

Abstract

This thesis explores the return of South Korean Adult adoptees in significant numbers began in the late 1980s, slowly picking up in the mid-1990s, and maintaining a steady flow today. Within this movement of return adoptees, there is a population that decides move to South Korea for extended to indefinite periods of time. These individuals have jobs, form communities, and redefine social expectations of the trajectory of international adoptees remaining in their countries of birth.

Four dominant categories emerged among the fourteen adoptees that I had the opportunity to interview: The Cultural Negotiator, The Expat, The Global Citizen, and The Deportee. The cultural negotiator adoptee travels and lives in South Korea to get a stronger sense of their ethnic and cultural identity by learning the language and experiencing the culture. They reside in different circles of adoptees, expats, and native Koreans and take on multiple cultural scripts to perform effectively in belonging in different social settings. The Expat adoptee returns to South Korea for reasons that are similar to non-Korean Americans travel to work in South Korea. They are exercising their ability to travel and live across the world and spend a few years abroad because of personal growth beyond ethnic identity, economic means, and convenience all while maintaining a relatively strong American identity. The Global Citizen adoptee internalizes a cosmopolitan sense of the world. They can imagine themselves living anywhere abroad, but they just happen to live in South Korea because it is easy logistically and legally. Lastly, the Deportee is a Korean American adoptee who was adopted to the United States but did not acquire citizenship. As a result, for one reason or another, they have been deported back to South Korea and are unable to navigate the country with the same ease as their counterparts with American citizenship.

Boomerang Adoptees: Making Moves in South Korea

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Introduction

The return of South Korean Adult adoptees in significant numbers began in the late 1980s, slowly picked up in the mid-1990s and has sustained itself until today. The return of international adoptees has become a part of the "adoptee life cycle," and many are actively encouraged to return to learn more about their ethnic and cultural roots (Kim 2010). This desire to reconnect has driven some adoptees to return to South Korea to live for an extended to indefinite period of time. However, this desire is not the only motivation nor the only explanation to understanding the movement of return adoptees; there are material consequences that must be examined in why Korean Adult Adoptees have returned to South Korea to live. This phenomenon is a movement in which infants and children are essentially adopted into to various Western families only to return later to live in South Korea for extended to indefinite periods of time. Some adoptees may return to their adoptive countries, never to look back while others will continuously maintain a life in which they will cross and re-cross borders to maintain ties to the motherland. I coin this movement, a Boomerang Movement.

In popular media narratives such as televised series that document birth family reunification, there is an assumption made by adoptees and non-adoptee's alike, that Boomerang Adoptees are individuals that are unable to move on from their past and are either unable to have a successful life in their adoptive countries or willing to give up everything to live in their country of birth. These narratives are often constructed for the voyeuristic pleasure of onlookers and are often sensationalized to increase viewership (Kim 2010). There is little mention to the legal and material circumstances that have allowed this flow of boomerang adoptees to occur such as the more accessible pricing of

transcontinental flights or the expansion of the F-4 Visa, a program that allows for Overseas Ethnic Koreans to live and work in South Korea without restriction that was adopted in 1999 (Nelson 2016).

Overtime, Korean American adoptees, have been able to reclaim their stories in the media landscape and have been able to politically reposition themselves within Korean society. For example, adoptee visual artists have been able to situate their activism in their work to show that adoption does not always equate to a guaranteed better life as some Korean nationals may believe (Kim 2010). In addition to the visual art world, journalists like Kaomi Goetz have been able to use their platform and continue to privilege the voices of adoptees who return to live in South Korea in forms such as podcasts.

Within the academic realm of adoptee return to South Korea, research has been limited to two primary authors: Eleana J. Kim and Kim Park Nelson. Kim's research grounds understanding of adoptee returns as creating alternative spaces of meaning that can build adoptive kinship ties and reside in a space of in-betweenness. Kim explains that the return population that she interacted with between the summers of 2003-2004 is not the result of "failed assimilation, biologicistic reductionism, or regressive nationalism" rather, the return opens up for the possibility for a diasporic citizenship and the benefits it can provide (Kim 2010:209). Although, Kim is very critical of the participation of adoptees in a form of diasporic citizenship as she has found that many articulate that they cannot choose between two essentialized identities of either being Korean or American; this becomes problematic when there is a perceived inherent inability to integrate into Korean society to do their adoption, and the inability to (re)learn cultural scripts (Kim 2012). Ultimately,

Kim's assessment of adoptee return concludes that many are searching for lost pieces of themselves, but it is not always at the rejection of their adoptive family or nation.

Nelson's research on the Korean adoptee bubble in Seoul provides a better insight to the lives of return adoptees. She covers topics such as why adoptees move in the first place and what their experiences are like navigating the country of their birth. She notes that there is not an inescapable pull that bring adoptees back to South Korea as Kim may suggest, instead it is often because it is a viable option for them to make when they review their choices in moving to a next stage in their lives. She provides an overview of the dating scene in South Korea, struggles of learning the language, and balancing their own expectations as well as "the burdens of high expections of Korean cultural competency...because they are perceived to be Korean" by native Koreans (Nelson 2016:188). Nelson presents alterative possibilities for Korean returns, but still relies on the assumption that adoptees reside within a liminal position that they are not comfortable in and does not offer extensive reasons to Adoptee's decisions to remain in South Korea.

The two researchers conclusions are different, but not in conflict with one another. They both find that the adoptees they interacted with between 2003-2006 to be a diverse set and have no single motivation for moving to South Korea as adults. They also find that there are usually no compelling reasons for adoptees to remain in South Korea beyond a matter of convenience. To some degree, both authors primarily speak on the identity formation and identity politics that Boomerang Adoptees are subjected to, and while this is important to understand, the goal of my research is to expand the material consequences of the adoptees that were living in Seoul in the summer of 2017 and move beyond a reductive identity crises narrative. There is a clear chronological gap between the two

authors and me, which answers why some of our findings are different. Additionally, while the other two authors utilized ethnographic techniques such as observation, interaction, and the collection of oral histories, there may have been topics of conversations that did not come up as naturally and so some perspectives may only be accessible via a direct question and answer interview. The primary goal of this thesis is to expand on the understandings of adoptee returns, as well as to expand on the knowledge of why boomerang adoptees remain in South Korea, choose to leave South Korea, their thoughts on obtaining dual citizenship (an option that was not available for adoptees prior to 2011), and belonging in South Korea. The answers that many of my participants aligned with previous literature, but some answers were also not what I expected coming into my research.

Four dominant categories emerged among the fourteen adoptees that I had the opportunity to interview. The Cultural Negotiator, The Expat, The Global Citizen, and The Deportee. The cultural negotiator adoptee travels and lives in South Korea to get a stronger sense of their ethnic and cultural identity by learning the language and experiencing the culture. They reside in different circles of adoptees, expats, and native Koreans and take on multiple cultural scripts to perform effectively in belonging in different social settings. The Expat adoptee returns to South Korea for reasons that are similar to non-Korean Americans travel to work in South Korea. While the category seems ironic, and that outsiders may view their return to South Korea as a form of repatriation, it is clear that they strongly associate themselves with American identity. They exercise their ability to travel and live across the world and spend a few years abroad because of personal growth beyond ethnic identity, economic means, and convenience all while maintaining a relatively strong American identity. The Global Citizen adoptee internalizes a cosmopolitan sense of the

world. They can imagine themselves living anywhere abroad, but they happen to live in South Korea because it is easy logistically and legally. One of the primary differences between an Expat Adoptee and a Global Citizen is the lack of desire to associate oneself with a strong American identity. Lastly, the Deportee is a Korean American adoptee who was adopted to the United States but did not acquire citizenship. As a result, for one reason or another, they have been deported back to South Korea and are unable to navigate the country with the same ease as their counterparts with American citizenship.

The categories mentioned above serve as a way to help better frame the spectrum of adoptees that move to South Korea. Through a presentation of nine different case studies, I put forward profiles of adoptees to understand their motives to move and remain in South Korea. While using only nine case studies to present my research limits my pool of experience to draw upon, it does allow for me to analyze better the material circumstances that influence their decisions in tandem to their varying levels of identity as Korean American adult adoptees. In the final chapter, I explore the intersections of the three categories and unfold complicated narratives to why adoptees remain in South Korea beyond a measure of convenience. While a majority cite economic stability, avoidance of racial discrimination in the United States, or just a general desire to not to return to the United States, others feel the exact opposite in that they are economically trapped into staying in South Korea or that it is less safe for them to live there on a permanent basis.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapter One, I provide a brief review and background overview and literature on international adoption and Boomerang Adoptees. Chapter Two presents nine case studies and three profiles that better situate the

understanding of adoptee return to and residency in South Korea. Chapter Three explores the intersections of The Cultural Negotiator, The Global Citizen, the Expat in their navigation in Korean society as Korean Adult Adoptees. The Boomerang Adoptee community is complicated. It is filled with adoptees who would consider themselves to be repatriating back to their county of birth, but also adoptees who maintain an incredibly strong American identity despite living in the country an extended period of time. The purpose of this thesis is to expand the knowledge of this phenomenon and present a case of adoptees that are returning to South Korea beyond a desire to search for lost identities.

Chapter 1

Background and Literature Review

The Situation

The boomerang movement of adoptees has quickly turned into a spectacle with an audience of both adoptee and non-adoptee alike. Journalists and documentarians jumped at the opportunity to record the narratives of return, many of which framed the topic as “adoptees, having achieved resolution about their origins, could then be freed from the question or traumas of the past and psychologically “move on” from their past” (Kim 2012:300). The media reports of adoptee return often framed them as “short-term roots tours or birth family search attempts” and asked why an adoptee “would give up a good job and comfortable life to come to [South Korea] to reach at a cram school [hagwŏn]” (Kim 2012:300). These widely circulated stories often construct the adoptee’s return as one who is unable to achieve success in a Western society or willing to give up their success in exchange for remaining in their country of birth. However, the construction of success has shifted and it is far more complex to understand adoptee return and their decisions to return to South Korea.

There is a multitude of material consequences which allowed for this movement to occur and paved the way for adoptees to make a move back to their country of birth, especially after Korea began to expand its global interaction in the early 1990s. One, air travel to Korea had become significantly cheaper. Second, as the internet became more accessible and wide spread, adoptees began to connect with one another across the country and across the globe to discuss their experiences. Third, media outlets began to broadcast reunion stories and often sensationalized the phenomena. (Kim 2010). Fourth, and arguably

the most important for more extended to an indefinite residence is the inclusion of Korean adoptees in the F-4 visa program for Overseas Koreans in 1999 (Nelson 2016:162). Although, the F-4 visa has been criticized due to only applying to Koreans who left post 1948, meaning that “it mostly applies to diasporic migrants who reside in Western countries” and excludes millions of co-ethnics that traveled before 1948, over half of which reside in China, Russia, and Japan; it is important to note that all adoptee returnees are covered under the F-4 Visa as they were adopted after the formation of the South Korean state (Nelson 2016:163).

Tired and frustrated by the way Korean American Adoptees were being framed to the media, many adoptees have since turned to report on their own experiences and provide platforms for others. For example, Kaomi Goetz, the producer of Adapted Podcast, spent July 2016- April 2017 collecting stories from Korean American adoptees who have resettled in South Korea to live. Similarly, adoptive parents, such as Maggie Jones, have also begun to reframe narratives. While Jones is not an adoptive parent of a Korean American adoptee, she is a mother of two internationally adopted children. As a reflexive parent, she became interested in the older generations of international adoptees and had provided space and reporting on the experience of return. In 2015 the New York Times Magazine published her article, “Why is a Generation of Korean Adoptees returning to South Korea.” She covers explanations of motivations for their returns ranging from political activism to end the flow of inter-country adoptions to a simple longing and desire for reconnection to one’s birth country.

The article covers multiple stories, but focuses on one adoptee in particular, Laura Klunder. She made the move to South Korea in 2011 after attending an event the summer

of 2010 known as the Gathering in Seoul, a Korean Adoptee conference devoted to bringing together the community (Jones 2015b). She left behind her life in Minneapolis with a partner she loved and moved to a country where she had no friends, no employment options, and no fluency to the country where she was born. Upon arriving, she began spending her time with other adoptees that were a part of Adoptee Solidarity Korea (ASK), who focuses on lobbying for legislation that has helped reduce the flow of Korean children overseas with a goal of making International Korean adoptees extinct (Jones 2015b). Laura Klunder's story is important to understand, because it is portraying an image of the return adoptee to the general public. Her decision to buy a one-way ticket to Korea feeds into a narrative that adoptees may want to return to South Korea for an indefinite period of time, without much planning behind it. For Klunder and other adoptees who return, this is their reality. However, it is important to understand the full realities of other adoptees and why they return.

Academic research walks a fine line between wanting to distance the image of the adoptee return from loss and belonging while simultaneously relying on adoptee's articulations. The research is conducted primarily by two authors and between 2003-2006. Previous literature is unable to fully answer why Boomerang Adoptees remain in South Korea to live and primarily focused on the identity politics of return as opposed to material consequences that enable many adoptees to make the move.

A Brief History

The roots of transnational adoption as we know it today began in 1955 when an American Korean War veteran, Harry Holt, adopted eight children from South Korea (Liem 2000). Harry and his wife, Bertha, would go on to inspire a movement of Americans

to adopt children from war-torn Korea. In 1956, the Holt's would found one of the most influential international Adoption Agencies in the world, Holt International Children's Services. The Holt Agency would later be responsible for placing more than 60,000 of the 150,000 adoptions from South Korea to the United States alone (Liem 2000).

The facilitation of Korean American adoption has been the result of social policies between the United States of America and the Republic of (South) Korea that mirror each other in such a way that made adoption a quick pathway to family formation... On the American front, adoptees were given immigration privileges while other members of the Asian diaspora were effectively controlled through various Asian Exclusion Acts practiced by the United States before 1965 (Nelson 2016:52). This allowed Americans, primarily white Americans, the ability to build multiracial families through adoptions. In South Korea, the government began to formalize overseas adoptions through a special agency of Social Affairs (Liem 2000). The initial hopes for adoption would protect children of multiracial origins, often children of American and other United Nations soldiers and Korean women, in an attempt to shield them from potential discrimination post-Korean war. In an interview with Arissa Oh, a scholar on the origins of international adoption, she states that "Koreans have this myth of racial purity; they wanted to get rid of these children. Originally international adoption was supposed to be this race-based evacuation" (Tong 2015). Concern for multiracial children was shrouded in stigma and the fear for these children to fully integrate into Korean society. By 1961, international adoption had been able to bypass immigration laws that restricted other forms of immigration into the United States, and within the same month, overseas adoptions were officially recognized through a special agency of the Ministry of Social Affairs (Liem 2000). While this initial intent was

to shield multiracial children, it is important to note that “less than 4 percent of the current Korean American adoptee population was adopted before 1962”(Nelson 2016:41). As a result, the majority of these children could not be the product of Korean War relationships. Over time, children that were adopted overseas were not the result of the consequences of the Korean War; rather it was due to lack of social welfare implemented by the Korean Government.

International adoption became the one-stop solution for handling orphaned and abandoned children post the Korean War and as a way to resolve social crises that come along with rapid industrialization. The children were not orphaned, instead they were relinquished or abandoned by parents from a combination of backgrounds: poverty-stricken families who could not feed or educate their children, widows, or single mothers who gave up their children due to social stigma and poverty (Kim 2010:25). These children came between the period of the end of the Korean War and before the rapid urban industrialization. Many of these children were older than the infants that came later flood international adoptions of 70s-80s. This increase of infants in the adoption industrial complex was the result of rapid industrialization and urbanization, which in turn led to increased divorce rates and teen pregnancies (Liem 2000). On the other side of the world, the United States had legalized abortion during this time, had reliable birth control methods, and greater social acceptance of single parenthood (Liem 2000). Desirable children (read: white, able-bodied, and neurotypical) were less common to be put up for adoption, and as a result, many parents looked abroad to build their families through adoption.

