Asian Transnational Adoption: Subject and Trauma in Life Narratives of Korean Adoptees and Gish Jen's *The Love Wife*

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Across disciplines, from literature, anthropology, and psychology, to law, politics, and social work, there is a rapidly growing body of scholarship on adoption. With the expansion of the global economy, transnational/-racial adoption, in particular, has emerged as a serious subfield of study over the past decade in the United States, the "Adoption Nation," as journalist Adam Pertman has called it. On the one hand, transnational/-racial adoption provokes conventional issues of biological versus social determinism (nature over nurture, or vice versa), the adoption triad (the relationship among birth parents, adoptive parents, and the adoptee), and closed or open adoption arrangements (which refer to the degree of contact between the adopted child's birth family and the adoptive family). On the other hand, transnational/-racial adoption offers a new means to probe adoptive identity with reference to gender, race or racial hybridity, and class in the contexts of diaspora, post-colonialism, and the new global market. Adoptive identity is being questioned, re-experienced, and opened to negotiation.

Not only is identity in transnational/-racial adoption complex and often ambiguous but it also leads to contradictions and tensions in the lived experiences of such adoptees and in the scholarship on them. Is the transnational/-racial adoption an act of altruism, salvation, exchange, or exploitation? Does it politically subvert or reinforce the existing social hierarchy? Do we view adoptees as a gift of love and see the adoptive parent as caring-parent or view adoptees as objects of consumption and the adoptive parent as consumer-parent? Further, should we link the transnational/-racial adoption to personal, familial, or psychological narratives or to economic, political, global concerns? How do we deal with the impossible gap between

abandonment and adoption, between biological origins and culturally-chosen kinship, between a colourblind rhetoric and a race-conscious society?

In this article, instead of merely engaging in the debates, I explore the ethico-political situations that have been obliterated by taking such binary positions and argue that this very ground not only conditions these contradictions but allows adoption (either domestic or international) to prosper in the first place. Comparing *Seeds from a Silent Tree* (the first published anthology written by Korean adoptees),[1] *Outsiders Within* (the groundbreaking collection of critical essays and personal narratives written exclusively by transracial adoptees about their unique and complicated experiences), and Gish Jen's *The Love Wife* (the first novel about Chinese adoptees),[2] I explore controversial concerns about transnational/-racial adoption, including the primal wound and the issue of authenticity/authority. According to the Lacanian view of subjectivity and trauma, adoptees are not traumatized by the absence of origin but its over-presence, not by a harrowing history in the past but the present-day symbolic deadlock of being excluded. In this context, some adoptees tend to romanticize the country of origin as a stark contrast to an America viewed as a nation sustained by exploitation; they see birth mothers as unwilling victims and white adoptive mothers as ignorant and self-interested agents. As a result, the discourse of transnational/-racial adoption is, on the whole, gendered as feminine. In the coda, I try to answer the following question: how must we face the contradictions and tensions in the discourse as well as the practice of transnational/-racial adoption? Rejecting the lure of any easy way out (from assuming colour blindness through assimilative universalism or ethnic interpellation, or from assuming celebratory multiculturalism or cultural hybridity), we should confront head-on the antagonism of the discourse of adoption by restoring history to the process of transnational/-racial adoption and p*resenting adoption as a result of historically-specific power relations and cultural mores*. What is more, following Slavoj Žižek's critique of global capitalism and identity politics, I argue for a more radical position: to define the discourse of transnational/-racial adop-

tion not as one bound to a group-specific narrative of suffering but as one that can articulate a universal critique and launch a global assault on the system.

I: The Primal Wound

For several decades, identity as a stable object has been challenged in scholarly inquiry. Postmodern theories of subjectivity celebrate the possibility of multiple shifting identifications as well as the choice to identify with a proliferation of differences. Constructionist positions defy the Cartesian notion of the subject as an agent of rational self-legislation and a unified being of disparate parts, mind and body. The anti-essentialist viewpoint, however, is losing its potency. Especially outside the academy, we are witnessing the swing of the pendulum away from identity as social construction to identity as biologically determined and genetically recognizable. According to *American Demographics*, family history is now the second most popular hobby next to gardening. The vogue of genealogy is fueled by subscription-based websites, email newsletters, magazines, DNA testing, and so on.[3] Reinforced by the ease of obtaining DNA, the latest marker for biological essence, the return to essentialism is growing powerful and seductive, rapidly achieving dominance in the discourse of adoption, diminishing the notion of family as a social construction.[4] U.S. adoption culture once virtually ignored the biological origins of the adopted but nowadays insists on an ideology of geneology. Attacking such an insistence on the biological beginnings of the adopted child, Toby Alice Volkman observes a trend in adoption culture that claims "without [an] embrace of those beginnings there will forever be a gaping hole, a primal wound, an incomplete self" ("Embodying" 43). It is no wonder that David Eng asks, "We have moved beyond structuralist accounts of language, but have we moved beyond structuralist accounts of kinship?" (4).

Where identity is equated with biological origins, the missing link of the blood tie may suggest not only the absence of birth parents, birth culture, or genealogical continuity but also devastating losses of ontological stability and psychic wholeness. According to some adoption experts, the adoptee will be traumatized throughout life by, in Nancy Verrier's

term, "the primary wound."[5] In *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adoptive Child* (1993), Verrier argues that

> [t]he severing of that connection in the original separation of the adopted child from the birth mother causes a primal or narcissistic wound, [one] which affects the adoptee's sense of Self and often manifests in a sense of loss, basic mistrust, anxiety and depression, emotional and/or behavioral problems, and difficulties in relationships with significant others. (21)

Created by the trauma of separation between mother and child, the wound of adoption damages adoptees throughout their life spans in Verrier's view, causing depressive disorders, addictions, and even suicidal tendencies. Moreover, the adoptee may live an inauthentic life, adopting a false self to prevent further pain and rejection. In *Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows Up* (2003), a sequel to *The Primal Wound*, Verrier provides adoptees the strategies necessary to start a journey of healing, to uncover an authentic and whole self. There is a growing body of similar writing on adoption: *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self* (1993), *Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness* (1995), *Children's Adjustment to Adoption: Developmental and Clinical Issues* (1998), *Adoption Healing . . . A Path to Recovery (2000), Adoption and Loss: The Hidden Grief* (2000), *The Post-Adoption Blues: Overcoming the Unforeseen Challenge of Adoption* (2004), *Healing Parents: Helping Wounded Children Learn to Trust and Love* (2006), *When Adoptions Go Wrong: Psychological and Legal Issues of Adoption Disruption* (2006), *The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family* (2007), and *Wounded Children, Healing Homes* (2010). The list is rapidly expanding. The thematic terms in the titles—"Self," "Wholeness," "Wound," and "Healing"—loom large in contemporary discourses of adoption. Unsurprisingly, maladjustment and failure among transnational/-racial adoptees can now be clinically diagnosed through a disorder labeled the "Adopted Child Syndrome" (Smith 491–97).[6]

Much scholarship on transnational/-racial adoption now centers on working through the pre-adoption trauma because the healing of "the primal wound" is seen to be decisive in a successful post-adoption ad-

justment to the adoptive family and assimilation to the host culture. Such a thematic focus on the traumatic loss directs much critical energy toward the past and disregards or even depoliticizes everyday concerns. Actually, it is present-day ideologies and practices that exclude and marginalize Asian transnational/-racial adoptees (a full discussion is deferred until part V). The traumatic loss of origin is resuscitated by not only adoption experts but also many Asian transnational/-racial adoptees themselves in their personal narratives.

