

Quilts In Between:
The Material Culture of Commemorative Community Patchwork
Made for Chinese Adoptees in the U.S.

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One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts (OHGWQ) are a contemporary form of material culture that commemorates an American family's adoption of a Chinese child. Made and/or coordinated by parents in the midst of adopting, OHGWQ are community-based objects constructed from fabrics donated by a large number of family, friends, and acquaintances. A practice that spread largely via the internet starting around 2000, the OHGWQ tradition is based upon a host of phenomena and contexts: the sudden growth of China adoption in the late 1990s and 2000s; indigenous patchwork and quilting practices in China and the U.S.; the Western history of cultural appropriation; and present-day forms of web-based communication.

Drawing on interviews with nearly two dozen adoptive parents, this research utilised a phenomenological approach to explore the experience of making a OHGWQ, a form of material culture never previously studied. The work explores how OHGWQ function on the individual or personal level, in such ways as celebrating a significant moment in a family's history, making the adoption process seem less onerous and interminable, building support for a non-traditional method of family-building, and giving makers the opportunity to participate in a form of "everyday creativity" (Gauntlett 2011). The thesis also examines the OHGWQ's place and meaning in the lives of those who organise and/or make the projects and within American society and culture at large.

In particular, the thesis demonstrates that the OHGWQ project plays several "in-between" roles, functioning as a link or transitional device in each case: between being a non-maker and a maker, between disparate Eastern/Western cultural practices, between various groups of people, and between pre- and post-adoption senses of identity for the family as a whole and potentially for the adoptee. In essence, it is argued that OHGWQ connect people, cultures, and ideas.

Dedication

To my son, Per

and

my grandmother, June Almen Hanson (1919-2013)

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PART 1: Foundations

Chapter 1: Introduction

One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts (OHGWQ) are a contemporary form of material culture that commemorates the adoption of a Chinese child into an American family.¹ The phenomenon was at its most popular from around 2000, just as adoption from China started to rapidly increase, until approximately 2007, shortly after China adoption rates began to decline. Disseminated largely via the internet—first by individual websites and subsequently by a dedicated online discussion board—OHGWQ are community-based projects, made by parents adopting from China who assemble fabrics donated by friends and family into a patchwork quilt. The quilt marks and celebrates the adoption, welcomes the child to her² new family, and represents a supportive community—ideas further bolstered by the written good wishes that many donors also submit.



Figure 1: Informant Christine's daughter with her OHGWQ.

¹ While the OHGWQ phenomenon appears to have begun in the U.S., adopting parents in other countries have made the quilts as well. This thesis, however, only addresses the American context of the practice.

² Throughout this thesis, I will use the pronoun “her” to refer to Chinese adoptees, primarily because all of this study’s informants adopted Chinese girls and because, until relatively recently, nearly all Chinese adoptees were female (see Chapter 2.1).

Like other patchwork quilts, OHGWQ are composed of multiple fabrics stitched together to make repeat patterns that can range from simple to complex. The fabrics in OHGWQ frequently symbolise the relationship between donor and recipient. Relatives or close family friends might donate fabrics that represent their personal interests or avocations, while acquaintances made through the shared experience of adopting from China might give Asian-themed fabrics. Thus, the colourful materials often contain a wide range of imagery and designs, with very little, if any, redundancy between individual pieces. Once OHGWQ makers have assembled their fabric donations to create the decorative quilt top, they complete the multi-layered bedcover by adding a backing fabric and a middle layer of batting or wadding, all of which is held together with quilting stitches or evenly spaced yarn ties. The resulting quilt often resides in the recipient's bedroom, whether displayed on a bed or on a wall, as in this adoptee's room:



Figure 2: Informant Louise's daughter, with her OHGWQ.

Via interviews performed with nearly two dozen adoptive parents (and one grandparent), this thesis examines the OHGWQ's place and meaning in the lives of those people who organise and/or make the quilts, and within American society and culture at large. It aims to describe the informants' experiences of making OHGWQ, from first encountering the idea to gathering the fabrics, constructing the quilt, and presenting it to the recipient. It also uses these descriptions, which invariably touch upon ideas of object- and family-making, preparing for cross-cultural adoption, and eliciting emotional support during the often prolonged adoption process, to assess the OHGWQ practice's place within larger socio-cultural contexts. These contexts include: adoption, generally, and intercountry adoption (ICA), specifically, and their attendant difficulties and controversies; American material culture, particularly as a receptacle for emotion and meaning; the American predilection for romanticising the past and consuming foreign cultures; and the twenty-first-century phenomenon of online communities, especially as surrogates for traditional support groups. The thesis' ultimate goal is to identify the roots and sources of OHGWQ, characterise the experience of making one, and interpret the meaning and significance of the practice for individuals and groups, and within American society, generally.

As outlined in the following chapters, many social and cultural components contributed to the formation of this multi-purpose, cross-cultural object, for instance: the China adoption phenomenon of the 1990s and 2000s; indigenous patchwork and quilting practices in China and the U.S.; the Western history of cultural appropriation and exploitation; and present-day forms of internet communication, which facilitate and encourage rapid, widespread communication, sometimes within narrowly focused groups of people (e.g. parents adopting from China). Additionally, the thesis reveals how OHGWQ serve a multiplicity of roles on the individual or personal level, for example: helping to mark a significant moment in a family's history; making the often interminable adoption process seem more endurable; building support for a sometimes misunderstood or criticised form of family-building;

and discovering and connecting with long-standing cultural practices, both home-grown and unfamiliar (i.e. Chinese).

Crucially, the OHGWQ project plays several “in-between” roles, functioning as a link or transitional device in a number of ways: between the concepts of maker and non-maker, between disparate Eastern/Western cultural practices, between various groups of people, and between pre- and post-adoption senses of identity for the family as a whole and potentially for the individual adoptee herself. Most often, this in-betweenness represents a state of connection rather than separation, facilitating people or cultures coming together and influencing one another. And while material culture has often played this type of a transitional or communicative role, the significance of this thesis’ research lies in two main areas: 1) its focus specifically on the material culture of adoption, and 2) its examination of the OHGWQ as a potentially cross-cultural form of material culture. Although anthropologists, in particular, have examined the role of material culture in human migration, forced or otherwise, few scholars have studied the objects that become touchstones for participants in the process of placing a child from one family and culture into another. Adoption and ICA have been thoroughly dissected, as well, particularly by social work researchers, but generally not with reference to the materials that adopters and adoptees find practically or emotionally useful before, during, and after the adoption process. Similarly, material culturists, and especially quilt scholars, traditionally have focused greater attention on objects that reflect a narrowly localised culture and have less often studied artefacts that are shaped by multiple, widely disparate cultures and peoples, although studies like this will conceivably become more common as we move further into the internet-saturated twenty-first century.

The current chapter outlines the characteristics of OHGWQ, sketches out the brief, internet-driven history of the phenomenon, presents some of the contexts that bolstered its development, and introduces the main themes of the thesis, namely, making, imagining, and connecting. Next, in placing emphasis on the research’s main informants—adoptive parents—it stresses

the fact that this thesis tells the OHGWQ story from the maker/giver's point of view, not the recipient's; further work with Chinese adoptees themselves will be necessary to garner a fuller understanding of the place and meaning of this commemorative form of material culture. Finally, it outlines the subsequent chapters in the thesis.

1.1 OHGWQ: An early twenty-first century phenomenon

Created by parents who were in the midst of adopting a child from China, websites devoted to OHGWQ, which began appearing around 2000, presented a mostly consistent format. They provided a brief summary of the family's adoption experience to date, an introduction to the OHGWQ concept, and, most importantly, a call to action: the websites existed primarily to solicit fabric donations from friends and family for the creation of a quilt celebrating their child's adoption. As the donations arrived, parents often catalogued the fabrics with a photo and description, and thanked each donor. Sometimes, they posted an image of the completed quilt to round out the experience.

A typical site, thebutterflyquilt.blogspot.com, begins with this introduction:

With the arrival of our beautiful little Butterfly coming soon, we want to welcome her to our family and community with loving arms. There is a special tradition in China to do so with a 100 Good-Wishes Quilt. Please join in to welcome her into our family.

(The Butterfly Quilt 2014)

Another site elaborates:

In some parts of Northern China, when a baby is born, family and friends of the child donate fabric scraps from old clothing to the child's mother. She then makes a quilt for the baby from the scraps. It is said that the luck and energy of the people who wore these clothes surrounds the child when she is wrapped in the quilt. This is the tradition upon which the 100 Good Wishes Quilt is modeled. In April, we sent letters to our family and

friends asking them to contribute a piece of fabric along with a written wish or note for Meikina. We now have over 130 squares for her quilt! ... Since I can't sew, my sweet Grandma Betty will be making Meikina's quilt. ... I know Meikina will cherish this quilt and the good wishes that were made for her before we ever even knew her.

(One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt 2014)

Although the OHGWQ websites and weblogs (blogs)—websites created by individuals to post their own personal writing and images, as well as links to other sites of interest—span the last decade and a half, a few key elements tie all of them together. As seen in the examples above, the quilt project to which the sites are devoted is in some way community-based, it is said to be derived from Chinese tradition, and it is made to commemorate the adoption of a child from China.

I first discovered these websites as I was researching Chinese patchwork and quilting traditions,³ about which there is very little published in traditional print sources, let alone on the internet. However, as I utilised search terms such as “China quilt” or “China patchwork,” sites focused on One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts were among the most frequent results. I knew very little about adoption from China, but my previous research into quilts and textiles as expressions of East-West cross-cultural contact inspired me to take notice of these quilt-specific sites (Hanson 2001, 2006, Hanson and Smucker 2003). Their nearly universal emphasis on the quilt’s ties to Chinese cultural practice convinced me to pursue research on OHGWQ, eventually visiting all websites I could find on the internet.

³ I am a curator at the International Quilt Study Center & Museum at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (U.S.A.) and am responsible for researching, building, and interpreting the museum’s non-Western quilt collection.

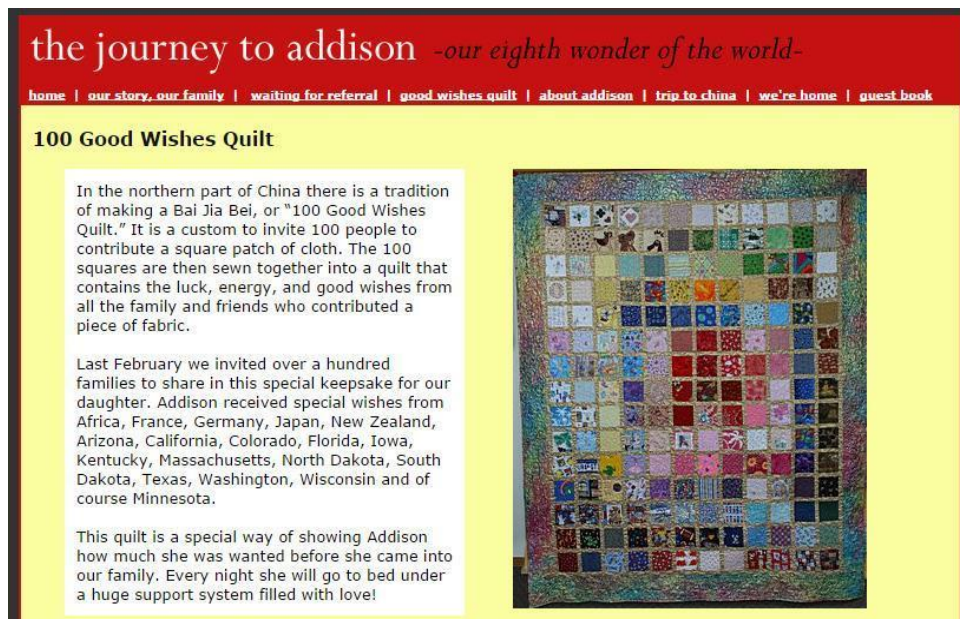


Figure 3: Informants Jen and Jason's website (screenshot).

Although I have visited hundreds of OHGWQ websites dating from 2000 onward, some of the earliest sites are now defunct. Indeed, the earliest website I found devoted to the topic, "100 Good Wishes Quilt Project 2000," no longer exists.⁴ It described the quilt project in this way:

To welcome and celebrate a new life, there is a tradition in the northern part of China to make a Bai Jia Bei, or 100 Good Wishes Quilt. It is a custom to invite 100 people to contribute a single square patch of cloth. The 100 patches are sewn together into a quilt that contains the luck, energy, and good wishes from all the families and friends who contributed a piece of fabric. The quilt is then passed down from generation to generation.

The website's author also explains how and why her website came into being:

In the spring of 2000, adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents on the APC listserv [Adoptive Parents China, a Yahoo.com private discussion board founded April 18, 1999] learned of this tradition and several people became interested in

⁴ Fortunately, I took electronic screenshots of the site when I first discovered it several years ago and still retain these data files.

making a 100 Good Wishes Quilt for their child from China. One list member volunteered to compile a list of names and addresses of parents wishing to make a quilt so that they could exchange fabric squares. This website will showcase the resulting quilts.

The quilts shown on subsequent pages pictured colourful patchwork bed quilts—sometimes on their own, sometimes with the recipient child posing next to them. Each entry came with a description from the parent who made the quilt. For instance, a woman named Abby wrote, "Here is the quilt I made for my daughter, finished just before and presented to Hannah on our first Forever Family Day [the anniversary of the day the family met their child for the first time in China]." Another mother, Teresa, wrote that her daughter Bethany's crib-size quilt "has fabrics from friends and family and there is a queen sized quilt to follow that will be all of the squares in this one plus another 100 from adoptive moms and dads all over the world." Documenting and recording the history, contributors, and significance of the quilt seems to have been an important part of the project. Sharing the experience online turned out to be significant in a larger sense, as well. I suggest this group's grassroots community project and, more importantly, their online documentation of it, was a critical component in the development of what I call the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt phenomenon.

I use "phenomenon" deliberately because the word is defined as a perceived object or occurrence with an especial connotation of something "the cause or explanation of which is in question" ('phenomenon,' n 2014). This definition seems particularly relevant to internet-based occurrences like the OHGWQ. There is likely no way to precisely pinpoint how the practice got started—the internet is too decentralised and too complex to provide simple or unequivocal proof of how a phenomenon like this began. The abundance of websites and blogs created from 2000 onward, however, and the lack of OHGWQ presence in traditional media formats (such as quilting magazines,

women's magazines, or quilting books⁵) strongly suggests that the quilt was popularised via the internet. Indeed, for this research I contacted over 80 people, most of whom had either written a blog or posted to an online group about their OHGWQ,⁶ and there were dozens of other OHGWQ sites I found for which I was unable to find a contact email. In addition, the 100 Good Wishes Yahoo group, an online discussion board which I will describe in more detail below, has over 1000 subscribers, all of whom presumably have a direct interest in OHGWQ. It seems likely, therefore, that it is truly an internet-based phenomenon, perhaps inspired by early websites like the now-defunct "100 Good Wishes Quilt Project 2000."

Another early website that likely helped disseminate the OHGWQ-making practice is a commercial website, originalquilts.com. Run by a professional quilter, the site offers to complete OHGWQ projects for people who have collected the fabrics but do not have the skill, time, or inclination to complete the quilt. The earliest quilt posted on the site, which has been a successful online business for over a decade, is from September 2001 and the most recent, October 2013 (100 Good Wishes Quilts - Original Quilts 2014). The website also sells Asian-inspired fabrics and Chinese character embroidery services, both of which tie into the making of a OHGWQ.⁷

⁵ These are all media with which I am familiar, as I am regularly exposed to them for my work.

⁶ In the end, 21 people agreed to be interviewed (see Chapter 3.2).

⁷ The owner of originalquilts.com declined to be interviewed for this project.



Figure 4: Screenshots of originalquilts.com showing professionally completed OHGWQ.

In addition to its business objective, the site also aims to educate about OHGWQ. It describes the project using wording very similar to that on the "100 Good Wishes Quilt Project 2000" site mentioned above and cites that page as a source for more information (the hyperlink to it is now inoperable).

The originalquilts.com website also adds a new element to the concept of the OHGWQ project:

[In China] it is a custom to invite friends and family to contribute a patch of cloth with a wish for the baby. Part of the patch of cloth goes into the quilt for the baby, and the other part of the cloth can go into a creative memory notebook with the wish for the child.

(100 Good Wishes Quilts - Original Quilts 2014).



Figure 5: Informant Michele L. looking through the OHGWQ scrapbook with her daughter.

This "creative memory notebook" has become an essential element of the OHGWQ phenomenon, despite the fact that it is most likely derived from the current American scrapbooking fad, rather than an indigenous Chinese tradition.⁸ As this thesis discusses in Chapter 4, many OHGWQ makers feel a

⁸ In 2010, the Craft & Hobby Association (U.S.) estimated that 18.4 American households participated in scrapbooking, making it a \$1.4 billion industry (CHA ANNOUNCES 2010 CRAFT INDUSTRY STATISTICS 2014)

particular affinity for this portion of the project. For people who are not interested in making the scrapbook themselves, however, originalquilts.com offers to do that, as well.

Perhaps most important in disseminating the idea of the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt, was an online discussion board founded in 2002 by an adopting mother who perceived a need for an online space where parents could exchange fabrics in order to assemble sufficient numbers to make a OHGWQ. The “100 Good Wishes Yahoo Group” is set up like many other online discussion boards, with its primary function being to serve as a centralised location for members’ communication (100 Good Wishes Quilts - Yahoo Groups 2011). The site also includes a page for posting photos and another for posting electronic files, usually documents with useful information about how to set up a fabric exchange, general quilting tips, Chinese cultural information, etc.

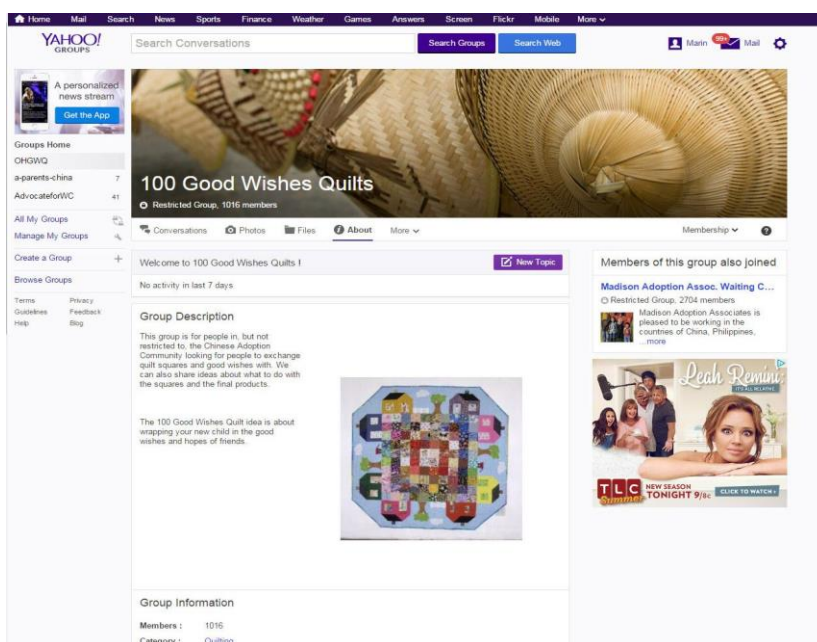


Figure 6: Screenshot of “100 Good Wishes Quilts” Yahoo Group, an online discussion board.

Christine, the adoptive mother and OHGWQ informant who founded the Yahoo group, learned about OHGWQ through other adoption-related discussion boards and felt that a centralised location would more readily

facilitate the exchanges that were already happening elsewhere. Up to that point, she said, it was a clumsy system wherein parents would email each other individually in order to exchange fabrics; she wanted to create a space in which many people could swap all at once. The yahoo.com discussion board system was the best way to do it, she felt, especially since so many other adoption-specific groups already existed on the Yahoo system.⁹ Swapping fabrics online, Christine explained, was a mutually beneficial activity:

A lot people were frustrated because they would try to explain it to families and friends and they wouldn't quite get it, or they weren't quite engaged enough to want to go get squares and share them, whereas in our group we were all doing the same thing, so it was fun to buy one big piece of fabric, cut it up into pieces, send it to a bunch of people and then get squares in return. It wasn't like you were asking somebody to do something just for you, you were actually sharing—you got some, they got some, everybody was happy ... it was a mutual win-win thing.

After the discussion board debuted in 2002, it immediately began filling a need: it averaged over 250 posts per month in its first several years. Parents came to the site to exchange fabrics, but also to share their adoption experience with others in the same situation as themselves.

1.2 A short-lived phenomenon?

Why did this sudden burst of China-focused quilting occur in the first place? The answer lies in the history of China-U.S. intercountry adoption. Since 1994, the single largest source for ICAs in the United States has been the People's Republic of China.¹⁰ Between 1992, when China first officially allowed international adoptions, and 2005, when these adoptions peaked, the number grew from 210 to 7,903 annually. Although the number has declined

⁹ There are hundreds of Yahoo groups devoted to international adoption and dozens specific to China, from small groups with fewer than ten members to groups like "Adoptive Parents China" with nearly 18,000.

¹⁰ Hereafter, I will shorten the People's Republic of China to simply "China."

drastically since then, it still represents a large percentage of overall American ICAs; in 2012, for instance, 2,696 children were adopted from China, equalling 31% of all U.S. ICAs. Between 1999 and 2012, nearly 70,000 children of ethnic Chinese descent joined thousands of American families (Affairs 2014, Johnson 2002, p. 387).

This precipitous influx of Chinese children—mostly girls (see Chapter 2.1)—significantly altered the overall character of U.S. ICA. Indeed, the year 2005 saw the greatest number of ICAs in American history—22,734—35% of which were from China (Affairs 2014). Quite naturally, the availability of thousands of orphaned or abandoned Chinese children for adoption also signalled momentous change for individual American families: more parents could adopt. As those parents entered the China adoption pipeline, they searched for ways to celebrate and mark the occasion. Making a One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt, a tradition begun online just a few years earlier, was one of those ways. Thus, shortly after China adoptions peaked in 2005, activity on the Yahoo OHGWQ group also spiked, with three months in 2006 breaking the 1500-message mark.¹¹

Many of the individual blogs I discovered were written around this time of peak China adoption. “A Million Miles to Mia,” for instance, is the blog of single mother-to-be, “Special K” (Mia’s 1st Quilt Square: Southwest Ohio 2014). In the blog she documented all 117 fabrics she’d received, starting on 23 July 2006 and ending nearly a year later on 19 June 2007. Every entry includes information about the person/family who donated it and a brief description of their fabric and accompanying wish, a format that many of the other OHGWQ blogs also follow. Importantly, this presentation mode gives bloggers the chance to recognise and thank all of the people involved in the project.

In Special K’s case, one can also catch a glimpse of the grassroots, internet-based nature of the OHGWQ phenomenon. She documents one fabric sent to her by another blogger named Natalie:

¹¹ Adoption figures dropped by about 18% in 2006, to a total of 6492.

Natalie is just starting on the quilt square collecting. She asked if she could reference this blog as an example when she sent out her requests. Of course, I told her to go for it. I remember when I first started this and tried to explain it to others that had never heard of the idea before. It was so much easier to show them instead of explaining it. So I borrowed [from] other blogs, too. She sent the sweetest letter thanking me. You're very welcome, Natalie.

(Special 2015)

The idea of making a quilt to commemorate a China adoption must have spread quickly through online exchanges such as this one.

Like Special K, most parents experienced a dramatic slowdown in their adoption process in the years after the 2005 spike. Although Special K's "Log In Date" (LID)—the date on which her dossier of official paperwork was logged into the Chinese government's system—was 14 June 2006, she did not get her referral—the official notification of a match with a Chinese child—until 5 April 2011, nearly five years later. This is many years longer than most parents had understood it would take. Even today, the nationwide support group Families with Children from China states on its website that the process generally takes 12 to 18 months, even though this is only a fraction of the time needed for most non-special-needs adoptions.¹² Official statistics for adoption processing times are unavailable, so adopting parents have created websites such as ChinaAdoptTalk.com, which compiles wait-time data submitted by individual families. According to this site, wait times increased from about six months in 2005 to three years in 2009, to over six years in 2013 (CCAA Updates & Referrals 2014). The most recent official statistics show that adoptions from China numbered only 2,306 in fiscal year 2013 (1 October 2012 - 30 September 2013), a 71% drop from the 2005 peak (Affairs 2014).

¹² Chinese adoptions are separated into two programs, special needs (SN) and non-special needs (NSN). The medical and developmental issues included in the SN program range from minor to moderate; older children are also included in this program. SN adoptions take much less time than NSN adoptions because they are drawn from a pre-identified pool of children.

Special K's wait—and that of thousands of other families—fell in the midst of this drastic decline in China adoptions.¹³

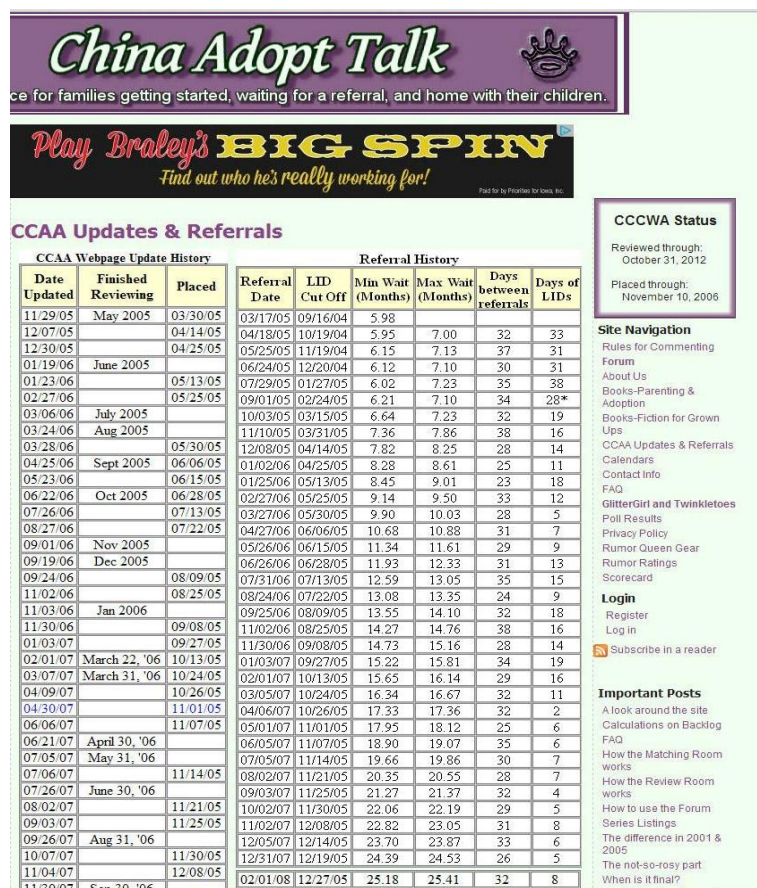


Figure 7: Screenshot of chinaadopttalk.com (now defunct) showing wait-time data.

Activity on the OHGWQ Yahoo group dropped off, too, as adoption from China slowed. In 2007, monthly posts averaged 360, a significant drop from the record highs a year before. In 2008, they were down to 190 and a year later, 64. Today, the group sees almost no traffic. In addition, internet searches for recently created or updated OHGWQ blogs turn up very few results. It appears that the OHGWQ phenomenon has been intimately tied to the vicissitudes of the larger China adoption phenomenon. Several other conditions existed, however, to facilitate the rapid spread and adoption of this unique quilting practice.

¹³ The decline in adoptions from China is paralleled by a drop in all international adoptions (see Chapter 2.1)

1.3 Contexts underpinning OHGWQ

Quiltmaking as an act of commemoration and expression of community has a long history in the United States (see Chapter 2.3). The mid-nineteenth century development of the Album quilt—a collection of sewn fabric blocks either made by different women or signed by various friends and family—was an early and influential commemorative quiltmaking fad (Lipsett 1985, Nicoll 1986, Brackman 1989, p. 20). Other styles followed, including quilts commemorating political and social causes, such as abolition and temperance, as well as those used to raise funds for churches and service organisations (Ducey and Gregory 2012). Quilts made especially for children have a long history as well, and some have particularly poignant stories; for instance, the story of an 1830s cradle quilt inscribed with a poem describing a slave woman's anguish at having to relinquish her baby (Benberry 1983, p. 60, Waldvogel 2007). More recently, quilts have been made to honour the deaths of soldiers in various fields of combat (Junge 1999, Gregory 2010). Probably the most famous recent commemorative quiltmaking effort is the NAMES project, honouring victims of the AIDS epidemic (Ruskin and Herron 1988, Howe 1991). Most of these commemorative quiltmaking practices have a community component to them; quilts seem to have encouraged communal participation throughout American history. OHGWQ fit squarely in this tradition of making quilted textiles to commemorate an important family or community event. Like many other Americans before them, adopting parents—whether they have previous quiltmaking experience or not—have turned to a quilt tradition to mark the momentous occasion of their adoption of a Chinese child.

Changing attitudes about international adoption (see Chapter 2.1) have also contributed to an environment conducive to a thriving China-inspired craft project. The origin of ICA in the United States stemmed largely from the need to find families for thousands of orphaned children in post-World War II Europe (Altstein and Simon 1991, p. 1). With the advent in the 1950s of adoptions from Korea, however, American parents—usually white—began to face issues associated with the transracial nature of their family. In the early years of Korean adoption, most children were brought up under the so-called

“assimilation model” (Lee 2003, Falvey 2008), in which parents attempted to “circumvent racism by encouraging a de-coupling of the child from her birth culture” (Falvey 2008, p. 277). A new model emerged in the 1990s with the influx of children adopted from China. Labelled the “immersion model,” this new approach encouraged parents to fully embrace their child's birth culture. The goal was to impart a sense of connection to the country from which the child—by dint of her racial difference—could never be wholly disassociated. Integral to the immersion model are learning experiences such as Chinese language lessons, dance classes, and “homeland tours,” in which the adoptive families visit the region, town, or even the specific orphanage from which their child originally hailed. The adoption of a China-inspired quilt project makes sense within the immersion model's emphasis on celebrating the traditions of a child's home country.

Just how much of the OHGWQ is Chinese is unclear, however. Although many OHGWQ websites cite a Chinese folk object, the *bai jia bei*, as a source of inspiration, very few of these articles are extant. Examples of another folk object, the *bai jia yi*, on the other hand, exist in museum collections around the world and are documented in historical paintings and tapestries (see Chapter 2.2). For centuries, Chinese mothers made these patchwork *bai jia yi*, “one hundred families robes,” as gifts for their sons to celebrate auspicious birthdays (for example, one month, one year, or three years). Ideally, the robe's patchwork body was constructed from fabrics donated by numerous local well-wishers, the so-called “hundred families.” The fabrics, symbolising the combined strength of the donors, were believed to help the young boy resist or deflect evil spirits and ghosts (Garrett 2007, p. 181). One way in which this practice has reached Western audiences is through mid-twentieth century American author Pearl S. Buck, who based many of her novels on her experience as the daughter of missionaries in early twentieth-century China. Her 1956 book, *Imperial Woman*, tells the tale of an imperial concubine taking steps to protect her newborn, the only son of the emperor, through the creation of a *bai jia yi*. While tenuous and difficult to document, there does seem to be a genuine cultural connection between

Chinese folk practice and the OHGWQ. Select aspects of the OHGWQ also speak to the West's history of appropriating or incorrectly interpreting Eastern cultural elements, a topic that Chapter 2 explores.

Further providing a base for the growth of the OHGWQ phenomenon was the explosion of “weblogging” (blogging) and online discussion boards in the early to mid-2000s (see Chapter 2.5). Blogging began around 1997 and by the mid-2000s had become a mainstream activity, with special web-based software catering to the quick and easy publication of online personal posts (Nardi *et al.* 2004, p. 222). Although there has been relatively little research on quilters’ participation in online communities, scholars have shown that some quilters—and textile artists in general—have wholeheartedly embraced web-based opportunities for sharing information with fellow makers (see Chapter 2.5) (King 2002, Avila and Kaiser 2010, Sikarskie 2011). Adoptive parents, too, seem to have embraced online communication methods. The ChinaAdoptTalk.com Community Forum page (now defunct), for instance, had over 1.3 million posts by its 10,000+ members in its 8+ years of existence. Additionally, a Google search for “China adoption blogs” yields over 6 million results, including many of the pages devoted to OHGWQ I found during my research.

1.4 Interpreting the quilts: making, imagining, connecting

Discovering the OHGWQ phenomenon online was merely my introduction to the topic. To understand the objects more fully, I needed to talk with the people who made them. Through a series of 18 semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 3.2), I set out to discover why parents chose to make a OHGWQ to mark the occasion of their adoption of a Chinese child. Another goal was to identify the role the OHGWQ project played in parents’ lives as they were waiting for their adoption to finalise, as well as the quilt’s place in the family afterwards. Additionally, I aimed to tease out the cultural strands of the OHGWQ: How much of the quilt tradition is American? How much Chinese? At its heart, my research asks, “What does the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt mean, both to the individual families making them and within

American society generally?”



Figure 8: Informant Michele K.'s nearly completed OHGWQ.

One important theme to emerge from the research was the idea of making (see Chapter 4). Parents spoke about making from a variety of perspectives: making (or adding to) a family through adoption; past history with making and crafting; ideas about what it means to make things by hand; working with others to create; making associated items—a blog, for instance; and how making a OHGWQ triggered a desire to become a “real” quiltmaker. Making for these informants was more than a simple act of sitting down, getting to work, and producing an object; indeed, in several cases a finished product has yet to be assembled. In other cases, the parents who organised the OHGWQ project were not the ones to physically perform the sewing that created the quilt. Yet, they felt that they had been intimately involved in its making. These ambiguous, nuanced understandings of the act of making align with anthropologist Tim Ingold’s concept of a dynamic “thing” (as opposed to a static “object”), which he poetically defines as a “gathering together of the threads of life” (Ingold 2010, p. 4); in other words, an

understanding of material culture as plastic and ever-changing (see Chapter 3.2). The physically and notionally flexible nature of material culture, especially textiles, contributes to a sense that OHGWQ exist somewhere *in between*: between beginning and completion, between the project organiser's being and not being a maker, and between an adopter's being and not being a parent.



Figure 9: Informant Michele L.'s daughter wrapped in one of her OHGWQ.

Another distinct theme that became evident was imagining (see Chapter 5). Informants revealed their preconceived notions about quilts, many of which focused on ideas of history, family, intimacy, tactility, and utility. They also used quilts as metaphors, especially when speaking of the OHGWQ as a wrapper that could both physically and emotionally protect their child and as an embodiment of the community of people who contributed to it. This usage mirrors design historian Judy Attfield's conception of textiles' role as "an embodiment of self and group identity" (Attfield 2000, p. 121). Their intimate and embedded part in humans' lives, Attfield argues, gives textiles the power

to stand in for larger ideas. Indeed, they also often stand *in between* people and the outside world, shielding and comforting humans in both a physical and psychic sense. In the case of OHGWQ, textiles also function as a bridge between cultures. Immediately upon deciding to adopt, most informants began augmenting their existing knowledge of China (if any), which is how some of them discovered the OHGWQ practice. Parents also came to understand the importance of helping their child retain a connection to her birth culture, and many saw the OHGWQ as an important link in that effort. Via the OHGWQ project, therefore, informants imagined the ways in which a quilt could represent ideas ranging from family history to emotional comfort to cultural connectivity.



Figure 10: Informants Jen and Jason with their daughter and her OHGWQ.

Finally, informants, almost to a person, narrowed in on the concept of connecting as the most critical component of the OHGWQ project (see Chapter 6). The quilt was seen by makers as key in their attempts to forge connections with their adopted child, with online support groups, and with family and friends. The nature of ICA—with its intense periods of paperwork followed by potentially prolonged waiting—caused anxiety for many families. Working on a OHGWQ helped parents cope with stress and feel like they were working towards something, towards *someone*: their longed-for child. It also provided entree to online communities that gave critical aid and encouragement during the wait. Perhaps most importantly, the OHGWQ symbolised the support of dozens of friends and family members. Each square of fabric was tangible evidence that a community surrounded and buttressed the family during the wait and welcomed and celebrated the child upon her arrival. All of these forms of connection, of *in-betweenness*, add up to the kind of activity media and communications scholar David Gauntlett cites as critical for individual, family, and societal well-being:

Happiness cannot be determined by a certain level of material comfort. Instead, it stems from having meaningful connections with others, and meaningful things to do. [Creative] projects are especially valuable if they are not contained at the individual level but involve some form of sharing, cooperation, or contribution to other people's well-being.

(2011, p. 126)

1.5 The researcher's role and perspective on OHGWQ

Upon beginning this research, I naively thought I would first and foremost be studying the quilts and that the ICA context would form a backdrop, neatly hanging behind the main story of the quilts. As I talked with makers, however, I began to see those positions reversed. In the end, I understood that the adoption experience—and all the complexities it entails—comprises the foreground, and the quilts, in a critical supporting role, stand in for ideas that underpin most parents' experiences: love, loss, longing,

growing, and, most importantly, connecting—with their child, with another culture, and with their own communities of family, friends, and fellow adopters. I came to see the quilts as perfect examples of Ingold's "things": the quilts are malleable, ever-evolving, unfixed, not simply because they are textiles (and therefore materially flexible and modifiable) but because they are invested with different meanings at different times by different people.

I also did not anticipate the impact the research would have on me personally. I am a museum professional who has studied quilts in an academic setting for over 15 years, but I am also a quiltmaker. I understand the motivations for wanting to create things with my own hands. I understand the desire to make things to commemorate important moments in a personal or family history. I also am a parent for whom becoming a parent was not easy. Although I have a biological child, my husband and I considered adoption before our son was born (years later than we had originally hoped). China was the only place I ever thought about as a "source country," to use ICA-specific language. I studied Chinese language and culture as a young person and was a Chinese Studies undergraduate, attending Nanjing University for a semester; in other words, I have felt a connection to China from a very early age. As I studied the demographic impact of China's One Child Policy (see Chapter 2.1), read the memoirs of orphanage observers, watched documentaries about the experiences of Asian adoptees, and spoke with nearly 20 adoptive parents, I was at times deeply emotionally affected. I found it very easy to relate to some of the experiences about which I was learning.

Recognizing the affinity I have for my research participants has been an important part of the research process for me and constitutes much of my attempt at practicing reflexivity. Reflexivity is the performance of constant self-evaluation during the research process, with the recognition that every person possesses inherently singular viewpoints and biases. Practicing reflexivity is a postmodern exercise, one that rejects the modernist goal of absolute objectivity. Until the later twentieth century, the "fly on the wall" approach to research was still accepted as legitimate:

... although the variable position of the researcher—politically, socially and culturally—was certainly known to affect the research *question*, few thought that this variation might affect the particular research methods chosen and the ways of collecting and analyzing data.

(Goodwin and Horowitz 2002, 38)

More recently, however, this outlook has shifted; researchers now acknowledge that they are a *part* of the research, not outside of it, and that process and results can be affected by personal predispositions. Reflexivity, particularly from feminist and Marxist standpoints, can include the researcher's own subjective experience in the process. Therefore, care must be taken to moderate between the extremes of implied objectivity, in which the researcher's own voice is completely eliminated, and intruding between the reader and the subject matter through an overreliance on personal narrative.

In this thesis, I will ground my interpretation in research and theory from a range of disciplines: material culture studies, communications, sociology, anthropology, and textile history, to name some of the most relevant. One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts provide fertile interpretive ground precisely because they can be analysed from a range of viewpoints and placed in many different contexts. But my underlying identification with quilting parents adopting from China must also be acknowledged. In the end, I aim to contribute to the scholarly dialogue about objects and making, but I also recognise that in so doing, I have been deeply affected and changed by the people and things I have been studying.

1.6 What this thesis does not address

Although this thesis focuses on an object, a contemporary form of material culture—a quilt—the heart of the topic is adoption, and specifically, intercountry adoption. Adoption is a highly charged subject. It can encompass a complex set of emotions, felt by both adoptive parents and adopted children. Parents sometimes deal with stressful infertility issues before

deciding to adopt. While adopting, they experience anxiety related to tackling copious amounts of complex paperwork, wondering about the health and safety of their child, and waiting, often for years, for the adoption to finalise. For the children, a lifetime of absorbing, processing, and interpreting their status as “adopted” typically includes a great deal of pain, as they struggle to understand how they were severed from their birth family in the first place, how they “fit” into their adoptive family, and, particularly in the case of transracial adoption, how they fit into the society that surrounds them. Existing alongside these apprehensions and concerns, however, are intense feelings of joy, love, hope, and commitment.

The powerful—and sometimes contradictory—emotions that adoption engenders are critical elements to understanding contemporary ICA. It is important to note, however, that this thesis only addresses adoption from the parents’ viewpoints. The objects that this study’s participants created to commemorate their adoptions—One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts—are receptacles for a range of emotions, but at this point I can only attempt to understand what emotions they engender for the parents, not the children.

As touched upon elsewhere in this thesis, adopted children have often felt marginalised, that they were not allowed to fully develop their own voices and identities. As adults, many adoptees expressed dismay and anger over this denial. For instance, the blog “Red Thread Broken,” a project of an adult Chinese adoptee, directly addresses the stereotypes, racism, lack of agency, and painful separation from a birth culture/family that many Chinese adoptees face as they come of age in the U.S. In a succinct refutation of the idea many adoptive parents express about feeling a “pre-destined” link to their adopted child, the author says:

The problem with saying that children are connected to the people “destined” to become their adoptive parents is that it is also saying birthmothers are equally destined to be in situations in which they have to relinquish their children and that these children are destined to lose their first families,

countries, cultures, and everything they know.

(About This Site 2013)

Adopted children need to be allowed to express their own ideas about what it means to be adopted. Today, many of them are speaking out and training a spotlight on the dark sides of international adoption, even as they express love for the parents who brought them to a new family.

With this research, I endeavoured to describe what OHGWQ meant to the makers. I therefore fully appreciate that if I want to learn what they mean to the recipients, I will someday need to talk directly to them.

1.7 Thesis structure

Part One, “Foundations,” provides background for the OHGWQ phenomenon and outlines the thesis’ methodological and theoretical approaches. Expanding upon the present chapter’s brief introduction to OHGWQ antecedents, Chapter 2 explores more fully the various historical and cultural strands that intertwine to inform the OHGWQ practice, from Eastern and Western patchwork practices to contemporary web culture. Chapter 3 introduces the thesis’ phenomenologically-based methodology, emphasising the primacy of informants’ words in order to “let the phenomena speak for themselves” (Giorgi 1985, p. 151, Moustakas 1994, p. 13). The aim of this approach is to “determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience” and ultimately to derive “general or universal meanings ... in other words the essences or structures of the experience” from the informants’ descriptions of it (Moustakas 1994, p. 13). These derived essences form the bases upon which Part Two is situated and I interpret them using theory drawn from material culture studies, creativity studies, web studies, and sociology, among others. These interdisciplinary perspectives are also outlined in Chapter 3.

Part Two, “Themes,” describes the multiple ways in which OHGWQ fit into individual family contexts as well as socio-cultural ones. It does so in three thematic chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on the experience of making, as both a physical and conceptual act. OHGWQ informants who were in the

midst of making a family through adoption—a conceptual act—paralleled this pursuit with the physical act of making a commemorative quilt. This chapter asks: how are these processes similar and how do they diverge? Further, the chapter explores various aspects of being a maker. From a traditional, Western perspective, a maker is generally an autonomous, singular, hands-on figure, but are there other ways to consider maker-hood that could involve multiple people, some of whom participate in conceptual rather than physical ways?

Chapter 5 focuses on imagining, primarily as it is centred on quilts and China. Quilts, like many other forms of material culture, are socially as well as physically constructed. What ideas about quilts—especially as relates to their material nature as well as their historical and cultural status—do adoptive parents hold in common and how do these affect their perceptions of OHGWQ? China, too, lives primarily in the imagination for most Westerners. How do adoptive parents recognise and move beyond imaginings in an effort to help their daughters create healthy transcultural identities and what part do OHGWQ play in that effort?

Chapter 6 centres on connecting, and more specifically, connecting people. Informants often described how the OHGWQ project helped them feel connected to their Chinese daughter during the frequently protracted adoption process. By making a OHGWQ, they also connected with other adopting parents, primarily via blogs and internet message boards, and with friends and family, all of whom formed pre- and post-adoption support networks for the adoptive family. How do these OHGWQ-directed connection efforts echo larger, societal concerns about community, both online and IRL (in real life)?

Finally, Chapter 7 draws conclusions from the preceding discussions, homing in especially on the various liminal aspects of the OHGWQ project. In other words, it summarises the ways in which the OHGWQ is positioned *between* people, ideas, and cultures, providing connection and transition between and among them.

Chapter 2: Contexts and Antecedents

One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts exist within a number of specific contexts that underpin an understanding and interpretation of them. A range of social, political, and cultural phenomena came together to inspire this narrowly focused form of material culture, each one contributing a unique element to its character and makeup. Without this mixture of influences, OHGWQ—which focus on a relatively small, specifically defined group: Chinese adoptees—would not exist. This chapter presents the most important of the OHGWQ's contexts and antecedents in an effort to demonstrate the complex nature of the practice's development.

The first and most critical element is the China adoption phenomenon of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which, although a recent development, was shaped by demographic and cultural realities that have existed in China for centuries. Next is the millennia-long trajectory of worldwide quilting practices, which also played a significant part. This history includes Chinese patchwork and quilting, particularly those traditions that directly relate to the “One Hundred Good Wishes” construct. It also encompasses American customs of quilt-focused commemoration as well as the nation's rich history of quilt-based myth and metaphor. Because makers cite Chinese tradition as a source of inspiration for OHGWQ, an appreciation of the long history of Western interpretation and appropriation of Eastern culture is also vital. Finally, because OHGWQ have an important “virtual” context, exploring twenty-first-century online culture is another important foundation for understanding this richly rooted object.

2.1 U.S. Adoption from China

Although U.S. intercountry adoption originated in the 1940s and 1950s as a way to find homes for European and Korean war orphans,¹⁴ adoption

¹⁴ ICA from Korea began in 1953 as the Korean War was winding down, as a way to place war orphaned children and to find homes for the Amerasian children of American G.I.s, who were rarely accepted into Korean society (Kim 1995, p. 142). Later eras of adoption from

from China, which has dominated American ICA from 1994 onward, emerged from a different set of circumstances. Governmental policy, rather than war, was at the root of the need to find homes for hundreds of thousands of Chinese children. In an effort to stabilise rapid population growth, the People's Republic of China instituted a set of policies that limited the number of children each family could have, resulting in illegal births and, thus, child abandonment on an unprecedented level. This twentieth-century population explosion had both ancient and recent historical roots.

For nearly two millennia (0-1650 C.E.), China's population was relatively stable, fluctuating between roughly 50-60 million people to around 100 million. Demographic swings generally followed the timeline of imperial dynasties; population increased with the peace and stability of a new reign and declined with the chaos and fighting that typically accompanied the fall of a dynasty, each of which generally lasted a few hundred years. Mortality was the key factor keeping overall population growth in check. (Poston and Yaukey 1992, p. 1)

With the establishment of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), however, this situation changed. The country's population exploded from around 100 million at the start of the dynasty to about 400 million by the middle of the nineteenth century (Poston and Yaukey 1992, p. 1). Naturally, social pressures developed, focused largely on keeping people fed, which in turned hinged on the availability of agricultural land. Government response centred on expanding food production, which resulted in cultivated land increasing by four- or five-fold. The chaotic period between 1850 and 1949—which included multiple civil wars and the Chinese dynastic cycle's complete downfall—saw only a 0.3 percent growth rate in contrast to the 0.9 percent growth rate of the earlier Qing dynasty. In 1953, just four short years after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a nationwide census put the population at 582.6 million (Banister 1987, pp. 52–53).

