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Intercountry adoption in the new millennium; the "quiet migration" revisited

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Abstract. Intercountry adoption is not usually seen as a matter for demographers, although articles in the *International Migration Review* have looked at international adoption as a migratory process. This article outlines the author's estimate of the number of intercountry adoptions world-wide, using data recorded by 18 receiving states in the 1990s. Data from selected receiving countries are used to estimate the number of adoptions from states of origin. Comparisons are made with data for 14 countries over the period 1980–89 collated by Kane (1993).

The global estimate of at least 32,000 adoptions in 1998 is much higher than the numbers usually cited and suggest a rise of fifty percent over the previous decade. Total numbers are dominated by adoptions to the United States and from China and Russia. However standardisation against population size or number of live births suggests that the highest rates among receiving states are to be found in Scandinavia, while the highest rates for states of origin are in countries of Eastern Europe, followed by Korea – countries typified by very low birth rates. The article ends with a discussion of the implications of these findings for the future of international controls and the implementation of the 1993 Hague Convention.

Keywords: Adoption, Children, International, Migration

Introduction

Child adoption is not usually seen as a matter of concern for demographers, but rather an issue of primary interest to social workers, lawyers and psychologists and of secondary interest to sociologists and anthropologists. The requirements for a demography of domestic adoption in Britain and the United States was considered in an earlier paper by the author (Selman 1997) presented at a meeting of the International Sociological Association in Beijing and has been discussed elsewhere in greater detail in respect of adoption trends in England & Wales (Selman 1976 and 1988) and in a cohort analysis of adoptees' access to birth records (Selman 1999b).

This lack of demographic analysis is also true of *transnational* or *intercountry* adoption (ICA), although a recent article in the *International Migration Review* (Lovelock 2000) looks at intercountry adoption as a migratory

process and an earlier article in the same journal referred to international adoption as "the quiet migration" (Weil 1984).

Consideration of the movement of children as a form of migration can also be seen in the long sad tale of "child migrants" from the UK (Bean & Melville 1989), which continues to be a major issue both in the UK and "receiving states" such as Australia and New Zealand. Most of the children were not placed in families and many were subsequently subjected to exploitation and abuse. But the placements were arranged by reputable childcare agencies and at the time were seen as in the best interests of the child. Commenting on this, the House of Commons Health Committee Report concluded that "child migration was a bad and, in human terms, a costly mistake" and urged "extreme caution" when considering applications for intercountry adoption.

Towards a demography of intercountry adoption

In his 1984 article, Weil argued that many aspects of intercountry adoption were not well understood and concluded that: "To answer questions such as those listed above requires far more data be collected on a systematic worldwide basis. The total volume of foreign adoptees, how this number has changed over time, precisely what countries are linked in the flows of children . . . " (Weil 1984: 291–92).

The aim of this paper is to address some of these issues and give a clearer account of the growth of intercountry adoption over the past thirty years, using available national statistics from receiving states. I shall show that the scale of ICA is greater than is usually acknowledged and could potentially grow in the first decades of this century, making international controls even more important. I shall end by looking at some of the social and demographic characteristics of sending and receiving countries.

In doing so, I shall argue that a demography of intercountry adoption must see the movement of children not only as an aspect of international migration – in which case it is of very minor significance – but also as related to issues of fertility, in that a key motivation in receiving states is the demand for children by childless couples who have not been successful with infertility treatment and who have faced a diminishing availability of young children for domestic adoption (Hoksbergen in Selman 2000). For this reason, it can be useful to relate intercountry adoptions to the number of births in both sending and receiving countries.

While ICA was a phenomenon involving only a small number of children from relatively few countries, the possibility (or necessity) of a demographic approach was largely ignored. Today it is a phenomenon involving over 30,000 children a year moving between more than a hundred countries. Just

as domestic adoption has been shown to affect a large proportion of people in countries such as the USA (Hoksbergen in Selman 2000), so most countries today have been affected by intercountry adoption, whether as states of origin, receiving states or as both (Selman 1997; van Loon 1990). This was the background to the establishment of the Hague Conference (Duncan in Selman 2000), which was to involve over 80 countries during its five years.

If we are to understand this phenomenon, it is important not only to be able to give an accurate picture of the number of ICAs taking place and of changes in that number over time, but also to identify those countries most involved. This paper aims to estimate the number of intercountry adoptions world-wide, using data recorded by 17 receiving states. Results will be compared with a similar exercise carried out ten years ago by Kane (1993), using data from 14 receiving countries. Adoptions from these countries are believed to account for over 90 per cent of all international adoptions.

The differing incidence of ICA in states of origin will be estimated using data from 10 receiving states with reliable recording systems, which account for about 80 per cent of total ICAs, but sources of children for adoption vary between countries so that the estimates for states of origin are distorted by the omission of key receiving states. The extent of this distortion is explored by checked the estimates against data available in three sending countries (Korea, India and Brazil).

