

ORPHANAGE OR FOSTER HOME PAGE

The purpose of creating this page is to tell your children where they spent the first part of their lives and describe who took care of them.

What is a **CWI**? Children's Welfare Institute

What is a **SWI**? Social Welfare Institute

Both of these terms are interchangeable with orphanage.

WHAT is an "**ayi**" (Eye-EEE)? She is a kind and caring person.

She takes care of the children's everyday needs.

WHAT is a **nanny**? A person, with training, that cares for the children in orphanages.

It is fine to use the two terms interchangeably or pick just one reference for the people who cared for your children in China.

Have FUN with this page! Children love to see their own photos.

You may have some or all of these items to work with:

1. A photo of the orphanage or foster home
2. A photo of your children with their caretaker
3. The address of the orphanage or foster home
4. Children's daily routine (from referral papers)
5. Photos of your children's friends or foster siblings from China or some of the kids from your travel group from the same orphanage
6. A cute note card (art) of children playing

Lifebooks are for kids, about kids. Try to keep the tone upbeat, lively and "kid friendly."

TIP: BEFORE leaving for China, ask if you can go visit the orphanage or foster family at their home. Hire a guide/driver.

In China, there are about 1,000 orphanages. Only 250 of those orphanages will send children out of the country to be adopted.

In 2004, around 7,000 children were adopted into the United States.

That sounds like a LOT of children, but in reality only about 5% of children in Chinese orphanages are adopted.

Foster homes offer Chinese orphans a family setting to live in. Foster parents and siblings may have grown emotionally close to your child. While the separation may be more difficult, the bonding that has taken place between the foster family and your children is beneficial to the child.

Waiting families:

While in China, take advantage of opportunities made available to visit orphanages or foster homes. Your children's early life history took place with people in these settings. No picture or description will replace standing in the building where your children lived. Express your wishes to meet foster families. Visit them at their home before you leave for China. Your guides might be able to arrange a meeting, if adequate time is allowed. Ask questions; take photos and gifts when you visit orphanages or foster families.

Families with adopted children:

If you have returned home already, you know how valuable the film or photographs of these settings and people are. Keep them in a safe place, such as a safe deposit box. Make copies of photos and download digital images onto discs. Print extra copies to use in lifebooks or travel albums. Treat adoption photos, as you would precious photos: with care and caution.

Write about your children's early lives. This page is an excellent opportunity to give a "snapshot" of a day in China. Information for this page may be gathered from talking with the foster mother, nanny or gathered from the referral paperwork. Tell the children what the home or orphanage looked like, where it was and how many children lived there with them.

This page is meant to be VERY SPECIFIC to your children's information. Fun facts to record: a daily routine, the child's likes and dislikes.

Foster home information:

1. Was the home in a city or rural area? GET the address! Take photos of the neighborhood.

2. Tell a little about the foster siblings and home (include lots of photos).
3. When did your child live with the foster family?
4. If you communicate by mail, copy and reduce one letter.
5. What were your child's favorite activities? Favorite foods? Child's favorite family member?
6. Did the family send a special gift home with your child? Photograph this keepsake.

Orphanage specifics:

1. How many children lived at the orphanage?
2. Which ayi (or nanny) took care of your child most often? (Take a photo of her holding your Child, if possible.)
3. How long do the children stay at the orphanage? Where do they go when they leave?
4. Do children at the orphanage go to school?

If this information is not given to you during your trip, during a tour to the site or from a person who "delivers" your child on adoption day, then try to join a Yahoo group of parents from your child's orphanage. Photos and a wealth of information are available from other parents who have visited the orphanage.

Keep language age-appropriate:

Young children love to see photos of themselves and friends.

Forget the statistics. Describe the photos.

Older children will want to know every detail of their early lives, so record EVERY detail you have been told in their lifebooks.

Give a positive, honest description of the children's lives in the orphanage or foster home. Don't glamorize the orphanage or foster home experience, but make the presentation of the page fun!

