Consuming Identity: Cuisine, Adoption, and Identity in The Kimchi Chronicles

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Consuming food in certain dining contexts mimics the sensation of traveling, both geographically and temporally, to a foreign place. The increasing availability of restaurants with different cuisines and the increasing number of people who partake in these cuisines allow for vicarious experiences of other cultures through food travel shows and culinary tourism. Food tourism is the act of visiting other countries to seek memorable dining experiences, which can involve media production, such as Food Network's many travel shows, which not only advertise travel destinations, but also, through the camera and TV narratives, raise questions about the tourist gaze, perception and conception of the *other*, cultural capital and authority in the consumption of food, and the implications of globalization. *The Kimchi Chronicles* addresses these issues and notions of national identity, historical narratives, and liminality within an Asian and Asian-American context.

The Kimchi Chronicles centers on Marja Vongerichten, a half Korean, half African American adoptee who was born in Korea but raised in the United States and is now the wife of world-renowned French chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten. In the 13-episode series, Marja

travels to South Korea to explore her Korean identity through Korean cuisine. When she returns home, she prepares Korean food in her own kitchen for her family in an ostensibly more authentic way than before. Each episode takes place in a different part of the country and focuses on a specific element of Korean cuisine, such as the ubiquitous kimchi or shellfish sourced from the coastal city of Jeju. Though the show's introduction touches on Marja's biography, it does so superficially, situating her in a position of simultaneously having and lacking Korean cultural authority and capital. Though she was born in South Korea, she was raised in the U.S. by African American parents and has no memory of her years in Korea. In the States, she has the ability to speak authoritatively about Korean cuisine, dining, cultural practices, and traditions by virtue of her national origin. When in Korea, however, she must defer to her travel guide and the native purveyors of the food she eats. Her own existence as a mixed-raced Korean adoptee offers an interesting perspective of identity and belonging in lieu of the historical and political legacy of the Korean War, American neocolonialism in Korea, and the South Korean construction of national identity which develops from these conflicts. Thus, *The Kimchi Chronicles* does much more than educate its audience about the diversity of Korean cuisine; it a portrayal of the manners in which audiences perceive foreign cultures and practices. The racial, ethnic, and national identity of the host further presents the complexity of post-war Korea, revealing the influences on the formation Marja Vongerichten's identity: adoption-adoptee relations, cultural and ethnic authenticity, and cultural agency.

The Kimchi Chronicles aired in 2011 on the Public Broadcasting Service as a production sponsored by the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism and the Korean Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries;[1] this sponsorship serves as evidence for the show's pedagogical intent and its position in the construction of a Korean national cuisine. The first episode briefly introduces the

[1] "Credits." *Kimchi Chronicles,* PBS, accessed April 8, 2019, http://www.kimchichronicles.tv/credits/.

audience to Marja Vongerichten her husband before turning its focus to explaining the show's purpose. Marja does so through discussing the noteworthy characteristics of Korean food: "Korean food isn't shy, it's all about loud, punchy flavors [and] communal eating [in a] culture that is rooted in tradition and committed to innovation," and that Koreans "need and enjoy hot and spicy food,"[2] as demonstrated though the use of *gochujang* in most Korean dishes. These descriptors at best attempt to portray Korean food as uniquely bold and distinctive from the monolith of "Asian food," and at worst portray Korean food in terms of its archetypes, minimizing it to a foreign, unrefined, singular cuisine. Yet, this conception of Korean food as consisting only of kimchi and *bibimbap* is exactly what *The Kimchi Chronicles* seeks to dismantle. In subsequent episodes, Marja—accompanied by a Korean translator, local food vendors, restaurant owners, and home cooks—travels to different parts of Korea to taste the various regional cuisines: the abalone and shellfish delicacies of Jeju and Songgae, the bean varieties of Chodang, the fish of Sokcho, and the beef of Andong, among others. In each place, she learns about the local sourcing of every ingredient before watching the preparation of dishes, usually by elderly women, and then tasting them. This regional focus encompasses the ways in which "the local food movement and local media rely on the romanticization of the local, with the very word—'local'—conveying notions of morality, values, trust, and quality [where] both...are characterized by tension between local content and national policy."[3] Although the show seeks to educate its viewers on the diversity of Korean cuisine, it effectively romanticizes local food production when, for example, Marja visits generations-old family-run restaurants and turns to elderly women as voices of culinary authority and authenticity on multiple occasions. These women also

[2] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 1, "The Kimchi Chronicles Begin," directed by Charles Pinsky, aired July 2, 2011, on PBS, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdI1nfQpOps&t=49s.
[3] Christopher Ali, *Media Localism: the Policies of Place* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017) 31.

serve as quasi-maternal figures that guide her through Korea in ways her birth mother and American mother did not.

