Adoption in Korea & Birth
Family Search

INTERNATIONAL KOREAN ADOPTEE RESOURCES BOOK
Adoption in Korea, Then and Now

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The adoption of South Korean children into Western families has been ongoing since the end of the Korean War (1950-1953). Since then, more than 200,000 children have been sent overseas for adoption, with more than half adopted to the United States, and the rest to Western Europe, Canada, and Australia. South Korea’s foreign adoption program is the longest running program in the world, and is also a source of continual political controversy and public debate. The following presents a brief overview of the history of adoption from Korea and addresses some of the cultural and social factors that are related to the adoption issue.

Adoption in Korean History

It is often said that one reason children from Korea need to be adopted by families in foreign countries is because there is no tradition of adoption in Korean culture. This is, in fact, only partially true. In his book Korean Adoption and Inheritance (Cornell University 1983), anthropologist Mark Peterson argues that adoption in pre-modern Korea was historically linked to the problem of family inheritance and continuity of the bloodline. Since the Confucian transformation of Korean society in the 17th century, adoption has been a solution for ensuring the continuation of the father’s bloodline in the case of infertility or the inability to have sons.

In the 17th century, the ruling class (yangban) adopted an orthodox form of Confucianism from China, and instituted the Confucian Clan Code as a state ideology. This code excluded women from inheritance and thus drastically reduced their social status, whereas it gave men, especially first-sons, exclusive control over politics, property, and the family. A woman’s value under this system was directly related to her ability to produce sons for her husband’s family, in order to ensure the continuity of the patrilineal bloodline. With this transformation to neo-Confucianism, males became the exclusive heirs to family property and were the only ones permitted to perform ancestral rites. According to this code, only male relatives of a younger generation could be adopted from the patriline, usually between the ages of 20 and 30, so that they could inherit property and uphold the tradition of ancestor worship. After the yangban class instituted this conservative system, it gradually spread through Korean society, becoming the ideal model for family and social organization.

Before this conservative transformation of Korean society, however, women and men had equal rights to inheritance and women’s family genealogy was as important as men’s. There is evidence that until the 17th century, unrelated abandoned children were often adopted, as well as children related through the wife’s family. In addition, widows and unmarried women also adopted children. Despite this evidence of Korean adoption practices that share similarities to contemporary Western adoption, Mark Peterson in 1977 reported that Koreans understood adoption only in neo-Confucian terms, and that they found the American adoption of non-relatives to be “incomprehensible.”
International Adoption

The international adoption of South Korean children first began as a humanitarian response to the needs of thousands of children who were orphaned or separated from their families as a result of the Korean War. Many of these children, born to Korean women and fathered by American and European servicemen, were stigmatized because of their racial difference and illegitimate backgrounds. Immediately following the war, the South Korean government established Child Placement Service in 1954, and the following year, Harry Holt, an evangelical Christian from Oregon, responded to the plight of the mixed-race children by adopting eight of them. By 1956, Harry and Bertha Holt had established Holt Adoption Agency, and the Seventh Day Adventists and the Catholic Relief Service had also set up placement services for overseas adoptions. Between 1953 and 1960, around 3,500 Korean children were sent for adoption abroad; more than 90% of this first wave was of mixed-race parentage.

By the 1960s, full-Korean children began to be adopted overseas through the four government approved adoption agencies, Holt Children Services, Social Welfare Society (formerly Child Placement Service), Eastern Social Welfare Society and Korea Social Service. The postwar period in Korea was one marked by massive poverty and large-scale social and economic transformations. South Korea, once a predominantly rural, agricultural economy of extended family households, became, within one generation, an urban, industrialized economy of nuclear family households. By the mid-1980s, three-quarters of the population was living in urban areas. The social implications for this transformation have been widespread. Young women from the countryside traveled alone to the cities to find work in factories, often being exploited physically and sexually. During the 1960s and 70s, poor female factory workers relinquished their children for reasons of poverty and illegitimacy. As the Korean economy improved in the 1980s, more liberal sexual practices among young people as well as the loosening of the traditional family structure contributed to the problem of unplanned pregnancies among single college-age women. Today, the majority of babies relinquished for adoption are born to middle- or working-class unwed mothers in their teens and early 20s.

