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„Adoption and Cultural Identity:  
the Case of Adopted Koreans in Denmark and Sweden“

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

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## **Abstract**

Transnational adoption is a complex phenomenon. It is also a topic that can be analysed from different perspectives. This is because on the one hand, it concerns various issues on a national or an international level; on the other hand, the topic bears personal or family stories. This thesis attempts to address these two dimensions by dealing with the cultural identities of adopted South Koreans in Denmark and Sweden. The thesis has two major parts: The first part discusses transnational adoption and how and why a large number of Korean children have been placed in transnational adoption. The second part deals with the cultural identities of adopted individuals who experienced transnational relocation.

In order to analyse these issues, different perspectives regarding the phenomenon of transnational adoption as well as several involved aspects of this phenomenon are to be presented. The history of adopted South Koreans in Denmark and Sweden is also to be delineated. Furthermore, based on interviews with women and men who had been adopted from South Korea to Denmark or Sweden, this thesis explores how these women and men define and negotiate their cultural identity in a national and transnational setting. The findings show that the phenomenon of transnational adoption and of cultural identity of transnational adoptees can only be grasped within a broader context beyond national frames.

## **Abstract German**

Transnationale Adoption ist ein komplexes Phänomen. Es ist auch ein Thema, das von unterschiedlichen Perspektiven aus analysiert werden kann. Das liegt einerseits darin begründet, dass es verschiedene Aspekte auf nationaler und internationaler Ebene betrifft; andererseits beinhaltet das Thema persönliche oder familiäre Geschichten. Die vorliegende Arbeit versucht diese beiden Dimensionen zu beleuchten, indem sie sich mit der kulturellen Identität von adoptierten Kindern aus Südkorea in Dänemark und Schweden beschäftigt. Diese Arbeit hat zwei Hauptteile: Der erste Teil diskutiert transnationale Adoption, wie und warum eine große Anzahl von koreanischen Kindern in die transnationale Adoption kommen konnten. Der zweite Teil beschäftigt sich mit der kulturellen Identität der adoptierten Kinder, die eine transnationale Umsiedlung erlebten.

Um diese Themen zu analysieren, werden sowohl die verschiedenen Perspektiven in Bezug auf das Phänomen der transnationalen Adoption als auch verschiedene involvierte Aspekte des Phänomens selbst präsentiert. Es wird auch die Geschichte der Adoption von südkoreanischen Kindern in Dänemark und Schweden skizziert. Außerdem, basierend auf Interviews mit Frauen und Männern die von Südkorea nach Dänemark oder Schweden adoptiert worden sind, untersucht die Arbeit wie diese Frauen und Männer ihre kulturelle Identität vor einem nationalen und transnationalen Hintergrund definieren und verhandeln. Die Ergebnisse der Arbeit zeigen, dass das Phänomen der transnationalen Adoption und der kulturellen Identität von internationalen Adoptivkindern nur im breiteren Kontext jenseits nationaler Grenzen verstanden werden kann.

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## **Preliminary and introduction**

The “transnational” dimensions of these phenomena (transnational adoption) entail ongoing, crisscrossing flows in multiple directions, in space that is both real and virtual. (Volkman 2005)

### **1. Research background**

The idea of this thesis was inspired by a meeting with an adopted Swede from South Korea whom I happened to sit next to on a flight back to Vienna. I was reading a book about transnational adoption when she initiated a conversation. She introduced herself with her full Swedish name and then with her full Korean name. As she recognised the book due to her friendship with the author we began to discuss transnational adoption.

I have heard a series of stories about Korean adoptees, mostly about the reunions with their birth parents or returning back to the “motherland” for I was exposed such stories over the years through Korean media coverage. Due to the social norms of South Korea that put much value on blood bond and ethnical homogeneity, Korean adoptees have been generally seen as quasi-Korean to some degree. During the discussion with her, however, I realised that the way South Korean society as a whole regards adoptees is fairly partial. Issues around transnational adoption from the perspective of an adoptee entail more complicated stories. As a matter of fact, the way in which the concept of transnational adoption is interpreted is different by each individual involved. Furthermore, this varied understanding is intertwined with “the value and limitations” of transnational adoption.<sup>1</sup> In light of the insightful discussion, I decided to investigate further transnational adoption.

To be able to understand how this research question was formulated, it is necessary to explore several characteristics of transnational adoption that attract my interests. As Howell (2006)

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<sup>1</sup> Hollee McGinnis, “South Korea and its children,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2007, accessed October 7, 2014, <http://relativechoices.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/11/27/south-korea-and-its-children/comment-page-3/>.

argues, transnational adoption is a phenomenon that activates several levels of issues “that range from the most intimate sphere of the life of individuals to macro-politics on a global level.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in connection to this phenomenon several actors are involved. To list a few, it includes sending and receiving families/societies, adopted individuals, as well as international conventions.<sup>3</sup> Adoption across national borders not only reconstructs participating countries’ population structures but also bears social and political implications to sending and receiving states. For many recipient societies, adopting children from other countries builds multi- or trans-racial grounds, while for sending states, involvement in adoption often reflects the countries’ lack of resources or ability to care for their own children. Moreover, since the initial aim of transnational adoption is to promote the rights of children, adoption is required to comply with an international standard such as the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Inter-County Adoption (herein after the Hague Convention).

Besides the fact that transnational adoption entails various actors and brings different societal implications, this phenomenon also tackles a traditional division between the home and host society. As Volkman (2005) notes, similar to other transnational groups such as immigrants and refugees, adopted persons cross boundaries of nation, culture, race and ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> Yngvesson (2005) furthermore argues that even if an adopted individual receives a new name and citizenship as well as lives in an adoptive society and family, it has been a question whether an adoptee has a “clean break” from a country of origin or not.<sup>5</sup> This is because one’s cultural identity – especially, when it comes to a person in transnational groups, the identification may or may not be the same as citizenship.<sup>6</sup> Again Yngvesson outlines two different perspectives regarding the question of adoptees’ cultural and biological belonging. From one side, he considers that every form of connection between an adopted person and a birth country is completely delinked. Without doubt, an adoptive society becomes the centre of an adopted person’s identity. However, the country of origin underlines significant cultural or biological ties. As a result, many adoptive parents and families suggest to their adopted child(ren) to visit their country of origin. Moreover,

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<sup>2</sup> Signe Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners: Transnational Adoption in a Global Perspective* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Toby Alice Volkman, “Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship,” in *Culture of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Yngvesson, “Going “Home”: Adoption, Loss of Bearings, and the Mythology of Root.” in *Culture of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 25-6.

<sup>6</sup> Fred E. Jandt, *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication: Identities in a Global Community* (US: Sage Publication, 2013), 8.



adoptees' rights to know their biological family backgrounds are promoted on an international level.<sup>7</sup>

Arguably, regarding adoptees' cultural identities, this dichotomous view becomes more visible. For some adoptees their country of origin can be regarded as a 'homeland' or a 'motherland'. To a considerable degree there is a relationship between this home society and adoptees. For other adoptees, a sending society does not bear significant meaning in terms of their cultural identification. Within this point of view, adoptees' cultural heritage is extensively tied up with the corresponding adoptive state. However, from this standpoint, the question arises whether it is sufficient enough to look into the issue of belonging with a sending-receiving division.

## **2. Aims, justification, and terminology**

On the basis of these interesting aspects of transnational adoption, this thesis will specifically focus on adoptees' cultural identities. In order to do so, this thesis aims to answer the question, How can we understand the cultural identities of South Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden? Because this question covers a rather broad spectrum, I will limit my research to more specific research aims (see below).

This particular study looks into the case of Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden. There are justifiable reasons for selecting these countries: South Korea as a sending country, Denmark and Sweden as receiving countries.

Firstly, I decided to research South Korea because of its dominance in this field. This sending society also pays attention to Korean adoptees due to the persisting societal norms on ethnical homogeneity.<sup>8</sup> By stressing the bond of the 'mother' land and 'abandoned children', the Korean society attempts to frame the adoptees as a group of their diasporas, even if this kind of understanding can hardly be consistent with the way in which the adoptees identify themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Second, I chose to look into the adoption cases from Denmark and Sweden for several reasons. As a matter of fact, these two countries bear the longest history of adopting children transnationally. At the same time, if considering the adopting rate per capita, the largest number

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<sup>7</sup> Yngvesson, "Going "Home"," 26-7.

<sup>8</sup> Jung-Sun Park and Paul Y. Chang, "Contention in the Construction of a Global Korean Community: The Case of the Overseas Korean Act," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 10 (2005): 3.

<sup>9</sup> Eleana Kim, "Our Adoptee, Our Alien: Transnational Adoptees as Specters of Foreignness and Family in South Korea," *Anthropological Quarterly* 80 (2007): 497; 507.

of children has been transferred to these societies along with Norway.<sup>10</sup> I can approach the topic of transnational adoption from various angles by selecting these countries, since they encompass different social issues and a significant amount of history in regard to transnational adoption. Their active engagements in transnational adoption can be regarded as resulting from the established welfare system and “social engineering.”<sup>11</sup> It has been argued that these countries are colour-blind when it comes to transnational entities.<sup>12</sup> In addition to these factors, there is an organisation for Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden. Although not every adoptee participates in these organisations, it is important to note that these communities broke ground regarding where cultural activities and networks among adoptees are organised.

In light of this research, the thesis aims to understand:

- What aspects are involved in transnational adoption, and for what reasons does this phenomenon is related to transnational adoptees’ cultural identities?
- For what reasons do South Korea, Denmark, and Sweden engage in the field of transnational adoption, and how these societies deal with the issues of transnational adoption, and transnational adoptees?
- How do Korean adoptees identify their cultural identities with regard to the sending and receiving society and what factors influence this identification?

To be able to fulfil these aims it is necessary to clarify the central concepts of this thesis. According to Bartholet (2006), transnational adoption involves “the transfer of children for parenting purposes from one nation to another.”<sup>13</sup> There are many other terminologies that define the same phenomenon such as international adoption, transracial adoption, and transcultural adoption. Each term underlines a specific aspect that is intermingled in adoption across countries. In the case of ‘transracial adoption’, for instance, racial issues are at the centre of discussions. This term specifically stresses the one-way relocation of non-Caucasian children

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<sup>10</sup> Tobias Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006), 65.

<sup>11</sup> Tobias Hübinette, “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: European colonial trafficking, American empire-building and Nordic social engineering. Rethinking international adoption from a postcolonial and feminist perspective,” 9, accessed <http://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org/files/pdf/ACT3/MANUSCRIPTS/Huebinette.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Hubinette, Tobias and Carina Tigervall. “To be non-white in a colour-blind society: conversations with adoptees and adoptive parents in Sweden on everyday racism.” *Journal of intercultural studies*, 30 (2009): 335.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Bartholet, “International adoption,” in *Children and Youth In adoption, Orphanages, and Foster Care*, ed. Lori Askeland (USA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 107.

to white families.<sup>14</sup> From this standpoint, I will use the word ‘transnational adoption’, although these terms are interchangeable with the above mentioned words in linguistic sense. Seeing this term as drawing a particular attention on national issues, it is justifiable to use such a term for the reasons that this thesis mainly focuses on specific countries, namely South Korea, Denmark, and Sweden. Furthermore, this research concerns Korean adoptees’ cultural identities in relation to the sending and receiving countries.

When it comes to the word ‘identity’, this thesis concentrates on cultural or collective identity. According to Smith (1995) identity operates on the individual and collective level and thereby people have multiple identities. In terms of the collective level, people in essence have various affiliations with families, cultural communities, ethnic groups, and so forth. Interactions with these groups compose one’s cultural identity. What is important here is that cultural identity is not constituted of fixed traits or unchanging essence.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, shared communities and affiliations do not mould one’s cultural identity completely. In this thesis, the concept of ‘cultural identity’ refers to the identity that is shaped by interactions with collective groups and certain cultural or social backgrounds. Apart from the keywords clarification here, the identification of ‘cultural identity’ and issues around cultural identity will be exclusively discussed again in chapter 3 (see chapter 3. 3).

Last, I use the word ‘Korea’ to indicate South Korea/ Republic of Korea. The word of ‘Korean adoptee(s)’ refers to adopted individual(s) who was/were born in South Korea and later were adopted by Danish or Swedish families. Using the expression ‘Korean’ adoptees can be contested as the word places a particular emphasis on the birth country, to which some adoptees can hardly feel connected. However, using these expressions do not intend to bring special implications. These terms are selected due to their conciseness.

### **3. Research design**

As Yngvesson (2005) mentions, transnational adoption carries two predominating stories. One is ‘a story of abandonment’ and the other is about ‘roots’.<sup>16</sup> The story of abandonment explains the background and process of adoption. The story of roots reflects the identity issues of the adopted persons. These two stories are interwoven throughout this thesis. The history of Korean

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<sup>14</sup> Ruth G. McRoy and Christine C. Lijima Hall, “Transracial adoption: In Whose Best Interest?,” in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*, ed. Maria P. P. Root (California: Sage Publication, 1996), 64.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “The formation of national identity,” in *Identity: Essays based on Herbert Spencer Lectures Given in the University of Oxford*, ed. Henry Harris (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 130-2.

<sup>16</sup> Yngvesson, “Going “Home”,” 25.

adoptees in Denmark and Sweden underscores how the adoptees were sent to these countries and reveals many causes for abandonment. When it comes to the story of roots, I rely on interviews with Korean adoptees who delineate their perception of cultural identities.

A researcher is expected to be objective and unprejudiced. This is because the subjectivity of a researcher that stems from personal experiences or pre-existing understanding can make a different argument on the given subject. For this reason, before looking into the stories of abandonment and roots, I present what has been so far argued. It is important to note that transnational adoption is a multi-disciplinary topic. Therefore, reviews on already existing literatures can serve to give a general understanding of transnational adoption.

#### - **Outline of chapters**

To provide an incisive understanding of transnational adoption and its identity issues, the first chapter reviews the large number of literature that addresses these topics from different analytical tools, and perspectives. First, the ways in which the phenomenon of transnational adoption is interpreted will be elucidated. This includes the opposing viewpoints that give support to transnational adoption and criticise this phenomenon. Transnational adoption is correlated with political and social issues of participating nations. Therefore, these correlating factors will be incorporated. After drawing an outlook of major issues around transnational adoption, reviews on adoptees' identities will be followed.

Identity issues of transnationally adopted persons have frequently researched in accordance with the adoptees' experiences in their "birth country" and their encounters with the birth country's culture.<sup>17</sup> Especially when it comes to the issues of constructing one's cultural identity, the way adoptees consider their country of origin and the potential existence of cultural ties between adoptees and sending countries have been at the centre of debates.<sup>18</sup> By reconsidering these key discussions, I can analyse Korean adoptees' cultural identities in relation to their birth country.

A comprehensive understanding of adopted Koreans in Denmark and Sweden and their cultural identities essentially necessitates historicising the flows of transnational adoption between these countries. Chapter two presents the adoption history of Korea and explains the social impetuses

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<sup>17</sup> Eleana Kim, "Wedding Citizenship and Culture: Korean Adoptees and the Global Family of Korea," in *Culture of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 52; Laura Briggs and Diana Marre, "Experiences in receiving countries," in *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*, eds. Laura Briggs and Diana Marre (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 223.

<sup>18</sup> Volkman, "Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship," 5.

that have caused the country's dominance in the field of transnational adoption. As a sending state, Korea's long-term engagement on transnational adoption is summarised chronologically along with pointing to specific themes. Topics such as war orphans, mixed-race children, and population policies not only draw the historical circumstances but also reflect Korea's societal perceptions of adoptees. In addition to the perspectives of the sending country, the adopting experiences of Denmark and Sweden are followed. By looking into the history from the perspective of the receiving societies, one will be able to see the way in which these countries have regarded transnational adoption.

The concept of cultural identity is known as an abstract notion. It would be challenging to find a theory or analytical framework that embraces the whole spectrum of one's cultural identification. Chapter three builds an analytical tool to capture cultural identity for the use of this thesis. Specific contexts that are generally hypothesised to have a particular meaning to adoptees, such as their ethnical features and cultural experiences regarding a birth country, are incorporated into the analytical frame. In addition, this chapter introduces the theory of 'third space',<sup>19</sup> which challenges the usual framing of adoptees' identity as one based on the division of sending-receiving societies.

On the basis of the constructed analytical framework, Chapter four presents case studies based on the analysis the interviews with Korean adoptees. This part considers how the Korean adoptees regard their cultural identities and whether or not there is a cultural tie between the adoptees and the sending country. To be able to do this, I present empirical "narratives" which in turn bring more tangible stories to the table. This chapter aims to contribute a more sufficient understanding of the complexities of identity issues of transnational adoptees.

Chapter five, finally, offers the concluding remarks for the above chapters. This chapter summarises the key arguments and findings from the overall contents in light of the research aims of this thesis. It also includes further considerations that can be connected to the topic of transnational adoption.

#### - **Methodological considerations**

The way I investigate the chosen topic is threefold. As mentioned above, first, I review different academic works and relevant discussions about the phenomenon of transnational adoption. Second, historical accounts on the case of Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden will be

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<sup>19</sup> Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Londong: Routlegde, 1994).

presented. These two parts are based on secondary resources. When it comes to adoptees' identity issues, I rely on the primary sources, namely interviews which I conducted with Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden. The way I conducted the interviews will be introduced in the analytical chapter 4 (see chapter 4. 1).

The difficulty arises when using interviews, because the interview contents of this thesis reflect personal histories and experiences. From this standpoint, I have to delimit the boundaries of the research. Arguably, this thesis cannot represent and capture the overall practices of transnational adoption, nor can it generalise the adoptees' cultural identity. As a matter of fact, if considering the characteristics of transnational adoption and the abstract nature of cultural identity, it is hardly possible to make a generalisation. Most important, that is not the aim of this thesis.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Reviewing the concepts around transnational adoption**

When adoption takes place between different countries, questions of identity, belonging, ethnicity, race and culture are immediately placed on the agenda.

(Signe Howell 2009)

#### **1. 1. Introduction**

Before focusing on the specific case of Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden, it is necessary to clarify the idea of transnational adoption and the way it has been developed on a global level. In this chapter I outline some characteristics that are embedded in the practices of transnational adoption. At the same time, the reasons why questions regarding adoptees' identities emerge are to be explained.

First, I will review a positive and a negative viewpoint regarding transnational adoption. Although framing transnational adoption with a pessimistic or an optimistic angle is not the ultimate goal of this section, it is important to note that these arguments provide social and economic aspects that are entangled in the practices of transnational adoption. After that, various relationships and issues of transnational adoption will be addressed. As a complicated social phenomenon, different dynamics have pervaded in the overall process of transnational adoption. The subchapters of transnational adoption as a global phenomenon will scrutinise these characteristics. Last, I take a close look at the identity issues. This chapter critically considers bits and pieces of issues around transnational adoption. What this chapter ultimately aims for is introducing the key concepts of transnational adoption from various angles so that it can partly answer the first purpose of this research, which is grasping the concept of transnational adoption and identity issues as well as presenting its related characteristics.

#### **1. 2. Transnational adoption: rescuing mission or orphan industry?**

The question of whether transnational adoption makes a best alternative for the children who are in need of homes and primary care has been a key issue around the concept of transnational

adoption.<sup>20</sup> Bowie (2004) as well as Brigg and Marre (2009) state that there is a long historical relationship between adoption and foster care for children in Western Europe.<sup>21</sup> Over the course of adoption history, adopting children from other countries has typically occurred in time of war and conflict.<sup>22</sup> For instance, around ten thousand unaccompanied Jewish refugee children in German-occupied countries were assisted by British Kindertransport. This scheme transferred the children from the occupied territories to temporary refuges in Britain.<sup>23</sup> Similar to this initiation, Swedes evacuated Finnish children to Sweden when there was a conflict between Finland and Russia during the Second World War. In the midst of wartime, a large number of children in refuges were relocated to foster houses or adoptive families in other European countries.<sup>24</sup> On account of this historical trend, transnational adoption has been largely deemed a compassionate act.

