

# The Diasporic Homecoming: Framing International Korean Adoptees in *Black Butterfly* and *Anna's Will*

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## 〈Abstract〉

This paper explores the diasporic experience and sensibility of Koreans represented through international Korean adoptees in two Korean films, namely *Black Butterfly* (*Heungnabi*, 1974) by Byeon Jang-ho and *Anna's Will* (*Anna-ui Yuseo*, 1975) by Choe Hyeon-min. These are films that represented international Korean female adult adoptees for the first time in the history of Korean cinema. The issue of international adoption in Korea parallels the compressed modernity of Korea and Koreans' changing social and cultural awareness of kinship and

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ethnic identity. The paper analyzes the representational mode of adult female adoptees returning from their Western adoptive countries to find out about their roots, which began to emerge in South Korean cinema in the 1970s, and discusses the unique features of diasporic sensibility developed in a Korean context. In both films, the international adoptee returnee serves as a cultural marker and political device for the military regime's rigid censorship and propaganda to present the nation's fast recovery from the traumatic war and unprecedentedly rapid economic development on silver screen. The diasporic sensibility of displacement represented through international Korean adoptees functioned as a consolation for the collective postmemory of the South Korean spectators as the diasporic subject, thus, prevented the audience from seeing the material and ontological condition of international Korean adoptees.

**Key word:** International Korean Adoption, diasporic sensibility, *Black Butterfly*, *Anna's Will*, Byeon Jang-ho, Choe Hyeon-min, displacement, compressed modernity, the 1970s of Korean history

## 1. Introduction

There has been extensive debate over the definition of diaspora and what it comprises. The classic diaspora studies started from the original meaning of a racial or an ethnic group's dispersal, whereas in the last two decades, the main concern of this field has related to emancipatory politics and the exploration of various conditions of racial, ethnic, and political minorities. Describing proliferation of the use of the term "diaspora" in the last decade, Rogers Brubaker states that the trajectory of "diaspora" resembles that of "identity" (4), while Stephane Dufoix suggests that the term is not useful at

all for any role other than as “a rallying cry” that tries to give coherence and visibility to a group (107). David Carment and David Bercuson argue that “today’s diaspora” differs from previous generations of “ethnic migrants” because advances in late-20th-century telecommunications and cheap travel allow for “a new type of ‘hyper-connectivity’ between diasporas and their home communities” (6–7). Distinguishing between classical (Jewish and Armenian, among others), modern (slave and colonial), and contemporary diasporas, Michele Reis argues that contemporary diasporas are characterized by “fragmentation and dislocation,” implying that dispersal to overseas or a decisive break with the homeland is no longer necessary to constitute diaspora in a postcolonial and globalized world (47).

Instead of arguing over what or which entity constitutes diaspora, we should think of diaspora “as idiom, stance, and claim” as Brubaker suggests or “a phenomenon, rooted in a particular kind of experience and consciousness” (Kim 337), thus we can focus on the social and political formation of diasporic sensibility. Redefining diaspora through a phenomenology of postmemory, Sandra So Hee Chi Kim argues that “this approach seeks to move beyond ontological definition based on categorical criteria toward a more phenomenological definition that can help us better understand the lived experience of diasporic subjects” (337). The international adopted returnee in the Korean films of the ’70s is a phenomenon, a cultural reminder of war and family separation, a symbol to South Koreans of a fractured and divided nation.

The purpose of this paper is neither to bluntly claim a new type of Korean diaspora to be added to the already prolific diaspora studies nor to highlight the aesthetic and cultural significance of the two almost forgotten films from the 1970s. Rather, this paper examines the diasporic experience and sensibility of South Koreans projected upon the representation of international Korean

female adult adoptees. As Korea is rapidly turning into a multicultural society that is now in transition from a traditional ethnocentric society of kinship to a globalized and transnational country of citizenship, the historical and cultural phenomena that have constructed Koreans' collective understanding of race, nation, and ethnic identity has not been sufficiently explored. As the first Korean films featuring female adult adoptees, *Black Butterfly* (*Heungnabi*, 1974) and *Anna's Will* (*Anna-ui Yuseo*, 1975) function as a window on Koreans' burgeoning sense of ethnic identity. International adoption not only intersects with Korea's social, cultural, and historical contexts, but also parallels the compressed modernity of Korea and Koreans' changing social and cultural awareness of kinship and ethnic identity.