The 1988 Winter Olympic games in Seoul led to a temporary decrease in international adoption due to the criticism that South Korea received for the export of their children. In less than ten years, international adoption plummeted from over 6,200 children adopted abroad in 1986 to 1,700 children in 1993 (Liem 2000). However, it is important to note that their attempts of stifling international adoption did not last instead it continued to follow in accordance with economic systems in the country. The Korean government had planned to cease international adoption by 1996, but in 1994 due to low domestic adoption, reopened international adoptions for multiracial, differently abled, and neurodivergent children and with the economic collapse of 1997, policies shifted once again to and foreign adoptions of children with less medical needs(Liem 2000).

Arguably, the reliance on international adoption had grown so large that it not only delayed the development of “domestic adoption and child welfare policies,” but also has been complicit in “the social disenfranchisement of Korean women (Kim 2010:25). “Lack of support for poor and single-parent families, lack of access to programs like free or affordable childcare, a growing preoccupation with population control and the continuing dependence on international aid organizations that support orphanages” all contribute to the export of these children abroad (Liem 2000). Although, is hard to determine whether or not domestic adoption would have been a viable option for Korean children that were abandoned or relinquished by their biological families because of cultural attitudes and pervasive stigma towards orphans, adoption, widows, and single and unwed mothers had a deep impact on relinquishing decisions by birth parents as well as the reinforcing the importance of blood relations in Korean culture (Liem 2000). For example, one of my participant’s friends, a heterosexual Korean national couple, intended to adopt. All through

the process, the woman wore a pillow to disguised herself as being pregnant. Unfortunately, before the child was placed in their home, the child passed away. The woman swore that it was a bad omen and vowed she would never go through the process of adoption again. Furthermore, I had met a Korean national volunteer who has a younger brother in his 30s who was adopted as an infant. She explained to me that her mother also wore a pillow to disguise a pregnancy, and intends to never tell her son of his adoption.

I do not bring up these examples to discount the clear underfunding and lack of support for a social welfare institution in South Korea, but rather to provide more nuance to this discussion of domestic adoption practices in South Korea as an alternative to international adoption and institutionalization of a child. In fact, it is cited that many “birth mothers in Korea, now given a choice, reportedly prefer to place children internationally in the hopes of meeting them again in the future, which is less likely to happen if the child is adopted into a Korean family,” and while “there are changing attitudes toward adoption in Korea, the primacy of blood and patrilineality in Korean kinship are continually cited as major hurdles to the opening of Korean adoption (Kim, 2010, p. 29). Furthermore, it is crucial that the South Korean Government fund social welfare programs to prevent the need of adoption at such a high scale, but also the society as a whole, must shift their views of adoption from one of shame to one of mundane. Before international adoption can end, there needs to be systems in place that allow children to grow up outside of being institutionalized and give parents the right to raise their children in equitable circumstances.

While international adoptions continue, there has been a steady wave of Adult Korean Adoptees returning to South Korea. The majority of returns are those who come on motherland tours, general tourism or work with the company that they may work for in

their adoptive country. Interestingly, despite the increased interest of returns, it is estimated that roughly one-fifth of the more than two-hundred thousand adoptees worldwide have returned, meaning that the vast majority of Korean Adoptees never return to their birthplace of South Korea (Nelson 2016:155). The ones that are returning have been surrounded by the imaginings of a media landscape. Their returns are subjected to either be one of deep desire to reconnect with biological parents, ethnic culture, and identity, political activism to end international adoption, or a combination of all three. Research has briefly pointed towards a more nuanced view. Many adoptees that return, often do it out of "mundane and pragmatic reasons" and that causes them to stay is that "there is not much going on at home" (Nelson 2016:171–72). While Adoptee return may be influenced by the loss of culture, language, and birth family, it is often more complicated and filtered through a broader global context of what is best for an individual to create and maintain their lives.

Literature Review

The vast majority research pre-1990s has mostly focused on the psychological experiences of domestic adoption and family adjustment and not the broader social implications of adoption at large. As adoption researcher, Katarina Wegar writes, “our knowledge of cultural attitudes towards adoptive kinship has until recently been limited by the lack of large-scale studies of community attitudes” beginning in 1964 (Wegar 2004:363). Most adoption studies focus on the adjustment of the individual within the family and “generally focused on children and adolescents, while the lives of adult adoptees have received less attention” reflecting the “implicit assumption that adoptees are and remain children” (Wegar 2004:365).

Not only does previous literature limit the views of adult adoptee experiences, they often do not include the experiences of transracial, transnational adoptees. This is important to note, because up until the early 2000s, many case workers that placed children for adoption in scenarios of matching, a practice that focuses on matching the adoptive child to physical features and mental disposition to their adoptive parents. The practice is believed to alleviate the stigma of adoption by hiding the adoption within plain sight and is viewed as a way to ensure "successful adoptions" (Wegar 2004:267). And as one of the social workers comments the purpose of matching, "helps with the bonding process" by a child's ability to look like an adoptive parent (Wegar 2004:367). While the intention is to lessen the stigma and help with the bonding process, in reality, it perpetuates the stigma of adoption as second best family formation. In the case of international adoption, many children are often placed in homes where their parents do not reflect their physical features. As a result, research on domestic adoption does not always adequately address the concerns that international transracial adoption.

Eventually, international adoption research on international adoption slowly began to be published in the mid-1990s when researchers became interested in understanding the lived experiences of Korean transracial transnational adoptee psychological adjustment. In Dr. Wun Jung Kim's case review of Korean children, he focuses primarily on the developmental characteristics of post-adoption adjustments while briefly covering ethnocultural identity formation of late adolescence and early adulthood (Kim 1995). His work primarily serves as a way to examine the Korean adoptees' experience's but urges that "studies beyond adolescence and young adulthood will be able to illuminate complex psychological issues unfolding throughout the lifespan" (Kim 1995:152).

Over time, research was slow to transition from the concern of the developmental outcomes international adoptees to the development of self-identification, specifically the social context of Ethnic Exploration for international adoptees. In Jiannbin Le Shiao and Mia H. Tuan's article, there is a focus on how social environment mediates ethnic explorations and the renewal of ethnic identity (Shiao and Tuan 2008). Shiao and Tuan assert that their "research complements the recent scholarships of psychologists on adoptee racial/ethnic identity and cultural socialization" (Shiao and Tuan 2008:1061–62). While this study begins to move away from the developmental stages of an adoptee's placement and begins to privilege adoptee's lived experiences, it remains focused on an individual's understanding of one's racial and ethnic identity within the United States. While this is important to understand, it does not satisfy understanding boomerang adoptees.

Ultimately, the research on Korean Adult Adoptee return is extremely limited. As a result, the three texts that I primarily engage with is Eleana J. Kim's book: *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* and article: "Human Capital: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Neoliberal Logic of Return" and Kim Park Nelson's book: *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism*. Eleana J. Kim writes that when adoptees move back to South Korea, they can create alternative spaces of meaning that may "supplement or even replaces" the "fantasies of national or familial reintegration" (Kim 2010:176). She points to the rise of identity politics in the 1990s that lead to the "heightened feelings of liminality and disidentification" and expresses that a recognition in "that they fit neither the dominant nonracial constructions of America as white nor ethnocentric constructions of Koreanness" (Kim 2010:120–21). The desire to return to South Korea is often a

combination of both “folklorized versions of Korean culture” and the failure to grasp “connections to place, biography, and natal family that, in their fragmentation and incompleteness, haunt adoptee subjectivities and often constitute the powerful pull that motivates adoptees’ returns” (Kim 2010:175). Much of Kim's conclusions about adoptee return is imbedded in loss and longing desire for connection to the “motherland” coupled with neoliberal processes in which adoptees are encouraged to return to South Korea as a tourist and English teacher.

On the flip side, prior to Kim Park Nelson’s research, she assumed that “adoptees living in Korea would all articulate some sort of deep and meaningful connection to the Korean nation, Korean culture, or Korean people” and cites that many of the adoptees she had spoken to often “articulated much more mundane and pragmatic reasons for moving to Korea” (Nelson 2016:172–73). Some of these reasons included to maintain relationships to birth families and others who lived in Korea, but many said that the reason they stayed is because they had nothing else going on in the United States; there were no strong ties to careers or they often had breaks with family or long-term partners (Nelson 2016:172). Nelson’s assumptions may have been influenced by the ongoing sensationalized narratives that are produced by the media, but it also paints a much different portrait than Kim’s experience of adoptees in her research in which she describes as “surprisingly impetuous decisions to suspend their university study or postgraduate schooling, to quit their jobs or career paths, or to take an extended leave from work in order to experience life in Korea or to initiate a search for their Korean family” (Kim 2010:176). Kim's portrayal of adoptees' decisions to return to South Korea is one that is filled with longing to live in their country of origin, willing to give up everything. On the other hand, Nelson's portrayal grounds

adoptees' decisions to be one of convenience and "many had left behind uninspiring or nonexistent careers in the United States or that they had experienced recent personal breaks with family or long-term partners" (Nelson 2016:172).

The stark differences between the two researcher's findings do not contradict one another, but rather presents a large spectrum of kinds of adoptees that return to live in Seoul for extended periods of time. On one end of the spectrum, there are adoptees that have imagined themselves moving back to South Korea at a very young age. Their desire to return is often so strong that they are willing to drop their entire lives, no matter how significant of a life they have built for themselves, to return to South Korea as they believe that there is something missing in their lives. On the other end of the spectrum, there are adoptees who return to South Korea as a matter of change in their lackluster lives. They travel and navigate the global immigration system in such a way that allows them to create a life that benefits them due to their American citizenship and the F-4 Visa.

Kim's interviews of returned Korean adoptees in the summer of 2003-2004 and Nelson's in the summer of 2006, a world that is much different than the one that we live in now and the interviews I collected in 2017. In the past ten years, we have seen the election of the first black President of the United States, but we have also seen the rise of Donald Trump coupled with the increasing rise of economic insecurity, white supremacy, and global access to technological advances. Conversely, we have seen more of a push for racial and social awareness among individuals and social movements. This push has also become prevalent in adoptee advocacy work in their desire for white parents to learn more about the experiences their children of color will face in the United States.

The material conditions that allow adoptees to return to South Korea is "the inclusion of adoptees in the Overseas Koreans Act, the expansion of the English-language teaching market, and South Korea's proactive globalization policies" (Kim 2012:300). Also, the growing online community, access to flights, and established communities have contributed to the possibility and reimagining of Korean adoptees to return to the country of their birth. Additionally, these factors solely influence adoptees who have citizenship and the capacity and ability to be able to travel across borders. Many adoptees prior to the Child Citizenship Act in 2000 were not given automatic citizenship and many "parents were unaware that their transnationally adopted children are not already automatically receiving citizenship and that adoptees who slip through the cracks, like other noncitizens, are in danger of deportations if convicted of a felony" (Nelson 2016:166–67). While the possibility of deportation may appear to be outlandish, there is a history of adoptee deportation that has occurred in the United States and continues to occur today. My experience in South Korea included attending a funeral of one deported adoptee and meeting another who is more widely known in the adoptee community than others, Adam Crasper.

I hope to further the research that has already been conducted and provide alternative viewpoints of adoptees that I met and conversed with while in South Korea. For example, Kim writes that the factors behind adoptee returns were varied, those who considered a more permanent stay were "those in their twenties and thirties who could find employment as an English language instructor" (Kim 2010:185). Nelson asserts that "the population of adoptees who have returned to Korea also share many characteristics with other Korean ethnic return migrants in that their return to Korea is motivated by an interest

in their ethnic homeland rather than by economic opportunity" (Nelson 2016:188). While this may be true for the participants that were interviewed between the summers of 2003-2006, I found that many of the experiences of the adoptees that I worked with in summer of 2017 differed from those previously interviewed.

Secondly, many of the examples that Kim and Nelson are situated in adoptee's reluctance to choose between identifying with either Korean or American culture due to their experiences of inability to assimilate fully to either culture. I would argue that these assertions are contingent upon an individual's experience of the inability to be seen as American due to their racialization and their lack of cultural awareness due to their lack of knowledge and access to learn cultural scripts. Many adoptees cite language to be a primary barrier to integration in Korean society. In the analysis of Kim's *Adopted Territory*, she writes that adoptees constantly stuck in two distinct cultures, Korean and American swinging in between two irreconcilable locations and painfully static in-betweenness (E. J. Kim, 2010, p. 185). Adding on that for some adoptees that she interviewed, that the imagery of a pendulum does not quite match the actual painful reality of existing in limbo. Nelson later writes, that adoptees share similar burdens with other overseas Koreans "of high expectations of Korean cultural competency, including understanding the Korean language and knowledge of Korean cultural practices, because they are perceived to be Korean" (Nelson 2016:188).

Kim and Nelson cite that language is a major barrier for adoptees to integrate into Korean society and the inability to work outside of English Teaching jobs. Nelson states that "Lack of Korean language skills was...the biggest reason why adoptees said they would never be able to be truly Korean or pass as Koreans" (Nelson 2016:173). And Kim

explains that many adoptees, even if gaining the ability to be fluent in Korean, will feel as though will never integrate into Korean society (Kim 2012). While these feelings are valid and true for many adoptees, there is a significant population of adoptees who do not care to assimilate into Korean culture or find it a driving inner conflict of identification. It is also critical to highlight the experiences of adoptees that do not find barriers of integration to be culture or language, but other forms of marginalized identities such as being gay or recovering alcoholics in South Korea.

Previous texts suggest that adoptees that are interviewed are generally not fluent in Korean; in Nelson's interview group only one of twenty-one claimed to be fluent enough to read a newspaper or hold a casual street conversation (Nelson 2016:173). While over half of my interviews felt or were perceived to be by others around them to be intermediate to high level of fluency. While culture and language may be cited for exclusion and discrimination, it is not one of the impossible feats according to many of my participants.

There is a chronological gap in the research, and I argue that due to the increasingly changing, shrinking, globalized world that we live in, there is an additional economic motivation and cosmopolitan experience that may not have been previously relevant to return adoptees interviewed between 2003-2006. More importantly, one question has not been addressed extensively is understanding why Korean American Adoptees who boomerang back to South Korea decide to stay. On the one hand, you have the outside perspective of boomerang adoptees by non-returners and non-adoptees as them being "retrogressive, nationalistic, and anti-cosmopolitan because it is presumed that they are seeking to restore an authentic cultural or ethnic-nationalistic identity" (Kim 2012:313). While Kim is critical of this description of adoptee returns and recognizes that many

adoptees know that they cannot “sustain an essentialized view of cultural identity for very long,” she does not go into a deeper explanation to why they remain in South Korea (Kim 2012:314). Furthermore, Kim explains that many of her participants remained in South Korea because “nothing much was happening at home” and that “many mentioned that they had left behind uninspiring or nonexistent careers in the United States” (Nelson 2016:172). The purpose of this question helps alleviate the questions of others to why adoptees remain in South Korea beyond a pathologized hue of the inability to move on from their adoption. My research also expands the realities of the material reasons behind boomerang adoptees decisions to remain in South Korea.

