

The Politics of Adoption in Korea

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the politics of adoption in Korea. A theoretical framework was adopted that address gender, culture, and power inequalities in a domestic and international context in order to understand why so many children have been given up to orphanages, and why international adoption has been and continues to be common in Korea. The thesis is based on secondary data in form of academic work and eight interviews conducted with Koreans in Seoul. The collected data indicates that Confucian beliefs make it difficult for unwed and single mothers to raise their children, and therefore feel forced to give up their children to adoption. Many children have in this way ended up in orphanages. The study also found little indication that the Korean state has tried to mitigate the underlying structural gender inequalities and legal and economic obstacles for single mothers to raise their child. The data also shows that there is a notion that it is better to grow up in West than in Korea. International adoption has therefore been seen as a good option and grown bigger at the same time that domestic adoption in Korea is rare due to concerns of bloodlines.

Keyword: international adoption, Korea, gender inequality, abandoned children, orphanages, Confucianism, unwed and single mothers

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adoption from South Korea, hereinafter referred to as Korea, is quite large and has been heatedly debated in the media and in academic works. Since the end of the Korean War in 1953, about 200,000 children from Korea have been adopted internationally (Kim, 2010; Moon, 2015; Walker, 2018). These numbers indicate that Korea is one of the leading countries in international adoption (Hübinette, 2005; Kim, 2010, p. 21; Walker, 2018; Selman, 2009). The US, France, and Sweden are the countries that have the largest number of adopted children from Korea (Hübinette, 2005). The view of adoption is often portrayed through the lens of the adoptees or the adoptive parents, and in many cases the stories of the biological family, the adoption bureau, and the government are ignored. What is often lacking is an understanding of the complexity of adoption and the many actors involved. Scholars and researchers have done important and interesting research on the history of adoption, the consequences of sending children to other countries, and the causes of international adoption. In many of the cases, the researcher has brought up problematic issues and unexpected consequences that put international adoption in the light for further examination.

1.1 Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

Korea hosted the Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988, and that is when they started to be criticized for their very high rates of international adoptions (Hübinette, 2005; Chira, 1988). In recent years, the criticism seem to have become more frequent and harsh, and it is noticeable that new perspectives have been brought into this field from adoptees who have become scholars and professors studying international adoption (for example Hübinette, 2005; Lundberg, 2013; Oh, 2015; Park Nelson, 2016). The question whether it is right or wrong to adopt children from other countries, and more importantly, the way it is done, raises heated debates and discussions. Arguments that Korea has handled adoptions in a questionable way has sparked intensive debates among scholars, and one aspect in the discussion has been the fact that the country has sent away a very high number of children for international adoption, despite its fast-growing economy and improved welfare system. Compared to other countries with similar economic status, Korea still shows remarkably high numbers, which raises concerns that there might be other factors than economic factors behind adoption. Still today, international adoption from Korea takes place, and the reasons why children are given up for adoption become crucial in order to understand the development of international adoption from Korea.

This thesis explores the underlying reasons behind adoption and addresses two specific questions:

- Why have so many children been given up to orphanages in Korea?
- Why has international adoption been and continues to be common in Korea?

It is essential to look at the factors to why Korea was able to send so many children overseas for adoption in order to understand why adoption developed the way it did. If there had been a small number of children at orphanages, there would probably not have been the same development. However, Korea has had many children in orphanages, which then has made adoption not only possible but also necessary to a certain extent. Therefore, the first research question will look at cultural, economic and political reasons to why there have been so many children at orphanages. The second question will look at additional factors to why international adoption was and still is common in Korea.

It thus puts the focus on the cultural, economic and political reasons behind adoption in Korea rather than address the situation of adoptees, that previously has been the focus of much literature (for example Lundberg, 2013; Oh, 2015; Park Nelson, 2016). Interviews with Korean people, who have not been involved with adoption, were conducted as one source of data in order to get an understanding of the Korean cultural context and view of family, the position of women, and adoption.

My own background as a Korean adoptee has inspired this thesis. Growing up as an adoptee in Sweden has made me aware of certain expectations and ideas regarding adoption and being adopted, such as the view that adoptions save children from growing up without a loving family. However, an understanding of why adoptees' biological parents could not care for their children is often lacking. Therefore, it is interesting to research, and potentially challenge, the reasons why Korea has adopted away so many children internationally.

1.2 Putting Adoption from Korea in a Global Perspective

It is important to remember that international adoption from other countries is very common, in order to understand the specific Korean case. Some countries with specific international adoption histories are China, Vietnam, and Romania among others. Many other countries have, or have had, high numbers as well, but there have been shifts throughout the decades. For example, Romania had an extreme spike in overseas adoption during 1990 and the first half of 1991, just after the fall of dictator Ceausescu, when they sent away about

10,000 children (Miller Wrobel & Neil, 2009, p. 41). China and Russia started to send many children abroad in 1992, which increased international adoptions by twice as much between 1995 and 2004 (Miller Wrobel & Neil, p. 42 & 46). These two countries have since then been the leading countries in sending away children for international adoption. The reasons why countries adopt away children differ. Adoption in Vietnam took off in 1975 after the fall of Saigon, as a sequel of the Vietnam War (Miller Wrobel & Neil, p. 50). International adoption from China saw a huge increase around 1992 when the relationship between China and the West opened up. Abandoned children had at this time increased as well, much due to the One-Child Policy that started in 1979, which eventually led to the abandonment of mostly girls (Miller Wrobel & Neil, pp. 57-58). China is the leading country of international adoption since 1995, but because of its large population, the adoption ratio is quite low. Every country has their story of children in need, but it becomes an international matter when many of these children are sent overseas. There are also specific and complex socio-economic, cultural, and political reasons behind both why children are abandoned and why international adoption has developed.

1.3 Outline of Thesis

After the introduction, chapter 2 addresses the methodology of the thesis and issues of data collection, the selection of interviewees, reflexivity, limitations and demarcations, and ethics. Then follows two chapters that combine literature review with a critical historical overview of adoption respectively an analysis of the cultural context and view of family and the role of women within Confucianism. There is a growing literature on adoption in Korea with scholars coming from different disciplines and focusing on different perspectives and adopting different theories. In chapter 5 some central works and theoretical perspectives will be addressed and the thesis' analytical approach of the "politics of adoption" explained. In the analytical chapters 6 and 7 the two main research questions are being addressed and answered in the light of the academic literature and based on insights from interviews conducted with nine people in Korea. The final chapter provides a conclusion and some discussion on the future of adoption in Korea.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Design

Qualitative research was used in this thesis as it “tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers”, which I find most suitable and useful for my research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Primary data was collected in form of semi-structured interviews, both in verbal and written form, and secondary data was collected from articles in the media and academic works. The semi-structured approach to interviews was based on twelve already prepared questions, but they were also adapted and based on “the interviewees’ answers and the new directions they may open up” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 130). Since more than one source of data was used, the thesis aim to use triangulation to analyze the information and to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 392).

2.2 Sample

I conducted my interviews in Korea and before going I had decided to try get around ten interviews as this was a realistic number in view of the length of my stay and in order to get a sufficient sense of people’s views. I decided to only interview women but as discussed below, I also had the possibility to interview a man. I ended up with getting eight interviews that I could use, but with nine interviewees as one face-to-face interview was conducted with two participants. I had planned for two additional interviews, but one interviewee withdrew after the actual interview and a second one delayed our interview to the point that we did not find time. In order to find my samples I decided to narrow it down to women who were from Seoul or had grown up in Seoul. They had to be over the age of 18 because I wanted to only interview adults, but it did not matter if they were married or not, nor did it matter if they had children or family themselves. Their educational level did not matter, but since I interviewed or contacted my respondents in English, most of them turned out to have obtained some kind of higher educational degree. They all had graduated from high school, and all of them have fairly strong connection to international friends. Since they grew up and live, or have lived, in Seoul, it is not unlikely that they might belong to the middle class or above. More than half of my samples were people that I briefly had been introduced to previously, or friends of friends, but none of them were close acquaintances. The rest of the samples were contacted through the so-called snowball effect, where “sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research” (Bryman, 2012, p. 424).

As it turned out, an interview with one of the women took place in a setting where another man and another woman participated in Korean in the discussion, before they responded back to me through a translator. The other woman never responded back to me, but the man did a few times, which is important to mention as his answer might have made a difference for the woman I interviewed and therefore also affected the analysis. Another of my interviews was supposed to be with a woman, but due to unforeseen circumstances, the interview took place with a man. However, the interview turned out to be of great value with material that I found useful for my thesis.

2.3 Interview Process

As I approached a potential participant I briefly introduced them to my topic and asked if they would like to take part in my interview. Four of my nine participants clearly indicated that they would not want to be interviewed verbally or face-to-face for unknown reasons, but they definitely wanted to take part in some other way. Therefore, I decided to conduct the interview in written form with the same questions as my face-to-face interviews, and thus four of my interviews were conducted in written form in English. Of my face-to-face interviews I conducted three of them in English, and one of them was done with help from a translator.

