

A South Korean Adoptee, Caught Between Two Worlds

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To the Editor:

My heart goes out to the South Korean adoptee you portrayed in “An Adoptee Returns, and Changes Follow” (The Saturday Profile, June 29). The adoptee, Jane Jeong Trenka, certainly deserved better.

But as the parent of a young man adopted from South Korea when he was 5 months old, I take exception to the negative depictions of adoption that the media love to embrace.

Most international adoptees live in well-adjusted, loving families and become integrated members of their communities. I am not insensitive to the potential identity issues for my son, nor am I insensitive to the pain that being seen as a “baby exporter” has caused the South Korean people. I commend those who are working to change that.

However, it is important to recognize that when circumstances have led birth parents to make the painful decision to place their child for adoption, it usually does not end in a Hollywood-style tragedy.

WILLIAM LEESON

Santa Fe, N.M., June 29, 2013

To the Editor:

I am a white American. My husband is a South Korean citizen. We adopted our daughter in Korea in 1998, and we lived mostly in Korea until one year ago.

I have to wonder what Americans would say if the United States enacted a law that required birth mothers to live with their babies for a week before they were allowed to give them up for adoption.

I would argue that making these young Korean women feel even worse than they already do about relinquishing their babies is not even a part of the solution to Korea’s overseas adoption problem.

Open and honest discussions about birth control in middle and high schools would go a long way toward reducing unwanted pregnancies. The life of the young Korean women who choose to keep their children is almost unbearable. Korean culture simply does not welcome out-of-wedlock children at this point.

It will take the full and active participation of Korean churches and schools to change the way Koreans think about adoption. The government’s role should be to facilitate this new way of thinking, not coerce vulnerable young women to keep their children in order to change statistics.

ROBIN BULMAN

Portland, Ore., June 29, 2013

To the Editor:

South Korea's decision to restrict international adoption out of national pride, and in the gamble that Koreans will then adopt rather than allow children to languish in state care, amounts to a hostage situation. Such strong-arm, immoral tactics do not take the well-being of children into consideration, and they violate a child's basic human right to grow up in a family.

Although Korea may indeed be reaching a point in its economic development in which it is able to care for its own children, many other countries are not even close to that point. Adoptees with identity crises should not be used as yet another justification to limit international adoption.

KATIE JAY

Hollywood, Fla., July 1, 2013

The writer is an adoptive mother and a blogger about international adoption.