Since the 1970s, there have been attempts to reduce the numbers of adopted children, to completely stop international adoptions, and to encourage domestic adoption by Koreans. Negative press coverage by the international media during the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games focused on the adoption issue, calling South Korea’s children its “greatest export.” In response to this criticism, the government implemented a quota system, intending to increase domestic adoption, and to gradually reduce international adoptions by three to five percent a year, with a projected end to adoptions by 2015. From a peak of more than 8,000 children sent abroad in 1986 alone, adoptions were reduced to around 2,200 per year by the early 1990s. During the 1997-98 IMF economic crisis, however, the decline in the number of adoptions was reversed, as financial woes created desperate situations for families, and increasing rates of divorce, domestic violence and bankruptcy coincided with thousands of children being relinquished to the state. Adoptions increased by nine percent between 1997 and 1998, and since then, overseas placements have
hovered above 2,000 per year. This history indicates that adoption policy and practice in South Korea are exceptionally sensitive to economic fluctuations and international opinion.

International adoption quickly became institutionalized in the early 1960s to become a population and social welfare policy that hindered the development of alternative approaches for dealing with the needs of women and children. Despite South Korea’s dramatic economic and political development over the past 50 years, children continue to be born and relinquished. Imagining an end of adoption from South Korea requires finding an adequate solution for the estimated 7,000 children who are in need of state welfare intervention every year. In-country adoptions have been encouraged by the government through media campaigns and education, and domestic adoption reached a high of around 1,700 children in 1999. Still, adoption among South Koreans is still predominantly parent-centered, and physically or mentally disabled children often have no alternatives but to be placed in institutional care or adopted by families overseas. There is no easy solution to the adoption issue. Nevertheless, understanding the factors that help perpetuate international adoption is an important first step towards finding a solution.

**The Status of Women**

The status of women in Korean culture is one factor that is essential to understanding the adoption issue. After the Korean War, the new South Korean government embraced the conservative Confucian ethics of pre-modern Korean society. Although the South Korean constitution was influenced by American democratic principles and included protections for civil rights, personal liberties and the right to vote, the South Korean Family Law of 1960 effectively undermined the democratic rights of women by instituting male patriarchy as a legal fact. Despite opposition from women’s groups, the new South Korean government claimed neo-Confucianism as an essential part of Korean “heritage” and indigenous values, and ignored the pre-Confucian tradition that gave greater equality and opportunity to women. The Family Law essentially adapted the ancient Confucian Clan Code into modern law.

Under the Family Law, only the eldest male member of the patrilineage was recognized as the legal head of the household. He controlled the family registry, inheritance, and the legal status of all members of the family. Children born out of wedlock, therefore, were not legally recognized unless they were included in their maternal grandfather’s family registry. When a woman divorced her husband, she had no claims on the child, who was considered the father’s legal property. Women’s rights groups challenged the Family Law for nearly four decades, arguing for greater equality for women, but it was not until 1991 that the contradictions between the constitutional rights of women and the lack of rights afforded under the Family Law began to be addressed by the government.

Under the reformed law of 1991, it became possible for family members other than the eldest son to serve as the head of household. It also allowed husband and wife equal power in deciding issues of residence and property and prohibited age discrimination in inheritance. With this
revision, women were also able to include their children on their own family registry, instead of having to petition their fathers or husbands.

These important legal changes, along with the many advances made possible by democratization, modernization, and globalization have helped improve the status of Korean women, yet many barriers to equal rights and opportunities for women still exist. The preference for sons in South Korea is one of the strongest in the world, and is reflected in unbalanced gender ratios and higher rates of female infant mortality, although there are some signs that this preference is softening among the young urban population. Nevertheless, job discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace are still prevalent, and women's wages continue to lag behind men's. As became clear during the IMF crisis, women are the last to be hired and first to be fired during periods of economic difficulty, and it is often assumed that once a woman has children she will give up her profession.

