korean War, which I will look at more closely.
Immigration policy, however, had just as much influence. Like the US, until the 1960s
Canada banned or limited immigration from Asia as part of racist policies aimed at keeping
the majority of the population “European” (Thobani 2007). Even now, with large Asian
populations in the main cities, Asian children joining white families present an anomaly that
challenges both “colour-blindness” and the prevailing discourse of “multiculturalism.”
Archival research in this chapter is juxtaposed with an account of field research at an
adoption agency in BC, as well as relevant interviews conducted with agencies in Korea.
Websites for prospective adopters in Canada reveal the extent to which they, as well as the
children involved, are subject to scrutiny. Family structure, age, and physical fitness are
assessed, as well as educational level, financial security, and community affiliations.
Adopting families have to submit to invasive in-home inspections and make promises
regarding the child’s future, including exposure to the culture of origin. Same-sex couples
and single women are directed away from Korea, although this discrimination is contrary to
the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As Canada’s cities reflect an increasing
number of Westernized second-generation Asian-Canadians and mixed-race families are not unusual, adopting children of a different race may appear to be open-minded and cosmopolitan; the adoptive parents may sincerely believe they are fighting racism. Yet the rules governing the institution of international adoption tend to re-confirm classism and heterosexism, as well as white economic entitlement and a belief in cultural superiority, simply by assuming that a child from elsewhere in the Majority world will be better-off raised in North America by middle-class, probably white, heterosexual parents.

The experience of children adopted in European countries may be different in some ways, as several studies point out, but the underlying dilemmas are the same. In the Conclusion, as well as up-dating the situation in Korea I will attempt to pinpoint the many paradoxes and ironies of international adoption. As studies by a number of researchers dealing with international adoption from other countries also show, this is an area where unusual generosity and openness on the part of individuals and families may be combined with ignorance of the causes and after-effects of adoption; where selfish or religious motives may be camouflaged by apparent altruism; where governments use children, who cannot provide informed consent, for their own ends; where colour-blindness is not sufficient to erase racism; where women and girls engage in complex relationships among themselves, and men are conveniently or inconveniently excluded or marginalized; where what is at first resistance to authority or discipline may develop into a new apparatus of control. The

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9 These include Sara Dorow’s *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship* (2006a), focused on adoption from China; Barbara Yngvesson’s *Belonging in an Adopted World* (2010), which includes India as well as Latin-American countries; Karen Dubinsky’s * Babies Without Borders. Adoption and Migration across the Americas* (2010); and most recently Laura Briggs’ *Somebody’s Children. The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (2012).
evolution of discourses about international adoption clearly illustrates what Foucault saw as the aim of his “genealogical” approach to history:

the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience or set of practices which were accepted without question . . . becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new relations, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behaviour, habits, practices, and institutions.\textsuperscript{10}

International adoption “incites new relations” at the level of the individual family, as well as that of nation-states and academic disciplines. It serves to illustrate the fact that what is assumed to be “knowledge” depends on perspective, as Foucault claimed in the epigraph to this Introduction. It is also inseparable, as Foucault demonstrated, from power relations.

Debates over international adoption always end up asking what the better alternatives may be “in the child’s best interests,” as will this study. Because of its age, the child is the one participant who has no say in the decision. The solutions proposed vary according to the power/knowledge perspective and context of the adult speakers. What constitutes the “beautiful life” wished for their baby by birthmothers who send their child to America, a place whose name in Korean means, as Trenka (2009, 101) points out, “beautiful country”? How does the American life imagined relate to the “beautiful” (aesthetic and ethical) life-as-story discussed by Foucault in his work on self-construction through writing? Is such a life assumed to be available (or desirable) only to Western-educated individuals? The questions are not simple to formulate, and any answers even harder to suggest, but the topic is certainly worthy of close attention. It has been approached from many different angles, and in undertaking this project I have benefited from the research and stories of many individuals, whose contribution will be more adequately acknowledged in the next chapter.

Chapter 1

An “Undisciplined” Approach: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Adoptions from South Korea to North America

*To adopt:* to take into one’s family and treat as one’s own child, esp. legally; to take to oneself by choice or approval, as policies, principles, opinions, a course of conduct etc.

*Adoption:* the act of adopting, or the state of being adopted.

*Adoptive:* constituted by adoption; adopting or being adopted; assumed.


Adoption Debates

The above definitions of terms related to “adoption” indicate several of the contentious issues entailed in any discussion of this topic. What is “one’s family”? Who is the “one” who owns it or belongs to it? How is a “family” to be understood as constituted? Is it nuclear or extended, or necessarily more than one person? Is it assumed to be heterosexual and monogamous? What does it mean to treat someone as (or as if?) “one’s own (biological?) child”? What age limit is imposed on being a “child,” if any? Or on being a parent? Why is this process associated with “legality” rather than custom or circumstances? Does “to take to oneself” (as a possession or relative?) apply to children as well as “policies, principles” etc.?

What kinds of “policies, principles, and courses of conduct” are “adopted” or espoused in the adoption of children? Adoption can be either active (from the adopter’s perspective) or passive (from that of the adoptee). A child is constituted as adoptee by being adopted, usually with little or no choice in the matter, although the adopter exerts agency (through an “agency,” involving policies, conduct etc.) and some degree of choice. What kind of choice is in fact available to the adopters? Is this their first choice, or only the second or third best option? Is the child taken unconditionally or “on approval”? Is the adoptee’s new identity (or that of the would-be parent) necessarily “assumed,” in both senses of that
word? Is it freely given and taken, or imposed? To what extent is it fake or a fiction, involving a mask covering up something shameful, entailing secrecy or deceit? Is this new identity a “gift” and privilege, making the adoptee’s life easier, or does it constitute a constant reminder of an initial rejection that might be repeated? Does adoptive love have to be earned, by both parents and children?

The transfer of children across national borders raises all these questions, and has been approached from a range of disciplinary and personal perspectives that mostly ultimately either defend it as representing a positive aspect of humanitarian globalization, or condemn it as implicitly exploitative and imperialistic. In this chapter, I aim to situate this study in relation to the growing mass of relevant research in a range of disciplines. I will begin with an overview of some general studies of adoption in North America, and transnational and/or transracial adoption in particular, as they relate to the three nation states concerned here: (South) Korea, the US, and Canada. Specific issues and events and recent studies of international adoptions from Korea will be taken up in the individual chapters to come, but I will attempt here to map some of the main approaches in relation to each other. I will go on to justify my juxtaposition of archival, historical material with textual analysis of auto/bio/graphical texts of various types and observations based on fieldwork using qualitative research methods. This combination is connected to my introduction of concepts from Foucault to frame this study, and I will elaborate on feminist critiques of Foucault that are relevant to international adoptions from Korea to North America. This first chapter attempts to combine elements that are often separate in social science studies: the literature review of existing work in the field, the theoretical framework, and the methodology. In this particular study all three overlap.
The History of Adoption in North America

There had been until recently surprisingly little attention paid to adoption issues by feminist scholars, as Sally Haslanger and Charlotte Witt pointed out in 2005 in their introduction to an important cross-disciplinary collection of "philosophical and feminist essays" entitled *Adoption Matters*. They claimed that "interdisciplinary thinking about adoption can provide new perspectives on the institution of adoption itself," revealing the "unstated assumptions concerning race, identity, and the natural form of family life" that shape "the tacit norms and explicit rules governing adoption and adoption practices" (Haslanger and Witt 2005, 15). The disciplines represented in their volume include Philosophy, Law, Political Science, Women’s Studies, History, and Social Policy. The essays cover definitions of “family” and of “motherhood” in relation to changing laws and procedures regarding adoption in the US, including gay and lesbian adoption, policies related to adoption law involving privacy and disclosure, and “matching” families by racial characteristics, in comparison with transracial adoptions.

Several of the authors present historical accounts of the reasons for the availability of children for adoption in different contexts. Janet Farrell Smith, in analyzing the legal treatment of children as property, which may be abandoned and exchanged or retrieved, looks at the role of poverty in causing children to be homeless in the US in the nineteenth century (Smith 2005, 115. See also Brysk 2004). While poverty is acknowledged as the main cause, its relation to gender or race is not central to her discussion. It becomes so in “Feminism, Race, and Adoption Policy” by Dorothy Roberts (Haslanger and Witt 2005, 234–
Roberts is one of only three out of fourteen writers in Adoption Matters who do not reveal in the biographical notes that they are either adoptive mothers or adoptees. Adoption is strongly defended by Harvard law professor and adoptive mother of two Peruvian children Elizabeth Bartholet, in “Abuse and Neglect, Foster Drift, and the Adoption Alternative” (Bartholet 2005, 223–233). Bartholet upholds a positive view of transracial adoptions in the US that has been contested by Roberts and others expressing the more critical perspective of the Black community.²

The often hostile debate over the history of the adoption of Afro-American children by white families in the US has been paralleled in Canada by controversy surrounding the apprehending of First Nations children, as discussed by Veronica Strong-Boag (2006) in Finding Families, Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption. “Native Indian” children were placed at first in residential schools, where many suffered abuse, then widely adopted out to white families, often with negative outcomes. Some were adopted abroad, including in the United States, as documented by Karen Balcom in The Traffic in Babies (2011). More recently, many are assigned to long-term foster care in conditions that leave much to be desired, as demonstrated in Strong-Boag’s latest book, Fostering Nation? Canada Confronts its History of Childhood Disadvantage (2011). The campaign by Black

² See Bartholet’s Family Bonds: Adoption and the Politics of Parenting (1994) and Abuse and Neglect, Foster Drift, and the Adoption Alternative (2005). Briggs (2006a, 610) points out Bartholet’s connections to the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute and successful lobbying for subsidies to white parents in the US who raise children of colour. The title of Briggs’ recent book, Somebody’s Children (2012) might be seen as a response to Bartholet’s downplaying of the birthmothers’ perspective. Somebody’s Child is also the title of a recent collection of twenty-five personal stories by people adopted in British Columbia (Gillespie and Van Luwen 2012). This volume is a sequel to two collections of accounts of childlessness entitled Nobody’s Mother and Nobody’s Father.
social workers in the US in the 1970s to have Black children placed with Black families has parallels with Canadian First Nations’ successful attempts to have the supposedly protective removal of their children re-interpreted as a form of ongoing genocide. The situation of “children of colour” who remain in care in both North American countries, rather than being adopted, provides an important point of comparison with those from overseas, especially Asia, who are welcomed with open arms.

Social workers and adoption agencies, as well as immigration departments, play a central role in both North American contexts in facilitating this influx from abroad. Histories of adoption in the US cover the evolution of social welfare agencies, as well as the origin and type of children available for adoption, and who is allowed to adopt. In Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives (Carp 2002), Brian Gill analyzes the role of “Adoption Agencies and the Search for the Ideal Family, 1918–1965.” The model family has varied a great deal across continents and cultures, and within North America over the last two hundred years. Another study by Ellen Herman, Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States (2008), looks at religious as well as racial “matching,” and the “technologies” of modern child adoption, as does Strong-Boag (2006) in the case of Canada. Procedures and practices are also the focus of two works by Judith Modell entitled Kinship with Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture (1994) and A Sealed and Secret Kinship: The Culture of Politics and Practices in American Adoption (2002). The role of women in the evolution of social work as a profession with its own rules and disciplinary apparatus (Balcom 2011) will be important in later discussions of adoptions from Korea in the chapters to come, as will the absence of a history of non-familial adoption in Korean culture. The Korean version of the “model family” has led to the ejection from the nation of
many children whose mothers would have raised them if that model were less pervasive, while changes in the North American model have had the reverse effect.

**Gendered Transactions: Transnational Adoption and “Real Mothers”**

References to “kinship,”3 and especially “mothering,” in all these studies distinguish and shift between biological or genetic assumptions about blood ties and physical resemblance and the nurturing role that governs the acquisition of language and culture.4 The latter is especially significant where cross-cultural communication and two or more “mother-tongues” are concerned. “Nature” and “nurture” may be considered equally important or not, and tend to be competing in adoption discourse. When racial and cultural “matching” was the norm, adoption could remain a secret, as it often was historically (and may still be preferred) in Korea and other Asian countries. In cases of transracial domestic or transnational adoption, physical difference is built into the relationship, and curiosity about origins is bound to occur, on the part of the child and others. This curiosity has motivated the trend towards “opening up” adoption files (Wegar 1997), shedding new light on the role of birthmothers, as well as agencies with sometimes dubious record keeping.

In her social history of adoption in North America from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Julie Berebitsky (2000) claims that adoption was less rigid and adoptive parents more varied before social workers and psychologists became involved in the adoption process (although their interventions certainly prevented some flagrant abuses). According to her, until the second half of the twentieth century adoption was viewed as “a

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4 Dorow (2006) introduces a nuanced analysis of what she terms “kinwork,” as adoptive mothers perform the process of bonding with an initially foreign and strange child.
positive way to create a family that closely mirrored the biological ideal” (Berebitsky 2000, 1–2). The 1950s and 1960s saw a new trend, with fewer families able to adopt from a dwindling supply of the healthy white infants deemed most desirable. Long waits and increasing bureaucracy led many frustrated couples to reject the intervention of professionals and look for sources outside the public welfare services. Private transnational adoptions became increasingly common, and the expert practice of “matching” was ignored in the first adoptions to the US from Korea. As will be seen in my next chapter, interracial adoptions of this transnational nature were dramatized and romanticized to appeal to white families in ways that domestic adoption did not.

Berebitsky also notes that in the 1950s American women were being called on to provide homes and families for abandoned children at a time when domesticity was being glorified. Childless women were expected to acknowledge that “they needed the children as much as the children needed them” (Berebitsky 2000, 55). A large family of adopted children, as illustrated by the Holts (see Chapter 2), reinforced pre-second-wave-feminist ideas about motherhood as essential to a woman’s “fulfillment,” while at the same time confirming neo-colonial stereotypes of white women as saviors and contributing to negative images of the culture of the source countries. This is particularly apparent in the case of some Asian countries, where gender prejudice seemed to be confirmed since most available children until recently were female, and birthmothers were often assumed to have been sexually exploited or irresponsibly promiscuous.

In her historical overview of inter-country adoptions in Canada, the US, and New Zealand, Kirsten Lovelock (2000) distinguishes two distinct phases: the first, from World War II to the mid-1970s, emphasized “finding families for children,” especially those
orphaned or displaced as a result of war or other disasters. Transnational adoption was perceived as a form of humanitarian emergency aid. The second, from the mid-1970s to the present, is marked, according to Lovelock, by a shift in emphasis to “finding children for families” (Lovelock 2000, 908), with transnational adoption becoming a market-driven enterprise. In the case of Canada, bringing in children from Europe after World War II did not go against the “preferred race” (i.e. white) criteria in Canadian immigration law.\(^5\)

Crossing racial divides did not become a feature of inter-country adoption to Canada until a change in immigration policy in the 1960s (Lovelock 2000, 916). Lovelock argues that the discourse of earlier international “rescue” operations camouflages current efforts to remove children from the world’s troubled and impoverished regions to satisfy the demand from Western families who can afford to pay for them and raise them (May 1995; Zelizer 2007).

In transnational adoption, money changes hands. The children may appear to become commodified, even if no actual trafficking or kidnapping is involved (as has occurred in some cases).\(^6\)

According to Karen Dubinsky (2007), transnational adoption produces its own kind of kidnap narrative with particular resonance in both the United States and Canada, where Native American children were taken away from their parents without their consent (Dubinsky 2007, 147). As with transnational adoptees, the children who later returned to meet their birth families were unable to speak the same language and had been culturally as

\(^6\) In November 2007 the media drew attention to the case of African children abducted without the consent of their parents to be taken to France by an adoption agency which has since been prosecuted. For more details see “Europeans Try to Kidnap Chadian Children from their Families,” *International Herald Tribune*, November 2, 2007. Accessed April 20, 2011. [http://www.iht.com](http://www.iht.com).
well as physically cut off from their origins. First Nations children who would have been treasured by their own families were raised to see themselves as objects of charity and pity, needing to be saved or rescued and re-formed in order to acquire value in a white, Christian world.

As in the case of Korea, the “humanitarian” discourse at the heart of the history of transracial and transnational adoption is inseparable from religious and colonizing motivations. Christian missions were central in promoting a “saving grace” interpretation of their interventions into local culture and customs, as well as in providing refuge for vulnerable children who were then made available for overseas adoption. Laura Briggs credits a visual iconography of the “Madonna and Child” motif in Christian settings for the success of some agencies’ publicity for intercountry adoption (Briggs 2003, 184). Images of motherless children with an empty rice bowl or bloated bellies, or a barely surviving mother holding a skeletal child, provoke pity for Third World “poverty” in TV commercials for charities. Adoption (or sponsoring/fostering by making monthly donations) is presented as a viable solution, implying that there is an ethical “responsibility” for North Americans to assist children in need in poor countries. The supposedly generous outpouring of Christian charity camouflages the role of Western states in maintaining the exploitative conditions that produce the dire material circumstances that lead poor parents to abandon or relinquish their children. As Kenneth Herrmann and Barbara Kasper have argued, “the mere acceptance of international adoption overlooks the negative impact on children, birthmothers, adoptive parents, and the Third World countries from which the children are removed” (1992, 46). According to their study (conducted twenty years ago), the practice of treating transnational
adoption as a business was already resulting in violations of standards and laws in both the countries of origin and the receiving states. This trend has only grown since then.

**Race Matters in Transnational Adoption**

In 2002 Peter Selman compiled an estimate of the number of “intercountry adoptions” (ICA) worldwide through data collected from eighteen receiving states over thirty years, up until the 1990s. The results suggested that “the scale of ICA is greater than is usually acknowledged and could potentially grow in the first decades of this century, making international controls even more important” (Selman 2002, 206). His prediction was realized, as shown in his up-dated report covering 1999–2004 (in Marre and Briggs 2009, 32–51).

Selman emphasized that demographic analysis of intercountry adoption should not focus simply on the movement of children across national frontiers as an aspect of international migration, as it is of relatively minor significance in comparison with legal migration, refugee claims, temporary migrant labour, and illegal infiltration of borders. Adoption raises different types of issues in relation to “biopower”: the control of fertility and the domestic treatment of children in care. Selman relates intercountry adoptions to the number of births in both sending and receiving countries, and to the child welfare systems in different contexts.

Like Briggs (2006b), Selman (2002, 223) disagreed with the conclusion expressed by Lovelock and others that international adoptions have increased simply because there is an increasing “demand” for children in the West and an “oversupply” in poor countries. The “supply” side did decrease in North America, because of changes in social attitudes to “illegitimacy” and single motherhood as well as access to contraception and abortion: yet many older and “special needs” children remain in care, as do racialized children. On the
other hand, many career-oriented Western women put off having children until it is too late, even with the help of modern reproductive technologies. The fact that many adoptive parents would still prefer children that might look like them was reflected in the rush to obtain children from Romania and Russia when they became available. The shift to Asian children will be discussed in detail in the chapters to come, but in the case of Korea and China there is also a false assumption on the “supply” side, since for the last twenty years both countries have had very low birth rates. In the case of Korea, as will be seen, the reasons for these children’s availability may be similar to the reasons for the availability of children in North America: yet adoptive parents who would not consider a “special needs” child born in their own country may be willing to take one from Asia. The intersections of class, gender, and racialization have produced complex and sometimes unexpected effects in the realm of transnational adoption.

Taking a child from overseas may appear less risky than domestic adoption because foreign and distant birthparents were, until recently, expected to be less likely to want contact or to intervene in any way (Allen 2005). Hiromi Ishizawa et al. (2006), in a study based on the 2000 US census, pointed to the fact that white families may adopt children of other racial backgrounds from abroad, whereas minority families are restricted to children of the same race. While this may reflect a justifiable preference for racial matching where possible in the interests of the child in domestic adoptions, it nevertheless confirms that where foreign children are concerned, middle-class white families are generally deemed competent to raise children of another race, whereas the reverse is not the case. They may even be considered by

some Korean birthmothers as preferable to adoptive families in the child’s homeland, for reasons that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The media played a significant role in publicizing transnational adoption and leading many would-be parents to see it as a way to fulfill their desire for healthy young children, without necessarily meeting all the stringent requirements for domestic adoption. Beginning with the extensive media coverage of “Korean war orphans” which will be discussed in Chapter 2, there have been a series of “disaster” scenarios to which the North American public is asked to respond by “opening their arms” to suffering children. Churches frequently remind Christians of Christ’s words: “Suffer the little children to come unto me.” It is tempting to be able to act as an exemplary believer while obtaining a greatly valued object of desire, a child who will be expected to be grateful for this chance at a better life (Sullivan 2008). Lisa Cartwright (2005) has drawn attention to the proliferation of media images of a transnational response network addressing the needs of children in multiple sites across the world that were newly opening their borders to global trade in the 1990s (especially Romania, the former Soviet Republics, and China). Cartwright interprets the dissemination of spectacular portraits of desperate children as a moment in the formation of a transnational “politics of pity” articulated to make America look “good.” She argues that the “intimate encounters” that occur within adoptive families have transnational political implications for global social policy, as social welfare is privatized and children’s well-being left in the hands of “charitable” individuals with money.

Once the adopting family has welcomed the child, the reality of adjustment on both sides may not correspond to the perfect harmony depicted or predicted by the media. Katarina Wegar (2000), a sociologist, claimed that failure in the past to recognize the
stigmatized social position of adoptive families in North America has shaped current public opinion about adoption and hindered research and practice related to it. As a result, according to Wegar, the individualistic (and often victim-blaming) approach of some adoption research has served to perpetuate rather than correct stigmatizing biases against adoptive family life. To her, it is important to recognize that adoptive families are different in one crucial aspect: “They are families tied together by bonds beyond genes, but they exist in a society that still primarily assumes that real families should be connected by blood” (Wegar 2000, 368). She claims that by failing to recognize negative cultural attitudes toward adoption, researchers and social workers who counsel members of adoptive families are unable to prepare their clients for the real social and cultural challenges they will inevitably face. More recent studies of attitudes to families with transnationally adopted non-white children (such as Dorow 2006) indicate that the situation has changed to some extent, at least in multicultural urban contexts where unconventional families have become more common.

An earlier study of transracial adoptees by Karen March (1995) also examined experiences of social stigmatization. In response to an open-ended questionnaire about the outcomes of reunions with birth family members, many reported discrimination from others who constantly questioned their unknown biological kinship ties. The results of this study supported the trend toward more openness in adoption, which has since become the predominant model. The benefits are not only to the adopted individuals but also to the birthmothers, who previously had very little say in what happened to their children and no contact with them.
Documenting Identities: Collective and Individual Sources of Information

Drucilla Cornell’s essay “Adoption and its Progeny: Rethinking Family Law, Gender and Sexual Difference,” in the book Adoption Matters (Haslanger and Witt 2005) discussed above, addresses the distinctions separating a birthmother from the adopting mother (Cornell 2005, 19). To her, it is not just class privilege, economic security, or racial prejudice that separates the two women, but how the state deems one or the other to be the “real” mother, according to varying criteria. She proposes a reform in American family law which would change the very meaning of adoption, as the adopted children and birthmothers would be given the means to work together through the traumatic events that produced their situation (Cornell 2005, 21). Cornell argues for open public records where all adopted children and birthmothers could register and should be given the option to contact each other if they wish to do so, as was already the case in some jurisdictions. Her discussion relates to domestic adoptions in the US, but it raises issues that are increasingly relevant to adoptions from Korea and elsewhere in the world, as many adult adoptees now return to their country of birth and attempt to establish communication with family members (Yngvesson 2003) in locales where records may be non-existent, changed, lost, or destroyed, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

As the above overview of some relevant studies of adoption in general and transnational/transracial adoption in particular indicates, inquiry into this field has occurred from a range of perspectives but it has often been hampered by a lack of complete, available, and trustworthy documentation. Most agencies, governmental or non-governmental, that keep or destroy files and compile statistics do so with specific ends in mind. As well as consulting existing sources of information, I undertook my own research in relevant archives
in Korea and in Canada in my efforts to trace how policies and attitudes towards international adoption have developed and changed over the years. My field research included visits to adoption agencies, on-site observations, interviews, and discussions with adoption workers and scholars in both Korea and Canada, as well as many meeting with Koreans who were adopted in North America.

In addition to the studies discussed above that raise general issues, a number of sociological or psychological studies assessing the “adjustment” of transnational and transracial adoptees in the US were published prior to some recent ones specifically dealing with adoptees from Korea (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 4). Earlier research mostly aimed at defending transracial adoptions and focused primarily on the opinions and experiences of adopting parents. Some researchers drew their conclusions from observation of young children based on types of tests that have since been abandoned as inconclusive.\(^8\) Rita Simon and Howard Altstein conducted an initial study in 1972 of white families in the Mid-West that had adopted racialized children, and a follow-up study ten years later (Simon and Altstein 1981). Both stages of their research looked at the perceptions of children of colour adopted into white families, in relation to those of their adoptive parents and siblings. The sample included Afro-American, Native Indian, and Asian children, with some from Korea. The main purpose of the first study was to “explore the racial identity, awareness, and attitudes of the adopted and non-adopted children in the families” (Simon and Altstein 1981, 1). The children were young, and tests involving dolls of different colours claimed to show that both the adopted children of colour and white siblings were “colour blind” in their preferences. The researchers came to the conclusion that, based on this evidence, “the parents

\(^8\) See Kirton (2000, 33–37) on the types of test conducted.
were extremely optimistic about what relations between different racial groups in the United States would be like in the next one or two decades” (Simon and Altstein 1981, 1).

This favourable outlook in 1972 undoubtedly reflected gains made by the Black Civil Rights Movement and support for integrated schooling. Nevertheless, the authors also reported that a majority of prospective parents would not consider taking an Afro-American child, and one respondent gave the following reason: “A black child is from American society . . . they suffer from prejudice, which is not usually the case for a foreign child” (Simon and Altstein 1981, 104–5). This view also turned out to be overly optimistic. In the second stage of the study, seven years later, only the parents were contacted, not the children. The second questionnaire included questions relating to extended families and the type of neighborhood where the families lived (almost all all-white). In response to new interventions by the National Association of Black Social Workers in the US that criticized the removal of Afro-American children to white homes, this time the parents were asked “what kinds of activities or rituals” they practiced to “enhance the adopted child’s knowledge of or identification with his or her racial or ethnic background” (Simon and Altstein 1981, 3). More sensitive issues were raised, such as whether the parents had experienced a change in their own self-perception as a result of the adoption, whether it had changed the relationship between them, and what type of dating or marriage the children were likely to enter into, in terms of race (Simon and Altstein 1981, 3). As open adoptions were beginning to be discussed at that time, information was also collected on whether the adopted children had sought contact with birth families, and if so what the result had been.

Not all the original families agreed to take part in the follow-up study, and of those who did a quarter admitted that the experience had been less easy than they had anticipated.
Some expressed bitterness and disillusionment, but the majority still believed they had made a good choice in adopting transracially, for themselves and the children (Simon and Altstein 1981, 5). The same authors conducted a further follow-up study in 1991, and went on to publish Adoption across Borders: Serving the Children in Transracial and Intercountry Adoptions (Simon and Altstein 2000). This volume looked more closely at the arguments in favour of matching children to families of similar racial background, and undertook a more detailed comparison between domestic transracial adoptions and international ones. It provides a useful summary of the growth and distribution by country of transnational adoptions to the US up to 2000 (Simon and Altstein 2000, 7–22) and relevant changes in immigration law (Simon and Altstein 2000, 30–35).

One chapter devoted to empirical studies of intercountry adoption (Simon and Altstein 2000, 85–95) includes tables conveying the reasons for adopters’ choice of this route (Simon and Altstein 2000, 89) and criteria for assessing the “psychological health” of adoptees. Several studies cited compare the experiences of international adoptees from European countries and those from racialized groups, with inconclusive results. It was the Asian adoptees (Simon and Altstein 2000, 93) who most readily acknowledged both race and adoption as being significant elements of difficulty as they reached adolescence, although only 25% of the respondents did so. The authors conducted their own study with grown-up Korean adoptees, located through the Holt Adoption Agency, in which the vast majority of adoptees and parents expressed satisfaction with their experience. This study is typical of a number that continue to be used to justify the continuation of transracial adoptions, as defended by Bartholet (2005), whereas some more recent sociological studies, as well as individual accounts by adult adoptees, raise more difficult questions. I shall return to the
variable results of some sociological studies, as well as the deficiencies in agency records, in Chapter 4, which will focus on the views expressed by adult adoptees, especially those who have returned to Korea to seek out their birth families.

**The Value of Personal Testimonies**

It is clear from a superficial perusal of sociological and psychological studies of the outcomes of transnational adoptions that the results are likely to be determined to a large extent by the context of the study, the selection of the sample, the way the questions are posed etc. Nevertheless, they do provide valuable and necessary cumulative and quantitative information. Individual or anecdotal evidence may be considered even less “scientifically” valid, but the personal stories produced more recently by adult adoptees that will be analyzed in Chapter 4 provide more in-depth accounts of the issues raised in their lives than do statistics or questionnaires. These texts do not make any claims to be “objectively” representative, but they do convey the depth of the emotions involved on all sides. My goal here is not to make a case for one type of “evidence” being more convincing than the other, but to look at them together to see where convergence or divergence occurs. In Foucauldian terms, academic studies reflect the type of institutionalized collective “knowledge” legitimized by disciplinary power structures, whereas personal confessional accounts may represent acts of resistance to the dominant discourse, through “testimony” based on a different kind of knowledge and “speaking truth to power.”

As well as individual published autobiographical texts there are now also a number of anthologies of auto/bio/graphical texts discussing various types of testimonial communication, and the importance of the context of their production and reception, will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

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9 Different types of individual and collective “testimonial” communication, and the importance of the context of their production and reception, will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.
accounts of transracial and international adoptions. One collection entitled *In Their Own Voices: Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories* (Simon and Roorda 2000) is based on interviews with black or biracial individuals adopted by white families, but raises many of the same issues regarding racial discrimination in North America as do other narratives by international adoptees.

*Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (Trenka et al. 2006) explicitly addresses the similarities and differences when not only race but also a separate geographical space and language are involved. This volume includes a number of contributions from Korean transnational adoptees, representing a range of views, who will be cited in Chapter 4.10 An earlier collection, *Voices from Another Place* (Cox 1999), was published as part of the International Gathering of the First Generation of Korean Adoptees in September 1999. The narratives include the story of the editor, Susan Soon-Keum Cox, who was herself a mixed-race child adopted to the United States in 1956 at the age of six. Other contributors include adoptees raised in the United States, Europe, and Australia, some of whom are now living in Korea. A more recent collection entitled *After the Morning Calm: Reflections of Korean Adoptees* (Wilkinson and Fox 2006) adds further accounts of growing up in America, as illustrated earlier by Catherine Choy and Gregory Choy in “Transformative Terrains: Korean American Adoptees and the Social Construction of an American Childhood” (in Levander and Singley 2003). While there are as yet no such anthologies of life stories from Koreans adopted in Canada, the examples from Korean adoptees raised in Europe do show some differences from the US that will be relevant to the discussion of Canada in Chapter 5.

10 They are J.A. Dare, Laura Gannarelli, Mark Hagland, Tobias Hûbinette, Sunny Jo, Jae Ran Kim, Mihee Nathalie Lemoine, Beth Kyong Lo, Soo Na, Ami Inia Nafsger, Kim Park Nelson, Sun Ying Shin, and Kirsten Hoo-Mi Sloth.
notably less religious influence.

Full-length memoirs are increasingly being published by adult Korean/American adoptees, including Thomas Clement’s *The Unforgotten War: Dust of the Streets* (1998) and Hyun Sook Han’s *Many Lives Entwined* (2007), as well as Katy Robinson’s *A Single Square Picture* (2002) and Jane Jeong Trenka’s two volumes, *The Language of Blood* (2005) and *Fugitive Visions* (2009), which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Adoptive mothers have also begun to tell their stories (like Cheri Register in *Beyond Good Intentions: A Mother Reflects on Raising Internationally Adopted Children*, 2005), possibly in reaction to the growing number of anthologies of “letters” by Korean birthmothers which will be discussed in Chapter 3. The most recent volume of such letters, *Dreaming a World: Korean Mothers Tell Their Stories* (Han 2010), provides a sequel to *I Wish for You a Beautiful Life* (Dorow 1999). These accounts, like those of the adult adoptees, vary in their emphasis on a therapeutic function related to self-recovery or self-reconstruction, a polemical function conveying a political message about transnational adoption, or an aesthetic function that plays with formal aspects of memoir writing (as in Trenka’s second volume, 2009).

In analyzing these texts I will bear in mind feminist reflections on the theory and practice of reading women’s auto/bio/graphical texts, as developed by Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson and others. In the second half of Chapter 2, dealing with early adoptions from Korea, I will look closely at the memoirs dictated or written by Bertha Holt, who co-founded the Holt Adoption Agency with her husband, Harry Holt, who received most of the credit.

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Her account, from an Evangelical Christian perspective, conveys a favourable vision of international adoption—one that still survives but now competes with the alternative views offered by adult adoptees and birthmothers. The latter are often closer to the sub-genres of trauma narrative or testimonio (witness accounts of atrocities). Cross-disciplinary research on transnational and transracial adoption also relates to broader studies of diasporic identity politics and cultural or racial hybridity.\textsuperscript{13} The autobiographical accounts of Koreans adopted into white North American families reveal many experiences and conflicts that are similar to those experienced by second-generation children of Korean immigrants (Kim and Yu 1995). However, many of the adoptees grew up in geographical and social contexts where they were the only Asian-looking person on the horizon, and their adoptive families knew little or nothing of traditional Korean food, costume, or customs, let alone language.

When they return to Korea, they realize to what extent their perception of life has been trained to be through “white eyes.” They are physically marked as outsiders, in both locations, although they mostly feel and think like insiders in the West. They suffer from being torn between two cultural worlds and struggle to make sense of what institutions (governments, agencies, the family) have made of them. Their writings indicate their determination to redefine who they are or wish to be in their own terms. Returning adoptees are precariously balanced on a “tightrope” or “sitting on the fence,” images that Eleana Kim (2010, 113, 120) notes as often mentioned by those she interviewed. Many are attempting to “go it alone,” but are attracted on one side by the safety net of the adoptive family, which reassures but restrains and maintains dependency, and on the other by the unknown, beckoning space of Korea. They are precariously situated between what Foucault terms the

“discipline of institutions” and the performance of “technologies of the self,” as will become clearer in the chapters to follow.

**Web-Based Sources**

Kim’s study (2010) relies heavily on reports, both formal and informal, from various gatherings for adult Korean adoptees, as well as on websites and listservs that provide access to exchanges between the adoptees dispersed across the world. These reveal personal stories that are unlikely to be published, and communicate the adoptees’ efforts to research their own genealogies and the intricacies of adoptions from Korea. Some unearth horror stories of alleged mistreatment of adoptees in Western homes, while others discuss the problems they have experienced in Korea. The Internet is also the easiest source of up-to-date statistical information from governments and details of political and legal shifts in national policies. American and Canadian adoption agencies have websites that set out the changing requirements for prospective adopters, and provide links to various venues for discussions among adoptive parents. These sources will be drawn on especially in Chapter 5, which focuses on Canada and the intermediaries that facilitate transnational adoptions from Korea.

The Internet is also an invaluable source for accessing press reports on inter-country adoptions, and has been particularly useful in keeping track of new developments in Korea that have led to a reduction in adoptions over the last few years. Public perceptions of transnational adoption in all the countries concerned has been strongly influenced by media images, from the arrival of the Holts’ adopted children in the 1950s to more recent tales of rescue and kidnapping, as illustrated in Karen Dubinsky’s *Babies Without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas* (2010). The fact that narratives of events and perceptions of their contexts are always framed within ideologically determined discourses is one of the
reasons that I have chosen to deploy some concepts borrowed from Foucault in this study, in
spite of the reservations of some feminist scholars regarding some of his ideas.

The Relevance of Foucault, in a Feminist Framework

The terms I have chosen to use resonate in surprising ways with the issues raised by
transnational adoption. Several studies of adoption refer to Foucault in passing (including
those by E. Kim 2010, and Strong-Boag, 2006), but none, to my knowledge, uses any of his
concepts in a more extended fashion.14 I make no claim to be an expert on Foucault, or to
have read all his works, and I admit to relying to a great extent on others’ interpretations of
his methods of inquiry.15 I am not attempting to apply his method or make a contribution to
Foucault scholarship, but following his advice to treat his ideas as a “toolbox” 16 by making
use of some concepts he introduced to provide a conceptual frame for my “undisciplined”
approach.

14 Kim refers mainly to the concepts of “technologies of the self” in relation to the Internet,
and “heterotopias” as in-between spaces. Moosnick, in Adopting Maternity (2004), a work
which I discovered only at the end of my research, comments on the relevance of some of
Foucault’s ideas to the medicalization of mothering (7–8).
15 I found the explanations of some of the terms used by Foucault on a website created by
Clare O’Farrell, author of Michel Foucault (2005), particularly useful as I began thinking
my glossary of terms from Foucault on pp. xi–xii). I also wish to acknowledge the
contribution of Valerie Raoul in pointing out the usefulness of Foucault’s work for this study.
16 In A Very Short Introduction to Foucault (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005;
available on-line) Gary Gutting (author of The Cambridge Companion to Foucault,
Cambridge University Press, 2005), quotes Foucault in a 1974 interview as saying: “I want
my books to be a sort of toolbox that people can rummage through to find a tool they can use
however they want in their own domain” (112–113; Gutting’s translation from the original in
Vol. 2 of Foucault’s collected writings and interviews in French: “Prisons et asiles dans le
mécanisme du pouvoir” in Daniel Defert and François Ewald, eds. Foucault: Dits et écrits
Foucault’s early use of the image of “archeological excavation” to describe his first approach to history corresponds, to my mind, with the kind of delving into lost or hidden archives that research on adoptions in and from Korea entails. Like Foucault, I have discovered that the documentary or discursive materials available reveal taken-for-granted attitudes and expectations rather than “facts,” which prove hard to pin down. The past has to be deciphered from traces that link it to the present, and cannot be separated from the current situation. For Foucault the reason for historical inquiry is to better understand the present situation and how we think today. His focus on how institutions evolve from “disciplines” that govern the “subjects” created by them (and subject to them) is very relevant to the evolution of policies and practices related to both adoption and transnational migration. The applicability of some of his ideas to the growth of social work as a feminized profession and discipline is particularly striking. The treatment of children “in care” represents a particular kind of exclusion, detention, and institutionalization (in orphanages or group/foster homes), involving various types of surveillance and scrutiny. The seclusion of women about to give birth in unwelcome circumstances is also ambivalent in fulfilling both protective and condemnatory functions. The role of Christian missionaries and welfare workers illustrates the “pastoral” control that Foucault also discusses, including “confession” and guidance.

Attitudes to promiscuity or prostitution, unwanted fertility or sterility, miscegenation and “illegitimacy,” all of which may be stigmatizing for both mothers and children, are part of what Foucault calls “biopower” (see Hook 2007). This term refers to all the ways in which governments “administer life” and produce “docile bodies” by controlling who may be born or aborted, in what circumstances, what kind of (dis)abilities they may be assumed to have, and what kind of treatment they may be subject to.

17 For applications of Foucault’s ideas in sociology and social work, see Trainor and Jeffreys (2003), and Kendall and Wickham (1999).
the health-care available to them, and what constitutes a useful or superfluous body. It applies also to genetic engineering, eugenics, and reproductive technologies. This biopower or control of life becomes “biopolitics” when it extends to collective notions of race or nation and involves the control of whole populations, as in genocides, mass migrations, forced sterilizations, or China’s one-child policy (Hook 2007, 226–7). Individuals’ genealogy, in terms of their racial and familial history, is undoubtedly relevant to efforts to control the exodus or entry of foreigners or returning exiles into nation states.

Foucault’s use of the term “genealogy” to describe the method he developed in his later historical work seems to me to be particularly appropriate in the context of adoption studies, where origins or roots are hidden, and “growing up” takes place as part of a different “family tree.” In his much-cited essay entitled “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (Rabinow 1984; see also Prado 1995), Foucault explains that Nietzsche’s reinterpretation of the term, which he himself builds on, is not about finding “true origins” (Rabinow 1984, 78), as investigation always shows them to be disparate and murky. As he puts it, “things are most previous at the moment of birth” (79); what came before remains mysterious and unknowable. Accidents rule in the realm of “succession” and inheritance, and no “true self” is to be found behind any mask (78). This is certainly what many adoptees discover, on searching for their birthmothers and documents, and Foucault could be speaking to them when he writes: “The origin lies at a place of inevitable loss, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost” (79). They may be engaged in the type of “adolescent quest” for origins that he urges his readers to abandon, yet they may be more fortunate in investigating the other aspects of genealogy as Foucault defines it: “descent/stock” and “emergence.”
“Descent” involves “the ancient affiliation to a group, sustained by the bonds of blood, tradition and social class” (Rabinow 1984, 80). Transnational adoptees may grow up to identify with initially unfamiliar traditions and change socio-economic class, but when they are of another race their lack of “bonds of blood” with the majority population in the new country remains, since it is embodied and visible. The third aspect of genealogy that Foucault distinguishes, following Nietzsche, is “emergence” or “arising/growing up” (84–5). This stage occurs through the “interaction of forces,” as the result of a “play of dominations,” in a “non-place” (85). For Foucault knowledge “emphatically excludes the ‘rediscovery of ourselves,’” because history “introduces discontinuity into our very being.” (88)

What interests Foucault in history is “the affirmation of knowledge as perspective” (in Rabinow 1984, 90), and he believed the historian should focus on what is unique, “the reversal of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of vocabulary” (88). The aim is to produce a counter-memory of effects rather than of causes or origins, of alternative identities rather than certitudes. All these statements are remarkably applicable to the history of international adoptions from Korea, as the chapters to come will show by emphasizing shifts in perspective. As Foucault puts it, “Genealogy . . . does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return: it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us” (95).

While a number of feminist theorists have used Foucault’s ideas, critiques from writers representing different types of feminist thought are summarized usefully by Margaret McLaren in *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (2002, 7–10). Some liberal feminists, who seek equal rights and opportunities with men, have seen Foucault’s denial or

18 This was the sixth anthology of feminist essays arguing for or against the usefulness of Foucault; McLaren lists the others on page 16.
demolition of both the “unified” humanist subject and the concept of history as progress as dangerous for women, who have yet to be recognized as fully human and able to speak as subjects. Other radical feminists, who privilege femininity and difference and defend the category of “women,” may regret his lack of recognition of women’s experience and question his downplaying of sexual difference. Socialist or Marxist feminists point to a lack of class analysis or focus on the material aspects of economic structures in his work, and some condemn his analysis of the “disciplinary power” of institutions as deterministic and ruling out collective agency. Anti-racist feminists see little direct analysis of issues related to race in his work, and may be suspicious of the concept of “biopower.” Postmodern feminists with a more psychoanalytic orientation, like Judith Butler, have criticized some aspects of his work but seen it as useful to deconstruct sexual difference and analyze how power relations function and identities are constructed (Stozier, 2002, 79–110).

McLaren’s summary of the stages of feminism in relation to Foucault provides a striking parallel with Derek Kirton’s (2000) overview of changes in attitudes to transracial adoption in England. He points out that at first, in the “liberal” stage, it was considered progressive and anti-racist (“colour-blind”) for white families to adopt children of colour, as a positive force for equality and “integration,” although they would not have contemplated non-white families adopting white children. In the second stage, marked by the counter-movement for “radical blackness,” racial “matching” was promoted as better able to prepare children of colour to face racism and value black culture, as well as representing the right of the black community to reproduce itself. Meanwhile, socialists have continued to campaign for changes to welfare programs to provide services to make adoption unnecessary, and postmodern globalists maintain that racial diversity, cultural hybridity, and mixed families
will become so common that there will no longer be a problem.

Overall, I find McLaren’s arguments for the usefulness of Foucault’s ideas convincing. Foucault does address socially and historically situated embodiment, from a marginalized perspective as a homosexual; he certainly provides insights into how power works; and he also leaves room for individual agency, resistance, and self-construction, which he addresses in his last work on “technologies of the self” (Martin 1988; see also Rabinow 1994, 207–251). In terms of attention to racialization, the work of Derek Hook (2007, 215 ff.) on biopower in relation to institutionalized racism in South Africa offers an interesting example of the application of Foucauldian theories in this area. Hook’s analysis of the concept of “heterotopias” in the same book (178 ff.) will also be referred to at a later stage. In the present study some of Foucault’s ideas will be used to draw out aspects of adoptions from Korea in North America that are relevant to critical studies of whiteness, as well as to the perception of racialized and gendered bodies in relation to culture, and the intersections of gender, class, and age where writing about the self is concerned.

Following Foucault’s advice to examine history from “up close” and begin with the present situation (which is constantly changing), this study also includes accounts of fieldwork that I conducted in Korea and Canada which enabled me to contextualize both archival information and the personal accounts of adoptees and birthmothers.

**Fieldwork: Close Encounters in Korea**

For this part of my research I followed the “Ethical Guidelines” set out by UBC for preparing questionnaires and interview questions, and obtained the appropriate permissions and letters
of consent from all those I contacted. I also bore in mind my own location and perspective, cultural differences demanding sensitivity, and the principles of respect and inclusivity governing feminist qualitative research.

In Korea I conducted my field research in two phases. I began in the summer of 2005, while visiting Korea to participate in the Women’s World Congress held at Ewha Women’s University in Seoul. Ewha University, which claims to be the biggest women-only postsecondary institution in the world, is home to the Asian Centre for Women’s Studies and a well-respected journal, the Asian Journal of Women’s Studies. I was therefore surprised that Korean feminist academics seemed to have paid little attention to transnational adoption, judging from the conference program. The single session dealing directly with related issues was sparsely attended, with only two presenters and an audience of three people from among the three thousand participants in the Congress. However, I was fortunate to meet the chair of the panel, Professor Kim Hyun Mee, a specialist in Gender and Cultural Studies from the Department of Sociology at Yonsei University, who was willing to spend time with me later discussing my research plans. Her advice, and recommendation of articles in both English and Korean related to the situation of women in Korea and the history of the Korean social welfare system, were invaluable. This background provided a solid foundation for the fieldwork I undertook on my return to Korea for four months in 2007, when Professor Kim agreed to be my supervisor and provided a Korean student to assist me.

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19 The questionnaires used can be found in Appendix A.
20 See the Preface to Chung, Sei-wha (1986). Ewha University was founded in 1886 as the first college for girls in Korea; the Korean Women’s Institute began there in 1977 and it has been home to the Korean Association of Women’s Studies since 1984, as well as a centre for gender studies in Asia. Twenty other Korean universities have Women’s Studies programs, and Ewha offers both Master’s and Doctoral degrees in Women’s Studies. Many research studies conducted there are published in Korean, but relatively few are available in English.
This student accompanied me on visits to adoption agencies. In spite of media publicity for returning adoptees’ reunions with birth families, she admitted that like many other Koreans she was not aware of the scale of international adoptions from Korea. \(^{21}\) I had already conducted background research on various agencies and maternity homes for unwed mothers in Seoul, and contacted their representatives right away. It took longer than I had expected to obtain their agreement to allow me to visit, and I realized that they are very cautious and somewhat suspicious about discussing potentially contentious or confidential issues with an unknown outsider. I was able to reassure them that their anonymity would be respected and that I was not intending to attack their agency’s reputation.

As I began conducting my visits, I faced a number of situations regarding access to information that made me re-think the scope and methods of my research. My appearance and introductory letters from the Korea Foundation identified me as a student from India living in Canada. At times this worked in my favour, as India has positive associations as the main source of Buddhist influence in Korea, in the past and in the present. I was obviously not a Christian missionary, government agent, or spy. Canada is also viewed positively, as a modern Western nation where many Korean students would like to go for higher education. I realized that the difficulties I experienced in gaining access to various facilities were not due to my identity or attitude, but rather to understaffing and overwork for the social workers. At Korean Social Welfare Services (SWS) the Director of the International Adoption Program was responsible for administering all international adoptions; her time was precious and it therefore took longer than I had anticipated to arrange a meeting with her. However, the staff members at SWS and at Holt Children’s Services were very helpful in answering the

\(^{21}\) I later learned that this student became so interested in my topic that she worked on it for her graduating essay.
questions I had formulated in my questionnaire (see Appendix A).

