

CHINA SPEEDS UP ADOPTION PROCESS And A Historical Prospective

By Joshua Zhong, Co-founder and President

I will always remember the good old days when it took only about six months for an adoptive family to complete their adoption process, from submitting their application to CCAI to going to China to pick up their child. That was between 1994 and 1996 when China adoption was relatively unknown to many people.

With the positive stories of China adoption spreading fast, applications for China adoption started to dramatically increase. As a result, the wait between DTC (Dossier to China) and child match lengthened to five or six months between 1996 and 1998. Nonetheless, it was still pretty common for an adoptive family to complete the process within ten months to a year.

Two major events happened in the following two years that drastically altered the landscape of China adoption. On April 2, 1999, the Chinese government revised the original Adoption Law, which was first published in 1992. The revised law lowered the age limit for adoptive parents from 35 to 30, and the non-childless couples who were only qualified to adopt special need children in the past were now allowed to adopt healthy children. In the same year, the China Center of Adoption Affairs was appointed and installed as the only governmental agency in control of receiving and approving adoption applications and matching children. The repetitive work resulting from the power struggle between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Civil Affairs since 1992 had come to an official closure.

As a result, the amount of applications every adoption agency received increased 25 to even 50%. In the meantime, however, the pace of the increase of children available for international adoption started to fall behind. The problem of “more applicants but fewer children” added unanticipated stress to the CCAA. The DTC-to-child-match wait was stretched to around ten months. By the time the CCAA welcomed its new Director in 2001, the wait had expanded to an alarming point—fourteen to even fifteen months.

To respond to the constant complaints from adoption agencies, adoptive parent, and even orphanages who would like their children adopted quickly so they could receive much-needed donations, the CCAA decided to take a well-measured gamble by publishing the well known “Adoption Quota System” in October, 2001. Instead of passively accepting unlimited numbers of dossiers from adoption agencies around the world, most of them coming from the USA, the CCAA assigned quotas to each agency based on its three-year average between 1998 and 2000. CCAI’s quota was 509, the largest among all agencies.

Although it was very controversial, the quota system has been the most effective temporary tool of quantity control for CCAA. It shifted the pressure from the CCAA to adoption agencies. It forced almost all agencies to take tremendous pains to control their monthly numbers for a whole year, something that was next to impossible. The good

news for CCAA was that by the fourth quarter of 2002, the anticipated result of the quota system became very obvious. First time since 1998, they had some breathing room. They started to plot another critical move to speed up process—to shorten the wait from fifteen months to about ten months.

First, knowing that after twelve months' struggle of "self-control", the adoption agencies would not be able to quickly recover their former strength of recruiting, the CCAA announced in October 2002 the elimination of the quota for 2003. Although this was a good news, many agencies were not able to immediately get prospective adoptive families back in to their China program. As a result, as the CCAA had correctly predicted, the CCAA did not see a major surge of dossiers within the first few months after the elimination of the quota.

Second, the CCAA stepped up its adoptive children recruiting by encouraging small orphanages that were far away from the provincial capital to build a network with bigger orphanages that have more international adoption experience. This "one-big- orphanage-assisting-a-few-smaller-orphanages" strategy open the doors to many adoptive children living in remote and formerly "closed" orphanages. With the help from the big-brother orphanages, the smaller orphanages learned new ideas and technology in caring for their children. Most importantly for the CCAA, more and more children's profiles started to arrive at the CCAA. The CCAA was ready to make the big move.

Suddenly, it came the SARS in early 2003. Fears dominated national and international headlines. Like all other Chinese governmental agencies, the CCAA decided to hunker down to wait for the pass of the dark storm.

Immediately after the World Health Organization announced on June 24, 2003, that it would be safe to travel to China again, the CCAA released all the delayed child matches in less than two months. By September 2003, the wait to child match was cut to just over ten months. The CCAA has successfully accomplished its goal: Shorten the wait to match to around ten months.

The CCAA is very confident that the ten-month wait will be the norm for a while. The secret behind their confidence is their powerful weapon of the "quota". The CCAA is willing to use it again if the wait gets longer.

The shorter wait is good for adoptive families. Most importantly, it is beneficial to the adoptive children. The bottom line is that the family can fulfill their dream a little faster, the children will go home earlier, thanks to the CCAA.