

Author's speech at KoRoot, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 2008-08-15

Firstly, I want to congratulate KoRoot on its 5<sup>th</sup> year anniversary, and express my deepest respect to its director Reverend Kim Do-hyun for his unrelenting work to support the overseas adopted Koreans. I also want to express my humblest gratitude to the translator team and to its project leader Choi Jinkyung, who has put in such an enormous amount of effort to make this Korean language translation come true, as well as to the Sonamu publishing house, and to everybody who has contributed to this publication such as Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine who did the cover design, and Raphael Bourgeois who took the photos.

I am one of Sweden's 10,000 adopted Koreans, one of Scandinavia's 25,000 adopted Koreans, one of Europe's 60,000 adopted Koreans, and one of the altogether 200,000 adopted Koreans who have been exported and scattered by the wind to over 20 Western countries. The adopted Koreans make up 90% of all Koreans living in Scandinavia, 60% of all Koreans living in Europe, 20% of all Koreans living in Australia and New Zealand, and 10% of all Koreans living in USA and Canada. No other country in modern history has sent away so many of its own citizens and children for international adoption as Korea, as the adopted Koreans make up between 25-30% of all adoptees who have been born in the Third World and who have been adopted to the West. At the same time, every year 1,500-2,000 Korean children are still sent to Western countries for international adoption, and Korea is the third biggest supplier of adopted children to the West. The practice of international adoption was also founded in Korea after the Korean War, and international adoption is therefore certainly one of Korea's main contributions to world history.

This book originally came out as my Ph.D. dissertation in Korean studies at Stockholm University in Sweden in 2005, and was subsequently published in English in the following year, and it is thus now finally out in Korean. I also want to tell you that just before I left Sweden in July, a German academic publishing house contacted me and expressed an interest to translate the book into German, and just before I came here today, I checked the statistics regarding the most widely spread Swedish dissertations, and this book which can also be accessed on the internet in its English language version, has by now been uniquely downloaded by 34,499 people, which makes it the most popular Swedish academic publication coming from any Swedish university.

So why has this book of mine been published so many times, and why is it so internationally well-known and read, used at it is at several universities around

the world as course work, as a starting point and as an inspirational source by journalists, artists and political activists, and cited and referenced to by adoption research scholars both in sending and in receiving countries? I don't think that it is difficult at all to understand this, given that international adoption from Korea affects millions of people around the world, with the background of approximately 200.000 overseas adopted Koreans, and therefore the Korean adoption issue is not just a Korean experience, but truly a global phenomenon.

However, except for my book, there are no books at all on the subject within Asian and Korean studies as adopted Koreans are not considered to be a part of Korean history and society, and there are no previous books on the subject within ethnic and migration studies as adoption is not considered to be a part of international migration. The Korean adoption issue is truly one of the most forgotten chapters in modern Korean history, and the adopted Koreans are also without doubt the most invisible group within the Korean diaspora, and some of the most transnational and queer subjects in the contemporary world.

I also want you to know that this book also has caused me a lot of pain and sorrow, and that it has unleashed many dramatic events and actions which truly have been life changing for me. The response and reaction to the book both within the academic world of Korean studies and adoption research and outside it among the adoption and Korea related contexts and communities in the West, has been extremely hostile, and especially some white women who have adopted Korean and Asian children, some white men who have married Korean and Asian women, have been waging a campaign against me which in the end has resulted in me being branded and shunned in the media and in the academia as an anti-West, male and bourgeois hater, as well as an inverted racist who goes to far when criticizing the adoption industry and the white empire, as well as Western colonialism and Western racism, and Korean ethnic nationalism and Korean Confucian patriarchy.