Methodology

My research centered around the collection of interviews from Korean American Adoptees that returned to live in South Korea. I arrived in Seoul May of 2017 and remained in the neighborhood of Itaewon for one month. The first few days were spent adjusting to the new culture, while also scrambling to get participants to interview. When I was doing my first round of recruitment, I reached out to several researchers in the field about their experiences and posted to multiple online Facebook pages for recruitments. From that process, I found only one of my participants. The rest was a combination of a snowball sample and random encounters.

One participant was from meeting him on a food tour while in South Korea. Three participants came from attending an annual Adoptee Potluck event. One participant came from reaching out to a local Non-Profit, Global Overseas Adoptee Link (GOA'L) and interviewing one of their employees. The majority of my participants, six participants,

came from a single source. A Mount Holyoke alumnae connected me to a friend she studied abroad with who happened to work at an English hagwŏn (cram school), her coworkers were four of the adoptees that I had the opportunity to interview. From those four, I was able to interview two of their significant others. The last two participants were snowballed from a single participant from the potluck.

All interviews consisted of semi-structured and open-ended questions with follow up for clarification and allowed participants to ask me to answer my questions. While I recognize that there could be complications, such as my research not being seen as objective, I found it was the best practice for me to follow. I desired to have an open dialogue with my participants rather than have an interviewer/interviewee relationship. This was influenced by the work of Michel Foucault's thinking around The Subject and Power. While he notes that relationships of communication and power relations are different, I find that the position as an interviewer creates a power dynamic that is not often confronted (Foucault 1982).

In my initial research, I spoke to many adoptee researchers who had lamented about the odd feeling of being under a microscope of being interviewed. Many of the Korean Adult Adoptee community that I met while in South Korea also felt similarly. These sentiments were clearly projecting feelings of unequal power dynamics that were occurring. According to Foucault, "human beings are made subjects," his findings had allowed him to understand the subjugation of humans in three modes: inquiry, dividing practices, and the way that humans turn themselves into subjects (Foucault 1982:777-78). Research in the relation to power become a lot clearer when we recognize that an interviewer is seen as the authority and interviewee is seen as the subjugated. There is an

exchange of unequal power when an interviewer is able to ask invasive intimate questions, all while seeming ambivalent with the respondent's answers. The idea of objectivity does not interest me, nor should I think it is responsible of me to try and convince my participants of objectivity while I interviewed them. As a result, I allowed my participants to ask me questions and also shared parts of my experience as a Chinese American adoptee to some of the questions that I asked in order to clarify some of the questions they may have been confused about.

One of the unintended consequences of my snowball sample was the result of my choices in my interview methods. For one participant, in particular, Angie, my methods made all the difference in her decision to be interviewed for this project. She came upon my project when I met her boyfriend, Sam, for an interview. Sam and I went to a coffee shop in Itaewon, and she went off to shop. Angie ended up finishing early and sat while I continued to interview Sam. While I recognize that he may have answered differently if she was not present, I think it created an interesting dynamic. Instead of being reluctant to answer questions, he began to answer more extensively and candidly than before. Our conversation continued, and they got up and left as I completed my notes post interview.

Later that night, I had received an email from Angie volunteering her time to be interviewed by me. I was surprised by this request because her boyfriend had mentioned that she rarely spoke about this topic and often refused to be interviewed by researchers and journalists. When Angie and I connected in the same coffee shop, I asked her why she had reached and if Sam had asked her for me. She replied simply that she observed how the interview between Sam and I and appreciated the conversational method that I had chosen. She went on to explain that she felt that the interview felt different in comparison

to others and I attribute that to my conscious effort to break down power dynamics as an interviewer.

A Note on Reflexivity

In qualitative research and analysis that I conducted, I modeled the approach of reflectivity like many feminist scholars before me. I spent a long time confronting ethical questions as I pursued my research project. How would I interview my participants? Would I label them as ‘subjects’ in my final product? Would it matter that I am not a Korean adoptee myself? What is the point of my research, and am I going to produce anything new that provides the Korean American adoptee any form of agency? Up until my final moments of putting my research out into the world, I questioned my intention and possible impact. I still question my intentions and the possible consequences this research will produce. As someone who would like to consider themselves a feminist scholar, I needed to be reflexive of my positionality as a researcher, analyst, and writer.

For transparency sake, the pursuit of my research question: “Why do some transnational South Korean Adoptees move to South Korea for extended to indefinite periods of time?” stemmed from personal curiosity. I wanted to understand why and how the largest international adoptee population in the United States were traveling back to the country in which they were born. I wanted to understand because as a Chinese American Adoptee, what were the possibilities of the Chinese Adoptee community moving back to China? Would the driving points be the same? Would they remain in China for the same reasons that South Korean adoptees remained?

As a Chinese American Adoptee, I am situated in an odd position as an insider-outsider. While I am not Korean, I share similar experiences with Korean adoptees as an

adoptee myself. I have been racialized, pathologized, and raised in proximity to whiteness. Being an adoptee, I found myself able to integrate into the adoptee community much more easily than a non-adoptee researcher. As a non-Korean, I believe that it was my duty to inform those around me that I was Chinese. When I first met my participants and other members of the Korean Adoptee community, many believed that I was also a Korean adoptee, and instead of passively allowing them to assume I was one, I actively informed them of my Chinese origin. Their interest piqued upon learning of my positionality in this research and wanted to know why I was doing the research I was doing.

Furthermore, this position also made me aware of the advantages I had over non-adoptee researchers. There were moments where I spent a lot of time with Korean adoptees and could have had the opportunity to recruit more individuals to participate in my interviews. For example, while at a potluck picnic, I had initially intended to attend and ask as many people to be a part of my study, but upon arrival, it felt wrong to invade a space with my agenda that was meant to be a space of community and shelter from the daily grind they experience. Instead, I chatted. I chatted with adult adoptees for the first time in my life and learned of their experiences and perspectives not as a researcher, but as a younger Asian American adoptee. If they asked why I was there, and if they showed interest, then I would ask if they did not care why I was there, but simply acknowledged my presence, then I would not bring up my research.

I found myself balancing my own emotions towards adoption as well as leaving room for Korean adoptees to fully express themselves and allowing them to ask questions of myself and why I had decided to travel to South Korea to conduct research. The answer is simple, Chinese adoptees are now becoming of age and very few of have returned to

China in the same manner as the long-established vibrant Korean American adoptee community in Seoul. Additionally, my position as a researcher is situated by Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith's thoughts in *Decolonizing Methodologies*. She notes that “insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflective and crucial, as outsider research” (Smith 2013). This method of understanding research assisted me in my decisions to interview, but also to let go of previous ideas of what it meant to be a legitimized researcher.

The questions above informed my thoughts around the phenomenon of return. However, once I had arrived in South Korea and spoken with adoptees, I realized that I had to actively unlearn and disengage with the theories I had previously worked with. I was committed to the work that I was doing, but not attached to the theories I had preconceived in my head. I wanted to prove an experience or a theory, known as boomerang assimilation—the belief that this was happening because of a failure to assimilate into Western culture. That the returns that were occurring were due to the factor of something “missing” from adoptee's lives. While for some this may be true, for the majority it is not. It is important to note that the majority of Korean American adoptees do not return to the “motherland,” and if they do, many do not stay for extended to indefinite periods of time.

At this time, I would like to qualify that the title I put forward may imply that the decision to move is automatic and unavoidable, but it is not. The vast majority of adoptees never make a trip back to the country of their birth, let alone return to live and find jobs in South Korea. Instead, the boomerang movement describes a process in which some adoptees will feel a constant pull back to South Korea and may travel between Korea and other countries. Unlike a physical boomerang, Korean American adoptees, if legal citizens

have a choice in their decision to move back to South Korea. Their returns can signify a lost and longing for birth country and culture; however, for adoptees who have returned in the past five years, it is a means for economic opportunity, convenience, and a way to escape racial discrimination in the United States of America. The term is a useful one in understanding the various experiences and movements of adoptees and understanding their decisions to return to South Korea, and more importantly, understanding why there is a population that is remaining to live in South Korea for indefinite to extended periods of time or electing to live their lives in both the United States and South Korea.

Chapter Two

A Closer Look: Case Studies of Boomerang Adoptees

The spectrum of return adoptees that were presented in previous literature echoed in my research while in Seoul, South Korea in the summer of 2017. Many moved to South Korea to reconnect to their birth culture, while others returned because there was not much else going on for them in the United States. I met dozens of Adult Korean Adoptees who had returned to live and had the opportunity to interview fourteen of them. From those fourteen, I found that four dominant categories emerged. There were four major groups that came up among my participants: The Cultural Negotiator, The Global Citizen, The Expat and The Deportee. The Cultural Negotiator travels and lives in South Korea to get a stronger sense of their ethnic and cultural identity by learning the language and experiencing the culture. They reside in different circles of adoptees, expats, and native Koreans and take on multiple cultural scripts to perform effectively in belonging in different social settings. The Global Citizen internalizes a cosmopolitan sense of the world. They can imagine themselves living anywhere abroad, but they happen to live in South Korea because it is easy logistically and legally. They do not hold a strong American identity and some distance themselves from the American identity altogether. There is a recognition of the privilege one holds as an American citizenship, but beyond that, it is nothing more than a convenient way to move throughout the world. The Expat returns to South Korea for reasons that are similar to the reasons that non-Korean Americans travel to work in South Korea. They are exercising their ability to travel and live across the world and spend a few years abroad because of personal growth beyond ethnic identity, economic means, and convenience all while maintaining a relatively stable American identity.

Lastly, The Deportee is a categorization of Korean American Adult Adoptees who were adopted to the United States, but for one reason or another, were deported back to South Korea. At this time, I would like to qualify that not all adoptees fall neatly into these categories and that there are significant intersections between the groups.

The intersections that exist among the groups help better understand the motivations and material consequences that Boomerang Adoptees are deciding to remain in South Korea or maintaining F-4 Visa's to return to South Korea to live. Their decisions often revolve around the convenience of living abroad, the fear or lack of desire to return the United States, or the inability to return due to legal implications or lack of transferable skills. My research helps better understand adoptee's articulations of belonging in South Korea, but also explanations to why many American adoptees do not seek to obtain dual citizenship. The goal of this paper is to privilege adoptee narratives and to provide an insight into adoptee returns ten years after previous literature.

When I asked my participants how long they had lived in South Korea, many commented that they had not planned to stay in South Korea for as long as they had, yet the vast majority of them also claimed that they did not have an exact timeframe of when they wanted to return to the United States. The lack of commitment to set a timeframe to leave is interesting, but also not uncommon in comparison to previous research. However, one of my participants did make it clear that she was on the path to quickly end her stay in South Korea. Jessica, a 23-year-old woman who has lived in Seoul for about a year. She and her twin sister, Riley, were raised in Boston, Massachusetts. And while her twin sister is hoping to stay in South Korea for a few more years, after a year of living in South Korea, Jessica expressed that she is ready to return to the States. She said,

When I first came here, I wasn't really sure if I wanted to stay for a year or two years or three years, and I pretty much came to the conclusion that I'm ready to leave after a year. And like, not in a bad way. I don't think it's...I would never say I disliked Korea or that I didn't like living here. I think it was just enough for me.

Part of her decision to move back is because she is a self-identified homebody. After her first year and a half in College in Los Angeles, she transferred to New York to continue her studies. She said, that "there was more culture shock going to LA than Korea" and that while she initially wanted to move to a place where there was a larger Korean population, she found that home was New England.

Jessica expressed how being connected to Korean culture and knowledge of the language had always been important to her. She told me that she had been planning to move to South Korea to teach English since the end of high school, and while she was not thrilled at the opportunity of teaching abroad, she said that it was "the most obvious way to get to Korea and be able to live here and make a little bit of money". Also, one of her primary motivating factors to moving to South Korea was to learn the language. She had learned the foundations of the language in College and wanted to continue her study of the language. At one point in our conversation, she expressed that she was awful at speaking Korean, but in Riley's interview, she expressed that Jessica was really good. Jessica admitted that she is hard on herself and said that she holds a lot of

shame of not being as good as I should be. Like everyone expecting, oh because you look Korean you should just speak it. And people not understanding why I don't...so I think I've internalized a lot of that...those feelings of shame so I always feel like I should be better, but I'm not. I don't know, I've studied it for so long and I can barely understand what people say to me.

Jessica's shame is one that the result of social expectation to her to be a vessel of cultural knowledge because she is racialized as a Korean American. While she has always been

interested in knowing about her heritage, it is increased by the interactions that she has with people.

She expressed her appreciation towards her parents for integrating Korean culture into their lives and that, "going to Korean school and being surrounded by other Korean kids and eating Korean food and having adult Korean figures in our lives...was a big part" of their childhoods. However, she also remembers how isolating being a Korean adoptee could be. She said it was isolating at points and continued,

I had experiences where my Asian friends would be like, you're not really Asian or like you're not Asian enough...I think that influenced my interest in learning Korean, like wanting to feel more Korean. The cultural aspect was always kind of important to me like learning the language and understanding not just being adopted, but being Asian American and being Korean.

The interactions that Jessica had with some of her peers while growing up reinforced a desire to connect with her Korean identity. However, after living in South Korea for a year, she is ready to move back to the United States. She will continue cross and re-cross borders between the United States and South Korea, but unlike many of my participants, Jessica intends to follow through on her plan of living in South Korea for a set amount of time.

Ironically, Riley, who did not have much interest in Korea as much as her sister while growing up, is planning on staying on in South Korea for a few more years. While she does not have a strict deadline to when she will make her departure, she did mention how both she and Jessica were warned by older Korean adoptee friends who had lived in South Korea not to get stuck as other adoptees do. The negative assumptions for adoptees to view long-term residential adoptees in South Korea is consistent with previous research. I aim to deconstruct and provide more answers to why adoptees remain in South Korea beyond a perceived inability to "get over" their adoption.

The presentation of the following case studies draws upon a diverse set of voices and their articulations to why they return to live in South Korea. While interest in the culture is a common thread, it is often not the most defining reasons to why they move to South Korea, nor is it the full explanation to why they remain in South Korea. In Chapter Three, I go into more details to why adoptees remain in South Korea. The decision to present my categories as case studies were to provide more holistic presentations of my participants. While this method has restricted me to the experiences of nine participants as opposed to all fourteen, I believe that it was the best way to present my research. While these case studies do not contain everything that I spoke with my participants about, my intention is to focus on how these four dominant categories: The Cultural Negotiator, The Global Citizen, The Expat, and the Deportee were created in understanding the lives of South Korean adult adoptee's decisions to move to South Korea and their experiencing living in their country of birth. The intention for this chapter is to move away from the assumption of loss and desire to assimilate and fully repatriate into Korean culture, but also to interweave stories in understanding an adoptee's agency and how their (in)decisions to move to South Korea is often socially reinforced by a multitude of characters.

Cultural Negotiator: Dennis, Jerry, and Lydia

The category of Cultural Negotiator is to describe the relationship that adoptees have in relation to their identity including both an American identity and a Korean identity. This categorization is not to say that other adoptees do not have an interest in learning about their birth culture and language, instead these are individuals that take comfort in having an adaptable ability or desire to learn cultural nuances, language, and have a special connection in belonging in South Korea. These feelings are strong enough for them remain

in Korea for extended to indefinite periods of time. While some of them do recognize that they may have to return to the United States due to various pressures, they make it clear that the door to travel between Korea and the United States is one that they hope to maintain.

