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TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION, *HALLYU*, AND THE POLITICS OF KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE

SO YOUNG PARK

In recent years, major South Korean networks such as KBS and MBC have produced a proliferation of reality television programs that feature transnational adoptees of Korean descent and their return to their birth country. The Korean Broadcasting System's *그사람이 보고싶다* (*Geu Sa Lam*) is a talk show that presents a panel of transnational adoptees who address the audience directly, providing mini-narratives of their childhood and their overseas adoption. A toll-free number is displayed on the screen, and remarkably, family members are sometimes reunited—on live television. The Munhwa (Culture) Broadcasting Corporation's *꼭한번 만나고 싶다* (*Ggok Han Bun*) resembles a talk show in format but, unlike the KBS program, uses dramatizations of familial separation and overseas adoption to tell the life stories of children before and after their adoption, sometimes airing short documentaries that follow journalists and producers in their search for the lost siblings and parents.¹

What is most striking about these shows is the contrasting mix of the super-technological and the traditional. On the one hand, the programs have high production value and use twenty-first-century Internet and media technology to track down long-lost relatives. As is widely known, South Korea is one of the most wired nations on earth, with over two-thirds of households having access to high-speed Internet. Communication between televisers and the audience travels at the speed of light. On the other hand, the sudden reunion reality shows tell a decidedly traditional story: an ages-old narrative of the search for lost origins and the restoration of broken family ties.

This curious blend of the new and the traditional perhaps explains why the shows are so popular: on a symbolic level, the return of the transnational adoptee resonates with the national story of the division of Korea in the 1950s, and with what several scholars have called “Korean reunification discourse” (Hübinette, “Orphaned” 228). In this interpretation, the transnational

adoptee's personal narrative of separation and trauma represents the collective political trauma of the nation as it became divided in the aftermath of the Korean War. In this light, the figure of the transnational adoptee taps into the painful history of "victim diaspora" (231): the mass domestic displacement and worldwide emigration of Koreans that resulted from the rapid industrialization and modernization beginning in the 1960s. It's not difficult then to observe how adoptees have been represented as subalterns—voiceless and powerless—in the Korean imaginary.² Indeed, feminist scholars such as Janice Raymond have linked the practice of transnational adoption to larger global problems such as human trafficking and the illegal "trade in organs" (Hübinette, "Orphaned" 229).

The television shows, however, signal to both domestic and international audiences that the culture as a whole cares about transnational adoptees, the so-called victims of diaspora. Furthermore, the televised welcome of ethnic Koreans who are culturally Western provides a space in which to examine the fascinating figure of the transnational adoptee and of personal—and politically implicated—narratives of separation and adoption. In this essay, I trace the figure of the transnational adoptee to shed light on how popular television shows and films mediate personal narratives of orphanhood, adoption, and return to produce new narratives that promote the idea of a cosmopolitan South whose identity no longer hinges on its political difference from the communist North. By tracing the figure of the transnational adoptee in programs like *Geu Sa Lam* (*GSL*) and *Ggok Han Bun* (*GHB*), as well as films on transnational adoption such as *Susanne Brink's Arirang* (1991) and *My Father* (2007), we can discern how television and film mediate personal biographical narratives to produce collective narratives that seek to erase the painful memory of war and diaspora. Key to understanding this process is the transnational adoptee's return, which has consequences not only for his or her birth country, but also for the transnational imaginary. This is a particularly opportune moment to examine the figure of the transnational adoptee because of the success of *Hallyu*, or the "Korean wave," a renaissance in Korean arts and entertainment that has enjoyed popularity across Asia in the last decade. Through *Hallyu*, the figure of the transnational adoptee of Korean descent has entered into the transnational imaginary.

THE FIGURE OF THE TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTEE

The history of adoption in the West and in Asia intersected in the aftermath of World War II, when American families adopted large numbers of children from war-torn countries. Beginning in the postwar years to the end of the Korean War in 1953, children from Asia, and primarily South Korea, were sent

as adoptees to the United States. In the 1970s, transnational adoptions from Asia steadily increased, reaching record-high numbers in the 1980s (around 10,000 a year). In fact, the largest group of international adoptees in the US is of Korean descent.