While traveling outside of the larger cities of Seoul and Busan, Marja claims that "peasant food is the absolute best food in any country because it's simple [and] that's what you want to eat,"[4] an explicit glamorization of a sentimental and developmental past. Later, while in Jeju, she visits a local fish market with an older woman who seems to dress only in *hanbok,* speaks little English and lives in a so-called "Jeju Folk Village," where she prepares a traditional stew over an open fire in a hut surrounded by rural scenery.[5] Such an acts not only to situate the woman in the past, but also the entire region of Korea in its idealized and fetishized preparation of this stew. The rural scenery situates and idealizes both the woman and the region as a whole in the past of civilizational and technological underdevelopment in implicit contrast to mechanized food production of developed, modern, Western nations: "the local as fetish sees the local through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia and sentimentality...the demise of community solidarity immediately springs to mind….[accompanied by] the moral panic over the decline of 'authentic' communities."[6] In turning to an older Korean woman, Marja defers to those who possess greater life and culinary experience in a way that vaguely mirrors traditional Confucian and Asian cultural reverence of elders that is evocative of a past in which respect and honor are highly valued. This representation reduces the whole of Jeju to a "folk village," which extends to the rest of Korea, for the audience may or may not be able to distinguish between Jeju and Seoul, or anywhere else. Illustrating the role of cuisine in the construction of national identity, this temporal and developmental

[4] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 2, "The Rice Chronicles," directed by Charles Pinsky, aired July 9, 2011, on PBS, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SCLvutyVlA.
[5] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 3, "The Jeju Chronicles," directed by Charles Pinsky, aired July 16, 2011, on PBS, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loFnl3cE9JA.
[6] Ali, *Media Localism,* 44.

positioning results in the minimization of regional culinary specificity into general national and culinary uniformity.

Because of deliberate and aggressive government promotion of a national Korean cuisine, Korean cuisine greatly influences the formation of Korean national identity both domestically and internationally. The government-sponsored Global *Hansik* campaign—of which *The Kimchi Chronicles* is a part—arose in response to "a period of rapid economic growth and an increasing familiarity, even infatuation, with foreign food...it is [such] greater freedom of choice that causes the issues of identity to arise, and it is the consciousness of change that stimulates the inventive use of tradition."[7] After the Korean War, South Korea experienced rapid industrialization, especially during the 1960s, and the increasing globalized movement of goods and cultural influences left many fearing the loss of Korean identity due to new methods of standardization and Americanization of goods and culture. The government subsequently launched its Global *Hansik* Campaign to "make [Korean] cuisine 'national' through claims of traditional ownership [and] authenticity….Korea lobbied for international standards to be applied to the production of *kimchi*….[and] in 2009, the government-run Korea Food Research Institute went even further, standardizing Korean food recipes on a national level and claiming the intellectual property rights for them."[8] The government identified certain dishes like *bibimbap* and *bulgogi* as national dishes of Korea and specific products such as kimchi and *makgeolli* (fermented rice wine) as national commodities, though the declarations of latter two resulted in fierce contestation with Japan, which for a time was the largest consumer of both kimchi and *makgeolli.* By explicitly defining such dishes and products as Korean, the government made explicit claims about their status as being authentically Korean, and

[7] Katarzyna J. Cwiertka, "The Global *Hansik* Campaign and the Commodification of Korean Cuisine," *The Korean Popular Culture Reader,* ed. Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 366.
[8] Sonia Ryang, *Eating Korean in America: Gastronomic Ethnography of Authenticity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), 1-2.