Before I conducted an interview I had introduced them briefly to my studies and my topic. I offered to send out my questions beforehand if the participant wished so, as well as a consent form. Permission for audio recording was given by three of my interviewees, and one wished not to be recorded. Three of my four face-to-face interviews were in English, ranging from decent English to very good English. A translator translated one interview from Korean to English. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews took about 1-1.5 hours and took place between January 15 to January 24, with the exception of one interview that took place in March where the interviewee recorded the interview himself following the interview questions that I had sent to him. Transcribing the interviews took place at the same day as the interview itself.

The written interviews consisted of the same twelve questions as the face-to-face interviews, and can be found in the appendix. A consent form was sent out to these participants as well. The questions range from one's own experience growing up, to Korea's view of children outside of marriage and single parents, to knowledge about adoption in Korea. The respondents in the written interviews had very good English and could take all the time they needed to answer.

2.4 Reflexivity

In this thesis we take reflexivity to mean that I, the researcher, have an understanding of where I stand in terms of what implications my methods, values, and biases have in my work (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). It also means that, “reflexivity entails a sensitivity to the researcher’s cultural, political, and social context” (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). The importance here is that my participants knew that I was a Swedish graduate student, conducting fieldwork in Seoul. They also knew that I was a Korean adoptee myself, which most likely have caused myself to approach my work in a specific way. Furthermore, my interviewees may as a consequence also have answered in a different way to avoid an uncomfortable situation or what they might think would be hurtful answers. I also have to be mindful of that I grew up in Sweden and that I therefore might not be able to fully understand the implications of my participants’ answers and the Korean cultural context. To tackle this situation, I tried to take as neutral position as possible but at the same time show my participants that I wanted to get educated by them and their answers.

Reliability is important when conducting interviews as we want to make sure that the interviewee gives the same answer regardless of who asks the question so “the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings” can be relied on (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 245). By asking some broad questions in the beginning where the interviewee can give some information about their own experience and point of views, and then ask more specific questions towards the end, one can potentially reduce the risk of getting different answers as the interviewee will feel more comfortable as the interview goes on. Two types of questions should in particular be avoided, and those are leading questions and questions that are too sensitive or upsetting. This was also something I tried to pay attention to both when formulating my questions and during my interviews.

2.5 Limitations and Demarcations

The limitations both refer to the selection and size of my sample. I choose not to interview adoptees or people who have been involved in adoption (either as birthmothers, officials, or parents of adopted children), as I wanted to get an understanding of the broad sentiments in society. Since the sample size is very small it does not represent all socio-economical classes and there is a bias towards the urban middle-class. I thus do not claim that my sample is representative but I find it sufficient enough in order to find useful data that can

be analyzed with the help of other sources. It should be noted that my interviewees, due to their background, might not be aware of the socio-economic situation of mothers who had to give up their children for adoption. These individuals have different family experiences but as far as I know, none of my participants have given up a child themselves, nor adopted a child, nor had immediate family members who had experienced this. I also deliberately avoided asking any personal questions about these issues in order to not cause distress.

One of my biggest limitations is the language skill. I do not speak Korean, and I could not use any literature in the Korean language, nor could I conduct any interviews in Korean. I solely had to rely on English and Swedish literature, and some translated texts. When a scholarly work or a text is translated, there is always a risk that some important edges or feelings are lost in the translation. The same phenomenon goes with face-to-face conversations when an interpreter translates sentences and conversations. I only had to use an interpreter in one of my interviews, but the fact that some of my other participants in my face-to-face interviews did have some limitations with the English language might have compromised the answer they were able to provide.

Another limitation, connected to the language barrier, is the basic understanding of certain terms or values. What might be considered one thing in West might not be understood in the same way in Korea. For example, terms such as ‘family values’ might be understood differently in different countries, which make this issue crucial when it comes to some of my questions and answers.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

I have followed the ethical guidelines in the Center’s Guidelines for the Master’s Thesis. There has been information prior to an interview regarding the research and what questions that will be asked, and there has also been information that the interviewee will be anonymous throughout the entire thesis, that participating in the interview is completely voluntary, and that he or she can withdraw from the study at any time (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 70). A consent form and a certificate that I am a student at Lund University have also been given to the interviewee prior to the interview.

I have chosen to interview people over the age of 18, and I have given them fictional names to make sure their identity stays anonymous as “confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the participants will not be disclosed” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 72). In order to make my participants as comfortable as possible, I have tried to be as flexible

as I could by conducting the interviews either in a verbal or in a written form. Personal or sensitive questions have been avoided. The anonymity and security of the participants of my interviews have been of very high priority for me throughout this work.

3. A CRITICAL HISTORY OF ADOPTION IN KOREA

Throughout times, children have been moved away from their biological families to other families, care centers, orphanages and other institutions, and especially during war times as parents have fallen victims to combats. However, international adoption did not take off until after World War II when Americans adopted children from European countries (Oh, 2015, p. 2). The beginning of the history of adoption in Korea started after the Korean War. Many people had lost their lives due to combats when the Korean War ended in 1953, and poverty was substantial as the entire country struggled to rebuild infrastructure for a manageable daily life. South Korea, who had a vital support from the United States both during and after the war, was in need of additional foreign support, which they started to receive in 1954 by Western relief organizations (Hübinette, 2005, p. 52; Oh, 2015, pp. 58-59). However, the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency had already in 1951 calculated that Korea had about 100,000 orphaned children, which then increased throughout the Korean War.

As many as 12,000 children were born between 1950-1965 to a Korean mother and a father who was in Korea temporarily, such as a UN soldier (Hübinette, 2005, p. 56). Both parents often abandoned their mixed race babies, commonly referred to as ‘GI babies’, as the father went back to the US and the mother had difficulties raising the child herself. Being mixed race in the Korean society proved difficult as “racial mixture threatened Korea’s nationalistic ideas of racial purity”, and since citizenship was passed through father to child under the Korean law, “illegitimate children without Korean fathers, GI babies were stateless nonpersons who would never find legal or social acceptance” (Oh, 2015, p. 7). The number of abandoned children and orphans then increased significantly, both due to difficulties in raising mixed race children, but also due to economical difficulties for many Korean families suffering from the wartime. Therefore, different adoption organizations took form in order to help children in need.

The very first formal and registered international adoption of a Korean child took place in 1953 as the Korean government, with help of the passed Orphan Act and Refugee Relief Act by the American Congress, authorized adoption of children to American families

(Hübinette, 2005, p. 58). However, American servicemen had adopted so-called mascots, who was often orphaned or abandoned children who served as servicemen with domestic chores during the war, which had two important significances (Oh, 2015). On a practical level it created an awareness of regulating the adoption process, both in Korea and in America, which led to changes in their immigration law. Ideologically, it helped “fostering international goodwill” and to promote US-Korean friendship that was seen as an essential political function for the US (Oh, 2015, p. 46).

The development of international adoption was just started, and one of the most prominent people within the business was Harry Holt, an American philanthropist and farmer from Oregon who started the Holt Adoption Program in 1956 (Hübinette, 2005; Oh, 2015). Holt himself had adopted several mixed race children from Korea and since the Korean state wanted to remove these GI children from Korea, and there was a demand for them in America, the Holt Adoption Program was able to develop their program into the leading international adoption agency in the world. Due to the supply and demand of Korean children, the Holt agency was also able to make the adoption faster, which critics argue that they “overused proxy adoption, making ‘mail order babies’ possible, disregarded minimum standards” in order to benefit their business (Hübinette, 2005, p. 61). Holt emphasized the Christian fundamentalism because he believed he rescued and civilized the Korean children, at the same time as the Korean state was satisfied with receiving help to care for these orphans, and also reducing the mixed race babies in the country.

In the 1960s, Korea saw numerous adoption agencies being set-up as international adoptions increased. A decade later, there were seven major agencies that were called the Seventh Day Adventists, with the Social Welfare Society, the Korea Social Service, and Holt Children’s Services as three of the bigger ones (Hübinette, 2005, p. 64). According to statistics from the Ministry of Health and Welfare in Korea, the number of international adoptions during the 1960s reached 6,166, but with an enormous increase in the 1970s that indicates 46,035 international adoptions from Korea (Hübinette, 2005, p. 264). Even though Korea had started to recover since the Korean War, there were still many families that struggled economically and there was a certain stigma against children born out of wedlock. Children born out of wedlock often turned out to become children to a single-mother because the father left without any obligations to the child, nor the mother. Stigma towards single mothers was, and still is, even stronger than the resentment to children born out of wedlock, and therefore many of these children were abandoned for adoption. As the numbers of orphans and abandoned children grew bigger, an idea was formed that adopting away children

to West was in the best interest of the child because they would get a better life abroad than in Korea (Kim, 2016).