According to Briggs and Marre, acknowledgement of transnational adoption in regard to the narrative of rescuing children has relevance to the changed perception of childhood as well.<sup>25</sup> Compared to when children were recognised as miniature adults, from the beginning of the twentieth century, a different identification was applied.<sup>26</sup> This shifted perspective from a little adult or a less-skilled worker to an innocent being who needs special protection and shelters, arguably led to adoption practice with a “reflection of the generosity.”<sup>27</sup> As a consequence of that, transnational adoption could be considered as a humanitarian act.

From a legal perspective, recognition of the vulnerability of children is associated with transnational adoption, since transnational adoption primarily offers an alternative home and safety. For example, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924) specifically recognized the vulnerability of children in disastrous situations. Article 2 claimed that: “The child that is hungry must be fed; the child that is sick must be nursed; the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif must be

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<sup>20</sup> Volkman, “Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship,” 5.

<sup>21</sup> Fiona Bowie, “Adoption and the circulation of children: A comparative perspective,” in *Cross-Cultural Approaches to adoption*, ed. Fiona Bowie (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Briggs and Diana Marre, “Introduction: The circulation of Children,” in *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*, eds. Laura Briggs and Diana Marre (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>23</sup> “Kindertransport, Saving refugee Children?,” The National Archives, accessed September 21, 2014, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/topics/kindertransport.htm>; Briggs and Marre, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>24</sup> Briggs and Marre, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>25</sup> Laura Zagrebelsky, “Adoptions across Identity Borders and the Right to Cultural Identity in Context: The case of England, Germany and Italy” (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012) 51-2.

<sup>26</sup> Briggs and Marre, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>27</sup> Briggs and Marre, “Introduction,” 2-3; Zagrebelsky, “Adoption across Identity Borders,” 52.



sheltered and succoured.”<sup>28</sup> This declaration, although it did not explicitly deal with transnational adoption, set a crucial ground for institutionalising transnational adoption on an international level as it suggested basic protections for children in poor conditions.<sup>29</sup>

From this perspective, it is argued that humanitarian activities that offered aid for war orphans and children in refuges were a forerunner to transnational adoption.<sup>30</sup> This way of understanding is also mirrored in contemporary debates. Much of the literature also interprets transnational adoption as a gesture of altruism or family based good-will.<sup>31</sup>

However, as Cuthbert (2012) delineates the opinions around transnational adoption can be divided. For the advocates, this phenomenon is the salvation project for children who would otherwise suffer from disadvantage. For the critics, it generates the commodification of children as well as serves the interest of privileged Westerners.<sup>32</sup> In light of this divergence of perspectives, it is important to consider a critical understanding in depth.

According to a sceptical perspective, as Volkman argues, transnational adoption has emerged due to “a critical interrogation of a global political economy.”<sup>33</sup> During the last three decades, the rate of transnational adoption of toddlers and young children has continued to increase. Many children, in the end, are relocated from underprivileged societies to privileged countries.<sup>34</sup> Bartholet (1993) also explains that there are a range of critical researchers who delve into the matter of transnational adoption with reference to a global economic division. If considering the fact where the children come from and to where they are transferred, transnational adoption cannot be simply connected with altruistic mission.<sup>35</sup> Rather it can be framed as “the white middle-class rights to have a ‘complete’ family”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Geneva Declaration of the Right of the Child”, UN Documents, accessed September 21, 2014, <http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Bartholet, Elizabeth. “International adoption: Current status and future prospects,” *The Future of Children* 3 (1993): 94.

<sup>30</sup> Briggs and Marre, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>31</sup> Zagrebky, “Adoptions across Identity Borders,” 52.

<sup>32</sup> Denise Cuthbert, “Introduction: Waiting for a Better World: Critical and Interdisciplinary perspectives on Intercountry Adoption,” *Social Policy and Society* 11 (2012): 375; Zagrebky, “Adoptions across Identity Borders,” 73.

<sup>33</sup> Volkman, “Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship,” 7.

<sup>34</sup> Signe Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners: Transnational Adoption in a Global Perspective* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 3; Briggs and Marre, “Introduction,” 1; Zagrebky, “Adoption across Identity Borders,” 73.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Bartholet, “International adoption: Current status and future prospects,” 90.

<sup>36</sup> Nicole Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and “Mail-Order” Marriages* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003), 211.

Graff (2008) specifically comments on the corrupt system of the adoption processes. He also notes that the children who are subjected to transnational adoption are by no means ‘orphans’. They are deemed to be abandoned by their caregivers, despite the fact that their parents or families generally make use of orphanages and fostering systems for temporary care.<sup>37</sup> To illustrate this problem, Graff has titled his research “the lie we love.” It can be argued that the “lie” alludes to the image of vulnerable children whose living conditions are not complied with an “international” standardisation of children’s rights. In this connection Howell deliberates on how the international legal frame such as the Hague Convention and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children attempt to apply western norms on a global scale.<sup>38</sup> If stepping into the critical perspective, one is able to see the reason why anti-adoption movements are arranged. These movements claim that the transnational adoption initially separates children from their primary caregivers and forcibly disconnects the children from their national, racial, and cultural communities.<sup>39</sup>

The main argument from the sceptical point of view is that transnational adoption cannot make the best situations for the subjected children. As Bartholet introduces, the critics regard transnational adoption as the practice that ultimately exploits the subjected children.<sup>40</sup> That is to say, the overriding aim of transnational adoption is to serve the needs of wealthy societies and families.<sup>41</sup> In this context, the practice of transnational adoption is based on the industry that is driven by western customers.<sup>42</sup>

These two different perspectives conceptualise transnational adoption in a different way. Transnational adoption can be regarded as a humanitarian phenomenon or it can be perceived as an orphan industry. It is important to note that transnational adoption not only embeds social and cultural implications but arguably it is also entangled with the division between privileged and underprivileged societies.<sup>43</sup>

In connection to the scepticism, it is required to consider the unequal relationships between sending and receiving states. However, this frame alone cannot suffice to investigate the adoption case from Korea to Denmark and Sweden. This is because of Korea’s economic

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<sup>37</sup> Bowie, “Adoption and the circulation of children,” 13-4.

<sup>38</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners*, 159-60.

<sup>39</sup> Bartholet, “International adoption: Current status and future prospects,” 90.

<sup>40</sup> Bowie, “Adoption and the circulation of children,” 14; Bartholet, “International adoption,” 107.

<sup>41</sup> E. J. Graff, “The Lie We Love,” *Foreign Policy* 168 (2008): 59; Bartholet, “International adoption,” 107-8.

<sup>42</sup> Graff, “The Lie We Love,” 60.

<sup>43</sup> Zagabsky, “Adoptions across Identity Borders,” 73.

modernisation during the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> Despite modernisation and the rapid economic development Korea remained a leading country in terms of sending children until the beginning of the 2000s, even though Korea has become a privileged country in terms of national economic scale.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the argument that frames the phenomenon of transnational adoption by applying the tension between developed and underdeveloped countries cannot cover the more recent cases of Korea. Instead of applying this frame, it is appropriate to take historical and social accounts (see chapter 2. 2).

### 1. 3. Transnational adoption and related relationships

As mentioned prior (see prologue 1), transnational adoption is the topic that invites a range of actors. Different aspects and themes permeate pervade in this phenomenon as well. In order to grasp this variety, Howell outlines multiple layers of relationships that are generated by transnational adoption. The overview from the scholar can be listed as follows: “First, the relationship between sending and receiving states are constructed; second, there are the relationships between international agencies and sending countries’ national agencies; third, the relationship between adoption agencies in adoptive societies and the local institution that temporarily care for the subjected children for transnational adoption; fourth, this relationship is generated within the receiving county between prospective adoptive parents and the public authorities that manage their application; fifth, the relationship between the prospective adoptive parents and the adoption agency; sixth, the relationship between the adopted child(ren) and their adoptive parent; seventh, the relationship among transnationally adopted persons; eight, the relationship between adoptees, their adoptive families and the adoptees’ birth countries; lastly, the relationship between the adoptees and their biological relatives.”<sup>46</sup>

It can be argued that the first five relationships come into view when the process of adoption is initiated and proceeded. These relationships can arguably bear political and social aspects of transnational adoption. Furthermore, with connection to these relationships arguments for or against this phenomenon can emerge. Adoptees in these relationships are minimally active since, as being immature, they cannot express their interest on adoption procedure.<sup>47</sup> The last four relationships generally occur when adoptees arrive in the adoptive societies and live together with their adoptive families as well as when they socialise with other adoptees.

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<sup>44</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting and orphaned nation*, 203.

<sup>45</sup> Barbara Yngvesson, *Belonging in an Adopted World: Race Identity, and Transnational Adoption* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 19

<sup>46</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners*, 5-6.

<sup>47</sup> Zagabsky, “Adoption across Identity Borders,” 27.

#### 1. 4. Transnational adoption as a global phenomenon

Since the late 1960s transnational adoption has been recognized as a global phenomenon.<sup>48</sup> This fact is evidenced by two reasons. First, more countries have participated in this practice. Particularly, more countries have begun to send their children abroad. Compared to the main recipient societies, the dominant sending countries have often shifted by newly participating countries.<sup>49</sup> As Selman (2009) points out, the war-torn societies from the Second World War actively engaged in transnational adoption. After that, Korea was a leading actor by sending a number of children during and after the Korean War. Latin American countries then emerged with transnational adoption as well during the 1980s.<sup>50</sup> Especially during the Cold War these countries institutionalised systems for transnational adoption.<sup>51</sup> More current cases of transnational adoption have been largely sourced by China and Russia.<sup>52</sup> In the case of China, its engagement was initiated in order to cure the side effects of the country's one child policy.<sup>53</sup>

Another reason that supports the idea of transnational adoption as being a global phenomenon is related to the growing scale of the overall adoption cases. The rate of transnational adoption has increased dramatically during the 1960s. According to Selman (2012), the estimated numbers of children adopted through transnational adoption during 1947 to 1969 was approximately 50,000; whereas the number from 1970 to 1979 was more than 100,000, demonstrating that the rate of transnational adoption was doubled. Estimates for the 1980s and 1990s were 180,000 and 230,000, respectively. Last, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, as many as 410,000 children were adopted transnationally.<sup>54</sup>

Seeing these global patterns raises the question of why more adoptions have proceeded since the 1960s. McRoy and Hall (1996) argue that from this period, private adoption agencies began to experience a significant decline of native-born children available for adoption. As a consequence numerous local agencies began to discontinue their adoption programs. Some agencies turned to transnational adoption as a substitute for domestic adoption.<sup>55</sup> The decline of possibility for domestic adoption in the main recipient countries, such as the countries in Northern and

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<sup>48</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Volkman, "Introduction, New Geographies of Kinship" 1; Peter Selman, "The Movement of Children for International adoption: Developments and Trends in Receiving States and States of Origin, 1998-2004," in *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*, eds. Laura Briggs and Diana Marre (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 36.

<sup>50</sup> Selman, "The Movement of Children," 36.

<sup>51</sup> Briggs and Marre, "Introduction," 11.

<sup>52</sup> Selman, "The Movement of Children," 36

<sup>53</sup> Briggs and Marre, "Introduction," 13.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Selman, "Global Trends in Intercountry Adoption: 2001-2010," *Adoption Advocate* 44 (2012): 4.

<sup>55</sup> McRoy and Hall, "Transnational adoption in whose best interest?," 65.

Western Europe, caused their active involvement in transnational adoption and thereby transnational adoption could meet its needs.<sup>56</sup> The relationship between domestic adoption and transnational adoption in these countries reflects their social and political features. This aspect will be specifically taken into consideration in the later chapter (see chapter 2. 3. 3).

The above subchapters have considered the phenomenon of transnational adoption by reviewing different issues. The following subchapters clarify another key concept of this thesis. These parts concentrate on identity issues.

### **1. 5. Identity issues, racial background and “clean break”**

In conformity of perceiving transnational adoption as the process of transferring infants or children from a certain sending state to a receiving country,<sup>57</sup> identity issues have come into play when the questions of racial background and birth culture are posed. The question of “where do you ‘originally’ come from?” which might be asked on a daily basis, implies that there can be tension surrounding racial or cultural differences.<sup>58</sup>

Due to the ethnical or racial differences between adoptees and their adoptive parents, adoptive families are considered by some a mimic form of a “natural” family.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the question of whether “race matching” is a necessary condition for transnational adoption remains in academic and political debates.<sup>60</sup> As Robinson (2012) describes, some researchers concern the issues of the development of racial or ethnic identity by taking into account psychological factors that focuses on racial aspects and their probable influences on identity development.<sup>61</sup>

It is clear that adoptees who crossed the borders are at the centre of the identity issues. On the one hand, they are expected to bear dual, or even multiple, cultural identities.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, it also has been considered that adoptees’ identities are monocultural.<sup>63</sup> Concerning the fact that an adopted individual is presented with a new name, citizenship, and nationality as soon as he or she arrives in a new society, the identity construction of the adopted individual can newly begin.<sup>64</sup> In a similar sense, Zagrebelsky (2012) brings to the foreground two main theories

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<sup>56</sup> Briggs and Marre, “Introduction,” 16-7.

<sup>57</sup> Bartholet, “International adoption,” 107.

<sup>58</sup> Volkman, “Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship,” 11.

<sup>59</sup> Yngvesson, “Going “Home,”” 26-7.

<sup>60</sup> McRoy and Hall, “Transracial adoption in whose best interest?,” 65.

<sup>61</sup> Lena Robinson “Identity development and transracial/ethnic adoption: some challenges for practice,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 22 (2012): 117.

<sup>62</sup> Volkman, “Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship,” 5.

<sup>63</sup> Tobias Hübinette, “Adopted Koreans and the Development of Identity in the ‘Third space,”” *Adoption and Fostering* 28 (2004): 22.

<sup>64</sup> Volkman, “Going “Home,”” 25-6.

that explain the identity issues of adopted people. On the one side, the adoption process entails new beginnings for adopted persons, as they become members of a new society. On the other side, the adoptees' identities remain in their country of origin and thus no clean break from the homeland is possible. The second argument even presents that the alienation of adoptees' identities from their birth societies may cause psychological sufferings.<sup>65</sup> In respect to these two interpretations, identity issues of transnational adoptees have been considered on the basis of a distinction between a sending and receiving country.

## **1. 6. The international legal framework and identity issues**

Identity issues around transnational adoptees and the phenomenon of transnational adoption were also considered on an international level. As Carlson (1994) argues the Hague Convention, although this is not the first initiation pertaining to adoption on a global level, is the first legal framework that addresses issues around transnational adoption in a considerable degree. Before this convention the concept of transnational adoption was considered too broad and various to be systematised, therefore, international adoption law was structured with limited scope.<sup>66</sup> In connection to this background, transnational adoption can also be defined as a legal institution that is intended to serve the human rights of vulnerable children, which are also regulated by international conventions.<sup>67</sup>

This legal frame also touches upon identity issues by noting the “best interest” of children. The Hague Convention in 1993 claimed that transnational adoption ultimately has to protect and promote the “best interest” of the subjected children for adoption by understanding their fundamental rights. The convention states that the countries that are involved in this international scheme should “ensure that [transnational] adoptions are made in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights.”<sup>68</sup> Regarding the notion of the “best interest of the child”, Howell criticises that this principle hardly has received satisfactory

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<sup>65</sup> Zagrebelsky, “Adoptions across Identity Borders,” 53.

<sup>66</sup> Richard R. Carlson, “The Emerging Law of Introductory Adoption: An Analysis of the Hague Conference on Intercountry Adoption,” *Tulsa Law Review* 30 (1994): 247.

<sup>67</sup> Laura Briggs and Diana Marre, “Defining Reproduction: Law, Strangers, Family, Kin,” in *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*, eds. Laura Briggs and Diana Marre (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>68</sup> “Convention on protection of Children and co-operation in respect of intercountry Adoption,” Hague Conference on Private International Law, accessed September 21, 2014, [http://www.hcch.net/index\\_en.php?act=conventions.text&cid=69](http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.text&cid=69).

debate.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Carlson argues that the concept of children's best interest hardly can be generalised, as every child (and his or her situation) is unique.<sup>70</sup>

Apart from the critical insights, it can be argued that this convention recognises identity issues of transnational adoption.<sup>71</sup> This is because the rights of a child, which are noted by the convention, implicitly embrace the issues around identity.<sup>72</sup> One statement of the Hague Convention presents that:

“[E]ach State should take, as a matter of priority, appropriate measure to enable the child to remain in the care of his or her family of origin,... [I]ntercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her state of origin.”<sup>73</sup>

It is important to take into account that the Hague Convention is not only structured to guide transnational adoption by standardising and legitimising the process but as Davis (2011) interprets, it also concerns and embraces ethical and cultural issues.<sup>74</sup> In order to fulfil the notion of the best interest of the child, the convention recognises the importance of one's birth background. It has also stipulated that adoptees have justifiable reasons to search and know about their biological parents, and hence they have free access for information about their adoption.<sup>75</sup> According to Zagrebsky this stipulation about preserving information bears a significant meaning, as it acknowledges the complexity of identity issues of adoptees in the context of their biological ties and identity development within adoptive family.<sup>76</sup>

To summarise, identity issues of transnational adoption have been arguably considered by the Hague Convention. Even though the key concept of the best interest of children is not well clarified and hence remains vague, it can be argued that adoptees' relationships with the birth families and societies have been considered.

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<sup>69</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners*, 163.

<sup>70</sup> Carlson, “The emerging Law,” 258.

<sup>71</sup> Zagrebsky, “Adoptions across Identity Borders,” 54.

<sup>72</sup> Volkman, “Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship,” 5.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Mary Ann Davis, *Children for Families or Families for Children: The Demography of Adoption Behavior in the US* (New York: Springer, 2011), 186.

<sup>75</sup> Caroline Legrand, “Routes to the Roots: Toward an Anthropology of Genealogical Practices,” in *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*, eds. Laura Briggs and Diana Marre (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 251.

<sup>76</sup> Zagrebsky, “Adoptions across Identity Borders,” 55.

## 1. 7. Summarising remark

I have introduced a range of ideas that are linked to the phenomenon of transnational adoption. As Howell categorises, a variety set of relationships (see chapter 1. 3) can be found and therefore this phenomenon invites different academic fields and understandings. In order to grasp the concept of transnational adoption and its implications, it is necessary to apply multiple perspectives. This is because this topic cannot be comprehended at a glance. Therefore, this chapter is employed as a prerequisite for the following chapters that focus on the specific case. The very aim of this chapter is to show various arguments around transnational adoption and mapping the relationship between transnational adoption and identity issues.

First, this chapter has brought the different interpretations on adoption across national borders. These divergent opinions reflect that transnational adoption cannot be viewed as an action that relocates a child from one country to the other.<sup>77</sup> Rather, it is a topic that is associated with the social issues of sending and receiving countries and the division between privileged and underprivileged societies. Transnational adoption has developed on a global scale. In connection to this tendency, this chapter secondly has explained the major causes of this trend. With historical account it has shown that more states have engaged in the field of transnational adoption after the 1960s. At the same time, the overall number of adoptees has grown larger as a consequence of the decreased possibility of domestic adoption. The patterns again point out that transnational adoption is largely related to the social impetuses from sending and receiving states.

When it comes to identity issues of transnational adoptees, their ethnic or racial differences have been considered. The question of whether adoptees' racial backgrounds are significant for their identities remains in question. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the academic debates around a clean break. Some scholars have claimed that the relationship between adoptees and birth countries and families is important. However, there are other researchers who argue for the clean break from this relationship. Last, the way in which the Hague Convention regards identity issues is introduced. The Hague Convention claimed to protect adopted children's rights, especially the rights to know about their birth backgrounds.<sup>78</sup> Despite the fact that this convention neglects to answer the question about what does best interest of children means it plays an important role. Particularly, by guaranteeing the information accessibility of adoptees' adoption backgrounds, it

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<sup>77</sup> Volkman, "Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship," 2.