II. *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees*

Edited by Tonya Bishoff and Jo Rankin, *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees* (1997) is the first published anthology written by Koreans who were adopted by American families. A collection of short stories, poems, and personal narratives, it unfolds the traumatic experiences of transnational/-racial adoption within a linear time frame. With four section titles—"Roots Remembered and Imagined," "Transplantations," "Reunions," "and "Seeds Resolution"—the anthology presents various individual experiences within a biographical model bound by narrative coherence and temporal linearity. The collection offers a beginning, a middle, and an end, ranging as Mark Jerng observes, from "the explorations of roots to the negotiation of new environments to a return to biology and finally to some form of reconciliation" (48).

Though voicing the pain and loss of the adoptee, *Seeds* renders the transnational/-racial adoptee's identity as a linear process of identity formation, moving from "pre" to "post" and determined by the wound of adoption.[7] Not only does this frame

> collapse the individual narrative of the transracial adoptee into a collective identity in securing recognition . . . through the construction of a collective script into which individual adoptees are made to fit and around which they shape their life-stories . . . at the cost of repressing the ambivalences of the adoptive relationship (Jerng 44–45)

but it attributes all adoptees' actions to the origin as the point of reference. Finally, the technique is biographical, the plot predictable, and the

effect misleading because narrative coherence obscures spatial disloca-
tion and sudden discontinuity, and because it is assumed there exists
an imaginary ideal of full ontological identity—non-alienated, non-
lacking, non-contradictory.

In the first part of *Seed*, the adoptees start on a journey—a regres-
sive passage—to recover a missing link, to heal the wound of adoption,
and to complete a sense of self. This section repeatedly stages a fantasy
scenario of the (birth mother's) abandonment that haunts the adopted
Korean writers. Beth Kyong Lo ends her poem, "Explosions," with a
reference to "a motherless, fatherless, / peopleless dust" (7). Kimberly
J. Brown fantasizes the figure of a birth mother as "someone without
a name" (18) but who, as a figure haunted and haunting, insists on
saying, "I am not gone / I promise. / I am with you" (19). Continuing
to elaborate upon the far-reaching consequence of the trauma, the
second part, "Transplantations," explores the issue of the identity
crisis that results from "genealogical bewilderment," to borrow Betty
Lifton's phrase (68): adoptees suffer either alienation from their roots
or an awkward attachment to marginalized race-ethnicity, "Koreaness."
Ellwyn Kauffman confesses, "I was ashamed of my ethnicity" (46) and
"reluctant to write about my experience growing up as a Korean adop-
tee" (172). More seriously, Young Hee once felt "white" and "hated
other Asians because they forced [her] to see [herself] in them" (88).
On the other hand, Melissa Lin Hanson, though not ashamed of her
racial/ethnic heritage, cannot help wonder: "My heritage is a black
hole" (60) and "My past is lost / and questions pervade. / I have a
family here, but / who am I?" (63), and some adoptees feel trapped
between "two cultures" or "two realities," between "American branches"
and "Korean roots" (93). Thus, "pulled on both sides," David Miller
grieves that "I lose a part of me" (107).

While suffering from an identity crisis that, I will claim, is actually
induced more by the oppressive racial ideologies and practices of the
present day, the adoptees are consciously and unconsciously creating
a myth—a promise of wholeness through the recovery of genealogical
connection. Margaret Homans is right to claim that "adoptive origins
and origin stories are not discovered in the past so much as they are

created in the present and for the present" (5). Lamenting the losses of "origin," "being," and "mother tongue," Leah Sieck asks, "How can I come home?" (96). Unsure of "a way . . . to integrate [her] *false self* . . . into one *complete, whole self*" (66; emphasis added), Mi Ok Song Bruining resorts to going to Korea, claiming "to find myself, learn more about myself, my birth country, my Korean heritage, my cultural identity, my mother tongue" (71). Indeed, returns and reunions hold out to the adoptee the hope of healing and wholeness—a myth foregrounded in the final two sections of the volume. Just as the titles clearly suggest—"Remembering The Way Home," "Completing My Puzzle. . .," and "Now I'm Found"—the narratives of such journeys toward wholeness and healing culminate in the final poem of the anthology, "Full Circle." The poem concludes with a sense of affirmation or fulfillment:

> A final realization that both
> The beginning and the end
> Eternally hide within the depths
> Of the unknown;
> And the circle is complete. (164)

"Break[ing] a certain silence" (2), *Seeds* forms a collective voice of adoptees in terms of their "specific common origin" (1). *Seeds* anchors an identity in traumatic loss and connects the quest for origin to the quest for wholeness. Questioning the trend of searching for one's roots, Žižek asserts that

> in so far as we experience contemporary postmodern social life as "non-substantial" the proper answer is the multitude of passionate, often violent returns to "roots," to different forms of ethnic and/or religious "substance." What is "substance" in social experience? It is the violent emotional moment of "recognition," when one becomes aware of one's "roots," of one's "true belonging," the moment in the face of which liberal reflexive distance is utterly impotent—all of a sudden, adrift in the world, one finds oneself in the grip of a kind of absolute

longing for "home," and everything else, everyday common concerns, becomes unimportant. (*Ticklish* 209)

In short, root-searching depoliticizes our daily concerns.

III. *Outsider Within*

Also created to make visible the transracial adoptee, *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* is groundbreaking in scope and objectives. Written by thirty-nine transracial or transnational/-racial adoptees, the anthology does not confine adoption to an individual journey but views it as an industry, or, in the words of the editors, as "the intimate face of colonization, racism, militarism, imperialism, and globalization" (7). Combining data, poetry, artwork, political analysis, and first-person narrative with voices of Asian, Native, Black, and biracial Americans, *Outsiders Within* not only tackles conventional issues in adoption but also offers rarely-considered aspects of adoption, such as Native residential schools, drugs, class, warfare, slavery, racism, militarism, imperialism, and the global economy. Divided into six parts, *Outsiders Within* presents section titles that invite the reader to embark on the journey of adoption:

I: Where are you really from?
II: How did you get here?
III: Colonial imaginations, global migrations
IV: Growing through the pain
V: Journey home?
VI: Speaking for Ourselves (viii–ix)

Though also arranged on a temporal axis like *Seeds*, the anthology is not oriented toward the convention of the traumatic origin. There are three section titles written not as statements but as questions. With titles as questions, the first two parts do not stage the fantasy scenario of the birth mother's abandonment or the adoptive parents' colourblind love; instead, they explore the complexity of belonging and the politics as well as economics of the adoption industry. The third part reveals "the colonial roots of transracial adoption" (9) and

the global movement of children. The fourth part depicts the grief and trauma of the adoption experience, resulting not so much from temporal disruption as from spatial estrangement. The fifth part—"Journey home?"—questions the assumption behind return and re-union as a panacea for the adoption trauma, underlining instead that "[w]ith each 'homecoming,' another phase in [one's] journey is just beginning" (11).

