

SARS, MEDIA AND CHINA ADOPTION

By Joshua Zhong, Co-founder and President

When the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) announced on May 15, 2003, that it would postpone the issuing of child match and travel notices and recommend adoptive families not come to China in the midst of SARS epidemic, U.S. media throughout the country jumped on the news and, without reading and analyzing the announcement carefully and responsibly, chose the most sensational words to communicate with their readers. USA Today stated: "China Suspends Foreign Adoptions." The Washington Post says: "China Freezes Adoption." The Denver Post announced that China is "cracking down on adoption."

The truth is that the Chinese government is neither suspending, nor freezing, nor cracking down on international adoption. The May 15 announcement basically states: *For the protection of adoptive families and to bring the SARS epidemic quickly under control, the China Center Adoption Affairs (CCAA) has decided to delay the mailing of child match information and travel notices. This is a temporary measure and it should not affect other parts of CCAA operation, including receiving and reviewing adoption dossiers. It will also not affect those families who had received their travel notices prior to the announcement.*

I received "urgent" phone calls from more than thirty major newspapers, television stations and radio stations fishing for news about how the "China adoption closure is affecting CCAI's operation" or "if CCAI is still in operation." When I told them that we are still mailing out adoption information packets, receiving adoption applications and continuing to send adoptive families to China, many reporters seemed surprised or disappointed. I could tell that what I was telling them truthfully was not exactly what they were looking for. Understandably, we quickly lost our status as a hot media target.

After living in this country for almost two decades, I have noticed that the majority of American media tends to see the communist China in a negative light. There is no doubt that there are many aspects of life in China that are worthy of criticism, reform, transformation, or even revolution. However, China today is changing rapidly and its government is trying to make well-meaning decisions everyday--just like many other countries--to meet its people's growing needs and concern.

No one can deny that the Chinese government has done a marvelous job in turning China adoption into one of the most successful international adoption programs in the world. Its pro-adoptive child and families adoption law, its hands-on governmental control and supervision, and its willingness to improve services contribute directly to the overall good reputation of China adoption program. The CCAA's policy on SARS reflects their concern for the families and its focus on the long-term healthy endeavor to find loving homes for abandoned Chinese children.

Since May 15, CCAI has successfully sent more than sixty adoptive families to Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shanxi, Beijing and Chongqing to pick up their children. All the provincial registration offices have been very cooperative and conducted their business professionally and cordially. Families followed willingly all the precautionary rules by limiting their mobility beyond their hotels and spent a great deal of quality time with their children. Neither the adoptive parents nor their children are infected by SARS. The good news was that the usually crowded White Swan Hotel was much quieter because you saw almost no adoptive families from any other agencies. ☺

It would be the safest and easiest decision for any adoption agency to not allow their families who hold travel notices to travel to China. However, that would be the most irresponsible decision an adoption agency could make. When an adoptive family gets their match and holds their child's photos in their hearts, they want to go right away. If at all possible, it is an adoption agency's responsibility and mission to exhaust all resources and channels to enable the union of a child and his or her parents.

It has always been CCAI's policy and practice to openly communicate with our adoptive families on all issues and situations throughout the adoption process, and deal with crisis, governmental or international, with great sensitivity, respect, calm, and strength. Many potentially damaging domestic and international events have happened since China opened its door to international adoption in 1992. None in fact has derailed the progress and direction of China adoption.

Nonetheless, the SARS panic in China and around the world once again proves that adoption is not exactly smooth sailing. Adopting a child is not much different than giving birth biologically. Ups and downs fill the seemingly endless adoption journey. However, it is a part of the adoption "pregnancy." It tests our will, patience and strength. And ultimately, it brings our dream child closer and closer, and eventually home to be together as a family.

Our hearts go out to those families who are anxiously waiting for their child match. I know the child match will come in God's timing and you will fly to China to unite with your little angel. So hang in there. It will happen.

An end note: By the time this commentary was written on June 5, CCAI received thirty Waiting Children information from the China Center of Adoption Affairs. It is the clearest indication that CCAA is still working and I am confident that more child matches will be on its way to us very soon.