In *The Seed from the East*, published in 1956, Bertha Holt describes how she and her husband, Harry, changed legislation in Congress to adopt eight biracial children from Korea. They adopted children known as “GI” or “UN” babies, and eventually established the Holt Agency based in Seoul, the oldest and most respected international adoption agency in Korea (21).³ What began as one Oregonian family’s religiously motivated, humanitarian project became an international concern, as transnational adoptions became popular in the 1980s. But also in the 1980s, especially in the wake of the ’88 Olympics in Seoul, Western media began to examine critically adoption practices in South Korea. Charges of commodifying and exporting children became widespread, creating a cause célèbre. As Tobias Hübinette explains, “Particularly during the 1980s, the military government created a thriving and profitable adoption industry with close to 70,000 international placements” (“Nationalism” 117). Hübinette suggests that “international adoption was used as a method of decreasing the numbers in an over-populated country, as a child welfare practice to avoid costly institutional care, and as a goodwill strategy to develop political ties to, and trade relations with, important Western allies” (“Orphaned” 229).

In 1989, perhaps in response to the scrutiny by Western media and allegations from North Korea, an MBC documentary directed by Chae You Chul and produced by Lee Geung Hee tracked down adoptees of Korean descent in Europe (“MBC Special: Overseas”).⁴ Among the group was a twenty-six-year-old Swedish woman named Susanne Brink, who had been adopted when she was three. Focusing on Brink’s story as a “tragedy,” the documentary pointed out the failures of overseas adoption, blaming the country as a whole for abandoning its children. The tragic elements included Brink’s physical and verbal abuse by her adopted mother, years of loneliness and struggle, a suicide attempt, and single-motherhood—she was the only caretaker of her daughter Eleanora.

The MBC production team reunited Susanne with her Korean birth mother, Lee Ok-soon, tracking their reunion—described in the voice-over as an “emotional typhoon”—from Brink’s arrival to her eventual departure from Kimpo Airport in Seoul. The reunion was remarkable not only for its emotional power, but also for providing a moving metaphor for the sense of collective loss, longing, and hardship experienced in the aftermath of the postwar diaspora.

Brink's story of unhappy childhood, marked by physical abuse and emotional estrangement, struck a nerve; she quickly became a celebrity in Korea and in Sweden. Following the success of the documentary series, MBC produced a feature film, *Susanne Brink's Arirang* (수잔 브링크의 아리랑), directed by Jang Gil-su and starring Choi Jin-sil.⁵ Choi was one of the best-known and highest paid television actresses in Korea until her suicide in 2008 ("Top Actress"). With its unconventional depiction of a Korean-Swedish adoptee's troubled early life, the movie was one of Choi's early successes. At the time of her death, Web sites of transnational adoptees singled out her work in the groundbreaking film, attesting to its significance to the adoption community worldwide.⁶

Throughout the early to mid-90s, in the aftermath of the Brink life narratives, transnational adoption and adoptees continued to evoke collective anxiety (Yang; "Babies"). The steady increase in transnational adoptions coincided with another cultural phenomenon: back in 1983, KBS began to facilitate reunions between long-lost family members within South Korea, bringing together thousands of people (Hübinette, "Orphaned" 232). More important, in 1985, KBS televised the reunions of families from the North and South, some separated since the outbreak of war in the early 1950s. These episodes are truly remarkable for their visual and aural intensity: people cling to each other, and language virtually disappears, to be replaced by the sound of wailing. The most wrenching scenes are those of leave-taking: North Korean family members leaning out of the windows of buses that carry them away into a country estranged from the South. The televisualization of the past making traumatic returns into the present is represented at its most raw, almost brutal form.