A primary reason that couples from Western countries have turned to places like South Korea to adopt is because they are unable to adopt healthy white babies in their own countries. Cultural acceptance of single motherhood in the West, along with family support and government aid for single parents has created a situation where more than 90% of single women decide to raise their children on their own. Korean culture is very family-oriented, and the shame accompanying single motherhood is often too great for a woman to endure. For a woman without financial or emotional support from her family, social network, or from the government, to raise a child on one's own is an impossible choice. Effective sex education programs to help prevent unplanned pregnancies among young women and teenagers are keys to reducing the numbers of children relinquished for adoption every year. In addition, greater financial and emotional support for single mothers and increased openness among South Koreans to domestic adoption are vital to seeking an end to South Korea's dependence on international adoption.
Search: 10 Questions to Ask

As adult adoptees our adoptions did not end the day we were placed in the waiting arms of our adoptive parents. It was only the beginning of our lifelong journey of self-discovery and the very beginning of our adoption journey. Our adoption journeys have not always been clear, nor have they been simple. Often we fumbled unknowingly in the dark, but today adoptees have an unprecedented opportunity to share the wisdom gained from our individual experiences.

The decision to search for one's birth parents is one of the many milestones in our adoptions. Although we might try to create a road map based on another person's search, the reality is when you were adopted, the age you were adopted or relinquished, what orphanage you were first placed in, what agency you were processed through, and the circumstances that led up to your relinquishment all affect your search and, ultimately, what the outcome will be. Every search is unique.

I thought it would be useful to offer ten "moment of truth" questions I have gathered from listening to other people who have searched and united with their birth families, with illustrations from my own experience of meeting my birth family. The first five questions relate to searches and the last five questions relate to reunions. These questions are useful not only for those who want to search but for any adoptee who is engaged in understanding their own adoption.

**Question #1: "What are you searching for?"

Research on Korean adoptees who search for their biological parents indicate that all adoptees, as we become older, gradually begin to have an interest in different kinds of searches. Motivated by our interest in learning more about our roots, our first search is typically for our birth culture. Lastly, after possibly visiting our birth country, we begin to consider the possibility of searching for and uniting with birth parents. Often a search is about the act of searching and not the actual reunion. So it is important to distinguish whether your search is for your birth culture or your birth family.

I did not search for my birth family, they sought me. I was adopted when I was three years old from Korea and when I was 13 my adoptive parents received a letter from my paternal grandfather asking for pictures of me. My family was divided on whether they should show me the letter or wait until I was older. After speaking with an adult adoptee, who recommended they wait until I was older, my parents showed me the letter when I was 20.

It was October break from college and I sat at the dinner table. Suddenly the atmosphere got very serious and my Dad said, "Hollee, there is something I need to talk to you about." My mind raced as I tried to think of anything wrong I had done. I was not prepared for what they actually had to tell me. My mother was afraid I would be angry because they waited to show me the letter. I was simply overwhelmed. I peered at the grainy photo of my paternal grandfather and...
grandmother and it was like looking at a National Geographic photo. They were strangers. And yet they were connected to me by blood.

I believe I would never had embarked on a search for my birth family had they not searched for me first. I was content with the life I had and the only family I knew. Until I received that letter I never thought about Korea and at 20 I was not ready to meet my birth family. When I received this letter, I suddenly felt like I had to go to Korea, but I knew nothing of its culture or language. It would take four more years exploring my American, Korean and adoptive culture before I would finally be ready to travel to Korea and meet them.

**Question #2: "Why do you want to search?"**

There are many reasons that adoptees search for their birth family. Some are simply curious or feel a need to find more about their identity, while others are motivated by a need to feel complete. Others want medical information or want to find their “real” parents. Many want to find their birth family to simply let them know that they are okay.

It is vital that you understand your motivations and why you want to meet your birth family prior to beginning a search. After receiving the letter from my paternal birth grandfather I felt I had to meet them, but I did not know why I wanted to meet them except for the fact they had contacted me. My adoptive parents never pressured me and respected the fact that the decision to meet was mine. It was not until I was 24 that I understood my motivation for meeting my birth family: I wanted to let them know I was alright. And in the chaos of returning to Korea, meeting my birth family, and learning more about my past, I was able to hang onto this one truth.

**Question #3: "What are your expectations?"**

I think all adoptees create a fantasy about birth parents, whether we are conscious of it or not. When I was growing up I would bounce between two extremes. On the one hand I thought I must have been a princess and my birth parents were royalty. My older sister would tease me and say, “Yeah you always were a princess-spoiled!” On the other hand I thought maybe my birth mom was a prostitute. I thought what if they did give me up because they did not want me? I simply did not know.

What are your expectations and what are your fantasies? Do you imagine that when you meet your birth family you will automatically connect, that you will find the “real” parents you have been always hoped for? Are you willing to give up your expectations and childhood fantasies? Many adoptees have told me that after meeting their birth family, they realized their real parents were the ones right here, the ones who had adopted them.
Question #4: "Are you ready to confront your adoption?"