If we are to make comparisons between countries, whether receiving or sending, we also need to develop standardised measures of intercountry adoption as is routinely done for births, deaths and other demographic events (Selman 1999). In this paper I have chosen to follow Kane (1993) in standardising against the annual number of live births, but alternatives include calculating rates per 1,000 population (Pilotti 1990; Selman 1999) – or per 1,000 aged 5–9 for states of origin – and examples of these calculations will be included.

Problems of availability and accuracy of data on intercountry adoption

Weil (1984) noted that in the 1980s "worldwide availability of data on foreign adoptions is uneven in both quantity and quality" and that "data from the United States, while in some respects limited, was the best obtained from any country" (Weil 1984: 277–8).

The availability and quality of data on international adoption continues to vary greatly between receiving countries. Kane (1993) approached government offices in 21 such countries, and was able to obtain "relatively complete" data from 14 (see Table 1): figures obtained for Canada were for Quebec only; estimates for Germany were based on 4 northern lander; and statistics for Spain were only available from 1988. No statistics were obtainable from

Austria, Israel, Ireland or the United Kingdom and three other (unspecified) countries failed to reply.

Such problems continue ten years later, despite the stress in the Hague Convention on the importance of gathering data systematically. In the United States, the Department of State has for many years published statistics on the number of immigrant visas issued in each fiscal year to "orphans" coming to the United States. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has figures for the number of children actually entering the country on such visas. US statistics are available on the internet, categorised by state of origin – so that it is possible to look at changes in the incidence of ICA and also in the countries from which the children came.

In Europe there is wide variation in the quality and availability of statistics. In Scandinavia and the Netherlands, domestic non-relative adoptions are now very rare and only intercountry adoption statistics are published annually. In the Netherlands detailed statistics on children adopted from overseas are provided by the Ministry of Justice. In Sweden there are annual figures from their National Board (NIA) on international adoptions by state of origin. In Norway the Governmental Office for Youth and Adoption provides information from 1979 on the annual number of children mediated by the three licensed organisations. Detailed figures are also available for Denmark and Finland and for adoption agencies belonging to EurAdopt (see Sterky in Selman 2000).

Annual figures providing information about country of origin are available for France and Germany and in England & Wales the Department of Health provides the number of applications (home studies) received each year, but does not know how many actual adoptions take place. In the eight years from 1993 to 2000 there were over 1,700 such applications (Brennan in Selman, 2000). It is estimated that in addition over 100 children are being brought into the UK each year without entry clearance. UNICEF (1999) provides total figures up to 1997 for seven countries including Canada, Italy and Switzerland. I have also used incomplete data for Spain (Catalonia only) and Belgium (adoptions through agencies which are members of EurAdopt) in order to match the 14 countries used by Kane. The overall data presented for these countries is more comprehensive than Kane's for Germany and Canada, but less complete for Belgium. In both exercises Spanish numbers are underestimated. Three additional countries – UK, Ireland and Iceland – have been incorporated in the estimates of global numbers, the first two of which are also used (with eight receiving states) to estimate the number of adoptions from states of origin.

The growth of intercountry adoption since 1970

The early history of ICA has been described in many publications (e.g., Altstein & Simon 1991; Selman 1998; van Loon 1990). Altstein & Simon (1991) note that intercountry adoption "began primarily as a North American philanthropic response to the devastation of Europe in World War II that resulted in thousands of orphaned children". European states were the main source of children to America until the late 1970s (Selman 1998), when adoptions from Korea became increasingly important in numbers, accounting for over half of all ICAs in America by the 1970s.

Most estimates of global numbers in the early 1990s are for between 15,000 and 20,000 (e.g., Duncan 1993; Kane 1993; Lovelock 2000; NAIC 1997) with an unstated assumption that there is little variation from year to year. Yet the number of "orphans" arriving in the USA alone has risen from 2,080 in 1969 to 8,102 in 1989 and 16,396 in 1999. If we accept estimates of 10,000 ICAs to Europe each year (Altstein & Simon 1991; Hoksbergen 1986) and note the growing numbers going to Canada and Oceania, the total figures for the end of the twentieth century seem likely to be substantially higher (see also UNICEF 1999).

By far the best picture of intercountry adoption worldwide in the 1980s is that provided by Kane (1993). Using data from 14 countries, she calculates the minimum number of ICAs between 1980 and 1989 at just over 162,000 – an average of more than 16,000 a year. Noting that she was unable to get statistics for ICA in the UK, Israel, Ireland and Austria, and that statistics for Canada and Germany were incomplete, she concludes that there is a shortfall of 5–10 per cent and estimates the actual total for the decade as lying between 170,000 and 180,000: – an average of 17–18,000 per annum.

