

# The Adoption Underworld

Who wants to buy a baby? Certainly not most people who try to adopt internationally. And yet too often that's how their dollars and euros are being used.

The idea that the developing world has millions of healthy infants and toddlers in need of new homes is a myth. In poor countries as in rich ones, healthy babies are rarely abandoned or relinquished — except in China, with its one-child policy. The vast majority of children who need adoption are older, sick, disabled or traumatized. But most Westerners waiting in line are looking for healthy infants or toddlers to take home.

The result is a gap between supply and demand — a

gap that can be closed by Western money. In some countries, Western cash has induced locals to buy or kidnap children or defraud or coerce their families into giving them up, strip the children of their identities and transform them into orphans for Western adoption. In 2008, Vietnam stopped adoptions to the United States because of these concerns. A cable from the U.S. embassy in Vietnam, recently obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request by the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, said that, "while there are legitimate orphans in Vietnam, the corruption in the adoption process has become so widespread that [the embassy] believes that there is fraud in the

overwhelming majority of cases of infants offered for international adoption."

Last year, the United States finally implemented the Hague Adoption Convention, a 1993 treaty designed to address these problems. But the regulations apply only to adoptions from countries that have also signed the treaty.

Of course, not every internationally adopted child has been purchased or kidnapped. But when the orphan manufacturing chain gets going, it generally works like the one below. For more information, visit [www.brandeis.edu/investigate](http://www.brandeis.edu/investigate).

— E.J. Graff, associate director and senior researcher at Brandeis University's Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism

## The Orphan Manufacturing Chain

### Babies

are born to families in some poor countries.



### Child finders,

including orphanage workers, nurses, police officers, village officials and taxi drivers, trick families into selling their children or kidnap the children outright.



### In-country facilitators,

who may be orphanage directors, lawyers or freelancers, purchase babies from the child finders and bribe government officials for clean identity papers.



### Government officials

sign false documents certifying that the children are orphans.



### U.S. adoption agencies

pay in-country facilitators to refer them to healthy infants or toddlers. They do not guarantee the veracity of the children's papers.



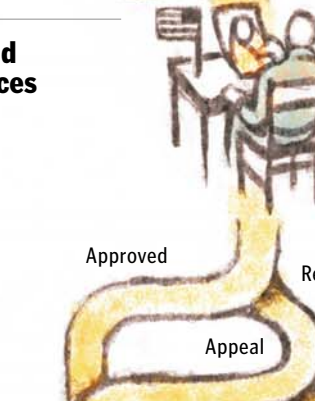
### Americans

seeking to adopt submit these papers, often not realizing that their legal burden is to prove that the child is an orphan as defined by the United States.



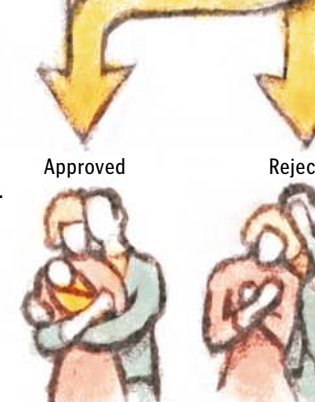
### U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

investigates the child's orphan status if it suspects fraud but deals only with the prospective parents in approving or denying these applications.



### Adoptive parents

bring home a manufactured orphan.



### The Money

The orphan manufacturing chain puts a price tag on something priceless: human life.

Child finders, promising families that they'll see their children again, may offer them "assistance" worth **\$50-\$300** — or kidnap the children and pay nothing.

In-country facilitators pay child finders as much as **\$300-\$6,000**, or the equivalent of a year's middle-class salary in many countries, for each healthy baby or toddler.

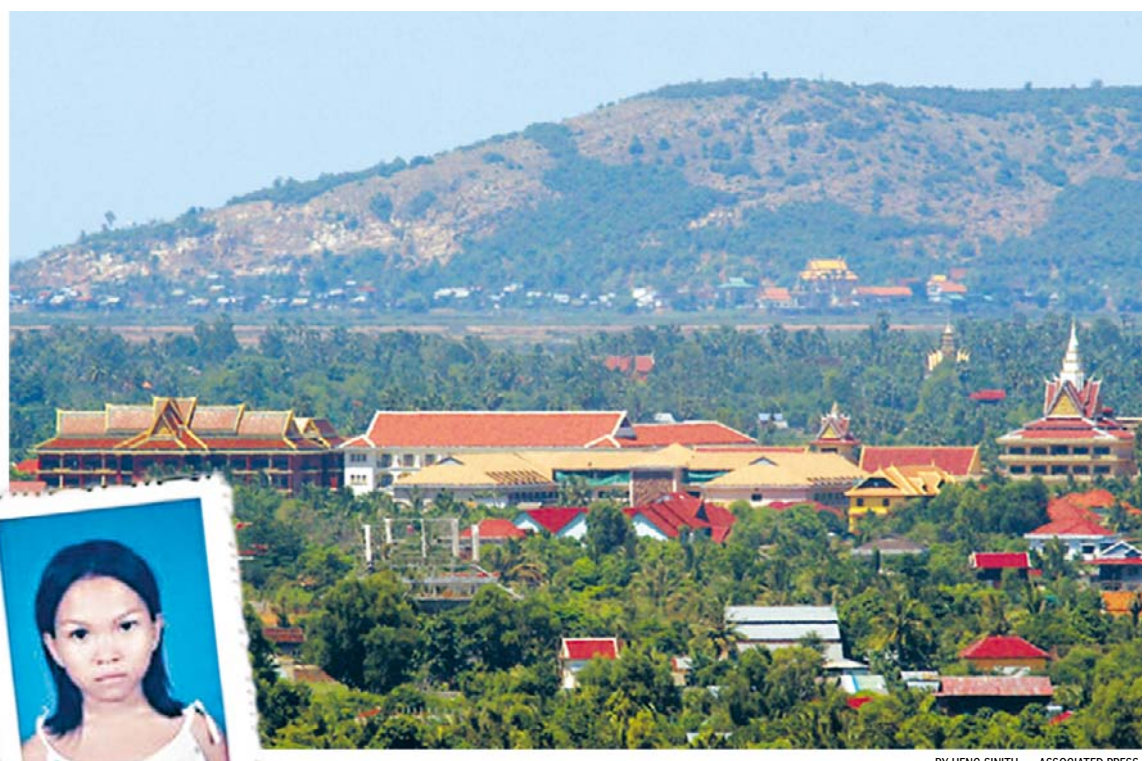
Corrupt officials can rake in enormous sums from in-country facilitators for each set of documents.