The science of demography was largely ignored or actively

Korea were fuelled instead by societal mores that discouraged unmarried women from keeping their babies.

discouraged during the first few decades of communist rule in China, mainly for political reasons. During more stridently Marxist periods in the PRC's first decades, population control was forbidden, and demographic research was therefore also proscribed (Poston and Yaukey 1992, p. 20). The turbulent periods of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) saw politics trump all other concerns, including population control. Indeed, China's population was *inadvertently* controlled by the famine the Great Leap Forward caused, which resulted in over 45 million premature deaths (Dikötter 2010, p. 333). By the time population studies were again widely conducted in the late 1970s—after the country's post-Cultural Revolution “opening up”—China's population had doubled. In 1984, China's population stood at 1.03 billion, by far the largest in the world (Poston and Yaukey 1992, p. 2).

Despite 1970s population control efforts that focused on encouraging later marriages, longer periods of time between children, and fewer overall children, Chinese demographers concluded that the government's goal of having 1.2 billion people in the year 2000 would be surpassed by a large margin. In response, the so-called One Child Policy was instituted in 1979. The primary goal of the policy was to “eliminate all births above or equal to three per family, and to encourage most families to have no more than one child, especially those in urban areas” (Poston and Yaukey 1992, p. 398). As a result of this policy, by 1984, the total fertility rate had dropped to 1.94, lower than the rate for population replacement (Poston and Yaukey 1992, p. 401), and since 1995, it has consistently remained around 1.7 (Liu and Zhang 2009, p. 900). In the strictly statistical terms of trying to tame an out-of-control population growth, the policy, which was formally ended by the Chinese government on 1 January 2016 and replaced with one in which two children generally are allowed, was a success.

In theory, the One Child Policy limited most Chinese couples to one child. However, over the decades and from province to province, the policy's implementation varied widely. In addition, policing of the policy was stringent in some periods and lax in others. In rural areas particularly, second children

were sometimes allowed. A policy dubbed “one-son/two-child,” carried out in the late 1980s, recognised China’s cultural preference for sons by allowing rural couples to try again for a son if their first child was a daughter (Johnson 2004, p. 15). In China, as in most other East Asian cultures, sons are seen as the economic breadwinners, the future of the family, and the ones who carry on the surname and care for parents in old age. When the One Child Policy, in its many variations, was implemented, parents were forced to accept that they may not have a male descendent, which led some of them to take the drastic measure of abandoning their daughters. As Kay Johnson, China scholar and adoptive parent phrases it: “At this fundamental level—the level at which someone decides to keep or abandon a child—the gender bias of Chinese society is overwhelming” (Johnson 2004, p. 2).¹⁵

It was because of China’s population control measures that the country began to experience a radically unbalanced gender ratio. The biologically determined sex ratio at birth is around 105 boys to 100 girls. Prior to the introduction of the One Child Policy, China’s sex ratio fell in this normal range, but by the late 1980s and early 1990s the ratio was severely skewed at 110 to 113 boys for every 100 girls (Johnson 2004, p. 6). More recently, in 2013, the ratio variance was an even more dramatic 120:100 (Chi *et al.* 2013, p. 51). The reasons for this imbalance are varied: hidden pregnancies and births, informal adoptions wherein a child is raised by family or friends,¹⁶ and increasingly, selective abortion of female foetuses, in spite of the illegality of the practice (Johnson *et al.* 1998, Chi *et al.* 2013).

Despite the well-documented phenomenon of “missing girls,” (Johansson and Nygren 1991, Ebenstein 2010, Huang 2012, Wetzstein 2014)

¹⁵ However, Johnson herself notes that “although many people abandon female infants in their quest to have a son, most do so only after they have reached or exceeded the limits imposed on them by birth planning. Girls are not readily abandoned” (Johnson *et al.* 1998, p. 478). In addition, more recent scholarship has shown that gender preferences are changing, with younger generations less focused on having a son at any cost and more open to keeping a daughter (Chi *et al.* 2013).

¹⁶ The practice of hiding girls from local authorities or sending them out for informal adoption means that official sex ratio figures are likely inaccurate. It also results in a population of governmentally unrecognised females who are often called “black” (i.e. unregistered) children (Johnson 2004, p. 8).

thousands of female children still were placed in orphanages. The Chinese government viewed international adoption as an ideal solution to the abandonment problem. After implementing a robust and well-organised ICA program, the China Center for Adoption Affairs (now known as the China Center for Children's Welfare and Adoption) began placing children—mostly girls until recently—with families around the world, particularly the United States.¹⁷ In 2001, when girls constituted 98% of Chinese adoptees, some demographers argued this group constituted a “unique diaspora”—an idiosyncratically gender-specific ethnic group living outside the borders of its national “homeland” (Miller-Loessi and Kilic 2001). Certainly, American popular culture has latched on to the gender-specificity of China adoption, with widely read books and television programs focusing on this characteristic (Evans 2000, National Geographic Explorer Television Channel 2004, 欣然 2011).

In addition to these gender issues, another aspect of China adoption that distinguishes it from previous eras of U.S. ICA is a shift in general societal attitudes towards international transracial adoption. From the 1950s to the 1980s, South Korea was the predominant source country for ICAs and remained a major source well into the new millennium. More than 98,000 Korean children were adopted by American parents between 1954 and 1998, 42% of whom were male and 58% female (Freundlich and Lieberthal 2014). Most Korean adoptees were raised under an “assimilation model,” in which they and their families were encouraged to ignore racial differences in favour of attempting to seamlessly fit into mainstream society. This model was driven by the pervasive attitude that “American” was a single, homogenous (i.e. white) identity: “Assimilation was fuelled by tacit agreement with majority

¹⁷ Of the parents interviewed for this study, all of them had adopted a girl, many in the mid-2000s when China adoption was at its zenith. More recently, however, 90% or more of children in orphanages have special medical or developmental needs, largely due to birth defect rates increasing by 70% between 1996 and 2010 (Eldridge 2013, Jiang 2014). A June 2014 article on CNN.com about a new “baby hatch” in the city of Jinan, Shandong Province, noted that: “In just 11 days, 106 children, all with disabilities or medical conditions, were dropped off at the Jinan facility, according to local state media. That is more than the 85 orphans the city accepted the entire previous year” (Young 2014).

interpretations of ‘American citizenry,’ and what it meant to be an American” (Falvey 2008, pp. 276–277). Indeed, most adult Korean adoptees responding to a 1999 survey *did* grow up surrounded by white American culture, 70% saying they lived in an all-white neighbourhood and 55% saying they had exclusively Caucasian friends. This imbalance naturally led to identity issues for some. One survey respondent reported:

I always felt slightly like a ‘fraud’ since I was not really a Korean, nor did I feel I was accepted as an ‘American’ like Caucasians. It is real hard to feel ‘American’ when strangers constantly asked me ‘Where are you from?’ and ‘How long have been you been here?’

(Freundlich and Lieberthal 2014, p. n.p.)

A host of academic papers, memoirs and documentary films depict the damage the assimilation approach inflicted upon many Korean adoptees’ senses of self (Trenka 2003, Trenka *et al.* 2006, Lee 2008, Kim 2010).¹⁸

Partly in response to Korean adoptees’ experiences under the assimilation model, a new approach emerged in the 1990s, just as China was becoming the predominant ICA source country. Research with Korean adoptees showed that a positive parent-child bond with specific emphasis on encouraging ethnic socialization—in other words, acknowledging and incorporating a child’s ethnic background into daily life—helped in developing a greater sense of self-esteem (Yoon 2000, 2004). Embracing such findings, adoption agencies and experts actively encouraged a new model, sometimes dubbed “immersion.” In response to this new paradigm, parents formed grassroots groups like Families with Children from China (FCC), a nation-wide

¹⁸ Jane Jeong Trenka (among others) has taken the critique of Korean adoption beyond her own personal experience to condemn intercountry adoption as a whole, particularly within the context of institutionalised racism: “The adoption system and the way it intersects with other world systems in order to exploit women who have few resources has been especially brutal to women of color ever since the days of the American Indian boarding schools and the ‘Stolen Generation’ in Australia. That is because of the power of global institutionalized racism is getting exercised in addition to the patriarchy and moral police that work together to take mothers’ children away from them. The brutal practice of taking children away from their mothers and calling it ‘social service’ continues especially in ‘intercountry’ adoption (20,000+ per year to the U.S.)” (Trenka 2007).

organisation dedicated to giving adopted children the chance to learn about and celebrate Chinese culture *together* (countering the assimilation model's emphasis on mainstreaming, and therefore isolating, Asian adoptees). FCC chapters all over the U.S. organize group celebrations of important holidays and events such as the Lunar New Year (Spring Festival), Dragon Boat races, and Mid-Autumn Festival. These chapters also sponsor language and dance lessons as well as summer camps specifically for Chinese adoptees.

Many parents have embraced Chinese culture on personal as well as family terms. Traver (2007) has argued that some adoptive parents consume Chinese cultural objects in an attempt to become “more Chinese” themselves. Through a series of open-ended interviews with parents, she concludes that decorating portions of the home in a Chinese style is seen as a way of welcoming the new child and encouraging her to appreciate her birth culture; equally important for the parents, displaying Chinese cultural objects “signifies and solidifies their own identification with Chinese culture” (2007, p. 201). While many parents would have made the effort to learn about Chinese culture anyway, when the United States signed on to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption on 1 April 2008, ten hours of training, including attention to issues surrounding transcultural and transracial adoptions, became compulsory (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2014). This institutionalised emphasis on recognizing cultural differences reflects the overall shift from “assimilation” to “immersion.”

Many parents are acutely aware of the shortcomings of the assimilation model and attempt to move beyond it not only through participation in FCC activities or language lessons but also by taking their children on “homeland tours” to visit China and perhaps their own orphanage—the sources of their own Asian identity.¹⁹ Is the immersion approach enough to help Chinese adoptees navigate identity and cultural issues as they grow up in the U.S.? Some scholars claim that the immersion model is simply another version of

¹⁹ See, for instance, (Welcome 2014).

chinoiserie (see 2.4), employing a superficial and hegemonic presentation of Chinese culture, and that it “unintentionally stresses the need to accentuate difference as a way to perform it for white culture” (Falvey 2008, p. 276). These researchers argue that a child should have agency when it comes to forming her own ethnic identity and lobby for the formation of an “integration” model in which there would be a “creation of social, cultural, and political conditions that would offer adoptees optimal choices to either embrace or reject identities (either American or their country’s [sic] of birth) at will” (Falvey 2008, p. 284). In terms of timeline, many of the OHGWQ makers’ adoptions fall in the midst of the immersion model’s dominance; whether the quilt itself represents immersion or something else depends on how much of it is actually “Chinese” (see Chapter 5.2).

The first step in understanding the development of OHGWQ is to follow the path from China’s historically cyclical population growth pattern to its sudden twentieth century population explosion and subsequent curtailment via draconian governmental policies. This latter situation led to thousands of orphaned and abandoned children becoming available for adoption into U.S. families in the 1990s. Tracing the historical American attitude towards ICA and transracial adoptees is another step, setting the stage for understanding how previous “assimilation” approaches differ from today’s “immersion” and “integration” models, paradigms that encourage cross-cultural practices such as the making of OHGWQ. Next in the process is acknowledging the history of indigenous Chinese patchwork traditions, upon which the first OHGWQ makers based their new practice.

2.2 Chinese Patchwork and Quilting Traditions²⁰

As noted in Chapter 1, adopting parents frequently cite Chinese tradition as a source of inspiration for their One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt project. For instance, informant Jason wrote in his blog:

In the northern part of China there is a tradition of making a Bai

²⁰ Portions of this section appeared previously in (Hanson 2014).

Jia Bei, or “100 Good Wishes Quilt.” It is a custom to invite 100 people to contribute a square patch of cloth. The 100 squares are then sewn together into a quilt that contains the luck, energy, and good wishes from all the family and friends who contributed a piece of fabric.

(100 Good Wishes Quilt | The Journey to Addison 2014)

As with Jason, parents generally do not cite a source when they refer to the *bai jia bei* tradition. Understanding the Chinese patchwork and quilting context, therefore, is necessary in attempting to identify the possible Chinese roots of the OHGWQ.

In Mandarin Chinese, *bai jia bei* literally means, “one hundred families quilt,” which would seem to reference a community-based quilt project. Colloquially, however, the phrase can be used more loosely. The term *bai jia*, “one hundred families,” often simply means “many people,” as in “many people quilt” (baijia | Definition 2014).²¹ Although patchwork has undoubtedly been made in China from donated fabrics, it is likely that most people use the *bai jia bei* phrase to simply describe the scrappy or patchwork nature of a textile. On a 2013 research trip to Xi’an, China, members of the International Quilt Study Center & Museum (IQSCM) curatorial staff met craftswomen who made what they called *bai jia bei*. These pieces were constructed entirely from new, rather than donated fabrics.²² In addition, a *bai jia bei* made 30 years prior for a baby boy—which the museum acquired during this trip—also was constructed from a limited number of fabrics, not the range one would expect from “one hundred,” or even “many” families (see Figure 11). Therefore, it seems likely that the “one hundred families” component serves primarily as a metaphor for the varied fabrics used in the quilt’s construction.²³

²¹ *Bai jia* is also part of the phrase, *bai jia xing*. Historically, *bai jia xing* refers to the “Hundred Surnames,” a Song dynasty document that lists over 400 of the most common family names of the day, but colloquially it means “the common people” (Hui 2007). *Bai jia* can also refer to one hundred (or “many”) schools of thought (philosophies) (baijia | Definition 2014). Thus, the term *bai jia bei* contains within it several linguistically rich concepts.

²² Admittedly, these pieces were being made specifically for the tourist market and therefore needed to be constructed from new materials. However, the fact that the *bai jia bei* term is applied to them indicates that it is a flexible concept.

²³ No English-language sources have been found that refer to *bai jia bei*. IQSCM research



Figure 11: *Bai Jia Bei*, made by a Mrs. Ma of Gansu Province, China, c. 1980, International Quilt Study Center & Museum (IQSCM), 2013.021.0001.

The concept of a “quilt” is also problematic in the Chinese context. Scholars and dealers in Chinese textiles confirm that the Western definition of a quilt—a bedcover made from three layers held together with quilting stitches—does not generally exist in China (Coleman 2011, Hall 2011, Vollmer 2011). What is more common is a multi-layered bedcover consisting of a decorative cloth “envelope” (similar to the European notion of a duvet) within which the owner inserts a warm and practical filling—a blanket or loose batting, for instance (Wilson 2005, p. 44). These bedcovers are used among the majority Han people as well as among many of the 55 ethnic minority groups (Museum 2007, pp. 267–277, University of Hawai’i 2009, p. 290). Thus, when the Chinese word *bei* is translated as “quilt,” this can lead to the misleading notion that quilts as thought of in the West are also common in

partners at the Xi’an Jiaotong University Art Museum have not yet found any references in Chinese-language sources, either.

China.

While quilted bedcovers are rare in China, the techniques of quilting and patchwork—quilts' most basic construction techniques—are not. Quilting is most often seen in padded clothing or, more rarely, in armour and babies' lap cloths/diapers (Harrell *et al.* 2000, p. 28, Torimaru 2008, p. 37, University of Hawai'i 2009, p. 267). Patchwork has been more widespread and used for decorative as well as practical purposes. Archaeological textiles prove that patchwork has been employed for millennia in China. A group of objects from the Dunhuang Buddhist Caves in northwest China, discovered by late nineteenth-century British explorer Sir Aurel Stein, contains examples of patchwork textiles, particularly liturgical cloths, some of which are dated as early as the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) (Chung Young Yang 2005, p. 201).

Indeed, patchwork seems to have been used most prominently in the creation of religious textiles—particularly Buddhist. For instance, patchwork robes, known as *jia sha*, were commonly worn by Buddhist priests. Derived from the Indian Buddhist *kasaya* robe—*kasaya* being the Hindi word for “dirty colour” or multi-coloured (referring to their patchwork nature)—*jia sha* were inspired by the historical Buddha's wearing of patched garments as a rejection of material wealth. Scriptural texts such as the Vinaya Pitaka urged monks to do the same to symbolise their own dedication to asceticism (Lyman 1985, p. 25, Chung Young Yang 2005, p. 201). Thus, as Buddhism spread into China in the first century of the Common Era, *jia sha* and other liturgical textiles made of patchwork accompanied it. In Tibet, for instance, patchwork was frequently used to make altar cloths in the form of a mandala (a sacred diagram of the universe), which were used to enhance meditation (Vollmer 2004, p. 132) (see Figure 12).



Figure 12: Patchwork mandala, Tibet, made from Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) Chinese silks, IQSCM, 2011.042.0001.

A well-known historical garment²⁴ known as the *bai jia yi* (“One Hundred Families Robe”) provides a likely link between Chinese patchwork traditions and the idea of a *bai jia bei* as espoused by the modern day OHGWQ makers. Referring to the *bai ji yi*, textile scholar Valery Garrett writes that a traditional Han Chinese custom was to “present the mother with small pieces of silk and embroidery for her to sew together to make the child a jacket, all those contributing thus joining in to wish the child good fortune and protection from evil” (Garrett 2007, p. 181). Elaborating on this notion, textile historian John Vollmer writes that the making of *bai jia yi*, “evokes Buddhist practice ... but seems to have developed from more ancient beliefs and customs that sought to protect children from evil” (Vollmer 2000, p. 69). The

²⁴ A number of *bai jia yi* exist in both public and private collections. For instance, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Chinese Clothing Art Museum at Donghua University in Shanghai, the Capital Museum in Beijing, and in several private collections in Hong Kong. In total, I have discovered 15 *bai jia yi* in various worldwide collections. In addition, I have personally examined one at the Saint Louis Art Museum, three at the Field Museum in Chicago, and three at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

robe is composed of hundreds of patches—tessellated squares, rectangles, triangles, diamonds, or hexagons (see Figure 13). It is often embroidered with auspicious symbols and motifs, such as the twelve symbols of the zodiac and the *wu du* (“five poisons,” an ironically propitious set of symbols). Given these symbols, it is not surprising that the robes were made as spiritually protective garments, particularly for male children on special birthdays such as one month or one year. It is clear that the *bai jia yi* was a talismanic garment, protecting its wearer from harmful, unseen forces.²⁵



Figure 13: *Bai Jia Yi*, late 19th century, Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Julius A. Gordon and Ilene Gordon Wittels in memory of Rose Gordon, 112:1989.

Bai jia yi have also been depicted in other artistic media, most notably *kesi* slit tapestry. A Ming dynasty *kesi* fragment at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York illustrates a boy wearing a blue and white diamond-patterned *bai jia yi* (Panel with Boys at Play | China | Ming dynasty (1368–1644) 2014). An early Qing dynasty *kesi* curtain panel at the Beijing Arts and Crafts

²⁵ Many other articles of children’s clothing and adornment were intended to ward off evil spirits and ghosts, such as hats in the shape of a tiger, collars in the shape of a lion, and shoes embroidered with dragons (Garrett 2007, pp. 181–191).

museum depicts boys at play, some of whom wear diamond-, square- and hexagon-patterned *bai jia yi* (Zhao 2000, pp. 182–183). In addition, brocade-woven fabrics from the Qing dynasty with the so-called “Hundred Boys” motif sometimes feature boys wearing *bai jia yi* (Zhao 2000, p. 208, Haig and Shelton 2006, p. 221).²⁶

One way in which the *bai jia yi* concept might have been introduced to western audiences, as first mentioned in Chapter 1, is via author Pearl S. Buck, who described the practice of making patchwork robes for boys in her 1956 novel, *Imperial Woman*. In it, an imperial concubine takes steps to protect her newborn, the only son of the emperor:

She must offer the child as an adopted son, by symbol, to other powerful families in her clan. Yet what friends had she? She thought and she pondered and she devised this plan. From the head of each of the highest one hundred families in the Empire, she required a bolt of the finest silk. From the silks she commanded the palace tailors to cut one hundred small pieces and from these make a robe for her child. Thus he belonged, by symbol, to one hundred strong and noble families, and under their shelter the gods would fear to harm him. For it is well known that gods are jealous of beautiful male children born of human women and they send down disease and accident to destroy such infants before they grow into godlike men. (Buck 1956, p. 56)

Buck’s tale was repeated in large part in 2011 by a contributor to the About.com website’s quilting forum:

One version of the legend behind [the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt] says that an Emperor's only son was born to one of his concubines. She had to leave the child, and feared for his safety. She ordered the 100 top families to each send a bolt of

²⁶ The Hundred Boys motif is a common one in a variety of media including ceramics and scroll painting; its popularity derives from the fact that it represents the wish for abundant, healthy sons (Welch 2008, p. 156).

silk to the palace, took a square from each one, and had her tailor make a robe for her son from the 100 patches. Through the garment, he was tied to all 100 families, and thus no one would be brave enough to harm him. (Bai Jia Bei - Quilting Forums 2014)

It seems likely that Buck, a twentieth-century western fiction writer, is the actual source of this Chinese “legend.”

Examining the history of Chinese patchwork and quilting reveals a number of folk and religious traditions relevant to twenty-first-century One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts. Although Western-style quilts are rare, the techniques of both quilting and patchwork have been practiced in China for millennia. More importantly, patchwork possesses deep religious and spiritual qualities, particularly as manifested in Buddhist robes and liturgical cloths and in children’s talismanic robes. Perhaps inspired by a Western source such as Pearl S. Buck’s *Imperial Woman*, the creators of the OHGWQ practice seem to have adopted various aspects of existing Chinese patchwork traditions, with particular emphasis on their spiritual protection—their “luck, energy, and good wishes”—and used them to create a new one, which also incorporates American patchwork and quilting practices.

2.3 Quiltmaking in America

Quilts are a form of folk art that, like other types of craft, serve utilitarian, decorative, and communicative functions. Their most basic use is as a bedcover. Their three layers—typically, a decorative top, plain back, and middle layer of batting or wadding—are held together with quilting stitches and serve to insulate the sleepers beneath them. Extant evidence of quilted fabrics goes at least as far back as first-century Mongolia. In the mid-1920s Russian archaeologists discovered a Xiong Nu (Asiatic Hun) layered and stitched rug in a northern Mongolia burial ground. The skilful rendering of both geometric and naturalistic figures on the object suggests that quilting was used for both functional and decorative purposes from a very early date. (Colby 1972, pp. 5–6, Kulikov *et al.* 2010). Surviving medieval European quilts

illustrate another of quilted textiles' functions: communication. For example, three extant fourteenth-century Sicilian quilts intricately illustrate the popular tale of Tristan and Iseult, with quilting and supplementary embroidery stitches outlining the images of the story's key figures (Colby 1972, The Tristan quilt (Bed cover) 2014).

Beyond popular tales, quilts and patchwork also communicated the status and wealth of their owners. The most direct European precursors to American quilts are British patchwork bedcovers, which were customarily made by or for the wealthier classes. Brightly printed cotton chintzes, first imported from India and then imitated by European printers, figured prominently in British quilts and could only be afforded by people with expendable income. The laborious techniques used in the creation of patchwork covers also meant that it was primarily wealthy women who had the excess time to engage in quilting. For instance, the quintessentially British technique called mosaic patchwork involves the painstaking cutting and stitching together of thousands of small fabric pieces, which, when completed, would often serve as decorative objects rather than to keep people warm. Mosaic patchwork fulfilled one of its primary roles—communicating wealth and status—whether or not it was turned into a functional bed covering. (Colby 1958, Rae 1987, Rae *et al.* 1996, Long 2011)

When quilting arrived in the American colonies, it remained an activity largely for the wealthy. As in Europe, textiles in America were among the most valuable household commodities. Well past the colonial era, into the 1820s, many finished textiles were imports, adding significantly to their cost. Making a quilt, therefore, was a leisure activity primarily for the rich, who often displayed their textile wealth by creating *tour de force* quilts that featured large quantities of expensive fabric and complex and time-consuming techniques. Chintz appliqué quilts, for instance, were constructed from chintz fabrics, strategically trimmed around specific motifs or designs, then appliquéd onto a plain white ground. Only the wealthy could afford to cut apart these costly fabrics simply to use portions of them in a new quilt top (see Figure 14) (Allen 1987, Bassett *et al.* 1998, Bassett 2009, Baumgarten and Smith 2014).



Figure 14: Chintz appliqué quilt, Trenton, New Jersey, U.S., 1843, IQSCM, 2005.053.0003.

As the technologies that fuelled the Industrial Revolution in Britain made their way to the U.S. in the early to mid-nineteenth century, production costs dropped and a broader range of Americans could afford to buy greater quantities of domestic textiles. After the Civil War (1861-1865), the price of printed cottons fell dramatically, from a wartime high of \$10-\$20 per yard to less than 10 cents per yard (Brackman and Hanson 2009). At this point, American quilts began to evolve more rapidly. While prior to the Industrial Revolution the most common styles of quilt were limited to whole cloth, chintz appliqué and a few other styles, after the mid-nineteenth century a greater variety of patterns and formats appeared (Maines 1985, Brackman 1989, Allen 1994, Chase 2008, Shaw 2009). One of the most significant developments to affect nineteenth-century American quilting was the popularisation of the "block-style" quilt (see Figure 15), which eventually came to symbolise American quilts. The style does not have an overall or central focus; instead, it is based on a grid, which gave American quiltmakers a greater degree of design flexibility just as they were also able to afford a greater variety of fabrics (Holstein 1985, Hanson and Crews 2009, pp. 19–64).

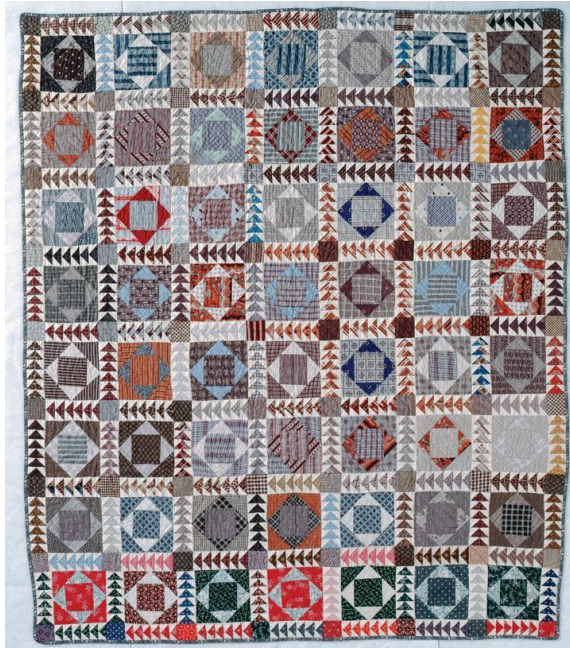


Figure 15: “Square in a Square” block-style quilt, U.S., c. 1860-1910, IQSCM, 1997.007.0051.

Another particularly American addition to the practice of quilting was the romanticisation and mythologizing of its practice. By the end of the nineteenth century, patchwork quilts were often thought of as quintessentially American, as a thrifty, community-based craft that had been widely practiced since Colonial times. The myth that quilting had been a general practice from early times was fed by an evolving American self-image, commonly expressed in what is called the Colonial Revival. Reacting to rapid, widespread, and unsettling post-industrialisation issues such as urbanisation, immigration, social unrest, and the development of a middle class, American society (or at least its arbiters) began to look to the past for comfort. An idealisation of pre-industrial American life, the Colonial Revival was expressed most visibly through the decorative arts, including quilts. Indeed, quilts in some ways became a symbol of the movement, even though the styles that were touted as typically colonial had not been invented until well into the nineteenth century. Historical accuracy was not a hallmark of the Colonial Revival (Axelrod and Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum 1985, Clark 1995, Cord 1995, Hanson 2008).



Figure 16: *The Quilting Party*, by Edgar Ward Melville, U.S., c. 1892, IQSCM, 2010.004.0001.

By including quilts in the pantheon of "colonial" objects, tastemakers began the process of transforming them into American folk art icons. They ignored the fact that until the Civil War (1861-1865) quilts were objects mainly made for or by the well-to-do and that although quilting "bees"—large gatherings for communal quilting (see Figure 16)—did occur periodically throughout American history (Fox 1995, Davis 2002), the majority of quilts were likely made by a single person or a limited number of people. Instead, the Colonial Revival redefined quilts' legacy as primarily one of thriftiness, hard work, collaboration, and diligence—all of the characteristics Americans wanted to believe their forebears had epitomised. Their status as a cultural icon added a new function to quilts; beyond providing warmth, indicating status, and communicating popular stories, quilts had become symbols of something much larger than themselves.

Although quilts fell out of media focus between World War II (1941-1945) and the 1970s, their romantic connotations endured. When late 1960s/early 1970s counterculture proponents began exploring traditional crafts in efforts to "get back to the land," they rediscovered quilts and

embraced them for their earthy, handmade, unassuming qualities. The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s was another reason quilts regained some of their former cachet. Feminists reclaimed traditional women's crafts, imbuing them with a more overt political and social importance than they had ever held before (Mainardi 1978, Berlo 2003, 2014).

The American Bicentennial (1976) and its attendant celebrations also led to a resurgence of quilting. The Colonial Revival, which had never fully faded, was revived in full force, with American myths gaining new traction. Quilts were once again thought of as admirably quaint and humble, a connection to a shared past of commonly held values and experiences (true or not). Quilts also reclaimed their status as a mainstream hobby, a big business, and an activity embraced by people (mainly women) of all classes and backgrounds. Since then, quilts have garnered attention from two new groups: fine artists and scholars, both of which have contributed new perspectives. In general, they have demonstrated and argued that quilts are an acceptable medium for mainstream artistic expression, and that quilts are an important form of material culture, providing lenses for examining various aspects of social, cultural, and political life and history (McMorris and Kile 1986, Shaw 1997, Gunn 2009, James 2009). Today, quilting enjoys continuing popularity and has also experienced a surge of newcomers, partly due to the “modern quilt” phenomenon—a reimagining of how quilts can function and look. Members of groups such as the Modern Quilt Guild, a U.S.-based organisation with worldwide chapters, eschew traditional (i.e. prior to the mid-twentieth century) quilt aesthetics, opting for “the use of bold colors and prints, high contrast and graphic areas of solid color, improvisational piecing, minimalism, expansive negative space, and alternate grid work” (About The MQG 2016), all while maintaining a focus on quilts made for everyday use and utility.

One well-documented role that quilts have played in American society across the generations, and which is particularly relevant to the study of OHGWQ, is that of commemorative object. From the early nineteenth century onward, quilts were made with the specific purpose of marking an event,

person, or political or social cause. Whether noting significant moments in family or community history—a birth, a death, a departure—or commemorating larger national or global events, quilts have often been deemed an appropriate symbol.



Figure 17: Album quilt, Preble County, Ohio, U.S., 1853-1856, IQSCM, 1997.007.0267.

The so-called Album quilt of the mid-nineteenth century was an assemblage of patchwork or appliqué blocks, each one sewn and/or signed by different people (see Figure 17). Collecting signatures in paper albums was a popular sentimental activity of the 1830s and '40s and may have inspired the Album quilt style (Ducey 2008, p. 35). Album quilts also became popular, perhaps not coincidentally, as the United States was experiencing massive westward expansion. As Americans began to settle territory further and further west, families were broken apart, and sisters, brothers, daughters, and sons might not have seen their East Coast relatives ever again. Album quilts became a way to create a physical memory of distant family members; loved ones would sew and/or inscribe a block with their name and perhaps an inspirational passage, and the quilt would travel with the recipients to remind

them of the people they had left behind. Within church communities, Album quilts were also sometimes constructed to thank a pastor or minister who was retiring or leaving for a new congregation (Brackman 1990, Ducey and Gregory 2012).

As American women became more politically and socially active in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, they often utilised their needlework skills in promoting pet causes. Whether agitating for woman's suffrage, temperance, or their favourite political party, women used quilts as a form of personal communication (Ferrero *et al.* 1987, Powell 2000, Lensch 2013). Women also found an outlet for their moral and religious commitments through quiltmaking, with the abolition of slavery being one of the most potent of these issues. Women, who were key members and founders of abolitionist groups, used quilts to both denounce the practice of slavery and to raise funds for organisations seeking to overthrow it. One famous fundraiser quilt, sold at an 1836 anti-slavery fair in Boston, is inscribed with lines by the Quaker poet, Elizabeth Margaret Chandler: "Think of the Negro mother/When her child is torn away/Sold for a little slave-oh then/For that poor mother pray" (Shaw 2009, p. 100).

Quiltmaking also served as a way to process grief, both during wartime and other times of crisis. Quilts made to comfort northern (Union) soldiers during the Civil War survive to this day, as do Red Cross and other relief and fundraising quilts from both World War I and World War II. More recently, quiltmakers across the U.S. made quilts to comfort the surviving family members of service people who have died in conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan (Davis 2002, Gregory 2010, Reich 2010, Shaw and Bassett 2012). Others made quilts to protest the military ventures that caused those deaths in the first place (Armstrong 1992). When HIV/AIDS became a nationwide crisis in the 1980s, members of the gay-rights community began what they called the AIDS Memorial Quilt, administered by an organisation called the NAMES Project. This quilt is in actuality a group of over 48,000 3-foot by 6-foot panels, each of which commemorates a person who died from AIDS; as a group, the panels are currently too large to display at once,

although on five different occasions between 1987 and 1996, all of the panels were exhibited on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. (Howe 1991, About The AIDS Memorial Quilt 2014).

Today, many of the U.S.' 21 million quiltmakers frequently make quilts to donate to a social cause or charity. Causes devoted to medical issues—breast cancer or Alzheimer's disease, for instance—or for social issues—supporting battered women, children in hospitals, or the homeless, for example—inspire individuals and groups of quiltmakers to use their needle skills to give comfort to someone in need (Erikson 2007, Bell 2009, Tapper and Zucker 2011, Balagna and Babbit 2012).

The rich history of quilting in the United States provides OHGWQ makers with an immediate touchstone for their own quilt project. Commemorative quilts, in particular, have a storied past and represent the countless individuals and groups who have paid homage to people, events, and causes through their quilts. In celebrating their adoption of a Chinese child with a OHGWQ, parents have built upon and augmented the inherently American tradition of marking special occasions with the creation of a group quilt. Because OHGWQ combine both American and Chinese cultural practices, the next step in understanding its development is to place it in the context of how the West has historically borrowed from and interpreted the East.

2.4 Western interpretation/appropriation of Chinese culture

China has long been a source of inspiration for the West, particularly in visual, literary, and popular culture. Initial, limited contact with China led to fantastical stories and images of great Khans and their grand cities, including Xanadu, the setting for Coleridge's famous 1816 poem.²⁷ Medieval and enlightenment concepts of "Cathay" eventually gave way to clearer, more accurate understandings of China, but even in the modern era, stereotyped

²⁷ Samuel Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" centres on the eponymous Mongol ruler (khan) and his summer capital, Xanadu (Kubla Khan by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Poetry Foundation 2014)

images and figures such as Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu have dominated the West's depictions of the East. Additionally, appreciation for Chinese art and antiques, especially in the United States, has often coincided with disdain for or even direct legal discrimination against Chinese people, especially immigrants (Miller 1969, Metrick-Chen 2013). This “nagging incongruity” (Metrick-Chen 2013, p. 2)—reverence and fear, admiration and contempt—is a long-standing hallmark of U.S. dealings with China.

For centuries, Western decorative arts and architecture have incorporated and interpreted not only Chinese, but also Indian, Japanese and other Asian forms of art and design. Little distinction was made between these widely divergent peoples and their material culture. In the early years of East-West trade, for instance, “‘the East’ was an entity, a single source of bizarre customs and fabulous treasure. ... A general geographical confusion ... persisted ... and there was little attempt to distinguish imports from the East on stylistic grounds” (Jacobson 1993, p. 31). Despite imprecise geographical designations, Asian imports were universally desired, and supply was insufficient to satisfy demand. Therefore, Asian-inspired design was incorporated into existing Western decorative styles. In most cases, however, these were fanciful interpretations, the only requirement being that they possess an exotic aura. The term *chinoiserie* has been used to describe these incomplete, inaccurate, or culturally confused presentations (Honour 1961, Impey 1977, Jarry 1981, Lewis 1985, Jacobson 1993).

The chinoiserie style was the culmination of centuries of growing Western obsession with objects and imagery from the East. Tantalising glimpses of Central and East Asia—many of which were either fictional or highly sensationalised—reached Europeans via the 13th-century book *The Travels of Marco Polo* (a real person who actually travelled to China) and the 14th-century bestseller *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (a fictional character whose fantastical tales were borrowed from a variety of sources) (Jacobson 1993, pp. 12–13, Polo *et al.* 2008, Travels of Sir John Mandeville 2014). It was only after global trade began in earnest—with the early seventeenth-century founding of the various European East India

companies—that the East fully captured the West’s imagination. Europeans marvelled at the exotic nature of these imported products: brightly printed and painted cottons from India, crisp blue-and-white porcelain and skilfully brocaded silks from China, and sleek, luxurious lacquer from Japan. It was only natural that the makers of domestic goods and furnishings would attempt to reproduce the exotic spirit of these imports.

European chinoiserie was at its peak in the mid-1700s, influencing textiles, ceramics, furniture, and wallpaper, and fuelling a fad for pagodas and other Chinese-inspired garden and pleasure buildings, including London’s famous Kew Gardens pagoda. Although some chinoiserie imagery was drawn from marginally accurate sources, such as Sir William Chambers’ 1757 *Designs of Chinese Buildings* (Chambers 1968), much of it was a romantic imagining of what life might be like on the other side of the globe. Chinoiserie designs often evolved through a complex system of reinterpretation by leading design professionals such as architects, engravers, and textile printers. This meant that “Chinese” designs were hybridised or reconfigured to the point of being almost completely removed from any original source (Morris 1957).

Continuing into the nineteenth century, anything from Japan or the “Orient” [an indistinct term that in Europe generally referred to the Near East but in the U.S. included the Far East (Said 2003, pp. 1–2)] was fashionable. The stereotyped Japan of the 1885 Gilbert and Sullivan operetta “The Mikado” was widely popular, and Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters from Manet to Whistler drew inspiration from Japanese prints, lacquerware, and *netsuke* (miniature sculptures). By the early twentieth century, China had returned as a primary influence, as Chinese “fretwork” (linear background designs) became part of the Art Deco design vocabulary and eighteenth-century Chinese Chippendale-style furniture experienced a revival, prompting a furniture industry observer to comment, “Besides being merely good, it [offers] unlimited play for fanciful imagination of the highest order” (Denker 1985, p. 47). Even popular architecture reflected an Asian influence. For example, Chinese-themed movie theatres sprang up all over the country, including the famous Grauman’s Chinese Theatre in Hollywood (Jacobson

1993, p. 224). Inside those buildings, motion pictures with stereotyped characters like detective Charlie Chan and actors like Anna May Wong fed the public's appetite for the foreign and exotic (Leong 2005, Huang 2010). More recently, the cult status of Kung Fu movies and the development of "Maoist fashion" have pointed to a continuing fascination with elements of Chinese culture (Steele and Major 1999, p. 88, Hunt 2003).



Figure 18: Chinoiserie copperplate print, c. 1800-1825, IQSCM, 2008.040.0192.

Naturally, historical textiles and quilts bear evidence of the chinoiserie design influence. Early nineteenth-century *toiles de jouy* (monochromatic copperplate-printed fabrics) frequently featured chinoiserie scenes (see Figure 18), replete with pagodas and latticework, and many of these fabrics made their way into early American quilts. Later in the nineteenth century, the crazy quilt—a Japanese-inspired quilt style that also included Chinese design elements—became one of the first quilting fads (see Figure 19) (McMorris 1984). A curious phenomenon in the 1920s and 1930s centred on exotically-

named quilt patterns published in widely distributed newspapers and magazines. Patterns with names like Chinese Gongs, Chinese Fans, Chinese Coins, Oriental Poppy, and Oriental Tulip were common, but their actual designs were never Chinese, rarely exotic, and hardly original, most being based on common traditional American patchwork patterns (Hanson 2006). Like the broader popular culture surrounding it, the world of quilts and quilting embraced the perceived exotic nature of China and incorporated elements of chinoiserie in a number of ways.



Figure 19: Crazy quilt: "My Crazy Dream," Mary M. Hernandred Ricard, Massachusetts, U.S., 1877-1912, IQSCM, 1997.007.0267.

Clearly, Western depictions of China and the Chinese often have been based on a partial or outsider's view of the culture. In the late twentieth century, particularly since the 1978 publication of Edward Said's seminal cultural critique, *Orientalism*, scholars have been acutely attuned to the imperialist nature of many of these depictions. One definition of orientalism,

Said wrote, is: “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 2003, p. 3). The corollary to this imperialist motivation is Said’s concept of “the Other”—the Western vision of a weak, feminised, and often romanticised East (Said 2003, p. 206). Within Said’s paradigm, chinoiserie and its many counterparts (e.g. *japonisme*, *indiennerie*, and *turquerie*) were a way to aestheticise Asian cultures—in other words, reduce them to a set of stereotyped yet refined (i.e. feminised) images—all with the goal of highlighting the West’s presumed superiority.

A prerequisite for aestheticising another culture is ethnic essentialism—defining groups of people by an artificially narrow set of characteristics. Social scientists, however, have repeatedly argued that ethnicity cannot be narrowly conceived (Barth 1998, Eriksen 2002). Countering the popular, non-academic notion that ethnicity is encoded in the DNA of human genes, psychologist Francisco Gil-White states:

If humans come equipped with mental machinery for naively processing ethnic groups as species, this is obviously a grave mistake from the scientific point of view. An ethnic so-called nature, after all, is nothing if not a set of culturally transmitted norms and behaviors.

(2001, p. 518)

The Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture’s definition summarises the flexible and transient nature of ethnicity: “It is preferable not to refer the concept of ethnicity to stable groups, but to groups which share certain economic, social, cultural, and religious characteristics at a given moment in time” (Bolaffi *et al.* 2003, p. 94). On the other hand, while ethnicity involves choice on the part of members, race has different connotations: “The concept of race may be considered to be more externally motivated, stemming more from the apparent need of human beings to categorise, identify and control others than the need to form inclusive social groups” (Karlsen and Nazroo 2006, p. 22). Ethnicity, therefore, centres on evolving self-definition within and amongst groups (Eriksen 2002, p. 12) while race is assigned by others as a method of dominance.

In reference specifically to the essentialisation of Asians, American Studies professor Robert Lee has identified “six faces of the Oriental”: the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook (Lee 1999, p. 8). Each of these imposed identities reveals the fear that Westerners felt as Asians began to immigrate to the West and global events such as the Russo-Japanese War (when the Japanese quickly and soundly defeated the Russian Navy) and the Vietnam War (which was never “won”) dramatically revealed the West’s own weaknesses. In discussing the quintessential embodiment of the “yellow peril,” author Sax Rohmer’s Dr. Fu Manchu, Lee points out why the character is so terrifying:

His Chinese racial identification is decentered by the fact that much is made of his scientific Western education and his sophistication. He is the very definition of the alien, an agent of a distant threat who resides amongst us. He represents the cosmopolitan world of Empire. Yet this cosmopolitanism masks his evil intent ... “to pave the way’ ... for nothing less than a colossal Yellow Empire.”

(Lee 1999, p. 116)

Despite his fixed, externally-assigned race, Fu Manchu strays into the ethnic territory of whites by identifying with their shared cultural constructs of sophistication (as represented by his Western education) and cosmopolitanism (in his embrace of the white/European concept of global expansion and Empire).

More recently, and perhaps most relevant to the contemporary topic of OHGWQ and their cultural strands, is the effect of globalisation on notions of ethnicity. Social theorist David Harvey argues that “a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterised by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us.” This process results in what Harvey calls “time-space compression” (1989, p. 240). Time-space compression can act upon our shared notions of ethnicity and culture, and within the specific realm of childhood experience—relevant to the ethnically Chinese OHGWQ

recipients—scholars argue that “the notion that children belong to distinct, homogeneous and static cultures is implausible” (Ackroyd and Pilkington 1999, p. 444). Children are now exposed to a range of global cultural information and have the opportunity to incorporate it into their daily lives. Although OHGWQ, as culturally-defined objects that straddle the Asian/white ethnicity/race divide, exist within the history of orientalism, their recipients, as residents of a globalised age, will potentially be able to choose how they define their own ethnicity and determine their quilts’ place within it.

The history of the West's consumption of Eastern objects and aesthetic constructs as well as its stereotyping and vilifying of Eastern peoples is a context that cannot be ignored when studying OHGWQ. Based on sketchy cultural information and driven by ill-founded notions of ethnicity and race, historical concepts of the East—which found expression in such formats as *chinoiserie*—served to heighten the perceived “exotic” nature of Asia and its residents. It also reduced them to two-dimensional, often negatively connoted, caricatures, some of which still exist today and, as explored in Chapter 5.2, appear occasionally in OHGWQ. As twenty-first century globalisation continues, however, availability of accurate and in-depth information about other cultures will likely reduce the occurrence and/or severity of these inaccuracies and the concept of cultural appropriation will shift as the world moves towards a more globally-oriented culture. Much of this movement has been and will be driven by the internet, another important context for understanding how OHGWQ emerged.

2.5 The “Virtual” Context

At the most fundamental level, twenty-first century web culture is defined by explosive growth in the number of users. In North America, there were roughly 108 million internet users in 2000. Eleven years later, that number had grown by 153% to about 274 million, or about 79% of the total population. The growth rate in Europe during that time period was double North America’s at 394%, and in less developed parts of the world, growth percentages of internet use were as high as 3,607% (Africa) and 2,640%

(Middle East). (World Internet Users Statistics Usage and World Population Stats 2014). With massively larger numbers of people online, internet platforms became primary means of communication.

One major mode of internet communication is weblogs, or blogs. They were especially prominent prior to the mid-2000s rise of social networking sites such as Facebook.²⁸ Blogs are websites wherein the owner can regularly post written and image-based entries, which are listed in reverse chronological order. Many blogs follow a topical or current events format and take advantage of the site's comments section to incorporate discussion with readers. Blogging began in the mid-1990s and in fewer than 10 years became a mainstream activity, with around 1.3 million blogs in total, nearly 70% of which were being actively maintained (Schiano *et al.* 2004, p. 1143). Easy to use web publishing tools eliminated the need for specialised knowledge (i.e. HTML) to create a blog, opening the activity up to virtually anyone on the internet (Nardi *et al.* 2004, p. 222). By 2011, there were an estimated 181 million blogs, many of them hosted by popular services such as Blogger, Tumblr, and WordPress (Newswire | Buzz in the Blogosphere: Millions More Bloggers and Blog Readers 2014).

A much-touted component of blogs is the ability to link to other blogs, leading to a universe of interconnected sites that has sometimes been referred to as the “blogosphere.” Initially, attention within the blogosphere was focused primarily on blogs that receive the most mainstream notice (“A-List” blogs) and to blogs that link to external content from the web at large (“filters”), but studies have shown that the majority of blogs do not actually link to non-blog web content or even to other blogs (Herring *et al.* 2005). Many blogs were created by individuals to fill their own individual needs, such as

²⁸ In very general terms, “social media” includes internet platforms that are mostly geared to content delivery, like blogs (though they certainly can include elements of interactivity), while “social networks” are two-way communication platforms such as Facebook.com, which was opened up to the public in 2006 and by the end of 2013 had over 1.2 billion users. The term “Web 2.0,” used frequently in discussions of both social media and social networks, is defined by David Gauntlett as an “ethos” of open-ended and inclusive participation (Gauntlett 2011, pp. 5–8), and by the term’s popularizer as a “platform”—a system within which users control their own data and are provided with cost-effective tools for experimentation and collaboration (O’Reilly 2014).

journaling and sharing photographs with family and friends. These humbler blogs often appeal to smaller, more intimate audiences and are sometimes called “narrowcast” blogs (Nardi *et al.* 2004, Brake 2007). One study of UK bloggers found that, “in many cases, webloggers wrote either for a group of known individuals or for a specific kind of reader and could be indifferent to or even hostile to other readers” (Brake 2007, p. 4). For internet researchers, these are the “zero comments” blogs, the ones that rank at the bottom of the blog hierarchy due to their apparent lack of interactivity (Lovink 2008).

Certainly, many personal blogs do not attract the kind of interactivity seen on mainstream blogs, filters, and social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter, but scholars such as David Gauntlett argue that online creation, whether it is a family vacation blog or a short YouTube video of one’s cat, is a form of grassroots creativity, part of what he calls a shift away from a “sit back and be told culture” and towards a “making and doing culture” (2011, pp. 11–12). He ties this notion of “everyday creativity” to other current phenomena, such as the DIY and modern craft movements and argues that making something new, potentially in partnership with others, gives meaning to people’s lives, makes them happier, and can lead to the accumulation of “social capital,” the glue that coheres a healthy society through a network of one-to-one relationships based on mutual respect and interests (Gauntlett 2011) (See Chapter 3).