My first visit was to the SWS Adoption Centre, established by the Korean government as its first welfare agency in January 1954. Four adoption agencies are recognized by the government and licensed to arrange international adoptions from Korea, but SWS is the only one that administers an adoption program in collaboration with Canada. The building itself conveys a clear message that adoption is a positive experience for all concerned. A large collage at the entrance showed celebrities posing with babies in their arms, and I found myself surrounded by promotional posters of cheerful children with adoptive families (some foreign, some Korean), and others with disabilities “waiting for homes.” A horizontal banner on the outside of the building proclaimed in Korean “Adoption Means Giving Birth from the Heart;” another vertical one showing popular film star Shin Hae Ra holding a child provided phone numbers for domestic adoption and the “House of Unwed Mothers.”
I also visited the office of Holt Children’s Services (HCS) of Korea, which began as the “Holt Adoption Program” (HAP) in 1956, and was founded by the American farmer and Christian believer, Harry Holt, whose role will be discussed in Chapter 2. Though the Holt agency does not deal with adoptions to Canada, I learned more about its role in placing many mixed-race and Korean children, including many with disabilities, with American and Western European families. I was also able to talk to Molly Holt, the Chairperson of Holt Korea and third biological child of Bertha and Harry Holt, who has been living in Korea at the Holt Ilsan Centre for four decades. With her assistance I was able to visit the Holt Ilsan Centre, which serves the needs of approximately 300 residents with some kind of disability, as well as their home for unwed mothers and the Holt Baby Reception Centre, where the
relinquished children are taken care of until they are placed with a foster family or adopted. These visits will be described in Chapters 2 and 3. The Holt building was decorated with the flags of many adopting nations, conveying the message that adoption is a global concern and fosters good international relations.


The emergence of organizations administered by and for returning adult adoptees represents a new stage in the history of transnational adoptions from there. As Kim (2010) documents in detail, small but significant groups have taken up the daunting task of spreading grassroots-level awareness about issues concerning children sent abroad, while creating support networks and lobbying for those who wish to return, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. I was able to have extensive individual and group discussions with a number of participants, including those running the web-based network called Adoptee Solidarity Korea (ASK), and to make site visits to the office of Global Overseas Adoptee Link (G.O.A.’L) founded in 1998. There I met with G.O.A.’L’s secretary general, Kim Dae-Won (Jan Wenger, adopted from Korea in 1968), who invited me to attend a session organized to
connect returning adult adoptees with those already settled in Korea. He also facilitated meetings with Molly Holt and Jane Jeong Trenka, whose memoirs will be analyzed in Chapter 4. Trenka was President of a recently formed organization called “Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoptee Community of Korea” (TRACK), with a mission to “advocate full knowledge of past and present Korean adoption practices and to protect the human rights of adult adoptees, children, and families” (TRACK 2009).

Another visit was to the Overseas Adoptee Korean Services office, where I met the Reverend Kim Do Hyun, director of “KoRoot,” an organization established in 2003 to support returning adoptees by providing guest house facilities during their stay in Korea. As he accompanied me to the guesthouse he provided some insights into changing socio-cultural norms in Korea in the twenty-first century. He maintains that in spite of economic development and a degree of westernization there has been no dramatic change in the status and treatment of women, because of the still dominant role of patriarchy (as will be discussed in Chapter 3). He also shared his views on the celebration, since 2005, of May 11th as “Adoption Day,” an event that I was able to witness in May 2007. He explained that the Korean Government introduced this annual reminder at the suggestion of the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the adoption agencies, who recommended it as a way to promote domestic adoption. In 2006, 2000 Korean families that had adopted children were invited to the big KOEX Centre, where celebrities congratulated them. Rev. Kim regretted that during this celebration “more than 150,000 birthmothers who had sent their children for international adoption were forgotten.” He went on to make the following statement: “Many Korean women feel low and guilty. If the sun shines on one side it is dark on the other, for those who had to relinquish their children. We should think first about not separating family
members. In this respect, domestic adoption is not an ideal solution any more than international adoption.”

Eleana Kim’s detailed account of meeting Rev. Kim provides further details that complement my discussion with Rev. Kim (E. Kim 2010, 109, 222, 230–35). He sees overseas adoption as entailing an unjustified kyŏkch’ul (displacement) from the society into which these children were born and might have expected to spend their future. Since they cannot consent, this may be seen as a form of social violence toward children. At his suggestion I also visited an SOS (Save Our Souls) children’s village in Seoul, which offers an alternative solution. Rev. Kim interprets Adoption Day as an attempt by the government to celebrate something of which they are, or should be, ashamed. Although a leftist in favour of social welfare reform, he is opposed to abortion for religious reasons. He expressed his opinion in terms that evoke Foucault’s concept of biopower as a form of government control deciding who is encouraged to thrive or considered expendable (though a pro-choice advocate would see it differently): “Life in women’s womb has no power. How can we make our society more sensitive about life?” The availability of contraception and sex education has improved, but abortion (although illegal except in certain cases) is still the only alternative to adoption available to many young unmarried Korean women who find themselves pregnant, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

My meetings with adult adoptees left me with several unanswered (and probably unanswerable) questions regarding the effect of gender on individuals’ desire to find out about the circumstances of their birth. Some of the returning adoptees I met looked on their visit to Korea as a cultural holiday rather than an identity quest, and it was noticeable that those who had little motivation to find their birthmothers were mostly male. Was that
because they were not thinking, as were many of the female adoptees, about giving birth themselves? I also speculated as to whether some male adoptees might have more fear of disappointment, possibly sharing a masculine disapproval of the kind of “loose” women who produce unwanted babies and then send them away? Why, as men, were they not more curious about their birthfather? These are amongst the complex and perplexing questions that cannot be easily answered through academic research.

**An Evolving Project**

I have ended this chapter outlining my research sources and methods with a personal, autobiographical account of the beginning of my fieldwork in Seoul, to which I will return in the chapters to come. As explained in my Introduction, this project has taken much longer than I had originally expected, as it was interrupted by two maternity leaves and prolonged periods spent in places where I had little access to the necessary materials. The fieldwork aspect of my initial endeavors is still relevant, but mainly as background. Statistical information has also required a good deal of updating, and there have been significant recent changes to Korean laws regarding adoption and family structures. Fortunately, the delays have enabled me to take these into account as well as to incorporate references to several important studies of adoptions from Korea that were not available earlier, including *International Korean Adoption* (Bergquist et al. 2007) and the in-depth studies of adult adoptees’ experiences by Eleana Kim (2010), Tuan and Shiao (2011), and Palmer (2011).

In each chapter I attempt to combine “archeological” historical material with personal accounts that demonstrate what Foucault calls “care of (or caring about) the self.” Some of these convey the experience of very young mothers, still in need of care themselves, who
decide that the best way to show they care for their child is to allow someone else to care for it. Some of those children have later told their own story, and may see themselves as having been deprived of maternal care, or forced to be part of a family where they do not belong. They attempt to construct a self that is “grown-up,” still relational but self-supporting, in the face of forces that tend to infantilize them. The next chapter will delve deeper into the genealogy of the beginnings and early stages of adoptions from Korea, focusing on the close-up perspective of Bertha Holt, a woman who had already raised one family and found herself unexpectedly responsible for a second one composed of Korean-born children. Her story, which is often referred to but has not to my knowledge been analyzed before in detail, reflects and explains some of the paradoxes involved in international adoption. Personal self-sacrifice and heroic dedication to saving children are interwoven with unspoken assumptions of western/Christian superiority. Bertha Holt herself eventually became “Koreanized” in an apparent reversal of the westernization of her adopted children, but her voluntary exile was based on very different power relations.
Chapter 2

Archeology and Genealogy:

Post-War Adoptions from Korea to the United States

It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent . . . in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them.

—Michel Foucault, in Rabinow, Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth (1984, 6).

The cheers and celebrations on August 15, 1945, marking the independence of Korea from thirty-six long and harsh years of Japanese colonization, were short-lived in the wake of the arbitrary division of the Korean peninsula along the thirty-eighth parallel, under Soviet and American influence. South Koreans realized the worsening economic situation of their country after liberation. While the people were mourning the sudden partition of their ethnically homogeneous nation, the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea aiming to reunify the country, led to further mass destruction of human life and property. By its end on July 27, 1953, 36,000 American troops were dead, and 3 million Koreans on both sides had perished (E. Kim 2010, 47).

The history of transnational adoptions from South Korea (designated simply as “Korea” from now on) began in the mid-1950s in the aftermath of that war, when policies related to the political, economic, and military interests of the newly developing nation-state and of its ally, the United States, conflicted with Korea’s socio-cultural traditions regarding race and gender. Both Japanese colonialism and American/UN military occupation led to sexual relationships between Korean women and occupiers of different races, resulting in
many unwelcome pregnancies that produced mixed-race offspring. While Korean women had been forced to become unwilling “comfort women” for Japanese soldiers, and redress was later sought on their behalf, those recruited to serve the American and UN forces during and after the Korean War were in a different situation. These troops were allies, and the South Korean government implicitly condoned or even encouraged the existence of “camp towns” surrounding foreign military bases, in the interest of good relations with the occupying forces (Hall 2006, 37).

The children born as the result of various types of sexual relationships between foreign troops and local women were recognizable from their mixed-race physical appearance, and therefore even less acceptable in Korean society than other “illegitimate” offspring. All unmarried mothers suffered from extreme social stigma and lack of material support, because of the central importance in Korean culture of “pure blood lines” and a patriarchal, patrilineal kinship system dominated by hierarchical relationships based on gender and age. Two regimes of social control, the state/government and the family, were in this case in conflict. While the state saw women’s bodies as a “natural” or “national” resource to be deployed for military, political, and economic advantage, the women concerned were spurned by their families and their children were deemed unacceptable. In an extreme example of “biopower” (in the sense of control over who should be encouraged to live and thrive or allowed to be excluded or die as part of a nation), some were left to perish or fend for themselves, while many others were effectively expelled from the country, with the cooperation of foreign missionaries.

\[1\] This was the first war in which the United Nations participated as peacekeepers. See Moon (1997).
This chapter will look closely at why and how this occurred, from two perspectives. The first is “archaeological,” in Foucault’s terms, as it involves excavating archival sites that reveal the traces of planned and unplanned events involving governments, armies, social services, and population control. The second is “genealogical” in personal as well as Foucauldian terms, as it focuses on personal accounts by one woman, Bertha Holt, whose family and beliefs were instrumental in the birth and subsequent growth of the campaign to bring thousands of mixed-race “orphans” to the US. The intersections of class, gender, race, and age are mediated in this context by specific religious and cultural discourses originating in Korea and the US, both of which may be seen to mask the use of women and children as pawns in promoting national agendas. I will begin by delving into the background to traditional adoptions in Korea, which partly explains why so few “war orphans,” even those who were really orphaned and had “pure” Korean blood, found homes in the country of their birth.

The Confucian Kinship Model and Adoption in Pre-War Korea

Perceptions and practices of adoption are inseparable from cultural models of the ideal family and legal issues relating to lineage and inheritance of names, land, and property. Both scholarly sources and my personal interaction with Korean families have given me some insights into how Korean concepts of adoption differ significantly from those current today in most of the Western world (Peterson 1977, 28–31). In the North American context, as discussed in Chapter I, “adoption” usually refers to a situation where a couple takes a homeless and supposedly parentless unrelated child permanently into their own home and
family. Both the receiving family and the state are expected to treat that child “as if” it were
the natural child of the family, but in the present-day context most children are told that they
are adopted and there is no pretence of their being the adoptive parents’ biological child.
While the adopting parents’ desire to have a child or increase their family is acknowledged,
adoption is now seen by domestic agencies as primarily “child-centred,” with concern for the
child’s wellbeing as the initial and official motivation.

In Korea (as in India) adoption was traditionally seen differently, as a response to a
lack on the part of the adopting family, rather than the needs of a child. According to the
Korean tradition, a related child, sharing the same paternal bloodlines, could be adopted and
assimilated into the family as if born into it. In the Korean context, “bloodlines” are
considered of major significance, both in terms of a collective desire to maintain a racially
homogeneous nation and individual families’ protection of their reputation and inheritance.
Rather than the individual birth certificates issued in North America, each Korean family has
(as in some European countries such as France) an official “family book” showing all family
births, marriages, and deaths (which will prove significant in Chapter 4 as part of returning
adoptees’ attempts to trace their lineage). Until recently this family record was always held in
the father’s name, except in exceptional circumstances. A Korean family without a son
traditionally adopted a relative’s son—a child or young adult who had living parents, well
known to the adopters. The adopted child was necessarily a male, often a nephew from the
father’s side of the family, as the purpose was to acquire a legitimate male heir to bear the

2 Many legal adoptions in North America today are by stepparents in “blended families,” but
these are seen as regulating an existing situation where parental ties already exist.
3 Changes since the new Family Law of 2005 (in effect since 2008) will be discussed towards
the end of this study.
4 The new Family Law now forbids this type of adoption.
father’s name and maintain the patrilineal line. As boys are considered precious, parents seldom abandon or give away a son, and doing so represented a sacrifice to serve another branch of the same family, to maintain the frequently expressed belief that “incense must be kept burning at the family altar” (Peterson 1977, 28). The family, according to the traditional Korean belief system, is not considered to be a passing constellation based on voluntary association, but an institution inherited across generations. Those of the next generation are essentially valued as caretakers of the family line; while women prepare the food involved in the traditional rituals celebrating ancestors, it is sons who are expected to perform the official rites.

Some Buddhists in Korea did see the care of abandoned children as a “good deed” and eventually established orphanages and encouraged the adoption of an unrelated male child in some circumstances, but the emphasis on “pure bloodlines” in the dominant Confucian context made filial piety the ultimate social virtue. All important occasions, such as births, marriages, and funerals, are still associated with ceremonies marking respect for ancestors, according to the Four Rites established by the Chinese Confucian scholar Zhu Xi.

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5 For details see Hübìnèttè (2006, 30–33). He discusses how ancient Korean texts such as Samguk sagi and Samguk yusa (the historical Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla) portrayed adoption as acquiring a legitimate heir. During the Koryo dynasty (918–1392), adoption still represented a means to ensure a male line of descent. The word for an adopted child is yangja (yang meaning adoption and ja signifying son). See Peterson (1977); confirmed in personal discussion with Lee Jong Hyeok and Lee Mi Kyeong in Las Cruces, New Mexico, 1999.

6 Koreans frequently use the word “bloodline” to describe patrilineage, which is the only legitimate line of descent. The word for an adopted child is yangja (yang meaning adoption and ja signifying son). See Peterson (1977); confirmed in personal discussion with Lee Jong Hyeok and Lee Mi Kyeong in Las Cruces, New Mexico, 1999.

7 Feminist theologian Choi Hee An explains that “ancestor worship was the first responsibility a married woman had to assume,” including remembering the dates, preparing the food, and serving it with special silverware (2005, 38). This is confirmed as still the case by Nicola Jones (2006, 218).

8 See Hübìnèttè (2006). In 994 the ruling King, Sonjong, instituted a law that gave the right to an orphan under the age of ten to be provided with food and clothing. Later, in 1046, an orphanage was established. In 1068 it became legal to adopt an unrelated abandoned boy under the age of three, if there was no direct male heir.
(Deuchler 1992, 129–178). Prior to the Choson dynasty (1392–1910), rites of passage had different regional characteristics based on locality and individual family traditions, but under Choson rule the family became the principal means to enforce and perpetuate Confucian values based on hierarchical interpersonal roles according to gender and age. The basic relationship of continuity and inheritance/indebtedness between father and son established the foundation for all other relationships among family members, reinforcing a strong sense of being embedded in a social continuum (Grayson 1989, 210–220). Korean feminist scholar Lee Sang-Wha (S. W. Lee 2005a) explains the force of patriarchal control in Korea by a theoretical model showing the centrality of the family, embedded within a larger system encompassing political, military, and social institutions, organizations of production, and ideology (S. W. Lee 2005a, 70).

The Confucian code of conduct emphasized three “cardinal principles” (samgang): loyalty to the ruler (ch’ung), filial piety towards one’s parents (hyo), and obedience, faithfulness (yol), and chastity in the conduct of women, who were assumed to be subservient to men. These principles were reflected in five “ethical norms” setting out the responsibilities and obligations governing relations between individuals, based on the authority of patriarchal rulers and male heads of households. Although this model of responsibility and respect applied strictly only to the aristocratic elite class (yangban), others attempted to follow them in order to rise in the social hierarchy. Women were confined to private domestic spaces and excluded from public life: gender segregation, a corresponding division of labour, and women’s subordination formed a critical triad in perpetuating the patriarchal model of power relations (S. W. Lee 2005a, 71).
The Confucian way of life became more concerned with external rituals than with the moral obligations that they originally represented (Deuchler 1992; Nahm 1988). Patterns of speech and writing focused on the use of honorific forms of address, reinforcing class, age, and gender divisions. To members of the lower classes, those of higher rank used blunt forms of expression (panmal). The scholar-official class never used the honorific forms to address their wives and children or servants, while wives and children always addressed their husbands and fathers in this form. These linguistic distinctions are still in use in modern Korean society, and the fact that these hierarchies are built into everyday language makes it difficult to challenge them (see D. H. Chung 1986).

The status of Korean women certainly declined with the establishment of the Confucian social order. Men were free to have concubines and practise adultery, while women’s sexual behaviour was strictly controlled and regulated. Under the principle of samjong a woman was to follow her father before marriage, then her husband, and her son if her husband died; the remarriage of widows was forbidden by law in 1485. A woman’s life was conceptualized in three stages: first as a daughter, second as a wife, and finally as a mother (S. W. Lee 2005a, 71). Beginning from a marginal, temporary position in her natal family, her filial piety was to be transferred to her parents-in-law on marriage (S. W. Lee 2005a, 72). Her main task was to produce a son, and failure to do so could result in divorce. Divorce was rare, and virtually impossible for women to initiate, but a man could in theory divorce his wife for any one of “seven evils” (chilgojiak): (1) disobedience to parents-in-law;

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9 For details on the situation of women in Korea in pre-Confucian times, see Choi Hee An (2005).
10 There are a surprisingly high number of references to this code in a collection of brief accounts of Korean women’s lives (Daughters of the Bear, Maite Diez and Jennifer Mathews eds.) published by Ewha University in 2004.
(2) failure to bear a son; (3) adultery; (4) jealousy; (5) carrying a hereditary disease; (6) larceny; and even (7) being talkative (Nahm 1988, 11–14; S. W. Lee 2005a, 72). Women no longer had the right to own or inherit property, and the status of women worsened over the next two hundred years.\textsuperscript{11} Widows and unwed mothers were unable to provide for their children unless the extended family took them in. It was only in 1885 that King Kojong ordered the establishment of orphanages, and in 1894 non-agnatic (i.e. unrelated) adoptions became legal for the first time, especially in instances where the spouse or concubine failed to bear a male child.\textsuperscript{12}

It was not until the time of the Japanese colonization of Korea (1910–1945) that a fully-fledged modern adoption law came into force (Hübbinette 2006, 33; Holt Children’s Services 2005, 122). Whereas the civil law of 1912 (Choson minsaryong) still relied on the Confucian concept of adoption (Hübbinette 2006, 33), in 1939 Japanese government officials promulgated a revised law, making the inheritance rules similar to those in Japan and legalizing adoption outside the family structure. However, after independence in 1947, the Korean department of justice again forbade adoption of a child from a different family (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 122; Hübbinette 2006, 33). In 1949 the government also outlawed the previously accepted practice of adopting a son-in-law (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 122). No enumeration of non-agnatic adoptions was made during the later stage of Japanese colonial rule, but Tobias Hübbinette, citing a government source, estimates that between 1939,\textsuperscript{12} for further details on the status of women, see Deuchler (1992), Kim Ok-yol (1986), Nahm (1988), Palais (1996), Peterson (1996).

\textsuperscript{12}Hübbinette (2006, 33); Deuchler (1992). “Agnatic” is defined as being descended from the same male ancestor or lineage. In 1894 a program of social reforms, popularly termed the Kabo Reforms, was introduced by pro-Japanese Korean officials. Yangban (the aristocratic class) and commoners were made equal before the law, and the old Confucian civil service examination was abolished.
when the colonial law came into effect, and 1961 when independent South Korea’s adoption law was passed, a total of 4,491 domestic adoptions were registered in the country (Hübínnette 2006, 34). As no available data provides a gender ratio, one assumes that such adoptions during colonial times were mostly of male children who were close relatives; later, as the Korean War ended, the relatively few domestic adoptions were of “full-blood” Korean children, while “mixed-blood” children were made available for international adoption.¹³

The Confucian belief system was still dominant in post-war Korea, and explains the reluctance of Koreans to adopt any unrelated children, let alone those of mixed race. It also contributed to the shaming of Korean women who had illegitimate children, and affairs with foreigners were subject to even greater condemnation. Yet the government tacitly encouraged the sex trade, and lack of alternative ways to make a living tempted many poor women to join the “camp-towns,” while false promises led some to allow themselves to be seduced by foreign soldiers.¹⁴ The reasons why many were compelled to abandon their children, and even killed themselves or their babies, were a complex combination of lack of material resources and social rejection. Some accounts (including Harry Holt’s, which will be discussed below) claim that hundreds of older mixed-race children were roaming the streets or left uncared for, while babies and toddlers were found near orphanages, on the doorsteps of foreign missions or hospitals, or outside private homes. Many were simply abandoned on the street or in an open field, as a number of contacts confirmed during my fieldwork (2007).

¹³ Interestingly, Taiwan, like Korea, witnessed a large number of mixed-race children born out of wedlock, fathered by American soldiers in the early 1950s, yet that country never placed such large numbers of children for international adoption, in spite of sharing Confucian traditions. See Hübínnette (2006, 32). A recent documentary film entitled Left by the Ship (aired on PBS in May 2012) follows the lives of mixed-race teenagers in the Philippines fathered by US naval personnel, showing their mothers’ struggle to raise them. ¹⁴ See Moon (1999, 310–327). E. Kim (2010, 68) refers to “underclass military brides.” See also Abelman and Lie (1995).
For these “abject,” discarded or rejected children, adoption outside their country of birth, especially in the US, the putative home of most of the fathers, became seen as the easiest solution at the time, and “in the best interest of the child” (Kim and Carroll 1975, 223–35; Valk 1957, 4–5). Children born of African-American soldiers deployed by the United States faced even greater difficulties than those with white fathers, because of their physical appearance, since Koreans openly expressed their even greater prejudice against dark skin than against white complexions, as will be further discussed below. One of the ironies of the first adoptions from Korea to the United States is that the adopters were quick to denounce the “racism” of Koreans, while many remained blind to the racial prejudice still dominant in their own country.

**Historical Background to Transnational Adoptions from Korea**

Transnational adoption was an unfamiliar venture in Korea in the early 1950s. There were no specific laws, policies, social agencies or networks governing the adoption by foreigners of either Korean orphans or mixed-race children. It was under these circumstances, at the end of the Korean War, that a change in adoption policy took place which shifted the purpose from continuing the family lineage to a new goal: “to protect children with no parents or to protect children from unqualified parents and find new families to satisfy children’s basic needs” (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 123). To achieve this goal the Korean government established an office under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

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15 See Steven Lee, *The Korean War* (2001). In tracing the origins of the Korean War Lee discusses its social background, including the new racial integration of the American forces, war and disease, and women and war. Kim (E. Kim 2010, 71) mentions that some Ethiopian UN troops offered to adopt half-black children—possibly their own biological offspring—but were refused permission.
(MHSW). An attempt to pass a new adoption law did not succeed, but in October 1952 a new clause allowed the MHSW to arrange the adoption of children who were given shelter in welfare facilities. In January 1954 the government established its first child welfare agency, the “Korea Child Placement Service” (CPS).

The American adoption of Korean-born children (both mixed-race and Korean “war orphans”) was launched in 1955 by the Catholic Relief Organization and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, followed in 1956 by the Holt Adoption Program (HAP), which at first placed only children assumed to be of mixed-race in American homes. Between 1958 and 1960, domestic adoptions in Korea accounted for a mere 6.2% of the total number of adoptions (168 out of 2700 according to Holt records (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 124)). The Holt Adoption Program processed 1,514 children between 1958 and 1960, accounting for about 56% of the total and almost 60% of international adoptions, while domestic adoptions remained almost non-existent. In the same period, of the 2,700 international adoptions the majority (2,388) were of mixed-race children. Of a total of 4,185 mixed-race children adopted between 1951 and 1961 US citizens adopted 4,155.

In subsequent years, the Holt Adoption Program began to place other war orphans and abandoned children in secure Korean homes as well (Miller 1971, 29–31). Data compiled by the association of Overseas Adoptee Koreans (OAKs), in collaboration with the Korean Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs (MIHWAF), show that the only other countries taking children from Korea before 1960 were Sweden and Norway, where a relatively small number were sent owing to the presence of Scandinavian missionaries in Korea. Statistics that will be examined more closely in the next chapter reveal that there were
about 157,145 children adopted abroad from Korea between 1958 and 2005, and two-thirds of them (104,781) went to the US (OAKS 2006).

The Beginning of Transnational Adoptions to America from Korea

Korea’s need to find homes for children who had no family to care for them coincided with the growing willingness and desire of many American couples to adopt children from overseas. At least four significant motivating factors can be seen to explain in part the popularity of Korean adoptions in the US in the 1950s. The first is glorification of nuclear family life in post World-War II middle-class America (as described in works cited in Chapter 1), where women’s fulfilment was assumed to lie in raising a family and demonstrating domestic accomplishments, and women with few or no children were at a disadvantage; the second, demonstrated in Bertha Holt’s memoirs, is the strength, especially in rural states, of commitment to Evangelical Christianity with its message of salvation by faith and the need to “save” others, especially in distant and “undeveloped” parts of the world; the third, also illustrated by the Holts’ story, is the new power of the visual media in bringing images of far-away events right into people’s churches and homes; and the fourth is the sense of responsibility and guilt experienced by some Americans, especially committed Christians like the Holts, on learning about the American-fathered abandoned mixed-race children and the Korean children orphaned by a war in which their country was involved.

Behind the apparently altruistic or redeeming motives that were presented in public, more personal and selfish factors often triggered the demand for international children to adopt. The sometimes over-eager prospective adoptive mothers included women who were unable to conceive (before the current reproductive technologies were available), and others
who had only one child, or children of only one sex. Many had considered, or actually tried, adopting domestically, but did not meet the criteria because of their age, health, or financial circumstances, as revealed in Bertha Holt’s memoir discussed below. Some were not willing to take an older American child, or one with a disability. Afro-American children were not available to white families, even if they would have accepted them, as racial segregation was still largely in force across the US, especially in the South. Some religious observers sincerely believed that they should share their own economic privilege with those less fortunate, and this was reinforced if taking a foreign child meant increasing its chance of “spiritual rebirth” as a Christian. The receiving family’s reputation in the Christian community, as well as their prospects for reward in Heaven, would be enhanced. Once “rescue” efforts were publicized, the opportunity presented itself for “ordinary people” to perform heroic acts—to make a real difference in at least one life (Register 1990, 2–22; Koh 1988, 22–34). Fantasy mingled with ignorance of where these children were coming from and what they stood to lose as well as to gain.

Social and economic circumstances in the 1950s and 1960s in post-war Korea meant that raising an illegitimate child there, especially one with mixed-blood ancestry, was almost impossible. One can argue that, from the Korean perspective, international adoption was prioritized, not because it was seen as being in the best interest of the child or that of the adopting family, but as in the “best interest of the nation” which sought to eliminate children marginalized and seen as a burden because of illegitimacy, mixed blood, or abandonment. Foucault’s concept of population control as bio-politics seems to be well illustrated in this case. While “race” preference certainly played a part on the Korean side, it seems to have stemmed from the traditional beliefs about bloodlines discussed earlier, rather than from any
particular political animosity towards the Americans or the mostly European U.N. forces that were present in South Korea. Ironically, most of the white American families who accused the Koreans of racism were very race-conscious themselves, in the American context, and even those who wished to fight discrimination against people of colour in the US implicitly assumed that these half-Asian children would be better off, from every point of view, being raised by Christian people in America. As will become clearer in discussing the particular case of the Holt family, humanitarian endeavour was inseparable from a subtly colonizing or openly culturally imperialistic attitude.

The Koreans, as well as the Americans, had political reasons for encouraging the closer ties between the two countries that these adoptions came to represent. The welcome given to Christian missionaries in Korea was originally based on anti-Japanese sentiments. As Hyaeweol Choi (2006) [quoting Chung–Shin Park], states:

> the association between the church and Korean anti-Japanese sentiment and activity—the primary cause of the rapid growth of Protestantism during the early colonial period—was established unintentionally, not by the church, but by colonized Koreans who joined the religion and colored it politically. (Choi 2006, 142)

Choi argues that while the political crisis in Korea during Japanese colonial times (1910–1945) initially motivated Koreans to join Christian churches, especially Protestant ones, conversions subsequently led to the unprecedented growth of the pro-American population (Choi 2006, 142). The popularity of missionary ventures was increased by the building of schools that were urgently needed. Although the missionaries were supposed to adhere to a strict policy of neutrality concerning political affairs (Choi 2006, 142–143), a shared anti-Japanese stance evolved into a common resistance to Communism. Many missionaries spent

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16 Kim (E. Kim 2010, 46–47) points out that Americans were less inclined after World War II to welcome mixed-race children born to Japanese mothers, as Japan was seen as an enemy, whereas South Korea was an ally.
their whole life in Korea and were committed to improving conditions for Korean people, albeit in the hope of influencing their religious beliefs. In the absence of state social services (which their own had made less necessary), at the end of the war they were present and able to “come to the rescue” of a devastated nation that did not know what to do with its Korean widows and orphans, let alone its “fallen women” and their illegitimate and mixed-blood children. The fact that members of the progressive Minjung (People’s Movement), which advocated for better social services, and especially for women’s rights, were suspected of Communist sympathies and consequently persecuted also contributed to the resistance to government intervention in “family matters” (Jones 2006, 32–34).

The Aftermath of the Korean War in the 1950s

The outbreak of the Korean War and attendant exigencies forced the Korean church to depend even further on foreign assistance. Numerous new missionaries from various denominations arrived in South Korea after 1953 to undertake evangelization (Holt Children’s Services 2005; Nahm 1988, 45–46). The end of the war led to a flow of economic assistance from overseas churches and their organizations, which encouraged the further spread of Christian beliefs. Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries brought in economic aid in the form of relief supplies, ranging from food to clothing and medicines (A. Kim 1995). The missionaries’ projects included the establishment of orphanages, homes for unwed mothers and widows, amputee rehabilitation centres, and other efforts to assist those adversely affected by the war. As the only national relief agency operating effectively, the Korean church conveyed a positive image of the Christian faith, and many converted. In fact,
traditional Confucian beliefs in the value of racial homogeneity, patrilineal bloodlines, and women’s chastity or fidelity (A. Kim 1995, 47) coincided with the views of many Christians.

Since childcare institutions did not receive any assistance or support from the government, they relied on relief aid from many private, usually religious, foreign organizations. The first President of independent South Korea, Rhee Syngman, was himself a Christian and a member of the First Methodist Church in Seoul. Some observers are of the view that he was heavily influenced by his own education in the West, and sought and supported the Christian missionaries’ charitable activities as a means to promote the “christianization” of South Korea while he was in office.17 He certainly shared the US view that Communism was to be curbed at all costs. His wife, a European woman from Austria, became involved in the cause of relocating mixed-race children.18 In marrying her, Rhee did not contest the importance accorded by Koreans to “pure bloodlines” but confirmed that the only blood that counted was the father’s. Children of Korean women with fathers of another race were not acceptable. Rhee initiated a policy of setting up separate shelters for mixed-race “orphans,” and encouraged their “repatriation” to America as consistent with a policy of “one state, one ethnic group” (Social Welfare Society 2004, 17).

17 Clark (1986, 18–20). For more details see Choi (2006, 142–143). Choi discusses how a number of prominent Korean national leaders during the early 1900s, including Yun Chi ho, Phillip Jaison (Seo Jae-pil), Yi Sang-jae, and Syngman Rhee (Yi Seung-man), were profoundly influenced by Christianity and believed it would help Korea transform itself into a modern nation. Currently around 25% of the Korean population are affiliated with Christian churches.
18 Kim (E. Kim 2010, 60–62) provides details of letters written to Mrs Rhee by individual parents, whom she tried to assist. Harry Holt also reported visiting a Buddhist orphanage where “Mrs Rhee, the President’s wife, is the sponsor of the 260 children” (Holt 1956/1979, 66).
His personal situation reflected a wider clash in Korea between loyalty to tradition and a desire to adapt to modernity. He probably also shared the general impression that the difficulties predicted in assimilating Korean children orphaned or abandoned due to poverty, illegitimacy, and disability, in a country recovering slowly from a devastating war, were enough to cope with without taking responsibility for these mixed-blood children left behind by the Americans, whose Korean blood was, for Koreans, also tainted by their mothers’ promiscuity. As Harry Holt noted (approvingly): “Unlike many in America, the Koreans do not think lightly of adultery. These children born out of wedlock are symbols of shame to them. Because of the difference in appearance, everyone knows what happened” (Holt 1956/1979, 65).

While missionaries and other foreign relief workers and institutions were working to assist the children in need, in 1954, in order to save its national and international image regarding child welfare, the Korean government established the first indigenous social welfare organization, initially called “Korean Child Placement Services” (CPS). Realizing that the mixed-race children, although numerous, were far outnumbered by Korean children in need of homes that were unavailable in Korea, the Rhee government decided to allow the new agency to handle national and international adoptions of all available “orphans”¹⁹ (Social Welfare Society 2004, 17–18). As a result, between 1955 and 1961, 4,190 children, of whom only 2,061 or 52 % were racially mixed, were placed for adoption overseas (Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link 2003, 17).

It is in these circumstances that US-based overseas adoption programs materialized, initially to facilitate the American adoption of Korean-born mixed-race children. In 1955, 

¹⁹ “Orphan” denoted any child unclaimed by a family member (Social Welfare Society 2004).
both the Catholic Relief Organization and the Seventh-day Adventist Church established programs, followed in 1956 by the Holt Adoption Program, which began by placing GI and UN children in American and Scandinavian Christian homes and went on to place other war orphans and abandoned children as well (Miller 1971, 29–31). In 1957, foreign adoption programs increased even more with the establishment of an American branch of “International Social Services” (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 124).20

According to data released by the Korean government after the war, about 715 children lost their families and were forced into the streets in 1955. The numbers rapidly increased each year after that, so much so that by 1961 the number of children in distress was assessed at 4,453 (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 118–119). Missionary-run organizations and childcare facilities or orphanages took custody of these children, although they had very limited resources and struggled to provide sanitation, food and medical supplies for the many children in need of care. The number of facilities for infants, older children, and those with disabilities grew, from 434 taking care of 46,000 children in 1955 to 525 looking after 55,000 children in 1961. This reflected the fact that Korean single mothers or families living in extreme poverty were willing to give up their children in hope of a better life for them, but even children with “pure” Korean heritage were not being adopted by Korean families. It was also difficult to find overseas families for very sick or disabled children, as they could not pass the medical inspection demanded by the US authorities. Rehabilitation and medical centres did increase, but there was a rise in the number of older homeless children roaming

20 International Social Services (ISS) is an international charity first established in Geneva as a non-government organization in 1924, as “International Migration Service.” The name was changed in 1946. It became active in more than 140 countries through national branches. ISS still provides assistance to individuals, children and families confronted with social problems. See http://www.iss-ssi.org. Accessed May 22, 2008.
the streets and seeking shelter and food when the number of centres for “juvenile
delinquents” was reduced from 43 in 1955 to 17 in 1961 (Holt Children’s Services 2005,
120).

Meanwhile, as US and UN troops continued to be stationed in Korea, there was no
decrease in the “military camp towns” or Kijich’on surrounding military bases. Many
Kijich’on women worked in bars and nightclubs in order to support their impoverished
families (Moon 1999, 310–327). Their numbers grew from about 439 in 1955 to over 1,300
by 1961 (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 120). Some of their children were taken care of by
their extended family, but many children of prostitutes, or those born to women deserted by
American soldiers, were in a vulnerable situation. The disgrace and shame experienced by
these mothers, who were disowned by their own family and treated with contempt by the
society at large, forced them to take the drastic step of abandoning their children in the hope
of giving them a better life through overseas adoption. In the immediate aftermath of the war,
the women who gave birth to these children mostly became invisible and were forgotten.
Years later, however, attention focused on them when some of the internationally adopted
children, on attaining adulthood, took the bold step of searching for their biological mothers
and hearing their stories. In Chapter 3, I will look more closely at the “letters from
birthmothers to their unknown child” which have been collected and published, although the
women writing are (not surprisingly) mostly from later periods. As will be discussed later,
irresponsible fathers went unscathed, while the women had to bear the shame and heartbreak
of abandoning their children. Their situation could not have provided a greater contrast with
that of the family responsible for removing many of their children to North America.
One Family’s Perspective: The Holt Agency’s Genealogy

The advent of the “Holt Adoption Program” (HAP) in Korea, founded by the American Harry Holt in 1956, led to the beginning of large-scale adoptions of mixed-race children from South Korea to the United States (Social Welfare Society 2004, 19; Holt Children’s Services 2005, 124). Harry Holt and his wife, Bertha, became pioneers in 1955 by adopting eight Korean-born children assumed to be half-American, all under the age of three, into their existing family of six children aged between eight and twenty-two. Much of the information cited by others about the situation in Korea at that time is based on the letters that Harry Holt wrote home in 1955 while searching for children to adopt. These letters are quoted at length in his wife’s memoir, The Seed from the East, first published in 1956 (reprinted in 1979 and 1983). It was followed by three texts bringing the situation up to date: Outstretched Arms (1972, reprinted with Seed in 1979), Created for God’s Glory (1982, focused on the rehabilitation of children with disabilities in Korea), and Bring My Sons From Afar (1986, a sequel including extracts from letters from Molly Holt and details from Bertha’s diaries).

Bearing in mind the method proposed by Smith and Watson (2001) for reading women’s auto/bio/graphical texts, and Foucault’s ideas on the “technologies of the self,” it is useful to look closely at the way in which these accounts are framed. The front cover of the most widely available edition of The Seed from the East (1979) depicts that of the original 1956 version bearing photos of the children the Holts adopted, including a larger one of the first, Christine, smiling impishly in the middle; behind it we see part of the cover of an earlier edition of Outstretched Arms, with a line drawing of Harry Holt’s strong-looking face, surrounded by small, unsmiling heads with black hair.
This re-presentation of the two texts assumes some familiarity with the Holts’ “fabulous story,” as it is referred to at the bottom of the cover. The reader, who may well be a prospective adopter, is addressed directly:

You’ve read parts of the story in Reader’s Digest, Life, Look, and in newspapers from coast to coast. Now—enjoy the entire account of how God worked in the hearts of an Oregon farmer, his wife and his six children to cause them to open their home to eight orphans—orphans who had been abandoned by their Korean mothers and their American fathers. Read how the Holt “Adoption Program” is successfully placing needy orphans from Korea with families here in America. This is the story of how it all began.

The repetition of the word “orphans” (referring to children who actually had parents) is reinforced visually on the back cover, which shows a black and white photo of Harry, seen from behind, carrying a small child with Afro hair and leading the way for six toddlers straggling behind him.

In the corner a framed text explains the book’s title: “Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the East, and gather thee from the West.” Isaiah 43:5.” This is the text that appeared when Holt opened his Bible at random, seeking divine guidance on what to do with the rest of his life after suffering a major heart attack (Holt 1956/1979, 55). It confirmed the reaction that both he and Bertha experienced in December 1954 on seeing a missionary film presented by Dr. Bob Pierce of World Vision (Holt 1956/1979, 14), about the war widows and orphans in Korea and the mixed-race children roaming the streets. The film was entitled “Other Sheep” (20), a reference to Christ as the Good Shepherd and his servants who have the mission to bring wanderers into the fold. Foucault’s concept of “pastoral” discipline is in evidence from the beginning of this story. The image becomes even more pronounced when, in the early scenes of life on the Holts’ Oregon farm, we learn of calves (27) and lambs (29) being born and nurtured back to health when necessary, thanks
to the hard work, hygiene, and home cooking of Mrs. Holt and her four daughters who are still on the farm. The sheep are gathered into “labour” and “nursing” pens that foreshadow future maternity homes and Baby Reception Centres, and one lamb is rescued when born in the wild because of a “stubborn” mother (33). Exclamations that “There’s nothing on earth sweeter than a baby” (15) in reference to animal breeding are accompanied, ironically, by the expression of a preference for purebred and registered livestock (18).

Maternalism and domesticity are glorified almost to comical excess in the first few pages (Holt 1956/1979, 13–16), where we see Bertha ironing and basting the roast while overseeing her daughters, who are busy cleaning the silverware and peeling potatoes, when they are not typing for their father. Harry Holt, still recovering from a series of heart attacks, is depicted with reverence. He is the one who normally drives the farm machinery and makes decisions, although it is often Bertha who carries out his wishes. The fact that the book is signed “Mrs Harry Holt” and dedicated to “Jesus Christ, My Lord” illustrates early models of female autobiography, as described by Mary Mason and others (Smith and Watson, 1998), characterized by an apparently modest focus on a central male actor, rather than the supposedly subservient female narrator. The woman’s life is not only eclipsed by her husband’s (or God), but owes its meaning to male orders from above. Her glory lies, like that of all traditional mothers, in being the means to ensure that the man’s name will live on. He will provide the “seed” and she will nurture it.

Their initial decision after seeing the film is to sponsor as many children as possible in Korean orphanages through World Vision, at $10 each. While the Holts are initially presented as simple farming folk, it becomes clear that they have not only been “well provided for by the Lord” (Holt 1956/1979, 15), but have risen from humble origins in a
trailer to occupy a thirteen-room house on 353 acres of land (76), as well as owning a beach
cottage and numerous lots on the Oregon coast, and a large sailing boat capable of taking
them to Alaska. Harry’s early business ventures in the lumber industry paid off well. Their
relative wealth has not made them any less thrifty, and they scrimp and save to be able to
sponsor more orphans. Each one comes with a card from World Vision bearing a photo, and
the picture of the first boy is greeted with joy by their son, Stewart, who suffers from being
the only male in a context where men are expected to play a leading role. He distributes
cigars, as if he had become a proud father (24). At that stage, these American Christians
seemed to be content to provide money to sustain homeless children in existing facilities in
Korea, to ensure that they have food, shelter, and “Christian education and supervision” (22).

The Holts’ vision shifted to bringing children to the US to join families there,
beginning with their own, after Harry’s interpretation of the text from Isaiah referring to “the
seed from the East” as a personal message from God, giving him a messianic mission to
undertake (Jae Ran Kim 2006). This view is strengthened by Bertha’s revelation, in Bring My
Sons from Afar. The Unfolding of Harry Holt’s Dream (Holt 1986/1992), written after
Harry’s death, that Harry had also had a recurring dream or vision, which he was
embarrassed to talk about, in which a specific Korean child (later identified with Christine)
called out to him. The Holts’ superhuman efforts in the years to come seem to reflect a
compulsion or obsession, arising from this “call from God” which led to the mass transfer of
children who otherwise might have been provided with care in Korea with the help of foreign
financial contributions. The shift depended on the Americans’ conviction that the Koreans
were in fact unwilling or unable to care appropriately for the mixed-race children, even with
assistance. Dr Pierce expressed this opinion, stating: “Mixed-race children will never be
accepted into Korean society. Even the youngsters, themselves, are conscious of the difference. At a very early age they seem to sense that something is wrong” (Holt 1986/1992, 21).

Harry’s first-hand observations (Holt 1956/1979, 46, 72) later confirmed the situation depicted in the film. The mixed-race children might be able to stay hidden with their mothers until they were about two, but as soon as they were exposed to others they were badly treated, even by other children. The film graphically depicted the tragic plight of hundreds of illegitimate children: “GI babies . . . children that had American fathers and Korean mothers . . . children that had been hidden by remorseful mothers until it was no longer possible to keep their secret…. Finally the children were allowed to roam the streets where they were often beaten by other children who had never known Koreans with blond hair . . . or blue eyes” (Holt 1956/1979, 21). Many of the mothers were compelled to either abandon their children or give them away to anyone who could provide them with food and shelter (Holt 1956/1979, 20). One was even found in a garbage dump (21). While the mixed-race children were assumed to be illegitimate, some mothers who relinquished children were widows “with large families for whom they had no means of support” (26). The film also displayed the terrible state of small bodies “ripped and torn by hellish metals of war. Some were left blind; some deaf and dumb. Some could not speak because of the psychological effects of what they had been forced to endure. These children were shown to be silently singing ‘Jesus Loves Me’ with their fingers” (20). The message was that they owed their lives to the Christian missions, rather than their wounds to an American war.

Pierce described some mothers as “remorseful” (Holt 1956/1979, 21) and also expressed his scorn at the men who had turned their backs on them. Both parents are
assumed to be equally guilty for producing this situation. When Bertha speaks of the “shameful results of undisciplined conduct” (21), it is not clear to whom she is referring. As one daughter, Wanda, gazes at the picture of a child she is sponsoring, she exclaims, “Imagine such a thing! Deserting a lovable little darling like this. . . . Isn’t she cute?” (32)

Throughout this account, there is a mixture of pity and contempt for the birthparents of the children, and admiration or desire for the children in the pictures is proportionate to their cuteness (often associated with light-coloured hair or eyes) and the wistfulness of their expression (“such wistful little faces,” 21, 90).

Once the decision was made to bring eight children into their family (four of each sex, the maximum number the house could accommodate according to Bertha’s calculations, 38), their attitude changed. Harry left for Korea in May 1955, to find suitable children for himself and other would-be adopters. On his arrival he saw that “The damage to this country is heartbreaking” (Holt 1956/1979, 65) and the situation for many children was desperate. On witnessing bodies washed up on beaches (65) and the death of many babies from starvation and disease (74), he reverses his criteria for selection: he will take those who are not so attractive, or struggling to survive, as the cute, chubby, fair-haired ones will find other families:

There are lots of cute little girls but I don’t allow myself to get too wrapped up in the cute, fat ones. They’re the babies others will want. I want the kids that look frightened and lost. I wish I could take them all. (Holt 1956/1979, 66)

He visits a number of orphanages, finding some to be good and some “awful” (Holt 1956/1979, 60). The one where their sponsored children were located was deemed good, so he decides to leave them there (62). The first mixed-race child he commits to is Christine, who resembles the small girl in his dream. The wife of the overseas director of World Vision
had already written to Bertha to tell her about her:

A little GI-girl has just been brought to our office for placement in one of our homes. She was two years old last April 7th. Her father did not want her. He has returned to the States assuming no responsibility whatsoever. Her Korean mother brought her to a chaplain saying she could not keep her any longer . . . she is old enough to play outdoors but the children of the street hit her. They call her names and spit on her because she is different. She has nice brown eyes and light brown, or blondish, hair . . . Her name is Christine. Would you want her? (Holt 1956/1979, 56)

Later, when another woman in Oregon looks at the photos of the children the Holts expect to adopt and picks out Christine, saying “I want that little girl in the picture . . . behind your husband,” Bertha responds possessively: “She belongs to us . . . no-one else is going to have her!” (101).21 The fact that Christine’s father accepted no responsibility was typical. Holt later records the arrival of another baby: “A GI man brought him in, saying it belonged to his buddy. That seems to be the stock answer for where they come from” (Holt 1956/1979, 83–4).22

Holt observed gender and race disparities in all the orphanages:

Among the white GI-children there are many girls to every boy. However there are a considerable number of negro boys. . . . Pray [for] these poor little colored boys and girls that nobody wants. Many of them have been thrown in the river. . . . They need to be cared for right along with those of white mixtures” (Holt 1956/1979, 64–6).

As at that time children of colour were not placed with white families, he adds:

21 Kim (E. Kim 2010, 64–5 and 67) draws attention to the fierce competitiveness and sense of entitlement and ownership revealed in letters from mothers determined to obtain a particular child, even if a father or foster family wanted to keep them in Korea.

22 In Sons extracts from Bertha’s diary during the time she spent at the orphanage in Korea in 1956 record that some GIs, including one “big black man,” volunteered there, or inquired about adopting. In Outstretched Arms she also mentions visits to their office in Oregon by former soldiers who have a guilty conscience about the child or sweetheart they left behind in Korea. Kim (E. Kim 2010, 45) describes orphans becoming army “mascots,” and some single military personnel adopting boys, as well as a photo exhibit entitled “GI’s and Kids. A Love Story” that presents GIs as the children’s saviours (E. Kim 2010, 51).
I wish the negro people of America could be offered an opportunity to help in this mixed-race mess over here. I know there must be thousands of good negro families who would welcome these negro GI-babies into their homes. Many of the children are very nice looking. They have dark wavy or straight hair and fine features. There are people in the United States Embassy here who know that the Koreans will never let the black children grow to the ages where they can reproduce. The Koreans keep saying they have never had a race problem, and they’re not going to have one now. (Holt 1956/1979, 115)

In fact, Holt ended up bringing one half-black child back with him for adoption by a mixed-race family, and later many Christian Afro-American families did adopt these half-black children.