Dennis is a 26-year-old man who has lived in South Korea for the past four years. He grew up primarily in a small town in northern Iowa that adopted a sense of love is colorblind approach to him and his siblings. And while he has resentment towards the idea, he does not hold it against the community. He describes his upbringing as formative part of who he is as a human being and still subscribes to “those Midwestern vales...of hard work and modesty and casseroles and things”. His experience while growing up was shielded from most microaggressions related to race and adoption; his experience with racism changed drastically when he moved to Tucson, Arizona. He said that,

Dealing with race issues and realizing that I was Asian American and that people saw me as Asian American and it didn't matter if I pretended I was white, you know? It didn't matter if I pretended. It doesn't matter if I have a white sounding name or whatever. People saw me as Asian, and they treated me accordingly.

One particular experience that he brought up was a time when he was a senior in high school. He was in the school's band and a swimming coach at the time had criticized the band in public, and he called her out on it. Afterward, his friends had told him that she said racist things about him and used racial slurs. It was not the racial incident that stands out most to him; rather it was how the people around him had dealt with it. He said,

I told my parents, and I was obviously very upset about it...I told my band director, and then my parents eventually told the principal or whatever, but I remember feeling very disappointed all three of those groups. Because I told my parents, but they didn't pressure. They didn't push on it. Like, it should have been a very big deal because she called a student racial slurs in front of other students.

Dennis continued to say that his parents didn't ensure that the swim coach received proper punishment for her actions and his band director, another adult figure in his life and someone who he had felt that he could seek faculty support, was overall uninterested in the topic. The administration, he said, was very weak. At no point did anyone check on how he was processing the situation or what the incident might have done to him psychologically. The experience of racial discrimination he had received and how it was subsequently dealt with made him realize that "the way Asian Americans are treated in the United States is treated very differently than other groups". He went on to explain that he believes that if any other group was targeted in that way, that there would have been harsher consequences. The experience made him realize where Asian Americans stand regarding power in the United States and how it set him on a path of racial realization.

When recounting his childhood in Iowa, he had a critical view of his upbringing as someone who is a part of a Midwestern culture and wished he had a more realistic approach in regards to acquiring tools in regards to being a racialized minority in the United States. He looks back and does not have a desire of culture camps or a special way of celebrating Korean culture, but rather a toolset to deal with racial issues in the United States. Surprisingly, despite the jarring experiences of discrimination while growing up in Tucson, Dennis feels very fortunate to have moved to Arizona because he had gained a racial awareness before a lot of Korean adoptees who remained in predominantly white communities. While his desire to have more of a racial toolkit growing up instead of the tools to retain Korean culture is one that may appear to be out of place, his placement as a cultural negotiator is even more important.

His path back to South Korea is one he describes as similar to other Korean American adoptees who return to live in the country for a year or two. He came to teach English and to learn about Korean culture, but also as a way to defer his decision on whether or not he wanted to continue onto a graduate school program or enter the job market at a low point of the American economy. After his first year teaching at a hagwŏn, he was able to transition to a job at a University and worked in a research center teaching both English and Korean to multi-ethnic children with autism in Jeonju, South Korea. He was able to secure his job due to his high-level knowledge of Mandarin, as most of the mothers of these children were Chinese. His capacity to speak English, Chinese, and Korean gave him a specialized skillset that was advantageous in South Korea and in other parts of Asia where he has worked. After two years at that job, he realized that he missed Seoul and moved back to enroll in language school to continue his study of Korean, work teaching Business English part-time all while completing an online master's program in political science.

His long-term plans include returning to the United States to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science but made it clear that he doesn't ever really anticipate leaving Korea. He explains that "I kind of see myself coming back and forth between both societies...I don't see myself having to be here" to be Korean. When I asked him about how his plans to remain in academia would help him sustain his lifestyle of choice to straddle between the two countries, he went on to explain that his focus is on United States, Korea, and Japan's political alliance. His future career would allow him to be in Korea to do language study or field study and if he has to be in the United States, then he would return during the summer.

His desire to keep a door open to South Korea is the comfort that he feels while living in South Korea. For him, living in South Korea, there's comfort in racial belonging. He was tired of being a racial minority in the United States, and while he recognizes that he is a linguistic minority in South Korea, he is one with "a considerable amount of power and opportunity." When asked if he identified as Asian American, Korean American or any other form of racial/ethnic identity, he explains that he finds solace in the academic world because he doesn't have to think about identities as much and that and stated that most of these things are social constructs. The idea of being Korean is a social construct and being American is a social construct. He went on to say that,

You can lean to be Korean; you can learn to do Korean things. I could learn...if I had the time, if I had the energy, I could literally sit in my room and practice my pronunciation until it is so good that it sounds...where you can't differentiate between a native speaker and me and I'll never have the native ability to produce the language...but I can get to a level where people wouldn't question of I'm native or whatever...For Korean people, like if I could speak the language, fluently, with zero pronunciation issues, they wouldn't question my Koreanness. You know, it is something that can be learned and constructed.

He describes his return to South Korea as not caring about his loss of birth culture; instead, he believes that the loss of birth culture is a euphemism for the loss of his birth mother, the trauma associated with losing his birth mother.

When it boils down to it, like cultural behaviors and things...they can all be learned. Even language can be learned even as an adult. I mean, yeah sure, I won't be a native Korean speaker but, you know, I'm learning Korean.

Dennis argues that his ability to learn cultural codes to navigate Korean society is one that can be acquired and used. He expresses that while he would ideally like to live in a world in which he could detach himself from having to choose between his identities, he recognizes that it's not realistic. No matter how much of these

identities are social constructs, there are still material consequences that are tied to them and that he has to be Korean and he has to be American to pursue the things that are advantageous to him in the world.

For example, Dennis believes that because he was in a Korean office in Jeonju, and that offices in that city are still traditional in many ways, he can function in the conservative professional world in Korea better than some Koreans who grew up in a more globalized cosmopolitan Seoul. For him, instead of lamenting over the loss of his culture, he said that he used is midwestern values of putting in hard work to reobtain it and benefit his life. In many ways, he described his ability to juggle his American identity and Korean identity with ease and without either one compromising the other. On the other hand, Dennis said that he does feel at times that he has to give up his gay identity to live in Korea, in his words Korea does not "know how to deal with it yet and doesn't have the systems in place yet to deal with it."

The connection that Dennis has to Korea is one that he feels he can comfortably navigate and relearn the cultural cues. His ease of obtaining a Korean identity is one that he credits his American upbringing and using the opportunity to enrich his life rather than to lament over it. Rather than his American upbringing and lack of native cultural awareness, he describes that this exclusion and point of barrier is one due to his sexual orientation rather than of adoptee identity. His comfort going in between the two cultures and desire to remain in both is why the dominant theme of cultural negotiator is most salient when speaking to Dennis about his experiences moving to and living in South Korea.

In addition to Dennis, I found that four other of my participants fell into the theme of a cultural negotiator to varying degrees. For example, Jerry, a 45-year-old man, who describes the area he grew up in as a small town in the middle of the cornfield in Minnesota. Unlike other adoptees who often remembered their upbringing in the Midwest fondly and had minor incidents of racism, Jerry hated it. He commented on the fact that "people were racist towards me and always made comments and things like that...and I just hated it...I just couldn't stand it" and has cited this as being a significant factor in wanting to be in South Korea. Although he knows that he is a linguistic minority, like Dennis, Jerry was willing to shed a racial identity for a chance of being able to blend in.

He recalled his first time traveling to Korea was in 2012 on an adoptee heritage tour and could envision creating a life for himself. When the same feelings returned on his trip in July of 2016 to meet his biological family, after a 30 day trip that was only supposed to be a visit, lead him to return back to the United States, pack up his apartment, quit his "cake [information technology] job, got [his affairs] in order and within a week, and was back in South Korea". He first began working as a cook in a restaurant in Itaewon, but soon found out that it was not for him, so after four months working in the kitchen he landed himself a temporary printing job. He expressed his deep gratitude for having the opportunity to work there and to gain experience while working in a Korean company. His coworkers were patient with him despite having little grasp of the language and of the full immersion experience he had as opposed to working in an English speaking kitchen. When his

contract was up in December, he enrolled and dedicated most of his time his studies while living with his biological mother.

Jerry's relationship with his biological family is unique. While adoptees have very limited successful searches, let alone successful reunions, I have never read or met any adoptee to have moved in with their biological family on a permanent basis. While there is a language barrier, he talked about their bond has grown stronger while he has lived with her. The fact that he has family that he is connected with, Korea “now feels like home even more” and that’s a huge draw for him. In addition to the pull and longing to be in South Korea and search for his biological family, Jerry found comfort in being a part of the racial majority. Jerry commented

I love the fact that everyone’s Korean. It seems weird because, a lot of people want diversity and things like that...um, but I’ve been in the United States for so long that I’ve seen it and so...I just like not sticking out and not having people stare at me and not have people think I’m different looking. And the Anonymous part...I love it. I don’t feel like anyone stares at me here...

The realization of no longer needing to be a racial minority is one that brings relief to Jerry. He no longer feels on the edge of having to consistently defend himself from racist remarks. The embrace of Korean culture is also a much different outlook than when he was fourteen and “just trying to be white and fit into American society” and not wanting anything to do with Korean culture. There are still moments where he hesitant when claiming a Korean identity. He said,

I would say Korean American because I'm still not that fluent in Korean and so, you know I can't...I really have embraced my Korean side, but when it comes down to it, I'm really American...like the way I interact with my mom and other people, and you know, a lot of my friends are adoptees or English speakers. So, I would say that I am Korean American, but you know, it's a hurdle we all face as adoptees because none of us...we didn't learn it as a kid, so, it's not like you can learn that overnight.

Once Jerry obtains command of the Korean knowledge, he hopes to return to a career in Information Technology. He said,

I don't think I need to be perfect in Korean, I just need to be able to understand what they're saying...I'll probably have to start off at a helpdesk which is fine, but I'd like to be able to answer a phone call and have the customer explain what's wrong and then be able to tell them. A lot of the IT terms don't translate to Korea, so they'd still be in English.

Jerry explained that once he learned the language, he felt that he could fully reclaim his Korean identity. Otherwise, adjusting to the cultural shifts from American society and Korean society has been smooth for him.

Not only does Jerry have a desire to connect with his biological family more and gain entrance to a career path in Korea outside of teaching English, but a lot of his desire to learn is also from others expectations for them to learn. He said,

I feel like I feel more Korean when I speak Korean. Because a lot of people are like, Oh, you're Korean? Like you know, when I was growing up they would be like. Oh, you're Korean? Oh, I love... and they would say something to me in Korean, and it would be something simple, but I'd be like...fuck, I have no idea what you just said, and I felt so embarrassed... like I should really know my own language.

Language is a huge driving factor for Jerry in his endeavor to claim a Korean identity. Not only is it a factor of interacting with the people he meets on a daily basis, but also by what others expect of him. It reinforces the social construction that Dennis was referring to when constructing a Korean identity. It is reinforced on an individual level, but also by the people they interact with, both Koreans and non-Koreans alike.

Conversely, the feelings of easy transition and racial belonging and blending in is not the experience for all cultural negotiators. Lydia is a 30-year-old woman living in Korea for the second time. She grew up in Minnesota and describes herself as not being aware of

her differences. She had felt that she fit in and that there were no stark memories of being discriminated against. Although, she explains,

I didn't really understand who I was and if something happened, I probably didn't think of it, and I have no memory of microaggressions or anything like that, and I'm sure they happened in High school, I'm sure they did. Like, they can't not happen, you know?

Her feelings at the time might not have registered any forms of discrimination, but as she has gotten older, she has become more comfortable in articulating her experience as a racialized minority.

When she was fourteen years old, she traveled to South Korea on a birth tour trip and vowed that she would come again when she was older, and that's just what she did. Her original plan was to spend two years in Korea to teach English and then to move to Chile and teach English for 1-2 years. Korea was to reconnect and spend time in the country of her birth; Chile was because she wanted to become fluent in Spanish as her undergraduate degree was in international business with a focus in Spanish. Before her move to South Korea, she had conducted her on informal informational interviews on her friends' experiences in teaching in Korea. They had promised her it would be an incredible experience and one that she would not regret.

Unfortunately, this was not the case. Anger and disappointment were the overwhelming emotions that dominated her first move to South Korea as an adult. The moment she arrived in Korea in 2009, was the moment of her "racial awakening" an acknowledgment that she was not white. She recounted the discrimination she felt in comparison to her white friends. The looks she would get and verbal abuse she would receive on the streets for not speaking Korean. When describes her first experience living in Korea; it is in anger,

I was getting yelled at for some reason, and I was getting stared at all the time. I don't know, I just...it was really pushed into my face. That you were different because the society is so collective... and so when someone is different, they shun that. You're not supposed to be different, and that's what they did with me, thinking that I was Korean. And in my whole view, which made me very, very angry, like I was angry that year, and in my head, this is your fault, like all you people yelling at me, this is your fault. You're the ones who can't take of your babies; you're the ones who have to ship them off. It's your fault. I don't speak Korean culture, and I don't speak the Korean language because of you not because of me. You know? And I was just so angry because of the animosity that I was feeling from these Korean people who didn't know I was who didn't know my background like they just assumed.

Her disappointment was amplified because her expectations were the experiences of white Americans who had taught in Korea. It had never occurred to her at the time, that her experience would be any different than theirs. The expectations for Lydia to be a vessel of cultural knowledge and to subsequently disappoint Korean nationals upon interaction is a burden that many adoptees experienced in the 2000s. She had described that year in South Korea as the worst year of her life. Despite her negative experience, she described herself missing Korea and being pulled back to the country.

Lydia's desire to be in Korea was strongly tied to the joy of being in the country. Despite the harsh realities of discrimination she experienced, it was not enough to keep her away. And although she planned to move back by the end of summer due to external pressures and expectations of beginning her life back in the States by her father and boyfriend who was also moving back the states.

Lydia did move back to the states in August of 2017; she made plans to renew her F-4 Visa and vowed that the doors to Korea will always remain open. She continues to say that her reason behind this choice is that,

The last time, I left, I left. I hated the country, and I'm never coming back to this country...and I came back. And I came back because I don't hate the country like I missed it. I grew to love it...and I think every Korean adoptee has a hate-love

relationship with Korea because we feel...like when we don't open our mouths we feel like we're a part of something, and then when we do open our mouths, we're obviously not a part of it. So, I mean it's the same in America too. Like inside, we're a part of that culture. Like, we identify with that culture, but then the way that we look, some people don't accept us to be American. It's always that, where do we fit in, you know? Because I don't fully fit in here and I don't fully fit in there. Where am I supposed to be, where am I supposed to belong? But, I am going to renew my visa, so it is an option to come back.

Part of the reason why Lydia is willing to keep the option to return to South Korea is that of her experience of return the second time around. She states,

Now with the increase of adoptees returning, it's way more open now. The country didn't know that that was going to happen. Not it's been pushed in their face, and it's completely changed, and it's really good to see the country change so much and become more open to adoptees.

She explains that instead of anger from Korean nationals, she now experiences pity from them. A common experience that many adoptees in my project resonate with. But, as Lydia explains, she would rather someone pity her than be angry at her for not knowing the cultural cues and Korean language.

Unlike Dennis and Jerry, Lydia had fewer feelings of wholly belonging in South Korea. She feels like she exists in an in-between state of existence. This may be attributed to her experience as a woman living in South Korea or as someone who is multiracial, an identity that she did not find out until she had met her birth mother who identifies as half Filipino, and even then, she is skeptical of the relationship. However, as a Cultural Negotiator, Lydia exemplifies qualities that make this particular theme the most salient. Her desire to be a part of the fabric of the South Korean nation. Additionally, while her return to the United States may seem on par with Jessica's return back to States, it's important to note that Lydia did not fully want to return. A lot of it boiled down to external pressures from both her family, a partner moving back to the United States, and continuing

in the development of a life that is reflective of a "successful" middle-class American life with a career to be proud of pursuing.