## 2. Defining Koreans' Diasporic Sensibility

The historical period following Korea's independence from Japanese colonization from the Korean War to the 1970s provides a glimpse of how Korean people experienced diasporic sensibility without actual border-crossing dispersion. The most fundamental criterion of diaspora defined by William Safran and James Clifford includes any kind of dispersion in space, even within state borders, since space-oriented discussion of diaspora is no longer universally accepted. What constitutes the Korean diaspora is the abrupt, forced, and traumatic dispersion in space within state borders. Having remained a primarily agrarian society until the late nineteenth century, 35 years of colonization and 4 years of war followed by the rapid and rushed change into modernization in the '60s and '70s had a strong impact on the country, similar to some of the classical and modern period diasporas such as the Palestinian, Algerian, Greek, Puerto Rican, and Vietnamese cases.

What makes the Korean diaspora unique is that, as a relatively

homogeneous ethnic group, Koreans collectively shared a forced traumatic consecutive displacement that dismantled their nation. In order to understand the role of collective memory in creating the phenomenon of Korean diaspora, individual experience and accounts of the Korean War should be recognized. The unexpected bombing on Sunday afternoon, 25 June 1950, signaled the beginning of the Koreans' four years of fleeing from the war on the Korean peninsula. Most of the Korean literature and accounts of the war emphasize the deeply embedded sense of loss arising from leaving home. North Korea and China's attack on South Korea shocked Koreans and the entire world as well, causing fear of the so-called domino effect of Communism. The unexpected attack of the Soviet Union in Manchuria, which used to be an imaginary space for liberation and the actual hub of the Korean independence movement during Japanese colonization, frightened the entire nation, giving a sense that there was no way out. Bruce Cummings describes South Korea of the 1950s as "a terribly depressing place, where extreme privation and degradation touched everyone: Cadres of orphans ran through the streets . . . beggars with every affliction or war injury . . . half-ton trucks full of pathetic women careened onto [U.S.] military bases" (303).

After the 35 years of colonial rule under Japan, Korea was in an almost orphaned state, without a strong political leadership or government. Most Koreans suddenly became refugees who were forced to flee to Pusan, hoping to return home one day. One Seoul resident, Lee Jong-yun, was a student of English literature whose family was in North Korea when the Korean War broke out; he remembers being caught up in a mad rush during his escape to south: "I ran like I was running from a volcano . . . I thought I would return to Seoul in a few days and the North Koreans would be defeated" (Salmon B1). Betraying most Koreans' expectations, the war went on for four years and the 38th parallel was set as a temporary marker to pause the war.

As the division hardened, many Koreans were never able to see their family in North Korea. South Koreans' rapid recovery from the war coincided with the constant threat of war and nuclear bombing, although South Koreans seem to be in collective denial concerning the political danger. As the one and only divided nation in the world today, people of South Korea have experienced a permanent emotional state of being sojourners.

In the process of constructing a wealthy nation, South Koreans' domestic and international migration increased, resulting in the development of a regionally-divided sentiment. During the Park Chung Hee regime, when Korea was undergoing rushed industrialization and urbanization, people from eastern Provinces had more opportunities and connections to political power and most of the chaebol—the Korean business conglomerate including Samsung, Hyundai, and LG—came from the same eastern regions. The unbalanced speed of urbanization and economic development among different regions solidified the homebound-sentiment between the provinces of Kyungsang, Jeolla, and Chungcheong. The regionally divided antagonism and segregation among politicians and citizens are still noticeable in Korean politics, although most South Koreans are against it.

The domestic migration from South to North, from East to West toward Seoul, the nation's capital, was another noticeable phenomenon. During the 1960s to 1970s, the population of Seoul jumped from 2.4 million to 5.5 million people. As of 2015, Seoul, together with the greater Seoul areas, represents the second largest metropolitan area in the world, with more than 25.6 million people—half of all the residents in South Korea. One good example of phenomenological events manifesting the Koreans' diasporic sensibility is the live broadcast television program called "Finding Dispersed Families" (*Isangajokchatki*) on KBS in 1983. The program aired for almost 456 hours and it was recorded as the world's first and the longest live broadcast,

its viewing rate reaching to 78%. More than 100,000 Koreans applied to find their dispersed family members and only 10,180 people found their lost family members.

More than anything else, the South Koreans' diasporic experience has been based on gender- and class-bound sentiment in which wealth and access to power and educational opportunities have not been fairly distributed; thus, being middle class in the newly located megacity or becoming part of the mainstream of South Korean society has become a communal desire. The so-called compressed modernity drove the entire nation into a fast-paced race toward material success, which has been reflected in South Korean popular culture, including predominant Cinderella stories in television drama, the booming business of cosmetic surgery, and the performance-oriented music industry, to name a few examples. More than any country in the world, Korea quickly embraced global standards of capitalism and consumerism, almost to an extreme level. Even Pope Francis, during his short visit to the country in 2014, urged that South Koreans should "combat the allure of a materialism that stifles authentic-spiritual and cultural values and the spirit of unbridled competition which generates selfishness and strife" (*Agence France-Presse*, 15 Aug. 2014).

