



Between Goodbyes

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Jennifer Gibson, Assistant Director of Strategic Initiatives of St. Louis County Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *Between Goodbyes*.

When a queer Korean adoptee reunites with her birth mother in Seoul, long-buried cultural misunderstandings and unspoken regrets surface. With tenderness, humor, and determination, both mother and daughter navigate the heart-wrenching legacy of international adoption.

Contributors

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ADULT NON-FICTION: KOREAN ADOPTEE EXPERIENCES

Bordier, Anais and Samantha Futerman. *Separated @ Birth: A True Love Story of Twin Sisters Reunited*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2015.

Adopted from South Korea as an infant, Sam grew up in New Jersey with her parents and two brothers. She never imagined she had a sister; nor did Anaïs—who grew up in France and was also adopted from South Korea—until she saw an actress with a face identical to her own in a YouTube video and decided to contact her doppelgänger via social media. A few dubious exchanges turned from mistrust and cynicism to utter shock, as the women discovered more in common than just their looks—and their birth date.

Chung, Nicole. *All You Can Ever Know: A Memoir*. Catapult, 2018.

Nicole Chung was born severely premature, placed for adoption by her Korean parents, and raised by a white family in a sheltered Oregon town. From childhood, she heard the story of her adoption as a comforting, prepackaged myth. She believed that her biological parents had made the ultimate sacrifice in the hope of giving her a better life, that forever feeling slightly out of place was her fate as a transracial adoptee. But as Nicole grew up—facing prejudice her adoptive family couldn't see, finding her identity as an Asian American and as a writer, becoming ever more curious about where she came from—she wondered if the story she'd been told was the whole truth.

Dennis, Laura ed. *Adoption Reunion in the Social Media Age*. Entourage Publishing, 2014.

This anthology gives voice to the wide experiences of adoptees and those who love them; examining the emotional, psychological and logistical effects of adoption reunion. Primarily adult adoptee voices, we also hear from adoptive parents, first moms and mental health professionals, all weighing in on their experience with reunion. The stories run the gamut, and even non-adopted people will find something in here to which they can relate. The memories of adoption reunion in this anthology are joyous and regretful; nostalgic and fresh; angry and accepting. They show pain, but they also tell of resilience and strength in the face of incredible loss. In short, the essays of this anthology relate the human experience: raw, resilient, and most of all real.

Docan-Morgan, Sara. *In Reunion: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Communication of Family*. Temple University Press, 2024.

“Do you know your real parents?” is a question many adoptees are asked. In *In Reunion*, Sara Docan-Morgan probes the basic notions of family, adoption, and parenthood by exploring initial meetings and ongoing relationships that transnational Korean adoptees have had with their birth parents and other birth family members. Drawing from qualitative interviews with adult Korean

adoptees in the United States and Denmark, as well as her own experiences as an adoptee, Docan-Morgan illuminates the complexities of communication surrounding reunion.

Fox, Nancy and Sook Wilkinson, eds. *After the Morning Calm: Reflections of Korean Adoptees*. Sunrise Ventures, 2002.

Korean adult adoptees speak out in this anthology. Through memories, reflections, and poetry, adoptees speak to the range of issues that accompany adoption: feelings of belonging and difference, self and other, culture and accommodation, love and loss. We now know that it is in late adolescence and young adulthood that many adoptees move full-tilt into struggling with these issues. These writings offer a wonderful tool to help adoptees move through the process.

Ja, Janine Myung. *The "Unknown" Culture Club: Korean Adoptees, Then and Now*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.

This collection, compiled by Korean adoptees, serves as a tribute to transracially adopted people sent all over the world. It has been hailed to be the first book to give Korean adoptees the opportunity to speak freely since the pioneering of intercountry adoption after the Korean War. If you were adopted, you are not alone. These stories validate the experiences of all those who have been ridiculed or outright abused but have found the will to survive, thrive, and share their tale. Adopted people all over the world are reclaiming the right to truth and access to birth documents. This book is a living testament on why previous "orphans" do not endorse the profitable Evangelical Orphan Movement. Those who work in the human rights field, whistleblowers, or adopted, will see the value of this book. After years of forced "positivity" led by the profiteers, it is time to be real. These are real stories from individuals no longer serving the adoption pioneers' fanciful wishes and advertising campaigns. Read this book before you pay adoption agency fees. These courageous narratives could save you tens of thousands of dollars or prevent you from obtaining a child unethically. Be the first to read these narratives and join the ever-expanding Adoption Truth and Transparency Worldwide Network. It's never too late to walk in awareness!

