

*Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging.* By ELEANA J. KIM. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010. xviii, 320 pp. \$84.95 (cloth); \$23.95 (paper).

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As the world's fifteenth largest economy, South Korea presents itself as a unique case in the transnational system of adoption. Its current demographic profile, characterized by the world's "lowest-low fertility," rapidly "aging population," and "shrinking workforce," is reminiscent of that of the "receiving countries" (p. 3). In 2008, however, South Korea sent 1,250 children to overseas homes (p. 20). Public discussions around adoption have been heavily dominated by its proponents, who argue for its beneficial impacts on individual adoptees, and its opponents, who denounce it for reproducing race, class, and gender inequalities. In South Korea, particularly, the continuance of transnational adoption often has been a subject of national embarrassment and even translated as a sign of the country's incomplete modernization. By making visible rather "unheard" voices of adult Korean adoptees, the anthropologist Eleana Kim's *Adopted Territory* adds another important dimension to this contested space of adoption.

In *Adopted Territory*, adoption is not simply individual activities of bringing up biologically unrelated children but a complex system that relies on the coordination of "a range of technologies" (p. 71). An important actor in the system of adoption is a national government. Thus, while tracing its origin from the Korean War, Kim reveals how transnational adoption occupied an important place in the South Korean government's geopolitical interests and biopolitical concerns. Adoption—sometimes referred to as "civil diplomacy" at that time (p. 72)—not only transferred the welfare responsibility of the state into individual adoptive families overseas, but also became a means to secure foreign aid and maintain favorable interstate relations. In the time when only 2 percent of the national budget was spent on social welfare while about 40 percent was spent on national defense (p. 74), sending mixed-blood war orphans and later full Korean social and economic orphans to other countries literally meant a biopolitical relief to the fledgling, ethnonationalist state.

Adoption, however, is not the monopoly of state actors and cannot be reduced to the state's welfare or geopolitical strategies. Another face of transnational adoption becomes visible when looking at its place within the global politics of pity. The abandoned child becomes a heavily sentimentalized object while media and international organizations such as World Vision and Holt become the agencies of the emergent adoption humanitarianism. Following the anthropologist Liisa Malkki, who argues that "children function as a 'tranquilizing convention' in the international community by serving to depoliticize highly political contexts," Kim discusses how the children abandoned by their American fathers during the Korean War became "humanitarian orphans" and how the U.S. postwar occupation was translated as its humanitarian intervention (p. 75).

Kim's largest contribution to the existing scholarship on adoption, kinship, and citizenship is the chapters where she devotes herself in delineating the

“adoptee counterpublic”—a “form of performative world-making” (p. 5). Kim notes how the process of making sense of kinship and social belonging among individual adoptees is so much based on a process that she calls “contingent essentialism”—how “adoptee identity is at once essentialized as something natural and also construed as something culturally and socially constructed” (p. 86). Importantly, the “rise of biomedical subjectivity (Carlos Novas and Nikolas Rose, “Genetic risk and the birth of the somatic individual,” *Economy and Society*, 29:4 [2000], pp. 485–513) and technologies of the self (Martin et al., eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* [Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988])” (p. 88) is another important context that shapes the emergent adoptee kinship. That is, the contemporary mandate to “know yourself” brings individual adoptees into the quest for their origins and birth parents and thus into the motherland of Korea. This modern odyssey of tracing one’s identity—powered by the modern technology of the Internet—is yet constituted by processes of identification and disidentification, connection and disconnection, and belonging and disbelonging.

The “homecoming” adoptee—once an unwanted object of pity in the state’s nation-building and developmentalist projects—faces another new set of rationalities that calls him or her various names; while the neoliberal South Korean state embraces the adoptee back as an “overseas Korean” and as another source of human capital to enhance its “global competitiveness,” civil society groups see the adoptee as the “latter-day *minjung*” and as the remnants of its unfinished political project. To the urban middle class the adoptee becomes a “model cosmopolitan.” Kim discusses how adult adoptees’ articulation of “their alternative subjectivities and cultural identities” (p. 247) may reject the reach of these “new titles” and how their homecoming and their very presence poses a challenge to the dominant “Koreanness” and normative conceptions of the nation, kinship, and citizenship.

By examining the dynamic history and relations among the concerned state actors, international and domestic adoption agencies, adoptee advocacy groups, and individual adoptees and their self-governance groups, Kim expands existing scholarship within Korean studies on the geopolitics of intimacy (e.g., Katharine S. Moon’s *Sex Among Allies* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1997]), the gender politics of the state and citizenship (e.g., Seungsook Moon’s *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005]), and neoliberal and developmentalist modernity (e.g., Nancy Abelmann’s *Melodrama of Mobility* [Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003] and Jesook Song’s *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis* [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009]). *Adoptee Territory* may be of particular interest to scholars in the fields of Korean studies, Asian and Asian American studies, and anthropology.

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