

# BOOKS

## Adoptee Sheds Light on Overseas Adoption

By Park Chung-a  
Staff Reporter

Lee Sam-dol gained a new name, Tobias Hubinette, when Swedish parents adopted him in 1972.

He has become a rare expert in the field of Korean adoption and adoptee studies, and a vehement proponent of Korea's international adoption service. Now a lecturer in the Department of Oriental Languages at Stockholm University in Sweden, he received his Ph.D. in Korea Studies last year writing on the Korean adoption issue. He is also an active member of the Korean adoptee community in Sweden.

His new book "Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture" is not only a meaningful contribution to the burgeoning field of Korean adoption and adoptee studies, but also an insightful commentary based on in-depth research of the Korean adoption issue, which has rarely been academically discussed or analyzed. Significant is the inexistence of any previous study regarding representation of adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture.

Hubinette was born in Korea in 1971 and adopted to Sweden a year later. Before adoption, he was discovered on a train with a piece of paper. On the paper was written his Korean name. He grew up in Sweden and graduated with a BA in Irish Studies at Uppsala University. He had no particular interest in Korea until the summer of 1996 when he visited Korea for the first time as an adult adoptee to take part in the semi-governmental World Ethnic Korean Festival. First, he was surprised by the country's impressive economic development but soon he was even more surprised by the fact that such an economically developed and democratized country continues international adoption. In order to find out reasons for Korea's ceaseless international adoption, he changed his graduate school major to Korea Studies.

In the book he reaches the conclusion that international adoption in Korea comes from an implicit connection between Western colonialism and Korean modernism. According to Hubinette, the West could wear a mask of benevolence by adopting abandoned children and

Korean government could reduce social welfare expenses and make profits from the adoption business.

By analyzing Korean adoptees, and containing references to the adoption issue, the author reveals implications for a nation depicting itself as one extended family, that has conversely sent away so many of its own children. He explains reactions from a culture emphasizing homogeneity on encountering and dealing with adopted Koreans.

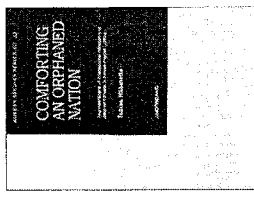
He points out that according to Korea's popular cultural representations, international adoption is an expression of Western exploitation and oppression and that adopted Koreans are all living miserable and tragic lives. The adoptive parents are abusing their Korean children and the white population of recipient countries are torturing them with racism and discrimination, including their significant others.

"Korean media and popular culture homogenize the fate of all adopted Koreans into one stereotypical narrative, instead of acknowledging the group's multiple and diverse experiences and subjectivities and the fact that there are numerous kinds of overseas Korean adoptees," he said.

For example, in 2004, MBC produced the drama "Ireland" featuring an adopted Korean woman Jung-ah, played by Lee Na-young, who grows up in an Irish-American family. However, when the family moves back to Ireland, her adoptive brother becomes involved in the Irish Republican Army and her adoptive par-



A scene from the 2004 hit drama "I Am Sorry, I Love You," featuring the character of overseas adoptee Mu-hyuk, right. So Ji-sub plays Mu-hyuk, raised by an abusive family in Australia.



**Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture (English Book)**  
Tobias Hubinette; Jimmoondang: 263 pp., 25,000 won

ents get killed. Deeply traumatized, Jung-ah then returns to Korea where she falls

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## Recent Books

**Journey to the West 1, II, III (Soyugi)**

Go Woo-young; Jaemum & Moeum: 3 volumes, 200pp each, 7,500 won each

To mark the first anniversary of the death of the renowned cartoonist Go Woo-young, his representative work "Journey to the West (Soyugi)" has been published in three volumes.

It is a cartoon version of a classic Chinese mythological novel of the same title, which he serialized in a local newspaper in the early 1980s, winning great popularity.

The fantasy novel, believed to be written by Wu Chengen, a scholar during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), relates the adventures of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) priest Saizang and his three disciples, Monkey, Pig and Friar Sand, as they travel west to India in search of

Buddhist Sutras.

With unique wit, Go's cartoon novel is ent historically informed.

An exhibition of the la showcasing his photographs is b the Korean Cart in Puchon Cit; Province until Al For informat exhibition, call 3745.

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**In a Sentimental Mood (Sentimental)**

Keiichiro Hirano, translated by Yang Yun-ok; Munhak Dongne: 264pp., 9,500 won

When he was a 23-year-old law student at Kyoto University in 1998, Keiichiro Hirano shot to stardom by winning Japan's most prestigious literary award, the Akutagawa Prize, for "Eclipse," his debut novel.

Now well established with a few successive novels and essays, Hirano tries his hand in "experimental" short stories in this book, which the Korean version is titled after a jazz piece by John Coltrane and Duke Ellington.



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