

Spoken for and speaking

Up until the late 1990s, adoption agencies, social workers, psychologists, and adoptive parents wrote most of the records we have about them. Since then, with the establishment of organizations and especially the Internet as a resource for gaining knowledge and enabling meetings across geographical boundaries, there was a veritable explosion of cultural and autobiographical works written and produced by themselves.

Ranging from novels, poems and art works, to documentaries and films, the adopted Koreans were here for the first time considered active agents capable of creating their own social spaces and expressing their own authentic voices instead of just being valuable commodities of Korea's adoption program, grateful and privileged children of Western elite families or idealized and perfectly assimilated adoptees in academic research.



Organization and self-definition

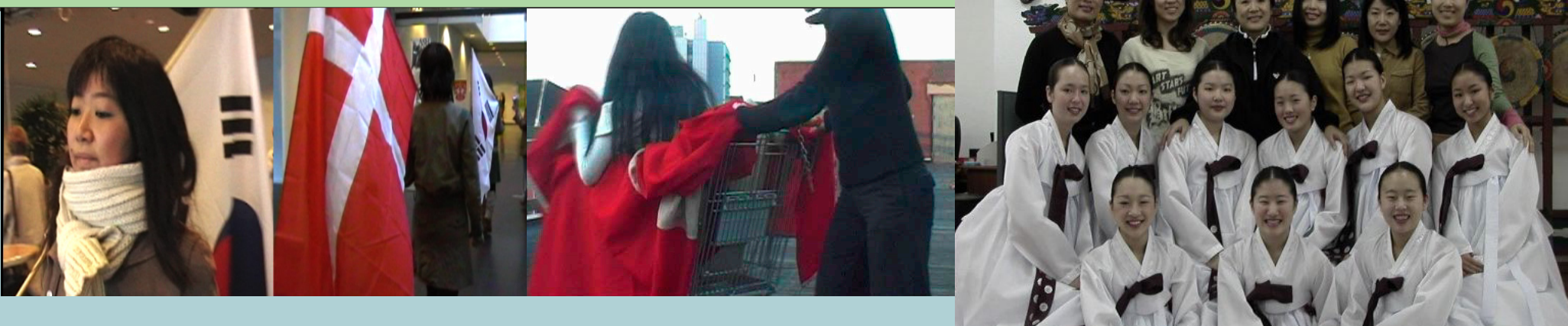
Since the end of the 1980s they began to organize themselves through associations and organizations. These organizations functioned both as meeting points and gatherings with social and cultural activities, language classes, and group tours back to Korea. As most of them had lived their entire lives in Scandinavian families, these meetings often marked a first re-encounter with their origin, and for many, a great step into a self-definition as being something more / other than pure Scandinavians.



A first hand experience from a korean adoptee

"I went to my first meeting in Koreaklubben* last year when I was 24. It was an introduction to the association and I became interested because they held information meetings about tours to Korea. When I entered the room, I was shocked to see so many Korean people. I thought to myself; "I don't fit in here at all!" Then I understood that they were all Danish Korean adoptees like myself. I think that was the first time I really understood that I looked Korean and that other people must have viewed me like just another person in the crowd. That was both a very, very scary and very happy moment that somehow changed my life. Scary because I had to confront myself with my physical appearance. No matter how much I had tried to fit into Danish society, my face would somehow always betray me and label me as a foreigner. Happy because for the first time in my life, I met other people with whom I could share my thoughts about Korea and identity as adoptee".

*Danish adoptee association for Korean adoptees.



Several Internet based groups point to the fact that the adopted Korean movement was very much a virtual community. Like many other marginalized groups, they benefited greatly from the coming of the Internet. The most important international networking was the holding of three subsequent International Gatherings, first in Washington D.C. 1999, then in Oslo, Norway 2001, and in Seoul, South Korea 2004.

"A growing number of adopted Koreans resettled in Korea and created their own groups. This ethnogenesis of an adopted Korean community with its extremely heterogeneous and diverse and completely de-territorialized character took place in the interstitial space between the birth country's nationalist vision of a global Korean community where the adoptees were automatically essentialized as Korean brethren and expected to reconnect with the "Motherland", and an arrogant Western culture demanding colonial subordination, complete assimilation and absolute loyalty".

Quote from a Swedish Korean adoptee scholar

"To apply postcolonial theory when studying international adoption from Korea may appear reasonable given the many aspects of coloniality involved in the setting; Korea's semi-colonial status from the end of the 19th century and nearly half a century as a former Japanese colony, likewise the country's half a century old subordinate position within the present day American Empire, international adoption as a colonial-style trade and trafficking in human commodities, and finally the adopted Koreans as subaltern subjects. Having a postcolonial perspective is according to me therefore arguably a useful approach to the Korean adoption issue.

My use of postcolonial theory is driven by the conviction that colonialism cannot be limited just to direct territorial control belonging to the classical imperialist period, but must be seen as the still existing relationship between the West and the non-West in terms of economic, political, social, linguistic and cultural dependence, domination and subordination not to mention the moral and ethical aspects. Anne McClintock (1992), Ella Shohat (1992) and Stuart Hall (1996a) have all three also questioned the very concept of postcoloniality and its disorienting association as an infinite aftermath. For them, the term has become a mere substitute for the "Third World", celebrates colonialism as what brought historical time to non-Western societies, gives the false idea of colonisation as a once-and-for-all and before/after process, reinstates the coloniser's privilege to de-define the state of the world and, above all, obscures the ever-present colonial projects of the West, which are still going strong. I regard international adoption to be one of these contemporary colonial projects. Together with other critical postcolonial and feminist writers on international adoption, I consider the involuntary transferral of hundreds of thousands of non-Western children on a worldwide scale after formal decolonisation as a clear reflection of a global colonial reality and racial hierarchy, and a grim reminder of the still existing astronomical power imbalance between the West and its former colonies".



7) Represented

-A private recording about their opinions on how they were viewed and portrayed by us, especially in popular culture and in commercial products.

8) Speaking back

This recording is a conversation about their political activism and their thoughts about how they viewed their current lives and futures.

NO GRATITUDE



"24 Hours in the Yellow Zone project"

Seoul, South Korea, October 2005. 10 Adopted Korean-Europeans and Korean-Americans, 1.5 Generation and 2nd generation Korean-Americans spent 24 Hours in Koroot Guesthouse, performing and discussing issues of decolonization, transracial identity, Diaspora, and healing.

A transnational movement

Groups of artists, activists, and theorists emerged in Europe, the United States and in South Korea. They criticized the underlying power structures involved in International adoption and promoted domestic adoption in South Korea. Groups like Scandinavian founded UFOlab, Adoptee Solidarity Korea, and Orientality Exhibition emerged, addressing not only adoption, but also issues of race, representation, and Diaspora.



"Adoption Action Day"

A group of artists and activists went to the four adoption agencies in South Korea and the Parliament, each holding a sign with their adoption number. Nathalie Mihee Lemoine, Kate Hers, Adel Gouillon, Trine Meesook Glerup, Jane Jin Kaisen



UFOlab, Copenhagen, Denmark 2005.