Unlike *Seeds*, the narrative of which is driven by the traumatic origin, *Outsiders Within* displays teleological development toward self-authen-tication and self-defining, objectives elaborated in the final section, "Speaking for ourselves." In fact, such "a declaration of independence" (Mason 5) is clearly announced by the editors as early as the opening page of the introduction:

> This book is a corrective action. Over the past fifty years, white adoptive parents, academics, psychiatrists, and social workers have dominated the literature on transracial adoption. These "experts" have been the ones to tell the public—including *adoptees*—"what it's like" and "how we turn out." Despite our numbers and the radical way we have transformed the color and kinship of the white family, the voices of adult transracial adoptees remain largely unheard. Our cultural production has been marginalized and essays discussing our personal experi-ences of adoption have remained undistributed and largely un-known. (1; emphasis in orig.)

Challenging outside experts, the contributors to the anthology aim to speak their own "truths," "reinvent" themselves, define their own "reali-ties," build a "global, multilingual community," and call for "a global response" (12, 13, 14). Not united on the basis of a shared view of a traumatic origin in the past, they act as a group by reason of the expe-riences of "racism, marginalization, and discrimination" (2). In short, they endeavor to "create new identities authentically based on [their] experiences" (4).

Because today's postmodernism celebrates identity as self-shaping as well as self-reinventing, because "the grand narrative of the self de-

volves into multiple stories" (Holstein and Gubrium 215),[8] the adoptees are keenly aware of a greater demand and urgency in articulating their unique life experiences and authorizing a proper collective identity. They battle with "outside experts" over questions of an authoritative voice and representation, not out of an interest in some intact, genuine, yet disintegrated selves hidden beneath or beyond but rather to fight for authority in reality. For them, authenticity is not so much a matter of aesthetic or anthropological being as it is a fight for authority in the cultural, political, and linguistic realms. To authenticate the adoptee's experiences is to call for an authoritative voice and an identity specific to the adoptee. Authenticity and authority become intertwined. As a consequence, "I am a transnational/-racial adoptee" is not only a statement, both descriptive and prescriptive but also "a site of struggle" (*Outsiders* 13), just as Anthony Elliott states that in present-day society "the multiple sites of subjectivity refuse containment within institutionalized systems or structures" and "the self is portrayed as a resistant element to ordered structures" (16).

Such an act of self-authentication is anchored not in the traumatic origin but in the traumatic *experience*—in one's suffering from abuse, racism, alienation, forced assimilation, and so on. The contributors to the anthology portray themselves as survivors, not victims, and the editors also claim in the introduction that "we resist being defined as victims condemned to half-lives between cultures" (4). However, to essentialize identity into one solely determined by "suffering" might well fall into what Žižek calls "the cult of victimology." Drawing support from Richard Rorty, Homi Bhabha, and Gilles Deleuze, Žižek strongly criticizes the ideology of victimization:

> The ideology of victimization penetrates intellectual and political life even to the extent that in order for your work to have any ethical authority you must be able to present and legitimize yourself as in some sense victimized. Richard Rorty gives the definition of a human being as someone who can suffer pain and, since we are symbolic animals, as someone who can narrate this pain. So, in a sense, from Rorty we get the fun-

damental coordinates of our postmodern predicament: we are potential victims and the fundamental right becomes the right, as Homhi Bhaba puts it, to narrate; the right to tell your story; to formulate the specific narrative of your suffering. This is the most authentic gesture you can make.

I think that what is fundamentally wrong with it is that ultimate authenticity is based on the idea that only the person who is immediately affected by circumstances can tell the true story about his or her suffering. But, as Deleuze puts it somewhere, the reference to your unique experience as the basis of ethical argument always ends up in a reactionary position.[9] (*Conversations* 140–43)

Worse, identity politics grounded on authenticity of either traumatic origin (like that in *Seed*) or traumatic experience (like that in *Outsider Within*) may open up "new spaces and opportunities for capitalist intensification" (J. Dean 116).[10] In fact, even one of the contributors of the *Outsiders Within*, Kim Park Nelson, detects the risk of "authenticity" with reference to transracial adoption, for an authentic identity becomes "desirable" and "marketable" (93). When the desire for authenticity is "extended to foreign children in transnational adoption," "parents as consumers are already conditioned to want the authentically exotic, and what better way to meet this desire than to adopt an authentically exotic child?" (94). Self-authentication usually does not undermine the dominance of the Other but reproduces the same underlying discourse. The narrative of authenticity might temporarily win some local battles, but in the long run it will lose the larger discursive war over identity.

IV. *The Love Wife*
The issue of authenticity is one of the major themes in Gish Jen's novel *The Love Wife*, in which she explores the racial and familial ambiguities of an adoptive family. The man of the household, Carnegie Wong, works at a high-tech company, and, in spite of his Chinese mother's objections, marries a Midwestern woman named Janie Bailey. A yoga-practicing career woman with New England WASP manners, Janie has been

pejoratively nicknamed "Blondie" by Carnegie's mother. Prior to their marriage, Carnegie and Blondie adopt Lizzy, a foundling of indeterminate Asian heritage, and years later travel to China to adopt another girl, Wendy. Finally, Janie gives birth to their "half-half" son, Bailey, who looks disturbingly non-Asian. With the two adopted daughters and the one biracial biological son, the racially-mixed family is referred to by a neighbour of the Wongs as the "New American family" (3) and yet derided as "unnatural" by Carnegie's mother, Mama Wong.

The family of transnational/-racial adoption, however, gradually disintegrates after Blondie encounters a woman from China, one who becomes a surrogate birth mother in her daughters' eyes due to the fact they share the same skin colour. When Mama Wong dies—after a long decline into Alzheimer's—the Wongs are shocked to learn that she has arranged through her will for a single female relative from Mainland China to join the family. The novel opens with the arrival of Lan, who is quite mysterious to the Wongs. Is Lan a housekeeper? Or is she, as Blondie suspects, sent by Mama Wong to be Carnegie's "Love Wife," the character referred to in the novel's title? In contrast to Blondie's *semblance* of Chinese-ness, does Lan's authentic essence—Chinese-ness—qualify her as a more natural mother to the adoptive children of Asian origin, an assumption with which Lan herself agrees? Lan's arrival immediately, in any case, disrupts the Wong family's entire way of life and calls into question many issues—particularly one regarding authenticity in parenthood.

