



# LOVE

WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

When LWB first began helping orphaned children in China back in 2003, formal domestic adoption of the children in our programs was very rare. What a difference a decade makes! Now every month, children leave our programs to become the sons and daughters of families throughout China. In fact, almost 90% of Chinese children officially adopted today remain in their birth country. In this issue of our newsletter, we explore the important topic of domestic adoption.

**In 2013,  
there were  
21,230  
official  
domestic  
adoptions in  
China, while  
foreigners  
adopted just  
3,320  
Chinese  
children to  
overseas  
homes.**

Source:  
Ministry of Civil Affairs

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### 1) What is hukou and why is it important in adoption?

Hukou is a person's official family registration in China, which can impact his or her ability to receive education, health care, and employment. Children living in official government orphanages are issued a hukou registration through the social welfare institute. If a family domestically adopts a child from an orphanage, they can then legally transfer the child's hukou to their family through Civil Affairs. However, if a family adopts a child who is not from an orphanage, it is almost impossible for that child to get hukou in the local community. This makes it extremely difficult for the child to get permission to go to local school.

### 2) Can a family adopt if they already have a biological child?

Yes, in many locations. A family with their own biological child can usually adopt from an orphanage, although national law still says the parents should be childless.

### 3) How long does it take to do a domestic adoption?

Domestic adoption goes much more quickly than international adoption. In most cases, the family wishing to adopt submits their application materials to the city level Civil Affairs office, along with records on their health status, financial status, and living conditions. The city level officials will conduct an investigation of the family's situation, and if everything is in order they proceed to make the registration for adoption. The process can usually be completed in a matter of weeks to several months. Families doing domestic adoptions in China receive the same official red adoption booklet issued to international families. With that certificate, the child can legally receive a family registration (hukou) which will give them the right to attend local schools.



*Rose was domestically adopted this spring. Her new dad is a police officer and her mom stays at home to care for her.*



*Elizabeth was adopted by a family who lives in the city about two hours from her rural orphanage.*



## *Adopting from Foster Care*



*Baby Mei*

LWB runs foster care programs in 16 cities in China, and we are frequently asked by our supporters whether the foster families are allowed to adopt the children they care for. The quick answer is “yes,” but it is still not a common occurrence. The majority of foster families in our programs are quite poor, and without the monthly stipend LWB and the orphanage provides, they would be unable to support raising a child, especially as the child ages. High school education in China is not free (and often expensive,) and so while they can meet a child’s needs with our ongoing support, they would not be able to care for the child without that assistance. However, we have seen several adoptions by our foster care parents who are more financially sound, and we always celebrate when we learn a foster family wishes to adopt. In March, we sat down with several families who had adopted their foster child from LWB’s program.



*Mei’s drawing of her family*

Mei came into LWB foster care as a baby born with cleft lip. She was placed with a family who had one grown son, and they were thrilled to have a little girl in the house. LWB provided Mei with cleft surgery once she made the required weight and arranged her cleft palate surgery when she was three. Just before her fifth birthday, the foster family decided to file the official paperwork to make her their legal daughter. We had not seen Mei for over a year when we visited her family this spring.

As we walked up to their home, the mom ran out ahead and asked us to please not mention the word “adopted” to her daughter, as she said they had not told her she wasn’t their biological child. When we asked the reason, it became clear that it was actually a decision made out of love for their daughter. The mom explained that since China on the whole hasn’t fully embraced adoption yet, she was afraid her daughter would face ridicule or shame in their community if anyone knew. They didn’t want anyone at her school to treat her differently. Her parents felt strongly that by not telling her, they were protecting her.

The moment we walked into the home little Mei greeted us as the perfect host, bringing us oranges and offering us stools to sit on. At one point an orphanage staff member made the mistake of calling her by her original surname name that all the orphanage kids share. Mei immediately corrected her and said, “I’m sorry, you have my name wrong. It is Li Mei.” And she was absolutely correct, as Li is her FAMILY surname now through adoption.\*



*Mei and her mom*

Mei’s mom was absolutely wonderful. She kept hugging our team (full out bear hugs), while starting to cry over how grateful she was that we had foster care in her city so they would meet their daughter. She kept telling us, “I love her so much.” At one point Mei ran out to get some of the drawings she had done in school. When she came back, she showed us a picture she had done of her family. It was herself, her mom, and her dad, with a house and flowers – and of course we thought it was the greatest picture ever. We took a photo, because it summed up so completely the love we want every orphaned child to feel. Mei’s parents proudly showed us her report cards from school, and she is excelling in every subject.

It was a very special afternoon. Since Mei’s mom feels she cannot tell anyone their daughter is adopted, it meant a lot to her to be able to talk to two adoptive moms from the US. She had lots of questions. At one point she grabbed our hands in hers and said, “**Family is not about blood, but love.**” It was a very emotional moment to stand holding hands with a mom in a different country, both of us overcome with just how blessed we are to parent children who were not born to us.