Social media platforms such as blogs radically changed the way in which people with shared interests were able to connect. In the world of crafting generally, people have embraced online tools for communicating and creating. One current movement, a combination of crafting and activism dubbed “craftivism” by sociologist Betsy Greer, is a worldwide phenomenon that has largely spread through the internet. The Craftivist Collective, whose goal is to agitate for human rights awareness through non-violent creativity—specifically needlework—sees the internet as a critical tool:

We are using an ancient form of craft (cross-stitch) integrated with the capabilities of modern technology (tweeting, blogging, and using Facebook to reach as many people as possible with

our intentions and actions)—and we believe that we can use this to have a far bigger impact as a group.

(Corbett and Housley 2011, p. 351)

Less politically-motivated crafters have outlets, too, including online learning environments such as craftsy.com and places to sell their hand-made wares such as etsy.com.

Quiltmaking, too, has found a large online audience: a 2010 quilting industry survey showed that of America's 21 million quiltmakers, 91% owned a computer and 68% visited quilt-specific websites (Creative Crafts Group LLC 2010). Quiltmakers have utilised a variety of online tools for creating quilt-focused spaces: blogs, social networking sites, social gifting sites such as "Quilt Block Party," and online games such as "Farm Town," the latter two of which users sometimes use to send or receive virtual (digitally-created) quilts (Sikarskie 2011). Scholars have argued that participating in online communities is a logical and natural extension of the traditional quiltmaking ethos of information sharing and communal activity, which in the past would have been practiced through "round-robin" letters and quilt guild meetings (King 2002, Sikarskie 2011).

In terms of ICA, sharing information was harder for parents in the pre-internet days than it is currently. Before the World Wide Web, most parents' contact from start to finish was solely with their adoption agency. Today, parents have a range of sites to choose from to access information or assistance, from online discussion boards to individual blogs. One of the most popular China adoption Yahoo boards, Adoptive Parents China, has nearly 18,000 members and has received multiple thousands of messages every month from its beginning in 1999 until the end of 2006, the point at which adoption slowed dramatically (Adoptive Parents China 2014). Topics of discussion on the board range from filling out paperwork and preparing to go to China, to dealing with behaviour issues post-adoption. Sites also exist to provide web-based training for dealing with a range of adoption-related issues including sleep problems, anger management, eating disorders, etc. (Pacifici *et al.* 2006, p. 1332). In terms of individual blogs, many fall in the "narrowcast"

category, appealing directly to other China adopters, but this seems to be exactly their intended purpose. Like quiltmakers, adoptive parents have embraced online tools for creating helpful and supportive communities (see Chapter 6.2).

Were it not for the internet, OHGWQ makers likely would not have found each other and therefore would not have spread the new quilt tradition as rapidly as they did. The meteoric rise of internet usage, blogging software, and social media that roughly coincided with the China adoption phenomenon meant that more adopting parents discovered and helped distribute the practice via their own online and IRL networks. The internet also made it easier for them to research Chinese culture online, which in turn enabled them to gain a more solid, yet nuanced understanding of how OHGWQ fit into Chinese tradition and how it could fit into their own families' approach to including China in their daughters' lives (see Chapter 5.2).

Taken together, the contexts and antecedents discussed in this chapter provided fertile ground for the development of the OHGWQ practice. Most important was the rapid, large-scale establishment of a China adoption programme. China's post-1949 population growth and the government's response to it—otherwise known as the “One Child Policy”—led to excess, “illegal” births which in turn resulted in the abandonment of thousands of children, many of whom entered the ICA pipeline. This fact alone, however, would not have led to a commemorative quiltmaking practice had there not been existing traditions in China and the U.S. that encouraged its development. Chinese talismanic patchwork and American commemorative and community quiltmaking both contributed elements from which OHGWQ makers took inspiration. Indeed, motivation to appropriate Chinese cultural practices and hybridise them with American ones could be seen as a natural extension of a historical power imbalance, with Western nations feeling free to indiscriminately “borrow” from Eastern cultures—an issue that is further discussed in Chapter 5.2. Finally, without the burgeoning web culture of the late 1990s and early 2000s, OHGWQ makers likely would have failed to

connect with one another or spread the practice beyond their own intimate circles. A range of diverse political, social, and cultural phenomena, therefore, coalesced to inspire this novel form of commemorative material culture.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Theoretical Grounding

The primary objectives of this research were to explore and describe the informants' One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt experiences, to interpret the quilts' meaning²⁹ in their family and community contexts, and to locate them within American culture, particularly in reference to perceptions of quiltmaking, adoption, and Chinese culture. Achieving a deep, nuanced understanding of the quilts required an appropriate methodological approach as well as a solid theoretical base. This chapter introduces methods and theories utilised in interpreting OHGWQ, including an overview of the study's phenomenological approach as well as its grounding in key writings which, though drawn variously from anthropology, communications, design history, and textile history, all focus on the interdisciplinary field of material culture studies.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research focus and questions

I pursued this research from the premise that OHGWQ exist primarily within two different contexts, which overlap and cannot be fully separated: individual/family and socio-cultural. The individual/family context is where the process of making a OHGWQ takes place. Because families ordinarily begin a OHGWQ project while waiting to bring their child home from China, I focused on the functions, particularly emotional, that the experience of making a OHGWQ served during the often years-long waiting period. The socio-cultural context, on the other hand, is where the quilts as a shared form are informed by larger cultural phenomena and contribute to new ones. OHGWQ are characterised by at least two distinct features: 1) they are made from materials donated by dozens, if not hundreds, of people, whose contributions have been requested using both traditional methods (face-to-face, posted mail, etc.) and through the use of newer modes of communication, i.e. the internet (blog pages, online message boards, etc.), and, 2) most makers

²⁹ see 3.1.2 - *Phenomenology and Meaning* for a discussion of "meaning" as used in this thesis.

identify OHGWQ as being explicitly drawn from Chinese tradition. On the socio-cultural level, therefore, I explored ideas of craft as a conduit for community building, and the making of OHGWQ as a potentially cross-cultural practice.

In attempting to discern the quilts' meanings my overarching research questions were:

- What was the nature of informants' experience of making a OHGWQ?
- What impact does OHGWQ-making have on traditional, localised communities such as family and friends, and what impact does it have on new types of communities such as adoption-focused online forums (and vice versa)?
- To what extent do OHGWQ contain elements of both American and Chinese culture and in what ways have these cultural elements influenced and/or reflected adoptive families'/communities' attitudes and beliefs?

Asking these questions required that I establish a methodology to help me structure my approach and at the same time allow the participants' voices to be fully expressed and heard.

3.1.2 Phenomenology and meaning

Because I examined a specific experience shared by different individuals and family groups, I used a phenomenological approach in my research. Based heavily on German philosopher Edmund Husserl's apprehension of "human consciousness as the way to understand social reality" (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005, p. 4), phenomenology favours individual human experience and "subjective openness" (Moustakas 1994, p. 25) over more abstracted, positivist approaches. For Husserl, "knowledge based on intuition and essence precedes empirical knowledge" (Moustakas 1994, p. 26), meaning that at its very root, knowledge comes from an individual's perception, not from any externally-derived source.

This thesis' specific approach is based on what one of its leading proponents, human science theorist Max van Manen, calls "phenomenology of practice" (van Manen 2014). Rather than concentrating on philosophical questions, phenomenology of practice focuses on everyday experiences as they are studied by practitioners in fields such as psychology, education or medicine. This type of phenomenology is particularly suited to the study of prosaic experiences; its goal is to "understand and describe the participants' experiences of their everyday world as they see it" (Daly 2007, p. 98). As van Manen explains, although phenomenology theorists have defined its philosophy and methodology in a variety of sometimes contradictory ways, what unites them is "the search for the source and mystery of meaning that we live in everyday life" (van Manen 2014, bk. Kindle edition). Its emphasis on examining quotidian experiences is the reason I chose this type of phenomenology for my study of OHGWQ.

While forming or expanding a family through ICA is not a particularly commonplace experience, family-building is; indeed, it is one of the most basic human pursuits. Additionally, the act of creating a craft-based commemorative object like a OHGWQ is also an everyday activity firmly rooted in American culture (see Chapter 2.3). In addition, the extended wait many of this study's families endured meant that adoption became a daily, ever-present fact of life for them. In this research, therefore, my intention was not only to describe OHGWQ and their makers but to elicit and absorb their words from an empathic position, as a part of a "process in which the researcher makes an interpretation ... of the meaning of the lived experience" (Creswell 2007, p. 59). Accordingly, the ultimate goal of my phenomenological study is first, to capture "the essences or structures of the experience" (Moustakas 1994, p. 13) of making a OHGWQ and second, to analyse these essences "with respect to the intention of discovering the meaning" (Giorgi *et al.* 1979, p. 83, as cited in Moustakas 1994, 13).

Appreciating the essence of a phenomenon, according to Husserl, requires bracketing, or setting aside preconceived notions about the research topic. Husserl defined bracketing—what he called *epoche*—as the practice of

doubting “‘scientific facts,’ the knowing of things in advance ... from an external base rather than from internal reflection and meaning” (Moustakas 1994, p. 85). Reflexivity, a more recent qualitative research practice, brings bracketing into the postmodern era by conceding that every researcher arrives with preconceived notions and encouraging the open acknowledgement and identification of them. In my research, prior experience—with China, quiltmaking, and parenthood, in particular—has been valuable in relating to the ideas, practices, and emotions expressed by interviewees. Being unable to engage in direct participant observation, especially as succinctly described by anthropologist Tim Ingold as a way of “knowing *from the inside*” (2013, p. 5), I nevertheless aimed to search for the meaning of OHGWQ, utilising my modicum of insider knowledge while attempting to avoid overgeneralisations or assumptions.³⁰

For this research, my understanding of “meaning” stems from commonly held notions of building a sense of identity and purpose. For instance, in historian Beverly Gordon’s framework for examining textiles’ meanings, she considers everyday roles such as facilitating community and expressing social and economic power, but she also explores textiles’ uses during notable life rituals such as marking births, marriages and deaths—all of which can be considered conventional signifiers of “meaning” (2010). My interpretation of meaning also draws upon sociological explorations of the concept, particularly Emile Durkheim’s emphasis on community and social integration as the nexus of meaning-formation in the modern world. In examining a community-based practice such as OHGWQ, I appreciate Durkheim’s view that “it is from our collective life that we derive those beliefs, symbols, values, and attitudes in terms of which we define our goals, achieve a personal sense of intellectual and moral order, confer meaning on our lives, or secure personal identity” (Seidman 1985, p. 116).

³⁰ Chapter 1.5 includes a summary presentation of my own personal reflexivity.

3.1.3 Process

My primary research comprised a series of 18 semi-structured interviews with 21 people (15 individuals, and three sets of pairs—either married couples or mothers/grandmothers; see Appendix B). All but one of the interviewees were parents/grandparents of an adopted child from China. The final interviewee was a professional quiltmaker who had been hired to complete the quilt for an adopting family. I found interviewees primarily through the internet using OHGWQ- and adoption-related websites, weblogs (blogs), and online forums (listservs). Several subjects were referred by other interviewees—a process sometimes called “snowballing” (Patton 2002, p. 237). Interviews averaged 50 minutes and all but one was conducted via telephone.³¹

Prior to performing interviews, I completed the University of Leicester Research Ethics Review, which included consideration of what types of ethical issues might be encountered during the study. Because the research did not directly involve children, it did not raise any ethical issues that required a specialised or more rigorously monitored approach. I did, however, recognise that I would need to be sensitive to the emotional nature of some of the issues that might be discussed during the interviews. Although the quilts were the primary focus of my research, issues such as infertility, intra-couple tensions, and feelings about race were topics that could be raised during the interview process.

I also emailed each informant a copy of my Participant Information Form, which outlined my research topic and approach, as well as the University of Leicester’s Informed Consent Form. Each informant signed the form and returned it to me, after which I kept it on file, both electronically and physically. I asked informants if they were willing to send me a picture of the quilt for me to use in the thesis. Those that were willing did so and gave permission for me to use it.

³¹ I originally had hoped to do interviews in person; however, as my interviewees were situated across United States, this was prohibitive in terms of both time and cost.

To guide my questioning during interviews, I created a loose framework based on four categories:

- Identification: basic questions about the OHGWQ and its maker(s)
- Function (including emotional): questions about the quilting and adoption process, and what the quilt's functions were during its making and afterwards (e.g. coping, celebrating, communicating)
- Community: questions about community participation, both traditional and online
- Cross-cultural: questions about the role of Chinese culture in the making of OHGWQ and in family life generally

Although these categories served to structure my interviews and ensure that I did not inadvertently neglect a relevant topic, most interviews progressed organically, with interviewees veering off into topics of their own and with many asking me questions about my own background and research interests (see Appendix D for an interview guide).

Once the recorded interviews were transcribed, I roughly followed what Creswell calls the "data analysis spiral" (2007, p. 150), wherein the qualitative researcher continually returns to her data as she moves forward with note-taking, coding, interpreting, and writing. Rather than processing the data in a linear fashion, this mode encourages the researcher to repeatedly consult the original data and to constantly reassess the interpretations she is forming. This is critical in a phenomenological study, as "each looking opens new awarenesses that connect with one another, new perspectives that relate to each other, new folds of the manifold features that exist in every phenomenon and that we explicate as we look again and again and again" (Moustakas 1994, p. 92). I found this process to be vital, as the amount of data would have been too much to absorb in a single step of a linear progression. It also allowed ideas to evolve instead of fixing them in place early on in the process.

A companion to this slow and repeated consideration of data is the process of phenomenological reduction, whereby the researcher describes in "textural language" what she sees (Moustakas 1994, p. 90). In considering OHGWQ, I began by reading through each interview, taking notes in the

document's margins in order to start identifying key concepts, phrases, and words. I then re-read them all, supplementing and editing the annotations where needed and then condensing them into significant statements. Moustakas (1994, p. 95) calls this process of condensation, "horizontalization": each piece of data is initially viewed as equal, as arriving on the same level. The outcome, however, is that "statements irrelevant to the topic and question as well as those that are repetitive or overlapping are deleted, leaving only the Horizons (the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon)" (Moustakas 1994, p. 97).

A third time through the interviews resulted in a "word cloud," wherein I wrote down all the significant statements and began grouping them together and assembling them under larger categories, or what Creswell calls "clusters of meaning" (2007, p. 61). I condensed this word cloud into a list of 22 codes within seven different categories: Process, Processing, Making, Community, Tradition and History, Comfort, and Cross-Cultural. Next, I created spreadsheets for each of the seven categories and pulled relevant pieces of data (sentences, paragraphs, etc.) from each annotated interview into the sheet, identifying each piece by code, interviewee name, and paragraph number. In the end, each spreadsheet contained anywhere from 42 to 153 pieces of coded data.

After sorting the data by code and reading (and re-reading) the words of my interviewees, I sought to assemble the codes into a narrative order, in other words, to cluster the aforementioned "Horizons" into themes (Moustakas 1994, p. 97). I asked myself, "What is the best way I can tell the story of these quilts?" and, more specific to my phenomenological approach, "How can I present *textural description* (what was experienced) with *structural description* (how it was experienced) and bring them together into an *essential description* that gets at the heart of the OHGWQ phenomenon?" (Creswell 2007, p. 61). After several iterations of sorting, I established a code order that collapsed, quite naturally, into three main thematic topics: "Making," "Imagining," and "Connecting" (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

3.1.4 Participants

Most of the interviewees were the organisers of the OHGWQ project, meaning they were the ones who solicited the fabrics for the quilt. Nearly all were the adoptive mothers of the recipient (17 mothers, two fathers, one grandmother, and one professional quiltmaker). The participants broadly represented all parts of the United States, hailing from both coasts and several regions in the middle of the country. Almost all families had already completed their adoption, most of which took place in the mid-2000s when China adoption was at its peak. Two families, however, were still in the midst of either their first China adoption or a second one (for which they were creating another OHGWQ). Although I did not solicit demographic data, my impression after months of examining hundreds of OHGWQ blogs, is that my informants were fairly typical among OHGWQ makers. Like many of my informants, OHGWQ bloggers in general appeared to be white women from middle- or upper-class economic circumstances, a status similar to most ICA mothers in the U.S.³² ICA is an expensive and time-consuming process, which automatically limits participants, and the quilt project, too, requires time and attention, meaning that OHGWQ organisers need to possess surplus amounts of both.

OHGWQ organisers solicited project participation primarily in two ways: some people requested fabrics from close family and friends only, while others also invited members of online adoption communities to participate. Many of the interviewees sewed at least a portion of the quilt, while others had a knowledgeable family member or friend complete it. A smaller number hired a professional quiltmaker to assemble the fabrics they had gathered into a completed quilt. About half of the project organisers also blogged (wrote a weblog) about their OHGWQ, often as part of a larger effort to document their adoption process.

³² In their survey of 1,834 parents who participated in ICA between 1990 and 1998, Hellerstedt et al. found that 97% of the parents were white and only 15% had an annual household income below \$50,000 (2008, p. 162).

Most research participants consented to the use of their real names; six, however, did not. Therefore, for consistency's sake, I use first names only in this thesis.³³

3.2 Theoretical Grounding

My interpretation of the experience of making a OHGWQ is grounded largely in three ideas:

1. The study of material culture intersects with and can include concepts of “material behavior” (Jones 1997).
2. Textiles are a form of material culture particularly suited to metaphorical thought and expression. Additionally, they can be helpful in exploring larger, overarching concepts of liminality and in-betweenness.
3. “Everyday creativity” (Gauntlett 2011), in its emphasis on process and community (sharing creativity with others), can be a source of both personal fulfilment and social “glue.”

This section will explore how these ideas—material culture/material behaviour, textiles and metaphor, and everyday creativity—have been explored by scholars in various fields.

3.2.1 Material culture and material behaviour

The field of material culture studies came into its own in the mid-1980s. No longer the domain primarily of museum practitioners and anthropologists “studying antiques or artistic objects as ends in themselves” (Ames 1985, p. 79), folklorists, archaeologists, geographers, and historians also began to embrace the study of material artefacts. They had come to appreciate material culture’s distinct characteristics, among them: primary evidential status (in other words, often being the only or only surviving evidence), longevity, three-dimensionality, representativeness (in particular, of groups of people not otherwise represented by documentary sources), and a sensual,

³³ The first names of the six who requested anonymity have been changed.

as opposed to intellectual, mode of understanding culture (Schlereth and Ames 1985). During this era, much attention was given to using material culture as evidence in pre-existing, often historically-focused arguments. Historian Thomas Schlereth, for instance, outlined three common scenarios for the use of material culture in research: when there is no other extant evidence, when material culture can be used to supplement documentary evidence, and when material culture can be used to refute long-standing or heretofore unquestioned arguments (1985). Art historian Kenneth Ames, a pioneer in material culture studies, expanded the notion of material culture beyond that of historical evidence when he wrote that “things constitute one of the most significant classes of human *behavior* [emphasis added]” but closed the door again by continuing, “... and, therefore, one of the most valuable kinds of historical document” (1985, p. 80).

As the field of material culture studies expanded, however, so did its theoretical base. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai added a new and oft-cited element to the consideration of material culture: its “social” nature. He posited that objects (specifically in their role as commodities, or items of value) possess “social lives” in that they embody the politics of exchange, the agreement between parties to transfer one desired object for another (1986). Pat Kirkham’s *The Gendered Object* and Katharine Martinez and Kenneth Ames’ volume *The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture* called attention to the various ways in which gender (socially constructed meanings applied to the sexes) is relevant and often central to the study of objects (1996, 1997). Others examined the philosophical nuances of the meaning of things, for instance interrogating the idea of “authenticity” (Phillips 1997) and delineating the difference between objects as instruments (those that can easily be identified by their use) and objects as signs or signifiers (those that require cultural specificity for their interpretation) (Maquet 2013). Material culture theorist Daniel Miller advocated in-depth object study by arguing that concentrating on a specific object helps avoid a habitual or over-reliance on theory. This method allows for approaches from a variety of disciplines, and it acknowledges the centrality of objects to culture creation. In

other words, it allows us to understand culture "through the study of what people do with objects, because that is the way the people that we study create a world of practice" (Miller 1998, p. 19).

Many of the material culture studies of the 1990s and 2000s began to pull the sole focus away from objects fixed in time and space in order to also emphasise the processes surrounding them. For instance, folklorist Michael Owen Jones' concept of "material behavior," is one that "includes not only objects that people construct but also the processes by which their artificers conceptualize them, fashion them, and use them or make them available for others to utilize" (1997, p. 202). Material culturists also began to reconsider objects as items only to be acted upon or used by humans, focusing particularly on the idea of agency (Gell 1998, Dobres and Robb 2000, Knappett 2005, Knappett and Malafouris 2010). Rejecting Western subject-object dualities, these theorists explored the liminal areas where humans interact with material. Cognitive archaeologist Lambros Malafouris, for one, proposed that "while agency and intentionality may not be properties of things, they are not properties of humans either: they are the properties of material engagement, that is, of the grey zone where the brain, body, and culture conflate" (2010, p. 22). Using the example of making a clay pot, Malafouris identifies what takes place at the "continuum of potter's brain-body-clay-wheel," describing how each plays upon the other in a "flow" to create a material engagement that belongs to no single actor.

Some material culture theorists take the idea of agency further; or, more accurately, retreat from it. An anthropologist who views material agency as a false issue is Tim Ingold, who states, "The problem of agency is born of the attempt to re-animate a world of things already deadened or rendered inert by arresting the flows of substance that give them life" (2010, p. 7). The problem, Ingold argues, is that from the very beginning, material culturists have treated objects as static, ignoring the life forces that exist in all things. Rejecting the Aristotelian model of creation arising from the relationship between matter and form (static), Ingold draws from the contemporary philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (2004) to instead propose a relationship

between materials and forces (dynamic) (2010, p. 2). His approach to studying material culture “assigns primacy to processes of formation as against their final products, and to flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter” (2010, pp. 2–3). In other words, he urges a consideration of process over product, form-giving over form, life over agency, and dynamic “things” over static “objects.” This approach is particularly applicable to textiles and quilts. Textiles are malleable, ever-evolving, and unfixed, not only because they are invested with different meanings at different times by different people, but also because of their physical nature. They are flexible and textural and can wrap around another article (or human) and be transformed through that wrapping. Likewise, they can transform the wrappee (as in, for instance, a washcloth wrapping around an arm, scrubbing away the dirt and sweat of a hard day’s work). Change is natural for textiles, and humans can more quickly and easily observe it in them than in materials such as stone, adding to the appreciation of their “thingness.”

At this point, however, in defining my specific approach to studying OHGWQ, I must circle back a bit. I appreciate the concepts of material agency and thingness and the fact that they move the study of material culture into exciting, thought-provoking territory, but OHGWQ, I believe, require a more traditional, anthropocentric approach. As made apparent through my choice of a phenomenological methodology as well as my admission in Chapter 1 that quilts had switched from being centre stage to backdrop—an absolutely critical component, surely, but only one part among many—in this thesis, I examine a complex phenomenon that includes much more than the thing itself. As explored in subsequent chapters, the thing—the quilt—is sometimes relegated to incompleteness as its component fabrics sit in a box waiting to be assembled. The quilt frequently serves as a metaphor, an idea possibly inspired by, but nevertheless still separate from, its materiality. The quilt also has critical roles—of psychically aiding adopting parents, of connecting strangers and family, etc.—but is acting primarily at the behest of humans, not via their own material nature. The OHGWQ experience

is as much about the makers and imaginers as it is about the quilts themselves.

Michael Owen Jones' concept of material behaviour, therefore, is one I find useful as a starting point for studying OHGWQ. As he defines it, "material behavior—short for 'material aspects and manifestations of human behavior'—refers to activity involved in producing or responding to the physical dimension of our world" (Jones 1997, p. 202). As a folklorist, his notion privileges the human actor:

The person who weaves a basket, constructs a chair, or prepares a meal possesses a self concept, has developed a personality, interacts with others (often including the object's recipient), and feels various emotions—elements of which the physical entity objectifies and discloses.

(Jones 1997, p. 202).

However, he also acknowledges that objects, too, impact human behaviour and feelings when he emphasises that they are not solely products of human processes, but can also be "palpable stimuli that trigger responses" (Jones 1997, p. 202). In other words, objects are shaped by people who are in turn shaped by them. Material behaviour, Jones argues, includes the maker's motivation, which generally falls into one or more of the categories of sensory, practical, ideational/creative, or therapeutic (1995)—all of which are shown in this thesis to be relevant to the OHGWQ-making experience. Importantly, he acknowledges other lenses through which one can interpret objects, but emphasises human behaviour, particularly as seen in *making*:

While we can view the production of objects as a reflection of historical processes, as an element of culture, or as an index of social conditions and processes, we can also investigate some things in their immediate situation of manufacture as aspects or manifestations of human behavior.

(Jones 2013, p. Kindle file)

Human behaviour, as a framework for considering human-object interaction, relates directly to the relationship I explore between OHGWQ makers/organisers/contributors and the quilt on which they collaborate.

The next two sections introduce some of the historical, cultural, and social processes that are helpful in further interpreting OHGWQ.

3.2.2 Textiles, metaphor, and in-betweenness

In her framework for examining textiles' meanings, textile historian Beverly Gordon delineates seven categories in which these objects play an integral role in humans' daily lives: survival needs; social community; social and economic power relationships; cognitive; aesthetic; self-actualization and personal fulfilment; and spiritual. Starting with basic needs such as shelter and protection, Gordon demonstrates how textiles have always safeguarded humans, not only in clothing and housing them, but in granting psychic protection, especially to children, through blankets and carriers that give them physical or symbolic closeness to a parent. She also addresses how group affiliation is frequently displayed through textiles such as folk costume or national flags, as is power and status, particularly through shows of conspicuous sartorial consumption. Communication is performed via textiles in a variety of ways, from direct written messages on objects like the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, or through aesthetic channels, as in contemporary fibre art. Finally, personal fulfilment and spirituality, at the apex of what might be considered a corollary structure to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, can be achieved through the potentially therapeutic process of making and the creation of spiritually focused textiles such as prayer flags and liturgical cloths. Concurrent with their participation in humans' daily lives, textiles have also been key components in marking pivotal or momentous occasions: birth, coming of age, pre-marriage, marriage, calendrical cycle, and death rituals are primary among these. From babies' receiving blankets, to bridal tents, to funeral shrouds, textiles have always been intrinsic components of commemoration (Gordon 2010, 2011)

Perhaps because they are flexible, both physically and functionally, textiles' meanings often have been seen as negotiable. Conservator Dinah Eastop references Appadurai's "social life of things" in her discussion of how textiles' meanings evolve and accumulate over time, as transferal of ownership takes place and, in many cases, as the object is physically transformed. Specifically, in reference to determining conservation treatment methods, she discusses a c. 1600 doublet found inside the walls of a house, which could, at the very least, be defined either by its rarity as an intact seventeenth-century garment or as an example of the phenomenon of "deliberately concealed garments." In the end, the latter was agreed upon and the treatment of the piece left it as-is, retaining the creases, folds, and stains it obtained during its centuries of concealment (Brooks and Marschner 2000).

Being intimate parts of human experience as well as carriers/creators of a multiplicity of meanings, textiles, as with other forms of material culture and folk life, have often been used as metaphors or as symbols for explaining complex or difficult ideas. The Hindu concept of the veil of Maya, for instance, uses a textile to represent the human condition: we live in the material world (Maya) but are separated from the spiritual plane by a veil, a thin, gauzy substance that allows those who are able to "see" through it to break free of the illusion of materiality. Other cultures, too, have incorporated textiles into their myths—tales that help them make sense of the world. In Greek mythology, for instance, the tales of Arachne, Penelope, Theseus and the Minotaur, and Clothos (one of the three Fates) all include textile-related themes. Metaphorical language also demonstrates the power of textiles as ideas: "spinning a yarn," "hanging by a thread," and "life's rich tapestry" are all common English phrases that use textile imagery to communicate abstract concepts.

The metaphorical power of textiles does not exist solely in ancient mythology and common catch-phrases. Modern literature also makes frequent use of textile-related symbolism. Literary critic Elaine Showalter outlines the use of quilts and patchwork as metaphors in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American women's fiction, tracing their evolution from a mark of

female cultural separateness prior to the Civil War, to a sign of “the decline of a female aesthetic” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to symbols of “vanished past experience to which we have a troubled and ambivalent cultural relationship” in the mid-twentieth-century feminist era (Showalter 1986, p. 228). In even broader literary and cultural terms, she also opines that,

The patchwork quilt came to replace the melting-pot as the central metaphor of American cultural identity. In a very unusual pattern, it transcended the stigma of its sources in women’s culture and has been remade as a universal sign of American identity.

(Showalter 1991, p. 169)

The patchwork metaphor—standing for Americans’ idealised perception of their nation as harmoniously heterogeneous—is also powerful because of the comforting nature of textiles. As Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley noted in their introduction to *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern*, a collection of essays on quilts in American literature and culture:

No matter who we are, we all want to wrap ourselves in a quilt, metaphorically speaking. Like those comfort foods of childhood—macaroni and cheese, peanut butter and bananas, tapioca pudding—quilts provide a sensory experience that makes us feel good about ourselves.

(Torsney and Elsley 1994, p. 1)

These piecework metaphors and of comforting via textile wrapping will be relevant in later discussions of informants’ views of OHGWQ (see Chapter 5.1).

Beyond myth, language, and literature, textile metaphors also appear frequently in the social sciences. In speaking of social scientists’ use of textile metaphors (e.g. “the fabric of society”), anthropologists Annette Weiner and Jane Schneider explain: “The softness and ultimate fragility of these materials capture the vulnerability of humans, whose every relationship is transient, subject to the degenerative processes of illness, death, and decay” (1989, p.

2). Human vulnerability is also seen in Sandra Dudley's anthropological study of Karenni refugees in northwest Thailand, for whom traditional dress "becomes a metaphor not only for the past itself but also for the loss of that past," as they adjust to a displaced lifestyle in which traditional costume is frequently discouraged (by Christian converts) or displaced (by the ubiquitous global garment, the T-shirt) (2010, p. 102). In some cases, the metaphorical and the real can be seen to converge. For instance, in Catherine Allerton's study of Indonesian sarongs, she describes the textiles as "super-skins," representing the skin's protective yet intimate properties while also describing how the sarong is actually an "artefactual extension of their [sic] wearer's body [in that] they absorb substances and intentions, offer comfort at times of upset or illness, and transmit social or emotional messages" (2007, p. 22). In the same way, the *pallu*—the loose, decorative end of an Indian woman's sari—serves as an extension of the woman herself, often acting as a comforting shell within which her children shelter, first as nursing babies, then as napping toddlers, and later as occasionally shy children (Banerjee and Miller 2003).

A corollary to the *pallu*—one that is relevant to OHGWQ—is Judy Attfield's interpretation of psychologist D.W. Winnicott's notion of the "transitional object." Winnicott originally proposed that infants utilise a "not-me" object to aid them emotionally as they transition away from mother-attachment. He argues that a soft, textural textile object such as a baby blanket, which serves as a stand-in for the mother, helps during this process of individuation. As the child separates from her mother through the use of a proxy, she begins to achieve a notion of her own selfness (Winnicott 2005). Although other material culturists have discussed the idea of the transitional object, Attfield argues that they ignore "the significance of the *particularity* of the blanket, the actual material object that facilitates that first separation of the subject from the object," i.e. the baby from the mother (2000, p. 126) [emphasis added]. She argues that specific textiles—ones that have become embedded in a human's life through repeated use and/or proximity—can play a unique role in identity formation. I reference Winnicott's transitional object

again in Chapter 6 when I discuss OHGWQ as objects that help parents make the mental shift to include their adopted child in their concept of family, and to help others do the same.

The identification and explication of textiles' importance in transitional roles relates to larger discussions of liminality and in-betweenness, a major theme throughout this thesis. For Winnicott, the transitional object (e.g. blanket) is an intimate part of an infant's liminal existence, during which he/she acquires the skills, tools, and increasing self-awareness to become a different person, separate from his/her mother. Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (1978) expands Winnicott's idea of *transition* to one of *transformation*, arguing that the mother, who, through her constant care and provision of sustenance, represents the transformative "object" (read: ever-present, all-encompassing, and sustaining environment) that humans consistently seek to reproduce into adulthood in order to feel fulfilled and existentially satisfied. He explains that,

In adult life, the quest is not to possess the object; it is sought in order to surrender to it as a process that alters the self, where the subject-as-suppliant now feels himself to be the recipient of enviro-somatic caring, identified with metamorphoses of the self.

(1978, p. 97)

Unfortunately, this journey can be fruitless and frustrating. Bollas argues that, "varied psychological pathologies emerge from failure ... to be disillusioned from this relationship" (1978, p. 99). The unfulfilled longing for a single object that satisfies internal and external needs in the way that one's mother met them as an infant can lead to a liminality that is limitless—an unending in-betweenness. This unsatisfying situation helps explain the power of objects such as textiles, which can easily be the object of what Bollas calls the "aesthetic moment," in which the longed-for transformative feeling is momentarily harkened. As the child uses the transitional blanket, so might an adult hope to find something to transport them out of a liminal state into one of emotional fulfillment.

Another framework for exploring liminality is anthropologist Victor Turner's (1977) examination of rites of passage in traditional societies. Turner identifies the three stages of an initiate's experience: detachment, in-betweenness, and reincorporation. Physical and/or participatory removal from daily life constitutes the first stage, followed by the typically longer liminal phase in which an initiate waits in limbo to take part in the ceremonies and rites that allow him to graduate to his new position and become reabsorbed into the group. This middle phase is one in which the initiate's status is made void or mysterious. Turner explains,

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions.

(1977, p. 96)

Uniquely, the liminal phase creates an environment in which all initiates are equal, despite prior status within the society. Because of its separate, simultaneously in-and-out-of-time quality, the liminal phase contributes to a sense of *communitas*, as opposed to hierarchy. *Communitas* in turn helps reinforce the "generalized social bond" (1977, p. 96) that is fundamental to sustaining a society or community.

Anthropologist David Parkin transposes the idea of liminality to the specific context of refugee migration and, like Winnicott, identifies the importance of objects to those involved in this transitional process. Migration, which anthropologist Maruska Svasek describes as "almost unavoidably a process that unnerves, motivates, excites, upsets or demoralizes individuals, or moves them in alternate ways" (2008, p. 214) is made all the more disruptive or stressful when it is forced. Refugees often latch onto objects that allow them to retain emotional connections to the life and community from which they were removed. In addition to linking a refugee to the past, Parkin argues, objects also can fill in for the absence of stable community in the

present. He asserts that when refugees are in a situation in which they cannot trust or forge substantial bonds with the people currently surrounding them (in a refugee camp, for instance), another alternative is to “invest emotionally ... in accessible objects, ideas and dreams rather than in the living people around one” (1999, p. 308). Forced migration can be traumatising, and the objects refugees flee with can be both comforting symbols of home *and* reminders of the trauma of displacement, giving them an in-between status that bridges positive and negative emotions. Parkin identifies a further aspect of liminality when he asks, “May not the notion of ‘home’ and of ‘origin’ refer to many places and not one fixed locus, in a way perhaps similar to the undeniably contestable and yet fluid boundaries of ethnicity and even nationality?” (1999, p. 309). In the same way that textiles’ flexible nature makes them ideal candidates for metaphorical linguistic usage, refugees’ status as being in between worlds contributes to a more fluid understanding of ethnic and national identities. These examinations of the importance of objects during and after migration—of which ICA is a distinct sub-group—will become relevant again in Chapter 6.3.4’s discussion of ways in which OHGWQ could play a role in adoptees’ identity formation processes and their transitioning from externally- to internally-devised notions of selfhood.

3.2.3 *Everyday creativity*³⁴

Another useful touchstone throughout this thesis is media scholar David Gauntlett’s concept of “everyday creativity.” Gauntlett argues that standard definitions of creativity have tended to privilege originality and societal impact as their most critical components, while other, less far-reaching forms of creativity have been neglected. He points to psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who examines the work of prominent scientists, artists, and other professionals, as one source for high impact notions of creativity. In his book *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Csikszentmihalyi defines the term as “a process by which a

³⁴ Portions of this section previously published at:
<http://worldquilts.quiltstudy.org/americanstory/creativity/everydaycreativity>.

symbolic domain [an area of creative practice such as poetry or sculpture] in the culture is changed” (1997, p. 8). He further outlines prerequisites for this culture-level change to occur: a creative individual, a pre-existing context, and arbiters who can judge whether or not the creative output has had significant impact. Gauntlett argues that relying on the appraisal of experts is appropriate in studying those whose work will deeply impact a field, but that “the lens which is helpful for asking ‘How do major cultural or scientific innovations emerge?’ is not necessarily the right lens for studying the much more everyday instances of creativity” (2011, p. 15).

In contrast, Gauntlett references Victorian philosopher and critic John Ruskin and thinker/maker William Morris to find the roots for a wider, more comprehensive definition of creativity. Writing as the Industrial Revolution had reached its full expression, Ruskin criticised the dehumanisation of industrial workers, emphatically stating that joy and creative expression must be maintained in the trades. In one of his most famous treatises, “The Nature of Gothic” (1853), he lauds medieval artisans’ individual creativity, as witnessed especially in Gothic cathedrals’ gargoyles, whose faces show an amazing range of personality, a reflection of their makers’ imaginations (Ruskin 1885). Ruskin’s admirer Morris put these sentiments to work, making objects throughout his career that exemplified a devotion to handwork, and agitating for socialist ideals focused on dignity and happiness through individual labour: “unless man’s work once again becomes a pleasure to him ... all but the worthless must toil in pain, and therefore live in pain” (Morris 1892).

Bringing Ruskin and Morris’ broad-based philosophies of making into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Gauntlett references not only traditional handicraft revivals such as the “back to the land” movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but also new forms of creativity and sharing such as YouTube videos and blog posts. The desire to make things is a nearly universal compulsion, he maintains, whether it’s through the physical processes of knitting, woodworking, or model train building, or through less material-based activities like creating poetry, websites, or a Pinterest board. Taken together, these activities can lead to what philosopher Ivan Illich calls

“conviviality,” or “the opposite of industrial productivity ... [the] autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment” (1973, p. 11). Making, therefore, can have a societal impact when many people (not simply a single creative genius) are engaged in creativity and community.

Drawing from these more populist conceptions of creativity, Gauntlett advocates for an inclusive definition that embraces common people’s activities and motivations:

Everyday creativity refers to a process which brings together at least one active human mind, and the material or digital world, in the activity of making something. The activity has not been done in this way by this person (or these people) before. The process may arouse various emotions, such as excitement and frustration, but most especially a feeling of joy. When witnessing and appreciating the output, people may sense the presence of the maker, and recognize those feelings.

(2011, p. 76)

What distinguishes this definition is that it does not rely on novelty or widespread significance as core elements. In addition, Gauntlett’s emphasis on process and the emotions it manifests takes precedence over the final product; indeed, his only reference to outcome involves others’ recognition of the maker’s “presence” inherent in the thing. He further argues that nearly everyone shares an inherent drive to create and to “make their mark,” which can lead to both personal happiness and social cohesion (2011).

Gauntlett is not the only scholar to reassess commonly held notions of creativity. Like Gauntlett, anthropologists Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam reject the artificial division between “high” and “low” creativity as well as the cultural partiality for the former. They argue that conventionally-defined creativity, rather than being inherently more novel or important, is primarily differentiated from everyday creativity by its emphasis on results. In other words, they argue, Creativity is powered by innovation—which always has an eye towards the end product—while creativity, conversely, is generated

through improvisation, which emphasises process. The creative output from improvisation, Ingold and Hallam hold, is both relational and temporal in that it is affected and shaped by surrounding phenomena over a period of time—in other words, it is not defined by an isolated, “Eureka!” moment. Improvisation is also an ingrained human process and as such, “the creativity of our imaginative reflections is inseparable from our performative engagements with the materials that surround us” (Hallam and Ingold 2007, p. 3). This constant give-and-take between makers and things and between makers, things, and the physical, cultural, and social environments in which they interact (much in the same way as is described by Michael Owen Jones, above, as “material behavior”) is what characterises improvisation and by extension, creativity.

The fluidity and contingency of improvisation is also what makes copying—an activity ordinarily dismissed as mechanical or rote within traditional models of creativity—an inherently creative act, an argument supported by anthropologist Maruska Svasek who maintains that “Whether replicated or not, there is always uniqueness in artefacts and pictures; produced or used in new situations, they are necessarily drawn into specific temporal or spatio-temporal situations” (2016, p. 2). In other words, imitation always includes maker- and situationally-affected modifications, both of which can contribute to the creativity of the act.

The creative legitimacy of copying and reproducing is particularly relevant within the context of everyday crafting such as quilting, which relies heavily upon person-to-person and pattern-based teaching for its transmission. Quiltmakers have nearly always learned their craft from other makers or via published patterns and manuals, and this instruction typically focuses upon the reproduction of increasingly complex models. Research has shown, however, that even when utilising a predetermined pattern, quiltmakers have often inserted their own esthetic sensibilities and technical innovations into the process, affecting the outcome in both subtle and more obvious ways. Art historian Janet Berlo argues that American quiltmakers have always exhibited originality despite the “supposed conformity to convention that the repeating block style suggests” (2003, p. 22). She cites

the Log Cabin quilt—one of the most popular patterns of the late-nineteenth century—which, despite its reliance on a standard, repeating block construction, has the potential for great variety: “Individual choices in scale, materials, and color palette ensure that each quilt is a unique visual statement” (2003, p. 22). Further, she acknowledges the potential for quilting situations in which “serendipity was part of the design strategy” (2003, p. 22). In other words, even when reproducing common patterns, as many of the OHGWQ makers did, quiltmakers can and do improvise, creating unique objects while reacting to internal and external influences.

Such newer, more nuanced understandings of creativity are becoming normative in contemporary DIY and craft communities, many of which emphasise learning and making as worthwhile in their own rights rather than as means to an end (Spencer 2005, Levine 2008, Frauenfelder 2010). In academia, however, writing on craft has tended to be more conventional and, some critics might say, elitist. Perennial theoretical issues such as craft versus art and crafting as a political act³⁵ are topics of interest to those in the academy, and have brought much-needed attention to craftspeople with self-consciously artistic or political motivations. However, as design historian Judy Attfield has noted, “the site which has been most neglected apart from the attention accorded to it by feminist historians, is craft production which takes place in the home” (2000, p. 72).³⁶ Even Glenn Adamson, today’s leading craft studies scholar, who defines craft broadly as “the application of skill and material-based knowledge to relatively small-scale production” (2010, p. 2), chooses to focus on studio-trained, intellectually-focused creators (2007) to the exclusion of home-based, everyday craftspeople.

For the most part, quiltmakers, like those who produce OHGWQ, are quintessential everyday craftspeople. Although there have been professional

³⁵ See, for instance, *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Buszek 2011).

³⁶ As exceptions, Attfield cites seminal works such as Roszika Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984) and *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (Broude and Garrard 1982). In reference to quilts specifically, I would also add Patricia Mainardi’s *Quilts: The Great American Art* (Mainardi 1978) and Janet Berlo’s *Wild by Design: Two Hundred Years of Innovation and Artistry in American Quilts* (Berlo et al. 2003).

quiltmakers in the past and although quilting today economically supports a range of professionals (teachers, shopkeepers, etc.), most quiltmakers are and have been everyday people. Sometimes they make quilts for purely practical reasons, but most quiltmakers today do it primarily because it is a creative activity. Sociologist Marybeth Stalp has shown in her intensive research of contemporary quiltmakers that, contrary to what non-quiltmakers often think, people who make quilts are motivated primarily by the love of the process, not by the desire to have an end product (2008). They love every step of the process: designing or choosing a pattern, picking and buying the fabric, sewing the blocks, performing the quilting, and finishing the piece. Indeed, process sometimes trumps product—thus the plentiful stories about quiltmakers' enormous fabric “stashes” and numerous “UFOs” (unfinished objects) or, in this thesis, the several instances of as-yet-incomplete OHGWQ.

Quiltmakers also love sharing their creative works with others—an activity identified by Gauntlett as a critical aspect of everyday creativity. Some do this through traditional quilt guild meetings or by entering their quilts in county or state fairs. Others do it through online forums. Whatever the venue, community often becomes a critical component of quiltmakers' creative lives. For OHGWQ makers specifically, Gauntlett's emphasis on making as a potent form of community-building is especially relevant: most makers cite the creation of a support system for their soon-to-be-adopted child as a primary motivation for making the quilt (see Chapter 6).

The three theoretical ideas discussed in this chapter—the intersection of material culture and material behaviour, the metaphorical power of textiles, and the mundanity/sublimity dialectic of everyday creativity—hold one important concept in common: process. Objects, as described by Jones, are formed by and thus reflect various aspects of human behaviour, which is affected by the object itself. Textiles, which are tactile and workable by nature, lend themselves to being used as metaphors, particularly as seen in Attfield's refinement of the “transitional object” to include reference to the specific nature of textiles (i.e. the baby blanket). Finally, Gauntlett's notion of everyday

creativity is defined more by the feelings it engenders and the communication it fosters than by any static end product. In the following chapters, this thesis continually returns to the idea of process, whether it is Making (a family, a quilt, a self-conception), Imagining (the quilt, China), or Connecting (to a child, via the internet, to family and friends).

PART 2: Themes

Chapter 4: Making

In examining the OHGWQ phenomenon, “making” has a variety of contexts and connotations. This chapter focuses on the conceptual process of making a family and the physical act of making a quilt. In the first instance, making a family through adoption—generally regarded as a “non-traditional” method—is predicated upon a range of considerations completely foreign to biological forms of family-building.

First, parents need to carefully research the often byzantine adoption process and investigate the vast array of available adoption agencies. They must decide upon a sending country, which may be influenced by the transparency and reliability of that country’s ICA program or by their own interest in a particular culture. Preparing emotionally is critical as well, both in terms of being ready to wait months or years longer than a biological pregnancy and in terms of studying the various medical and emotional needs children of ICA often face. In this study of OHGWQ makers, informants appreciated that adoption was an altogether distinct form of family-making and took seriously the unique modes of preparation and understanding it requires.

In the second instance, making a quilt, especially a community-based one, demands particular approaches and skills, many of which were unfamiliar to informants when they first embarked upon the OHGWQ project. Soliciting fabrics from both friends and strangers, planning the design, identifying the maker(s), and shepherding the materials through the sewing process, all in the midst of also managing the details of an ICA, could prove frustrating, possibly requiring novel approaches to accomplishing requisite tasks. The project also had the potential to serve as a barometer of sorts, revealing the coordinator’s personality—whether ambitious, casual, organized, or haphazard—and paralleling the adoption’s procedural and emotional highs and lows.

In addition to providing fertile ground for exploring issues surrounding

making a family and making a quilt, the OHGWQ project interrogates the concept of what it means to make and to be a maker. Informants for whom the physical construction of the quilt was not a realistic option often turned to a friend, a family member, or a professional for help. Yet, they felt that by planning, organising, and implementing the quilt project—and even further, by spearheading the creation of an allied product such as a scrapbook or website—they were an intimate part of the quilt’s production, i.e. one of its makers. Although this idea flies in the face of conventional notions of creativity, which value an individual’s solo act of novel creation, it aligns with newer, more quotidian ideas of “everyday creativity.” Alternatively, a select few informants who had not been quiltmakers prior to learning about OHGWQ, used the project as a way to learn and hone a new skill, eventually self-identifying as dedicated, full-fledged quiltmakers in the process. “Making” in the OHGWQ context, therefore, has varied definitions, with the unifying element being the desire to pursue a community project welcoming an adopted child to her new family. This chapter unpacks some of the complex issues surrounding the idea of making, whether in the creation of a concept, such as a family, or a physical object, such as a quilt.