<sup>78</sup> Francoise Romaine Ouellette, "The Social Temporalities of adoption and the Limits of Plenary adoption," in *International adoption: Global inequalities and the circulation of Children*, eds. Laura Briggs and Diana Marre (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 73.



can be argued that this international legal framework recognises the complexities of adoptees' identity issues in relation to their birth countries.<sup>79</sup>

As mentioned above, this chapter has considered the general background of transnational adoption and identity issues. From this standpoint, I can narrow down the research scope to the adoption case from Korea to Denmark and Sweden. The following chapter will provide histories this specific case.

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<sup>79</sup> Yngvesson, *Belonging in an Adopted World*, 19.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Historicising the Korean adoptees in Sweden and Denmark**

“I think during the war time, I can understand why they sent a lot of mixed race Koreans. But now it is also because of social issues, because many of the mothers are single and un-wed. [...] The culture is kind of like the Denmark in back in the 60s or 70s. It’s because of the culture that does not accept single mothers and un-wed mothers.” (Interview respondent 2)

#### **2. 1. Introduction**

In this chapter I wish to articulate the long history of transnational adoption from Korea to Denmark and Sweden. The adoption history of the sending nation and the history of the receiving countries are outlined separately. First, Korea’s long engagement in transnational adoption is delineated. Then, the adoption history between Korea and Denmark/Sweden will be duly presented. Taking account of historical issues, this chapter can trace how the sending society and the recipient countries have operated adoption activities. Furthermore, the way in which the adopted people have identified can be analysed.

#### **2. 2. History of the sending country**

This subchapter concentrates on the historical understanding of Korea’s long-term involvement in the field of transnational adoption. It ultimately draws a chronicle of the given case. While historicising this case, it is able to see the emergence of social and political configurations that influence the societal perceptions on Korean adoptees. This subchapter reviews the researches of Hübinette and other scholars who have already delved into the adoption cases of Korea, such as Eleana Kim (2005; 2007; 2009).

### 2. 2. 1. Korean War and war orphans

According to Howell, the phenomenon of transnational adoption reached the second phase owing to the Korean War (1950-1953). The first phase of transnational adoption was constituted by the war orphans who suffered from the Second World War. Therefore, the circulation of these children could generally be found within specific societies. While the first stage of transnational adoption proceeded in North American or European countries, the second stage went over to adopt “racially and culturally different children.”<sup>80</sup> The massive destruction by the Korean War resulted in a large scale of war orphans, and it caused the second heyday of transnational adoption.<sup>81</sup>

As Kim (2007) and Hübinette (2006) articulate Korea has been actively engaged in transnational adoption since the Korean War. This war was correlated to the power struggle between the United States and the former Soviet Union.<sup>82</sup> The capitalist South Korea with the US and UN troops, and the Communist side of North Korea armed with the Soviet Union and China, marched back and forth across the Korean peninsula. During the Korean War, Seoul was handed over to both sides four times. Arguably, the war caused catastrophic effects.<sup>83</sup> The consequence of the warfare was twofold. First, a large number of war orphans emerged and were sent to transnational adoption. Second, numerous mixed-raced children were abandoned.

The UN Korean Reconstruction Agency calculated that 10,000 orphans appeared in 1951 and 516,000 abandoned children appeared in 1953.<sup>84</sup> Since the stories of a massive scale of war orphans had channelled through Western soldiers and missionaries to their home countries, organisations for child welfare and relief as well as adoption agencies were established.<sup>85</sup> In the emergence of adoption agencies, adopting the war orphans was accelerated in the United States and some European countries. The first and foremost receiving country was the United States, in which Korean children dominated the overall ratios of transnational adoption for thirty-eight years.<sup>86</sup> Sweden and Denmark also began to adopt Korean children from 1957 and 1965

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<sup>80</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigner*, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigner*, 17; Tobias Hübinette, “The adopted Koreans of Sweden and the Korean adoption issue,” *The Review of Korean Studies* 6 (2003): 253.

<sup>82</sup> Eleana Kim, “Our Adoptee, Our Alien: Transnational Adoptees as Specters of Foreignness and Family in South Korea,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 80 (2007): 502.

<sup>83</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 38.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 38-9.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 49.

respectively.<sup>87</sup> The children went through the procedures from the National Medical Centre and Scandinavian Mission to Korea.<sup>88</sup>

### 2. 2. 2. Mixed-race children in a patriarchal society

During the early stage of transnational adoption in Korea, mixed-race children constituted 70 to 90 percent of the adopted children.<sup>89</sup> This was because the Korean society as a whole stigmatised biracial children and placed high value on family bloodline and pure ethnicity.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, a social structure that was void of gender equality played a significant role. Children who were adopted during and after the Korean War were predominantly female.<sup>91</sup> In fact, approximately 70 percent of adopted children were girls from 1958 to the middle of the 1980s.<sup>92</sup> What can be reflected by this tendency is a patriarchal feature of the Korean society that sought transnational adoption in order to secure the gendered societal norms. As a family genealogy could only be carried by a Korean male, boys were preferred over girls.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, ethnical homogeneity underpins the reasons for sending a massive scale of female children. In the beginning of the Korean adoption history, therefore, the purpose was rather clear. As the first President Syngman Rhee (1945-1960) aimed, transnational adoption was institutionalised and sponsored by the government on for the purpose of reducing the rate of mixed race children.<sup>94</sup>

As Kim states, the children who do not resemble their fellow Koreans were stigmatised as symbols of racial pollution and illegitimacy.<sup>95</sup> It is important to recognise that the society sorted out the mixed-race children from the “pure” Korean children. In connection to these circumstances, transnational adoption was institutionalised as a main solution for “purifying” the population by the Korean government.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 49, 262.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid*, 48.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid*, 48-9.

<sup>90</sup> Kim, “Our Adoptees,” 497; 502.

<sup>91</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 49.

<sup>92</sup> Kim Park Nelson, Kimberly J. Langrehr and Nate Bae Kupel, Survey of Attendees of the 2010 International Korean Adoptee Associations Gathering of Korean Adoptees, August 4, 2010, Seoul, South Korea: An IKAA Report (Seoul: IKAA, 2013), 4-5, Accessed in October 7, 2014, <http://ikaa.org/en/page/649>.

<sup>93</sup> Hye-Kyung Lee, “International marriage and the state in South Korea: focusing on governmental policy,” *Citizenship Studies* 12(2008): 112.

<sup>94</sup> Tobias Hübinette, “Asian Bodies Out of Control Examining the Adopted Korean Existence,” in *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Concepts*, eds. Rhacel S. Parreñas and Lok C. D. Siu, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 179.

<sup>95</sup> Kim, “Our Adoptee, Our Alien,” 502; Lee, “International marriage,” 110.

<sup>96</sup> Kim Eleana “The origin of Korean adoption: Cold War Geopolitics and Intimate Diplomacy,” *Working paper Series U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS* 9 (2009): 15, accessed October 7, 2014, <https://urresearch.rochester.edu/institutionalPublicationPublicView.action?institutionalItemId=8380>.

### 2. 2. 3. Transnational adoption and governmental policies

Hübinette historicises that from the beginning of the 1960s to the late 1980s, the authoritarian regimes of President Park Chung Hee (1961-1979) and Chun Doo Hwan (1981-1987) had closely engaged in transnational adoption. The function of sending children had been associated with the population controlling programme as well as the modernisation project.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, as Kim presents, by the late 1950s, the paradigm of sending biracial children was shifted by sending social or economic orphans. While the number of mixed-race children was decreased the number of abandoned “full-Korean”<sup>98</sup> children was multiplied. At the heart of the sending pattern after the 1950s, the children who were given up due to social or economic reasons began to dominate the field of transnational adoption in Korea.<sup>99</sup>

During the Park’s regime, the Orphan Adoption Special Law was legitimised. The first Korean local agency was also established for transnational adoption.<sup>100</sup> One of interesting remarks is that the governmental assistances on transnational adoption and the population policy to control the child bearing had pursued concurrently. To get rid of overpopulation and poverty issues, transnational adoption could not be separated from the practices of population controls. According to the demographic data, the goal of lowering the fertility level was accomplished in a dramatic sense.<sup>101</sup> The total fertility level, which refers to average number of children per women, had dropped from 6.1 in 1960 to 1.6 in 1990.<sup>102</sup> Contrary to this trend, the rate of sending the children abroad had increased. In the year 1960, 638 children were sent abroad, whereas in 1990, 2,952 children were adopted transnationally. The number was multiplied more than four times (see appendix 1).

According to Hübinette, the practices of transnational adoption in Korea have facilitated in a way of Foucauldian term of governmentality.<sup>103</sup> The authoritarian governments institutionalised the transnational adoption, and thus, it arguably became a tacit solution by which the population structure was regulated.<sup>104</sup> In accordance with this tendency, Bartholet has interpreted that: “South Korea stands out as the country that has made the most significant effort on the governmental level to facilitate the adoption of its homeless children by foreigner. It is of course

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<sup>97</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 49-54

<sup>98</sup> Kim, “The origin of Korean adoption,” 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 17-8.

<sup>100</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 49-50.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 51-2; 54.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>103</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 50.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 49-50.

in large part because this effort has been so successful that the South Korean government came under pressure to close down its foreign adoption program.”<sup>105</sup>

During the 1990s and 2000s, the new democratic governments attempted to downsize or even ban the programmes of transnational adoption.<sup>106</sup> This turning point was made possible because of the international media attention by hosting 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. The foreign media coverage not only presented Korea’s economic growth within a short period of time but also revealed Korea’s occupation in the field of transnational adoption.<sup>107</sup> The irony of being a wealthy country but still sending a number of children was represented by the word, “orphan exporter.”<sup>108</sup> To confront and solve this problem, the government simply decided to discontinue the practices. In a practical sense, since 2004 the recipient countries have been limited to eight countries including the Denmark and Sweden.<sup>109</sup>

Despite the attempts to cease transnational adoption in the country, Korea has remained as a sending state due to several reasons. First, the Asian economic crisis in 1997 caused a so-called “IMF orphan.”<sup>110</sup> Again, a number of children who were not orphans were abandoned to orphanages or fostering organisations. Accordingly, the rate of transnational adoption re-increased in the late 1990s.<sup>111</sup> Second, the lack of social and legal protections for a pregnant teenagers and unwed motherhood as well as social stigma toward this group of women in need caused a continuous involvement in transnational adoption.<sup>112</sup>

From this standpoint, mapping the relationship between transnational adoption and the societal gender discourse is inevitable. The Korean’s social norms denounce pre- and extra marital sexual relationship.<sup>113</sup> Compare this to post-war Korea, when the biracial children were given up; the contemporary Korean society also has illegitimated the children by premarital pregnancy.

In sum, Korea’s engagement on transnational adoption from the 1960s explains various aspects that are intermingled in transnational adoption. The roles of government, population policies, as well as the social narratives on gender drove transnational adoption to become more active. The

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<sup>105</sup> Bartholet, “International adoption: Current status and future prospects,” 92.

<sup>106</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 59-60.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid 71-2; Kim, “Our Adoptee, Our Alien,” 503.

<sup>108</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 72.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 61, 82.

<sup>113</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 60-1.

Korean society as a whole effectively utilised this activity in order to deal with socially unwelcomed pregnancy and mixed-race children.

In light of what Hübinette delineates, what is intriguing is that Korean adoptees and several issues around them were hardly taken into consideration publicly, in spite of the country's active and long-term engagement in the field of transnational adoption. This neglected issue was uncovered when Korea received international media attention in the late 1980s. As a result of that many Korean newspapers, feminist organisation and civil society began to discuss about it.<sup>114</sup>

#### **2. 2. 4. Globalisation project and diaspora politic**

Throughout the above subparts, I have explained the historical development of transnational adoption in Korean society. Most of the components have illustrated the social and political backgrounds that affect the country's involvement in transnational adoption. From this component, the question of how the society regards Korean adoptees will be to the focus. The Korean society has begun to identify the adopted persons as "value assets"<sup>115</sup> or "as ambassadors and bridges connecting Korea to the West."<sup>116</sup> The way this change has occurred is proficiently articulated by Kim (2007) and Hübinette (2003; 2004).

As shown above, the adopted children and adults did not initially receive much attention from Korea. Most of the adopted people in the early stages were biracial or social orphans, so that they were identified as "abandoned children."<sup>117</sup> Near the end of the 1980s, however, the adopted people were regarded as one of the Korean diaspora groups, as their 'blood' and ethnical characteristics entail the core elements of being 'Korean'.<sup>118</sup> Regardless of how the adopted persons identify the birth country, the society built a theoretical blood-bondage between the adoptees and the countries.<sup>119</sup>

This intentional link became more visible when Korean governments launched globalisation policies.<sup>120</sup> According to Park and Chang (2005), the president Kim Young Sam (1993-1997) attempted to invite overseas Koreans to form a global ethnic Korean community. In 1997, the Act on Overseas Korean Foundation was passed and the Overseas Korean Foundation was

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 70-1.

<sup>115</sup> Kim, "Our adoptee," 506.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 507.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 506.

<sup>118</sup> Hübinette, "Adopted Koreans," 20.

<sup>119</sup> Kim, "Our Adoptee," 506-7.

<sup>120</sup> Hübinette, "Adopted Koreans," 20.

launched. Later, the administration of Kim Dae Jung (1998-2002) passed the Act on Immigration and Legal status of overseas Korean to make a legal link with the ethnical Koreans.<sup>121</sup> These legal schemes were applied to Korean immigrants as well as Korean adoptees with granting quasi-citizenship that covers the permissions on working and prolonged stay.<sup>122</sup> According to the Overseas Korean Act, Korean adoptees were regarded as “ethnic Koreans who are citizen of foreign countries.”<sup>123</sup> From this period adopted persons who were born in Korea could be considered quasi-Korean on a legal or governmental level.

More needs to be mentioned about the societal perception of transnational adoptees. In many contexts, such as presidential speeches and news media, the adopted people have been referred to as quasi-Korean. A number of narratives about Korean adoptees were released and some of the Korean adoptees were invited to Korea.<sup>124</sup> Especially, during Kim Dae Jung’s administration, twenty-nine adopted Koreans from different countries were invited to the presidential residence.<sup>125</sup> The first lady also frequently participated in the conferences and events for transnational adoption.<sup>126</sup> The speeches by the first lady represent the way in which the public sector perceived transnational adoption and the adoptees.

“..., my dear guests, who came all the way to visit their *mother land*.... I cannot describe how proud I was to see *our Korean sons and daughters* who proved their excellent talents and abilities in various different sectors of societies.... We are coming to a fresh understanding of diverse cultures and customs in our homes, work places and societies, regardless of the colours, race, or ethnic backgrounds.... Please remember that your mother country is always behind you. Because you have been separated from your native country since you were young, you may have some disappointment toward your mother country. But I hope you will always remember us as your *parent country*....”<sup>127</sup> (emphasis added)

This speech was made when the first lady the first lady participated in the first International Gathering of Adult Korean Adoptees in Washington DC in 1999. By claiming Korea as their “mother country” and the adoptees as “Korean sons and daughter”, this speech implied the bond between birth country and adoptees. Essentially, this type of understanding bears

<sup>121</sup> Park and Chang, “Contention in the Construction,” 2.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>124</sup> Hübinette, “Adopted Koreans,” 82-7.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>126</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 83.

<sup>127</sup> “Remarks by First Lady Lee Hee-ho at a Tea Party With Korean adoptees form the US”, Office of the President, Republic of Korea, accesses October 7, 2014, [http://15cwd.pa.go.kr/english/library/press/view.php?f\\_kind=EA&f\\_nseq\\_tot=26376](http://15cwd.pa.go.kr/english/library/press/view.php?f_kind=EA&f_nseq_tot=26376).



paradoxical features of the globalisation project. On the one hand, the project from above aimed to make Korea a global nation.<sup>128</sup> However, on the other hand, this project re-emphasised ethnicity and blood bondage.<sup>129</sup>

All in all, as Kim concludes, this globalisation project was associated with building a global Korean community. From this moment, it has begun to organise cultural activities and homeland tour programs for the adopted people. The society as a whole sought to draw cultural connections between the adoptee and the society. Particularly, different legal schemes attempted to reconstruct the relationship between adoptees and the country on a national level. The perception from the Korean society has been arguably renewed. The adoptees began to be considered as “valuable assets” instead of “abandoned children”.<sup>130</sup> To summarise, by addressing the ethnical connection and asserting the blood-link, the society arguably identifies transnational adoptees as quasi-Koreans.

## **2. 3. History of receiving countries**

This subpart focuses on different issues around Denmark and Sweden. Both Sweden and Denmark entail long histories of transnational adoption. When it comes to adopting children from Korea, Sweden first initiated the adoption from the 1950s, and Denmark began to be involved from the 1960s.<sup>131</sup> Since the adoption history of Korea has delineated through the earlier subchapter this subchapter concentrates on the transnational adoption cases of Denmark and Sweden, especially these countries’ various motivations for adopting foreign-born children.

### **2. 3. 1. Adopting war orphans**

As Hübinette argues, the dominant engagements of Sweden and Denmark can be traced back to their earlier movements in the two World Wars. During both Wars, these countries played crucial roles in receiving war orphans and refugee children.<sup>132</sup> These two countries also participated in adopting Korean War orphans.<sup>133</sup> During this period, Sweden and Denmark came forward and participated in adopting Korean children in addition to medical aid. The Nation Medical Center (NMC) and the Scandinavian Mission to Korea (SMK) were founded for

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<sup>128</sup> Park and Chang, “Contention in the Construction,” 2; Kim “Our Adoptees,” 506

<sup>129</sup> Park and Chang, “Contention in the Construction,” 3

<sup>130</sup> Kim, “Our Adoptee, Our Alien,” 506.

<sup>131</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 58.

<sup>132</sup> Hübinette, “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism,” 8.

<sup>133</sup> Yngvesson, *Belonging in an Adopted World*, 30.

offering humanitarian assistance.<sup>134</sup> Most of these operations based on hospitals with 134 Swedish, 94 Danish.<sup>135</sup> The NMC was operated from 1958 to 1967. On the basis of this organisation, the Korea-Scandinavian Foundation was established in 1968.<sup>136</sup> With these organisations, Sweden and Denmark initiated the offer of medical aid for war-torn Korea. In the beginning, the main aim of these foundations was to provide medical support. Later, the organisations focused on improving medical services and standards.<sup>137</sup> These foundations mainly dealt with medical issues. However, it also arguably opened the grounds for transnational adoption between Korea and Scandinavian countries. According to Hübinette, private forms of adoption were initiated, for example, for example, by the staffs of NMC, although the accurate rates of private adoption cannot be estimated.<sup>138</sup> Arguably, children victimised by the war logically constituted the prerequisite conditions for transnational adoption and foreign aid.<sup>139</sup> In the early stage, the Danish and Swedish history of adopting Korean children was linked to their foreign-aid programs.<sup>140</sup> From this standpoint, it is able to understand how a huge flow of Korean children to Denmark and Sweden came about. Even in the United States, the Scandinavian-Americans were actively engaged in adopting Korean children. An estimated 15 to 20 percent of Korean children were relocated in the Scandinavia-like state of Minnesota.<sup>141</sup>

The idealistic motivations behind adopting Korean War orphans can be related to rescue mission as well as their Lutheran missionary ambitions.<sup>142</sup> This is due to the fact that both Denmark and Sweden stationed numerous relief workers, medical officers, as well as missionaries during and after the war.<sup>143</sup> Along with these motivations, these adoptions also can be linked to the Western rescue fantasies because the victimised children often were objects of relief projects by philanthropist and humanitarian activists.<sup>144</sup> The concept of rescue fantasies goes in line with “transnational politics of pity,”<sup>145</sup> which is the concept theorised by Cartwright (2005). According to Cartwright, charitable and humanitarian actions are generally a product of the presence of

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<sup>134</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 48.