governmental efforts to standardize their production seek to establish them as unequivocally *Korean,* regardless of the region of preparation, so that "food [is] objectified as a site for the (re-)production of national identity and culture."[9] The fact that the Global *Hansik* Campaign also selected dishes and the style of dining from the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897) further illustrates the government's desire to construct a unified, authentic form of Korean identity through national cuisine. By looking back to a centralized independent and imperial Korea, the South Korean government effectively ignores the 20th-century history of Japanese colonization, brutal war, and the resulting split into North and South Korea; Korea's past is glorified and, in its present, South Korea becomes the sole purveyor of what is authentically Korean, both in terms of cuisine and national identity. As a result, "South Korean food" is now just "Korean food," and "South Korean" is really just "Korean."

This understanding of a Korean national cuisine shapes the ways in which culinary tourism shows present national cuisines to viewers, or tourists, as well as the role of the show's host. *The Kimchi Chronicles* mostly ignores the political and historical realities that have culminated in the present situation of North and South Korea, consequently demonstrating how culinary tourism often results in the consumption of the *other*, which in this context, is Korea. Though this series was delivered to both American and Korean audiences, its broadcasting on PBS and its English audio clearly targeted American viewers. By watching the show, Americans may learn about Korean culinary traditions and the proper ways to consume it: "by positioning us [the audience] as tourists, [such] films...present themselves as educational tools, implying that the information we gather from stories, characters, and images can improve our knowledge and understanding of other

[9] Jenny Wang Medina, "Consumption, Class, and Cultural Belonging in South Korean Culinary
Dramas, 2003-2012" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015), 18.

cultures."[10] In this light, *The Kimchi Chronicles* and other food tourism films have a seemingly sophisticated goal of educating the audience about another culture that is in fact as multifaceted as the audience's own, often fostering a sense in viewers that they have achieved a level of cultural and culinary cosmopolitanism. Yet, the visit to a rural farm where the wizened owner grinds soybeans and produces tofu using the old-fashioned, traditional, and therefore more authentic process—grinding the beans, straining the liquid, hand-sifting out the tofu curds, and reusing the waste for dishwashing—is a clear effort to teach the audience about the "real" way Koreans produce tofu, which again, appears against a background set in the temporal past[11] that belies this cosmopolitan antiquated ideal.

Because the producers of *The Kimchi Chronicles* overlook the political, historical, economic, and social forces that are at play in the construction of national identity *vis-a-vis* national cuisine and repeatedly situate themselves in the developmental, premodern past, they prevent the global education campaign from being fully realized. The show seeks to further establish ethos, as it attempts to do through labeling what it authentically Korean, through Marja Vongerichten, whose role as a "'tour guide' [is] to introduce characters. The guide is, on the one hand, an insider, allowing viewers to enjoy the illusion of special access; on the other hand, she...serves as a cultural mediator, explaining all that could come across as obscurities to outsiders."[12] With this goal in mind, the show's choice of Marja Vongerichten is distinctive for reasons of her own personal history, which introduces contentions in her ability to truly claim Korean cultural authority and

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[10] Laura Lindenfeld and Fabio Parasecoli, *Feasting Our Eyes: Food Films and Cultural Identity in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 180.

[11] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 5, "The Bean Chronicles," directed by Charles Pinsky, aired July 30, 2011, on PBS, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_35jtttShQ.

[12] Lindenfeld and Parasecoli, 182.

authenticity, and which speaks to the larger phenomenon of hybrid identity in the context of Korean adoption.

