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HIST091
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Korean Transnational Adoption as an Act of Violence

Abstract

Building on an emergent field of critical adoption studies, this paper traces the transformation of the Korean orphan into adoptee through the army camp, orphanage, women's magazine, and family. In doing so, it demonstrates how Korean transnational adoption stood at the nexus of discourses concerning U.S. militarism, American consumerism, Cold War Orientalism, and white heteronormative kinship formation. It concludes that adoption was not the radical act that its architects heralded it to be, rather it reproduced and reified pre-existing notions of race, gender, and sexuality founded in Orientalism.



Jimmy Raynor reads American comics while his grandmother fixes up a fresh batch of cookies in the background.¹

Introduction

Consider the above photograph that appeared in the December 1953 issue of *Stars and Stripes*. Adorned in a plaid button-down and cowboy hat, a Korean child sits reading American comics. The photograph's caption tells us that this is 5 year-old Jimmy Raynor, formerly Choi Kyung Hyun, who was adopted by 25 year-old American ex-sergeant and bachelor, Paul Raynor. What is a single ex-serviceman doing adopting a Korean boy while the United States still retained legal and attitudinal prejudices against mixed-race families? It was not until the 1967 Supreme Court *Loving v. Virginia* decision that laws banning interracial marriage were deemed unconstitutional. And banning interracial marriage was just one of the ways by which the United States government discouraged mixed-race families to uphold the racial hierarchy. Moreover, amidst the era of communist containment, what would possess an American to welcome a foreigner into America's most sacred institution: the home? Not only did mixed-race families disrupt the semblance of an all-American (white) heteronormative

¹ "Seoul to South Dakota" *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, December 9, 1953, reprinted in *Korean War Children's Memorial*, Korean War National Museum, <http://koreanchildren.org/docs/SSS-218WP-Q.htm>.

biological nuclear family, but they also posed a serious national threat. Yet, news stories about Jimmy Raynor and others like him made no indication that transnational adoption was anything but conventional. Rather, architects of Korean adoption (media outlets, social workers, adoptive agents, and adoptive parents) heralded it as a symbol of America's racial tolerance during the Cold War. They presented stories of Korean adoption as ones of peaceful, seamless assimilation, thereby obscuring the unnatural and transgressive nature of transnational adoption. It is only in recent years that adoptees and historians have begun to generate an emergent field of critical adoption studies to counter this narrative. This paper seeks to situate Korean adoption within the context of U.S. militarism, American consumerism, Cold War Orientalism, and white heteronormative kinship formation by tracing the adoption process through army camps, orphanages, women's magazines, and the family. In doing so, this paper argues that transnational adoption was not the peaceful process that social workers made it out to be, rather it was a violent process that necessitated the continual monitoring, disciplining, and commodification of the Korean child. As such, transnational adoption reproduced and reinforced pre-existing notions of race, gender, and sexuality founded in Orientalism.

Background

Since the Korean War, approximately 200,000 Korean children have been adopted by Westerners, the majority of these adoptions being to Americans during the Cold War Era.² Initially, Americans framed Korean adoption as a national responsibility, as America's occupation of southern Korea had produced a population of mixed-race children. A *Los Angeles Times* article titled "Babies GIs

² Yuri Doolan, "The Camptown Origins of International Adoption and the Hypersexualization of Korean Children," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 24, no. 3 (2021), 352.

Left Behind Are Tragic Aftermath of Wars” lamented that “the people of Korea prided themselves on the purity of their race,” thus mixed-children were “abandoned as soon as they were born” while others were “stoned to death, by children as well as adults.” To further the appeal to white Americans, the article spotlighted the European characteristics of the mixed-race children, describing one unfortunate orphan as a “small, blue-eyed blond girl”—her Korean half apparently indiscernible.³ American media fostered a sense of urgency among American people, who became convinced that Korea was teeming with unwanted and imperiled mixed-race (but white-passing) children. Nevertheless, mixed-race children were actually a negligible proportion of the postwar orphan population, constituting approximately 1,500 GI babies out of an estimated 100,000 orphan population.⁴ Furthermore, Americans continued adopting Korean children decades after the war, after the small population of mixed-race children was depleted and in spite of the fact that Korea eventually recovered from the war. Today, Korean adoptees are the largest adoptee diaspora in the world.