Kang, Kate Anne. *Given Away*. Kate A Gjerde, 2017.

Anny Kang was six years old when she was sent by her mother to live in America, where she becomes Catherine (Kate) Strand. Raised by a Scandinavian family in the homogeneous suburbs of the Twin Cities, Kate struggles as a Korean adoptee, her voice capturing the loneliness and sadness of a young girl who attempts to forget everything she knows in order to navigate a new family, a new language, and a new life. When her Korean birth family contacts her after more than two decades, an adult Kate is forced to confront her past. Caught between two cultures for the majority of her life, it is in Korea that Kate begins to understand her long-standing inner conflicts with loss and rejection and discovers how her past has formed her current sense of self. *Given Away* begins as a portrait of a childhood spent in two very different worlds: Korea and America. One forgotten, one remembered. It is a story that asks the questions of home, family, and identity, and is, in its own right, a story of race and belonging.

Laybourn, SunAh M. *Out of Place: The Lives of Korean Adoptee Immigrants*. New York University Press, 2024.

Since the early 1950s, over 125,000 Korean children have been adopted in the United States, primarily by white families. Korean adoptees figure in twenty-five percent of US transnational adoptions and are the largest group of transracial adoptees currently in adulthood. Despite being legally adopted, Korean adoptees' position as family members did not automatically ensure legal, cultural, or social citizenship. Korean adoptees routinely experience refusals of belonging, whether by state agents, laws, and regulations, in everyday interactions, or even through media portrayals that render them invisible. In *Out of Place*, SunAh M Laybourn, herself a Korean American adoptee, examines this long-term journey, with a particular focus on the race-making process and the contradictions inherent to the model minority myth.

Lee, Ellen. *Once They Hear My Name: Korean Adoptees and Their Journeys Toward Identity*. Tamarisk Books, 2008.

A testament to the more than 100,000 Korean adoptees who have come to the United States since the 1950s, this collection of oral histories features the stories of nine Korean Americans who were adopted as children and the struggles they've shared as foreigners in their native lands. From their early confrontations with racism and xenophobia to their later-in-life trips back to Korea to find their roots (with mixed results), these narratives illustrate the wide variety of ways in which all adoptive parents and adoptees—not just those from Korea—must struggle with issues of identity, alienation, and family.

Robinson, Katy. *A Single Square Picture: A Korean Adoptee's Search for Her Roots*. Berkley Trade, 2002.

A young Korean woman describes her adoption by an American family from Salt Lake City, Utah, her return twenty years later to Seoul to search for her birth mother, and her discovery that she had become an American outsider in her native land.

Sjöblom, Lisa Wool-Rim. *Palimpsest: Documents From a Korean Adoption*. Drawn and Quarterly, 2019.

In *Palimpsest*, an emotionally charged memoir, Sjöblom's unaddressed feelings about her adoption come to a head when she is pregnant with her first child. When she discovers a document containing the names of her biological parents, she realizes her own history may not match up with the story she's been told her whole life: that she was an orphan without a background.

Sound, Megan. *The Struggle for Soy: And Other Dilemmas of a Korean Adoptee*. Megan Sound, 2018.

Like many Korean adoptees of the 1980s, Megan Sound was brought up in an era when American parents were led to believe that the best way to raise their babies was to take a color-blind approach. The denial of a child's ethnicity neglects a significant part of their identity. *The Struggle for Soy* is a powerfully intimate essay collection that shows how one transracial adoptee navigates from the

margins to the middle, from I am not to I am. With wit and whimsy, Sound sheds light on race, gender, and identity. *The Struggle for Soy* shows how Sound navigates restrictive labels like ‘unexplained infertility’ and stereotypes of Asian women. Her experiences are thought-provoking for both those familiar with representation and how misrepresentation in pop culture feels, and those who haven’t had reason—before now—to imagine what it’s like to be Asian in America.

Trenka, Jane Jeong. *Fugitive Visions: An Adoptee's Return to Korea*. Graywolf Press, 2009.

made in Korea > cheap goods > cheap labor > cheap womb > cheap adoption > cheap immigration > cheap immigrant > cheap yellow daughter > honorary white > almost but not quite

Whenever she speaks to a stranger in her native Korea, Jane Jeong Trenka is forced to explain what she is. Japanese? Chinese? The answer—that she was adopted from Korea as a baby and grew up in the United States—is a source of grief, pride, and confusion.