More recently, UNICEF (1999) has made an estimate of the number of adoptions to seven major receiving states (USA; France; Italy; Canada: Sweden; Switzerland and the Netherlands) in the period 1993–1997. This shows a sharp rise in numbers over this period from 16,027 to 23,199, so that by 1997 the total for these seven countries is at least 5,000 higher than the world average estimated by Kane for the 1980s.

In Table 1, I have tried to build on these two exercises by extending and updating the UNICEF calculation to include the other seven countries used by Kane plus the UK, Ireland and Iceland. Data from Belgium and Spain are incomplete: the Belgian data are only for agencies which are members of EurAdopt; the Spanish data are only for Catalonia.

My estimates for the total number of ICAs in the 1990s, using the 14 countries covered in Kane's analysis, show a substantial increase in transnational adoption – from 19,327 in 1988 to 31,856 by 1997–9 – reflecting mainly the sharp rise in children going to the United States. Kane's figures

Table 1. Major receiving countries 1980–1999

Country	Mean annual adoptions 1980–1989	1988	Mean annual adoptions 1993–1997	1998 or latest year
United States	7,761	9,120	10,070	16,396***
France	1,850	2,441	3,216	3,777
Italy	1,006	2,078	2,047	2,019**
Germany	189[1]	875[1]	1,642	1,819
Canada	109[2]	232[2]	1,934	1,799**
Spain	19	93	784[3]*	1,522[3]***
Sweden	1,579	1,074	906	1,019***
Switzerland	616	492	761	733**
Netherlands	1,153	577	640	825
Norway	464	566	531	643
Denmark	582	523	510	624
	15,328	18,071	23,041	31,176
Belgium	544	662	183[4]	254[4]
Australia	356	516	247	245
Finland	40	78	134	181
Sub-total	16,268	19,327	23,605	31,856
UK	–	–	180[5]	277[5]***
Ireland	–	–	61	147
Iceland	–	–	11	15
TOTAL			23,857	32,295

[1]For 1980-89, figures based on 4 northern lander (Kane 1993).
[2]For 1980-89, Canadian figures are for Quebec only.
[3]Spanish figures for 1994–98 and 1999 are for Catalonia only.
[4]For 1993–8, Belgian figures are for "EurAdopt" adoptions only.
[5]UK figures are based on applications processed by DoH.
*1994–8 figures; **1997 figures; ***1999 figures.

are understated for Canada and Germany but more comprehensive than mine for Belgium. Addition of the further three countries mentioned above brings the total to over 32,000. The global figure will be substantially higher, if we allow for an underestimate of numbers to Belgium and Spain and the omission of other receiving states which have signed, ratified or acceded to the Convention (Austria, Cyprus, Israel, Luxembourg, New Zealand and Portugal).

The incidence of ICA seems to be rising in most receiving states, so that the total for the early years of the new millennium is likely to be higher. This gives a very different picture from Altstein's prediction – made in the aftermath of the Romanian influx, which he saw as temporary – that "... as a long-term world-wide phenomenon whereby non-white children from poor nations are transferred to families in rich, white nations ICA appears to be declining" (Altstein & Simon 1991).

Which countries receive most children?

Table 1 shows that for the last 20 years, the United States has been the largest recipient of children for adoption, but that Canada, France, Italy, Germany and Spain also receive substantial numbers of children and many of the smaller European countries receive numbers which are relatively greater in proportion to their population.

Table 2. Annual Number of International Adoptions: USA, Sweden, Netherlands and Norway: selected years 1970–1998

Country	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1998
USA	2,409	5,633	5,139	9,285	7,093	9,679	15,774
Sweden	1,150	1,517	1,704	1,560	965	895	928
Netherlands	192	1,018	1,594	1,138	830	661	825
Norway	115	397	384	507	500	488	643

Table 2 reminds us that the number of intercountry adoptions can fall as well as rise and that for some European states – notably Sweden and the Netherlands – the current level is well below that found in the early 1980s.

Standardisation of ICA against population or birth levels in receiving States

If we wish to compare the levels of intercountry adoption in either sending or receiving countries, it is essential to develop some form of standardisation as would be routine for any other demographic event – births, deaths, marriages, divorce etc. – but is rarely found in the adoption literature. The simplest standardisation is to relate adoptions to the population size – a Crude (Intercountry) Adoption Rate. This has been used to make comparisons between receiving states (Selman 1989, 1999; Pilotti 1990) and shows Sweden as having a much higher rate than the United States. Such a rate could also be calculated for

states of origin, but could be very misleading in making comparisons between countries with different age-structures.

In earlier analyses (Selman 1999, 2000), I chose 100,000 as the base for these rates (rather than 1,000 population as in Crude Birth and Death Rates) because of the low level of adoptions compared with births and deaths. Rates were calculated for five receiving states for the years 1987 to 1995 and ranged from 11.9 per 100,000 for Norway to 1.9 for Finland. The United States, despite the large numbers of ICAs had a rate of only 3.3. By 1998 the Norwegian rate had risen to 14.6 and the American rate to 5.7, but both remained well short of the peak of 22.7 found in Sweden in 1980.