The western media frequently compared Jews and Koreans in terms of their traumatic experience of having been victimized and sharing the similar level of survival instinct in hostile environments. The two ethnic groups strive to attain high levels of educational, economic, and cultural prominence, underpinned by a collective anxiety to fit into the mainstream in any society. Korea's rapidly developed social system, however, has not easily allowed upward mobility in terms of social class; thus, education has served as the only means of fitting into the middle class. There is even more profound difference between the two ethnic groups' diasporic sensibility. Unlike the

Jewish pattern of diasporic identity that is strongly based on the religious belief and tradition, Koreans' diasporic sensibility has not been formulated through a singular collective religious identity.

The Koreans' diasporic experience has been constructed based more on postmemory of the national predicament. Therefore, the second- and third-generation Koreans' level of desire to fit into the mainstream or strive toward prominence may be weaker than that of the first generation, which had direct memory of colonization and war. This pattern of different levels of desire for assimilation and success among different generations can be found in most cases of identity formation in different diasporas. This is why some of the Korean cinema from the past, before discussing contemporary films, can be useful to examine in terms of how the films affected spectators' construction of their postmemory in the beginning stage of Korean modernity.

### 3. Cinema as 'Postmemory'

In her writing on family photography and the Holocaust, Marianne Hirsch uses the term postmemory to describe "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (103). Hirsch goes on to explain how the legacy of Holocaust survivors and their trauma of forced separation from home remain deeply marked in their postmemory. She sees cultural space as "sites of memory" (13), comprising "leftovers, debris, single items that are left to be collected and assembled in many ways, to tell a variety of stories, from a variety of often competing perspectives" (13).

An Asian American literary scholar, Sandra Kim deploys Hirsch's notion of postmemory as a means of redefining a new type of diaspora, namely diaspora



studies as a phenomenology. Kim points out that “diaspora must be understood as a phenomenon that emerges when displaced subjects who experience the loss of an ‘origin’ (whether literal or symbolic) perpetuate identifications associated with those places of origin in subsequent generations through the mechanisms of postmemory” (337). The Koreans’ diasporic experience and the collective diasporic sensibility can be explored in the process of how cultural products construct the Koreans’ postmemory. In both a literal and a symbolic sense, the Korean War is not yet officially over, and Koreans’ existence is perpetually diasporic. During the postwar recovery and modernization, the military regime’s rigid cultural policies shaped and manipulated Koreans’ collective memory, thereby greatly affecting South Koreans’ sense of community and identity. The films of the 1960s and ’70s, as the only available public entertainment for Koreans, induced ethnic solidarity and motivation to construct a wealthy nation and family that would be strong enough to protect “us” against any enemy, including Communists.

It should be noted, though, that the gendered and class-bound Korean modernity has developed through the exclusion of minorities in Koreans’ postmemory. One such minority group was and still is international Korean adoptees. The 1970s Korean films, *Black Butterfly* and *Anna’s Will*, show the dramatic journey of Korea from a war-torn state to rapidly developing country, as well as society’s biopolitical exclusion or integration of minorities in the process.

#### 4. Social Context of the 1970s

The 1970s marked a truly paradoxical decade in the history of Korean cinema. The military regime’s strict control over all social and cultural sectors discouraged the artistic freedom of film directors and writers; thus, many Korean cinema scholars evaluate the decade as the darkest era of dictatorship,

censorship, and the lowest quality of film production. Although it is true that most of the films from the decade exhibit a regression to melodramatic spectacle and lack of artistic originality and imagination, some of the films show illuminating moments of modern Korean history, particularly the country's burgeoning awareness of ethnic identity and the ambivalent response to rapid and forced modernization.

*Black Butterfly* by Byeon Jang-ho and *Anna's Will* by Choe Hyeon-min have been largely forgotten films that were not even commercially successful works compared to Lee Jang-ho's *Hometown of the Stars* (1974) and Kim Ho-seon's *Youngja's Heyday* (1975), the two most popular films of the decade. *Black Butterfly* premiered on November 27th, 1974, at the Asia Theater in Seoul and the box office record was 7,917 viewers. Meanwhile, *Anna's Will*, adapted from Oh Young-soo's novel with same title, was released at the Kookje Theater—meaning “international theater”—on Korea's Independence Day, August 15th, in 1975, and was seen by only 5, 319 spectators. Both *Black Butterfly* and *Anna's Will* feature adult female international Korean adoptees returning to Korea for the first time in the history of Korean cinema, thus providing an interesting point of departure to examine how the issue of international adoption and the identity of international Korean adoptees are represented to South Korean spectators.