<sup>135</sup> “National Medical Center,” Norway the Official site in South Korea, access 14 October, 2014, [http://www.norway.or.kr/News\\_and\\_events/Norway-Korea-Relations/medical/medicalcenter/#.VEBgPhaNaY1](http://www.norway.or.kr/News_and_events/Norway-Korea-Relations/medical/medicalcenter/#.VEBgPhaNaY1).

<sup>136</sup> “History: 1950-1969,” Korean-Scandinavian Foundation, accessed 14 October, 2014, <http://www.ksfn.or.kr/en-us/history/19501969.aspx>.

<sup>137</sup> Chong-dae Choe, “Korean National Medical Center,” *Korean Times*, April 10, 2014, accessed 14 October, 2014, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2014/06/162\\_155126.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2014/06/162_155126.html).

<sup>138</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 48.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>140</sup> Hübinette, “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism,” 9

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*; Hübinette, *Comforting an orphaned nation*, 64

<sup>142</sup> Hübinette, “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism,” 1, 9.

<sup>143</sup> Hübinette, “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism,” 9.

<sup>144</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 43, 16.

<sup>145</sup> Volkman, “Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship,” 4.

global news media, by which the images of children in extreme need are delivered.<sup>146</sup> Despite the fact that her argument is concerned with the patterns of transnational adoption in the 1990s, this perspective also can be applied to the case of adopting Korean War orphans. As these countries joined the Korean War by offering military hospitals,<sup>147</sup> stories and images of the children in vulnerable situations were released. Various news articles and documentaries on such stories were also published, as stated by Hübinette.<sup>148</sup> Arguably, the Danish and Swedish engagement in transnational adoption by adopting Korean children can be motivated by Cartwright's notion of transnational politics of pity.<sup>149</sup>

### 2. 3. 2. Overview of adopting rate

More tangible data should be mentioned in order to prove the dominant engagements from Denmark and Sweden in transnational adoption. Scandinavian states have adopted various ethnic groups of children among other receiving countries. Many researchers who have quantified the flows of transnational adoption also agree that Denmark and Sweden have adopted children most proportionally per capita, while the United States has received more than two-thirds of children in absolute numbers.<sup>150</sup> The surveys of Selman (2002) show that the measurement in the numbers of transnational adoption per one thousand live births of Sweden (10.8) and Denmark (9.9) was higher than that of the United States (4.2) in 1997-1998.<sup>151</sup> Consequently, a huge flow of transnational adoption occurred as a form of relocating non-Caucasian children to western countries. Specifically, this phenomenon actively appeared in Sweden during the 1960s.<sup>152</sup> In the case of Denmark, 80 percent of transnational adoption consisted of children from other European states until the 1970s.<sup>153</sup>

With reference to the numerical data (see Table1), it is not difficult to argue that both Sweden and Denmark have been ranked on the top in terms of receiving children from other countries.

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<sup>146</sup> Lisa Cartwright, "Images of "Waiting Children": Spectatorship and Pity in the Representation of the Global Social Orphan in the 1990s," in *Cultures of Transnational adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 4, 188.

<sup>147</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 41.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 39, 42.

<sup>149</sup> Cartwright, "Images of "Waiting Children"," 187-9.

<sup>150</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 65.

<sup>151</sup> Peter Selman, "Intercountry adoption in the New Millennium; the "quite migration" revisited," *Population Research and Policy Review* 21 (2002): 213.

<sup>152</sup> Selman Peter, "Intercountry adoption in Europe 1998-2007: Patterns, trends and issues," in *Analysis and Debate in Social Policy 2009*, eds. Kirstein Rummery, Ian Greener and Chris Holden (UK: The Policy Press, 2009), 138.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 137.

**(Table 1) Crude intercountry adoption rates (per 100,000 population): US and selected European receiving states 1998-2008 ranked by rate in 2004.<sup>154</sup>**

Adoption per 100, 000 population				
Country	1998	2001	2004	2008
Norway	14.6	15.9	15.4	6.4
Spain	3.8	8.6	13.0	7.1
Sweden	10.5	11.8	12.3	8.6
Denmark	11.8	9.8	9.8	7.2
Ireland	3.3	9.3	9.8	9.4
US	5.8	7.6	7.8	5.6
France	6.4	6.7	6.8	5.3
Italy	3.9	4.8	5.9	6.7
Germany	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.8
UK	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.4

This table indicates the active engagements of Denmark and Sweden in the field of transnational adoption. What is missing from this data is the transnational adoption rate before 1998. In order to show the historical involvement of these two countries, more data is appended (see appendix 2 and 3). The above table show more recent patterns. By reviewing this pattern, the question of why Denmark and Sweden have continuously been involved in transnational adoption arises. As implied by the earlier chapter (see chapter 1. 4), the reason behind adopting many children transnationally is related to the decreasing level of domestic adoption and other social conditions.

### **2. 3. 3. Motivations for adopting a foreign-born child**

Apart from the humanitarian or rescue-fantasy-based motivation, the involvement of Denmark and Sweden in transnational adoption is also related to these countries' social conditions. This subpart focuses on the other reasons that can drive these countries into transnational adoption.

Goody (1969) delves into the question of why certain societies involve themselves in transnational adoption and what role does transnational adoption play with receiving countries. According to his work, three basic reasons for adopting children can be listed as follows:

<sup>154</sup> Peter Selman, "Intercountry Adoption in Europe 1998-2008: Patterns, Trends and Issues." *Adoption & Fostering* 34 (2010): 7.

offering homes for abandoned children; providing children to infertile couples; and to provide a person who can inherit the adoptive parents' property.<sup>155</sup> The first motivation is related to the adoption patterns during the war time, namely rescuing children in extreme need (see 2. 3. 1). The last two functions are related to adoptive families' interests.<sup>156</sup> Even though he summarises these motivations in general, his argument can be applied to the case of Denmark and Sweden. This is because, as Briggs and Marre point out, falling birth rates in most of the receiving countries including Denmark and Sweden is one of the propelling conditions for the rise of transnational adoption.<sup>157</sup> It has also argued that "the sudden disappearance of adoptable Nordic children" also has driven these Scandinavian countries' dominance in transnational adoption.<sup>158</sup>

Howell (2006) also delineates this aspect specifically. Transnational adoption has become an alternative method to have children for childless couples who desire a family. The reason why many countries step into transnational adoption is because of the unavailability of domestic children for adoption. Especially after free contraception became available and when the welfare system financially covered single mothers, the difficulty of finding native-born infants emerged. As he argues, these conditions prevailed in most European countries.<sup>159</sup> In line with this argument, Hübinette also argues that the reason for the disappearance of native Scandinavian children for adoption is due to the development of social welfare system.<sup>160</sup>

Additionally, transnational adoption began to be considered as an alternative way of having a child. This phenomenon goes along with the development of the new reproductive technology (NRT).<sup>161</sup> According to Briggs and Marre, in the 1990s a number of European countries amended their laws on assisted reproduction. As a result, both NRT and transnational adoption began to be considered as assisted reproduction. They also explain that the social acceptance of transnational adoption has been contributed by NRT, as this technique normalises the idea of having children without "natural" biological reproduction.<sup>162</sup> What is important to consider from this aspect is that the phenomenon of transnational adoption is not only the result of war and conflict but also keenly related to adoptive countries' reproduction issues.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Jack Goody, "Adoption in Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11 (1969): 57.

<sup>156</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of foreigners*, 42.

<sup>157</sup> Briggs and Marre, "Introduction," 16.

<sup>158</sup> Hübinette, "Rethinking Nordic Colonialism," 9.

<sup>159</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of foreigners*, 19.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>161</sup> Briggs and Marre, "Introduction," 15-7; Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners*, 3.

<sup>162</sup> Briggs and Marre, "Introduction," 15.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, "Introduction," 17.

## 2. 4. Summarising remarks

This chapter has reviewed the history of transnational adoption from Korea to Denmark and Sweden. The Korean War in the early stage and the economic crisis in the later stage caused a large number of war and social orphans who in the end were placed in foreign countries with new families. The socio-cultural features also enhanced the country's engagement in the field of transnational adoption. First, due to the country's emphasis on blood ties and ethnicity, a number of mixed-race children were abandoned to transnational adoption. Second, the governmental policies on population planning also affected the country's continuous patterns of sending children.

Over the course of its adoption history, Korea's societal perception of the adopted persons has changed as well. Compared to the earlier times, when there was lack of public discussion about transnational adoption and Korean adoptees, more recent cases shows Korea has begun to identify the adopted persons as quasi-Koreans. As the country has aimed to become an international state, the governmental policies have revised to invite Korean adoptees to join several programs that aim Korean adoptees to explore and discover their country of origin. This understanding arguably cannot comply with the adoptees' own identifications. This chapter has not considered the adoptees' arguments in response to Korea's perception of the adoptees. However, this aspect will be considered in the later chapter of analysis (see chapter 4. 4).

Historical accounts on the receiving countries have been briefly mentioned. Numerical data that indicates the active engagements of Denmark and Sweden in the field of transnational adoption has been explained. There are various reasons for these countries' participation in the field of transnational adoption. It can be argued that various aspects such as compassion for war orphans, unavailability of domestic children for adoption as well as their social welfare system are all key factors.

The overall contents of this chapter point out that the phenomenon of transnational adoption plays a role in different social and cultural issues. By historicising and scrutinising this case, this chapter has answered the second research aim of this thesis, which is 'for what reasons do South Korea, Denmark, and Sweden engage in the field of transnational adoption, and how these societies deal with the issues of transnational adoption and transnational adoptees?' On the basis of this chapter, the following chapters will mainly consider cultural identities of Korean adoptees.

## Chapter 3

### **Constructing an analytical frame to understand cultural identity**

A Complex picture emerges when we consider the identity of transnationally adopted persons. (Howell 2006)

#### **3. 1. Introduction**

The prior chapters have introduced the issues around transnational adoption and the history of transnational adoption from Korea to Denmark and Sweden (see chapters 1 and 2). From this chapter the concept of cultural identity, and specifically cultural identities of Korean adoptees, are to be researched. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to form an analytical frame in order to understand adopted individuals' cultural identities.

It has been argued that transnational adoptees exemplify a group of border crossers.<sup>164</sup> Hübinette presents that adopted people, mostly during their childhood, are relocated to different societies and cultures. Similar to emigration and diasporas, a process of transnational adoption occurs between a certain homeland and host country.<sup>165</sup> However, unlike other border crossers, adopted individuals entail unique characteristics. For example, in the case of Korean immigrants, it has been considered that they have more tangible cultural bonds with their native homeland. In the case of transnational Korean adoptees, however, their cultural ties with their home land have been broken and cannot be easily defined, as they are raised and socialised within a monocultural background.<sup>166</sup>

As Howell points out, some transnational adoptees desire to see and experience their place of birth and culture. As a consequence of the desire there is the growth in 'homeland tours' or 'root trips'.<sup>167</sup> The installation of such programs arguably implies that their cultural attachments go beyond adoptive societies. Even though their citizenship and legal status are bound in recipient

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<sup>164</sup> Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 129.

<sup>165</sup> Hübinette, "Adopted Koreans," 16.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>167</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of foreigners*, 113.

societies, adoptees' cultural interests can transcend the borders of receiving states. This tendency implies that how adoptees identify "themselves in terms of nationality is unproblematic."<sup>168</sup> However, how they define their identities "culturally, socially, and ethnically is more complex."<sup>169</sup>

In order to analyse this complex issue, this chapter aims to outline an analytical frame. First, before I define the concept of cultural identity, I will introduce the relationship between cultural identity and ethnic identity. As Korean adoptees bear ethnic or racial differences, mapping the connections between these two abstract concepts is required. Additionally, adoptees' ethnic differences have been considered a significant aspect of their cultural identities. Then, in the following subchapter I will explain what cultural identity does mean. In the third subpart, I will propose different aspects that can be associated with one's cultural belonging. This part will specifically consider the relationship between adoptees and their birth countries. As mentioned above, many adoptees join cultural activities that are related to their country of origin and become a part of adoptees' organisations. Therefore, including the possible functions of such activities is important to construct an analytical frame. Last, Bhabha's theory of "in-between" space will be outlined. Due to adoptees' border transcendental characteristics, his theory can bring a significant point to understand adoptees' cultural identity. I review several scholars' explanations, since there are by no means all-encompassing theories for comprehending a notion of cultural identity. Inviting different scopes of understandings, in the end, will build a framework for the actual interviews of this thesis.

### **3. 2. Cultural identity and ethnic identity**

According to Hübinette, the adopted persons from Korea might face "clashing conditions" which are, on the one hand, being Koreans racially, and on the other hand being Western culturally or socially.<sup>170</sup> This statement implies the intricate challenges that adoptees might face owing to their racial differences. As Hollingsworth (2008) argues different ethnic features are incorporated within identity issues of transnational adoptees.<sup>171</sup> In this context, there are a number of researchers including Robinson who focus on the "transracial/ethnic" dimension of adoption. By stressing racial aspects of transnational adoption, these scholars investigate on ethnic or racial identity. It is important to note that these studies do not regard that different

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Hübinette, "Adopted Koreans," 22.

<sup>171</sup> Leslie Doty Hollingsworth, "Does the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption Address the Protection of Adoptees' Cultural Identity? And Should it?," *Social Work* 53 (2008): 378.



racial groups are biologically distinctive. Rather, these studies consider that these groups have experienced different conditions of domination or oppression.<sup>172</sup>

As Howell (2009) delineates, questions of ethnicity, race, identity, and culture immediately emerge when transnational adoption takes place.<sup>173</sup> In connection to this understanding, information regarding biological origins became important in terms of a person's self-perception and harmonious identity development. This tendency has derived from the growth of transnational adoption as well as NRT, especially in Scandinavian countries and in Western Europe.<sup>174</sup> (see also chapter 2. 3. 3)

Robison also examines different theories about the racial or ethnical identity of adoptees. In most cases, the concepts of racial and ethnical identity tend to be used interchangeably.<sup>175</sup> Ethnical identity is defined as a part of one's identity in the context of one's relationship with (a) social group(s) and emotional attachment to (a) social membership(s).<sup>176</sup> Interestingly, ethnical identity not only considers ethnical or racial features but also poses a question regarding the relationship between ethnicity and cultural identity. As ethnical identity poses the question about social groups and memberships, it has argued that adoptees may have confusions and challenges when they "are uprooted from their own culture."<sup>177</sup> However, there are some studies that underscore the fact that adoptees may hardly approach their cultural heritage or have a strong ethnical identity.<sup>178</sup>

This understanding also brings back some contestations around the Hague Convention. The Hague Convention confirms that best conditions for children are to be adopted by other families within the same societies where the children are born.<sup>179</sup> This understanding implies that ethnical configuration can be a matter for children's best interests.<sup>180</sup> Therefore in order to understand the cultural identity of a transnationally adopted person, it is necessary to cover trans-racial aspects as well.

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<sup>172</sup> Robinson, "Identity development," 118.

<sup>173</sup> Signe Howell, "Return journey and the search for roots: contradictory values concerning identity," in *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*, ed. Laura Briggs and Diana Marre, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 256.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>175</sup> Robinson, "Identity development," 117.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Hollingsworth, "Does the Hague Convention," 377.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 378.

Racial or ethnic identities are an important segment to be taken into account. However, it cannot explain a set of complexities on adoptees' identities. In fact, according to McRoy and Hall (1996), ethnic identity and racial identity refer to one's self-identification and sense of belonging to a particular group. It defines the way in which a person describes oneself and distinguishes oneself from the other, mostly based on ethnical characteristics.<sup>181</sup> Even though several implications that stem from ethnical differences are to be covered in this thesis, it is not served as a main focus. Furthermore, different physical or racial features are intermingled with one's cultural identity. This means that ethnic identity can be covered by investing cultural identity.<sup>182</sup> From this standpoint, the notion of cultural identities is selected as a main focus.

### 3. 3. Defining cultural identity

What is cultural identity? Furthermore, is cultural identity pregiven or acquired? Both words "culture" and "identity" entail abstract conceptualisation. Therefore, understanding cultural identity requires conceptualisation of identity.<sup>183</sup> Stuart Hall (1996) states that identity is a concept that does not indicate "stable core of self."<sup>184</sup> That is to say, unlike general expectation, identity is not transparent and unproblematic. Nor is it an already accomplished fact. Rather, identity can be regarded as a production that is always in process and is never complete.<sup>185</sup> Another definition by Jeffrey Weeks (1990) notes that identity is a concept about belonging. This concept explains commonalities as well as differences of oneself with others. What an individual shares with some people and what distinctions the person has from others are central issues. Accordingly, one's social relationships or complex involvements with others bear significant meanings for the person's identity. To summarise, identity is an ongoing process that tells about personal location. Also, it is a perception that defines one's cultural belonging.<sup>186</sup>

Hall again notes that there are at least two ways of understanding the concept of cultural identity. The first conception clarifies that cultural identity stems from a shared culture. He terms it as a collective "one true self."<sup>187</sup> In this standpoint, cultural identity is shared by people with a shared history and common ancestry. According to this definition cultural identity reflects shared

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<sup>181</sup> McRoy and Hall, "Transracial adoption," 70.

<sup>182</sup> Jandt, *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*. 13.

<sup>183</sup> Hollingsworth, "Does the Hague Convention," 378.

<sup>184</sup> Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity," in *Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gray (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 3.

<sup>185</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community Culture Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222.

<sup>186</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, "The Value of Difference," in *Identity: Community Culture Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 88.

<sup>187</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223.

cultural codes and historical experiences.<sup>188</sup> The second position states that cultural identity is a matter of future as much as it is affected by the past.<sup>189</sup> From this view, the history continues to speak within one's cultural identification so that an individual's identity is a constant process of transformation. Additionally, since the history is not a factual fact and it continues to speak, cultural identity is an issue of "becoming."<sup>190</sup> From the second position, cultural identity is fragmented and fractured. It is constructed across different interactions and positions.<sup>191</sup> To summarise, cultural identity is subject to a ceaseless play of history and not a fixed fact from some essentialised past.<sup>192</sup>

In accordance with this perspective, identities of diaspora or of the group who have crossed borders and boundaries transnationally are continuously produced and reproduced by facing transformation and difference.<sup>193</sup> Similar to this point, Yngvesson (2004) presents that transnational adoption invites the past into the present. Therefore, instead of separating the "before" and "after" of adoption practices, it is important to acknowledge the interactions between the past and the present.<sup>194</sup>

These concepts raise several questions regarding transnational adoption. Does the cultural identity of adopted people change similar to that of other transnational groups? Furthermore, what aspects should be considered in order to better understand this identity matter? In the next part, I will take a close look at the meaning of "sending country" in order to map the relationships between a sending state and an adoptee's cultural identity.

### **3. 4. Cultural identity and a question of "birth country"**

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the right of cultural identity has been focused by political and academic debates.<sup>195</sup> In accordance with this tendency, adoptees' cultural activities or interests in relation to their sending states have been the major focus, as this aspect poses a question about adoptees' cultural belonging.<sup>196</sup> Scholars like Eleana Kim (2005; 2007) and Signe Howell (2002) research adoptees' identity issues in relation to collective gatherings among adopted people with the same origins. They also observe what kind of position the sending society bears for adoptees.

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<sup>188</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>191</sup> Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity," 4.

<sup>192</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>194</sup> Barbara Yngvesson, "'Completing' families and international adoption," in Bowie in *Cross-Cultural Approaches to adoption*, ed. Fiona Bowie (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), 223.

<sup>195</sup> Zagrebelsky, "Adoptions across Identity Borders," 21.

<sup>196</sup> Howell, *The kinning of foreigners*, 111.