So what is then the message that I want to convey with my book? To summarize, this book is about the history of international adoption from Korea from its beginning during the Korean War and onwards up until today, including an analysis of the principal reasons and driving forces behind this enormous forced child migration, which has been going on for the last 60 years. By the use of a postcolonial and feminist cultural studies perspective, I connect the Korean adoption issue to issues regarding gender and class as well as to Korean nationalism and the Korean diaspora, and I try to understand how the Korean society imagines the adopted Koreans by analyzing a collection of Korean media articles, pop songs and feature films

representing overseas adoptees. My conclusion is that the adopted Koreans haunt and torment this country and its people, by reminding of a tragic modern history including Japanese and American colonialism, a failed nation building, national division and civil war, a brutal developmental state, a rigid patriarchy and class society, and a continuous colonial relationship to the West. At the same time, the adopted Koreans are also promising a brighter future and a hope of reconciliation and reunification for all Koreans in the world, including overseas and adopted Koreans, and South and North Koreans, by being the most extreme products and results of modern Korean history and contemporary Korean society, and the most marginalized group within the Korean diaspora. Especially the adopted Koreans who come back to Korea are seen as bearing the hope of being able to stitch together Korea's tortured past with its chaotic present, to bridge together the different parts of the Korean diaspora and the two Korean nation states, and in the end, to comfort and heal a people which are truly as lost and hurt, as damaged and confused, and as orphaned and homeless as the adoptees themselves.

On the other hand, even if up to 500 adopted Koreans reside within Korea today, and even if up to 3,000 adopted Koreans visit Korea every year, the adopted Koreans are still not considered to be a part of Korean history and Korean society. The full history of international adoption from Korea has therefore not yet been told, and the complete truth regarding the principal reasons and the driving forces behind this enormous forced child migration from Korea have not yet been revealed, settled and accounted for. Furthermore, few Koreans know that many adopted Koreans are also suffering from loneliness and isolation, and racism and discrimination, and that for example suicide is 4-5 times more common among adoptees than among white people in some Western countries.

So thanks for enduring this perhaps a bit long and tedious author's speech, and thanks for coming to this anniversary and book release event, and finally I want to dedicate this book to the whole Korean adoption community, which for me encompasses both all the adoptive family members in the West and all the biological family members in Korea, as well as the spouses and children and significant others and friends and comrades of all adopted Koreans, who altogether are also a part of this global phenomenon of international adoption, as well as a part of the modern Korean history, the overseas Korean diaspora, the contemporary Korean society, and in the end Korea's past, present and future. Thank you once again!

Tobias Hübinette

It is an honor to be able to speak today at this important celebration for the publication of *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*. We are especially thankful for Rev. Kim, who recognized this book's importance and potential to change Korean society.

I have known Tobias Hübinette for about seven years. During that time he has published numerous papers and also tirelessly supported other researchers, artists, and activists. He has supported not only the adopted Koreans, but anyone of any ethnicity or nationality who shares his common vision of a more just world. This book is just one part of Tobias' larger body of work that extends outside academia and has become a social movement.

Lately I have noticed that in conversation, many transracial adoptees, of all ethnicities, use a postcolonial lens to refer to their experiences. These are very academic ideas, yet this kind of talk just seems to be in the water. How did it get there? Isn't it strange that a whole community of people, most of whom are *not* academics, have some knowledge of post-colonialism and it just comes up in common conversation?

I think this kind of phenomenon is a direct result of Tobias' work. It is also a testament to his ability to say things in a way that everyone can understand. It proves his ability to say things that matter, to point out the things we need and want to hear, but couldn't quite say for ourselves. Perhaps more than anyone, Tobias has enriched our understanding of ourselves as adopted Koreans and the world that created us.

Tobias is also one of the most generous people I have ever met. He has been supremely generous in sharing his work for our community's common benefit. Like many others, I am indebted to Tobias for providing me with much of my education. He has provided me not with a degree from a university. Rather he has given me an education that is important to my everyday life. He has nurtured my own understanding about Korean adoption through the many, many articles, books, songs, pictures, and movies he has shared with me.

Tobias is a true leader in our community and an important Korean studies scholar in the West. I think we are all proud to call him our true friend. So, many congratulations to KoRoot and Dr. Hübinette. We wish your book success in Korea and look forward to the pivotal impact on Korean society that this book is sure to have.

Jane Jeong Trenka 鄭敬我

KoRoot, Seoul, R.O.K., 2008-08-15

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