



October 28th, 1996

Vol. 2, No. 6

Americans Adopting Orphans Newsletter

News from China

Processing Time

Why are things taking a little longer than they have in the past? Things got a little backed up in China. In retrospect, it is all pretty understandable.

- 1) In June, there was a major organizational change. Where two ministries had been administering adoption (the Ministries of Justice and Civil Affairs), one was placed in authority (the Ministry of Civil Affairs), and a single China Center of Adoption Affairs was established. This effectively doubled the number of applications being sent to the Ministry of Civil Affairs personnel.
- 2) In July, a new director was named to the China Center of Adoption Affairs.
- 3) In August the main processing areas of the Center were moved, expanded, and new staff were added.
- 4) In September, the (estimated) 1,000 adoption applications that were in the possession of the Ministry of Justice were transferred to the China Center of Adoption Affairs. About 6 months worth of work delivered all at once.

Now think about where you work. What would it be like there if all of this happened to you. That's right, things got a little behind.

While things are a little slower than we would all like them to be, processing continues in China. The family who most recently returned from China (with a very handsome baby boy), reported seeing and speaking with many Americans with babies at the US Consulate in Guang Zhou (and this was during the HUGE Trade Fair during which many agencies avoid sending families to China). Apparently, though it is currently slow getting referrals and travel permissions when looking at it from the perspective of individual families, from an overall perspective Chinese adoption authorities are issuing approvals at a phenomenal rate. They are working very hard to catch up. We are seeing referrals taking 2 to 6 months (on the longer end of the spectrum for families who already have children) and travel permission being issued in 2 to 3 months (this has been a little more consistent).

News from Americans Adopting Orphans

Congratulations to families in all phases of their adoptions.

We have been very busy since our last newsletter, and our clients have seen it all. We have welcomed 25 new clients, applications have been sent to China, children have been assigned by Beijing, families have received permission to travel, and we have added to the population of the United States. Hurray for the new babies and their families.

Announcing our First Schedule of Classes

Just in time for National Adoption Month, we are proud to announce 16 classes taught by 9 different instructors. These classes are not limited to the clients of **Americans Adopting Orphans**. We have chosen to open our **Education Center** to the general public. Even though we are a small private agency, we believe that anyone who is interested in learning about adoption should be encouraged and enabled in their pursuit of knowledge. Many of these classes should soon be available on video tape.

News from the Net

Changes in Special Needs Regulations and Enforcement?

The interpretation of Special Needs regulations and how they might be applied to families since the naming of the new Director of the China Center for Adoption Affairs has been causing stress levels to rise as speculation and rumors increase. Indications are that the China Center will indeed begin assigning children with true medical conditions to families who already have children, or who are under 35 years of age. Our experience has been that the medical conditions are still relatively minor. In one case, one of our families was assigned a child with a "minor cleft palate" (apparently no lip involvement). We have not heard of any assignments of children with uncorrectable or severe medical conditions. We have always told our families who may be asked to adopt a special needs child to be prepared for such an assignment, and we continue to ask the China Adoption Center for as much flexibility as possible in their assignments.

Longer Wait Times for Some Families Explained

Families who may be asked to adopt children with medical conditions have been slower to receive assignments of children. It seems to be the consensus of the adoption professionals who post on the net that relatively few Chinese Social Welfare Centers have sent information about children with medical conditions to Beijing. In the past, both Ministries have simply been assigning healthy children to almost all applicants. There has been little need for Beijing to take the time to sort families into categories, and assign different kinds of children to different families. Now that it appears more attention will be paid to existing adoption regulations, there has been a logistics problem in having current physical examinations and Hepatitis tests performed on a wider variety of children, and having that information sent to Beijing. While there are plenty of kids with minor medical conditions in the Social Welfare Centers, and plenty of families willing to adopt them, it is just taking a while to get all of the paperwork in the right place at the right time.

Some Agencies Turn Away Clients

It has been reported that some adoption agencies are unwilling to accept or process clients who may be asked by the Chinese authorities to adopt children with medical conditions. Even after some families have gathered all of their documents, and have almost completed preparing them to be sent to China, they have been told that their applications will not be sent. This has been devastating to those families. While **Americans Adopting Orphans** advises families that waiting times may be longer, and that they may receive an assignment of a child with a medical condition, we continue to welcome families who are under 35, or who already have children.

What's in a Name?

Part of the excitement of preparing for a new baby is in deciding on a name. Although the children coming to your family may have been given a Chinese name by her or his caretakers, you may be more comfortable changing, modifying, or totally discarding the existing name in favor of "something more American." Or you may choose to keep the child's name without any alteration to reflect her/his Chinese origins. Another option is to make all or part of the Chinese name a part of a new "American" name to allow the child to maintain a tie with her Chinese heritage. For example, Katherine Li Jin Ptasnik. This could also permit the child to decide, when they are older, the name by which they are referred.