³ Anne Norman, “Babies GIs Left Behind are Tragic Aftermath of Wars: War Baby Tragedy,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 23, 1957.

<https://proxy.swarthmore.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/babies-gis-left-behind-are-tragic-aftermath-wars/docview/167158619/se-2?accountid=14194>.

⁴ Arissa H. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015), 23.

The Army Camp: Mascots, Houseboys, & *Gijichons*

America's military occupation of Korea produced a neocolonial relationship between the two countries that made mass transnational adoption possible. Although some scholars begin the history of Korean-American transnational adoption with the end of the Korean War, transnational adoption began in the army camps themselves, with the figure of the mascot. Homeless Korean children, mostly boys, were "adopted" into the U.S. military units as mascots or houseboys and aided in the unit's daily routine by doing domestic work and running errands.⁵ While they were used interchangeably, the role of the mascot and that of the houseboy were distinct as were the ideologies that undergirded them. According to historians David J. O'Brien and Stephen S. Fugita, 51.2% of the Chinese workforce in the United States was "engaged in domestic and personal service work."⁶ The relatively high rates of Asian men doing domestic work were the result of the racial violence and hostilities that Chinese laborers faced in rural areas, causing them to gravitate towards urban centers where they could only find work in domestic service.⁷ Thus, the Asian houseboy reified Orientalist notions of Asians as docile, feminized, and subservient. As Midori Takagi states, "the image of an Asian male dusting, cooking, and cleaning linked the supposed liberation of middle-class housewives from the toil of housework and the strict sexual division of labor to the colonization of 'Orientals' and their labor."⁸ Therefore, it follows

⁵ SooJin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee: U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 59.

⁶ Midori Takagi, "Consuming the 'Orient': Images of Asians in White Women's Beauty Magazines, 1900-1930." *Sexual Borderlands: Constructing an American Sexual Past*, edited by Kennedy, Kathleen, and Sharon R. Ullman. (Ohio State University Press, 2003), 312.

⁷ Takagi, "Consuming the 'Orient,'" 312.

⁸ Takagi, "Consuming the 'Orient,'" 312.

that the concept of the militarized houseboy was a continuation of American gendered racial stereotypes.

The construction of the militarized houseboy began with the American occupation of Japan in the aftermath of WWII, during which servicemen began hiring local boys to clean and polish shoes, gather firewood, and wash clothes.⁹ American servicemen imported the notion of houseboys to Korea during their occupation and further introduced a new category: the mascot. Military mascots were not unique to the Korean War, human military mascots may be traced as far back as the American Civil War with the figure of the drummer boy. However, the Korean War was the first war to produce *transnational* military mascots.

Korean boys often began as houseboys and were only promoted to the eminent role of mascot if they were successful in ingratiating themselves with their unit. Unlike the houseboy, the mascot was not merely a servant—he was fully integrated into the unit through a dynamic that resembled that of a family. Arissa Oh explains that “servicemen fed, clothed, and even educated mascots, integrating them into their military culture, and into American culture.”¹⁰ A 1953 *Pacific Stars and Stripes* article “2 ‘Dads’ of Korean Orphan Mike Find PTA Meeting Fun, Difficult” reports that two lieutenants attended their mascot, Mike’s, PTA meeting as his fathers.¹¹

Mascots provided servicemen with a sense of familiarity, through which they could reproduce family ties. It is no coincidence that mascots did not crop up during America’s occupation of Japan as they did in Korea. Christina Klein writes that during the Cold War “the family became a framework

⁹ Oh, *To Save the Children*, 31.

¹⁰ Oh, *To Save the Children*, 32.