An alternative is to relate the adoptions to the number of births (Andersson 1986; Kane 1993). I have called this an adoption ratio (Selman 1998), defining this as the number of adoptions per 1,000 live births. Kane refers to a "rate of adoption" per 100 births. Adoptions are seen as in some sense the equivalent to acquiring a child through birth (Andersson 1986). Because of the similarity of demographic characteristics (e.g., age-structure and birth rates), the relativities are the similar whichever measure is used for receiving states. In 1998 the adoption ratio in Norway was 11.2, which indicates more than one intercountry adoption for every 100 live births. In Sweden in 1978 the ratio was 17.4 per 1,000 – nearly two adoptions for every 100 live births – or equivalent to a rise of 0.2 in the crude birth rate.

Table 3 contrasts the figures for 1997/1998 with those provided by Kane for 1989. As with the crude adoption rates, standardisation against births shows the level of intercountry adoption to be substantially higher in Norway and Sweden than in the USA. In most cases the level is higher than in 1989 – substantially so in the case of Switzerland, France and the United States.

Which countries send most children?

Weil (1984) shows that in the early post-war years the main countries of origin were those defeated in the war – Greece, Italy, Germany and Japan – but that from the mid 1950s the main source of children to the United States became Korea, which accounted for the largest number in total over the period 1948–62. Between 1963 and 1975, Korea became even more dominant, accounting for nearly 15,000 out of a total of 34,568. The next six years (1976–1981) saw 19,283 children moving from Korea to the United States out of a total of 35,229. Ecuador, Colombia, Philippines and India followed, with the numbers from Europe falling to very low levels.

This set the pattern for the 1980s, where Kane (1993) identified Korea, Colombia and India as the major sending countries, confirming the pic-

Table 3. Intercountry adoptions per 1,000 live births; 1998 and 1989: Selected receiving countries[1]

Country	No. of adoptions 1997*/1998	No. of births (1,000s) 1998	Adoptions per 1,000 births 1997*/1998	Adoptions[2] per 1,000 births 1989
Norway	643	57	11.2	11.0
Sweden	928	86	10.8	9.4
Denmark	624	63	9.9	8.5
Switzerland	733*	80	9.2*	6.2
France	3,777	713	5.3	3.0
Canada	1,799*	344	5.2*	2.7
Netherlands	825	179	4.6	3.7
USA	15,774	3,788	4.2	2.0
Italy	2,019*	512	3.9*	3.8
Germany	1,819	749	2.4	1.6
Finland	181	57	3.2	2.0
Australia	245	245	1.0	1.4
UK	258	689	0.4	N/A

[1]Spain and Belgium have been omitted as figures for 1998 were incomplete.
[2]Kane's figures per 100 multiplied by 10.
*Asterisked rates are for 1997.

ture given by Pilotti (1990) using data from the United States, Sweden and Norway.

For a short period in the early 1990s Romania became the largest single source of children for international adoption (Defence for Children International, 1991). In the United States alone the number of intercountry adoptions rose by nearly 2,000 between 1990 and 1991, the increase being entirely due to the Romanian adoptions. The total number of adoptions from Romania in the months following the fall of Ceausescu remains uncertain, but the DCI report cited above lists a total of over 4,000 children going to 22 different countries in the seven months from August 1990 to February 1991 and figures as high as 10,000 have been suggested for the period from March 1990 to June 1991, when Romania called a halt to adoptions (Selman 1998).

Because of the difficulties involved in obtaining comparative data from many states of origin, I have followed Pilotti (1990) and Kane (1993) in using data gathered by receiving states to provide an estimate of the relative levels of intercountry adoption in states of origin in the mid and late 1990s. Such figures can be misleading where states of origin have particular links with receiving countries not included, but the exercise is useful in indicating trends over time and comparative levels of involvement in ICA. By 1995 China and

Table 4. Major sources of ICAs: 1980–89, 1995 and 1998 [Adoptions to selected Western Countries]

Country	Annual adoptions 1980–89*	Country	No. of adoptions 1995**	Country	No. of adoptions 1998**
Korea	6,123	China	2,559	Russia	5,064
India	1,532	Korea	2,145	China	4,855
Colombia	1,484	Russia	2,014	Vietnam	2,375
Brazil	753	Vietnam	1,523	Korea	2,294
Sri Lanka	682	Colombia	1,249	Colombia	1,162
Chile	524	India	970	Guatemala	1,143
Philippines	517	Brazil	627	India	1,048
Guatemala	224	Guatemala	574	Romania	891
Peru	221	Romania	558	Brazil	443
El Salvador	218	Philippines	427	Ethiopia	438
Mexico	160	Paraguay	360	Bulgaria	347
Haiti	153	Poland	301	Thailand	333
Poland	148	Ethiopia	297	Poland	326
Honduras	110	Bulgaria	232	Philippines	322
Thailand	86	Thailand	222	Cambodia	307
		Chile	142	Haiti	248
		Mexico	131	Ukraine	237
				Mexico	210

*Kane (1993) – adoptions to 13 receiving countries [those listed in Table 1 excluding Finland].
**Adoptions to 10 receiving countries [USA, France, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Australia, UK and Ireland] – = c 75–80 per cent of ICAs.