Public Domesticity: Finding and Appropriating the Holt Children

Harry Holt travelled around the country looking for the eight children that he believed God would reveal to be the ones chosen to join his family, and reported regularly to Bertha, who distributed his letters to church people. His efforts were accompanied by much prayer, especially by a blind friend, Paul Davis, who saw that task as his particular mission. Harry’s reactions to life in Korea are mixed. He admires the courage of Korean pastors and missionaries who saw many of their colleagues killed by the Communists. He also approves of the way Koreans raise their children (Holt 1956/1979, 90), but is shocked by ancestor worship and the use of human fertilizer on the fields (85), and hates the Korean climate and food (126).

As they accumulate, the chosen children are taken to stay with him in a separate room at a Christian hospital in Seoul, and later in a borrowed house. He sends pictures and home movies to his family in Oregon, showing him making up many bottles of baby formula and

23 The first film shown by Bob Pierce was “Dead Men on Furlough,” about Christian martyrs in Korea, and he refers to meeting people who had family members murdered, claiming that 600 pastors were killed (Holt 1956/1979, 15, 19).
changing diapers. Bertha is amazed at this, as their roles are switched: he becomes a surrogate mother (“Harry never minded babies before!” Holt 1956/1979, 97), while she drives the pick-up truck and combine harvester “in skirts” (81). The female Korean staff members are initially sceptical about a man taking care of young infants, but end up admiring his dedication (103). All the children suffer from malnutrition, serious infections, and parasites, and some have life-threatening conditions such as TB and a virulent form of pneumonia. One baby girl, Judy, dies, and is buried under the name of “Judy Holt” (106). Holt comments: “These little ones do not have the resistance American children have. Of course, she never had a mother. She was abandoned in a hotel a day or two after she was born” (113). He fails to consider that Korean children may have more resistance to local contagions than those of foreign extraction. The Holt family grieves for “Judy” as if she had belonged to them, but she is soon replaced by “Betty.” Harry remarks that these children have no “real names” (Korean ones do not count), but he will give them his (95). Similarly, one of their daughters says, “We’d have to teach them how to talk . . . our language, I mean” (36). For Harry, “It is always somewhat a shock to hear children who look American speak Korean. It just doesn’t seem right”(145).

It is as if their life in Korea will be erased, or assumed not to have existed, once they arrive in the USA. Christine is the only one who remembers her mother and cries for her at night. She already has a Christian name, which she is allowed to keep. One boy is named after Paul, but fails to pass medical inspection, so a second Paul is sought out. The descriptions Holt provides of each child emphasize the lightness of their hair or eyes—not perhaps from personal preference, but to justify their classification as half-American and therefore eligible. Bertha records that many letters of request state that the potential parents
“don’t care whether the children look oriental or not. Some people say they’d be willing to take the babies with oriental and negro blood,” but the Holts, adopting an attitude that would later become the norm, think these children would be better off “matched” with Black families. They are hoping the negro people will open their hearts and homes to those children. It would be so much kinder for the children to grow up in the society of the race their fathers belonged to. (Holt 1956/1979, 236)

They also assume that the fully Korean-born children would be better off in Korean homes, if they were available. Probably speaking of Betty (who was later considered to be wholly Korean), Harry states: “I have one little girl about six months old. The folks at the orphanage think she’s Korean but I feel almost certain she’s white. When I brought her here to the hospital, the head nurse and some others said, ‘GI-baby.’” (Holt 1956/1979, 73)

The infants are placed in his care without questioning whether it may be the best solution for them. He is amazed himself that “the children are turned over without even having to sign a receipt. Just think . . . precious boys and girls being handed over like that” (Holt 1956/1979, 90). The mothers’ consent is of little importance, as Korea is “a man’s country. They don’t even list the wife on Korean adoption papers so there’s nothing for women to sign” (97). He adds, jokingly, “She (the Korean nurse) says the man has always been the head of the household. Remind me of this when I get back.” As his stay is extended from two to four months because of the children’s health problems and legal issues in the US, the children begin to call him “Aboji” (father), and he comments that the babies who have never been held cling to him, and think he is also their mother (99). He manages to move his new “family” into separate accommodation, and by the time they leave for America strong bonds have already been formed. It was in fact an arduous endeavour to get through
all the procedures required to import eight children from Korea into America.

Process and Pressure: Changing the Law

When Harry Holt went to Korea in May 1955, it was his first visit to Asia. A successful businessman turned farmer, he was used to making deals, but had little experience of working with or through government agencies. In spite of his poor health, he travelled extensively across the war-torn country and made contacts at both the grassroots and senior government levels through his church connections. His conviction and perseverance gained cooperation from many sources, but he also met with many obstacles that he blamed on what seemed to him unnecessary red-tape, in spite of his comment cited above about the informality with which children were handed over.

To begin with, he had little understanding of immigration requirements, both in Korea and in the US. In order to be admitted to Korea at all, one had to be either a statesman or a missionary, so he was passed off as a missionary (Holt 1956/1979, 44). Once there, he was surprised to learn that he needed a Korean resident permit to be allowed to adopt a child, so needed to stay longer than anticipated (94). The children required inoculations and extensive medical examinations in order to be declared fit to enter the US. Obtaining visas for them, even once they had been officially adopted by him in Korea, was not a straightforward process. American immigration quotas for Koreans and other Asians were very limited, and there was a two-year wait to bring a child in under that category. There was another option, to bring them under different legislation, left over from World War II, originally aimed to assist displaced war refugees from Europe. The US Refugee Relief Act of 1953 was about to expire at the end of December 1956. In addition, it permitted only two children per family
While Harry was in Korea in May 1955, Bertha gained support from Senator Richard Neuberger (a Democrat representing Oregon who was also an Evangelical Christian), who began to lobby the Senate to extend the Refugee Relief Act. On June 24 his colleague, Senator Wayne Morse, introduced a separate Bill “for the relief of certain war orphans.” Its stated purpose was “to allow Mr and Mrs Holt to bring, upon enactment, six Korean War Orphans to the United States in addition to the two orphans permitted under the Refugee Act . . . (they) shall be deemed to be the natural born alien children of the said Harry and Bertha Holt” (Holt 1956/1979, 79).

In fact, the Holts were to serve as a pilot project to publicize the plight of abandoned children in Korea and encourage other families to adopt. Bertha’s account of the situation in Oregon gives a running commentary on the lobbying undertaken at every level, and the hundreds of letters written to the President and various levels of government by their supporters. With support from Congresswoman Edith Green, the “Holt Bill” (Bill HR7043) was adopted in the House of Representatives, though complications arose because two of those coming (the replacements for Judy and the first Paul) did not correspond to the original list of eight names. Bertha commented (naively?): “It’s wonderful to live in a country where great men are attentive to the needs of an unfortunate few” (Holt 1956/1979, 79). That the same “great men” were responsible for the plight of more than a few “unfortunates” in Korea seems to have escaped her.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that Harry also wanted to bring back four additional children who were adopted by him in Korea by proxy for other Christian couples linked to World Vision. One was a previously sponsored child who had needed

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24 The use of the word “alien” was to become an emotional topic of debate years later among adult adoptees, as Eleana Kim (2010) documents.
hospital treatment, and two were for the Holts’ friends Bill and Penny Collier of Portland (Holt 1956/1979, 42). The fourth, the Black-Korean girl that Holt is holding on the book cover, was for a mixed-race family in Michigan that had been approved, unlike the others, by the US Welfare department. He wrote home: “We thank God for this family and for every Negro family who will adopt these children. . . . Lee Young Soni is the first coloured child to be adopted from Korea through the Welfare. Hundreds remain” (157). Bertha expressed her frustration: “Seventy couples there (in L.A.), many of them negroes, had been trying to adopt GI-babies from Korea since last February [1955] but it seems there are forces at work within our country who would rather see the children die in Korea rather than be brought to America” (117). This was only the beginning of the Holts’ conflicts with “the Welfare,” whose social workers justifiably wanted to check out the adoptive homes proposed.

On July 16, 1955, Holt signed the papers to become the lawful parent of the children he had chosen: the boys were Joe, Bob, Paul, and Nathaniel, the girls Christine, Helen, Mary, and Betty. When he finally landed in the US on October 14, 1955, after a long journey via Japan and Hawaii, he was accompanied by twelve children and one nurse. Bertha had ensured that the media would be there to greet them, and to observe the children’s arrival at their new home, which all the Holts’ biological children had been busy preparing for them.

The scenes recorded on film and in photos are reminiscent of the public’s fascination with the Dionne quintuplets when they were born in Ontario in 1937. But whereas the Dionnes were considered unsuitable parents to raise such a large and special family (Strong-Boag 2006, 28, 89–90), the Holts received approval from almost everyone. The publicity surrounding the arrival of their children, and the planeloads that followed, produced a constant stream of requests from others who wanted a Korean-born child. In fact, with four
daughters living in the same house (Barbara, Wanda, Suzanne and Linda) and another training to be a nurse close by (Molly), the situation at their home in Cresswell, near Eugene, Oregon, was more like a group home with several caregivers than a conventional family. The house gradually became the hub for the administration of the Holt Adoption Program, once it became incorporated as a licensed agency with charitable status. Later, in 1961, when the Holts went to live in Korea for two years with Linda (their youngest biological child, by then fifteen) and all the Korean-born children, Bertha recorded her own concern that their adopted children would lose the sense of being part of a family: “I resolved to keep our identity in spite of everything. But I did not always live up to this” (Holt and Wisner 1956/1986, 263). By that time, the couple was frequently separated as Harry and their biological children all travelled to and fro between the US and Korea, and more and more children were airlifted on often dangerous journeys across the Pacific. What had been a family affair would grow to become a worldwide enterprise, and their undisciplined ad hoc arrangements would be institutionalized.

**Changes in the Adoption Process**

In response to pressure from American social workers and their American-trained Korean counterparts, the government-sponsored Korean Child Placement Service (CPS), initially acting as Holt’s proxy, agreed to help the Holt Adoption Centre in seeking appropriate American adoptive parents for mixed-race children, and later also for Korean orphans (Social Welfare Society 2004; Holt Children’s Services 2005, 131). The Holts agreed, partly because of a threat to start sending Amerasian children to Japan (Holt 1986/1992, 13), at a time when Holt himself was thinking of sending some to Paraguay (Holt 1986/1992, 101). In the autumn
of 1957 the US passed a new Orphan Act, permitting proxy adoptions until the end of June 1958 and allowing families that had already adopted two children from abroad to take in two more. Available statistical data for 1958–1960 show that in-country adoptions remained insignificant, totalling only 6.2 percent (162 out of 2,700) of completed adoptions at the time, in spite of Bertha Holt’s prayer “that the Korean people will open their hearts to adopt these children even though it is very much outside their culture” (Holt 1986/1992, 130).

Transnational adoptions continued to grow, rising to 4,185 by 1961. The sequels to *The Seed from the East* (*Outstretched Arms* and *Bring My Sons from Afar*) convey the ongoing battles over both proxy adoptions and Welfare approval of homes and placements that continued to occur over several years. The Holts, with the support of Senator Neuberger until his death in 1960, fought tooth and nail to keep transnational adoptions under the control of Immigration, rather than the State Department. Their lawyers were successful in finding loopholes in immigration laws that allowed supposedly temporary regulations to be extended several times, but eventually proxy adoptions were ruled out, and plane-loads of pre-approved would-be parents headed for Korea and accompanied the children back to the US.

The resistance of social workers to their ad hoc procedures was incomprehensible and infuriating to the Holts, who believed God was bringing children and families together in answer to their prayers. Many of the hundreds of requests they received were from couples who had been turned down by the Welfare Department for a range of reasons, while others did not want to even try that route because it was known to take so long. At first, the Holts arranged to have an investigative agency inspect potential homes and check out the record of would-be parents. Not every placement worked out perfectly, and their inspections were questioned when one adopted child died by falling off a swing (Holt 1986/1992, 44). The
parent was charged with murder by neglect, and rumours of child abuse by adoptive parents continued to circulate, although that person was acquitted and allowed to adopt Korean twins in 1958. North Korea contributed to hostile criticism, claiming that the Americans were importing child-slaves from South Korea (125). Others closer to home, “violently opposed to bringing oriental blood into the US” (203), hurled abuse at the Holts for adopting “slant-eyed children,” demonstrating racial prejudice at least as strong as that attributed to the Koreans.

Some rival adoption agencies charged the Holts with forcing mothers to give up infants, and they were falsely suspected of paying money for children (Holt 1986/1992, 91). Holt admitted, once the numbers of children able to leave increased, that “we have trouble finding the little ones, other agencies are grabbing them, and some aren’t released by the mothers” (27). His fear seems to have been, however, that the children would perish before they could get to them, or that some other agencies would want them because of the sponsorships they could bring in. Harry Holt complained that “enemy forces have circulated stories that we dump children into any kind of home . . . the young mothers are afraid to give us their babies, some even kill them” (16). On another occasion, he recorded that “the mothers and grandmothers had tears running down their faces, but they wanted to give us the children for their sake, and let them have a chance to live in a home where they are respected” (17). Some bring the children to them: “They saw pictures of children with parents in America, so they decided they should help their child instead of forcing him to grow up here with no future” (38). Whether the dire predictions of their fate if they remained in Korea were justified or not is difficult to prove.

Although the details of this case are recorded in Bringing My Sons From Afar (Holt 1986/1992, 44, 45, 49, 84), there is a reference to it as an example of abuse on an adoptee website called “Pound Pup Legacy”: http://poundpuplegacy.org/abuse_in_child_placement. Accessed June 18, 2010.
Missionary Zeal

The Holts and their representatives did indeed persuade many mothers to relinquish their children (Holt 1986/1992, 82), but in these early post-war years the poor condition they were in and the high infant mortality rate suggest that many of them would in fact have died otherwise. Many did die, even after they were taken into care in a Korean orphanage or hospital, and some of those flown later to America succumbed on the way. It is difficult to know if some babies too sick to travel were irresponsibly included (66), as others equally weak recovered in the US, including a number with TB who received free treatment at the Jewish Hospital in Denver. Although in later years the demand for children from the West outstripped the supply from Korea, and the Holts’ methods of obtaining and placing children were condemned and eventually stopped by social workers and others, it appears that in the early years the Holt Adoption Program was motivated by concern for the immediate physical welfare of the children. This was, however, inextricably entwined with their Evangelical perception of the need to “save” them through conversion and a Christian upbringing. The family certainly did not make money out of the operation, as some claimed. On the contrary, in Sons Bertha meticulously documents the progressive decline in their resources, as they sold farmland, beach lots, and stocks to cover the expansion of facilities in Korea. Even Wanda’s airplane was sold off for the cause, after she died in 1961, by accidental smoke inhalation while on a missionary assignment in Mexico (Holt and Wisner 1956/1986, 266).

Because of their faith, the Holts preferred adoptive families that declared themselves to be “born-again Christians.” At the end of Bring My Sons From Afar, Bertha explains that in 1964, since there were no longer enough such families available, “We reluctantly changed our policy and voted to adopt, when absolutely necessary, to non-Christian families. This has
been a matter of controversy ever since. I prayed even more earnestly that every adopted child would become a born-again Christian” (Holt 1986/1992, 199). It is difficult for anyone who does not share this belief to understand that for the Holts, the children’s spiritual salvation was as important as saving their physical life. It seems to have been their faith that gave them the determination to continue their work in spite of all obstacles. They appear to have been unconcerned that their missionary zeal combined with US military presence on Korean soil to establish a firm foundation for prolonged American domination of that country.

On the contrary, since they saw Communism as opposed to Christianity, they wholeheartedly supported military and ideological propaganda ensuring that no left-wing ideas (such as state provision of adequate child-care services) would take hold in South Korea. After showing the film that first exposed the Holts to the situation there, Dr Pierce condemned the North Korean Communists, claiming that “they will separate a family . . . to achieve their perverted aims” (Holt 1956/1979, 19). To non-believers it might seem that these Christians had similar priorities, since children were removed not only from catastrophic dangers but also from the reluctant arms of family members, with the justification that they would be better off in Christian homes in America.

As my next chapter focused on the birthmothers’ perspective will show, many Korean mothers and families did not have access to the social or financial resources that would have allowed them to keep their children. As a successful businessman, Harry Holt had ample financial reserves to start his project, and he benefited from the volunteer labour of friends and family to keep it going. His social status gave him access to the right contacts in the US Senate and Congress to promote his ambitious project, and Bertha proved the power of
lobbying elected officials. The Holts’ church connections facilitated publicity in the media and the distribution of Bertha’s memoirs. Their family came to represent the success of an American “self-made man” or “do-it-yourself” philosophy that saw government-run services as an unnecessary intrusion into entrepreneurship. In their view, Korea could only gain by adopting a neo-liberal capitalist ideology, and they would not have comprehended an interpretation of their actions as neo-colonial or implicitly racist. It was only later, after living for many years in Korea, that Bertha and some other family members came to acknowledge the intrinsic value of the Korean culture, language, and land, and appreciate what had been taken from their Korean-born children. While the Holts’ adjustment to life in Korea might be negatively interpreted as “going native” in a way associated with colonial cultural appropriation, it nevertheless represents a dramatic change from Harry’s initial reactions.

As the number of Korean adoptees in the US increased, efforts were made by adoptive parents in Oregon and elsewhere to expose them to Korean food, traditional dress, and customs, and to other Korean-looking children, by annual reunions. However, several adult Korean-American adoptees, especially those who were old enough when adopted to remember Korea, have since talked about how difficult it was for them to adapt, not only to Western food and customs such as sleeping alone, but to the strict discipline and rigid beliefs of some Evangelical families. This aspect will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Birthmothers have also had to accept exposure to Christian proselytizing in order to be accepted into maternity homes, as will be seen in Chapter 3.
Technologies of Persuasion

In comparing the style and form of Bertha Holt’s auto/bio/graphical texts, a change is evident. The first, *The Seed from the East*, was written with the help of David Wisner, a professional writer and publicist working for World Vision, who “condensed and spiced it up to make it more readable” (Holt 1986/1992, 8). The amount of reconstructed dialogue, self-conscious use of sustained images (such as the animal husbandry discussed earlier), and humorous anecdotes turn Harry’s letters and Bertha’s diaries into a more entertaining as well as inspiring account of heroic endeavours. That book was published in order to raise money for the construction of new buildings in Korea, as Bertha explains in *Sons*. It was part of the same strategy that led both the Holts to engage in radio and TV shows and give many interviews, as they wanted as much publicity as possible in order to process more adoptions and provide care for more children in Korea. Harry was accused of liking the limelight, but to his family he complained about the invasiveness of journalists. Their private family life was difficult to protect. In fact, it seems that they were closest as a family in Korea, when they camped for several months in a tent on a building site with all the adopted children and Linda, their youngest biological daughter, who later married a Korean she met at that time.

*Outstretched Arms* is less dramatic and narrated in a sober style, more like a report or summary bringing the reader of *The Seed* up-to-date on events. *Bring My Sons from Afar* is different again, as it presents extracts from Bertha’s diaries and Molly’s letters far more directly, with little commentary. Readers are left to draw their own conclusions, though the extracts selected are sometimes defensive. Written after Harry’s death, “my sons” in the title may refer equally in this case to Bertha, as the mother. With her daughter, Molly, she became responsible for the future of Holt Adoption Services, as well as for preserving Harry’s
memory. The goal, as expressed in the Foreword, is to convince readers that this is an accurate account, that the Holts are not hiding anything and the facts are corroborated by other witnesses. Just as all Christians must attribute their success to the Lord, the writer must excel by her sincerity and humility in confessing her weaknesses. This is a “technology of the self” that will re-appear in the “letters from birthmothers” to be discussed in the next chapter.

Bertha Holt’s writings represent a paradoxical type of feminine self-representation that attributes success to someone else (God or Harry, in this case), while conveying at the same time the narrator’s superior powers of self-effacing multi-tasking. Bertha had been an active farmer’s wife, physically involved in the work, and becomes a highly successful political lobbyist and media propagandist, but it is as a mother that she is remembered. Turning her private nuclear family into a public international rescue operation allowed her life to emerge as both simply domestic and heroic on a grand scale. This glorification of motherhood occurred at a time when the life of a suburban housewife (the “feminine mystique” later exposed by Betty Friedan) was being glorified in America, partly to persuade women who had worked outside the home in the war years to retreat from the workforce. In this case, Bertha’s recognition as “American Mother of the Year” in 1966 was achieved at the expense of young Korean women who had no chance to mother their children, in a context where Korean women were also traditionally led to believe that being a mother was the noblest vocation. It is also somewhat ironic that the subsequent, professionalized work of the Holt agency was continued by their second biological daughters, Molly, who never married or had children (biological or adopted) herself.
Meeting Molly Holt

When the eight children adopted by the Holts arrived in Oregon, Molly was away at nursing school, but she soon began accompanying her father on his frequent visits to Korea to find and bring back children for adoption. Bertha Holt’s notes in Sons are interspersed with hair-raising letters from Molly recounting some of these perilous and often dramatic journeys, as well as providing detailed accounts of the children’s medical problems. When Molly completed her nursing degree at the age of twenty-one she became a full-time worker in Korea with the Holt agency and others attempting to place children. She returned to the US to complete Bible College training, and after the death of her sister Wanda she decided to spend the rest of her life as a medical missionary in Korea. Bertha also mainly lived there after Harry’s death in 1964, while other children ran the Oregon office of the Holt Adoption Agency. One of the paradoxical ironies of the Holts’ story is that having worked so hard to bring children out of Korea to the US, they themselves eventually became acculturated to life in Korea, and in a sense Korea adopted them. Bertha became known as “Grandma Holt,” and her youngest biological daughter, Linda, had a Korean wedding.26 Not only all the adopted children but also Linda and Molly learned to speak Korean.

Now in her seventies, and still chairperson of Holt Korea Inc., Molly Holt continues to be actively involved and lives in a cottage attached to the Holt Ilsan Centre27 situated in the northwest of Seoul, where both Harry and Bertha Holt are buried. Owing to her extensive

26 Her marriage to Paik Hyun, a young Korean Christian she met at the time when the Ilsan Centre was under construction, later ended in divorce.
27 This is a residential care facility for homeless children with disabilities, originally financed by Harry Holt, who physically participated in building the original structures. Ilsan currently serves the needs of approximately 300 residents, ranging in age from toddlers to adults. Most of them live in group-home arrangements and receive therapy and training. For more details on the Ilsan Centre visit: http://www.holtinternational.org/korea/ilsan. Accessed June 20, 2007.
work for the rehabilitation of children with disabilities, she is known as “Mother of the Disabled” \(^{28}\) and respectfully addressed as *Onni/Nuna* (Older Sister).\(^ {29}\)

Dae-Won Wenger, Secretary General of the adoptee-run organization G.O.A.’L. (Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link), arranged for me to meet with Molly Holt in Seoul on May 8, 2007.\(^ {30}\) I was aware that the Holt agency did not have an adoption program with Canada, and my main focus at that stage in my research was on adoptions to this country, but I was nevertheless eager to ask Molly Holt a number of questions. I was particularly interested in her experience as part of the Holt family and her memories of the adoption process in the early years. Since I aimed to examine the intersections of gender, class, age, and race, I wondered how she saw these aspects of the situation when assigning children to specific homes. When I asked her if the Holts themselves had considered adopting a Black-Korean child, she replied:

> At that time in the history of social work, no one adopted Black children to white families. In fact we had lots of Black families wanting Black children. Of course my father didn’t know that until after he arrived home with my brothers and sisters. In one letter he mentioned the Black children (while he was in Korea in 1955). I wrote him a letter (I was in nursing school then), and told him I would be happy with a Black brother or sister. He didn’t answer that at all, but I think he was trying to find the children we could help most.

This response conveys some ambivalence as to whether the Holts were conforming to written


\(^{29}\) *Onni* is used by a girl and *Nuna* by a boy to address an older sister.

\(^{30}\) G.O.A.’L was established in Seoul in March 1998 as an independent organization to assist returning adoptees. It brings Korean adoptees from European countries and the US together with over 100 native Korean volunteers who share knowledge about Korean culture and provide insight into Korean behaviour, as well as increasing public awareness of adoption issues. For more details see: [http://www.goal.or.kr/eng/](http://www.goal.or.kr/eng/). Accessed May 10, 2011.
or unwritten rules, and whether she agreed with her father or not. She threw a clearer light on the reasons why some families preferred to adopt through the Holts:

After he [her father] arrived back in Oregon with the new additions to our family, we got letters from a group of several hundred families, many of them Black, who lived in Southern California. Many of them were in the process of adopting children from Korea through ISS (International Social Services), and they were very frustrated at all the delays they encountered. My father once wrote that one family had fifty-three visits to their home by social workers. . . . He put these families in contact with Child Placement Services and they processed some. Then he went to Korea in March of 1956 and directly began to adopt these children to waiting families.

Her memory confirms that adoption agencies generally kept few records of their transactions, and children were sometimes mixed up:

A Black adoptee visited me recently from Florida (but she grew up in Los Angeles), who had been adopted through CPS (Korean Child Placement Service) in 1958. We tried to find out her background at SWS (Social Welfare Society, formerly CPS) but they had no records. She had her old passport and Family Registration but it was in another name, as she had been switched with another child. Since she was adopted at age six, she remembered her own name. She remembered living with her grandparents in the country and living briefly at an orphanage. She also knew Mrs. Ok Soon Hong, the head of CPS, and remembered when Mrs. Hong visited LA in the late ‘50s. There is a picture of these children in the book “The Five Decades of SWS.” She had had a wonderful adoptive family and many adopted Black Korean friends. They were all middle class families. She found twenty-three names of her friends in my lists of 1956–1958 (all adopted to Black families).

It is not surprising that Harry Holt, like most white American citizens in the 1950s, was not more outspoken in condemning the racial segregation policy, which was still in full force. Although he challenged racism in taking partly Asian children into his home, he also furthered racial segregation by organizing adoptions along racial lines. His reasons for favouring racial and religious “matching” were different from those brought forward later by Black social workers, who saw the frequent adoption of Afro-American children by white families in the 1970s as depriving the Black community of its children and the children of their heritage. Holt believed that half-black children would be better off in Black homes.
because of the racial prejudice they would suffer in white neighborhoods, rather than encouraging adoptive parents to confront anti-Black racism. He also assumed that only middle-class Christian homes would be desirable, of whatever colour.

I found it difficult to question the motivation behind the Holts’ efforts, in a context where Molly Holt is venerated by all around her as the representative of the family. Her personal manner inspires respect, and I was favourably impressed by her kindness and willingness to talk. If I had the opportunity to meet her again, having completed this project, I would ask a different set of questions regarding the current situation of children in need of care in Korea and alternatives to adoption. I believe her response would be informative, in view of her long experience of living and working in Korea.

The Institutionalization of Transnational Adoptions from Korea

With the establishment of Child Placement Services in Korea in 1954 and Holt Adoption Services as an official agency in 1956, transnational adoptions began for the first time on a large scale. Statistical data for 1958–1960 show that in-country adoptions remained insignificant, totaling only 6.2 percent (162 out of 2,700) of completed adoptions at the time, while transnational, transracial adoptions accounted for the majority, rising from 2,388 to 4,185 between 1955 and 1961 (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 121). Two other religious organizations, the Seventh-day Adventists and the Catholic Relief Service, also gained government recognition as international adoption agencies, but both were short-lived. In 1964 Korea Social Service (KSS) was established, and the Eastern Child Welfare Society (ECWS) was founded in 1972. These two organizations have collaborated with the Social Welfare Society Inc. (SWS) and Holt Korea Inc., to become the only licensed agencies that
deal with inter-country adoptions from Korea. According to OAKS’ (Overseas Adoptee Koreans) statistics, of a total of 6,677 children adopted overseas from Korea between 1958 and 1968, 6,002 were placed in the United States, 491 in Sweden, 12 in France, 13 in Denmark, 34 in Switzerland, and 11 in Canada (OAKS 2006).

The Social Welfare Society, after its inception in 1954 as discussed earlier, became a non-profit organization authorized by the government, with six regional branch offices and seventeen institutions with facilities across the nation. One adoption worker I interviewed in 2007 noted that in Korea SWS cares for “children who are neglected, amid social indifference and apathy . . . children with special needs and nowhere else to go to be rehabilitated.” Like Holt, the SWS also runs several other adoption and post-adoption programs, including homeland tours and counselling for returning adoptees, as well as “unmarried mothers’ shelters,” “in a bid to assist those who become mothers too early in life to cope with trauma.” Attitudes to both birthmothers and adopted children have evolved, and by the mid-1960s the reasons for children being adopted abroad were very different from those first encountered by the Holts.

By the mid-60s the Holt Agency was also forced to conform to the rules set out by US and Korean welfare departments. Their work expanded to include placements from Korea in countries other than the US, and to the US from countries other than Korea (Holt 1986/1992, 209). While their religious motivation and unselfconscious sense of American superiority and entitlement undoubtedly contributed to a culturally and politically imperialist agenda, they clearly saw themselves as stepping in to assist in a unique and dramatic context. Why adoptions from Korea have continued up until now in spite of very different conditions there is another difficult question, to be addressed in the next chapter. The focus will shift to
the perspective of birthmothers who “deliver” their child in maternity homes like the one run by the Holt agency. The Christian “pastoral care” they receive there may be some comfort in their grief at losing their child, but this does not cancel out the fact that the presence of such “charitable” services perpetuates the lack of social infrastructure that would allow the children to remain in Korea. Whether a child is “given” or “taken,” and the extent of the constraint or obligation involved in the transaction, may be difficult to discern but remains a central issue.

A more critical view of the Holts’ venture will emerge in Chapter 4, where adult adoptees provide yet another perspective. Sadly Joe Holt, the oldest of their adopted children, was among the far too numerous adoptees “saved” from Korea only to decide later that their life was not bearable. He put an end to his life in 1984 at the age of thirty-two.\footnote{See “More than just a number: Harry and Bertha Holt’s adopted children.” Transracial Korean Adoptee Nexus 2010/05/13. \url{http://kadnexus.wordpress.com}. Accessed November 3, 2011. Adoptee suicides will be discussed in the next chapter.} Such individual tragedies draw attention to the “political violence . . . exercised . . . obscurely” through institutions, like international adoption, that “appear to be both neutral and independent,” as stated by Foucault in the epigraph to this chapter, but in fact have barely hidden agendas.
Chapter 3

Surveillance and Confinement:
Mothers and Children in Need of Care in Korea after 1960

From [1961] on, Korea embarked on its rocky road from tradition to modernity through a Korean version of a Foucauldian-style governmentality and instrumentality, and . . . international adoption was to become one of its most successful self-regulating and self-disciplining biopolitical technologies of social control and biological purification in the reproductive field.

—Hübinnette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation* (2006, 50)

In the 1950s and early 1960s children available for adoption in Korea were the result of the Korean War, as described in Chapter 2. Christian missionaries initially became involved in response to an emergency situation, and the Holt family and others undeniably made a significant contribution to saving many lives, as well as to establishing a colonizing American presence in South Korea. The growth of Protestant Christianity in that country was inseparable from an on-going US military presence and the expansion of a capitalist economy in collaboration with American-based multinational companies. It might have been expected that responsibility for children in need of care in Korea would shift to the Korean government, as the country emerged from post-war chaos into rapid economic development. This did not occur, because of the desire to maintain close “familial” ties with the US and a shared anti-Communist position sustained by hostile relations with North Korea; the latter made any attempts to encourage government interventions into social welfare suspect as inclined to socialism (Jones 2006). By the 1990s, economic and political changes had moved Korea from the status of an impoverished nation in need of aid to that of an “Asian Tiger.” Social change accompanied economic development, as women joined the labour force in large numbers, but Confucian patriarchal models of family relations remained strong in spite of modernization and globalization.
As Eleana Kim (E. Kim 2005, 56) explains, by the 1970s the children available for adoption were “full-blood Korean ‘orphans,’ relinquished in large part due to extreme poverty, lack of social service options, and the importance still given to consanguineous relations, especially on the status that comes with bearing sons.” The abandoned or relinquished children were no longer unacceptable in Korea because of racial prejudice, but because of gender and class distinctions, as poverty disproportionately affected working-class women, especially single, deserted, or widowed mothers, and the majority of the children concerned were initially female. As Korea became increasingly industrialized and urbanized, fewer women were able to conform to the full-time housewife/mother model still dominant in the middle-class, more were exposed to contact with men in situations that made them vulnerable, and attitudes to sexuality and reproduction evolved.

These developments will be discussed according to four decades marked by political changes of regime: the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Data and information gathered during my fieldwork in Korea will be combined with archival and secondary sources to provide an overview of these changes, with a focus on the intersections of class, gender, and age. The second half of this chapter will bring in the perspective of birthmothers, as conveyed in personal accounts that reflect these changes. The priorities established by militarized governments, and the effects on women and children of the disciplines they imposed in the areas of both production and reproduction, are interwoven with the personal priorities and emotions that characterize the tensions between “caring for others” and for the self.
The 1960s: Abortive Attempts to Find Domestic Solutions

The nation-wide student protests of April 19, 1960 (mentioned in Bertha Holt’s diary in Sons on May 2, 1960) brought down the corrupt government of Syngman Rhee (1948–60),\(^1\) under which any progressive or critical political actions had been quashed as pro-Communist (Jones 2006, 39). The “Democratic Spring” led by Chang Myon (May 1960–May 1961) proved disappointing, since he failed to purge the bureaucracy and security forces (Jones 2006, 39), and his administration was removed through a coup d’état. It was led by the military commander Park Chung Hee, who declared himself President in May 1961. The main focus of Park’s regime was to mobilize national energy for rapid industrialization, expansion of production, and an export-based economy.

In the first half of the 1960s this authoritarian military dictatorship recognized that “overseas adoption undermines the spirit of an independent state” (Social Welfare Society 2004, 23). This was partly in reaction to criticism from North Korea (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 197, 291; E. Kim 2005, 56–7. See also Hǔbinette 2005, 56), which had sent children to the USSR at the end of the Korean War, but on condition that they be returned to Korea.\(^2\) My interviews with SWS and HAP adoption workers confirmed that, as Korea planned to become the equal of First World countries, the government was embarrassed by the export of children who were no longer the result of war and the presence of foreigners, but of the dire poverty experienced by many female factory workers, both married and unmarried, and lack of social assistance for them (Social Welfare Society 2004, 23; field research at SWS and HAP, Seoul 2007). To improve Korea’s image abroad, significant

\(^1\) Jones (2006, 26) mentions that businessmen who had “fattened at Syngman Rhee’s trough” were marched through the streets wearing Chinese-style placards denouncing their greed.

\(^2\) On the situation of war orphans in North Korea, and others since, see Hǔbinette (2007).
policy initiatives were introduced with two aims: increasing the availability of long-term foster care and promoting domestic adoptions (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 195; Tahk 1986, 79–82; Social Welfare Society 2004, 22). Both these projects would prove difficult to realize.

Adoptions within Korea at the beginning of the 1960s were still not well regulated, and as the number of abandoned children increased the existing orphanages and other child-care facilities were unable to cope. It was estimated that more than 70% of the children in orphanages had living parents. Many were sent there for schooling or day care, with the expectation that a parent would retrieve them at some point, while some existed only on paper to bring more money into the institution (E. Kim 2009, 18). The government made plans to place about 2,000 children in domestic foster-care homes, as well as attempting to make domestic adoption more attractive. In the 1950s the latter accounted for only 6.2% of all adoptions. During the 1960s there were 4,206 domestic adoptions, about 36% of the total number, as a result of new laws and policies aimed at reducing both the number of children in care and international adoptions (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 198). The modernization of Korean society under the Park regime thus included, in principle, accepting state responsibility for providing welfare services for children needing assistance outside their family homes.

International adoptions became much more strictly regulated with the passing, on September 30, 1961, of Korea’s first modern law concerning adoption, the “Orphan Adoption Law.” The new law emphasized that the aim of overseas adoptions was “to improve the welfare of the orphan,” and established clear legal procedures for conducting them. It also placed restrictions on children to be made available, as well as clarifying the
approval process for adoptive parents (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 195; Hübinette 2006, 50). Four government-appointed adoption agencies were assigned to work with Western agencies in placing Korean children with overseas families, and an adoption fee was fixed to prevent the growth of a black market for children. More professionals in the field of social work and child welfare were recruited in order to promote awareness regarding the new rules and to seek and approve both temporary and long-term foster-care homes, as well as Korean adoptive families.

While adoption as it is perceived and practised in the West was foreign to Korean culture, as discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of caring for children in the equivalent of foster homes was not, although their status at times in the past was closer to that of indentured labourers or slaves. Beginning in the early 1960s, Korean social workers trained in America encouraged programs similar to those in the West, emphasizing the importance of nurturing young children in a home-like environment rather than in institutional settings. Since most Koreans continued to resist encouragement to adopt, the government turned to the fostering program as an alternative, urging that “each family raise an orphan” (Social Welfare Society 2004, 21; Holt Children’s Services 2005, 227). In August 1961, the first

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3 Examples from the early thirteenth century on were cited in the Annals of the Choson dynasty (1392–1910). Abandoned and orphaned children, along with widows and others lacking adequate family support, were provided for through legally codified relief efforts: “the local government officer should provide such children with food and accommodation until he or she reached the age of ten years, upon which they could settle wherever they wished” (Kim and Henderson 2008, 15). Care for children displaced through war or other disasters could be implemented in three ways: one could take a child as a suyang (foster child) or suyancha (adoptee), or as a servant or slave (Kim and Henderson 2008, 15). Provisional care was also provided in Seoul through the Chesaengwon (similar to modern emergency homes operated by child welfare authorities). Many communities also took care of orphaned children without government intervention, and Buddhist monasteries played a major role in housing, educating, and caring for abandoned children who later became monks or nuns. For further details see Kim and Henderson (2008).
social welfare agency, Child Placement Service (CPS), which was established in 1954 as a subsidiary of the Ministry of Social Welfare, was expanded into a nation-wide welfare organization and began to move approximately 2,000 children per year from institutions to foster homes. However, this campaign came to an end three years later, since the government did not adequately lay out the expectations for fostering a child, and lack of funds meant that families were paid very little to take on the task (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 228). Published records reveal incidents where children were exploited for home labour, as had presumably occurred under less formal arrangements in the past. Some were returned to the orphanage or became homeless when they were not useful to the family.

The government did not expect to be able to do away completely with overseas adoptions, and records confirm that many children remained in need of homes (Social Welfare Society 2004, 21; Holt Children’s Services 2005, 227). In spite of measures to encourage both domestic adoptions and foster homes, by 1964 the number of abandoned children had increased to around 11,000 (in comparison to 755 in 1955). In 1968 approximately 70,000 children were still living in about 600 institutions, many of them considered unsuitable for adoption owing to their older age, poor health, disability, or “unattractiveness” (E. Kim 2009, 18). The earlier promises to provide better government-run child-care services were not fulfilled. With only 2% of the national budget spent on social welfare, and more than 40% on national defence, Korea was once again criticized for transferring its welfare responsibilities to other countries. Many facilities became completely dependent on foreign sponsorships, and orphanages and baby homes held on to as many sponsored children as possible in order to receive a continuous flow of financial assistance from foreign organizations (E. Kim 2009, 18).
CPS itself underwent a transformation on June 8, 1965, when it ceased to be a “semi-governmental office under the Department of Health and Social Welfare” and became a “civilian institute” designated as a “corporation” (Social Welfare Society 2004, 31). That year it launched a campaign to increase funding called “Share Your Love”: employees of the organization donated 1% of their salary each month towards child welfare, and sponsorships of individual children were sought from affluent families both in Korea and abroad. In 1966, CPS was formally recognized as a “not-for-profit organization serving (overseas) families who wish[ed] to adopt a child from Korea,” and produced a four-page black-and-white pamphlet in English entitled *If You Want to Adopt a Child* (Social Welfare Society 2004, 31; fieldwork at SWS, 2007). By 1965 it had the support of about 60,000 overseas sponsors linked one-on-one with a child, and by 1966 it had already successfully placed more than a thousand Korean “orphans” in homes in the USA, Norway, Sweden, the UK, and elsewhere (Social Welfare Society 2004, 31–32).

As it became clear that overseas adoptions were not going to be easily phased out, SWS continued to work closely with foreign missionary agencies. The latter also began to promote domestic adoptions and foster-care. My interview with Molly Holt confirmed records put together by Holt Children Services showing that from April 1965 on the Holt Adoption Program (HAP), under its American CEO, Louis O’Connor, began to actively promote foster care through its regional offices and main office in Seoul. HAP succeeded in establishing a Foster Home Department, in spite of the high costs of implementing and maintaining the program, which mainly served to place children relinquished by single

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4 According to Molly Holt, and the Holt published records, Louis O’Connor (CEO for HAP in 1965), already had experience in organizing foster care in America. He was responsible for promoting the program, in the belief that creating a warm family environment was essential for the wellbeing of the child. See Holt Children’s Services (2005, 228–29).
mothers and waiting for adoption (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 229). The newly developed process for selecting foster families included home visits and assessment of the neighbouring environment and family relations, aimed at a suitable placement for each specific child (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 230).

The program showed positive results, but its long-term success was impeded by limited human resources. Only one social worker dealt with approximately thirty families, with sometimes negative consequences. Placements of up to six months did increase the survival rate for fragile infants and demonstrated the benefits of personal parental attention in child-rearing, but the child was taken away to be sent overseas just when bonds had been formed. Adoption workers at SWS and HAP confirmed in interviews that this was (and still is) often hard on the foster families, as some foster-mothers were grief-stricken when the time came for the child to leave. In the short-term foster care was of benefit to the children, but not all agencies adopted this policy, and even HAP could not keep it up at that time because of the high costs involved, since government support was minimal and donations hard to come by (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 230–31).

Some administrators of regional orphanages and children’s shelters formed an alliance to resist foster-care, for fear of losing their jobs. Used to running things their own way, they also resented the authority given to government officials at the regional health departments and were not ready to take orders from placement centres (Social Welfare Society 2004, 23). Ultimately, the government’s initial plan to replace overseas adoptions by domestic arrangements had already failed by December 1964, three-and-a-half years after it started. The domestic adoption program came to an abrupt end by late 1964, and the foster-care program collapsed in the late 1960s (Social Welfare Society 2004, 22). The Department
of Health and Social Welfare, after discussions with the Department of Home Affairs, decided to reabsorb all the regional branches of CPS into provincial departments of Health and Social Welfare. By 1964 CPS, one of the most promising nationwide programs, lost all its regional branches and was downsized to one main office in Seoul (Social Welfare Society 2004, 22). In these circumstances, the primary mission of CPS at the end of 1964 reverted to international adoption, continuing the program initiatives it had started in 1954 (Social Welfare Society 2004, 23).

By 1965, 70% of the children being sent overseas were of full-Korean heritage, yet unadoptable within the country of their birth. By 1967, the number of countries these children were sent to saw an expansion, including the Scandinavian nations, the Netherlands, Australia, and Canada (E. Kim 2009, 18; see Appendix B). A new Child Welfare Act was enacted in 1966 in response to the on-going recourse to international adoption as an alternative to costly institutional care (Hübinañette 2006, 50; E. Kim 2009, 18). The Orphan Adoption Law had been revised in 1966, when the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs was given the authority to oversee adoptions through its four licensed agencies. In 1971, CPS became a private agency, renamed Social Welfare Society (SWS), and was one of the four, along with the Eastern Child Welfare Society established in 1972 (presently the Eastern Social Welfare Society, Inc.), Holt Children’s Services established in 1956, and Korea Social Service founded in 1964. All received approval from the Korean government to place children for both domestic and overseas adoption. The law clearly stated that it was illegal to adopt a child from Korea without the consent of one of these four agencies. Article 7 of the same law emphasized the need for confidentiality regarding the child’s origins, while Article
8 provided a detailed list of the steps expected of adoption agencies to protect adopted children (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 195).

As a result of this law, the Holt agency, that had placed all children under their care with American families up until 1967, began expanding its adoption program in 1968 to Europe, beginning with Norway which had provided post-war medical services for the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis patients in Korea. Concern for Korean children expressed by members of the Norway-Korea Association led to the adoption of Korean children in Norway (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 232–33). By June 1968, formalized adoption programs existed with seven countries, including Belgium, Italy, Iceland, Switzerland, France, and Australia (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 234). In the following years, HAP further expanded its links in Europe to Germany, England, and Denmark. As a result, the number of children adopted in countries outside of America in 1968 reached 277 out of a total of 783 children placed by HAP for adoption overseas, showing an increase of 35.4%. The numbers had increased even further by 1970, when 408 children were adopted through HAP in European countries, representing 37.99% of international adoptions through HAP (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 234). With the agreement of the Department of Health and Social Welfare, HAP reviewed the foreign receiving agencies’ qualifications and facilities, and held them accountable for initially monitoring the child’s progress in the adopting family (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 235).

Failure to successfully implement domestic adoption and foster care programs in the 1960s, in spite of efforts in that direction, eventually led to an overall increase in international adoptions. The sustained supply of children was complemented by increased demand from American and European families wishing to adopt children from Asia,
especially from Korea where procedures were already in place. The economic situation in Korea at that time was also quite sluggish, in spite of the desire to expand and modernize. Low salaries, rising prices, and lack of job security or educational opportunities led to family break-ups and in many cases extreme poverty as well as domestic violence. My meetings with representatives of SWS, HCS, and other agencies in 2007 confirmed the reports that I had read. Although Korea achieved significant economic progress in terms of GNP, and living conditions improved for some sectors of the population, many workers were exploited and lived in miserable conditions. Some married women with several children could not cope with another one, and believed the child would have a better future elsewhere.

The 1970s: The Persistence of Transnational Adoptions

As will be discussed later, the government did not at any time in this period consider providing financial support for the birthmothers to raise their child themselves, or allocate funds to provide subsidized day-care facilities in factories. Abortion was illegal except under very restricted circumstances (as will also be discussed later), and contraception not widely available. While Western cultural influences were increasingly felt, the population still largely adhered to traditional values regarding the unworthiness of unmarried mothers, discarded wives, and fatherless children. The mothers continued to fear the disgrace and social stigma attached to raising a child alone, as well as the financial hardship if they had to quit work, which newly married women or those with infants were expected to do (Ochiai and Molony 2008, 49). Whether the foreign agencies could have directed money in the direction of support for single mothers at that time, or lobbied the government to provide services for them, is a question requiring further research.
The situation throughout the 1960s already reflected competing views of Korean women’s bodies as a “natural resource” to be exploited for the benefit of the nation (Choi 2005, 45): they were valued, according to the Confucian tradition, as mothers of sons (who would be subject to military service), but also as sex workers still serving foreign troops stationed in Korea (Choi 2005, 84), and increasingly in the 1970s as cheap labour in the rapidly expanding sweat-shop factories, where they worked extremely long hours (often a 54-hour week) for very low pay (Choi 2005, 79, 82). In any of these roles they were expected to be willingly self-sacrificing for the common good (Choi 2005, 63).

The economy of South Korea reached new heights, with rapid industrialization and growth throughout the 1970s. Women constituted 53% of the industrial workforce, and two out of three of these women were unmarried and aged between fifteen and twenty-five. A number of studies show that although Korea approached the status of a developed nation economically, issues related to gender relations and the treatment of women and children remained unresolved. In agrarian rural areas the Korean population suffered from mass poverty and overpopulation (Hūbinette 2006, 63; Gills, 1999). The growing number of relatively uneducated and very young rural women migrating to the cities and living away from home for the first time in order to work in factories can be seen as contributing to the rise in illegitimate births. Family planning measures were implemented by the military government, along with greater access to contraception, including a “two child policy” that resulted in an increase in gender-selective abortions (although abortion was still officially illegal) and sterilizations (Jones 2006, 28–9, 85–6). Emigration and international adoption

6 This study shows how low-wage subsistence farming by women subsidized initial urban industrialization, and later rural women became cheap labour in factories.
were seen in the 1970s as additional useful measures of population control (Hübinnie 2006, 63). Attention was not paid to the reasons for an increase in children given up for adoption by mothers who simply could not afford to keep them, nor to the need for more accessible sex education for teenagers.

Adoption agencies like HAP had to deal not only with an increased number of children in need of care, but changes in the laws regarding adoptions and modification of their status in relation to the Korean government. On January 1, 1970, the military government created a “Law on Society Support Services” in an attempt to regulate social services, including the Korean branches of foreign organizations. The Holt Adoption Program had been subject to governmental approval since December 1960, and Molly Holt confirmed that in October 1971 the Holt agency accepted official status as a Korean “social welfare corporation.” In July 1972 the name was changed from Holt Adoption Program to Holt Children’s Services (HCS), to represent the additional types of support being offered.