In a similar sense, there are also many researches that invite the relationships between sending countries and adopted individuals.<sup>197</sup> It is therefore important to cover implications of cultural practices and meanings of such activities for transnationally adopted persons.

### 3. 4. 1. Adoptees and cultural activities

Activities for adoptees such as revisiting programs and reunions with biological relatives are often organised by almost every sending society that takes part in transnational adoption.<sup>198</sup> In the case of Korean adoptees, it has been indicated that hundreds of adoptees visit Korea every year.<sup>199</sup> Arguably, it is critical to ask questions regarding the cultural activities and returning journey. Furthermore, the question of whether these activities have certain implications on the relationship between adoptees' and their birth countries has to be considered. Legrand (2009) states that since adoptees generally do not have enough knowledge about their birth and genitor, searching for origin entails both searching biological relationships and investigating the place where once was "home."<sup>200</sup>

Adoptees encounter their country of origin under different circumstances. Arguably, the meanings of such encounters can be interpreted differently. Indeed, there is an assumption that expects a tacit bond between adopted persons and their birth countries. It has been also presumed that adoptees have multiple identities.<sup>201</sup> This hypothesis has arguably derived from the Euro-American conceptualisations that distinguish between biological and social kinship.<sup>202</sup> This dichotomy ultimately views that the biological relationship is continued, even though the process of adoption reconstructs adoptees' family ties. From this standpoint, cultural activities and the return journey can be regarded as retying the relationship with a birth country.

However, as Legrand states, even if it is generally presumed that adoptees' activities for revisiting their country of origin is associated with searching their 'roots'; it does not link to genealogical fever.<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, Volkman (2005) also argues that adoptees have struggled to create an alternative way of identification through wrestling with a fantasised idea regarding their sending state.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Howell, *The kinning of foreigners*, 111.

<sup>198</sup> Howell, "Community beyond place," 259.

<sup>199</sup> Emma Kalka, "Adoptees help to change adoption culture in Korea," *Korea Herald*, May 28, 2013, accessed September 23, 2014, [http://khnews.kheraldm.com/view.php?ud=20130528000660&md=20130613002445\\_BK](http://khnews.kheraldm.com/view.php?ud=20130528000660&md=20130613002445_BK).

<sup>200</sup> Caroline Legrand, *Route to the Roots*, 246-247.

<sup>201</sup> Volkman, "Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship," 5.

<sup>202</sup> Howell, *The kinning of foreigners*, 111.

<sup>203</sup> Caroline Legrand, *Route to the Roots*, 246.

<sup>204</sup> Volkman, "Introduction," 10.

Certainly, there is a group of adopted people who desire to visit their birth countries and who attempt to meet their biological relatives.<sup>205</sup> This phenomenon can be observed among the Korean adoptees as well. In connection with this, what exactly “return visits” means to adoptees must be researched.<sup>206</sup> As Legrand notes, for some adoptees these could play a significant role, as these experiences can include the confrontation and reconciliation between the biological and social kinship.<sup>207</sup> In contrast, as Howell interprets, these cultural initiatives serve as a way to confirm the adoptees’ foreignness.<sup>208</sup> By interviewing adoptees, Howell concluded that cultural practices regarding birth countries and returning journeys do not bear significant implications to adoptees. This is because adoptees’ cultural interests or curiosities toward their birth countries can rarely be differentiated with those of tourists.<sup>209</sup>

With regard to these different viewpoints, reflecting on such activities can discover the relationships between birth countries and adoptees’ cultural identities.

### 3. 4. 2. Adoptees and their communities

In most cases, adoptees’ organisations are arranged based on adoptees from the same origin. These types of collective communities can remind their country of origin as well as underscore the shared experiences between the members.<sup>210</sup> The commonality here points out “the fact of being adopted” from the same country.<sup>211</sup> As they are born in the same sending country and since they socialise in the same adoptive society, these features constitute the core concept of adoptees’ communities. That is to say, the connections among them are created due to the common characteristics.<sup>212</sup> It also can be argued that the networks between adoptees play an important role for whom across borders. Not only can it connect people from the same backgrounds but also such associations can assist adoptees when they encounter their birth country in any sense.

However, the arguments against this assumption are represented by many scholars. Howell indicates that the common experiences of “being adopted” cannot be a determining factor for adoptees’ cultural identities. In conjunction with the question of adoptees’ collective communities, cultural activities relating to birth countries are also not as influential as one might

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<sup>205</sup> Howell, *The kinning of foreigners*, 113.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>207</sup> Caroline Legrand, *Route to the Roots*, 246.

<sup>208</sup> Howell, *The kinning of foreigners*, 115.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>210</sup> Howell, “Community beyond place,” 89.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 89.

expect.<sup>213</sup> Insofar as adopted persons continue to stay in adoptive countries, they are integrated into their local societies.<sup>214</sup>

In sum, there are different interpretations on the roles of adoptees' communities when it comes to the question of their cultural identities. Therefore, questions considering the aspects of communities need to be covered by the analytical scope of this thesis.

### **3. 4. 3. Summary**

Certainly, there are different perspectives that weigh the probable influences of birth countries in terms of the issues of adoptees cultural identities. It is important to note that questioning the purposes of joining such activities and personal reflections from these experiences can construct an alternative understanding about adoptees' cultural identities. Accordingly, on the basis of these components, namely cultural activities regarding the birth country, return journeys, and adoptees' communities, I will delineate the case of Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden who arguably cross the borders of race and culture.<sup>215</sup>

### **3. 5. Adoptees' cultural identity in a third space**

Recently Zagrebelsky (2012) poses the idea of "adoption across identity borders."<sup>216</sup> What is worth paying attention to is that she has driven the issues of identity into the centre to understand the phenomenon of transnational adoption. Her terminology underlines adoption in relation to "mutability of the borders intersected."<sup>217</sup> Adoption is an institutionalised frame in which different identities meet.<sup>218</sup> In particular, this phenomenon goes beyond the borders of ethnicity, culture and religion. Therefore, her notion of border is not fixed or naturally given but it is socially constructed and thus "[can be] change[d] throughout history and context."<sup>219</sup> She also claims that in order to study adoptions across identity borders, it is required to explore a new model, which means that "the study of adoptions across identity borders presents the researcher with great challenges. It obliges us to question simplified and essentialised notions of identity. It requires us to develop a new identity model that can reflect the complexity, fluidity and developing nature of an adoptive child's identity."<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Howell, "Community beyond place," 84-105.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>215</sup> Robinson, "Identity development," 117.

<sup>216</sup> Zagrebelsky, "Adoptions across Identity Borders," 10.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 16.

In response to the need for a new model, Bhabha's conceptualisation of "third space" can be applied as an analytical tool. Bhabha (1994) claims that we need to think beyond the singularities of 'class', 'gender', 'race' or 'geopolitical locale.'<sup>221</sup> What Bhabha has meant by "beyond" is exceeding the barrier or boundary and living somewhere beyond the border of our time.<sup>222</sup> This is highly related to postmodern thinking and also corresponds to what Stuart Hall has delineated in relation to cultural identity. According to Bhabha, the very concept of homogeneous national culture is put into question and must be refined.<sup>223</sup> The history of "post-colonial migration," "cultural and political diaspora" and "political and economic refugees" represent the fact that boundaries are the places where something begins to exist.<sup>224</sup>

Transnational adoption has not been included in Bhabha's theory. Nonetheless, his theory creates a room between sending and receiving societies that also can be called 'third space.' This is applicable to the cases of transnational adoption. Third space is un-representable by itself. This space does not have primordial unity or fixity.<sup>225</sup> It is also a place in-between and neither-nor space that can be characterised by ceaseless translation and negotiation.<sup>226</sup> Furthermore, "there is neither a beginning nor an end."<sup>227</sup>

It is important to note that my use of using Bhabha's theory of third space is not directly related to post-colonial theory. Instead, I borrow his conceptualisation within the specific context of transnational adoption. This concept can explain adoptees' cultural identity that can be formed in the "in-between" space of sending and receiving societies.

### 3. 6. Summarising remarks

In order to formulate an analytical tool this chapter has outlined different ideas in relation to adopted persons' cultural identities. First, I have presented the possible implications of ethnical differences to adoptees' cultural identities. When it comes to adoptees' cultural identity, ethnical features or racial backgrounds lead to different understandings. Second, I have implied that cultural identity does not entail fixed or essentialised characteristics by introducing a conceptualisation of Stuart Hall. Since cultural identity is not a pregiven identity, one should consider it as a process. Furthermore, there are several factors that might impact a person's cultural identity. Among many other aspects that might be associated with cultural identity I have

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<sup>221</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>226</sup> Tobias, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 131.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

chosen to concentrate on cultural activities and adoptee's communities that recall their country of origin. These two dimensions have been at the centre of concern for many other scholars, for these aspects can reveal the relationships between a birth country and an adoptee. Despite the fact that these two factors cannot finally grasp the overall complexity of cultural identity, I will include these when it comes to the analytical framework. Last, the concept of third space can be a useful tool to see where the cultural identity of an adopted individual is placed. The very notion of in-between space can open discussions as to whether adoptees' identities go beyond the borders and boundaries. In the following chapter, these aspects will be applied and analysed.

Clarification on the constructed analytical frame would make a great contribution for reading the following chapter. Three core analytical pillars are embedded in this framework. This covers the issue of: (1) how the ethnical features of transnational adoptees are regarded; (2) how adoptees relate birth country and culture to their cultural identity; and (3) can their cultural identities go beyond the frame of nationality.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Analysing cultural identity**

Humans are like colours. Depending on the surroundings how we read them. So like yellow, if you put blue beside you see the red aspect and if you put red beside then you see the blue aspect from the yellow. It is the same yellow. My children they are very Asian in here, but in Korean they are very westerner. So it's always in the interaction. (Respondent 1)

#### **4. 1. Introduction**

The very purpose of this chapter is to understand how adoptees, who crossed borders, identify their cultural belongings and how they regard their cultural identities. To be able to understand the topic, an empirical account of interviews will be given throughout the overall chapter. Each interview contains a different adoption story and indicates various perspectives. By looking at the interviews it is possible to obtain a better understanding of a specific context a Korean adoptee faces and the relationship between an adoptee and a country of birth.

As Steinar Kvale states, interviews should be conducted in order to portray empirical knowledge of the interviewees' experiences of a research topic.<sup>228</sup> Most arguments from prior chapters have underpinned secondary resources. Therefore, to have more tangible comprehensions on adoptees' cultural identity, more specific experiences of adoptees needs to be taken into consideration.

By applying the analytical frame from the prior chapter, this chapter answers the last research aim: "How do adoptees identify their cultural identities with regard to the sending and receiving society and what factors influence this identification." This chapter also sheds light on the issues

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<sup>228</sup> Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 38.

of adoptees' cultural identities in relation to Bhabha's notion of third Space. This theory, in the end, allows us to see adoptees' cultural identities beyond national frames.

#### **4. 1. 1. Conducting interviews**

Six interviews were conducted during July 2014. The interviews occurred in major cities in Austria<sup>229</sup>, Denmark, and Sweden. Even though it was not easy to arrange the interviews in three different countries with respect to the given time frame and financial matters it was fortunate that I could find these six respondents who were very open to speak about their life stories and who welcomed the opportunity to share their opinions about the given topic. The participants not only provided relevant information but also inspired me with many different aspects and further implications.

I was able to conduct six interviews through various ways. First of all, I contacted some of my friends who come from Denmark and Sweden and explained my thesis topic. I also sent an email to a Swedish professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Korea. Since they have personal connections with Korean adoptees, it was possible for me to receive a great range of prospective interviewees. My study year in Denmark at Roskilde University as an Erasmus Mundus Global Studies (EMGS) student also helped with finding interview participants. I could meet some adopted persons, when I joined the cultural activity organised by a Korean community. They assisted me in contacting other Korean adoptees. Only one out of six respondents was known to me before I arranged the interviews. However, I did not know about that particular interviewee's personal story before the interview. This also means that for the rest five interviewees were whom I had never met personally before the interview.

The interviews were pursued in a semi-structured way. As Flick (1998) presents, I asked questions that can be answered with relatively freely. By doing so, the answers from participants can illuminate the interviewees' perspectives on the given subject.<sup>230</sup> Although the interviews mostly followed an interview guidance (see appendix 4), several follow-up questions were added or skipped in accordance with the interviewees' experiences and perspectives. Steinar argues that a semi-structured interview entails a clear purpose and a specific approach. At the same time, this way of interviewing is close to an everyday conversation. Because this type of interviewing seeks to gain a personal description on an interviewee's life experiences, it is able to understand a topic

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<sup>229</sup> One of interviewee stays in Austria due to the interviewee's occupational reason. The interview was conducted at the interviewee's apartment.

<sup>230</sup> Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 94.

from a respondent's viewpoint.<sup>231</sup> Indeed there was flexibility at the heart of the interviews structure – more specifically, the order of questions, whether or not to ask sub-questions or not, and so on. However, I have chosen to begin the interview with the introductory question, which asks the participants' adoption history. As a consequence of that, I could expect two things. First, they could portray their personal experiences in a casual way. Second, in conjunction with taking the interviewee's adoption history into account, I was able to prepare the following questions in relation to his or her experiences.

An interview is the way to obtain knowledge through interactions between an interviewer and an interviewee, and thus each interview can produce different knowledge about a certain phenomenon.<sup>232</sup> In this respect, I choose to have interview in person instead of interviewing via telephone, email or other communication technology. The interviews were conducted in different places, mostly cafés or parks with quiet surroundings. Each of the interviews took approximately 30 to 40 minutes and was recorded as well.

#### **4. 1. 2. Empirical considerations**

It is required to justify the interviewee selection in my qualitative research. As table 2 indicates, there are six interviewees who participated in the interviews. Three of the interviewees are from Sweden and the other three are Danes. Six interviews might seem a relatively small amount of reference. However, as argued by Steinar, the number of participants should be decided in consideration with the purpose of the study.<sup>233</sup> In connection to this point, interviewing six interviewees is sufficient for the purpose of this thesis. The purpose of this research is to understand an adoptee's cultural identity, and hence each interviewee's personal experiences and thoughts have to be questioned. Each adoptee is incorporated into a different family and a diverse part of social organisation, especially each person has his or her own adoption history or background. Consequently, the overall six interviews will accumulate a number of implications and the finding from the interviews will lead to further discussions. In addition to this, this thesis does not aim to make a generalisation of Korean adoptees' cultural identities. In regard to these points I am convinced that interviewing six Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden is appropriate.

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<sup>231</sup> Kvale, *Doing Interview*, 10-1.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 13-4.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 43.

	Gender	Nationality	Meeting with birth parents	Visiting Korea (times)	Adoptee's community
Respondent 1	Female	Swede	No (willing to meet)	Yes (n/a)	Participating
Respondent 2	Female	Dane	No (willing to meet)	Yes (11)	Participating
Respondent 3	Female	Swede	Yes	Yes (3)	No
Respondent 4	Female	Dane	No	No	No
Respondent 5	Male	Swede	Yes	Yes (8)	Participating
Respondent 6	Male	Dane	No	Yes (1)	Participating

Table 2. Information about interviewees<sup>234</sup>

The reason for selecting more female interviewees than male is owing to the unbalanced gender preference in Korea. According to Freudlich and Lieberthal (2000), 42 percent of Korean adoptees from 1955 to 1998 were male, while the rest were female.<sup>235</sup> Currently, this trend goes in a complete opposite way, for the field of domestic adoption in Korea now prefers girls than boys. To sum up, since the participants' ages range from their twenties to thirties, I applied the tendency of gendered pattern into the interviewee selection criteria.

## 4. 2. Adoption history

As mentioned above each adopted individual has a different adoption history, that is, family backgrounds, the age of adoption, and so forth. Accessibility to adoption information varies as well. Some of them were provided with more information including facts about birth parents and reasons for adoption, while others have limited information and opportunity to know about their birth backgrounds. The same patterns can be applied to the interviewees. Some of the respondents said that they have a good range of information about their adoption history. The other interviewees mentioned that they do not have much information. In most of cases, their adoptive parents offered the adoption histories to their children. A short illustration about the way in which the adoptees encounter their adoption history at first is described as follows:

My family has been very open about the adoption and I was very interested when I was a child. Like 'where is Korea' and I remember having booklets and stuffs like that. My parents made a binder with all the papers from the adoption, which I regularly went through. ... I think that it was a very nice story telling. My parents also wrote down on a diary like [the

<sup>234</sup> These are the basic information which can be listed in this thesis. Other personal information such as name, place of residence and family background were asked and answered. However, through this thesis, these information will not be shown due to anonymization purpose.

<sup>235</sup> Madelyn Freudlich and Joy Kim Lieberthal, *The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees: Adoptees' Perceptions of International Adoption* (New York: The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2000) accessed October 7, 2014. <http://adoptioninstitute.org/publications/the-gathering-of-the-first-generation-of-adult-korean-adoptees-adoptees-perceptions-of-international-adoption/>.

adoption process]. So it's all written down and I have this story line in my head in the way that my parents told me and the way that they remember it. (Respondent 4)

It (the adoption history) is actually written down in my adoption documents. I did have a surprising amount of information including both of my biological parents' names. Actually, my parents had all the papers, they showed me, maybe, when I was 14. But I did not actually think about my biological mother until many years later. (Respondent 3)

I know when I was adopted and which city I came from, but I don't have any information about my birth parents. So they are kind of unknown. ... they (adoptive parents) told me that there was nothing. There was no information. (Respondent 2)

In most of cases, adoptive parents instruct the adoptees about the birth country and provide the adoption information. As Legrand points out, on account of the Hague Convention which stipulates the obligation of preserving birth information and adoptees' rights to know their adoption history,<sup>236</sup> some of the adoptees could have a good range of information. However, considering the fact that Korea ratified the convention in 2013,<sup>237</sup> it is not difficult to see the reason why some of the interviewees hardly know about their birth backgrounds. Both Denmark and Sweden have been the members of the Hague Convention since 1996 and 1997, respectively.<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, in most of the receiving countries, adoptive parents often regard that tracing adoptees' birth backgrounds and searching for origin is important as they consider that these practices can solve adoptees' identity issues<sup>239</sup>

The interviews state that their adoptive parents collected all the facts regarding the adoption. Most of the parents introduced information about their birth country and were supportive when their adopted children were willing to investigate about their biological heritage further. In light of this given information, some of the adopted persons actively engaged in search activities in the forms of return journey and searching for or meeting their birth parents.

In the following part, the first analytical thread – how are the ethnical features of transnational adoptees regarded – will be taken into consideration

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<sup>236</sup> Legrand, "Route to Roots," 251.

<sup>237</sup> Steven Borowiec, "Change in Korean Adoption Law Followed by More Abandoned Babies," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 2013, accessed <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303442004579121030310275014>

<sup>238</sup> "Status table," Hague Conference on Private International Law, [http://www.hcch.net/index\\_en.php?act=conventions.status&cid=69](http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.status&cid=69)

<sup>239</sup> Legrand, "Route to Roots," 252.

### 4. 3. Adoptee's ethnicity and cultural identity

As Jeffery Week considers (see chapter 3. 3), cultural identity is associated with the question of where a person belongs. Belonging explains social or cultural commonality and differences.<sup>240</sup> The most tangible and obvious difference between transnationally adopted Danes or Swedes and the native-born-white Swedish and Danish population can be appearance, or ethnical features. Even though it can also be argued that different appearances are not an essential aspect that affect and determines one's cultural identity, some scholars such as Hollingsworth argue that adoptees' different physical features in regard to the surrounding population is a relevant issue for cultural identity.<sup>241</sup> Therefore it is necessary to take into consideration ethnical features that adoptees have. The reason why this factor should be considered is already delineated in the prior chapter (see chapter 3. 2). Therefore, this sub-point serves to analyse this aspect in accordance with interviews.