The three case studies that I present provides a generalized overview of the experiences that Cultural Negotiators have while in South Korea. They articulate a sense of belonging in both the United States and in South Korea, or at least a longing to belong in both cultures. In some ways, they very much identify with their American upbringing and culture and do not want to replace it or shun it; rather they envision themselves as being able to hold both identities in tandem to one another. They express a willingness to trade parts of their identity to feel the social cohesion in Korean society and to some extent, are very willing to be socio-linguistic minorities within Korea as opposed to racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. In the next chapter, I discuss further the implications of the pressures they experience in the possibility of return to the United States and why they actively choose to remain in South Korea beyond a sense of loss of identity.

Global Citizen: Brandon and Lucy

In colloquial terms, the idea of a global citizen is one that believes that they do not belong to a single nation-state but instead believes that they are a citizen of the world. While this category sounds similar to a Cultural Negotiator, the dominant theme that arises within Global Citizens is that they can imagine themselves living in any part of the world. They can appreciate Korea, but ultimately find themselves not particularly drawn to remain in South Korea for any personal desire. Whether they are a racial minority or a racial majority, their main goal is to foster a sustainable life that allows them to travel with ease. Their circles of friends are diverse, and often include close relationships to Korean

nationals in comparison to other boomerang adoptee populations. They have no firm desire to be a part of a single nation-state but recognize the privileges that a United States passport has given them.

Brandon is 37 years old and the longest residing resident of South Korea in my sample. He has lived in the country for twelve years on and off. Unlike many adoptees that I interviewed, Brandon was adopted at the age of 5, he said,

I remember being young running around as a kid. I remember being in the orphanage. I remember running around and playing with kids and stuff, you know? I remember that stuff. I remember going to the orphanage, and I remember my father, my brothers, and sisters. I remember a lot.

Growing up, he had never cared much about race and said that he identified with different races and described his friend group as more of a multiracial friend group. As he got older, he noticed himself more on the periphery of social groups, but on his terms. He said,

I didn't have a problem fitting in ...If I was on the outside, it was more of like; I made myself an outsider. I went against popular opinion on many things, Like, I was into alternative culture. Reading a lot... I would read everything by Joyce...I identified with more existentialism type of stuff...I didn't think it was because of race, for some reason I just was.

Brandon did not have an interest in viewing himself on racial terms. However, it was clear to him that others would continue to do so. He recalled a lot of visceral experiences of racism, but that after a while, they all began to blend into one another. Racial slurs were thrown at him, and many wanted to get into physical fights with him because they thought he was Chinese. His mother encouraged him to stand up for himself, but after one fight, he realized that it never solved his problems, so he just let it go.

Eventually, he told me that “if you get down to it, I would have identified myself more as white. I tried to fit in as white as I could...I did everything that a rebel white male, I would assume would have done when he was growing up”. His experiences of identifying as white are not the result of rejection, but rather the images he often associated with counter-culture movements in the media. The one face that he saw that he could identify with strongly was James Iha, co-founder, and guitarist, of Smashing Pumpkins. He said that “it was really cool that he was Asian and he was playing guitar.” He took pride in his alternative outlook on life. A self-described black sheep, artistic type, traveler, and someone who takes risks, it makes sense that at the age of twenty-five, after teaching for a while and working in areas of hospitality, he quit everything and wanted to travel. He said,

I paid off most of my student loans and sold off my car, and then I was just like, I want to travel. I didn't know where I was going to go, but Korea was definitely one of the places I wanted to go to. So, there wasn't really a doubt. I wanted to travel everywhere, but I wanted to travel to Korea first. And since traveling to Korea, I've been all over the place.

The decision to move to South Korea stemmed from his desire to travel all over the world and with an American friend who was already based in South Korea at the time, and the two spent a long time touring the country. Eventually, he made Korea his hub, established his own food tourism business and has gotten multiple businesses off the ground. He would go off and travel to the Philippines and Thailand for extended periods of time, only to return to the convenience of living South Korea. Although now, he feels a lot more rooted because he has a wife who is a Korean national, a daughter, and another child on the way.

The family that he created is one of the major reasons that he has decided to remain in South Korea because in his words,

You never know. The job market and everything...we have our own restaurants and stuff, but they're running independently now, so as long as that's happening...

then it gives [me] the freedom to do stuff. I like to travel like I said, it's always been in my nature to be wandering and going someplace...my wife is very structured, you know, she wants the kids to go to school and go to day care and stuff like that and I would be like hey, let's go and live in Thailand for a while with the kids and live frugally and um, it's very counter-culture to what she kind of has in mind, so we'll see.

If Brandon had his choice, he would freely move around the world while keeping Korea as a center to sustain his way of life. The primary thing that keeps him tied down is his wife's desire to remain settled and with a steady paycheck.

Brandon self-identifies more of as “a citizen of the world, a traveler,” it's why he likes the job sphere that he's in. Brandon does not have a strong sense of national identity or belonging, but he feels as though it has been an advantage to him. For example, he said,

There's no real reason to [assimilate into Korean culture]. It's always better to be kind of... because I've done a lot of things that are...that have been so different that, you know...that I was more successful. Like, Koreans don't see different things that are possible, and I do. They didn't realize that food tourism could become a thing, but I...I started doing the food tours like seven years ago...And that's what I'm saying; it's not like... everything is not as easy as [adoptees] think it is. You know? Sometimes, it's better to stand on your own.

Brandon describes himself as an outsider in both the United States and in South Korea. His adoption and racial identity were ones that he did not believe to have affected him. While he has returned to the country he was born, he can envision himself living anywhere in the world that would benefit him and his family the most.

Comparable to Brandon, Lucy also identifies as a global citizen of the world. She is a 34-year-old woman who has lived in South Korea the past six and a half years. Within the first minute of our interview, it became clear that Lucy juggled multiple identities to her advantage as she used her American last name strategically when “trying to pass as an American English teacher” and goes by her Korean last name in her writing and art name. She was adopted by a family in Pennsylvania, and of the people I interviewed, she had the

most negative experience. Her adoptive family was verbally, emotionally, and physically abusive and she often recalled having to walk on eggshells and a constant state of unknowing what she might experience from day to day. In regards to any racial discrimination she experienced, she said

Over a period of time, [I've] let go of a lot of the negative things. So maybe something that bothered my last year or two years ago, I'm not really too miffed about it anymore. You know, I can't really think of anything in particular. Again, I think that once people get over like, well, I guess that's a horrible way to put it, get over... the fact of what you look like, no matter what it is you look like and they figure out who you are, and who you are is a good person and they're a good person, you usually have no problems. So I guess it's about coming to heads with people who aren't accepting of the difference of others.

Her attitude had shifted greatly from when she was younger when she was angrier, but through,

a lot of therapy, like yoga training-teacher training, and meditation, I think I've definitely gotten to place where, like everyone does, you figure out that the stuff that you carry around is no longer service you and that it's time to let it go.

The path that led Lucy back to South Korea was to meet her birth family for the first time a few months before her permanent move six and a half years ago. She had initially applied for an E-2 visa which is an English teaching visa before switching over the F-4 overseas visa and stayed longer than the original one year plan. Before her arrival, she had no interest in learning the Korean culture and wanted to teach English in Vietnam because she was already more familiar with the culture. Her extended stay was due to a myriad of reasons, one of which was a long-term Irish ex-partner. They realized that moving to either the United States or Ireland was not a viable option because of work visa restrictions and opportunity. They settled on remaining in South Korea to be with one another. Additional job opportunities arose and time passed by really fast.

Lucy does intend on branching out of South Korea but does not have a specific timeline. While assessing her options, she said that would like to remain in South as she works towards to getting teaching certification because she would like to continue being an elementary school teacher and remain in the international school circuit, but recognizes that it's hard to do from South Korea and it is an expensive process. Nevertheless, she doesn't see moving back to the United States and waitressing again as a viable option to pursue that option either. Lucy is self-aware of the comfort zone that she has created for herself in South Korea and is a little regretful that she "clings to security a little bit more" than what she wanted for herself.

The life that Lucy has created for herself in South Korea is not one of strong ethnic belonging, one that is convenient for her. She utilizes the tools of having both American citizenship and the F-4 visa she receives as an overseas Korean adoptee, she explains

It's so unbelievably easy to live here. Like, once you have some language...when you have, like a lot of people covet the kind of Visa that we have, we could literally work at McDonald's if wanted to do on this visa or we can work at whatever company that will have us or teach...we're not restricted by visa laws or anything like. I really like my apartment and I have a community here and my birth family.

While Lucy feels the same power in being invisible and being able to blend in racially, her residence in Seoul is not one that creates a strong Ethnic identity. When asked what advice and knowledge she would give to new Korean adoptee arrival, she states "don't align yourself with any group" and that to seek out some people who have lived in South Korea. Other adoptees help create a community, but it's important that there is more to the relationship than the mutual identity of being adopted. And most importantly, she states that "you don't have to be Korean." She recognizes that there is a desire to be Korean and the pressure to dress and act in specific ways, and to some extent, many will have to go

through this phase, but ultimately, in the end, Lucy asserts that adoptees do not have to conform to a Korean identity to feel as if they can live in Korea.

Global Citizens are those who try to leverage the systems that are currently in place to better benefit their opportunities in lives. While they reside in South Korea, it is often one of convenience and maintains a lifestyle that would allow them to travel frequently around Asia. In the next chapter, I go onto situate both Bandon's and Lucy's thoughts on the benefits of hold an American passport and lack of desire to obtain Dual citizenship to South Korea. Both do not imagine themselves moving back to the states for various reasons and ultimately affirms their positions as global citizens.

Expat Adoptee: Sam, Tyler, and Steven

An expatriate international adoptee returning to the country of their birth seems like an oxymoron. If we look at the archaic definition of an expatriate, it is defined as someone who is exiled from their native country. It can be argued that international adoptees, as infants and children, were exiled from their native countries. They are exiled, their citizenship revoked and sent away. Before the return of South Korean adoptees, they were expected never to return. Some Korean American adoptees would claim repatriation when they return to South Korea. However, when we look at the case of the current definition of expat it includes individuals who works abroad from their home country and maintains a strong national identity should be considered an expat, and I argue that that alternative outlooks exist for adoptees are some international adoptees who believe the United States to be their home country and do not have a desire to reclaim an ethnic identity or view their return to South Korea as a form of repatriation. Additionally, these adoptees often a

negotiation of boundary work and place distance between themselves and Korean nationals.

Sam is a 26-year-old man how has been living in South Korea for over four years. He grew up in Rochester, Minnesota in an environment in which he describes as really lucky for himself. The area as a whole is a “really open-minded and highly educated” so he can’t recall if he had experienced any microaggressions in regards to his race or his adoption. In fact, to his recollection, "the hardest things were not due to race... The hardest thing I had for me was that I didn't like playing American football or baseball. I didn't like American sports; I liked soccer". For Sam, his inability to connect with his peers on his interest in soccer was difficult, but the only barrier he could remember as a kid.

Sam was always aware of his Korean background, but it was not much of an interested in him. On the other hand, his parents were,

Really into Korea themselves. After they adopted from Korea, they got really into it. Really interested in the culture and so I grew up with like Korean books and stuff. And going to Korean camps a lot. And my mom was really involved.

Sam's consistent exposure to Korean culture did not have any effect on his desire to return. He commented on how he was always proud of being Korean and knows that some people are ashamed or embarrassed by it and that they feel like their identity pigeonholes them and he never felt like that. Over time, it just never aligned with his interests at the time. Eventually, he just stopped associating himself with his Korean identity because it was not a salient identity for him.

His decision to travel and live in Korea was not from a long desire to reconnect, but rather at the insistence of his parents. They had encouraged him to travel because once he began working and earning a salary, it would be hard to stop taking one. After his

undergraduate degree, he moved to South Korea at the prompting of his parents because he expressed that he had,

No obligations back home, I was able to just start living without having a life to disrupt...I had considered it when I was really little, and then I grew up and kind of disassociated with Korea and uh, they brought it up again and they said it was a really good opportunity...it was kind of at their prompting. I really had no interest in Korea until I like, came here.

Sam's first year in South Korea was dedicated to learning the Korean language and eventually found work that allowed him to remain in the country. Eventually, he was able to make his way up as a manager of a hagwŏn and enjoys his job as an English teacher.

However, despite the lack of draw to move to South Korea, Sam currently has no desire to return to the States anytime soon because he's really happy in South Korea. Life is easy for him, and it's fun, even with limited knowledge of the Korean Language. Although, according to multiple sources and his girlfriend who I also interviewed, Sam has an intermediate-high proficiency in the language. He is comfortable, but he was quick to point out that he does not think it's a racial thing. He said,

I know that some people think because they look like everyone here, they're more comfortable, I don't find that to be true at all. Sometimes I see white people and think, Oh, another white person and then I'm like wait...I'm not white.

Sam's relationship to his Korean identity is one that suggests a much different narrative for Korean adoptees. He was exposed to his culture and was always proud to know that he was born in Korea, but his main interests and identity was shaped by his American identity. He explained while he loves Korea and he loves living in Korea, he states that his identity as an American was even more enforced when he moved. He draws clear distinctions between himself and Korean nationals, for example, he does not agree with the practices around

how they raise dogs as pets. Sam was particularly critical of the practices, he reflects on something that he heard,

Having dogs as indoor pets is a new concept in Korea. And they're just not good about it. Like, they don't walk their dogs, they don't pick up the pop...they don't like...I don't know. They're fine, but it's like a toy for them. They buy clothes and stuff, but it's a lot different from how my parents treated the dog and how I grew up with dogs. Like a family member. It's not a toy

Arguably, the treatment of dogs as toys is not restricted to a Korean societal practice, but it was enough for Sam to express his frustration around the practice and begin to draw lines that he saw between himself and Korean nationals. The lines that he was were not also drawn by him, but also by Korean nationals that he meets. Sam explained that when Koreans see him, they view him as a *kyop'o*, or an overseas Korean. The way he dresses and the way he acts signals to them that he may look Korean, but he grew up outside of the country. He is not dismayed by this knowledge. Instead, it further solidifies his identity as an American.

Sam's American identity intensified the longer than he has remained in Korea and even when he returns to the United States for vacation, he said,

it just reinforces the fact that I like being American, but I don't like being American in America. Because it's not fun. So, I think when I'm old, and if I want a more settled life, I would go back there, but right now, no desire to move back.

It is clear with this statement that Sam strongly identifies as an American. While he does describe himself as a Korean American, the Korean part of his identity is more of a modifier as opposed to a noun. He enjoys being in South Korea because of the comfortable and convenient lifestyle he is able to live in a major metropolitan city.

The American identity that Sam holds is similar to Tyler, a 35-year-old man, who has lived in South Korea for ten years. Tyler grew up in a small town in Nebraska with a

population under 1000 people and recalls growing up like ordinary Americans. His family didn't talk about racial differences, because they were the same. However, despite the resistance to speak about race, Tyler's parents spoke to him about adoption and his cultural background. Tyler said that,

They would talk to us a little about it, and when I was younger, they would take us to some Korean culture camps for adoptees. We learned more about Korean culture, and I remember that we made mandu together. We sang some Korean songs...played some games...but I didn't really care actually. I'm just...I told everyone that I was an adoptee and it didn't really matter to me.