¹¹ “2 ‘Dads’ of Korean Orphan Mike Find PTA Meeting Fun, Difficult,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, July 24, 1951, reprinted in *Korean War Children’s Memorial*, Korean War National Museum, <http://koreanchildren.org/docs/PSS-160-WQ.htm>

within which these differences could be both maintained and transcended, and offered an imaginative justification for the permanent extension of U.S. power, figured as responsibility and leadership, beyond the nation's borders."¹² U.S. propaganda extolled the virtues of a stable home and called upon ordinary citizens to do their patriotic duty by conforming to heteronormative, nuclear family structures—a stable home produces well-adjusted American soldiers. If family was a bulwark against communism, then it follows that American servicemen sought to fight communism within the army camps by reproducing a family dynamic with Korean children. However, the contradiction is that they were also welcoming a foreign agent within the sacred boundaries of their “family.” Thus, servicemen had to replace the mascots’ Korean identity with that of an American to make this family dynamic tenable.

Mascots were made in the image of the American GI. Reporting on a group of 22 Korean mascots, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* describes one wearing “a lone ranger sweater, a baseball cap, a pair of blue jeans and cowboy boots” while another “looked like a half-pint first sergeant” as he “wore clothes and shoes similar to army issue, but they were hand made.”¹³ The two mascots were dressed as quintessential American icons: the cowboy and the GI. To cement their new identity as Americans, mascots were often given American nicknames such as “Bonzo” and “Mike.”¹⁴ Although most mascots were eventually placed into Korean orphanages, some were legally adopted by American servicemen. In the *Los Angeles Times* article “Korean Waif Becomes Officer in U.S. Army,” Lt. Steve Limb, a former

¹² Christina Klein. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 115-116.

¹³ “Yanks Lose 22 Korea Mascots To Orphanages: Waifs Traveled With Troops For Months,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 13, 1951.

¹⁴ Oh, *To Save the Children*, 34.

“mascot, messboy, and general roustabout” recalled that “my Korean life died in 1950, of hunger and freezing...I was born again by the U.S. army.”¹⁵ Lt. Limb was one of few mascots who became naturalized U.S. citizens through their association with the U.S. army. As mascot, the male Korean orphan was made into the image of the American soldier. Thus, the mascot set the precedent for the seamless Korean-to-American assimilation that would later inspire legal adoptions.

Sometimes the hyper-masculine, war-ridden space to which mascots were exposed paradoxically rendered them unsuitable for adoption. Former mascots had difficulty adjusting to nonmilitary life in orphanages. One Korean social worker described a houseboy as “sophisticated in sex matters” and noted that his corruption made it difficult to place him with an American family while another social worker described a nine-year-old mascot as “lazy, vain, and using adoption as a means to enter the United States.”¹⁶ As Oh observes, this suspicion was usually reserved for Korean women who sought to marry American soldiers, and it is shocking to hear an official describe a child using language of decay and corruption.¹⁷ However, the mascot and the camptown prostitute were more alike than they were different. In addition to performing domestic chores and errands, the mascots served as entertainment for the unit. Soojin Pate explains that “mascots operated in the same kind of economy as camptown prostitutes by entering into informal contracts and providing emotional and physical services in exchange for material goods.”¹⁸ In addition to social workers’ fear of the children’s corruption, army commanders discouraged the practice of mascots, warning their servicemen that

¹⁵ Julian Hartt, “Korean Waif Becomes Officer in U.S. Army: Korean Waif” *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1970.

¹⁶ Oh, *To Save the Children*, 40 and Susie Woo, *Framed by War: Korean Children and Women at the Crossroads of US Empire*, (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 52.

¹⁷ Oh, *To Save the Children*, 40.

¹⁸ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 59.

“they were there to fight a war, not act as fathers to Korean children.”¹⁹ The Korean War marked the end of the mascot in American military history but its legacy opened up pathways for the widespread, systematic legal adoptions of Korean children.