The frequent featuring of international Korean adoptees in the first half of the 1970s resulted from the Korean government child welfare reform in 1972. At this time, the government reformed child welfare facilities such as childcare centers and orphanages, but ironically, this very reform process caused the number of child welfare facilities to drop in the mid-1970s, leading to a greater number of children with special needs being put up for international adoption. Due to the social stigma and prejudice against children with unwed or single mothers and children with disability, the general perception in Korea was that

these “minority” children would be better off in Western countries. Consequently, in 1972, the Korean government passed the Special Adoption Law, which officially approved a legal system for international adoption. Setting the model for other international adoption programs, the Holt agency, together with several other adoption agencies in Korea, continues to be one of the largest international adoption agencies worldwide. Between the mid-1950s and late 1980s, adults from Western countries adopted approximately 165,000 Korean children, making South Korea the top country sending children out for international adoptions during that period.

The international adoption of children from Korea coincided with the beginning of the country's rapid industrialization and economic development. Against the backdrop of postwar poverty and the various biopolitical population-control agendas of the shifting Cold War military regimes, international adoption was systematized starting in the late 1960s, and served to establish a Westernized welfare system and system of reproductive rights among Korean women. Consequently, the number of international adoptions escalated, seeing a virtual boom in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>1)</sup> In numerous recent studies on cultural representations of South Korean overseas adoptees, a recurring claim is that these representations are often stereotyped and the products of a masculine nationalist ideology that uses adoptees in the service of the nation (Nielsen 154). Furthering the ethnonationalist discourses of Korean-ness<sup>2)</sup> constructed around the notions of fictive homogeneous kin and

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1) For the extensive research on the history of inter-country adoption of Koreans, see Tobias Hubinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted South Koreans in South Korean Popular Culture* (Seoul: Jimmondang, 2006), p. 38-66 and for the representational history of inter-country adoptees, see Jacob Ki Nielsen, “The Return of the Returnee: A Historicized Reading of Adult Overseas Adoptees “Going Back” in South Korean Cinema” in *The Review of Korean Studies* 18.1 (June 2015): 153-178.

2) The term “ethnonationalism” was first used by Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest*

of the nation as a family prevalent in Korean society, representations of international adoptees canonized a powerful master narrative of all Koreans as part of a large, dispersed but blood-related family. From this perspective, adoptees stand as a near-perfect allegory for the divided nation and familial separation (Hubinette 159–60). Looking from the viewpoint to consider how films from the past shaped postmemory through international Korean adoptees, it seems clear that the adoptee characters were used as a means to reflect and console South Koreans' diasporic sensibility.

How, then, do these two films depict the international adoptee's experience and deal with the postmemory of Koreans' past? There are two different diasporic subjects we can discuss in these films, namely the international adoptee as an object of representation, and South Korean film directors and the films' audience as the subject of representation. First, by analyzing the representation of international adoptees, we can understand how the films shape the new identity of adoptees. Second, through reviewing the construction of collective memories about Korea's past presented in the films, we can glimpse the diasporic sensibility of Koreans generated as postmemory.

## 5. Framing the International Korean Adoptee in *Black Butterfly*

Both *Black Butterfly* and *Anna's Will* open with an international Korean adoptee who has been living in the United States and is temporarily visiting Korea, which she left at an early age. Because of the newly established Cinema

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for *Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993). Shin Gi-wook defines Korean ethnonationalism as a political ideology and a form of ethnic identity that is prevalent in modern Korea, which is the belief that Koreans form a nation, a race, or an ethnic group that shares a unified bloodline and a distinct culture, in *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006), p. 2.

Promotion Council's harsh censorship and military government's interference in the film industry, the first parts of both films present a visual spectacle of downtown Seoul which almost reaches national propaganda. The adopted character's old friends or adoptive father explain the dramatic changes that have occurred in Korea in the two decades after the Korean War. With the voiceover of the dialogue, the camera captures panoramic shots of the Seoul cityscape. Both films glorify the modernization of Korea, and the presence of the adopted returnee becomes a plot device to highlight the economic development of Korea. In that sense, the ordinary urban setting and cityscape turn into "diasporic landscapes" (Christou and King 1) of the homeland.