When I went to Korea for the first time I was forced to confront my own adoption. No longer could I pretend I was not adopted. I was returning to my birth country. One of the reasons I delayed going to Korea was because of my fear of how my parents would feel. I feared that if I met my birth family, the only parents I knew might feel I did not love them. I did not want my reunion with my birth family to negate the years of nurture given to me by my adoptive parents. On the night before I left for Korea I sat with my parents on our back patio, my fears locked in heart. And with a few simple words my Dad dispelled my worries by saying, "We always knew we had family in Korea." They accepted my Korean family as they had accepted me 21 years ago. There was no competition for my love.

Are you ready to confront the knowledge about your past? For many adoptees the years prior to our adoption are masked in mystery that we fill with our fantasies. I ended up learning about the circumstances of my birth and I was not born a princess. My birth mother had been a prostitute. She had also been orphaned when she was nine years old, lived with an aunt until she was twelve, and survived by sheer will on the streets. She loved my birth father who took her away from the brothel. They gave birth to me and he promised to marry her, but never did because Korean law forbade couples with the same last name to marry. When I learned this I had to struggle with how this information fit into my life and defined who I was.

Question #5: "Are you ready not to be in control?"

I think those who have embarked on a search can attest to the roller coaster ride of emotions. You will not be in control. Currently there is no simple way of finding birth parents. Many agencies are not required by law to give adoptees information about their birth. There are ethical issues about birth parent’s rights to confidentiality, which adoptees must respect. You may initiate the search, but most people find their birth parents through sheer luck and kindness of strangers, not through careful planning.

Once I arrived in the Seoul I was definitely not in control. I could barely ask for a glass of water. I had to rely on strangers and new friends to help me navigate through the foreign culture. When I had made arrangements with the Director of my orphanage, I only thought I would be meeting my birth father. I had not heard anything about my birth mother and simply assumed I would never meet her. When I called the Director two days before our appointed meeting he suddenly informed me that he had found my birth mother. I was shocked. I could barely digest the news while I agreed to meet her as well.
**Question #6: "Are you prepared to meet strangers?"**

I do not like to use the word "reunion" because at least for me, meeting my birth family was not a reunion. I did not remember them. It was a getting-to-know-you. People ask, “So, how was it? What was it like to meet your birth parents?” Sometimes it is good, sometimes it is bad. Sometimes it is very, very bad. I have heard of adoptees who searched for years only to find out that their birth parents do not want to meet them. Others realized that they are still the family secret. Even those who do remember their birth families realize how much they have changed since they last were with their birth families.

I will never forget waiting with the Director of my orphanage for my birth father to arrive. First my paternal birth grandmother walked in the door, a short and stocky woman. She gave me a crushing hug while she sobbed and spoke to me in words I could not understand. But I did not feel anything. I saw her and felt her arms around me but my mind could barely comprehend that she was a real person, not a grainy photograph. Then my birth father walked in and I suddenly felt shy and could not look at his face. I wanted to look but it was like confronting my own face. When the Director of my orphanage told me that my grandmother wanted me to stay with them that night (I thought I was going to stay at his home), my first reaction was, “I’m not going to go with those strangers!” And as I walked out into the coolness of the night and clamored into my birth father’s car, I smiled remembering my mom warning me as a child about getting into cars with strangers.

**Question #7: "Are you ready to meet possible extended family and integrate new people into your family?"**

As I stood on the subway traveling from Seoul to Incheon where I was to meet my birth father, I broke down and started to sob. My friend Trilika, a mixed black and Korean adoptee, looked at me and said, “Hollee, you are making more room.” And I realized that was what I had to do. When you meet your birth family, you are taking on more, not less. You open yourself up to a family that you may not remember and yet is yours by birth. It is up to you to decide how much you want to share your life with them and embrace them as members of your family.

As we left the Director of my orphanage’s home my birth father mentioned I would be meeting my half sister and brother. He had married a woman who had since passed away. In addition my birth mother had married and bore three children. Her husband had been dead for over ten years. Suddenly I had five half sisters and brothers I had never known before in addition to uncles and aunts and cousins.
**Question #8: “Are you able to respect your birth parents and their culture?”**

It was easier for me to relate to my birth father’s family. They were a solid middle-income family. My half sister was going to college and my half brother would follow. However, my birth mother was very poor. Her three children barely finished high school, and she continued to work long hours in a factory. Her home was a simple two-room shack with a tin roof and outhouse.