Like the male mascot, Korean girls were made in the image of the camptown prostitute or *gijichon*. A 1951 *Pacific Stars and Stripes* article, “‘Adopted’ Korean Girl Loves Officer, Now Happy,” described how a Lt. Doernbach and a six-year-old orphan girl named Baby-san “fell for each other the minute they met on a street in Suwon.” When it came time for her to go to an orphanage, Baby-san “clung to Doernbach, crying and trying to stop his departure.”²⁰ The story could easily be about a *gijichon*, not a six-year-old Korean girl, and an American GI. The lieutenant even gave Baby-san gifts, “stateside shoes, a dress and stockings,” which could also have been gifts for a *gijichon*. Korean girls also served as entertainment for American servicemen and would often dress up and perform cultural dances. Borrowing from visual studies, it may be argued that their performances reinforced the Korean girls’ *to-be-looked-at-ness*, as signified by the detailed attention to their appearances.²¹ In a U.S. Navy photograph taken of Korean girls performing for the USS Wisconsin, the girls are sporting traditional *hanboks* and have their hair tied up with ribbons. Thus, the Korean girls became a spectacle for the American servicemen, from which they derived scopophilic pleasure.

¹⁹ Woo, *Framed by War*, 53.

²⁰ “‘Adopted’ Korean Girl Loves Officer, Now Happy,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, July 24, 1951, reprinted in *Korean War Children’s Memorial*, Korean War National Museum, <http://koreanchildren.org/docs/PSS-003-Q.htm>.

²¹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (UK, 1975),” *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, by Scott MacKenzie, 1st ed., University of California Press, 2014, pp. 359–370. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt5vk01n.109.



Korean girls from the Pusan Orphanage present a show for the USS Wisconsin at Pusan — March 1, 1952²²

As Pate puts it: “The militaristic gaze is an imperial male gaze that emerges from the close encounters between foreign servicemen and Korean orphans and the cultural codes of militarized prostitution.”²³

Following Pate’s characterization, the militaristic gaze is founded in notions of Orientalism and encoded with desire to possess and to save. Like the mascot, the Korean girl operated in the same environment as the *gijichon*, which constructed the Korean child as an object of desire.

²² “Korean Dancers,” Photograph, *Stars and Stripes*, Date Unknown, Korean War Children’s Memorial, <http://koreanchildren.org/docs/SSS-108WP-Q.htm>.

²³ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 61.

The Orphanage



Korean children from the Catholic Children's Home thanking the 10th Fighter Bomber Wing for their \$127.50 donation.²⁴

The orphanage was a site of citizen-building that was critical to the transformation of the orphan into adoptee. In the orphanage, children were continuously monitored, surveilled, examined, and disciplined in an effort to prepare them for adoption. U.S. immigration required physical examinations which included “stool examination, blood examination, chest X-ray, TB skin test and a complete physical examination by the doctor.”²⁵ It was only by passing these rigorous and invasive tests that a child was categorized as either adoptable or unadoptable. However, these results were only valid for six months, thus children were often subjected to the examinations periodically. The fact that these examinations were not considered permanent suggests that children could easily move between the two categories of adoptable or unadoptable, and that these categories were indeed fluid. The physical exams for potential Korean adoptees are reminiscent of Nayan Shah's discussion of the rigorous exams that South Asian laborers were subjected to upon their arrival to Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. In both

²⁴ “Orphans Aided By Airmen,” Photograph, U.S. Air Force, Date Unknown. Korean War Children's Memorial, <http://koreanchildren.org/docs/SSS-447WP-Q.htm>.

²⁵ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 111.

cases, officials were concerned that ill immigrants would become a ward of the state and drain the American healthcare system. Similarly, South Asian laborers were subjected to tests of their blood, feces, and even x-rays. As Shah puts it “the use of biopolitical techniques to determine the fitness of the body over subjective calculation marshaled purportedly objective knowledge of the future of the body, as worker, as citizen, and as dependent on the state’s resources and public charity.”²⁶ In other words, officials took the fixed state of immigrants at the time of examination and projected their futures as either productive or nonproductive American citizens. But children, by their nature, are not fixed products. However, the fact that the results of these examinations were not final, at least in the case of the orphans, and that a child once considered unadoptable could become adoptable contradicts this very logic. Thus, it may be argued that the true value in repeatedly performing the physical examinations lay in their capacity to regulate the child and give the state a semblance of control over its populace.