In 1972 the military government announced “maintenance of child welfare centres” and promised to repair rundown and overcrowded buildings, while at the same time converting some of these facilities into centres for people with mental or physical disabilities. The overall number of places for children in care was reduced as a result, while the number of children needing protection continued to grow, opening the path to a further increase in transnational adoptions (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 197). Like other agencies, HCS began to be involved in a wider range of programs, such as counselling for single mothers, as well as promoting domestic adoptions from 1973 onwards (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 242). In late 1973 they also began producing a Korean version of a Newsletter called Child Welfare published in English by their US branch since 1959. Along with information about
adopted children and news of the organization and its staff, the journal highlighted new policy initiatives to assist children in care. It received an award in 1978 for its efforts in the field of social welfare (Molly Holt, fieldwork interview 2007; Holt Children’s Services 2005, 243).

In spite of efforts to improve services for children in need of care in Korea, transnational placements continued unabated. In the first half of the 1970s, the number of children placed overseas by all agencies saw a further increase, from 2,725 in 1971 to 5,075 in 1976 (Social Welfare Society 2004, 47). Legislation regarding adoption underwent further modifications: in December 1975 the “International Adoption Law” was revised, only to be replaced a year later by a new law covering domestic adoption as well (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 196). A “Five-Year Plan for Adoption and Foster Care” (1976–81) was introduced in a renewed attempt to promote domestic adoptions as a preferable alternative to transnational placements, which were once again seen as a blot on South Korea’s national reputation (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 197; E. Kim 2005, 57). This came into effect in 1976 through a “Special Law on Adoption” that led to the establishment of a wide range of adoption centres and counselling services nationwide to facilitate domestic adoptions. Further measures suggested to make the latter more attractive included shortening the procedures involved and arranging for the adopted child to take the name of the adopting family, in order to avoid stigmatization (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 197).

These efforts, however, did not produce the desired results, as the new domestic adoption centres had inexperienced and unqualified staff, with the result that a number of children were inappropriately placed and experienced abuse (Hübínette 2006, 82). At the same time, in the late 1970s a “quota policy” was introduced, regulating the number of
international adoptions in proportion to domestic adoptions. The plan was to increase
domestic adoption and reduce transnational adoption by 10% respectively each year (Holt
Children’s Services 2005, 292). This system, ironically, ultimately had negative results for
child welfare, as the rate of domestic adoptions increased extremely slowly and transnational
ones were correspondingly severely curtailed (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 291; E. Kim
2009, 19), leaving more children in institutional or foster care.

The Korean children sent abroad were welcomed with open arms. They compensated
for a decline in the number of healthy white infants available for adoption in North America
(where other children still remained unadopted and were even sent abroad: Hŭbinette 2006,
55). In America the widespread availability of the contraceptive pill and legalization of
abortion in the late 1960s and early 1970s contributed to this decline. Single mothers in the
West were also increasingly deciding to keep their children and raise them themselves
(McDade 1991; Westhues and Cohen 1995). Whereas needing to find homes abroad for
desperate children had been considered shameful for South Korea, by the late 1970s their on-
going provision was reframed as an aspect of maintaining good relations with the West: the
children served as “goodwill ambassadors” in what many saw as a “win-win” situation
(Hŭbinette 2006, 55).

Under the rule of President Park Chung Hee any political dissidence or lobbying for
social justice, human rights, or welfare services was branded pro-Communist and brutally
repressed. The National Security Law stipulated prison sentences for anyone speaking
favourably of North Korea, and military spending increased. As Jones (2006, 33–34) points
out, “Korea’s modernisation project capitalized on Confucian hierarchy and family values to
discipline workers (i.e., as loyal “sons” and “daughters” of the “father” employer and
nation).” Protests against political repression and the harsh living conditions of many workers did, however, occur, spear-headed by unions, intellectuals (including feminists from Ewha University), and some church groups. The Evangelical Protestant churches did not, as in the US, take up right-wing political causes. Park’s assassination on October 26th, 1979, was the result of “a heated post-dinner squabble with his national security chief” (Jones 2006, 40) rather than an overtly political action, but many rejoiced at his demise. Lack of concerted organizing by the opposition produced another period of political unrest and instability, leading to the rise of another military government in February 1981 under Chun Doo Hwan. The economic boom continued and Chun allayed dissatisfaction by promising better state provision for social welfare. Yet the number of children needing a home did not diminish and the situation of women showed little improvement.

The 1980s: Incentives to Give Up or Take In a Child in Korea

In the 1970s many of the young unmarried women giving birth were poor migrant factory workers, but as a result of Korea’s economic prosperity in the 1980s women of all classes achieved higher levels of education. Those who still planned a traditional life as stay-at-home mothers nevertheless took advantage of the opportunity to acquire a college degree, as a means to find a better-class husband or take on part-time work when their children reached school age (M. Lee 1998). Like the young rural women who migrated to the city, many middle-class students left home for the first time to live in student housing. Some were victims of sexual harassment, others engaged in romantic affairs, and many were surprisingly ignorant about birth control (Jackson, Liu, and Woo 2008). Although abortion had been tolerated under the two-child policy, it was still illegal and not easily accessible or free. As a result, a rise in teen-age pregnancies continued throughout the 1980s, ensuring the on-going
supply of adoptable infants (E. Kim 2010, 36). Overall, with no support or assistance from their family or the father, who usually completely disappeared from their lives, many of these often very young mothers reluctantly gave up their children for adoption (E. Kim 2005, 57). As their own accounts confirm, pressure was exerted by the stigma their children would bear as illegitimate, as well as the shame they themselves and their families would experience if they should try to keep the child.

During the 1960s, unwed mothers represented only about one fifth of those giving up children for adoption, but by the end of 1980 that proportion had increased to over 80% (B. J. Lee 2007, 79). At the same time, there were cases where children whose parents were temporarily unable to care for them were made available for adoption, provoking criticism. The reasons for sending children overseas could no longer be assumed to be dire poverty, since the nation was now relatively rich. The Chun government was increasingly embarrassed to be seen as unable to care for its own children, and in 1981 it stated its intention to “prohibit all forms of international adoption from 1985” (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 292–93). New rules instructed the adoption agencies not to allow adoption for at least three months after the child arrived in an institution, imposing a waiting period that was increased in 1984 to six months for infants and twelve months for children older than eighteen months (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 294). Records do not reveal how many of the children affected ended up remaining in institutions, or were taken back by a parent or extended family member. It was often not easy to ascertain if a child was in fact an orphan or had no family capable of caring for it, and mothers were still not offered the option of assistance in raising their child.

The Asian Games of 1986 and the 1988 Seoul Olympics marked a major turning point for Korea where transnational adoptions were concerned. Journalists all over the globe portrayed the host country as the “Number One Orphan Exporter,” exploiting a “natural resource” (children) and “trading in human beings” (E. Kim 2005, 57; Hûbinette 2005, 57; Social Welfare Society 2004, 102). The New York Times of April 21, 1988, claimed that each year “About 6,000 deserted children are admitted to the United States through overseas adoption” while “the Korean government is merely indifferent and disregards the issue.” The situation was summarized thus: “Originally the adoption service began after the Korean War, when the country was lying in ruins. But long since that time Korea has economically revived and is stable enough to host the Olympics. Yet, such untimely child welfare practice continues even today” (Social Welfare Society 2004, 101–102). Newsweek, in its June 6, 1988 edition, stated: “Confucianistic Koreans appreciate their ancestry and therefore do not wish to admit any illegitimate children to their family. Because of this, two-thirds of children with no family ties were sent to homes overseas, with a fee of $4,500 paid by the adoptive parents” (Social Welfare Society 2004, 102).

The payment made by adoptive parents from abroad remained a contentious issue, as all four major adoption agencies in Korea relied on foreign funding sources to run their welfare programs, leading many to question their “non-profit” status (E. Kim 2010, 33). Reducing the number of international adoptions meant downsizing their other activities. Consequently, when the total number of overseas adoptions dropped from an annual average of 12,000 to 8,000 in 1989 (Social Welfare Society 2004, 104), the SWS had to downsize some of its programs and lay off some employees (Social Welfare Society 2004, 105). In the following year (1989) intense media coverage and lobbying by civil rights groups compelled
government officials and policy-makers to legislate more new policies to emphasize the value of domestic placements and reduce international adoptions, with the deadline for their cessation postponed to 1996 (Hübiniëtte 2005, 87; Holt Children’s Services 2005, 294). Incentives such as tax reductions and family benefits were provided for domestic adopters, and overseas adoptions were restricted to cases of relinquishment of infants born to young, unwed mothers at the maternity clinics run by government-recognized agencies (Hübiniëtte 2006, 71–73).

The government made it clear after the 1988 Olympics that there would be no more overseas adoptions of children with known parents or adult male guardians, or those abandoned and unidentified (Social Welfare Society 2004, 104). This initiative clearly signified that the “illegitimate” children of young, single women, known to be born out of wedlock with no claim to a father (or father to claim them), were still liable to be banished. As Choi (2005) explains, the church provided facilities for the mothers, but with the aim of reforming them and “exposing them as deviants” (81). Their children were regarded as a “legitimate” source of revenue for the centres run by government-approved agencies where they were “confined” for the “delivery” of their baby. Shelter and assistance were provided in return for the loss of their right to “own” and raise their child. The placement of these children with families abroad created a regular source of revenue for the adoption agencies, which could continue to provide services for the state.

Official policies also gave preference to foreign couples open to adopting mixed-race or special-needs children (E. Kim 2005, 57). Many took children with disabilities, who accounted for only 1% of domestic adoptions, compared to almost 40% of international adoptions in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 295). This
occurred in spite of the creation of a “Rehabilitation Division” within the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 295). The government increased funds for people with disabilities and opened various service centres to take care of such children. Free support services and rehabilitation became available in 1980, and work programs in 1982, followed by a policy for recruiting professionals with disabilities in 1983. In 1987, the initial service agency was expanded, and in 1990 a policy on compulsory hiring of people with disabilities signified a major step towards improving the level of their acceptance (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 295). However, despite such changes, high unemployment rates, low wages, and inadequate social welfare facilities meant that many struggled to survive, and the future appeared brighter elsewhere for some of these children. By the mid-1980s, Korea had achieved considerable economic wealth, and Park In Sun (1998, 229) has called the infants who were dispatched abroad as “goodwill ambassadors” in that decade the forgotten victims of a government in pursuit of even greater national economic prosperity (Hübinette 2005, 72).

International and domestic adoptions continued to be arranged by the four government-recognized adoption agencies, while there were eighteen other institutions that specialized in domestic adoptions only (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 295). Adoptions through Holt Children’s Service in the 1980s accounted for over 40% of the total number of adoptions in Korea. Their international adoptions constituted over 50% of all international adoptions from Korea before 1985, and although the numbers were greatly reduced in the 1990s, they nevertheless made up approximately 45% of all international adoptions in that decade. They were also responsible for about 30% of all domestic adoptions in the same period, the largest share in comparison with twenty-two other agencies (Holt Children’s
After the amendment to the welfare program for those with disabilities, the Holt Ilsan Centre (which had been built twenty years earlier by Harry Holt and housed three hundred children, including young people with disabilities), rebuilt its dormitories and subsidiary buildings and reopened under the new name of “HCS Ilsan Centre” (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 297). The facilities expanded to include an improved farm, a sheltered workshop providing vocational training, the Holt Special Needs School, the Holt Memorial Hall, and a gymnasium with specially designed equipment. During my visit to the Ilsan Centre in 2007 I observed the range of activities and work conducted there by a well-trained staff, headed by Molly Holt who personally cared for several young children with severe disabilities in her cottage located at the Centre.

In the 1980s, under Presidents Chun Doo Hwan (1981–1987) and Roh Tae-Woo (1988–1993), almost 8,000 children born in Korea were placed through overseas adoption every year. By the end of the decade, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, under pressure, had reduced the rate to 2,000 per year (Social Welfare Society 2004, 23). According to Holt records, a total of approximately 91,000 children had been adopted both domestically and internationally (i.e., since the 1950s), amounting to around 9,180 children on average per year. Of this number, about 26,000, or 28.66%, were adopted domestically, with an average of 2,650 per year, while 65,000 children, or 71.14%, were adopted abroad, for an average of 6,532 per year.

The period leading up to the 1988 Olympics saw rapid change on the Korean political scene. In 1985 the New Korea Democratic Party, led by Kim Young-sam and Kin Dae-jung, gained ground with the support of minjung (progressive) activists including feminist groups (Jones 2006, 40–42). By the time of the 1988 presidential election massive demonstrations
included middle-class civil-rights proponents as well as union members and students. Unfortunately, the vote was split between the two rival pro-democracy leaders, allowing the ruling party under a more conciliatory leader, Roh Tae-woo, to hold on to the Presidency for five more years. Roh was, however, obliged to promise constitutional reform, and a gradual transition away from the military rule in effect since 1961 culminated in the election of Kim Young-sam as the first civilian President in 1993. This led to the expectation of major shifts in policy, as Kim announced ambitious plans for “Productive Welfare,” aiming to reform almost all sectors of the government to produce a better distribution of the benefits of a booming economy (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 364).

**Changing Trends Since 1993**

Kim saw the importance of providing better public welfare services, and introduced employment insurance as well as new legislation concerning social security and medical insurance (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 364; Hübinne 2006, 81). In 1994 the new government’s policymakers turned their attention to the adoption law. They wanted it to reflect a shift from maintaining family lineage, which still figured prominently in the Family Law, to an emphasis on the welfare of children in need of care, security, and protection outside of the family home. In 1995, the government replaced the Special Law on Adoption of 1976 by a “Special Act on Adoption Promotion and Procedures,” in order once more to promote domestic adoption and protect the rights of adopted children (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 366).

While the new law did make concern for the child a priority, it failed to accept that the child might be best off with its own mother. On-going prejudice against single
parenthood and “illegitimate” children still prevented the introduction of any measures of financial and social support to birthmothers who might wish to keep their child. Although Korea had witnessed a major economic transformation and was now considered a developed country, traditional beliefs still reigned where social issues were concerned. Birthfathers continued to be absent and no claims were made on them. Many mothers felt they had no available alternative to adoption that could ensure an economically stable and socially accepted life for their child. Nonetheless, the new law did check the illegal sale of children, by prohibiting private adoptions completely. At the same time, the government announced the renewal of licenses to a select number of agencies, which were legally permitted to carry out the adoption process with specific countries. In order to improve Korea’s image, the government also provided better benefits to parents adopting domestically (B. J. Lee 2007, 77). All prospective adoptive parents had to undergo rigorous investigation before acceptance, including a home study conducted by a licensed agency, initial supervision, and follow-up reports to ensure the child’s welfare.

The licensed adoption agencies were also mandated to provide pre- and post-adoption counselling and other support services (B. J. Lee 2007, 77), and counselling for birthparents was also established. The new government planned to make international adoptions illegal by 1996, but came up against the same obstacles as existed earlier. Many children, especially those with disabilities or of mixed race, could not be placed in Korean homes. In response, a new foster care system was set up in 1994, and international adoptions were allowed to continue (Holt Children’s Services 2004, 366–67).

Between 1991 and 1997, the Korean government succeeded in keeping the numbers of overseas adoptions down to about 2000 placements a year. However, the “IMF crisis” of
1997–1999 was a major setback, as the economic crash clearly revealed the fragility of Korea’s apparently robust economy, and high unemployment put a strain on the social security system at a time when funding was being cut back. The stress arising from loss of income lead to situations of domestic tension and family breakdown, including increased child abuse or neglect (Government of the Republic of Korea 2002). Women’s wages were much lower than men’s (42c to $1 in the mid-1990s\(^8\)), and many women could not maintain a family on their income alone. Unable to deal with the economic crisis, the Ministry of Health and Welfare announced its decision to reverse its policy aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating international adoptions, claiming: “[We] have no choice but to make changes to recent policy which sought to restrict the number of children adopted overseas” (E. Kim 2005, 57). The result was an increase in the placement of “IMF orphans” abroad (Kim and Finch 2002; see also Hübinnerette, 2006). The number of children placed for adoption had risen throughout the 1950s, decreased in the 1960s because of government restrictions, soared again in the 1970s (to about 63,550), and reached even higher in the 1980s (to 91,824) (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 376). Since 1990, however, the low birth rate,\(^9\) high number of

\(^8\) Choi (2005, 82). This applied to factory workers and married women doing contract work at home.

abortions,\textsuperscript{10} and stabilized social conditions had led to a decrease in the number of homeless children, and overseas adoptions were down to around 2000 a year in the late 1990s. While the IMF crisis represented a setback, there was still the will to prove that Korea could take care of its own children.

Domestic adoptions, which had increased to 36.6% of total adoptions in the 1960s, decreased to 30% in the later periods, but after the new incentives were introduced in the early 1990s they rose to account for 40% by the end of the century (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 367). However, for children with disabilities, the proportion of domestic adoptions was still very low: only 0.3% between 1958 and 2002, while international adoption of such children reached 23.4% (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 367). Although adoption was gradually becoming more acceptable in Korea, children with disabilities were still regarded as a burden that most families would not be willing to take on, and “disability rights” were only slowly being recognized.

The shortage of homes available in Korea and reluctance to send children abroad led to another new development after the crisis of 1997–8. While between 5,000 and 6,000 children were placed in state-run orphanages in the first half of the 1990s, the numbers increased to about 7,000 by the end of 2000 (B. J. Lee 2007, 79; Social Welfare Society

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{10}Abortion is illegal in South Korea except in cases specified under the Mother-Child Protection Law. However, according to a 2005 survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, 340,000 abortions were carried out that year across the country. The actual numbers may have been much higher. The abortion rate for married women is stated to have fallen sharply to 17.1 in 2010, from 20.7 in 2009 and 28.1 in 2008. However, the rate for unmarried women shows an increase to 14.1 in 2010 from 12.7 in 2009. According to the Ministry, the number of abortions for every 1,000 fertile women saw a gradual decline from 21.9 in 2008, to 17.2 in 2009 and 15.8 in 2010. See “South Korea: Low Birth Rate Blamed on Women,” Inter Press Service News Agency, December 19, 2009. See also “Abortion Rate in South Korea on Decline,” \textit{Korea Herald}, September 23, 2011. http://www.koreaherald.com/kh/view.php?ud=20110923000439&cpv=0. Accessed June 14, 2012.
\end{flushleft}
2004, 21). This represented a large-scale return to “residential care” in institutional settings rather than foster families or group homes, as statistics from 1998 reveal (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Children Separated from Their Birthparents Requiring Different Types of Care in Korea

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Residential Care</th>
<th>Family Foster Care</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
<th>Youth-Headed Families, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4,576</td>
<td>2,819</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>4,951</td>
<td>3,161</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>6,734</td>
<td>3,917</td>
<td>1,209</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>9,292 (100%)</td>
<td>5,112 (55%)</td>
<td>2,353 (25%)</td>
<td>1,283 (14%)</td>
<td>544 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>7,693 (100%)</td>
<td>4,683 (61%)</td>
<td>1,249 (16%)</td>
<td>1,181 (15%)</td>
<td>572 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7,760 (100%)</td>
<td>4,453 (58%)</td>
<td>1,406 (18%)</td>
<td>1,337 (17%)</td>
<td>564 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>12,086 (100%)</td>
<td>6,274 (52%)</td>
<td>3,090 (26%)</td>
<td>1,848 (15%)</td>
<td>874 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>10,057 (100%)</td>
<td>4,663 (46%)</td>
<td>2,177 (22%)</td>
<td>2,544 (25%)</td>
<td>673 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>10,222 (100%)</td>
<td>4,824 (47%)</td>
<td>2,392 (23%)</td>
<td>2,506 (25%)</td>
<td>500 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>9,393 (100%)</td>
<td>4,728 (51%)</td>
<td>2,212 (24%)</td>
<td>2,100 (22%)</td>
<td>299 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Alternatives to Adoption

Jung-Woo Kim and Terry Henderson (2008) define the modern Korean use of terms such as foster care, residential facilities, and “youth-headed households.” They explain that foster care began primarily to prepare infants for adoption abroad, but advocacy promoting longer-term foster care by the Korean Foster Care Association led to a change by 2000. In 2003 the government set up sixteen centres for the development of foster care services throughout the country, and provided funding for research, recruitment, and management of the system.

Foster care appeared to occupy a relatively stable portion of the child welfare system,
however, according to Kim and Henderson (2008), 90% of what the Korean Government defines as foster care could be more accurately described as kinship care, since a majority of children are taken in by their grandparents. A comparative study of child-care arrangements in Korea and other East Asian countries published in 2008 noted that Korea is unique in the region in that care by grandparents is often remunerated by the child’s parents (Ochiai and Molony 2008, 51–52). The government allowance to foster grandparents or other extended family may therefore in some cases be a replacement for what was previously paid by a parent. Since 2007, longer-term foster care primarily focuses on children of known family origins, whose families have maintained traditional kinship ties but been hit by drastic economic or social crisis. The non-kinship proportion accounts for a mere 10% of the total, and the numbers remained steady between 2003 and 2006 (Kim and Henderson 2008, 25–26).

During my field research at SWS in 2007, I observed an emotional reunion between a seven-year-old boy adopted abroad and his unrelated former foster mother. The SWS counsellor explained that with the help of photographs from his early childhood, the boy and his adoptive parents were able to reconnect with the foster family. In her opinion it was the efficient foster care system, which enables infants and young children to thrive in a family setting while waiting for formalities to be completed, that made Korea such a popular source for international adoption (Field research SWS, 2007). However, though the government provides some assistance to the families coming forward to offer foster care, it is very limited and there are more children than families available. Ironically, the fact that some foster mothers bond closely with the child may also become a deterrent to providing foster care, as mentioned earlier.
The “youth-headed household” (at first referred to as “child-headed”) is another model that emerged in the mid-1980s. It provided young people over seventeen with some assistance to remain in their own community, living independently but under the supervision of relatives. This extension of kinship care assumes that the teenagers are of known origin and residing in communities close to some extended family members (Kim and Henderson 2008, 25–26). It is not clear whether the teens themselves were expected to care for younger siblings or simply live with other teenagers in a group home. In 2000, the government began providing financial, counselling, educational, and other support for such arrangements. This was a viable option for some youths, but the number of such households declined steeply, from 13,778 in 1990 to 3271 in 2006. The reason may be that in many cases older relatives moved in to benefit from subsidies, rather than supervising the young residents from a distance (Kim and Henderson 2008, 26).

Since 1998 the number of children being cared for in institutions has remained stable at around 18,000. Between thirty and a hundred children may be housed in one facility. Since 1997, however, after a successful pilot program, the government has increasingly established group homes. As of 2008, there were 120 group homes with a maximum of seven children residing together (Kim and Henderson 2008, 19). The Ministry of Health and Welfare promised to expand such programs as part of better financial and legislative support, to ensure the best conditions for children in need of care (Kim and Henderson 2008, 19).

During my fieldwork (2007) I had the opportunity to visit one model which combines some of the best features of foster-care and group homes, an SOS (Save Our Souls) Children’s Village in Seoul originally established in 1980. This spacious compound consists of fifteen individual houses, each of which accommodates up to eight children. In each
dwelling one woman, who makes a long-term commitment to stay, plays the role of mother to a group of children permanently housed there, who function as siblings. As I entered the “Village” I was impressed by the surroundings. In addition to the well-maintained and comfortable family homes I was shown an administrative building and a shared community centre with several small and large playrooms well equipped with toys, games, and musical instruments, including a piano. One area was reserved for children with special needs, staffed by workers trained to build their skills. I learned that other children from the neighbourhood also come there, or to the large outdoor playground, to join the resident children for sports or musical activities. The Village does not discriminate against families or children with low economic standing and visitors are welcomed with open arms.

The Village Director, who has his own house on the site, serves as a father figure for all the children (reflecting the patriarchal model still prevalent in Korea). Several other small houses are allocated to retired mothers, so that they can remain close to the family, and to the “aunts” (eemo in Korean) who provide respite care on a rotating basis so that the mothers can take a break. When a mother retires one of the aunts, who is already known to the children, takes over her role. I was given a warm welcome by the Director of the Village, who answered my questions at an informal information meeting that included social workers involved there. I was told that the negative impact of high unemployment and poverty has produced an increase in the number of “social orphans” who may have parents, or only one parent, with insufficient means to care for them adequately. The Village provides permanent homes for abandoned or orphaned children as well as some from financially unstable families facing economic hardships. Some of the latter are not permanent residents, but stay in a short-term shelter until their parents’ situation improves. I gathered that the facility has been
acting as a Children’s Welfare Centre, admitting children from government-run institutions. At this Korean SOS Village the staff members were mostly Roman Catholic and many of the children were following this faith, but the SOS organization does not espouse any particular religious belief. While most of the resident children are healthy, there is also provision for a number of children with disabilities or medical problems. Both physical therapy and psychological counselling are available. There is an on-site Kindergarten that is open to children from outside, thus creating links with the community. Older children attend good local schools. Their academic program is complemented by a study schedule and extracurricular activities such as sports or performing arts. The children not only receive a good education and training, according to their interests and ability, but also a sense of security, belonging, and togetherness. Normally only children under the age of ten are accepted as permanent residents, unless older biological siblings are involved. None of the children from the Village are put up for adoption and they grow together as a family of brothers and sisters.

The website (www.ekf.or.kr) is well maintained and explains the origins of the SOS Children’s Villages in South Korea. In addition to the one in Seoul there are two others: Daegu, founded in 1965 in the south-east, and Suncheon, founded in 1982 about 200 km from Daegu Village. An umbrella organization, SOS-Kinderdorf International, has the task of guaranteeing that each village follows the same educational and administrative guidelines. In Korea they are registered as a charitable organization and receive 60% of their funding from the South Korean government, 40% from private donors. Most of the children have a sponsor who contributes to the cost of activities and further education or training beyond

11 See the Europe-Korea Foundation http://www.ekf.or.kr for more on their philosophy.
high school, which can be very expensive. Those who manage to go to college or university serve as role models for the younger children. An additional SOS Youth Village was established in 1988 to house 30 boys while they pursue vocational training or continue their post-secondary schooling in Seoul. The Youth Village provides a degree of independence without cutting them off.

Since 1982 the SOS Social Centre, located on the site of the Seoul SOS Children’s Village, has offered further education courses, lectures, and other activities open to the public. It also runs a day-care centre for children of working mothers and study classes for neighbourhood children to improve their learning skills, as well as providing a meal every day for children from low-income families. The big cafeteria on the premises, where I was invited to dine with the Director and some other Village officers, was an impressive unit with motherly Korean women expertly preparing traditional food with great care and warmly hosting the children and guests (constantly urging more food on us, as is common in Korea). All these contributions to the local community have ensured their support, and the children are treated with respect beyond the Village. This model allows stability and provides a family-type environment without cutting children off from extended family and the local community.

More amendments were made to the Child Welfare Act of 1961 in the year 2000, when legislation was introduced to prevent or deal with the mistreatment of children. Before this there was no law mandating the reporting of suspected abuse or neglect, only minimal services were available through private investigating agencies, and advocacy groups had not yet emerged to lobby for assistance to abused children and their families on a voluntary basis. After mass media coverage of some cases of severe abuse and neglect in the late 1990s, child
welfare groups urged the government to include a mandatory reporting clause in the new law, as well as to ensure provision of a twenty-four-hour emergency line and clear procedures for official intervention (B. J. Lee 2006, 77–78). These measures, once in place, have proved difficult to implement, as procedures for apprehending and placing children at risk were not spelled out. The traditional Confucian system emphasizing family hierarchy, dignity, and honour, is still strong enough that most families do not want to admit to problems in this area.

The law does not include any particular specifications about the treatment of adopted children, and in spite of the good intentions expressed South Korea was not a signatory to the Hague Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. This Convention clearly states that priority should be given to providing the child with a safe environment in its own home or country, and only if such efforts fail may the child be made available for intercountry adoption. Hübinnette points out that in 1997 the Korean government's welfare budget accounted for about 6.8 % of GDP (up from a mere 2.6% in 1987), far behind OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, where it is generally 30–50 %, but even behind some Latin American nations with lower per capita income than Korea (Hübinnette 2006, 81; Bai 2007, 208). Korea’s amended Child Welfare Law (2000) did partially comply with the provisions laid out by the Hague Convention, but it still gave no incentives to birthmothers to raise their child on their own. It was only in 2007 that a new amendment was enacted to provide limited financial assistance to those who wish to do so.

12 In 2011 the Korean Government announced its intention of ratifying the Hague Convention and is being encouraged by agencies such as KCARE to do so as soon as possible.
The Perspective of Korean Birthmothers

Little was known until relatively recently of the birthmothers’ perspectives on the abandonment or relinquishing of their children, or their thoughts on domestic or transnational adoption in relation to alternative solutions. Three collections of narratives produced by some of them are now available. All of them were collected and selected by staff at maternity homes run by adoption agencies, and are addressed to the unknown child who may return to Korea and want to meet the birthmother. They provide invaluable insight into the range of reasons for the birthmothers’ predicament, confirming much of what has been discussed so far in this chapter. Changes in policies regarding adoption, foster care, and assistance to single mothers, as well as the role of the extended family and religious institutions, are illustrated or denounced by individual voices. The previously depersonalized and anonymous “birthmothers” become engaged actors, victims or heroes rather than villains, in these accounts. Eloquent and moving stories reveal the trauma they experienced in making the often agonizing decision to give up their child.

As was the case in examining Bertha Holt’s memoirs, the “letters from birthmothers” will be analyzed here using the approach to women’s auto/biography suggested by Smith and Watson (2001). I will first discuss the context in which these stories were produced and published, taking into account their purpose(s) and the implied and actual readers. I will then make a thematic analysis of the content, in relation to the archival evidence discussed so far in this chapter.

Letters to an Imagined Child: A New Genre?

At the time of my fieldwork visit to Seoul in 2007 I had the opportunity to see several maternity homes run by agencies that arrange both overseas and domestic adoptions. I was
already aware of the book *I Wish for You a Beautiful Life: Letters from the Korean Birth Mothers of Ae Ran Won* (1999) edited by Sara Dorow, who grew up in Korea herself. As Dorow puts it (1999, 4), “the birth family’s story may be inaccessible, poorly understood, or even avoided, leaving painful gaps in the adoption narrative.” In 1998, when she was writing, *Ae Ran Won* was “one of few organizations in Korea that provides . . . support both during and after pregnancy” (Dorow 1999, 4). Since then things have changed, and it is now one of around forty maternity homes that currently exist. Initially known as “House of Grace,” it was established in 1960 as a home for runaway girls and prostitutes by Eleanor E. Vanlierop, an American Presbyterian missionary, and was originally funded by private donations. The Director, Ms. Sangsoon Han, explained that it became a home for unwed mothers and their children in 1973, in response to the Korean government’s desire to establish such homes. When the founder retired to the United States in 1983 the building was turned over to the Presbyterian Church of Korea, and renamed *Ae Ran Won* (“Planting Love”) in honour of Mrs. Vanlierop, as this was her Korean name. Although it was licensed by the government and has since received 70% of its financing from the state, it still maintains its Christian mission to meet the “spiritual” needs of the women, as well as their physical, psychological, and vocational ones.

While seeking information at the Holt office I also came across another less polished anthology, *To My Beloved Baby* (Holt Children’s Services 2004), based on accounts collected from other birthmothers who had dealt with the Holt agency for their child’s adoption. This book was available only through the office of Holt Children’s Services in Seoul, whereas the earlier one received wider distribution, though mainly outside Korea.

13 The botanical image also seems to be a logical extension of the Holts’ *Seed from the East*. 
Since then a sequel to *I Wish for you a Beautiful Life* has appeared, with the title *Dreaming a World. Korean Birthmothers Tell their Stories* (Han 2010). The editor this time is Sangsoon Han, the Director of *Ae Ran Won* who welcomed me there. Each of the seventeen accounts she presents includes a retrospective narrative by the woman concerned as well as a letter to the child that was given up for adoption, followed by brief notes from the editor giving an up-date on the narrator’s present situation.

All three volumes provide some information about how and why the “letters” were produced and published, while leaving a number of questions unanswered. Ms. Han explained to me that from quite early on expectant mothers who were considering relinquishing their child were encouraged to write in a diary about their own feelings, and their hopes and fears for the child’s future. This practice has continued as a therapeutic exercise supervised by counsellors. Since the publicity surrounding adult adoptees who have returned to Korea in large numbers to look for their birthparents (to be discussed in the next chapter), these reflections are often addressed to the child who might come in search of the writer. Many of the birthmothers express the hope that they may see their child again at some point, and their desire to make a favourable impression is evident. The “letters” all try to answer the imagined question, “Why did you give me up?” All those included in these volumes were read by staff members, if not directly solicited by them, who realized that they offer useful information about the circumstances of these women. Many also provide testimonials as to the value of the work done at *Ae Ran Won*, and the role of Christian faith in enabling some mothers to cope with the grief of separation from their child, as well as the church’s assistance in overcoming the material obstacles that led to that situation.

At the time when these narratives were originally written, women in the maternity
home shared their stories with each other, as they did the experience of being there. They wrote in their diaries in hangul, the Korean national script, and spoke to their imagined child in Korean. For publication, the accounts have been first selected (with success stories not surprisingly predominating), then translated into English, then edited, and presented in a frame that emphasizes the positive role of Ae Ran Won and the fact that all proceeds from the book will go to running programs for the birthmothers and their children. The Introductions, Prefaces, and Forewords are significant in directing the reader to approach these texts in a certain way:

We [Ae Ran Won Agency social workers] find that a helpful part of recovery for each birthmother (is) to express her feelings in the form of a letter to her child. It is my pleasure to select some of these letters from our files . . . in order to share them with the adopted children and their families . . . . My staff and I hope that people who read these letters will better understand birth mothers [and] that the stories courageously told by some birth mothers will help other women in their journeys. (Dorow 1999, 3)

Ms. Han confirmed that the letters are not published without the writer’s consent, although this aspect is not mentioned in the first volume. These books represent a new type of auto/bio/graphy: the individual speaker with her unique story becomes part of a collective “we” representing all birthmothers. The addressee, her own child, is merged with all adoptees who may read the book. These texts function as “frame stories” with one act of communication (from the birthmother to her absent and unknown child) enclosed within another, between someone representing a supervisory role in relation to the mothers and the readers, who speak English and may be actual or prospective adoptive parents or adult adoptees in search of their roots. The fact that both the mothers and the agency have specific purposes in mind affects the selection of what is told and the manner in which it is narrated.

In the more recent letters, some of the narrators appear to be very conscious of ambivalence in regard to their addressees and implied readers. In the earlier ones, the context
of the text’s production remains very vague in terms of time and place, and Ms. Han attributed this to the desire to protect the identity of the narrators. Dorow states: “the letters were translated as directly as possible and edited only to protect confidentiality” (Dorow 1999, 6). In the more recent cases, by contrast, some writers have requested that their real name (or that of the child) be used, so that their child might be more easily able to find them. In the most recent volume more attention is also paid to assuring the reader that the writers have consented to having their reflections edited and made public, although few of them speak English well enough to assess the result. The collection produced by the Holt agency is the only one to include the letters in Korean, alongside the translation, and therefore the only one that many present-day birthmothers might be able to read, but it is not readily available even in Korea. There is considerable overlap in some of the stories in the Holt collection and the others, leading one to assume that in some cases the same person was involved.

*I Wish for You a Beautiful Life* includes a Foreword by two American social workers, Jeff Mondloh and Maxine Walton of the Children’s Home Society of Minnesota, who encourage adoptive parents to become familiar with these stories, which may allow the birthmother to become “real” and convey her “struggles, disappointments, regrets, and lost dreams” (Dorow 1999, 8). On reading the letters, however, one wonders how a child might react to the mixed messages that they send, and how easy an adoptive parent would find it to read them with a child who would be wanting to know if any of these mothers is anything like her own. In fact, they reveal a wide range of personalities and situations, beyond the common issues raised. I will begin my analysis by looking more closely at the socio-economic and family background of some of the narrators, and how this relates to the reasons for their unplanned pregnancy, the availability (or not) of termination, and their inability
(until recently) to keep their child.

**How Did the Situation Arise?**

None of the three volumes includes any accounts from birthmothers of the immediate postwar period, or mothers of GI babies. No woman confesses to having lived in a “camp town” or been a sex-trade worker. At that time, there were no maternity homes where pregnant women could take refuge, as the few shelters available were only for children. The earliest accounts are from the early 1980s, when some basic support for mothers, at least for the confinement and delivery of very young ones, became available. The second volume from *Ae Ran Won* (2010) dates the narratives by giving the year in which the child was born, covering twenty years from 1984 to 2004. The earliest ones confirm that poverty and family breakdown made some very young women vulnerable to either sexual assault or seduction. Several narrators describe dropping out of school and running away from their parents’ home at a young age to find work, because of the violent behaviour of alcoholic fathers and poverty due to the debts the fathers accumulated and could not repay. Once alone in a rented room, they had no family members to defend their person or reputation, and several women reveal that their first sexual experience was forced on them.

The first narrator (in Chapter 1, 1984), who was raped by a taxi driver at the age of fourteen, felt that she had to agree to move in with him and mind his two sons from a previous marriage. She is not the only one to explain that family and friends thought that once a girl had lost her virginity, even by rape, she was obliged to marry the man responsible, or live with him although he was already married (Han 2010, 36). This narrator discovered she was pregnant after her aggressor left her, having decided to return to his wife, and she
had no-one to turn to. Her situation brought great shame on her family, and her brother told her she should kill herself. The neighbours gave her “bad looks” (13), and though her mother would have supported her she did not dare to go against the father’s wishes. She laments, “I broke my mother’s heart” (14), but “God took pity,” and she discovered *Ae Ran Won*. In spite of the hardship she herself suffered at the hands of her own father, she believes it would be terrible for the child to grow up “with no father” in Korea. The child was taken away from her immediately after she gave birth, and she was able to remake her life a few years later by accepting an arranged marriage. Ironically, unable to have any more children, ten years later she herself adopted a child whom she sees as a “reincarnation” of the one she lost.

Several elements of this story are echoed by others. Violent fathers are mentioned by a number of women from poor or rural backgrounds, and moral support from grandmothers, mothers, or sisters who had no material resources to help them. The narrator in Chapter 2 (1990) recounts that she herself was almost given up for adoption at the age of three because of drunken domestic violence, but her mother went to get her back from the orphanage. On leaving home she also turned to alcohol, and she describes herself and her boyfriend as “selfish people who only thought about our own pleasure” (Han 2010, 24). She is not the only one to mention ignorance about contraception. There seems to have been a widespread assumption that it was the man’s responsibility, and that if the woman became pregnant he should marry her, provide a home, or at least pay for an (illegal but nevertheless usually available) abortion. In this case, the boyfriend claimed that the child might not be his, and refused to do anything. Her mother was willing to help her to obtain an abortion, but she was already very advanced in her pregnancy.

These stories provide evidence of strong solidarity among women across generations,
owing to the shared experience of being devalued because of being female. The narrator in
Chapter 3 was herself adopted, because of her own birthmother’s poverty. She was well
treated until the adoptive parents also took in a relative’s son to carry on the family name,
according to Korean custom (as described in my last chapter). The boy was then favoured
over her, and she was mistreated. This woman was one of those who were raped, and her
birthmother contacted her to advise her not to marry the alcoholic man concerned, in spite of
pressure from her adoptive family. She had been getting news of her daughter through a
relative, without the girl knowing. The narrator admits that she hated her birthmother for not
being there when she needed her (Han 2010, 31), but married the father of her child so that
the child would have a name and family. She was also happy at the prospect of having a
blood relative of her own. Unfortunately the father only became worse, and she took refuge
at Ae Ran Won in fear of her life. Since children born to married couples were not eligible for
adoption at that time (1994), she had to pretend that the child was not her husband’s (39).
Finally she chose overseas adoption, not wishing her child to have an experience like her
own as an adoptee in Korea. The note added by Ms. Han explains that the child was born
with disabilities, but was adopted abroad, and this woman returned to her husband after he
converted to Christianity. She actually went to the US to try to meet her daughter, but the
adoptive parents refused, fearing that such a meeting would be too disturbing for the child
(Han 2010, 42).

Almost all the women who were not married mention the unbearable shame that
becoming known to be pregnant implied not only for themselves but also for their whole
family. One who gave birth in 1995 states: “To be an unwed mother in Korea is like being
branded with a scarlet letter on the chest” (Han 2010, 49). Another remembers that “the
doctor told me that raising the baby would be disastrous for everyone involved” (114).
Several mention that they thought of suicide, and one tried to kill herself but was saved by a stomach pump (49).

At that time (2000) there was no financial or moral support for single mothers to raise a child alone. In some cases the grandmother was ready to help, but this brought great shame on her also, as well as blame and in some cases threats of violence from her own husband. One woman (Chapter 7, 1997) did manage to keep her daughter, with the help of her mother who was also alone, by moving away from her hometown to a remote place where she was unknown. Another chapter provides a dual story, told by the grandmother of a child born at Ae Ran Won in 2004 as well as her daughter. The grandmother’s husband left her and she raised her daughter as a single mother, only to become distraught when she discovered that the daughter had become pregnant without a husband. She blames herself and asks: “Would she have become a single mother if born into a normal family?” (Han 2010, 202). Horrified that her daughter will also suffer “the cold glare of our relatives and scornful criticism of our neighbours” (203), she feels hate for the baby and tells the child, “Don’t feel you are the only one who was hurt” (204). This child was also born with a disability, and adopted to the US.

Several narrators were expecting to marry the father of their child, and only realized after they were pregnant that the man was unfaithful, alcoholic, had many debts, or was already married (Han 2010, 85). In other cases the couple were both very young and unable to support themselves, let alone a child (80). One young woman speaks for many when she says, “I thought I was a smart girl who knew what I was doing, but I wasn’t” (86).
Sometimes a difference of class (Chapter 7) or age made marriage impossible. In Chapter 5 (1996) an art student with a good education and a more comfortably off family begins her
narration in the US (57), having been sent there so that people at home will not know about her pregnancy. Seduced by an older professor, she states that “I thought I deserved all the blame” (Han 2010, 60), and returns to Korea to give birth and have her child adopted.

Most of the fathers immediately expect the woman to have an abortion, and some offer to pay for it. Others simply disappear right away. A number of women describe going to a clinic to terminate the pregnancy but being unable to go through with it, especially those who had already seen an ultrasound picture of the foetus (Han 2010, 70, 98). The narrator of Chapter 5, whose stay in the US was paid for by an American “right-to-life” group, told the father that she had had an abortion, rather than have him know that the baby would be adopted. Like some others, she was influenced by a Christian religious leader (61), or in one case a doctor (114), who believed that abortion is murder. One mother kept the money given to her for an abortion by the man who had raped her while drunk to pay for her stay at Ae Ran Won (Han 2010, 69, 70). Another young woman admits that she would have terminated the pregnancy, but she had already had two abortions and it would have endangered her health (Han 2010, 179).

Several writers recount harrowing stories of visits to clinics and hospitals, not only to inquire about abortion but also to give birth. One young woman already in labour (Chapter 9, 1998) was taken to two hospitals that refused to admit her, not because she could not pay but because she was still a minor and had no authorization from a parent, husband, or guardian (Han 2010, 98–99). The third hospital accepted a friend’s parents as stand-ins. Several women had the support of their mother or grandmother at the time of giving birth, even if the delivery occurred at a maternity home, but others would have been entirely alone and unsupported without recourse to Ae Ran Won.
A number of women talk about the experience of giving birth as both painful and joyful. They were glad to be at the end of their pregnancy and thrilled with the experience of seeing a new life emerge from their body. Their eagerness to see the baby and assess who s/he might resemble gives way to grief and depression as they realize they will hold the child only briefly (in the earlier cases) before it is taken away. Two of the mothers blame themselves for the fact that their child was born with health problems: one because she was so reluctant to give birth she refused to push and the child was damaged during the birth (Han 2010, 104), another because she did not give up smoking and drinking during her pregnancy and the child, born underweight and deformed, died after a few weeks although adoptive parents were available (Han 2010, 113–117). Like others they ask their child to forgive them, whether it is for having brought them into an unwelcoming world, contributed to their poor health, or having to give them up to strangers.

More recent cases were able to breastfeed for a few days, and knew that the child would go to foster parents for several weeks before being adopted. One changed her mind after signing the papers, and retrieved the child (Han 2010, 198); another met the adoptive parents and “held their hands and cried” (52). Only one (in Chapter 9) explains that her child was adopted in Korea by church people known to her, with the knowledge that she would not only be able to watch its progress but stay in touch regularly, and the expectation that it would be revealed later that she was the birthmother. Some of the women recall how their breasts ached and leaked when the baby was taken away, and many experienced postpartum depression in the ensuing months. In her note following the narrative of Chapter I in *Dreaming a World* (19), Ms. Han explains that the American Psychiatric Association’s *DSM-IV* list of psychiatric illnesses includes “Korean ethnic syndrome.” She describes this as a
complex type of depression (*Hwa-Byung* or “anger syndrome” in Korean) associated with Korean women who have suffered mistreatment at the hands of men they were often forced to marry, or who abandoned them.

Many of the writers express contradictory and shifting feelings, ranging from remorse, regret, and self-accusation to anger and resentment at their own fate and that of the child. The desire to justify what happened frequently emerges as a story of redemption through self-sacrifice in giving up the child for adoption for its own good. This act, initially undertaken under duress to ensure the mother’s social survival, or because she cannot afford to raise the child, becomes interpreted as the wisest choice since the child would be stigmatized in Korea for having a single mother. The message most of the mothers want to send to their child is that they were not abandoned for lack of love, but because they were loved. As one mother puts it:

How can I pity myself with the pain of sending you away? I just had to understand my future. . . . I had to give you up as soon as you were born, my lovely child, because I loved you so much. Maybe you will hate me. But I had to send you away because I was sending you to a better environment and a better place where you could be happy rather than live with an incompetent mother . . . it would be too cruel to raise you as the child of a single unwed mother in this society because of the way people would treat you. (Dorow 1999, 29)

**The Effects of Christianity**

About a quarter of Korea’s population is affiliated with some branch of Christianity, and many of the women at *Ae Ran Won* in *Dreaming A World* already had contact with a church, although some speak of *karma* rather than God’s will (Han 2010, 55). A number of them mention the attendance at church services required while at *Ae Ran Won*, as part of a disciplined schedule to which some had difficulty adapting (Han 2010, 14, 61, 70), and at least one was converted and baptized while she was there (71). One mother, who came from
a Catholic family, although she herself had not been practising the religion, was shocked when a priest refused to baptize her child (165). Another woman refers to a Bible story about a prostitute being forgiven (Han 2010, 31). The narrator of Chapter 9 (1998) was a regular churchgoer in spite of her parents’ opposition (Han 2010, 94), and as “a good Christian girl” who taught Sunday school (98–9) she was even more ashamed of becoming pregnant by a supposedly Christian man who turned out to be already married (96).

Some church people reviled her, calling her a prostitute (98) and her child “the illegitimate trash of an equally worthless mother” (102). This condemnation is difficult to reconcile with the peace and sense of redemption that several narrators claim to have experienced at Ae Ran Won. Choi Hee An, a Korean feminist theologian, confirms in her account of Korean women’s relationship with the Christian church that women who admitted to premarital sex were “disdained and treated as prostitutes” (Choi 2005, 68–69). She also mentions that some former prostitutes have been known to convert and become “aggressive, restrictive and conservative Christians” (93). While none of the birthmothers cited here fall into that category, those rejected by their own parents or partners find the concept of a protective and forgiving Father-God attractive. One reassures herself by writing to her child: “even though I can’t be beside you and watch you grow up, I am not worried about it. I trust that God, who is always with me, will be with you forever” (Dorow 1999, 98).

In an article entitled “Scattered Seeds. The Christian Influence on Korean Adoption” Jae Ran Kim (2006, 152) claims that a concept known in Korean as han “is at the very essence of the Korean experience.” It is “an emotion, a state of consciousness, and a physiological state . . . the collective consciousness of a people colonized, occupied, divided, raped, and beaten . . . the blood and breath and dreams of Korean individuals” (J. R. Kim
2006, 152). Similarly, Choi claims that *han* “reflects the subjective experience of those who have been oppressed politically, exploited economically, and marginalized socially” (2005, 4). Andrew Sung Park has explained it in Christian terms as “the individual or collective consequence of being sinned against” (Park 1993, 152). Kim’s article looks at *han* as experienced by adopted Korean children, but it is equally applicable to their birthmothers. While some of them confess that they themselves have “sinned” by being irresponsible or promiscuous, they also proclaim the fact that they were mostly sinned against, by men who deceived or let them down and a society that blamed only the women and often refused to help them.

