

WINDOW TO CHINA

Break the Cultural Isolation
By Joshua Zhong, President

In the entire year of 1994, the China Center of Adoption Affairs received about 1000 adoption applications from all over the world. In December 2000, in just one month, the CCAA received more than 1000 applications from American adoptive families alone. There is no doubt that after observing and hearing so many successful China adoption stories, more and more families are becoming believers in Chinese adoption and are rushing to catch up the China adoption fever.

There are many contributing factors in the success of Chinese adoption: the sound legal process as detailed in Chinese Adoption Law; the warm reception that adoptive families receive from the Chinese people and the local officials; the relatively affordable cost; the excellent reputation of few adoption agencies; the overall good health of the children; and the generally satisfactory physical and mental development of the adopted children in America.

It is not uncommon to hear from adoptive families how wonderful, beautiful and smart their children are, or that their children are identified as gifted and talented students, or that their children are the top readers in their class. There is no doubt that many adopted Chinese children are doing extremely well both physically and intellectually. However, the long term emotional and psychological development is often over shadowed, or even worse, ignored by some families in face of how wonderful their children are doing now .

There are many similarities between Korean and Chinese adoptions because the two countries share a similar cultural, environmental and social background. According to research and adoptees' testimonies, adopted Korean children growing up in American families, who did not make a conscientious effort to provide a positive cultural environment, tend to have a more difficult time when they reach their teenage years, dealing with such daunting questions as: Who am I? Why do my parents look different from me? What's wrong with my oriental look and background?

John and Suzie adopted Sarah from Korean in the 1980s. They were so happy to finally have a child after struggling with infertility. Suzie gave up her promising career to become a full time mom. To protect Sarah, John and Suzie decided to isolate her from the local Asian community and send her to a good private school. They were determined to raise Sarah as a regular American kid. Sarah did well until she entered middle school, where for the first time and then quite frequently, she was called "Chinese eyes" or "pancake face". Knowing very little of her own background and having no other Asian friends to share with, Sarah quickly became lost and depressed. Her grades fell and she no longer wanted to go to school.

Most of the adopted Chinese children living in America are under ten years old. They are still, at least in most of their parents' eyes, in the cute, smart, obedient, or no-problem-at-

all stage. The truth is it would be dangerous and irresponsible to believe that everything will be as rosy as it is today, five or ten years from now. Some of these wonderful children adjust emotionally or psychologically if they are raised in an isolated or culturally ignorant honey jar; if we ignore the relevance of their Chinese cultural heritage. I truly believe that all of us, both adoptive families and adoption agencies, should take positive, proactive steps, integrating the Chinese culture into their upbringing from the first day they arrive at the United States.

Malisa came to our Joyous Chinese Cultural School in 1996 when she was about two years old. Since then, she has never missed a class. Today, she can not only carry on a simple conversation in Chinese with her parents, but she also performs with the Chinese dancing team. She can't wait to see her Chinese friends at the Joyous Chinese Cultural School. She also loves to share with her American friends the Chinese songs and stories she learned from cultural school. She tells her friends, "I am adopted from China and I am very proud to be a Chinese American."

Decorate her room with Chinese art, take her to an Asian food market, make Chinese food together, befriend other Chinese families, study Chinese together, attend a Chinese cultural camp, or take a heritage tour in China. Your adopted child will benefit forever from your effort because you are contributing to her positive cultural understanding. In return, she will be your forever pride and lovely child.