*\*Name changed to protect the family’s privacy*

**Want to help a child know the love of her very own foster mom and dad? Sponsors receive monthly photos and reports on the child whose life they are changing. Visit our [sponsorship page](#) to see which kids are waiting!**

## *Meet Mui Koh: Adoptive Mom in Guangdong*

**We first met Mui in late 2005. Mui is a warm and caring teacher in Guangdong province, who domestically adopted a little girl as a single parent. Mui has done many charity projects for the children still living in orphanage care. We asked her if she would be willing to share her experience as an adoptive mom in China.**



### *1) Why did you first consider adoption as a way to build your family?*

I didn't intend to adopt a baby as a way to build a family. Actually the word adoption had never come across my mind until I followed a friend to visit the local orphanage. There I met Portia, a baby girl who was about 3 or 4 months old. She had an angioma on her thigh, and she gave out a forlorn and shrill cry. I kept thinking about this baby girl the rest of that day, and my feeling told me I would like to do something for her, at least to relieve her pain. Believe it or not, I had lunch with a friend and her cousin who happened to work at the department of pediatrics in a hospital. I told her that baby Portia needed help. So through that cousin's arrangement, I took Portia to the hospital the following day for treatment. After that, I visited the orphanage almost every day to take care of her, as her wound needed to be soaked in salt water. Portia would feed on the milk I bought for her. A few more days passed, and Portia gave me a big big smile when I showed up. I won't forget the scene that she giggled and waved her arms and shook her legs to show her excitement. I was amazed at her being able to recognize me even though I was standing at the door which was about 15 feet away from her. As Portia's wound was healing, one day the doctor asked whether I had decided to adopt Portia. And my decision was of course yes!

### *2) Do you talk openly about adoption with your child? Do you discuss birthparents?*

I told Portia that she was adopted when she was in first grade, because she began to ask why she didn't have a father, and I didn't want her to live a life covered with a lie. She read the journal I kept for her, and I could see that she felt kind of lost. (Yes! She was in primary one and she could read!) She hated thinking that she didn't come from my belly. I then told her that she was from my heart and that was far more precious.

We have discussed her birthparents once or twice. I have asked her whether she wants to find her birthparents one day. She says she doesn't know. "They will just like strangers." That's her answer. We also talked about why she was sent to the orphanage, and we figured out the possibility that her birthparents could not afford to pay the bill for the treatment of her illness.

### *4) Are there any support systems in place in your town to connect with other adoptive families?*

I have never heard of any support systems in my town to connect with other adoptive families. I guess most of the people think that adoption belongs to a personal issue, something within the family. And most Chinese adoptive parents would conceal the truth rather than being open.

### *5) How do you think other people you know view domestic adoption?*

Most people view domestic adoption as a normal case once their curiosity is satisfied. I mean they will show over-concern on you when they know that you have an adoptive child. As the town where I am living is relatively traditional, people still prefer to have children of their own.



### *6) How has adoption changed your life?*

I give no time to think about the question of what my life would be if I didn't adopt Portia. However, adoption does change my life. I was a single woman but now I have been a mum for 8 years. Being a mum is not something like where you get a degree or complete an assignment. It is a commitment that will never change -- a commitment to bring up a child, to grow with that child, to build up a future path and to walk through the path together with that child.

### *7) Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?*

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank LWB which has changed thousands of life in China. I hope all the kids in the world have a loving sweet home.



## *Current Challenges*

With the rise of domestic adoption, there are some current challenges facing China:

- ◇ The question of permanency with adoption: We still see families occasionally return children to the orphanage when the child doesn't meet their expectations, such as being smart enough or well behaved enough, although the vast majority of children placed from our programs are doing very well in their adoptive homes.
- ◇ Pre-adoption education: This is almost nonexistent, although things are changing rapidly. Thanks to the internet, there are growing online resources for families who are considering adoption, although there is still a huge need for more services.
- ◇ Secrecy about a child's beginnings: Families still frequently don't tell a child he or she is adopted. It is important to remember that adoption is still not often talked about openly in China, and so there aren't many resources discussing the long term implications that can occur when a child finds out their past has been hidden from them. Of course it wasn't that long ago in the US that we did very similar things.
- ◇ Post-adoption support: With a lack of social workers and formal adoption agencies, it is difficult for parents to find ongoing support following the adoption, which could be one of the reasons why some families choose to return a child when things don't go as planned.
- ◇ Rising birth defect rate: Just as in countries like the US and Canada, the majority of families wishing to adopt are hoping for a "healthy" child. The number of available healthy infants in Chinese orphanages today is much smaller than the number of families hoping to adopt a child. With 98% of the children now entering orphanage care having medical needs, domestic adoption will continue to grow only as families become more and more open to adopting children born with special needs.