As recently as September 2009, these North-South reunions have continued to evoke fascination and anxiety alike. In a series of articles and videos, BBC correspondent John Sudworth has documented the reunions of families separated during the war ("Korean Families"). Sponsored by the government's Unification Ministry, the reunions are open to 200 families who have been selected by lottery to search for long-lost relatives. The average length of separation runs into the decades. Lee Sun-ok, for instance, searches for younger sisters with whom she lost contact sixty years ago; Kim Yu-jung, 100 years old, searches for her daughter, Hye-gyong, last seen when she was sixteen. Describing the scenes of reunion, Sudworth writes: "Fathers and mothers cling to lost sons and daughters, husbands to wives, and sob uncontrollably, grieving for the more than five decades of lost time" ("Koreans Prepare"). In a follow-up article, Sudworth interviewed Kim Yu-jung's family after its brief (eleven-hour) reunion: Hye-gyong's South Korean sister states, "She was 16 years old when I last saw her; she is now 75. . . . [S]he has been so very, very lonely. After

60 years in the North she still thinks of us and of our old home in Seoul that she left behind, and she cries a lot” (“Korean Family’s Tale”).

The case of Kim Yu-jung, searching for her daughter in the North, eerily mirrors that of Lee Ok-soon and her daughter Susanne Brink. In the MBC documentary, Lee and Susanne are shown clinging to one another in tears. Because neither speaks the other’s language, the reunion scenes center on the body, with the two women holding onto one another. In fact, the image of the mother’s body recurs in family search/reunion programs like KBS’s *GSL* and MBC’s *GHB*. In episodes featuring transnational adoptees from the United States, Sweden, and Belgium, the rhetoric of nationalism and ethnic belonging is translated via the mother’s body; that is, the relation between the returning adoptee and the birth country is naturalized via the bodily yearning for and embrace between the adoptee and the birth mother.

An analysis of synopses of *GHB* episodes that aired between 2003 and 2007, from MBC’s Web site, reveals that adoptees almost always search for their mothers, rather than their fathers (“Ggok Han Bun”). On camera, the adoptees identify themselves using the names given to them by their Korean mothers (Gyung Hwan, Jung Sun, Yoo-min, Mee-young, Jin-hee, Sang-tae, Soo-bong). Although the age of the returning adoptees ranges from the twenties to the mid-forties, and the period of separation from about twenty-three to forty years, key words associated with the mother’s body/mother country recur in the personal narratives: words such as longing (그리움), emptiness (허전함), and homesickness (향수병). Of particular note is that female adoptees outnumber male, with several of the women citing the birth of their own children and the experience of motherhood as the motivating factors behind their search for their birth mothers.

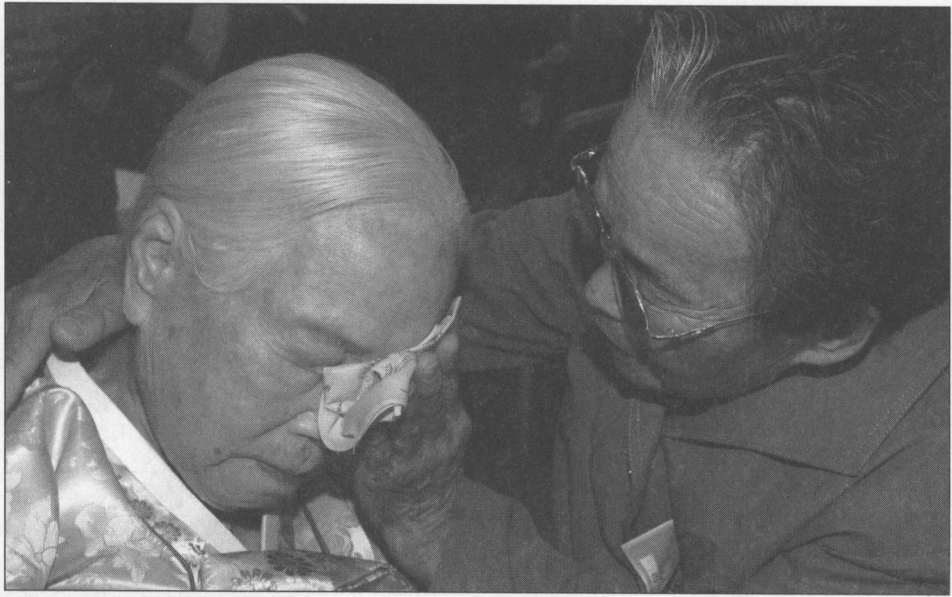
The transcript of the April 29, 2008 episode of *GSL* featured two female transnational adoptees: Jung Young-ha (Mindee) and Kim Soon-hee (Lena).⁷ *GSL* shares many similarities with the MBC show, but unlike *GHB*, the KBS show does not include dramatizations or mini-biopics within the program (“Geu Sa Lam”). The personal narratives of Young-ha and Soon-hee center on the body, and indicate that their return to their birth country was motivated by their desire to understand the Korean bodies they inherited from their mothers.