Section 4.1 examines the meaning of making within the family context. It outlines the differing procedures and emotional and ethical considerations between building a family biologically and via adoption, and discusses how some families felt their choice to adopt was not seen as an equal form of “making.” Section 4.2 looks at the process of exchanging fabrics, recruiting donors, and overseeing the quilt’s production as one of complexity, and an activity that often directly paralleled other aspects of the project coordinator’s personality and the adoption process as a whole. Finally, Section 4.3 addresses conceptual issues of making, related to who actually constructed the quilt and what other forms of auxiliary material people associated with the project members produced.

4.1 Making a family

For most people, “making a family” refers to producing biological

children. Deciding to make a family via adoption is a wholly other process. First-hand experience with adoption and adoptees can help facilitate decision-making but there are always unknowns, such as potential medical issues and whether the source country's requirements and processes are stable. Deciding to adopt from China includes its own specific variables; the rapidly increasing number of children with special medical needs and the widespread nature of institutionalisation for orphaned and abandoned children in that country can factor into a family's decision to adopt.

OHGWQ informants came to the decision to adopt from China in a number of ways and were influenced by both universal and personal issues. Making their family through China adoption also required various forms of preparation, including communicating their decision to others and sometimes steeling themselves against uninformed and judgmental opinions about adoption. To ensure the success of the adoption, parents also required a team of people, not just themselves and their medical doctor as in most cases of biological family building. All of these varied preparatory activities and personnel held the goal of—like the OHGWQ—welcoming the adopted child into her dramatically new life. This section addresses the complexities, difficulties, and unique decisions faced when making a family via adoption, which will lead into the next section's discussion of the complexities of pursuing a group project like a OHGWQ.

4.1.1 Deciding to adopt

Informants in this study came to the decision to adopt in a variety of ways. Several cited the fact that it was prevalent in their immediate and extended families as a primary reason for being comfortable with adoption. Lisa talked about the fact that between herself and her husband, they had five adopted cousins—one adopted domestically and four internationally. Because of this they felt “it was a very normal way to build a family.” During the 1980s alone, ICA brought nearly 8,000 children annually to the United States, making Lisa's experience not unusual (Kreider 2007, p. 133).

Growing up, Cybil was intimately familiar with adoption, because her

best friend in high school and three of the children she babysat were adopted from Korea; even today, her best friend is an adopted Korean woman who is a “really strong role model” for her Chinese daughter. Cybil’s acquaintance with multiple Korean adoptees over the years is unsurprising given that between 1955 and 1998, approximately 100,000 Korean children were adopted into American families, with South Korean adoptions representing over half of all international adoptions in the 1980s and early 1990s (Kim 2003, p. 63).

One informant, Denise, had multiple connections to adoption, including from Korea. In addition to having extended family members with internationally adopted children, she had adopted a Korean daughter decades earlier with her first husband and had subsequently adopted a Vietnamese son and a Korean son with her second husband before they decided to adopt again, this time from China. They had made the decision to start thinking about adopting again when her husband, who was on their local adoption agency’s board of directors, learned that the agency had just received its first cohort of children with special medical needs, including a young girl with a congenital heart defect. Denise’s husband began advocating for this girl, despite Denise’s hesitation:

I was like, “No way, we are not doing this. We’ve got a[n] ... under three-year-old [and] a one-and-a-half-year-old. We live in a fairly rural place. That surgery— she would have to have it in San [Francisco] ... you’re crazy, absolutely not.” And by the next morning, I’d said, “yes.”

Another parent of a child with special needs, Karen, noted that she was comfortable with her daughter’s specific medical issue, cleft lip and palate, because her own uncle, now in his 60s, also had the same condition, “and you would never know it at this point. ... Having personal experience with that ... that was something we definitely felt like we could handle.”

In one case, regret about *not* having an immediate connection to adoption served as partial inspiration: Shannon spoke about the regret her own mother had that she never adopted, even though she had wanted to. Shannon explained,

It just never really worked out. I think at the time she was thinking about a Korean adoption when I was younger. It was important for me to allow her to share in this experience because it was one thing that I think she— if she was really honest with you, I think she would say it was one of her things that she missed out on in life.

Whether or not a family had prior experience with adoption or with a specific special need clearly played a role in some informants' decisions to adopt.

Although several informants obliquely referenced difficulty in conceiving a biological child as motivation to adopt—primarily by talking about their participation in online message boards devoted to infertility—only one informant talked directly about health issues as a reason for adopting. Lucia said,

We always knew that we would be open to [adoption], and actually had some issues getting pregnant with my son. Then the biggest thing is that I had a life-threatening situation during my pregnancy with him. We knew after that definitively if we wanted to build our family we'd have to do it through adoption.

Infertility and previous exposure to adoption are often cited as reasons that Americans pursue adoption—whether publicly (via the foster care system), privately, or internationally. Based on data drawn from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth, Hollingsworth (2000) found that women who had been treated for infertility were five times more likely to seek to adopt than those who had not. A more recent study based on the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP), showed that over fifty percent of adoptive parents had reported infertility as their reason for adopting (Malm and Welti 2010, p. 194). For parents who had specifically adopted internationally, Welsh et al. found that infertility was one of their top four motivations, along with “just wanted to adopt,” “concerns about birth parent issues associated with domestic adoptions,” and “humanitarian reasons” (Harris Interactive 2007, pp. 23, 27). In terms of familiarity with adoption, a 2007 survey by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption found that

“exposure to adoption improves opinions of private infant and foster care adoption” and that nearly half of respondents had personally been “touched by” adoption (i.e. are adopted, have adopted, or have family/friends who were adopted) (Harris Interactive 2007, pp. 23, 27). Furthermore, analysis of the 2007 NSAP data shows that 90% of parents who had adopted internationally had a prior relationship with an adoptee, which is significantly higher than parents who had adopted through the U.S. foster care system (74%) or through a private domestic arrangement (67%) (Harris Interactive 2007, pp. 23, 27).

Special needs (SN) adoption, as Karen, Denise, and other informants in this research pursued, has been extensively researched in the U.S. domestic context (e.g. Denby *et al.* 2011, Mullin and Johnson 1999, Schweiger and O’Brien 2005) but very little in terms of international adoption (Tan *et al.* 2007). Despite this dearth of research, SN cases have become increasingly relevant, especially within the China context. According to Amy Eldridge, founder of the organization Love Without Boundaries, which raises medical funds for children in Chinese social welfare institutions (SWI), SWI directors report that 90% to 98% of the children they care for have a special medical or developmental need, as compared to a decade ago when most SWI residents were healthy girls (Eldridge 2013).³⁷ Tan *et al.*’s finding that “children classified as special needs were significantly more likely to be adopted in families that had raised or were raising biological children” (2007, p. 1277) corresponds with the experience of four of the informants in this research; and of the two other informants who talked explicitly about their SN adoption, both had previously adopted a non-special needs child from China. Previous experience with child-rearing and/or with adoption seemed to play a significant role in parents deciding they were prepared for a child with special needs.

Indeed, in the case of Michele L. and her husband, who were in their

³⁷ In addition to a wide range of medical and developmental issues, older children (over one year) are also considered ‘special need,’ as are children who have suffered abuse, neglect, and exposure to drug/alcohol abuse.

50s when they adopted a special needs daughter from China, they already had two adult biological children, a son graduated from college and a daughter still enrolled. When Michele told her daughter they were submitting their papers to adopt from China, her daughter said, "Are you kidding?," a semi-humorous reaction to the fact that Michele had teased her daughter in the past, saying if she didn't come home from college more often, when she did she would "find a little Chinese girl in her bed." Less humorous was the fact that the baby they were in the midst of adopting suddenly became unavailable when her SWI discovered she had a severe heart defect. Michele and her husband were not on the special needs "track" and were therefore forced to shift to adopting a different, non-SN child. Their commitment and emotional attachment to the first girl, however, was such that they continued with their efforts to adopt her, despite the regulations against it. In the end, they were successful and these older parents were able to adopt two young daughters from China.³⁸

While previous parenting, relationships with adoptees, and/or familiarity with specific special needs inspired some, for Cybil and her husband, their decision to adopt was a serendipitous one inspired by a television chat show. In 2004, the National Geographic cable television channel produced a documentary titled "China's Lost Girls." Hosted by Chinese-American journalist Lisa Ling, it explored the reasons for child abandonment in China and followed a group of American parents on their journey to China to retrieve their adopted daughters. In promoting the documentary, Ling appeared on Oprah Winfrey's popular daily chat show, of which Cybil was a devoted fan. Her husband happened to watch it with her that day (although he normally did not), and they were both so affected by the stories of abandoned Chinese babies and the American parents who joyously welcomed them into their families, they immediately decided to adopt from China:

[My husband] turned to me and said, "We have to do this."

³⁸ Although Michele and her husband were older than usual, the average age of parents adopting internationally is relatively high; in one study, the parents' mean age was around 40, a figure consistent with previous studies on adoptive parents (Welsh *et al.* 2008, p. 187).

That's all he said, and the next day I sent away for a packet. The agency we used was Great Wall [China Adoption], which is the agency they talked about in the National Geographic documentary ... It was very touching, it kind of just proved that that was how I knew I was supposed to be with my husband. We were so on the same page with this.

For these two parents, the decision to adopt from China was a quick and mutual one.

In a couple of other cases, however, informants talked about being ready to adopt before their spouses were. Jen admits, "I talked him into it, I mean, I started the process before he was even ready." For Jen's husband, Jason, absorbing adoption was a slow, gradual process, and he did not feel ready until "we walked in the door of the hotel [in China] and saw the crib and [I knew that] 'oh, this is gonna happen.'" But I was fine with it. It's just that [this is when] reality set in." Similarly, Amy was ready to adopt but her husband didn't want to "go window shopping," as he phrased it and instead felt that "If God leads someone to our door, that's great." Once he saw a photograph of their daughter-to-be, however, Amy's husband recalled their church pastor's recent encouragement to help those in need, and told her to "go for it."

Amy's husband's objection to "window shopping" aligns with concerns international adoption observers raise over the use of photographs on adoption websites and elsewhere. Adoption agencies frequently share "waiting child" lists with prospective parents, complete with images and information about the child's background and special need(s). Cartwright has outlined several of the moral issues surrounding this use of photographs, including "the problematic nature of a system where children of poor countries become commodities and their images become advertisements in a global market, the enhanced potential for racial and esthetic discrimination in image-based child selection, and the child's right to privacy" (2003, p. 83). The absorption of children available for international adoption into modern visual culture paradigms (e.g. the photo-listing of objects for sale on internet shopping sites) is ubiquitous but not without controversy.



Figure 20: Screenshot of gwca.org showing their China adoption photo-listing feature.

The circulation of waiting children photos, however, is only one of many contested aspects of international adoption. As Cartwright noted, the overall commodification of children is a genuine concern for adoption critics, many of whom cite the income disparity between “sending” and “receiving” countries as well as the overall impression that one country, South Korea, for instance, is “selling” its children to a wealthier one such as the United States.³⁹ This general resource imbalance also has led to claims that international adoption is a form of “neo-colonialism,” with Western nations exploiting poorer, less developed countries in new, non-territorialistic ways (Hübinette 2004). Another target for criticism is the documented history of women, generally

³⁹ South Korea’s relatively liberal adoption policy during the 1950s-1970s, which allowed “almost unrestricted adoption” (Altstein and Simon 1991, p. 4), made it the frequent target of criticism from its neighbor, North Korea. Later, during the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, the country received considerable negative publicity in the U.S. about the number of children leaving its borders via adoption (Kim 2003, p. 64, Hübinette 2004, p. 18).

from poor and uneducated backgrounds, being coerced or forced to give up their children (Herrmann and Kasper 1992, McKinney 2007, Rotabi and Bromfield 2012). Further, the removal of children from one race or culture into a wholly different one can present serious identity issues for adoptees as they mature (Hollingsworth 1997, Hübinette 2004, Baden 2008, Kim 2010, Docan-Morgan 2011, Annamma 2012, Kalb 2012). Finally, some observers argue that the infrastructure supporting international adoption (governmental bodies, private adoption agencies, etc.) has become so widespread and embedded that “goal displacement” has occurred; in other words, the “system goal” of perpetuating governmental and private institutions has replaced the original “outcome goal” of finding homes for orphans. In the South Korean example, Sarri et al. argue,

the original goal of attempting to solve the social problem of orphaned and abandoned multiracial children [who were products of U.S. military presence during the Korean War] was gradually displaced by continuance of the practice long after the original problem no longer existed, because it served organizational maintenance needs of adoption agency administrators and because it relieved the South Korean government of having to establish domestic programs.

(1998, p. 89)

In South Korea’s case, critics claim, such institutional self-perpetuation has effectively stunted attempts at shifting cultural values that contribute to child abandonment in the first place, such as the stigma against single motherhood. Opponents of international adoption, therefore, have cited specific examples of abuse and exploitation as well as a general imbalance of power between sending and receiving nations to bolster their argument against the practice.

Proponents of ICA, on the other hand, argue that the frequently substandard conditions in which orphaned and abandoned children live—either in institutions or on the streets—trump any anti-adoption arguments. They say that while solving the problems that lead to children without families should be paramount, there are simply too many children worldwide who need

homes for adoption not to be one of the options in caring for them. Law professor Elizabeth Bartholet, one of the most outspoken advocates of international adoption writes,

International adoption is not a panacea. It will never be more than a very partial solution for the problems of the homeless children of the world. There are millions on millions of those children. The best solution in any event would be to solve the problems of social and economic injustice that prevent so many birth parents from being able to raise their children themselves. But given the realities of today's world, and the existence of so many children who will not be raised by their birth parents, international adoption does provide a very good solution for virtually all of those homeless children lucky enough to get placed.

(2007, p. 158)

Similarly, law professor Sara Dillon draws a parallel to political asylum when she argues that just as granting asylum to those persecuted in another country will not solve the in situ socio-political issues that cause them to flee, ICA will not fix the problem of child abandonment; however, both political asylum and intercountry adoption *will* help specific individuals in need. ICA, Dillon says, will “relieve the violation of the rights of certain children in the here and now, something that is of clear value to individual children” (2003, p. 197). The desire to provide a family for an individual child impelled most OHGWQ informants to pursue ICA.

4.1.2 Adopting from China

In deciding to adopt from China specifically, informants revealed an array of motivations. For some parents, it was a simple gender issue: they wanted a girl. Louise wanted a girl so greatly that she was blind to all other issues, a fact that embarrasses her now:

I have to admit, back then, I went into it so naïvely. It's so embarrassing and so painful to me now because all I wanted

was a daughter. That's all I wanted. I just wanted a daughter.

This was how I was going to complete that vision. I didn't know a lot about adoption, didn't know a lot about adoption issues, didn't know a lot about anything.

What she *did* know was that virtually all of the children available for adoption from China at that time (mid-2000s) were girls, but because her husband was Italian, she wanted to give him the option of choosing Russia, since it was geographically and culturally (relatively speaking) closer to his home country. Her husband pleasantly surprised her, however, by choosing China, saying "We're going to China. China is the future of the world." Karen, who already had three biological sons, wanted a girl so ardently that she even named her blog, "Praying for Pink." When she saw a family at a local department store with three Caucasian boys and an Asian girl, she immediately saw a parallel to her own family and was inspired to begin researching Asian adoption, eventually settling on China.

As discussed in Chapter 2.1 "U.S. Adoption from China," China's gender balance went from normal levels in the 1970s to a dramatically skewed ratio of 120 males to 100 females in 2013 (Chi *et al.* 2013, p. 51). Most observers lay the blame for this imbalance on the One Child Policy. Parents who feel the pressure to have a son as their sole governmentally-sanctioned child have sometimes aborted, hidden, or abandoned girl babies. Because abandoned female babies were by and large the "orphans" who filled Chinese SWIs from the 1980s through the mid-2000s, China adoption from its inception primarily involved girls. In fact, in the early 2000s an overwhelming 98% of Chinese adoptees in the U.S. were girls (Miller-Loessi and Kilic 2001). Miller-Loessi and Kilic (2001) argue that these adoptees constitute a "unique diaspora," sharing some characteristics with traditional diasporas such as common ethnic background and dispersion away from an ethnic "homeland," while displaying distinctive features such as a single mode of migration (adoption) and gender homogeneity (nearly all female). In the first population-based survey of U.S. families who had adopted internationally—conducted in the state of Minnesota with parents who had adopted between 1990 and

1998—researchers found that compared with the other largest sending country, Chinese adoptees were 98.2% female to South Korea's 52.2% (Hellerstedt *et al.* 2008, p. 165). Until recently, parents hoping for a girl were virtually assured one when they chose to adopt from China.

Other parents were attracted by the perceived straightforwardness of the China adoption program. As Christine explained it, "China says, 'You need to do ABCDEF and G,' you go do ABCDEF and G, and if it satisfies them you're going to be able to adopt, you just have to wait." Denise described the process similarly:

At that time, it had been such a predictable program. You put in your paperwork. You get everything done. Nine months later, you get a referral. One month later, you travel and then within a year ... you're going to have a baby in your arms.

The transparency of China adoption was psychologically critical to some informants. Shannon knew that she needed an open, predictable process, and explained that,

The thing that really sold us was the transparency of the program. I have known a lot of people to adopt from other countries where there wasn't as much transparency about the process. Then the process or the rules would change on them in the last minute. ... My personality is very structured. I would not handle that well.

Although the China adoption process has retained its reputation for straightforwardness, its other trademarks, efficiency and speed, have disappeared in the last five to seven years, as is addressed in Chapter 6. Dolly, who, unlike most of the informants, had not yet completed her adoption, acknowledged this decline in speed, but also praised the China program's well-established systems and protocols:

Doing the research about the stability of the adoptive program, the orphanages, and even now, the emerging foster care program, [we saw that in China] ... they have the organization of the process down, I mean, yes, there's long wait times,

depending, but although there can be some stressful periods that you go through in adoption, which we may yet encounter ... there's none of the really crazy stories that you hear about in other countries.

Although adopting from China is no longer the quick and efficient process it once was, adoptive parents appreciate the stability and predictability of the program.

Religion played a role in some couples' decisions to adopt from China. Lisa and her husband were unfamiliar with China's One Child Policy and its effects until they went to an adoption agency's informational meeting and listened to the story of a family who had adopted three Chinese children. During this meeting, Lisa said,

[That's where] I first heard the phrase the One Child Policy. I guess I'd heard it before, but it just didn't ... I hadn't registered it. [My husband] and I started listening to [this] family, and we're seeing the family, and we were really feeling pulled. There's no other way to describe [it]. I think that the Holy Spirit led us in a religious sense, for us, to look into China, and the more we researched, the more we thought this is more comfortable for us.

For Michele L., the role of religion was more historical and wide-ranging. She spoke of the fact that China welcomed Jewish refugees into Shanghai during World War II and of feeling compelled to help China in turn:

My family was not able to be rescued in that way [going to China] but it felt to me that my mother had survived [the Holocaust] and that just my being here and being able to have a life was because she survived. If I was going to adopt I was going to, I wanted to do a good turn. ... When I first learned about [China adoption], it was because [there] was a great need for girls to have families and I wanted to participate in that and China was a perfect place for me to adopt from because they had opened their doors to Jewish people.

For Michele, adopting from China was her way of contributing to her community: “The fact that I named her Shoshana and wanted to name her Shoshana is [that] I wanted a neon light on her head that she’s a Jewish girl. I wanted my community to immediately recognize the fact that she’s a Jewish girl. I think it’s great that there’s new blood in the Jewish community.”

The recent history of ICA has deep roots in religion, especially evangelical Christianity. Many Christians have felt “called” to adopt, often citing the Bible’s encouragement to “defend the fatherless” (Isaiah 1:17) as their inspiration. The Christian Alliance for Orphans, an umbrella organisation of evangelical adoption advocates, declares that their goal is to ensure that “an ever-expanding army of passionate advocates invest time, talent and treasure in a personal and sustained commitment to caring for orphans in the name of Christ” (About | Christian Alliance for Orphans 2015). Indeed, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest American Christian denomination apart from Catholicism, passed a pro-adoption resolution at their 2009 conference which, “encouraged every Southern Baptist family to pray about whether God wants them to adopt or provide foster care for a child or children” (Robinson 2015). The result of this urging has been a dramatic increase in adoptions within the evangelical Christian community, some members of which subscribe to author Dan Cruver’s belief that “the ultimate purpose of human adoptions by Christians is not to give orphans parents, as important as that is. It is to place them in a Christian home that they might be positioned to receive the gospel” (Cruver *et al.* 2011, p. n.p.). This theology-weighted understanding of adoption is one hallmark of the Christian adoption movement.

Critics of this development, however, argue variously that the theological grounding for “orphan theology,” as it is sometimes called, is faulty (Smolin 2012) and that it feeds an industry with a history of documented corruption while simultaneously inadequately preparing parents for the real, psychological and emotional needs of orphaned and institutionalised children (Joyce 2013). Although religion was not a focus of this study, a few informants talked briefly about their feelings about the “Christianisation” of international

adoption. Denise, for instance, criticised certain attitudes in some explicitly Christian adoption communities:

It's a really good thing that I'm not in charge of the world because if I was in charge of the world, a Christian adopting to save a poor lost soul would never be allowed to adopt. If that's what your motivation is, that's not a good one, but that's my book.

Maggie, who was active on a number of different adoption discussion boards, eventually was removed from one that had been founded by a Christian adoption advocate who, she felt, did not appreciate her defending the rights of Jewish and non-religious subscribers to voice their beliefs: "It felt like it was turning into a very Christian forum, and I felt like there was a lot of people who felt pushed away. When I tried to stand up for that, [the founder] kicked me out." Discussions of religion were largely coincidental in this study, however, and it was addressed by most informants as it related to personal experience and not as expression of universal or political values.

A familiarity with Chinese culture, more or less intimate, played a role for some informants, as well, in choosing to adopt from China. For Dolly, it was an obvious choice: being half Chinese and having travelled to China several times with her husband, she felt, "It's part of my family, it's part of who I am, and it's also a culture that my husband understands maybe more than someone who's never been there, and so in that sense, we've always been drawn to China." Michele L. talked about having always admired American author Pearl S. Buck, who is most famous for novels about early twentieth century China, but who was also a champion of ICA. Cybil talked positively about having grown up in a multicultural community, and Shannon cited the fact that her husband frequently travelled to Asia as significant in their choice of China.

Choosing China as the source country for an ICA can come with drawbacks, however, as some informants noted. Lucia and her husband, who were living in Japan at the time of their adoption, had initially looked at China, but when someone mentioned to them that Taiwan adoption included the

possibility of knowing their child's family, they changed their minds:

The big piece [of] why we decided to go to Taiwan was we knew there was a possibility that we might have the ability to form a connection with a birth family and to get information about our daughter's family. To us that was really important. The piece with China that was so saddening was that there would be no information, no connection, nothing to share with our daughter as she grew older.

As Lucia discovered, adoption from China rarely comes with the opportunity to know the birth family, since most children come into state care via anonymous parental abandonment (see Chapter 2.1). Denise, for instance, knew that her daughter, who has a congenital heart defect, had been left in front of a toy store near a police station at three months of age and was accompanied by a photograph portrait inscribed with her date of birth. Denise could only guess at the parents' motivation for abandoning their little girl. She surmised,

Perhaps her parents intended to raise her [since she was not abandoned at birth like so many other girls] and we can also assume, too, that at some point they realized she had a medical condition ... they could not afford to take care of ... and left her to be found in a place where ... she would be found by proper authorities.

Like Denise, all of the informants who had adopted from China had little to no information about their child's life prior to abandonment.

A dearth of information about a child's family and medical history prior to institutionalisation is common in ICA, but particularly so with China. Welsh *et al.* found that parents who had adopted from China knew significantly less about their child's prenatal and perinatal history prior to adoption than all other regions except Latin America and had significantly less information about their child's abuse history than all other regions (Welsh *et al.* 2008, p. 189). With

the continuing growth of China's "Waiting Child" program,⁴⁰ however, more adoptive parents have access to, at a minimum, the diagnosis that was used to place their child in the special needs category. In Tan et al.'s study of 124 children adopted from the Waiting Child program, for instance, over 80% of the preschool-aged children had cleft lip/palate, heart defect, or other visible disabilities (2007, p. 1276).

4.1.3 Preparing for the adoptee

In getting ready for their child's arrival, informants encountered a variety of emotionally-charged issues that needed to be addressed or considered. In revealing to others their decision to adopt, for instance, parents sometimes felt judged or misunderstood. Particularly disheartening were ubiquitous comparisons between adoption and pregnancy. For one thing, as Lisa phrased it, many adopting parents feel excluded from the "becoming a parent club" because friends and family often forget to do things, like throwing a baby shower, that are expected and routine for a pregnancy. Louise added that while people generally welcome pregnancies, they frequently misunderstand or question the choice to adopt:

Sometimes you don't get the support when you're adopting that you do when you're pregnant. Regardless of how you became pregnant, people are generally pretty positive about a pregnancy. Adoption— people have all sorts of ideas about it. Sometimes people can surprise you with their lack of understanding, the lack of support, or their questioning your choices.

Cybil, who never attempted to have a biological child, often had people say to her, "Why wouldn't you want to have one of your own?"—a question she found rude and intrusive. Additionally, Lucia, who has a biological child, explained that although there are ample worries during a pregnancy, the

⁴⁰ The Waiting Child program officially began in September 2000, but only in the last few years has it become the primary way for parents to adopt a child from China. In 2010, for instance, of the 3,415 U.S. adoptions from China, over half were from the special needs program (Facts and Figures 2015)

body's physical changes and the marking of health milestones along the way can ease the stress and communicate a sense of being "on track," whereas an adoption can continue for months or years without any signs of progress. Physical changes to the body also signal to others that you will soon have a biological child. Lucia explained,

As you grow physically and you start to have baby showers and start to gather baby items in your house, it's a clear identifying marker to everyone that you're about to have a child. When you're going through adoption you don't have these things. That's hard because there is such a tenuous kind of nature to [adoption]. ... People are more than happy to share [information and thoughts] with you, just [like] when you're pregnant, but differently. Stories of, "Oh, I heard of so and so whose adoption didn't work out," or that kind of stuff.

While cultural norms exist to guide others in their attitudes towards pregnancy, some adoptive parents find that people do not know how to act or talk about adoption, and sometimes even feel free to express rude or uninformed opinions about it.

Another emotional concern, whether adopting from the Waiting Child or non-special needs program, is the fact that virtually all China adoptees have abandonment and institutionalisation in common. Several of this study's informants thought specifically and deeply about these issues prior to adoption. Amy cited the book *Silent Tears: A Journey of Hope in a Chinese Orphanage* (Bratt 2011) as an aide to her more fully understanding abandonment and empathising with mothers who felt intense pressure not only because of the "need" to have a boy within the One Child Policy/Chinese cultural context, but also because of their poverty: "I'm very defensive when people judge the Chinese moms that give them up because I imagine a lot of them really loved their children. It was not an easy decision." Amy discovered that her daughter's SWI also was trying to do its best within a difficult, nation-wide crisis. Despite initial reservations about the SWI due to incomplete or confusing communication during the adoption process, upon visiting it later,

she found that it was “an amazing orphanage that really cared about her.”

Likewise, Denise felt some defensiveness about the assumption that Chinese families do not care for their girls. In China, right after adopting their daughter, she and her husband often encountered older women while walking in the street, many of whom admonished them to dress their daughter more warmly:

[In China,] they believe that your child should have lots of layers on and should be completely clothed ... [and] grannies would come up to us on the street and ... wag their fingers at us if they could see a little bit of her skin between her pants and her socks ... and then they would smile and then we would talk. They would want to know how old she was and—we don’t speak Chinese, they didn’t speak English—and it was just so wonderful to be able to bring back those stories, particularly for those who think that the Chinese don’t care about their children because of the One Child Policy. And [the story for us] is that that they love their children and they love their daughters.

Coming to an understanding that the reasons for abandonment were demographically, socially, and politically complex was important for some parents and, to a certain extent, helped them prepare for adoption.

Other parents realised that, despite reading books and taking classes, they hadn’t prepared enough for their adoption experience. Lisa, for instance, felt that her eldest daughter, who had been in a loving and supportive foster home when they adopted her, probably felt “kidnapped,” a situation for which Lisa was completely unprepared:

I’ll be honest. Really, it was trial by fire once we met our daughter, because we did not prepare ourselves very much. Back then, it wasn’t Hague adoptions, so we didn’t have the mandatory training that they have now, and basically, we just had an hour-long conversation with our social worker about parenting a child of a different race, transracial parenting. We read a couple of books ... and that was pretty much it. Then we

met our daughter, and I cannot believe now how ignorant and silly we were, because when we met [her], the poor thing, she was just shattered by this. It was trial by fire. I just realized we are not enough for her, and I need to come up to speed.

Louise, who had adopted in the mid-2000s, felt similarly unprepared:

The agencies at that point were working at it, fever pitch. They just took people in, matched them up, sent families home. I mean, everything was *bing, bang, boom*. There wasn't a lot of preparation. We had to attend one course—*one*—one day. It was just for a couple of hours, and that was it. That was our preparation. ... Then, after she came home and I saw that this is not, absolutely *not* like having a child from birth biologically. It's just ... having a toddler coming from an institutional setting, plopped down in another country, in another language, transracially. I thought, "Holy cow. What did we do?"—to her, not to us. I was like, "we can handle it, but, oh my God, what have we done [to her]?" After that, I started to do a lot of research and reading books and finding out all sorts of other stuff and getting whatever help we needed along the way. But ahead of time, we knew nothing. Nothing.

The psychological and emotional needs of their child was an unknown for many parents prior to the completion of the adoption. This lack of preparation left them scrambling to find methods and resources to help their daughter adjust to her new life.

Formal adoption preparation resources have increased considerably since most of this study's informants completed their adoptions in the mid-2000s. On April 1, 2008, the United States ratified the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, an international law agreement commonly referred to as the Hague Convention. Intended to curb abuses in the international adoption industry, some of which were outlined above, the Hague Convention made pre-adoption requirements more robust for sending and receiving countries as

well as agencies and adopting parents. In terms of parental preparation, all accredited agencies are compelled to supply a minimum of ten hours of training for pre-adoption clients—as referred to by Lisa above as “Hague adoptions”—in order to introduce them to issues their child may face related to institutionalisation, special medical and developmental needs, and cultural differences.

For instance, one adoption agency, World Association for Children and Parents, offers an online Hague training package, consisting of 12 hours of webinars with titles such as “Grief and Loss in Adoption,” “Making Sense of Your Child’s Background Information,” and “Becoming a Multiracial Family: Helping Your Child Form a Healthy Sense of Identity” (Webinar registration Hague adoption training 2015). By contrast, Welsh et al. found that in the pre-Hague era, when this type of formal training was rare, parents prepared in other ways, with 95% of respondents indicating they performed self-study activities such as reading adoption-related books and 78% reporting they consulted “adoption experts,” including other adoptive parents (2008, p. 188).

Whether or not they completed their adoption in the Hague era, nearly all OHGWQ informants emphasised openly discussing adoption from the outset as key in addressing their children’s psychological and emotional needs. For Denise, the only informant who had also adopted during an earlier era (from Korea in the 1980s), talking about adoption was particularly important, largely because she felt she was not as conscious of it the first time around. She indicated that from the very beginning, before her three youngest children could understand her words, she would tell them their adoption story. She repeatedly told it to them for their sake, but also for her own. She wanted to practice the story so that when the children got older she would speak without excess emotion in her voice; she wanted them to feel their adoption story was normal, accepted, and a matter of fact. Cybil, too, incorporated her daughter’s adoption story into their family narrative from early on and attempted to normalise it as a concept:

We talked about it as soon as she came home. We talked about how we went to get on a plane, and show[ed] her pictures.

That's her story. Just like when other mothers speak to their children and they say "When I was pregnant with you, we decorated the nursery, or I had these [food] cravings." We do the same things. That's her story.

For Jen and Jason, openly talking about their daughter's country of birth led to difficult questions from their four-year-old. For instance, after looking at photographs of their daughter with her orphanage caretaker, their daughter asked, "Can my nanny come live with us?" Adoptive parents sometimes deal with emotionally charged moments like these through the use of a "life book," a scrapbook in which the family records what they know about their child's life before she was adopted, as a means of laying a foundation for addressing questions and issues that may come up over time. Christine described her two adopted daughters' life books this way:

Each of them has a book that says, "We don't know very much about your birth parents. This [was] the situation in China at [that] time." [It includes] where they were found, where they lived until we met them [and it] ... fills in some of the blanks for them and ... makes them feel it's okay to ask any questions that they have. Every now and again the girls [would] act out a little bit. It's like, "What's going on?" Then they'll finally say, "I miss my birth mother," and that ... means she needs to talk about it and work out some of the things she's not understanding. ...

Ideally, as they get older they would go through [the book] and rewrite it ... for themselves so they can put it in their own words.

Openly acknowledging adoption seems to be a hallmark practice among parents adopting from China in recent years, at least as represented by this study's informants.

Recent research shows similar results. Chapter 2.1 introduced the dominant historical approaches to transracial adoption that scholars have identified: assimilation, the earlier practice of ignoring racial difference in an attempt to help the child "fit in;" immersion, the more recent practice of celebrating a child's racial and ethnic background; and integration, a newer

recommendation for allowing adoptees the freedom to select or reject identity elements from both their birth and adopted cultures. A study of 38 white adoptive mothers of Asian children found that only two informants fell into what could be labeled the “color-blind mothering” category, which resembles the assimilation model, while all the others had a “color-conscious mothering” approach, in which the parent “believe[s] that their child’s ethnicity and race are important components of her or his identity” (Gill 2012). Another study found that parents who had participated in international transracial adoption tended to take part in a variety of activities related to their child’s birth culture. Over half of the informants responded affirmatively to participating in seven of nine examples of cultural activities—ranging from reading books about other cultures to watching racially and culturally diverse movies to having multiracial friends (Vonk *et al.* 2010).

While most informants focused on the specifics of their own adoption experience, a few expressed more global opinions about adoption, too. Denise emphasised the need for serious self-reflection before deciding to adopt:

My attitude towards people who ... cannot imagine loving an adopted child [is that they] are the people who shouldn’t adopt ... and I don’t hold any rancour towards them at all. It’s that I have to think that, you know, we all better be pretty honest with ourselves [before adopting].

Lisa talked about the difference between foster family care, which her eldest daughter experienced, and orphanage care, the experience of her younger daughter. Her younger daughter adjusted more readily to her new adopted life partly, Lisa believes, because she saw that life in a family was superior to orphanage life, where the child to caregiver ratio was around 20:1. At the same time, Lisa acknowledged the loss inherent in adoption: “[Our daughter] was very happy [after her adoption, although] that’s not to say she won’t experience loss at some point in her life, because adoption is wonderful, but *it’s the best of a bad situation*” [emphasis added]. Lucia also acknowledged the hard parts of adoption, but maintained a philosophical

attitude about it:

We're still always learning in adopting. That's the hard piece. You have that with your biological kids too. The pendulum swings and you think, "Oh, this is the way to do it," and then the next day it's something else. We're all just trying to do the best we can and hope it all works out well.

While some informants acknowledged difficult aspects of making a family through ICA, OHGWQ makers were mostly positive about the experience in their own lives. For Michele L., whose experience was emotionally traumatic because the baby she and her husband were in the midst of adopting suddenly became temporarily unavailable after the girl's congenital heart defect was discovered, adoption remained a positive, powerful, life-changing process, one that she also couched in much larger, socio-cultural terms—remembering the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001:

This was a spiritual journey for me to do what I always wanted to do, to adopt a child after 9/11 in our country. I had made a decision on the [one-]year anniversary of that tragedy [to adopt.] ... It turned us from being a typical middle aged family with children in college to this incredibly amazing family. It's just completely changed our lives. We love it.

The ICA experiences of this study's informants generally reflect global issues and practices. Many OHGWQ makers were drawn to China adoption because they were related to or friends with an international adoptee, because they knew China's adoption program was a stable and transparent one, or because they were attracted to elements of Chinese culture. They also prepared for their child's arrival in similar ways, understanding that a history of institutionalisation—and its attendant difficulties—is common to most Chinese adoptees. But informants' stories also reveal the particularities each family faces when deciding to make a family via adoption. Whether the adopters are a couple with adult children adding to their family at a late stage or a childless couple inspired by a television chat show, making a family

through adoption presents different challenges, opportunities, and joys.

One distinct component of the OHGWQ project—community participation—echoes an important aspect of adoption that distinguishes it further from biological family building. As Dolly noted, from the outset ICA is a group effort, much in the same way the OHGWQ project is. While a pregnancy is often a private issue until further along in the process, she said,

[In] adoption, from the get-go you are relying on other people and working with a community to make this happen. From the beginning, all the way through, it's a very public process.

Community is part of it. There's a team, and people, and governments, and different countries, all making this family come together, just like the quilt—many contributions making that come together. So [the quilt is] a cool parallel to adoption.

The next section, “Making a quilt,” examines the various ways in which adoptive families learned about OHGWQ and approached the tasks of gathering the fabrics and assembling the quilts—including the pleasures and difficulties inherent in working with multiple people to bring the project to fruition.

4.2 Making a quilt

In deciding to make a One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt, adopting parents committed to creating a community-based textile that would welcome their new child and celebrate her adoption. This section explores similarities amongst informants in their approaches to the project: shared types of internet usage, creative ways of encouraging project participation, and realisations that the OHGWQ maker would likely not be a single person and that the quilt might not even include their own handiwork in any direct way. It also identifies the ways in which the OHGWQ project paralleled the adoption process.

4.2.1 Discovering OHGWQ

True to its nature as an internet phenomenon (see Chapter 1), nearly all informants discovered One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts online. This fact is unsurprising, as online research was a nearly universal way in which informants began their adoption experience. Countless websites—government-, agency-, and parent-generated—exist as outlets for pre- and post-adoptive parents to share information and advice (see Chapter 2.5). As Shannon described it, “The China adoption crowd online is huge and very chatty. ... That’s how I learned about the quilt originally.”

Blogs and online message boards—websites created and used by adopting/adoptive parents themselves—were the sites informants found most helpful in searching for information and answers to their adoption questions. Martha was particularly drawn to blogs for information: “As we were going through the process to adopt ... I was reading a lot of blogs of other families who had previously adopted. That’s how I became aware of the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts.” Amy, on the other hand, found the information on a Yahoo message board to be invaluable:

I was part of a group on Yahoo of parents that were adopting from China, gleaning all kinds of advice from parents that had been there [adopted] before, because I was a newbie. I stumbled across one of them asking if fellow adoptive families would want to contribute squares to her quilt because she was having trouble getting to her one hundred. I read more about what it was about and I was intrigued and thought it would be a great project for us to do.

While helpful to all informants, online research was especially useful for parents like Lucia, who was living abroad at the time, in Japan. About researching adoption, she said, “Our connection to adoption books and [the] adoption community was very, very scant, so mostly it was over the Internet. ... It’s probably through reading other blogs [that we found out about OHGWQ]. To me, right away it felt like a very nice thing [to do].”

Even Christine, a founder of the OHGWQ Yahoo online message board, which itself is a major way in which adopting parents have discovered the practice, learned about it through a website. When she came upon the now-defunct "100 Good Wishes Quilt Project 2000" website shortly after it launched, she was inspired to set up an online group for facilitating OHGWQ fabric swaps (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 6.2). Her Yahoo group has gone on to include over 1000 members, all of whom are interested in making a collaborative quilt, and it became an important conduit for spreading the OHGWQ practice. Another informant, Michele K., also learned about OHGWQ through the "100 Good Wishes Quilt Project 2000" website; when she first joined her DTC (Dossier to China) Yahoo group,⁴¹ they had recently posted a link to the site and were in the midst of setting up their first OHGWQ fabric swap.

4.2.2 Exchanging Fabrics

Online OHGWQ fabric swaps (as opposed to direct donations) generally occur within the China adoption community, often among members of DTC groups, the OHGWQ Yahoo group, or other online adoption support groups. A coordinator announces an upcoming swap, people sign up to be a part, and then each participant mails a pre-determined size of fabric to everyone on the list. As Christine, founder of the OHGWQ Yahoo group, recalled: "sometimes you [would] get up to 50 squares [in a swap] but it seems like it was more manageable if you had about 20 people participating, [and it would take], I would say, four or five swaps for each quilt." Multiple swaps were often running concurrently at the height of OHGWQ Yahoo group activity, meaning that participants could quickly build up enough fabric squares for a 100-piece quilt. Informants in this study varied in fabric swap participation, from those who did not swap at all because they were able to

⁴¹ Because their adoption timeline will be similar, many families who submit their dossier of adoption paperwork to the Chinese government in the same month form "DTC" groups and set up their own online message boards to share information.

get fabrics solely through donations from family and friends, to those like Cybil who participated in about 15 different swaps.

Along with swapping, asking family and friends to donate was an equally popular way of soliciting fabric. Informants sent requests via email, blog posts, or posted mail and often copied wording about the tradition from OHGWQ websites. Denise confirmed, “I am sure I cobbled the language together from the online groups,” and Jen and Jason, too, used the standard website language, though they also “tweaked it to make it our own.” Some parents were able to acquire the bulk of fabrics this way. Michele K., who concurrently adopted a son from Vietnam while adopting a daughter from China, said,

I sent out a letter to all of our family and friends ... and we got really good response from everybody. ... I didn't swap with anybody in that Yahoo Group, I didn't need to. ... Originally the plan was to have 100 for each [child's quilt], and I ended up with ... 129 for each, and originally I worried a lot of how to cut it down to 100, but decided in the end not to take any out, because I wanted them all to be a part of my kids' quilts.

Indeed, many of Michele's close acquaintances sent larger pieces of fabric than was requested, or they sent multiple fabrics, so she was able to capitalise on this extra material to make the quilt larger. Similarly, Laureen was able to gather enough material from family and friends that she did not swap online. Kristine and Sam, who sent out between 150 and 200 solicitations with their annual holiday greeting card, also obtained the vast majority of fabrics from people they already knew, swapping only one time with a single small online support group.

Most informants, however, utilised a combination of the two methods. Shannon, for instance, estimated that 15% to 20% of the fabrics in her daughter's quilt were from online swaps; however, she emphasised that she had actually received more than that and only included swapped squares from online acquaintances with whom she became particularly close during her six-year adoption process (see Chapter 6.2). Because swapping online

became routine for many people, they developed standard wishes and fabrics to send. Christine, who adopted two girls from China in the early 2000s, always included her older daughter's name and photograph on her wish when she was gathering fabrics for her younger daughter's quilt. Maggie, too, had a standard wish she sent out; she said, "I got a lot of wishes that way. [Our daughter's] quilt has a lot of wishes from people we don't know, but it also has wishes from people that she does know. Actually, they were the hardest to get. That was the weirdest thing."

Maggie's difficulty with follow-through was common to many informants' experiences. Maggie found that the other person closest to the adoption, her husband, was the most difficult in persuading to contribute; she said, "My husband was the last one to give a wish and that was at the bitter end. ... Finally, I just said, "Do you not want to do this? Because I need to know." Martha, whose daughter has been home several years hasn't finished her OHGW, partly because, "[the fabrics] kind of keep dwindling in." Christine noted that tardiness sometimes happened in the online swaps as well. In those cases, the swap coordinator would inform the offender that she could not participate in another swap until she completed her commitment to the first one. Fortunately, this was rare: "Out of 20 people you might have one person who was really late, but it almost always happened that all the squares got sent."

In addition to the standard online swapping and direct solicitations, some parents developed novel ways to gather their OHGWQ fabrics. Kristine, for instance, created a blog in which she logged the number of miles she walked each week, wearing a pedometer, and she wrote about each weekly segment as if it represented a leg in the journey to get to China. Finally, realising she would not be able to virtually "walk" there, she conceptualised the trip as a magic carpet ride, facilitated by OHGWQ fabric donations. Each week she would post a picture of a donated fabric/wish, which would be the next square in creating the "magic carpet" that would carry them back home after going to China to meet their daughter.

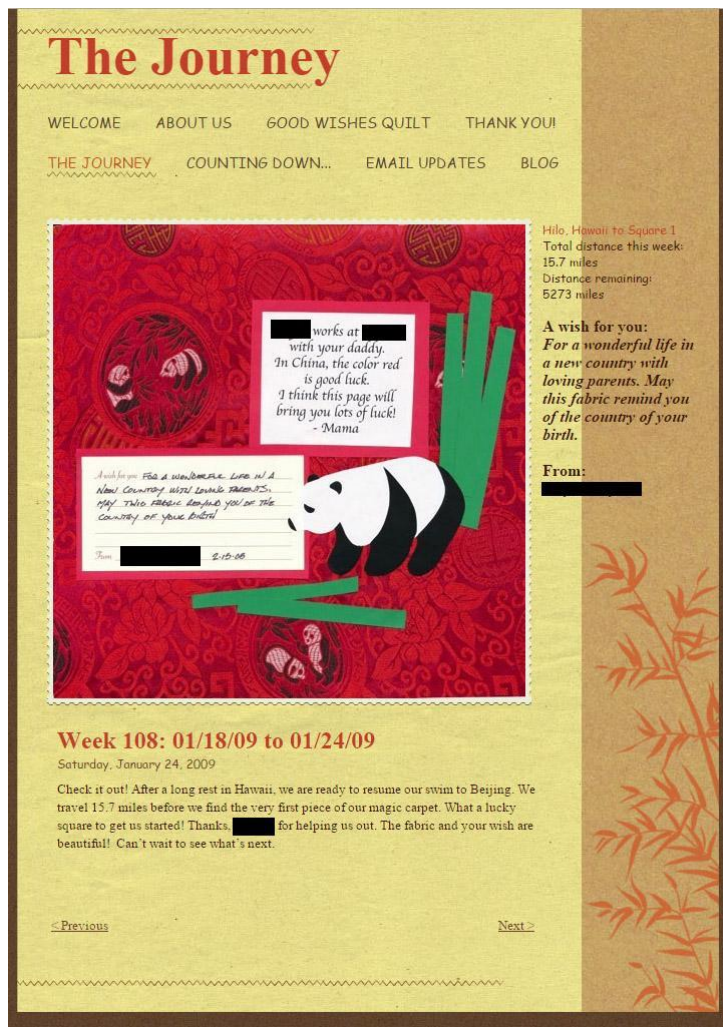


Figure 21: Screenshot of Kristine's "walking to China" blog (personal information redacted).

In a less fanciful but equally helpful way, Laureen's local Families with Children from China group assisted each other in gathering fabrics: "we all bought two yards of fabric and ... because we're such a large group we already had squares cut up and if anybody needed them we just would automatically have them all ready." Similarly, Shannon found that because most of her friends were not "crafty," it was easiest to help them along in their participation by having fabric ready and available for them to choose from:

I had a quilt party over the course of two days. It was like an open house. I had people come to my house. I laid out all the fabric and I said, "Pick something that speaks to you. ... Make

me a wish. Write something that you want to say to my child.”

That’s how I filled my [quilt] ... I made it easy for everyone.

Lisa had a different concern, which she also addressed creatively. Aiming to reach the full 100 squares but only ending up with around 80, she decided to purchase the extra needed fabrics herself. Instead of using the fabrics as “filler,” however, she intentionally saved them to accommodate people who might become important to her daughter in the future. As someone new entered her daughter’s life, that person would “claim” an undesignated square in the completed quilt and write a wish to include in the OHGWQ scrapbook. To Lisa, simply filling in with extra fabrics to reach the 100 was unacceptable:

Every fabric square still has a meaning, even the ones that we filled in. ... [Squares with] no meaning—I couldn’t deal with that, so we just did it that way, and it was, like, her kindergarten teacher, a new pastor at our church, different people that came into our lives later that I knew would be important to her, because it’s hard to know when the children are one [year old] who they’re going to remember.

Although it meant that the OHGWQ was completed later, it was important for Lisa to be able to include people her daughter herself would deem important.