Due to demand from Western countries and a suffering economic and political situation in Korea, international adoption was able to continue without any specific hindrance. The peak with highest numbers of Korean children sent abroad came in 1985 when close to 9,000 children were adopted internationally, with a total of 66,511 children sent abroad during the 1980s (Hübinette, 2005, p. 264). The vast amounts of children being adopted overseas indicate that, "...by the 1980s, international adoption had become big business in Korea" (Oh, 2005, p. 176).

Already in the beginning of the 1970s, there had been a shift from adopting away mixed race children to ethnically Korean children (Hübinette, 2005; Oh, 20015). The majority had been girls in the very beginning, and so was still the case, but more and more boys were seen in the adoption process as well. Maternity shelters and home for young and unwed mothers started to grow in cooperation with the adoption agencies, at the same time as an increase of children from unmarried and single mothers from middle-class background became obvious (Hübinette, 2005, p. 72).

Initiatives throughout the decades have been taken by the Korea authorities to decrease international adoption and increase domestic adoptions. Promotion of domestic adoption during the 1960s was quite successful, although critics argue that Confucian traits in combination with economical and political difficulties prevented a continued development (Hübinette, 2005; Oh, 2015; Kim, 2015, p. 713). Strong criticism and scrutinizing of the Korean international adoption took place in 1988 when Korea was in the public eyes as they were hosting the Summer Olympic Games. Western journalists brought international readers to the attention that Korea was a leading country in "exporting" children, and the critics were massive (Hübinette, 2005, p. 73; Kim, 2015, p. 713; Moon, 2015; Walton, 2018). The commotion led the Korean government to implement certain changes, such as "limiting overseas adoptions to just children of mixed-races and children with disabilities" (Kim, 2015, p. 713). Since then, we can see a substantial decrease, as the 1990s accounts for 22,925 international adoptions, which is roughly about 2,000 – 2,500 adoptions per year (Hübinette, 2005, p. 264). The numbers were steadily dropping, but increased a little again after the financial crisis in 1997. A new attempt to increase domestic adoption took place in 2007 when international adoption was forbidden during the first five months that a child was eligible for adoption (Kim, 2015, p. 713). The long-term goal was to terminate international adoption, but this goal was not reached because domestic adoption did not pick up to the required level.

In 2011, the Special Adoption Act was implemented as a response to the continued criticism of Korea's adoption process. Even though Korea had managed to decrease the number of international adoptions, it was still considered as a high number, and that, in combination with a low number of domestic adoptions, was heavily criticized. Korea had signed The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoptions in May of 2013, which works on keeping children together with their biological family (Kim, 2015, p. 710). The Special Adoption Act was meant to decrease the amounts of adoptions by trying to keep the children with their biological parents, and the act was also trying to prioritize domestic adoption before international adoption (Kim, 2015; Moon, 2015). However, the changes in the adoption law can only be seen as a failure as the abandoning of children increased since the implementation of the Special Adoption Act. "This apparent failure may be because the Act ignores the social and cultural context that surrounds adoption and children born out of wedlock in Korea today" (Kim, 2015, p. 716).

The Special Adoption Act included eight major changes in the adoption law. The most significant change is that birthparents have to wait seven days before going through with their adoption, and "all adoptions must now be approved and granted by the Family Court", which means that, "birthparents are required to report the birth of the child to the government" (Kim, 2015, p. 719). The problem with these changes is that parents that want to adopt away their children often do not want their families and people around them to know that they gave birth to a child. Specifically women are sensitive in this matter, because family and society subject them to stigma and shame when they give birth and feel unable to care for their own child. Therefore, to register their child with the government, and care for the baby for seven days, will forever put parents in an uneasy situation if they want to adopt away their child. The result of the new act consequently led to an increasing number of anonymously abandoned children.

During the last twenty years, Korea has developed long-term foster care systems based on Western models in order to better care for orphans and abandoned children, and domestic adoptions estimates to about one third of all adoptions (Hübinette, 2005, p. 74). Since the beginning of 2000, international adoptions from Korea has yet again started to decrease, with a number below 1,000 adoptions in 2011 (Selman, 2013). However, international adoption from Korea is evidently enormous, as a total number of approximately 200,000 children have been adopted worldwide (Kim, 2010; Moon, 2015; Walker, 2018).

4. UNDERSTANDING ADOPTION AND GENDER: CULTURAL AND FAMILY VALUES

In order to understand adoption in Korea, most scholars agree that one needs to be aware of certain important characteristics of Korean culture and notions around family life. The system that has made most impact on the view of family is Confucianism that traces back to more than 600 years ago, which is a topic that has been researched a lot. Different arguments regarding how, and to what extent, Confucianism has had an influence within society are debatable, but it is clear that Confucianism plays a big role in many aspects. The law, the mindset amongst the Korean people, and the way families live is evidence of Confucian beliefs, which has created structure but also inequality for different families.

4.1. Confucianism

Korea has been influenced by Confucian ideals, which can be seen everywhere in society, and is most evident in family life. Confucianism is a moral philosophy with social and ethical standards that was implemented during the Yi dynasty (1392-1910), also known as the Joseon or Choson dynasty (조선국), with focus on harmony between nature and humans and ancestor worship (Kim, 1994, pp. 146-147; Lee, 1998, p. 249). The harmony between nature and humans is achieved through a hierarchical system of relationship with the belief that “inequality in social relationship – between the generations, the classes, and the sexes – is not only natural but essential for peace and harmony” (Kim, 1994, p. 147). Therefore, Confucianism has created five fundamental categories where father-son, ruler-subject, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, and friend-friend constitute for basic relationships with a strict dominant-subordinate structure. This kind of vertical configuration of relationship, with “a nonconfrontational approach for the sake of the group, and personal sacrifice for the prosperity of the family” has, what many scholars and researchers believe, helped Korea with their rapid modernization (Lee, 1998, p. 250). Since Confucianism has been influential in Korea and the entire East Asia for centuries, it has become natural for the population to live accordingly (Kim, 1994, p. 148). Throughout time, there have been advantages with Confucianism, where an order of how to live and how to care for each other has been established.

Confucianism has also brought inequality to the Korean society, especially gender inequalities. Within family life, men are responsible and obligated to represent the family in society with great loyalty to the lord and the state, at the same time as he is supposed to

manage his family members and control the family property (Lee, 1998, p. 252). Women have inferior status to men, regardless of their age, and women are supposed to be wise mothers and good wives. Once a man and a woman gets married, the woman becomes part of the man's family and her legal power is diminished because she now belongs to her husband's family (Kim, 1994, p. 155; Lee, 1998; Yang, 2006). There are many different regulations to how a family is run according to Confucian beliefs, such as the oldest son has obligations to stay and live with his parents until their passing. For women, despite their social subordinated position, they are in charge of the "inside" of the house, which includes the "consumption and the allocation of resources within the family and household" (Lee, 1998, p. 252). Men are responsible for the "outside" with farming and properties as their main care. The divided responsibilities, with a so-called inside master and an outside master, indicates that both men and women have obligations and responsibilities, but in the bigger picture men are superior with more power that prevents women from equal rights within family life and society.

4.2 Family-Head System

Another importance of the Korean family life is the family-head system, sometimes referred to as *hoju*, which has taken form after the Korean War. In this system we usually see the husband, or an adult male, representing the family with all its members, and it is basically the family-head who has all legal rights of the family (Kim, 2014, p. 66; Lee, 1998; Yang, 2006). This particular family institution, which is part of the Family Law, has "strong and complex social effects: it defines the boundary of the family, endows a kind of 'natural right' to be the head to a family to every adult male in Korea, while it also naturalizes the inferior status as 'member' to almost every adult woman in Korea" (Yang, 2006, p. 13). The family-head system is usually not emphasized on a daily basis in society, and it does not become problematic until legal matters become an issue, in situations such as divorces or other kinds of family registration issues. When these legal situations arise, the woman is inferior with fewer legal rights.

When a woman marries a man, she has to register into her husband's family register. This register "is a system of recording personal identification according to one's male lineage, equivalent to a birth certificate", but it also "denotes the clan to which one belongs", which clearly indicates that the woman upon marriage "belongs" to her new family both socially and in legal documents (Kim, 1994, p. 149). As the family register is a form of identification card and official documents, it is important that all family members become registered. When a

married couple gets children, the children are automatically registered under the father's family register, which once again, indicates the superior role the husband has towards his wife.

There are two different ways for a Korean family to continue their family branch. If the oldest son in a family marries, he is the one to carry on the family branch and the legacy of the family (Lee, 1998, p. 253; Palley, 1992). He will have higher social status than his younger brothers who have to move out after marriage and start their own family branch. As there is more responsibilities for the eldest son, such as taking care of the grandparents and maintain the family legacy, than there is for the younger brothers, there is also more social status and more powerful legal rights. Traditionally, this family system was applied at all times, but in more modern times it has been possible for other sons to take over the caregiving role (Palley, 1992, p. 788). However, for daughters when they marry, they get limited legal power within the family structure and “forces women to abandon her own family and join her husband's family” (Kim, 1994, p. 155).