**China's official adoption law has been in place for over 20 years, since 1992. You can read a translated version of the laws on this [official website](#).**

**The child age limit is the same for both domestic and foreign adoption. Children may only be adopted until their 14th birthday.**

## *Faces of Domestic Adoption*



## *“Love is Beautiful”*

### **Ting’s parents could not be prouder of their daughter through adoption.**

Ting\* is a beautiful seven year old girl who was born with cleft lip and taken to a local orphanage. She was part of LWB’s many programs when she was younger and was placed into foster care with a family who had one grown daughter. Very quickly, they fell completely in love with baby Ting, and they made the decision to legally adopt her when she was a preschooler. We visited her family this past spring, and it was wonderful to see her once again. She just began primary school, and her dad told us again and again that she is the smartest child in her class. They had proof to back it up, as they had Ting go and get her many awards and report cards to show she has a 100 in every subject! In fact, Ting’s father told us that his daughter is so brilliant that they are saving every penny they make so she can go to Peking University someday, the Harvard of China.

Ting’s family asked us before the visit to please not mention in front of their daughter that she was adopted. They have chosen to keep this information from neighbors and the school, as they want to protect her from people being hurtful. They told us they spend all of their free time making sure that Ting has a happy life, and the love in the home was palpable. We were even treated to a gymnastics demonstration in the middle of their family room, with Ting’s dad running to get the mat and ballet slippers so she could do an amazing performance for us. Everywhere we looked there were photos of Ting around the home, and her parents were particularly proud of a calendar they made with her photo featured on every month.

When it was finally time to go, we expressed our thanks to Ting’s parents for having us come over, and right away they both shook their heads and said, “No – THANK YOU for helping us find our daughter.” This went back and forth a few times with us thanking them for opening their hearts to adoption while they thanked LWB for allowing them to be her foster parents. Finally we all just laughed and gave each other hugs. Her mom said emphatically, **“Love is beautiful.”**

Ting’s adoption is yet another example that there are indeed families in China open to adopting children who were born with special needs, especially when they are able to fall in love through foster care. We know that China on the whole is moving away from foster care in many locations, as newer and larger orphanages are built, and the children are returned to institutional care. We have always loved foster care, however, because it allows orphaned children (especially those born with medical needs) to become part of the outside community versus spending all of their days inside an institution.



Meeting these families who first fell in love through foster care showed us the beauty of people being able to foster and then adopt. We know their stories are just a tiny snapshot of domestic adoption in China, but we are encouraged that more and more of the children we help through our healing program are then chosen by local families.

*\*Name changed to protect the family’s privacy*

## *Domestic Adoption in the Chinese Media*

- ◆ In 2012, in an effort to curb child trafficking, the Chinese government made changes to its official adoption law. Before, it was possible for a couple to give up their child for adoption to another family, but now orphanages are the only legal institutions allowed to place children for adoption. You can read more about the changes in this [article from China Daily](#).
- ◆ In 2013, Zijian Mu, a documentary film maker in China, released a short film about the families who lost children in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. One set of parents who are too old to conceive again consider domestic adoption in the film (both legal and illegal). You can watch the [video online at ChinaFile](#).
- ◆ This [article from People's Daily](#) in April discusses the long waiting lists that many orphanages have for Chinese couples wishing to adopt a healthy child.
- ◆ [Another article from People's Daily](#) discusses that the long waiting list for healthy babies has led to many families choosing illegal adoption instead.
- ◆ There are over one million Chinese families wishing to adopt, according to this [article by People's Daily](#).

Official reports vary, but authorities in China place the number of orphaned children at between 550,000 and 712,000. Only 20% of those children live in approved government orphanages, which is required for legal adoption and hukou registration.



**In June, [China Daily reported](#) that the number of Chinese children being adopted has actually dropped 10% since last year.**



## *Final Thoughts*



It is a very exciting time in China with regards to official domestic adoption, but it is definitely a new frontier. And just as parents in the US and other Western countries learned some very hard lessons through mistakes we made in the past, China will go through similar issues. For example, as mentioned earlier in this newsletter, the majority of adoptive parents we have spoken with have told us they will not tell their children they are adopted. They feel this is perfectly acceptable since they are the same race, and most parents feel it is a private family matter. Adoptive parents in the US, of course, have learned the hard way that hiding a child's past can cause enormous emotional issues long term, so only time will tell if it becomes an issue among adult Chinese adoptees as well.

I believe with more and more families considering formal domestic adoptions, there will now be a huge need for adoption education and support in China, and many of the parents we have spoken with are truly wanting information on how to best raise their child. I know personally just how much my friendships in the adoption community have meant to me as I try to understand things my own children are going through. I wish the same for moms and dads like us in China. I hope that as domestic adoption continues to expand there, that those of us who have already walked this path can help provide the encouragement and support these new parents will need.

Amy Eldridge, CEO

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