Eleana Kim (2010, 232–4) notes that reading material at government-sponsored but Christian-run maternity homes includes novels from the US with a pro-Christian message, and that some returning adoptees from Europe are surprised at the level of evangelization still evident at these homes in spite of secularization. As mentioned in some of the birthmothers’ letters, the fact that some churches oppose abortion prevented some of them from terminating their pregnancy. Nevertheless, as Nicola Jones (2006) points out in her study of the various branches of the women’s movement in Korea, Christianity initially had a liberating effect on many women. Choi (2005) comments on Christianity’s appeal for women in an extremely patriarchal culture where many rarely had opportunities to leave the home, let alone become active in a community organization. The expansion of the churches in Korea was largely due to women’s influence, and the majority of regular churchgoers are women (Choi 2005, 6, 44, 64). As Jones (2006) documents, church-going women have participated in struggles for better conditions for both working women and those who define themselves primarily as mothers in Korea, although they remain conservative in debates over abortion,
homosexuality, and the sex trade.

Jones (2006, 50) explains that there are two main umbrella organizations representing women’s associations in Korea, one of which is more socially progressive (the Korean Women’s Association United or KWAU, founded in 1987), the other more conservative (the Korean National Council of Women or KNCW, founded in 1959). Whereas the former includes Women’s Studies academics, students, and union activists who consider themselves moderately or radically feminist, the second brings together Mothers’ Unions and housewives organizations, many of them associated with churches. By creating coalitions allowing the two organizations to work together on specific campaigns, women have achieved considerable success in a number of areas. These include better political representation for women by establishing quotas in the political arena, and changes to laws regarding the family, the sex trade, domestic violence, and women’s rights at work.

Most of the women holding elected office at various levels of government, including self-defined feminists, have been from a Christian background.14 The on-going influence of religion has at times impeded the acceptance of gay and lesbian issues as central to debates over gender discrimination, and divided women on how to best support sex workers (Choo 2008). However, efforts by Christian churches to reduce domestic violence and assist those who are its victims have allowed many women, including young unwed mothers, to survive their ordeal and attempt to take control of their lives. Christian-run maternity homes are now among those that provide the best services and offer a range of options to their clients.

14 See Jones (2006), Chapter 8, on “Women’s Political Representation” (181–213).
The Current Situation

The more recent entries in *Dreaming a World* reflect changes in the level of support provided for unwed mothers through training centres such as the one run by *Ae Ran Won*. Young mothers who give up their child are offered not only counselling and therapy but vocational training in a range of occupations, from cooking, sewing, flower-arranging, and hairdressing, to computer skills and assistance with high school completion. Some have received scholarships to continue their studies in Korea or the US, and a number of those selected for inclusion in the volume have gone on to contribute to *Ae Ran Won* by volunteering, becoming social workers, conducting workshops, or making financial contributions.

The biggest change is that women may now receive some government assistance to raise their child, although conditions are attached (Han 2010, 3): they must apply for the limited amount of funding available, with all the humiliation that entails, and agree to stay in a group home for young unmarried mothers, such as the one run by *Ae Ran Won*, where the number of places is very limited. According to Ms. Han, 80% of the single mothers who give birth at *Ae Ran Won* now wish to keep their child, compared to 1% in 1995 and 20% in 2000. However, since the amount of financial support they receive from the government is less than that given to adoptive parents, and terminates when the child is ten years old, the aim is to provide them with enough training to become financially independent.

Other significant changes have occurred as the result of the abolition of the “male head of family” rule in 2008 (Nam 2010). One birthmother explains in her story that every Korean previously had to be included in a family registry, and it was impossible in 1997 to register a child’s birth without a father to sign (Han 2010, 87). This determined individual tracked the father down and forced him to marry her so that the child would have a name,
although she never saw him again after that. Single-parent families have since become less exceptional, as the new changes to the Family Law benefit divorced women, who may now claim custody of their children, as well as single mothers. The divorce rate doubled between 1995 and 2005, to become one of the highest in Asia when “quick divorces” by mutual consent became common. Since June 2008, when a new law was introduced requiring a “cooling off” period of three months for those with children and one month for those without, the rate has dropped by 25%. It is possible, however, to obtain a very fast and cheap divorce on the grounds of physical or sexual abuse, with evidence. More career women are also choosing not to marry or have children. Eleana Kim (2010, 37–8) mentions that single women may now adopt a child in Korea, and some relatively well-off individuals are doing so. The result is that far more women than ever before, single or formerly married, now live alone and may be raising children without a male partner.

As many of the birthmothers’ testimonies reveal, domestic violence is a pervasive problem in Korea (as elsewhere, including the West), and often related to the consumption of alcohol. Jones (2006) provides insight into the culture that promotes the latter, as an aspect of the militarization of masculinity in the South Korean context. All able-bodied men are obliged to complete 39 months of unpaid military service (Jones 2006, 33), in all-male environments where drinking is the main social activity, along with attendance at clubs

where young women serve as “hostesses.” Even after marriage, many men continue to bond with male colleagues through their work and engage in heavy after-work drinking as “part of the job.” Women working for large companies are often also expected to participate, and may be treated more like the hostesses than as equal colleagues. An article by Lee Sung-Eun (S. E. Lee 2008) entitled “The Office Party: Corporate Sexual Culture and Sexual Harassment in the South Korean Workplace” graphically describes the kind of situation that young women may find themselves in, causing them potentially to end up somewhere like Ae Ran Won.

The authors of the published letters from birthmothers did not benefit from the new laws, and continued with their lives as best they could. Several women who gave up their child say that they have since married and had other children. Most of these told their husband before marrying about the child they gave up, although some men have had difficulty in accepting it and one such marriage ended in divorce when the mother wished to meet her child (Han 2010, 52–3). The reason for maintaining anonymity for many women, and for not publishing any accounts by others, is probably that they may have (re)married without telling their husband about the past, which they presumably are trying to forget, or fear losing their husband if attention is drawn to it. Raising children alone is financially difficult for a formerly married woman as well as for an unmarried one, and divorce used to be expensive to obtain, as explained by one determined mother who studied law in order to be able to arrange one for herself (Han 2010, 88).

For those who decide they cannot raise the child alone, for financial or other reasons, there are now more options available. Longer-term foster-care allows the mother to see the child and retain the possibility of regaining custody later, although this may be disturbing for the child and the foster family. Adoption within Korea is still preferred by some, although the
birthparents will have no access because it is usually secret. One mother states, “I hoped you could be raised in Korea because then you could grow up without knowing you were adopted” (Dorow 1999, 101). There is still an assumption that a child known to be adopted in Korea will be thought to have “bad blood” and experience discrimination.

The reasons given by some mothers for preferring overseas adoption are the possibility of it being open and meeting the child again (one narrator also mentions that the child will keep its name (Han 2010, 28)), and the belief that the child will have more opportunities abroad and live in a less prejudiced social context. One mother wonders if her child will feel racially isolated and be “looking for someone who looks like you among the people who look different from you” (Han 29, 2010), but others are very optimistic, expecting “a better environment, free from prejudice and discrimination” (Han 2010, 50), or “a good, loving family in a prejudice-free society” (Han 2010, 73).

Some mothers were surprised and shocked to hear from adult adoptees that their experience in the US has not always been good, and one expressed her disappointment on learning that the adoptive parents that she admired had divorced, just as she herself had done (Han 2010, 55). They tend to see themselves, rather than the child, as the victims of an impossible situation. One laments, “regardless of the wonderful opportunities my child will receive as a result of leaving this prejudiced land, I am forever guilty in the eyes of society” (Han 2010, 77–3). Nevertheless, those who record having met their child later, and in some cases also the adoptive mother, express relief and even delight. Contact through letters and photos, especially on birthdays, may be made possible through the agency. In other cases, the mother has sought her child in vain, since records were not always complete or accurate, as will be discussed in the next chapter. One or two examples of correspondence with the
adoptive mother (including an example in the Holt collection) illustrate a best-case scenario. As one birthmother puts it, “For a healthy adoption, I thought it would be necessary to share the facts and together fight through difficulties we would face” (Han 2010, 63).

Overall, the stories in all three collections demonstrate remarkable resilience on the part of these particular (selected) birthmothers, as well as a deep concern for their child’s welfare and a sense of wanting to make up for past failure by future success. If their child comes to meet them, they do not want anyone to feel embarrassed or ashamed. One mother recounts how she rented a car in order to show her returning child around, and did everything possible to make a good impression (Han 2010, 55). They are conscious that this child has inherited their genes and physical characteristics, in spite of having grown up in a completely different context. Some mothers learn English in order to be able to communicate (64), and one even watches the Oprah Winfrey show, believing this may give her something in common with her American son (Han 2010, 32).

These anecdotes convey the fact that the birthmothers are haunted by their absent child, just as the adoptees are haunted by what might have been, as will be discussed in the next chapter. The fact that these women are considered unworthy or unable to raise their own child, in a society where motherhood is very highly valued, is devastating for them. Some social workers may treat them more like children themselves than potential or actual parents. Like adoptees, they may feel suspended in a state of what Foucault termed “tutelage,” in need of care and guardianship rather than being responsible for caring for themselves.
Visiting *Ae Ran Won*

On my own visit to *Ae Ran Won* in 2007 I was conscious of being there as an observer, rather than a participant in the “adoption circle.” On entering the three-storey building, with a capacity for forty residents, I saw four young women sharing a fairly large Korean-style room with heated floors and futons. They had access to the common facilities: kitchen, dining, bath and laundry rooms, and exercise and relaxation space to maintain their physical health; a library, computer room, and chapel to occupy their minds, as well as rooms for meetings and counselling. They were all either about to give birth or had just done so, and were wearing matching blue maternity gowns. One showed me her newborn baby girl, dressed in pink in clothes she had chosen.\(^{18}\)

The Director, Ms. Han, explained that the *Ae Ran Won* Mother and Baby’s Home opened in 2000, to support the increasing number of young women considering keeping their child. In the past most mothers stayed only briefly in a maternity home and had to hand over the baby almost immediately for adoption. Now, even if they have decided to have the child adopted they can volunteer to care for it for several weeks. If they decide to keep it, they have the option of moving to *Ae Ran Seumter*, a group home for teenage mothers from abusive families that opened in 2001 (Han, 2010, 209). I have since learned that the new Adoption Law of 2011 contains a clause requiring that all birthmothers considering adoption should remain with their child for at least seven days, to be sure that they have made up their mind. This is not welcomed by all, and one website\(^{19}\) reveals that some expectant mothers see this rule as cruel, making it even more difficult for them to separate from the child.

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\(^{18}\) This was a moment that I remembered when I held my first child in 2010.

I was familiar with the location of Ae Ran Won, as it was close to Yonsei University where I had taken a Korean language program (in 1996–1997 and 2000–2001). That neighbourhood is popular for foreign students seeking rental accommodation, and I was surprised to realize I had passed the building before when visiting friends, without knowing what it was. Although the building has a small sign at the entrance it resembles other houses. Ms. Han agreed that most local people were probably unaware of Ae Ran Won’s existence, or indifferent to it. Once I knew its location, I noticed some very young and obviously pregnant girls shopping at the nearby store, but no-one was paying attention to them. Dorow’s Preface to the first volume of letters from birthmothers states the hope that they may “lift some of the mystery we tend to drape around the ‘unknown’ birthmother” (1999, 4), but many mothers aim to remain in the shadows, without drawing attention to themselves. All the letters were published only after the women concerned had left Ae Ran Won, and most of the authors use pseudonyms. It was only on seeing these teenagers that I realized how young and vulnerable some of the birthmothers are, and that each has her own story to tell and life to live.

**Imaginary Letters and Foucault’s Concepts of “Confession” and “Truth-telling”**

The letters themselves convey a mixture of revelation and concealment, of denunciation and reticence. It is understandable that the writers do not wish to expose others whose identity needs to be protected, as in any confessional auto-biography (Smith and Watson 1998). Foucault extended his earlier consideration of “confession” as an instrument of power in “pastoral” contexts, to consider its relationship to the Greek word *parresia*, or “truth-telling” (Foucault 2010, 41–42). I was struck by two aspects of this connection. First, he developed it
in relation to a Greek play\textsuperscript{20} in which a young man, Ion, discovers that he was adopted. Having learned that he was born in Athens he goes there in search of his birthparents. At first he believes he has found his birthfather, in the person of Xuthus, the ruler of Athens. This man has no children by his wife, Creusa, who was assumed to be barren. On meeting Ion, she realizes he is the son she bore after being seduced by the god Apollo, a baby that was abandoned in the forest. Xuthus is not his birthfather, but she is his birthmother.

It is her “confession” that Foucault uses to develop a version of that concept that combines admission of “guilt” with imprecation—denouncing the circumstances that produced the situation of “guilt” in what amounts to a profession of innocence. This is what he describes as the capacity of the powerless to “speak truth to power” (Foucault 2010, 133). Ion has to fight to regain citizenship in the land of his birth (like Korean adoptees, as will be seen in the next chapter), but his birthmother guarantees his “autochthony” (belonging to the land, 104). By speaking out she herself demonstrates maturity, and goes beyond the need for “tutelage” associated with being a minor or dependent spouse. In the following lecture in Foucault’s series called “Government of the Self and Others” he relates this new ability to speak out to other “technologies” of self-construction and resistance to disciplinary pressures. Becoming self-sufficient and proficient in self-representation entails care for and of the self (“le souci de soi”), and this is what the young mothers who choose to stay on at \textit{Ae Ran Won}, with or without their baby, are learning to do.

Nevertheless, the new type of collective and tentative life-writing-as-testimony illustrated by these “letters from birthmothers” is very different from the more strident, polemical and much better-funded texts produced by Bertha Holt, as discussed in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{20} Foucault (2010) Chapter 5, 75–97. The play \textit{Ion} (412–414 BC) is by Euripides.
Holt also claims to defer to God’s will and attributes her success to him, but she began from
a place of strength in terms of money, class, age, and political connections. She is far from
anonymous, as her family name echoes throughout my research. These birthmothers, on the
other hand, have not had access to these resources; they are deprived of their child, and most
fear to reveal their identity because for them motherhood is a shame and a loss, rather than
the glory and gain it became for Bertha Holt.

Many of the Korean birthmothers are nonetheless grateful to the adoptive parents who
raise their child. In retrospect, they see the child as a “gift” to the family that desired one:
“My heart aches when I think of the fact that you were given up for adoption, as I was a
single unwed mother . . . but I should stop thinking in this way, because you were not given
up but merely taken care of by different parents. I will consider you a gift to them and they
will help you to grow up as a fine person” (Dorow 1999, 47). The use of the words “give”
(up) and “gift” softens the guilt or irresponsibility implied by harsh terms like “abandoning”
or “relinquishing” a child. It moves the birthmother into a position of choice and generosity,
rather than the forced circumstances and neediness that characterize most of their narratives.
Allowing the child to go to a supposedly better place is the unselfish act that redeems them
and wipes out their past mistakes, making them examples of the Korean self-sacrificing
mother. The artwork accompanying these texts, depicting Christian-style mother-and-child
motifs, (Briggs 2003, 184) conveys images of what was lost but is retrieved by writing about
it.

The concepts of a “better place” and a “beautiful life” connect with other terms
deployed by Foucault: *heterotopias* and the *aesthetics* of care for the self. In the next chapter
I will focus on the adult adoptees’ perspective, looking at the various organizations and
events that now bring them together. A general overview based on observation and published studies will be compared with personal memoirs told from the point of view of the “child,” who is now (like the birthmother) no longer under tutelage. While in Korea, I collected newsletters from several adoption agencies. In one, from SWS, an article entitled “By the New Name of Sharing” brought together comments from birthmothers on the effects on them of sharing their stories. One of them wrote: “My name is Birth and new Beginning: I have led my life too ignorantly and indiscreetly, mistaken in thinking that I was already grown up. I regret that I have lived at my own discretion and followed my own will, under the illusion of being an unnamed adult” (Park 2007, 17). Both adoptees and birthmothers are confused as to who they are, but both are now able to search the records for their name and proof of their genealogy.

Laurel Kendall, an anthropologist and the adoptive mother of a boy from Korea, argues in “Birth Mothers and Imaginary Lives” that “Korean birth mothers were not commonly in contact with the agency when the adopting family was selected and the child placed, and until the late 1980s, when foreign adoption became a political issue in the Republic of Korea, few birth mothers requested their children’s files” (Kendall 2005, 164). In fact, she adds “many did not even know that they had this option or that the agencies would treat them as anything other than shameful women.” They may still meet with resistance, as Kendall explains: “[In my case] until the Korean adoption agency feels that my son’s birth mother is secure in her own adult life, she remains an act of imagination for both Henry [her adopted son] and his adoptive parents” (164–65). In the next section I will examine what happens when the imagined child and imagined birthmother meet and become a reality, or turn out to be inaccessible.
From Being in Care to Caring for the Self: Adult Adoptees’ Perspectives

To arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework . . . this is what I would call genealogy . . . this analysis of the relationships which can exist between the constitution of the subject or different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power and so forth.


Through personal meetings in the US and Korea with a number of adult adoptees I became aware of the wide range of experiences and emotions that those born in Korea and adopted by Americans have gone through and are, in many cases, now attempting to share and express. The publication of letters from birthmothers has made many more aware of the situations that led to their abandonment or relinquishment, and in recent years large numbers have returned to Korea to attempt to trace their birth parents (most often the mother), and to understand the social, economic, political, and personal reasons for the phenomenon of wide-scale adoptions from Korea to the US. Many wonder to what extent it was the “best interest of the child” that governed the decision to send or receive them abroad, and ask questions about the role and motivation of the various agencies involved, as well as of both sets of parents. They are also aware of the tendency to treat them as eternal children in need of perpetual guardianship, rather than as independent adults able to define their own identities.

Various organizations are currently involved in facilitating visits to Korea, and international publicity has continued to draw attention to international adoption as a blot on South Korea’s reputation. At the same time, the national media have dramatized the adoptees’ search for their origins, showcasing emotional reunions with birth mothers. The searches increased after Kim Dae-Jung, who had been a social activist in the struggle to
establish democracy, took office as President in 1998 (as discussed in Chapter 3). Recognizing the urgent need for reforms following the IMF crisis, his administration introduced the concept of “Productive Welfare,” enhancing the role of government in wealth distribution and welfare services (Holt Children’s Services 2005, 364). In his inaugural speech he declared that international adoption was one of the main issues to be addressed (Hübinterre 2006, 83). On October 23, 1998, President Kim and his wife, First Lady Lee Hee-ho, welcomed twenty-nine Korean-born adoptees from eight countries to the presidential residence and offered a public apology from the nation for sending them and 200,000 other Korean children abroad (Hübinterre 2006, 83; E. Kim 2007, 116). This was one of the events that sparked the growth of the returning adoptee movement.

In his speech the President referred to national guilt, sorrow, pain, shame, and regret, as well as expressing appreciation to the adoptive parents for their generosity. He blamed the situation on the still dominant Korean cultural belief in maintaining legitimate and patrilineal bloodlines (Hübinterre 2006, 84). During my field research in Korea in 2007 I met an adoptee who was among the group invited to the presidential residence, the “Blue House.” This individual expressed great pride and joy at having met the President and heard the apology in person, and did not convey any resentment against the Korean government, the adoption agency, or his biological parents for placing him with an overseas family. Rather, he considered himself to be among the “lucky ones” raised abroad, as he was not sure how he would have survived the harsh economic conditions faced by his Korean family. However, another adoptee who spoke to me in 2007 was less positive in her evaluation of the official apology, saying: “I think it’s important that it happened at all, but it’s also empty. When someone punches you in the face, if they say “I’m sorry” and then they keep punching you in
the face, it doesn’t really count, does it?” While the apology acknowledged that international adoption should not be necessary and provided the opportunity for some returning adoptees to experience a sense of reconciliation, it failed to recognize, along with the adopted children and the adoptive parents, the painful experiences of the birthmothers. These women remained forgotten or rejected, while the role of the birth fathers was ignored and they still do not experience any of the disgrace heaped on the women.

In 1999, the year following the apology, the government announced that it would grant legal status to returning adoptees as “overseas Koreans,” legitimizing their existence as part of the global diasporic presence of Koreans worldwide (Kim 2007, 117). Some adoptees have taken advantage of this offer, as will be discussed below, while many more have opted to visit Korea briefly but continue to identify primarily as Americans. The range of reactions of adult adoptees in terms of racial and ethnic identities and affiliations has been analyzed in detail in two recent sociological studies: Choosing Ethnicity, Negotiating Race: Korean Adoptees in America by Mia Tuan and Jiannbin Lee Shiao (2011), and John D. Palmer’s The Dance of Identities: Korean Adoptees and their Journey Toward Empowerment (2011). In attempting to synthesize and compare accounts from various sources, I will begin by reviewing the findings of these studies. These authors did not have the others’ work available to them at the time of their writing, nor anthropologist Eleana Kim’s Adopted Territories: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging (2010), which provides an ethnography of the returning adoptee community.

The qualitative social science research approach adopted in these studies raises issues regarding the representativity of samples and justification of any generalizations. As in the previous chapters, I will move from the general to the specific by going on to look closely at
memoirs published by adult adoptees who explore their own individual experiences in more depth. Two authors in particular, Katy Robinson (2002) and Jane Jeong Trenka (2003, 2009), have published accounts that illustrate the deployment of what Foucault (1988) calls “technologies of the self,” specifically from a woman’s perspective. These technologies of self-construction and self-representation involve narrative techniques and framing that allow Foucault’s concept of “le souci de soi” (care of—or for—the self) to emerge from situations that otherwise imprison the individual in a state of “tutelage,” of being defined only in relation to others and subject to others’ will. For Korean adoptees these “relations” are literally shifting and uncertain, but some have gone beyond being anonymous or disguised participants in social science research projects in order to speak in public for themselves. The fact that the western model of an independent and autonomous self, which is very different from the relational self defined by family still more common in Korea, may be seen as the source of some profound misunderstandings when reunions do occur.

The last part of this chapter will focus on the adoptee organizations and networks discussed by Eleana Kim (2010), who analyzes the emergence of a new, chosen collective and relational identity for an increasing number of Korean adoptees living in Korea, the US, and elsewhere in the world. My discussion of this study will, like the analysis of the memoirs, attempt to bring out intersecting elements related to race/ethnicity, class, gender, and age.

Recent Studies of Racial/Ethnic Identity Conflict for Korean Adoptees

Earlier studies, as discussed in Chapter 1 and reviewed by Tuan and Shiao (2011, 7–9), focused on the “adjustment” of transnationally adopted young children to life in a new
society and culture. Mostly based on information from adoptive parents in the US, along with schoolteachers, social workers, and other American participants, few of the early researchers consulted the children themselves. They were in any case at that time mostly too young to have experienced being away from their new “home” and exposed to a wider range of reactions, or to express any discomfort they felt. The overall conclusions of such “outcome” studies were very positive, and they contributed to the continuation of adoptions from Korea to the US.

The recent studies by Tuan and Shiao (2011) and by Palmer (2011) make an important new contribution by using qualitative research methods to collect and analyze the experiences and opinions of adoptees who are now adults. Both concentrate on those living in the US, though Palmer does include some references to others in Europe without making any clear distinctions between these categories. Tuan and Shiao (2011) add another dimension by beginning to situate their participants’ experiences in relation to those of non-adopted second-generation Koreans in the US and other Asian Americans. Their framing reflects the authors’ own backgrounds as Chinese Americans and Tuan’s research on the “honorary whiteness” often accorded to (East) Asian Americans, resulting in what she terms the “triangulation” of racial categories in the US (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 143), with Asians situated between White and Black.

Palmer, on the other hand, is himself a Korean adoptee raised and now living in the US, although he spent several years in Korea and is married to a Korean woman. In his Preface he explains that his original project was to limit his study to the lives of young female adult adoptees, but he “found interviewing Korean adopted young women to be emotionally painful” (Palmer 2011, xiv). He had himself to resist viewing them as “poor little
orphans who needed my assistance, rather than strong and resourceful young women” (Palmer 2011, xiv). This awareness of gender distinctions in the experience of Korean adoptees and in attitudes to them is an element that tends to be glimpsed only to disappear in most studies, but will come to the fore in the present chapter.

**Inside-Out and In-Between: Negotiating Race and Ethnicity**

Tuan and Shiao (2011, 7–9) state that their goal is not, as in earlier studies,\(^1\) to measure the outcomes of transracial and transnational adoption, as illustrated by Koreans adopted in the US, in terms of psychological adjustment or social success; rather, they aim to examine the strategies that adoptees develop, over the course of their lives, to deal with the issues they should be expected to have to confront. The questions that interest them are: (1) how racialized children learn about racial/ethnic connotations and conflicts, with white parents who cannot transmit their own experience of derogatory treatment and coping strategies; (2) what variables (geographical, social, age- or gender-related) lead them to embrace or reject the racial/ethnic identities attributed to them by others; and (3) how they choose to identify, and the meanings they themselves attach to their chosen self-identification(s) (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 2). The sample for their study, which began in 2000, was obtained through the Holt centre located near the University of Oregon (Eugene) where the study took place. They conducted life-history interviews with fifty-nine individuals, all over the age of 25 at the time of the meetings, and all originally brought to the US from Korea by the Holt agency and placed with white families (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 13–14). The ratio of two-thirds females and one-third males reflects the overall gender distribution among the 3,255 placements in

\(^1\) For example Benson, Sharma and Roehlkepartain (1994) and Richard M. Lee (2003).
the western US made by the Holts between 1950 and 1975 (13). The participants belonged to various age cohorts and represented both rural and urban upbringings, as well as a range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

Tuan and Shiao trace the evolution of attitudes and practices over time, from the “clean break” expected when the Holts first brought children from Korea to the US and assumed they would assimilate relatively easily into white American culture and society (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 10–11; see Chapter 2 of my dissertation), to present-day preferences for more openness in international adoptions and exposure to the culture and society of origin (Dorow 2002, 2003, 2006a, 2006b). They situate these changes in the context of race relations in the US (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 22–5), from the civil rights movement and the end of laws against miscegenation in 1969 to the 1972 statement by Black social workers condemning transracial placements of Afro-American children, and the backlash against that policy expressed in the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 that reinstated them. They emphasize the shift from a “colour-blind” insistence on individual equality and the importance of a stable family setting over racial/ethnic differences (see Quiroz 2007), to awareness and acknowledgement of these elements and a focus on strategies to deal with the conflicts faced by adoptees and their adoptive families.

The study is divided into sections addressing childhood experiences as part of a white family, early adult exposure to attitudes beyond the family setting and to others of similar racialized appearance, and adult curiosity (or lack of it) regarding Korea, its culture, and the birth parents. Most of those interviewed for Tuan and Shiao’s study were not heavily committed to any adoptee associations, and though many of those adopted after 1970 have participated in mediated visits to Korea few would consider living there. The reasons some
give for not going there include insufficient time or money (reflecting class disparities) as well as apparent lack of interest. Some also confessed to reluctance for fear of worrying or hurting their adoptive parents by appearing dissatisfied or ungrateful (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 44), the risk of further rejection by either the birth parents or the adoptive family, embarrassment at their lack of Korean language skills, and commitment to relationships with white American partners that might be disturbed. For some, early “exposure” to some Korean cultural events was off-putting as it seemed artificial and an unwelcome imposition (57). Even within the same family, the attitudes and reactions of Korean-born siblings may be very different (53).

The authors define “race” as something that is not a private choice but a physical and visible (though culturally constructed and interpreted) distinction beyond the individual’s control (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 5). Attitudes to one’s racialization by others, on the other hand, vary and may change over time and in different contexts (5, 12). Individuals identified as (East) “Asian” in the US may originate from a range of national, geographical, and ethnic categories (Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean etc.) that become blurred in the larger dominantly white context. Second-generation Asian Americans may identify as part of that broad category, or more closely with a specific ethnic group with a shared language and customs (82). However, transracially adopted children in the US coming from abroad, especially the first cohorts from Korea, often had little or no opportunity for exposure to the culture of origin as they grew up.

Those who visit Korea primarily become aware of how American they are, although they blend in with the crowd in a way many have never experienced before (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 69). They are condemned to feel “alien” or foreign in the US because of their racial
characteristics, and in Korea because of their lack of ethnic affiliation (knowledge of history, customs, and language). In both contexts there is a disconnect between what they feel they are “inside” and what they appear to others to be, from “outside.” Their genealogy in both places is imaginary or unfitting, as they are expected to identify with European “ancestors” and extended family in the US, and lack ancestors or family to identify with in Korea (67). While they may benefit from “honorary whiteness” in America, in the presence of other Asians they become “individuals shorn of their group” (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 7).

While this situation creates difficulties and conflicts for many, some also experience it as an advantage. They may be able to serve as a “bridge” between cultures and contribute unique perspectives to discussions about racism/anti-racism. Yet they are mostly aware of their precarious position in-between, and suffer from being torn between gratitude and resentment, negotiating shifting interpretations of their situation as one of privilege or irreparable loss.

The aim of Tuan and Shiao’s study is not to critique international or transracial adoption per se, or to delve deeply into the political and economic reasons behind its existence. Rather, the focus is on how adoptive families can participate in an approach described, following David Kirk (1964/1984), as a “shared fate,” in order to facilitate the adoptee’s negotiation of racial and ethnic identifications (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 44). The authors conclude that this is more successful in those families in which the adoptee is able to talk about experiences of racism and alienation with the parents, who acknowledge difference, and the family participates with the adoptee in exposure to the culture of origin based on genuine curiosity. Biculturalism may then be seen as an asset rather than a hindrance, and such families often choose to live in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods.
Welcoming a child from abroad into the family is perceived as enriching the family, rather than “saving” the child, and the family is expected to change, not just the child.

Gender distinctions come to the fore at several points in Tuan and Shiao’s study. Adopted women are more likely to have a relatively good relationship with the adoptive mother and understand that woman’s fear of “losing” her adopted daughter, or her feelings of guilt or failure for any problems the daughter faces (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 45–6). The participants reveal that some adoptive parents are reluctant for their Korean-born daughters to date non-white men, whereas they do not seem to show the same concern for sons in similar situations (147). The authors attribute this to an over-protective attitude based on cultural assumptions about Asian women’s fragility and vulnerability (147–8). More girls than boys are adopted in any case, which may reflect not only availability but western stereotyping: Asian boys may be seen as effeminate or dangerous (148), whereas the girls are welcome as attractively exotic “Ornamentals,” as one interviewee jokingly remarks (119). An alternative explanation lies in the implicit attribution of cultural whiteness to the adopted daughters in spite of their racial characteristics, which makes them subject to the desire to preserve the mythology of “pure white womanhood” (see Glenn 2002).

Some adopted women who visit Korea are disturbed and put off by what they perceive as blatant sexism and gender prejudice, including the condemnation of unwed mothers and illegitimate children (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 108) from which their birthmother may have wanted to protect them. They find it upsetting to be expected to conform, because of their appearance as Korean, to a model of feminine behavior that is foreign to them. Those who have American partners or mixed-race children are concerned for the effect on them (110). Many conclude that they are “American at heart” (120–121), and only one of those
interviewed perceived being American as having negative connotations (131).

Some males, on the other hand, like Caleb who is cited at the beginning of Tuan and Shiao’s study, may internalize the racism they experience in the US, which appears even more outrageous because it is unexpected (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 38–39, 139). Some engage in inter-minority hierarchization, putting down other groups. Others become rebels in various ways, conveying their anger by criminal activities, substance abuse, or self-destructive behaviors. In the overall picture conveyed by this study, these are a minority, as are those who might consider leaving the US. The majority of these adult adoptees are committed to life in America, with few regrets about their citizenship.

The issues raised by Tuan and Shiao concern family and personal relationships rather than the political or systemic ones that brought about the adoption of Korean children in America. They conclude with practical recommendations on how to improve the experience of international adoptees (148–152), rather than on how to bring the practice to an end. Their study makes an important contribution to debates over the experience of Korean adoptees by its thought-provoking analysis of the “invisibility of their specific racial experiences to whites” (6). They demonstrate that “while their very existence challenges hegemonic whiteness, their daily actions and efforts to gain white acceptance do not” (Tuan and Shiao 2011, 154).

**Divided Loyalties and Polarized Reactions**

Palmer, a Korean-born adoptee himself, begins his study with an autobiographical account of his own “awakening” to awareness of his precarious situation in-between cultures, before going on to survey the experiences of thirty-eight individuals encountered or contacted
through the “Gatherings” for adoptees from Korea held in the US (1999), Oslo (2001, and Korea (2004) (Palmer 2011, 13). He emphasizes that this sample does not represent the majority of adoptees from Korea living around the world (3). Most of them were raised in the US; although a few were adopted in Europe, this distinction is not considered important enough to be included in the table summarizing their characteristics (16–17). This table focuses on their current age, age at adoption, and whether they had visited Korea. Only five participants were male and gender distinctions are not central to the analysis, although they appear relevant where relationships to adoptive mothers are concerned (Palmer 2011, 119, 124, 126, 129). Two of the older interviewees were biracial, and are deemed to have had atypical experiences for that reason (101–103).

At the outset, Palmer expresses a critical approach to theories of identity development based on clearly defined “stages” (Palmer 2011, 2–3), as they tend to suggest a model pattern leading to some kind of final resolution. He prefers the image of a “dance of identities,” where different stages may overlap, individual trajectories vary, and there is no final conclusion. Nevertheless, his study is divided into sections based on broad periods in an individual adoptee’s life. They move from assuming or desiring a White (Palmer uses the capital letter) cultural identity in childhood and adolescence (corresponding to Tuan and Shiao’s first stage), to experiencing racism and problematizing Whiteness for someone who looks Korean (similar to Tuan and Shiao’s “ethnic explorations in early adulthood”), to acknowledging and exploring Koreanness in what Tuan and Shiao refer to as “later adulthood.” Palmer adds a further stage, when those he interviewed had the opportunity to become “empowered” by assuming a “transracial adoptee identity” through contact with

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2 For example, those propounded by Beverley Tatum (1992).
other adoptees (Palmer 2011, 13). Like Tuan and Shiao he sees individuals’ reconciliation with a troubled and divided racial/ethnic identity as difficult and tenuous, but he extends the concept of “empowerment” to the desire to share this experience with others. A number of his participants, like himself, then embark on a “social justice” agenda that implies questioning the political and economic factors behind transnational and transracial adoptions. Palmer’s avowed aim is to raise awareness of “transracial adoptions, race relations, and White privilege and entitlement” (2).

Palmer does not downplay the contradictions and tensions that adoptees experience (Chapter 5). They begin in the early stages when they discover that they are “neither/nor” White or Korean, rather than being both at once (Palmer 2011, 32). Conversations with their White parents, siblings, and partners become even more difficult later for those who become angry at what was done to them without their consent. To maintain these relationships they have to steer a difficult path away from the “poor little orphan” role (34) at the risk of being reclassified as unreasonable and ungrateful adult adoptees (32, 66). Most of them attribute only good intentions to those involved in their adoption, but the realization of the negative sides of their experience is distressing for their White loved ones as well as for themselves, and both sides experience feelings of guilt. The adoptive parents may “uphold beliefs of cultural racism and colorblindness simply by raising and loving their transracially adopted child as their own” (Palmer 2011, 24). For those who manage to establish contact with Korean relations, similar issues arise, complicated even more by requiring translation.

Anger is certainly a justified reaction when many adoptees discover that information about their origins was deliberately withheld from them by either their adoptive parents or the agency involved (Palmer 2011, 62–3). Files were lost, others incomplete or contained
false or contradictory information (60). Many who search for records in Korea find only the equivalent of a “sales slip” (39). The horror stories told about what would have happened to them if they had stayed in Korea frequently prove to be false (62). Nevertheless, the majority of adoptees do not want to alienate themselves from their White family by making accusations (46). Some wish that they had had more exposure to Korean culture, however superficial, as they grew up, whereas others feel that ritual cultural events were foisted on them as a kind of “branding” (47). Most parents did not express genuine curiosity themselves, and those who did risked engaging in cultural appropriation (53). Many adoptees received a subtle message that “Korean adopted children were allowed to live in the house, but their racial heritage would remain inferior to that of their White parents” (47): they were “White-washed” (21).

One adoptee interviewed by Palmer states: “even though I had a good life, I always felt like I was living a phony life” (Palmer 2011, 72). Many of those who visited or stayed for some time in Korea found that life there was equally “surreal” (72, 84). They experience a sense of not being “part of a story that has existed before you and will continue to exist after you” (89) because of the absence of a genealogy. Their life stories are constantly told (badly, with gaps) by other people, rather than composed, recounted, or recorded by themselves. This is the situation that the many groups formed by adult adoptees seek to remedy, to allow them to “own their own stories” (95).

Their stories are in fact very varied, according to their age now, their age at the time of adoption, and where they live (with the presence or absence of racial and ethnic diversity being more important than the geographical or national location). Within the community of adoptees involved in organizations in Korea, the US, or elsewhere, there are rifts and
tensions: “The more engaged adoptees . . . view the newly awakened . . . as contributors to transracial adoptees’ oppression because they are not actively working against White institutional and cultural racism” (Palmer 2011, 104). Newcomers may feel like outsiders, silenced if they do not conform to a supposedly “authentic” Korean adoptee identity and trajectory. Beyond these associations, some “angry adoptees” are viewed by agencies and others involved in international adoptions as “immature, erratic, and psychologically unstable” (106). Some adoptees have stories that are too painful to share (106–7), including physical, sexual, emotional, and religious abuse or repression. While many remain “in denial,” pretending that everything is fine, a few have published individual accounts that may be seen, like the letters from birthmothers, as a particular type of testimony (*testimonio*), belonging to a form of life-writing that serves both individual and collective, therapeutic and polemical, functions (see Sommer 1988). Their accounts both testify to a traumatic experience and provide models for how to overcome it (107).

Engaging to this extent with the issues related to transracial and transnational adoption puts strain on individual relationships with white parents and partners (Palmer 2011, 114–127), who may feel they are losing the person they knew (127). Korean-born siblings in the same white family sometimes have different reactions (130), and the range of ways of coping with their situation amply shows that there is no one “true” path to an ideal resolution. As one participant put it, “I think we could write an encyclopedia of stories” (144).

Many adoptees have now opted to tell their own individual story in public. The title of the first anthology of brief accounts, *Seeds from a Silent Tree* (Bishoff and Rankin 1997) echoed that of Bertha Holt’s first memoir, *The Seed from the East* (see Chapter 2). It was
followed by other collections like *Voices from Another Place* (Cox 1999) and *After the Morning Calm* (Wilkinson and Fox 2002). The first book-length autobiographical account was *The Unforgotten War: Dust of the Streets* (1998) by Thomas Park Cement, a biracial man adopted at the end of the Korean War who became a “poster boy” for early Korean adoptees. Most accounts by those adopted later have been by women, including Elizabeth Kim’s *Ten Thousand Sorrows* (2000), Joanne Higginson’s *Unlocking the Past* (2003), and Jeanne Vance’s *Twins Found in a Box* (2003), which are all mentioned by Palmer. In my next section I will focus on two accounts by women who illustrate the two poles described by him: Katy Robinson, who after a visit to Korea that uncovered a father rather than a birthmother returned to life in the US with a white husband, and Jane Jeong Trenka, who found her birth mother, became a leader in the adoptee movement, and since divorcing from her white husband has chosen to make her life in Korea.

**Reclaiming the Adoptee’s Life Story: Alternative Outcomes**

Both Robinson and Trenka were adopted by white Americans in the early 1970s and returned to Korea for the first time twenty years later to establish personal contact with biological family members. Both were taken into care by Christian institutions operating in Korea: Roman Catholic in the case of Robinson (2002, 62), Lutheran for Trenka (2003, 19). Both went to live in parts of America where Asians were rare, Trenka in Minnesota and Robinson in Utah.

Robinson’s adoptive parents already had three biological sons and wanted a daughter (Robinson 2002, 35). Another child was originally assigned to them, an infant girl who was

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too sick to travel. Katy (then known as Kim Ji-yun), already seven years old, was offered as a fast substitute (15–16). She spoke and read Korean and had a photograph of herself at the airport with her sad-faced mother and grandmother, the “Single Square Picture” of her book’s title, reproduced on the front cover. She was obviously not an orphan and arrived with a hanbok made by her grandmother and a scarf belonging to her mother. This photo left her with the impression that she had been either “kidnapped by foreigners or betrayed by her own family” (Robinson 2002, 70).

Trenka (Jeong Kyong-Ah) was only six months old when she was relinquished in 1972, but she was adopted together with her sister, Carol, who was four and a half. The adoptive parents had no children and were persuaded by a church minister that taking in these siblings would be an act of Christian charity (Trenka 2003, 19). Carol had the impression that she was a free bonus that went with the desired infant, Jane, who was more loved (Trenka 2003, 29), whereas Jane grew up envious of Carol’s good looks and popularity (Trenka 2003, 139–140; 2009, 134).

Both authors comment on their complete change of identity, including their new name, birth date and certificate, nationality, language, sleeping arrangements, and diet. Both use the image of being reborn from the womb of the airplane (Robinson 2002, 56, 90; Trenka 2003, 104, 212; 2009, 159). Although some information was known about their origins and the reasons for their relinquishment, either the adoptive parents or the agency withheld it. Both families attempted to raise their Korean daughters “as if they were their own” (Trenka 2003, 39), and both claim that they grew up initially believing they were white. Robinson saw herself as “shedding my Korean language and identity and stepping into an American skin” (Robinson 2002, 74), but later asks her American mother: “Do you know what it feels
like to have an Asian shell while longing to be white just like you?” (2002, 36). Trenka felt treated as an “honorary white person” (Trenka 2003, 97) and classified herself as “white” in college applications (2003, 129). Both were made aware in their high school years that others beyond the family did not perceive them as white, and recall being the objects of curiosity and racial taunts (Robinson 2002, 77–8; Trenka 2003, 34). They made futile attempts to change their appearance, Robinson by fixing a clothespin to her nose (2002, 86–7), Trenka by dying her hair (2003, 66). Each experienced the sensation of looking in the mirror and not recognizing what they saw, of lacking others around them with whom to trace a physical family resemblance (Robinson 2002, 1; Trenka 2003, 38). They knew that they were not of Irish descent (Robinson) or German/Scandinavian ancestry (Trenka), but their biological roots and Korean genealogy were cut off. Neither was exposed to other Asians or Korean culture, or given any reason to feel proud of being or looking Korean. Both Robinson and Trenka dated and married white men (Robinson 2002, 85–6; Trenka 2003, 49), and wondered what they would pass on to their own children (Robinson 2002, 28–9, 34; Trenka 2003, 49).

The stories told by these two authors of their return to Korea and attempts to find out more about their past confirm many of the accounts of frustration cited in Palmer’s study. Robinson encountered resistance and ignorance at the adoption agency, where her file contained only minimal or false information. Her adoptive mother failed to tell her until much later that her Korean father had contacted the agency hoping to trace her (Robinson 2002, 36, 91), claiming that she wanted to protect Katy from possible disappointment and also herself, since she feared losing her. The Korean father was also given false information by the agency about his daughter and believed her to be a doctor in New York (49). She manages to meet him during her first brief visit to Korea, only to learn that he has no
knowledge of where her birth mother might be.

On a second longer stay, accompanied by her American husband, Robinson hears conflicting reports and rumours from various Korean relatives: first that her mother died in an accident ten years before, then that she remarried and is still alive somewhere in Korea, then that she must have since died, and finally that she was thought to have gone to the US and is possibly living in Chicago. Katy gradually deciphers the probable story: her Korean parents were not in fact married, as she had believed, and her mother may have given up her daughter in order to marry someone else and save her child from the stigma of illegitimacy (Robinson 2002, 241). Any record of her mother’s life or death is to be found only through family registers based on male lineage, and it is through an uncle, her mother’s half-brother, that some facts are established. It transpires that Katy’s father, who claims to have thought of her every single day (54), has actually had three families, including his first legitimate one, an affair with Katy’s mother, and a more recent third set of children. His first wife agrees to meet Katy and eventually offers to adopt her, though, as Katy puts it, she does not need a third mother (199). Trenka has a similar experience of Korean women wanting to be surrogate mothers to her (Trenka 2009, 165).

Robinson meets with an aunt, her birth mother’s half sister, Sunny, who believes that her own father (Katy’s maternal grandfather), like Katy’s, was a “no-good Korean bastard” (Robinson 2002, 233) who fathered children with a series of women whom he abandoned, although he was an important political figure. Katy is surprised that this glamorous woman speaks fluent English, having lived in Australia. Sunny provides a new insight into “what I

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4 In doing so, she was following the Korean custom that the legal wife became the stepmother of any children her husband had with another woman, which was abolished in recent changes to the Family Law (Jones, 2006).
might have been if I had stayed in Korea,” raised by a single mother (241–2). This Korean woman has fewer options open to her than Katy does, but is proof that she would not necessarily have ended up destitute or driven to prostitution to survive, as the American adoption agencies often claimed.

Trenka also suggests that her birthmother was of “high class” origins (2003, 44), and her case is unusual because her Korean mother sought her out, rather than the reverse. She learns that she was not abandoned at the orphanage, as she had been told, but given up under pressure from her violent and alcoholic Korean father, who did not wish to keep a fifth daughter whose paternity he questioned. Her mother feared that he would kill her, and saw sending her away, though painful, as a better alternative. She sent Carol as well to make it easier for her and maintain a family connection. Over several visits Trenka comes to know her mother and helps to nurse her though her final illness, along with her older Korean sisters and one younger one born (and registered with a boy’s name) after she had left for the US. Like Robinson, she believes the agency exaggerated the danger she would have been in had she stayed there. She also acknowledges the plight of many Korean women seduced and abandoned by men who father children and take no further responsibility for them, especially if they are not sons.

Gender roles and relations certainly play a central part in the stories of these female adoptees and their birth mothers. The subservient and dependent status of women in a society where male dominance is still upheld is one aspect of Korean culture that greatly disturbs both Robinson and Trenka. Both declare that it is not easy to be born a girl there, and that males are privileged in many ways. Katy does not easily adjust to being given orders by her Korean father, who still treats her like a child (Robinson 2002, 119), drinks too much, spits
and belches, and does not tell her the truth. The relationship that develops between them is fraught with misunderstandings and suspicion, as he may be seeking financial gain from his American daughter. When they first meet he claims that his house burned down, but is sure his luck will change by meeting her, “a citizen of the great US of A” (Robinson 2002, 45–6, 98). On her return to the US she does send him money (103). Her half brother later suggests that the family expects material support from her, though she should not feel “put under any obligation until you are ready” (163). Katy feels this should be her own “personal choice” (163).

Robinson’s American father also drank and became violent, as did two of her white brothers, but her American mother obtained a divorce when Katy was in Junior High School. Trenka also had a difficult relationship with her “silent” adoptive father, and suspected her American maternal grandfather of having sexually molested his daughter and even Carol (Trenka 2009, 88). Her attitude to her stern and undemonstrative American mother is ambivalent, as she seeks her love but feels rejected by her. When her Korean mother dies she plans a memorial service for her in the US, to which she invites her adoptive parents. Feeling rejected by her in their turn, they refused to attend and she did not speak to them for several months. They relented when invited to attend her wedding, but there is no warmth, only hurt and misunderstanding, in the relationship as Trenka describes it. At the time of writing her second memoir (2009), Trenka states that she had not seen them for six years.

Robinson’s relationship with her American mother, Sue, is more favourable. When Katy falls ill in Korea Sue goes to be with her, and Katy states with relief: “We are more than just mother and daughter; we are good friends. I feel so lucky that she came into my life” (Robinson 2002, 264). Katy abandons the search for her birth mother, and does not regret
having given her Korean mother’s scarf (the only thing she had that belonged to her) to Sue. Both these accounts reveal fear of rejection on the part of both adoptees and adoptive mothers. Robinson and Trenka, like so many others, go to Korea primarily in the hope of understanding why their Korean mother gave them up for adoption. Their relationship with their American mother is affected by that first sense of rejection. The idea that they were “chosen” is not necessarily reassuring, as it seems like being selected at a store, with the possibility of being returned if not found to be satisfactory (Trenka 2003, 24–5). Katy reflects that if the first child assigned to that family had not been too sick to travel, “my mother would have told another little girl how lucky they were to be together” (16). She had a sense of being “disposable, a drifter, passed randomly from one set of hands to another” (16).