By video conference, the adoptee Jung Young-ha, a forty-year-old woman named Mindee by her American adoptive family, begins by telling how at the age of five her grandmother brought her to city hall. Through the Holt Agency, Mindee was then adopted by a Michigan family in 1977. In a detail that seems to come straight out of Homer’s *Odyssey*, and again accentuates the significance of the body in narratives of transnational adoption, Mindee describes the colored birthmark on her right inner thigh (“Episode 46” 5).

When asked why she began to search for her family, Mindee responds: "In 2006, while planning a trip abroad, I came across my adoption files that had been kept by my adoptive mother. My son was five years old at the time. When I read that my grandmother had given me up when I was five, I was shocked. I began to feel what she must have gone through giving up a child."⁸ In this scene, the figure of the transnational adoptee is represented in triplicate: the five-year-old Young-ha, given up for adoption; the adult Mindee, discovering the origin of her adoption; and her son, the child of a transnational adoptee and the same age as his mother when she was adopted.

The narrative of Kim Soon-hee (Lena), a thirty-three-year-old woman from Germany, began similarly to that of Mindee: she was left on the steps of Daegu city hall, then sent to a municipal orphanage, then to the Holt Agency in Seoul, and adopted to Germany in 1976. Lena's narrative also returns to the body: she reveals that she had a scar, under her right rib cage, the precise origin of which, it is implied, only the birth mother might know. When asked to talk about the motivations behind her search, Lena replied that as a dancer, she loves to express herself through her body. Although she has a German adoptive aunt who is a dancer, Lena said that when one thinks of Germany, one does not particularly think of dance. She had always wondered if her love of movement and dance came from her roots in Korea (that is, her mother's body). Lena concluded by saying that she wanted to tell her birth family about her happy life, and also about her desire to fill the empty space in her heart left by their absence.

The striking and haunting presence of the mother's body governs the narratives of both these transnational adoptees, of Susanne Brink, and of the mother-daughter, North-South reunions John Sudworth reported. Here is the nexus where we might locate transnational adoption and its figures as analogues for lost relatives in the North. In fact, the reunion story of Kim Yu-jung and her daughter after sixty years haunts and compounds the significance of more recent images of transnational adoptees returning to Korea in search of their birth mothers. Add to this the fact that family search shows like *GSL* and *GHB* are marketed primarily to a female, middle-class, non-professional audience, and it's easy to see why the iteration of the search for the mother makes for arresting and popular television.⁹ The popularity of family search shows might also be traced to the fact that the adoptee's return and the potential end of her separation from both her birth-mother and birth-country provide a manageable, less harrowing re-presentation of the primal longing for the reunion of the Korean peninsula. Unlike the family members from the North with whom only a temporary reunion was possible, the transnational adoptees could return to South Korea and be reunited with their family—permanently. In the realm of popular culture, a happy ending is made possible through the



Recent reunions between family members from the North and South separated by the Korean War (AP Photos/Yonhap, Han Sang-kyun).

translation of a personal narrative of trauma into a political one that still persistently haunts the peninsula, as well as East Asia, to this day.