Indeed, personal experiences caused by different appearances are varied depending on a personality as well as social settings. For instance, one of the respondents explained that adoptees who have grown up in a smaller town might have faced more difficulties than those who have families in a large city. This is due to the fact that the adoption ratio in a rural area is not as high as the rate in a big city. Thus the local people living in a city can encounter more foreigners and/or adoptees who have different racial features so that the people are more familiar with the appearances of adoptees.

The interviewee who spent some times in Korea represented how ethnical characteristics are regarded from both a sending and receiving state. One interviewee explains that:

When I compare to Sweden ... in Sweden, some people look at me as a foreigner, but I feel like I am Swedish in my mind and I just have a different appearance. When I come to Korea, it's like they would address me as a Korean first. They would actually talk Korean with me. I just like that they would normally do that first. Here (Sweden) sometimes people, especially if I am in an airport they would normally talk English with me first, which is just... it's okay but, when I am in Korea they talk Korean to me and I like that. Also everyone is pretty much Asian [in Korea], so I am not a part of a minority like I am in Sweden. (Respondent 5)

According to the interview, adoptees' ethnical features have a different effect in both Korea and Sweden. In Sweden, people cannot easily identify adoptees as local people at first due to their

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<sup>240</sup> Weeks, "The Value of Difference," 88.

<sup>241</sup> Hollingsworth, "Does the Hague Convention," 378.

different ethnical or racial features, whereas Korean people regard them as Korean. Throughout the following subsection, more interviews in regard to ethnicity are to be analysed and discussed.

#### **4. 3. 1. Adoptee's ethnicity in the sending society**

Considering an ethno-nationalistic social feature in Korea, the society as a whole underlines ethical commonality. The Korean society and the people at first do not recognise a Danish or Swedish adoptee as a Dane or Swede. Before the adoptees go deep inside the country, the society as a whole considers them to have a quasi-Korean identity (see chapter 2. 2. 2 and 2. 2. 4). This is the typical manner that emphasises the notion of ethnical homogeneity and illustrates how the overall sending society understands the meaning of ethnicity in relation to adoptees. As the interviewee stated:

I think some older people or some old generation they might think that you should, even if you are adopted ... you should know more about your history and about the Korean culture the language and especially like the rules. (Respondent 5)

From the Korean society's side, the shared ethnical features shape the way people identify adopted persons. However, from the adoptees' side, the similarities of appearance do not lead them to feel connected to their birth society.

It was strange because I expected to blend in more in Korea, but I did not. When I have been there, I usually have my boyfriend with me so we were a mixed couple. But even when I walked on my own, I realised different clothing, difference in something and in the way you brought up in some way. But I did buy some Korean clothes in a common clothing store. When I wore it... one man walked up for me and asked me about the direction. Which was a bit funny because ... in Sweden, it is my appearance that makes me apart. But in Korea, it is my lack of knowledge and language and social roles that people notice. (Respondent 3)

The interviewee stated that the way of dressing and the way to interact as well as to communicate are different from the adoptive society. These types of differences, in the end, made a distinction. Due to these differences, it was difficult to mingle in the native society. The symbolic action of purchasing a typical Korean-styled cloth made her blend in the society on an external level. However, there were other barriers such as language, social norms on politeness and so forth. Even though the ethnical similarity reminds of her 'Korean-ness' when encountering Koreans, not having enough cultural awareness or language skill made a noteworthy impact on the experience. This aspect is also reflected by another interview.

By just seeing them (Koreans), I cannot see the difference. However, the Koreans adoptees they are like the Danes. I have been hanging out with a lot of Koreans and I found that there is a big difference. ... Actually, when I walked down one of the shopping streets [in Korea], suddenly I saw this Caucasian guy come against me. I thought he was very familiar so I smiled at him. But then afterward I thought about it and I thought he would think that I was very weird, because I was just among all this Asian and why should we have something special...but he was just very familiar for me. But I felt very strange in all this. (Respondent 6)

When adoptees visited their birth country, they generally expected to blend into the society relatively easier than other visitors. The above interviewee also described that he could not recognise the distinctions between Korean and Korean adoptees by appearance. However, when it comes to in-depth communications with Koreans, he could address essential culture differences.

Interestingly, during his journey in Korea, he felt more familiarity with the Western guy whom the interviewee saw on the street than with native Koreans. Of course, he has lived in Denmark over the course of his life, except for during the adoption process. He might ask back, “why should I feel solidarity with other Koreans, even though I do not have any common factor except from the appearance.” Considering his life experiences, it is not surprising that he felt familiarity with the Caucasian guy. However, as the interviewee said, for the Western guy he was an Asian or a Korean since this Western guy by no means could notice about the respondent’s adoption background.

One of respondents highlighted that the usual ethnical categorisation from the sending and receiving society does not comply with her cultural identity.

I thought it would be so weird for me to go to Korea, because I would look like everybody else. ... Of course, I sense that I am not like a blond and tall Nordic person but it would be sort of weird because my mind set would be difference from [other Koreans]. It will be difficult to explain that I am Danish. ... I have experienced a similar experience once when I worked at a department store. There was a lot of Asian people and Asian tourists, and lots of them spoke to me in different Asian languages. I was always like ‘I don’t know’. People often do that when I am travelling as well. They want to speak to me in Korean or in Chinese. It feels so strange for me. It seems like people see connection when the looks of persons is similar. (Respondents 4)



The respondent stressed that her adoption background and Asian appearance are not essential points for shaping her cultural identity. Even though the respondent does not resemble the native Danish population and looks similar to the Korean population, as well as other Asian people, this racial aspect does not create a challenging condition for her Danish mindset. Other interviewees implied that the shared racial or ethnical features enable them to mingle in the Korean society relatively easier even though most of them in the end faced the distinctive cultural gap between Korea and Denmark/Sweden. In the case of this interviewee, she ironically pointed out that ethnical commonality might make for a unique cultural clash in her birth country. Furthermore, the interviewee stressed that the typical expectation of feeling connection owing to similar appearance is limited and restricted perception. According to this interview, it is possible to see what Hübinette has argued from a different perspective (see chapter 3. 2). For the respondent, being Korean by race and Dane by culture does not create a challenging situation in the adoptive society. Rather, this challenge occurs when people regard her racial background more significantly than her cultural or social background. Arguably, she disagreed with the usual judgement based on the ethnical characteristics.

From this aspect, it can be argued that adoptees' cultural identity is independent of ethnical features. One can also argue that the concept of visiting a birth country or meeting birth parents does not stem from the question of ethnicity. Therefore, applying a discourse of ethnic-Korean in order to map a relationship between the adoptees and the birth country is an insufficient method.

In general, the shared ethnical feature is not a crucial configuration for adoptees when they are in the sending country. The question toward the receiving countries still remains. The following section deals with the impact of different ethnical characteristics.

#### **4. 3. 2. Adoptee's ethnicity in the receiving societies**

When it comes to ethnical issues in the receiving society, the question of how adoptees' different appearance or ethnical background is regarded was asked. In most cases, the answers were divided into two parts: experiences from a personal level and experiences from the society as a whole. From a societal level, most interviewees claimed that ethnical distinction is not observable. As a citizen of the receiving society, an adopted person is identified as a "completely Swedish [or Danish] and Western."<sup>242</sup> Nordic countries like Denmark and Sweden were often depicted as

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<sup>242</sup> Hübinette and Tigervall, "To be non-white in a colour-blind society," 337.

a post-racial utopia or colour blind society.<sup>243</sup> These can cause a simple assumption that an adopted person is well accepted from the receiving society and thereby questions regarding ethnicity do not need to be asked.<sup>244</sup> However, issues around ethnical features are related to personal experiences as well. From an individual level, every interviewee experienced some types of prejudice due to their Asian appearances. Herein lays the reason why the ethical issue in the receiving society is more complex than those of the sending countries. Despite the fact that these countries are described as “colour-blind” societies, which means that these societies do not distinguish and discriminate people by colour,<sup>245</sup> there are many circumstances that make a distinction from the adoptees from Korea and an ethnical Dane/Swede.

### **- Experiences on an individual level**

Although adoptees identify themselves as Danes or Swedes, racial distinctions by some people make them feel as an ethnical minority. As mentioned, if we go down to an individual level, an adopted person can experience some levels of confusion or racism due to their ethnical background.

For some people, they might look at me before I speak and think that I might have a dialect or I cannot really speak Swedish or something like that in their mind. They might have this thinking that I am going to be like this or like that. When I start to speak Swedish than ... their minds [would be] changed. They would accept me in another group but initially I was in this group. So, it is complicated and I think normally in society, they do not think this is a big problem so they do not really listen. ... Let's say like 30 years when most of adoptees would have their own children, they are I think in here they are Swedish but they do not look Swedish. It will be more issues for later not only for us but also for children. Like this common questions: where are you from? I don't know how it will turn out. (Respondent 5)

As implied by the interview, there can be a tacit categorisation that distinguishes, for instance, Swedish-looking Swedes and foreign-looking Swedes. A typical image of how Swedes generally look like can disconnect transnationally adopted persons in the society. Even though their self-identification are grounded in the Swedish or Danish society, there are specific circumstances that make adoptees feel if they are in an ethnical minority group. Another interviewee described her experience as follows:

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 335.

<sup>244</sup> Yngvesson, *Belonging in an Adopted World*, 101-2.

<sup>245</sup> Zagrebsky, “Adoption across identity borders,” 57

One girl said that my appearance is ugly and I was surprised because ... what she tried to say that was how people is attracted by you and like you, when you are not blond and blue eyed. I think that was a real message [and I was discouraged]. ... But after we (her family) went back to Korea together, that feeling [that I am the minority of the Swedish society] left me totally. In Korea, I was regarded beautiful. Before we went to Korea my husband was never jealous about me, but when we were in Korea for three weeks he was. After we came back, I did not have this feeling anymore. (Respondent 1)

She also experienced a mistreatment owing to her appearance during her school days. What is interesting here is when she visited Korea; she could identify herself without discouragement. For her, connecting herself with other Koreans was important in a way sp that she could break the typical image of Swedish female and be satisfied with her Asian appearance.

It has also been argued that the adopted persons are frequently confronted with this typical image of how Danish or Swedish people look. Admittedly, her Asian appearance or ethnic background does not comply with this image. As an Asian-looking Swede, she could face prejudice against ethnicity.

As an Asian-looking Swede, one of the other interviewees described her experience of gendered perception. Her interview presents as follows:

I think since Korean adoptees are fairly common in Sweden I don't think they regard us as strange. When I went to high school there was one guy who had been adopted from an African country. There are all kinds of family. I think it is fairly common. ... It (different ethnical background) does influence [in the way that the Swedish society indentifies me] since no matter where you go, you will always face sort of racism. I think if you are a female then there is a specific type of men who will treat you in a very unpleasant way because they think you are Asian, so you are easy, submissive and so on.... So it is detestable to receive that kind of objectification. But, generally, I do not feel that there has been a specific problem. ... I think Asians are fairly well accepted in Sweden ... even though they usually think either from China or they think maybe you are from Japan. (Respondent 3)

Having an Asian appearance sometime causes peculiar situations especially to female adoptees. Furthermore, due ethnic features adopted groups can arguably face challenges that the other fellow citizens hardly encounter. In the adoptive societies, there are circumstances in which adoptees are differentiated from the native population. This aspect brings back HübINETTE's notion of "clashing condition" (see chapter 3. 2). However, these cases are occur on an individual level. As stated, most of the adoptees also claimed that such experiences do not

impact their relationship with or belonging to the adoptive society or their cultural identity. Another interviewee said that:

I am not very often confronted with my Korean heritage. It's mostly foreign people that ask me 'where are you from' because they cannot see that I am born in Denmark. ... I mean some people asked me where my real origin is, but I think persons that I talk with aware of that adoption are not so abnormal. ... I think it (different appearance) is always meant something and says me something.... It is not something that I feel irritated. But it did when I was younger especially when I started school. ... I think everybody that looks different in one way or another will feel it, when you start a socialisation process with other children. I don't think it was much different than ... when I got glasses I was teased. I don't think it was a problem in that sense. I do not feel it was difficult in later years in my school life. Definitely it means something, but I think it is in line with being different in many ways.  
(Respondent 4)

According to the interview, an adoptee's different ethnical background scarcely bears meaning more than different appearance. Even if it causes misconceptions or unjustifiable situations, adoptees' being non-ethnic Swedish or Danish does not detach their connections with their adoptive society. Additionally, ethnical features are not a contributing element that leads to adoptees' investigation on their birth background.

### **- Experience on a society level**

In Denmark and Sweden, the number of Korean immigrants is relatively small. Even though Koreans have been the largest East Asian minority, Korean adoptees, in fact, constitute most of the ethnic Korean presence.<sup>246</sup> As a result of that, no strong subculture can be found in Denmark and Sweden. There are few chances for the adoptees to encounter Korean culture unless they have a particular interest in Korean society. Furthermore, both countries have a long history of adopting children from abroad (see chapter 2. 3. 2). In accordance with these tendencies, Asian-appearing children were generally recognised as adoptees. The interviewees also acknowledged this aspect:

Because in Denmark we have very few Asian immigrants, they do not have this all sub-culture in Denmark. If you meet an Asian on the street in Denmark it is almost 90 percent sure that it is an adoptee. So I have never experienced discrimination from the society side. Of course if you go down to the individual perspective I have heard some name calling and

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<sup>246</sup> Hübinette, "Adopted Koreans," 19.

so on but I have never seen it as a problem. I think Asian adoptees are very accepted by the Danish society. (Respondent 6)

As the adoptees already received citizenship and were planted into the society through a new family tie, most of the interviewees said that there have been no discriminations or distinctions made on the part of society.

Sometimes [I had difficulties because of different appearances], but mostly when you are young and a child. ... But I think there is an acceptance because we were considered as Danish. (Respondent 2)

According to the interviews that were concerned with ethnic issue in the adoptive societies, we can summarise the roles of ethnical features toward adoptees' cultural identities. Different appearances and ethnical backgrounds apparently distinguish the adoptees from the typical image of how native Swedes or Danes appear. Despite the fact that adoptees might experience discouragement owing to this difference, however, such differences can hardly be the factor that determines their relationship with the adoptive country. Nor is this an issue which drives adoptees to research their cultural or birth heritage.

#### **4. 4. Cultural identity and the birth country**

Here, I will take a closer look at the relationship between the adoptees and birth countries. Given the fact that some interviewees visited Korea and were involved in adoptees' associations, the purposes of encountering the birth country and implications from such engagements will be analysed. The second pillar of the analytical framework: "how do adoptees relate birth country and culture into their cultural identity" will be mainly considered.

##### **4. 4. 1. Purpose of visiting**

What can be the purpose of visiting a birth country? Among the six interviewees, five respondents visited Korea at least once. Some of them joined an annual visiting program, which was organised and sponsored by the adoption agency, especially when they went to Korea for the first time. The others did not participate in such programs, although they contacted a certain adoption organisation through which they can find accommodation during their visit in Korea, or more information about their biological relationships.

I guess, it (visiting Korea) was just to experience the country and the culture. Because I think all adoptees, at some level, are curious about the country they came from. (Respondent 3)

As this interviewee said, many Korean adoptees visited Korea due to their curiosities about their country of origin. Indeed, each visitation is motivated by different circumstances. However, one of the main reasons for visiting is related to cultural curiosity. Such cultural curiosity may or may not entail the same characteristics with that of tourists. One interviewee argued that his main purpose of visiting was cultural exploration.

[I visited Korea] just once in 2012. ... it was only there for 14 days. So actually I was just a normal tourist. ... I was hoping that I could sense something, something that I could recognise, for instance, some smells, some situations of sounds because I was two years old when I came here [in Denmark]. But nothing, I couldn't feel anything. (Respondent 6)

He initially planned to see the country and experience the culture like a tourist. On top of that, however, he had an additional anticipation of finding cultural connections as well. Although adoptees' visiting activities are organised in a similar sense to those of travellers, adoptees' explorations bear a specific expectation, which can be differentiated by other groups of visitors. When the interviewee discussed his adoption background, he mentioned that the adoption proceeded when he was relatively older than other cases. In connection to this point, he arguably expected to sense a certain degree of recognition with the surroundings of Korea such as some smell and sounds. In the end, however, he could not grasp any kind of 'connection' in Korea.

One respondent described her experience as follows:

[I have visited Korea for] eleven times. ... I like the culture. I have got some friends and I really like Korea. [I like to] be a part of because I blend in and enjoy the city. ... I know a lot of people, many [Korean adoptees] who would often visit Korea on holidays. Sometimes, maybe study there or live there for a while. ... I feel connected to it (Korea). Not just as a tourist. [There is] some kind of connection. (Respondent 2)

What is intriguing is that this interviewee pointed out her connection with the country. Her experience of connection does not stem from a biological bond, as she could not meet her birth relatives even though she attempted to do so. According to the interview her connection is rather a result of her interactions with other Koreans and Korean adoptees.

When adoptees visit their birth country, they invite their own adoption history. In the cases of the above-mentioned interviews, one interviewee invited his history by expecting a sensual connection with Korea. The other respondent faced her adoption history by visiting the country every year since her first visit and interacting with Koreans and Korean adoptees. As Yngvesson

(see chapter 3. 3) argues, transnational adoption invites the past into present.<sup>247</sup> However, they can or cannot feel certain types of connections, as cultural identity is subject to a ceaseless play of history and not a fixed fact from some essentialised past.<sup>248</sup> In line with Hall's articulation (see chapter 3. 3) adoption history speaks to each adopted person differently.<sup>249</sup>

By visiting a birth state, an adoptee can look into the past, which is made known by adoption documents or adoptive parent's storytelling. Arguably, the unexplored past is linked to an imagined life. As one interview stated, an adopted person may have imagined his or her life without an adoption.

I think first I just wanted to actually see the country and see what is like I could have imagined. ... If I would have lived here, what would my life have been like? (Respondent 5)

This statement goes against the argument that views transnational adoption as a process that delinks adoptees from the sending states. They can revisit and reconstruct their personal history by visiting the country of origin. In this standpoint, the visiting program can open a ground for exploring more about their unknown past.

To summarise, their purpose of visiting Korea arises from complicated desire.<sup>250</sup> On the one hand, it is due to cultural curiosity. On the other hand, it is because there is a certain level of expatriation to find or experience a connection with a birth country. It also can be concluded that these activities can shape a new relationship between adoptees and the birth country. The new relationship here does not mean in a sense of re-writing genealogy or retying a biological bond (see chapter 3. 4. 1).<sup>251</sup> In fact, as the interviewees argued it can be a part of their personal history, and a part of their cultural identity.

Apart from the perspectives that see the significance of exploring the birth culture, it also must be taken into account that this conceptualisation cannot be universalised for adoptees. In other words, visiting the country of origin is not an essentialised taken for granted step for all adoptees are willing to take. This aspect is reflected by the interview as well.

I haven't visited Korea. I think when I was younger I was very interested in going to Korea. At some point, my parents also urged me like 'you should go someday'. But, it has never

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<sup>247</sup> Yngvesson, "“Completing” families and international adoption,” 223.

<sup>248</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 225.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>250</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners*, 113.

<sup>251</sup> Legrand, “Route to the Roots,” 246.

been a big subject for me. ... I think I will go someday, but I do not know when. It is not like something I really feel that I have to do. (Respondent 4)

As can be seen by this interview, the respondent described that, compared to the time when she was younger, her interest toward her birth country and its culture has decreased. Adoptees' curiosities toward their birth countries or culture can be inactive and possibly even disappear as time goes by. For this particular respondent, searching for details about her adoption background does not hold significantly important meaning, although her parents or acquaintances expect and support her journey. As Howell argues, it is noticeable that there are an increasing number of return visits and reunions with birth families, and hence there might be a societal expectation on adoptees' activities related to their country of origin (see chapter 3. 1).<sup>252</sup> However, instead of generalising the relationship between adoptees and their country of origin, it can be rather claimed that some adoptees are willing to revisit their birth country, while there is another group who do not have a particular interest in the country of origin.