In addition to the body, the orphan’s soul was monitored and regulated. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was a U.S. agency that screened Korean immigrants and oversaw visa applications for potential Korean adoptees. In determining a child’s eligibility, INS officers personally examined the children’s moral, mental, and physical health and scrutinized them for signs of communist affiliations.²⁷ Despite the fact that the children were as young as infants, they were not beyond suspicion of having communist sympathies. In order to ensure that the child was mentally sound, orphanages invested in their moral well-being. For example, at the Holt Adoption Program’s Il

²⁶ Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 200.

²⁷ Woo, *Framed by War*, 115.

San orphanage, the orphans were subjected to “Sunday school and church services on Sunday, Bible classes throughout the week in school, and Child Evangelism classes conducted each Monday.”²⁸ The Il San orphanage’s methodology falls under what Oh terms “Christian Americanism,” which was a “fusion of vaguely Christian principles with values identified as exceptionally ‘American’: an expansive sense of responsibility and a strong belief in the importance of family.”²⁹ Thus, Christian, American, and anti-communist all became synonymous in the construction of the Korean orphan into potential adoptee.

The Commodification of the Korean Orphan

Korean adoption was a project that required the commodification and marketing of Korean orphans. The commodification of the orphan began in the orphanage, where any traces of a child’s individual identity was erased. All male orphans’ heads were shaved and all female orphans’ hair was cut into the same bob with short bangs. The children were sometimes even dressed the same, making them even more indistinguishable. Furthermore, all children were categorized as “orphans” despite the fact that some had ended up at the orphanage because they had been separated from or abandoned by a living parent. Thus, all children became orphans in name, not fact. As Pate observes, “erasing individual difference not only creates a semblance of order and management, but it also creates an aura of mass production.”³⁰ Another way in which the orphans became commodified was their undergoing what Jodi Kim calls “social death.”³¹ Historically, Korean family registries were patrilineal and mapped

²⁸ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 124.

²⁹ Oh, *To Save the Children*, 79.

³⁰ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 90.

³¹ Jodi Kim, “An ‘Orphan’ with Two Mothers: Transnational and Transracial Adoption, the Cold War, and Contemporary Asian American Cultural Politics.” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (12, 2009), 857.

lineage that determined citizens' social belonging. However, in preparing children for adoption, new family registries were produced that made the child the head of the lineage, thereby erasing any ancestry or connection to Korea.³² Yet, this social death was temporary, a precondition for the child's induction into an American family and restoration of social identity as an American citizen. Following Karl Marx, the child's social death turned them into both a commodity and a fetish. The social death, like the fetish, obscured the unnatural manner in which the child became an orphan and gave the orphan a desirable quality.³³ Similarly, Pauline Turner Strong, writing on the history of trans-ethnic adoptions of Native Americans to settlers posits that "Adoption across political and cultural borders may simultaneously be an act of violence and an act of love, an excruciating rupture and a generous incorporation, an appropriation of valued resources and a constitution of personal ties."³⁴ Thus, the orphan underwent a social death in order to be rendered adoptable.

The Asian child as a commodity was not unfamiliar to American consumers. In Midori Takagi's essay "Consuming the 'Orient': Images of Asians in White Women's Beauty Magazines, 1900-1930," she discusses how advertisements for Jap Rose Soap and Quaker Rice Cereal invoked bucolic images of an "infantilized Oriental." Such ads featured Asian children "frolicking among soap bubbles, taking bubble baths and kissing behind a transparent bar of soap."³⁵ Their Asianness emphasized the innocence of the children and further reified the notion that Asians are passive, docile, and unsexed. Moreover, the ads conjured a sense that Asians were "under control," a tactic that Jeffery

³² Woo, *Framed by War*, 115.

³³ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 94.

³⁴ Kim, "An "Orphan" with Two," 858.

³⁵ Takagi, "Consuming the 'Orient,'" 309.