*Black Butterfly* unfolds with a scene in which the female protagonist, Madame Jang, arrives at Kimpo International Airport on a rainy evening. The quasi-noir atmosphere of the film is heightened by an airplane approaching the runway with an unbearable ear-piercing metal sound, which symbolizes the dizzying speed of the nation's rushed modernity. Yoon Sam-yook, the scenario writer for *Black Butterfly*, emphasizes "metallic sounds" (1) of the flights as the most noticeable sound effect in the first and the last scenes in his manuscript. Holding umbrellas, the airport staff members run to the airplane as if they are expecting some VIP passengers' arrival, and pretty soon, passengers exit the plane. Interestingly, both *Black Butterfly* and *Anna's Will* open with an airplane arriving at Kimpo International Airport, which was a symbolic site of Korea's modernization and social and political privilege in the 1970s. After the airport was remodeled and reopened for civilians in 1971, it became a gateway to the world for exclusive Koreans who had the privilege of flying and served as a visual symbol of Korea's modernity. During the 1970s, most Koreans were not allowed to fly abroad without the government's permission. South Koreans had to wait until January 1989 to be able to travel to other countries without receiving authorization from the government.

Therefore, the airport in the 1970s was a symbolic site of yearning for exotic and luxurious adventure.

Madame Jang, played by Woo Yeon-jung—who was known for her tall, glamorous, Westernized beauty—is just coming back from the United States to Korea, her homeland, accompanied by eight men with dwarfism. The visual spectacle of the young beautiful woman surrounded by eight small, middle-aged men evokes a surreal fantasy and even suggests a dark twist on the fairytale of *Snow White*. The physical difference between the protagonist and the bodyguards highlights her isolation and loneliness. Madame Jang, who has struggled to adapt to a foreign land, is eager to meet her childhood friends to fill an internal void. As a war orphan adopted by a wealthy American parents, Madame Jang has been living in the United States for about nineteen years. For the first time in her life, she has been given a month's visit in Korea, and her husband has arranged eight bodyguards for her trip. With all that money and time, she searches for her friends from her orphanage years through a private detective agency. To her surprise, however, the male friends whom Madame Jang spends time with are invariably found dead the following day, and she discovers that her husband has ordered the bodyguards to murder the men. Madame Jang realizes that she will never be able to free herself from her American husband's suffocating control and surveillance, which has ruined her marriage. Lamenting her tragic fate and hoping to be buried in her homeland, she commits suicide by jumping from roof of her hotel.

Crossing two different cultures, the first impression of the Madame Jang character is that of homelessness. She had been an orphan in Korea, and even though she is now married to a wealthy American businessman, her strong emotional ties with her native country do not allow her to assimilate to American society. In other words, the film suggests that her adoptive identity is only temporary and that she ultimately belongs to Korea. It is symbolic

that she goes back to the orphanage after she returns to Korea to search for her childhood friends. In this narrative, the film effectively uses Madame Jang's diasporic experience and sentiment as a tragic spectacle of cultural inbetweenness. As through her Westernized life style and her interracial relationship with her American husband were a form of cultural contamination, she becomes expendable; it seems that she cannot be saved from the excess of Western values. This is also why most of the hostess films in Korean cinema conveniently kill off the bargirls and prostitutes they depict. In this sense, *Black Butterfly* is similar to *Madame Butterfly* in terms of patriarchal gender politics.

Since its first performance in 1904, Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*, one of the ten most frequently produced operas throughout the world and a mainstay of every opera company (Carner 30), has had a persistent presence in both elite and popular cultural spheres. In the opera, an Asian woman belatedly realizes the nature of her relationship with her American husband and ends her own life. Ultimately, however, the beauty of Puccini's music and the colorful pageantry of the processions of paper lanterns and young kimono-clad women, faces framed by painted umbrellas, have blinded Western audiences to the subtextual message. In her description of opera audiences who experience *Madame Butterfly*, Susan McClary states that "because they can claim to be paying less attention to the action per se than to the beauty of the music, they can leave the hall feeling edified—not as though they had just witnessed a snuff film" (xiv). While explicitly presenting what purports to be a tragic love story between an Asian woman and a Caucasian American man, the narrative certainly promulgates the stereotype of the Asian woman as exotic, sexually desirable because of her demure and self-abnegating traits, and readily available by virtue of the poverty or powerlessness of her country of origin. The international relationship between the United States and Korea in *Black Butterfly* can be read as a metaphor for the power dynamics

of the two countries, in which the postwar-torn Korea was dependent on American control and protection for economic and political support. The belittled Korean bodyguards and Madame Jang become metaphors for their homeland; they are ordered, penetrated, and manipulated by the invisible American husband.