Russia had emerged as the main sources of children both for the USA and many other countries (Selman 1999).

Table 4 gives the number of adoptions in states of origin using data from 10 receiving states for 1995 and 1998 and also Kane's estimate for the 1980s, which are based on data from 13 receiving countries. Although Korea continues to be an important source of children, the annual number has fallen sharply and was overtaken by the number from Vietnam in 1998. Kane's top 15 countries accounted for about 80 per cent of all adoptions to the 13 sending countries in her analysis.

In 1998 adoptions from the 18 sending countries listed accounted for 85 per cent of all adoptions to the 10 countries in my analysis. Each additional set of data from receiving countries improves the picture and makes the list less dependent on USA figures. The major problem with the countries I have used is the omission of Italy, which would have substantially increased the numbers from Brazil, India, Romania and Russia; and of Spain, which would have increased the numbers from India and Colombia (UNICEF 1999).

Table 5. Adoptions from Korea, Brazil and India (1994 to 1998)

Country	Korea	Korea	Brazil	Brazil	India	India
Year	Official Data[1]	Estimate (Selman 2001)	Official data[2]	Estimate (Selman 2001)	Official data[3]	Estimate (Selman 2001)
1993	2,290		1,655		1,134	
1994	2,262		1,281		1,128	
1995	2,180	2,145	991	627	1,236	970
1996	2,080		848		990	
1997	2,057		717		1,026	
1998	2,249	2,294	637	443	1,406	1,048

[1]Provisional data from Ministry of Health & Welfare.
[2]Data from Immigration section of Foreign Ministry.
[3]Data from CARA (in Selman 2000).

Table 5 shows that the 1998 estimates for Korea are close to those recorded by that country, as the 10 countries listed include all those receiving significant numbers of children from Korea. In contrast the estimate for Brazil is about a third lower than their official figures as a result of not including Italy, which takes a large proportion of the children adopted from Brazil (40% in 1994). Likewise India is underestimated by 20–25 per cent, as I have not included adoptions to Spain and Italy.

A closer inspection of table 4 shows clearly how much change there has been in the sources of children in the past decade, with four of Kane's top fifteen countries – Sri Lanka, Peru, El Salvador and Honduras – no longer featuring in the lists for 1995 and 1998 – and numbers from Korea and Chile falling substantially. The annual number of adoptions from China to the United States rose from 61 In 1991 to 4,206 in 1998; the number from Russia rose from 324 in 1992 to 4,491 in 1998. By 1998 these two countries dominate the ICA field largely due to US adoptions, but Russian adoptions also increased sharply in France, Germany and Sweden; and Chinese adoptions in Sweden and the Netherlands. Between 1995 and 1998, numbers rose in most of the listed countries: only Brazil, the Philippines, Chile and Paraguay experienced a fall in the number of adoptions, so that the increases seem to reflect an overall rise rather than changes in the countries from which children are coming.

There are a number of different reasons for a reduction in numbers of ICAs from states of origin, which suggest that there are likely to be further changes in rank ordering in the years ahead.

Examples include:

- Crisis countries where the social/economic situation has transformed, e.g., Greece and Germany which were major sending countries after WW2, but are now receiving children.
- Countries that have moved to domestic adoption – e.g., Sri Lanka, Korea and India all have policies leading in this direction, which have already significantly reduced levels of intercountry adoption.
- Suspension of adoption by either side – e.g., Paraguay (or Romania temporarily in the mid-nineties). In future years we may see falls in the number of children from Vietnam and Guatemala due to their governments' response to reports of trafficking.

Standardised rates for states of origin

The number of children under the age of 5 form a varying proportion of the total population of different states of origin: 15–16 per cent in Paraguay and Guatemala; 11–13 per cent in India, Vietnam and the Philippines; 7–8 per cent in China and Korea; but only 5 per cent in Russia, Romania and other Eastern European countries. For this reason a crude inter-country adoption rate (per 100,000 total population) is less suitable for states of origin, where it is the number of young children which is most relevant in assessing the impact of ICA. Analysis of adoption rates per 100,000 population aged 0–4, using data from 10 receiving countries (Table 6) shows that in 1998 Bulgaria, Romania and Russia had the highest rates, closely followed by Korea and Guatemala. The large numbers of children moving from China and India are modest in relation to the under-5s population in those countries.