Tuan, Mia and Jiannbin Lee Shiao. *Choosing Ethnicity, Negotiating Race: Korean Adoptees in America*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2012.

Transnational adoption was once a rarity in the United States, but Americans have been choosing to adopt children from abroad with increasing frequency since the mid-twentieth century. Korean adoptees make up the largest share of international adoptions—25 percent of all children adopted from outside the United States—but they remain understudied among Asian American groups. What kind of identities do adoptees develop as members of American families and in a cultural climate that often views them as foreigners? *Choosing Ethnicity, Negotiating Race* is the only study of this unique population to collect in-depth interviews with a multigenerational, random sample of adult Korean adoptees.

ADULT NON-FICTION

Choy, Catherine Ceniza. *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America*. New York University Press, 2013.

In the last fifty years, transnational adoption—specifically, the adoption of Asian children—has exploded in popularity as an alternative path to family making. Despite the cultural acceptance of this practice, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the factors that allowed Asian international adoption to flourish. In *Global Families*, Catherine Ceniza Choy unearths the little-known historical origins of Asian international adoption in the United States. Beginning with the post-World War II presence of the U.S. military in Asia, she reveals how mixed-race children born of Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese women and U.S. servicemen comprised one of the earliest groups of adoptive children.

Kim, Eleana J. *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Since the end of the Korean War, an estimated 200,000 children from South Korea have been adopted into white families in North America, Europe, and Australia. While these transnational adoptions were initiated as an emergency measure to find homes for mixed-race children born in the aftermath of the war, the practice grew exponentially from the 1960s through the 1980s. At the height of South Korea's "economic miracle," adoption became an institutionalized way of dealing with poor and illegitimate children. Most of the adoptees were raised with little exposure to Koreans or other Korean adoptees, but as adults, through global flows of communication, media, and travel, they have come into increasing contact with each other, Korean culture, and the South Korean state. Since the 1990s, as Korean children have continued to leave to be adopted in the West, a growing number of adult adoptees have been returning to Korea to seek their cultural and biological origins. In this fascinating ethnography, Eleana J. Kim examines the history of Korean adoption, the emergence of a distinctive adoptee collective identity, and adoptee returns to Korea in relation to South Korean modernity and globalization. Kim draws on interviews with adult adoptees, social workers, NGO volunteers, adoptee activists, scholars, and journalists in the U.S., Europe, and South Korea, as well as on observations at international adoptee conferences, regional organization meetings, and government-sponsored motherland tours.

Kim, Hosu. *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea: Virtual Mothering*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

This book illuminates the hidden history of South Korean birth mothers involved in the 60-year-long practice of transnational adoption. The author presents a performance-based ethnography of maternity homes, a television search show, an internet forum, and an oral history collection to develop the concept of virtual mothering, a theoretical framework in which the birth mothers' experiences of

separating from, and then reconnecting with, the child, as well as their painful, ambivalent narratives of adoption losses, are rendered, felt and registered. In this, the author refuses a universal notion of motherhood. Her critique of transnational adoption and its relentless effects on birth mothers' lives points to the everyday, normalized, gendered violence against working-class, poor, single mothers in South Korea's modern nation-state development and illuminates the biopolitical functions of transnational adoption in managing an "excess" population. Simultaneously, her creative analysis reveals a counter-public, and counter-history, proposing the collective grievances of birth mothers.

McKee, Kimberly D. *Adoption Fantasies: The Fetishization of Asian Adoptees from Girlhood to Womanhood*. Ohio State University Press, 2023.

In *Adoption Fantasies*, Kimberly D. McKee explores the ways adopted Asian women and girls are situated at a nexus of objectifications—as adoptees and as Asian American women—and how they negotiate competing expectations based on sensationalist and fictional portrayals of adoption found in US popular culture. McKee traces the life cycle of the adopted Asian woman, from the rendering of infant adoptee bodies in the white US imaginary, to Asian American fantasies of adoption, to encounters with the hypersexualization of Asian and Asian American women and girls in US popular culture. Drawing on adoption studies, Asian American studies, critical ethnic studies, gender studies, and cultural studies, McKee analyzes the mechanisms informing adoptees' interactions with consumers of this media—adoptive parents and families and strangers alike—and how those exchanges and that media influence adoptees' negotiations with the world. From *Modern Family* to *Sex and the City* to the notoriety surrounding Soon-Yi Previn and Woody Allen, among many other instances, McKee scrutinizes the fetishization and commodification of women and girls adopted from Asia to understand their racialized experiences.