TRANSNATIONAL REUNION AND PERSONAL NARRATIVES

What's at stake in these shows of North-South and transnational reunion is the representation of how complex personal and political narratives intermingle to form new narratives that attempt to erase or leave behind the pain of war and diaspora. The reification of the Susanne Brink documentary into a popular feature film two years later reflects an increasing use of

the technologies of mass media to narrativize the nation's repressed, painful stories for consumption by wide audiences. Much more so than the documentary, the film downplays the transnational adoptee's traumatic return to a foreign birth country and the linguistic barriers between Brink and her Korean family by relying heavily on melodramatic conventions, structuring the film on scenes of physical abuse, romantic betrayal, early pregnancy, suicide attempts, mental breakdown, and religious conversion.

The commercialization of personal narratives for wide consumption—what might be called a melodramatization of individual, idiosyncratic life narratives—is also at work in the dramatizations and mini-biopics in MBC's *GHB*. Although to a lesser extent, KBS's *GSL* also taps into the melodramatic strain in the personal narratives it chooses to showcase. Transnational adoptees' stories are often interspersed among domestic stories of wrenching separation. The April 29, 2008 episode featuring Jung Young-ha, for instance, also includes a sixty-two-year-old woman looking for her mother and sisters. Tragic stories recur with unrelenting frequency, as domestic searchers of lost family members point to immigration, divorce, illegitimacy, and poverty as causes for their separation. Taken together, the narratives of transnational adoption and domestic estrangement represent the collective longing and loss experienced in the aftermath of the Korean War and the ensuing decades of diasporic activity, further exacerbated by rapid industrialization and immigration.

What's new about the way in which personal narratives of transnational adoptees are melodramatized in Korean popular culture, however, is that they serve to promote an underlying political purpose. In addition to broaching painful topics like abandonment, poverty, and abuse that center on the bodies of mothers and children, the family search shows and films about transnational adoption collectively attempt to project two key ideas of contemporary Korea: 1) as a wealthy and prosperous nation with the advanced technological means to effect the seemingly impossible—the reconstitution of families and the rewriting of origin stories; and 2) as a globalized nation hospitable to foreigners and, by extension, foreign capital. It is essential to understand the adoption-themed programs in the wider political context of Korea's status as the tenth biggest economy in the world, and its desire to join the group of G-8 nations in the coming years. The nation's journey away from the Asian financial crisis that almost derailed it in the late 1990s has been marked by efforts to generate cultural capital, so to speak, by rehabilitating the painful stories associated with the practice of transnational adoption and the historical, social, and economic circumstances that necessitated it in the first place. As Drucilla Cornell writes, the practice of transnational adoption is fraught with “political and ethnic complexity” (234), especially for emerging nations

with established adoption relationships with the United States. During the 1990s, Paraguay's domestic politics hinged on passing anti-adoption laws: "All the [political] parties had one thing in common: they promised to outlaw all adoptions to the United States" (235). Cornell observes: "By 1995, Paraguay, a nation of only 4 million people, had become the largest supplier of adopted children to the United States." In the case of Korea, Cornell notes a similar desire to separate the nation's image from the stigma associated with transnational adoption: "South Korea's struggle to become a 'modern' nation led to the decrease in adoption" (260).

Recently, there has been a movement to stop transnational adoptions from Korea altogether; in fact, the current administration of Lee Myung-bak has indicated that overseas adoption will be phased out in the next three to four years (Kim). The Ministry for Health, Welfare, and Family has published statistics that show that overseas adoptions have been steadily decreasing, and in 2007 announced that for the first time, domestic adoptions outpaced transnational ones ("S. Korean").¹⁰ Government agencies see the decreasing number of transnational adoptions as an index of Korea's wealth, and a positive sign in its continuing bid to join the G-8 nations.