Adoption agencies may pay **\$10,000-\$30,000**, or up to 10 times the local per capita income, for each referral.

Parents pay adoption agencies **\$200-\$1,500** in application fees, **\$1,500-\$6,000** in "country fees" and **\$10,000-\$25,000** for completed adoptions.

Grateful adoptive parents often make generous donations to orphanages in their adoptees' birth countries — the same orphanages that, in some cases, helped place the children in the orphan manufacturing chain. Parents who appeal rejections can pay more than **\$10,000** in legal fees.

**Those who are rejected** may appeal. Some prospective parents abandon their efforts, with little chance of a refund, or start over — if they can afford it.



Camryn Mosley, left, was taken from her family in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

## Out of Cambodia

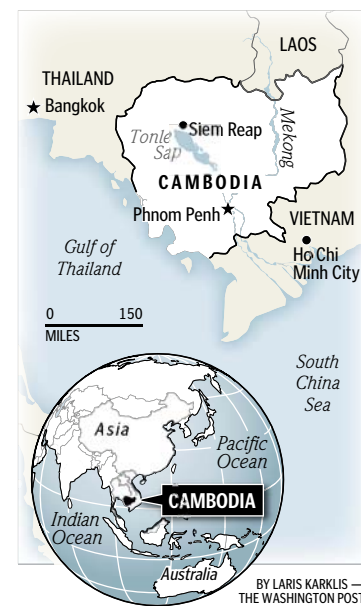
The orphan manufacturing chain is not limited to infants and toddlers. In 1999, Songkea was 9 or 10 years old. She lived with her brother, sister, brother-in-law and nephew in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Her mother had recently died, but close relatives lived nearby. Songkea thrived in school and in her dance lessons and loved playing with her nephew and cousins.

One day, a man approached the girl. He was a child recruiter and later told ABC's "20/20," which investigated Songkea's case in 2005, that he had been paid \$300 to recruit her for adoption.

"[A] man stopped me, and told me to go and ask my family if I could live in America. The man told me if they agreed, I should move to the orphanage for two weeks, and they would take me to Phnom Penh after that," Songkea wrote five years later in a victim-impact statement presented in a U.S. court. "Suddenly, they told me I would go to Phnom Penh that day and meet my new mother. I didn't say goodbye to my sister, or anyone else."

Meanwhile, Judith Mosley, who was living in Saipan with her husband and children and awaiting word about a pending adoption, got a call from Lynn Devin at Seattle International Adoptions, which Devin ran with her sister, Lauryn Galindo. Devin told Mosley to go to Phnom Penh to meet Galindo, the adoption facilitator. There, Mosley was told, she would receive her new daughter.

After meeting Songkea, Mosley — despite Galindo's protests — insisted on going with the girl to see the Siem Reap orphanage where she had lived. But once at the orphanage, the child gave the taxi driver directions to her family's house. There Mosley learned that Songkea had a family, although she believed that they had knowingly given her up for adoption.



Just before Mosley and Songkea, now to be named Camryn, boarded the plane back to Saipan, Galindo handed Mosley the adoption paperwork. It said that Songkea had been living in the orphanage for four years and had no known family — which Mosley by then knew to be false. She continued to believe, however, that Camryn's family had chosen to give her up and that Galindo had simply mishandled the documentation.

In December 2001, following investigations by a local human rights group and the Phnom Penh Post that exposed baby-buying and abduction through Galindo's adoption operations, as well as others, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service halted adoptions from Cambodia and began its own criminal investigation. The moratorium on adoptions continues today. In 2004, Galindo pleaded guilty to federal charges of conspiracy to commit visa fraud and launder money stemming from her role in arranging the adoption of Cambodian children such as Songkea. She was sentenced to 18 months in prison and also ordered to forfeit more than \$1.4 million in property in Hawaii.

Devin, who prosecutors say did not know that babies were being bought, pleaded guilty to related charges after providing information to officials about her sister's activities and was sentenced to six months of house arrest. It is not known how many of the more than 700 children whom the operation matched with new families were actually orphans.

In 2004, Mosley took Camryn back to Cambodia to visit her biological family. By then a teenager, Camryn was no longer fluent in Khmer, but she says she was profoundly happy to see the family she loved. Today she is waiting for her college acceptance letters.

— E.J.G.



First family: Camryn, second from right, with her nephew, sister and brother in 1999. Below, the siblings are reunited five years later.



FAMILY PHOTOS COURTESY OF JUDITH MOSLEY