

Appendix

Transracial adoption in the US and Canada in the second half of the twentieth century
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In 1955, an evangelical family in the rural town of Creswell, Oregon petitioned US Congress to pass a bill that allowed them to adopt eight orphaned children from South Korea. The transnational adoption industry as we know it began the year after, when that family began to build an infrastructure to facilitate the adoption of South Korean children to other countries. This was achieved, Eleana Kim details, by inserting itself in South Korea as a network of child social services—a “vertically integrated system of orphanages, baby homes, medical services, and adoption administration”—at no cost to the South Korean state, in order to encourage foreign adoption as social policy (73–75). The Holt Adoption Program, Inc., founded in 1956, remains at the forefront of the industry it initiated; today it is known as Holt International Children’s Services.

Under Korean law, citizenship passed from father to child; as illegitimate children without Korean fathers, GI babies were stateless persons (Oh, 7).

At first, South Korea-to-US adoption primarily involved mixed-race children fathered by American soldiers during the Korean-American War, but by the early 1960s almost no children adopted out of Korea had been conceived during the War. As Kim Park Nelson points out, less than 4% of the Korean American adoptee population was adopted before 1962 (41), but the North American imagination nonetheless regarded the practice through a lens of humanitarian child rescue that, Karen Dubinsky notes, might just as readily be read as kidnapping (19–21).

... would-be parents have increasingly sought abroad for youngsters when healthy Caucasian infants became largely unavailable at home (Strong-Boag, 210).

A dwindling supply of adoptable mixed-race children had by [the 1960s] led to practices such as baby hunting and financial remuneration to Korean mothers who were counseled by adoption agency workers to relinquish their children (Kim, 72).

The transracial adoption of Korean children by mostly white North American families—which by the late 1960s grew to include families in Canada—arose from a scarcity of adoptable white children, caused by the domestic rises of birth control in the US and Canada and the diminishing number of Eastern European adoptees that had been available in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Simultaneous to the first decade of Korean adoption, a shift in Canadian federal policy on the administration of Indigenous and Métis families that empowered

provincial oversight enabled social service agencies to apprehend Indigenous and Métis children and place them in foster care, and eventually with adoptive, usually white, families (Chupik-Hall, 38). Today we consider this a genocide; in Canada it is known as the Sixties Scoop.

There is nothing illegal or “black market” about our American adoption program. We are very proud of the exceptionally fine homes we have been able to provide for our children in the United States. We work very closely with the American state-approved adoption agencies, securing in every instance their help and co-operation in doing a home study and following normal adoption procedures (Alberta Child Welfare Commission, 1968, quoted in Strong-Boag, 189–190).

... we are working in the dark (Holt, 1955).

Organizations such as Manitoba’s Adopt Indian-Métis (AIM) and the cross-border Adoption Resource Exchange of North America (ARENA) filled the same gap for white adoptive families in North America that Holt and its international colleagues did. Karen Balcom’s *The Traffic in Babies: Cross-Border Adoption and Baby-Selling Between the United States and Canada* is incredibly upsetting in its account of the collusion of governmental and non-governmental agencies to exploit the Canada-US border to evade jurisdictional oversight. But what is perhaps most instructive here is that these manoeuvres were in large part also written into social welfare policy and law, just as the Korean adoption industry was written into US immigration law.

Ironically, it was criticism from African American and Native American communities that pushed the adoption industry to pursue sources of children outside the United States. ... in the 1970s and 1980s, the number of transnational adoptions from Korea began to rise as American domestic transracial adoption declined (Park Nelson, 74, 97).

In a sense, the rapid growth of the Korean adoption industry in the 1970s was caused by organized political action by US minority groups against the state abduction of their children in the guise of social services. Almost immediately as Manitoba implemented AIM in 1967, another group using that acronym, the American Indian Movement, for which adoption was a key issue in the struggle for self-determination, was founded in Minneapolis, just on the other side of the Canada-US border. Within five years, the Upper Midwest, where the Movement was most active, came to disproportionately dominate Korean adoptee placement. By the 1980s, Minnesota was home to North America’s largest concentration of Korean adoptees.

Immigration policy which barred Asians from entry into the United States was excepted, then overturned, as the symbolic value of the rescued Korean war waif outstripped the value of racist exclusion policies designed to “keep America American” (Park Nelson, 45).

The Canadian government preferred orphan adoptions to refugee resettlement schemes because orphans, by definition, were alone, and their resettlement would not create any impetus for significant family reunification initiatives (Madokoro, 152).

In both Canada and the US, transnational adoption pierced important holes in Asian exclusion law. However, when Canadian church groups petitioned to sponsor more refugees following Canada’s one-time absorption of one hundred refugees from Hong Kong in 1962, they were instructed by the federal government to redirect their humanitarian energies towards orphans. Family separation, it seems, was built into Asian exclusion; likewise, Asian exclusion was built into transnational adoption.

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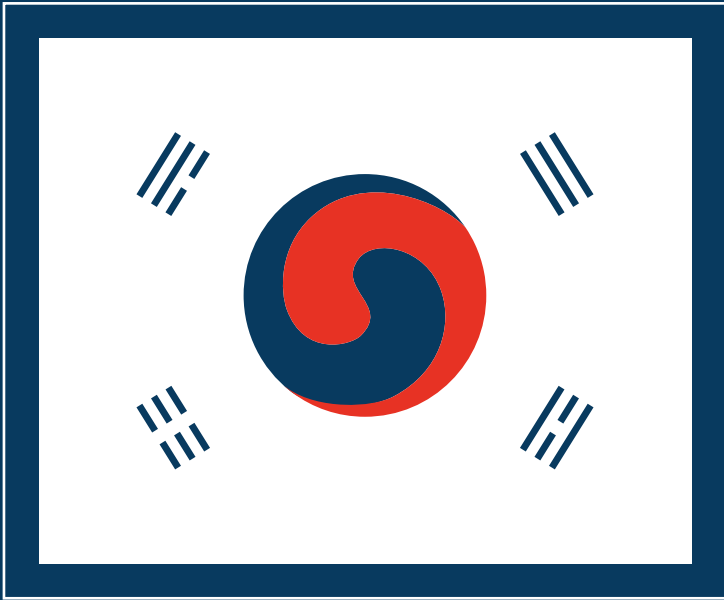
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On the unceded Territories of the x^wməθk^wəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations.

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