Key to achieving this goal is the transformation of the personal and political trauma of transnational adoption into a new form of cultural commodity; more specifically, the raw material of trauma is translated into watchable, popular media through a process of melodramatization that in turn attempts to occlude the painful historical past of war and diaspora. What is at stake politically is the rebranding of South Korea as an open, cosmopolitan, multilingual nation ready for global capital. We will see this process at work in the film *My Father* (2007) below, but for now, I want to stress that the national rebranding of Korea centers on the staging of melodramatic returns through the personal stories of adoptees from Western countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Germany, and especially, the United States.

Part of the national rebranding has already happened with the onset of *Hallyu* (한류), translated as "the Korean wave." The term describes the pan-Asian popularity and cultural dissemination of Korean pop music, television, and what has been billed as Asian extreme cinema, such as Park Chanwook's film *Oldboy* (Buruma). *Hallyu* as transnational phenomenon is often seen as the logical outgrowth of Korea's growing economic status and power in Asian geopolitics and the global arena.¹¹

Although *Hallyu* covers a broad spectrum of Korean popular culture, it has enjoyed particular success with television serial dramas, especially melodramas (Yin and Liew 221). Korean serial dramas have been translated into Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese, and are popular in places as diverse as

Hong Kong, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia (Onishi, "Roll" A1). As early as 2004, Norimitsu Onishi of the *New York Times* used the term *Hallyu* to describe the remarkable success of *Winter Sonata* (겨울연가), about a Western-educated architect and amnesiac who recovers his lost childhood, memory, and Korean identity when he returns to Seoul. According to Onishi, the drama and its soft-spoken star, Bae Yong Joon, generated an estimated 2.3 billion dollars in tourist and entertainment revenues in both Korea and Japan. Bae was nicknamed "Yon-sama" by his Japanese fans, composed mostly of middle-aged women (in Japanese, "sama" being "an honorific reserved for Japanese royalty") (Onishi, "What's" A1). Bae's popularity reached its peak when Junichiro Koizumi, the Prime Minister of Japan at the time, quipped that he himself needed to work extra hard to earn the name "Jun-sama."

As Bae Yong Joon's popularity shows, the wide appeal of *Hallyu* melodramas depends on what might be called the transnational viscosity of the performers. In *My Father*, directed by Hwang Dong-hyuk, the popular biracial actor Daniel Henney plays the role of James Parker, who enlists in the army to search for his birth parents in Chuncheon, Korea. In many ways, the film is a vehicle tailored for Henney, who plays an American who does not speak Korean. The figure of the transnational adoptee haunts this film, particularly because Henney himself is the son of a transnational adoptee of Korean descent. More intriguingly, the film simultaneously displays and ignores the actor's biraciality: in the world of the film, James Parker, the character Henney plays, is ethnically Korean.

The film contrasts sharply with *Susanne Brink's Arirang* on many counts: James's adoptive family is loving and supportive, not abusive; James emerges as a conciliator between Korean and American soldiers at the military base; politics in the film do not center on North-South reunification but engage with the American military and conflicts between Korean and American soldiers. In fact, there is scant reference to the North per se, except through the general American military presence on the peninsula. The film is more fluidly plotted than the chronologically linear *Arirang*, partly because James's birth father, Hwang Namcheol, is on death row for murder and has numerous flashbacks to his past life of hardship. Despite Hwang's sentence, James fully accepts him and longs to hold him physically, especially since he knows that his mother, Eunjoo, has passed away. The film is in many ways propelled by James's desire to have a picture, any image, of Eunjoo, which Hwang is mysteriously unable or unwilling to provide, despite James's repeated requests. In fact, the life story and physical appearance of the mother are not revealed until the very end of the film, when Hwang engages in a violent fight with another inmate to claim a black-and-white photograph of Eunjoo. The film

concludes with James discovering, through a DNA test, that he and Hwang are not genetically related. After a short period of estrangement, James decides to become Hwang's son by taking his surname and registering under Hwang's family records at city hall, writing down "Chuncheon, Korea" as his "permanent address," rather than the United States. The reconciliation between Hwang and James is effected at a transnational level when Hwang sends the black-and-white photograph of Eunjoo to James in California.

