

**Session 2 Ubiquitous Borders**

**Presentation 3**

**The Deportation of Korean Adoptees from the U.S.  
and the Quest for Citizenship**

Ji-Hye Shin

**Abstract**

On May 21, 2017, Philip Clay, a 42-year old Korean adoptee, ended his own life in Seoul, Korea. Adopted to the U.S. at the age of eight but not naturalized, Clay was deported to Korea in 2012 never to return “home.”<sup>1</sup> In the United States, many adoptees like Philip Clay are in the precarious position of noncitizens, and in constant fear of deportation even for minor criminal convictions. Once deported, they find themselves in a strange country whose language and culture they do not know. Clay’s case sheds light on transnational adoption as a form of child migration, the importance of documentation for child migrants, and their quest for citizenship. Taking his case as a starting point, this paper exposes the vulnerability of Asian child migrants—Korean adoptees, in particular—in the U.S. immigration system, and discusses their rights in an age of globalization and transnational mobility. Adding to the previous studies on transnational adoptees that highlight their identity formation and lived experiences, this paper emphasizes the continuing significance of nation-states in defining citizenship and examines various challenges posed by the mobility of children across borders.

1) Sang-Hun Choe, “Deportation a ‘Death Sentence’ to Adoptees after a Lifetime in the U.S.,” New York Times, July 2