From the beginning of the novel, Jen foregrounds a sharp contrast between Blondie and Lan along the axes of Fake/Real. Throughout the novel, Lan distinguishes "the real" from "the fake": she distinguishes real Chinese, real Chinese crickets, real Chinese girls, real mothers (versus adoptive mothers such as Blondie), real candies (versus date candies), a sincere expression (versus Blondie's put-on ones), a real family, a real brother, a real hope, and so on. Lan accuses Blondie of being "fake" "from the very first moment" they meet (364), depicting her two adopted girls as ones with no "real mother" and "no real family" (223). Yet, Blondie wonders, "Had I not loved them deeply and well, as if they were from the beginning my own?" (133).

The question of authenticity is of even greater concern for Lizzy and Wendy, the two adopted daughters. At the very beginning of the novel, Lizzy asks Wendy to "[f]ace facts" of their mother's favoritism for Bailey, the biological, natural son (11), saying that she will someday find her own "real mom" (54). Her concerns over authenticity lead to a direct confrontation with Blondie. Lizzy rebukes her mother for being "fake" and repeatedly claiming that "If you were my real mother, you'd be like Lanlan!" (214; 265). "Authenticity" in the novel is never clearly defined but remains open to various, often contradictory, readings. As the novel moves toward its resolution (Lan moves back to the Wong family, and, at the same time, Blondie moves out with her biological son), it is Blondie, not Lan, whom the children consider as their "real mother" (360). Ethnicity plays a much less significant part in maternity.

Most surprisingly, at the very end of the novel, a book of family history sent by a relative from Hong Kong reveals the startling secrets that Lan is actually Mama Wong's birth daughter, born in China, and that Carnegie is a child Mama Wong adopted in the United States. As the family book reveals the actual identities of Lan and Carnegie, we must ask, "Who isn't a real mother?"—Mama Wong or Blondie? And "Who is an unnatural child?"—Carnegie or his two adoptive daughters? The revelations, which raise the spectre of sibling incest between Carnegie and Lan, are so unsettling that they lead Carnegie to a heart attack; in a coma, Carnegie has an imagined conversation with Mama Wong, interrogating her for the truth:

> Ma, . . . I got the book, and it turns out I'm not even your son.
>
> Only an American boy would read something and think, Oh, that must be true. As if true is that simple! [Mama Wong says]
>
> So what is the truth? I say. Tell me before I go back to my family.
>
> Your so-called family, she says, with a laugh.
>
> My family, I insist.
>
> She laughs again.
>
> Lan is your daughter.

> My long-lost daughter.
>
> And I?
>
> She laughs. Who you are if you are not my son?
>
> . . .
>
> Ma. Weren't you the one who sent her to me, from your grave? A second wife? A love wife?
>
> Laughter.
>
> It seemed natural enough, I say.
>
> Natural! She exclaims. On the other hand, marry Blondie not so natural either.
>
> What is, then?
>
> *Nothing is natural*, she laughs. Nothing. (376–77; emphasis added)

Nothing, indeed. Identity (gendered or racial) is never natural but is performatively enacted over time. Even Lan's naturalness has been always already tainted by some unnatural elements—her telling of exotic stories, her show of non-desiring desire, and her acting out of charm, tenderness, mysteriousness. Paradoxically, the Chineseness she reifies is mysterious not only to Blondie but also to herself. At the same time, nothing is totally performative; identity cannot be one hundred percent represented or performed. Blondie's passion for the semblance in the Symbolic (a network of linguistic and cultural signs) is equally problematic. Excluding any uncanny excess from life (in a Lacanian sense), Blondie insists on, in Žižek's words, "the position of absolute self-positing subjectivity" (*Neighbor* 138). Disallowing the excess/lack of representation over the represented, she thus fails to recognize that there was a rift—the intrusive *thing*—in her marriage that already existed prior to Lan's arrival. The excess of fixity and the impenetrability of the thing, the novel suggests, belongs to both the Other *and* themselves.[11]

Though *Seeds* and *Outsiders Within* distinguish themselves through their *authentic* voices, their act of authentication/authorization, operating through the shared traumatic origin or experience, assumes "the fictionality of phantom lives" in order to achieve "a kind of continuity of life narrative" (Honig 219). While *Seeds'* and *Outsiders'* first-person nar-

ratives "fictionalize" accounts of adoptive life, *The Love Wife* as a fiction is more "real" in Lacanian terms because the novel reveals the excess/lack of identity representation and the impenetrability of the impossible trauma. In the following section, I shall first elucidate the Lacanian notion of subject and trauma and next read adoptees' identity in the Lacanian schema.

V. Subject and Trauma

Psychoanalytically, the fact that we speak at all is the effect of trauma since our being centers on the traumatic thing.[12] Wrought upon a fundamental lack, absence, and trauma, subjectivity is constituted retroactively through a circular movement around an inherent deadlock of any given structure. The subject, as Žižek maintains, is "nothing but the failure of symbolization, of its own symbolic representation" and is "nothing 'beyond' this failure" ("Class" 120). The subject emerges not when identification (or dis-identification) is made but when it fails to be made. The perceptual failure makes sense of the identity of the subject in retrospect. Thomas Rickert explains that "the subject's sense of identity is belated, being a retroactive achievement that effaces itself as the finger of time moves forward" (21). The belatedness of the subject is congruent with the concept of trauma. Trauma becomes traumatic not through some intrinsic features but through delay.[13] It is a certain blockage in the process of signification that retroactively traumatizes the event; the retroactive production of trauma can be put simply in the words of Jean Laplanche: "it takes two traumas to make a trauma" (88). In short, trauma is not merely another word for disaster, nor does trauma always require a dreadful cause since an event takes on traumatic status only retrospectively.[14]

In the Lacanian sense of trauma, Jen's *The Love Wife* is more *real* than the first-person "authentic" narratives *Seeds* and *Outsiders Within* since the novel—instead of essentializing the traumatic origin—represents it as something that can be characterized only by after-the-fact episodes. In *The Love Wife*, the Wongs, as I mentioned, travel to China to adopt a second daughter, Wendy. The interlude in China involves an angry mob and a car accident, yet the accident is not traumatic to Wendy immedi-

ately afterwards but traumatic to her elder sister, Lizzy. Lizzy insists on never visiting China again, saying "you think that's bad, you won't believe what happened [to me] in China" (131). To Wendy, the adoption trauma becomes traumatic only when this adoption trauma is taken as a reference to which later accidents are related. For example, when Lan joins her boyfriend in attacking a goat, Wendy associates the attack with the mob scene in China when she was merely a baby. Wendy pictures the moment: Lan "looks like she could be one of the Red Guards she told us about, or like the guys outside the car when I was just adopted in China" (314). The present, second traumatic accident retrospectively traumatizes their early experiences in China.