The final surprise, however, comes at the end of the film: as the credits roll, the audience is shown footage from adoptee Aaron Bates's real-life search for his father, which took place between 1996 and 2001. As video clips flash on-screen, it becomes clear that this short gesture toward documentary is meant only as a coda to the story, and not as a central text, as was the case with the Susanne Brink narratives. This directly contrasts with the Brink documentary and feature film, both of which were built on a documentary apparatus (i.e., investigative journalism with its sense of social justice) that led to Susanne's search for and reunion with her mother, as symbolized by the image of their bodies clinging, almost becoming one entity. In contrast, *My Father* rests on the failure of the documentary apparatus: James fails to find his birth parents. But this failure yields an entirely new narrative of transnational adoption. A reverse adoption occurs in which James adopts Hwang, a man to whom he is not biologically related, but one with whom he forges cultural ties.

In fact, *My Father* renovates the figure of the transnational adoptee by dissociating him from the mother's body—and its filiation with the rhetorics of bloodlines, ethnic belonging, and nationalism (e.g., "motherland," "birth country")—by providing instead a cultural connection to the new Korea of the new millennium. From the beginning, the mother's body is missing from *My Father*: Eunjoo is always already a photograph, an image. The mother's body, so vitally central to the narratives of Susanne Brink and those featured in *GSL* and *GHB*, has been abstracted and dematerialized into an image, replaced by a cultural father-figure who reenacts a scene of birth. In a sequence that is both bizarre and powerful, Hwang slowly and painfully spits out of his mouth the crumpled picture of James's mother, which he has hidden from authorities before he is brought to solitary confinement. The graphic image of the globular object issuing from his mouth, the contortions of his body, as well as the fact that he is in "confinement," position the father as giving birth to (a photograph of) the mother. The creation of the mother through the father at the son's persistent request highlights not only the significance of the father, but also the desire to erase the mother's body. In a film that posits that the maternal body is not an issue in transnational returns, it ironically portrays that body as literally issuing from the father's mouth.

This scene displays the process of melodramatization on several levels. First, there is a gender reversal in which the abjected, imprisoned Korean father takes on the role of the suffering, guilty mother who awaits the returning child/adoptee, a role that makes possible the adoptee's melodramatic return. In addition, the father gives live birth to an object that represents both mother and child, collapsing the two separate entities (as we've seen in countless reunion scenes) into one in his mouth. Although he produces the mother from his body, the photograph might also represent the (cultural) son whom he has painfully created and given birth to through his invented tales about James's origin. Finally, the photograph itself undergoes the process of melodramatization: it's an image on paper that becomes saturated with the father's saliva and tears, thereby bearing the traces of his suffering, and ultimately becoming an overdetermined object of melancholic expiation passed from father to son.



This publicity photograph for *My Father* highlights the idea of a happy return for transnational adoptees (Cineline Co., Ltd., 2007).

The birthing scene in *My Father* also helps us understand how the political context of *Hallyu* transforms the figure of the transnational adoptee. As we've seen in family search programs like *GSL* and *GHB*, the representation and experience of the returning adoptee has been moored to the mother and her body. The film breaks with that tradition, replacing the mother and her body with the father and his body, all the while retaining the melodramatic apparatus I've outlined above. What is the significance of such a move? By detaching the figure of the transnational adoptee from the mother's body and, by extension, the search for lost familial bodies, it dissociates the figure from the decades-old North-South reunification discourse, and from the "victim diaspora" described by scholars and historians. Films like *My Father* created under the cultural and political logic of *Hallyu* stage melodramatic returns through adoptee narratives to effect national rebranding, but with this twist: in *My Father*, the transnational adoptee as a figure becomes truly transnational, no longer tied to the mother's body or the mother country through bloodline or family history, but allied instead with the father through cultural affinity. *Hallyu* as a national and political campaign offers the opportunity to cultivate Koreanness, as it were, through the image, the melodrama, and the music of its culture. *Hallyu*, that is, replaces the mother's body and the primal longing for her. In this light, the diaspora does not have to come home; it can stay back in adopted countries and consume products of *Hallyu*, forgetting about the mother's body and the mother country, and forging instead a cultural connection with the images, visual media, and filmic representations of a cosmopolitan and newly globalized South. Or so the political narrative runs.