As with receiving states an alternative is to standardise against births (an adoption ratio), which accentuates the gap between high and low birth rate countries – e.g., South Korea and India. Table 7 shows that a ratio per 1,000 births gives a similar standardised order to the rates in Table 6. This measure allows comparison with similar measure for 1989 calculated by Kane (1993). In making comparisons it must be noted that my figures are based on only 8 of the 13 countries used by Kane (plus the UK and Ireland) – which together account for about 80 per cent of the adoptions from the countries listed so that equivalent ratios would be about 25 per cent higher. Despite this the unadjusted ratios are higher for a majority of countries featured.

Table 7 shows dramatically the changing pattern of intercountry adoption over the past decade from the point of view of states of origin. In 1989, the five countries with the highest level of ICA standardised against births, were (in descending order) Korea, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Haiti. Only one of these – Korea – still features in the top 5 countries. The level of ICA has risen in Bulgaria, Russia, Romania, Guatemala, Vietnam and China, but has

Table 6. Adoptions per 100,000 children aged 0–4; 1998 (and 1995): States of origin sending at least 200 children to the ten[1] countries

Country	Annual number of adoptions 1998	Population under age 5: (millions) 1998	Adoptions per 100,000 aged 0–5 1998	Adoptions per 100,000 aged 0–5 1995
Bulgaria[2]	347	0.38	91.3	55.0
Romania	891	1.06	84.0	39.2
Russia	5,064	7.00	72.3	25.6
South Korea	2,294	3.43	66.8	57.3
[Paraguay][3]	–[3]	0.76	–[3]	[50.1]
Guatemala	1,143	1.79	63.8	30.3
Vietnam	2,375	8.76	27.2	14.3
Colombia	1,162	4.79	24.3	28.2
China	4,621	98.57	4.7	2.3
India	747	115.62	0.6	0.5

Source: Population data from UNICEF Country Statistics; http://www.unicef.org
[1]See notes to Table 4.
[2]Latvia and Lithuania sent less than 200 children in 1998 but have similar overall rates to Bulgaria, resulting from their low numbers in the under-5 population.
[3]Paraguay had no recorded adoptions to the ten countries in 1998.

fallen in Korea, Colombia, the Philippines and Brazil. Chile, Paraguay and Sri Lanka, which had high levels of ICA in 1989, no longer feature in the top eighteen countries.

The table only includes those states of origin sending at least 200 children in 1998 – inclusion of all sending countries would find other states of the former Soviet Union such as Latvia and Lithuania with adoption ratios similar to those recorded for Bulgaria and Russia.

The adoption ratio in sending countries tends to be lower than in receiving countries. This is partly a consequence of the larger number (and larger population) of sending countries. As we indicated above, adoptions to Scandinavia have been equivalent to 1–2 per cent of annual births, while those from Bulgaria and Russia are equivalent to less than 0.5 per cent of births in those countries. However, the latter are underestimates and in the early 1990s the adoption ratio for Romania would have been the equivalent of 4–5 per cent of annual births, although the age-range of the children moving in the peak year would make such a standardisation of limited value.

The standardised measures also offer insight into the potential scale of intercountry adoption. If China had the same level of ICA (measured by an adoption ratio) as Bulgaria, the number of children moving would rise to

Table 7. Adoption ratio (per 1,000 live births) 1998 and 1989: states of origin sending at least 200 children to the ten[1] countries

Country	Adoptions in 1998	Births in 1998 (1,000s)	Adoptions per 1,000 births 1998*	Adoptions per 1,000 births 1989**
Bulgaria	347	71	4.9	–
Romania	891	202	4.4	<0.1
Russia	5,064	1,420	3.6	–
South Korea	2,294	682	3.4	5.4
Guatemala	1,143	393	2.9	0.8
Vietnam	2,375	1,681	1.4	NA
Colombia	1,162	988	1.2	2.5
Haiti	248	253	0.94	1.1
Cambodia	307	364	0.84	–
Poland	326	418	0.78	0.8
Ukraine	237	482	0.49	–
Thailand	333	1,000	0.33	0.3
China	4,855	20,134	0.24	<0.1
Ethiopia	438	2,652	0.17	<0.1
Philippines	322	2,064	0.16	0.4
Brazil	443	3,340	0.13	0.5
Mexico	210	2,335	0.09	<0.1
India	1,084	24,671	0.04	<0.1

*Based on adoptions to 10 receiving countries (see notes to Table 4).
**Kane's figures are derived from 13 countries.
NB: In 1989 the highest ratios included Chile (3.0), Sri Lanka (1.0) and El Salvador (1.0), none of which reached the minimum of 200 ICAs in 1998 used as a criterion for inclusion in the table, although the average number of adoptions from 1980-1989 were 524, 862 and 218 respectively. By 1998 adoptions to Paraguay (ratio of 2.0 in 1989) had virtually ceased.

nearly 100,000, nearly three times the current estimated total for all states of origin.