The family-head system is in the process of changes. Revisions of the law can be traced back to 1962, and since then, several revisions have taken place due to activists from women's movements (Kim, 2014, p. 67). A significant change of the Family Law in Korea was taken in 2005, as the family-head system was eliminated due to protection of human dignity and gender equality in family life (Yang, 2006, p.13). It is a continuing process to replace the former family-head system with another family system that will take time to change. However, the unequal roles of men and women in the Korean society have already created a mentality that probably will take even longer for society to recover from. Due to the applied family-head system and the Confucian philosophy, the differences between men and women in the Korean society are significant. The different gender roles have led to inequality in different situations in the society, and perhaps most significantly in the family life.

4.3 Race and Bloodlines

There are other factors that affect the view of family life and family values in Korea. Due to “Korea's nationalistic ideas of racial purity”, one can see certain traits of racism and stigmatization towards other nationalities (Oh, 2015, p. 7). Part of it can be explained with the Confucian belief that a family should be created with the appropriate blood band, and part of it can be explained with a hostile attitude towards foreigners due to war and occupation by other countries. Non-Koreans do not fit into the Korean ethnic homogeneity, nor do they have the right skin color, which up until recent years have been of a huge importance in the country,

with support from the people claiming that “our ethnic homogeneity is a blessing” (Choe, 2009). Being a mixed race child in Korea is described as living in difficult conditions, with limited financial support, and social-, economic-, and legal discriminations (Hübinette, 2005, p. 56; Oh, 2015, p. 7). Mixed race children were among the first children to be sent abroad after the Korean War, which also became the true take off of international adoption from Korea.

4.4 Views on Sexuality and Unwed Mothers

Having a child outside of marriage is not acceptable since the notions around marriage are very strong, both traditionally and legally. If a woman becomes pregnant, without being married, the man often leaves the woman and the baby without having any obligations to the baby. In this case, the unwed woman becomes a single mother, a phenomena highly stigmatized in the Korean society (Babe, 2018; Jung, 2015; Jung & Park, 2018; Kim, et al., 2013; Lee, 2011). “In South Korea, Confucian culture and a hierarchical society mean that bloodlines play a dominant role in defining community”, which indicates the difficulties that a single mother without the support from the family of the father’s side will have (Babe, 2018). Since a child inherits both last name and social respect from the father, this is missing for children with a single mother. An unwed mother often becomes single because the father leaves, but her own family can also take distance because “it’s a real stigma to the family itself and a sign that they didn’t raise the woman well” (Babe, 2018). The problematic view of children outside of marriage, and the shame of single mothers are deeply engraved in the Korean mentality, causing dreadful problems for many women.

As many single mothers stand without support from the father, as well as no support from their own family, the economic situation is difficult to tackle. Due to the negative view that the entire Korean society has on children outside of marriage and single mothers, the state support is also minimal (Jung, 2015; Jung & Park, 2018; Kim, et al., 2013; Lee, 2011). Therefore, the economic situation, on top of the already stigmatized position, makes it almost unbearable to survive in the Korean society and raise a child as a single mother. According to statistics from 2007 by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, three out of four unwed mothers are eventually “forced to give up their child due to economic difficulties and social discrimination” (KUMFA, n.d.). The cultural attitudes towards single mothers is hard to change, however, very little incentives from the state and government can be seen in terms of financial aid, housing support, and support of organizations for single mothers.

In case of an unwanted pregnancy, women may resort to abortion. However, abortion is illegal in Korea, but that does not mean that abortions do not take place (Barr, 2017; Choi, 2017; Rich, 2018; UN, 2011). Abortion was strictly prohibited from 1953 until 1973, but was then revised to allow abortion in certain cases, such as to save a woman's life, due to rape or incest, or if genetic diseases could be proved (Rich, 2018; UN, 2011). According to the Health and Welfare Ministry there was 16,900 abortions conducted in Korea in 2010, but only 6% of them were legal (Choi, 2017; Rich, 2018). Abortion is widely available despite being illegal, but one could face prison or fines of two million Korean won (about \$1,840), but prosecution is rare (Barr, 2017; Rich, 2018). Evidently, abortions still happens in Korea but in an illegal, and therefore also most likely in a more dangerous way, which is why the public wants to bring up this sensitive topic to the governmental level. The current government of President Moon Jae-In has been forced by the public to revise the law, but they want to call it "interruption of pregnancy" rather than abortion, in order to mitigate the sensibility of the question (Barr, 2017).

As Korea has had an incredible development into modernization with an increasing welfare, it is reasonable to expect that financial support for all children within the country is sufficient. However, this is not the case as "experts say single mothers in S. Korea suffer stigma, and should receive increased state assistance" (Jung, 2015). Different cities and provinces have different supporting systems, where a small amount of financial aid is given depending on the mother's income, and sometimes even housing support can be received in few cities. To qualify for financial aid, the mother cannot have an income above a certain level because then the aid will be lost or reduced (Babe, 2018; Jung & Park, 2018). This rule makes it difficult for single mothers to get motivated to get a fulltime job, and often leaves her at part time jobs, which is a poor solution in the long run. To conclude the economical situation, "no unwed mother can afford to raise a child on government assistance without the help of her family or a private facility" (Kim, et al., 2013).

4.5 Domestic Adoption

Governmental incentives have been done, such as the Special Adoption Law and the introduction of "Adoption Day" on May 11 for domestic adoption (Kim, 2015; Lee, 2011). President Chun Doo-hwan, President Kim Young-sam, and President Roh Moo-hyun all implemented incentives to increase domestic adoption and to decrease the number of babies that were abandoned by their biological families. The methods used were for example tax

reductions and “incentive-driven policies which offered single-mothers 400,000 won (US\$417 in 2006 exchange rate) per month to support their children and 100,000 won (US\$104 per month) per child to South Korean adoptive parents” (Moon, 2015). These kinds of governmental incentives are meant to ease and help the different family situations, although, when it comes to single parents and adoption, it seems to be very difficult for the Korean population to change their mindset and approach to their view of family life.

4.6 Conclusion: Understanding Adoption Within a Cultural and Gender Framework

Confucianism is often brought up in literature when we read about Korea’s history and its culture. Some critics say it only plays a small role, whereas other critics say that Confucianism is totally dominant in Korean history. Although, when we look at how family life has developed, and what laws and notions that are implemented in society, it is easy to see that Confucian traits can be found in every aspect of how Koreans are structured to live and act. The consequences create huge gaps between men and women where inequality leads mothers to give up their children for adoption.

Confucianism does not only look at the different roles for men and women, or fathers and mothers. The philosophy also takes blood band into consideration, as it is important to have a clean bloodline in your family. This trait was specifically emphasized during and right after the Korean War when international adoption in Korea took off, starting with mixed race children to be sent to America. These children were not accepted in the Korean society, as a nationalistic approach and pure blood was essential to be one with the people.

Even though international adoption in Korea started with mixed race children, it continued on with ethnic Korean children after a while. Researchers in quite recent times have started to write about stigma towards having children outside of marriage, and how the father leaves the mother and the baby, where the single mother then experiences even more stigma from society and people around her. Difficulties of being a single mother, as well as having a baby outside of marriage, are true problems in Korea. Despite efforts by the state it seems difficult to change the mindset of people’s approach towards this issue. However, many of the reasons of giving up one’s child and the large number of international adoption from Korea are imbedded in the issue regarding the view of family and the stigma around children outside of marriage and single mothers.

Many critics and scholars argue that the Korean state, on different levels, has tried to make changes in gender equality, family issues, and family and adoption laws in order to

improve family life. However, the changes have been with varied results, and to conclude, the result has not been satisfying as the goal was to end international adoption and increase domestic adoption. Domestic adoption has not picked up as much as needed in order to eliminate international adoption. Although, what usually has been missing from the state's side is emphasize on the actual problem – namely, why mothers and parents give up their child in the first place. Literature has brought up this problem from several different aspects where we come back to issues relating to Confucianism and the structure of a Korean family.

When we look at the view of family in Korea, and dig deeper into the issue regarding high numbers of international adoption and why parents abandon their children, we can see that there is limited research of biological parents in Korea, with some exceptions, such as Hosu Kim's article and book *The Biopolitics of Transnational Adoption in South Korea* (Kim, Hosu, 2015; 2016).

5. THE POLITICS OF ADOPTION: GENDER, CULTURE, AND POWER INEQUALITIES IN A DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

When we research questions related to the causes of adoption in both a domestic and an international context we need to, as also shown in the two previous chapters, examine a range of different aspects. Important aspects are the view of the adoptee, the view of the adoptive or receiving parents, the view of birthparents, and the view of the state, including different governmental bodies and adoption bureaus in both the sending and receiving country. Additional aspects such as poverty and economic inequalities are also important as they explain the socio-economic reasons behind adoption. A study of adoption should not be limited to only addressing the view of for example the adoptee and the adoptive or receiving parents. Therefore, it is essential to find a fitting analytical approach that can be applied and include all essential aspects that our research questions take into consideration.