BEFORE leaving for China, there is one way to request photos of the children, caretakers, and orphanage or foster home. ASK your agency if it's "OK" to send a shoebox to the orphanage or foster family. Send a shoebox shortly after referral, before travel. Fill the box with:

1. A disposable camera

2. A toy
3. An outfit for your child or small blanket
4. Small gifts for the foster siblings or orphanage staff

Attach a referral photo to the camera, and put the contents into a shoebox (no larger). Mail to China (cost about \$30) and hope for the best. Many families get the camera back. The cost and time investment is well worth the chance to get priceless photos of your children's early lives.

While in China, **ASK for additional photos of your children at an early age.**

Style 1:

"You lived in the orphanage for 11 months. The nannies took very good care of you. You were a happy baby who liked to play with toys and other children. You loved musical toys! Many caring ladies made sure that you were fed and safe and warm. They tucked you into bed every night until we could come and pick you up."

(A good sample for young children, using information from the referral paperwork. This sample is personal and reassuring. Its tone is warm and upbeat).

"This (photo of orphanage) was your home for the first 10 months of your life. The director, along with nine ayis, loved and watched over you while you were there. You loved being held! You slept in the crib next to Riley, Chen and Nora. The grandmothers that lived in the town came to play with you. You loved to play outside and listen to music. The ayis said that you smiled a lot and played with your friends."

Addition for older children: "In the orphanage lived 110 babies and a few older kids. The children can stay in the orphanage until they are 16 years old. Then they go to a factory to work."

"This is where you lived for the first nine months of your life. You slept in a crib surrounded by other babies. Boy, I bet that room was NOISY!!!!!!!!!"

(Use many photos of baby cribs are available on Yahoo parents' orphanage groups on the Internet).

"For a whole year you played with your friends at the orphanage. Hannah's crib was right next to yours. Anna slept six cribs down the row from yours. You slept in the orphanage with a stuffed animal. Now you have "Piggy" to sleep with." (Great sample for a

toddler because it's short and talks about things that a preschooler or younger age child can relate to).

“You lived with your foster family from the time you were two months old until we came to China to adopt you. The Zhu family was a loving and very caring family. The foster mother's name was Fen. She had a husband We, and one son named Bright. The family lived in a very rural area, and the home only had two rooms. You slept with Bright each night. He kept you warm and cozy (photo of family or foster siblings). He was eight years old and this is a note that he wrote for you when he said goodbye: (color copy and reduce any letter, note or items given that might fit on this page).

When we met the foster family, you held onto Fen's shoulder and buried your face into her neck. Of course you were a little scared, my face was so strange to you! Fen said that you loved to ride on her back in a little pack.

We will always have a special place in our heart for your foster family in China.”

Style 2:

“I lived in the Changshu CWI for 10 months of my life. I was one day old when I arrived. The ayis took good care of me, until my Mom and Dad could come and pick me up. My paperwork says that I loved to play outside. I was trying to walk a little bit with my nanny in this photo: (photo from camera sent ahead of time in the shoebox). I was kind of cute and chubby back then! I hope to visit the orphanage some day when my Mom and Dad take me back to China.”

“My foster family cared for me and loved me (photo of the child as an infant and the foster family). I was fed my favorite foods: noodles and fruit and conge. They taught me how to love, how to walk and drink tea (imagine that!). I STILL love noodles today and I think of them every time I look into a bowl of Chinese noodles.”

If older children are writing the lifebook, encourage them to contribute any thoughts or feelings they have about the foster family and friends from China.

Style 3:

“ At the Shanghai CWI, a worker at the orphanage thought her rosy cheeks were adorable so they named her (Chinese name). She played with her friends, ate conge and warm rice milk for 9 months. The ayis rocked her to sleep every night. She was cared for and loved until one special day....”(go on to explain the paper trail that lead to her adoption).

ALTERNATE option: make this page combine or “flow” from the abandonment information to orphanage information to the Chinese name page. If the orphanage named your child, then this sample might appeal to you:

“When you were one day old, you were placed at the gate of the Yangdong Social Welfare Institute. The doctor at the orphanage said you were healthy.

The director gave you your name: Dong Ai. It means...”

(This is an excellent sample that “bridges” several topics together. If you would like a shorter book, try to combine topics that are related).

Information that I have gathered about my child's early life:

I would like to combine this with the name page: (yes/no).

I would like to use my child's specific abandonment information and combine it with the orphanage or foster home page:(yes/no).