Trenka’s answer, when asked as a child, “What does it feel like not to know your real mom?” was, “It feels awful. Weird . . . like I was never born” (2003, 38). Later a white friend who was also adopted tells Jane that any adopted child tends to feel like a second-rate replacement for the one the adoptive parents were unable to have. They are reminders at some level of a man or woman’s inadequacy (206–7). Girls or children of colour may feel that they are inferior substitutes for the perfect white male infant that was unavailable (Trenka 2003, 26). In any case, being “chosen” implies the possibility of being unchosen, there is never the inevitability of blood ties that often enforce loyalty in spite of conflict. Adoptive parents and adopted children carry an additional burden of responsibility and gratitude because of the choice involved on the parents’ part, and a risk of resentment because of the lack of choice for the child.

The accounts by Robinson and Trenka graphically illustrate competing loyalties, responding to “the language of blood” (Trenka) or the sense of trust based on shared values
and experience (Robinson). The two white husbands also visit Korea, both attracting much admiring attention, but Trenka’s marriage did not survive the new loyalty she discovered to her Korean roots. Katy returns “home” to found a mixed-race family in the US, while Jane returns again and again to Korea, finally making a new home there, surrounded by other “floating” adoptees from around the world.

For both these women, the search for their origins took a heavy toll on their mental and physical health. Robinson was bedridden with eye problems for weeks while in Korea, as if she could not bear what she saw. Trenka had already suffered mental health problems when she was stalked in the US by a would-be murderer whose interest in her is attributed to her Asian looks. She admits to having made one suicide attempt. In spite of such different trajectories, both authors “make sense” of their lives through writing. Each began by keeping a diary to express and record what could not be shared with their adopted family. Robinson went on to become a journalist (Robinson 2002, 89–90), Trenka a creative writer (2003, 212). Both also turned briefly to Buddhism at one point as a possible alternative to the strict Christian orthodoxy in which they were raised (Robinson 2002, 49, 62; Trenka 2003, 13, 89).

Written words play a large part in both these stories. While birthmothers in Seoul were writing letters that would never be sent to their imaginary child (see Chapter 3), both Katy and Jane write similarly to their mythical “real” mothers (Trenka 2003, 38, Robinson 2002, 70–1). These letters were either never sent or returned by the adoption agency (Robinson 26, 70, 93). Trenka’s birthmother also wrote directly to her when Jane was in Junior High, having obtained her US address from the agency in Korea, and this led to their meeting six years later. Katy’s father wrote to her adoptive mother, who revealed the letter

5 See E. Kim (2010, 192) on the privileges granted to white men in Korea.
only when Katy turned eighteen. At that time she also saw Sue’s letters to the Korean father and the agency. Through these letters, along with the documents in their files (or missing from them), their lives are constituted and blurred by paper trails with gaps, marred by faulty translation and language difficulties. The few surviving photos serve as anchors that confirm something from the past, but they remain mysterious.

Each in her own way later chooses to shape her life-story through words. Trenka sees herself as following in the steps of her Korean mother, who hoped to “master her life through story-telling” (Trenka 2003, 116). This first volume of her autobiography is dedicated to “Umma,” the Korean woman who gave her life: “I am made in the image of you; I am a daughter after your body and after your heart. Even if I fail to create you again in words, I will carry you with me, in the language of blood” (161). For her publications she uses a combination of three names that indicate three different affiliations (Trenka being her married name): “I deliberately choose my name, my place in the world” (Trenka 2003, 238). For her, becoming an adult and assuming responsibility for her own care and choices meant turning her back on her American existence and ultimately deciding to move to Korea. Robinson, on the other hand, accepts her place in America while maintaining links to her Korean extended family, and has founded her own family in the US. She does not appear to have felt a compulsion to continue to write about being adopted, and her hope that journalism would “offer me a chance to write about life’s complexities” (including being “trapped between two identities” (Trenka 2003, 90) seems to have been fulfilled.

On November 6, 2007, Robinson wrote a piece for the New York Times opinion pages entitled “Relative Choices. Adoption and the American Family. Tracing my Roots Back to Korea.” She recounts another visit to Korea, with her son when he turned one year old. She
stays in regular touch with her Korean father and other relatives by phone. Now when she looks in the mirror she sees “a face with features I got from my Korean family, and expressions I got from my American one.” She declares: “It is no longer important to be fully one or the other. I have the privilege to move between these two halves, and still feel whole.”

This choice seems to have been shared by Trenka’s sister Carol, who was much less affected by meeting her Korean mother than Jane, maintained ties to her American family, and started a family of her own with a white husband.

Jane Jeong Trenka’s first telling of her story is far less journalistic or straightforward than Robinson’s, incorporating scenes as in a play and other literary devices that convey her awareness of formal literary techniques and effects. The sequel published in 2009, Fugitive Visions adopts an even more elaborate and aesthetically challenging form based on a musical score by the composer Prokofiev with the same title. Whereas the first volume emphasized the idea and theme of involuntary exile from Korea, this one represents Jane as a “fugitive,” fleeing the hold that America has on her and hiding out in the expatriate (or repatriated) adoptee community in Seoul. Having escaped from her marriage and her American family, she is a free agent and has made a conscious decision to become Korean. Her attempts to cut off her ties to the West are symbolized by the absence of a piano in her life, and her earlier efforts to adjust to American expectations are evoked by her need to modify the music to suit her small hands (Trenka 2009, 79). An accomplished musician, she previously made a living by giving piano lessons, but quit after the death of her Korean mother (23).

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Trenka’s contact with other adoptees from several countries has made her even more aware of how many children have suffered from adoption abroad. Her attempts to communicate with her American mother were fruitless. She could not understand “how profoundly painful and lonely it was in all that whiteness” (Trenka 2009, 29). Her mother’s advice was “get over it,” an attitude that her sister Carol (who works in the mental health field) seems to share. Korean relatives also tend to underestimate the effects of racial prejudice in the US. Robinson’s father asks her if she experienced racism there, but is envious of her prosperity (48); Trenka’s older sister says it must have been hard growing up with no other Koreans around (2003, 128), but also shares the perception that life is generally easier in America. As a teacher of English, Trenka is constantly exposed to the desire of Koreans to emigrate to the US, or at least study there. Ironically, it is her mastery of English that enables her to earn a living.

Although she has tried to learn Korean, Trenka knows she can write only in English. For her, this is evidence of “a mind violently occupied” (Trenka 2009, 28), rather than a “political choice” (65). She is undertaking a project of “mental decolonization,” though she still cannot appreciate Korean music (2009, 32). She uses the expression “back in the day when I was still white” (29), but confesses “the love I want most is that of an aging white woman” (2009, 32), and asks wistfully, “my blue-eyed, blond-haired mother, what wouldn’t I do to be loved by you?” (50). Whereas the first volume is an elegy to her Korean birthmother, in the second one she mourns the loss of closeness to the white woman who raised her. When America was familiar she dreamed of Korea, now it is the reverse (2009, 56–7). Whereas in the first book Trenka looks to her Korean mother for a story-telling model, now she remembers that it was her American mother who told her to “write it down,”
who was “hypergraphic in her own way” (2009, 155).

Trenka claims that “defending myself, my choices, my experiences—that has always been my job” (Trenka 2009, 68), but goes on to recount a series of aborted affairs with other adoptees from different backgrounds who, like her, cannot commit to a permanent relationship. Her tone becomes more accusatory and strident, as she asks: “Should you appease foreign powers by giving humans as gifts?” (81), or “If you could recognize a child’s mother as a human being, would you still think of taking her child from her as a charitable act?” (2009, 85). Later, however, she adds, “If parents fall so low that they would even give their own children away, why should anyone else help them?” (88). She excuses her birth mother nevertheless, saying she did not know “how much of her child she destroyed in trying to save her” (2009, 88–9). The agencies also come in for harsh criticism for mixing up children’s names and files and disguising their origins because “no-one wants a stolen child” (92). Many adoptees cannot handle the stress of the search, or what they discover, and become suicidal: “We adoptees in Seoul . . . are all in various degrees of suiciding our Western lives” (Trenka 2009, 95). At the same time, Koreans envy them, and she is “the person my students wanted to be” (97–8). Ironically, even her birthmother converted to Roman Catholicism and changed her name to Julia before she died (Trenka 2003, 126). Koreans who want to become Westernized do not acknowledge “that the Korean economy is built on my back, my mother’s back. . . . I am the expendable of Korea” (2009, 98). Adoptees are, for Trenka, in the same export category as migrant workers and mail-order brides (2009, 104).

This second account by Trenka reflects a more political analysis of the on-going adoption of children from Korea and the circumstances behind it, accompanied by intense
anger and bitterness. Trenka personifies the indignant, angry, “ungrateful” adoptees on the verge of a nervous breakdown that some of the participants in Palmer’s study fear becoming. They know, like Trenka, that “no-one, not even an adoptee, wants to be the friend of a lonely needy sad person” (Trenka 2009, 138). In her own circle, “nearly everyone has either made a suicide attempt or knows someone who has” (172). Some question the truth of what she writes: “it is publicly argued how much I write is true and whether the truth matters, what kind of truth is mine” (145). One truth she reiterates is that it is not easy to be a girl in Korea. If she had been born a boy, her father would not have tried to suffocate her or wanted to send her away (2009, 146–7). She also comments on the differences between her and her sister Carol, and claims that of those adopted with siblings “half claim to care little or nothing about Korea, and the other half are in jail or in mental hospitals” (165). She waited twenty years to hear Carol say that she had felt disconnected growing up in spite of her popularity (Trenka 2003, 139), and resents the fact that Carol, a mental health professional (139), diagnoses her with “Reactive Attachment Disorder” (Trenka 2003,156).

This work ends ambivalently, as although Trenka sold her grand piano (a symbol of her attachment to western civilization) she now has an electric one in her Korean apartment (Trenka 2009, 193). In spite of her rejection of America she acknowledges that support from a US academic institution (Augsburg College, Minneapolis) enabled her to complete this book. She finishes on a more optimistic note, proclaiming that “the accumulated suffering of Korean women has to be worth something” (192), and expressing the hope that “our work can be just, forgiving, truthful and abundant” (194). The main change from the beginning is that her “I” has become “we.”
Collective Stories

This shift from speaking as a unique individual to consciously becoming a representative of a group with a common experience and cause, as in testimonios, was already conveyed in Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption, which Trenka co-edited with Julia Chinyere Oprah and Sun Yung Shin in 2006. That collection of thirty essays or personal accounts by individuals from a range of backgrounds begins with a dedication: “To the transracial/national adoptee holding this book: We are grateful (it) has found its way into your hands. It is our gift to you.” The aim is both therapeutic and polemical: to give courage to those who have lived through similar traumatic experiences and to encourage them to share their own stories, so that fewer will suffer in the future.

The contributors include a number of Korean-born adoptees in addition to Trenka, and it is worth listing them to get a sense of the range of lives, skills, and attitudes that they represent. Most were adopted to the US. Among them, Mark Hagland describes himself as “an Asian American, an adult Korean adoptee, a gay person, the father of a daughter, a twin, the brother of a transgendered woman, a journalist, and a spiritual seeker . . . constantly . . . referencing one or more of my identities in relation to each other” (Trenka, Oprah and Shin 2006, 39). Sun Yung Shin, a creative writer, contributes poems about Korea. Laura Gannarelli, a graphic design artist, shares two photos of herself as a child in Korea reminiscent of Robinson’s “square picture.” Beth Kyong Lo, a clinical psychologist, also begins from an old photo to express the pain of hwa-byung, the Korean “fire disease” (also mentioned in Chapter 3) recognized in the DSM-IV and attributed to repressed anger (169). As previously discussed, it is often associated with han, an inconsolable state of mind combining resentment, grief, and angst (169). Another creative writer, Jae Ran Kim, analyzes
the Christian influence on adoptions from Korea, including the role of the Holts (151–162). Soo Na, who returned to Korea to live, recounts the role of letters in attempts to communicate across cultures and the refusal of a US visa for her birth mother to visit, because “she might be a liability” (21). Ami Inja Nafzger, co-founder of G.O.A.’L (Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link), entitles her brief memoir “Proud to be Me” and provides useful information on resources available to returning adoptees, concluding “only we can help ourselves” (240). Kim Park Nelson, whose PhD dissertation “Korean Looks, American Eyes: American Adoptees, Race, Culture and Nation” (2009) and university teaching focus on Korean adoption, provides an essay on “Shopping for Children in the International Marketplace” (Trenka, Oparah and Shin 2006, 89–104), and J. A. Dare writes about adoptions from Peru. This catalogue is in itself evidence of the range of professions and careers in which these articulate individuals are successfully engaged, and a tribute to their resilience in overcoming obstacles.

Some other contributors grew up in Europe rather than America. Tobias Hübinette was adopted in Sweden and has conducted extensive research on adoptions from Korea in relation to US empire-building and Korea’s “modernity project” (Trenka, Oparah and Shin 2006, 139–149). Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, a French-speaking Korean-born Belgian, spent twelve years in Korea and co-founded G.O.A.’L, as well as making a prize-winning film on adoption. Kirsten Hoo-Mi Sloth grew up in Denmark and is active in an adoptee organization there; and Sunny Jo, a younger adoptee also living in Scandinavia, describes being reunited with her Korean parents and a brother adopted in America, as well as “The Making of KAD Nation,” the emergence of a new Korean Adoptee community. The inclusion of work by these non-American adoptees demonstrates the breadth of the adult adoptee community,
revealing common experiences but also suggesting some differences among them that I will address in my next chapter.

Many of the issues raised in this impressive collection, as in the stories told by the participants in the studies by Tuan and Shiao (2011) and Palmer (2011), echo those brought up by transracial and transnational adoptees in Maxine Rosenberg’s collection, Growing Up Adopted (1989). The biggest difference in the case of those adopted from Korea is that there now exist a number of organizations, list-serves, etc. to assist them with their search for information in Korea and to provide a supportive community. The emergence of this community is the focus of Eleana Kim’s Adopted Territory: Transnational Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging (2010).

Coming Together in Korea and Elsewhere

Kim, an anthropologist, asks several important questions in her ethnography of what she terms a “counterpublic” composed of Korean adoptees located around the globe (E. Kim 2010, 13), existing in both virtual cyberspace and the real world. She is interested in what this phenomenon can tell us about larger issues of kinship and belonging, personhood and citizenship, in relation to tensions between the “geneticization of identity” and liberal concepts of the unique individual (5). Borrowing from feminist theorists, she develops the idea of a specific type of “contingent essentialism” (95) as central to adoptees’ new hybrid formulations of nation, race, and ethnicity. At several points in her study she comes back to the story of Thomas Park Clement, the author of the first full-length individual memoir by a Korean adoptee (mentioned above). Clement chose “Alien” as his online user name, recalling the designation “alien” on his original immigration papers (80). In spite of his subsequent
success and celebrity status, Clement grew up feeling “alienated” in a white American context. He described to Kim how he became involved in various adoptee associations and projects, including the publication of the memoirs of Norwegian adoptee Sunny Jo, founder of “Korean Adoptees Worldwide” (84). Clement also set up a suicide hotline for adult adoptees (81). A significant number have ended their own lives, many in response to the alienation they experienced in their adoptive community or the rootlessness that may result from being transplanted. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Joe Holt, one of the Holt family’s adopted children, was among the Korean adoptees who have killed themselves in the US, for whatever reasons. Many, however, face despair when they go to Korea and feel an equally alienating sense of not belonging there either. Kim cites one adoptee’s experience, shared by many, of being an “inside outsider,” “essentially Korean-looking, like . . . other ethnic Koreans, yet inside, as American as they come” (189). This individual echoed many others in discovering that “I am in one sense one of them, and in another sense not. I will always be physically one of them, and culturally not one of them.” (189).

Kim describes in detail a controversial art exhibition held at two galleries in Seoul in August 2004, entitled Ibyangin, Ibangin/Our Adoptee, Our Alien. The title plays on the resemblance between the Korean words for stranger (ibangin) and adult adoptee (ibyan gin). (E. Kim 2010, 177). This project, which began as the “Korean Adoptee Suicide Memorial,” was put together by artist-activist Mihee Nathalie Lemoine (previously mentioned as a contributor to Outsiders Within). Lemoine sent out a request on adoptee list-serves for

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7 See “More Than Just a Number: Harry and Bertha Holt’s Adopted Children.” Transracial Korean Adoptee Nexus 2010/05/13. Accessed November 3, 2011. http://kadnexus.wordpress.com. While one should not automatically attribute some suicidal adoptees’ dissatisfaction with life to the fact that they were abandoned and adopted, other adoptees seem to assume it has some part to play in their despair.
thoughts to commemorate those who had committed suicide, as a way to “voice [the] memory of adoptees” (E. Kim 2010, 198). The messages she received were printed on white fabric and hung like clothes drying on a line, signifying the public airing of (dirty) laundry. Lemoine described the event as “a critique of what Korea has not given its overseas adoptees: a sense of identity” (E. Kim 2010, 199). The reactions from adoptees and others were mixed, and a few weeks later a twenty-seven-year-old male adoptee from San Francisco living in Seoul added himself to the list of those who chose to die. This raised concerns over the role of the adoptee “community” in providing a sense of kinship, social support, and informal peer counselling for returnees coming to terms with unfulfilled expectations (E. Kim 2010, 201–202).

There is in fact less cohesion among the returning adoptees than some would like to believe. The majority, raised in America, face one set of issues: their inability to speak the Korean language marks them as foreigners, but their fluency in English does not suffice to designate them as Americans, reaffirming stereotypes of whiteness as essential to expectations of Americanness. In both places they suffer from being perceived as non-native and inauthentic (E. Kim 2010, 197). European adoptees who grew up speaking a language other than English have further barriers to overcome. Speaking neither English or Korean fluently, they are not envied to the same extent for having grown up abroad and it is far more difficult for them to find a job in Korea. How much returning adoptees can earn in Seoul creates an economic hierarchy within adoptee circles. Trenka’s second memoir (2009) describes the difficult situation of a French adoptee, Dominique, who also appears in Kim’s book. Few Koreans or American adoptees can speak French, and this further complicates his attempts to join not only Korean society but also that of the adoptees.
During my fieldwork in Seoul in 2007 I witnessed incidents that illustrated the importance of language barriers between adoptees coming from various national and geographical locations (see E. Kim 2010, 125). At one large meeting the language and nationality of the adoptees divided them into different groups and there seemed to be some tension, as the English speakers were more vocal and dominant than the European participants. Later I heard from some that they found it difficult to communicate with other adoptees across cultural barriers (including age difference), although they were all there with the common goal of searching for traces of their birth parents.⁸ They were all involved in one or more of several adoptee-run organizations, and most lived close to each other in the same neighbourhood. They met up in the cozy environment created at KoRoot, the welcome centre run by the Rev. Kim Do Hyun (described in my Introduction; see also E. Kim 2010, 230–235). Some European adoptees were put off by the presence there of religious materials they saw as proselytizing and that they, unlike the Americans, had not expected to encounter. Subgroups based on the country and time of adoption and on attitudes to international adoption are evident.

**Media Exposure**

The art exhibition dealing with adoptee suicides illustrates the role of artists and performers in publicizing aspects of the adoptee experience. Visual artists, as well as creative writers, have made significant contributions, and several films have been particularly influential. Eleana Kim (2010, 177) also comments on the role of the media in Korea in facilitating reunions and drawing attention to adoptees’ stories. These representations may be

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⁸ See E. Kim (2010, 99) on generational differences.
sentimentalized and sensationalized, with a voyeuristic aspect to them, and adoptee reunions are among many others show-cased between families separated by the division of Korea (E. Kim 2010, 177). *First Personal Plural* (2000), a documentary by adoptee Deann Borshay Liem, records the appearance of a Mrs. Kim at the 2004 Adoptee Gathering conference, holding a poster-sized picture of her daughter, Sumi, reluctantly relinquished in 1972 (E. Kim 2010, 253). The film allows her to explain why she gave up the illegitimate daughter she was trying to raise alone, in response to pressure from her family and others. After marrying another man, she had tried with the support of her husband to find her daughter in 1979, with no success. Just before the Gathering she discovered that the daughter had tried to find her in 1995. Like her, many others have sought to use the media to establish contact. Tobias Hûbinette (2007), another adoptee who has written widely on this topic, has analyzed the role of popular culture in creating a collective discourse about adoption in Korea that mingles regret and remorse with fascination and envy.

On a visit to *Ae Ran Won* (the home for unwed mothers discussed in Chapter 3), I was introduced to Tammy Chu, an adult adoptee born in Seoul and adopted by a US family along with her twin sister, at the age of nine. Tammy had been living in Korea since 2001 and has become a well-respected filmmaker. In 1998 she wrote and directed her first documentary, *Searching for Go-Hyang (Hometown)*, a personal account of her own reunion with her birth family. At the time of my fieldwork (2007), she was working on a second documentary entitled *Resilience*, in which she follows the story of a Korean birthmother’s search for her son, who was put up for adoption without her consent. She finally found him thirty years
According to Tammy, this project was possible thanks to the support she received from the Rev. Kim Do Hyun of KoRoot, who encouraged her, and from one of the largest adoptee-run organizations, G.O.A.’L (see below). These associations facilitate publicity that may defend or condemn international adoption, with tensions arising from their different goals.

Some work relatively closely with adoption agencies, and strive to make the returning adoptees feel welcome by assisting with “Motherland tours” and birth family searches. Many individual accounts, as discussed above, testify to the frustrating experience of finding only incomplete or inaccurate information, and following trails that disappear. Many adoptees also describe, as Robinson and Trenka do, the ambivalent feelings aroused by visiting orphanages and maternity homes for mothers who will probably give up their child. When I met Tammy at Ae Ran Won she was interviewing birthmothers, who see each returning adoptee as the image of their child in the future. Conversely, the adoptees look at the babies as reincarnations of their past selves, and fear for their futures (Trenka 2009, 29, 164–5). Some have themselves adopted Korean children and taken them to their western country (E. Kim 2010, 126), repeating the pattern with a significant difference: the adoptive parent will know what to expect. My informal meetings with Tammy, as well as with Jane Trenka and others active in the “adoptee movement,” revealed the range of attitudes among those now living in Seoul. Whatever their position on adoption in general and their own in particular, they all appreciated and supported the work done by adoptee-run organizations, for those like themselves and for the long silenced birth mothers.

Adoptee-Run Organizations

Kim fully documents the extent and variety of organizations that now exist in many places, and during my field research I was able to collect materials produced by several groups. I visited the Overseas Adopted Korean (OAK) Foundation, a non-profit organization affiliated with the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and met one of the directors, Jeannie Hong. She explained that this Foundation, which began in October 1997, had played an active role in hosting a Summer Cultural Program for returning adoptees since 1998, and worked to enhance awareness of adoption issues and build bridges among Korean adoptees across the globe. It also played a key role in sharing information with other Korean adoptee organizations and constructing networks through conferences, workshops, and forums. They supported a range of post-adoption services sponsored by adoption agencies, including Korean language study and mediating reunions with birth family members, where translation is usually needed (OAKS 2004, 50).

According to the OKF guide (OAKS 2004), the first association specifically by and for adult Korean adoptees was the AKF (Adopterade Koreaners Forening/Adopted Korean Association) started by Swedish adoptees in 1986 in Stockholm and soon followed by a branch in Malmo. By 2007 it had welcomed 900 members, a relatively small percentage of the close to 9,000 Korean adoptees in Sweden (E. Kim 2010, 106–7). At first people were contacted by chance or through overseas Korean organizations, but since the Internet became available it is much easier to find out where they are. Eight other Continental European countries established similar support networks: Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Germany, the Netherlands, and France (E. Kim 2010, 113–4), offering opportunities for adoptees from Korea to socialize, share stories, learn about Korean culture
and language, and mentor younger Korean adoptees. Kim quotes Mihee Nathalie Lemoine’s comments on the range of experiences described by European adoptees, from extreme racism in some Scandinavian contexts, to a denial of the importance of race by others raised in France (E. Kim 2010, 109).

The relatively small number of Korean adoptees in European countries other than Sweden paradoxically probably explains the emergence of national associations in Europe before the US. In the American States where there were larger concentrations and in some cases very active adoption agencies (as in Minnesota and Oregon), local activities began to bring people together quite early on. Most events were, however, organized by agencies or adoptive parents, and it was only with the advent of the Internet that regional networks were established allowing adult adoptees to communicate directly with each other (E. Kim 2010, 111–113). American-run organizations went on to take a leadership role. It is significant to note that Anglophone countries outside the US (the UK, Australia, Canada) welcomed very few adoptees from Korea, and those who grew up there were relatively isolated, with only small groups being formed. My next chapter, dealing with the Canadian context, will consider elements that may be specifically American in the experience of some adoptees.

Returning adoptees, who have chosen to move to Korea either permanently or for several years, like Lemoine and Trenka, were central in establishing global networks like G.O.A.’L, the Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link that began in 1998 and has provided a home-base for returning Korean adoptees since then (OAKS 2004, 50, E. Kim 2010, 178). A visit to their office and a meeting with the then (2007) secretary-general, Kim Dae-won (Jan Wenger, a Korean adoptee from Switzerland already mentioned in Ch 2, since he arranged for me to meet with Molly Holt) in relation to introducing me for a meeting with Molly Holt,
confirmed the information I had gathered from their website. The primary aim of G.O.A.'L is to inform the Korean public and government about issues of importance to Overseas Adopted Koreans (OAKs) and what it means to be adopted. Their second mandate is to foster positive links between adoptees and Korean society, and increase international awareness regarding issues related to international Korean adoption. Thirdly, G.O.A.'L provides support to adoptees who wish to learn about Korean life first-hand, as well as those who are looking for their birth families. Finally, G.O.A.'L strives to slowly break down the walls of prejudice, misunderstanding, shame, and pity that separate Koreans from adoptees and adoptees from each other (www.goal.or.kr). Operating out of a very small space, G.O.A.'L has managed to be very active in compiling lists of resources such as translators or guides, and facilitating searches for birth families as well as for accommodation and employment. I was able to see that Korean volunteers assist in the running of the G.O.A.'L office and contribute greatly to their success.

Another NGO that serves adoptee and adoptive family interests is INKAS (International Korean Adoptee Service), which offers summer camps, scholarships for language program, assistance in finding birth families, and translation of letters, etc. (see OAKS 2004, 96–7; E. Kim 2010, 213). An important role in making connections is also played by KoRoot, the welcome centre mentioned before. This is a European-style family guesthouse established in 2003 and run by the Rev. Kim Do Hyun and his wife. It provides affordable accommodation for returning adoptees with all the comforts of a home (E. Kim 2010, 213; OAKS 2004, 98), and meeting space for events and courses.

It was at KoRoot that I presented my early research in 2007, at the invitation of Adoptee Solidarity Korea (ASK), another association founded in March 2004 by a group of
adopted Korean adults living and working in Korea.\textsuperscript{10} Kim Stoker, one of its members, explained that this group emphasizes broader social and political concerns arising from intercountry adoption, from a human rights point of view. Through education and activism, ASK aims to raise awareness, advocate for change, and support alternatives to intercountry adoption. This was the first time I was asked to speak to an audience of returning adoptees about my proposed project and I was nervous at first, not knowing how they would react to an outsider’s view of the sensitive issues raised by this area of research. However, they soon put me at ease, and many shared their stories and experiences with me at the end of the presentation. I could see that the friendly atmosphere at KoRoot is reassuring for returning adoptees who do not know what to expect, and this space enables them to be mentored by those who have already embarked on the journey of discovery.

Actual presence at global gatherings or participation in Motherland tours entails considerable expense, and many adoptees are unable to participate physically for financial reasons or because of other commitments to work and family. As Tuan and Shiao (2011) point out, class distinctions among adoptees may be camouflaged or underestimated. However, many of the less affluent can and do become involved in Internet communication. As a result, regional, national, and international connections among adoptees have multiplied over the past decade, as well as list-serves, blogs, personal websites etc. As Kim points out, these are new “technologies of the self,” in Foucault’s terms, which have greatly contributed to the transformation of many adoptees’ identities. Since 2004 an umbrella group of International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) (\texttt{www.ikaa.info}) (OAKS 2004, 50 and E. Kim 2010, 228) has enabled the many networks now involved to stay in touch with each

other, as described in Sunny Jo’s “KADS in Cyberspace” (OAKS 2004, 64–5). She notes that the Yahoo group Korean @doptees Worldwide (K@W), founded in 1998, currently hosts the largest online forum for KADs with over 900 members from many countries (OAKS 2004, 65–6). Postings in English, French, and Scandinavian languages convey the diversity of its members, who share personal stories with other adoptees worldwide.

**Autonomous or Relational/Generational Selves?**

Foucault discusses “technologies of the self” as means to engage in “care of/for the self,” rather than always being inevitably in the care or control of others or external “disciplines.” Their use seems to support the view that he does allow for agency and resistance within power relations, as McLaren (2002, 10–12) claims in repudiating the critiques of some feminist theorists. Yet his analysis of the central role of writing, as both an ascetic and aesthetic pursuit, limits the possibility of constructing an “autonomous” self to those who are literate and in fact already have some control over their lives in terms of time, space, and the demands of responsibility to or for others. The Greek model of selfhood that he analyzes is male, white, adult, and financially independent. It was in fact specifically patriarchal, as the ideal ethical citizen living a “beautiful life” was a man who took responsibility for his family and treated them well, as in the Confucian model.

According to Foucault (in Rabinow 1984, 370), “From the moment that the culture of the self was taken over by Christianity, it was . . . put to work for the exercise of a pastoral . . .

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11 See “On the Genealogy of Ethics” (in Rabinow 1984, 342–9), on “bios” (life as the raw material for a story) as both ascetic (implying moral choices and self-discipline) and aesthetic (imposing a beautiful shape); the role of writing (346) is as a type of self-surveillance, before entailing publication and effects on others (i.e., becoming an author). Both Robinson and Trenka kept diaries.
power . . . the care of others.” This type of apparently altruistic authority allowed more room for women to exert a maternal type of power. It was the model espoused by the Holts, and still often implied in adoption discourse (as will be seen in my next chapter). It is significant that Bertha Holt, who was relatively wealthy and certainly not afraid of speaking her mind, nevertheless began writing with the aid of a man, and appealed to the authority of her husband or God to justify her right to be heard. Her role as a woman was as well defined within the family and gender hierarchy as that traditionally assigned to women in Korea. Yet she was able to replace her husband and become an author and a powerbroker in her own name. Once an author’s name is known, who speaks becomes less important than where and how the text circulates, who can appropriate it, and what difference it makes to those who read it (Foucault, “What is an Author?” in Rabinow 1984, 119).

The young women raised in the US who have published their memoirs are in a different situation from Bertha or Molly Holt, as part of a neo-liberal, consumer-oriented “me” generation. They assume that each individual should be valued as a separate entity rather than primarily in relation to others, and that freedom (caring for the self) is as important as caring for others or mutual dependency. As Sara Dorow points out, America has encouraged narratives of new beginnings and the idea that “identities can be remade at will” (2006a, 3–4). It is not only adoptees of their age in North America who may wish to sever ties with the family that raised them. In some ways, the absence of blood ties may appear as an advantage to this generation in terms of the potential to construct a new or different self, and the possibility of discovering relations in Korea adds an exciting dimension to the world travel they might engage in anyway.
When they do meet their Korean relatives and acknowledge that ties still exist, the exchange reveals divergent expectations since the adoptees have American attitudes to familial connections that differ from those still dominant in Korea. Dorow (2006a, 277) cites an adoptive parent of a Vietnamese child who is paying for that child’s siblings in Vietnam to go to school, but is warned by the adoption agency that the demands may become too heavy. Yet poor relations in Asia (and elsewhere) are accustomed to turning to their extended family in times of difficulty and may assume that a family member who is now in their eyes rich will assist them financially and in other ways. Trenka responded to this expectation by going to help care for her Korean mother in her last illness. Robinson had more difficulty, as do many other adoptees, in knowing how to react to financial demands from her Korean father without showing resentment or suspicion that this may have been his goal in wanting to meet her. The assumptions of what it means to be “family” are very different, and those raised in the West presume that it is a personal choice whether or not to help. For many Asians, reliance on family members has meant survival, and many adoptees were only relinquished, like Robinson, when a grandmother was no longer able to care for them.

Both the birthmothers’ letters and collections of accounts by adoptees reflect collective storytelling based on a common experience. Both serve a therapeutic function in terms of allowing feelings to be expressed and acknowledged, and a polemical one since they draw attention to the negative aspects of international adoption and aim to promote changes to perceptions of birthmothers and adoptees and the way they are treated. Like the films and artwork associated with the same themes, they illustrate the role of aesthetics in achieving
these aims. As Foucault claimed in speaking of the “death of the author,” it is not so much who writes that matters as how the writing is distributed, by whom, and who gets to read it. In this respect, it is obvious that birthmothers’ stories have more difficulty reaching a wider public than do those of adoptees or adoptive parents with access to American money and markets.

Reflecting on different models of kinship responsibilities in Asia and America has helped me to come to terms with my ambivalence towards the figure of Molly Holt. On the one hand, she represents her family, the Holts, and her presence in Korea is a constant reminder of American/Christian colonization and the questionable “rescue” narrative. On the other, although she has no children “of her own,” she has fulfilled the ideal mother role by Korean/Asian standards, in devoting herself to the care of children with disabilities without removing them from their homeland. Is it indulging in Orientalism to assume that Asians still have a more “relational” model of selfhood than contemporary Americans? Or would it only be Orientalism if that model is assessed as inferior to one of independence? Does being relational necessarily imply a failure to grow up, or “develop,” an acceptance of dependency on someone older or stronger? Or is mutual dependency a possible model, in which patriarchy or maternalism is replaced by mutual care for each other?

Studies of Korean adoptees, as well as their own narratives, bring out the tensions between care for/about the self and being cared for, or caring for others, at the personal level of family relationships and at the societal level that sets up the models for such relationships. Any conclusions that might be drawn regarding the general desirability or dangers of international adoptions are confronted with individual experiences that diverge widely. The

12 See Raoul (2007) for a discussion of the intersections of therapeutics, polemics, and aesthetics in such narratives.
two memoirs analyzed in detail illustrate the two poles that emerge. Katy Robinson, who has remained close to her American mother, would probably identify with a remark from one adoptee cited by Kim, in response to critiques of international transracial adoption as a type of oppression: “(In this model) white people are victimizers and people of color are victims. I’m being oppressed by white people, who are my parents. That was too much” (E. Kim 2010, 94). Trenka, on the other hand, might agree with another person quoted by Kim, who stated that getting to know other adoptees was “like taking off rose-colored glasses, seeing how the world really is” (E. Kim 2010, 94). “How the world really is,” or seems to be, depends on what lens is used to see it, and how close one is to the object being examined. Most studies of overseas Korean adoption are conducted from an American/Korean perspective, and just a few from a European one. So far, no-one, to my knowledge, has looked closely at attitudes to adoption from Korea in Canada, where the historical and political framework is different from both the United States and from Europe. This will become clearer in the next chapter.
Chapter 5
The Administration of Biopower: Families, States, and Intermediaries in Adoptions from South Korea to Canada

[Biopower is] situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomenon of population.


A brief glance at any bibliography of the now extensive body of research related to international adoptions from Korea\(^1\) immediately reveals that those to the United States have received the most attention. This is not surprising, given that they are by far the most numerous and many of the authors concerned live in the US. However, where comparisons with other countries do arise they lead to intriguing questions. It is only in relatively recent publications (such as Bergquist et al. 2007) that adult adoptees raised in European countries are mentioned or appear as authors, although the first networks for adoptees (as opposed to adoptive families) were created in Europe (see Chapter 4). Palmer (2011) and E. Kim (2010) both interviewed Korean-born adoptees from Europe, and report some disturbing findings ranging from extreme experiences of racism in Denmark to a number of suicides in Switzerland (E. Kim 2010, 198). Other individuals from Europe have claimed to have had positive experiences, with some tending to attribute some of the American adoptees’ identity issues to the fact that they grew up in the US. Signe Howell (2006), in her study of adoptees from Korea raised in Norway, maintains that they do not share the same curiosity or desire to return to Korea, and wonders if countries composed largely of immigrants have a different fascination with genealogy than relatively homogeneous nations like Norway. In an Internet

\(^1\) See Bergquist et al. (2007) for an extensive bibliography covering the period up to 2007.
post responding to Katy Robinson’s piece in the *New York Times* (November 6, 2007; see Chapter 4), an adoptee from France commented: “France and the United States are very different countries: ethnic origins are not considered the same way.” This person also considers the adoptive home environment more important than unknown origins and claims that not all adoptees want (or should want) to find out about their biological roots. To what extent may it be justified to see some of the issues related to Korean adoptions overseas as specifically American, or North American?

In this chapter I will examine the Canadian context, looking for the reasons why there have been far fewer adoptions from Korea, and why there were, and still are, any at all. One study of Korean adoptions in Australia exists (Gray 2007), which raises many points that are comparable to the Canadian context; both share a similar British settler colony history of racism against aboriginal peoples and other settlers or immigrants of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. In the case of Canada, the role of French-speaking Quebec, where children from Korea were first welcomed, adds another dimension. International adoption relates to both provincial efforts there to sustain the level of the francophone population, and federal multicultural policies aimed at keeping Quebec in Canada.

Since the 1960s Canada has officially espoused “multiculturalism” in explicit ways, whereas in the US attitudes have changed without the encouragement or enforcement of official policy. Race relations in the US have been dominated by black/white dichotomies arising from the history of slavery, which was practised only on a small scale in Canada. Canada’s involvement in the Korean War and relationship to Communism and the Cold War were also different from those of the US. Attitudes to the importance of religion have changed more dramatically north of the border, where fundamentalist Christian
Evangelicalism has not been as strong a political force. These intersecting elements provide a different context, with attitudes that in some ways reflect those in the US but also diverge from them.

I will begin with a brief background history of adoption in Canada before the Second World War, in relation to immigration policy and relations with the First Nations. I will then move to a discussion of the immediate post-war period, when the first official international adoptions occurred, and aspects of Canada’s involvement in the Korean War and the Cold War. The second part of this chapter will examine the development and institutionalization of international adoptions in Canada from the 1970s until now, with a focus on the role played by adoptions from Korea. The last section, based on fieldwork conducted with an adoption agency in British Columbia and consultation of materials available from agencies in other provinces, will take a close look at the assumptions behind the current requirements of and for adoptive parents. To what extent do these explain the relative popularity of adoptions from Korea, and the more recent decline in their numbers?

Foucault included in his version of “biopower” governments’ ability to control the growth, composition, and movement of populations. Demographic control implies authority over women’s reproduction within the state, and the selection of new citizens. Issues of race, religion, and gender are central, as is the economic or class-based capacity to consider some bodies surplus and expendable in one place, but welcome and valuable in another. This overview will look at the reasons for which Canada, as a state, has allowed or encouraged international adoptions from certain countries at certain times, or exported children itself.
Race and Religion in Domestic Adoptions and Adoptions to the United States

The background to changing attitudes to adoption in the English-Canadian context has been well researched by Veronica Strong-Boag, whose *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s* (2006), is invaluable for anyone working in this area. Official adoption, as a process for legally assigning parenting responsibility, was not known in Canada until the first provincial adoption statute was passed in New Brunswick in 1873, based on an earlier Massachusetts statute dating from 1851. The process was simple and straightforward: the court accepted a petition to adopt from prospective parents, after receiving a letter of consent from the birth parent/s (if alive) and being satisfied with the ability of the adopting parents to raise a child in a secure and safe environment, based on their reputation. Nova Scotia passed similar legislation in 1896, and other provinces subsequently added statutes pertaining to adoption between 1920 and 1930 (Daly and Sobol 1993, 67). The process usually involved secrecy and shame, for both ostracized unwed birthmothers whose child bore the stigma of illegitimacy, and adopting parents who often tried to conceal the fact that they could not conceive. As in the United States, having a child outside wedlock and being unable to reproduce were both contrary to social norms, and adoption was seen to provide a solution for both parties.

In the early part of the twentieth century, as in the nineteenth, Aboriginal children (now usually referred to in Canada as “First Nations”), like the far less numerous black or mixed-race descendants of African slaves, were regarded as suitable servants in white settler households but not usually accepted as part of the family (Strong-Boag 2006, 177). While some Aboriginal children were adopted into white homes, Strong-Boag cites historical
records that clearly indicate that this was often a negative experience for both sides. It was only tolerated as part of the genocidal assimilation agenda of the Canadian government’s Indian Act, which assumed that Aboriginals were not able to raise their own children in an appropriately “civilized” fashion. Benita Lawrence describes the “destructive processes” used by both French and British settlers to eradicate Aboriginal populations through the spread of “disease, alcoholism . . . and finally the theft of Native children, first into residential schools and then into the foster care system.”

Other studies corroborating this include those by Ernie Crey and Suzanne Fournier examining the devastating impact of large-scale efforts to assimilate First Nations children into mainstream Canadian society, based on firsthand experience. Crey describes how “as a child, I was forcibly removed from Sto:lo culture by social welfare authorities.” As he recalls, “Our family life was shattered after seven of my eight siblings and I were split apart into separate foster homes. We were never again to reunite as a family. . . . In so many ways, the history of my family is the history of aboriginal children in Canada” (Fournier and Crey 1997, 19–20). He discusses his ultimate return home after forty-three years to Sto:lo territory (part of the large Coastal Salish region in BC) as a journey to regain the wellspring of cultural knowledge and strength that he believes “had guided our ancestors since time immemorial” (19). Describing a scenario not unlike that experienced by some returning

3 Ernie Crey, who was executive director of the fisheries program for the Sto:lo Nation and former president of the United Native Nations along, received the Hubert Evans Non-Fiction Prize in 1998 with journalist Suzanne Fournier. As a social worker and activist he has been seeking economic justice, social cohesion and political power for all Aboriginal people since the 1960s. See “The perpetual stranger: four generations in my Sto:lo family,” in Fournier and Crey (1997, 19–46).
Korean adoptees, Crey went as a stranger to be reunited with his own native culture, beliefs, and society, seeking out the tribe, ancestors, and extended family that he now treasures. From a First Nations perspective, adoption or foster care in a white family, however well meaning that family might intend to be, has been experienced as cultural, social, and personal deprivation of identity.

The prairie provinces, especially Alberta in the late 1940s and Manitoba in the 1960s, also exported many Metis and First Nations children, to the US and elsewhere, in spite of complaints from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association that they were being deprived of their citizenship and connection to the land (Balcom 2011, 208). In the 1960s and 1970s individual bands protested the removal of their children (Balcom 2011, 224–5), and by the 1980s most provinces were working with First Nations to find Aboriginal homes for children in care. Yet indigenous children from Manitoba continued to be placed out-of-country, mostly to the US, until a moratorium was declared in 1982. This was in spite of a 1947 report that had already condemned adoption in the US as “an excuse to reduce state expenditures” (Strong-Boag 2006, 187)—an accusation more recently levelled at South Korea. Girls and boys were sometimes treated as merchandise, and even as interchangeable when unrelated infants were marked as twins or siblings in the rush to obtain passports and speed up their “expatriation to another land, sovereignty and new parenthood” (Strong-Boag 2006, 187).

Until the 1960s, a number of white infants, mostly born to unwed mothers, were available for adoption in Canada and many were in fact adopted by Canadians, often into families that already had biological children of their own (McDade 1991; Westhues and Cohen 1995). Religious affiliation played a major role. Many illegitimate children were of Roman Catholic (Irish or French-Canadian) background, since the Church was strongly
opposed to contraception, and unwed mothers and their offspring were socially stigmatized. Some grew up in orphanages in Quebec because there were not enough Catholic families available to take them in, and Protestant families were not considered appropriate by the Catholic authorities responsible for the child-care system there. There was also a high level of “racism” from Anglo-Saxon Protestants who considered Catholics as of inferior stock, although they were white (Strong-Boag 2006, 38–9, 75–6).

Strong-Boag (2006, 185) discusses how the presence of a major American military base in Newfoundland’s Avalon Peninsula during the Second World War contributed (as in Korea) to the conception of unwelcome offspring who were subsequently placed for export, to the US or elsewhere. Historian Karen Balcom’s recent study The Traffic in Babies: Cross-Border Adoption and Baby-Selling between the United States and Canada, 1930–1972 (2011) reveals the extent of illegal trafficking of babies from Canada to the US, especially from Nova Scotia in 1945–7 when the “Ideal Maternity Home” (54–93) made headlines, and from Quebec to New England in the 1950s (132–165). Montreal was, until the mid-1960s, home to rings of child smugglers who managed to evade both provincial and state laws by secretly taking babies across the border (166–194). These children were often Catholic, and could officially be placed only in Catholic homes, but many ended up being raised Jewish in New York. Official estimates cited by Westhues and Cohen (1995), show that between three and four hundred children born in Quebec were placed outside of that province between 1965 and 1970, mostly to American families.

The reduction in the number of “healthy white infants” available for domestic adoption after the 1960s is generally explained, as in the US, by changes in legislation which made abortion legal in many parts of Canada in the late 1960s, as well as more effective birth
control resulting in fewer births outside marriage and an increase in the proportion of single mothers who chose to raise their child (McDade 1991; Westhues and Cohen 1995). A decline in religious belief and removal of the social stigma attached to extra-marital sex and illegitimacy were significant factors, particularly in Quebec. The previously exceptionally high birthrate in that province (known as “la revanche du berceau”—the revenge of the cradle) fell dramatically after what was known as the “Quiet Revolution” of the 1960s overthrew the power of the Roman Catholic Church (Raoul 2010). In the 1970s Quebec enthusiastically embraced both the leftist rhetoric of decolonization and the sexual revolution, and soon became the province with the lowest rate of marriage, the lowest rate of church attendance, and the lowest birthrate in Canada.

**Children Arriving from Overseas**

The first foreign children from overseas sent to Canada without other family members arrived in 1872, when Thomas Barnardo, a doctor who had trained as a missionary for China, became involved with the plight of destitute children in London’s East End. He arranged to send some of them to Canada through “Miss Annie Macpherson’s Organisation” after visiting the country in 1871. Two group homes for these children were established in Ontario. Like Holt, Barnardo ran into “problems” when some English parents claimed that their children had been taken away without their consent, and the Catholic Church objected to Catholic children being raised in a Protestant environment. Barnardo’s children’s homes continued to send children from England to Canada until 1939. Some estimates claim that

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more than 20,000 children came to Canada through this scheme, while many others from orphanages in England were sent to Australia well into the 1960s.

Those in Canada were among around 125,000 “home children” who arrived from the UK. By the middle of the twentieth century a new trend developed when children from English orphanages were brought over as part of a programme to provide indentured workers on Canadian farms. While some were exploited as cheap labour (Strong-Boag 2006, 176), others were adopted into Canadian families. This programme was favoured because of the close ties that still existed with Britain, which was seen as an extension of home and a source of “good bloodlines” (Strong-Boag 2006, 177). Foreshadowing more recent attitudes to children from developing nations, removal from the “old world” was considered an opportunity for a better future; even exploitative employers of such children regarded adoption as “a benefit conferred by . . . the powerful on the less fortunate” (Strong-Boag 2006, 176). As with modern-day transnational adoptions, this attitude of benevolence camouflaged other individual or collective motives, and enabled the Canadian nation to establish a reputation for “rescuing” unfortunate, homeless children.

Like the US, Canada as a nation was portrayed as what Strong-Boag calls “a beacon of hope” to regions of the world “wracked by economic and political tragedies” (2006, 174). Refugee programs were based on the belief that children affected by war and other disasters would be better off on Canadian soil, an attitude reinforced during World War II, when young evacuees from Britain were welcomed. In spite of earlier denial of access to Jews desperate to escape from Europe as fascism flourished, young survivors of the Holocaust were among the first significant groups of refugees to be placed with families across Canada when that war ended. An initial contingent of fifteen boys and eight girls, all aged thirteen
and older, were welcomed in Vancouver, as discussed by Strong-Boag (2006, 192). In 1950, BC’s Social Welfare Branch received applications for forty-six displaced children from different nations, the majority from Europe, including former enemy states. However, there was less enthusiasm when dealing with proposals from Latvia and the Ukraine, as postwar agreements with these countries required eventual repatriation of children to their country of origin (194).

In 1956, when about 4,000 Japanese “war babies” were in need of homes, 1,000 were adopted by families in the United States but only two in Canada (Strong-Boag 2006, 195). This reflects the on-going effects of Canadian immigration policies, which still largely excluded those who did not come from Britain, the United States, or Europe. The racist foundations of Canadian immigration law, like the discriminatory treatment of Aboriginals and visible minorities, have been well documented (see Bolaria and Li 1988; Jakubowski 1997; Thobani 1999; Thobani 2007). Changes in Canadian immigration policy beginning in the 1960s had effects with particular relevance to the intersections of race and gender, and ultimately made transracial, transnational adoptions possible.