Different approaches can be used depending on the research questions in focus. Arissa Oh studied the origins of international adoption by “examining the changing ways Americans envisioned and constructed their families in the second half of the twentieth century” (Oh, 2015, p. 10). Her focus is on biological ideas and the history of family, with a specific focus on Korea and the US. Other work by Swedish professor Tobias Hübinette focuses on “popular cultural representations of adopted Koreans restricted in scope to overseas adoptees in Western countries”, using insights from cultural studies and a postcolonial perspective (Hübinette, 2005, p. 15).

However, to only address biological ideas, history of family, and cultural factors would not be sufficient in order to answer our research questions. In order to find answers to why so many children have been given up to orphanages we also need to look at economic and political factors, the role of the state and the government, as well as adopt a gender perspective. We also need to understand the structure and impact of Confucianism, and how important political decisions were taken and carried out in Korea. Furthermore, adoption needs to be understood within the context of unequal economic and power relations among countries, which puts an international context to our thesis as well.

Another useful approach in adoption studies is using biopolitics. Both Hosu Kim and Natalie Cherot write from a biopolitical perspective, where Hosu Kim emphasizes on welfare and social governance and Cherot focuses on the biopolitical power and control of women (Cherot, 2006; Kim, Hosu, 2015). They both look at governmental regulations, but Hosu Kim brings in additional perspectives, such as in-depth interviews with birthmothers, letters written by birthmothers, and other Korean literature (Kim, Hosu, 2015, pp. 60-61). However, my own sample, although providing some insights that also show how young unmarried women were regarded and controlled, is very different and thus biopolitics was not used.

Instead this thesis combines several different perspectives, and a framework based on cultural perspectives where Confucianism, gender, and politics have been developed. The analytical concept of the “politics of adoption” will be applied in this thesis as a framework to provide a more in-depth understanding on the structural causes to adoption. We study adoption paying attention to cultural factors such as how Confucianism has shaped gender roles and family values in Korea, how gender inequalities manifest themselves in legal and economic biases, the impact of poverty and marginalization on both women and men, and inequalities and asymmetries among countries. Laura Briggs explains the power issue regarding adoption as following:

“If we want to understand adoption, especially intercountry and interracial adoption, we need to see that its practices do not resolve neatly into categories of coercive and innocent, good and bad. Adoption may sometimes be the best outcome in a bad situation, but it is always layered with pain, coercion, and lack of access to necessary resources, with relatives (usually single mothers) who are vulnerable. Stranger adoption is a national and international system whereby the children of impoverished or otherwise disenfranchised mothers are transferred to middle-class, wealthy mothers (and fathers). The relative power of these two groups, and the fact that stranger adoption almost never takes place in the opposite

direction, sets the inescapable framework in which adoption is inserted” (Briggs, 2012, pp. 4-5).

Briggs’ approach has been helpful as it draws attention to both the power relations and the complexities of adoption. It is important to tie together aspects of gender inequalities, political inequalities, and cultural traditions in order to understand adoption in the case of Korea.

6. HOW VIEWS ON GENDER, FAMILY, AND MARRIAGE EXPLAIN ADOPTION

In this section, which is based on the literature review and interviews, we will look in more detail at which factors play a role in why Korean children are given up to orphanages. The factors identified include: the importance of marriage; stigma of having children outside of marriage; the difficulties for single mothers; and the economic aspects of parenthood. Views on the role of women, family, and the importance of marriage affect the decision to abandon children, which eventually leaves the children at orphanages. Looking into several different aspects of family traditions, infrastructure, and governmental decisions will show us that there is a mixture of factors that matters when it comes to answering why so many children have been given up to orphanages in Korea.

6.1 The Importance of Marriage

It is easy to conclude that all my interviewees and much academic work agree that marriage in Korea was more important before than it is today. Revisions of the Family Law have seen changes since 1962, with a major change in 2005 when the family-head system was abolished (Kim, 2014; Yang, 2006). These changes indicate that the importance of marriage has slightly declined in the legal system, however, the value and notion of marriage is still significant today, both on a social and a legal level. The notion of how important and what significances marriage has, and has had, varies a little bit according to my interviewees. Regardless of what view the interviewees has on marriage, it is clear that marriage in Korea is important to fully be accepted and respected as a woman, as well as be seen as successful in society. One of my interviewees, Ms. Han, describes marriage as a crucial mission:

“Korean people have a mindset that everyone has to get married around their 30s, and if a person doesn’t (or can’t) get married until 40 or something, people, especially parents and other relatives, treat him/her like a failure who couldn’t do his/her ‘homework’ in his/her life. So, this made people just focus on getting married and ‘complete their mission’, instead of getting married to the right person that they really want to spend the life with”.

What can be seen as central with marriage in Korea is that the marriage itself does not only connect two people but two entire families. There is a strong connection between these families, whether they wish so or not, and having an unmarried woman in the family can create problems. From a gender perspective we can see that a lot of pressure is put on women when it comes to marriage and family life. A woman’s position can be seen as vulnerable both as a married woman and as an unmarried woman, whereas men rarely are exposed to such vulnerable or pressured situations. Another of my interviewees, Ms. Park, who is positive towards marriage, describes certain issues that might arise even before marriage:

“Marriage combine two families, and this is important that both families are good and ‘clean’. For example, if you have one sister that is single mother, it can be difficult for her brothers and sisters to marry because that means their partners would marry into a family that is not ‘clean’ or good. It is a bit scary to marry into a family like this. It could also be a big problem if a single mother wants to marry a new husband, because the new husband will marry into a family that is viewed as bad or not so good”.

Ms. Kim describes marriage as “a union of two families”, which clearly indicates that Koreans connect their entire family with the family of their spouse when they get married. And it is important that all family members fit well together with the other family’s members in order to create balance and harmony, which is essential in the Korean society in order to be accepted and respected.

A negative tone towards the pressure of getting married can be seen among my participants as Ms. Jeong says, “my country seems to force girls or women to marry - society encourage women to marry and have child”. Ms. Jeong means that society is forcing females to marry because the state supports ‘normal’ families by giving more financial aid if they marry and have children.

Almost all of my interviewees emphasized that the importance of marriage has decreased today compared to before, but they also come back to the fact that reality is

different. Regardless if you want to break free from the norm of getting married, it is impossible to avoid being judged by society if one decides to give up marriage. Two of my participants, Mr. Chung and Ms. Kim, use words as being “black labeled”, “a disgraceful thing”, and being “embarrassing”, when someone does not get married in the traditional way in Korea. The fact that society views a person as a failure, or that it is embarrassing to not get married, indicates that marriage still has a significant role in society for people today, even if the notion used to be even stronger decades ago.

6.2 Social Stigma of Having Children Outside of Marriage

A lot of emphasize is put on Confucian traditions in Korea when it comes to family values. Getting married is obviously an important part, but there are other so-called milestones to be reached in Korean life and Ms. Ahn describes it as following:

Korean society is more of a collectivist society. The bottom line is that people think there are multiple milestones in life, and many of them believe that everyone needs to follow that rule. For example, Korean society expects you to go to a decent college, get a well-paid job after graduation, get married, have kids, buy a house under your name, etc. If you don't follow the regular path, you tend to get judged negatively”.

One of the most difficult so-called milestones to stray away from is having a child before marriage. Much due to Confucianism, this kind of scenario is seen as something very negative, and Ms. Park says:

“There is a strong idea of being pure and virgin, so if you have child outside of marriage or you are a single mother, it is not good. It reflects badly on you and your entire family. You should be, and need to be a pure woman. Virgin”.

Ms. Jeong is even more critical as she says:

“Our society has a very strong taboo against sexuality, especially for women. Getting pregnant without marriage is like breaking rules. They believe that sex outside of marriage is crime, or moral corruption”.

Many difficulties arise if a woman becomes pregnant before marriage because of the strong belief that a woman needs to be pure and virgin when she gets married. Since marriage connects two entire families, both families also get affected negatively when a couple becomes parents before marriage. The chain reaction is often that the father leaves both the mother and the baby, in order to save himself and his side of the family from the shame. Ms. Han blames the Korean government, as she explains how there are no obligations for men:

“The problem is that there is no law that gives responsibilities to unwed dads and not enough support programs/financial support for the unwed moms. So, when a woman gets pregnant then her partner just breaks up with her and leaves. This makes the unwed moms have no choice but to have an abortion or put the baby to an adoption. However, abortion is illegal in Korea, most unwed moms choose to have the baby and send them away”.

The result is that the mother becomes a single mother to the child, which is possibly even more stigmatized and negatively viewed upon than having a child outside of marriage. Regardless if the father leaves his new family or not, there is a big chance that the baby is given up to an orphanage, because having a child outside of marriage or being a single mother is considered extremely difficult in the Korean society. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, we can see that 65,321 children have been adopted overseas between 1981-1990, and 47,153 of those children come from unwed mothers (Hübinette, 2005, p. 265). That calculates for about 72 percent of all overseas adoptions during that specific decade, which is an enormous increase since previous decades where the numbers have been 37 percent for the 1970s and 18 percent for the 1960s.