As the host of *The Kimchi Chronicles,* Marja Vongerichten acts as and becomes the cultural authority for all of Korea and Korean cuisine. As with many other food travel series and television shows, *The Kimchi Chronicles* invokes the host's "racial or ethnic heritage...in order to frame his or her take on this kind of food as *authentic.* This is a cuisine that they grew up with, or experienced among natives, or been taught to cook by immigrant family members, or otherwise understand with a high degree of authority."[13] Indeed, half of each episode situates Marja in her home kitchen in the United States. She guides her husband through the process of preparing authentic Korean dishes, including her "famous" *kimchi jjigae*,[14] and explains the purpose of *banjan* side dishes, how to properly and respectfully serve drinks, and the correct way of thanking someone in Korean, all the while urging her husband—and by extension, the viewers— to "just try some."[15] The choice of Marja Vongerichten as the show's host complicates and challenges the notion of her cultural culinary authority as derived from her ethnic background, to which the show even alludes by way of the introduction to each episode. The opening theme introduces Marja and her husband Jean-Georges by juxtaposing their respective upbringings, ostensibly to construct a cross-cultural narrative between a Korean American woman and a Frenchman. According to the show's description of Marja's biography, Marja "was born in the outskirts of Seoul to an American G.I. and a young Korean woman….[and] put up for adoption at three, and then lovingly raised in Virginia by her new family…[she later] found her birth mother when she was nineteen."[16] The abrupt forty-

[13] Lori Kido Lopez, "Asian American Food Blogging as Racial Branding: Rewriting the Search for Authenticity," *Global Asian American Popular Cultures,* ed. Shilpa Dave, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha Oren (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 152.
[14] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 3, "The Jeju Chronicles."
[15] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 1, "The Kimchi Chronicles Begin."
[16] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 1, "The Kimchi Chronicles Begin."

second recount of both Marja and Jean-Georges' biographies not only establishes a distinct dichotomy between their two experiences as a male-Caucasian-French-celebrity chef and as a female-African-Korean-American-adoptee creates a power imbalance in terms of culinary and gender authority. The cursory and casual nature of the smooth narration and the rapid flashes of childhood and family photos is dehumanizing, as it effectively compresses Marja and Jean-Georges into flattened characters whose lives are mere stories meant for the audience's entertainment. The introduction simultaneously glosses over the history and politics surrounding post-war Korea, especially regarding the legacy of American intervention in the region, the South Korean government's adoption programs for war orphans and other children, and its later attempts to extend Korean identity to these children. It also elides the much more personal questions of the hybridity of not only Asian American, but also African American, Afro Asian, and adoptee identity, the latter of which encompasses "adoptees' split temporality and shape-shifting transnationality [that reflect] the complexities and contradictions of the global and also illuminate the ways in which we all negotiate contingencies of personhood out of insufficient and mutable categories of the biological and the social."[17] The ways that adoptee identity challenges such conceptions of identity as a biological construct is particularly prevalent in a Korean and Korean American context.

After the Korean War reached a stalemate in 1953, American and United Nations forces remained in South Korea as an occupying force, and their presence resulted in the eventual births of thousands of mixed-race children. These mixed-race realtions and children contradicted "the ideology of 'one people'....that posited Korea as an ethnically homogeneous nation based on unbroken ancestry and shared bloodline. In this context, children of mixed parentage presented a polluting element and also...clear evidence...of South Korea's dependency on and

[17] Eleana J. Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 19.

subordination to postwar American occupying forces."[18] The advent of the South Korean government's adoption programs combined with the United States' neocolonial desire to establish South Korea as an industrialized democratic power resulted in the widespread adoption of these mixed-raced children by American families. These adoptions by Americans allowed for the maintainence of the idea of "one nation, one race (*ilguk, ilminju*)"[19] in Korea, which, up until this point, had denied these children citizenship and had labeled them as "*t'wigi* (an extremely offensive term meaning "hybrid" but derogatorily to mean "half-breed" or "half-blood")...and considered them completely alien."[20] Discomfort with any kind of liminal, hybrid identity led to the denial of Korean and American citizenship and any kind of legal Korean identity, illustrating Korea's strong desire to establish a unified national identity in the wake of its geopolitical separation, as well as a more general aversion to complicated categories of belonging and selfhood. Although the government alienated all mixed-race babies, those who were half Korean and half African American suffered the most, both in Korea and America, for "in Korea, half a drop of white or black blood made a child American [at a time] when many...still used *American* and *white* interchangeably." [21] This kind of understanding is extremely problematic both in terms of understanding and conceiving American identity and is significant in understanding role of race in American history and politics. In Korea, any mixed race babies faced stigmatization and discrimination based on their Western American heritage, which intensified if those children were half black, since "Korean ideas about color hierarchy had been corroborated by the racial ideologies that accompanied Japanese imperial rule…[and since] Koreans knew that blacks occupied the lowest status in American

[18] Kim, *Adopted Territory,* 31-32.
[19] Ibid., 62.
[20] Arissa H. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: the Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 51.
[21] Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: the Cold War Origins of International Adoption*, 68.

society."[22] These children, including the young Marja Vongerichten herself, presented the greatest threat to Korean notions of a singular ethnonational body politic and identity, as well as confounded the historical conflation of American identity with white identity, both in Korea and the United States.