McKee, Kimberly D. *Disrupting Kinship: Transnational Politics of Korean Adoption in the United States*. University of Illinois Press, 2019.

Kimberly D. McKee examines the growth of the neocolonial, multi-million-dollar global industry that shaped these families—a system she identifies as the transnational adoption industrial complex. As she shows, an alliance of the South Korean welfare state, orphanages, adoption agencies, and American immigration laws powered transnational adoption between the two countries. Adoption became a tool to supplement an inadequate social safety net for South Korea's unwed mothers and low-income families. At the same time, it commodified children, building a market that allowed Americans to create families at the expense of loving, biological ties between Koreans. McKee also looks at how Christian Americanism, South Korean welfare policy, and other facets of adoption interact with and disrupt American perceptions of nation, citizenship, belonging, family, and ethnic identity.

Nelson, Kim Park. *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism*. Rutgers University Press, 2016.

The first Korean adoptees were powerful symbols of American superiority in the Cold War; as Korean adoption continued, adoptees' visibility as Asians faded as they became a geopolitical success story—all-American children in loving white families. In *Invisible Asians*, Kim Park Nelson analyzes the

processes by which Korean American adoptees have been rendered racially invisible, and how that invisibility facilitates their treatment as exceptional subjects within the context of American race relations and in government policies.

Oh, Arissa. *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*. Stanford University Press, 2015.

Arissa Oh argues that international adoption began in the aftermath of the Korean War. First established as an emergency measure through which to evacuate mixed-race "GI babies," it became a mechanism through which the Korean government exported its unwanted children: the poor, the disabled, or those lacking Korean fathers. Focusing on the legal, social, and political systems at work, this book shows how the growth of Korean adoption from the 1950s to the 1980s occurred within the context of the neocolonial U.S.-Korea relationship, and was facilitated by crucial congruencies in American and Korean racial thought, government policies, and nationalisms. It also argues that the international adoption industry played an important but unappreciated part in the so-called Korean "economic miracle."

Pate, SooJin. *From Orphan to Adoptee: U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Since the 1950s, more than 100,000 Korean children have been adopted by predominantly white Americans; they were orphans of the Korean War, or so the story went. But begin the story earlier, as SooJin Pate does, and what has long been viewed as a humanitarian rescue reveals itself as an exercise in expanding the American empire during the Cold War.

Transnational adoption was virtually nonexistent in Korea until U.S. military intervention in the 1940s. Currently, it generates \$35 million in revenue—an economic miracle for South Korea and a social and political boon for the United States. Rather than focusing on the families “made whole” by these adoptions, this book identifies U.S. militarism as the condition by which displaced babies became orphans, some of whom were groomed into desirable adoptees, normalized for American audiences, and detached from their past and culture.

Shackleton, Mark. *International Adoption in North American Literature and Culture: Transnational, Transracial and Transcultural Narratives*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

This book is about transnational and transracial adoption in North American culture. It asks: to what extent does the process of international adoption reflect imperious inequalities around the world; or can international adoption and the personal experiences of international adoptees today be seen more positively as what has been called the richness of “adoptive being”? The areas covered include Native North American adoption policies and the responses of Native North American writers themselves to these policies of assimilation. This might be termed “adoption from within.” “Adoption from without” (transnational adoption) is primarily dealt with in articles discussing Chinese and Korean adoptions in the US. The third section concerns such issues as the multiple forms that

adoption can take, notions of adoption and identity, adoption and the family, and the problems of adoption.

Walton, Jessica. *Korean Adoptees and Transnational Adoption: Embodiment and Emotion*. Routledge, 2019.

Korean Adoptees and Transnational Adoption is based on ethnographic fieldwork in South Korea and interviews with adult Korean adoptees from the United States, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, and Sweden. It seeks to probe beneath the surface of what is "known" and examines identity as an embodied process of making that which is "unknown" into something that can be meaningfully grasped and felt. Furthermore, drawing on the author's own experiences as a transnational, transracial Korean adoptee, this book analyses the racial and cultural negotiations of "whiteness" and "Korean-ness" in the lives of adoptees and the blurriness that results in-between.