Steel describes as an “answer to the more disturbing racial anxieties of the time.”³⁶ Additionally, Pate notes that the “Japan craze” of the late nineteenth century, the 1927 Doll Exchange between Japan and the United States, and the Chinese Patsy doll created by the Effanbee Doll Company contributed to Americans “perceiving Asian bodies as playthings, as curios, and as toys.”³⁷ Much of Americans’ contact with Asia and its people was through consumer goods, thus when magazines began featuring advertisements that marketed the “moral adoption” of Korean children, the concept was not unfamiliar.

The moral adoption is a direct example of the commodification of the Korean child undergirded by adoption discourse. Amidst a spread of advertisements in the August 1956 issue of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, one advertisement stands out from the rest. “Her Rice Bowl Was Not Broken,” an advertisement by the Christian Children’s Fund (CCF), takes up one quarter of the page, and stands out not only because it is the only advertisement with all-around borders, but also because it is the only advertisement to use a photograph rather than an endearing illustration. Visually, “Her Rice Bowl Was Not Broken” interrupts, if not offends, the idyllic hodge-podge of American consumer goods. However, upon closer examination, one might come to see that they are one and the same.

The photograph in question is of a small, emaciated Asian child being comforted by a well-dressed Asian man. The advertisement’s text tells us that this child is a Korean orphan named Ahn Wha-sil and the man is Dr. Oh from the CCF. “No gift is too small to show a child a bit of mercy,” it claims. For just \$10.00 a month, a kind American can “adopt” an orphan child and give them “a decent

³⁶ Takagi, “Consuming the ‘Orient,’” 309.

³⁷ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 92.

chance at life.” The advertisement calls upon the sentiments of American housewives (to whom the *Ladies’ Home Journal* is directed), imploring them to imagine the “pitiful, homeless child” wandering hungry, alone, and in desperate need of a mother. In doing so, the ad likens the orphan child to a consumer good. It is no coincidence that the CCF ad appears directly next to ads for “Armour Star Lard” and “Unguentine” antiseptic dressing. The CCF’s choice of readership is fitting as women, due to their ostensibly intrinsic maternal instincts, are expected to be the heart of the nation. Like the Jap Rose Soap advertisements that portray Asian children as blissfully cheerful, the CCF ad employs similar language, describing Ahn Wha-sil as a “pert, happy imp,” who, despite hardship, remains sweet and innocent. Therefore, the CCF’s advertisement builds upon the advertisements that came before it that employed similar Orientalist notions of Asian children as commodities for the American (female) consumer.

Through its use of quotation marks around the word “adopt,” the ad is careful to ensure that its readers do not mistake this “adoption” for a legal adoption. However, by figuring this strictly financial exchange in familial terms, the CCF renders the unusual process natural. The CCF employs the word “adopt” rather than “sponsor,” thereby obscuring the fact that these children are being bought and sold. As Christina Klein points out, “CCF literature published regular testimonials on the pleasures of “parenthood” by childless and unmarried individuals.”³⁸ Moral adopters saw these adoptions as legitimate representations of familial relations and themselves as parents rather than patrons.

³⁸ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 125.

It follows that moral adoptions opened up new pathways for marginalized Americans to stake a claim in the nation. The U.S. during the Cold War championed the nuclear family as the bulwark to communism. Those who did not fit into the mold of a nuclear family were viewed with suspicion, as a disordered family was believed to be vulnerable to communist subversion. Thus, the single, divorced, or homosexual—otherwise denied the full benefits of citizenship— could also partake in the fight against communism.

More specifically, it is not a child, but a morality that the American consumer receives for \$10 a month. Implicit in the advertisement is the claim that, without American dollars, Ahn Wha-sil will be vulnerable to communist influence. Thus, Americans, if not for the purely selfish reason of protecting themselves against the spread of communism, should sponsor Ahn Wha-sil so she can receive a proper Christian education through the CCF. Furthermore, the American family may welcome a foreign orphan into their family without the social and political repercussions of a mixed family. By this logic, everyone can participate in the nation's containment efforts.