Marja Vongerichten is one of these transgressive, transnational, transracial hybrid subjects, and she is even more complex, since she was adopted by African American parents and raised in the United States, where the most prominent marker of her identity was and continues to be her skin color. Whereas in Korea, she is unequivocally American, in the United States, she is unequivocally black, and these categorizations both come from the understanding of biology and genetics as the sole markers of identity. In interviews, Marja has articulated her own struggles with her identity, especially as a Korean African American with African American parents, saying, "[I] identify with being African-American because my family was. I wasn't really accepted as African-American because I don't really look 'full' African-American...black kids would call me oriental."[23] Her feelings of exclusion and issues of belonging in any singular community further illustrate how deep collective conceptions of identity rest solely on race and ethnicity. These conceptions create tension for diasporic communities, but are especially problematic in adoptee communities, for adoptees exist in a liminal space, born in one place but living in another, often with a family that looks nothing like them. In diasporic communities, cultural memory and practice is at least able to survive through the efforts of older generations, such as in culinary reproductions of dishes of the homeland. In adoptee spaces, often the only cultural memory an adoptee has comes from their parents' attempts to educate them—which may or may not be "authentic," or from a trip to their birthplace, both of which Marja has experienced; *The Kimchi Chronicles* frames itself as a "portrait of [an]

[22] Ibid., 131.
[23] David Lee Sanders. "Interview with Marja Vongerichten," last modified August 31, 2011, http://www.halfkorean.com/?page_id=6502.

adoptee....visiting the motherland (*moguk pangmun*) to explore [her] roots (*ppuri ch'atki*)."[24] In this way, Marja is able to gain knowledge of authentic Korean culinary and cultural practice that will make her a more effective and legitimate purveyor of Korean food in the future, which raises another issue of spatial positioning. In the United States, by virtue of her Korean mother and Korean blood, Marja has authority to teach her husband and the audience about the authentic methods of cooking Korean food, but in Korea, where she has not lived or grown up with Korean parents, she remains an American tourist, evident in her reliance on her Korean translator and guide.

Marja remarks, "My life has been quite a ride, born in Korea, raised in America, and now back in my *mogu* motherland...it's amazing for me to come back with my husband...but what really blows me away is seeing my [daughter] here in Korea. In some strange way, it makes up for the childhood I missed out on in Korea. I know I'm blessed."[25] The show's frames her returning to her birthplace as a means to "discover" or arguably "rediscover" her roots; the former connotes an idea of enlightenment, while the latter suggests turning back to the past or to something forgotten. For Marja, both are true: she simultaneously discovers new facets of the contemporary Korea that is so distant from the post-war context of her birth, which she subsequently rediscovers as unrecognizable from the place in her memory (or her constructed memory). For Marja's daughter, traveling to Korea is simply "going" to Korea because she has no geographic connections there. Both she and her mother were raised surrounded by and immersed in American culture. Anything she experiences is not necessarily as a Korean citizen or young Korean girl; though her own perceptions of herself as Korean do shape her identity, Korea is not where she finds belonging, like Marja. Marja's expressed nostalgia for the idea of a lost Korean childhood,

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[24] Kim, *Adopted Territory,* 177.

[25] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 4, "The Seafood Chronicles," directed by Charles Pinsky, aired July 23, 2011, on PBS, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As5i_2KF8Jg.

which may be coded as a more genuine Korean upbringing, implies a "quest...in issues of procreation [with] the role accorded to 'blood' and 'actual' facts…[that are] considered foundational to personal identity, and that includes knowledge about both birth and parentage."[26] Marja seems to long for a Korean childhood in which she would not have the tensions and complex emotions that are inherent to being an adoptee, and in seeing her daughter in Korea, Marja seems to project her own life onto her daughter's and vice versa, living vicariously through her. Yet, Marja aches for a life that arguably could never be, at least in the specific historical context of post-war Korea, in which her unmarried mother with a mixed-race child was considered a prostitute, and in which her half black heritage would have brought personal struggle and social ostracization. Marja's nostalgia and romanticization of Korea, which arise from her daughter's trip and her own return to her birthplace, in reality present more challenges to her sense of self.