Demographic influences on intercountry adoption

The most commonly cited "causes" of ICA are the crises of war, famine and disease which make it impossible for poor countries to provide for all their children. ICA continues to be largely a move of children from poor to rich countries (Selman 1998). A Malthusian interpretation would see these crises as demographic in origin! It is, however, evident that the major sources have not been the poorest or highest birth rate countries, that patterns persist long past the "crisis" and that demand for children is as also a key factor. It is

Table 8. Economic and demographic indicators 1998: selected receiving states

Country	Adoption ratio 1997/8	Per capita GNP (US $) 1997	Infant mortality rate, 1998	Total fertility rate 1998
Norway	11.2	36,100	4	1.9
Denmark	10.8	34,890	5	1.7
Sweden	9.9	26,200	4	1.6
Switzerland	9.2	43,060	5	1.5
France	5.3	26,200	5	1.7
USA	4.2	29,080	7	2.0
Netherlands	4.6	25,830	5	1.5
Italy	3.9	20,170	6	1.2
Finland	3.2	24,790	4	1.7
Australia	1.0	20,650	5	1.8

Source: State of the World's Children 2000.

instructive to note that states of origin are not all high birth rate countries facing Malthusian population growth, but include countries with total fertility rates below that of the major receiving states (see Tables 8 and 9). That South Korea, China, Thailand and the former Communist states of Eastern Europe are sending children to the United States and Sweden, when they have birth levels below replacement level must give pause for thought.

The economic disparities in per capita GNP are of course vast; $20–36,000 for the receiving countries; less than $4,000 for all the sending countries other than Korea ($10,550) and Brazil ($4,790). Similarly, the differences in infant mortality are substantial: 4 to 7 per 1,000 for the receiving states; up to 110 per 1,000 for the states of origin. However, it must be noted that of the eighteen countries listed only seven had a per capita GNP less than $1,000 for a year in a year (1997) in which UNICEF's *State of the World's Children* gives the average per capita GNP for the fifty least developed nations as only $256. The major sending countries are not the poorest in the world and Ethiopia is the only representative from Africa.

Demographic pressures and intercountry adoption

Three "sending" countries have dominated the story of intercountry adoption in the 1990s: Romania, China and Russia. Romanian adoptions are thought to have accounted for at least a third of all intercountry adoptions in 1990/1 (DCI 1991), but this was short-lived as the Romanian government reacted to international criticism. Since 1995 it is China and Russia who have dominated

Table 9. Economic and demographic indicators 1998: selected states of origin

Country	Adoption ratio (1998)	Per capita GNP (US$) 1997	Total fertility rate 1998	Infant mortality rate 1998
Bulgaria	4.9	1,170	1.2	14
Romania	4.4	1,410	1.2	21
Russia	3.6	2,680	1.3	21
South Korea	3.4	10,550	1.7	5
Guatemala	2.9	1,580	4.9	41
Vietnam	1.4	310	2.6	31
Colombia	1.2	2,180	2.8	25
Haiti	0.94	380	4.3	91
Cambodia	0.84	300	4.6	104
Poland	0.78	3,590	1.5	10
Ukraine	0.49	750	1.4	17
Thailand	0.33	2,740	1.7	30
China	0.24	860	1.8	38
Ethiopia	0.17	110	6.3	110
Philippines	0.16	1,200	3.6	32
Brazil	0.13	4,790	2.3	36
Mexico	0.09	3,700	2.7	28
India	0.04	370	3.1	69

Sources: Population and Economic data from UNICEF country statistics.

adoptions to the United States, accounting for more than half of the record number of 16,396 in 1999. All three countries have experienced particular demographic pressures to which intercountry adoption has seemed to offer a relevant – if minor and inappropriate – response.

Romania after the fall of Ceausescu

The flood of children from Romania in the early 1990s was triggered by media images of desperately overcrowded institutions, but the crisis in those institutions had built up over the previous 25 years of rule by dictator Ceausescu whose pro-natalist policies had banned legal abortion. Following the fall of Ceausescu, abortion was legalised and within a year the number of recorded abortions was three times the number of live births (Hord et al. 1991). By 1995 the total fertility rate (1.5) was well below replacement level and it has fallen further since (see Table 9).

Despite this, the rate of adoption from Romania has been rising in recent years – by 1996 Romania was fourth as a source of children in the USA and for Euradopt agencies. Renewed charges of trafficking in children (News-

night, 2nd March 2000) may reverse this trend, as Romania was shown to lack the control over ICA expected of a country which has ratified the Hague Convention, an issue discussed at the Special Commission of 28 November –1 December 2000. Planned new legislation is hoped to resolve some of these problems.