“Her Rice Bowl Was Not Broken” exemplifies the shift in American consciousness as American mass media began to cultivate within its citizens a paternalistic duty towards Asians, which served to reify American imperialism in Asia. Furthermore, the advertisement was published in conjunction with real Korean-American adoptions that were taking place. Thus, moral adoptions and legal adoptions were mutually-constitutive. To discuss legal adoptions, one must not forget that moral adoptions were seen as legitimate adoptions to many who could not afford or did not wish to go as far as legal adoptions.

The Family

The disciplining of Korean orphans did not end after they left the orphanage. Once adopted, the Korean child was constantly monitored and disciplined in an effort to contain their racial otherness within the white American domestic ideal. Though scholars such as David Eng champion Korean adoption as examples of racial tolerance and multiculturalism during the Cold War, this was historically not the case as the ideology of color blindness and compulsory white normativity served as the maxim of Korean adoption.⁴⁰ Similarly, Klein figures adoption as a “voluntary affiliation” that “offered a way to imagine Americans overcoming the ingrained racism that so threatened U.S. foreign policy goals in Asia,” however, in doing so, she fails to recognize how adoption simultaneously reified traditional boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality.⁴¹ Pate writes:

“[The adoptee’s] very presence exposes the contradictions of white heteronormativity. Because the presence of the adoptee is what queers Korean adoption and the white American (adoptive) family, the regulation of the adoptee’s racial, gender, and sexual normativity is incomplete and therefore ongoing.”⁴²

It follows that adoptees were expected to *perform* whiteness by conforming to heteronormativity. The Holt Adoption Program newsletters from the 1960s and 1970s attempted to figure adoptees as fully-assimilated, model minorities by substituting hypernormativity for their racial lack. The newsletters featured stories of Korean adoptees’ graduation and marriage, signaling that the children are on their way to becoming successful and respectable middle-class Americans. One 1973 newsletter titled “Report on the Ruders,” spotlighted adopted siblings Marsha and Dennis and lauded Marsha as “an excellent homemaker, and a knitting champion” while Dennis played football and was set for law

⁴⁰ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 128.

⁴¹ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 115.

⁴² Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 130.

school.⁴³ Although the children are still in high school, they are already showing signs of a bright (heteronormative) future: they are Marsha, the housewife, and Dennis, the successful lawyer. Similarly, a 1955 *Los Angeles Times* article “Korean Waif Becomes Real American Boy” celebrated the seamless assimilation of Lee James Paladino, who “has become so Americanized that he no longer calls his foster father ‘Abooji’ — Korean for father—but addresses him as ‘Dad.’” The photo accompanying the article showed Lee sharing a book with his white classmate, Mary. Despite the fact that they are children, the caption implied a chance of heterosexual romance between the two, suggesting that Lee “seems to have won over Mary.”⁴⁴ Following Pate’s assertion that “if complete assimilation is the goal, then marrying another Korean adoptee would defeat this purpose,” the newsletters commonly featured wedding announcements of Korean women marrying white men. However, taken out of context, photos of the happy couple could easily be that of an American GI and his war bride, or worse, a *gijichon*. Here, Pate presents a contradiction: although Korean women were impelled to marry white men to complete their assimilation, the partnership does not obscure their Asianess, it problematizes it by evoking the history of militarized sexuality between American men and Korean women.

During the war, the American occupation of southern Korea created a sexual economy in camptown districts. In attempt to curb the spread of venereal disease, all women working within the boundaries of the camptown were subjected to regular testing, not just prostitutes. Yuri Doolan demonstrates how this contributed to Korean women being seen as “prostitutes until proven

⁴³ Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 136.

⁴⁴ “Korean Waif Becomes Real American Boy,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 10, 1955, <https://proxy.swarthmore.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/korean-waif-becomes-real-american-boy/docview/166739163/se-2?accountid=14194>.