4.2.3 Project and adoption parallels

The way in which the project progressed from initiation to completion often mirrored the families’ adoption timeline, following the accelerations and lulls that naturally occurred during the process. Many informants began the project with alacrity, propelled by the excitement of starting their adoption. Laureen, for instance, collected 146 OHGWQ squares in less than two months, and had the quilt ready a full half-year before her daughter came home. Amy, too, moved very quickly to gather fabrics and finish the quilt: “I found out about [the OHGWQ tradition] at the beginning of June in our process and I cannot remember exactly what day I got it [back from the maker] but I know it was here waiting for [our daughter] ... in January.” For

Lucia, the adoption wait was much shorter than anticipated, which means that her daughter's quilt is still incomplete:

Our plan had been, our hope had been, that we would collect the fabric and that we would have a quilt at least pieced together during the months that I was waiting for the time for us to get our daughter. Things happened so quickly and we're glad about that. We were able to get permission ... to bring her home just a month after we got a referral and bring her home at the age of three months, which again, is also unusual. That of course put everything on hold in terms of quilting, because suddenly we were doing bottles and babies and wonderful things that we were thinking we were going to be waiting for.

While for Laureen, Amy, and Lucia the adoption timeline was less than two years, for many others, it extended up to six years. For these informants, the project often stalled as their adoption process slowed. For Shannon, the continual extension of her adoption timeline (she waited six years), was emotionally traumatic, to the point that she didn't even want to look at the OHGWQ project for several years: "I started out fast with the quilt exchange fabrics. Then, when it became clear that our wait was going to be extraordinarily long and we weren't sure whether it would happen, I had to put it away." Kristine and Sam, likewise, realised two years into their adoption that it was going to be much longer than they originally anticipated (it ended up being six), but they eventually viewed the extension as an unexpected boon. Sam said,

In retrospect I think in a way it was good that we had that extended wait because our goal was 100 squares and I had no doubt that we would find 100 people that wanted to contribute but we also had a lot of procrastinators on our list, so there were plenty of people that wanted to contribute but didn't make our first deadline by a long shot, but [they] were still able to contribute later on.

Jen and Jason's process slowed, too, right around 2008, a delay that Jen attributed to the Chinese government wanting to "make sure that China looked beautiful for the [2008] Olympics." For them, however, the delay was also accompanied by a somewhat slow return rate of fabrics: "we're very relaxed here [in Minnesota] ... and sometimes deadlines are [seen as flexible]." Despite this regional characteristic, Jen and Jason finished the project a full year and a half before their daughter came home.

Naturally, the way in which informants pursued their OHGWQ project also reflected their own personalities. Some parents were extremely organised and driven. Michele K. said, "I'm a multi-tasker, so the practicality of [organising the project] was sort of an easy thing." Maggie, an accountant in her professional life, also managed the incoming fabrics without difficulty:

I had a spreadsheet going that had who gave them and the date. I kind of had categories for them, too, like if they were family, if they were friends that we knew, if they were [online] friends, how I knew them online ... It's helpful to keep the spreadsheet like that.

Maggie, like Kristine/Sam and Lisa above, was also concerned with reaching the seemingly critical "one hundred" fabrics. She worried that if she collected fewer than that, her daughter would feel cheated: "I can't just call it a 'Good Wishes Quilt' because she'll hear it's a 'Hundred Wishes Quilt' and be like, 'What's wrong with me? I only got 70?'" Despite her organised approach to collecting the OHGWQ fabrics, however, Maggie was less efficient when it came to completing the quilt, largely because she knew she was unequipped to sew it herself. She spoke of "flurries of activity and then nothing at all," until, inspired by her completion of the companion scrapbook, she finally sent the squares to her husband's aunt to be constructed. Lisa's OHGWQ project also experienced delays, both externally- and internally-driven: "wishes slowly trickled in, and we did a deadline, but then I just didn't get my act together, and so we still had ... quilt squares coming in for at least another year after the deadline." Like Maggie, she turned to a relative, her mother-in-law, to do the actual quilt construction.

When it came to constructing the quilt, informants took many different paths. Karen and Christine were among the few to sew it entirely themselves. Some, like Denise, Shannon, Michele K. and Michele L., designed and pieced the quilt top (i.e. sewed all of the OHGWQ fabrics together) but hired a professional to do the quilting (sewing the three layers together into a finished quilt). Others recruited family members to help with all stages, most often mothers or mothers-in-law (Jen/Jason, Louise, Lucia, Amy, Lisa), although aunts and close friends assisted as well (Maggie, Cybil). Others still hired a professional for all parts of the design and construction. Indeed, for a few, completing the OHGWQ was largely dependent on finding the right person to make it. For instance, Laureen, who had rapidly collected all her OHGWQ fabrics, said, “The longest time [in the process] was finding somebody that I trusted with doing the project.” Several informants still had yet to complete their quilts (Dolly, Martha) but intended to make at least part of it on their own.

All families approached their OHGWQ project in slightly different ways, but several similarities stood out between the informants’ experiences: discovering the phenomenon on the internet, using multiple—sometimes highly creative—methods to gather the fabrics, and experiencing a project timeline that often echoed that of the larger adoption process. Finally, nearly all informants’ OHGWQ project involved multiple creators; those who acquired the fabrics, pieced them into a quilt top, and/or quilted it into a completed bed covering were frequently different people.

The next section, “Who is making what?” discusses in further detail how informants, the project coordinators, made the decision about who would be involved in the design and construction of the quilt, what other companion articles (e.g. scrapbook, blog) they would produce, and whether or not they came to self-identify as “quiltmakers.”

4.3 Who is making what?

In the case of OHGWQ, the person whose idea it is to make the quilt is not necessarily the one who sews it together. The project coordinator may conclude that others are better equipped to help with the design and/or

construction of this complex textile assemblage. Simultaneously, they may also decide that their efforts towards completion of the project best lie in making a separate but related item. This section discusses the idea that “making” is not a single, fixed concept, and that multiple makers—an entire network of people in some cases—can be an integral part of the process, rendering “maker-hood” difficult to pinpoint. It also examines making as a transformative act, one that can alter the maker’s notions of self-identity.

4.3.1 Outsourcing, collaboration, and maker-hood

In most cases, the level of prior personal experience with sewing or quilting influenced OHGWQ informants’ decisions about whether or not they would construct the quilt themselves. Some, like Maggie, had no background in sewing and knew from the outset they would need someone else to make it. Maggie confessed,

I’m probably one of the least crafty people out there ... I do some things but I’m not scrapbook-ey, I don’t quilt. I mean this is out of my league. But it was okay, that’s what’s neat about this. That was the thing when I first heard about [OHGWQ]. My first thought is, “I can’t do that.” My second thought is, “Why?” I think I was catching on that you don’t need to do the quilting yourself, and then I realised, “I live in Lancaster County.”

For Maggie, living in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the home of North America’s largest community of Amish people—who are known for their quilting skills—meant that she felt free to assume she would be able to find somebody to help her.

Similarly, Kristine noted that although she was a creative person who especially enjoyed doing collage, sewing was not in her skill set. She said, “I’m not a sewer at all so I had no desire to put the quilt together myself but I have a real appreciation for the art and so if there’s a quilt show around ... I like to go and look at quilts because I think they are so amazing.” Laureen, on the other hand, initially hoped to construct it herself, despite lacking substantial sewing experience, but in the end she thought, “This is too

important for me [to make it myself].” Informants with little to no background in quilting generally perceived the OHGWQ project as too daunting to pursue solely on their own.

More commonly, informants had some exposure to quilts or quilting and wanted to work on a portion of the project, but still felt that they would need assistance. Jen, for instance, grew up around quilts but never had made one herself; therefore, her mother, an avid quilter, was her project partner: “I cut, she sewed,” Jen said. Dolly, a self-described intermediate sewer but non-quilter, saw the OHGWQ as a “monster project” she would be unable to complete all on her own. She admitted,

Oh, I definitely need help. I’ve already had some very experienced seamstress friends volunteer to help me bind the quilt, and teach me how to do different things, so I welcome the fellowship time with them, learning the skills directly from people who’ve done this before.

Lucia had actually made quilts when she was younger—for friends’ weddings or baby showers—but her mother, a more experienced quilter, had often assisted her; therefore, she always intended to have her mother help construct the OHGWQ. Martha, who had not yet completed her quilt and never had made one before, nonetheless had intimate knowledge and experience with them. Her parents ran a home-based quilting business for many years when she was young, which made her at ease with the craft in general:

Quilting was always something that was in our home, something I was around. I’ve never done much of it myself. I’ve done, like, skirts and dresses for my daughter and little headbands and things like that, nothing [too] involved. The pattern on [my OHGWQ] is pretty simple, just simple squares and binding, but the idea of a quilt has ... always been important just because that’s kind of part of my heritage, too.

Other informants had extensive experience with quilting, in particular, Christine and Karen. Christine grew up sewing and even took a

specific quilting class with her mother when she was young, and Karen had been an avid quilter for many years, particularly enjoying online group projects with other quilters. It is not surprising, therefore, that Christine had and Karen intended to sew most of the OHGWQ on their own. Even for those with some experience with or exposure to quilts, however, finding assistance with constructing the OHGWQ was generally still preferable.

For informants ill equipped or uninterested in doing the sewing themselves, having a family member or friend who was a quilter made choosing someone to construct the OHGWQ easy. For Maggie, who had originally pinned her hopes on finding a maker in her “quilt rich” community of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, an assistant was found even closer to home. Her husband told her:

“You ask [Aunt] Doris if she can do it, and if she can’t, she’ll know somebody who can.” I contacted her and she said, “I’ll piece it and then I’ll send it to this other woman who can quilt it.” I’m, like, “Sounds great.”

Although Maggie had started the OHGWQ project five years earlier, the entire construction process took a mere five weeks, thanks to her husband’s aunt and her aunt’s friend.

By asking her mother-in-law to piece the quilt and her aunt to quilt it, Amy, too, kept the quilt’s construction within the family circle. She was happy letting others make most of the design decisions: “I pretty much deferred to [my mother-in-law] and said it looked fine. My aunt— I just trusted her to quilt it the right way because I know nothing about sewing. I said, ‘Whatever you think is best I am fine with.’” Cybil, too, enlisted the help of her mother-in-law. In fact, she felt there was no one else for the job. She said,

Hands down, the first person I asked [was my mother-in-law]. She sews and has her own [quilt-related] business ... She like, immediately was the person I needed. I wanted it to be more personal too— that my daughter's grandmother made it for her

rather than just having it made. It was important that I had somebody that I knew make this for me.

Louise also felt that a family member, her mother, was the right person to sew the quilt, but unfortunately, her mother's poor health kept her from completing it. Serendipitously, a friend stepped forward to ensure the quilt was finished:

As it turns out, my mom was able only to complete it partially. She sewed the squares into strips, but then the idea of completing a quilt was just more than she could do. I had happened to mention this to a friend of mine who is a teacher at my children's school. ... I was looking for quilting places that could help me out, maybe point me towards someone who could do it. She said, "Oh, I can do that." I was stunned. I was like, "You can do that?" She goes, "I'd love to do it. I'd be happy to do it," and she did. She completed it for us. It was amazing.

For Lisa, who confesses she "can't sew worth anything," having her mother-in-law, Pam, make the quilt was not only convenient, but critical. Lisa understood that for many people, the difference between having a box full of collected fabrics and a finished quilt was hiring a professional to complete it. For her family's situation, she said,

Pam's ... a very talented quilter, but I think the relationship really made a big difference. ... I'm not a particularly sentimental person, nor am I very crafty. I don't know if I would have chosen to do a quilt if we didn't have Pam in our lives, or someone, a relative who really cared to make the quilt ... I just don't know if I would have paid someone to do it. I don't know if I would have made that choice.

Unlike Lisa, some people did choose—or had no other option—to hire a professional to complete their OHGWQ project. Laureen, who had originally hoped to make it herself until she realised it was too important to trust to her own abilities, found a professional quiltmaker through a local art fair. In the end, she was pleased with the final product but even more, she appreciated

the extra effort the quiltmaker took to use some of the left over and trimmed fabrics:

She made a little wall [hanging] that is like a teeny tiny mini version of the quilt. ... Around the edges of it ... on this border, [in the quilting] ... it says, “I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you” ... It just blew me out of the water. That was really cool.

Kristine and Sam, who found a professional quiltmaker through a local quilt shop, especially appreciated the woman’s openness to incorporating their ideas. Sam, in particular, originally wanted to take the lead in the design process. He revealed,

In my mind, I had this idea that I would take individual scans of all the squares and then arrange them the way that I wanted them and then present that to the quilter to do. As it turns out, of course, once we got our referral,⁴² things just started to landslide for us as far as all of the things we had to get ready ... It quickly became obvious that ... we were not going to be able to design it ourselves, not if we wanted to have it done anywhere close to when [our daughter] came home.

In the end, Kristine said, “I think both of us were happy to let it go because we ... felt so good and comfortable with [the maker] when we met her.” The quiltmaker conferred with them on colour preferences and patterns and included them on all of the big design decisions, so that in the end, Sam considered it “a real collaborative effort.”

The idea of collaboration as a legitimate part of the creative process is a contentious one. Traditional—and some may claim, masculine—ideas of creativity privilege the lone, professional artist or creator. Modernist notions of the “artist as hero” or even the “starving artist” are based on the basic perception that creators are isolated, singular—even genius. One of the best

⁴² The referral is the official notification from the China Center for Children’s Welfare and Adoption of your match with a child. Normally, travel to China to pick up the child occurs within a couple of months, sometimes even just a few weeks.

known writers on the topic of creativity, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in writing about “symbolic domains”—areas of creative pursuit such as music composition or scientific invention—posits that,

Creativity results from the interaction of a system composed of three elements: a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain, and a field of experts who recognise and validate the innovation. All three are necessary for a creative idea, product, or discovery to take place.

(2009, p. 6)

From this viewpoint, the only significant interaction between people is in the final stage, when the creator receives verification from external cognoscenti that what he produced was genuinely novel and, because they took the time and effort to assess it, significant.

Feminist art historians have been arguing for decades that this system is rigged—that the external assessment of creativity or novelty has long ignored the accomplishments and insights of women. In her essay on the Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot, for instance, art historian Linda Nochlin questions why Morisot has never been considered a “top-tier” member of that school, laying blame at the feet of a gendered essentialism:

Why has her very flouting of the traditional “laws” of painting been seen as a weakness rather than a strength, a failure or lack of knowledge and ability rather than a daring transgression? ... And if we consider [her] erosion of form to be a complexly mediated inscription of internalized conflict—motherhood versus profession—then surely this should be taken as seriously as the more highly acclaimed psychic dramas of male artists of the period ...

(1988, p. 53)

Similarly, Rozsika Parker, in her in-depth study of the history of embroidery, maintains that the distinction between fine art—the “high”—and craft—the “low”—is also based on a gendered hierarchy: “When women paint, their work

is categorised as homogeneously feminine—but it is acknowledged to be art. When women embroider, it is seen not as art, but entirely as the expression of femininity. And, crucially, it is categorised as craft” (1984, p. 5). She describes the Renaissance emergence of the art/craft divide, outlining the progressively unequal status of the latter, and asserting that “the real differences between the two are in terms of *where* they are made and *who* makes them” rather than in their intrinsic artistic significance (Parker 1984, p. 5). Craft historian Glenn Adamson gives the example of Bauhaus artist/weaver Anni Albers to illustrate this inherent sexism. In speaking of one of her works, he writes:

Her wall hanging appeals not only optically, but also through its tactile juxtaposition of contrasting materials. ... It was made by a professional employing a specialized skill, and indeed attests to Albers’s mastery of loom weaving. As an object made by a woman in a sexist culture, and without any institutional authorization as an artwork, however, it carries overtones of amateurism.

(2007, p. 5)

Adamson is defending Albers’s work, and yet, his emphasis on her “specialized skill” and “mastery” situates his analysis more in the camp of creativity as a form of exceptionalism, taking place within the realm of the professional rather than the amateur (read: domestic, female).

Precisely because of *who* has traditionally made textiles in many societies—particularly in domestic settings—anthropologists Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner state, “The study of cloth can illuminate women’s contributions to social and political organization that are *otherwise overlooked* [emphasis added]” (1989, p. 4). Scholarly research such as that featured in archaeologist Elizabeth Wayland Barber’s *Women’s Work: The First 20,000 Years* are the relatively rare instances of history (and prehistory, in this case) being considered primarily from the standpoint of women, who, Barber emphasises, revolutionised textile production—fulfilling the basic human need of bodily protection and creating sophisticated, non-verbal forms of communication along the way—all while raising the next generation of

humans (1989, p. 4). Design historian Judy Attfield also points out that, particularly in the study of material culture, “the site which has been most neglected apart from the attention accorded to it by feminist historians, is craft production which takes place in the home” (Attfield 2000, p. 72). Indeed, quilts, whether as material culture or works of art, have only become the subject of serious academic study within the last half century (see Chapter 2.3), likely because they have been quintessentially domestic products for most of their history. And even when they are “elevated” as objects worthy of academic and artistic consideration, some, like philosopher Susan E. Bernick do not view this as progress:

The increase in status for some quilts was bought at the cost of women’s control over quilting as an art form, the creation, reception, and preservation of their quilts, and at the cost of deep divisions between traditional quilters and art quilters, including some feminists, which resulted from a splintering of what had been a fairly unified tradition.

(1994, p. 134)

For many scholars, the sexist roots of the separation between art and craft make the analysis of creativity severely problematic.

One of the foremost writers on contemporary craft, Peter Dormer, identifies what he sees as the late-twentieth century logical conclusion to the art/craft divide: “the separation of ‘having ideas’ from ‘making objects.’ ... the idea that there exists some sort of mental attribute known as ‘creativity’ that precedes or can be divorced from a knowledge of how to make things” (1997, p. 18). Gloria Hickey echoes this idea in her essay, “Craft within a Consuming Society,” when she states that people who are drawn to buy handmade goods, often do so with “reverence” because “they view them as products of inspiration” and feel that “no amount of training ... could enable them to create an equivalent object” (1997, p. 86). Divisions based on gender aside, both Dormer’s and Hickey’s observations identify a clear separation between thinker and maker, creator and consumer, amateur and professional.

What of One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts and other forms of domestic and/or non-professional forms of production? Do they qualify as “creative”? Bringing it back to the idea of collaboration, how does the fact that these quilts have multiple contributors affect how they are considered?

A different paradigm for considering creativity—one that I argue is more appropriate to domestically-produced objects like quilts—is outlined in media and communications scholar David Gauntlett’s *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*. Rather than using Csikszentmihalyi’s “high-impact creativity” (2011, p. 14) model, Gauntlett explores “everyday creativity,” which for him is more of an organic process and a feeling than a means to an end or a finely honed tool. Critically, his definition includes the possibility of collaboration. He argues not only that creativity is not necessarily “high impact”—leading to culturally or socially significant results—and that it often evokes strong feelings in both maker and viewer, but that it “brings together *at least one* active human mind” (2011, p. 76). Gauntlett’s creativity is one in which we can all be a part, singly or in tandem, and not solely if we create something that others deem noteworthy or novel. His is a democratic creativity that embraces such quotidian things as “a complex marble run made by a father and daughter team, or ... handmade toys at a craft fair, or an agricultural machine made by a farmer to make a regular task more efficient” (2011, p. 76). What he is interested in is regular (non-professional) people making something new *to them* and feeling some kind of emotion—which to him indicates growth or catharsis, however minor—both during the process and once they have finished.

One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts, as described throughout this chapter, fit comfortably in the realm of everyday creativity. The OHGWQ project coordinators (virtually all of whom were mothers), the individual contributors to the project, and the various quilt constructors—mothers-in-law, aunts, friends, professionals—worked together to make something new, something that triggered powerful emotions in everyone involved. The quilts do not represent a dramatic new invention. As seen in Chapter 2 and as will

be discussed again in Chapter 5, they are the product of various cultural threads joining together. But each quilt was a creation that was wholly new to those who made it, even those with prior quilting experience.

4.3.2 Allied contributions

For informants who were not drawn to the quilting component of the OHGWQ project, other activities became a critical way for them to participate in it. For Jason, writing a weblog about his and Jen's adoption preparations, including the OHGWQ, was an outlet for him. As he described it, "I did all the blogging. That was the thing that I did ... because Jen pretty much did everything else." In fact, Jen drew a parallel between Jason's blog and the OHGWQ project by saying, "that was his quilt." Kristine, too, who knew she would not be involved in sewing the quilt, blogged extensively about their adoption process and the gathering of OHGWQ fabrics. Once she began cataloguing the donated fabrics on her blog, she updated it every week for nearly two and a half years. Lisa, whose mother-in-law constructed their OHGWQ, blogged throughout the adoption process as well, and learned that the blog, which she and her husband created just prior to the dramatic 2005-2006 increase in China adoption, had been helpful to many other parents. Maggie, who had benefitted from others' blogs early on in her adoption research, became an avid blogger herself. She said,

I started [blogging] early on because I discovered that that was a way to connect with other people who had adopted. I learned a lot about adopting from China from people who had blogs and got a lot of inspiration from them. I started one pretty early in the process. The idea then was, "Let me figure out how to do this so that when we go to China, I'll be good at it," [and now] I'm completely hooked.

For Lucia, blogging suited her personality as well as her family's itinerant lifestyle, dictated by her husband's frequent overseas job stints. Referring to the OHGWQ companion object, the scrapbook, she said, "I'm not a scrapbooker ... that's another reason the blog has become kind of important

for our family, documenting things. It's been the most mobile and safe way to keep track of things for us with ... being so nomadic."

Unlike Lucia, however, other informants were "scrapbookers." Kristine, who enjoys making collage and other forms of art, was immediately drawn to the scrapbook component of the OHGWQ tradition and said she felt very "invested" in that part of the project:

I didn't see the scrapbook at a later time and say, "oh, we should do that part too." It was very much from the very beginning: you have these two squares and one goes in the scrapbook and one goes in the quilt. That's how I kind of saw the whole project and I'm sure both elements I was really attracted to.

She described creating the scrapbook as a "labour of love," but her husband also saw the practical nature of it, in its function as a key for matching each fabric in the quilt with the donor and wish. Similarly, Louise saw the scrapbook as a vital part of the process. For her, it was just as important as the quilt:

When you lose the story, you lose a big piece of what its significance actually is. ... That's why with this thing, it's so important to have the book that goes with the quilt because attached to each wish is a little square of the same fabric. You can actually place the wish with the fabric and identify, "This patch came from so-and-so. His wish for you was this." The [project] is ... like a two-part artefact ... the quilt and the book.

Lisa, too, saw the two components as inseparable: "I think the wishes are becoming more important [as time goes on], but the wishes wouldn't be there without the quilt, you know? It's just a very special significance." Lucia, who had not yet completed the scrapbook and did not see herself as a "scrapbooker," saw a parallel between it and another important object in her daughter's life: the photo book her Taiwanese birth family had given her. Lucia said, "That book is really a treasure, a very important piece of her story and her family. It would be nice to have something similar to that ... to relate to the quilt too." Finally, for Amy, making the scrapbook simply meant that she

had been a true participant in the OHGWQ project: “What I did was put the scrapbook together. That way I did have an active role in part of the project.” Participation in the OHGWQ project took different forms, and making the actual quilt, while the most visible, was only one of them.

4.3.3 Becoming a quiltmaker (or not)

Two informants, Michele K. and Denise, were unique in that their OHGWQ project actually transformed them from novices into self-identified, full-fledged quiltmakers. Denise had been a hand-weaver as a young woman and had “cobbled together” a couple of quilts for her older children, but never would have considered herself a quiltmaker. When she discovered the OHGWQ tradition during the process of adopting her daughter, however, she saw the project as a “nice way to reconnect with that fibre artist side of me.” She began participating in online fabric swaps and was so unfamiliar with the quilting subculture that some of the terminology she encountered left her confused:

The swaps were wonderful. I loved participating in them and they, you know— when I first started and someone would say, “quilt shop quality fabric only,” I would go, “what does that mean?” I mean, I knew nothing about the ... difference between [lower quality] Joann [craft store] fabrics and [higher quality fabrics] ... I mean, I think I can remember participating in my first swap and someone once said “Asian fabrics” and I’m like, “how do you even find Asian fabrics?”

By venturing out to find high quality fabrics with which to swap, Denise discovered a nearby quilt shop, and through it connected with the local quilting community, learning from them and eventually becoming a self-identified quiltmaker herself. Indeed, she quickly became attuned to the hobby’s allure, noting that “quilting is very addictive. ... At some point along the line, I did manage to stop myself from being too acquisitive ... I do not have gigantic fabric stashes, [but] ... I have way more fabric than I actually

need.” Through the act of making a OHGWQ, Denise became a serious quiltmaker.

Denise also became part of a new social circle. She said, “in addition to having a wonderful daughter, the fact that I have this new extended community of friends is extraordinary to me.” She especially appreciated the fact that her quilting brings her together with people she normally never would have been friends with, especially people with divergent political and social views from her own. About one particular friend she admitted,

I adore [her] and she adores me and I’m, like, the last person in the world she’d be friends with. She and her husband are NRA⁴³ gun-loving Mormons and I’m not. But she has a lot of other incredible, fine qualities that I would never have learned to appreciate if I wasn’t spending time quilting with her.

Because of opportunities like this to see past traditional socio-cultural divides, Denise viewed becoming a quiltmaker as a “remarkable gift.”

Researchers of quilting communities have made similar assessments of the value these groups hold for individual members. Echoing Denise’s thoughts about discovering common ground in unexpected quarters, sociologist Marybeth Stalp found that when makers with disparate viewpoints or experiences come together, “quilting becomes the unifying force and helps women to overcome differences that they might otherwise have” (2001, p. 101). Similarly, in her study of a large, regional quilt guild⁴⁴ in the Midwestern United States, textile historian Catherine A. Cerny found that its members, while hailing from varying backgrounds, found comfort and support in the fact that quilters “speak the same language” (2001, p. 101). Grounding her interpretation in the fact that quilting has traditionally been, and remains, a female-dominated craft, Cerny posits that, “The understanding that comes from shared experiences, whether it reflects what women share in managing the family or what they share in tackling the challenge of quilting,

⁴³ National Rifle Association, an American nonprofit organization which advocates for gun rights.

⁴⁴ “Guild” is the most commonly used term for quilt-focused membership organizations.

contributes to a woman's sense of satisfaction with self and accomplishment in her endeavors" (1991, p. 38). In discovering quilting, women like Denise also often find a community with whom they can learn and grow (see Chapter 6 for more on the importance of community).

Like Denise, most contemporary quilters begin practicing the craft as adults. A recent nationwide survey found that the average age of an American quilter was 64, with the most advanced sewers having quilted for 26 years or so and self-described beginners having quilted for around seven (F+W 2014). In past generations, girls ordinarily learned sewing and quilting from early on, but starting in the early- to mid-twentieth century, this was not always the case, leading to what Stalp refers to as the "skipped generation of quilters" (2008, p. 53). Indeed, many of Stalp's quilter informants recounted that although their grandmothers and great-grandmothers quilted, their mothers did not, likely a result of higher levels of post-World War II female employment and correspondingly lower levels of leisure time. Unsurprisingly, quilting experienced a distinct popularity dip in the 1950s and 1960s.

Also contributing to a decline in mid-century quilting was the fact that the era's modern consumer culture generally valued manufactured merchandise over handmade goods. This remained true at least until the "counter-culture"-influenced DIY movement of the 1960s began to go mainstream, a trend that David Gauntlett cites as a forebear to today's millennial "Web 2.0" culture (Gauntlett 2011) (See Chapter 2.5). In his work, Gauntlett outlines this trajectory from a "sit-back-and-be-told" generation to one in which creativity, collaboration, and making (in its many forms, from knitting to blogging) are facilitated and encouraged, particularly via online communication. Gauntlett argues that today's digital participatory culture both reflects and contributes to people's greater willingness to try something new, to share their amateur productions with others, and to experience making as not simply a means to an end, but a joyful, growth-inducing process. The quilting revival of the late twentieth century roughly followed this same path, from the DIY-inspired 1970s to the recent "modern" quilt movement,

which is buoyed by the presence of many newcomers to the hobby (see Chapter 2.3).

Michele K., who had even less quilting experience than Denise when she decided to pursue a OHGWQ project, nevertheless proved open to trying something new. Because she knew almost nothing about making a quilt, she asked a friend who was taking a quilt class to share with her the teacher's weekly written instructions. Following these classes, she made her first quilt. Afterwards, she launched directly into her OHGWQ project. Because she was adopting a Vietnamese son and a Chinese daughter concurrently, Michele solicited OHGWQ fabrics for both at the same time and planned on making the quilts nearly identical. She thought that process would be simpler: "my plan was to make the exact same quilt for both of them just because I wasn't a quilter. I didn't know what I was doing. I figured it was easier to figure it out once." But by the time she had finished one quilt, she felt like she had become a "real" quiltmaker. In fact, she confessed,

I'm [now] totally addicted. We have a new house that we moved into a couple years ago, and I acquired the fourth bedroom as my studio. Originally it wasn't planned to be. ... I just slowly acquired it. Yeah, it's a good thing that we are done adopting, because there would be a bit of a struggle [about] what to do with a new child's bedroom. I'd have to give up my studio and I wouldn't be real happy about that.

Michele has even started her own quilt business, designing quilt patterns and helping other people finish their quilt projects. Wanting to assist other adoptive parents in completing their OHGWQ was a partial inspiration for her to start a business. She has helped members of her online adoption support group complete their project and she lamented the fact that so many other projects will likely remain incomplete: "I can't help but wonder how many more people are just sitting with fabric and wishes in a box, and they'll stay that way possibly forever, which is a shame." Although Denise and Michele were in the minority in terms of a dramatic transformation into self-identified quiltmakers, the enthusiasm with which they embraced quilting was noteworthy.



Figure 22: Screenshot of Michele K.'s quilt business website.

Some of the language they used ("addicted" and "stash," for instance) reflects Marybeth Stalp's observation that "the behaviors of quilters do parallel those of drug users in some ways ... Referring to fabric as 'stash' as well as women's guarded behavior around family [to hide the extent of their quilt-related activity] does link quilting to other deviant acts, like illicit drug use" (Stalp 2008, p. 82). Stalp argues that for dedicated quiltmakers, finding adequate time, space, and materials within the family context, a traditionally "greedy institution" (Coser 1974), can be exceedingly difficult. She has found that women, who are traditionally seen as primary caregivers in the home and thereby possess less flexibility and abundance in leisure time, find it necessary to identify strategies for making their hobbies less noticeable and/or more palatable to family members. In the case of quilting, they might hide recently purchased fabric, work on small or portable projects that can fit into the family's busy lifestyle, or emphasise the gift-giving aspect of their hobby. Additionally, they turn the addiction analogy to their own benefit: "When criticized for their quilting activities, women are quick to make comparisons with other potentially addictive pursuits [like gambling or hard

drugs], demonstrating the [relative] harmlessness of quilting ...” (Stalp 2006a, p. 113).

Despite these potentially negative implications, quilting for women like Denise and Michele often becomes an integral part of who they are. Indeed, utilising sociologist Robert A. Stebbins’ framework for identifying “serious leisure” (1996), Stalp outlines the ways in which quiltmakers’ identities become tied into their hobby: they make time and space for it, sometimes in the face of resistance; they set personal quilting goals; they regularly build and supplement their skills; they “derive personal, social and familial benefits” from it; they adopt the externally- and internally-agreed upon attributes of a “quilter”; and they recognize their hobby as a “passion”—something more than a casual activity (2006b, pp. 106–107). Denise and Michele K. both followed this path, increasing their commitment to quilting and the “lifestyle” it connotes. Still, they were the only OHGWQ informants who made that leap from novice to dedicated quiltmaker as a result of the project.

Even for informants who were experienced quiltmakers or enthusiastic novices, quilting—the act of sewing the three layers of the quilt together—often presented too great a challenge for them to perform it personally. Because quilting requires a large space and specific knowledge, it is common for people who sew their own quilt tops to hire out the quilting. In addition, professional quilters often use specialised equipment, called long-arm quilting machines, which make the quilting easier and more efficient. These machines are an expensive investment, though; therefore, people who purchase them are often in the business of quilting for others.

Not only did novice OHGWQ makers such as Shannon and Denise use a professional quilter, but so did more experienced quiltmakers like Michele L. and Jen and her mother. Michele K., the informant who became a self-identified quiltmaker and started her own business, also hired a professional but was contemplating taking the “next step” in her quilting trajectory: “I feel comfortable enough in my piecing abilities, and what I can create, and want to take it to the next level ... I actually was at a [quilt] show on Friday and

test drove a bunch of [long-arm quilting machines] for the first time. It's a natural progression." Michele's notion of a "natural progression" is shared among many quiltmakers, who understand that once they embrace the hobby, they not only self-identify as "quiltmaker" but they also will likely become increasingly committed to it, emotionally and financially.

OHGWQ possess a number of characteristics that make them unique when considering what it means to make one. In all cases represented by this study's informants, there were dozens, if not hundreds of people who contributed to the project. Often, the project coordinator—usually the adopted child's mother—did not do any of the actual quilt construction herself. In many cases, a friend or family member, or multiple people, volunteered to do the sewing. Even when that was not possible, the coordinator was able to find a knowledgeable quiltmaker with whom she could work on bringing the project to fruition. Allied products such as a "good wishes" scrapbook or a website also came out of many OHGWQ projects. In all cases, informants expressed admiration for the art of quilting, with several already being self-described quiltmakers and others becoming one because of the pleasurable feelings of "everyday creativity" they experienced while making a OHGWQ.

Because of these varied participants and circumstances, assigning maker-hood is difficult. In the Western, especially Modernist, tradition, single makers are the norm. However, I argue in the case of OHGWQ that even those who did not sew a single stitch are still "makers." I argue this for a number of reasons. Each contributor selected a fabric, making a conscious decision about what pattern or colour to send; some even decorated or constructed a specially crafted piece to contribute. Donors also wrote a wish, a companion thought to go with the fabric. The sewer(s) of the quilt made countless creative choices in constructing the quilt. The project coordinator made the initial decision to make the quilt, solicited the fabrics from a wide web of supporters, and identified and commissioned sewing assistants. They all played a critical role, without which the quilt would not have existed. Most importantly, I argue that all OHGWQ contributors were makers because what they were forming was much more than a physical object. They invested

emotion and intentionality with the goal of producing a symbol of support, welcome, and celebration. In essence, the quilt represents a community, a network of individuals who cooperated to create a positive atmosphere in which an adopted child could find comfort and succour. Chapter 6 addresses in greater detail the importance of community for the quilt and the metaphor of OHGWQ as network.

This chapter has explored various aspects of making. The first section shared One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt informants' ideas and feelings about making a family via adoption. Many of these perspectives focused on how informants came to the decision to adopt and, specifically, to adopt from China. Adopting internationally involved a range of considerations and emotions, distinguishing it from other forms of family-making. The second section explored the ways in which OHGWQ informants approached the physical act of making the quilt. This, too, varied from person to person but commonalities existed in project coordinators' decisions to make the quilt themselves or seek outside assistance and in how the project often followed a similar timeline to that of the adoption itself. Finally, the third section explored what "making" meant in the specific context of the OHGWQ phenomenon, specifically, who could be identified as the maker when there were multiple contributors and the kind of creativity that was involved.

The next chapter, "Imagining," delves into the ways in which informants thought about two crucial conceptual bases for the OHGWQ: quilts and China. It looks at quilts' embedded meanings, especially in reference to family and social history and in relationship to their qualities of tactility and utility. It also explores the metaphorical power of textiles, especially as it relates to informants' framing of OHGWQ as both physical and emotional wrappers. In discussing the idea of imagining China, the chapter focuses on ideas of "Chineseness" with reference to the West's historical appropriation of Chinese cultural elements. It also delves into individual families' bicultural socialisation practices, identifying where in those activities the OHGWQ might lie.

Chapter 5: Imagining

While the last chapter addressed the practical and philosophical aspects of making One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts, this chapter examines the two richest conceptual bases for the practice: quilts and China, both of which have deep roots in the American imagination. In the U.S., quilts have come to symbolise a host of dearly held traits and institutions. For Americans who possess quilts made by relatives or forebears, the textiles often come to represent the individual maker(s) as well as the thread that connects all of them through time. Family history and the idea of heirlooms are closely associated with the idea of quilts. Even for those Americans without direct connection to quilts, these textiles have come to symbolise perceived national traits such as thriftiness, communal labour, commitment to family, and generosity. Furthermore, as will be seen in this chapter, textiles and quilts have long been valued for their ability to envelop and protect, making them ideal candidates for metaphorical notions of “wrapping” the recipient in love. In the American context, quilts are not simply physical objects but complex and emotionally charged concepts as well.

China, too, sits deeply, albeit somewhat uncomfortably, in the American imagination. The history of chinoiserie—stereotyped representations of Chinese culture—is generally a Western one (see Chapter 2.4), but the U.S. has been particularly egregious in depicting Chinese people in broad, ignorant, and sometimes malicious ways, especially in early twentieth-century mass media and cinema. The indiscriminate use of Chinese imagery and consumption of Chinese objects also reflects larger colonialist and racist attitudes. In addition, mid-twentieth-century isolation from the rest of the world meant that China was largely a mystery to most Americans nearly until the turn of the millennium. The rapid growth of a Chinese ICA program in the 1990s, therefore, meant adoptive parents had few accurate resources for researching Chinese culture. After coming across a poorly-documented Chinese patchwork tradition, the *bai jia bei*, some adoptive parents latched on to the idea, making it their own but discovering and documenting little in the

way of concrete evidence for its provenance. Incorporating Chinese cultural elements into family life has become easier, however, especially with the growth of internet communication, and it has been strongly encouraged by governmental and private organisations alike. Today, adoptive parents and adoptees have more resources for including Chinese culture in their lives—including the OHGWQ itself, as well as such things as heritage trips, language lessons, foodways, and festivals—all of which point to the recent shift in American approaches towards acknowledging and embracing adoptee identity and birth culture.

In this chapter, imagining is a process that works upon and interplays with the concepts and objects introduced in the last chapter: the family and the quilt. Section 5.1, “Imagining the quilt,” examines informants’ perceptions of quilts’ embedded meanings, particularly as representatives of family and social history. It also unpacks ideas of tactility and utility, both of which are closely associated with household textiles such as quilts. It also taps the metaphorical power of textiles in discussing the OHGWQ’s perceived ability to wrap its recipient in both warmth and love. Section 5.2, “Imagining China,” focuses on the OHGWQ’s Chinese roots and how much makers were able to discover about them, while also incorporating the concept of “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm 2012). It addresses the presence of chinoiserie elements in the quilts and also delves into individual families’ bicultural socialisation practices, for instance, how they incorporate China into their daily lives. The overarching effort in this section is to assess the OHGWQ’s “Chineseness” (in itself a contested status) in an attempt to locate the practice within the larger China adoption phenomenon.

5.1 Imagining the quilt

As informants talked about quilts generally, several themes emerged. A major theme was the idea of quilts representing history, primarily family history. This perceived tie to the past endeared quilts to informants; for them, quilts represented ancestors and loved ones as well as family and personal values. Accordingly, some of the most memorable OHGWQ contributions

were ones with a past; repurposed fabrics—from clothing or other sewing projects, for instance—were among the most mentioned by informants, particularly because they were seen to be imbued with deeper meaning. Interestingly, although family history emerged as a strong topic, women’s history did not. This is perhaps due to the fact that quilts are so deeply associated in American society with women’s handiwork—accurately so, for the most part—that informants did not think to mention this aspect.⁴⁵

Another major theme centred on use and utility. The tactile, pliable, warm nature of a quilt lent it to descriptions of how the OHGWQ was intended to wrap the adoptee, both physically and affectively. Despite the fact that the OHGWQ was a special, highly-valued object, most informants insisted that an inherent part of quilts’ nature was to be used, not stored away or merely displayed. As we shall see, history and utility, imagining and tactility are all bound up in the materiality of the quilt, the essence of which flows from, as design history Judy Attfield states it, “textiles’ ability to withstand and adapt to changing conditions, and still manage to retain vestiges of their original form” (Attfield 2000, p. 132). In other words, textiles can speak to both the past and the future, evolving and playing key roles in humans’ lives throughout.

5.1.1 Quilts as family and social history

Many participants talked about growing up with quilts or reminisced about family members who made them. Shannon remembered a complex Trip around the World quilt made by her great-grandmother, which is still on display in the family holiday home. Similarly, Christine recalled a Grandmother’s Flower Garden quilt made by her great-grandmother: “It’s a beautiful quilt, it stays tucked away because it’s deteriorating but we pull it out every once in a while and look at it.” Martha described being “surrounded” by quilts growing up, as her mother and father ran a successful quilting

⁴⁵ The demographic results in a recent nationwide survey of American quilters simply lists “Female” under the question “Who is the Dedicated Quiltermaker” whereas for other characteristics, such as “Affluent” and “Well Educated” they provide specific data (“\$101,080” and “79% attended college,” respectively), suggesting that the percentage of female respondents was so close to 100%, they did not need to specify.

business, supplying popular mail order companies with completed quilts. Kristine and Sam both had grandmothers who quilted and Kristine, who is a college professor, laughingly recalled:

My grandmother quilted and I always joke about the fact that the quilt she gave me—she gave me a quilt when I graduated from college—[she] said, “I was planning on giving this to you when you got married, but I’m not sure if that’s ever going to happen, so here’s the quilt.”

These stories point to the embedded nature of quilts in some informants’ lives.

It is natural that quilts are sometimes regarded as representing family lineage, particularly because quilts have often been made within a family context and subsequently passed down through generations. In her detailed history of one South Carolina family’s quilts—more than a dozen bedcovers made between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth—folklorist Laurel Horton summarises the importance of the quilts as links between the past and present:

Looking backward into the lives of Mary [Black]’s ancestors, we can better understand the motivations and choices made by quiltmakers within the social and economic contexts of their lives. Looking forward through the lives of Mary’s children and grandchildren, we can see how the quilts have continued to function within the collective memory of the family and community.

(2005, p. 1)

For Mary Black, the woman who assembled the collection, “each quilt contained the seeds of stories about the intertwined lives of the women in her family” (Horton 2005, p. 1), including tales of gift giving and shared handwork, as well as larger stories about the family’s financial and social status within a single region in one southern American state. For Mary’s Black’s descendants, the quilts were a link to her and to an understanding of their inherited place in the family and community.

The Blacks were only one among countless American families whose

members made quilts for and with each other and whose quilts descended through the generations. Particularly poignant were the quilts made for families who were about to immigrate west to unsettled regions of the United States:

Marriage and death are important to women of all generations. But to 19th-century American women emigration was an occasion every bit as significant. The anguish of families whose loved ones left home during the period of westward expansion, many of them never to be seen again, can hardly be exaggerated.

(Clark 1986, p. 67)

Many of these quilts were inscribed quilts, which together constitute an important—and well documented—segment of American textile history (Lipsett 1985, Brackman 1990, Fox 1995, Ducey 2011, Ducey and Gregory 2012). The inscriptions on these textiles, such as “Remember me when far, far away” and “Shall we meet again?” (Clark 1986, p. 67) provided the recipient with an explicit and heartfelt expression of loss and farewell. More subtly, and perhaps more meaningfully, these inscribed quilts also might have served to *embody* the missed loved ones, due to textiles’ ability to “take on someone’s essence and come to stand for that individual” (Gordon 2011, p. 31).

As argued by textile historian Beverly Gordon, textiles’ sequentially-assembled and malleable nature has led many cultures to use them in myths concerning the concept of time and to metaphorically equate them with life-giving. This, she argues, means “we can easily understand why they hold important meaning at every point in life’s mortal journey” (2011, p. 44). From births to weddings to leave-taking (whether departure or death), fabrics frequently play an intimate part as humans mark significant milestones. But, she adds, they also are embedded in daily life in widely varying roles, “from basic survival to social interaction to transcendent experience” (2010, p. 4). Thus, facilitating and representing social and familial connections over time, in the way quilts often have done, is one of textiles’ natural abilities.

Gordon further claims that “textiles also function as tangible expressions of what are in some senses larger intangible entities—extensive and diverse geographic areas, political territories, and abstract concepts and beliefs,” giving national and organisational flags and banners as particularly powerful examples (2010, p. 7). Accordingly, some OHGWQ informants explicitly drew a connection between family quilt history and personal values and aspirations. Amy recalled a baby quilt that was made for her, which she still possesses, and related it to her own outlook on life: “I do like how they can be handed down generationally and represent family history. I’m a small town girl. ... I like a lot of things that are a symbol of small town America or country type of values.” Lucia, whose mother is an avid quilter, remembered that when she was young, a quilt was always set up in the living room to be worked on. For her, “it’s always been a part of our family, and a nice a way of traditions and connections”; thus, she sees it as a “natural thing to do for my own kids.” She expressed particular attachment to a quilt her mom made for her when she was young, and appreciates the fact that it is still being used. She said,

There’s something about being wrapped up in that quilt and knowing that my mom made it for me and that I had it on my bed all those years. Now my kids use it on their beds and when they build tents out in the backyard. It gets taken to the beach. It’s just well used, well loved. It’s just thoroughly woven into our life and I hope that [the OHGWQ] will be for [my daughter] too.

Karen similarly saw a connection between past and present, as represented by quilting. Her grandmother, a preacher’s wife who did a lot of quilting within her church community, exposed Karen to quilting from an early age, and made quilts for all three of her biological sons. Karen now wishes she had started making quilts earlier herself: “It’s been something that I’ve really enjoyed and wish now that I could have done it a little earlier and shared that joy with my grandmother because she would be happy to know that I was quilting.” For Amy, Lucia, and Karen, quilts constituted a thread between the past and the present, bringing forward values and hopes they

currently hold dear.

For a few informants, quilts represented a component of their family history with which they wished they had had a closer connection. Michele K., who became a serious quiltmaker because of her OHGWQ project, only found out long after her paternal grandmother's death that she had been a devoted hand quilter:

I didn't know of my father's mother quilting by hand until my older sister had mentioned it when I was collecting fabrics [for the OHGWQ], and ... since I wasn't a quilter at that point, it never really clicked, the connection; but ... I guess my father's mother did quite ... a bit of hand-quilting. She actually thought that was the only way to do it, and thought ... to use the machine was cheating.

For a serious quiltmaker, the distinction between hand and machine quilting is an important one, and Michele was able to appreciate her grandmother's predilection for working by hand only after she was no longer alive. Jason expressed disappointment that his father's mother never made him a quilt, saying, "When we were growing up, on my dad's side all of my cousins got a quilt. [My grandmother] got too old before I was born or she didn't make one, never took the time. My brother has one. My sister has one. I'm jealous that I never got one." A similar sense of regret came through in a story Louise told about a quilt given to her brother by a neighbour when they were children. Louise's current occupation as a paintings restorer made the recollection of the quilt's loss even sharper:

When I think about it, we no longer have that quilt. It just was like another blanket. I don't think there was the appreciation for old and important things and handmade things. ... I enjoy history and I'm involved in things you do with your hands. That's my job. Those things just resonate with me. ... I'm involved with these old things and preserving them. When I think of that quilt, it just kills me that we don't have it.

The sense that a closer connection might have been made—to a particular

person or a time long past—via a quilt made the missed opportunity more poignant.

A few informants referenced history and tradition more generally, apart from the specific family context. For Cybil, the value of quilts was tied directly to their past: “That’s what’s important about quilts. I feel like there’s this history in them.” Christine talked about age-old practices with which she was familiar concerning quilts: “There’s a tradition with quilts that when you make a quilt you must sleep under it before you give it away.” And as Dolly talked about how she was going to design her OHGWQ, she referenced the difference between the aesthetic of old quilts and her own visual preference, which, she said, “tends to be more modern ... than the traditional square, log cabin[-style quilts] ... sometimes the older quilts— they’re beautiful, but they just look tired to me. And I wanted it to look fresh, and fun.” For these three, quilts embodied history, whether through traditional practices associated with them or through specific aesthetic markers that tied them to a certain place in time.

5.1.2 *The “intimidating” nature of quilts*

Perhaps due in part to their connections with ideas about history, many people felt overawed by the notion of making a quilt. For them, it was simply too important or too difficult to attempt themselves. Referring to the OHGWQ project, Louise said,

It’s funny because the idea of making the quilt is a little bit intimidating. I don’t sew, and a number of people, my friends also, they don’t either. I know many, many, many people collected the [OHGWQ] squares and the wishes but were never able to bring the project to completion. I think the idea of doing a quilt is something that intimidates a lot of people and they chose not to do it. Loved the idea, but didn’t actually follow through.