6.3 Social Stigma against Single Mothers

When someone becomes a single mother in Korea, regardless of the reason, the mother and child is left in a very difficult situation. From a gender perspective we can see that social stigma against single mothers, in combination with a poor infrastructure for these kinds of families, leaves single mothers with few options. They either have to live in an extremely vulnerable situation, both emotionally and financially, and most likely without family and state support. Or they believe the option of giving up their child to an orphanage is better, with hopes that their child will be adopted. Both options force women to very difficult decisions, whereas men have no obligations. All of my nine interviewees think that it must be

hard to raise a child as a single parent in Korea. The social stigma can be explained as Ms. Lee says:

If a woman is single parent, people probably will ignore her. Like withdraw from her, because it's like what's wrong with her that she couldn't stay or keep her husband? People will probably think so".

With this kind of attitude towards single mothers, it is not difficult to understand that single mothers themselves doubt if they will be capable to raise their own child in a fair way due to stigma and difficulties within the Korean society. Ms. Ahn believes that there is a lack of psychological support, especially to young moms, which makes many single mothers think about giving up their baby. Ms. Kim has an explanation towards this issue:

"Some families think it's embarrassing to deliver a child when you are not married, and are afraid to raise a kid as a single mom in this country. Like I said, the social environment is not very open/comfortable about this topic, nor are the regulations/laws supportive".

Ms. Kim touches upon another important factor to why single mothers struggle as much as they do, and that is because the regulations, infrastructure, and laws are not supportive towards them. Social stigma in itself is hard, and in addition to that they also have to face financial child support that is withdrawn because the mother is not married, difficulties in finding daycare and schools for the child, and other limitations of financial and structural support that is regulated by the state.

6.4 Economic Difficulties to Raise a Child as Single Mother

Many single mothers also struggle economically. Ms. Ahn and Mr. Chung both mention that it must be more difficult as a single parent with only one income to meet ends. Mr. Chung continues to say:

"It must be really difficult because you need to work to make a living and here working hours are really late. You also have to make the house chores so the house works. I don't think that is something that one person can do. It must be incredibly hard".

Mr. Chung's concern of how difficult it must be as a single parent does not only mention the financial aspect, but also the time- and structural aspect. As your own family tends to withdraw out of shame if you have a child outside of marriage, or you become a single mother, you will not have any financial support from them, nor help with the household. A babysitter or daycare for the child is required in order for the mother to be able to work, but it is difficult to get daycare in the Korean society for single mothers because stigma is highly distinctive even here. Privileges that often is taken for granted for 'normal' families, such as access to daycare, right to go to school, opportunity for parents to have a full-time job, economic child support, and so on, is not at all available to the same extent for children of single mothers. Ms. Ahn says:

Unless the single parent's family has a decent financial background, single parents often struggle with finances. Especially, for women, they tend to have limited chances to get hired due to their situation. Even if they end up getting hired, babysitting and/or schooling expenses could add up pretty quickly".

Stigma towards single mothers also prevents them from getting hired, or even to keep their current job position, as employers do not want to have them in their working places because of the shame. There is another major problem for these mothers because the little financial aid or child support they receive from the state will most likely be taken away if the mother finds a full-time job, as she then would not be qualified for these benefits (Babe, 2018; Jung & Park, 2018). Regulations like this take away the incentives for single mothers to get a full-time job, which has devastated consequences in the long run.

7. THE POLITICS OF ADOPTION: INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

International adoption from Korea has been common since the end of the Korean War. An estimated number of 200,000 Korean children have been adopted to families abroad, mostly to American and European families (Moon, 2018; Kim, 2010; Walker, 2018). This section will address why international adoption was and still is common in Korea, as Korea has been a leading country in sending children abroad. There are four basic reasons for this: there are many children at orphanages, domestic adoption is rare, international adoption has

been seen as the better option for children, and the government has influenced and facilitated international adoption.

7.1 Background to International Adoption

Korea experienced severe poverty and suffering during the Japanese occupation and the wars that followed. The numbers of orphans increased as their parents lost their lives in combats and their extended families were unable to care for them under the difficult situations that prevailed after the Korean War. International adoption took off for several reasons where a philanthropist named Mr. Holt was a leading figure who started a well-organized adoption process together with Korean adoption bureaus (Hübinette, 2005; Oh, 2015). Because there were many mixed race children that were abandoned, on top of many war orphans, the Korean government and orphanages were relieved when there was a demand for international adoption. At this time it was expensive for Korea to have many children in orphanages. The start of international adoption was thus due to specific circumstances at the time but no one could probably have predicted then that international adoption would continue and even grow during the next couple of decades.

7.2 The Increase in Numbers of Children in Orphanages

One of the biggest reasons to why adoption was and still is common in Korea is because there are many children in orphanages. From 1955, there were more than five hundred orphanages that took care of roughly 53,000 children, and these five hundred orphanages were all still in use well into the 1970s (Oh, 2015, pp. 57-58). According to the Korean Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, thousands of children have been abandoned annually from the end of the 1950s, with a peak in 1964 where 11,319 children were abandoned (Oh, 2015, p. 179). However, it is difficult to know how accurate these numbers are because “many discarded babies and infants die from exposure or malnutrition before they have a chance to become government statistics” (Oh, 2015, p. 180). Reports indicate that, as of 2005, there were “19,150 Korean children living in welfare institutions and another 10,198 in foster care” (Moon, 2015).

Welfare institutions and orphanages were often private and run by volunteers, especially right after the war. Much foreign relief aid was received, at the same time as very little welfare was provided by the Korean government, which then unfortunately led to corruption. “Given the relatively large sums of money that were available from voluntary organizations

and missionaries, it is unsurprising that some orphanage directors sought to turn their institutions into profit-making businesses” (Oh, 2015, p. 60). However, there are organizations established by the Korean government as well, such as the Social Welfare Society that was part of the “Seventh Day Adventists” after the Korean War (Hübinette, 2005, p. 64). The Social Welfare Society, established in 1954, “is committed to helping less privileged people make their own hopes come true by providing services in a variety of sectors including adoption, children, unmarried mothers, teenagers, overseas, and senior citizens” (Social Welfare Society, Inc., n.d).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are several specific factors to why children have ended up in orphanages after the Korean War. About 90 per cent of children adopted are given up by single mothers, which clearly indicates that there is a structural obstacle for this type of families in Korea (Jung & Park, 2018). The shameful situation that couples face if they have a baby outside of marriage, and the social stigma and structural obstacles that young and single mothers face, are significant factors to why parents choose, or feel forced, to give up their children to orphanages. The Korean society does not allow these kinds of families to raise their own children in a fair and humane way. Therefore, the parents, often single mothers, see orphanages as the best option and hope that their child will be adopted. The result is that a large number of children end up as abandoned children in orphanages, and this has continued even after the end of the war. The hope is for all these children to be adopted into new families.

7.3 International Adoption is Sometimes Seen as the Better Option

In Hosu Kim’s book about transnational adoption she shares some personal experience as she explains that, “my mother told me that she wished that some Americans would adopt me, and support me, as if I were their own daughter” (Kim, 2016, p. 1). At first it surprised her, but she later understood that this was not uncommon for Korean parents to believe and wish for. Three of my nine interviewees confirm this belief. Ms. Kim says that some parents “believe the child will have a chance of a better life with a better family when they are raised abroad”, whereas Mr. Chung says that parents “wanted to send their child abroad to like America for better life”. Ms. Han has an interesting take on the topic:

“To be honest, I had a fixed mindset about adoption before I met my husband, who is an adoptee. For example, I always thought all adoptees would have better lives because they grew up in advanced countries, or all the adoptive parents are ‘good people’ and etc.”.

The strong belief that growing up in America and in West was better than growing up in Korea started after the wars as Korea was a very poor country. The belief grew stronger and stayed in people’s mindset despite the development and increased wellbeing in the country. This notion became important when parents decided to give up their child to orphanage, as the parents then hoped for their child to be adopted internationally. Giving up a child for adoption has reasonably been a difficult decision, but multiple factors indicate that it might be less challenging in the Korean society. Mr. Moon gives an honest and broad description of why children are given up, both today and before:

“Women give up children easier because there is lots of information, easy access to information, to NGO, and other organizations, to help you give up or adopt away your child. The women don’t want this problem or burden to have a child today. Before was a bit different because people were poor, but today there is a pattern that women follow to give up their child. They do not want to have children. And obviously the problem is even bigger if you have child outside of marriage or if you’re a single mother. Big problem with age too, if you are young there is a bigger risk you will give up your child”.