Although Marja refers to Korea as her "*mogu* (motherland)," [27] upon her return to the "purported homeland, [she] confront[s] the impossibility of true repatriation in the form of seamless belonging or full legal incorporation and may discover that [her] hybridity, which is marked by racial difference in [her] adoptive country is, in the context of Korea, inverted, thus swinging [her] to the other side of…[the] pendulum from Korean to...American."[28] Unlike many adoptee return trips or self-discovery journeys, Marja manages to reconnect with her birth mother and biological relatives, though not in Korea; according to an interview, Marja found her birth mother in Brooklyn, which further complicates the "return."[29] Though she and other adoptees may believe that reconnecting with their birth mothers will somehow stabilize their sense of self and belonging, it in fact does the opposite, for they are as good as strangers despite their biological linkage; the strangeness and

[26] See Marilyn Strathern in Kim, *Adopted Territory,* 89.
[27] *The Kimchi Chronicles,* episode 4, "The Seafood Chronicles."
[28] Kim, *Adopted Territory,* 186-187.
[29] Sanders, "Interview with Marja Vongerichten."

non-existence of this relationship again illustrates the limits of blood kinship. The fact that Marja finds her birth mother in the United States additionally reflects the diasporic movement of Koreans to the U.S. and around the world. Indeed, in the act of referring to her place of birth as the "homeland" or "motherland," Marja, like many other adoptees, and like many other hyphenated Americans, gives precedence to the idea of origin and cedes power to a place that she has no memory of and that barred her belonging. Rather than asserting her own self, she allows Korea to decide who she is. Yet, the "return" is fraught in different ways for these two distinct groups: Asian Americans who are American-born second generation children of immigrants, have no experience, memory of, or origin point in the home country except their parents' traditional practices at home; adoptees, who do have this origin point and link to the home country, are often raised by American parents and do not find acceptance upon their return journeys. The idea that returning to one's homeland will automatically grant a sense of belonging and legitimate identity does not come to fruition, and the adoptee is left to grapple with her liminality once more.

Despite the challenges that liminal identity presents to the construction of a singular ethnonational identity as well as to the hybrids themselves—the adoptees, the Asian Americans, and those of mixed race—the Korean government has made concerted efforts to incorporate these hybrids into a united Korean national body. Although the Korean government originally prevented mixed race G.I. children from obtaining citizenship on the grounds of their biracial blood, it has recently made strides to "toward the construction of [a] 'deterritorialized nation-state' through the political incorporation of diasporic populations,"[30] most notably in the form of the Overseas Korean Act, which extends Korean citizenship to select overseas Korean populations. The act includes Korean Americans and Korean

[30] Paul Y Chang and Jung-Sun Park, "Contention in the Construction of Global Korean Community: the Case of the Overseas Korean Act," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 10.1 (2005): 1.

Japanese as citizens, while excluding Korean Chinese and Korean Russians for political and historical reasons, and also postulating that Korean citizenship rests on one's paternal lineage— having a Korean father or grandfather is another requirement.[31] Despite this supposed need to have blood of a Korean father, "the Korean state has extended recognition to adoptees as 'overseas Koreans,' thereby enfolding them into an official version of the Korean diaspora." [32] The inherent contradiction in the law's requirements reveals the problems of trying to construct a unified national identity, especially when considering diasporic communities abroad, many of whose members were not born in Korea. Under this law, adoptees like Marja Vongerichten would simultaneously qualify and disqualify for Korean citizenship based on their birth in Korea and their being Korean American, but also because their fathers were not Korean. Furthermore, the law's uses "legal categories to define 'Korean identity'" which "[entail] the construction of a Korean identity based on 'primordial' ethnic ties and the belief in shared blood and heritage (*hyŏlt'ongjuŭi*),"[33] so why does it exclude ethnic Koreans living in Russia and China? The Overseas Korean Act attempts to construct a technical definition of Korean identity with stipulations for belonging in reaction to globalization and ever-increasing minority groups, and genuinely overlooks the realities of diasporic community and identity construction. Though the law claims to prize ethnic Korean-ness above all else, the government rejects ethnic but non-national Koreans like Marja, who may arguably never be truly considered Korean by virtue of her black heritage.