On one of the last nights I was in Korea, I took my birth mother out to dinner. I told my friend, who was Korean American, that I wanted to give her some money. He looked at me and said, “You can’t!” I did not understand. She was poor and I had a good income. He could not explain why but was adamant that I should not give her money. I thought he was being crazy. We went to a kalbi, or barbecue, restaurant which is an expensive meal in Korea. My birth mother could barely look at me. She said, “What kind of mother am I who gets taken out by her own children?” She was so distraught that she could not pay. Before us was a wonderful meal and all she ate was a bowl of rice with water. And that was when I understood. I could not disrespect her. I had to respect her dignity and her culture. I had to respect that she was my birth mother, even though I had no memory of her. And I understood why I could not give her money. Parents give to their children, and even though I was an adult, to her I was still her little daughter. As we departed I allowed her to press a few Korean won, or dollars, into my hands.

**Question #9: “Have you thought about life after the reunion?”**

Often the focus on a search is on the quest, but the true journey begins after you meet your birth family and are left with the question “Now what?” Are you going to continue this relationship? Or are you satisfied with the reunion and do not wish to have further contact? If your birth parents are poor, do you feel an obligation to maybe help them? Will you try to travel to Korea once a year? Will you send gifts for the holidays and remember birthdays? You have traded in your fantasies, your dreams and imaginations for reality and after the reunion you will not be able to simply tuck these people back into the furthest corners of your mind. You have seen their faces, you know who they are, you have seen their lives.

Meeting your birth family may answer some questions but in reality raise far more questions. The search is only the beginning of the journey. Life after the reunion will be a far longer road.
Question #10: “Is this your choice?”

As adoptees we did not get to choose our adoptions. We did not choose to be relinquished. We did not choose to be adopted. Besides choosing the meaning of our adoption in our lives, the decision to search is one of the few things adoptees get to actively choose. It is a part of our adoption life journey; and while we may be able to share the experience with our adoptive parents, it is not their journey.

There is definitely a right time for everybody. It is a very individual thing. I would recommend you listen to your gut, your heart and have a clear mind. Do not listen to others who are enthusiastic about your search or reunion. Make sure the enthusiasm is yours. Do not feel pressured by your birth family or adoptive family to search or reunite until you are ready. Make sure the decision is yours. Although I could never tell anyone when the right time is to begin a search, I would advise the person be mature enough to clearly answer these ten questions for themselves.
Frequently Asked Questions for post adoption services by adoptees and adoptive parents

1. Presently, I have set of adoption documents, which my parents gave me; my parents have received the documents during the adoption progress from the facilitating adoption agency in my country. Does Holt Children's Services have the same adoption documents as I have?

Yes, same set of the adoption document is kept at Holt Safe-Vault. Facilitating adoption agency is forwarded a set of adoption document during the adoption process for their records, and another set is distributed to the adoptive parents for their information.

Individual adoption file consists of the following documents:

- Birth parents records or/about circumstances of the relinquishment and history prior to the relinquishment
- Progress reports and medical reports to provide clarification of the child’s physical/social/emotional development during Holt’s guardianship
- Home study documents of the adoptive parents
- Legal documents for administrative process
- Post placement reports, explains the adjustment phase after arriving to his/her new adoptive family

In case where the child was not directly relinquished by the birth family, there may not be any information about the birth family. In place, there may be a relinquishment document signed by the directors of orphanages or other authorized facilities.

2. I was adopted long time ago. I have never seen nor had in my position of any of my adoption documents about my background information. Does Holt have an adoption file of children they have placed for adoption? Is it possible for me to review the file and/or would Holt release set of copy of the document to me?

If Holt Children’s Services, Inc. had facilitated your adoption, Holt should still have record about your adoption. Holt’s has done its best to keep all the adoption record as long as possible. When and if you, adoptee is over the age of 18 year old, are also welcome to copied set of your adoption document.