The belief that children will get better lives abroad and the easy access to how and where one can give up their child, in combination with the stigma and problems towards single mothers and children outside of marriage, creates high numbers of children in orphanages. As about 90 per cent of adopted Korean children come from single mothers, it is easy to see that all factors mentioned in this thesis matters when it comes to why children are give up to orphanages (Jung & Park, 2018).

The decisions single mothers, unwed mothers, and all other parents have to go through when considering giving up their child for adoption are often very difficult, but also affected by the circumstances in the given situation. Some mothers go to an unwed mothers’ facility or a maternity homes to hide during their last couple of month of pregnancy. One mother explains:

“Every month, adoption agency staff members visited the home and offered adoption workshops in which the advantages and disadvantages of domestic and foreign adoption were explained, and followed by Q & A. After a long period of hesitation, when my mind was moving more towards adoption, I set up an appointment with staff members from all three adoption agencies” (Kim, Hosu, 2015, p. 68).

Despite the difficult decisions that has to be made about the future, many women sign for adoption as another mother confesses, “though I didn’t think consciously about adoption for my baby’s future, what seemed certain to me was that raising a child as an unwed mother was unimaginable” (Kim, Hosu, 2015, p. 67). Social stigma, lack of economic and psychological support, and the shame all contributes to the difficult situation, however, the dreadful consequences of having a child outside of marriage or being a single mother can be avoided in one way. Ms. Lee says, “it is okay, like no problems, if no one knows and it is a secret that you gave away your child”. Therefore, there is an abundant of abandoned children at orphanages in Korea with unknown parents.

After the Korean War, when the country was rebuilding its economy and infrastructure from terrible devastation, there was a legitimate reason to believe that life in America was better because financial and military help was supplied by the US. America was seen as a prosperous country with plenty of opportunities. Mr. Chung confirms this idea as he says, “like 50 years ago we were poor and they wanted to send their child abroad to like America for better life”. However, Korea developed fast and one would have thought that international adoption would decrease as the wellbeing increased. This was not the case as it took a long time for most of the Korean population to experience any improvements. Ms. Park explains the situation as following:

“Well, up to the 80s, people were still poor in Korea. Development happened but not for everyone and not for the whole country. It was quite diverse actually. Some areas of the big cities were very poor. This is something that you have to remember”.

Ms. Park’s view on the country’s economic development explains why a lot of people still in the 1980s believed that their child could get a better life in West. Despite the improved economic situation for Korea, it was far from everyone that could take part of the increased quality of life. And therefore, the notion of a better life with more opportunities in West continued to grow and became even stronger. A notion that still today is strongly imbedded in

Korean people's mindset as Ms. Han admitted that she has a "stereotype towards adoption", where she believes that adoptees has "better lives because they grew up in advanced countries".

7.4 The Negative View to Adoption in Korea and the Low Number of Domestic Adoptions

Domestic adoption in Korea has proved very rare as Koreans focus a lot on bloodlines and to care for one's own family (as discussed in chapter 4.3 Race and Bloodlines). To care for one's own family implies true devotion to family members with same bloodlines and also to those family members that are connected through marriage. To adopt a child, or take in another family member outside of one's own bloodline is not common in the Korean society. You need to keep your family 'clean', which is absolutely essential in order to be accepted by society. Even though the state has made attempts to increase and promote domestic adoption in Korea, with increased benefits for those who adopt domestically, the domestic adoption has not reached numbers that are sufficient enough to mitigate the large amounts of international adoptions. Ms. Kim explains the view of family blood:

"Korean people, since they have a very traditional view for family, want their own blood, especially in the elder generation. So it is the woman's 'duty' to deliver a son who can succeed the family".

Mr. Chung gives his opinion on domestic adoption from a Korean perspective:

"You know every family have their own family root. It is really important to make it pure. It's really rare to adopt another child and put in your own family. It is more difficult because you kind of have an idea that you have to keep your family pure".

The traditional view of pure bloodlines and to preserve your own family root has made it very unconventional to adopt within Korea. Therefore, almost all adoptions that take place in Korea are international. Three of those interviewed said adoption was not a difficult topic to talk about, but three other interviewees said it was difficult, uncommon, and a tricky topic. Three of the interviewed did not express their opinion explicitly. The different answers regarding adoption in general in Korea implies that the view on adoption is diverse, however

almost all of those interviewed said domestic adoption was challenging due to the traditional view that Koreans have on family. It is reasonable to say that the view on adoption is slowly changing in Korea as about a third of those interviewed said it was not a difficult topic, but we see indications that it still is a fairly new topic as Ms. Han says that “it’s not a difficult topic to talk about but I think people just don’t know how to react to it”. Because traditional family values were stronger before, we see that people try to change their stereotypical view of blood band and adoption, although, the low numbers of domestic adoption in Korea has given room for more international adoptions from the country throughout the decades.

7.5 The Role of the Government

It is not completely straight forward when we look at what the Korean state has done and how it has affected adoption. What the state did, together with adoption bureaus, was to approve adoption of mixed race children after the Korean War. This was the start of international adoption from Korea and organized adoption bureaus were then established. When almost all of the mixed race children that were orphaned and abandoned at orphanages were adopted away, the adoptions however continued with ethnic Korean children. As the orphanages kept receiving children even when the war was over, Korea managed to keep the so-called clean blood bands fairly intact. It can be seen as a win-win situation for Korea who could spend less money on orphanages as many children were adopted away to West, at the same time as they could keep Korea clean from both mixed race children and children that were born outside of marriage, as they also according to Confucian beliefs were seen as unacceptable.

It is clearly a cost for any country that has children in orphanages, however, looking at Korea and the numbers of international adoption, one can only understand that there has been a lot of children in orphanages. Even if it is difficult to know the exact numbers throughout times of how many children that have been present at orphanages, we know that thousands of children each year from the end of 1960s to well after 2000 has been adopted overseas (Hübinette, 2005, p.264).

Number of international adoptions from Korea, 1969-2004

Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number
1969	1,190	1981	4,628	1993	2,290
1970	1,932	1982	6,434	1994	2,262
1971	2,725	1983	7,263	1995	2,180
1972	3,490	1984	7,924	1996	2,080
1973	4,688	1985	8,837	1997	2,057
1974	5,302	1986	8,680	1998	2,443
1975	5,077	1987	7,947	1999	2,409
1976	6,597	1988	6,463	2000	2,360
1977	6,159	1989	4,191	2001	2,436
1978	5,917	1990	2,962	2002	2,365
1979	4,148	1991	2,197	2003	2,287
1980	4,144	1992	2,045	2004	2,258

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare (cited in Hübinette, 2005, p. 264)

The costs to have all these children in orphanage decreases for every child that is adopted away, and in addition for international adoption, “the adoptive parents pay around \$4,000, a fee that includes transportation costs, medical expenses, payments to Korean foster parents and adoption agency processing costs” (Chira, 1988). Despite little figures on exactly where and how the money is distributed, international adoptions brought in over \$35 million in 1985. It means that it is clearly beneficial to adopt away children internationally than to continue to have them at the orphanage.

As there is little information to be found on how much money orphanages receive, where and how the money from international adoption is distributed, and how much money that has been earned on international adoption throughout time, it is impossible to determine what exact effects and influence the state has had in this matter. What we do know is that the adoption process of all children that has left Korea has not been recorded properly as statistics and numbers are insufficient or impossible to find, and the awareness among Koreans, and probably also the international audience, is scarce. Both Ms. Park and Mr. Moon agree that “it wasn’t until after 2000 when regular people of Korea realized how many children Korea had adopted away to other countries”, which indicates that there was information that the state did not want the public to know about, possibly because the state and private persons was making

money of the process in an unconventional way. Since international adoption truly took off in the beginning of 1970, this sort of business took place for over 30 years without the Koreans and the rest of the world knowing what really was going on. Some scholars are calling international adoption in Korea as “the orphan exporting country” (Hübinette, 2005, p. 86), or “big business” (Oh, 2015, p. 176). Ms. Jeong says in the interview that the state supported adoptions to the point that it eventually became commercialized, and “some people even want to call it human trafficking”.

We find logical explanations to why international adoption was and still is common in Korea as discussed above. When Korea was a poor country and tried to develop in the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s, it is understandable that there were many children in need for new families. But the fact that international adoption increased by tens of thousands from the 1960s to the 1970s, and even during the 1980s is more difficult to understand.

Number of international adoptions from Korea per decade

	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Total number	2,899	6,166	46,035	66,511	22,925

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare (cited in Hübinette, 2005, p. 264)

It is interesting to try to answer why this significant increase occurred, which made Korea a world leading country during the 1970s and 1980s in overseas adoption.

As development took off after the Korean War, we see that little financial support for young, unmarried, and single parents existed. This is the case even today as Jung and Park describes it: “at first, the central government and local governments only helped single mothers with childbirth, but they have gradually expanded the scope of assistance to raising children and helping the mothers support themselves” (Jung & Park, 2018). Despite increased expansion of support, it was not nearly enough for certain parents to financially have a chance to raise their own child. Many parents during the 1970s and 1980s were poor, and especially single mothers were financially exposed with very little support from the state, and often with canceled child support just because of the fact that they were single mothers or had a child outside of marriage. The state only properly supported ‘normal’ families, and exposed certain families to less financial and social support, which ultimately led a lot more parents to give up their child.