The film director, Byeon Jang-ho, was better known for the so-called hostess movies and action series set in Myeongdong Street in the 1970s. After he won the Best Director Award at the 19th Asia-Pacific Film Festival and the 9th Baeksang Arts Award for his film *Hongsalmoon* in 1973, he tried to incorporate a more international style into his films, experimenting with different genres such as action, gangster, and thriller, whose style is noticeable in *Black Butterfly*. The film, as well as its poster, emphasizes the suffocating fear of surveillance through the image of multiple bodyguards and the seemingly endless number of agents from whom Madame Jang will never be freed. The image of a black butterfly and a blue hand with long sharp fingernails heightens the fear of oriental mystery. Although it seems that the director tried to emulate the psychological thriller and murder mystery inspired by Hollywood and Hong Kong films, the low budget of less than \$50,000 US was not enough to save the film from the shoddy mise en scènes. The fear of unknown conspiracy and the horror of serial killing are mostly constructed through action and dialogue:

(Sitting around in a living room, there arises a sense of competition among the little men)

No 1: Who ordered those dogs?

No 3: I did.

No 1: What's the reason?

No 3: (coldly) Madame might be bored...



No 1: Is that all?

No 3: That's all.

(The two fiercely stare at each other)

No 2: (Confronting) More than anything...

No 1: What?

No 2: Where was the Madame last night?

No 1: (Perplexed)...

No 2: If these things continue to happen, we all can die. (B 1)

A later scene of the film suggests that the dogs were involved in the small men's killing of the victims. Sungmin, one of Madame Jang's male friends, searching for his friend Youngju, finds Youngju's prosthetic eye in Madame Jang's house. Frightened, Sungmin looks at the dogs; one of them is smacking his lips, the other yawning. Sungmin is too scared to move at the sight. Disturbingly violent murders of the Korean men foreshadow the female protagonist's tragic fate in the end. The last scene of the film shows the first little man holding a small white box containing Madame Jang's ashes. His eyes are filled with tears as he says, "Madame, how can I live without you. My life was meaningful, because of you. How can I go on without you? I will live with this box of ashes... Until I die, I will live believing this box of ashes is my wife. Will you forgive me, Madame?" He approaches to the airplane, tears rolling down on his cheeks. The last scene captures the airplane screeching as it rises high in the air, again making the ear-piercing metallic sound.

In numerous Madame Butterfly narratives, including operas and Hollywood movies, the sentimental and sacrificial death of the Asian heroine is used as a convenient narrative device to prevent miscegenation. Such self-perpetuating displacement of the female protagonist is one of the many patterns of

melodrama and late-nineteenth-century operas. In *Black Butterfly*, however, Madame Jang is an international adoptee returnee who chooses to end her own life in her motherland in order to free herself from her American husband. By voluntarily ending her relationship with her husband and her adoptive country, the film claims Madame Jang for Korea. Thus, it proves the international Korean adoptee's chaste, virtue and loyalty in relation to her homeland by staging the dramatic suicide. Her jumping from the roof of a high-rise hotel symbolizes how modernity in Korean society consumes social minorities as a spectacle, thereby conveniently eliminating the diasporic other. The international Korean adoptee's demise eliminates her from both societies, so that the social norm reinforced at the end of the film is an ethnically divided and racially "clean" homeland-bound identity politics. Madame Jang's identity as an international adoptee is used purely as a plot device and for the purpose of the exotic spectacle of Occidentalism—in this case, Occidentalism is the exact opposite tactic of Orientalism—which has nothing to do with actual American identity or reality.

Encountering her old friends in her homeland, Madame Jang feels torn between two different countries. Her native Korea is emotionally complete but lacks economic protection, while her adoptive country is affluent but lacks freedom and a sense of belonging. Most 1970s spectators could sympathize with Madame Jang's alienation and struggle to fit in both countries, because her identity as a war orphan turned into an international adoptee symbolized a remnant of Korea's traumatic past. Despite the sympathetic representation, it is hard to say that Madame Jang is a diasporic subject because the film does not depict the actual experience of an international adoptee. Who represents the diasporic phenomenon is a significant matter. Unlike the contemporary diaspora literature or self-representation by international adoptees, *Black Butterfly* presents an imagined identity of an international

adoptee for the purposes of cinematic spectacle. She serves as a fetish similar to Madame Butterfly, but is more tragic and isolated because she cannot even afford to prove her unconditional virtuous love to anyone other than her home country—a country that had originally sent her away.