Holt has to consider the best interest and welfare of everyone we assist; Due to confidentiality and privacy of the triad (adoptee, birth parent/s and adoptive parents) Post Adoption Services can release documents with identifying information (for example, name, birthday, ID number[much like Social Security Number] and address at the time of relinquishment, etc) of birth parent/s only when we have approval from the birth parent/s. If you are under the age of 18, you will need to have the permission of your adoptive parent/s in order for the file review to take place, and also to receive the copy of the document.
3. Does listed designated guardian in my adoption record have personal relationship with me? Does he/she still remember me? Does he/she have any background information regarding my past or the birth family?

The listed guardian in your adoption record should be the President of Holt Children’s Services at the time of your adoption. As a representative of Holt, he/she was designated as the legal guardian for all children under the care of Holt Children’s Services. Therefore, he/she does not have any personal relationship to you. Any information regarding your background information and/or your birth family will be within the adoption file.

4. I read in the adoption document of family register, that my family origin is recorded as Hanyang. What does it mean?

Family register is official document which lists a family members’ identifying information as well as brief history of the family, for example, their names, birth, death, dates of marriage and/or divorce. Family origin is also noted on the family register. Family origin refers to the area where the ancestors of a certain surname had settled down and built that family’s history. For example, one of Korean family surname is Lee of Jeon-joo region. Lee of Jeon-joo implies that the oldest ancestors whose family name is Lee built their family history in Jeonjoo; in other words, the surname Lee was originated in Jeon-joo. For Holt adoptees, Holt had created each adoptee his/her own family register to provide them an identity. And record the family origin as Han-yang. Historically, Hanyang was the capital of Jo-seon Dynasty and its current name is Seoul.

5. If I was interested in searching for my birth parent/s, does Holt have service to assist me with my search?

If you are over the age of 18, Holt has Post Adoption Services, who will do its best to assist and support you during the process of your search. The possibility of actual search for the birth family will be assessed according to amount and quality of information in the file.

There may be various limits to the birth family search. First, if there are limited identifying information of the birth family, search may not be possible. For example, if the crucial identifying information of the birth family is missing, the search may not be possible. Also, if and when a child was found abandoned the child would be reported to a near by police station/office and referred to an orphanages and later relinquished to Holt for adoption, the relinquishment document will be signed by its directors.
Second, in case where the relinquishing birth parent/s were unmarried/and or single parent/s when the child was relinquished, Holt does not initiate the search for the birth parent/s, but when and if the birth parent/s come requesting search for adoptee/s, Holt will initiate the search. This is because in majority cases, we have found that the birth parent/s who had relinquished their child in the past, have kept their past as a secret and do not share it with their new partners in life, even after marriage. Therefore, when adoptee/s requests search of their birth parent/s who was unmarried, we will make a record in the file and make the match when the birth parent/s come forth.

If the birth parent/s announce at the time of relinquishment that they want to be informed of news about adoptees even after the adoption, we can contact the birth parent/s even though they are unmarried parents at the time of relinquishment.

6. When and if I am reunited with the birth family through assistance of Holt, what options do I have in keeping in touch with the birth family continuously?

Because Holt understands the sensitivity of having cultural and Language barriers between you and the birth parents, during this process, one of the important service Holt Post Adoption Services can offer is translation of letters for our family and friends at your requests. Until both involved parties are comfortable with releasing their contact information, Holt will also assist with the mailing the letters.

Until the new relationship between adoptee and birth family becomes stable or find other methods of corresponding with one another, our services is at your services.

7. How does a ‘reunion’ with a birth family take place?

Holt social worker will play the role of a mediator throughout the process; We will arrange for both parties to meet, and be present throughout the initial meeting. Due to the sensitivity of the matter, Post Adoption workers finds a comfortable and neutral meeting place, for example at Holt office. But if special requests is made, Post Adoption Services is open to other arrangements.

8. Is it impossible to look for the birth family if there are no identifying information about the birth family within the file?

Without identifying information Holt can not guarantee a successful search, nor do Holt have a way to verify and/or confirm the match, but a non-confidential method of search is a possibility. For example, you can advertise your adoption story in Korean newspapers, web sites, or TV programs and hope that if not your birth family, someone who knows of you will step forth.
Holt will be happy to refer you to the TV stations or newspapers who has been cooperative in the past in placing adoptee/s’ stories in the media. Holt, also, has new webpage, where adoptees’ and birth families can register their information in order to make a match. The important point to using the media is to get your story out there in the view of the general Korean public and have it out there for people to read/and see it time-and-time again. For further assistance, please feel free to contact our Post Adoption Services.