Like Sam, Tyler had access to resources about learning pieces of Korean culture, yet it was not a significant part of his identity growing up. Dissimilar to Sam, Tyler's interest in South Korean culture stemmed from his own personal curiosity. He said,

Part of the main reason [I came to South Korea] is because I was curious about where I came from. I came to Korea the first time in 2005 for a couple of months. I had a Korean roommate in college, and he asked me if I wanted to visit Korea and to check it out, and I said okay, why not. I stayed with his Aunt and Uncle in Gimpo for a couple of months, and I tutored his cousins in English. I was able to tour around a little bit, and then after that experience, I decided to come back in 2006, and then...that's where I am now. Set out to look for a job and also wanted to meet my Korean friends again that I met in college. So it that goes like that. The whole reason I came to Korea

Instead of his parents prompting him, Tyler's decision to move to South Korea was an interest in the country he was born. Initially, he had only intended on living in South Korea for maybe a year or two, but explained that "it's such a different experience and such a different culture." In his perspective, Tyler did not return to Korea to relearn or reclaim a Korean identity; rather it was to learn about a culture that he viewed differently from his own.

When I asked about his identity, he identified as an American, and when asked if he would identify as a Korean American, he responded, "I mean, if I want to be specific

because somebody asked me like...exactly, I would say that I'm a Korean American...but generally, then I would just say American" and that he basically viewed himself as an expat. Tyler enjoyed the life that he lives in South Korea. His job as an after-school English teacher provides him with housing and the train system is efficient enough that he has no need for a car, and with those two things, he said that he could save a little more money than what he could in the States.

The lines that Tyler draws between himself and Korean nationals is a lot more defined. He comments that while he enjoys being able to blend in and that people no longer stay at him, but went on to say that "for me, it just feels like I look Korean, but inside I'm not. So...I call myself the fake undercover Korean". Furthermore, whenever he spoke about Korean culture, it was always at a distance. His adjustment to Korean culture was not difficult because he believes that for him the most difficult was understanding the military style of leadership and while it was initially hard to deal with, he said that "once you understand Korean culture, you're just oh like, oh, it's Korean culture. It's what they do...once you get to know Korean people, they actually are very cool people". There is no urge to reclaim a Korean identity, and when comparing Korean culture and American culture, he states that "the biggest flaw about American culture is that we're too independent. Too much selfish and pride...Americans don't want to listen to anybody" in comparison to Korean society's collective mindset. The usage of we further indicates Tyler's preference of maintaining a strong American identity despite spending a decade in the country.

Steven, a 47 year old man, who has lived in South Korea for 10 years and adopted by a an upper-middle class family in Michigan and would not describe his childhood as

rough in comparison to other adoptees who "have really crazy stories" and would said "I was just one of those one's that had a pretty functional...good siblings". And while he understood that he was a racial minority he did not feel it. He said "people were pretty accepting even though I was like....it wasn't common back then. Especially in Michigan, the 70s, 80s, to have...adopted. It became more of a trend later in the 90s" to adopt. He felt that he had little to no problems growing up.

He arrived in Seoul in July of 2007 and came to "know the culture, people food...job opportunity and change of scenery." While Steven was interested in learning about Korea, he was not invested in reclaiming an ethnic identity. In comparison to Brandon and Lucy, Steven holds more of an American identity. When asked how he identifies, he responded "Korean American. That's what we're called [in the United States], right? That's the title. Korean American cause we look Korean, but we're American. Our citizenship is American...I just go by it because that's just the legal term" but he associates with his American identity more than he does Korean because he is not fluent in Korean beyond basic survival needs and has only spent one-fourth of his life in South Korea.

Steven's sense of American identity really resonates with the category of Expat adoptee. While he does not care for the traditional "American Dream" life style with cars and houses like his siblings, he has adopted a more cosmopolitan image of himself. A result of now living in a more globalized world than ever before. An American passport enables the ability to travel around the world with relative ease and maintaining a life in South Korea allows him to take the time to do so. He recalled "once I went to Indonesia for a job, I was kind of like, whoa, I need to see the rest of the world. Asia is pretty cool".

On the other hand, as Steven gets older and as tensions were rising between South Korea and North Korea, he expressed a desire to get out. However, due to his long stay in South Korea, he acknowledges that due to his ten years of work history in South Korea, returning to the United States might not be a viable option. He said that "American companies don't recognize that as... most companies that I worked for don't exist anymore and/or they don't speak English". He expresses that for him, "just over the ten years, it's gotten harder because you don't have jobs here and things...just getting more and more difficult." Compared to a lot of my other interviewees, he describes that being an older adoptee is difficult in the English teaching business. He explains, "it's because they want young, good-looking" teachers. And while he keeps getting jobs, he's worried that one day his luck will run out. In some ways, Steven feels trapped and his perceived inability to move back to the United States demonstrates a timeline for Expats ability to return to the United States to reintegrate in American society and settle down with a career and family.

The categorization of an Expat adoptee include adoptees who either have a firm and steady American identity or view the United States as home in ways they can never envision South Korea. Rather than articulating any sense of in-betweenness, they are very strong in their identification as Americans and cite that as a primary reason why they could never claim South Korea as home. As we see in Sam and Tyler, both have acquired a relatively high level of Korean language proficiency, a skill that many adoptees consider a source of feeling more Korean, has not made them lessen their identities as Americans living abroad. In the case of Steven, he is unable to return to the United States after ten years of living in Korea due to his inability to transfer his skills as an English instructor in South Korea. While he may not want to choose to live in South Korea, he is unable to see

a possible transition between living in South Korea and the United States and may choose to remain in South Korea for the rest of his life. Overall, the expat adoptee views Korea as a temporary stint, regardless of the length of time, and that their established futures will be in the United States if given the opportunity.

Deported Adoptees: Philip Clay and Adam Crasper

On May 24, 2017, I woke up in the studio apartment that I was staying in and scrolled on Facebook to see a post about the death of Phillip Clay. A man that I had never met, but felt like my world had shattered. May 21, he became one of many adoptees who has taken their own lives, a statistic that is not uncommon as adoptees are projected to be four times more likely attempt suicide than the nonadoptees (Keyes et al. 2013). I want to be clear, that while adoptees are more likely to take our own lives, the circumstances and resources made available to us can potentially curb the realities.

Phillip Clay's burial was intended to be a small affair until adoptee advocacy groups stepped in to arrange that he would have a proper funeral and final resting place. After calling my mom and asking her if I should attend the funeral, I wore the darkest colored dress that I brought with me to South Korea and made my way down to GOA'L's Office where they were offering rides to adoptees in Korea to attend the funeral. Phillip Clay's circumstances were not like many of the adoptees mentioned in my previous sections, as he did not have a choice in returning to South Korea. He was adopted at the age of 8 by American parents, and 29 years later, in 2012, Phillip Clay was deported back to the country of his birth (Sang-Hun, 2017).

He was among many adoptees whose adoptive parents did not apply for citizenship because they did not know they had to, they assumed that their children would receive automatic citizenship (Nelson 2016:166–67). Similarly, when I was adopted in 1996, my mother had not thought of applying for citizenship until one of her acquaintances encouraged her to do so. It took almost five years to receive my citizenship, and to the joy of one of my mother's friends, an American flag now hangs in my childhood home that reads July 1, 1999. However, even if my mother had never applied for my citizenship, I would have been grandfathered into the Child Citizen Act in 2000. A law that would give any future adoptive children automatic citizenship as long as at least one parent was a U.S. Citizen. This law would exclude anyone who was 18 years of age 18 or older, including Phillip Clay (Anon n.d.).

Immigration and Customs Enforcement reported that “Clay entered the U.S. lawfully. But he accumulated a lengthy criminal history dating back nearly two decades—the most serious of which included criminal convictions for robbery and multiple thefts and drug-related offenses,” yet they do not mention that he suffered from alcoholism and substance abuse (Sang-Hun, 2017). Nor was there a report of bipolar disorder and other mental health issues that Phillip Clay suffered from (Sang-Hun, 2017). I do not excuse the acts of violence and the crimes in which he committed, but it is important to recognize the United States has an extensive history of criminalization of substance abuse (McNiel, Binder, and Robinson 2005). Phillip Clay is no longer alive to tell his part of the story, but another undocumented adoptee that I met while at the funeral briefly is.

Adam Crasper, 41, was deported to South Korea months before Phillip’s death. Arguably, Adam is one of the more widely known deported adoptees in the United States

as he has done multiple interviews in hopes of spreading awareness to the realities of undocumented adoptees and to potentially end the deportation of deportees. The day funeral was the first and last time I met Adam, and while one of my interviewees asked if I wanted to sit down for a conversation with him for my project, I declined. While waiting at the GOA'L office to depart to the funeral site, I overheard an interview and after, heard his frustration that the reporter had not done prior research and that he had bared his soul to multiple news agencies. At the funeral, I saw Crasper's anger and fear. The two men were not far apart in age, and both had criminal histories that led them to the deportation back to South Korea.

Adam was adopted by an American family at the age of three and recounts six years of being whipped and forced to sit in a dark basement until the parents decided that they no longer wanted the children they adopted (Jones 2015a). He would continue to bounce around in various foster homes until he was placed in Thomas and Dolly Crasper's custody, later "convicted on the charges of child abuse, including mistreatment and assault," which often included burning flesh and broken noses (Domonoske, 2016). Adam was eventually kicked out of the Craspers' house, and it is then which he first began his criminal record. He broke back in to take back his possessions including a pair of shoes and a Bible. Convicted of burglary, he served time and post-release began collecting other criminal offenses, including assault (Domonoske 2016). The shoes in which he tried to steal back, were shoes that were often given to the children of South Korea when they were adopted overseas. As one of my part pants, Samuel explained, he had the same pair of shoes when he left the country. The only remaining object he had from South Korea. Adam would eventually put his past behind him and settle down with his wife and three daughters. He

eventually decided to apply for a “Green Card to start down the path toward citizenship,” but when he did, it was pinged in ICE’s system, and triggered his deportation. A local paper, *The Oregonian*, that covered the court trial writes that Adam explained that he claimed full responsibility for his past actions and that he did his time and pleaded that he wanted to remain in the United States and that he and he wanted to do was be the best American than he could be (Denson 2016). But his pleas were not enough, and he was still deported back to South Korea, a country he had never been to prior to his departure as a toddler.

The stories of these two men are two of many and year after year; there are various newspaper articles that are written about them. While there are no reliant statistics or tracking, personal narratives come through. On a petition that created in 2010, before either man were deported back to Korea, a petition came out to support citizenships for all international adoptees. Joao Herbert, a Brazilian adoptee, deported back in 2000 at the age of 22 for a minor, non-violent drug offense and was murdered four years later (Miller and Mace 2014). As Sang-Hun of the New York Times titles their article, for many adoptees who are raised in predominately white American that are deported back to countries that they no longer connected to, deportation can ultimately be a death sentence (Sang-Hun 2017)

Currently, there are an estimated 35,000 international adoptees that are currently without citizenship ("Adoptee Rights Campaign – Citizenship For All Adoptees," n.d.). Every few years or so, there is a petition that circulates to demand citizenship for all adoptees. In 2013, an amendment was proposed to close the loophole to the Senate Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Action, which passed

the Senate but later failed to pass the House of Representatives (Lam, 2016). This resulted in a standalone bill, the Adoptee Citizenship Act, introduced in 2015, but ultimately fell through the cracks and is now being reintroduced for a second time in 2018 (Anon n.d.)

Conclusion

The case studies that were covered above are a mere sample of the diversity of adoptees who return to live in South Korea. It is clear that their experiences of returning to and remaining in South Korea go beyond a search for lost identities. While many of them do have an interest in learning about their birth culture, it is not the only reason to why they choose to live in South Korea. In addition to internal motivation, it is also typically reinforced by friends and family. The purpose of this section is to lay out nine different case studies, and two profiles of adoptees that have been deported back to South Korea to lay the foundations of examining the intersections of adoptee's experiences while in South Korea. It is clear that when adoptees with citizenship have a choice in their move, those who do not are confronted with the realities of the possibility of never being able to return to the United States.

Chapter Three: Intersections of Boomerang Adoptees

The previous chapter briefly introduces a variety of adoptees and their experiences in the United States and the motivations behind their decisions to move to South Korea. I was able to present four different categories that assist in understanding the diversity of motives for returning to South Korea and what their general experiences have been. In this chapter, I will focus on the exploration of the material conditions that help better understand trends adoptees decided to move to and remain in South Korea, why some choose to leave South Korea, their thoughts around obtaining dual citizenship, and the assumption of desire to belong in South Korea. For this section, I will only be focusing on the first three groups: Cultural Negotiator, Global Citizen, and Expat adoptees because one, I did not interview deported American adoptees, and two, the three categories have more flexibility when talking about these options because of their ability to cross national borders with a United States Passport. There are clear differences that arise when these topics are addressed among the three categories, but there are also significant intersections between them.

What's Taking So Long: Adoptee's (in)decisions to remain in South Korea

Previous research regarding the reasons behind Korean American decisions on why they choose to continue to live in South Korea is limited and relies on how other non-residential adoptees may view their peers. Previous research has focused primarily on identity formation and motivations behind return which is why there may not be enough of a holistic overview to why adoptees remain in South Korea. Both researcher's pool of participants had lived in South Korea for at least one year, and few had exceeded a timeline

of five years. Kim Park Nelson, in particular, explains that many of her participants explained that they did not see a permanent move to South Korea as a viable option. Those who do remain in South Korea often do so with the belief that they will eventually move from South Korea. To explain further, Kim provides the example of Sally Morgan, one of the many adoptees she met while doing her research. Sally, was among the group of adoptees "who had been in South Korea for five years or longer, who often talked about plans to leave South Korea, but like trying to kick a habit, would end up postponing those plans for following year or would set them into a more distant, vague future" (Kim, 2012, p. 312). Kim reasons that part of Sally and other adoptees' indecision to return is due to the having a convenient and comfortable lifestyle with a steady income and built-in community. Both authors cite that convenience is one of the most important factors to remaining in South Korea.

From the outside, adoptees decisions to remain in South Korea does not seem particularly advantageous. Kim writes that, "when adoptees extend their stays, they begin to appear to Koreans and other adoptees as failed cosmopolitans" (Kim 2012:311). They do not return "home" to continue on the path of "upward mobility promised by adoption" and are negatively judged by remaining in "jobs without any opportunity for advancement, were unmarried, and devoted much of their time to maintaining the adoptee community in Seoul" (Kim 2012:312). This is primarily in relationship to their economic opportunity within a neoliberal framework and prioritizes how others view adoptees' choices to remain in South Korea. She comments on how others begin to view the boomerang adoptees "as regressive, nationalistic, and anti-cosmopolitan because it is presumed that they are seeking

to restore an authentic cultural or ethno-nationalistic identity” and that their extended stay “begin to take on a pathologized hue” (Kim, 2012, p. 313-314).

The explanations above only cover a fraction of adoptees’ reasons to why they choose to stay South Korea. My research is better able to contextualize why adoptees remain in South Korea, especially given that the nine out of my fourteen participants did not see themselves on having any set timeline to leave the country and if under the right circumstances, six participants would prefer to live in South Korea for an indefinite period of time. While a few of the adoptees that I interviewed agreed to external pressure were great enough to force them to return to the United States to participate in the “path to upward mobility” the vast majority felt comfortable enough in determining what a successful life meant to them.

