

WINDOW TO CHINA

By Joshua Zhong

Yes, Boys Are Available!

After a L-O-N-G seven months' wait for their child match, John & Mary were thrilled to receive "The Call" from CCAI. They had been matched with a beautiful... ten-month-old... baby BOY!

Although their social worker had briefly touched on the issue of gender in adoption during their Home Study process, they really did not take it to heart. All their friends who had adopted from China had been matched with girls. Wasn't that how China adoption worked? They hadn't even bothered to specify the gender of the child they wished to adopt in their Adoption Petition. It simply stated: We would like a young and healthy child.

Now suddenly, John realized that he needed to repaint the baby room and Mary had to start shopping again. They were very surprised, but equally ecstatic. "Finally we will have a child," they thought. "Let's hang on to all the pretty dresses for our next China adoption!"

Yes, boys are available for adoption from China.

Since 1994, more than 140 boys (compared to about 4,900 girls) have found loving families through CCAI, and the percentage of families matched with a boy has grown higher in the past two years. In fact, among the children in our Waiting Child Program, a program for older and special needs children, the percentage of boys is as high as 50%.

True, that number is lower in the "traditional" program. While the vast predominance of adopted children are still beautiful little Chinese girls, boys have been popping up more and more often. John & Mary's story may be rare, but it's not impossible. If you request to be matched with a girl, you can expect to be picking out frilly dresses. BUT, if you specifically request a boy or even select "No Preference," you could be joining the ranks of those parents proudly bringing home a little boy from China.

So where do these boys come from? Bet you thought only girls are abandoned in China. The truth is that although a large percentage of children living in orphanages are girls, there are also a lot of boys. Boys end up in abandonment and living in an orphanage mainly because of three reasons.

Special Needs

For as long as little Jack Qiang could remember, the other children in the orphanage had always made fun of his physical defect, his crippled leg as a result of polio. But after he came to the US at the age of six and started first grade, it seemed that no one paid attention to his physical problem. He became friends with a lot of kids, and he finally felt accepted. Then his adoptive parents decided to send him to the weekend Chinese language school run by the local Chinese community. After his first day of school, Jack came home in tears and did not want to go back. When his parents asked him why, he told them: "Those Chinese kids made fun of me!"

In China, giving birth to a physically handicapped child is seen as shameful. Among many traditional Chinese, it is believed that the parents must have done something wrong in their previous lives to be punished with the birth of a handicapped child. It is also a source of tremendous social pressure to be born handicapped. Often, you and your parents are the subject of rude stares or

name-calling. It is very hard to survive in a society where handicapped people are seen as second-class citizens. In addition, as medical costs have skyrocketed in recent years and passed beyond the financial ability of many ordinary people (whose modest monthly income can only maintain a simple lifestyle), many parents are overwhelmed by the potential costs of caring for a handicapped child.

So when a child is born with physical defects, especially external ones, he or she might face abandonment so the parents can not only avoid social discrimination and burdensome medical costs, but also have the chance to try again for a healthy child. In many orphanages, at least half of the children are physically or mentally handicapped.

Children Born Out of Wedlock or as a Result of Extra-Marital Affairs

China is an old country; its society is overall traditional and conservative. There are many social taboos and pressures that guide and control people's way of life and behaviors. Having a child before marriage or giving birth to a child that does not belong to your recognized marriage is one of the biggest taboos in China. By committing this "social crime," you will be labeled as "immoral," "shameful," or a "futureless person." It is mission-impossible to raise an out-of-wedlock or extra-marital child. Facing the tradition of more than 5,000 years and relentless societal pressure, a woman in such a situation is truly powerless. To survive or continue with their lives, these women have no choice but to abandon a child that "does not belong to them," no matter if the child is a boy or girl, healthy or handicapped.

Over-Quota Birth

When Mao Zedong took power in China in 1949 and established Communist China, he was convinced that the World War Three was imminent. An expert in guerrilla warfare, Mao believed that it was the quantity of human life, not the number of airplanes or tanks, that would determine the final outcome of any war. As a result, he madly encouraged larger families and multiple siblings. When Mao passed away in 1976, the population in China had rapidly reached 800 million and the economy had taken a nose-dive to the verge of bankruptcy. As such, the new leadership put a sudden brake on the population growth by implementing the infamous "One Child Policy," as well as the "Late Marriage and Late Birth Policy," aiming to drastically contain the population growth rate and reduce the global impact of population explosion.

Until recently, the penalty for *chao sheng*, or over-quota birth, has been severe and unbearable for most families in China. Nonetheless, many couples are still willing to take the risk and try again if the first child is a girl, or incredibly if the first child is a boy. A second child, who turns out to be same gender as the older sibling, may face abandonment.

It is commonly known that girls, especially those born over the quota, usually end up abandoned simply because parents want boys to carry their family names. But that is only partially true. The whole truth is that in a traditional family, it is always considered good luck to have both boys and girls, because it is believed that while boys carry on the family name, it is the girls who care for their parents in their old age. Thus, in a strange twist, when a couple gives birth to a son, they usually want to try to have a girl. If the next child is another boy, they may consider abandoning the boy, healthy or handicapped, to avoid the steep penalties. In recent years, more and more couples who already have boys will choose to adopt a girl to get that good luck.

The sources and reasons of child abandonment are tragically multi-faceted. Both girls, primarily, and boys are victimized. Adoption is the only dignity-restoring and life-saving way to impact at least some of the children living in the orphanages. My heartfelt thanks go to all of you who have adopted and those who are in the process of bringing home an abandoned child.