



# baby blues

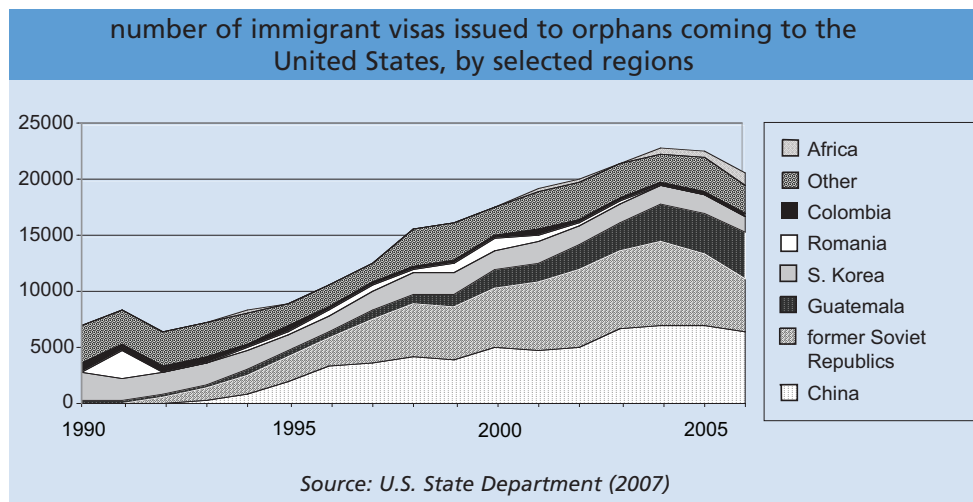
China stunned many would-be adoptive parents last year by abruptly changing its adoption policy. The new policy prohibits single people, the obese, those older than 50, high-school dropouts, newlyweds, and even people on antidepressants from adopting Chinese babies. The government-run China Center for Adoption Affairs says it is imposing these restrictions to reduce the flood of adoption applications from foreigners. They receive far more applications than they can process, and want to ensure that Chinese infants are raised by emotionally and financially secure parents.

This is not the first time a nation has changed its adoption policies. Over the past 20 years, the number of immigrant visas issued to orphans coming to the United States for adoption has varied widely by nation (see chart). In the early 1990s, South Korea and Romania were the top two sources; by the late 1990s, Russia had emerged as the leader. South Korea has remained a steady source, placing roughly 1,750 babies with American families each year over the past two decades. But political upheaval in Romania has changed its adoption policies. After the overthrow of President Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989, Romanian orphanages were teeming with children. Media publicity sparked the demand for adoptions, and in 1991 the United States issued 2,600 visas for adoptions of Romanian babies. Under new political leadership since 2000, Romania has halted international adoptions. Although Russia and Ukraine have been among the top

sources in recent years—with an average of 4,000 visas issued to Russian orphans annually over the past five years—this is also starting to change. As newspapers, Web sites, and blogs recount tales of bureaucratic red tape and painfully long waits, cautious parents are shying away from Russian adoptions.

The change in China's adoption policy is surprising because that nation has been the top source of foreign-born children adopted by Americans since 2000. In 2006, the U.S. State Department granted 6,493 visas to Chinese orphans—nearly one-third of the 20,679 granted. American parents have flocked to China because its system is organized and efficient, and Chinese babies are usually healthy and well cared for.

China's new policy means that large numbers of Americans are now ineligible to adopt Chinese babies. One-quarter of Americans are currently obese. An estimated 4 percent of men and 10 percent of women over age 18 take antidepressants. And one-third of American men and women between 35 and 44—the most common age group for foreign adoptions—are unmarried. Many of these prospective parents will turn to other nations with less restrictive policies, like Guatemala, Vietnam, and Kazakhstan. Undaunted by China's new restrictions, they believe that their ability to be loving parents is not impaired by the occasional Prozac pill, a little extra cellulite, or the decision to bypass the altar on the route to parenthood.



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