Any subject is what Lacan terms the barred subject (*Écrits* 258, 278). The term indicates that while a person "appears somewhere as meaning [e.g., as having symbolic identity as adoptee], he is manifested elsewhere as 'fading,' as disappearance" (Lacan, *Four* 218). We are all subjects fundamentally split, divided, inconsistent, incomplete, and alienated from ourselves, with no possibility of "wholeness." Žižek explains that the subject cannot "achieve full ontological identity" and "always remains as 'a bone stuck in the throat of the signifier'" (*Conversations* 4). As Lacanian subjects, we are not alienated "*from* our authentic being . . . but we are alienated *in* the symbolic order as the condition of possibility for our existence as subjects" (Vighi and Feldner 86; emphasis in orig.). We are fragmented or incongruous in all aspects of class, race, gender, sex, and adoption.

Thus, to view the Other, such as adoptees, as forming an authentic, closed, and consistent community is to romanticize or to debase the other as non-divided, totally rhetoricalized, in disregard of the unbearable lack/excess of subject and as what Todd McGowan calls "existing prior to the fall" (131). The act of self-authentication grounded either on the traumatic origin or the traumatic experience may reinforce peripheral differences, and it traps the adoptee within an essentially prescriptive discourse.

In view of the Lacanian notion of subject and trauma, adoptees are not traumatized by the absence of origin (the lack of knowledge of one's familial, ethnic roots) but by its over-presence (the excessive asso-

ciation with the origin)[15]; not by a harrowing history in the past but by present-day oppressive ideologies and practices—the symbolic deadlock nowadays of being excluded, marginalized, and unrecognized. Without a doubt, the dark segment of adoption history did exist, yet it is the present symbolic deadlock and exclusion that induce the traumatization of the genealogical origin, just as Žižek characterizes the trauma as one that "has no existence of its own prior to symbolization. . . . [I]t remains an anamorphic entity that gains its consistency only in retrospect, viewed from within the symbolic horizon" (*Metastases* 31). The adoptees are more afflicted by being regarded as the Exotic Other and their birth countries represented in adoption stories as ones "robbed of their rich literary, professional, and intellectual traditions[,] . . . overwhelmingly inhabited by dehumanized, one-dimensional characters, including beggars, AIDS victims, unmarried women, and prostitutes" (Willing 262). Additionally, they are repeatedly reminded to be grateful as well as loyal and commanded to assimilate fully into their host cultures, ones that at the same time endorse colourblind rhetoric and deny social antagonism.

It is colourblind rhetoric that traumatizes Asian adoptees and induces them to downplay their heritage, reducing racial antagonism to individual adaptation problems or generational conflicts, ones contained within the domestic locale. Colourblind rhetoric is strongly anchored in the anti-essentialist view of identity as performatively enacted: because race in the anti-essentialist view "is socially constructed, it can be socially dismantled in a blaze of colourblindness" (Fogg-Davis 9). But in Lacanian theory, identity cannot be one hundred percent represented or performed; there is always some fundamental surplus or impossibility. To put it another way, "the self is always falling short, falling apart, fading or failing to live up to some imagined version of identity" (Elliott 76). Colourblind rhetoric thus fails to recognize the excess/lack in, for instance, being American. In addition, colorblind rhetoric does not acknowledge that the social is also marked by a fundamental antagonism (i.e., of class, race, gender, and so on). As Žižek states, because of one thing or another, "society is always-already divided" (*Ticklish* 220). As long as the social and the subject are both

inherently split and antagonistic, the social can never be rendered as whole or harmonious and the subject never as unified, or completely represented. When raised in an assumed colourblind utopia, the adoptee could be "traumatized" by being expected to live up to the multicultural ideal. Thus, because her subjectivity is presumed to be thoroughly assimilable and her splitness is denied, her failure is regarded as the result of ingratitude or even diagnosed as a psychological disorder. In *Seeds*, for example, Mi Ok Song Bruining depicts the pain she felt in adolescence, the pain, however, never acknowledged by her adoptive parents:

> My parents didn't know what to do with me when I asked & begged them to take me for counseling, when I was fourteen. They refused to take me to counseling. I felt I was going crazy. . . . I was convinced I was going insane because I felt so inauthentic. I did not feel white, as I had been raised. I did not feel Asian, as I clearly looked & was. (66)

In *Outsiders Within*, Ron M. confesses that "I wet the bed until I was 12. The doctor told my mother it was due to anxiety from being adopted" (190). In *The Love Wife*, Lizzy grows up in a family where her adoptive mother, Blondie, practices colourblind rhetoric, denies racial antagonism, and claims that "[b]eholding my daughters, I did not see Asians. I saw persons I knew better than I had known my parents" (246). Blondie advises that one should be "happy" and should not "dwell on unpleasant things" (208–9). As for something she is unable to symbolically represent, such as Lizzy's uncertain Asian origins, Blondie chooses to ignore it: "We did indeed decide not to mention them. Because who knew what the truth was? How would we ever know? And what good would come of such talk?" (217). Albeit ineffectually, Blondie tries to help in another way by identifying with her daughter: "I come from a lot of different countries. I don't have a simple label, like German American or Scotch-Irish American. I'm soup du jour, too" (213). Lizzy retorts, "Yeah, but it doesn't matter as much because you're white and not adopted. Nobody wonders where you're from, nobody asks you" (213).

Because of the denial of the fundamental antagonism in the social and the subject, adoptees face a symbolic deadlock by their being excluded and unrecognized. In order to struggle against this symbolic deadlock, they take a wrong turn with recourse to the act of self-authentication or the integration of the impossible origin. They try to avoid the impasse constitutive of desire, acting as if desire (i.e., to be a *real* American or to have an intact self) will be possible only if not prohibited by their being adoptees or only if not prevented by their genealogical loss and the lack of (mis)representation. Simply stated, such defenses actually serve as a fantasy to make the desire possible and mobile in the first place. In order to secure their desire, they avoid confrontation with the inherent impossibility and transform the impossible Real of desire into prohibition. "Prohibition is easier to swallow than radical impossibility, when it comes to desire," as Karen Coats maintains (125).

It is one's refusal to confront the fundamental split in both the subject and the social that inclines one to fall into the trap of binary oscillations: in this instance, transnational/-racial adoption is seen as an act of altruism, on the one hand, or a strategy of exploitation, on the other, as either subversive or as supportive of the existing social hierarchy, as conforming to either biological or social determinism. Adoptees are seen as either a gift of love or as objects of consumption, adoptive parents as either caring-parents or as consumer-parents. Transnational/-racial adoption is situated within a sphere of domestic and psychological concerns or it is related to global capital and political institutions.