The three main factors that adoptees cited, regardless of their categorization, as to why they remained in South Korea is comfort and convenient lifestyles, various fears and anxiety towards moving back to the United States, and the lack of desire to be in the United States in general. Rather than a vague understanding of adoptees decisions to remain in South Korea, I was able to discuss with my participants why they may put off moving back to the United States. Instead of a passive choice to remain in South Korea, many saw it as a strategic way to navigate their lives by residing in South Korea and not return to the United States.

Comfort and a convenient lifestyle is an important factor to remain in South Korea, across all three themes of my participants. All fourteen of my participants cited transportation has been one of the significant benefits of living in Seoul, and many commented on the multitude of cafés everywhere they walked. There are many restaurants,

pools, computer rooms, and other forms of entertainment that are open 24 hours a day and you can order food from any restaurant and have it delivered to you, regardless of where you are with ease. While a lot of these factors of convenience may be common among most large cities, the standard of living can change drastically, and access may not be as readily available.

English teachers made up nine of my participants which is unsurprising as many return adoptees do not have the qualifications to work in any occupational field requiring Korean language proficiency. While the variety of jobs may be limited, there are some advantages to this job as it often comes with housing. Coverage of this expense alone enables many adoptees to live rather comfortable lifestyles while also paying off any additional student debt they may have back in the United States. They can travel extensively throughout South East Asia and have a work-life balance that allows for staying out late at night on a weeknight and still be able to show up to work in the afternoon. For younger adoptees, especially those that are recent college graduates, this is effectively an economic and social advantage that they have in comparison to their peers that are unable to enter the job market or are forced to live at home with their families due to economic constraints (Fry 2017). This is important to understand because Nelson explains that return to South Korea is often “motivated by their interest in their ethnic homeland rather than by economic opportunity” (Nelson 2016:188). While this may not have been true for the adoptee's Nelson interviewed in 2006, after the recession in 2008 and recovery since it has been challenging for many Americans to have the sense of economic security they did before the market crash. As Jessica's father told her and her twin sister, Riley, he was proud

that the two had even found jobs after college, let alone be able to financially support themselves independent of their family.

The comfortable lifestyle that adoptees can live also translates to the standard of living for older adoptees who have lived in South Korea for extended periods of time. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, while Lucy may want to ultimately move from South Korea once she gets her English as a Second Language international teaching certificate, she will most likely remain in South Korea until she does. The job that she currently has allows her to travel and to live comfortably. She believes that the alternative is to move back to the United States and begin waitressing again, and it is a much more labor-intensive job than the one she has now as a private school elementary English teacher. Similar to Kim's participant, Sally, Lucy also has a habit of delaying her departure from South Korea, but it is a more thoughtful decision than falling back on the convenience of living in South Korea.

The way comfort has been presented previously has been vague and typically refers primarily to the logistical aspects of living in South Korea. However, comfort extends beyond just a convenient and materialistic comfortable life. Nelson comments how many of the adoptees she interviewed "say it is difficult for them when they return to the United States because of the racism they experience as return culture shock, though most do not cite this as a reason to stay in Korea" (Nelson 2016:186). This is yet another discrepancy that I found while doing my research. In the summer of 2017, it was a few months after the inauguration of Donald Trump as the forty-fifth president of the United States. With the rise of Donald Trump came the public rise of white supremacy and the Alt-Right. Racism, now more than ever, has become more publicly wide spread than it has in the past few decades. And while hate crimes against Asian Americans have always

existed, due to the recent rise in numbers, the first hate crime tracker for Asian Americans was launched just two days before the inauguration by Asian Americans Advancing Justice, a civil and human rights nonprofit (Chen 2017).

Many of my participants, the election of Donald Trump brought up and reinforced many anxieties they had as being racial minorities in the United States. For Jerry, being a part of the racial majority was not only a comfort of being a part of a group that physically resembled him but also a means of safety. Jerry said,

My Korean adoptee friends post on Facebook about the racism that they have experienced after [the election] and like, we're talking about places like New York and Los Angeles where you wouldn't think there would be hardly anything because it's so diverse...If I was still in Indiana, I would probably be fighting people...it would just be a lot of me trying to defend myself again. And like, in the US you just never know who's got a gun, and so I'd probably have to make sure I'm safe. I don't know...at my age, I just don't want to deal with it. It's a lot better being here because no one has ever said anything to be here...racist.

Jerry is particularly concerned about the possible return to the United States because of the racism his friends have experienced firsthand and is particularly invested in wanting to remain in South Korea because of this. While Jerry does not experience discrimination in South Korea, I do want to recognize that other adoptees have experienced discrimination on the basis of their lack of cultural knowledge of their ethnic identity and the shame it brings, they also claimed that it would be better to live in South Korea as a socio-linguistic minority than a racial minority in the United States at this time.

Not only does Brandon also cite concerns around racism that he and his family may be exposed to, in the United States, there are also concerns about access to health care. He said,

you know, one of the biggest fears that I have is...well, the America I know is of discrimination and the healthcare problem. It's...you know, I've lived with universal health care basically my entire adult life, and I remember being younger and some

of my medical bills that my insurance wouldn't cover, I would have to pay for them. So, yeah, it would have been really really tough to have survived. Luckily most of my insurance covered most of the stuff, but I would be so in debt that I would never be able to survive there.

He continued to respond to my question when asked if he would return to the United States,

going back hearing things and stuff I see on the News, I would find that...I would be scared for my wife, my daughter and myself. Um, I mean now, maybe it's the media, but now all I think about when I think about America is racism, gangs, drugs, and those sort of issues.

It is clear that both Cultural Negotiators and Global Citizens cited anxiety and fear around returning to the United States due to current political climate.

Interestingly, while Expat Adoptees shared some of their concerns, they mostly felt unaffected by the election of Trump or discrimination as one of the factors that would make them stay in South Korea. For example, Steven explained that because he is a legitimate citizen, he has very little concerns about discrimination. He went on to say,

I have an American last name...and the fact that you sign something on a paper, just because they see your late name, that's it. They may not even see your face; it's discrimination right a way of they see Steven Chang Vs. Steven Smith, you know?

Steven is well aware of the discrimination that occurs, but because he is a legal citizen of the United States and because he has a white-passing last name, he does not see a lot of concerns around returning to the United States. Furthermore, Sam also does not see it as an issue. He said, "realistically, it's not going to have a great effect on me personally. Especially if I go back to Minnesota. Minnesota is very liberal, and so, I feel fine there."

While Cultural Negotiators and Global Citizens felt concerns about increased levels of discrimination, many Expat Adoptees did not feel like their lives would be seriously impacted enough to prevent them to return to the United States.

Reasons for Leaving

There were very few adoptees that I interviewed who wanted to return to the United States. Many did not want to assign a timeline to their stay and did not feel any substantial amount of pressure to leave South Korea. Jessica was the only one of my participants who was ready to return to the United States, and while Lydia did return to the States, she did not want to. She explains,

my contract ends in July...and I'll go back to the U.S. My initial decision for doing that is because Lydia, you're 30. Like, what the hell, you need to do something with your life. And I hate that because that is...family and American society telling that you need to have a certain career or you need to be in a certain point in your life at this age, and I'm following along with that because half of me agrees and half of me doesn't, but my parents are also out there telling me, like what's going on, when are you coming home...so I'm at this cross road in my life and feel like I'm having a midlife crises at 30 of I don't know what I'm going to do, I don't know where I'm supposed to be. I don't want to leave Korea, every day it makes me said walking around thinking that I only have so many days or months left here...I am not closing the door, I am coming back.

A lot of the pressure that Lydia feels is in agreeance with Eleana J. Kim's thoughts surrounding the neoliberal logic of return for adoptees. In many ways, Lydia is in South Korea working in a job without opportunity to advance, is unmarried, and her parents are concerned for her future (Kim 2012:312). On the other hand, there were other adoptees in my sample that were aware of these pressures but did not feel the same parental pressures that Lydia felt. For Tyler, his parents did not seem to have any negative feelings that he has lived in South Korea for the past ten years. He explained,

You know, most American parents...usually, American parents are very laid back. I don't know about all them, but I think most of them are in my experience. So my adoptive parents are very supportive of whatever I decide.

Tyler felt secure in his decision to remain in South Korea and even felt supported even after living in the country for after a decade by his parents.

The intersection between this Cultural Negotiator and Expat adoptee is that one of the major reasons they will leave South Korea at some point is because they do not feel as though they will find a life partner in South Korea. This echoes many of the sentiments in Nelson's work. Adoptee women tend to have a difficult time trying to find partners beyond the adoptee bubble. While some do date Americans who are also living abroad, the pool is limited to their social circles. Lydia and many other of my participants who identified as women explained that they were seen as too masculine or assertive for many Korean men who subscribed to rigid gender roles. On the other hand, adoptee men have more mixed results in finding partners, and for Tyler, he felt that he could not find a partner because he felt that many Korean women did not share the same values as he did and even went as far as explaining that Korean women tend to be very materialistic.

Finding partners may have been an intersecting piece to why some adoptees would choose to leave South Korea, I found that only Expat adoptees felt that they would leave South Korea to have kids. Part of this has to do with the hyper-competitive lifestyle Koreans live. For Sam, he explained

I mean, they have hard lives. They work crazy hours; they go to school for like...from sun up to sun down...[Koreans] are hyper-competitive with themselves. At universities here, for like tests, your name is on a big wall with everyone and your grade

Tyler is in agreeance, he said that "raising a child is better in American than in Korea because, you know, too much competition...they just stress about studying all the time in Korea," and while he notes that it's common in a lot of other Asian countries, he thinks it's particularly poignant because Korea is ranked fourth highest suicide rate in the world.

Beyond the different personal reasons for leaving permanent Korean residency behind, there are professional reasons as well. For example, in the case of Dennis, he plans

to stay in South Korea for another year or so to complete his master's degree before returning to the States for a Doctorate of Philosophy in Politics focusing on the alliances between the United States, Japan, and South Korea and continue on path in either academia or the public sector. Despite the conversations about either the inevitable or possible return to the United States, all adoptees felt strongly about maintaining their F-4 Visa and continuously desire to travel between the countries.

Dual Citizenship

In 2011, adoptees and other overseas Koreans gained the ability to obtain dual citizenship. Adoptees who apply and become dual citizens may vote and have the same political and economic rights as other South Korean citizens. Adoptee dual citizens are exempt from the compulsory military service that is required by male citizens and can maintain their citizenship of their adoptive countries. She goes on to comment on how adoptees can only really access dual citizenship if they are residing in South Korea and cannot access it if they are living outside of South Korea. As a result, while the ability to obtain a “dual citizenship has considerable symbolic values for adoptees who wish to reclaim political belonging while in Korea...few adoptees have completed the process to become dual citizens” (Nelson 2016:163). Some of the benefits that Dual Citizenship can bring to Korean adoptees is the ability to be more politically active within South Korea have access to both systems of social welfare such as health care (Folger 2015).

Many of my participants found that the option to obtain dual citizenship is more of a symbolic action as opposed to the material benefits that would come along with the citizenship. On paper, it is a way to reclaim an identity that was, to no fault of their own, revoked from them. However, as many as my participants claim, the symbolic value does

not outweigh the benefits that having single citizenship to the United States provides. For example, they would have to give up the right to be immediately evacuated if a natural disaster or war breaks out within the peninsula. Also, if adoptees choose to hold dual citizenship, they would bound to the laws of South Korea and tried by the Korean court system (Folger 2015). This was particularly poignant for my group of global citizens. As Brandon cites,

There's no benefit for me to get it...I need to make sure that if anything happens with North Korea, I can get out. And I can get my family out...my wife has citizenship, and my daughter has dual citizenship.

And when Lucy was asked, about her choice, she said that she would pursue a dual citizenship, but not a Korean one. She said,

Possibly, I don't really want it for Korea. Maybe if I change my mind and go away and end up wanting to stay in Korea, it's possible. But, I kind of want it for... not Korea. For EU. Yeah, but even that is not actually Dual. I would have to give up American for that.

For Lucy, the possibility of losing some of her rights as an American citizen, like the ability to be assisted by the country while abroad (The Times Editorial Board 2014). At this point, she does not feel prepared to give up her American citizenship because as long as she's "in the world of ESL, [she] needs to be an American," although it is changing. She continues

It's kind of sad that it was, you know? The fact that we benefited for so long, like oh you hear expats say, oh it's so easy to travel there, you don't have to get a visa, that's so great, but like...sorry, it shouldn't be easy for us to dip in and out of the world. It's not easy for other immigrants.

However, individuals that may have a similar experience to Steven, they may have to follow through with applying for dual citizenship. Unlike other adoptees where a dual citizenship is primarily viewed it as a symbolic legal reclamation, they described it as being an advantageous route now that they're older and not sure if they can transition back into

the United States. For Steven, the ability to obtain dual citizenship, “you automatically get health insurance, national health insurance,” something he saw as a golden ticket because for a period of time between jobs, he went without it and it hurt for a little bit. He explains that while there are some legal rights that he would have to give up, like if he committed a crime, he would be tried by a Korean court as a full Korean citizen. However, he expressed that having access to health insurance as he gets older and has less of an ability to transition back to the United States, the material benefits to dual citizenship may outweigh the cons that other adoptees see.

While categorized global citizen adoptees would rather maintain the unilateral privilege, they hold as an American citizen. For cultural negotiators, there was more complexity. The desire to obtain dual citizenship is there, but they are hesitant for obtaining dual citizen. For Jerry, a man who strongly identifies along his Korean ethnic identity, states

If I found somebody that wanted to marry me and would be crazy enough to marry me and they wanted to stay here, and I see that as being permanent, then I’d do dual citizenship. But for us to do that, we would be giving up our ability to get federal loans, which isn’t that big of a deal, but if I ever want to go back to school for anything, then it would be challenging. So, I’m not going to it unless something like that in my life changes, but even marriage isn’t permanent.

Jerry weighs the pros and cons of being able to vote, but also the requirement to begin paying into the health care system here and retirement, so it would be a benefit in the long run for him to invest time in pursuing.

Lastly, the majority of Expat Adoptees did not feel a desire to have a Dual Citizenship. As Tyler stated, “I’m F-4, so that’s good enough. I could go back and forth to Korea if I want to. So my visa status is good enough.” However, for others like, Steven, they may have to follow through with applying for dual citizenship. Unlike other adoptees

where dual citizenship is primarily view it as a symbolic legal reclamation, they described it as being an advantageous route now that they're older and not sure if they can transition back into the United States. For Steven, the ability to obtain dual citizenship, "you automatically get health insurance, national health insurance," something he saw as a golden ticket because for a period between jobs, he went without it and it hurt for a little bit. He explains that while there are some legal rights that he would have to give up like if he committed a crime, he would be tried by a Korean court as a full Korean citizen. However, he expressed that having access to health insurance as he gets older and has less of an ability to transition back to the United States, the material benefits to dual citizenship may outweigh the cons that other adoptees see.

The Politics of Belonging in South Korea

Eleana J. Jim and Kim Park Nelson repeatedly cite that community and adoptee kinship formation is one of the most important processes for return adoptees. Kim argues that non-governmental organizations like Global Overseas Adoptee's Link (GOA'L) have important functions is "to provide an instant community for adoptees who arrive in Korea." Additionally, Park Nelson asserts that adoptees "identify most strongly not with Korean or American nationals living in Korea, or even with other ethnic return migrants, such as other Korean American returnees, but with other adoptees" (Nelson 2016:188). The community in the early 2000s was strong among adoptees, and many found comradeship with one another through groups like GOA'L, but with any identity-based group, it can be suffocatingly small and sometimes exclusive.

