

'Immigration Divides Families'

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Body

The article "Hands -- and Hopes -- Across the Sea" [front page, Feb. 1] should have been labeled news analysis. Although the immigration process could benefit from increased public scrutiny and understanding, articles such as this -- in which the author's disapproval of the system of quotas established by Congress in 1952 is obvious -- serve only to muddy the waters.

During my 1994-1995 tenure on the nonimmigrant visa line in Seoul, I saw countless individuals in Mr. Shin's situation. Refusing their visa applications was often a heart-wrenching decision, but it was the only possible decision given our immigration law.

Nearly a million people immigrate legally to the United States each year. If every person in financial difficulty who wanted to join relatives in the United States were allowed to do so by simply obtaining a tourist visa, immigration would increase exponentially each year. Would even the most ardent supporter of expanded immigration favor allowing 5 million, 10 million or even 15 million new immigrants each year?

Finally, I would like to point out that "U.S. visa policies" don't divide Asian families; immigration divides families. From time immemorial, immigrants have had to decide between pursuing opportunity in a new land and remaining with their extended families. Those who have come to America were not forced to leave their families behind; they chose to. Granted the decision is painful, but it is made freely nonetheless.

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