#### **4. 4. 2. After visiting Korea**

For those who visit Korea, their journeys result in several consequences. First, this encounter attracts them to investigate more about the country by learning the language or staying as a student or employee. Second, as a consequence of the visitation, adoptees can elaborate on their biological family search. Even though not many adoptees are able to find their birth relatives due to rejection on the birth parents' side, there have been a number of adoptees who attempt to delve into their adoption history. This part analyses what these consequences mean for their cultural identities. Last, Howell assumes that visiting Korea can result in the adoptees' cultural detachment from the birth society. This means that contrary to the prevailing thought, adoptees might reconfirm their Danish-ness or Swedish-ness throughout the journey on account of cultural difference. Therefore, this part will also apply to Howell's argument.

##### **- Cultural activities**

After the birth-country journey, some adoptees begin to incorporate into their lives other cultural activities. For instance, learning the language is frequently initiated after their visitation to Korea. This is because speaking the same language is a useful way to connect on a deeper level with their country of origin. One interview described this situation:

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<sup>252</sup> Howell, "Return Journeys and the search for root," 259.



After my first trip, I made a lot of friends and I wanted to go back to spend more time because my first visit was just 10 days. So it was not enough. ... Actually, I stayed there for six months once I took a basic Korean class. But I would like to stay maybe one or two years, so that it will give some times. Because I think, it is interesting to raise culture a bit more and to figure out what everyday life would be like. (Respondent 5)

Another adoptee also stated her willingness to learn Korean. According to the statement, learning Korean is not only practicing the new language. It is also a way to maintain her interest in Korean culture.

I am interested in Korean culture. But I feel that since the language is the key to the culture so I really should spend more time to learning it. ... It is good because then I have sort of constant interest going even if it's not always active. (Respondent 3)

As implied by the interviews, such activities like learning the language are the way to blend into the culture. Together with cultural activities, exploring more about their biological backgrounds is inspired by visiting Korea. In particular, when it comes to a visiting program by a certain adoption agency, the organisation frequently asks whether the visitors want to search for their biological relatives.

### **- Family research**

Visiting a birth country can enhance one's curiosity and lead the person to investigate more about their birth heritage. Sometimes, the visitation includes a reunion with birth relatives. The following interview shows the way in which return journeys proceed and how birth-family searches are incorporated.

One of Korean adoption agency had a 'welcome home program' at this time, so I could apply for this. I did not know about this but it was basically: you can come to Korea; you can embrace the culture; you can go with other adoptees and; you can get a nice start. I thought, 'okay, I will apply and see what happens'. In this application they asked like 'are you interested in finding your birth parents' and I said yes. ... It was two days before my departure that my social contact worker in Korea said that they found my mother so that I could meet her if I wanted to. So I said yes, but obviously I was shocked, because I was not prepared for such meeting. (Respondent 5)

There are many adoptees who searched for their biological relationships. As mentioned above, such activities are growing. Some of them, like the interviewee, were able to meet their birth relatives. However, it is important to note that adopted persons have not initiated such activities

in order to “complete” their identity. It is contested to consider these activities as reconstructing a genealogy. As a matter of fact, adoptees’ activities of looking for their biological parents have emphasised the relationship between identity and biological tie.<sup>253</sup> Like Schneider (1968), many scholars understand identity in relation to biological family linkage. They also believe that a specific identity is shared by blood relatives.<sup>254</sup>

Against this perspective, one interviewee who has met her biological family member described how improper it was to use a metaphor of salmon when an adopted person returns to its birth place or meets his or her birth parents.

Korean man wrote an article about his experiences with adoptees in Sweden. ... He claimed that this child (an adopted child from Korea) had turned to follow his eyes on him. He said that this is because Korean children should grow with Korean parents. He kept sort of rhapsodising how adoptees are like salmon they should ....swim back to their origin, settle down there and become real Koreans, which sort of make both me and my sister angry. ... Where I was born and where I have a blood relative are not that I consider as most important ties. Even though I found my birth mother, she still is a person who I very rarely speak to and whom I cannot communicate with without an interpreter. (Respondent 3)

The interview points out that blood ties are not a determining element that define one’s identity. Furthermore, the above interview indicates that the barrier between the adoptee and her birth mother can hardly be eliminated. From this standpoint, adoptees’ activities on family search are not keenly related to the notion of “rebuilding” a relationship with biological family.

This interview also shows how the sending country fails to understand the complexity of transnational adoption and identity issues surrounding transnational adoptees. Throughout the news article that the respondent read, cultural identity was generalised by national frames. This generalisation might stem from drawing clear boundaries between sending and receiving society. As Bhabha conceptualises (see chapter 3. 5), this dichotomous perspective only can see adoptees’ identity issues with fixity and singularities of different categories, in this case the categorisation of ‘birth country versus adoptive country.’<sup>255</sup> However, as the respondent argues, why should Korean adoptees become ‘real Koreans’? Certainly, adoptees’ activities of visiting Korea and meeting biological family does not work as the form of “leaving” the adoptive country and “returning” to the birth society.

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<sup>253</sup> Zagrebelsky, “Adoption across identity borders,” 72.

<sup>254</sup> David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A cultural account* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1968), 25.

<sup>255</sup> Bhabha, *The location of Culture*, 2.

### - Confirming the gap with a birth country

While the visiting birth country provides the chance to grasp Korean culture, the visitors also experience cultural difference and cultural gap. In one sense, this can be a taken-for-granted phenomenon, since the adopted persons are generally raised up in monocultural contexts as Hübinette argues.<sup>256</sup> This aspect is also related to what Howell discusses; the returning journey can act as a way to prove and strengthen their ‘Danish-ness’ or ‘Swedish-ness’ (see chapter 1 and 3. 4). When asking the interviewees the question of how and when they face cultural differences in Korea, they responded as follows:

It is very different. ... Some people could not really accept that I was non-aware of social etiquette roles. They expected me to know it, just because I was born in Korea. I have not grown up there so it was impossible for me and that would really irritate me and make sad. ... I did not really know how to respond. I tried to speak with English they just kept talking in Korean and looked at me strangely. I was really upset when I went to Korean restaurant I am not really used to chopstick ... and the people working in the restaurant they were pointing and laughing at me. They cannot handle the fact that the Korean cannot handle the chopstick. [But again] I did not grow up here. (Respondent 3)

I think some older people or some old generation, they might think that you should, even if you are adopted or if you are a kyopo (Korean immigrants), ... you should know more about your history and about the Korean culture the language and especially like the rules. (Respondent 5)

As reflected by these interviews, Korea’s insistence on ethnical homogeneity forces adoptees to have Korean mindset and expect them to know about Korean culture. In this stand point, one interesting aspect emerges. In Korean society, adoptees are arguably expected to have their cultural identity in relation to the birth country. In Sweden or Denmark, as shown by the earlier analysis (see chapter 4. 2), birth backgrounds and searching for origin are considered an important issue for adoptees’ identity issues.<sup>257</sup> However, this pressure or emphasis on belonging to a specific country of culture is hardly complies with what adoptees’ see as their own identification.

Experiences at a restaurant or occasional encounters with the elderly underlined the adoptees’ cultural differences with their birth culture and customs. Even though they can easily blend in

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<sup>256</sup> Hübinette, “Adopted Koreans,” 22.

<sup>257</sup> Legrand, “Route to Roots,” 252.

the birth society when they visited due to their similar appearance; there are many circumstances that disconnect them from a birth country in a cultural sense. In that respect, adoptees confirm their Swedish or Danish mindset. As Howell insists visiting journeys and cultural activities arguably reflect adoptees' foreignness.<sup>258</sup>

#### 4. 4. 3. Adoptee's community

As shown earlier (see table 2), four interviewees answered that they have been a part of an adoptees' community in Denmark or in Sweden, although participating at times not that often. The communities are also well known to those who have never been involved in them. The statements from the two different interviewees – one who joined these communities and the other who did not – show the roles and implications of these collective community.

I take a part in some of the cultural activities [organised by the Korean adoptee's organisation] but not active in that way. [The activities include] some annual parties and activities like a fall camp, summer party or Christmas party. ... I joined in order to meet other adoptees with the same background and the same reference and also to explore the culture, Korean culture. (Respondent 2)

I have heard of it but I am not involved. Apart of it, I heard nice things about it but actually I do not know lot of other adoptees except from my sister. ... Every time I mentioned that I might visit Korea then, someone has referred to this organisation. So I think it would be the way to take if I want to visit. (Respondent 4)

Being a part of these organisations means that a participant occasionally meets other adoptees from the same origin and explores the sending countries' native cultural aspects. Apart from the fact that these communities serve as a way to raise adoptees' cultural interests, it is the field in which to meet each others who are similar and share their experiences. That is to say, gatherings with other adopted individuals can function as a sphere in which they can discuss numerous issues around transnational adoption as well as in which they can pose questions regarding their own adoption issues. The following interview presents this dimension of adoptees' communities.

We have travelled together and for most of us, it was our first time to come to Korea and there were a lot of questions and things that you want to talk about and that you actually could. Before this trip I couldn't discuss this kind of thing. I didn't really know how I would talk to anyone about it. And it not I would talk to another adoptee, just try to start a conversation about it because some people might be offended as well. So when I was going

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<sup>258</sup> Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners*, 115.

to this trip, it was really relieved that it was be able to say like what do you feel about this. I could just say anything and it was like perfectly normal. (Respondent 5)

However, according to the interviews, being a part of these communalities does not bear significant implications when it comes to the question of cultural identity. Even if these types of collective communities can remind their country of origin as well as underscore the shared experiences of ‘being adopted,’<sup>259</sup> these factors may not impact adoptees’ cultural identities (see chapter 3. 4. 2)

#### **4. 5. Cultural identity of Korean adoptees**

The concept of cultural identity was discussed in the previous chapter (see chapter 3. 3). Particularly, the conceptualisation of an in-between or the third space examines in which adoptees’ cultural identities are developed (see chapter 3. 5). With these ideas in mind, this part explores the issues of cultural identities of Korean adoptees. In accordance with the aims of this, the third analytical pillar that questions, can their cultural identities goes beyond the frame of nationality is placed at the centre of the analysis.

During the interviews, some of interviewees presented that their cultural identities by and large are related to the Danish or Swedish society. However, the others argued that their cultural identities are not definable within the scope of certain societies. These different arguments reflect the complex nature of cultural identities.<sup>260</sup> In regard to this respect, one interviewee described that understanding adoptees’ identities might bear a variety of different aspects.

I think issues around adoptees bear complexities. It is also different from what ages you were sent and which kind of family you have. It is really complex to put all adoptees into one pot. (Respondent 1)

As the respondent argued, the adoption process as well as family or social backgrounds affects adoptees’ identity development. That is to say, how adoptees encounter their adoption history and various social interactions are involved in the issues of cultural identity. This interview statement can also be interpreted that their identities cannot be understood by inviting specific space. As each adoptee has their own history and adoption background, and furthermore since they interact with their adoption history differently, it is hardly possible to determine their cultural identities in a concrete way. This understanding recalls what Hall has explained (see

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<sup>259</sup> Howell, “Community beyond place,” 89.

<sup>260</sup> Zagrebelsky, “Adoption across Identity Border”16

chapter 3. 3). He points out that cultural identity is a constant process for oneself and hence it cannot be completed.<sup>261</sup> Therefore, before looking into the issues of adoptees' identities, it is important to note that cultural identity of an individual cannot be pinned down.

Another interviewee described how she regards the birth and adoptive countries in relation to her self-identification. She implied that the borders between these two societies solely affect her cultural identity.

[It is like] you want to belong somewhere, but then you get confused where you supposed to belong. So for me, I think in the end I will just pick and mix bit of that I like from Sweden and Korean because there are things that I like and dislike from the both countries. ... I think, I do not have much choice because, even though I despise [some parts of] Swedish culture and Swedish national image, since I grow up and live here for whole of my life, I am Swedish. I am always questioned about myself because I have advantage to having a second place origin. [It] used to pain me when I was younger because I did not know how to integrate this into myself. But now I am older and it just feels that I could be just a Swedish with benefits, because I have other culture that I technically also belong to.  
(Respondent 3)

As the interviewee argued, she is Swedish in regard to her nationality as well as her life background. Furthermore, it is certain that her identity is mostly related to Swedish society and its culture. This means that the language, social norms, and again the culture are incorporated into her mind and identity. However, when it comes to the question of belonging, it is not confined by the adoptive society. As shown by the interview, when this question emerged, the respondent faced a certain type of confusion. This situation reminds one what Hubinette has argued (see chapter 3. 2). He notes that transnationally adopted persons could face the clashing condition of the two aspects, which is "being Korean by race but Western by culture."<sup>262</sup> In a similar sense, the interviewee described that her adoption background created complexities when she tried to define where she belongs. In respect to the interview, it is contested to identify adoptees' cultural belonging with a national frame. In other words, the concrete division between the sending and receiving countries bears limitations in order to understand adoptees' cultural identities.

Arguably, the respondent is in a process to determine her cultural identity as she said "I will later pick and mix." The concept of the cultural identities in a constant process does not mean

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<sup>261</sup> Hall, "Cultural identity and Diaspora," 222.

<sup>262</sup> Hubinette, "Adopted Koreans", 22.

identity crisis or one's identity in chaotic confusion. Rather, this idea manifests the persons' fluid journey between the sending and receiving societies.

Another interesting point from the interview is her way of identifying herself as 'Swedish with benefits.' The benefits can refer to her situation as an adoptee, which allows her to approach both the birth and the adoptive societies. During the interview, she said that it is preferable to explore Korean culture and language more. Even though she is not involved in a Korean adoptees' organisation in Sweden and is not surrounded by other Korean adoptees, she has her own way of interacting with her birth culture. In respect to that, Hall's second explanation on cultural identity can be applied. According to Hall, cultural identity, as an issue of becoming, is constructed across different interactions.<sup>263</sup> Therefore, the interactions with the birth country are included in the ongoing process that explains a sense of personal location.<sup>264</sup>

The other interview, in a similar sense, reflected the importance of considering cultural identity as an ongoing journey.

I think until six years ago it (cultural identity) was only [based in] Sweden, but now it is a bit mixed. But I am a Swedish of course.... [M]y wife, she's Korean. So it is this situation when they (Swedish people) might start to talk to me first then I would speak Swedish and they would talk to my wife and she could barely speak Swedish at all. Or, if we are in Korea they start talking in Korean with her and they turned at me and speak Korean and I speak very little Korean. It is also, it gets weird sometimes. I would say I am just a Swedish but in a Korean body I guess (Respondent 5)

As this interviewee said, he sensed that his cultural identity has changed based on his experiences and interactions. His visit to Korea eight times, partial participations in the adoptees' community, and most importantly his marriage to a Korean woman might arguably be connected to this change. What is intriguing about his interview is that he claimed his mixed identity and his Swedish identity simultaneously. It is important to note that adoptees' cultural identities are not an issue, which can be answered by selecting between "one or the other." As Bhabha claims it is required to transcend singularity concepts to be able to comprehend the identities of transnational groups.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity," 4.

<sup>264</sup> Week "The Value of Difference," 88.

<sup>265</sup> Bhabha, *The location of Culture*, 2.

From this stand point, one is able to understand what another respondent explained how she regard Korean culture.

It (Korean culture) is also part of my history somehow, part of my identity also.  
(Respondent 2)

According to prior interviews, adoptees' cultural identities always seem to have journeys between the birth country and the adoptive country. It also can be seen that the birth country generally bears some implications and influence toward the adoptees. However, as mentioned above, there are other interviewees who did not claim their cultural identities in such way. As a matter of fact, these concepts of in-between space or the third space do not define their territory. Nor is it a spatial concept that literally draws its boundary by placing a sending country on one side and a receiving society on the other side. These ideas are un-representable by themselves, as delineated by Bhabha.<sup>266</sup> Therefore, using this theory does not construct the general ground where an adoptee's cultural identity can be pinned down.

The following interviews reflect this aspect. Both of the respondents note that their cultural identities are highly related to Danish culture. They all know about their adoption history and one of the interviewees (respondent 6) visited Korea. As shown by the interview he interacts with other adoptees as well as some Koreans in Denmark. In light of what Howell established, such interaction is not a determining influential factor for some adoptees.<sup>267</sup>

My cultural identity is Danish. I am raised in Danish culture and also and again the Danish culture grows in my identity something like that. That is very much what I am. I don't explore the Korean culture that much. But I enjoy, hanging out around with the people who have similar situations as me. Not explore the culture maybe just to explore the people.  
(Respondent 6)

I think I am very Danish. I am confronted with it every other place than Denmark. I mean, my identity is bound to Denmark. Even living in Sweden for a year, I see the difference. I mean it is small differences but the cultural identity is very bound up on cultural heritage such as things you got used to when you were a kid. I experienced once when I lived in Sweden. I had some friends and we tried to do a game, something like you had to guess. A lot of questions were bound up on like TV personality, culture persona from Sweden. And I was like, 'I do not know anything about that'. I know all that stuffs from Denmark. I think

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>267</sup> Howell, "Community beyond place," 84-105.



in that sense, I feel a very big connection with my background and my generation of people from Denmark. (Respondent 4)

The second interview points to the circumstances that stress on interviewee's Danishness. When the respondent was in Sweden, she could face cultural difference, which again reflects her cultural bond with the Danish society. As similar to what Hall introduced, her cultural identity reflects the sharing cultural code with other Danish people.<sup>268</sup> The interviewee could face her attachment with the society in a particular situation, which in this case was staying in Sweden. In this context, her foreignness emerges when living in another society. Her experience brings back the experience of other adoptees when they visited Korea. In most cases, the other interviewees stated their encounter with cultural differences during the journey. As Howell theorises adoptees could confirm their foreignness in their birth country.<sup>269</sup> With regard to this aspect, adoptees arguably have tangible cultural bonds with the adoptive society.

However, one of the interviewees remarked that her cultural identity is more attached to the Korean society.

“I could cook better after I learned to cook Korean food. Korean food returns my sense of taste. So now I can cook Swedish food much better than before.... [In a similar context] mostly people remain in one perspective and one way of thinking, instead of seeing that it can be benefit to have different point of views.... Sweden is like a consensus society. It is really interesting because in Sweden,... once you say something then 20 years later you should have the same opinion as before, as if you never changed. And this explains why it was not easier to be in Sweden, because I am constantly changing and goes to the next level. I am not remaining in one spot.... I think Koreans also have [this] kind of attitude that interaction with other, not to be conserving, isn't it?” (Respondent 1)

According to her opinion, Swedish society is a “consensus society.” In reference to the context of interview, the meaning of her word consensus society is that the society values consistency or fixity. The interviewee described that the Swedish society as a whole respects one to have steadiness in terms of personal opinions or behaviours, which makes for difficult situations. For the respondent, who said that she is changing and does not remain in one space, this type of social feature does not complement her identity.

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<sup>268</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 223. Howell, “Community beyond place,” 84-105.

<sup>269</sup> Howell 2006, 115.

As she values the importance of interactions, her way of thinking and her identity does not remain in one specific context. From this point, her statement that argued her connection to the Korean culture should be understood. For this respondent by bringing back Korean society, she can reflect her continuous change as well as she can construct the space where there is no “primordial unity or fixity,”<sup>270</sup> as Bhabha argues.

Currently, she is not staying in Sweden due to the working conditions, although her family visits Sweden every summer for a vacation.