Even for those informants who had made a quilt before, making the OHGWQ turned out to be a greater challenge than they could bear. Cybil had previously taught herself to make small quilts, but the size of a bed quilt was intimidating. She said,

Quilting's hard. I actually taught myself to quilt before I adopted my daughter. ... I went online and I took tutorials and I made a whole bunch. I learned how to quilt on a smaller level. I made small quilts. I have about 12 of them that I made. They came out great, but the idea of making an actual [full-]size quilt was a little daunting.

Karen, an experienced quiltmaker, was feeling internal pressure to make her OHGWQ perfect because, she said, "I didn't want to mess it up. ... Since people have put so much effort into some of the [donated] blocks I wanted to make sure that it looked its best." In fact, in talking about her OHGWQ and the companion wall-hanging she was constructing, she admitted, "they're so special to me I think I may have them professionally quilted." Maggie conjectured that there was a "perfectionist" impulse that probably kept some people from completing their OHGWQ projects, because "once it's done, it's done and you can't change it." The impression that many had of quilting was that it is a formidable activity, not to be undertaken lightly.

Simply convincing people to contribute squares of fabric could be difficult as well, a problem Kristine and Sam found to be both frustrating and amusing. Kristine laughingly recalled,

One of the things that surprised me was how difficult it was for people—fairly intelligent people, folks we hang out with—to actually follow simple instructions. And how intimidated they were by the idea of participating in the creative process. ... [A]ll they had to do was choose two pieces of fabric. I mean, I had one person who was, who had adopted much earlier than [us]—her oldest daughter is 16 now—and she flat out refused. She loves us and cares about [our daughter] and wanted us to be successful and totally waited with us but flat out refused to participate with us because it was too intimidating to her. And no amount of me explaining the process helped.

The atmosphere within online fabric swapping groups could be intimidating as well. Denise, who was new to quilting herself, noticed that some

exchange participants could be finicky and judgmental about what kind of fabrics they received from others:

[There were] little contentious things that happened on the quilt group that some people would complain that their fabric squares were cut too short or they were cut crooked. ... I think there were [some] people who were much more concerned about the parity [than others].

Donating a fabric to a OHGWQ project was daunting for some, as was swapping fabrics online, if the other swappers were particularly critical.

5.1.3 Microhistories: using repurposed fabrics

In speaking about their OHGWQ projects specifically, history was again a significant theme for informants. When asked if there were fabrics in the quilt that were especially important or memorable, the majority cited pieces that had experienced previous use. A few had come from earlier generations, such as Louise's grandfather's handkerchief, which eventually received pride of place in her quilt's centre, and leftover fabric from a quilt Maggie's husband's grandmother had made decades earlier, given to Maggie by her husband's aunt. Other donated fabrics, such as from baby blankets, nursery furnishings, maternity robes, and wedding attire, had previously helped mark special occasions and milestones in the donors' lives. For instance, Sam's mother gave him her entire wedding dress to use in their OHGWQ, which made both Sam and Kristine nervous. Neither one of them wanted to be responsible for cutting into a loved one's wedding dress, so, Sam said, "We made the quilter do it!" Kristine echoed his words: "I said 'I can't do it. I can't cut into this' ... but the quilter did it and it's a lovely little square, the lace part of it. And she just took off a sleeve, actually, so the dress is still pretty much intact." Shannon was touched by the donation of a fabric that had been used to make the ties and sashes worn by her older children in her cousin's bridal party; she said, "That little piece of red silk really means a lot." Fabrics that had been used previously by the donors—especially for special occasions—were among the most memorable for the OHGWQ makers.

Other donated fabrics with history had more prosaic origins. Fabric from old clothing was particularly prevalent. A man donated fabric from one of his work shirts, another donated a piece from a jacket his mother had worn, and a woman gave extra fabric from when she sewed a set of pyjamas for her granddaughter. Cybil received many pieces that were taken from donors' children's old clothing. She explained the impulse to donate used garment fabric by saying, "It was something that had meant something to them and their child and now they wanted it put into this bigger piece, this bigger project." Some of the fabric from clothing had more specific resonance, like the pieces Lisa received from a friend who cut up dresses that his daughters had worn while the family was living in China, during a Peace Corps stint. Informants often felt that there was more meaning in everyday fabrics, even—or maybe especially—in old clothing.

In a variation on the used clothing theme, Lucia talked about the benefits of not having completed her OHGWQ yet, especially in terms of being able to use fabrics that have meant something over the years to her now eight-year-old daughter:

I'm a packrat, so now I've saved things that I think could easily be incorporated into the quilt, dresses and baby blankets and things that I think would be nice to have in there that I've saved of hers. Some of those things, she's always claimed [for herself] and said, "I'm going to give that to my daughter when she's old enough." There's some other things, I think, that she maybe would want to put in the quilt instead.

She also highlighted the importance of possessing items of clothing given to them by her daughter's birth family, which she can now incorporate into the quilt. Unlike the other families in this study, Lucia's daughter is from Taiwan, where open adoptions are a possibility, which is largely not the case for mainland China. Even so, she said,

We didn't know that we would have these meetings with her family or that they would provide us with— give us things to give her at different points in her life. That's really nice. It's

really meaningful. It would be nice to be able to take some of those things and incorporate them into a quilt that would last even longer.

Lucia pleasantly anticipated using years of her daughter's post-adoption clothing in her OHGWQ, but even more special to her was the thought of being able to include fabrics that had a direct relationship to her daughter's pre-adoption life.

Many well-used fabrics triggered emotional responses from both donor and recipient. Laureen talked about a piece donated by a woman from her church, and recalled that the woman told her, "When my daughter was a little girl, I made her a sewing box and this is the fabric that was at the top of the sewing box and it just reminds me of the love that I have of my daughter when she was ... young, from her childhood." Laureen, in turn, said, "That really had an impact on me." Louise was particularly touched by a fabric given by her sister, who had been a Grateful Dead rock group fan in her youth. Louise said, "It was a tie-dyed t-shirt and she cut it up. She said she thought long and hard about what fabric to send. ... [Her written wish] said, 'Every girl deserves to have a tie-dyed t-shirt and dance her heart out.'" Louise understood that although the sentiment could be taken light-heartedly, for her sister it was deeply felt, the ultimate good wish. In another example of a sibling donation, Sam's brother gave him a fabric reminiscent of an oriental rug the two of them had in their bedroom growing up and wrote a "really powerful wish," Sam said, about "how it reminded him of that carpet and how he hoped that she would have many hours of playtime and fun lying on the quilt like he remembered lying on that carpet." The fabrics that had been an intimate part of the donors' lives were especially notable for some informants.

Microhistories like these are often embedded in quilts that have been made from scraps. One woman, as quoted in folklorists' Marsha MacDowell and Kurt C. Dewhurst's study of Native American quilts, fondly remembered looking at just this type of family quilt:

It got to be a challenge to say, "That was Grandpa's and this was Mom's and that was Dad's," just from going through the

patchwork as you lay there in the evening remembering who wore what and then what it looked like on them ... it gave you a sense of warmth and closeness to other members of your family.

(1997, p. 19)

Another woman, featured in anthropologists John Forrest and Deborah Blincoe's work, spoke in remarkably similar ways about a Single Wedding Ring quilt she owned:

... It was made with old scraps. A lot of these pieces were my grandfather's pajamas, you know, and aprons and old dresses that my grandmother wore. In that sense it's kinda dear to have a quilt made of those things because you see those materials and you recognize them and say, "That was Gramm's dress," you know, or "That was my hat."

(1995, p. 188)

It is easy to see how one would become emotionally attached to a thing that held so many personal associations and memories.

At the same time, the notion of the "scrappy" quilt made from leftover and pre-used fabrics has also entered the canon of American quilt myths. In her study of early twentieth-century writers on quilts and decorative arts, textile historian Virginia Gunn concluded that tastemakers of the time, influenced by Colonial Revival romanticisation of early American life, speculated that even though patchwork items did not survive from colonial times, "it seemed plausible to believe that they had been in general use and were worn out by hard use, so much a part of everyday life that they were not of particular note to the men who wrote the history of that time" (Gunn 1992, p. 198). Further, these writers also theorised that, in Darwinian fashion, quilts followed "an orderly evolutionary development of quilt designs, working from simple to complex [beginning with] the random crazy pattern ... and so on to the more complicated styles" (Gunn 1992, p. 198). And although later scholars have clarified the understanding of colonial quilting, demonstrating why patchwork was *not* generally made during that era, and

also have thoroughly documented the *late-Victorian* (decidedly not colonial) crazy quilt fad, romantic notions of quilts as embodiments of long-standing American thriftiness survive to this day.

Indeed, one informant, Maggie, made a direct conceptual link between the OHGWQ and the current “T-shirt quilt” trend.

It kind of reminds me of how ... people make T-shirt quilts ... out of old T-shirts. I think that's a neat thing to do and [the OHGWQ] reminds me of that, where people are using old meaningful material. ... With [OHGWQ], people aren't necessarily using material that they wore, but I think in the old days in China they did. I think [the *bai jia bei*] was a possibly semi-beat up quilt to start [with], kind of like the T-shirt quilts.

Maggie directly articulated the equation shared among most informants that “used = meaningful.” She also made the assumption, likely based on what she read online, that Chinese *bai jia bei* were similarly worn, a conclusion that is impossible to confirm since *bai jia bei* are so rare, but which makes sense within the American context of romanticising “scrappy” quilts. In her study of T-shirt quilts, folklorist Janice Frisch compares them to scrapbooks, assemblages of noteworthy material—specifically clothing—from throughout a person's life (Frisch 2010). She summarises the appeal of the T-shirt quilt by saying:

Turning the shirts into a quilt simultaneously clears out drawer space while creating another beautiful object that can be displayed instead of hidden away. When on display, these quilts act as props allowing viewers to ask the owners and makers questions about them, opening up avenues of communication and making room for the relation of memories associated with each shirt.

(Frisch 2010, p. 60)

Just like OHGWQ, T-shirt quilts serve simultaneously as practical, thrifty objects and receptacles for the wearer's memories.

5.1.4 Looking to the future

In addition to referencing aspects of the past that had been incorporated into the OHGWQ, informants also speculated about the quilt's role in the future. Laureen and Jen both talked about hoping their daughter would one day take the quilt to university, as did Christine, who said,

some of us have talked on the [OHGWQ Yahoo] group about ... some day when our girls go off to college they might take those quilts with them for their beds, and how they would meet each other and go, "Oh, look, I've got that piece of fabric too." ...

There were so many kids that were adopted from China in that [early 2000s] window ... so it's entirely possible they could end up in the same dorm, somewhere in college.

Cybil, too, looked forward to college, though for her, she imagined making an additional quilt—made from her daughter's favourite T-shirts—for her daughter to take with her and to remember her mother by. Going away to university seemed to be a milestone at which informants imagined the OHGWQ playing a supporting role for their daughters.

Other parents looked to the quilt's future in other ways. Jen, for instance, saw the quilt as an heirloom, an object representing family and community traditions: "My mom quilts and my grandma used to quilt. This area is known for quilts—a lot of quilt shops. It's something you can pass down. This will be [my daughter's] that she can pass down to her children." Jen went on to conjecture that her two-year-old would grow increasingly attached to the quilt as time went on when she said, in an emotional voice, "I think it will be more meaningful to [her] later and it's something that she can look back on, be proud of." Similarly, Shannon foresaw her daughter someday appreciating each individual who contributed to the OHGWQ:

What I loved about this piece is that when she's older she can look at each piece and know who patched this thing together for her. There's so much interwoven into this thing because you actually have the tangible pieces of written word that are there for her with each piece of fabric that says, "This is what I want

for you,” or, “This is what I want for your family.” There’s just so much wonderful sentiment in it.

Pam, Lisa’s mother-in-law and sewer/designer of their OHGWQ, anticipated the quilt’s use well into her granddaughter’s adulthood as she talked about the fact that there were very few juvenile-style fabrics in it, making the quilt aesthetically appropriate for a grown-up, as well as a child. Apparently, some OHGWQ makers found it important to contemplate the longevity of the quilt—as an heirloom, an aide-memoire, and a utility object.

5.1.5 Tactility and wrapping

Another aspect of OHGWQ that emerged as informants talked about their quilts centred on tactility. In speaking about their daughters’ relationship with their quilt, informants often used words like “wrap” and “snuggle.” For instance, in talking about how the quilt has always been a part of her daughter’s life, Cybil said, “She had it when she came home, so we would use it for watching TV, snuggle up with it ... she’s always known it.” Shannon, too, referenced the integral—and tactile—nature of the quilt in her daughter’s life: “She wraps in it. It travelled with us back and forth for our ski weekends and she snuggled with it in the car. It’s her thing and it’s lovely. ... I think it’ll be big enough for her to snuggle on even when she’s a big kid, just to wrap up on the couch, [that] kind of thing.” For Kristine and Sam’s daughter, who had sensory processing issues when she first joined their family,⁴⁶ some of the fabrics’ textures took a while to get used to, but, Kristine said, “Now she actually likes those as well. The textures themselves have attracted her to them.” Because Cybil’s daughter so visibly enjoyed touching and playing with the second piece of fabric—the one normally intended for a scrapbook—Cybil never completed the book. Instead, she said,

I never mounted them. I keep them in a bag. I keep wanting to do it, but the way she interacts with it is— I don’t know. She just

⁴⁶ Sensory integration—“the process by which individuals organize and interpret information received through their senses in order to successfully meet environmental challenges” (Cermak and Groza 1998)—is often an issue for post-institutionalized children, largely due to a lack of stimulation and encouragement from a parent-type figure.

really enjoys touching them and taking them out. I just figured,
"You know what? I don't need to fix this. It's not broken.

Nobody's judging me for not mounting it." So I leave it.

Noting and celebrating the textural and enveloping qualities of quilts and textiles was a shared experience among some OHGWQ makers.

Additionally, many parents talked about the quilt wrapping their daughters in a metaphorical sense—in love, in comfort, in welcome. Sam summarised this dual physical/symbolic nature by saying, "I really liked the idea of a child coming home to have this blanket that literally she could be surrounded with, then also metaphorically surrounded by all those people who love her and contributed to the quilt." Like Sam, Laureen also thought of the quilt as physically representing the people who contributed to it, especially her large, extended family who, she said, "are scattered all over the place," which meant that the OHGWQ "really resonated with me—that my child would have something tangible that, right in front of her, it would be wrapped around her."

In a similar way, Dolly said,

whenever anyone asked me what kind of fabric to send, I asked them to send something that was meaningful to them or something that they liked, because that was going to bring more meaning to the quilt. ... in fact, if I was going to do it all myself, I would probably do something completely different than some of the fabrics that have been sent to me, but that's the whole point of it, that it comes from a community of other people that want to help wrap this little girl up with love and warmth.

For Lisa, the quilt's enveloping nature could serve to help with some of the more painful aspects of adoption:

Adoption comes with so much loss, and our oldest really, truly struggles with that quite a bit, and so to have [the OHGWQ] as a reminder of the joy of adoption, the excitement that people felt to welcome her into our lives. ... And she can just wrap it around her, like, literally and figuratively.

Parents easily shifted from thinking about the OHGWQ as something that

physically wrapped their child to imagining it symbolically embracing her as well.

The concept of wrapping is fundamental to the human experience and textiles are closely associated with it. Beverly Gordon enumerates the many ways in which we wrap ourselves—with clothes, disguises, and in death, shrouds—and wrap other things—with tea cosies, curtains, and dust covers, for instance. At their most fundamental, cloth wrappings bring us comfort and protection: “we remember cuddling under blankets on cold nights, or wrapping up in a towel when emerging from a bath” (Gordon 2011, p. 26). The comfort textiles give as they wrap around a person often is associated with the giver; for instance, as anthropologists Mukulika Banerjee and Daniel Miller argue, the *pallu*—the decorative, loose end of an Indian woman’s wrapped *sari* dress—serves as a shelter under which the woman’s child essentially grows up, first as a breastfeeding infant and later as a young child making his or her first independent forays out into the world. The *pallu* thereby functions as a physical manifestation of the mother’s love for and protection of her child (2003). As a similar extension of the human form, so intimate to the body are Indonesian sarongs—the ubiquitous and unisex clothing of that nation—that anthropologist Catherine Allerton refers to them as a “super skin,” an outer layer that is not static, as a “second skin” would be, but instead a flexible mediator between the body and the outer world. Just like the body’s skin, she notes, cloth is double-sided, both touching the wearer and facing outward; thus, sarongs not only have a “social life” (Appadurai 1986) as objects of exchange and communication, but also a “secret life,” known only by the wearer (Allerton 2007).

Relevant to OHGWQ informants’ conceptions of the quilt as a physical/metaphorical wrapper for their child is psychologist D.W. Winnicott’s notion of a “transitional object.” Winnicott posits that infants use a soft object, “perhaps a bundle of wool or the corner of a blanket or eiderdown, or a word or a tune, or a mannerism—that becomes vitally important to the infant for use at the time of going to sleep, and is a defense against anxiety” (2005, p. 5) and that this object represents the concept of “not-me,” thereby helping the

child identify and establish an identity separate from his or her mother. In examining Winnicott's theory, Judy Attfield emphasises the draping and covering quality of fabric—"one of the most intimate of thing-types that materialises the connection between the body and the outer world" (2000, p. 124)—as an important aspect of the transition. "Winnicott's blanket was not a substitute for the mother" (2000, p. 128), Attfield writes, then quotes psychotherapist Adam Phillips, rather it "provided a bridge between the inner and outer worlds ... where previously ... there seemed to be only mutually exclusive options; either subjectivity or objectivity" (Phillips 1988, quoted in (Attfield 2000, p. 128). In the case of the OHGWQ, while the recipients are not necessarily infants, they certainly are children who have suffered a traumatic severance from their birth mother. Perhaps the tactile, wrapping quality of the OHGWQ can help them—not necessarily by substituting for their new, adoptive community, but in their own internal process of bridging between "orphanhood" and "familyhood" and, eventually, "self-identity" (see Chapter 6.3.4, "Transitioning).

5.1.6 *"Quilts are meant to be used"*

The impressions informants had of quilts' tactility resonate with many of their views of quilts' utility. Although some, like Louise, displayed their OHGWQ on the wall of their daughter's room, and others, like Christine, kept it stored safely away from family pets, most of those who had finished the quilt firmly believed that it was meant to be used, touched, and manipulated. Laureen matter-of-factly stated, "It's meant to be used. It's meant to be worn. ... It's not filled with anything. We live in Florida. It's the perfect weight for us here." Likewise, Maggie insisted the quilt be a practical object: "It's on her bed. I wanted it to be something that she used. Like, I wanted it to be machine done because I thought it would be more durable. ... That was critical because I want it to be used." For Jason, the object's beauty was almost a barrier to its utility, a situation he found to be unsatisfactory. In looking at his daughter's quilt, he reminisced about the quilts he had as a child, saying,

To me, [our OHGWQ] looks too pretty to use, to actually fling on the floor and lay on it and roll up in it and watch a movie in it. Where[as] ours— we used ours, that's the ones that my mom had or my grandma had made. ... [They were] thrown around on the floor, so there's rips in them and tears, whatever, you know. All us kids used them. And maybe [our daughter] will use [the OHGWQ] but I don't see that being ripped up and torn— you know, it's too pretty.

Cybil, too, felt that having her daughter use the quilt was better than simply displaying it, even if it meant damage might occur: “I said to myself, ‘You know what, what am I saving it for?’ Because we were going to hang it up and then I thought, ‘Why? Why not use it so it gets used? [And if] it gets ripped? We'll patch it.’” The frequency with which parents talked about the quilt being an invitingly touchable object was often mirrored by an insistence that it was also an eminently usable object.

Accordingly, some parents seemed to equate utility with increased value. Shannon, for instance, said,

It's in her crib now, but it travels back and forth with us. It goes [in]to the car with us. We've had a lot of stomach bugs this winter, so it's been in the wash a lot. ... It's totally used. This is not a show piece anymore. ... I think it would increase in value every single time it gets washed, really, just because it's being used.

Similar to Shannon's concept of a “show piece,” Cybil turned the commonplace notion of an heirloom—an object kept from daily use because of its perceived value—on its head, by saying, “At first, when I was making it, I thought it would be an heirloom and we could hang it up, but it was so dear to me that I actually put it on my daughter's bed. She uses it every single day.” For her, it was the physical interaction that was important: “You have that memory. You live with it every day. I feel like it's not as special just having it hang on the wall.” These parents welcomed the daily interaction that is normally antithetical to the treatment of an “heirloom” or other highly valued

family object.

OHGWQ informants are not alone in assigning a different kind of value to quilts and textiles. While many scholars directly address the history of textiles as important forms of economic currency and trade (Mann *et al.* 1973, Reddy 1984, Maines 1985, Fagan Affleck 1987, Harris 1993, Berenson 2010), others delve into their value in other types of exchange, particularly social (Weiner and Schneider 1989, Barber 1994, Fox 1995, Rake 1999, Gordon 2011). Feminist writer Nora Ruth Roberts coined the phrase “quilt-value” to distinguish it both from Marx’s “exchange value” (value based on money) and his “use value” (value based on utility) arguing that both are insufficient to “explain the memory-value of my grandmother’s quilt to me or of heirlooms in general” (1994, p. 127). She further explains,

... the quilt links me through the female line to my own childhood and to precious memories of my grandmother standing close beside me or showing me how to do some chore or other. ... Yet I must face the fact that my most prized possession would not fetch twenty dollars on the open market. To anyone outside the family, its only use-value is as a covering or perhaps a quaint curiosity.

(Roberts 1994, p. 126)

Forrest and Blincoe refer to a quilt’s role in gift-giving, particularly between female family members, for whom the gift of a quilt can have powerful “symbolic and social value,” giving the example for instance of a wedding quilt made by a mother for her daughter, which could be seen as

signaling not only the moving on of fecundity in a biological sense but also in the sense of general creativity. The new household is expected to bring forth babies and quilts to cover them. ... In addition, the presence of her mother’s quilt on her bed is a constant reminder of [the daughter’s] connection with and debt to her mother.

(1995, p. 190)

Quilts and textiles clearly can have value that far exceeds economics, acting

as a social binder on both a macro and micro level.

For other informants, the concept of “use” had long-term and possibly therapeutic connotations. For Michele K., it was more important that her son’s OHGWQ be useful in the future than immediately, which affected her decision about how large to make it:

It’s huge, so it’s currently not being used, but ... I noticed on most [web]sites that people were making baby quilts—basically, lap quilts—and I wanted something that would actually get used for a much longer period of time; hence my need to go large. I wanted him to be able to use it more during adult years than child years; but it sits in his room and he looks at it all the time, and he gets in these moods where he pulls out his scrapbook.

Denise began talking to her daughter about her OHGWQ—and about being adopted, in general—from a very young age and in some ways it seemed to represent how normalised her adopted status was: “I started talking to her about it pretty early and she uses it every night. It’s always kind of been there for her. She’s never had, like, any questions for me about it, like ‘why did you do this?’ I mean ... it’s just a stable— a staple of her life.” And for Lisa, her hope was that the OHGWQ would give comfort when her daughter was having difficulty with adoption-related issues: “When she is feeling the struggle with the tougher sides of adoption, this might give her a lot of comfort. I know that she sleeps with it on her bed every night.”

“Imagining the quilt” for OHGWQ informants often revolved around ideas of history, but more specifically, an intimate history created through person-to-person relationships. Quilts embodied the idea of forming family and friendship bonds that could endure over time, supported, in particular, by the microhistories that contributed fabrics often represented. The symbolic associations and material nature of quilts also allowed adopting parents to imagine their OHGWQ not just as a physical wrapper but also a metaphorical one that represented all of the love and support they wanted to give their child. All of these strong, emotional associations with quilts also meant that,

despite the exceptional nature of the OHGWQ, most parents insisted that it needed to be used, not cherished in the traditional sense of safeguarding it from everyday life.

The next section, “Imagining China,” explores parents’ ideas about Chinese culture and where it intersects with OHGWQ. Assessing the “Chineseness” of the OHGWQ practice as well the appropriateness of certain forms of Asian-inspired imagery come into play, as do parents’ attitudes and approaches towards integrating elements of Chinese culture into their family’s daily life.

5.2 Imagining China

As discussed in Chapter 2, One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts are rooted in a number of sources: age-old Chinese patchwork traditions, Chinese spiritual and religious beliefs, American commemorative quiltmaking, and American literature, specifically Pearl S. Buck’s 1956 *Imperial Woman*. *Bai jia bei* (one hundred families quilts) and, more prominently, *bai jia yi* (one hundred families robes), provide a direct connection to Chinese traditions of using patchwork to spiritually protect young children. Combined with long-standing American practices of making quilts to mark important family and community events, as well as Buck’s compelling narrative about an imperial concubine creating a *bai jia yi* to safeguard her son, these various strands coalesce into a unique practice within the China adoption community. This section explores to what extent adoptive parents were aware of these various sources and whether or not it was important to them that the OHGWQ had specific Chinese cultural roots. It also delves into the informants’ attitudes towards and practices in integrating Chinese cultural elements into their children’s lives. In the end, it attempts to address the question, “How Chinese are One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts?”

5.2.1 Searching for the quilt’s roots

Most informants learned about OHGWQ via the web. Denise summarised her internet-derived understanding of the OHGWQ tradition by

saying, “it was a tradition [in northern China] for friends and family to give the woman a piece of fabric along with a good wish for [her] child. She would make the quilt and then her child would be enveloped in the love and good wishes of their family.” Maggie’s version of the story additionally referenced the nuance of using old fabric (see also 5.1.3): “the original idea of what I think they did in China ... [is that] the pieces were used—meaningful pieces of material, like, from somebody’s dress.” Christine added yet another layer, also derived from online sources, which centred on the Pearl S. Buck story:

In the book, the woman who eventually becomes the Last Empress has the only son of the Emperor and she fears for his life. She fears that something will happen to him, and symbolically by wrapping this child up in the robe, or the blanket made from fabric from all these noblemen, meant that if anything happened to that child, the nobleman would have to come and respond to that event.

These stories, which combine communitarian, utilitarian, and protective qualities, matched many of the informants’ overall perceptions of the OHGWQ’s background.

Generally speaking, however, OHGWQ makers did not take its Chinese pedigree at face value. Shannon, for instance, was honest about how little she knew about the origins of the practice:

I actually don’t really know anything more about it other than what I’ve read, which was maybe two sentences: ‘This is a tradition from northern China. This is what they do.’ That was it. I don’t know if women still do it. I don’t know if this is an old tradition or a current tradition. I don’t know. I thought it was neat, so I did it.

Jen similarly admitted that she knew little more than what she had read briefly online:

I did find a website that had an explanation of what it was. Then I found other ones that had that same explanation and so I just copied that explanation. ... You can’t find very much on the

Chinese tradition of it [online]. ... So I don't know if it was something that us here in America have created. I don't know.

But I just thought it was such a great, great idea.

In much the same way that Jen imagined the OHGWQ could have an American provenance, Lucia wondered about its origins. She mused,

I don't think I'd read [about] it in any books, so who knows?

Maybe it's not even an actual thing. I should go back and research more now. ... I'm guessing [I found out about the quilts] through other adoption blogs. ... Since getting your e-mail I started thinking, "I wonder what really the background is on this?"

Denise, too, expressed scepticism when she said, "I tend to think it's probably mythical but you'll probably be able to tell me, or I'll read about it in your final paper ... whether the tradition is actually true or not." Maggie wondered about the Chinese tradition as well: "do people still do this there or has it gone by the wayside and somehow or another, adoptive families in the United States heard about this and said, 'That's cool'? I'm very curious about that." Even though they may have read about the OHGWQ tradition on multiple websites, informants did not blindly accept the story of its Chinese roots.

A modicum of scepticism seems to be normal among internet users generally; however, this does not necessarily result in increased attempts at confirming internet-derived information. Although in the past, the more a communications platform was used, the greater its perceived level of trustworthiness, with the internet, "growing reliance on the medium appears to raise more rather than fewer questions and concerns about its credibility" (Carmen and Shyam 2008, p. 65). Much of this concern relates to the fact that, unlike traditional media, there are few if any "gatekeepers," meaning that users themselves must evaluate information and sources. Some researchers have found that information seekers do this by supplementing and/or verifying web-based information by consulting traditional outlets such as newspapers (Carmen and Shyam 2008). Others, however, have found that users only "rarely" or "occasionally" engage in verification efforts, with the easiest of

these tasks, such as determining the date of the source, occurring more often than the most difficult, such as researching the author to assess their credibility (Metzger and Hall 2005, p. 31). Additionally, people who are sceptical of media sources and/or are politically cynical have been found to be predisposed to trust online sources over mainstream media, affecting the perceived credibility of both (Carr *et al.* 2014). When it comes to blogs, the source from which most of this study's informants learned about OHGWQ, people who already relied heavily on blogs as news sources tend to rate their trustworthiness more highly than mainstream sources, as might be expected (Johnson and Kaye 2004). Thus, while there is a general understanding that the quality of online information is variable, information seekers do not necessarily take measures to scrutinise every site's accuracy.

OHGWQ informants, too, varied in the degrees to which they attempted to verify the source of the quilt tradition. Many were savvy about the potential for the OHGWQ background story to have been exaggerated, romanticised or simply "co-opted," as Denise phrased it. She said, "I suspect ... that it's an homage to a tradition, [and that] we're not [precisely] replicating that tradition." Dolly, too, understood the idea to have originated in China, but more importantly, to have become an embedded practice within the adoption community:

I did some online searching and found that that is something that's a recent part of the Chinese adoptive family culture. Or kind of a neat way to welcome home the little babies that American families are adopting from China. Because it was a tradition that apparently originated in China.

Louise was less concerned about the veracity of the Chinese background than she was about motivations for making the quilt: "I liked the idea of the tradition part. Whether that's a true, real tradition or not, I just really liked the sentiment behind it." In fact, she was enthusiastic about the fact that two of her close online friends, who were not adopting from China but rather from Guatemala, decided to make a OHGWQ. Many informants recognised that the quilt had become an important part of ICA even when they were not totally

sure of its cultural origins.

Creating a new tradition based, however loosely, on an old one is a common practice, and has been especially popular in the post-industrialised western world in the last 200 years—a reaction to folkways disappearing due to phenomena such as urbanisation, consumerism, and the increasing heterogeneity of societies. Historian Eric Hobsbawm defines the concept of “invented tradition” dually, as both, “‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period—a matter of a few years perhaps—and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (2012, p. 1). OHGWQ, I believe, lie somewhere in between. In some ways they fall into the latter category, with the precise origins being obscure and the practice taking root very quickly in response to the specific circumstance of the China adoption phenomenon. In other ways, the OHGWQ is a self-aware practice; makers cite Chinese tradition but also seem conscious that they are participating in a “constructed and formally instituted” tradition. Invented traditions may reference a “real” tradition—as Hobsbawm argues modern Christmas carolling does and as OHGWQ do in drawing inspiration from a Chinese patchwork garment—but, he says, they “can never develop or even preserve a living past” (2012, p. 8), primarily because although they reference the past, they do so mostly “by imposing repetition” (2012, p. 4). However, sustaining the original *bai jia yi/bai jia bei* tradition is nothing that OHGWQ makers ever claimed to be doing. Rather, as seen in Chapter 4, OHGWQ informants used the project to help cope during the adoption process and, as discussed in this chapter, to imagine ways in which they would provide comfort and support to their daughters. Further, as discussed in Chapter 6, developing community was another primary use, which aligns with one of Hobsbawm’s three invented tradition types: “those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities” (2012, p. 9). Given that these were some of the central motivations for making a OHGWQ, it follows that informants sometimes were sceptical or unconcerned about the quilt’s purported Chinese origins.

Bolstering the idea that at least some informants were conscious of the “invented” nature of the OHGWQ, two parents in particular were uncomfortable with claiming Chinese roots for the practice without knowing they definitively existed. Kristine, a university professor, said: “As a researcher and academic I was like, ‘I’m not quite comfortable saying that I know anything at all about tradition in northern China.’” She looked online, but she said, “I never could find verification, and so in our instructions [to fabric donors] I talked about the fact that ... a lot of adoptive families say this tradition emerges from northern China [but that] we weren’t able to confirm the story’s origin.” Lisa, a self-proclaimed “geek,” was the most persistent of the informants in researching the sources of the OHGWQ. Her tenacity was partly inspired by the fact that another popular story within the adoption community, the “red thread” legend, had been, in her words, “twisted and changed.” Instead of two lovers being connected by an invisible thread that would always connect them no matter how long or distantly they were separated, the China adoption community altered the myth to encompass the relationship between people who had never met before, specifically abandoned children and their (eventual) adoptive parents. In talking about this re-interpretation, Lisa said, “the whole red thread thing just drives me insane.” So when she encountered the OHGWQ practice, she “didn’t want to say that it was a Chinese custom unless it truly was.” What she ended up discovering—through online research, reading books, and talking to her Mandarin language teacher and other Chinese acquaintances—made her feel warranted in her caution:

A lot of people [in the adoption community] were, like, “Oh, yes, Chinese people do it all the time,” and every time I talked to a person that I knew from China, they’d be like, “What are you talking about?” I did a lot of research to figure it out. It truly is very much a regional custom within China, but the China adoption community has very much embraced it, and I think it’s because of that community aspect of it. It’s a way to not only get your friends and family excited about the coming of an adopted

child but also to connect with one another. I think that's why they've embraced it so much, but it's very much a very small regional custom in China.

Although Lisa was unique in her thorough approach to investigating the cultural roots of OHGWQ, informants generally were aware that the story they had discovered online might not be entirely accurate or complete—in other words, that the OHGWQ might be an invented tradition.

5.2.2 The importance of “Chineseness”

All the same, some parents thought it was important that the OHGWQ had a Chinese origin, however tenuous or localised. Dolly, who is part ethnically Chinese herself, said, “That totally drew me into the quilt. Otherwise, I would have just made a blanket, something simple, as in, I could finish it in 30 minutes, [that kind of] project.” Maggie distinguished between thinking the OHGWQ was an interesting project and actually taking the steps to make one: “I think I would like it no matter where the idea came from, but I think if I'd heard it was a Japanese tradition, I don't know if I would have wanted to do it because [my daughter's] not from Japan. Yes, the fact that it's Chinese was important. I felt like it was a link to her culture.” Laureen, too, felt the Chinese connection was vital because it provided a solid context for the making of the quilt:

I honestly don't think I would've done it if it didn't have the Chinese [connection] ... that's what really pulled at me. ... I visualise a small, tiny village in northern China that was poor and yet they were willing to all just give a little bit. It just had such an impact on me emotionally. I wanted something that I could share with my daughter, say, the story behind it. ... Not only the individual pieces but this is the background of why I chose to make this quilt.

For Michele K., the fact that the practice was based on a long-standing Chinese tradition was similarly crucial:

It was extremely important, that's why I went to it immediately,

being that my family is so big on tradition, and maintaining those close connections [with extended family]. ... To us, one of the reasons that we chose China, originally, when we started the adoption process was [that] it was a culture that we were extremely comfortable integrating into our family, and the extended family.

Michele—who also made a OHGWQ for her Vietnamese son—expanded and made more complex her notion of the practice when she continued:

I think it's not about the Chinese tradition, even though it is. For my daughter, very much, I think the friends and family aspect of it, and welcoming the child and wishing the child all the best for their future, I think that's ... equally phenomenal. There's actually a neighbour here who is newly pregnant and her husband knows that I make quilts and has seen some of them, and I've told him about this tradition, and I said, "If you want a quilt like this, and help getting your friends and family to contribute, I'd be happy to make it for her as a surprise thing."

She summarised her feelings about OHGWQ, saying, "I believe it's a phenomenal thing to make for any child, home-grown or adopted." Both Laureen and Michele K. felt the cultural origin of the OHGWQ drew them to the project; at the same time, they also emphasised the importance of its community-based elements, separate from its Chinese roots (see Chapter 6).

For a couple of informants, however, the limited, local nature of the original Chinese practice was a concern. Jen said: "[Our daughter] came from southern China and [the OHGWQ] was a tradition in northern China. And I'm sure there are traditions that I can't find that came from southern China, *[but] I wanted something*." Jen felt the need to make a commemorative object and was willing to overlook the fact that the OHGWQ was not a tradition in the part of China where her daughter was born. For Kristine, the regionality of OHGWQ was a bit more problematic, at least in terms of citing Chineseness as a factor in deciding to make a quilt. She said, "I definitely like that idea, that it ... had some kind of roots in the tradition. But again it's from northern China

and our daughter is very much from southern China. It's a huge country and so it's hard to say how important that connection really is or was for me.”

Shannon was less concerned about the specificity of where the tradition originated: “I think if I'd read about it being a French tradition, I would have done it [anyway]. Because it was Chinese ... it was [simply] a nice connection.” For her, the actual practice was more important than the pedigree: “When I tell [my daughter] the story, I don't know that I'll really play up the fact that this is a tradition of Chinese mothers. I think I'll just say I knew of it because this is something that some moms do in China and I thought it was a really special thing to do.”

The question of Chineseness is complex. Obviously, for a country with over a billion people, incredibly diverse geography, a 3500-year history, 56 officially-recognised ethnic groups, and a diaspora that covers the globe, it is difficult to define what it means to be Chinese. Even within the research focused on China's own burgeoning domestic tourist market, this question of cultural authenticity is a ripe one, with studies on accuracy in representing ethnic minority life being especially plentiful (Wang 2007, Yang 2011, Zhu 2012). Questions of authenticity also appear in studies on the Chinese diaspora, with events such as the traditional springtime Dragon Boat races—which are now held worldwide—being analysed for the “degree to which Chinese cultural traits are sustained” (McCartney and Osti 2007, p. 26). Within postmodernism's “fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or ‘totalizing’ discourses” (Harvey 1989, p. 9), it is especially hard to produce an all-encompassing definition of what it means to be Chinese. Indeed, anthropologist Aihwa Ong prefers to analyse what she calls “transnationality,” “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space,” rather than the “totalizing view of globalization as economic rationality bereft of human agency” (Ong 1999, p. 4). In other words, globalisation for Ong is concerned with more than just the economics of Harvey's “time-space compression,” it also affects—and is affected by—people, who then go on to effect cultural change. Some of those very people are Chinese adoptees, who themselves will participate in the “complex and

ever-changing ... diffuse relationships through which meanings of Chineseness are being negotiated” (Louie 2004, p. 8). Thus, being Chinese, while derived from biological, genealogical, and geographical roots, is a complex construct, with cultural practices, however “corrupted” or evolved, serving as a type of glue for a vast array of diverse people, including adoptees.

In considering whether or not the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt practice has “genuine” Chinese origins, informants generally were enthusiastic about the idea but they also took it with a grain of salt. Most of them felt its Chinese heritage was an important criterion in their decision to make a OHGWQ, but many admitted that they knew little more than what adoption websites and blogs had claimed. They therefore also understood that the OHGWQ could be a variation or adaptation of an original Chinese practice—an invented tradition. Other parents did more extensive research, wanting to accurately portray the OHGWQ practice and coming to a more nuanced understanding of it. In the end, what seemed most important to all informants was the sentiment behind the practice, the idea of welcoming a child into a family with tangible evidence of the love and hope her new community had for her. Denise thought about the differences between the original northern Chinese tradition and the way the American adoptive community approached it—in particular the material and technological differences between poor, northern Chinese villages and relatively wealthy, American familial and online communities—but still found common ground: “In a way, [the OHGWQ is] not authentic at all and in the other way, it still carries with it the, I don’t know, the intent, the intent of expressing love and the intent of welcoming a child into your community and into your family.”

5.2.3 Cultural specificity and accuracy

While many informants were ambivalent about assigning an inherent Chineseness to the OHGWQ practice, their use of China-inspired fabrics in the quilt was one way of assessing how much they, and possibly the donors, aimed for the quilt to have a Chinese character. Encouragement to do so

exists in many online sources, especially on the OHGWQ Yahoo Group, where members have posted information to assist fabric swappers in adding Chinese cultural elements to their quilts. For instance, a document titled “160 Common Chinese Art Symbols” lists Chinese religious and cosmological imagery such as the eight Buddhist auspicious symbols and the twelve zodiac animals. However, none of the listed items comes with explanation or context, meaning that objects such as “castanets” (a symbol of Cao Guo Jiu, one of the Daoist Eight Immortals) would likely be confusing. Another document, titled “ABC Quilt Ideas, China Themes,” lists people, places, and things associated with China in alphabetical order; each participant in an “ABC swap” would be responsible for a certain letter, for instance, A for acrobat, B for bamboo, C for calligraphy. Some of the ABCs are adoption specific—for instance, W for the city of Guangzhou’s White Swan Hotel, where most adoptive parents stay while waiting for their child’s U.S. visa to process—while others are culturally imprecise, for instance, using the Japanese term *bonsai* instead of the Chinese *pen jing* for the cultivation and shaping of miniature trees. It is unclear how many of these swaps occurred on the Yahoo group, although Christine explained that a zodiac swap, “where each person would take one of the animals and ... you’d find a fabric with a rooster on it, or a monkey on it, etc. and swap,” was one of her favourites.⁴⁷

The more generalised “Asian swaps,” however, could include any Asian imagery, Chinese or non-Chinese, and were consistently popular on the OHGWQ Yahoo Group and with some of this study’s informants. Christine described the Asian swaps, and their sometimes liberal approach to cultural iconography, by saying,

There would be dragons, there would be the Asian type flowers, bamboo. ... There’s been some with little girls, like little doll figurines that are Asian, clearly Asian. Sometimes a silhouette, like black-on-red dragons or it could be a Japanese figure or a Chinese figure, usually Japanese umbrellas, the parasols,

⁴⁷ All documents referenced are located on the closed OHGWQ online discussion board (100 Good Wishes Quilts - Yahoo Groups 2011).

there's a nice variety. ... We would just say "Asian." ... Chinese and Japanese are so close in so many ways, we just didn't worry about it.

Cybil, who participated in both Asian and China-specific swaps, was somewhat befuddled by people's indiscriminate use of Japanese imagery in the China swaps, and in the end she did not include those fabrics:

[The Chinese influence] shows [in my quilt], and especially because I did so many swaps with the Asian fabric, some Japanese, some Chinese—I think mostly because there were a lot of people at the time who just didn't know the difference [laughing]. It was supposed to be a Chinese swap, but I got a lot of fabrics that were definitely Japanese, but it was fine ... [though] I didn't put them in the quilt—the Japanese ones—because it didn't make sense to me. I liked the thought, but it didn't go with what I was trying to achieve.

Michele K. also was sensitive to cultural accuracy and theorised that part of the problem was that the textile printing industry is primarily focused on Japanese imagery. The owner of one of her favourite fabric shops told her that, "one of the biggest hurdles he runs into is that so many of them are Japanese-gear'd, with the Geisha and the Koi [fish], and some of these other things that are not indicative to other Asian countries."

Generally, informants who reported the greatest number of Asian themed fabrics in their OHGWQ were ones who did online swaps; as Amy put it, "[those fabrics] came mostly from the other adoptive families." In talking about online exchanges, Shannon said:

All people in the exchange have a tie to China, so a lot of the fabrics that I got from [them] had a Chinese or Asian kind of twist to them. [However,] all of the fabrics that I sent out for my wishes was an English *toile*. I didn't [send out Asian fabrics], but I did get a lot of Asian influenced fabrics from the swap.

In addition to China related fabrics, adopting parents often sent each other fabrics with adoption-specific imagery, such as ladybugs, which are thought to

signal the imminent arrival of a referral, or notification of a match with a child. Cybil even participated in a specific swap in which, she said, “every swatch that you would get would have some sort of ladybugs on it. Ladybugs are really good luck in, especially, Chinese adoptions. ... It's a big thing.” Parents sometimes also included reference to the aforementioned “red thread” legend in their quilt. Louise, for instance, whose friend ended up finishing her quilt for her, asked her to use red thread to tie the layers together because she thought it would be nice to reference the story.

Imagery based on inaccurate or limited knowledge of China has historically been labelled *chinoiserie* (see Chapter 2.4). Attractive for its “exotic” visual qualities, scholars have also noted chinoiserie’s function as a political tool and/or as a reflection of larger socio-cultural attitudes. In her book *Collecting Objects/Excluding People*, art historian Lenore Metrick-Chen asks the question, “What happens when the exotic refuses to remain our fantasy, our abstraction, and instead intrudes into our space?” (2013, p. 1) and answers her own question by outlining the paradoxical history of American obsession with Chinese objects and imagery as juxtaposed with its racially-motivated treatment of Chinese immigrants, comparing the impulse with legion examples of discrimination, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In a less political arena—early twentieth-century quilt product advertising—I have elsewhere argued that stereotyped images of Chinese cultural elements were sometimes used for their “exoticism” in combination with equally ill-informed Colonial Revival imagery to sell quilt patterns (Hanson 2006). While its use was more obviously widespread in earlier eras, the use of chinoiserie and other forms of stereotyping has not completely abated. In the dozens of websites visited for this research, images of fabrics with pandas, fans, dragons, parasols, pagodas, lotus blossoms, and even geishas (of Japanese origin) abounded and confirmed that there still appears to be a narrow set of images used in the U.S. to represent China.

Wish # 140

This panda-rific wish ts from Shannon of Virginia Beach, VA, a blogger buddy also.



posted by 4D @ [Sunday, January 21, 2007](#) [0 comments](#)

Wish # 139

This asian inspired wish is from Felicity and Mike of Melbourne, Florida. They are fellow blogger buddies.



posted by 4D @ [Sunday, January 21, 2007](#) [0 comments](#)

Sophie's 100 Good Wishes Quilt

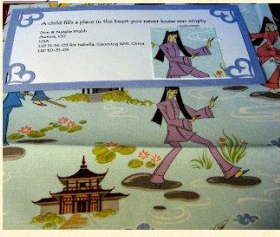
SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 2007



Can You Spare a Square?

Family and Friends, I recently learned of a custom, originating in the northern part of China. It's tradition to make a "One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt, or Bai Jia Bei as it's called in Chinese, to celebrate a new life in a family. To create this quilt, one asks one hundred people to each contribute a single square patch of cloth. The 100 patches are sewn together into a quilt that contains the luck and good wishes from all those family members and friends. I am beginning to gather patches for a quilt for our daughter. Would you consider contributing a square or two of cloth along with a separate written wish or prayer for this child on a small card or piece of paper? Wish can be written on a 3X5 card, but no larger than 4X6. Please attach a small square of the fabric to the wish card. These

Wish 91




This fabric cracks me up. I'm not sure if it is a known cartoon character or not. It comes from the Walsh family in Colorado.

Posted by [Michelle](#) at 9:08 PM [No comments](#)

MONDAY, MAY 21, 2007

Wish 90



Beautiful Asian fans from the Jackson family in CT

Figure 23: Screenshots of OHGWQ blogs with stereotyped imagery.

Parents also included fabrics and symbols that had more personal or direct connections to China. For instance, Kristine said, “it was really important for us to bring actual fabric back from China to be able to include.” To her, that piece in the quilt “represents the broader interest in us making that connection with China,” of endeavouring to include aspects of Chinese culture in their daughter’s life. She and Sam also deliberately chose blue for the fabric surrounding all the blocks: “We wanted this blue as the background to represent that connection between America and China that she’s always going to have in her life.” Similarly, Cybil’s OHGWQ included reference to the distance/connection between the two countries: “Someone had given me a big swatch of fabric of the map of the world. My mother-in-law cut out China and cut out the United States and she put that on the back to signify the two places. Where we were from and where she was from.” For Lisa, who began to study Mandarin soon after her daughter’s arrival, a piece that was in her mother-in-law Pam’s fabric “stash” (see Chapter 4.3.3) caught her eye:

Then there was ... from Pam’s stash, I remember this, it was a brown fabric, and it just had tiny squares with lines going through them, but the reason I chose that was because it looked like the Chinese character “zhong” as in “zhong guo,” Middle Kingdom [the Chinese word for “China”].

Pam, who constructed the quilt, also added Chinese script to other places on the quilt: “I put four Chinese characters, larger characters, in each corner ... and it was, I believe, Love, Hope, Faith, and Happiness.” Cybil and Christine also had Chinese inscriptions on their quilts, either the characters for *bai jia bei* or their daughter’s Chinese name. Lucia was able to incorporate another form of symbolism, also related to her daughter’s name: “Our daughter was named by her maternal grandmother in Taiwan. Her name is Zijin, which means ‘proclaiming purple.’ A lot of the fabrics have purple in them; have some connection with purple, either purple flowers or pieces.”