Researching the meaning of your child's Chinese name may be helpful in making these types of decisions. Based on how it sounds and what it means, you may find that it meshes with your preferences or that it just doesn't work for you.

It is common for male children to be given a first (and possibly middle) name reflecting a desired masculine trait such as strength or intelligence. For example, "Shi" meaning stone. Female children receive names denoting feminine attributes such as beauty and grace. For example, "Mei" meaning beautiful. Many times, the name "Xiao" is also part of a child's name. Xiao usually means "little," so adding Xiao to another name creates a diminutive name like "Xiao Ji" meaning little chicken. In China family names come before given names. So Yang Mei is Mrs. Yang, with Mei being the given name.

When a child arrives at an orphanage, usually as a small infant, many times they are given a family name which follows the year of the Chinese zodiac in which the child was born. For instance, this year is the Year of the Rat, so if you are assigned a child born this year of the zodiac, your child (in addition to the children in your travel group), may very well have the family name Su which sounds like the word for rat but has a different character than that of the rodent. (They are homonyms.) The character that represents the name Su has little meaning on its own (kind of like Jones her in the US).

At a few orphanages, it is common practice to give all incoming children the same family name as the orphanage director. So if the director of your child's orphanage is Mr. Zhang, your child could have many "sisters" with the Zhang family name. At other orphanages, children are given a name that is a contraction of the city at which the orphanage is located. For instance, children at the FoShan City Children's Welfare Institute may be given the family name "Fo."

Kiss the Cook

Some folks are intimidated about cooking Chinese style meals at home. It can be confusing to enter the "ethnic food" section of a supermarket to shop for ingredients. The labels may be written in a language you cannot understand and the pictures of the food on the packages may not be recognizable or appealing. But you needn't use a specific recipe or have a lot of fancy equipment, just begin with basic ingredients and modify according to your individual tastes. It may not resemble or taste like the fancy dish you had at your local Chinese restaurant, but with practice and a sense of adventure, you can create wonderful meals for your family from simple beginnings. It only takes a little familiarization and preparation, to begin experimenting with different dishes, sauces, and flavors.

Native Chinese people have their own individual tastes and preferences just like we Americans do. However, there seem to be several universal principles used in Chinese cooking. All vegetables must be cooked. It is uncommon in China to eat raw vegetables, rather they are steamed or stir fried. There are regional differences in the spiciness of foods in terms of how hot they should be, but most people in China use garlic and ginger liberally in their cooking. Soy sauce, sugar, green onion, vinegar, sesame oil, red pepper oil, and star anise (a flavor kind of like licorice) are used to create great combinations of flavors. Nowadays there is an abundance of pre-prepared sauces for cooking and marinating available in our grocery stores, not just in specialty stores. It is easy to find a bottle of stir-fry sauce, hoisin sauce, or oyster sauce to get off to a running start. There are also packets of dry seasonings that can be added to dishes to impart that perfect blend of spices to your homemade concoctions.

To help get you started, the following simple recipe may give you the inspiration to include more Chinese dishes in your repertoire and add a little Chinese culture to your home. Enjoy!

Stir-Fried Chicken with Vegetables

| | | | |
|---------|--|--------|------------------------------|
| 1 tsp. | Cooking wine | 2 tsp. | Soy sauce |
| 1 | Garlic clove, crushed | 2 tsp. | Cornstarch |
| 1/4 C | Oil | 1 | Green onion, cut into pieces |
| 2 | Chicken breasts, skinned, deboned, and cut into 1 inch cubes | | |
| 1/2 C | Bamboo shoots (canned, strips or sliced, found in the Asian foods section) | | |
| 1/2 C | Water chestnuts (canned, strips or sliced, found in Asian foods section) | | |
| 1 stalk | Celery, leaves removed, sliced into 1/4 to 1/2 inch pieces for uniform cooking | | |
| 1/2 C | chicken broth | | |

Seasonings:

| | |
|----------|--|
| 1 Tbs. | soy sauce |
| 2 tsp. | sugar |
| 1/4 tsp. | Chinese Five Spice (found in regular spice section in most stores) |

Mix chicken with cooking wine, soy sauce, garlic, and cornstarch; marinate for 20 minutes. Heat frying pan or wok and add oil. Add marinated chicken to hot oil and stir fry chicken until it is cooked. Remove from wok, leaving oil in wok. Stir fry green onion, bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, and celery for 3 to 4 minutes. Add chicken, seasonings, and chicken broth. Cook until broth thickens and is bubbling. Serve over rice.