**Changes in Canadian Immigration Policy**

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) 2005 census data, in 2001 there were 5.4 million permanent residents born in other countries, accounting for 18% of

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5 Strong-Boag (2006, 192–4) provides information on the origin of these forty-six children: four from Yugoslavia, three from Poland, one from France, four from Italy, one from Greece, two from Germany, eleven from England, three from Scotland, six from Ireland, three from Iceland, and eight (surprisingly) from the United States.

6 US immigration policies were equally exclusive at that time, but American attitudes to Japan were different—possibly because of ambivalence about responsibility for the effects of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
Canada’s population of 29.6 million. Patterns of immigration had changed owing to two fundamental shifts in Canada’s immigration policies. The first occurred in 1967, when preferential access for persons from European countries was abolished. The second was a rise in the level of immigration allowed, starting in the second half of the 1980s and continuing to the present. This has increased the size of a more diverse immigrant population both in number and as a share of the population, leading to further regulations with implications regarding gender and race.

Both were central from the beginning of colonization, when the imposition of European values forced sexist, patriarchal gender relations on Aboriginal communities, and discrimination according to race and sex became normalized within the governing structures of those communities as well as in relation to them (Thobani 1999, 2007). White hegemonic biopower (in the form of demographic control by the state) encouraged immigration of European settlers of the “preferred” race and class, particularly the importation of European women for future nation building, denying the suitability of First Nations women or racialized immigrants as a means to increase the population. Asian men from China or India, whose labour was required for large-scale projects entailing hard physical work, were not encouraged or even allowed to stay permanently or to bring in women of their race, to prevent them from reproducing. Their potential presence in larger numbers was seen as a threat of “pollution” to the purity of the white race (Thobani 2007; Bolaria and Li 1988); racialized others were assumed to be culturally as well as racially inassimilable and therefore a threat. While francophones and other underprivileged white Catholics, such as the Irish,

7 See Johnson (2002) for an account of poor women shipped to BC in the nineteenth century to become wives, reminiscent of the eighteenth-century “filles du roi” who were sent to New France as breeding stock.
were initially deemed to be “racingly” inferior to white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Third World immigrants of colour were judged as even more biologically and culturally undesirable, and expected to remain part of a subordinate class.

The term “race” first emerged as a prohibitive/restrictive legal category in Section 38(c) of the Immigration Act of 1910 (Jakubowski 1997, 17). This section, amended in 1919 to include “nationality,” is most representative of White Canada’s xenophobia. In reality, Section 38 (c) created a class of immigrants considered to be “undesirable” for admission to Canada. Those who could be denied were:

Any nationality or race of immigrants of any specific class or occupation, by reasons of any economic, industrial, or other condition temporarily existing in Canada or because such immigrants are deemed unsuitable having regard to the climate, industrial, education . . . or such immigrants are deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life [and their] inability to readily assimilate . . . after their entry. (Jakubowski 1997, 18)

By including this clause in the Immigration Act, the Canadian government’s discriminatory policies were enshrined in law, and differential treatment based on “race” or nationality was firmly established as a government policy (Jakubowski 1997, 18). The next step was the creation of a list of “preferred” countries:

The policy of the Department at the present time [1910] is to encourage immigration of farmers, farm labourers, and female domestic servants from the United States, the British Isles, and certain Northern European countries, namely, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Sweden and Iceland. On the other hand, it is the policy of the Department to do all in its power to keep out of the country . . . those belonging to nationalities unlikely to assimilate and who consequently prevent the building up of a united nation of people of similar customs and ideals. (Jakubowski 1997, 18)

The legislation of 1910 did not specify the “undesirable” countries, instead it gave immigration officials “wide discretion to exclude almost any prospective immigrant on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin or creed” (Jakubowski 1997, 18).
During the depression years immigration declined, but it boomed again after the end of World War II. Jakubowski (1997), like Bolaria & Li (1988), analyzes the links between immigration legislation and a political economy based on capitalist development in a North American context. Relatively large numbers of less skilled workers were admitted during periods of economic expansion. Changes in the origin of such workers, who initially came from southern Europe, occurred in the late 1960s and the 1970s, when a “multicultural” policy was officially adopted, partly in response to the “bilingualism and biculturalism” offered to placate dissatisfied francophones who might otherwise choose to separate from Canada (Raoul, 2010). The multicultural policy claiming to promote peaceful cohabitation actually maintained separateness between communities of different ethnic, racial, or linguistic backgrounds, and fostered the exoticization or folklorization of “other” cultures. All but the “founding nations” (English and French, excluding the First Nations) were considered “ethnic minorities,” and the exclusive norm remained undefined and unquestioned.8

In their analyses of racism and gender discrimination in Canadian immigration policies, law, politics and practices, Thobani (1999, 2007), Jakubowski (1997), Bolaria and Li (1988) have critically explored the shifting trends before and since 1968, when a supposedly liberal and non-discriminatory “point system” was introduced. The effects of this system are reflected in the fact that by the end of the twentieth century a “new wave” of immigration from the “Third World” countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America constituted almost two-thirds of the inflow of immigrants to Canada (Jakubowski 1997, 18–19). Jakubowski asks whether the new legislation resulted in a reduction or exacerbation of

8 The Immigration Act of 1952 maintained an explicitly restrictive clause, 38 (c), where the category “race” was changed to “ethnic group” Jakubowski (1997, 17–19).
racism in Canada, and examines how “race” is formulated or elided in official policies. Some “less preferred” white groups, such as Eastern and Southern Europeans or Ukrainians, became acceptable when “preferred” North-Western European countries did not meet demand and the alternative was non-white sources.

With the new supposedly non-discriminatory Immigration Regulations of 1962, “skills in relation to Canadian labour market needs” became the mainstay of the selection criterion (Jakubowski 1997, 20), and a 1966 “White Paper” reinforced the principle that all persons coming to Canada would be subject to the same entrance standards, regardless of “race,” religion or country of origin (Jakubowski 1997). As Jakubowski explains, Canadian officials realized that the country could not operate effectively within the United Nations, or in a multiracial Commonwealth, with a racially discriminatory immigration policy. Henceforth, the newly implemented multicultural policy that recognized racial and cultural diversity in Canada encouraged the formation of well-organized, politically active and increasingly influential minority groups. Through what Jakubowski terms “a formally color-blind immigration policy,” the government made it appear as though racial discrimination had been eliminated, but representatives of these groups and human rights activists still perceived prejudice against racialized immigrants, especially working-class women, in the Immigration Act of 1976–7 (Jakubowski 1997, 20; see also Thobani 2007).

Many researchers⁹ have shown that in claiming to adopt a multicultural policy, Canadian Immigration Law moved from being explicitly restrictive to being more subtly discriminatory. Research by Canadian anti-racist scholars Thobani (2007), Himani Bannerji (2000), and Sherene Razack (1998), clearly demonstrates that even in feminist contexts non-

white women and children are frequently seen as victims of their own oppressive cultures and traditions, and depicted as to be pitied and in need of rescue by enlightened and powerful western women. Immigrant families of colour of modest means often have to struggle to bring family members to Canada under the family reunification category, including children (Thobani 2007, 129–138). Meanwhile middle-class white couples who wish to adopt children of colour from abroad face fewer hurdles, as once adopted the child is assumed to be automatically assimilated into the still dominant white culture. The fact that the birthmothers are unable to raise their own children in their own land may also perpetuate the view that such mothers and/or such countries are lacking in social responsibility.

The “rescue” motif that dominated the Holts’ successful attempts to circumvent American immigration law in the 1950s and early 1960s, which was as racist as Canada’s, re-emerged in Canada and the US at the time when the plight of Vietnamese “boat people” made the headlines (see Strong-Boag and Bagga 2009). In both the Korean War and the war in Vietnam, Canada was less involved than the United States for various reasons, including different positions in relation to the broader Cold War against Communism and different relations with Asia as part of the British Commonwealth. Before taking a closer look at the part Korea has played in the more recent history of international adoptions in Canada, I will briefly focus on Canada’s relationship with Korea in an attempt to understand why no equivalent of the Holts emerged here.

**Canada and Korea**

As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, the Holts played a significant role in drawing public attention in the US to the situation of war orphans or abandoned children at the end of the
Korean War, especially mixed-race children assumed to be fathered by American soldiers. The perception of these children as at least partly American, and unassimilable in a “racist” Korea for cultural reasons, made them in some eyes the moral responsibility of the United States. This perception was shared by the Korean administration, overwhelmed by the after-effects of the war. As mentioned previously, strong personal connections between Korean leaders and the United States had led to the presence of Christian missionaries and successful propagation of Christianity in Korea. It was missionary societies like World Vision that took up the cause of the Korean-born children, and co-opted the support of the Holts and others. The account in Chapter 2 shows that their efforts reframed the irresponsibility of American fathers who had abandoned their offspring as heroic efforts to save them, converting a narrative of shame into one of redemption. While some Canadian missionaries were also present in Korea, as evidenced by Harry Holt’s references to a Canadian nurse who helped him, Canadians did not join the American forces in the Korean War. They were present only in much smaller numbers as part of a United Nations contingent that included other countries. Canada’s reluctance to be involved in the Korean War and ultimately marginal presence may be reasonably assumed to explain why Canadians did not experience the same sense of guilt or responsibility as some Americans for the situation in Korea when the war ended.

Press coverage in Canada at the beginning of the war clearly conveys the ambivalence of the Canadian government and lack of enthusiasm for any involvement. A few days after the beginning of the conflict, four Commonwealth countries (Britain, Canada, 

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11 Some Canadians did join the American forces as volunteers: See Wikipedia regarding Canada and the Korean War.
Australia, and New Zealand) agreed to provide combined naval support to the Americans. In Ottawa, Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester Pearson expressed reservations regarding the wider implications of US actions in Korea. The Canadian government’s message to the United Nations Security Council, offering three destroyers of the Royal Canadian Navy, contained the explicit instruction that Pearson wanted to separate military decisions in Korea from United Nations policy regarding the defence of Formosa.\textsuperscript{12} Canada, along with all the UN allies, wanted to contain the war within the Korean peninsula and avoid direct Soviet involvement, but according to reports in the \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, (June 28, 1950, p. 41), the Canadian government hesitated to state this clearly in a formal statement. The first Canadian media reports of the outbreak of the Korean War on Sunday, June 25, 1950, did not appear until a day later. Over the next few days, there was restrained optimism, conveying the belief that the war could be localized and brief. On June 28, mention was made of concern for “Five Canadian Missionaries in Thick of Far East War,” while another report stated: “Four Vancouver women are anxiously awaiting word of their sister, believed to be the only Canadian Salvation Army worker in Korea. . . . Brigadier Irwin has been doing missionary work in the Korean capital since 1947. She was among missionaries ordered out of Korea by the Japanese shortly before Pearl Harbor. She has worked in the Seoul Mission since 1936.”\textsuperscript{13} These missionaries were few in number and did not receive enormous publicity.

It was not until July 1, 1950, that the \textit{Ottawa Citizen} reported Canada’s decision to become at least marginally involved, and Pearson announced that “Canada will do as she has

\textsuperscript{12} “No Canadian Help for Formosa,” \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, July 14, 1950, 32.

\textsuperscript{13} “Awaiting Word from Sister in South Korea,” \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, June 28, 1950, 18.
always done, her full duty in regard to any international obligation that she has undertaken.”

Subsequent analyses reveal that the four allies were reluctant to provide ground troops to American commander General Douglas MacArthur for fear of compromising their regional and global defensive positions and committing limited resources to a peripheral battle (S. Lee 2001, 46–47). Finally, however, Canada agreed to send a limited number of ground troops, in order, as Prime Minister Louis-St. Laurent put it, to put Canada “in a position to act quickly if the UN asks her to help in the police action against North Korean aggression.” He made it clear that “Canada’s responsibility in Korea arises entirely from her membership in the United Nations and from the United Nation’s call. . . . Canada would participate in Korea if she were informed that her contribution to a U.N. operation under a U.N. commander would be important to achieve the ends of peace.” On August 7, 1950, St. Laurent announced Canada’s involvement in the war with a special army brigade fighting under UN Command against the North Koreans.

The Korean War turned out to be the third most costly for Canada, after the First and Second World Wars (Vancouver Sun, June 23, 1975, p. 56). By its end, overall there were nearly six million military and civilian casualties. Fatalities included 33,000 Americans, while there were only 1,557 Canadian casualties, 312 of them fatal (Vancouver Sun, June 23, 1975, p. 56). In Canada, even more than in the US, this became the “forgotten war,” especially as there was no large influx of South Korean children as refugees or adoptees, and fewer Koreans chose to immigrate to Canada than to the US, once racial barriers to

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14 “Korean War at Glance,” Ottawa Citizen, Saturday July 1, 1950, 1; “New Immigrant
Classes Permitted to Come Here,” Ottawa Citizen, June 30, 1950, 5.

The use of a feminine pronoun to designate Canada in this context is striking, and makes her role sound like that of a motherly referee.
immigration were reduced in both countries. It was not until 1962, when the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker, inspired by the Canadian Welfare Council, introduced policies for the adoption of individual children from abroad, that a few Asian children began to arrive without their families (Strong-Boag 2006, 195).

The first two Korean children known to have reached Canada for adoption arrived in March 1968, according to the *Toronto Daily Star*. The front-page newspaper article provides a photo of a 12-year-old Korean boy being met at the Toronto airport by a Hamilton couple who had been trying to bring him to Canada for three years. They had been advised by Children’s Aid to give up and adopt a Canadian-born child, when his papers were lost in transit on an earlier occasion. The couple welcoming the other child, a seven-year-old girl, had waited two and a half years. Her two new adoptive brothers are quoted as being pleased to acquire a sister “who can do the dishes.” This publicity did not lead to a spate of adoptions from Korea to Canada, though the *Toronto Daily Star* of June 20, 1970, includes an advertisement for a rally sponsored by the Toronto Gospel Mission in aid of “Korean Orphans.”

While the absence of a strong Canadian military or missionary presence largely explains the paucity of adoptions to Canada, another reason was the absence of a Canadian embassy in Seoul. Another front-page article in the *Toronto Star* three years later presents an account by two of the rare Canadians living in Korea at that time. One of them is a Canadian officer stationed there for two years with the United Nations (one of only two

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18 *Toronto Daily Star*, Saturday, June 20, 1970, 75.
Canadian soldiers per year to be on duty in the “no-man’s land” area of Panmunjom, which he calls “the loneliest posting in the world”). The other is a fifty-six-year-old French-Canadian nun from Sudbury (“the daughter of a tough policeman”), who had been working in an orphanage for 150 children, assisted by six Korean nuns, since the end of the Korean War in 1953. She laments the absence of any official representation of Canada in Korea other than the successive pairs of soldiers on UN duty, who always visit her “Star of the Sea” orphanage bringing clothes, medicines, and mail, as well as acting as transitory father-figures.

This nun, Sister Mary-Bernadette, states that many of the children are deformed because of mistreatment and malnourishment (she claims that one was thrown into a fire, another found in a sewer), but most are given up by living parents who simply cannot afford to keep them. The fact that the majority are girls is attributed to perception of the cost of their education and dowry as an extra burden. Somewhat surprisingly, she does not blame the young unwed mothers, but the Pope, whose edict forbade contraception. Although she disapproves of abortion, she states firmly: “It is just not right that Korean girls should have babies every two years when they can’t feed them. . . . I know. The Pope doesn’t know.”

Many of the children from her orphanage were eventually adopted in the US or Europe, but none left for Canada because at that time no process was in place to get them there. Those who remained raised livestock and took in sewing to make some money, but sponsorships are urgently requested.

In Canada, even when a process was established the rule was stringently applied that proof be obtained that the child was in fact an orphan, and it was also necessary to show that

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no child was available domestically to adopt. The absence of systematic and reliable
documentation for international adoptions in Canada, which remained an entirely provincial
concern until relatively recently, makes it difficult to obtain complete and accurate nation-
wide information about any adoptions that did take place. It was not until 1984 that one
Korean agency, the Social Welfare Society (SWS), officially established an international
adoption program with a Montreal-based agency called *Enfants d'Orient*. This arrangement
with the province of Quebec was subsequently extended to two other Canadian provinces, in
collaboration with the Children’s Bridge Agency in Ontario in the early 1990s and the
Sunrise Agency in BC in 1999 (Social Welfare Society, 2004). As international adoption
became more widely available and well known in Canada, Korea became a fairly important
source of children in those provinces.

**Transnational Adoption Statistics in Canada**

Any studies of transnational adoption in Canada reflect the fact that only the province of
Quebec kept accurate records prior to 1991. Although the “National Adoption Desk” was
established in Ottawa in 1975 to coordinate provincial efforts and negotiate international
agreements, responsibility for arranging and recording adoptions nonetheless remained at the
provincial level until then. The federal government subsequently made efforts to coordinate
information and policies, initially through the department of Employment and Immigration
and later through Canadian Immigration and Citizenship (CIC). The nation-wide data
collected since then provides a more reliable source of information for researchers like Anne
Westhues and Joyce Cohen (1995, 1998a, 1998b), whose work provides a starting point in
looking at adoptions from Asia to Canada.
These authors document two stages in the development of transnational adoption in Canada in the second half of the twentieth century. Almost unheard of until the post-World War II period, the influx of refugee children from abroad who arrived in the aftermath of that war did not continue. In the 1960s fewer than ten transnational adoptions took place per year. The numbers grew in the 1980s, to a new record of 2,700 by 1991 (Westhues and Cohen 1995). Table 5. Annual Status of Adoptions from Korea to Canada in Appendix B shows that only 13 children are documented as arriving in Canada from Korea in the period 1955–70, and none between 1970 and 1973. The number increased to 106 in 1976, then went down until it once more reached 107 in 1984, the year Enfants d’Orient began its operations in Quebec. The number increased year by year after that, to reach 184 in 1988, only to decline dramatically to 0 in 1992–5. By 2000, a year after the Sunrise agency in BC began arranging adoptions, it was back up to 51, and was around 100 in 2002 and 2003.

In 1995 alone, Quebec—the only province that kept detailed statistics—brought 964 children in from foreign lands, including China, Korea, Vietnam, Haiti, and Romania. In a press release in the Ottawa Citizen on June 11, 1996 (p. A1), Elspeth Ross, information coordinator for the Adoption Council of Canada (a charitable organization set up in 1991 to help would-be parents), noted: “I get calls every day asking about international adoption: it’s clear people believe that it’s the fastest, easiest way to adopt. . . . A lot of people desperately want children and they’ll go almost anywhere for them.” In the early years of the twenty-first century, 1,800–2,000 children arrived in Canada from abroad for adoption. The numbers saw a slight decrease from 2,122 in 2009 to 1,946 in 2010 (Hilbron 2011). In the process, as discussed by Ross and scholars such as Hermann and Kasper (1992), Lovelock (2000), and Kapstein (2003), the humanitarian aspect of adopting a child from overseas might
camouflage a lucrative business, with the risk of children being sold by desperate parents
exploited by illegal, profit-driven private agencies.

In order to prevent the trafficking of children and eliminate profit-making from
transnational adoptions, in 1993, at the instigation of many countries and child welfare
organizations, the United Nations introduced a worldwide code of conduct through the
Hague Convention on Child Rights. This agreement did not, unfortunately, eliminate the
problem, as a black market in children has continued to exist, even in countries that signed
the agreement. South Korea did not do so, claiming that the country had a satisfactory record
of arranging transnational adoptions since the 1950s.\footnote{In 2011, Korea is being pushed towards ratifying the Convention, as will be discussed in my Conclusion.} Neither the Korean government
agencies nor the missionary societies involved wanted outside interference.

**Impact of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoptions**

Canada was among the sixty-six countries that signed on in May 1993 to what became
establish a cooperative framework between the countries of origin of children in need of
adoption and the receiving countries, to ensure that the child’s best interests are safeguarded.
Its main objectives are to prevent abuses such as the abduction, sale, mistreatment or
trafficking of children and to preclude any improper financial gains by any of the parties
concerned. It also strives to ensure proper parental consent to the adoption, makes
recommendations for the child’s transfer, and establishes the adopted child’s status in the
receiving country.

The Convention spelt out the minimum standards and procedures for transnational adoptions that occur between signatory countries, but not all of the latter have as yet ratified the agreement. In the case of adoptions taking place between countries that have ratified it, the Convention ensures greater protection from exploitation for children, birthparents, and adoptive parents alike. Canada ratified the Convention in December 1996, and it came into force on April 1, 1997, in those provinces and territories that had taken the legislative steps required to conform to it. Canada’s role in intercountry adoptions is guided by the principles defined in Article 21 of the “United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.”

Each country that is party to the Convention must designate a central authority to monitor requests for intercountry adoption. As adoption falls under provincial or territorial jurisdiction in Canada, each province and territory has its own central authority, but Social Development Canada (SDC), as the federal central authority, coordinates matters between federal departments (such as Immigration) and the provincial or territorial authorities responsible for domestic adoptions. It also assists the provincial and territorial authorities with the implementation of the Convention. The central authority of the receiving province or territory and the country of origin must agree to the child’s placement, and the federal

Intercountry Adoption Services (IAS) office provides liaison between the provincial and territorial Adoption Co-ordinators, SDC, and other federal departments and foreign countries.

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23 Social Development Canada. n.d. *Intercountry Adoption: Intercountry Adoption Services (IAS)*. Publication of the former Social Development Canada Department, which has now been integrated into the new Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada. Accessed September 14, 2007.  
involved with transnational adoptions in Canada. In other words, IAS undertakes the work on behalf of SDC.

Along with SDC and IAS, three other Canadian federal departments play a significant role in international adoptions. The Department of Justice acts as the official liaison to the International Conference on Private and International Law, (i.e., the Permanent Bureau for the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption). The Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through its missions abroad, provides consular services and acts as Canada’s diplomatic liaison in communications and problem resolution. Finally, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) considers applications for sponsorship and provides either Permanent Resident or Full Citizenship rights to the child, before the adoption can take place and before a visa officer can issue an immigrant visa for the child. CIC ensures that adoptions proceed in accordance with existing adoption laws and (im)migration policies in both the country of origin and Canada.24

The Hague Convention applies only when the child to be adopted resides in a country that has implemented the Convention, and when the prospective adoptive parents live in a province or territory that has done so. Since that now applies to all Canadian provinces and territories, the Convention is respected nation-wide. Prospective adoptive parents are required to complete an application for adoption and present it to the central authority of their province or territory. They are advised to contact their provincial or territorial authority to obtain information on the adoption process and provincial or territorial requirements.25

Before a child can be adopted from one country into another, the Convention requires


that authorities in both countries agree to proceed with the adoption. In the case of Canadian families wanting to adopt a child from another country, their provincial authorities are required to agree with authorities in the child’s country of origin. More recently, the transnational adoption activities formerly handled by the National Adoption Desk have been reassigned to the jurisdiction of yet another federal department, Human Resources Development Canada, under the title of Child, Family and Community Division (CFCD), presently located in Hull/Gatineau, Quebec.²⁶ It exists to promote the best interests of children adopted from another country by Canadians, while coordinating intercountry adoption issues and information among the provinces and territories, other federal departments, foreign authorities and non-governmental organizations.²⁷

The situation of children coming from South Korea has been further complicated by the fact that Korea has continued to place its children in families overseas, including in Canada, although prior to 2011 it had not signed on to the Convention. As discussed in Chapter 2, there was a shift in Korean policy from the “Best Interest of the Family” in the 1970s to the “Best Interest of the Child” in the 1990s, yet Korea did not consider the Hague Convention necessary to ensure the latter. When I asked Korean social workers and adoption specialists, as well as Canadian experts and officials, to clarify this situation, both sides came up with similar answers. From the Korean point of view I was told: “Our (South Korean) International Adoption Policies and process are so efficient, we take care of all the details before placing a child with a family abroad. That meets all the requirements set out by the Hague Convention, making it unnecessary for Korea to be a Hague Signatory” (Fieldwork in

Similarly, Canadian adoption experts explained that they did not worry about South Korea not being a Hague Signatory, as their adoption program is well established, very efficient and swift, and all precautions are taken from both sides to ensure that the best interest of the children adopted in Canada is met. The Ministry of Child and Family Development does not forbid its licensed agencies to make arrangements with non-signatory countries, but asks that they bring any discrepancies in dealing with them to its attention (Fieldwork in B.C., 2007). Ironically, as will be discussed in my Conclusion, Korea appears to be about to sign on to the Convention at a time when international adoption from that country is supposed to be discontinued in the near future.

The effectiveness of the Korean government’s previous claims to have no need of outside regulation was brought into question by the testimony of adult Korean adoptees and birthmothers (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4) who have discovered and revealed that the Korean state has not in the past complied with some of the Convention’s basic principles. The most glaring discrepancy lies in the fact that the Hague Convention states that intercountry adoption should be the last resort after “all appropriate measures [are undertaken] to enable the child to remain in the care of his or her family of origin.” It further recognizes that if the birth family cannot raise the child, “intercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her State of origin,” implying that a family in the home country should be found if possible.28 This has not been the case in Korea, where, as discussed earlier, birthmothers have been counselled until very recently to relinquish their rights and make the child available for

overseas adoption. While domestic adoption in Korea is now more common than it was previously, some mothers still prefer the international option because nowadays there may be more chance of future contact with the child. As discussed in Chapter 3, economic status and gender discrimination still prevent many single unwed Korean mothers from being able to raise their child alone. There is also suspicion on the part of some returning adoptees (as discussed in Chapter 4) that both the Korean government and adoption agencies have continued to promote transnational adoptions because of the financial gains to them. Not only do overseas adoption fees contribute to the cost of running maternity and child-care homes in Korea, but many children with disabilities are adopted abroad, allowing the Korean state to abdicate responsibility for their care.

As discussed earlier, the reasons why children are still available in Korea are complex and have varied over time. The numbers adopted in the US have been enormous, and many have also been sent to European countries, especially Scandinavia (see Appendix B). Relatively few have gone to Canada, Australia, or New Zealand, largely because of those countries’ marginal involvement with Korea in terms of international relations and less engagement by missionaries there, as well as discriminatory immigration policies. It is important to note here that the numbers coming to Canada from Korea have vacillated in relation to those from other countries, and to examine the reasons for such variations.

Changing Trends in Adoptions in Canada

A study by Health and Welfare Canada in 1993 found that the number of Canadian-born infants available for adoption had seen a rapid decline, by 74% already during the 1980s. While the

abortion rate went down, many more women opted for life as a single mother. Where once there were more infants available for adoption than homes willing to accept them, in the 1990s a couple waited for an average of six years to obtain an infant through a public agency in Canada, and about two years through a private agency (Westhues and Cohen 1995). According to the Adoption Council of Canada (ACC), about 1,400 babies come up for adoption in Canada each year but at least 16,000 couples compete for healthy infants, resulting in long waiting lists. Currently (in 2012), there are more than 78,000 children aged three and up in the care of child welfare organizations in Canada under the Canada’s Waiting Children (CWC) program.

According to Michael Sobol, one of two Guelph University researchers who conducted the National Adoption Study in 1993, the primary reason for the growth of foreign adoptions is that of expediency (Daly and Sobol 1993): “It’s simply faster . . . When the door is open in Romania, they [adopting parents] go to Romania. When it’s open in China, they go there. When it’s open in Haiti, they go to Haiti. . . . People are frustrated working in the domestic system because there are so few infants around.” With the removal of rules for racial and/or religious matching (with the exception of First Nations children), the national and cultural origin of the child also became of less importance as an obstacle.

In recent years a Canadian family can bring home a child from overseas in about a year, depending on availability and relations with the other country. The cost of intercountry


31 Briggs (2012) discusses the different treatment of American Indian children in the US as being based on “nation” status (equivalent to being a state) rather than “racial matching.” The same argument may be true for Canada, but this would need further research.
adoption ranges somewhere between $25,000 and $30,000 (Daly and Sobol 1993), an amount which many are willing and able to pay. The countries providing the most children have varied owing to political and economic factors, and it is revealing to compare the trends in the US and Canada, before looking more closely at why Korea has been more popular at certain periods.

Statistics are more readily available for the United States, where in 2009 records from the Department of State reveal that over the previous decade between 20,000 and 22,000 international adoptions (from all countries) were completed. In comparison, the same numbers were reported to be around 1,800 to 2,000 for Canada, corresponding to the relative size of the population (CIC, 2010).\(^\text{32}\) China topped the list of countries placing children with both American and Canadian families, accounting for an average of 6,000 adoptions completed each year in the United States between 2007 and 2008, compared to about 800 for Canada between 2004 and 2007 and 431 in 2008.\(^\text{33}\) This trend changed in 2008, with a sharp decline in adoptions from China to the US, accounting for about 3,900 in comparison with 5,453 in 2007\(^\text{34}\) Guatemala took top place in the US in 2008 with 4,123 adoptions completed, followed by China with 3,909.\(^\text{35}\) The figures for transnational adoptions to Canada in 2011 were not yet available at the time of writing, but the 2010 CIC figures reveal a slight decrease in the total number of intercountry adoptions, from 2,122 in 2009 to 1,946 in 2010.\(^\text{36}\) China retained its first place as the country placing the most children with Canadian families, with a


\(^\text{33}\) See Appendix B for details of US State Department Statistics and CIC figures, 2010.

\(^\text{34}\) USDS, 2009. See table in Appendix B for details.


\(^\text{36}\) See Adoption Council of Canada (ACC): http://www.adoption.ca/adoption.news.
small increase to 472 in 2010, up from 451 in 2009. The numbers have, however, seen a
gradual decrease, as only 431 adoptions were completed from China in 2008, in comparison
to 1000 in 2004 and 2005.37 This decline may be assumed to be due to China’s introduction
of more restrictive rules in 2007, when some applicants previously accepted were excluded;
these included single applicants, and those over fifty or morbidly obese, unless they consider
taking a child with special needs.38 With a slowdown from China, Canadian families looked
towards Ethiopia, which was second in 2007 with 135 adoptions, having been in sixth place
in 2006.39 However, Haiti took the second place from 2008–2010 with 147 adoptions
completed in 2008, 141 in 2009 and 172 in 2010.40 The recent popularity of adoptions from
Haiti in Quebec may be explained by the francophone context and the large immigrant
population from Haiti now living in Quebec, as well as publicity surrounding the earthquake
and subsequent cholera epidemic.41

South Korea had dropped to fourth place in the US from 2004–2006, with 1,716
adoptions completed in 2004, 1,630 in 2005, and 1,376 in 2006. There was a further decline
to 939 in 2007 and 1,065 in 2008, making Korea fifth on the list after Guatemala, China,
Russia, and Ethiopia (US State Department, 2009, see Appendix B, Table 4). The 2004
figures for Canada showed a 33% increase in adoptions from Korea over the previous year,
when 74 adoptions were completed, making Korea fifth on the list. It rose again to fourth
place in 2004–2006, with 97 adoptions completed in 2004 and 2005 and 102 in 2006 (see
Appendix B). The numbers remained static owing to the new policy initiatives on the part of

37 See also Adoption Council of Canada (ACC): http://www.adoption.ca/adoption.news.
41 There was also publicity around the fact that the then Governor General of Canada,
Michaëlle Jean, who is of Haitian origin, has a daughter adopted from there.
the Korean Government assigning limited quotas to foreign countries, as discussed in
Chapter 2. Canada’s limit of 100 per year was enforced by the Korean adoption agency,
SWS, in collaboration with its three counterparts in Canada. The figures for 2007 showed a
sharp decline of 53% in adoptions from Korea, from 102 in 2006 to only 48 in 2007. This
made Korea number eight, down from fifth place. The numbers saw a further decrease in
2008–2010, with 98 in 2008, 93 in 2009, and 98 in 2010, when Korea was in sixth place after
China, Haiti, the United States, Vietnam, and Russia. Since the early 1990s, several
hundred African-American children from the US have found homes with white Canadian
families, presumably, as Balcom (2011, 241) surmises, because Canada is imagined (her
italics) by Black American birthparents as a place with less racism than the US. The numbers
have seen a slight decrease since 2008, when the Hague Convention came into force, as
adopting from the US has become more complicated and costly. The reasons behind the
changing trends in sources for transnational adoption to Canada will become clearer in
examining more closely the procedures followed by the Canadian adoption agencies.

42 Based on a country-specific quota system and the Korean government’s initiatives to phase
out international adoptions, as described earlier.
43 CIC released complete results for International adoptions for 2007 in January 2009 as
stated on the Family Helper website. For details see http://www.familyhelper.net. Accessed
May 10, 2009.
44 Adoption Council of Canada (ACC) website: http://www.adoption.ca/adoption.news.
Couples Spend Tens of Thousands to Adopt Children from Abroad, More and More U.S.
Birth Mothers Choose to Place their Infants with Canadian Families.” The Oregonian, July 4,
Procedures and Criteria for Adopting a Child from Korea in Canada

At the present time children from overseas are brought into Canada and the US from a number of countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe, where the main reasons for their availability are poverty, military or political conflict, and the sending nation’s inability or unwillingness to provide adequate financial and/or social support for them or their birthmothers. Lovelock (2000) explains that in both North American contexts the majority of international adoptions were until relatively recently arranged in the child’s country of origin, making them “independent adoptions.” The child could enter the receiving country as a citizen, having become part of the new family. Recent changes to the rules regarding the status of children adopted from overseas and brought to Canada (see CIC website: www.cic.gc.ca) have made it more difficult than it was in the past for the child to simply “become Canadian” by being adopted into a Canadian family. As the Sunrise adoption agency’s website explains, adoptions from many countries abroad, including Korea, are now finalized in Canada, with the adopting parents applying for “permanent resident” status for the child, who must wait like any other immigrant to become eligible for Canadian citizenship. These changes, which were aimed at reducing the number of “Canadian citizens” born abroad who had never lived in Canada, have produced a good deal of debate about “second-class” citizenship for internationally adopted children.46

There are many parallels, as Strong-Boag (2006, vii–ix) points out, between becoming part of a different family, as does any adopted child, and part of a different nation, which applies to all immigrants. In the case of international adoptions, the two intersect.

However, while immigration and citizenship issues are the responsibility of the federal government in Canada, assuring that the “best interests of the child” are met once it is here comes under provincial child-care services. In the case of British Columbia, which will be examined more closely, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is the main entity responsible for protecting children and placing them in government care if necessary. Private non-profit agencies that deal with international adoptions must operate according to provincial rules. The Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) website (www.cic.gc.ca) advises individuals or families interested in adoption to first contact the government-appointed coordinator within a specific province or territory for guidance on selecting an adoption agency. British Columbia established a system for licensing and overseeing adoption agencies in 1997, in order to protect children, birthparents, and adopting families within the province. Initially BC agencies were not involved in international adoptions, but complaints from the public about lack of information and regulation led to licensing for some agencies to extend their mandate to inter-country arrangements. In BC six agencies are licensed to deal with international adoptions, which are finalized in collaboration with the MCFD. These agencies offer a range of services, including information sessions, one-on-one counselling, group meetings between prospective adopters and families that have already adopted from abroad, and workshops on what to expect in adopting a child from a different culture.

Sunrise Family Services Society, whose office is in North Vancouver, is the only agency in BC that arranges adoptions from Korea, and they have done so since 1999. That year is significant, as it marked the re-launching of a program between Korea and Canada that had been suspended for over a decade. As discussed earlier, overseas adoptions were put
on hold or greatly reduced after foreign media depicted Korea as “the number one orphan-exporter” at the time of the 1988 Olympics (Chira 1988). The only reliable statistics available for adoptions from Korea to Canada are those kept by the Korean Social Welfare Society (SWS), which established its first official adoption program with Canada in 1984 through the Enfants d’Orient agency in Quebec. SWS records show individual adoptions to Canada occurring already in 1974, but there are no details of these. Links with Canada’s National Adoption Desk in Ottawa were in place in 1977, and no explanation is available as to why it took so long to set up arrangements with individual provinces. It was only in the late 1990s that Sunrise in BC and Children’s Bridge in Ontario began their adoption programs with Korea. The names of these agencies convey a glowing image of “bridging” West to East by welcoming children from the Orient, where the sun rises. By 2007, when adoptions from China were more available, numbers from Korea went down as the Korean government announced its intention to reduce national quotas with the goal of eliminating foreign adoptions for healthy children by 2012.47

The staff at Sunrise agreed to allow me to conduct fieldwork there in 2007, when some adoptions from Korea were still being arranged, although the waiting list was closed. My discussion of this agency’s procedures and criteria will incorporate information obtained through a questionnaire completed by a senior social worker at Sunrise who held the position of Asia Program Manager.48 My observations are also based on my own observation of information sessions for prospective parents, as well as perusal of publications and other print materials handed out, and of the agency’s website. I will integrate these findings with

48 See Appendix A for the questionnaire.
some less extensive information available from the two other Canadian adoption agencies that have had dealings with Korea: Enfants d’Orient in Quebec and Children’s Bridge in Ontario.

At the Sunrise agency, one important piece of information that emerged from the questionnaire completed by the Asia Program Manager was that the organization has no religious affiliation and welcomes families or individuals of any or no religious denomination to apply to adopt a child either domestically or internationally. No deliberate attempts are made at racial or religious matching. This appears to be the case also for the two other Canadian agencies dealing with Korea. While Sunrise completes about 125 domestic and international adoptions each year, the numbers differ significantly for each country and the proportions from different sources are always changing. In the case of Korea, since the inception of its program in 1999 the number was limited by the Korean side to a maximum of ten per year, representing BC’s share of the 100-child quota assigned to Canada at that time. More recent CIC statistics reveal that the quota had gone down by almost 50% by 2008, from 100 to 49, as part of the Korean Government’s initiatives to promote more domestic adoptions (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2008). The current Sunrise website does not include Korea on the list of countries with children waiting for adoption in 2012. The Quebec agency Enfants d’Orient also ceased accepting new applications for Korea in 2007. The magazine Adoptive Families (Sept.-Oct. 2006) reported that healthy children would only be made available for intercountry adoption from Korea after waiting at least five months to be adopted domestically.49

South Korea had until then been a popular choice for Canadian parents seeking to adopt transnationally, because of several features. Those noted by the Sunrise social worker include the following:

- The children available are mostly healthy young infants, usually about six months of age.
- They are typically born in maternity homes where mother and child receive adequate care.
- Health services in Korea are better than in many other countries.
- While waiting to be adopted the children are placed in foster families, avoiding the lack of individual attention and institutionalization associated with orphanages.
- The adoption process is relatively straightforward and swiftly completed, as the Korean agency SWS has a great deal of experience; in the past the child could be expected to be in Canada by the age of eight or nine months, and even with the new requirements before age two.

These criteria reflect the interests of the adopting parents and the receiving nation: the child should be as free as possible from any physical, mental, or psychological problems that might be predictors for difficulties in adaptation, or a potential drain on Canadian resources. While many Americans, especially Evangelical Christians conscious of a “rescue” mission, have adopted children with disabilities from Korea, this has not been the case in Canada (SWS, Fieldwork in Seoul, 2007). The Children’s Bridge website, however, mentioned that applicants should be ready to accept a child with “some minor, correctable medical health issues,” and Enfants d’Orient’s website encouraged those willing to take a prematurely born infant to apply.

The social worker’s response to my questionnaire confirmed that for some prospective adopting parents in the past, the choice of a child from abroad over one available domestically was justified on the assumption that there would be less risk of “interference” from the birth family or community of origin, or likelihood that the child would attempt later

to establish contact with birth relatives. Present-day adopters may share this view, but Korea may be preferred by some families for the opposite reason, as it has become common for Korean-born adoptees to make “Motherland” tours and seek out Korean relations, as described in Chapter 4. Adopting parents are now expected to encourage the child to have some knowledge of the culture of origin, rather than to pretend that the child is “as if” (white) Canadian-born. Curiosity about the child’s origins is considered healthy rather than pathological, and in many Canadian settings such as large cities contacts with immigrants from that country are relatively easy to establish.

The Sunrise Korea Program information brochure of 2007 explains that child proposals include “a brief social and medical history of the birth parents, if available, birth and present medical condition, developmental information about the baby, and pictures.” They are warned that “due [to] the changing culture in Korea, more of the birthmothers have a history of some alcohol use and smoking during their pregnancy.” The Children’s Bridge website similarly warns potential applicants of the need to educate themselves as to the risks of “recreational” smoking and drinking by birthmothers, in other words to be prepared for more health problems than the record might lead them to expect. This emphasis on what is obviously deemed irresponsible behavior by the mothers, putting the health of their child at risk, echoes the images associated with “underclass welfare mothers” in the United States, as discussed by Briggs (2012) in analyzing the ways in which “underclass” American birthmothers are encoded as not deserving to keep their child. Sunrise also states: “While the social workers at the Korean agency endeavor to obtain all information available, be prepared that it might be incomplete or not accurate.” This warning can be interpreted as a positive effort to avoid disappointment for the adopting parents, or a pre-emptive self-defense on the
part of the agency against potential charges of false representation. It may have the
unfortunate effect of giving a negative impression of all birthmothers, many of whom do all
in their power (as discussed in Chapter 3) to assure their child’s health.

When asked what impression she herself had of the reasons why birthmothers in
Korea relinquish their child, the Sunrise social worker admitted, “My experience is not first-
hand . . . I believe it to be lack of financial and social support for single parenting”
(Questionnaire, 2007). The Children’s Bridge information begins by claiming that “single
parenthood is a common reason that there are children waiting for families in Korea,” which
might be read as assigning blame once more to young women assumed to be irresponsible or
immoral. Both agencies could include more information on the social context in which the
birthmothers make their decision.

Concerning the gender of the adopted child, at Sunrise the adopting parents have no
say in specifying a preference. Each child is placed as s/he becomes available, based on other
“best match” criteria. However, as more girls were available for adoption in Korea up until
the turn of the present century, most couples in Canada in the past welcomed infant girls. As
noted previously, SWS workers in Korea confirmed that “lately more Korean families want
to adopt healthy baby girls, with a belief that girls are pretty, easy to raise, and will take care
of the parents in their old age—a notion similar to ideas about boys in the past” (SWS,
fieldwork in Seoul, 2007). Figures for domestic adoptions in Korea now reveal a gender
disparity, with more girls being adopted domestically than before, while more boys have
become available for international placement. Children’s Bridge mentions that in 2011, when
they were allocated twenty-one placements from Korea, mostly boys were available. They
also announced that this number was expected to decrease by 10% per year from now on.
While the children and their background are closely examined, scrutinized, and assessed for quality/desirability, the potential adopting parents must also undergo a rigorous and invasive evaluation for suitability, including a “home study” that can take several months, according to criteria that reflect still dominant middle-class Canadian expectations for standard of living and acceptable social and moral behavior.

**Eligibility of Adopting Parents**

The Sunrise website reassures adopters that every effort has been made to ensure the health and well-being of the child they hope to raise, and the adopting parents’ interests are protected in this regard. It also makes it clear that to ensure that the “best interests of the child” are also protected, according to the Hague Convention discussed earlier, the prospective parents must be assessed as suitable by experts. The Sunrise website enumerates a number of requirements, reflecting an image of the family make-up and environment deemed appropriate. Scholars such as Yngvesson\(^{51}\) also assess how host country policies regulate which parents are acceptable as adopters, including considerations such as marital status, race, gender, age, and religion (Ishizawa et al. 2006).

All applicants must be residents of British Columbia (with no mention of for how long), and while the Sunrise material does not refer to their immigration or citizenship status, Children’s Bridge and *Enfants d’Orient* specify that at least one parent must be Canadian. The next set of criteria concerns marital status and sexual orientation. While gay or lesbian couples have been allowed in some cases to adopt from other countries, and single women have frequently done so, the agreement between SWS and Sunrise (and the two other

\(^{51}\) See Ishizawa (2006, 1221), citing Yngvesson’s work, for discussion of how receiving countries control who may adopt.
agencies) specifies that only officially married couples composed of a man and a woman may apply for the Korea Program. The marriage must appear stable, as evidenced by at least three years of living together, and Children’s Bridge adds the proviso “only ONE (sic) divorce permitted for each partner,” a rule shared by Enfants d’Orient. The couple must both be neither too young nor too old—i.e., aged between twenty-five and forty-five—and in Quebec the age difference between husband and wife must not be more than seven years (with no specification of which may be older). These rules exclude not only homosexuals and single people, but also the many couples in Canada (and especially in Quebec) in stable relationships that choose to live “common-law,” without being married, or those entering a second marriage where one partner may be considerably younger than the other. The age restrictions may be there to protect the child (for example, to ensure that the child is not being adopted to provide care for elderly parents), but the strictly conventional nuclear family model also fails to take into account the important role played by extended family, especially grandmothers, in raising children even in Canada. From another point of view, these legal requirements can be seen as beneficial from a child welfare perspective to ensure that the proposed adoption is not an instance of trafficking of children.

A second category of requirements reflects middle-class expectations regarding education, income, housing, and general standard of living. A social worker conducts a home study, scrutinizing the family’s physical living conditions in order to make a detailed report on their adequacy. The number of other children in the family, whether biological or adopted,

53 Strong-Boag emphasizes the role of grandmothers in raising the children of single mothers in Canada, and the memoirs of Korean adoptees who were older at the time of relinquishment demonstrate their role in Korea (Strong-Boag 2006, 4, 9,11, 90).
is significant in this regard, and must not exceed four. In Quebec, those who have no children or have already adopted a child from Korea are given priority. There must be at least one year’s age difference between the children, the wife must not be pregnant, and there should be no child under eighteen months of age. The Holts, having several biological children already, would certainly not now be allowed to adopt eight more from Korea, all close in age, even with a big farmhouse to contain them (see Chapter 2). Today’s Canadian applicants must have at least completed high school and have a stable employment history. Their financial situation, confirmed by bank statements, must reflect savings and assets as well as income from employment. They must demonstrate sound financial management, including life insurance for both parents. At least one parent should be able to take time off from work for an adequate period after the child’s arrival to enable adjustment, and a child-care plan must be in place if the parent plans to return to work. A guardianship plan must also be set up, in case the parent(s) should die or become disabled.

The couple must undergo a medical examination to assess their physical health, and neither must be suffering from a serious illness. Enfants d’Orient specifies that anyone who has had cancer must have been in remission for at least five years. In particular, all three agencies surprisingly stress that they must not be obese (not more than 30% heavier than the normal body weight for their height), though no requirements are mentioned as to dietary arrangements or smoking and drinking. They must also be free from mental illness, even mild anxiety. Finally, a police check ensures that they do not have a criminal record, and they have to provide names of referees to attest to their emotional stability and moral worthiness. Those who belong to a church or other community-based organization are in a stronger position to produce appropriate references, but Enfants d’Orient adds a warning that no
dossiers will be considered coming from people who belong to a religious sect or are missionaries. Interestingly, it is only in Quebec that the agency’s website points out that some of the requirements imposed by Korea may be contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.\textsuperscript{54}

The couple must not only meet all these parenting conditions (none of which apply to Canadians planning to have biological children), but also be able to cover the considerable cost of the adoption and post-placement services. A Sunrise pamphlet (Sunrise Family Services Society 2007) provided a breakdown of the expenses to be expected in 2007, with total costs around $30,000, excluding travel (see Table 6 in Appendix B). The current (2012) Enfants d’Orient website predicts costs of about $19,000, distributed as follows: 42% living and medical expenses for the child; 34% legal costs; 24% a “donation” to SWS to maintain child-care facilities; and translation into English of a report on the psycho-social acceptability of the receiving family prepared by the Quebec office responsible for child protection. These fee schedules clearly signify class privilege, since the costs would prohibit families of modest means from applying. It is therefore surprising that the minimum family income mentioned to qualify for consideration by Sunrise in 2007 and Enfants d'Orient in 2011 is only $25,000 per annum. In reality, it would need to be much more, particularly for any family living in the Vancouver area. In response to my questions regarding the high fees involved, especially by SWS in Korea, I was told that part of the close to $20,000 required is used to cover the medical costs incurred for the birthmother’s confinement, delivery, and recovery period in a maternity home, and for the infant’s medical expenses. The rest pays for foster-care in a

\textsuperscript{54}“Certaines de ces conditions imposées par la Corée peuvent ne pas être conformes aux dispositions de la charte des droits et libertés. Elles vous sont communiquées à titre d’information.”
Korean family until the adoption is finalized, as well as legal and other costs in Korea. The fee schedule was one of the main issues mentioned by returning adult adoptees, who have criticized the Korean government and its adoption agencies for perpetuating overseas adoptions because of the money they bring in, which subsidizes the Korean child-care and welfare system. As mentioned previously, the Korean government has announced several times its intention to end transnational adoptions, yet the deadline has always so far eventually been put off. A recent newspaper article claims that foreigners will be further restricted from adopting a Korean child, as of July 2012, unless it is impossible to find a foster family in Korea. Korean children are, however, in fact still being sent abroad, especially those with disabilities who are not considered adoptable within Korea and would therefore face institutionalization as the only alternative.

