

A decorative border with a repeating pattern of stylized green leaves and branches surrounds the central text area.

TRANSNATIONAL KOREAN ADOPTION

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The image features a repeating pattern of stylized green leaves and branches on a white background. In the center, there is a dark green rectangular area. At the top of this dark green area, there is a smaller, lighter green rectangular tab. The word "HISTORY" is written in white, uppercase, sans-serif font in the center of the dark green area.

HISTORY

Korean War

- 1950-1953 Korean War

- Over 100,000 children orphaned
- Over 10,000 mixed-race children abandoned

- U.S. narrative of rescue and benevolence

- Redirects attention of U.S.'s military presence in Korea from violence and war to “saving children”
- Justifies U.S. involvement in Korea
- Enables U.S. citizens to practice their patriotic duty by “saving” Korean orphans from the threat of communism



1960s-70s: Korean Industrialization

- Korea transformed from an agricultural society to a modern industrial nation with “an astonishing speed and a horrifying efficiency”
- Majority of relinquished children from working-class unwed mothers, and intact poverty-stricken families
- Adoptees as “victims in a pursuit of greater national economic prosperity”
- US domestic adoptions become more scarce
- Women’s rights movement
- “Adoption was legitimized by a left-liberal ideology that framed it as progressive anti-racist act of rescuing a destitute child from the ‘miseries of the Third World,’ and a way to create so-called rainbow family.”

1980s: Peak of Korean Adoption

- 1984 -1988 international adoption from Korea peaks with 6,500-9,000 cases a year
- Korean government deregulation of adoption policies leads to adoption agencies to compete with each other and engage in profit-making adoption practices
- 1988 Seoul hosts Olympics
 - Showcased Korea as modern democratic nation
 - Korea criticized for profiting from “exporting children”
 - Korea drastically reduces international adoptions and releases a plan to gradually phase out international adoption

1990s and Today

- 1997 IMF Crisis
 - Phase out plan “revised”
- Today
 - “Nearly 90 percent of the 1,250 South Korean children adopted abroad last year, most of them by American couples, were born to unmarried women, according to the [Korean] Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs.” (NY Times)
 - Domestic adoptions surpass international adoption
 - Annual international Korean adoptions <1,000 in recent years





REPRESENTATIONS
OF KOREAN
ADOPTEES

American Representations

Through the United States' sixty-year history engaging in transnational Korean adoption, Korean orphans and adoptees have continuously been used by American popular media and society to construct nationalist narratives of rescue, benevolence, and neoliberalism that obscure a history of American imperialism, violence, and military occupation in South Korea.

Korean Representations

- Adoptees as “always already” part of the collective Korean national identity
- Re-appropriate adoptees to fit Korea’s modern international “brand” as successful, cosmopolitan, etc.
- Erases history of adoptees as unwanted in Korean society

Korean Adoptee Representations

- Importance of including Korean adoptee voices and productions
- Narrates the Korean adoptee experience from an adoptee perspective
- Provides nuance and complexity to mainstream adoption narratives
- Agency of Korean adoptees