ADOPTEE NARRATIVES AND THE TRANSNATIONAL IMAGINARY

In 2004, MBC produced a follow-up documentary on the European adoptees it featured in 1989. It reported that Susanne Brink is now a middle-aged woman who writes an advice column on transnational adoption for a Swedish newspaper. Fifteen years on, in keeping with recent government policy that seeks to end overseas adoption, the documentary producers urgently called for an end to the perception that Korea exported children abroad ("MBC Special: Mother"). As transnational adoptions become fewer and fewer, adoptees will less likely be portrayed as subalterns and resonate less as analogues for the lost relatives in the estranged North. In fact, we might anticipate the gradual decline of family search programs like *GSL* and *GHB*, especially in light of how China and Guatemala now lead the world in terms of transnational adoptions ("Top 15").

The adoptees' stories and their performance and framing contribute to changing the way Korean culture perceives itself and is perceived in the transnational imaginary. This essay has examined transnational adoptees of Korean descent returning from the West, but what if the new generation of returning transnationals come not from the West but from places closer to Korea? Continuing its tradition of chronicling the effect of diaspora on children of Korean descent, MBC began airing the second wave of "MBC Special" documentaries in May 2008. These investigative reports focused on Korean businessmen and their abandonment of Vietnamese wives and their now nationless, fatherless children. Now in their infancy and early childhood, these children constitute a new generation of the transnationally displaced, who draw attention to the darker side of the globalization story occluded by the success of *Hallyu*. These children recall the "GI" or "UN" babies abandoned by American fathers in the aftermath of the Korean War. What will their search for and return to their fathers look like? How will their returns differ from those of adoptees from Europe and America? How will their dual Asian ethnicity be understood? And what does it mean that the apparent economic and cultural power of a country is signaled by the way its fathers leave their children behind in less developed nations? As many societies, including Korea, face pressure to further Westernize at astonishing speeds in order to maintain their place in the global economy, we might do well as scholars, policymakers, citizens, and consumers of culture to consider these difficult questions about the figure of the transnational and his or her return.

NOTES

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1. *Geu Sa Lam* literally translated means, "I want to see that person," but might be understood colloquially as "I miss her/him." The title of the MBC program *Ggok Han Bun* is similar in meaning: "I want to meet that person, if only once." All subsequent references to the KBS and MBC shows will use the following abbreviations: *GSL* for the KBS show and *GHB* for the MBC show.
2. For instance, see Hübinette's discussion of Park Kwang-su's *Berlin Report* (1991) ("Orphaned").
3. For more information about the history and current programs of the Holt Agency, see their Web site (www.holtinternational.org).
4. The 1989 documentary can be accessed at iMBC.com for a small fee.
5. *Arirang* is the name of a well-known Korean folk song.
6. See, for example, Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (www.goal.or.kr).

7. During the research for this essay, back episodes of KBS's *GSL* were not available for viewing on the Internet. I would like to thank Ms. Kim Sae-young, one of the writers of the show, for sending me a transcript of the episode that aired on April 29, 2008.
8. On the April 29th broadcast, Mindee spoke in English. In the KBS transcript, her words have been translated into Korean. This is my translation back into English of Mindee's original narrative, which will also be the case in the second adoptee's story, except that Lena's narrative was originally spoken in German.
9. Family search shows like *GSL* and *GHB* are usually broadcast during the morning hours after the national news (after the morning rush hour).
10. On a related note, the United States joined the effort to "overhaul" adoption processes overseas by ratifying the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption in December 2007 (Gross). The Convention calls for an end to "shady" financial dealings, child abduction, and the purposeful misinforming of both birth and adoptive parents.
11. For instance, see Yin and Liew's study of *Hallyu* in contemporary Singapore.

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