**Transnational Adoptions in a Multicultural Canada**

Canadian families adopting children from Asia are now expected to encourage them to find out about their country of origin, and to inform themselves about its culture. Workshops provide advice on how to do so. Adopting parents are usually expected to go themselves to Korea to pick up the child, and sometimes to stay there for some time. The *Enfants d’Orient* website is the only one to provide background information on the history and culture of Korea, and to encourage parents from Quebec to become better acquainted with the country.

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56 “Nous vous proposons les liens suivants qui, nous l’espérons, vous donneront le goût de l’aventure . . . la personne responsable de votre dossier vous communiquera les informations
In multicultural urban Canadian contexts, making contact with Asians is not as difficult as it was in the American Mid-West in the 1960s. Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal all have large Asian populations (though Koreans are not among the most numerous categories), and Children’s Bridge mentions that prospective adoptive families with similar national, racial, or cultural origins may be given preference. In Quebec, where more intercountry interracial adoptions have taken place than elsewhere, it is mostly francophone families that have welcomed children from Asia (with Korea, Vietnam, and China in the lead). These children have to attend francophone schools and become part of the French-speaking provincial majority, which fears losing its majority status and therefore welcomes such additions as part of a pro-natal policy that includes heavily subsidized quality child-care for all working mothers. Quebec is also the only province where adoption by immigrants of related children from abroad has been separately documented and studied (see Collard 2009).

Another important difference in Quebec, according to Françoise Romaine Ouellette, author of a 1996 study of adoption in that province, is that the Civil Code based on French law co-exists as part of the legal system there. This has allowed what are termed “simple


adoptions” as an alternative to the “plenary” ones that were mandatory elsewhere in Canada (Ouellette 1996, 2009). In the latter, all kinship ties with the family of origin are deemed by law to be severed, and no further contact is expected or allowed. In simple adoptions, on the other hand, information is available and contact may be maintained. This model better fits the trend to more open adoption that has now become more common across Canada (Strong-Boag 2006, 238–241).

Some estimates claim that Korean adoptees in Canada, although less numerous than in the US or some European countries, may number around 3,000. They have formed their own support groups and networks, such as the Canadian Korean Adoptee Network (CKAN), which is active mainly in Ontario (see c-kan.blogspot.com). The Korean Canadian Children’s Association of Canada (KCCA) also arranges cultural events and organizes Motherland Tours. These associations focusing on adoptees are complementary to other groups providing support networks for adopting parents raising children who appear racially different from them. So far there have been no published memoirs by Korean adoptees living in Canada, but there is a “témoignage” (personal testimony/witness account) from an adopting family on the *Enfants d’Orient* website. An article published in the *Toronto Star* in August 2000 (Smith 2000) reported on a gathering of about 500 Korean adoptees and their families in Toronto, at which Hilary Hahn, who came to Canada at age four in 1976, told her story. At that time she “weighed 25 pounds . . . with hair tinged orange by a poor diet.” Echoing many of the adoptees in the US interviewed in the studies discussed in Chapter 4, she stated: “I grew up (in Mississauga, Ontario) with this sense that I was really strange, because there was nobody who looked like me.” When a Korean immigrant at the corner-store spoke to her in Korean, she panicked, fearing she might be returned to the orphanage in Korea: “It’s a trauma . . . I’ve
been constantly up and down, dealing with depression.” Nevertheless, she supports international adoption and approves changes in attitude: “There’s a lot more awareness in white families (than in 1976) that they can’t just culturally appropriate their adopted kids.” She believes that visits to Korea, whether or not they lead to family reunions, are valuable in “coping with being adopted,” as they can instill pride in “where you are from.”

The model for “gatherings” and developing an on-line community of adult adoptees emerged in the context of Korean adoptees searching for their roots, as described by Eleana Kim (2010) and discussed in Chapter 4, but it has since been imitated by adoptees from other countries, especially currently those from China who are now becoming adults. As adoptions to Canada from Korea became more rare, those from China increased, until recently (see Appendix B). A National Film Board documentary *On me prend pour une Chinoise* (*People think I’m Chinese*, 2011), by Quebec filmmaker Nicole Giguère, is an example of media depiction of international adoptions through a positive lens. Giguère followed five Chinese girls adopted by francophone Quebec families in the 1990s, including her own daughter, for three years. This depiction of how they deal with racial/ethnic identity issues includes a group visit accompanied by their adoptive parents to the orphanage in China where they came from. At the end of the film the group of girls, now aged 18–20, discuss whether they would consider adopting a child from Asia. One (the filmmaker’s daughter) says yes, certainly, as she appreciates what her adoptive parents did for her and would do the same for someone else; another, who is pregnant, is happy to be about to know her first biological relation; a third, who has struggled with depression and eating disorders, states adamantly that she would not put someone else through her experience as a transracial transnational
adoptee. As in the memoirs by Robinson and Trenka discussed in Chapter 4, their views are polarized.

**Is There a Future for International Adoptions in Canada?**

There is no doubt that in Canada, as elsewhere, international adoption came to represent a consumer-oriented market in the 1990s and early years of this century, with prospective adopters proving to be very “choosy” when the supply was abundant and they could “shop around” (Brian 2007, 67). Kristi Brian’s article “Choosing Korea: Marketing ‘Multiculturalism’ to Choosy Adopters” (2007) looks at the ways in which American adoption agencies dealing with Korea appealed to the “target market” of childless couples in the past, without acknowledging that the “business of adoption” does not work towards the elimination of the need for transnational adoption in sending countries (Brian 2007, 62). To expect them to do so, she adds, would be to suppose mistakenly “that such agencies exist for the purpose of effecting real social change, rather than for the purpose of fulfilling (American) dreams of nuclear-family-building by way of the misfortunes of others.” Brian goes on to examine the ways in which adoption agencies in the US have mediated messages about adoption from Korea that “fortify the notion that (it) is “a mutually beneficial arrangement for both participating nation-states, as well as for all individual participants involved” (62–3). The three questionable aspects she detects in their marketing strategies all apply equally well to Canada: (1) the goal of meeting adopters’ demand for “controlled, timely, cost-effective family-building”; (2) Korea as an attractive, non-political “cultural other” with nothing to lose; (3) adoption from Korea (or elsewhere in Asia) as evidence of support for multiculturalism and therefore supposedly inherently anti-racist.
Brian (2007, 65) draws attention to one aspect of the agencies’ staffing that affects their perspective: the prominent role played by white women who have themselves adopted transnationally.\textsuperscript{58} This colours their presentation of intercountry adoption from Korea as a wise choice, from an adopting parent’s practical point of view valuing efficiency, economy, and the quality of the “product,” rather than giving prominence to any other ethical or political dimensions of the process, or to the “best interests of the child.” Those who have adopted themselves and had an experience positive enough to make them want to encourage others to do so, are unlikely to emphasize the potentially negative aspects of the arrangement for any of the parties concerned. It is easier to praise the birthmothers for putting their children’s welfare ahead of what is assumed to be their own natural reluctance to give them up, than to blame the Korean government for not supporting single motherhood. Negative impressions of Korea are tacitly conveyed, but camouflaged. The choice of an Asian country such as Korea (or China) may also co-exist with more overtly racist attitudes to other countries that are not chosen, or children available in North America who are not considered suitable.

The self-interest barely hidden behind the demand for children from abroad emerges in an article entitled “The Future of Adoption Part II” (written in 2009 and still posted in February 2012 on the Sunrise agency’s website).\textsuperscript{59} The author (Doug Chalke, Executive Director of Sunrise Family Services) laments in his opening paragraph that “there are disturbing signs that the world is turning away from inter-country adoptions as a method of

\textsuperscript{58} Moosnick (2004) also points out that many adoption workers are themselves personally involved in the “adoption triangle,” which colours their ideas on what a model mother should be like.

family formation.” He admits that “from a political standpoint, many believe that children should not migrate to find a family but should remain in the country of their birth,” and this is having “a negative effect on governments’ willingness to support or encourage intercountry adoption.” He himself had predicted in 2004 that numbers would fall dramatically, in both North America and Europe. His view is that “this is a tragic result for the growing number of orphaned and vulnerable children of the world who face an uncertain future with staggering risks.” Not only are some being deprived of families abroad, but the reduction in fees paid reduces funding for other homeless children.

Chalke also acknowledges that there are still many children in BC waiting unsuccessfully for adoption. He notes that he does not expect a reduction in supply from abroad to increase the number of domestic adoptions here, although increased infertility rates have added to the number of childless couples eager to build a family. He expects Sunrise to complete fewer international adoptions, with fewer countries, and mentions that some agencies in the US have had to merge because of the drop in business: “We have entered the era of adoption gridlock, where any new adoption possibility anywhere in the world is quickly swamped by demand.” The effect on Sunrise’s “clients” has been dramatic: “They are stunned and upset by the lack of opportunities in international adoption.”

He goes on to ask what Canadian adopting parents can do to change this situation, citing political activism and lobbying by American groups (“In fact adopting parents in the United States have one of the strongest lobbies in the US Congress!”). Evidently the strategies used by the Holts in the 1950s to by-pass legislation and rules aimed at protecting the interests of the children are to be deployed once more. Chalke notes that new legislation has already been introduced in the US in response to their demands, entitled the Families for
Orphans Act, and a new specialized Office of Orphan Policy, Development and Diplomacy has been set up in the Department of State. Canadian adopting parents are urged to become more politically active, and to contact their MPs to bring pressure to bear on the Canadian government to ensure that babies will continue to be made available from abroad—not (overtly) so that adopters will not be disappointed, but “as an important outcome today for the orphaned and vulnerable children of the world.” He concludes, apparently without irony: “If adopting parents won’t advocate for families for the vulnerable and orphaned children of the world, who will?”

Who ultimately benefits from international adoptions, in Canada or elsewhere, and who stands to lose what? The answer depends on whose perspective is selected, and what criteria are used to make the evaluation. The central issues concerned will be brought together in the Conclusion to this study.
Conclusion

Rights and Wrongs: Practical Necessities and Ethical Dilemmas

Foucault begins with the fact that, at any given period in a given domain, there are substantial constraints on how people are able to think.


We need to move from asking whether we are “for or against” transnational or transracial adoption to asking what adoption *as practiced, is for or against*. . . *in situ*.


One sentimental narrative should not replace another.


The Korean Perspective: Changing Focus

The fact that in Canada there are now long waiting lists of people wanting to adopt children from Korea, and many prospective adoptive parents have therefore turned elsewhere, reflects the effects of the new policy established by the Korean government in 2007 aimed at restricting “the export of children” in response to international criticism. Another argument at that time for curtailing international adoptions was the country’s declining birthrate and increasing number of senior citizens. According to an article in the *Korea Herald* (“Banning International Adoption from Korea,” May 11, 2007),1 Rep. Ko Kyun-hwa of the then Grand National Party was quoted as in favour of introducing legislation that would prohibit the adoption of Korean children by foreign parents, “as we struggle to counter a dropping birthrate and the aging population.” These arguments contributed to the government’s decision in 2007 to reduce the quotas allotted to each foreign country since 1997 by 10% per year, with the goal of eventually eliminating international adoptions.

Achieving this goal depended on a substantial increase in the number of domestic

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adoptions and Rep. Ko Kyun-hwa also proposed concrete measures to promote the latter, including a state subsidy for foster care during the adoption process, an integrated database for adoption agencies, and a reasonable adoption fee (Korea Herald, May 11, 2006).

However, tying the quotas for overseas adoption to the number of domestic adoptions in fact resulted in more children remaining in Korea in institutional or foster family care. According to an article in the Korea Herald (November 21, 2010) entitled “More babies waiting to be adopted,” domestic adoption has not succeeded in responding to an increase in the number of babies in need of homes. The latest statistics available for the period 2005–2011 provide a breakdown of the comparative figures for domestic and international adoptions, with details regarding the gender and physical health of the children concerned as well as whether they were “born out of wedlock” or “abandoned.” The figures for domestic adoptions have vacillated, but the number recorded in 2011 (1,548) is actually lower than that for 2005 (1,775), before the policy came into effect. Over the same period, international adoptions fell from 2,101 in 2005 to 916 in 2011.

According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, about 8,590 infants and children were in need of care in 2010; only 1,462 were adopted domestically while 1,013 found homes with families abroad, leaving over 6,000 children in other types of care (see Appendix B). There has been some increase in the small number of homes found for children with disabilities (from 27 to 65, probably abroad), and as described earlier, institutions such as the Holt Ilsan Centre (presently still headed by Molly Holt) do provide a relatively good living environment for some children with disabilities. These services are, however, severely limited by lack of funding, and stopping foreign adoptions of children with special needs

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2 Ministry of Health and Welfare and KCARE Statistics, 2012. See Table, Appendix B.
would prevent many from receiving the care available in North America.

Some children, with or without disabilities, are forced to spend three to four years in a foster home while waiting to be adopted, or are moved from one foster home to another, becoming emotionally insecure and socially stigmatized. Foster families and others, as well as relatives, may end up adopting a child, but they want to be able to verify the birthparents’ background, including level of education. They also often now prefer a girl, who is expected to grow up to be more docile and contribute more in the home. Of 1,314 children adopted domestically in 2009, 855 were girls and 459 boys (Korea Times, November 5, 2011). The figures for 2011 show a further increase in the disparity, with 1,066 girls to 482 boys (KCARE, 2012. See Appendix B). While prospective adoptive Korean parents have become more selective, inspection and evaluation of potential adoptive homes has also become more extensive and closer to the requirements for foreigners. The result, as one Holt social worker stated, is that the situation has not improved in terms of the number of homes available:

Overall Koreans still have a negative image regarding adoption and those willing are insufficient to cover the domestic orphans waiting for parents. We have to consider that the children who cannot find adoptive parents have no choice but to end up in an orphanage. Most of the internal adoptions are closed adoptions and people would avoid revealing all documents in the courts to adopt a child. (Korea Herald, November 2, 2010).

**Birthmothers**

In 2009 a monthly payment of $85 per child to families adopting children was introduced—about twice the allowance to single women raising their child alone. At the same time a small group of South Korean women established the first association to defend the rights of birthmothers.  

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4 This information and what follows is from Choe 2009.
unmarried pregnant women to raise their own children. Many unmarried mothers do not apply for assistance because of the stigma still attached to their situation, as seen in Chapter 4. A government-sponsored survey estimated that 96% of those who discover they are pregnant obtain abortions (although they are still officially illegal except in specific circumstances); 70% of those who gave birth opted for adoption, and 90% of the 1,250 Korean children adopted abroad in 2008 were born to single women (Choe 2009).

According to another article in the Korea Times (September 28, 2010), 98% of the children relinquished in the previous year were born to unwed mothers, whether they gave birth in a maternity home or abandoned their child. Only a few with families were given up because of economic hardship or domestic problems. Several forums organized by returning adoptees have presented the case for enabling more single mothers to keep their child. In another article entitled “A generation fights to reform adoption laws” (Joongan Daily, November 11, 2009), Jane Jeong Trenka is quoted as stating: “The government wants to push domestic adoption, but all the children already have mothers . . . single mothers should be given resources to raise their own children. It is still a matter of social prejudice in Korea.” She goes on to express the opinion reflected in her memoirs (discussed in Chapter 4) that “adoption may be an act of love, but all adoptions are meant to separate children from their mothers.” While the letters from birthmothers analyzed in Chapter 3 have not received as much attention in Korea as they deserve, some efforts have been made to include birthmothers in discussions about the pros and cons of adoption. Rev. Kim of KoRoot organized a public discussion on Adoption Day in 2006 entitled “Rethinking Patriarchy in Overseas Adoption,” at which two birthmothers talked about their experiences for the first
time in a public space. Their courageous participation encouraged others to become engaged with young mothers giving birth at Ae Ran Won and other maternity homes.

A new development, one that recalls the widespread prejudice against mixed-race children after the Korean War, is the increasing presence of workers from other ethnic groups living in South Korea. Female immigrant workers from China, Vietnam, and the Philippines enter into relationships with Korean men that often do not last and apparently frequently become violent. Statistics show that 11% of marriages in Korea in 2008 were interracial/interethnic and there were 128,000 married immigrants in Korea. “Multicultural” children (those with at least one parent of non-Korean background) abandoned due to family break-up are becoming a new social issue. According to the Seoul Children’s Welfare Department (Korea Times, November 4, 2011), there were ten such children in their custody in 2010, an increase from seven the year before. The Seoul City government has taken measures to respond to the situation by opening centers to assist immigrant women suffering from domestic violence and support multicultural families facing difficulties. The children of such unions are even more difficult to place domestically, as discussed in another Korea Times article (“Adoption rare for multicultural children,” November 4, 2010). Until 2010 no “multicultural” adoption had been successfully arranged in Korea. It is ironic to note that it is usually the mother who is not Korean, reversing the situation at the time of the Korean War. Having a Korean father is not enough to give these children full Korean status in the eyes of society, although the paternal line is still valued over maternal ties.

A New Adoption Law

In the hope of encouraging more Korean families to adopt a child, in June 2011 the South Korean National Assembly introduced a Special Law on Adoption and its Procedures, aiming to further restrict international adoptions from Korea beginning in July 2012. According to this law, “top priority [is to be laid] on the welfare of adopted children . . . as [according to the lawmaker who proposed the bill] those adopted abroad are more vulnerable to identity crisis and abuse by (Korean) foster parents.” The new law, which should come into effect one year after its promulgation, also mandates Korean adoptive parents to obtain court approval before adopting abandoned children, and requires adoption agencies to declassify information about birth families. Even if the birth parents refuse to be identified, all information except their personal details would be available to returning adoptees seeking to find out about their family of origin. Government statistics for 2009 reveal that 56.7% of birth parents gave permission to disclose their information to the child, while the rest requested full or partial confidentiality. This reluctance to disclose the past reflects the “disgrace” that illegitimacy still entails for unmarried mothers and their children. The proposed law was drafted after consulting adoptee organizations, including TRACK’s president, Jane Jeong Trenka, who supported the condition that all birthmothers should keep their child for at least a week before making a decision about its future, and should not be confronted with propaganda in favour of either international or domestic adoption.7

7 See “La Corée limite les adoptions internationales,” in the French newspaper Ouest France, November 22, 2012). The compulsory week-long wait to finalize the decision for adoption is decried by some in on-line discussions, as making the separation even more painful for the mother (see http://the grandnarrative.com. Accessed April 2, 2012). I have since learned that
For Trenka, as for the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect to International Adoption, the child’s best interest is served by remaining attached to its own biological family. Another new development in Korea is the government’s changing attitude towards signing on to the Hague Convention. According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, in November 2011 South Korea was planning to sign, having agreed that to do so would provide further proof of their intention to ensure the utmost security, predictability, and transparency during and after the adoption process (*Korea Herald*, November 20, 2011). When I sought an up-date from Jeannie Hong, a worker at the Overseas Korean Foundation, she advised me to contact the office of Korea Central Adoption Resources (KCARE), which was established in 2009 as part of the Ministry of Health and Welfare and opened a centralized adoption database in May 2011. Their aim is to assist the government, adoptees, adoption agencies, birth families, and other adoption-related organizations. A representative of this office made the following statement:

> As you’re already informed, each year (since 2007) the intercountry adoption agency has to reduce the last year’s number of International Adoptions by 10%. As far as I’m concerned, the public agrees and welcomes this quota system, however, the country is not yet culturally well prepared to provide viable alternatives for children. There needs to be more public awareness of domestic adoption, encouraging the public to open their eyes for children who are left behind that need permanent families.

Also, since we were established by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 2009, KCARE supports the government in advance preparation for ratifying the Hague convention on the Protection of Children and co-operation over intercountry adoption. KCARE supports the government in researching other member countries’ adoption laws and policies and translating HCCH reports and the guides on intercountry adoption according to the Hague Convention (such as their Guides to Good Practice).

In November 2011, the Ministry of Health and Welfare opened a panel discussion on the Convention, which showed that the government is making a strenuous effort to ratify this and gather the opinions of the public as well as social workers and adoption-related organizations, including adoptees. (Personal Communication with a KCARE employee, Seoul, March 13, 15, 2012)

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Korean government had previously claimed that there was no need for them to sign the Convention because South Korea already had extensive experience in international adoption and had developed good practices. Nevertheless, suspicion is cast on the motives of those countries that refuse to sign, some of which may be involved in the illegal trafficking of children. However, in the case of Korea, agreeing to become a signatory may have become desirable for other reasons, namely to avoid fulfilling their supposed commitment to totally phase out international adoptions. The Hague Convention, as discussed earlier, maintains that it is in the child’s best interest to remain in its own family, if possible; failing that, to find a substitute home in the country of its birth and not be deprived of its cultural heritage; only if that is not possible should international adoption be considered as a viable solution. Since the statistics quoted above demonstrate that South Korea has failed so far to provide adequate support to birthmothers or substantially increase the supply of domestic adoptive homes, the government may, paradoxically, claim to have good reasons to remove the quotas on transnational placements, in accordance with the Convention’s guidelines.
They may even be able to “streamline” Korea’s cumbersome (but necessary and enforced) adoption regulations, to enable intercountry adoptions to be completed more speedily in “the best interest of the child.”8 As Signe Howell (2007) points out, “The principle of the ‘best interest of the child’. . . has received minimal debate. The use of the singular form of the noun is not accidental. . . . The focus is on the autonomous child with his or her embedded rights” (Howell 2007, 163). Different cultural concepts of relational selves constructed as part of an extended family are not taken into account, nor are the competing rights of birth families and adopting parents. According to an article in the Korea Herald, “sometimes parents have to wait for more than a year to meet their children though they have already decided which child to adopt. The government should consider what the best is for the children.”9 The agency spokesperson making this statement reminded readers that foreign parent-candidates had already filled up the next year’s quota. At the time of writing, no further information was available about the latest developments in Korea in regard to signing the Convention or re-assigning quotas.

A further irony is that signing on to the Hague Convention may also be seen to open doors for foreign children from poorer countries to be adopted by wealthy South Korean families.10 It may be possible that the situation in Korea could end up, as in Canada or the US, with richer families going abroad to adopt, while the nation’s own underprivileged children (still assumed to carry “bad blood”) wait in under-funded orphanages and foster homes for affluent homes abroad that may or may not become available.

8 For a critical analysis of the culturally imperialistic ways in which this term has been interpreted, see Howell (2006), 5–15.
Changing Concepts of “Family” in Korea

Two other aspects of the evolving Korean social context in terms of gender, age, and sexuality are likely to produce further reductions in the availability of children for adoption in the future. The first is the impact of revision of the Family Law, which previously allowed only male heads of household. As Nicola Jones explains, “The hojuje (family headship system) constituted both the ideological and substantive backbone of male supremacy within the family” (Jones 2006, 141). The efforts of a broad coalition of women’s organizations, supported by an increased number of women in the Legislature, secured important changes to the Family Law: first in 1989, when it was ruled to violate “the principles of human dignity and equality enshrined in the constitution” and then in 2005 when it was finally repealed (Jones 2006, 147, 237). Married women previously had no control over income, inheritance, or place of residence, and no child custody or even visitation rights in cases of divorce. Under new regulations implemented in January 2008, the family registry was abolished, and each individual now has a separate record; the mother’s name may be used instead of the father’s, if both parents agree, and “extramarital offspring” may be registered under the mother’s name; adopted children may take the name of the adoptive parents. This last change conveys that Koreans are still opposed to openness in domestic adoptions, and wish to maintain the impression that the adopted child is from the same family. It provides a possible explanation for why Molly Holt, who has heard from many individuals adopted abroad, says she has never heard back from a child adopted into a Korean family through the Holt agency (Nam 2010).
Another significant development is the change in attitudes to sexuality in the younger generation. Pre-marital sex is now common, and although sex education is insufficient and contraception not always easily available, advertisements for condoms and the pill have been allowed since 2008. Modernization has been accompanied by a growth of individualism, and western-influenced attitudes of entitlement to “self-fulfillment” conflict with still prevalent concepts of the self as primarily situated in relation to a familial structure (Jackson, Liu, and Woo 2008, 5–11). The new openness to the need for access to contraception reflects the desire of an increasing number of women not to have children, especially since a woman may lose her job for getting pregnant. The very low birthrate also led in 2009–2010 to attempts by religious groups to enforce the anti-abortion law (which has been in place since 1953), alongside the introduction of subsidies for fertility treatments, increased maternity leaves, and allowing workers to go home early on Wednesdays (supposedly to spend fruitful time with their spouses!). These measures were at one point supported by the Minister for Gender Equality, to the dismay of some feminists participating in a lively on-line discussion.

It is clear that not only gender, class, and culture are concerned in familial relationships, but also age is central. Even in North America, “parental control over dependent children reproduces age and seniority as fundamental principles of social organization” (Collins 1997). In Korea the Confucian system prolonged that hierarchy beyond the age at which children in the west are presumed to become independent adults,

11 See the sections on Korea in Bulbeck (2009); also Jackson, Liu, and Woo (2008).
12 See the website http://thegrandnarrative.com on “Why Korean girls don’t say no” and “Abortion Republic no more?” This site includes debates about gender issues in Korea in which both Koreans and ex-pats participate. Accessed April 2, 2012.
and women were treated like children. The debates over whether more independence is desirable \(^{14}\) demonstrate the ways in which Korea is caught between “traditional values” and western-style modernization, where family structure and gender-specific kinship roles are concerned. The age of the on-line debaters, as well as their religious affiliation, is usually conveyed by their position on women in relation to sexuality, motherhood, domesticity, and the workplace. The writers are often torn between nostalgia for disappearing Korean models associated with security and predictability, and dreams of freedom and independence, as represented by an idealized West.

**Heterotopias**

Eleana Kim (2010), in her study of the adult Korean adoptee community as a “counter-culture,” refers to Foucault’s concept of spaces that function as “heterotopias” (“des espaces autres” or “other(ed) spaces”). Kim analyzes the role played for this mobile and fluid community by intermediate, temporary, marginal, or virtual spaces such as hotels, airports, and the Internet chat-room. Many accounts by individual adoptees, including Robinson and Trenka, begin with memories of being “reborn” in the air, from the artificial womb of a plane. Bertha Holt’s diaries are full of stories of departures, arrivals, and close encounters with death in the air. Displacement from the land of their birth results in some adoptees not having their feet on the ground anywhere, as they see themselves as balancing on tightropes or swinging on pendulums, as mentioned before in Chapter 4. The “other(ed) place,” the lost land where the adoptee is not living, may become demonized into a dystopia or idealized into a utopia. Some, like Robinson and Trenka, ultimately make a choice, whether it is to remain

\(^{14}\) The Confucian model is defended by some, as in Chaihark and Bell (2004).
in America or build a new life in Korea, but many have the sense of living parallel lives, neither of which is more “real” than the other. The space “in-between” may be interpreted as exile or banishment, or freedom from repression and authority.

Foucault makes use of the term heterotopia in several different ways. A “crisis heterotopia” is a separate space, like a maternity home for unwed mothers or an orphanage, a refuge or cage for individuals who in some way do not conform to expectations. Museum-like heterotopias “encapsulate the supposedly essential features of an absent space within another one that is present but temporarily disguised,” as occurs at Korean “culture camps” held in receiving countries. Gatherings of adult adoptees from around the world, held in anonymous convention centres where no-one is “at home,” may be heterotopias that allow membership in a self-defining group that has no actual location.

As discussed in Chapter 3, while examining alternatives to adoption (whether domestic or international), and seeing the disadvantages of both foster-care and large institutions, I discovered the SOS Children’s Village model, which may be seen to function as another type of heterotopia: a different space, or space of difference, simulating the structure of a family in almost utopian fashion. This model, which is not discussed in any of the many studies of adoption that I consulted, deserves closer attention because it provides a family-type setting without cutting off ties to extended family and the community. Although financial support from abroad through sponsorships of individual children still allows the Korean government to evade full responsibility for funding welfare services, this model does allow Western “generosity” to come into play without “stealing” children. It promotes a kind

15 See the list provided by Wikipedia.
16 See Strong-Boag (2011), Fostering Nation, for an analysis of the problems with foster-care in Canada, which generally also apply in other contexts.
of cross-border income sharing, as long as all the children have sponsors and receive the same level of support. Sponsorship of children in orphanages was, ironically, the model first espoused by the Holts, although they do not appear to have considered the “children’s village” model (which already existed in Korea in 1965) as an alternative to both institutional care and adoption.

As I come to the end of this dissertation, I have made another discovery: there is an SOS Children’s Village in Surrey, British Columbia (just outside Vancouver), for Aboriginal children who would otherwise be in foster-care. Its existence was never mentioned by any of the adoption workers I interviewed in BC. This model may be as valuable in North America as in Korea or elsewhere, where children are in need of a supportive family-like “home” close to their extended biological family.

Changes at the Receiving End: Legitimacy, Morality, Expediency

The statistics show not only a steady decrease in the number of children from Korea being adopted abroad and the switch to other sources, but also shifts in the most favoured receiving countries for those that are still available from Korea. Of a total of 916 placed overseas in 2011, 707 went to families in the US, 60 to Sweden, 54 to Canada, 33 to Norway, 21 to Australia, 16 to Denmark, and 4 to France, which had previously been much higher on the list (KCARE Statistics, Seoul 2012: see Appendix B). While the US still receives the largest number, it dwindled from 1,013 in 2007 to 707 in 2011 (KCARE Statistics, Seoul 2012). For

17 Strong-Boag (2011) discusses alternatives in Canada to both foster care and traditional orphanages, citing as examples the “Daybreak” centre for people with disabilities near Toronto run by L’Arche, and the SOS Children’s Village in Surrey, BC, associated with the Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services network. It provides five homes on one site, each with 3–6 children aged up to 19, and maintains strong community connections (63).
Canada, as discussed in Chapter 5, the quota was set at 100 adoptions per year at the turn of the century, and by 2011 it was only 54 for all provinces combined (see Appendix B). The Korea Program Manager at Sunrise Adoption Agency in British Columbia, when asked what the effect of Korea’s signing on to the Hague Convention might be, replied: “The “quota” has been reduced each year with the intent to reduce it to 0. However, since Korea is considering joining Hague some IC adoptions will still happen—although in incredibly reduced numbers” (Personal communication, February 2012). The Asia Manager at Children’s Bridge in Ontario has seen her working hours (and income) considerably reduced because of the absence of children available from Korea, and it is not difficult to understand why agency employees would join with disappointed prospective parents in clamoring for the flow of children to resume, as cited at the end of Chapter 5.

The evolution of international adoptions from Korea demonstrates the applicability of Foucault’s approach to history, characterized in the quotations that serve as epigraphs to my Chapters and this tentative Conclusion. These adoptions have been perceived at different points in history as heroic life-saving rescues or as a threat to the welfare of the children concerned and the Korean nation. At the end of the Korean War, the Holts and others had no doubts that what they were doing was both ethical and necessary, even if it went against the laws governing immigration and the regulations of the US Welfare Department. Fifty years later, their actions are perceived as the result of Cold War politics and a colonizing religious ideology. The desperate birthmothers who abandoned their mixed-race children at that time were in a very different situation than those who now give birth in well-run maternity homes, knowing that their child sent to North America may come back to find them. They may believe, like affluent Korean families who send their children to school in Canada or the US,
that growing up in an Anglophone environment will be a great asset in the future. While the social unacceptability of “illegitimate” sexual relations and reproduction (as well as opposition to abortion in some cases) is still behind the availability of Korean children, national and international laws have been crafted to protect their interests. The adoption process, from birth to export and potential return, has been “sanitized” and regulated. Korean children have been popular in the West because they can be presumed to be relatively healthy and legally acquired.

The American parents who welcomed the first arrivals into their homes were often rural people living in modest circumstances, and many of them assumed they were challenging racism by expecting the children to adapt and to become like them. They had little institutional support and, unlike the Holts, little knowledge about Korea. Today’s adoptive parents are more affluent, often childless, and better informed on the children’s background and potential future issues. They are conscious that the decision to adopt internationally is for their own benefit, to create a family, rather than an entirely altruistic gesture. While in the past there was no expectation of contact with the birth parents, nowadays it is a distinct possibility. Laws, however imperfect, have been fashioned to protect the interests of both adoptive and birth parents as well as those of the child, although the interests of the three poles of the adoption triangle may at times be in conflict. Administrative structures have evolved to deal with legal and social issues, in both Korea and the receiving countries, and adoption agencies have become self-sustaining institutions subject also to their own self-interest and to relevant legislation.

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18 In Canada, there are rumours (providing ammunition for those against Asian immigration) about East Asian “goose fathers” flying in to visit their wife and children who are suspected of living here to benefit from the free health and educational system.
The biggest change over the last ten years has been the presence of adult adoptees as participants in debates over adoptions from Korea. They no longer accept being the object of discussion by others, imprisoned in a perpetual state of “tutelage.” On the contrary, they claim the right to express a range of opinions on a subject which for them may still have legal ramifications (if they wish to reclaim Korean citizenship, for example), but ultimately raises moral, personal, and practical concerns about who they are or wish to be. It is their participation that makes the Korean experience of international adoption valuable for the more recent adoptees from other countries (Vietnam, China, Russia and Eastern Europe, Guatemala, Haiti, Ethiopia), whose collective and individual experiences have not yet been analyzed to the same extent.

Relational Selves and Self-Relation

The topic of adoptions from Korea has in fact been studied so much, especially over the last five years, that at some points I shared Palmer’s (2011) qualms about being able to add something new to the discussion. He begins his book by commenting on how many Korean adoptees and American adoptive parents of Korean children have produced either personal narratives or research material related to transnational adoption (Palmer 2011, 12–13). Karen Balcom, in the introduction to her study of cross-border adoptions within North America, points out that adoption researchers are expected to answer what she calls “the question”: the one about where they are personally situated in the adoption triangle (2011, xii). She goes on to say, “this query is meant as a way of establishing community and connection, but I also worry that the question and the answer can be used to assess who may speak or write, or to discount what is said or written from a particular location.” I felt the need to situate myself,
in my Introduction. My project has attempted to encompass a wide range of locations, both academic and personal. There are other voices I could have included, if there were no time limit, including those of contemporary adoptive mothers and social workers in North America and Korea.\textsuperscript{19} Sara Dorow (2006) underlines the rift between academic research on adoption and more popular “self-help” books aimed at members of the adoption triangle, when she apologizes in her preface to any readers who may be put off by her theoretical framework. My hope is that the range of perspectives represented here conveys the ways in which the speaker’s distance from the topic, or closeness to it, illuminates how it is possible to hold such divergent views.

It is particularly illuminating to juxtapose accounts from different geographical locations and different periods in time, revealing sometimes surprising overlap. The situation for unwed mothers in Canada in the 1960s, for example, was similar to that of Korean birthmothers in the 1970s, and children were sent abroad from both places. “Illegitimate” Korean children considered part of a “sub-class” and therefore unadoptable in their home country are comparable to racialized children in the United States or Canada who also remain in care of the state (Briggs 2012). The memoirs of Bertha Holt, conveying her gradual shift to appreciation of Korean culture and understanding of what the adopted children lost as well as gained, is echoed in the experience of some contemporary adoptive parents. Holt’s writings, like those of Jane Jeong Trenka, reached a wider audience than any academic historical or sociological study, because they speak out in public about issues that usually remain in the

\begin{flushleft}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{19} On mothers, see the work of Cheri Register (1990), and also Nora Rose Moosnick (2004). There is at least one published memoir by a Korean social worker, Han Hyun Sook (2007), which I was not able to obtain.
\end{flushleft}
private realm, and convey the personal, affective dimension of breaking and making familial ties that researchers who belong in the adoptive triangle have to mute.

Writing is, for Foucault, a central component of becoming a subject who assumes responsibility for constructing her or his own life as a story, for shaping a “beautiful life” (Rabinow 1994, 342–6) that has meaning, even if the experience recounted is painful. Bertha Holt’s writings have been dismissed as religious propaganda or vehicles for fund-raising (as described in Chapter 2), but their power lies in the way she conveys her situation as a woman and a mother whose life was transformed by her involvement in adoptions from Korea. A careful reading reveals the ambivalence between the lines, the conflicts that were suppressed. She leads a double life, torn between home and away, though unlike the adoptees her exile is voluntary. She is “haunted” by the life she would have had if she had not become involved with Korea, just as the Korean-born Americans discussed in Chapter 4 speculate on parallel lives based on “what if I had not been adopted.” These auto/bio/graphical accounts, unlike Bertha Holt’s, belong to the sub-genre of testimonio, witness statements from first-hand participant-observers who are intimately affected by changes to laws and customs in ways that they both denounce and celebrate.

The “care of (or for) the self,” as described by Foucault, evokes a “relational self” somewhat similar to the one examined by some feminist theorists (McLaren 2002, 54), since the self is situated in relation to, and in resistance to, the various regimes of power that Foucault recognizes: the institutions that discipline individuals and produce citizens with

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20 On this topic, see Elizabeth Alice Honig, “Phantom Lives, Narratives of Possibility,” in Volkman (2005); also Dorow (2006), Chapter 7.
21 The Latin-American testimonio, as a politicized form of auto-bio-graphy, reflects Foucault’s concept of “speaking truth to power” or “constituting the self as the person who tells the truth” (Foucault 2010, 68).
“docile bodies,” the biopower that controls populations, and the more intimate hierarchies based on gender and age that govern familial and sexual relationships. Autobiographical self-representation allows the subject to engage in “self-relation” (as opposed to “self-revelation”), by crafting (rather than simply “revealing”) the self that is projected. The life-story is addressed to a reader, who occupies the role of “confessor” in Foucault’s model of “confession.” The reader becomes the judge (as does a priest, therapist, or doctor) before whom the witness presents his or her account, and must validate or reject it. This function is apparent in the “letters from birth mothers” discussed in Chapter 3, where the women disclose and display their feelings of shame, guilt, and betrayal in order to denounce the social and sexual/familial contexts that put them in this situation, as well as in the stories of adoptees.

In all these accounts issues related to gender, class, race, and age intersect. The rarity of personal accounts by fathers (biological or adoptive) and male adoptees is significant, but has not attracted the interest of researchers. While Bertha Holt represents privilege in terms of class, age, and race, as a woman she was eclipsed by her husband. Her success after his death is an example of triumphant white maternalism. The young Korean-born female narrators and the birthmothers share the marginalization of being “othered” and treated as minors, having decisions made for them. They differ in that the Americanized adoptees benefit from material and linguistic advantages shared by their adoptive mothers but not their birth mothers. Once they are in Korea, the situation is reversed and they are marked by cultural deprivation. All live between two places, in reality or in their imagination.

The publication of personal accounts by narrators from various points in the adoption circle confirms that adoption, previously often assumed to be an entirely private matter
concerning only the family, is in fact embedded in systemic power relations between states and socio-economic classes. Its perception as private obscures the subordination of poor women and the control of reproduction within patriarchal structures. Korean birthmothers and adult adoptees may be seen to be protesting against the same hierarchies that are denounced by Canadian or Guatemalan First Nations communities whose children have been removed. Transnational adoption is now being increasingly scrutinized through a critical lens focused on the reasons for the availability of children in specific places at particular times, the cultural and social environment on both sides of the transaction that makes the child’s removal possible, and the implications for the children concerned in terms of racial or ethnic identity issues. Further study of how transnational adoption intersects with changing models of the ideal family based on cultural and economic factors will throw light on the spread of “Western values” in Asia and elsewhere, and resistance to those values. In practical terms, the Korean model for transnational adoptions may appear exemplary, yet its institutionalisation in South Korea has contributed to the lack of adequate government-funded welfare services in that country.

**Future Research Directions**

This project has taken much longer than I expected, not only owing to changes in my own personal life and physical locations, but because there has been a torrent of research on international adoptions published over the last few years. While Korea was the subject of many of the first studies, the focus is now on comparisons between the many countries from which children are being “sourced,” and adoptees’ experiences in different receiving contexts. My research into the situation in Canada contributes to the latter, and I expect to
continue in that direction, possibly by comparing adoptions from Korea in France, where I currently live, with those in Canada. France has a different philosophy regarding collective identities and rights, as illustrated by the debates and legislation there that ban all signs of religion, including Muslim head coverings, in officially “Republican” spaces such as schools. How will the fledgling association for Korean adoptees fare there? I was surprised a few months ago to see an article in our local French newspaper on international adoption, citing the views of Jane Jeong Trenka. In view of my own family situation, I also hope to undertake research in the future comparing the experience of adopted children who appear racially different from their parents with children of mixed-race unions, who may appear equally different from one biological parent.

The topic of transnational adoption appears to be inexhaustible, and I do not think it is possible to make definitive or generalized judgements out of context. Some questions arise from stray items of information that open whole new perspectives and provoke questions that are probably unanswerable but nevertheless fascinating. I learned, for example, from a passing remark in Eleana Kim’s study (2010, 71), that UN soldiers from Ethiopia were not allowed to adopt half-black children abandoned after the Korean War, though they may well have had Ethiopian fathers. I wonder whether any of those children eventually reached Ethiopia? Another mystery was what happened to the children abandoned in North Korea, who were sent to the USSR, Eastern Europe (including Romania), and China. Future archaeological and genealogical research may provide answers to these questions, but I believe it is likely to confirm Foucault’s premise that history is full of accidents and

22 Ouest France, November 22, 2012; see note 7.
surprises, and individual trajectories resist institutional disciplines and biopower as well as illustrating them. He made a relevant comment, while discussing the effect of some of his ideas in *Discipline and Punish* on social workers in the 1970s. His aim, he said, was not to discourage any interventions, but to introduce “an ethic of discomfort”: “To criticize the present without anaesthetizing those who must act within it, to make conventional actions problematic without portraying them as acts of bad faith . . . to make it possible to act but making it more, not less difficult to know what to do” (in Rabinow and Rose 2003, xxvi).
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**Reports and Government Publications**


**Newspapers**


Films


Appendices

Appendix A  Questionnaire/Interview Guides

Questionnaire/Interview Guide for Adoption Agencies in Asia

Topic: Intersections of Class, Gender, and Race in Policies Related to the Adoption of Children from South Korea and India in Canada.

Researcher: Rupa Bagga

I. Information about the agency:
1. Location of the Agency:
   a) Your position in it (Optional)
2. Does your agency deal with international Adoptions?
3. When and by whom was the agency/orphanage established?
   a) Is it government funded or privately owned?
4. Does the agency have any particular religious affiliation?
   a) Can a family/an individual with any/no religious denomination apply to adopt child from your agency?
   b) Does the religious affiliation of the adopting parents matter in making the decision?

II. Information about the children for adoption
5. Approximately how many children are presently residing/available for adoption in your agency/orphanage?
   a) Number of girls:
      i. Infants:
      ii. 4–8 years old:
      iii. 9–15 years old:
   b) Number of boys:
      i. Infants:
      ii. 4–8 years old:
      iii. 9–15 years old:
6. At what age is a child legally available for adoption, at home or abroad?
7. What kind of gender ratio exists among children available for intercountry adoptions? Are more girls available for adoption than boys?
8. What kind of childcare facilities are available for children in your orphanage/agency, in regard to both pre and post adoption?
9. Are there any children (boys or girls) with a disability? What facilities are available for such children? Are they adopted domestically or available for international adoption?

III. Information about reasons for availability
10. On the basis of your experience, what compel birth parents/women to abandon or give up their children?
11. How and where are children found or taken in?
12. How many intercountry and domestic adoptions does your agency complete each year and approximate numbers?
13. Are there any specific countries/destinations where children are currently placed? Have there been in the past? For what reasons?

IV. Information about alternatives to international adoption

14. Are the children in the care of foster families or do they remain at an orphanage until they are adopted?
15. What happens to children who are not adopted either domestically or internationally?

V. Information about procedures for adoption to Canada (and why Canada?)

16. How extensive is your agency’s intercountry program with Canada?
17. Do children come from or go to specific regions?
   a) Where and when was the program with Canada established?
18. What would be the approximate cost + donation for international adoption to Canada?
19. How long does it take to complete all the formalities for domestic or international adoption to Canada? What legal issues arise?
20. Is the gender or race of the child of any significant preference to Non-Indians or Non-Resident Indian (NRI) families adopting from Canada?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Questionnaire/Interview Guide for Canadian agency

Topic: Intersections of Class, Gender, and Race in Policies Related to the Adoption of Children from South Korea and India in Canada.
Researcher: Rupa Bagga

I. Information about the agency

1. Location of the Agency:
   b) Your position in it (Optional)
2. Does your agency deal with international Adoptions?
3. When and by whom was the agency/orphanage established?
   a. Is it government funded or privately owned?
4. Does the agency have any particular religious affiliation?
   a. Can a family/an individual with any/no religious denomination apply to adopt child from your agency?
   b. Does the religious affiliation of the adopting parents matter in making the decision?

II. Information about the children for adoption

5. Approximately how many children’s portfolios are presently available for adoption in your agency/orphanage? How many of them are from India and South Korea?
   a. Number of girls:
      i. Infants:
      ii. 4–8 years old:
      iii. 9–15 years old:
   b. Number of boys:
      i. Infants:
      ii. 4–8 years old:
      iii. 9–15 years old:
6. At what age is a child legally available for adoption, at home or from abroad?
7. What kind of gender ratio exists among children available for intercountry adoptions to Canada from Korea and India? Are more girls available for adoption than boys from India and South Korea?
8. Are there any profiles of available children (boys or girls) with a disability?
9. What facilities are available in assisting such children and their adoptive parents?
10. What in your thinking might motivate adoptive parents to adopt a child with disability and is the process similar to adopting a healthy child internationally or domestically?

III. Information about reasons for availability

11. On the basis of your experience, what compel birth parents/women to abandon or give up their children especially from South Korea and India?
12. How and where are children profiles compiled and made available?
13. How many intercountry and domestic adoptions does your agency complete each year?
14. Are there any specific countries/destinations from where children are being currently adopted? Have there been in the past? For what reasons?

IV. Information about alternatives to international adoption

15. Are the children in the care of foster families or do they remain at an orphanage until a Canadian family adopts them?
16. What kind of childcare facilities or support groups are available for children and adoptive parents in your orphanage/agency, in regard to both pre and post adoption?

V. Information about procedures for adoption to Canada (and why Canada?)

17. How extensive is your agency’s intercountry program with South Korea and India?
18. Where and when was the program with India and South Korea established?
   a. Do children go to specific regions in British Columbia?
   b. What is the distribution to urban metropolitan/smaller urban and rural areas?
19. What would be the approximate cost + donation for international adoption to Canada from Korea and India?
20. How long does it take to complete all the formalities for domestic or international adoption to Canada from Asia? What legal issues arise?
21. Is the gender or race of the child of any significant preference to families adoption in Canada?
22. Is there anything else you would like to add?
## Appendix B  Statistics

### Republic of Korea Intercountry Adoption Statistics

![Table showing Republic of Korea Intercountry Adoption Statistics](image)

Reproduced with permission from Korean Central Adoption Resources (KCARE), March 13, 2012.

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## Republic of Korea Domestic Adoption Statistics

<Republic of Korea – Domestic adoption statistics>

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<th>Total no. of adoption</th>
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Total: 40,891, 75,567, 36,563, 39,394, 53,346, 18,516, 5,604, 589, 75,447, 510

Reproduced with permission from Korean Central Adoption Resources (KCARE), March 13, 2012.
Table 2. International Adoptions Statistics Comparison Between the US and Canada

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<td>1998: 15,583</td>
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Source: US Department of State Statistics

### Table 3. Total Numbers of Adoptions to the United States 2004–2010

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Table 4. Total Numbers of Adoptions from Top Ten Countries to Canada 2003–2010

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Table 5. Annual Status of Adoptions from South Korea to Canada

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<td>2011***</td>
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### Table 6. Sunrise Korea Fee Schedule (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Adoption Preparation Package</strong></td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including registration, home study, and Sunrise education program. Payable at the time of registration with Sunrise.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Sunrise Intercountry Adoption Fee for Korea</strong></td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including preparation of the dossier to be sent to Korea, receiving and reviewing the proposal for the child, and submission of documentation to obtain the Letter of No Objection, as well as three Post Placement Reports.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Courier Fees</strong></td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payable when the dossier goes to Korea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Social Welfare Society (SWS) Fee</strong></td>
<td>$19,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payable when the adopting family accepts the proposal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Legal and Court Filing Fee</strong></td>
<td>$2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payable when the adoption is finalized, six months after placement.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL APPROXIMATE COST (excluding travel)</strong></td>
<td>CDN $30,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Travel Expenses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel cost will vary depending on such factors as airfare, exchange rates, and meals in Korea. Family may stay at the SWS guesthouse.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Escort Fees for the Child</strong></td>
<td>CDN $3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if the adopting parents choose not to travel to Korea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Sunrise Family Services Society. 2007. “Korea 1: Adoption Information.” Pamphlet provided to Rupa Bagga by Sunrise Family Services Society.