9. After attempting the search via media and if someone was to come forth identifying that they are my birth family, what are the ways to confirm the biological relation, since I do not have any information regarding my birth family?

In the past DNA test has been available for accuracy of biological relation.

10. If I am not emotionally ready to meet or correspond with my birth family, but wish to just have their identifying information in my position for contact at later time, when I have decided I am ready, is this possible?

Due to confidentiality and privacy, Holt will not release the contact information, until the time of contact is ready by both party. At that time, Holt will be intermediary agency between you and your birth family to assist with unnecessary misunderstandings which could occur. This is because Holt feels it is necessary accountability and obligation because Holt had facilitated your adoption. Also, Holt will not release any identifying information until Holt has been given permission from the birth parents. Holt will hold the identifying information until you are ready to make the contact.

11. What is F4-visa?

F4 visa is originally entitled to overseas Koreans, who holds their immigrated countries’ citizenships but now you have the access to apply for this same visa. With this visa, you can reside and work in Korea for a period of 2 years; of course, every 2 years, if you have decided you will prolong your stay in Korea, you are to renew your F4-visa until you leave Korea.
12. How can I obtain the F4-visa?

In order for you to apply for an F4-visa, you will need the following items:

A. Your current passport
B. Two (2) passport size photos
C. Registration fee of 60,000 Won
D. An Adoption Certificate and Korean Family Registry (these two documents are available at your Korean adoption agency)

Your are also welcome to contact any Immigration Office near you to inquire about the requirements.

An Immigration Office located in Oh-Mok Dong  Telephone: +82-2-650-6337
Website: http://www.moj.go.kr

13. Where can I get an adoption certificate and a family register?

You can ask for the two documents at your Korean adoption agency, who have facilitated your adoption.

14. I was born in Korea and adopted overseas. Is Holt Children’s Services only adoption agency in Korea?

Currently, there are four adoption agencies authorized by the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Korea. The agencies are listed below, with their contact information. But in the early phase of overseas adoption, there were cases where adoption was facilitated privately.

Post Adoption Services’s contact information

Holt Children’s Services
Address: 382-14, Hapjeong-dong, Mapo-gu, Seoul, Korea
Telephone: +82-2-322-8104, 8302
Website: http://www.holt.or.kr
Email: holtkorea@hotmail.com / holtkorea@holt.or.kr

Eastern Social Welfare Society
Address: 493, Changchun-dong, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, Korea
Telephone: +82-2-332-3941-5
Website: http://www.eastern.or.kr
Email: postadoption@eastern.or.kr
15. How can I find out which adoption agency had facilitated my adoption?

There are several ways.
First, if you have your adoption documents, you will find your adoption agency by reviewing your documents.
Second, you can contact the Adoption Information & Post Service Center (GAIPS), located in Seoul City. GAIPS had access to the complete database of adoption which 4 Korean Adoption Agencies had facilitated, and GAIPS will be happy to direct you to your adoption agency. Please have your birthday and your adoptive father’s complete name when you contact the GAIPS.

Adoption Information & Post Service Center (GAIPS)
Address: Hansung Bldg 3rd Floor, 47-2, Seosoomoon-dong, Jung-gu, Seoul
Telephone: +82-2-776-9680-1
Website: http://www.gaips.or.kr
Email: gaipskorea@gaips.or.kr / adoptionkorea@gaips.or.kr

16. Is the adoption agency who had facilitated my adoption, only able to assist me? Or could other adoption agencies able to assist me?

The adoption agency who had facilitated your adoption will be the only one who will help you with the matters relating to your question. The 4 agencies have their separate policies which they work under; also, the adoption agencies do not have access to other agencies’s files.
17. My adoptive parents adopted me through a private adoption, not through an authorized adoption agency. As my case or in the cases where the facilitating adoption agency has closed, where can I go for assistance regarding Post Adoption matters?

First you would need to have in hand as much information as possible regarding your adoption. Once you have collected all the information, you may want to contact the below listed organizations, who have formed to assist overseas adoptees with the Post Adoption matters.

- GAIPS: http://www.gaips.or.kr
- GOAL: http://www.goal.or.kr
- IECEF: http://www.homestayclub.co.kr, molly@iecef.org
- KoRoot: http://www.koroot.org

18. I heard of motherland tour program, where adoptees can participate to visit Korea, how can I apply for such programs?