Indeed, as with Lucia’s daughter’s name, personal symbolism seemed to be even more common than fabrics with Asian or Chinese themes. Lisa explained how she intentionally purchased fabrics with Chinese cultural

imagery, but that with donations, the imagery usually reflected the giver:

We were also really fortunate that Pam lives where she does because the fabric store that we went to had a huge selection of Asian and Asian-inspired fabrics, so we did try and go along that line in some ways ... but the meaning behind the fabric squares is really personal in a lot of ways from the people that did actually provide fabric.

The personality of each donor was often distinctly present in the fabrics, which reinforces the notion of the OHGWQ as an embodiment of community, a topic that is discussed further in Chapter 6.3.

5.2.4 Incorporating Chinese culture into family life

Whether their OHGWQ included greater or fewer Chinese cultural references, most families found ways in which to retain elements of their daughters' heritage in their daily lives, frequently viewing the quilt as a component in that effort. In doing so, they were motivated by their own desires as well as the explicit encouragement of adoption agencies and social workers. Jen succinctly summarised the experience of many parents when she said, "[helping our daughter stay connected to Chinese culture] was strongly encouraged to us by the adoption agency and, you know, [we also feel] it's important to know where you're from." Not only did their U.S. agency encourage it, but when they were in China to bring home their daughter, Jen said, "One thing that the orphanage asked is that we keep her heritage alive." Elaborating on institutional encouragement, in particular, Martha said,

As we were going through our training and classes and our home study, it was repeated a lot how important it is to maintain the cultural aspects of our new daughter's coming from China and there's many things that we could implement into the home to kind of keep that alive. We thought [the OHGWQ] would be a good project to, one, keep me occupied [during the wait] and, two, to keep that cultural aspect in our home as well.

Martha was especially appreciative of a class instructor's recommendation of

children's books on Chinese culture and language, which her daughter has enjoyed reading as she has grown older and shown more interest in her background.

The 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption includes specific language concerning adopted children's rights to retain connections to their birth culture. The convention states that ICAs must be made "in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights" (Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) 1993, Introduction), which include giving "due consideration to the child's upbringing and to his or her ethnic, religious and cultural background" (Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) 1993, Article 16B). While the U.S. did not formally ratify the Hague Convention until 2008, it had been moving towards implementation for many years and in response, adoption agencies and other adoption-focused groups began incorporating additional cultural training and educational opportunities for adopting parents. In addition, changing societal attitudes towards transracial and transnational adoption led to

... all sorts of border-crossing movements that would have been unimaginable in an earlier era: an array of culture camps, charitable initiatives, orphanage visits, birth family searches, and other forms of travel. These movements are promoted by social workers and agencies, the adoption community, listservs, and even in some instances by policies of "sending" states.

(Volkman 2003, p. 4)

Adoptive parents in the early twenty-first century have received encouragement and support from multiple sources to find ways of including a child's birth culture in her life.

Beyond official support from agencies, most OHGWQ parents felt an innate desire and/or need to include Chinese culture in family life. Lisa and her family found it was *imperative* for their daughter's emotional well-being: "Compared to [most] other adoptive families that we know ... our family has immersed themselves the most just because of what our daughter needed.

[But] even before that, I wanted to do some things to honour her culture in some way, [including the OHGWQ].” Amy, who adopted an older child, was concerned about her daughter being able to strike a balance between cultural retention and assimilation:

I was really wanting to retain as much of my daughter's culture as I could. I want her to grow up with some constant reminders. ... I don't want her to feel whitewashed or anything. I want her to remember her Chinese heritage and be proud of it while also adapting well here in the United States. [The OHGWQ] seemed like a really fun way to do that.

Michele K. echoed Amy's sentiment about the need to honour an adoptee's birth culture:

It's very important to us as adoptive parents ... to keep whatever connections we can for our kids as to who they are and where they come from, what their own traditional backgrounds are, because it's part of who they are, and that will never change. You can't change the traditions of their heritage just because of the fact that they're in this country.

Simply being open to talking about issues related to transcultural adoption is the approach Shannon and her family took. She said, “We talk about China. We talk about adoption. ... We try to bring in as much Chinese culture to the house as we can. We're pretty multicultural in the family in that we just really enjoy other cultures, so it's kind of a natural for us.”

Historically speaking, these approaches were not always the accepted attitude towards ICA. As outlined in Chapter 2.1, the “assimilation” paradigm of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, meant that ICA adoptees, mostly from South Korea, were mainstreamed into American society without being meaningfully exposed to elements of their birth culture. The detrimental effects of this practice have been well-documented (Trenka 2003, Yoon 2004, Docan-Morgan 2011, Kalb 2012, Freundlich and Lieberthal 2014). For this reason, some adult adoptee groups, as well as various scholars of ICA, have strongly criticised adoption generally and approaches to transnational and transracial

adoption specifically. Indeed, Korean adoptees who have returned to live in Korea have been at the forefront in the effort to end ICA altogether in that country and instead implement changes in both legal and cultural attitudes towards single mothers in the hopes that more children will be raised within their own biological families (Sang-Hun 2013, Chan 2014). Other adult intercountry adoptees, Korean and otherwise, network with each other and agitate for legal and cultural change in their adoptive countries through organisations such as the International Gathering of Adult Adopted Koreans, Also-Known-As, and Gazillion Strong. For instance, adoptee advocacy groups recently (November 2015) were successful in finding sponsors to introduce a bill to the U.S. Congress that would “grant retroactive U.S. citizenship to all international adoptees regardless of when they were adopted,” closing a loophole that had kept some adoptees whose parents failed to naturalise them as children from becoming citizens (Wang 2015, p. n.p.). The Korean adoptee-centric community and worldview—known variously as the “fourth culture” (Stock 1999) and the “third space” (Hübinette 2004), as they are associated with but simultaneously separate from Korea, America, and Korean-America—constitute a model for how Chinese adoptees can start to conceptualise their own place in the world, separate from the opinions and influence of the adoption community and even of their own parents. At least one of the OHGWQ informants was attuned to criticism that much of the discourse on ICA has been industry- and parent-driven and -dominated. In expressing admiration for the documentary, *Somewhere Between*, which follows four American teenaged girls who were adopted from China, Lucia said,

So much of adoptive materials related to the Chinese adoption is through the eyes and the mouths of the professionals or parents. Now that we have this group of girls that have their own voices and their own experience to share, it's really fascinating and interesting and good to have. I feel like [the movie's producers] really gave us a gift.

The efforts of previous generations of adoptees and their allies have effected

real change on the ICA landscape, particularly in terms of allowing adoptees to fully explore their bicultural identities.

While most informants placed value on their daughters retaining cultural roots, how they pursued this goal varied, with families blending together a range of formal and informal activities. The formal activities often centred on organisations such as Families with Children from China (FCC), which has chapters across the country, including most major metropolitan areas. FCC and other similar groups organise activities such as Chinese New Year, Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations, offering opportunities for adopted children to learn about their cultural heritage and to socialise with one another. For many adoptive parents, these support groups are one of the first resources they access. For instance, Louise said, “I joined Families with Children from China right away, because that was another group of people [in addition to online friends] who would have similar families to ours and there were a lot of activities and things to go to. At this point, I’m on the board of our chapter.” Lisa, too, served as an officer in her local FCC group, which organises quarterly events in their part of the Washington D.C. area. Like Louise, she felt it was a great way to get to know other adoptive families, many of whom have become her close friends beyond the organised FCC events: “I’ve made several really close friends who are China adoptive parents, so they’re part of our community. We don’t just see them at adoptive family events. We just see them.” Formalised organisations such as Families with Children from China can assist with creating communities that work together to help adoptees retain Chinese culture in their lives.

Beyond regular participation in cultural events with groups like FCC, most informants felt that learning Chinese was a top priority for their children. Parents pursued this goal in a variety of ways: Jen and Jason found a local man who could teach their daughter Mandarin; Christine sent her daughters to language classes organised by Chinese students at a local university; Michele L. started her own language and culture group, hiring a tutor for her girls and other adopted Chinese children; and Louise enrolled her daughter in a “Chopsticks Toddler” Mandarin class that teaches children 18 months and

up. Lisa, whose daughter experienced severe post-adoption adjustment issues, discovered that Mandarin lessons, for both mother and daughter, were key:

When she had been home about eight or nine months, it was Christmas, and my mother had gotten her a Mandarin language DVD. [Through this,] we figured out really rapidly that the loss of her culture impacted her significantly. She was a very sad toddler who missed China. Once we figured that out, we did everything we could to try and bridge the gap, and one of the things that we did was I started taking Mandarin ... It really helped. ... We still do Mandarin language classes, and I would say from ages two until about first grade it was extremely important to her to have [a lot of] Chinese culture in our lives.

Laureen saw another benefit to her daughter enrolling in language lessons where most of the other students were Chinese-American, especially because they lived in a majority white community: “I thought, no matter what, it was worth it for 3 hours a week for her to feel like she was part of the majority.” Michele K. emphasised the long-term benefits of language lessons for her daughter when she said, “As an adult, it’s going to be whether or not she can speak the language which will say whether or not she can interact with Chinese people, Chinese culture—whether in China or here—or whether she’s going to be excluded from that. That’s what’s important to me.”

Other parents also see Chinese language learning as key to their child’s ability to maintain and grow their identity as Americans of Chinese birth. A *Washington Post* article from 2010 notes that, “More than 1,600 American middle schools and high schools now offer Chinese, according to the Center for Applied Linguistics, up from about 300 a decade ago” and points out that private language schools have flourished to an even greater degree, with hundreds of them operating as weekend non-profits across the country, catering mostly to adoptive families (Sieff 2010 n.p.). Parents of the China adoption “generation” are particularly attuned to the importance of bicultural—both American and Chinese—socialisation, which often includes

activities such as language classes and belonging to groups like FCC. In one study of adoptive parents and adoptees from China, one-third of the parents said they were “enthusiastic” about the Chinese part of bicultural socialisation, while over half of them said they were “interested” (Tessler *et al.* 2009, p. 149). Accordingly, one of the parents interviewed in the *Post* article, just like Laureen and Michele K., saw language lessons as critical, as “the key to culture - to [our daughter’s] heritage. ... These classes aren’t just about fluency. They’re about identity” (Sieff 2010 n.p.). Many adoptive parents see learning Chinese as crucial for their children’s healthy and positive identity development.

Several informants also mentioned returning to China as a way to help keep their daughters connected to their birth country. When they were seven, Michele L. took her daughters to China, even venturing to each girl’s individual orphanage. Their experience at one of the orphanages was particularly memorable: “When we got there it was as though we were coming back with a movie star. They hadn’t seen her for six years. People were calling across the facility ... and picking her up and hugging her. It was amazing.” Karen and Lucia, too, had specific connections they wanted to re-forge for their daughters on a return trip. Karen’s daughter had been raised in a foster family prior to being adopted and Karen had been in touch with them via email several times, expressing the desire to visit within the next three to four years. Lucia, whose daughter came to their family via an open adoption, said, “We ... will be going back to Taiwan to see [her family], that’s our plan. We actually hope to get stationed back in Japan within the next three to five years, and that will make it much easier to make those connections again.”

Shannon was considering several options for an eventual return trip to China. While she and her family were generally independent travellers—“50 people getting on a bus, that’s not how I travel”—she thought that for China, a so-called “heritage trip” might be a good idea. Heritage trips are a popular way for families to experience China as part of a guided tour. One tour provider reported that between 1995 and 2008 they had coordinated over 1000 trips to China for families of adoptees (Ponte *et al.* 2010, p. 101). Another tour

provider advertised their “adoption homeland tour” by giving a “greatest hits” description of the trip, the core of which featured several of China’s largest cities: “Experience the sights and sounds of China through our pre-scheduled group tour to Beijing, Xi’an, Chengdu (including a visit to the Giant Panda Breeding and Research Center) and Shanghai.” They also presented a customized feature in which adoptive families could “Discover your child’s heritage with an individualized trip to the adoption city and orphanage (welfare institute). Reunite with people related to the adoption” (Welcome 2014).



Figure 24: Screenshot of alwaysforever.us (now defunct) advertising a “homeland tour.”

This latter option is common to many tour operators, and a popular one. Finding birth parents in the China adoption context is nearly impossible; therefore, “some parents instead develop a sense of kinship with China as a country and return to children’s orphanages and abandonment locations to

get closer to children's lost origins" (Ponte *et al.* 2010, p. 105). In a Fulbright Foundation-funded study of parents and children who had returned to China, parents gave a well-defined set of reasons for wanting to return to China and, specifically, to their daughters' orphanage and/or site of abandonment: to make China "real," to find out more about their daughter's life in the orphanage, to meet people who had known her and cared for her during that time, and to give their daughter the chance to "fit in" (Ponte *et al.* 2010, p. 108). Some adoptive parents take the heritage tour to a (possibly healthy) extreme, finding that "a quick trip and tour are not enough"; according to a 2011 news article, "Some families are actually relocating to China, where their children can form balanced cultural identities and parents themselves can satisfy their own wanderlust" (Rodriguez 2011). Anthropologist Andrea Louie sees heritage tours—which includes returns by Chinese-Americans of all types, not solely adoptees—as a hopeful development:

The phenomenon of cultural tours helps me examine the relationship between diaspora and denationalization as such and suggests that Chinese Americans and China may be defined as much through connections and continuities as through discontinuities and differences. Transnationalism may not necessarily imply denationalization. Rather, it may result in the formation of new relationships with the homeland and the United States.

(Louie 2003, p. 738)

Especially in the twenty-first-century context of globalisation, Chinese adoptees may be in the enviable position of already having two distinct "homelands."

Although she was not generally partial to group travel, Shannon's concern with taking her daughter on an independent trip was that, unlike in Europe, where she felt she could always "get by" because she spoke French and some Italian, in China, "There's such an incredible language barrier for me. ... [Unlike Europe,] I could not make the best of any situation in China." Regardless of how they organised their trip, Shannon felt it would be valuable

for the entire family. Her older, biological children had gone along to bring their sister home from China and had benefitted from the trip: "They really got to experience China and see a lot of a wildly different culture than they'd ever seen before and they loved it. The trip was fantastic." She was optimistic that it would be helpful for her adopted daughter as well, and was encouraged by the experience of an adoptive parent she knew whose pre-teen daughter had expressed disdain for a heritage trip, saying to her mother, "Whatever, Mom. I'm American. I'm from Ohio. It doesn't really matter." But once they got to China, the girl's attitude changed completely, and her mother felt she "bonded with the people" she met: "[The daughter] loved it. She now is very interested in pursuing more connection with China." Laureen, whose daughter already felt a deep connection to China despite her young age, humorously anticipated China travel when her daughter got older:

She's very, very fiercely proud of her Chinese background. It's hysterical. We listen to [the news on National Public Radio] and I'm like, "Oh God, please don't let them say anything negative [about China]!" ... She's very, very positive and affirming of her background. When she's around 10 or 11, we're going to plan on going back. I want her to.

Dolly, too, was looking forward to a heritage trip with her daughter and especially appreciated the fact that her adoption agency would help support it financially:

The really cool thing about our particular adoption agency is ... they actually coordinate a trip, so all the children that have been adopted from China—that they've placed in homes in America—they give them the opportunity to go back and visit for two weeks to be immersed in their original country of heritage once again, which I think is actually a beautiful thing. And they pay for it.

All of the informants who mentioned the idea of a heritage trip to China were enthusiastically in favour of it.

Informants described a variety of other ways, largely focused on resources within their own communities, to incorporate Chinese culture in their family's life. A basic, and frequently mentioned practice was to include Chinese food in their meals, whether through visiting Chinese restaurants, shopping at Asian grocery stores, or cooking Chinese food at home. Amy's daughter, who was nine when she arrived in the U.S., especially appreciated their visits to a nearby city's Asian supermarket where she could get some of the snacks she had grown up with in China—what Amy called her “comfort food.” Dolly, who was still waiting for her adoption to finalise, understood that once her daughter arrived, transitioning her diet from Chinese to American would be an issue, which made her glad that her family already cooked a lot of Asian food.

For informants who lived near big cities, a visit to the local Chinatown was also a popular activity, especially during Chinese New Year and other festival periods. Living in major metropolitan areas also meant that Chinese daughters got to see more Asian faces on a regular basis, helping them feel like less of an anomaly despite living, for the most part, in all-white families. For Lucia's daughter, seeing other Asians was important because while they had been living in Italy previously, her daughter stood out in the mostly-white populace, but now, Lucia said, “We're in the [Washington] D.C. area where she's in a classroom which is very diverse and she has kids from all over the world, many different languages and cultures.” Spending time with Chinese friends—whether adopted or not—was especially comforting, and Amy's daughter was fortunate to be able to socialise with two boys from her orphanage who had also been adopted locally; Amy said, “To her, those were her older brothers.” Jen and Jason were looking forward to the time when their son's adoption went through so that their daughter would have someone with whom to share the experience of being Asian in rural Minnesota. Jen said,

I think it's going to be easier, you know, they're going to share something, they're going to have something in common. It will make us more aware of other cultures. They're not just going to

learn about the American culture and Chinese culture, they'll also learn about other cultures ... I think it's important for all people to know about many cultures. So that's just something that we're going to do.

Dolly, who was half Chinese herself and spoke some Mandarin, found a local Mandarin-language Bible study group to be helpful as she prepared for her daughter's arrival, and Martha and her daughter took advantage of their local library's Mandarin story time. Regardless of locale—urban, suburban, or rural—parents utilised resources near and far to incorporate elements of Chinese culture into family life.

Without a broad based approach to bicultural socialisation, it can be hard for adoptees to retain interest in experiencing Chinese or Chinese-American culture, making parental efforts as those discussed above especially important. One parent in a study of socialisation practices and attitudes within adoptive families admitted that, “for us, since there is no context for Chinese culture to grow in, it has been very difficult to [equate] any of the language instruction or other cultural symbols with personal emotional experiences” (Tessler *et al.* 2009, p. 150), meaning that in the end, their daughter had lost interest in Chinese cultural activities. Indeed, in another study of both domestic and international transracial adoptions, one important approach to bicultural socialisation—living in a racially and ethnically diverse community—was found to be the least practiced: “The most frequently used practices by both groups ... were primarily those that require little contact with people of the children's race, while the least frequent practice, living in diverse neighbourhoods, requires the greatest integration” (Vonk *et al.* 2010, p. 243).

Ironically, for this study's informants one of the least demanding bicultural socialisation activities—decorating the home with Chinese artefacts—was not a strong preoccupation, although it has been documented elsewhere (Traver 2007). Many parents mentioned bringing home objects from China that naturally held significance because they represented part of their journey to bring their daughter home. Some bought pearls or silk dresses for their daughters, others commissioned calligraphic scrolls with

their daughter's name on it. Other informants collected Chinese antiques during their wait in the U.S.; for instance, Shannon bought moon cake moulds—wooden moulds for shaping festive delicacies—and Martha decorated with vintage flash cards. However, no one emphasised collecting and decorating with Chinese objects as a critical element of their adoption and socialisation processes. In fact, Louise criticised this mode of expressing an affinity with China:

I have friends who have their houses decorated like Chinese restaurants. ... I mean, we have a lot of Italian things in our house because that's where my husband's from, like ceramics and paintings and things like that. Then we do have a few Chinese things here and there. In [our daughter's] room, she has some lanterns that she decorated herself, or an umbrella that she bought and she liked. She has things in her room that she enjoys that are specifically tied to her culture. We haven't gone the whole nine yards with turning it into a little pagoda or something. I think that would be silly.

Like most OHGWQ informants, Louise had a few, personally-significant Chinese objects in her home, but she placed little importance on collecting them as a way to introduce Chinese culture into her family.

In exploring informants' perceptions of the OHGWQ practice's origins, the material elements that give it a Chinese or Asian quality, and the adoptive families' approaches to bicultural socialisation, this section, "Imagining China," has attempted to assess the "Chineseness" of the quilt. This assessment is critical in understanding the practice's place within the China adoption phenomenon; in other words, does it serve as a genuine connection to Chinese culture as intended or is it simply a caricature, an appropriation of Chinese cultural elements drawn from a shallow pool? I believe it lies somewhere between (just as the girls in the documentary film feel). On the one hand, the plucking of a barely-documented Chinese quilt practice for inspiration and the de facto incorporation of chinoiserie elements into

individual quilts smacks of colonialist attitudes that have formed the core of some of the harshest criticisms of ICA. On the other hand, makers in this study understood that the OHGWQ, while inspired by Chinese patchwork, was likely an “invented tradition” of the China adoption community; their questioning of whether it was a genuine, widespread, or extant practice in China indicated not only a general understanding that not everything on the internet is true, but also an apprehension that culture is complex and not easily transferrable.

While Chapter 4 addressed the idea of making as both a physical act (making a quilt) and conceptual undertaking (making a family), this chapter has presented the OHGWQ’s most important constituent ideas—quilts and China—exploring informants’ thoughts and feelings about them and examining the ways in which they fit into the larger socio-cultural imagination. Both quilts and China have been interpreted through romanticised lenses, but OHGWQ makers’ notions of them are most intimately informed by personal attachments to concepts like family, history, and commemoration, and by the topic that is addressed in the next chapter, community.

Chapter 6: Connecting

Whereas Chapter 5 analysed two main concepts underpinning OHGWQ—quilts and China—Chapter 6 deals with their explicit function as connectors. In this chapter the “in-betweenness” of OHGWQ becomes clearest: the quilt projects provide linkages between parents and children, between and among adopting parents online, and between families and communities. Section 6.1 explores how adopting parents, anxiously working towards and awaiting the arrival of their child, used the OHGWQ project to feel connected to her, despite the fact that in some cases, she had not yet been born. Because the ICA process can be unstable and unpredictable, subject to a host of external influences, adopting parents often viewed time as their enemy, completely out of their control. They knew their adoption could take nine months, but it could also take six years. Feeling a connection to their child, therefore, was boosted through the pursuit of the OHGWQ project, which overlaid the adoption experience with a sense of stability and predictability. Working on something controllable, unlike the adoption process itself, gave informants a sense of agency and reassured them that their daughter would eventually be coming home. In addition to providing a method for day-to-day coping, the OHGWQ also came to *represent* the waiting period for some parents. Because they had invested so much time, effort, and emotion into it—and, of course, into their adoption—the quilt project often symbolised “the wait” and the pain that accompanied it. In both positive and negative ways, as coping mechanism and as symbolic barrier, OHGWQ stood in between adopting parents and their goal of bringing their daughter home.

In a more direct way, the OHGWQ project also connected adopting parents with one another, largely via the internet, a phenomenon that is explored in Section 6.2. Through the dedicated OHGWQ Yahoo group and other online forums, parents shared their quilt projects with each other—swapping fabrics and quilting tips. They also used online sites and tools (e.g. blog publishing services) to share their larger adoption story and gain both practical information and emotional support at critical moments in the

process. Several OHGWQ informants further extended their online friendships to IRL, getting together with other parents they met online for parties or family outings. The OHGWQ, which has its own dedicated online platform, the Yahoo group, also functioned as a metaphorical platform, without which online swapping never would have existed. The quilt project provided the initial impetus and opportunity for adopting parents with similar interests to meet one another, create a commemorative object together, and assist each other as they moved (or stalled) through the adoption process. Its in-betweenness in this case was in facilitating shared activity.

Section 6.3 examines how the OHGWQ project further functioned as a platform by giving adopting parents the opportunity to reconnect with IRL friends and family. Whereas online friendships and support largely focused on the shared experience of adoption, familial and affiliative relationships centred on pre-existing, non-adoption related bonds. Because adoption is sometimes societally misunderstood or disparaged, OHGWQ informants viewed reinforcement of those connections as comforting signs of support. Informants especially valued receiving fabrics that portrayed the donor as an individual, whether through aesthetic preferences or representational imagery. Fabrics were particularly meaningful when they came from or represented family members who were deceased or who had played pivotal roles in the parents' pre-adoption lives, reinforcing notions of textiles and quilts as symbols of family and social history (see Chapter 5.1.1). Without the OHGWQ project, informants might not have had a means by which to garner the support they needed, particularly within the non-traditional family-building context of international, transracial adoption. Beyond its intimate association with the adoption process, however, informants also viewed the OHGWQ as an object that would evolve as it came into the recipient's possession. This evolution or transition from representing the parents' pre-adoption emotional and psychological needs to being an object to be lived with and transformed by the adoptee is a final aspect of the quilt's in-betweenness.

6.1 Connecting to a child, their child

The process of adopting is largely characterised by waiting. Motivated to be working towards their child's homecoming, adopting parents determinedly work through copious paperwork, only to be left waiting, often with no signs of progress, for months or years on end. Additionally, their immediate community has few cultural cues for talking about or celebrating adoption, leaving the parents feeling isolated. OHGWQ, therefore, were seen by most informants as having the dual role of helping to pass the time—whilst still feeling productive—and providing a mechanism whereby family and friends could easily participate in the process and feel more comfortable talking about a culturally awkward topic. The way in which the OHGWQ project's became embedded within the adoption process also gave it strong metaphorical power, allowing it to symbolise for some informants both the emotional pain of waiting and "the wait" itself. This section discusses the ways in which the OHGWQ project helped informants deal with the anxiety of waiting and to feel like they were working towards connecting with their child.

6.1.1 "Paperwork pregnancy"

Creating or adding to a family via adoption is not an easy process. Countless hours are spent on filling out paperwork, participating in a home study, and, worst of all for some people, waiting while various agencies and governmental bodies process the adoption. Requisite paperwork often overlaps between the agencies for which it is being prepared, so redundant effort is common. In addition, the home study includes multiple visits from a social worker and one-on-one interviews with each parent as well as full criminal background checks and fingerprinting, all of which—while necessary to protect the adoptee—can feel intrusive and emotionally wearing. The expense of international adoption, which can run well over \$20,000, was what Amy originally thought would be the most difficult aspect to deal with, but in the end it was the paperwork that affected her the most:

The year [of our adoption process] felt sometimes more like four because the paperwork was very arduous. I'm a fairly educated

person. I have an M.Ed. and I didn't think the paperwork was what would be intimidating. I thought it would be the cost. The paperwork really did me in a couple of nights. There was so much repetition and redundancy. ... That's why a lot of adoptive families call it a paperwork pregnancy.

In addition, the adoption process is characterised by a lot of “hurry up and wait”; in other words, adopters quickly prepare their dossier of paperwork only to sit around months or years for it to process. Laureen summed up this lopsided dynamic when she said,

When you're going through the adoption process, it's so overwhelming. You just have to get really, really focused and just charge forward. You do that for almost 6 to 8 to 12 months and then it's submitted and your dossier goes to Beijing and then there's this giant let down of "Oh my God!" ... It's so frantic, and then all of a sudden, it's just boom! It's over.

While parents who adopted prior to the mid-2000s slowdown (see Chapters 1.2 and 2.1) acknowledged that compared to today their adoption process was short, at the time, it seemed interminable. Maggie reported that every few months throughout the process, her agency would tell her that it would be “six to eight more months,” until finally, at two years, her daughter’s adoption was completed. The constant extensions took their toll on Maggie’s motivation to complete her OHGWQ: “It was probably a year that I didn’t even look at it, didn’t look at the squares, didn’t think about it, except to maybe look at the spreadsheet [I had compiled] and see how many I had.” Completing an extensive amount of paperwork, then waiting for an indefinite number of months or years for it to process characterises most China adoption experiences, including those of OHGWQ makers.

All of the paperwork, and the waiting that accompanies it, can lead to significant levels of anxiety and doubt. Christine’s second adoption fell in the midst of a nine-month universal China adoption slowdown. This inspired her to create a short-lived blog titled, “Where’s That Darn Stork?,” on which she commiserated with other waiting parents about the inexplicable slackening of

the adoption process. Only after her paperwork began to move through the system again did she abandon this blog and return to swapping fabrics with others on the OHGWQ Yahoo Group. Because ICA is such an intense and time-consuming undertaking, many families become attuned to the rhythm of the process, with times of stress affecting other areas of life.

The adoption waiting period has been described as “the transition to parenthood in which individuals are neither not-parents nor parents but rather hoping-to-be-parents” (Sandelowski *et al.* 1993, p. 464). It is an intermediary stage that anticipates change in parental status but has none of pregnancy’s reassurance of a stable timeline nor any of its culturally formalised marking and celebratory practices, such as regular medical appointments and baby showers. “Child *waiting*” (Sandelowski *et al.* 1993, p. 464) as opposed to child *bearing*, leads to different types of parental anticipatory activities, such as constructing a mental image of the child by imagining the circumstances of his/her birth, gazing at his/her adoption agency photograph, and revisiting adoption selection criteria (Sandelowski *et al.* 1993). It also leads, as OHGWQ informants expressed, to a great deal of stress and dissatisfaction with “the wait,” which is, essentially, “time without content” (Sandelowski *et al.* 1991, p. 150). Prospective parents thus feel the need to “humanize time” and find a way to “regain some control over their lives and, most importantly, to maintain the hope that a child would eventually give their years of struggle and waiting meaning” (Sandelowski *et al.* 1991, p. 150). ICA differs from building a family biologically in numerous ways, with the indefinite waiting period being one of the most difficult aspects.

OHGWQ informants described additional sources of anxiety during the wait, including wondering about the health and safety of their child in China and experiencing the loneliness of building a family in a non-traditional way. For those who already had children at home, wondering how they would adapt to each other once the new adoptee arrived was also an issue. When Shannon and her husband submitted their paperwork, having been told the process would take two years, they already had a three-year-old and a four-year-old. By the time their adoption finalised six years later, however, their

children were much older siblings to their adopted child than they had hoped would be the case. Shannon said,

There was a lot of reasonable, rational kind of decision making that we had to make as parents in terms of whether this [adoption] is something that's now going to continue to be feasible for the structure of our family. I think in the end, actually, we felt like it wasn't going to work for our family because of the age gap. We travel a lot and we've been living overseas. We've been moving around a lot. Our kids were old enough now to really go and do things. It just didn't feel right to go back to the baby side of things after so long.

But, Shannon continued, despite all their reservations, they simply could not give up:

For six years we had a daughter in China. It was just [a matter of] *when* they were going to let us go get her. For all the logistical reasons, adding a baby to our family was just the wrong idea. But she is our child. She was our child. We just knew it.

Like Maggie, Shannon, too, stopped all work on her OHGWQ when her adoption appeared to be slowing to a near halt. She said, "The quilt, for me, was pain. It was a lot of pain because there was so much joy in the quilt from the beginning. Every time I looked at it and every time I touched that fabric, it was like I wondered whether she would come to us." For Shannon, the experience of adopting—and by extension, of making a OHGWQ—was an ambivalent experience. Because the quilt project had initially represented the hope and happiness Shannon felt about adopting a child, when the process stalled, the quilt, too, lost its appeal and became a symbol of all that had seemingly disappeared.

As discussed in Chapter 4.1.3, adoptive parents often encounter prejudicial or uninformed attitudes about adoption, especially related to its "invisibility" and perceived status as a "second option," which also can make the process difficult. Crawshaw and Balen suggest that the reason people are

generally uncomfortable talking about adoption is two-fold: first, they see infertility—the most frequent reason for seeking to adopt—as a taboo subject; and two, they are uneasy with talking about caring for “society’s casualties,” i.e. abandoned, orphaned, and neglected children, with any other than “altruistic, ‘rescuer’ ... motivations” (Crawshaw and Balen 2010, pp. 9–10). In a study of involuntarily infertile adoptive mothers, most participants perceived that society judged adoption as an inferior form of family building, with the greatest negativity focused on 1) biological ties being stronger and therefore better, 2) adopted children being second best because of unknown parentage, and 3) adoptive parents not being “real” parents. Thus, participants felt that, in society’s view, “a biological tie was not only important for the establishment of a loving relationship with a child, it was also perceived by these respondents to be considered in the larger society as the only *prerequisite* for parenthood” (Miall 1987). Given the perceived dismissal of adoption vis a vis biological parenthood, it is ironic that many adopting couples, “seeking the language or metaphor to convey their distinctive problem ... compared adoption waiting to pregnancy even while they found such comparison inadequate,” using terms such as “not-pregnancy pregnancy” or describing the wait as a “‘gestation period’ ... [where] you don’t know when it’s going to end” (Sandelowski *et al.* 1991, p. 151). External opinions about adoption, particularly as it compares to biological family-building, can affect adopting parents’ overall morale.

Many informants, therefore, welcomed the OHGWQ project as a way to mark the adoption process visibly and positively. Some saw it as a partial surrogate for the pregnancy process—a way to communicate, internally and externally, that the adoption was progressing. Lucia said,

I can understand why the quilt is appealing in that ... sense of you’re waiting and it’s just such an unknown process of when and how this child will actually come to fruition. Whereas when you’re going through a pregnancy, there’s definitely stages. It’s very identifiable. ... I think there’s something nice about the quilt for that [reason].

Each square that arrived, Louise said, gave comfort and served as an

external reminder that the adoption was progressing:

When the squares would come while I was waiting, I'd go to the mailbox, hoping [that] a document or some piece of my dossier had come. Then I would see this good wish and it was so comforting because as a pregnant woman you walk around and people see you. They smile. They ask about your due date, and everything's so happy and everything. When you're waiting for a child through adoption, you don't have any of that. ... [So the OHGWQ] was very helpful [that way].

Similarly, Martha talked about how receiving the OHGWQ squares made the adoption process more "tangible," and therefore more similar to a pregnancy. Some parents talked about the quilt project specifically in relationship to the concept of "nesting," or preparing for an imminent (usually biological) child by decorating the nursery, buying baby clothes, etc. Dolly said, "[the OHGWQ is] that kind of nesting preparation, [a] welcoming type of thing, where your time, your thought, and your heart go into a project before you know who your child is going to be." As a different form of preparation, Cybil saw the quilt project as a way to open the door to conversation with friends and family:

I think a lot of people don't know how to handle it when you adopt. Sometimes they don't know how to talk to you about it. When you're pregnant, it's like, "How are you feeling? When are you due"? But when it's adoption, you don't know when you're going to get your child, a lot of times. ... This seemed to open the door to that conversation for people who may not have been able to discuss it easily prior to that.

In many ways, the OHGWQ project helped adopting parents feel that their journey to a child could also, like pregnancy, have visible markers that gave them a feeling of stability as well as entree for others to feel comfortable talking to them about adoption.

Adopting parents, while lacking the physical and visible cues of pregnancy, nevertheless form an emotional bond to the child they are adopting, *their* child. Of all informants, Shannon described this phenomenon

most graphically and emotionally, homing in on the painful nature of already having conceptually welcomed a child into the family but being forced to wait indefinitely for her physical arrival:

There was actually a tremendous amount of pain. A lot of pain and a lot of loss. I know it's hard to explain the loss because we hadn't actually found our child yet, but she was already in our hearts, like she was already in there. She's already in this family. She already had a name. She already had a place. She already had a ... feet-at-the-table kind of thing.

The pain is particularly poignant—and perhaps inexplicable to non-adoptive parents—because in many cases, Shannon's included, the child is being celebrated, prepared for, and worried about months or years before she is even born.

Studies of adopting parents have shown that Shannon and other OHGWQ informants were not alone in feeling a certainty that the child they were adopting was meant to be theirs. In examining how adopting couples “stake a claim” to their adoption in order to mentally counter the cultural and legal emphasis on blood relationships, one research team found two common strategies: “‘unblooding’ the tie,” or focusing on the fact that non-biological relationships such as husband and wife (and by extension parent and adopted child) can be just as loving as biological ones; and “righting the claim,” or identifying reasons that, either through human or divine/cosmic intervention, the match to a child was destined to happen (Sandelowski *et al.* 1993). Sometimes this “righting” takes a specifically religious form—e.g. “God is watching over the process”—and other times it is seen as simple fate—e.g. “Our referral day is the same as Grandpa's birthday, so it must be destined.” Because the adoption process is unpredictable, believing that there was a “right” child waiting for them “preserved couples’ sense of purpose and order, and it imposed a certain natural and moral imperative on the adoption process as a whole” (Sandelowski *et al.* 1993, p. 481). As seen among OHGWQ informants and adopting parents generally, a sense of stability is highly desirable in the inherently unstable adoption process.

6.1.2 *Coping*

A similar desire for purpose and order can be seen in some of the sentiments informants had about their quilt project. Indeed, almost universally, informants saw the OHGWQ as a way to cope with the stresses of going through a “paperwork pregnancy,” worrying about the safety and health of their child, and waiting, often for years, to bring her home. For Lucia, especially, who was living overseas with her family at the time of their adoption, it was difficult to develop a support system to help her through this period: “We weren’t surrounded by family and friends, we didn’t have anybody, [and because we adopted from Taiwan rather than China] we didn’t travel as a group. We were very alone in our process.” However, she continued, the OHGWQ project served to help fill that void. She saw collecting the fabrics as a “comforting and affirming process” that helped them to build, piece by piece, a network that represented not only a virtual support system, but proof that the adoption was actually going to come to fruition: “The more that came in, the more that piled up, it made it feel like it was happening, it was getting more real.” For many adopting parents, the paperwork and waiting process inspires intense doubts and feelings of isolation, which, for some, can be mitigated through the experience of participating in a project like a OHGWQ.

Many informants used terms like “something to focus on” or “pass the time” to explain one of the OHGWQ project’s many roles. Amy described the quilt as “something positive to focus on” while she was completing the “monotonous paperwork.” For informants whose timelines stretched longer than they anticipated, it provided distraction; Laureen, for instance, said the OHGWQ was “a wonderful opportunity for me to focus my energy and my time instead of getting all stressed up about the extending deadline.” Similarly, for Denise, “other than obsessing about when the paperwork was next going to move along or when we were going to get it approved by whom, it was an opportunity to keep my hands and my head busy.” Martha, too, wanted to “feel like I was working towards something instead of just sitting idle,” while Jen said, “it just made the wait more endurable knowing that we were doing

something.” For Karen, receiving the fabric donations kept her from worrying too much about her daughter’s health and well-being on the other side of the globe:

Getting these [fabrics] in every day just meant the world because, [it’s] just a very trying time and a very nerve wracking time and during those times that you’re waiting, you know you’ve got a child over there waiting and you’re just counting the days. You don’t know how they’re doing over there. It’s hard to get any updates. You’re just praying constantly that they’re okay and things go through quickly so that you can get over there.

[The OHGWQ] helped me get through that time.

In nearly identical language to Karen’s, Louise said, “I really, really counted on those squares to get me through.”

Lisa targeted a related, but more specific need that the OHGWQ project fulfilled: a feeling of control. In describing how she felt as she saw her adoption extend from the originally predicted 8-12 months to five years, she said, “It gave me something productive to do, something I had control over while I didn’t have control over the other thing.” Lucia, too, added another element to her experience of the project when she said, “It’s nice to have a ritual when you’re waiting for a child, especially through adoption, because it’s such a different way to have a child.” While other informants may not have explicitly used the terms “control” or “ritual,” both concepts seem to be embedded in OHGWQ makers’ talk of “focus,” “keeping busy,” and “getting through.”

As outlined in Chapters 2.3 and 5.1, Americans frequently have used quilting as a way to process both positive and negative emotions, particularly at major family milestones such as births, marriages, and deaths. Another significant aspect of quilting is its benefit to makers’ everyday emotional and physical well-being, a feature especially relevant for adopting parents stuck in a waiting “purgatory.” Anthropologist Virginia Dickie, for instance, has looked at the various types of learning that take place in quilting, from practical matters such as learning a new technique to more

conceptual issues such as “learning to be a member of the quilting culture,” which carries positive social dimensions, and “learning to stretch oneself,” which provides personal growth benefits (Dickie 2003). Other studies have demonstrated the restorative qualities of quilting, suggesting that not only the “experiences of meaning, tradition, ritual, and rite of passage” that quilts embody but also the “associations with sleep, meaning, and the sensory qualities” they have make them something that can improve practitioners’ physical and mental states (Howell and Pierce 2000, p. 68). Reports and studies of quilts being made for oncology patients (Erikson 2007) and by oncology staff (Nainis 2005) have shown the benefits of receiving and making these objects, particularly in their nature as acts of “self-care.” This notion of quilting as “carework” for both the self and others, is a key theme in sociologist Marybeth Stalp’s study of contemporary quilters, who value the craft because it “leaves them with a calmness and focus not achieved through other requisite, everyday activities such as childcare, laundry, meal preparation, or housework” (Stalp 2008, p. 115). Stalp also argues that quilters, who are famously generous with the fruits of their labour, “care for others as they care for themselves” (2008, p. 71). In a deeply personal narrative, art historian Janet Berlo describes how for the 18 months of a deep depression, she was “quilting for cover”: “When I wasn’t quilting, I wasn’t alive. On most days, I felt that I literally needed those vibrant hues in order to breathe” (Berlo 2004, p. 3). For many people, quilting is precisely the right outlet for improving, or even saving, their psychic or physical self.

Media and communications scholar David Gauntlett marshals evidence for everyday creativity such as quilting being an important tool in improving happiness generally. In his review of research within the recently formalised field of happiness studies, he cites the fact that despite rising incomes in post-WWII Europe and America, people have not become happier; indeed, only when they compare their economic status to others less fortunate do people feel satisfaction with their own situation. In other words, money—unless people are in the kind of poverty where even a slightly higher income equals an appreciable rise in comfort—does not necessarily bring happiness

(Gauntlett 2011). The things that do, however, are often related to relationships with other humans: family, friends, community members, work mates, etc. They are also related to the satisfaction felt as objectives are reached, or as economist Richard Layard puts it, “The greatest happiness comes from absorbing yourself in some goal outside yourself” and, even more succinctly, “Prod any happy person and you will find a project” (Layard 2006 Kindle edition). Gauntlett argues that these projects, whether knitting or creating YouTube videos, can be significant contributors to a person’s happiness but, more importantly, “are especially valuable if they are not contained at the individual level but involve some form of sharing, cooperation, or contribution to other people’s well-being” (2011, p. 126). As a project with many contributors and often with multiple makers, the OHGWQ project embodies many of these community-based ideals. In its ability to act as a coping strategy and community builder, the OHGWQ helped informants emotionally regulate during the adoption process.

While nearly all informants framed the OHGWQ project within the notions of occupying time or otherwise assisting emotionally, Kristine talked in a larger sense about how the quilt became a symbol of the wait. She acknowledged that families often experience a great deal of stress while going through the adoption process, especially when it gets repeatedly extended, as hers and Sam’s did. She felt that they “managed pretty well,” for a variety of reasons: adoption had been an active choice, not a fallback; they had a supportive community and jobs they loved; and she was extremely busy working towards achieving tenure at her university. Thus, she said,

We very much felt like it was a choice to be waiting and we were comfortable with that. Despite all that it was still very much part of our lives, this wait. There weren't really any changes happening in our lives because of this wait, like, we were not going to get any new jobs, we were not going to move anywhere and so nothing was really changing for us, so we were in this holding pattern in a lot of ways waiting for this child, which was going to hugely change our lives. And so for me the quilt was

about that wait.

The “holding pattern” aspect of ICA is one of its strongest hallmarks—one that became a part of most informants’ stories and was therefore embedded in their OHGWQ as well.

By symbolising “the wait,” as OHGWQ did for Kristine and others, the quilt enters rich metaphorical and mythical territory. For instance, textile historian Beverly Gordon outlines world myths that equate textile techniques with time, e.g. Greek myth’s Clotho, Lechesis, and Atropos, the spinner, measurer and severer of time; the Norse Norns, also spinners and weavers of destiny; and the *Odyssey*’s Penelope, who is able to “stop” time by unweaving her tapestry every night (Gordon 2011). In each of these tales, textile techniques are equated with making or unmaking time, the concept against which many adopting parents feel they are battling. As Gordon further notes, creating a textile is also a building process, an expansion through cumulative growth: “When you knit or weave, you build up a structure row by row; when you make a quilt, you build it stitch by stitch” (Gordon 2011, p. 26), making these processes analogous to life-giving. In a similar way, the creation of a OHGWQ can be seen as “giving life” to a family, symbolically helping to build a new or newly-augmented social unit.

A final, important metaphor within this section’s context of “connecting to a child” is Winnicott’s “transitional object,” discussed in Chapter 5.1.5 in reference to quilts’ tactility and wrappability. The transitional object refers to a child’s “not-me” object (Winnicott 2005)—often a baby blanket or other textile—which acts on both the practical level of giving real, tactile comfort and the symbolic level of representing the paradoxical condition of simultaneously being attached to and separated from the mother. For Winnicott, the transitional object represents the child’s efforts at navigating the liminal space between dependence and independence. Similarly, the OHGWQ project—which I would argue acts as a transition for adopting parents from “not-her” to “her” (i.e. their adopted daughter)—also operates on two levels, providing a positive distraction during the adoption wait while also *representing* the wait and its attendant pain. Judy Attfield discusses the potential for textiles beyond

the baby blanket to facilitate transitions, specifically within the context of souvenirs of a specific person or past time: “these kind of objects can be termed a form of transitional object helping people to come to terms with the passing of time—the separation from their own youth, or from the loss of a loved one, a parent, child or partner” (2000, p. 146). Importantly, however, rather than transitioning *away* from someone, as in Attfield’s examples and in Winnicott’s child-mother construct, the OHGWQ represents a transition *to* someone—a family to their child, a child to her family; thus, it becomes a sort of “inverted” transitional object. The notion of the OHGWQ as a variation on the transitional object is further referenced in Chapter 6.3.4, “Transitioning.”

As discussed in Chapter 5 and in this section, quilts and textiles have broad metaphorical use and power. In Chapter 5.1, informants saw quilts as wrappers bestowing not only physical warmth but also conceptual love; conversely, in this section, they also saw them as containers of pain. In helping them cope with the long and indefinite waiting period, OHGWQ also stood in for time, giving it the structure and impression of manipulability adopting parents needed. Finally, in acting as a type of transitional object, the quilts also made “the wait” less passive and more active, reinforcing for parents the feeling they were working towards something rather than simply standing still. In the next section, “Connecting via the internet,” a new metaphor will become relevant: the quilt as a platform for making connections.

6.2 *Connecting via the internet*

Globalisation, as defined by sociologist Anthony Giddens, is “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990, p. 64). In the dawning years of the twenty-first century, the phenomenon most responsible for the virtual shrinking/linking of our world has been the internet. As outlined in Chapter 2.5, global internet usage increased exponentially in the first decade of the 2000s. As a result, individuals were able to share and connect with others, regardless of physical location, using systems such as online discussion boards and blogging sites

and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The “Web 2.0” aspect of these tools—their facilitation of user interaction—allowed people to create new community structures that accommodate both greater diversity (comments and reactions can come from people all over the country or world) and uniformity (people with specific interests, like China adoption, can more easily find each other).

In examining the OHGWQ phenomenon’s place in both the web-based and physical worlds, this section draws inspiration from David Gauntlett’s notion of the video-sharing website YouTube as an “archetype of the digital creative platform.” In his analysis, Gauntlett identifies three YouTube characteristics that make it an ideal environment for digital, everyday creativity: 1) via its free, easy to use tools, it provides a structure for participation; 2) because it is not geared towards any specific niche group, it is open to (nearly) any type of content; and 3) through its oft-used comments section, it encourages community or, at least, communication (2011).

In the most direct way, OHGWQ are a platform because they *have* a platform—a centralised, online location for shared activity to take place. Beyond that obvious alignment, OHGWQ fit Gauntlett’s creative platform criteria in other ways, despite their being material rather than digital constructions. As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the quilt project represents a way for people to be part of a family’s adoption experience; in other words, it provides a “structure for participation.” Additionally, as discussed ahead in section 6.3.2, donors are encouraged to contribute in a way that reflects their own personality (“open to any type of content”), and, as receptacles of signs of support for an adopting family and the imminent adoptee, OHGWQ projects “encourage community,” albeit in a less directly interactive way than YouTube. OHGWQ, as both physical and virtual platforms, once again act in an in-between capacity, bringing people together in an expressive, supportive activity. This section outlines the online character and history of OHGWQ and the next section delves further into the projects’ role in IRL communities.