Few legal changes have been made with respect to the Family Law in Korea. The abolishment of the family-head system is one change for more equality between men and women, but there is still a long way to go to protect all members of a family. Ms. Han considers it disappointing that the state has not implemented any laws stipulating men's obligations once a woman become pregnant. A father can leave the mother and child without any financial or legal obligations, which often leaves the mother alone to care for the baby. Ms. Han continues to clarify that the mother often feels like "no choice but to have an abortion or put the baby to an adoption", but because abortion is illegal in Korea, most mothers "choose to have the baby and send them away". A legal change where the father has obligations for the baby would most likely decrease the amount of single mothers in Korea, which would eliminate the vulnerable condition that a single mothers is exposed to when she is left alone with a child.

The last change of the abortion law in Korea happened in 1973, which made abortion legal in certain cases (Rich, 2018; UN, 2011). These certain cases include if the woman has been raped, if genetic diseases could be found, or if the woman's life is in danger. However, abortion still takes place outside of these specific circumstances, but then in an illegal and unsafe way (Barr, 2017; Choi, 2017; Rich, 2018; UN, 2011). Therefore, unwanted pregnancies could potentially be terminated in a safer environment if the abortion law was changed. Many women, especially those who are young and unmarried, could have had an option to terminate their pregnancy instead of having the baby and giving it up for adoption. It is a sensible topic, but illegal and dangerous abortions still take place in Korea.

One of the initial problems is that sex education is basically nonexistent in schools for youth. Ms. Jeong says, "our society also has very strong taboo against sexuality, especially for women". Sex education and sexuality is not an easy topic to talk about in the Korean society, and the lack of knowledge among younger people results in unwanted pregnancies. The many unwanted pregnancies among young adults has led to the fact that "experts agree that the problem urgently requires better sex education for young people" (Kim, et al., 2013). The statement suggests that the government should make it a requirement to implement better sex education in schools in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies and also for health reasons.

It might be difficult for the state to remove or change stigma regarding children outside of marriage and single mothers. However, the few efforts that has been made from the governmental side to increase domestic adoption and lower the numbers of abandoned children has not showed great results. Incentives to increase domestic adoption have been made by several presidents without any noteworthy outcomes. The change of the Special

Adoption Act backfired and actually led to even more anonymously abandoned children because the government was not focusing on the initial problem to why children are given up (Kim, 2015). The government tried to make the process of giving up a child to an orphanage more difficult by not allowing them to give up their child within the first seven days after birth. Instead, they should be looking at the problem and the reasons to why parents feel forced to give up their child, namely social stigma and financial difficulties. The Special Adoption Act also required parents to report the birth of their baby to the government, which ultimately just led more parents to anonymously abandon their child in a more unsecure way since registering a birth with the government means that you will be marked forever as a disgrace in the Korean society. Therefore, it is difficult to see what changes and improvements the Korean government truly has made in the last decades in order to decrease the numbers of abandoned children. To a certain point, one could almost believe that the state consciously has done nothing, and in this way made a profit of the income that they receive from all the tens of thousands of international adoptions that have taken place.

8. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined different views on gender, family and marriage by looking at secondary data, as well as conducting eight interviews with a total of nine participants from Korea. Through the data collection, this thesis seeks to answer why so many children have been given up to orphanages and why international adoption has been and continues to be common in Korea. The aim of the thesis is to shed light on the reasons to how Korea became one of the world's leading countries in international adoptions.

My findings show that the importance of marriage is crucial in the Korean society, as the view on family is based on Confucian beliefs. Marriage has such an important role in the Korean society that children conceived outside of marriage is almost considered like moral corruption, or at least as a highly embarrassing act, but interesting enough it turns out that it is the woman who has to carry the shame and who is subjected to stigma. It does however affect both the woman's and the man's entire family, which creates considerable problems for many family members. In this case, the man often leaves the woman because he has no obligations for the baby, and leaves the woman to care for the child herself. Because of the shame and the stigma, the woman is often left by her own family as well, leaving her alone with very little support and limited financial benefits from the state. Child support and financial benefits are often withdrawn from single mothers because they do not have the same privileges as a

'normal' family. On top of that, social stigma makes it very difficult for a single mother to get a proper job, or even to keep her current job, and it also puts the child in a vulnerable position as legal rights and respect is inherited by the father in Korea. Having a child outside of marriage, or being a single mother, is related with so many difficulties and stigma that society makes it almost impossible for these mothers and families to raise their own child. Therefore, they feel forced, or like it is a better option, to give up their child to an orphanage for adoption.

The fact that Korea had, and still has, many children in orphanages was one reason to why international adoption developed. However, there were other reasons as well, such as the notion that growing up in West was better than growing up in Korea. This notion grew stronger, which eventually also made it easier for mothers' facilities and maternity shelters that function as hiding spots, to help mothers adopt away their children secretly. Another significant reason to why international adoption became common is because domestic adoption is very rare in Korea. Due to the importance of clean blood bands and to keep one's family pure, it is not rational for Koreans to adopt another child into their family.

As there are multiple reasons to why international adoption from Korea became common, to the point that some critics call it child export and human trafficking, it is questionable whether this was done in a rightful way or not. It is reasonable to think that the Korean state, together with the adoption bureaus, put international adoption into a system where they made money on sending children overseas. In the beginning Korea sent away mixed race children, which helped the country to keep the clean blood bands intact. Eventually, it increased to children of vulnerable parents, who were subjected to social stigma and financial challenges. By not changing laws or supporting these vulnerable parents, which mostly turns out to be the mother, the state has not truly tried to fix the problem to why so many children ended up abandoned in orphanages. There have not been any substantial improvements in financial support for groups such as unwed or single mothers, nor have there been any legal changes that would give the father obligations to support the child. No significant laws or regulations have made any differences to mitigate the numbers of abandoned children, as most state and governmental changes focus on how to increase domestic adoption. The issue that the state should focus on should be how to make sure that as many children as possible can stay with their parents, regardless of the social or economic circumstances. In this way there would be fewer children at orphanages, and a more reasonable number of children that were eligible for adoption.

To conclude my thesis, the answers of the nine people that I interviewed in Korea helped to understand the importance of marriage, and the difficulties unwed and single mothers have in the Korean society, which is a big reason to why so many children have been given up to orphanages. The interviewees' answers also helped to understand the notion that many Koreans believe that growing up in West is better than growing up in Korea. The role of the state, and what implications the government has had, is difficult to confirm. Whether the state approved international adoptions believing it was in the best interest of the children, or if they did it for economic profit, remains uncertain. However, a combination of many children in orphanages, few domestic adoptions, and a government that approved of a lot of international adoptions made Korea one of the world's leading countries in international adoption. If no changes with respect to the obligations that fathers should have when a woman becomes pregnant, or any changes of regulations prohibiting abortion are being made, and no improvements of the legal and economic system that would enable single mothers to raise their child themselves are undertaken, it seems likely that international adoption from Korea will remain high.

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10. APPENDIX

10.1 Appendix 1: Information About the Informants

Ms. Ahn: Woman around 30 years old. Participated in the written interview.

Mr. Chung: Man around 30 years old. Recorded his own interview based on the Interview Questions that I had sent out. (Recorded)

Ms. Han: Woman around 30 years old. Participated in the written interview.

Ms. Jang: Woman around 30 years old. Participated in the written interview.

Ms. Jeong: Woman around 50 years old. Participated in a face-to-face interview. (Recorded)

Ms. Kim: Woman around 30 years old. Participated in the written interview.

Ms. Lee: Woman around 30 years old. Participated in a face-to-face interview. (Not recorded)

Mr. Moon: Man around 60 years old. Participated in a face-to-face interview with translator. (Recorded)

Ms. Park: Woman around 60 years old. Participated in a face-to-face interview with translator. (Recorded)

Interview Questions

What year are you born? _____

1. According to your own experience, what is different regarding family life today and when you grew up in Korea?
2. Are there differences between being a child in Korea today and about 30 years ago?
3. How important is marriage in Korea?
4. What are the best things with family life in Korea? Are there any difficulties?
5. Are there different roles for a father and a mother in Korean society?
6. Thinking back to when you were a child, would it be difficult to grow up with a single parent? (Perhaps you know of anyone who grew up with only one parent, or have heard about any one with only one parent).
7. What is society's view on single parents or children outside of marriage?
8. Has this view changed today compared to when you grew up?
9. Do you believe or have you experienced that family life and family values are different in other countries?
10. What do you think about adoption? Is adoption a difficult topic to talk about in Korea?
11. Why do you think Korea has and still adopt away children internationally?
12. What role do you think the Korean government has in the development of international adoption? Or what, if anything, can they do?