## 6. Framing Women Off-Center in *Anna's Will*

*Anna's Will* can be seen as a prequel to *Black Butterfly* in terms of narrative, because it focuses on how a Korean woman ultimately puts her daughter up for international adoption. During the modernization of the 1960s, young single women moved from rural areas to urban cities, particularly Seoul, to search for jobs. These female migrant workers constituted the lowest social stratum as “the most vulnerable and exploited group in the new urban society” (Kim 191). They provided cheap labor as factory workers or bus attendants, if they were lucky enough to find such jobs, or domestic helpers or maids in upper-class homes. In the worst cases, they became bargirls or prostitutes. This social phenomenon of a sudden boom of young female migrant workers influenced the depictions of women in Korean films of the 1970s, and the so-called “hostess” movies proliferated during this decade. *Youngja's Heyday* features the typical tragic life of the female protagonist, an innocent young woman who moves to Seoul in a turmoil of rapid migration to urban spaces and starts working as a maid in a household, later finding employment as a bus attendant, and ending up as a disabled prostitute.

Similar to the other “hostess” films from the 1970s, such as *Hometown of Stars* and *Youngja's Heyday*, *Anna's Will* follows a young woman's journey from her innocent prewar years with her family through many unsuccessful encounters with men to her eventual fall, where she becomes a bargirl-prostitute at an army-base club. The then emerging star Yoo Ji-in was

cast for the role of Anna, but at the last minute, she was replaced by Park Nam-ok, a new face in the film industry. If homelessness is the underlying theme of *Black Butterfly*, a sense of loss prevails in *Anna's Will*. Anna loses her mother, her younger brother, and her virginity as she tries to escape from Seoul after inception of the war. Later, she loses her parent's house to her uncle, her fiancé to a bomb, and finally her daughter to international adoption. Just as Anna cries out at the end of the film, "The war has taken everything from me," she finally becomes a Yanggongju—a Western princess—a euphemistic and yet derogatory term for a Korean bargirl or prostitute working for foreign soldiers in a U.S. army camp.

The melodramatic narrative is sympathetic to the woman's struggle for survival, seemingly emphasizing how the war and postwar experience have been particularly harsh to young women. However, her gradual fall into the supposedly lowest social stratum is captured through a camera loaded with voyeuristic male desire. The film frequently captures the young woman passively letting a man sexually exploit her body. These sexual penetrations by one man after another can suggest the futility of human life in relation to the massively destructive war to the spectators, but at the same time, the visual spectacle of frequent sex scenes—although the physical exposure is very limited and close-ups of the two people's face and the back of the head is all that signifies the sexual relationship—frames the woman's body as object of male desire. Due to the decade's rigid censorship, the hostess films served as pseudo-pornography for regular theater-goers, who were predominantly male. According to Annette Kuhn, the word *pornography* is a nineteenth-century coinage, referring "originally to writings about the lives and activities of prostitutes" (24). Kuhn writes that "this link with prostitution gives pornography a lowlife cast, which must have produced a titillating association with the desirably/undesirably forbidden, the illicit, the

underground, certainly for consumers of a particular social class" (24). Since the South Korean film industry was destroyed both in quality and quantity at this time, films like *Black Butterfly* and *Anna's Will* were quickly moved from the major downtown theaters to small local theaters in peripheral areas of the city. The number of theaters in the country dramatically decreased, from 659 in 1969 to 541 in 1976. These small theaters, that would replay less popular movies, were predominantly attended by the regular theater-going male audience, and such small theaters were considered to be dangerous places for women during the 1970s.

Although the topicality of international adoption in *Anna's Will* seems to be peripheral, since it is depicted only at the very beginning and end of the film, the narrative portrays Eunmi, Anna's daughter, as a diasporic subject who finds her roots in her motherland. The film opens with Eunmi arriving in Seoul with her adoptive American father, who previously served in the American forces in Korea. On their way to downtown Seoul, Eunmi's father explains how much the cityscape of Seoul has changed since the Korean War. Unlike the invisible American family of Madame Jang in *Black Butterfly*, Eunmi is taken to her mother's grave, escorted by her American father and Dongchul, who was Anna's first love. At her grave, Dongchul begins to tell Eunmi about Anna's past, and thus the body of the film is structured as a flashback based on Dongchul's memory. Similar to *Black Butterfly*, the international adopted returnee becomes a catalyst to recall the traumatic memory of the country for South Korean spectators.

In retrospective Korean War films about the fate of impoverished widows and young women who labored as sex workers in U.S. Army camps, both the American soldiers and Korean women are depicted as exotic protagonists whose love relationships tragically fail. In *Black Butterfly*, while attempting to assimilate and find complete acceptance as a racial minority and discover roots

in her adopted country, along with a sense of belonging as a foreigner in her motherland, Madame Jang realizes that there is no such thing as a permanent home or utopia. Meanwhile, unlike Madame Jang in *Black Butterfly*, Eunmi in *Anna's Will* appears to be a well-grown, healthy Korean American who feels confident enough to discover her mother's tragic past. Despite the differences in sentiment, the two films represent the adoptees' connection to foreign culture as a sign of socially stigmatized difference—in other words, a blemish and abjection, a permanent sojourner who never succeeds in assimilating to her adoptive country.

