(RE)EMBODYING IDENTITY:

Understanding Belonging, ‘Difference’ and Transnational Adoption through the Lived Experiences of Korean Adoptees

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Signed: ____________________________________________

Dated: _____________________________________________
For my fellow adoptees and

my two mothers,

Rose Marie Walton and 손화자.
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Abstract

Since the Korean War (1950-1953), over 170,000 Korean children have been adopted from South Korea and dispersed across the world to families in ‘the West’. As Korean adoptees reach adulthood, many are going back to South Korea through their own initiatives to understand their ‘past’ and to try to identify with a part of themselves that feels ‘unknown’. This study considers the significance of these dual transnational movements for Korean adoptees’ identities.

Based on their lived experiences, this dissertation explores the ways Korean adoptees make sense of their identities in their adoptive countries and in South Korea. Specifically, it draws on social scientific theories to focus on topics of ‘difference’, embodiment, experience and belonging.

Another key aim of this study is to examine some of the conventional ideas about kinship and identity that are embedded in a Euro-American construction of adoption. Through this analysis, issues associated with adoptees such as ‘loss’, ‘incomplete identities’ and ‘a need to search’ are alternatively considered to be socially and culturally derived rather than unproblematically viewed as individual problems.

Overall, this is a qualitative anthropological study that engages with Korean adoptees’ lived experiences as they work to situate their identities within shifting socio-cultural
contexts. A central goal throughout the course of this research has been to generate greater understanding about the complex processes involved for transnationally adopted people as they try to negotiate their identities within contested spaces of belonging. This study concludes by looking at the significance of shared experiences and mutual understanding between adoptees and the impact this has on their sense of belonging.
Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)
ACPP (Aboriginal Child Placement Principal)
AICCA (Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies)
AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)
ALMA (Adoptee Liberation Movement of America)
ARMS (Association of Relinquishing Mothers)
ASK (Adoptee Solidarity Korea)
CAP (Creative analytical processes)
CMC (Computer-mediated communication)
DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea)
EPIK (English Program in Korea)
ESWS (Eastern Social Welfare Society)
GAIPS (Global Adoption Information & Post Service) Center
GDP (Gross domestic product)
GOA’L (Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link)

Hague Convention/Hague Convention of Intercountry Adoption  (Hague ‘Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption’)

ICASN (Intercountry Adoptee Support Network)
IKAA (International Korean Adoptee Associations)
IMF (International Monetary Fund)
InKAS (International Korean Adoptee Service)

KAAN (Korean American Adoptive Family Network)

KAW (Korean Adoptees Worldwide)

MHW (Ministry of Health and Welfare)

MHWAF (Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs—formerly Ministry of Health and Welfare)

MMA (Military Manpower Association)

MOFAT (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

NABSW (National Association of Black Social Workers)

OECD (Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development)

OKF (Overseas Koreans Foundation)

ROK (Republic of Korea)

SWS (Social Welfare Society)

TRACK (Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea)

UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)
Note on Romanisation and Korean Names

I have used the ‘Revised Romanisation’ system which is the official system supported by the South Korean government’s Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. This replaces the McCune-Reischauer system that was developed in 1939 by American graduate students, George McCune and Edwin Reischauer (Ministry of Culture Sports and Tourism, n.d.). The McCune-Reischauer system is still widely used outside of South Korea and is gradually being changed over to the Revised Romanisation system within the country. However, in recognition of the changes made to minimise confusion and inconsistencies, I refer to the official Revised Romanisation system for the Hangeul (Korean alphabet) used in this thesis.

Finally, I use the order for Korean names with the family name preceding the given names. Family names have not yet been standardised according to the Revised Romanisation system as there are potential difficulties that have not been agreed upon (Ministry of Culture Sports and Tourism, n.d.).
Frequently Used Korean Words

교포 Kyopo (Overseas Koreans—people with Korean heritage living overseas)

단군왕검 Dangun Wanggeom (Mythological founder of Korea and ancestor of the Korean people)

뿌리의집 Ppuriui jip (KoRoot)

세계화 Segyehwa (Globalisation)

입양 Ibyang (Adoption)

입양인 Ibyangin (Adoptee)

호주제 Hojuje (Family registry system)

호적 Hojeok (Family register)