‘innocent’ in the minds of American authorities.”⁴⁵ Casting all Korean women as prostitutes allowed architects of Korean adoption to write off all birth mothers as prostitutes, even when this was not the case. In fact, experts in the camptowns confirmed that the “true prostitute does not have babies,” and that “the girl who has a baby is usually going steady with the father.”⁴⁶ Still, the repudiation or eradication of the birth mother was a necessary condition for a child to be seen as adoptable. Not only did this contribute to the child becoming a fetish in a Marxist sense, but it also allowed parents to imagine their adoption as an act of saviour. Framing the Korean birth mother as a prostitute fit nicely into gendered racial stereotypes and allowed adoptive parents to believe that, without them, Korean children would grow up to follow their mothers into prostitution. While Klein argues that Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly* is an example of how middlebrow culture made the hybrid, multiracial, multinational family created through adoption tenable to Americans, an alternative reading would reveal that works like *Madame Butterfly* (an opera about a relationship between a Japanese geisha and an American soldier) and *Miss Saigon* (a musical about a relationship between a Vietnamese prostitute and an American soldier) reinforced the notion that Asian women are hyper-sexual, available to white men, and—above all else—disposable. In both works, the birth mother valiantly kills herself in hopes that her child will find a better life with white American parents. It follows that the hypersexualization of Korean women carried over to female adoptees.

While racial stereotypes constructed Asian children as objects of desire, it had the converse effect of inscribing them with sexualized racial characteristics. As a result, female adoptees’ sexuality

⁴⁵ Yuri Doolan, “The Camptown Origins,” 356.

⁴⁶ Doolan, “The Camptown Origins,” 358.

was scrutinized. One adopted woman remembers her mother chastising her when she was a child for wanting to wear a red dress to a Christmas party. She recalls:

“I was told “no, because it’ll make you look like a whore, like your real mother. You should be grateful because if we hadn’t adopted you, you would have lived the life of poverty and probably been a prostitute like your mother.”⁴⁷

Thus, adoptive parents assumed that their daughters harbored a latent deviant sexuality within them that must be contained. Such suspicions are reminiscent of American immigration officials’ concern that Korean infants might be communist sympathizers. In both cases, the Korean child is scrutinized, disciplined, and contained. Similarly, Jan De Hartog described being enamoured by the charms of his adopted daughters by employing Oriental stereotypes of the lotus blossom: “Like all women from countries where the male rules the roost, they have the magic power of making our breeches drop at the crest of our strutting self-confidence.”⁴⁸ Thus, adoptive parents drew upon gendered stereotypes of Asian women as sexual objects in their policing of their daughters.

Conclusion

In a 2015 *New York Times* article titled “Why a Generation of Adoptees Is Returning to South Korea,” Korean adoptee Laura Klunder states, “Our goal is to make ourselves extinct.” Klunder and several other adoptees who were adopted during the Cold War have formed Adoptee Solidarity Korea (ASK) to lobby the Korean government to reduce the flow of international adoptions. She continues, “I was a transaction. I was a number in the same way that people who are criminalized and institutionalized are given numbers.”⁴⁹ How does Klunder’s testimony compare to that of the Holt

⁴⁷ Doolan, “The Camptown Origins,” 367.

⁴⁸ Oh, *To Save the Children*, 160.

⁴⁹ Maggie Jones, “Why a Generation of Adoptees Is Returning to South Korea,” *The New York Times*, January 14, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/magazine/why-a-generation-of-adoptees-is-returning-to-south-korea.html>.

Adoption Program newsletters? Indeed, Klunder's negative experience as an adoptee exposes the contradictions that the architects of adoption agents tried to obscure. Despite their attempts to make race a nonissue, they actually spotlighted race. Such contradictions produced an endless loop that required the continual disciplining of the Korean adoptee. Therefore, this paper demonstrates that Korean adoption was a violent and ongoing process, wrought with contradictions and anxieties. As orphan and later as adoptee, Korean children were disciplined to conform themselves physically, psychically, and culturally to heterosexual, American norms. Examples of such disciplining institutions include but are not limited to the army camps, the orphanage, and the family. Therefore, Korean adoption during the Cold War was not a radical act that produced new conceptions of race, rather it drew upon and reinscribed pre-existing notions of race, gender, and sexuality founded in Orientalism.

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