ADULT FICTION

Croley Michael. *Any Other Place*. Blair, 2019.

In his debut collection, Michael Croley takes us from the Appalachian regions of rural Kentucky and Ohio to a village in South Korea in thirteen engaging stories in which characters find themselves, wherever they are, in states of displacement. In these settings, Croley guides his characters to some semblance of home, where they circle each other's pain, struggle to find belonging, and make sense of the mistakes and bad breaks that have brought them there. Croley uses his absorbing prose to uncover his characters' hidden disquiet and to bring us a remarkable and unique collection that expands the scope of modern American literature.

Lee, Chang-Rae. *The Surrendered*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2011.

June Han was orphaned as a girl by the Korean War. Hector Brennan was a young GI who fled the petty tragedies of his small town to serve his country. When the war ended, their lives collided at a Korean orphanage, where they vied for the attention of Sylvie Tanner, a beautiful yet deeply damaged missionary.

Lee, J.S. *KEURIUM*. Pent-Up Press, 2018.

Shay Stone lies in a hospital bed, catatonic—dead to the world. Her family thinks it's a ploy for attention. Doctors believe it's the result of an undisclosed trauma. At the mercy of memories and visitations, Shay unearths secrets that may have led to her collapse. Will she remain paralyzed in denial? Or can she accept the unfathomable and break free? *KEURIUM* threads through one adopted Korean American's life of longing and letting go. On a quest for family, sanity, and survival, it challenges saviorism and forced gratitude. Woven through its heartbreaking fabric is a story of love and resilience.

Pickell, Karen. *An Adoptee Lexicon*. Raised Voice Press, 2018.

Contemplating religion, politics, science, and human rights, Karen Pickell, who was born and adopted in the late 1960s, intersperses personal commentary and snippets from her own experience with history and statistics pertaining to child development and the adoption industry. The collection of micro essays is presented as an organically ordered glossary, along with a robust list of sources and suggested reading, as well as an alphabetical index, creating layers of association between words commonly used when discussing adoption.

Sharkey, Lauren J. *Inconvenient Daughter*. Kaylie Jones Books, 2020.

Rowan Kelly knows she's lucky. After all, if she hadn't been adopted, she could have spent her days in a rice paddy, or a windowless warehouse assembling iPhones—they make iPhones in Korea, right?

Either way, slowly dying of boredom on Long Island is surely better than the alternative. But as she matures, she realizes that she'll never know if she has her mother's eyes, or if she'd be in America at all had her adoptive parents been able to conceive.

Stephens, Alice. *Famous Adopted People*. The Unnamed Press, 2018.

Lisa Pearl is an American teaching English in Japan, and the situation there—thanks mostly to her spontaneous, hard-partying ways—has become problematic. Now she's in Seoul, South Korea, with her childhood best friend Mindy. The young women share a special bond: they are both Korean-born adoptees into white American families. Mindy is in Seoul to track down her birth mom, and wants Lisa to do the same. Trouble is, Lisa isn't convinced she needs to know about her past, much less meet her biological mother.

Wuertz, Yoojin Grace. *Everything Belongs to Us*. Random House, 2017.

For childhood friends Jisun and Namin, the stakes couldn't be more different. Jisun, the daughter of a powerful business mogul, grew up on a mountainside estate with lush gardens and a dedicated chauffeur. Namin's parents run a tented food cart from dawn to curfew; her sister works in a shoe factory. Now Jisun wants as little to do with her father's world as possible, abandoning her schoolwork in favor of the underground activist movement, while Namin studies tirelessly in the service of one goal: to launch herself and her family out of poverty.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Myer, Sarah. *Monstrous: A Transracial Adoption Story*. First Second, 2023.

Sarah has always struggled to fit in. Born in South Korea and adopted at birth by a white couple, she grows up in a rural community with few Asian neighbors. People whisper in the supermarket. Classmates bully her. She has trouble containing her anger in these moments—but through it all, she has her art. She's always been a compulsive drawer, and when she discovers anime, her hobby becomes an obsession.

POETRY

Herrick, Lee. *This Many Miles from Desire*. WordTech Editions, 2007.

The haunting music of Lee Herrick's *This Many Miles from Desire* reflects the quest of the poet, an adoptee, to understand his place in the world: "one more child found in the world's history/of found children." Spiritually yearning, imagistically sharp, and lyrical, Herrick's poems are a journey of reward.