Caught between these binary oppositions, transnational/-racial adoptees are "traumatized" by being asked to serve as "bridge" or "link." In "Exchange," Jo Rankin narrates her struggle between the two worlds: "Born unto two / Realities two cultures; two different. You and me, / Crying silent tears while attempting to / Exchange American branches for / Korean roots" (*Seeds* 93). Kate Rushin describes the agonies she felt being a "bridge" in "The Bridge Poem":

> I've had enough
> I'm sick of seeing and touching
> Both sides of things

Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody. . . .
I'm sick of filling in your gaps
Sick of being your insurance against
The isolation of your self-imposed limitations
Sick of being the crazy at your holiday dinners
Sick of being the odd one at your Sunday Brunches
Sick of being the sole Black friend to 34 individual white
People (*Outsiders* 10)

Being a bridge is demanded not only by individuals but also by, in this instance, South Korea, China, and the U.S. Especially after a dual citizenship law came into effect in 1999, Korean adoptees were placed in a position to help the "motherland" integrate into the global capitalist economy and link her to "an ideal, global future" (Kim, *Wedding* 52). Korean adoptees, once disregarded, were recognized as "overseas Koreans," and the overseas Korean Foundation was inaugurated in 1997. Similarly, many Chinese government-sponsored cultural camps or roots tours arose in order to bond Chinese adoptees with the global community of Chinese in hopes not only that the adoptees would serve as mediators between Western and Asian powers—especially during the time when China hosted the 2008 Summer Olympic games—but also that they would aid her ambition to become a full-fledged political-military power. While Korean and Chinese adoptees are expected to perform as bridge or link, they are also seen to embody a multicultural utopia for the receiving nation, the United States, which embraces transnational adoption as "evidence of the peculiar American commitment to optimism, self-invention, malleability, and faith in social engineering" (Balcom 223).

Ironically, Korean-American adoptees are not seen as fully Korean in either the South Korean or the Korean American community. "For some adoptees," Eleana Kim remarks, "their actual experiences in South Korea have been marked by perceived rejection, outright discrimination, and painful alienation" (62). At the same time they experience prejudice and discrimination in the United States. The history of violence and displacement is intentionally occluded by Korea and America. In order

to favour the representation of China as an emerging capital market and U.S. adoption as a humanitarian action, people often ignore the fact that China, though an emerging world power, has surpassed South Korea as the largest supplier of adoptees, that the U.S. continues to be the greatest receiving nation in international adoption, and, above all, that structural inequalities remain in the contemporary global economy.

When caught between the poles of these binary oppositions and commanded to perform as bridge or link, Asian-American adoptees tend to romanticize or eroticize the country of origin as a stark contrast to an America seen as a nation sustained by exploitation. Likewise, birth mothers are often portrayed as unwilling victims, forced into "the act of abandonment, as victims with little or no choice in their actions" (Johnson 117). In fact, since the 1980s, most Korean adoptees "were born to middle-class high school or college students" instead of to unwilling victims such as poor factory workers (Hübinette 117). The act of abandonment is sometimes idealized as a "'brave act' . . . to save the child's life from abortion or infanticide or to 'give the child a better life'" (Johnson 117).[16] On the other hand, white adoptive mothers (notably, those in *Outsiders Within*) are usually portrayed as simply acting in pursuit of their own self-interests—their child-rearing regarded "as a way to become 'normal'" and to "complete one's life with family" and even to "enrich their lives by parenting a child from a foreign culture" (Nelson 89–90).

Prevalent in the culture of transnational/-racial adoption, such binary profiles are detrimental to the emerging field. The field is gendered as feminine in the sense that, first, "adoption is a more salient issue for women since family membership is in general more salient for women" (Novy 9). Second, those involved in adoption—including orphanage administrators, social workers, organization staff caregivers, and foster nurturers—are largely female. Moreover, adoption stories "are almost always stories about motherhood," not fatherhood, about motherland, rather than fatherland (Melosh 245). Karen Balcom observes that "more women than men look for [their] birth families, and those searching are most frequently looking for birth mothers, not birth fathers" (228). In addition, China sends thousands of babies abroad every year, and over

ninety-five percent are girls. It is also girls that are often favoured by adoptive parents. As Julie Berebitsky concludes, "a history of adoption is necessarily a history of women" (9).

This gendered discourse of transnational/-racial adoption, binary profiles of birth mothers and adoptive mothers (one abandons children and the other adopts them) are quite damaging because the discourse is reduced to—and about this I am most worried—a battle of the representation between two maternal figures or, rather, to a fight among three women when the adoptive daughter is included. The father is ignored In the discourse of transnational/-racial adoption, the male is out of focus, evading criticism. Yet it is in contemporary capitalist and *patriarchal* societies—China, Korea, and the U.S. as well—that transnational/-racial adoption operates. Second, though we cannot deny the fact that many birth mothers are the "most subordinated groups in an entrenched patriarchy and misogynistic state welfare system" (Kim 76), the victimization of birth mothers simply reinforces the existing prejudice toward women. Worse, women—including adopted daughters or adoptive mothers—are all represented as "grateful rescue objects" (Hübinette 121), who call for the protection of male power from either the supplying or receiving governments, or both.[17] At the same time, when we accuse adoptive mothers of being selfish and ignorant, we demand an impossible subject—a non-split (m)other, absolutely genuine in whom there is no gap between her belief and her performance. Indeed, love *shouldn't* and *can't* be colour-blind, and it is the neglect of adoptive children's ethnic heritage and family disruption that does often traumatize adoptees. Yet, love can hardly be one hundred percent pure, without the least taint of self-interest. Many adoptive mothers, in fact, are good-enough mothers. The act of adoption in itself does not make any mother good or bad as such.

CODA

How do we face the contradictions and tensions in the discourse (as well as the practice) of transnational/-racial adoption? The first response is often denial. The lure of an easy way out can be acted out in numerous

ways: from assuming colour blindness, through assimilative universalism as well as ethnic interpellation, and to celebratory multiculturalism or cultural hybridity. In one way or another, each endeavors to avoid the inherent antagonism. As examined earlier, this antagonism can be *unseen* in an altruistic utopia or displaced onto external hindrance (the primal wound, for example, the removal of which will promise wholeness and harmony). Similarly, in the name of celebratory multiculturalism, the antagonism is alleviated and depoliticized through politically correct inclusion of difference; these differences in the case of Asian adoptees are always racialized into Oriental stereotypes. Indeed, as Marianne Novy cautions, "what else can the adopted parents do to give content to ethnicity, other than rely on stereotypes" when "most Americans who identify strongly with some ethnicity have little content to their identification except a few such symbols" (18). More compelling in theory at least is to embrace a postmodern subjectivity opened up to multiplicity, free play, and hence free from antagonism. Adoptees may claim two or more mothers, fathers, homes, nations, names, and identities, or may engage themselves in the free play of the performance of identity. Such a poststructuralist kinship (to embrace numerous parents and social identities) does not "have any concomitant psychic support" (Eng 32). Problematically, it often renders the discourse and practice of transnational/-racial adoption as one devoid of violence, exploitation, and commodification.