China's one child policy

China's "One child policy" has created a crisis in the rejection of girl babies. By 1990 there was talk of hundreds of thousands of "missing girls" as male sex ratios reached over 110 (Johansson & Nygren 1991). This has been variously attributed to infanticide, selective abortion and non-registration of births (sometimes associated with de facto adoption). Johansson estimated that as many as half of the missing girls were adopted intracountry.

Inter-country adoption increased from 1990 and especially after the Adoption Law was implemented in April 1992 and had built up to 4,206 in the USA alone in 1998, Yet even if the number of adoptions from China were to rise to 10,000 per annum this would be barely significant when set alongside the total number of annual births [21,726,000 in 1995] or the population under 5 [5 million in 1995]. Johnson et al. (1998) note a rise in infant abandonment (predominantly female) in recent years, citing official (under)estimates of 100–200,000 a year with 8–10,000 domestic adoptions. There have also been reports of poor families "selling" unplanned babies to richer couples in China.

China charges prospective adopters a flat rate fee of $3,000 (which is said to be a contribution towards improving services for children) – a sum more than three times the per capita GNP in 1998 (see Table 9), which may make it difficult for the country to reverse the rise in overseas adoptions.

The Russian Federation after the fall of Communism

The recent rise of adoptions from Russia is associated with one of the most dramatic demographic reversals in recent times. Between 1989 and 1994, life expectancy fell from 73 to 65 and the number of male deaths rose from 762,000 to 1,226,000: – deaths to men in their forties trebled over the same period. Like Romania, Russia has a low birth rate, but the recent rise in mortality has led to a situation in which annual deaths exceed annual births by 50 per cent. The Russian population is declining and in twenty years time there could be a chronic labour shortage. So can Russia afford to send its children to the old enemy? In one sense, no – but nor can it afford the costs of the growing number of children in institutions. Children adopted from Russia include many abandoned by poor mothers and many of these have foetal

alcohol syndrome (McGuinness, 1999). A similar story is found in other parts of the former Soviet Union such as Latvia, Lithuania and the Ukraine. Current projections for the latter country are for population to halve in the next fifty years (Gerasymenko & Gerasymenko 2001).

What these three examples indicate is that a demographic history of adoption opens up the possibility of linking intercountry adoption to demographic crises in states of origin, as well as to demographic trends (e.g., a rise in legal abortion) in receiving countries. But such crises may then establish a pattern that is hard to reverse even when the initial crisis is over, as has been argued in respect of our final example, Korea.

50 years of intercountry adoption from South Korea

Korea continues to be a sending country with one of the highest rates of ICA. Since intercountry adoption began in 1955, more than 120,000 children have been placed for adoption in other countries. Over 70 per cent of these went to the United States, where the number of Korean "orphans" entering the country peaked at over 6,000 in the mid-1970s. Initially, many of the infants placed were of mixed race – the fathers being US military servicemen – but by the 1990s there were very few mixed race children placed for adoption.

Since the Olympic Games of 1988 there has been constant talk of reduction and eventual end to ICA. In 1989, the Ministry of Social Affairs proposed a schedule which would have reduced the number of intercountry adoptions to 1,700 by 1995 and raised the number of domestic adoptions to 3,500. However, by 1998 ICAs were still above 2,000 a year and domestic adoptions below 1,500. A new 20-year plan was announced in 1997 to phase out ICA by the year 2020.

South Korea today is a prosperous country with a high level of education and a low birth rate, but there is a continuing problem over stigma of unmarried parenthood and in the absence of a comprehensive welfare system it is impossible for a poor single mother to keep her child. Sarri et al. (1998) argue that ICA has discouraged Korea from developing an adequate child welfare programme. The example of South Korea reminds us that the factors influencing ICA may change over time and that there may also be a factor of inertia that makes it difficult to stop intercountry adoption.

Conclusion

I have shown above that the number of intercountry adoptions is much higher than many recent estimates and have argued that it is now at its highest ever level in global terms – confounding predictions from the early 1990s that ICA

was a phenomenon that had peaked. It seems probable that the first years of the new millennium are likely to see even more children moving across national boundaries. Intercountry adoption remains – as it has always been – predominantly a movement of children from poorer to richer countries.

The level of adoption is determined by the demand for children in rich western countries and the availability of children in those countries afflicted by poverty and other ills (Lovelock 2000). Several commentators (e.g., Weil 1984; Hoksbergen in Selman 2000) argue that the nature of intercountry adoption has changed over time and that the humanitarian motivation of the early years has given way to a demand from childless couples. The picture emerging in the United States – with numbers doubling in the last five years – suggests that there is a growing demand for young light-skinned healthy babies, which has led to a trade in children from and to countries, in some of which regulation of intercountry adoption falls far short of even the minimal standards sought by the Hague Convention.

Whatever the trends in individual countries, the recent rise in total numbers of intercountry adoptions makes the need for continuing research on the "epidemiological parameters" of the movement of children (Kane 1993), and on the alternatives for children and birth families in the states of origin, even more crucial than it was in the early 1990s.

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