It is easy live in Vienna. I can define who I am more than in Sweden. In Sweden, I constantly feel that I should be happy and grateful that I was adopted. Also my Korean-ness is more forgotten. And here, [it] is opposite that people is difficult to realise that I am adopted. ... Humans are like colours. [It is] depend[s] on the surroundings, how we read them. So like yellow, if you put blue beside you see the red aspect and if you put red beside then you see the blue aspect. ... It is the same yellow! My children they are very Asian in here, but in Korean they are very westerner. So it's always in the interaction, and the settings [that make difference]. ... Having an image makes us forget that we are all linked and connected. (Respondent 1)

As the interview presents, in the recipient society, adoptees' biological or cultural relationships with their birth countries are arguably forgotten. This is because from a societal perspective, as Volkman argues (see chapter 1), adoptees receive new citizenship and have familial and social ties.<sup>271</sup> Consequently, the society as a whole considers the clean break between adoptees and their birth counties.<sup>272</sup> The respondent was critical about the way how the Swedish society perceives her cultural identity without her adoption background from Korea. Her description with colours implied her disagreement with clean division of the sending and receiving countries. This is because in the sending country as well as the receiving society, different aspects of adoptees are emerged and reflected. Therefore, as Bhabha poses, in order to understand adoptees' cultural identity one should think beyond the boundaries of fixed idea.<sup>273</sup> From this stand point, it is possible to argue that the adoptees' cultural identity could be formed in the place of in-between.

Cultural identity in in-between space or the third space does not mean that adoptees have divided identity. In other words, it cannot be viewed that transnational adoptees' cultural

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<sup>270</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 55.

<sup>271</sup> Volkman, “Going “Home”,” 25-6.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

identities can be divided into two parts equally: one half of their cultural identities is related to the receiving countries; the other half is associated with the sending countries. The concept of in-between is rather the abstract concept that opens the boundaries of the societies where adoptees are related. From this standpoint, the argument from Zagrebelsky brings a significant suggestion (see chapter 3. 5), as she presents that a new identity model is necessary in order to reflect the fluid and developing nature of adoptee's cultural identity.<sup>274</sup> In the end, the theoretical frame that researches one's cultural identity by bringing a fixed frame cannot reach to a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the adoptee's identity.

#### **4. 6. Concluding remarks**

Three core analytical pillars are embedded in this framework that cover the issues of: (1) how the ethnical features of transnational adoptees are regarded; (2) how adoptees relate birth country and culture to their cultural identity; and (3) can their cultural identities go beyond the frame of nationality.

In this chapter, I have analysed the cultural identities of Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden by interviewing six adopted individual from Korea. These empirical data include each interviewee's adoption history and their experiences in regard to the phenomenon of transnational adoption. Furthermore, these interviews have been investigated in accordance with the analytical frame from the previous chapter. To be able to summarise this chapter clearly, I recall the core analytical pillars that have been structured throughout the previous chapter (see chapter 3).

First, the question how does the ethnical features of transnational adoptees are regarded has been considered. Many scholars as well as the Hague Convention consider the racial or ethnical aspects of transnational adoption. Specifically, it has been argued that on account of different ethnical features, the identity issues of the adopted persons who have moved across national borders are complex.<sup>275</sup> The Korean society as a whole tends to perceive the adoptees as quasi-Korean rather than typical foreigners. This is mainly due to Korea's societal emphasis on ethnical homogeneity. However, the pressure on adopted persons to fit into a certain type of ethnical group can hardly understand the complex nature of transnational adoptees' cultural identities. Even though the sending society attempts to build the connections between the adoptees and

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<sup>274</sup> Zagrebelsky, "Adoption across Identity Borders," 16.

<sup>275</sup> Hollingsworth, "Does the Hague Convention," 378.

the society on the basis of ethnical commonality, it arguably causes the adopted persons' distancing from their birth country.

According to the adoptees' experiences in the receiving countries, one of the interviewees stressed that Korean adoptees arguably are ethnical minorities in their receiving societies. This is because their appearance is dissimilar from the typical image of ethnic Swedes or Danes creates misconception on an individual level. However, this factor in the end does not affect their cultural attachment to the receiving countries.

These understandings all point out that ethnical categorisation toward the transnationally adopted persons is a limited and restrictive frame. Even though Korean adoptees' ethnical or racial characteristics reflect their birth country; ethnical categorisation hardly embraces the complexities of adoptees' cultural belonging. In order to understand the adoptees' cultural identities, it is necessary to go beyond the singularities of race and ethnicity. From this point, Bhabha conceptualisation on third space can bring a convincing point.

The second analytical pillar has dealt with the question, how do adoptees relate birth country and culture into their cultural identity. To be able to answer this question, I have investigated the adoptees' cultural activities in relation to their birth country and return journeys as well as the adoptees' communities.

The adopted persons have a varied set of motives for participating in these activities. The reasons for joining such activities can be stemmed from cultural curiosities. It may also be entangled with the search for biological relatives and so on. Despite different motives, these activities initially invite their adoption history as well as the birth country into the present.<sup>276</sup>

According to some of the interviews, the adopted persons assumed they would feel a connection with the birth country and its culture. As a result of these activities, some of the respondents could figure out their connections with the sending society, as they could consider Korean culture a part of their culture and a part of their identities. However, at the same time, they found the obvious distinction from the sending society in a cultural sense and figured out their foreignness. These reactions after visiting their country of origin do not necessarily need to be separated from each other. As a matter of fact, these reactions can be intermingled.

Certainly each adoptee interprets their relationship with the birth country differently. In respect of these diversities, it is important to note that one cannot generalise about adoptees' cultural

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<sup>276</sup> Yngvesson, "“Completing” families and international adoption,” 223.

identities in relation to their birth societies. As Hall has delineated, cultural identity reflects continuous interactions with an unfixed past. Furthermore, it is a constant process of becoming.<sup>277</sup> Taking this conceptualisation into account, their cultural identities in relation to the birth country is not fixed and it is in an on-going process.

One of the very aims of this thesis has been to understand Korean adoptees' cultural identity. In order to fulfil this research objective, the third pillar – can their cultural identities go beyond the frame of nationality could play an important role. Various interview contents of this chapter have discovered that a national frame offers a limited scope to understand adoptees' cultural identities. Therefore, it can be argued that their cultural identities are changed throughout history and context.<sup>278</sup> Herein lays the reasons why there cannot be a frame that can embrace all facets of transnationally adopted persons' identities and conclude their cultural belonging based on specific society. This understanding is highly related to Bhabha's conceptualisation of third space.

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<sup>277</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225-6.

<sup>278</sup> Zagrebelsky, "Adoptions across Identity Borders," 10.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Concluding remarks**

The central object of this thesis has been to research the cultural identities of Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden. As the specific research aims suggest, the thesis has considered the issues around transnational adoption and cultural identity.

At the beginning of the research, I touched upon the phenomenon of transnational adoption. By elaborating on various understandings, I was able to understand the complicated nature of this phenomenon. Transnational adoption entails different actors and various relationships. Furthermore, the actions of adopting children from other countries bear a varied set of implications. If considering the arguments that advocate transnational adoption, this phenomenon can be regarded in relation to humanitarian actions for vulnerable children. Since transnational adoption is rooted in a long history of rescuing children, this action can serve children's needs, especially, during conflict situations.<sup>279</sup> However, the critical perspective indicates that the phenomenon of transnational adoption can be performed due to the division of global economy,<sup>280</sup> and hence children and their interests are not at the centre of consideration. This perspective also argues that the issue of transnational adoption cannot be understood by applying a simplistic perspective. In order to comprehend this phenomenon, it is required to scrutinise the various relationships that are entangled in this phenomenon. Even though supporting a particular perspective was not a major issue for this thesis, I also presented that transnational adoption is the phenomenon that entails multilevel relationships and hence is needed to be considered with diverse angles.

Transnational adoption is associated with social and political configurations of sending and receiving countries. In connection to this point, chapter two historicised the given case of this thesis: Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden. By historicising this case, this chapter looked

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<sup>279</sup> Bowie, "Adoption and the circulation of children," 4.

<sup>280</sup> Volkman, "Introduction: New Geographies of Kinship," 7.

into different social and political contexts. In the case of Korea, this society has participated in the field of transnational adoption since the Korean War. After the country recovered from its war-torn situations, its social and political configurations affected Korea's active engagement in transnational adoption. The Korean governments' population planning as well as the social norm that values ethnical homogeneity led to its role as a children-sending country. In the case of Sweden and Denmark, as adoptive societies that also entail the long history of adopting children from abroad, many reasons have influenced their involvement in transnational adoption. Particularly, on the basis of their social welfare systems, not many domestic adoptions could be made available. In accordance with this contemporary circumstance, it can be argued that transnational adoption has been as an alternative to child bearing and domestic adoption. These countries' transnational adoption histories all point out a varied set of reasons that have motivated their involvements in the field of transnational adoption.

The way these societies identify transnational adoptees has gradually changed. Especially the Korean society as a whole has shifted its perspectives toward Korean adoptees. Compared to the past, when the Korean society hardly discussed issues of transnational adoption and Korean adoptees, Korea has begun to perceive Korean adoptees as quasi-Koreans. The question of how the Danish or Swedish society regards transnational adoptees was briefly touched upon by the analysis chapter. From a societal level, Korean adoptees have arguably been well accepted and identified as Danes or Swedes.

Throughout chapters one and two, the phenomenon of transnational adoption was explored as well as the different issues that are associated with this phenomenon. Furthermore, by historicising the case of Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden, not only was understanding the development of transnational adoption in these countries made possible but also this case provided the concrete example that reflects the complexity of transnational adoption.

Chapter three focused on Korean adoptees' cultural identities. In order to investigate this specific case, chapter three constructed the analytical framework for this thesis. In order to build such an analytical frame, I elaborated on different theories such as Stuart Hall's conceptualisation of cultural identity and Homi Bhabha's theorisation of third space. In addition to these theories, different aspects that could be related to adoptees' cultural identities, namely cultural activities in relation to their birth countries and visiting programs, were taken into the analytical frame. By encompassing these theories and aspects, the concept of cultural identity was relayed and, above all, the analytical frame for the given topic could be structured.

Chapter four finally dealt with the issues of Korean adoptees' cultural identity. As Stuart Hall points out, cultural identity can be considered a process of belonging and becoming. Furthermore, it entails continuous interactions with the past and the present.<sup>281</sup> In the case of the selected interviewees of this thesis, they all have their own unique adoption history and this history has already been made known to the adoptees. According to the interviews, each adoptee approaches their adoption history in a different way. Some of them actually have been in Korea and have engaged in cultural activities in their birth countries. However, as the other adoptees reflect, interactions with their own adoption history do not necessarily include certain types of activities. Furthermore, it does not need to weigh against the significance of their birth countries.

Due to their border-crossing characteristics, transnational adoptees arguably face being categorised based on race, ethnicity, country, and culture. Furthermore, it has been assumed that there are certain types of factors that might influence transnationally adopted persons' cultural identities. By considering Bhabha's conceptual understanding about transnational groups, however, such kind of categorisation cannot grasp the complexity of adoptees' cultural identities. To apply this comprehension into my case, one cannot understand Korean adoptees' cultural identities in the context of the division between Korea and Denmark/ Sweden.

Transnational adoption and the cultural identity issues of transnationally adopted persons bear many complexities. This thesis aims to understand these issues by exploring the specific case, namely the Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden. However, it is important to note that there are more issues surrounding these phenomena, and obviously this thesis only covers Korean adoptees in Denmark and Sweden. I hope this thesis provides insight for further discussions and researches in the field of transnational adoption.

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<sup>281</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225-6.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Number of transnational adoption from Korea 1953-2013

Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number
		1970	1,932	1990	2,962	2010	1,013
		1971	2,725	1991	2,197	2011	916
		1972	3,490	1992	2,045	2012	755
1953	4	1973	4,688	1993	2,290	2013	236
1954	8	1974	5,302	1994	2,262		
1955	59	1975	5,077	1995	2,180		
1956	671	1976	6,597	1996	2,080		
1957	486	1977	6,159	1997	2,057		
1958	930	1978	5,917	1998	2,443		
1959	741	1979	4,148	1999	2,409		
<b>1953-1959</b>	<b>2,899</b>	<b>1970-1979</b>	<b>46,035</b>	<b>1990-1999</b>	<b>22,925</b>	<b>2010-2013</b>	<b>2,920</b>
1960	638	1980	4,144	2000	2,360		
1961	650	1981	4,628	2001	2,436		
1962	254	1982	6,434	2002	2,365		
1963	442	1983	7,263	2003	2,287		
1964	462	1984	7,924	2004	2,258		
1965	451	1985	8,837	2005	2,101		
1966	494	1986	8,680	2006	1,899		
1967	626	1987	7,947	2007	1,264		
1968	949	1988	6,463	2008	1,250		
1969	1,190	1989	4,191	2009	1,125		
<b>1960-1969</b>	<b>6,156</b>	<b>1980-1989</b>	<b>66,511</b>	<b>2000-2010</b>	<b>19,345</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>166,791</b>

(Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare; Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 261.)

## Appendix 2

### Number of adoptees by major receiving countries in 1988, 1998, 2003 (Emphasis added)

	<b>1988</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2003</b>
USA	9,120	15,774	21,616
France	2,441	3,777	3,995
Italy	2,078	2,263	2,772
Canada	232	2,222	2,181
Spain	93	1,497	3,951
Germany	874	922	674
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>1,074</b>	<b>928</b>	<b>1,046</b>
Netherlands	577	825	1,154
Switzerland	492	686	366
Norway	566	643	714
<b>Denmark</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>522</b>

(Source: Selman 2000, 2005, cited by Howell, The kinning of foreigners, 21.)

### Appendix 3

#### Destination by country of adopted Koreans, 1953-2004 (Emphasis added)

Main countries (1953-2004)	Number
United States 1953-2004	104,319
France 1968-2004	11,090
<b>Sweden 1957-2004</b>	<b>8,953</b>
<b>Denmark 1965-2004</b>	<b>8,571</b>
<b>Norway 1955-2004</b>	<b>6,080</b>
Netherlands 1969-2003	4,099
Belgium 1969-1995	3,697
Australia 1969-2004	3,147
Germany 1965-1996	2,352
Canada 1965-1996	1,841
Switzerland 1968-1997	1,111
Luxembourg 1984-2004	492
Italy 1965-1981	382
England 1958-1981	72
Other countries 1956-1995	66
Total	156,272

(Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare, cited by Hübner, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation*, 262.)

#### Destination by country of adopted Koreans, 2007-2013 (Emphasis added)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	07-13
US	1013	988	850	775	707	592	181	5106
<b>Denmark</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>115</b>
Norway	20	45	40	43	33	26	7	214
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>442</b>
France	14	8	8	6	4	4	2	46
Australia	44	18	34	18	21	13	-	148
Luxembourg	3	16	17	12	15	9	3	75
Netherlands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Canada	68	78	67	60	54	45	15	387
Italy	n/a	1	4	4	6	7	4	26
Total	1264	1250	1125	1013	916	755	236	

(Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare)



## Appendix 4

### Interview Guideline

The Interviewees' personal information has been anonymised throughout the thesis. The interviews were proceeded in July 2014. The following part is the interview guideline by which the interviews were conducted.

#### 0. Personal information

Full name; Gender; Age; Occupation; Major in education (if applicable)

#### 1. Introductory questions: Adoption history/ Adoptive family

Q. 1-1. Could you briefly introduce about your adoption history/ adoption background/ birth background?

Q. 1-2. How and when did you get this information? (Who gave this information to you?)

Q. 1-3. Could you briefly introduce about your adoptive parents and family?

#### 2. Questions about the "return trip"

Q. 2-1. Have you visited South Korea? If so, how many times? (Which city have you visited/ who did organised the visitation?)

Q. 2-2. What was the main purpose of visiting Korea? (e.g. cultural experience? searching for a birth family?)

Q. 2-3. How was your journey(s) ? /How do you like/ dislike the journey(s)? (e.g. overall impressions, cultural difference)

Q. 2-4. Does the tour(s) satisfy your purpose(s)? (if so, why? If not, why?)

#### 3. Questions about "Communities" and "cultural activities"

Q. 3-1. Are you a member of an adoptee's organisation? (Since when? How often?)

Have you joined any cultural activities related to Korea? (Since when? How often?)

Q. 3-2. For what reasons have you joined the organisation(s)/activities? (Is it important for you to join such communities/activities?)

Q. 3-3. (if applicable) Please tell me more about your experiences

#### 4. Questions about "Sending country"

Q. 4-1. How do you regard your birth country/ Korean people/ Korean culture?

Q. 4-2. How do you relate this society into your cultural identity? (To what extent does the Korean society/ culture relate to you?)

Q. 4-3. How do you think about the fact that the Korean society as a whole regards the adoptees as Korean diaspora?

Q. 4-4. What is your personal opinion about Korea's long-term engagement on transnational adoption?

#### 5. Questions about "Denmark/ Sweden"

Q. 5-1. How was your growing background in this society?(including school life)

Q. 5-2. How does your different appearance have been considered regarded in this society? (Specific experience?) Or, is it considered?

Q. 5-3. How does Swedish/ Danish society regards transnational adoption/ adoptees in general? (personal opinion)

Q. 5-4. Do you think the Danish or Swedish society encourages you to know/ experience more about Korea?

Q. 5-5. Do you think Sweden and Denmark is a 'colour blind' society?

#### 6. Questions about "Cultural identity"

Q. 6-1. How do you define your cultural identity? (Danish? Swedish? Mixed? Korea)

Q. 6-2. How do you relate Korea, Denmark/Sweden into your cultural identity?

Q. 6-2. What are the influential factors for your cultural identity? (Why is it influential?)

## Curriculum Vitae (Sujin Kim)

### Personal Information

<b>Address in South Korea</b>	Hangang Mansion 14-502, Ichon 1 Dong Yongsan Gu, 140-724, Seoul Post code: 140-724
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<b>Mobile Number</b>	+43 676 6821386
<b>Email Address</b>	<a href="mailto:Suki7424@gmail.com">Suki7424@gmail.com</a>
<b>Nationality:</b>	Korean, Republic of
<b>Date of Birth:</b>	11 <sup>th</sup> Novemembr 1988

### Professional Experience

#### 2012. 01. 02 – 07. 17    **Swedish Trade Council in Korea (Internship)**

**Location:** 11Fl, Shil-il Bldg, 64-5 Chungmuro 2-ga, Jung-gu, Seoul, Korea.

**Responsibilities included:**

1. Searching and updating the market information to Swedish companies which have plans to enter Korean market (e.g. Arjo Huntleigh, Klippan and Nynas).
2. Logistic support for the delegations of Swedish CEOs when the king of Sweden visited South Korea in 2012.

#### 2011. 09. 14 – 11. 13    **The Bank of Korea (Research Assistant of the Input- Output Statistics Team )**

**Location:** 110, 3-GA, Namdaemoon-Ro, Jung-Gu , Seoul, 100-794, Korea

**Responsibilities included:**

1. Contacting a number of companies to gather information for the annual market report issued by the Bank of Korea.

**2011. 03. 22 – 08. 20    The Delegation of the European Union to South Korea (Public Affair department Intern)**

**Location:** 16th Fl. 116 Shinmoonro 1-ga, Jung-gu, Seoul, 110-700, Korea

**Responsibilities included:**

1. Assisting press conferences, interviews of the ambassador. Plus, clipping EU-related news, articles.
2. Participating the forums held by the EU delegation. (e.g. Study in Europe 2011, EU-Korea FTA Ratification Forum)

## **Educational Experience**

**2012. 09 - Present    Master Degree: Roskilde University and Vienna University**  
 Erasmus Mundus Master programme –Global studies  
 First year, Roskilde University (Denamrk), Faculty of Global Studies  
 Second year, Vienna University (Austria), Faculty of History

**2007. 03 – 2011. 08    Bachelor Degree** Sungkyunkwan University  
 Bachelor of Political Science – Journalism and Mass Communication  
 Grade: 4.07/ 4.5

**2008. 08 – 2009. 07    Uppsala University, Sweden**  
 Exchange Student – International Media and Communication Studies  
 Taking basic Swedish course as well.

**2004. 03 – 2007. 02    Jungkyung Highschool, South Korea**

## **Skills**

**Language Skills**                    English – Fluent / Swedish – Basic

**Computer Skills**                    MOS-expert in MS powerpoint and MS excel