To confront head-on the antagonism of transnational/-racial adoption, scholars insist on restoring history to the process of transnational/-racial adoption. They specify such a practice as historically constituted and thereby contextualize its relationship to a given mode of production. Ann Anagnost, for instance, notes that

> [c]elebratory representations of cultural difference, which are often detached from immigrant histories in the United States, may not only pose problems for adopted children in developing an understanding of their racialization, but this dehistoricization also maintains the separations that constitute racialized boundaries in U.S. society historically. (391)

Likewise, Volkman observes that an "overwhelming celebratory view of China and Chinese culture is sometimes questioned, especially by Asian American parents" for "exoticizing and mysticizing and obsessing about Chinese culture while ignoring the living, breathing Chinese American culture at our doorstep" ("Embodying" 39). In the study of Korean adoption, Eleana Kim points out that the evacuation of history is also encouraged by the South Korean government for the benefit of the master narrative of South Korean's economic miracle (76). Accordingly, David Eng claims that "[r]estoring collective history to the process of a transnational adoptee's social and psychic development is crucial to the survival of the global family" (33). Going one step further, Claudia Castaneda asks: "what kind of history 'belongs' to a child?" (296)

Beyond facing the tensions in the discourse and practice of trans-national/-racial adoption by historicizing the process, some Korean adoptees intensify its antagonism, endeavoring to reinvent an ethnic identity of their own "in the third space between their birth country's dream of a global ethnic Korean community . . . and a Western culture" (Hübinette 2) or a "fourth culture" against ones provided by Korean, American, and Korean American communities (Kim, *Wedding* 65). It is the *third* space or the *fourth* culture in which adoptees—following a manifesto drawn up by the editors of *Outsider Within*—share their "grief, learning from each other's journey, demanding change, and speaking [their] truths freely, without self-censorship" (12). A more radical view of transnational/-racial adoption is articulated by transnational/-racial abductees, Stephanie Cho and Kim So Yung, co-founders of a website of Transracial Abductees (http://www.transracialabductees.org/). Raging about transnational/-racial adoption, they see the practice as one that "conceals the unequal power between abductors and abductees, and in the abduction industry in general,"[18] and insist on using the term "ab-ductee" to "communicate an identity of one who had no choice in leaving his or her homeland, and becomes a type of forced exile and a stolen child" (Cherot).

Following Zizek's critique of today's proliferation of postmodern identity politics (*Ticklish* 208), I would argue for a position even more radical, one that asks for more than a third space and a fourth culture,

for more than inscribing the specifics of historical and cultural location. Rather than making a particular demand or turning antagonism into differences, we must radicalize further the discourse of transnational/-racial adoption: to define it not as one bound to a group-specific narrative of suffering but as one that can articulate a universal complaint and launch a global assault on the system. It is a move from the particular to the general. Žižek maintains that "the left has to involve itself in thinking locally and acting globally" (*Conversations* 17). Thus, we will not let "the primal wound" serve as the dominant theme in transnational/-racial narratives; rather, we must be more attentive to the present symbolic deadlock transnational/-racial adoptees face. Mutual recognition or compensation from the Other should not be our only concern; rather, we must be attentive to what fundamentally overdetermines the very horizon of transnational/-racial adoption—class struggle.[19] Capital is another name. Such a particular wrong—transnational/-racial adoption—stands in for the universal wrong, and, therefore, the particular calls for a global response. The universalization of particular demands prevents us from falling into the trap of identity politics; it prevents a claim—one, for example, from the editors of *Outsiders Within* to "reinvent ourselves and our world" (14)—from being conflated with a desire for consumption and a capitalist market.

How, in the Lacanian view, is such a breakthrough made possible? Opposite to the aim of therapy—stay "happy" and "healthy"—the goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to bring into existence subjects who recognize their lack and the fundamental lack in the Symbolic. We are always falling short and failing to live up to some imagined identity. To call for an authentic voice or an identity self-evident and specific to transnational/-racial adoptees, one needs to avoid remaining caught in the same fantasy framework and, hence, supporting the same, essentially prescriptive, discourse. On the other hand, to recognize the lack in the Symbolic does not mean submitting oneself to social and political inequality.[20] It indicates, rather, that the new recognition of the lacking, split self/Other stops us from blindly answering, fulfilling, repressing, avoiding, or enforcing the demand from (or on) others and the Other. Recognizing lack, we are able to avoid a "quest for whole-

ness" and give up constantly demanding perfect parents (birth or adoptive) and perfect children (birth or adopted). Far from seeking from the Other the guarantee of the consistency of one's being or blaming the Other for its failure or impotence, one assumes the non-existence of the Other.[21] The absence of guarantees is the very space of our freedom, the absence itself opening the possibility for the subject to take a new position relative to the traumatic impossibility. The subject begins to speak as "I" instead of "me." He or she may still be victimized, but he or she is no longer a victim. He or she is able to say "I was," "I did," "I will," or "I want to" rather than blaming others or the Other or excusing himself or herself by saying "It just happened to me," or asking "who did this to me?" or conceding "That is my fate" (Fink 62). The subject, as Zizek suggests, can finally experience his or her life "as a fully subjectivized, positive 'yes!'" (*Ticklish* 149–50). At the very end of *The Love Wife*, while in a coma, Carnegie has an imagined conversation with Mama Wong, where he interrogates her for the truth about his adoptee identity. In his eyes, Mama Wong is supposed to know the Other's desire, but she, much like a Lacanian analyst, refuses to provide him specific answers. As Žižek's discussion of Kantian autonomy of the subject suggests, "man"—meaning men and women—wants "firm coordinates . . . imposed on him from the outside, through a cultural authority," through, that is, "a master in order to conceal from himself the deadlock of his own difficult freedom and self-responsibility" (*Parallax* 90). It is freedom, then, that challenges Carnegie, the freedom to assume fully his own lack as well as excess and to take responsibility for his own enjoyment directly—without the need of an external master. For Carnegie as an adoptee, the task is to make a heroic acceptance of the deadlock: to experience adoption not as a constraint but as a condition for his existence, and thus to enjoy his own lack, seeing it not as "a state of loss" but as "originary" (McGowan 195). By virtue of no longer looking for a guarantee of his or her existence in another's desire, the subject becomes the "cause of itself."

In Lacan, the end of psychoanalysis opens up the domain of love (*Seminar XI* 263–76). In a similar vein, I propose a new political/subjective stance grounded on this love. Instead of reducing the discourse

to individualism or personal act, Pauline love, in Žižek's term, may bring forth new articulations and shape different social and political operations of the discourse. Pauline love—founded on the politics of St. Paul—is not "unconditional," and, therein, blind to all differences (as, for instance, ones of race, gender, class, nation, family, or others); rather, the non-all logic of love renders all differences incomplete. In the thirteenth chapter of his letter to *the Corinthians* St. Paul says:

> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (NIV, 1 Corinth. 13.1–3)

About this passage, Žižek writes, "love is not an exception to the All of knowledge, but precisely that 'nothing' which makes incomplete even the complete series/field of knowledge" (*Puppet* 115). Confronted with love, all becomes non-all, and the lack of totalization enables us to make choices as a subject. Moreover, love does not suspend the law but involves full immersion in the law. Jodi Dean explains that "this full surrender to law changes one's subjective perspective toward law" and we thus "no longer experience law as an 'ought'" but as "the condition in which I am" so that "it is incomplete, non-all, available for use and transformation" (165–66). In submitting ourselves, we enable the fundamental antagonism to appear.