You need to contact an adoption agency in your country. Many overseas adoption agencies host either motherland tour, only for adult adoptees, or a family tour, which the whole family can participate.

19. How can I participate in Holt Summer School?

The participants for Holt Summer School program, you will need to inquire with one of your adoption agencies in your country. Due to liability and reference of the participants, overseas adoption agencies recommend our participants. If you are interested in participating, please contact an adoption agency in your country.

20. How can I be sure that Holt had matched me with my real biological family?

Holt searches for the birth family on the basis of accurate identifying information which we have in our file. Only when Holt is sure it is a positive match, Holt contacts the family with the adoptee. Nevertheless, when it is a case where there are limited identifying information or if there needs to be further confirmation, the DNA test is recommended.
Frequently Asked Questions by Birth Parents

1. My child was adopted overseas. Is it possible to know which country he/she was adopted to and some basic information about him/her, for example, his adoptive family?

After verifying your relationship to adoptee, we will be happy to inform you of non-identifying information (information excluding the current name and the address) of adoptee and adoptive parents. Holt will be able to release the identifying information only when the permission is given to Holt to do so.

2. I would like to conduct my own search for my child, Holt can release his/her identifying information to me; Could Holt release the information?

Because of confidentiality and privacy of birth family, adoptive parents, and adoptee/s Holt does not release any identifying information, until the permission has been permitted.

3. I feel guilty of initiating the search of my child, who has been relinquished for adoption, just in case he/she is not emotionally ready to search. For future information, could birth family leave identifying information for when adoptee is ready for reunion?

All the previous counseling records are kept in file for record. Therefore, when inquiry is made, all the proper identifying information is recorded for future information.

4. It has been nearly 20 years since the relinquishment. Is it possible to find out how he/she is doing?

If you are interested in learning about adoptee’s non-identifying information, excluding the identifying information, Post Adoption Services will be happy to share with you what is available within our file about the adoptee. But for further information will depend on the policy and regulation of overseas adoption agency and adoptive countries.

Generally, to request information about adoptee/s, the child has to be 18 or older. And given enough time, case worker at Holt Children’s Services will be happy to work with overseas agencies to find out more about adoptee’s current situation, but as mentioned above, it will all depend on overseas agencies regulations.
5. If my child and I could be reunited, and both wants to keep in touch, what are the following steps?

If both of you and your child wants to keep in contact, one can begin by exchanging few letters with one another. This way, you can ask each other the questions you have been wanting to know about one another. If needed, Holt will be happy to assist you with the translation of letters exchanged. Due to the Language and Cultural barriers birth family and adoptee may have, Holt understands how important it is to have clear understanding between adoptee and birth families. Until both parties are comfortable corresponding directly, Holt is at your service.

6. How does the reunion take place?

Your case worker will walk through the reunion process with you each step. Our social workers understand the sensitivity of the first meeting therefore, we will make all the arrangements, for example, meeting place and even the translation during the meeting. Unless there is a special requests, the first meeting is held at Holt office where it will be a neutral place for both meeting parties.

7. My child was adopted overseas long time ago. But he/she is still registered in our family register. Could Holt help with our family register?

In case your child was placed overseas, Holt would have to wait for your child to receive his/her citizenship from his/her adoptive country. Once the citizenship is received, the overseas agency is to forward the document to our office, which give us the right away to cancel/erase the child from your family register. The Ministry of Law approves the cancelation of the child’s name from the family’s register.

8. Regrettably, I don’t have any pictures of my child/ren. Is it possible to receive a photo of my child, which Holt may have?

Once Holt had confirmed the biological relationship, and if there is availability of photos in our file, we will be happy to release a copy for you to have.

9. Prior my parents’ death, I was told of sibling/s who were relinquished for adoption. Is it possible for other families to search for the adoptee, even though both birth parents have deceased?

If the birth parents have relinquished the child had passed away, other relatives or siblings could bring a proof of their passing (family register), and further consulting is possible.
10. My baby was relinquished right after birth and due to the circumstance at that time, I had not kept any records of which adoption agency he/she was placed with. Is there way to find out which agency had facilitated the adoption?

You can contact the Adoption Information & Post Service Center, who has access to all complete data of all the children placed through the 4 adoption agency. They will assist you in verify which agency your child was placed by.

Adoption Information & Post Service Center
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