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Comforting an orphaned nation: Representations of international adoption and adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture

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2005 (English) Doctoral thesis, monograph (Other academic)

**Abstract [en]**

This is a study of popular cultural representations of international adoption and adopted Koreans in Western countries. The study is carried out from a postcolonial perspective and uses a cultural studies reading of four feature films and four popular songs as primary sources. The aim is to examine how nationalism is articulated in various ways in light of the colonial experiences in modern Korean history and recent postcolonial developments within contemporary Korean society. The principal question addressed is: What are the implications for a nation depicting itself as one extended family and which has sent away so many of its own children, and what are the reactions from a culture emphasising homogeneity when encountering and dealing with the adopted Koreans? After an introductory chapter, Chapter 2 gives the history of international adoption from Korea, and Chapter 3 is an account of the development of the adoption issue in the political discussion. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 analyse the cinematic and lyrical representations of adopted Koreans in four feature films and popular songs respectively. Chapter 4 considers the gendering of the colonised nation and the maternalisation of roots, drawing on theories of nationalism as a gendered discourse. Chapter 5 examines the issue of hybridity

and the relationship between Koreanness and Whiteness, which are related to the notions of third space, mimicry and passing. Linked to studies of national division, reunification and family separation, Chapter 6 looks at the adopted Koreans as symbols of a fractured and fragmented nation. Chapter 7 focuses on the emergence of a global Korean community, with regards to theories of globalisation, diasporas and transnationalism. In the concluding chapter, the study argues that the Korean adoption issue can be conceptualised as an attempt at overcoming a difficult past and imagining a common future for all ethnic Koreans at a transnational level.

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