  To adopt such a subjective position in the light of Pauline love, transnational/-racial adoptees must emotionally recommit to their families—not to "like" them for their (un)likeness nor to tolerate them in respect of an abstract Symbolic injunction but to love them as the real filled "with an impenetrable excess" (Žižek, "Divine" 12). Here, love marks the lack in imaginary complementarity or symbolic totality (imaginary synthesis and proliferation of symbolic differences). Resolving the deadlock of narcissistic reflection or symbolic injunction/prohibition, love may open up the possibility of hope, changing one from

within, involving one in arduous work, and forcing one to struggle to assert one's fidelity to failure, impossibility, and the absolutely incompatible gap. True love is not to embrace one's reflection, not to maintain a proper distance, not to be "afraid to get too close" (Žižek, *Iraq* 178), and not to "change her . . . or look for her essence" (Tim Dean 174). Rather, from love one *endorses* the system of adoption further and fully immerses oneself in re-adopting her adoptive parents psychologically on her own terms. It will be the act of Pauline love that will enable transnational/-racial adoptees to change the coordinates of the constellation and "allow [them] to reboot in the real so as to start up [their] relationship with the symbolic afresh" (Kay 155).

Notes

1 Cox's *Voices from Another Place: A Collection of Works from a Generation Born in Korean* and *Adopted to Other Countries* (1999) and Sook and Fox's *After the Morning Calm: Reflections of Korean Adoptees* (2002) are two other collections of narratives written by Korean adoptees.

2 The first Asian-American novel with major characters as adoptees, Lee's *A Gesture Life* (2000) features a protagonist named Franklin Hata, who is an ethnic Korean, adopted as a child into Japan by a Japanese couple. As an adult, he adopts a girl, Sunny, from a Japanese orphanage.

3 For a further discussion on the popularity of genetic research and genealogy, see Smolenyak and Turner.

4 For a further discussion on a return to genetics in adoption discourse, see Volkman, *Cultures* 14–15, and Cartwright 83–109.

5 In her opening chapter of *The Primal Wound*, Verrier presents her theory that the separation of mothers and children at birth or soon after causes a "primal wound" from which it is difficult for any child to recover completely. The babies prefer their own mothers and can distinguish them from other women. Infants are not "blank slates" upon which any family can write its history and heritage. Infants experience the loss of their mothers as abandonment.

6 The term was first coined by Kirschner in 1978 to explain misbehaviours in adopted children, including learning disabilities, difficulties with drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, attention deficit disorder, infertility, suicide, and so on. Kirschner concludes: "Finally, I believe that most adoptees have the same emotional vulnerabilities that are seen in dramatic form in the Adopted Child Syndrome, and that all adoptees are at risk" (100). For a further and recent discussion on the Adopted Child Syndrome, see Smith.

 7 Yngvesson points out that "[i]n the world of intercountry adoption, two stories predominate: a story of abandonment and a story about roots" (7).

 8 For a comprehensive account of the self in interdisciplinary perspectives, see Elliott, Holstein and Gubrium.

 9 Žižek illustrates how "the main excuse of many Nazis after the Second World War was always along the lines of: yes, you condemn us in general terms, but can you imagine what it meant to be a German in the 1930s?" (*Conversations* 142).

10 Similarly, Gamson observes in gay media network, "community needs are conflated with consumption desires, and community equated with market" (259).

11 Rather than a "real" thing, the thing, as the "beyond-of-the-signified" in Lacan's term, is impossible to imagine, impossible to put into signifiers, and impossible to reach in any way; the thing is the (psycho)logical effect of the subject's accession to the Symbolic order.

12 Lacanian psychoanalysis assumes that each one is first traumatized by the primordial loss of eternal life on the level of the organism (Verhaeghe 81), then by an encounter with sexuality, and next by "the wound of language" (Apollon 105). As the living being is traumatized linguistically, so is the subject being constituted. Inasmuch as a structural and logical limitation of language, there is always an excess. The inevitability of the signifying structure predetermines an alienated symbolic identity (leaving no possibility of wholeness or synthesis). Such a trauma is structural, cultural, and universal since one is always caught in a network of signifiers, either in written or spoken form. Though the symbolic or signification varies from culture to culture, we all share the same causality and starting point. While every human subject starts with a structurally-caused trauma, there might be accidental traumas later on top of this one. The interaction between external, real traumas and internal, structural traumas complicates the constructive process of individual subjectivity.

13 Žižek says of trauma: "In the case of the Wolf man, Freud's most famous patient, the Cause, of course, was the traumatic scene of the parental *coitus a tergo*—this scene was the non-symbolizable kernel around which all later successive symbolizations whirled. This cause, however, not only exerts its efficiency after a certain time-lag, it literally *became* trauma—that is, Cause—through delay: when the Wolf Man, at the age of two, witnessed the *coitus a tergo*, nothing traumatic marked this scene; this scene acquired traumatic features only in retrospect, with the later development of the child's infantile sexual theories, when it became impossible to integrate the scene with the newly emerged horizon of narrativization-historicization-symbolization" (*Metastases* 31; emphasis in orig.).

14 The retroactive production of trauma can be verified by Magids' findings that "traumas of the Holocaust may not have had pathological effects on all the survivors. . . . [T]he experience may have had the opposite effect on some" (252) and Waxman's observation that "some survivors of the Holocaust not only managed

to resume their lives but tended to be more successful than other U.S.-born Jews of a comparable age" (62).

15 Adoptees suffer from genealogical bewilderment, and, worse, as Lifton suggests, from a proliferation of "negative fantasies" (29) such as those relating their biological parents to beggars, unmarried women, prostitutes, rapists, AIDS victims, and so on. Besides, some adoptees are obsessed with questions of "what if?" More exactly, "What if my adoptive parents had adopted another child? What if my parents had not given me up? What if I had grown up in an orphanage? On the street? In Korea? In another country? What if I were a boy? A girl?" The possibilities can be never-ending.

16 Most adoption literature for children tends to "soften" the issue of abandonment, as Grice observes in "Transracial Adoption Narratives."

17 For a further discussion on the intervention of male power, see Hübinette.

18 For full details of their manifestation, see their website: http://www.transracial abductee.org and also for a further discussion of "abductee," see http://www.eurasiannation.com/articlespol2003-06abductees.htm

19 "The true task," Žižek claims, "is not to get compensation from those responsible, but to deprive them of the position which makes them responsible. Instead of asking for compensation from God (or the ruling class . . .), one should ask the question: do we really need God?" (*Conversations* 134).

20 T. Dean maintains that "articulating psychoanalysis with politics depends upon differentiating between losses and deficits; the latter represents unequal distribution of social resources" (205).

21 For a further discussion of the acceptance of the "dead" Other, see Žižek, *Parallax* 295–308.

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