## 7. Conclusion

Unlike exile or migration from one's birthplace that is self-imposed or caused by political and economic upheaval, international adoption is a forced displacement without the subject's conscious consent. As Jacob Ki Neilsen correctly perceives, male adoptee returnees in contemporary films such as *My Father* (2007) and *Take Off (Gukga Daepyo)*, (2009) are represented differently from female adoptees. As Kyung Hyun Kim points out that remasculinization becomes a dominant theme in mainstream South Korean cinema since the 1980, the male adoptee returnees are "re-Koreanized remasculinized through male bonding and camaraderie with local majority Korean peers and in some cases, romances with local women, which reads as a symbolic reinclusion into the big trans/national K-family and as a compensation for emasculation and effeminization, if not patriarchalization, of their 'Yellow' male bodies abroad" (Neilsen 168-69).

The diasporic sensibility of displacement represented through international Korean adoptees in *Black Butterfly* and *Anna's Will* functioned as a consolation for the collective postmemory of the South Koreans. As the exotic titles of

western influence indicate, the film writers and directors deployed the international adoptee returnee characters as a cultural marker and political device for the military regime's rigid censorship and propaganda to present the nation's fast recovery from the traumatic war and unprecedentedly rapid economic development on silver screen. The diasporic sensibility that the South Korean spectators projected on international adopted characters prevented them from seeing the real, material, and ontological condition of international Korean adoptees as the actual diasporic subject. In the contemporary era of overwhelmingly fast information technology and instant communication, a widespread sense of displacement exists in the world. Digital technologies have connected people better than ever in the past, but ironically, they have also created a sense of cultural displacement and feelings of alienation. In this vein, Makarand Paranjape writes that, "considering that no human community has ever remained entirely static, we can argue that there are no pure natives anywhere—that, to some extent, we are all diasporic" (229). As South Korea is quickly changing into a multicultural society, Korean cinema should work to channel the Koreans' diasporic experience toward minority sensibility so that it can be a vehicle to connect with other social minorities.

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디아스포라적 귀향:  
『흑나비』와 『안나의 유서』가 재현하는 해외입양아와  
한국적 디아스포라

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이 논문은 1970년대에 제작된 두 편의 한국영화 『흑나비』(1974)와 『안나의 유서』(1975)를 통해 한국인들의 디아스포라적 정서를 유추해보려는 데에 목적이 있다. 변장호감독의 미스터리 액션영화인 『흑나비』와 최현민 감독의 멜로드라마 『안나의 유서』는 흥행에는 성공하지 못했지만 한국영화사 최초로 성인이 되어 모국을 방문한 해외입양여성을 등장시킴으로써 당시 한국영화가 전쟁고아나 해외입양아를 통해 전쟁에 대한 기억과 달라진 한국의 현실을 어떠한 방식으로 재현하고 소비했는지를 보여준다. 1970년대는 유신시대의 개막과 함께 한국의 근대화가 본격적으로 추진되던 시기로 영화산업은 쇠퇴하고 있었지만 한국전쟁에 대한 기억과 급속도로 추진되던 근대화를 바라보는 한국인들의 양가적 감정이 포착되기 시작하던 시기였다. 20세기의 시작과 함께 일제식민, 한국전쟁, 고도의 근대화시기를 겪으며 정서적 이산과 이탈을 경험한 한국인들의 '사후기억'은 계층적 소외와 이탈을 두려워하는 출신지 지향적, 계층 지향적, 젠더 분리적 정서를 형성한다. 한국인들의 디아스포라적 경험은 영화에 재현된 사회적 소수자인 해외입양아와 사회주변인으로 전락한 호스테스 여성의 멜로 드라마적 스펙터클에 투영되었고 70년대 한국영화는 한국인들의 집단적 사후기억을 반영하는 기제였음을 알 수 있다. 한민족 중심적이었던 전통적 가치에서 탈피해 글로벌 시민사회로 급격히 변모하는 21세기에 한국이 성숙한 다문화사회로 전환되기 위해서는 그동안 학술적 연구분야가 아니었던 한

국인들의 디아스포라적 경험과 이산의 정서에 주목할 필요가 있다.

**주제어:** 해외입양 한국인, 디아스포라적 정서, 흑나비, 안나의 유서,  
변장호, 최현민, 이탈, 1970년대 한국영화, 근대화

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