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Fugitive Visions: An Adoptee's Return To Korea



Synopsis

The powerful second memoir by the author of the widely acclaimed *The Language of Blood* made in Korea > cheap goods > cheap labor > cheap womb > cheap adoption > cheap immigration > cheap immigrant > cheap yellow daughter > honorary white > almost but not quite. Whenever she speaks to a stranger in her native Korea, Jane Jeong Trenka is forced to explain what she is. Japanese? Chinese? The answer—that she was adopted from Korea as a baby and grew up in the United States—is a source of grief, pride, and confusion. Trenka's award-winning first book, *The Language of Blood*, told the story of her upbringing in a white family in rural Minnesota. Now, in this searching and provocative memoir, Trenka explores a new question: Can she make an adult life for herself in Korea? Despite numerous setbacks, Trenka resolves to learn the language and ways of her unfamiliar birth country. In navigating the myriad contradictions and disjunctions that have made up her life, Trenka turns to the lessons from her past—in particular, the concept of dissonance and harmony learned over her years as a musician. In *Fugitive Visions*, named after a composition by Prokofiev, Trenka has succeeded in braiding the disparate elements of her life into a recognizable and at times heartbreaking whole.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Trenka shakes up literary expectations in a beautiful, ponderous record of moving back to her birth country, Korea. Adopted as an infant, Trenka (*The Language of Blood*) was raised in the U.S.; in her latest, she faces lifelong feelings of inadequacy stirred by her move there, following an expired marriage (and several visits). Trenka uses her struggle for acceptance in

Korea-her blossoming relationships with blood relatives, her struggle to achieve fluency in Korean-to re-examine a life of similar challenges in America. Trenka employs anecdotes, lists, newspaper clippings and other sources to create a multi-pronged approach to the idea of "home," though some techniques (like odd collections of key words) can be a distraction. Trenka tackles her bleak material with courage and grace, raising interesting questions, but her charm also shines in simpler memories, like her account of childhood piano lessons gone awry.

Jane Jeong Trenka has won numerous awards and fellowships for her writing. She is the author of *The Language of Blood*, called "original and beautifully written" by *Publishers Weekly*. She now lives in Korea.

Based on the strength of *The Language of Blood*, I read this book, though it is not as strong as its predecessor. Trenka's anguish just bellows through the pages, though she tries to find solace in music and immerse herself in Korean culture. I admire her frankness in revealing her hatred, her frustration, her anger. She can't understand how her mother gave her and her sister up, or forgive being robbed of being Korean - raised in Korea - of belonging. I didn't like the references to music, and I wish there was more about her relationship with her sister and adoptive family, and even about her decision to live in Korea. Clearly, she is in pain, so much so that she is obsessed with what cannot be undone, her future consists of making up what she lost, tunneling into the past. Even when she is calm, you get the sense she is howling with loss. I don't know if I can recommend this book, it's not quite what I expected - and I thought it would be more of a narrative. Expectations aside, it wasn't all that coherent. I did admire the writing, though not all the time. In *The Language of Blood*, she seemed to come to terms with being adopted, but being with other adoptees and in Korea has unearthed feelings she had hidden - or maybe didn't know were present, and also aroused new feelings. I suspect there might be another book coming.

I love the way this is written. I highly recommend reading "the language of blood" before this one.

it`s good!!

Jane Jeong Trenka's willingness to stay with the pain of her alternate lives as a transnationally adopted infant, an exiled Korean child in America, a returnee to Korea where she was neither truly Korean nor truly "other" --is one of the bravest journeys of discovery and naming I've ever seen. It is

amazing, and should be required reading for anyone considering transnational adoption: the price exacted from the adoptee is all visible here, and it is heartrending. This is a fine piece of writing and an important book. Highly recommended. Janey Bennett author, *The Pale Surface of Things*

In a sea of adoption memoirs *Fugitive Visions* soars high above the rest. Not another "must read" filled with the stuff we need, but one you will savor reading and re-reading for its delicate flavors whether or not you have any connection to, or interest in, adoption or Korea. Trenka shares her pain without bitterness or anger in a book about a life which like the Joni Mitchell song looks at life from both sides now.

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