It is precisely people like Marja that challenge the strong associations between the physical body and ethnicity and identity. Though she does not look Korean upon first glance, Marja's personal history and experiences of Korean culture and her own Korean-ness have greatly affected her sense of self. Her life as a transplanted, hybrid

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[31] Chang and Park, 3.
[32] Kim, *Adopted Territory,* 98.
[33] Chang and Park, "Contention in the Construction of Korean Identity," 3.

adoptee subject has contributed much more to the construction of her identity than the physical markers of her Korean-ness have, which are tied to a "strong ethnic identity has already been gestured to in stories about connecting to a country or culture of origin and emphasizing the importance of family and a family history in telling food stories. But another important element of tracing the...identities of Asian American[s]...is the literal movement of peoples between the United States and Asia and the transnational...identities that such flows create."[34] The narrative of *The Kimchi Chronicles,* and to a further extent, the efforts of the Korean government, attempt to do exactly this: emphasize Marja's Korean ethnic identity to connect her to Korea in order to grant her the power to disseminate cultural capital of Korean food. Yet, such a narrative denies Marja herself a say in who she is. It is the fact of both her Korean birth and American adoption that drives her to study Korean, to travel to Seoul, to learn about her history, and to seek out and cook Korean food. She represents the flow of adoptee diaspora, the hybridity and code-switching that result from being an adoptee; one who "demonstrate[s] how identity…[is] forged at blurred intersections"[35] in ways that characterize the cosmopolitan subject and all of its contradictions. Although Marja may never feel fully Korean, American, Asian American, or African American, she remains all at once and can navigate sub-communities in both the United States and Korea. Though it is unlikely that Marja will ever experience unconditional acceptance into any of those communities, she can still enter and explore their borderlands.

The effects of globalization have had many implications for the flow of goods, capital, and culture, including culinary pathways and production, which in turn act as representations and markers of ethnic, racial, and national identity. Food travel shows and other forms of culinary tourism embody these phenomena: educating others about foreign cultures and places by making those places accessible;

[34] Lopez, "Asian American Food Blogging," 157-158.
[35] Kim, *Adopted Territory,* 86.

solidifying notions and boundaries of a national cuisine as representative of a nation and its citizens; and the subtle framing of these culinary practices as *other* in a reflection of how the "media deployment of culinary consumption and preparation...has always functioned as a marker of identity, class, and mastery…[and] aimed to educate its viewers in proper consumption and coherent national, class, and gendered identities."[36] Although these shows often do turn a neo-imperialist gaze on Otherness through temporal and spatial positioning, they also have the power to raise questions of identity and challenge existing ideas about identity construction. *The Kimchi Chronicles*, while not an especially original travel show, explores these issues through Marja's perspective and becomes a lens through which to study identity, hybridity, and liminality in the wake of globalization, diaspora, and national reactions to the free movement of people and ideas, specifically in a Korean, American, Asian American, and adoptee context. Marja demonstrates the limits of genetics and birthplace in determining identity, both through her own personal history and her body. *The Kimchi Chronicles* gives her cultural authority over Korean cuisine and culinary production, which is often tenuous due to the strong ethnic associations we conflate with identity. Her life in the United States and her American family in many ways have defined her more than her Korean-ness, though the latter also plays an important role. Ultimately, *The Kimchi Chronicles* demonstrates the complexities and intersectionality inherent in a hybrid, cosmopolitan adoptee subject that fundamentally redefine how we conceive the construction of identity.

[36] Tasha Oren, "The Blood Sport of Cooking: On Asian American Chefs and Television," *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*, ed. Shilpa Dave, Leilani Nishie, and Tasha Oren (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 248-249.

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