

Turning Point? The Past and Future Trajectory of Korean Adoption in American Youth Literature

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Abstract

Since 1955, a children's or young adult novel featuring an adopted Korean has been published every 2-3 years in the United States. This consistent publication pattern demonstrates the ongoing interest in this topic; carefully studying the books also reflects changes in adoption practice and ideology over time. However, one thing hasn't changed: white people, and specifically white adoptive parents, tend to dominate in terms of authorship. Very few of these books were written or illustrated by an adopted Korean. In recent years, Korean middle grade adoption narratives have been published in genres such as fantasy and mythology adaptations, while some adoptee-authored adult books have been marketed as crossover novels for young adult audiences. The rise of adoptee-created podcasts, Tik Tok videos, and Clubhouse chats has also allowed adoptees to #FlipTheScript and speak their own truths about their childhoods and adoptive experiences; technology is providing multiple media through which adoptees can determine and shape their own narratives. As adult adoptees speak out, they re-define what it means to be adopted and the conditions in which their stories are told. Meanwhile, by definition most adopted people have no memory of the moment of their adoption, thus adult adoptees must reconstruct their stories based on (potentially) fabricated documents and other people's memories and testimonies. In this paper, I give a brief overview of the evolution of American children's and young adult publishing regarding Korean adoption against the emergence of adult adoptee narratives. I conclude by providing future predictions and directions in which this literature should go, especially in regards to adoptee-authorship and the types of stories that are suppressed and yet untold.