Jessica described that her core group of friends were Korean adoptees and that "it feels like a bubble." She went on to say,

I'm not sure if it's a good thing or a bad thing...it's nice to feel like you belong here, but at the same time, I just haven't really gone outside the bubble very much. I think that's something that I may regret after leaving. Especially with the language, and like I don't know...culturally, I just live a very isolated Korean American Adoptee life. Surrounded by other Korean American adoptees.

For Jessica, the community in which she has formed has indeed been one of Korean adoptees. Another example is Lydia, who finds that she relates mostly to other Korean American Adoptees the most, describing it as an instant connection and the ability to create a stronger relationship from the beginning.

Global citizens tend not to want to align themselves with anyone. They say that it's important for them to have a community. If you don't have a community, it's basically socially isolating to live in South Korea, but they did not always find it within the Adoptee community. For Brandon, he finds his community in his wife and daughter, and Lydia is hyper-selective of the individuals she surrounds herself with. Expat Adoptees tended to remain in the foreigner community, and Similarly, Tyler explained that he enjoys spending time with the community he has found within a church that has a diverse population of Korean nationals and other nationalities from around the world. When asked if he was close with the Korean adoptee community, he said that he was not close to anyone and explained that he would instead not get too close to the community because heard "there's a lot of drama" within the community. Steven describes his friend group as including a diverse background hangs out with "pretty much everyone" and enjoys meeting new people, although many are not in his age range. When asked if he spent a lot of time with Korean Adoptee community, he responded, "not really, just at events. Special events, once or twice

a year. No, you know, I think that the only thing we have in common is the fact that we're adopted". Tyler and Steven are not the only one of my participants who does cite adoptees, and because of the known drama that can often occur in groups, some of my participants actively avoiding forming their community around the adoptee community and instead found their community in the foreigner community at large in South Korea.

Furthermore, while adoptees in the past may have relied on GOA'L and other non-profits in the past to create "instant community for adoptees who arrive in Korea," many of my participants commented on the decline of the organization and the distance they often placed between themselves and the organization. For example, while Lydia did want to make it clear that GOA'L offer's invaluable services, she and a few other adoptees that I interviewed commented on the cliques and exclusion that they felt while attending some events. Lydia said,

I think it's easier to go when you know people who are there. So, I've been when I haven't known anyone, and you think that adoptees are going just to be very welcoming and open to sharing and talking, and they are to a certain extent, but if you go and you're alone they're very cliquey, just because, Especially GOA'L, everyone who is a part of GOA'L has been in Korea for a really long time and they all really know each other well, and so coming in as more of a newcomer I think is a little more difficult.

She also recalled a conversation a friend that also went to a GOA'L event who had felt similar to her in that it was hard to integrate into the social scene. Around eight of my participants agreed with this sentiment, and while they all utilized the services that GOA'L provides and occasionally attend social events, they do not feel the strong sense of community that adoptees in early to mid-2000s felt. It is important to know that some adoptees found comfort in community with other adoptees, there are also those who have felt ostracized by the community and also do not associate themselves with the community at all.

Conclusion

Boomerang Adoptees are making moves in South Korea that extend beyond to recaptures lost identities. I argue that while there is a desire from some Korean Adult Adoptees to learn more about their cultural background, the material consequences of living in both the United States and South Korea have led to an ongoing population of Boomerang Adoptees returning to and remaining in South Korea. My research expands the socio-political and economic motivations that encourage the movement of a variety of adoptees who move to South Korea.

I identify four ideal types among Boomerang Adoptees. The Cultural Negotiator is primarily engaged and invested in learning more about their ethnic identities; however, it is critical to understand that many of the feelings of loss are not inherent in cultural longing. Instead, it is often reinforced by their surrounding environments and others' expectation for Cultural Negotiators to embody the Korean language and cultural scripts of belonging in South Korea, despite being raised in the United States for the majority of their lives. While there is a search for identity, many feel comfortable in the social circumstances that they find themselves in within South Korea. For example, in the cases of Lydia, Jerry and many other adoptees that I spoke with, there is a sense of peace of being in a community where they can racially blend in. It provides a break from the racism that they experience in the United States and transitions a salient identity into a silent identity.

The Global Citizen finds their circumstances to be one of advantageous opportunity to move throughout the increasingly globalized world. They view themselves to be on the fringes of both American and Korean society, but not feel the

liminality as a burden They recognize that their American passport coupled with the F-4 Visa enables them to move across borders with relative ease and have opportunities that may not otherwise be available. Their residence in South Korea is of comfort and convenience, and while they can envision themselves living in any part of the world, they have little to no desire to return to the United States to live.

The Expat adoptee archetype is one that surprised me the most in my research. While I expected to encounter individuals that fall into the Cultural Negotiator category and the Global Citizen category, I had not anticipated interacting with Boomerang Adoptees who hold onto a strong American identity. Not only were these participants sure of their identities as Americans, but two of the case studies presented had also lived in South Korea for more than ten years. They took an interest in their birth culture, but it was more of general interest than a deep desire to learn a missing part of their identity. This group in particular assists in understanding the material conditions that enable adoptees to return beyond identity politics. There is economic and social advantages to living in South Korea beyond returning to cultivate a more authentic understanding of birth culture.

Lastly, the Deportee is a category for individuals that are forced to return to South Korea. While I did not directly interview any individual that was affected by being deported from the United States, I found it important to include the category in my thesis. The purpose of presenting this category is twofold. First, I wanted to bring awareness of the phenomenon and introduce it to academic literature. While it has been spoken about in previous works, there has been limited examples of the real-world effects of being an undocumented Korean adoptee. Second, it is to highlight the distinction between this

group of adoptees and all others who return to South Korea. Ultimately, there is a decision that is made for those who have citizenship whereas those without legal citizenship are forced to return to the countries of their birth. This decision helps situate the understanding of Boomerang Adoptees and underscores the constraints that (non)citizenship provides.

Deconstructing previous knowledge and analyzing the intersections of Boomerang Adoptee categories is critical to understanding a Boomerang Movement. The time gap between previous research and mine spans a little more than a decade and informs the changes in the world that lead to the (in)decisions that adoptees have to remain in South Korea. The economic recession in the United States in 2008, the election of President Barak Obama and Donald Trump, the public rise of white supremacy, and access to obtaining dual citizenship in 2011 provided a wide range to individual choices of moving to and remaining in South Korea beyond the sense of lost identities.

Research should expand and continue towards assessing other populations of American adult adoptees that return to their countries of birth. If there could be more of an analysis of what adoptees are accomplishing as they return to their countries of origin, it would increase our understanding of the living conditions in the United States, but also help redefine the parameters of transnational citizenship. The material consequences that should continue to be examined reveal an economic and socio-political opportunity aspect of return as opposed to one that is shrouded in lost identities. I hope that this research continues to inform and break down understandings of the social construction of adoptee identity, loss, and belonging.

Appendix

Early Experiences Outside of the Home¹

- Please tell me about yourself
 - Your name, age, gender identity
 - How comfortable do you feel talking about adoption in general?
 - How comfortable do you feel talking about racial/ethnic identity?
 - Do you belong to other affinity groups (i.e immigrant, LGBTQ+, etc).
- So, tell me about the place(s) you grew up.
 - What were the racial/ethnic demographics of your neighborhoods?*
 - Did you notice any socioeconomic differences?*
- How about the schools you attended? How would you describe them?
 - Elementary, Middle School/Junior High, High school?
 - Was the school racially/ethnically diverse?*
 - Were there socioeconomic differences among your peers?*
 - What were your teachers like?*
 - Would you say that you felt like you fit in?*
- Did you ever experience racism within a school setting?
 - If so, What happened?*
 - How often did this occur?*
 - Perpetrators?*
 - What would you attribute it to? Physically differences or a perceived foreignness?*
 - Who came to your aid, if anyone? What did they say or do?*
 - Did you feel like you could talk to anyone at your school about these experiences? How did they respond? If not, did you tell your parents? How about other family members?*
- Did you ever experience discrimination in regards to your socioeconomic status?
 - If so, what happened?*
 - How often did this occur?*
 - Perpetrators?*
 - Who came to your aid, if anyone? What did they say or do?*
 - Did you feel like you could talk to anyone at your school about these experiences? How did they respond? If not, did you tell your parents? How about other family members?*
- Did you ever experience discrimination in regards to being adopted?
 - Did your community know that you were adopted?*
 - What were their general reactions?*
 - Did you ever experience microaggressions?*

¹ Many of these questions are borrowed from *Choosing Ethnicity, Negotiating Race* by Mia Tuan and Jiannbin Lee Shiao (Tuan and Shiao 2011)

- Did you ever have contact with other Asians or Asian Americans while growing up?
 - Where did this happen?*
 - Was any of this contact facilitated by your Adoptive parents or other adoptive family members?*
 - Did your adoptive parents ever place themselves and/or you in an Asian American social network?*
 - Did they ever send you to or bring you on special programs such as an adoptee heritage camp, ethnic schooling, ethnic summer camps, a tour of Korea, or a visit to an Asian American area?*
 - How did you feel about these interactions?*
 - Where they organic or were they forced?*

- Did you have contact with non-white communities while growing up?
 - Where did this happen?*
 - Was any of this contact facilitated by your adoptive parents or other adoptive family members?*
 - How did you feel about interacting with non-white peers in comparison with white peers?*

- Tell me about your friends growing up?
 - Did you maintain a strong friendship group throughout your K-12 school years?*
 - What were the race/ethnicities of your closest friends?*
 - If Asians were a part of the friendship circle, did you seek them out? Why/Why not?*
 - Were there any socioeconomic differences among your friends?*

- When you were growing up, how conscious did you think you were of being Asian, i.e. Racially different?
 - What prompted this consciousness?*
 - When did this consciousness begin?*
 - Feelings towards this consciousness?*

- When you were growing up, how conscious do you think you were of being Korean?
 - What prompted this consciousness?*
 - When did this consciousness begin?*
 - Feelings towards this consciousness?*

- When you were growing up, how conscious do you think you were of being of a certain socioeconomic class?
 - What prompted this consciousness?*
 - When did this consciousness begin?*
 - Feelings towards this consciousness?*

- How conscious of you were being an adoptee?
 - What prompted this consciousness?*
 - When did this consciousness begin?*
 - Feelings towards this consciousness?*

- Did you have any contact with other adoptees?
 - Were they also Asian Adoptees?*
 - How did you interact with them? Was this in a formal setting or in an informal setting?*
 - How did you feel towards them?*
- Did you ever feel “different” from others? What made you feel different?
 - Who were you comparing yourself to? (Fantasies about being “normal”)??
 - What was “normal” for your community?*
 - How might it have been different had you been male/female?*
- Is there anything else that you would like to say? Is there anything that happened during this period of time that

Adoption History

- Please describe the circumstances surrounding your adoption
 - What was the year of your adoption?*
 - Direct from your birth family?*
 - Direct from an orphanage?*
 - Direct from a foster family home?*
 - Other important circumstances surrounding your adoption?*
- How old were you when you were adopted?
 - What memories to have, if any, of arriving in the United States?*
 - What memories do you have, if any, of Korea?*
- Do you have any additional information that you would like to share? Is there anything specific that comes to mind that left a huge impact on who you are today?

Early experiences inside of the home

- How do you refer to your adoptive family?
 - Do you say that they’re your family or your adoptive family?
 - Does the wording matter to you? Why/Why not?
 - Are you still in contact with them?
- How important do you think it was to your family that you be familiar with Korean culture/values?
 - What aspects?*
 - Who felt it was important and how did they express this to you?*
 - Who took responsibility to teach you?*
 - Was Korean ever spoken at home? By whom?*
 - How often would you say your family ate Korean meals?
 - Home-cooked or restaurants?*
 - Which Korean holidays, if any, did your family celebrate?*
- How important do you think it was to your family that you be familiar with their ethnic culture? (e.g., Irish/Italian/Jewish)
 - What aspects?*

- Who felt it was important and how did they express this to you?*
- Who took responsibility to teach you?*
- Was Italian/Polish/etc. ever spoken at home? By whom?*
- How often would your family eat ethnic meals?*
- Home-cooked or restaurant?*
- Which ethnic holidays, if any, did your family celebrate?*

- Did your family ever speak with you about racism or discrimination that you might face?
 - What did they say to you?*
 - How did your family deal with the fact that you're racially different from them?*
 - Did they suggest any coping strategies for dealing with incidents?*
 - How comfortable did you feel in talking about racism with them?*
 - If any incidents happened to you, did you share them with your family? Why/why not?*

- How important do you think it was to your family that you knew you were adopted?
 - How did your family acknowledge it?*
 - Have they ever told you their motivations for adopting you?*
 - Was it for religious purposes?*
 - How did your parents explain your adoption to others?*
 - Was your adoption or arrival regularly celebrated?

- Please describe your adoptive family
 - Adopted by: Couple? Single mother/father?
 - Mother
 - Also adopted?*
 - An immigrant?*
 - Race/ethnicity*
 - Her age when you were adopted?*
 - Occupation?*
 - Education?*
 - Father
 - Also adopted?*
 - An immigrant?*
 - Race/ethnicity
 - His age when you were adopted?*
 - Occupation?*
 - Education?*

- Tell me about your siblings if you had any
 - Were they also adopted?*
 - If so, were they also adopted from South Korea? Were they adopted from other countries?
 - Did your adoptive parents have biological children?
 - What was that relationship like?*

- Are you still in contact with your adoptive family?

Post-Secondary Years

- What did you do after high school?
 - Did you go to college?
 - If yes, where did you go?*
- Where did you go to college?
- What were the racial demographics?
- Who were your closest friends?
 - Where did you meet them?
 - Race/ethnicity
 - Socioeconomic background
 - [if Asians are part of the friendship circle] Did you seek them out? Why/Why not?
 - Did you explore more about your identity?
 - [if yes] what motivated your interest?
 - Focused on race/ethnicity/adoptee identity
 - Sudden interest or was there all along?
 - What did you do to explore your identities? (take classes, join clubs, etc?)
 - If no, what did you do?*
- Who were your closest friends?*
- Where did you meet them?*
- During this time, did you explore different aspects of your identity?
 - If so, what motivated your interest?*
 - Sudden or there all along?*
 - What did you do to explore your identities?*
- Is there anything that you would like to share more about this time in your life?

Decision to move to South Korea

- How old were you when you decided to move?
 - How long have you been here?
 - How long do you see yourself living in South Korea?
- What made you decide to move to South Korea?
 - Had you visited before?
 - Do you know the language?
- How did your adoptive family/friends react to your decision?
- Did you have a choice?
 - If yes*
 - What were some of the main factors that led you to that decision?*
 - If no, why not?*

Experience in living in South Korea

- Do you have a community here?
 - Did you have anyone you knew already living here?*
 - How has it been adjusting to Korean Culture?*
 - Do you speak Korean/are in the process of learning?*

- Have you reconnected with your birth family?
- If so, has that relationship influenced your decision to stay or leave?*
- Do you have a job currently?
- How did you come about that job?*
- What has it been like being a Racial majority?
- Do you wish to seek dual citizenship?

2016 Presidential Election

- Were you in the United States during this time period?*
- How do you feel about Donald Trump as the President of the United States?
- Has this influenced your decision to stay in South Korea?

Closing Questions

- Looking back over your life, what advice would you give young adoptees who came to you for support?
- What challenges would you warn them about—based on any negative experiences
- What advantages would you tell them about—based on any positive experiences?
- Where do you see yourself 5 years from now, 10 years from now, indefinitely?
- Where will you live?
- Do you foresee yourself with a partner?
- Children?
- Biological or adoption*
- How important do you feel for them to know about your experience being adopted*
- Is there anything else that you would like to share?

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