6.2.1 *Building an online community*

In 1999, when Christine was in the midst of adopting her first daughter, she joined a Yahoo online discussion board dedicated to China adoption. On this general, clearinghouse-type board (possibly Adoptive Parents China, though Christine could not recall specifically), she noticed occasional message threads dedicated to exchanging fabrics for a One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt. These threads piqued her interest in the idea of making a quilt to celebrate her daughter's adoption. In a virtual sea of messages, however, she theorised that fabric swapping frequently went unnoticed, making it less likely makers like herself to be able to reach the desired number of 100 fabrics. She also knew that some DTC (dossier to China) group members occasionally swapped amongst themselves, but that was usually an insular activity, not open to those outside the group. Additionally, she recalled coming across some individual websites about OHGWQ swaps, but these, she said, were "harder to follow because it wasn't an [online] type of thing, it was more of: 'email me and I'll send you a list' kind of a thing, instead of a [centrally-compiled] Yahoo group type format." So after gathering fabrics via one-to-one or intra-DTC group exchanges, Christine decided in 2002 to initiate a Yahoo group specifically devoted to OHGWQ swapping, open to all who were interested. She reasoned, "The number of adoptions that were coming out of China was pretty high at that time, and it seemed like there was a lot of people that were interested. I basically made the group, put it out there, and was impressed with how many people wanted to be a part of it." In less than a month, there were 50 members and they had already started one fabric exchange and were planning several others (Jan 5, 2003, post by user "berysmom"⁴⁸).

Fabric exchanging on the site proceeded at a furious pace for several years, roughly paralleling the vacillations in China adoptions generally (as outlined in Chapter 1). Because it was devoted solely to OHGWQ, this Yahoo group was less explicitly an adoption support group than others—exchanging

⁴⁸ This citation is to a posting on a private message board.

fabrics and wishes was the primary goal. The site provided guidance for organising individual swaps as well as a range of other documents, from invitation letter templates to send to family and friends to “ABC”-style lists of Chinese cultural elements (e.g. “P” for “Panda”), to be used as inspiration when selecting fabrics. Swap organisers sometimes specified the type of swap—Asian-themed fabric, for instance—but the majority were what Christine called “general swaps,” in which she participated many times and enjoyed: “There [were] some really unique fabrics that came with the general swap. There was a woman in Australia that sent squares that had Australian flowers on them. It's like— where else would you get that?” Having a central location for swapping meant that OHGWQ makers were more likely to gather the number and variety of fabrics they desired for their quilt.

While the Yahoo group was primarily focused on collecting OHGWQ fabrics, in some cases, it filled the support role normally held by other online or real-world groups. Michele L. and her husband, for instance, were devastated when they found out that the child they had been matched with was no longer eligible for adoption due to a serious congenital heart defect. Michele found great comfort when she posted to the OHGWQ Yahoo group about their loss and their intention to start a health-care fund for the little girl, even though it appeared they could not adopt her:

When I told the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt Group that we had lost this little girl but we were going to try to get her help ... one of the other members of the group, Denise ... suggested ... that the group make a heart quilt for the little girl that I lost and send it to China for her. ... That was one of the sweet pure things that helped me because we were completely broken hearted.

In Michele's case, the OHGWQ Yahoo group filled an emotional need, moving it beyond its original, quilt-focused objectives.

For other members, however, the OHGWQ Yahoo group mostly met fabric-exchanging needs; as Christine said, “It was like you did the swap, you were done. Unless you had another reason to stay up with them, you pretty

much lost contact with them after that.” Even when informants did not stay in contact with people they swapped with on the OHGWQ Yahoo group, they appreciated swap participants’ diversity, especially geographic. Cybil said, “It was a really fun group. I got things from the Netherlands, Canada and literally all over the world and all over the United States. It was interesting because now when we look at the little wishes and the swatches [we] compare them [and see where they came from].” Laureen loved the fact that China adoption had brought people together from all over the world: “There's just this cool connection for me: here we are on the other side of the globe and yet we are both ... either in the process or [have] just finished adopting a child from China.”

The OHGWQ Yahoo group represents a narrow sliver of online textile- and quilt-related activity. As public historian Amanda Sikarskie shared in her thesis *Fiberspace*, textile practitioners and enthusiasts frequently bring their IRL textiles focus to their online lives as well, resulting in “products” ranging from “digital quilts and weavings made in the virtual world Second Life, textiles created in the brick and mortar world and presented digitally, quilts on the popular social network Facebook, the Quilt Index (an online scholarly resource for quilt study), [and] crafted textile objects in the online game World of Warcraft” (Sikarskie 2011, pp. 1–2). The internet also has contributed to the spread of such politically motivated activities as the urban knitting movement—sometimes called “yarn-bombing”—in which people draw attention to a contentious social issue by covering or decorating public spaces with knitted material (Buszek 2011, Farinosi and Fortunati 2013, Winge and Stalp 2013). Additionally, quilters and other textile practitioners often find ways of creating online spaces that share many of the functions they value in IRL communities. In an analysis of virtual quilt communities, for instance, Kim King found three characteristics in common between traditional and online groups: “a sense of belonging, common goals, and regarding others as whole persons of intrinsic significance and self-worth” (King 2002, p. 90). The latter attribute, King found, sometimes allowed “non-traditional” quilters to find each other, for instance, in the case of a woman who, treated unfairly at an

IRL quilt show because of “my tattoos and ... because I don’t hand-quilt everything” (King 2002, p. 97), found comfort and support from like-minded individuals in an online community. Similarly, the OHGWQ Yahoo group is one among many online quilt-centred communities where people with a specific focus or attitude can commiserate and support one another.

6.2.2 Connecting beyond Yahoo

Besides the Yahoo group, informants utilised other online forums for gathering OHGWQ fabrics. Kristine, for instance, exchanged fabrics with people who also had a June 2006 log in date,⁴⁹ using ChinaAdoptTalk.com, one of the most popular China adoption websites, as a platform. Karen, on the other hand, used her pre-existing contact network on Flickr.com, a photo sharing website, to solicit fabrics for her OHGWQ. She had already been a member of a Flickr-based quilting group, one that was accustomed to exchanging fabrics for projects. One of the most exciting parts for her was that: “I had gotten to know some people from all over the world through that [group] ... These quilting blocks for the One Hundred Wishes Quilt were not coming just from our local Tennessee area. They were coming from everywhere.” Informants such as Amy and Lucia took traditional routes and exchanged with other adopting parents with children from the same orphanage or geographical area as their own child. Most of this swapping was done via online support groups and message boards.

Other informants regularly blogged about their adoption and OHGWQ. Nearly half of them were discovered for this research via their blogs, which often served as an important means for soliciting quilt fabrics. Kristine, whose blog asked friends and family to contribute and tracked the fabrics as they arrived, indicated that she “even had a couple of people who just stumbled across the blog who actually sent quilt squares.” Dolly’s blog about life as a working mother attracted donations from all over the world, “some requesting an exchange, and others who are just excited that we are adopting,” inspiring

⁴⁹ The month in which the Chinese government officially recognises an applicant’s dossier of materials.

Dolly to draw comparison to an obsolete, pre-internet practice: “it’s kind of like I’m finding pen pals,” she said.

Within the China adoption community, blogging, like adoption itself, has also lapsed. Michele K., who wrote both a personal blog and a quilt-specific blog, lamented that, “it’s kind of sad that I’ve lost some of those connections. Some people—they’re not on Facebook either—they brought their kids home, they got busy with life, and they stop blogging altogether.” Dolly, a more recent adopting parent, found this to be the case as well:

I thought it was interesting because I was trying to find other people that were also blogging about the same things, that were currently working on a One Hundred [Good] Wishes Quilt ... I couldn’t find a lot of blogs that were actually active, but I found many that were [from] ... several years ago. And they were no longer active blogs, so I actually haven’t found anyone else who’s currently working on this project, currently blogging about it.

Much like China adoption generally, there has been a dramatic decrease in China adoption-focused blogging, making it less likely that new adopters will discover the OHGWQ practice.

Concomitantly, as the circa 2006 peak of China adoption recedes further into the past, the chances that parents who began a OHGWQ without finishing it before or soon after their child came home grow increasingly slim. Shannon considered this situation by observing,

There’s a lot of women with baskets full of quilt fabric for the [OHGWQ] exchange. They anticipated that they would make a quilt, then they never did. Now they are home with their kids and they think that someday they’re going to make a quilt for this child using these fabrics. I don’t know if that will happen.

Thanks to the internet, however, parents in need of help completing their OHGWQ certainly can find it. One woman, the owner of the website originalquilts.com—who is also a co-administrator of the OHGWQ Yahoo group—offers OHGWQ completion services. Her website displays the nearly

100 quilts she finished for adoptive parents between 2001 and 2013. Jen noticed that these types of websites were more common in the present day, as she and her husband were pursuing a second adoption, than during their first adoption: “When I first started Googling One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts, there was not much out there. Now there's a lot, there's so much more. The websites that I [have seen] were, like, ‘collect these good wishes and then I'll make your quilt for you.’” Michele K., the adoptive-parent-turned-avid-quilt-maker, became so committed to the OHGWQ idea that she reached out to fellow online support/chat group members, offering to sew together the fabrics they had worked so hard to accumulate. In the larger quilting community, completion services—especially for the specific act of quilting, or sewing the layers together—are abundant.⁵⁰

6.2.3 *Beyond fabric swapping*

Beyond the specific act of exchanging fabrics for a quilt, online forums, both OHGWQ-specific and general adoption, provided informants with abundant and varied forms of support. Shannon, in particular, spoke enthusiastically about the many online groups to which she belonged, each one providing different types of assistance:

One of my Yahoo groups was a group of probably about 12 women. We had all waited six years together. Then there are huge groups of a couple thousand people that are [meant for] anyone [adopting] from China. Then there's huge groups of a couple of thousand people that are agency-only. I'd go to the agency-only big group when I couldn't fill out such-and-such form, or I'd go to my small, little Yahoo! group when I was feeling really down about something. Or I'd go to the big, all-inclusive group to say, “Hey, guys. Did someone have a packing list of essential things that you need? Can someone e-

⁵⁰ For instance, according to the Austin, Texas quilt guild's website, there are nearly 30 different quilters for hire in that immediate area (Quilters for hire list 2015).

mail it to me?" Boom. Done. I [would] get, like, three packing lists.

For Shannon and many other informants, online forums were a primary means of obtaining the help they needed to negotiate the adoption process.

Online forums were hubs informants regularly visited seeking help with practical issues. Through the OHGWQ Yahoo group, for instance, Dolly met other adopting parents in her area and was able to talk about "similar agencies that we were going through, and what our current wait time experiences were, and so it was more than just quilts at that point, it was actually about adoption." For Karen, online forums were a way of overcoming geographical challenges: "I was in such a small, rural community. Nobody had ever adopted from China that lives in this town. It was definitely important for me to get online and find people that were going through it as well." Amy appreciated communicating with adoptive parents who had already been through the experience and could give advice and perspective that her adoption agency could not. Shannon agreed, noting that a visit to an adopting/adoptive parents' online forum could garner an answer to a question—about how to fill out a specific government form, for instance—much more quickly and easily: "These groups are so instrumental because the agencies can't tell you everything." Even simply visiting, and not asking questions, on the China Adopt Talk online forum proved instrumental for Martha: "I was on there constantly, like 24 hours a day. I wasn't necessarily posting but I was kind of lurking and becoming familiar with the [adoption] process." These practical forms of assistance were an essential service online forums provided.

Emotional support was equally vital. Michele K. described one of her small online groups as,

... a place to vent and a place to ask questions and a place to laugh about silly stuff. Besides reading quilt blogs, it's one of the places I [still] check every single day to see what's going on in our little circle, and it's such a really comforting feeling that they've got my back, and I've got their back.

Amy valued the fact that she could communicate specifically with those adopting from the same orphanage, meaning she could receive updates on her daughter as parents further along in the process travelled to China: “You grasp up any news you can get for your child. That was very wonderful to get these updates and new pictures as other people got there ahead of me,” she said. Denise, who organised the creation of a heart patterned quilt for Michele L., as described above, talked about the Yahoo group wanting to support the family through their grief:

I knew that Michele was a very special person and I knew that this was a huge loss for their family to lose that referral and it seemed, I guess, natural as we were all quilting and had fabric and we’re doing these exchanges that we ... use this as a way to communicate our support for Michele and for her family.

Shannon described her online communities as not being merely important, but “critical” in the support they provided during the adoption process:

Inevitably, someone’s chips will be down and they would get online and they would say, “I can’t do this anymore. I can’t wait. This is too painful.” Or, “This is too much, really.” Or, “My kids are getting too old.” Or, “This logistically isn’t going to work.” There are all these people who would bounce all the stuff back and forth with you and make you come back from the edge and help you just not feel so [hopeless].

During the emotionally uncertain process of adoption, online communities often provided exactly the support needed at precisely the right time.

Researchers have found that, like OHGWQ informants, many parents of international transracial (ITR) adoptees access online support resources. Interestingly, Vonk et al. discovered that substantially more ITR adopters than domestic transracial (DTR) adopters—56.3% versus 30.5%—sought web-based information, particularly in relationship to cultural socialisation support (2010, p. 236). In broader internet research, Barak et al. found that although online support groups did not necessarily have a positive *clinical* effect on participants’ psychological conditions, especially as compared to traditional

counselling or therapy treatments, they gave members a generalised feeling of empowerment. In essence, the authors argue, online support groups can tap into participants' own inner resources in dealing with stressful situations:

In exploiting inherent needs, expectations, and habits, online support groups activate—and actually foster—inner dynamic personality drives that elevate the participants' sense of power and control and combat feelings of powerlessness typical of people like them in distress.

(Barak *et al.* 2008, p. 1880).

Talking with others online about a commonly held situation or condition, such as the stressful ICA waiting period, can have positive psychic and emotional effects.

For people who connected most with the actual quilting part of the project, online groups gave support as well. Lisa's mother-in-law, who actually sewed their OHGWQ, found it extremely helpful to consult with one of her online communities. When she was trying out different patterns for the quilt, she turned to these online friends, who she felt she could trust: "I just knew that they were the people that would give me honest opinions." For Christine, the Yahoo OHGWQ group was more than a place to exchange fabrics:

Particularly for people who were already quilters to begin with [the Yahoo group was more than just for swaps]. They would share their experience with quilting. And the people that didn't get the support, the people who didn't know how to quilt, they were learning about quilting and other aspects of quilting from people who already knew how.

The Yahoo group page includes helpful documents such as "Sewing Tips for the Beginner," "help with fabric," and "Easy Applique" (100 Good Wishes Quilts - Yahoo Groups 2011). Visiting online groups was not simply for exchanging fabrics and finding adoption-related support, but also for learning about the practicalities of making a quilt.

6.2.4 Friendship post-adoption and IRL

In general, online groups provided the most support during the adoption process. Many OHGWQ informants, however, spoke about using the online networks they had tapped earlier to also assist during critical post-adoption moments. Amy, for instance, who had adopted an older child, found online groups indispensable:

[It has] been a great way for me to keep my daughter in contact with several other kids from her orphanage, which was especially important when she got here and couldn't speak English. Imagine going to another country and living in a house where you couldn't communicate with anybody. ... I could go right to Yahoo or even—I had written down phone numbers from those groups—and I could say, "Hey, could [my daughter] talk to so-and-so for a little bit? She's having a frustrating day." That was very, very helpful.

Michele K., who belonged to several online support groups, stated the need for continued support succinctly: "A lot of times adoptive kids have some issues; and non-adoptive parents with kids that don't have similar issues don't understand some of the struggles, or some of the resources and support that's needed." Searching for that support led Michele to belong to several online adoption groups over the years, even after her daughter came home. In addition, the OHGWQ itself sometimes provided a direct link between online support and the adoptee. Louise, for instance, used fabrics donated by online friends as a way to talk to her daughter about being adopted:

I tell her these are ladies I know from my computer, and ... I'll say, "You see this one here? This is from a lady who adopted a little boy from Russia. You see this one here? This is from a lady who adopted two children domestically." In doing that, it also normalises adoption to her. It's not only little girls from China ... I mean, so she knows that it's a bigger thing than just her. And that kind of ties in with the tradition part of it's a Chinese

tradition, but all these people loved the thought and wanted to participate, whether we know them in real life or not.

In terms of “in real life,” many OHGWQ informants went on to become IRL friends with online quilt contributors and other adoption support connections. Maggie and Michele K. became friends online, contributing to each other’s OHGWQ and continuing to share information and advice after their children came home. They eventually were able to have their families get together at an amusement park near Maggie’s home. Amy was still Facebook friends with several online adoption friends and had set up get-togethers between her family and the family of a girl from her daughter’s orphanage. Louise became online friends with one of her OHGWQ contributors, who, unlike Louise, never finished her quilt, and despite some physical distance, they still meet up occasionally: “Even though she’s in New Hampshire and I’m down here in New York, there’s a whole group of us who do get together.” And Christine, who moved from California to Virginia after her first daughter was adopted, said that during the drive across the country,

Every other day we stayed with somebody we either met or knew by way of the Internet. If I hadn’t been in the international adoption community I don’t think I would have even tried. I knew that the character of these people was such that it was probably safe to stay with them.

The relationships cultivated through online forums became genuine friendships that continued well after the OHGWQ was completed or a family’s daughter came home from China. Shannon, in talking about which fabrics from the online fabric exchanges ended up going into her OHGWQ, summarised her feelings about the online friendships she made:

I ended up being able to find 100 pieces without using too much of the [online] swap [fabrics]. ... Originally there were all these moms who were really psyched to get this going and we swapped. As it turns out, when I looked at that pile [of swapped fabrics], there were a significant number of people who had become people I spoke to everyday. While we may not have

met in person—[although] a couple of people we have—these are people that have now become very close friends of mine. ... I would say pretty much everyone that I used from the swap has become a friend of mine.

Online fabric exchanging became a way for informants to not only work on their OHGWQ commemorative project, but to forge connections with other adopting parents as well. While the OHGWQ Yahoo Group was the first online platform created specifically to facilitate swaps, parents utilised multiple other ways to connect—via general adoption chat groups and their own blogging activities, for instance. As adopting parents exchanged fabrics, they also exchanged stories and information, creating communities and making friendships that became vital forms of support and, in some cases, evolved into post-adoption and IRL relationships as well. This online activity was made possible through Web 2.0 tools—systems that allow greater user content production and interaction—but the OHGWQ was the original “platform”: it provided the base upon which all the other activity was built and supported. The next section discusses how the OHGWQ was a platform for including pre-existing family and friends, not only in the quilt project but by extension, in the adoption itself.

6.3 Reconnecting

As touched upon throughout this thesis and especially in 6.1.1, ICA can be a logistically and emotionally difficult process. The paperwork, the home study, the waiting, and the wondering about their child’s health and well-being frequently cause stress for adopting parents. Most find support from family and friends, a default group they feel comfortable turning to in times of need. Yet, because adoption is a rarer, less familiar form of family-building, adopting parents still can feel nervous about sharing the process with others for fear of being judged or second-guessed or, more typically, for fear that loved ones will be uncomfortable and not know how to talk about adoption or express their support. For this study’s informants, the OHGWQ project helped them start a dialogue about their adoption in a safe, indirect way. The project was a

platform that gave friends and family the opportunity to participate and show support whether or not they were comfortable or knowledgeable about larger issues of adoption, generally, or transracial and intercountry adoption, specifically. Informants viewed each OHGWQ fabric variously as expressions of welcome, representations of each individual donor, connections to family and community history, and taken together, as a solid base of support for themselves and their adopted child. Importantly, some informants also recognised that the quilt would likely transition from being about their adoption experience and the abstract concept of an adopted child to being about their actual daughter, the quilt recipient. The OHGWQ project had represented informants' efforts at managing stress, passing time, and building community during the wait for their child and now that she had arrived, the quilt was hers to form a relationship with, taking and ascribing meaning and possibly even using it as an aide in explorations of her own adoptee identity.

6.3.1 Welcome!

Reflecting on their OHGWQ project, many informants described it specifically as an act of welcoming—welcoming their daughter to her new family and welcoming their friends and family to be a part of her life. The idea of bringing others into the adoption process and of hand-building a community came across in different ways, for instance:

[The OHGWQ] provided our family and friends that wanted to be involved in some manner—but didn't know how—something to do, something to show their support and love. (Amy)

[The OHGWQ project] made it fun and exciting for other people, and they felt like they were involved. It also was like a bonding thing for my friends. (Cybil)

Not everyone that we love and care about is represented in this quilt, but it's pretty close. There were quite a few people whose participation would have been appreciated, but it wasn't

mandatory and there were a few people whose participation—we told them, “it is mandatory.” (Sam)

Inviting people—or requiring, in the case of Sam and Kristine—to participate in the OHGWQ project usually signalled the intention to include them in the larger effort of deliberately forming a community for their child.

Although this desire for inclusion appeared to centre on creating a community for the adoptee, informants also clearly valued the support *they* received as well. Martha said that one of the greatest messages from the quilt project was “that we weren’t alone in this journey. ... Just to know that there were all these people pulling for us who were so excited about what is happening, really was very important to [me and my husband].” Laureen, a single parent, was overwhelmed by the support embodied in the fabrics and wishes as they arrived:

It just really impacted me because it let me know that this child is going to be part of such a larger community. It's not just me and her against the world. It's all these other people who are going to care for and love her. It just blew me out of the water. The letters were just so beautiful to this child who, at that point when I started, she hadn't even been born yet.

The idea of support arriving before the adoptee was even born—and therefore primarily targeting the parents—was echoed by Sam, who said:

What imbues [the quilt] with meaning is that I can look at it and I can see in a glance the hundreds of people who waited with us and supported us on our journey, and were honestly, truly waiting with us for [our daughter] to arrive. It's a physical testament to the amount of love that surrounded her before she even— honestly, before she was even born.

The pre-adoption building of a ready-made community was a significant kernel around which many informants formed their quilt projects. As Shannon put it, “For me, the quilt really does symbolise my wait for her and the passage of time, and the many, many, many, many, many people that also

waited for her. Those are the people represented in this quilt. They waited for her, too.”

The emphasis informants placed on time and community aligns with psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s conception of the primary ways in which humans use objects to organize experience: as representations of personal power or identity, the passage through time, and connection to other people (2013). Csikszentmihalyi notes that “contrary to what we ordinarily believe, consciousness is not a stable, self-regulating entity. ... Most people require an external order to keep randomness from invading their mind” (2013, p. 22) and he posits that objects can help halt this tendency towards internal chaos. For instance, throughout history, humans have conveyed group affiliation and status—and therefore social order—through the objects they owned or wore. More recently, within modern consumer society, they have used objects and dress to communicate individuality and separateness. OHGWQ makers, as explored in this section, similarly encouraged donors to select fabrics that reflected their own personality, the effect of which was to build a virtual community of distinct individuals. Objects also help people fix their place in time, representing “both continuity and change in the life course and thus [giving] permanence to our elusive selves” (2013, p. 25).

Remembering the past, focusing on present needs, and dreaming of future pursuits are ideas that people solidify through the use of objects. Accordingly, as seen in 6.1, OHGWQ makers often saw time as an “enemy” and by working on a quilt, a tactile object, they were able to regulate the way in which they experienced it, giving it the structure they saw as lacking. Finally, Csikszentmihalyi argues, objects can “give permanence to the relationships that define the individual in the social network” (2013). In this way, receiving fabric donations from various family members and friends reminded OHGWQ informants of their place within a broader network. Being able to organise and manage their adoption experience through the creation of a quilt was an added benefit to the cumulative support they felt from the fabric donations.

In addition to acknowledgement and gratitude, some parents’ appreciation for external support took the form of relief. For Amy, certain

fabric and wish submissions meant that their decision to adopt from China was accepted by important people in their lives:

It was a really big deal to me that the family bought in right from the get-go. I'll admit I was concerned that older family members wouldn't be as excited about us adopting cross-culturally.

[However,] we absolutely got nothing but positives and the whole family buying in from the beginning.

Amy's nervousness about how others would react to her family's decision to adopt reflects larger socio-cultural issues and attitudes. Parents who seek to adopt, particularly due to infertility issues (unlike Amy, who already had a biological son), are often reluctant to reveal their intentions because they will be admitting "failure" (as infertility sometimes is culturally defined) and because acquaintances previously have expressed negative opinions about adoption, particularly due to it lacking a biological tie (Miall 1987). Importantly, however, researchers have suggested that the stigma against adoption, particularly in relation to the stereotype that adoptees are more psychologically or emotionally troubled than biological children, is based more on perception than reality and that part of the blame can be placed on adoption researchers themselves: "The focus on adoption failure and adoption pathology [within the field] has obscured the more general observation that most adoptive families and adopted individuals lead nonproblematic lives" (Miall 1996, p. 316). As the incidence of alternate kinship forms (step-parenting, the use of reproductive technologies, etc.) rises, one might expect that the primacy of blood relations will become less and less of an issue.

Amy's fear of negative reactions to the transracial nature of her adoption is also one that is shared by other parents and reflects some people's lived experience. For instance, in one study of families with children adopted from China, parents reported they had repeatedly experienced external challenges to the legitimacy of their adoptive family structure. According to participants, "despite feeling and acting like a family, the experiences [they reported] ... suggest that adoptive families continue to be seen as lesser than biological families within U.S. culture" (Suter 2008, p.

142). For some families, even compliments on a child's appearance were felt to be negative and a challenge to family identity, since "the compliment often calls attention to the visible difference between the parent and child" (Suter 2008, p. 142). Amy's fears of negative attitudes towards her transracial adoption, while in the end unfounded, are legitimised by the actual experiences of families who have adopted from China. In some cases, like Amy's, OHGWQ projects helped ease parents' fears about the adoption being accepted by their immediate community.

6.3.2 *A community of individuals*

When inviting OHGWQ project participation, many informants specifically encouraged people to choose a fabric that would relate to their own interests or personality. As Kristine put it, "We were pretty clear that we wanted them to choose something that had some meaning for *them*." Michele K.'s brother, who had trouble picking a fabric for the quilt, required a bit of encouragement:

I said, "Pick something." He's like, "How do I?" I said, "What do you like? What speaks of you? Don't try to base it on what you think my child will like. What represents you?" Once he heard those words he was able to focus and he picked something out instantly.

Other participants picked distinctive fabrics without being directed to. Lisa's mother, for instance, donated a fabric that reflected her attitude towards life. Lisa said, "[the fabric is] red, with lemons and lemonade on it, and my mother is somebody who very much has the attitude of 'when life gives you lemons, make lemonade,' and that's why she chose that fabric." For Amy's family, these representative fabrics sometimes spoke to avocations and professions:

... my nieces are in dance, so they found one with ballerinas.

Some people would find ones that would show the occupation they were in. One worked in a bank and they found one with dollar signs, one worked for Boeing, so they had one with

airplanes. Several things like that. It's really cool how different they all are.

Sam told a story in which occupation also played a role. He laughingly reminisced about how important his previous life as a Kinko's (copy and print centre) employee was:

I have several co-workers who contributed. One of my favourite squares— one of them cut up our uniform shirts from work, so it's got the FedEx Kinko's logo as part of the quilt square. ...

Everybody who worked with me knew how big a part of my life working at Kinko's was. Of course, this has changed since I've become a stay-at-home dad. But for about 15 years, I ate, slept and bled Kinko's.

Sam's wife, Kristine, also had a humorous story to tell about a fabric, the one her father chose:

My dad's, for example, is not a fabric that I ever would have picked out but I have a real fondness for it because it's from my dad and he picked it out ... It's an image of a deer and it looks very much like a deer that is being hunted [laughing]. My father is not a hunter at all, he just really likes deer, he likes animals and he thought it was really, you know, I don't even know. I just find it interesting ... [and] sweet.

For Martha, the fabric that had the most impact to her had less to do with what was on it than who the donor was. She said:

The first one I got is particularly meaningful. It's from my friend, Patricia. She adopted her daughter from China a few years ago and she has been a huge mental support for me as we were going through the process. ... At that time, when I met her five years ago, we were at the point when, "We're never going to have kids. This isn't going to happen." When we changed and kind of went on a different direction [towards adoption], she was there and she did a scrapbook page for me with a fabric. It's a

piece of fabric that's in her daughter's quilt as well. Just to have that first piece come in from her, that was very special.

Laureen's most memorable donations had a similar story in that they came from four "strong women," who now are influential in her daughter's life and were critical for Laureen during the adoption process:

I had these four different women that just really were supportive of me no matter what, so their pieces mean a lot to me. ... One of the women, she's a drama teacher at my school [where I teach]. She was one of the last people to give me the fabric because she actually sent away for the fabric. The fabric is bright orange with little teeny tiny yellow stars in it. She special ordered it because she said: "You're a star. You will always be a star." ... Her note is actually on the back of a playbill from Broadway, a Broadway show.

Having each donor's personality reflected in their fabric meant that the quilt could facilitate discussion and storytelling. Shannon recalled showing the quilt to a family friend who had contributed to it: "She just sat there, marvelling at it. I was pointing out all the pieces. ... 'Here's yours. This one's my mom. This one's my aunt.' We went through [it all], and it's a storyteller piece." And at least in one case, going through the quilt piece by piece revealed the relative importance of the individuals represented by the fabrics. Michele K. said,

The way I laid out my quilt was: my husband and I are in the centre, with the centre four blocks. Our immediate family ... and extremely close friends—[who] are pretty much family—surround us, and all of the adoptive parents that I don't know are on the outer ring. My husband is a firefighter and he chose two firefighter fabrics and that's what's in the centre. My fabrics have lobsters on it. Everybody knows I love lobster.

All the contributed fabrics together embodied a community and perhaps even a hierarchy within that community, but each single piece also represented the individual donor.

The representation of individual people in quilts has a long history, especially within the specific format of Signature Album quilts (see Chapters 2.3 and 5.1). These assemblages of signed fabrics—made as presentation pieces, commemorative objects, and/or fundraisers—not only represent each signee, but also function as an embodiment of the group as a whole. For instance, quilt historian Carolyn Ducey traces the history of album quilting within a single nineteenth-century Philadelphia church congregation; some of these pieces were made by members as gifts to notable fellow parishioners, but via their hundreds of signatures, they also represent the community of women who worked together to raise funds for the church’s missionary work—a critical aspect of that congregation’s outreach mission (Ducey 2011). Indeed, Album quilts, including OHGWQ, can be seen as a form of gestalt, an object or idea that is other than the simple sum of its parts. In the analysis of quilts, the gestalt concept more often has been applied to their design, to the idea that each block in a pieced quilt combines with the others to create a different, wholly other pattern or aesthetic (Forrest and Blincoe 1995). The concept of a quilt’s wholeness, however, has sometimes been used as a metaphor for other forms of gestalt; for instance, in discussing a “patchwork” of ideas and approaches to studying the lived experiences of women of colour, psychologist Meg A. Bond compares the overall understanding to a quilt:

The patches [of information] ... have contributed more texture and depth to our understandings of women of color. We can be enriched by exploring the unique pattern of each patch. And when we step back to consider the whole quilt, it is both the evolving gestalt and the variety of designs that is striking and enlightening.

Due to their partitioned construction, quilts lend themselves to these types of gestalt analysis, and Album quilts specifically, as “receptacles” for dozens or hundreds of individuals, are an ideal embodiment of the larger form of community. In this way, the Album quilt variant OHGWQ can simultaneously

represent its individual contributors as well as the all-encompassing concept of a support community.

6.3.3 *Family history redux*

Having family members of many ages contribute to the OHGWQ was widely remarked upon and valued by informants. Amy said, “the fact that the family could be involved [is what made the OHGWQ project so important] ... I think it's great to have strong relationships across multi-generations.” Fabrics donated by relatives who had died since contributing were particularly cherished. Sam was grateful for the participation of both of his grandmothers, one of whom recently had passed away. He said, “She was 94 almost 95. So seeing her square, knowing that she was able to meet [our daughter] and be part of her story is pretty powerful to me.” Cybil, too, felt a strong attachment to the fabric donated by her now deceased grandmother who, despite her approaching blindness from macular degeneration, had written a wish in her own handwriting. Fabrics that previously had been used by long-dead relatives were also appreciated. Michele K. was grateful to be able to represent her maternal grandmother via some fabrics she had used long ago in doll making:

My mother's mother passed away ... long before we ever started the [adoption] process, and when they cleaned out her house they found a box of fabrics. ... Mom gave them to me long before I was a quilter, and [later, I] decided to include some pieces from that box to represent [my grandmother] in the quilt.

Denise told the story about receiving a package from one of her husband's aunts, well after Denise had already finished piecing the quilt top. This aunt had enclosed two fabrics that Denise's husband's mother had made into clothing for her decades earlier. To Denise, these pieces fully merited inclusion, even though she was forced to tear out some seams to accomplish it:

[This aunt] may have been a little late with her gift, but it's really, particularly special because I think [my husband's] mom thought

she would never have grandchildren. She didn't live to meet any of her grandchildren. She died of cancer at a young age and so it's, you know, particularly heart-warming that I can look at that and [say], "And this was something that your Grandma Jackie touched. You never got to meet her and she didn't get to meet you but she would really love you."

Laureen summarised the importance of having fabrics from so many family members in her daughter's quilt by invoking cloth's ability to embody the giver: "It's almost like two, three generations back are still here physically with us through this quilt." Much in the same way that family and social history was a way for informants to conceptualise quilts in Chapter 5.1, family connections were especially valued in specific OHGWQ fabrics, especially when they represented multi-generationality.

6.3.4 Transitioning

Many of the informants' sentiments presented thus far, while nominally focused on the creation of a welcoming object for their adopted child, are fundamentally self-directed. Because much of the OHGWQ project activity occurred prior to the child's arrival, reminiscences often revolved around parents' emotional needs during that time. Hoping for broad participation from family and friends, positioning the project as the solidification of a support community for their child, recalling the attachment to far-flung or long-dead relatives—all of these things were important for *them*, not for their daughters.

None of this is to fault the parents. Despite the fact that many informants talked about being attached to their daughter long before they met her (or was even born, in some cases) (see Section 6.1.1), she was still a nebulous entity at that point, one to which few firm notions could be attached. They knew a handful of facts: she was Chinese, abandoned or orphaned, and most compellingly for them, in need of a permanent family and available to be adopted by one. Beyond those pieces of knowledge, they could not know who she was or who she would become. This is, admittedly, also the case with biological children, but there are so many other, difficult questions with

adoption: How long will the process take? How did her caregivers treat her? What effect will institutionalisation and/or abandonment have had on her? It makes sense, then, that the OHGWQ project was, in the beginning, primarily a means for parents to assuage their own feelings of loneliness, restiveness, insecurity, and doubt, in addition to celebrating with others their impending adoption.

Despite the OHGWQ project's initial focus on the emotional needs of adopting parents, informants were largely attuned to the potential for the quilt's meaning to evolve and grow. In some cases, they appreciated that only over time would their daughter understand what the initial impetus for the project was, or even who the individual contributors were. This is why parents, like Cybil, often began talking to their daughters about it from a young age: "I think she was about three when I took out the swatches for the first time. She didn't really understand it, but she liked matching the swatches ... the wishes to the swatches on the quilt." This simple act of comparing the fabrics in the quilt to the fabric swatches in the accompanying scrapbook served as a way to begin introducing the adoptee to the parents' specially-formed community. Often, this was a simple, low-key effort, as it was for Jen with her daughter:

Sometimes when we've been laying [sic] in bed we'll take [the quilt] out and she finds Tinkerbelle or she finds certain pieces that she likes. And so we haven't really talked about what it means, we just say that these are from family members and friends that were anxious about you.

Other times, the looking sessions become more involved. Louise shared that her daughter is now asking many questions: "What she likes to do is point to individual squares and say, 'Who sent me this one? Who sent me that one?' We get out her book and we read the wish and we talk about the person. It's really a warm and loving thing." Denise began talking to her daughter about the OHGWQ more intensively after her own mother died: "I don't mean to pinpoint it on that event necessarily but I think that after that is probably when I started to more actively talk to [my daughter] about her quilt and say, 'Look, these are the squares that came from your Grandma Doris.'" Through

discussions focused on the quilt and its individual fabrics, parents and daughters initiated a transition towards the quilt becoming a shared idea.

One story Lisa told illustrated how this shift began to occur within their family:

For months [after receiving the finished quilt], [my daughter] would ask me, “Who gave me this piece? Who gave me that piece? Who gave me this piece?” She would be really irritated if it was one of our extended relatives that she didn’t really know. I just would have to tell her, “Well, they’re important to Mommy and Daddy, and that’s why they’re important in your life because they’re important to us, and I know you don’t know them, but it’s Mommy’s cousin.” She knows the squares that are the most important to her. She knows the square Nanny Pam gave her, and she knows which square my parents gave her, and my sister, and her family, and her godparents, and our good friends. ... She knows all of those squares.

Lisa’s daughter was unfamiliar with some of the people represented in her quilt, which resulted in frustration as she was attempting to assess her relationship with it. For Louise’s daughter, by contrast, being familiar with the donors was less important than the fact that she had been the project’s centre of attention. In referring to the quilt’s accompanying scrapbook, Louise said, “It makes her feel good, you know? It’s a big, thick book. She flips through it and she knows all these people who she doesn’t even know had all these good feelings toward her.” For many informants’ daughters, the quilt being “about them” seemed to be a critical component of their connecting with it. Louise clearly explicated this transition from the OHGWQ being parent-focused to being child-focused:

I talked a lot at the beginning [of this interview] about how much it meant to me to get the squares and it was all me, me, me, me, me. That I guess is how it was born. I thought it was a cool idea and it was something to do while I was waiting, always having in mind that I hoped one day this would be important to her. You

don't know what's going to be important to your kids. I'm totally into jewellery. She's totally into shoes. You can't predict what is going to be important to your child. I started it as something that was important to me that I hoped would be important to her, and it really has become that.

She went on to compare the OHGWQ to the adoption process and to becoming a parent in general, homing in on the central theme of change:

Just having [the quilt] hang near her bed and once in a while flipping through the book and asking about this person or that person, it's alive. It's a living thing to her. ... I think that it's a visual proof that there are people out there who love you and wish you well. ... I think our whole adoption journey was that. Maybe even parenting is that. You start out wanting A, B or C, and hoping for this, that or the other thing. Then you get the child you get, even biologically, and you have to do a mind shift. It becomes less about you and all about them.

Kristine, too, articulated the shift from the quilt being about herself (i.e. "the wait," see Chapter 6.1.2) to it being about her daughter:

It's not about that sort of abstract wait anymore, it's about [our daughter], and I think for me, that's how it's changed. So now when I see [the quilt], I don't necessarily think of the wait. Even the scrapbook pages and the wishes for her, I don't think about it as "this is how I'm waiting," it's about "these are all these people who love [her] and who couldn't wait for us to have her here," and now it's this real, little person instead of an abstract concept of "how am I going to manage this wait successfully?"

This "real, little person" will have her own ideas about what the quilt means, what it means to be adopted, and what significance the OHGWQ community has in her own life. Lucia, who on the one hand regretted she had not completed her OHGWQ before her daughter came home, but on the other looked forward to her daughter being able to participate in making the quilt, summarised the unpredictability of parenthood: "The original plan didn't go

that way. I think that's a good precursor of just parenting in general, that you think you can plan things out and then things don't always go the way you think they're going to go and they go in a more wonderful way, actually."

The idea of OHGWQ transitioning from being about the *parents* to being about the *adoptee* provides a parallel to larger discussions of transracial adoptee (TRA) identity development. Adult adoptees and researchers cite the positive effect of adoptees exploring their various cultural backgrounds (Soon Huh and Reid 2000, Yoon 2000, Mohanty *et al.* 2006) while having the freedom and latitude to form their own sense of identity from them (or separate from them). Communications scholar Lisa Falvey, in discussing an "integration" (rather than an "assimilation" or "immersion") model (see Chapter 2.1), sees the fact that some Chinese adoptees are beginning to chafe at what they see as the simulated nature of immersion—e.g. being forced to participate in marginally Chinese cultural activities—as evidence for need of a new perspective:

We wish to argue, however, that this generation will interpret their [own] rejection of immersion as a way of proudly claiming what is rightfully theirs—an unquestionable American heritage that has been given instantaneously to centuries of white immigrants.

(Falvey 2008, p. 278)

Falvey argues that this emphasis on claiming "Americanness" is not a rejection of birth culture, but rather a sophisticated, twenty-first-century understanding that identity is not binary and that in order to combat the racism Asian-Americans and other people of colour regularly face, adoptees will need a more complex understanding of their own racial and cultural backgrounds, one that incorporates their indisputable Americanness. She continues,

Parents fear that their children are longing for a return to the days of assimilation as a result of white pressure to conform, but this generation of adoptees is [instead] navigating toward an alternate identity, one that has been forged by the work of

diversity and the support for difference. It is an identity born in the idea that the real racism that they face is far more covert, and requires a wholly different set of tools (beyond immersion) to address it.

(Falvey 2008, p. 279)

Psychologist and transracial adoptee Amanda Baden further points out that, “as they form their identities, TRAs may fluctuate or shift in the ease and degree to which they identify with [their] various racial and cultural traditions” (Baden 2008). In other words, identity formation is a continual process of exploring and selecting from various backgrounds rather than a fixed concept. Thus, in giving transcultural and transracial adoptees the power to determine their *own* relationship to their birth and adopted cultures, adoptive parents will potentially help to transition ICA and TRA from being parent-focused to being adoptee-focused, much in the same way the OHGWQ appears to transition from being about the former to being about the latter.

In this section, informants talked about how the OHGWQ project helped them not only gather material for constructing a quilt, but also receive comfort and reassurance that their adoption would be successful and their daughter would have a community to welcome her once she arrived. Once their daughter did come home, however, informants realised that the OHGWQ was no longer the same entity, that the quilt project no longer exclusively symbolised “the wait,” and that it was now a link between the past and the present, between their pre- and post-adoption lives. The quilt had also transformed into a shared object and idea, which the adoptees themselves could now participate in shaping.

Although this idea must remain conjectural until research is conducted with OHGWQ recipients themselves, one further role OHGWQ might play is to assist with another type of transitioning. Whereas in section 6.1.2, parents demonstrably used OHGWQ to transition from “not-her” to “her,” in this hypothetical case adoptees could potentially use OHGWQ to assist in transitioning from a received sense of identity to a self-constructed one. As illustrated throughout this chapter, OHGWQ start as parent-focused objects,

representing the adoption process itself, the pain and stress it induced, and the online and IRL community-building adopting parents pursued as they anticipated their child's arrival. As suggested by the story of Lisa's daughter who resented the fact that she did not personally know everyone on her quilt, at some point OHGWQ recipients begin to take ownership of it, identifying the people on it who are important to *them*. Received community is a concept an adoptee can conceivably explore via the OHGWQ, cultivating and "curating" her experience of it by framing each donor in a personal way and identifying where he or she fits in her life (if at all). Further, through parent-child discussions inspired by examining and experiencing the quilt—such as those already mentioned by informants above—OHGWQ recipients have the opportunity to talk about and contemplate their adoptee status. As an object that straddles diverse cultural traditions—Chinese and American—adoptees might find inspiration in their OHGWQ to explore their own version of a hybridised cultural identity.

This chapter summarised the multiple ways in which OHGWQ connected people. Informants forged a conceptual link with their child, using the OHGWQ as an inverted version of Winnicott's transitional device—helping to shift *towards* someone rather than *away*, or, in other words, from "not-her" to "her." The OHGWQ project also helped parents feel a sense of agency while in the unpredictable adoption process. Mostly, this development was positive, though when the adoption had seemingly stalled or failed, some parents then associated the quilt with the resulting emotional pain. Informants also connected with other adopting parents, often within the context of exchanging OHGWQ fabrics, and created online communities that facilitated the sharing of both practical information and emotional assistance. For many informants, online friendships became just as essential as traditional ones. Finally, OHGWQ makers re-connected with people who already held important places in their lives, using the quilt project as a way to reconfirm and reinforce pre-existing relationships. All of this connecting and re-connecting was done by parents to create a quilt that would mark the

adoption, welcome the adoptee, and signal the support of a community. After receiving it, however, the adoptee will likely go on to invest the OHGWQ with her own associations, meanings, and importance.

The next chapter, Conclusions, brings together all of the contexts and ideas this thesis has explored, with the unifying theme of in-betweenness taking centre stage. It also identifies the thesis' key contributions and looks forward to future research.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This thesis set out to describe a heretofore unexamined form of material culture, the OHGWQ, and unpack its significance on two levels: the individual/family and the socio-cultural. In so doing, the thesis supplied new perspectives on conceptual issues surrounding making and maker-hood, addressed the sparsely regarded topic of the material culture of adoption, and identified the nuanced place OHGWQ hold vis a vis Chinese-American cultural hybridity. This chapter summarises the thesis' key findings—homing in on the unifying element of in-betweenness—establishes the study's contributions, and identifies areas for future research.

Quilts in between

The OHGWQ practice began in the late 1990s, just as adoption from China started to rapidly increase, and peaked around 2007, shortly after adoption rates reached their zenith. Largely an internet-driven phenomenon, the practice was spread first by individual websites and message board posts and then by a dedicated online discussion board. OHGWQ, which are still being made today, though in much smaller numbers, are undertaken by adopting parents, who solicit donations of fabrics and written good wishes from friends and family. Assembling the fabrics into a quilt and placing the good wishes in a scrapbook, parents aim to commemorate the adoption, welcome the child to her new family, and create a symbol of the supportive community surrounding them. This specific form of commemoration, while practiced directly on the family or community level, exists within a number of broader socio-cultural contexts, including: the dramatic development and growth of China adoption, the history of both Chinese and American patchwork traditions, the West's practice of appropriating Eastern cultural elements for its own purposes, and twenty-first-century globalised Web culture.

Beyond the specific bases upon which it rests, however, the OHGWQ practice is its own unique phenomenon, and the quality of being in between, or in a liminal, threshold space is one of its critical, unifying characteristics.

Indeed, in-betweenness as a concept of cushioning and/or facilitating movement from one space to another is embedded within each of this thesis' organizing themes: making, imagining, and connecting.

When considering the concept of making, in-betweenness is a critical component specifically within three informant-identified sub-themes: making a family via ICA, making a quilt, and making as a fluid concept that includes multiple participants and forms of participation. In-betweenness is an integral part of ICA in two important ways: one, the personnel and bureaucracy situated between adopting parents and adoptees is more layered and complex than is usually the case in biological family-building, all of which has contributed to, two, the waiting period between submitting a dossier of paperwork and travelling to China to meet the adoptee is unpredictable and in recent years, rapidly lengthening. This means that adopting parents are in an in-between state—between not having and having their child—for an indefinite period of time.

For this study's informants, frustrations due to the unpredictability and complexity of the process were sometimes mitigated via the OHGWQ project, especially the arrival of fabrics and good wishes. In its status as an object being made to prepare for an adoptee's arrival, therefore, the OHGWQ comforted parents, functioning as a buffer between themselves and the onerous, unpredictable adoption process. The project served, in essence, as a quintessential example of Michael Owen Jones' notion of "making as therapy," a component of material behaviour which encompasses the idea that "making things can distract one from the pain, refocus attention and energy, or even resolve issues and restore a sense of self-worth" (Jones 1995, p. 271). At the same time, however, the OHGWQ also conceptually *separated* parent from child, symbolising "the wait" that all adopting parents must live through. Perhaps as a result, the two processes frequently paralleled one another, with the push and pull of progress and inertia simultaneously occurring in both the adoption and the quilt project.

In-betweenness also plays a significant role in making the quilt and deciding who will be part of the process. The most obvious example is the fact

that some informants have yet to complete their OHGWQ: the quilts still exist in a physically in-between state. For these parents, working on the quilt project during their adoption waiting period served its emotionally restorative and community-building purposes, and they felt no overwhelming need to complete it (though most insist that they will return to it someday). These informants' accumulation of fabric and/or incomplete construction of a quilt defies traditional notions of "making," and yet, as Tim Ingold notes, the study of material culture has traditionally focused too greatly on "finished objects and on what happens as they become caught up in the life histories and social interactions of the people who use, consume or treasure them," all while ignoring the "creativity of the productive processes that bring the artefacts themselves into being" (2013, p. 7). These processes, according to Ingold's argument, should be valued for the various functions, including emotional, that they serve, even when failing to result in a completed object.

Other of this study's informants, realising they would not be able to finish the project on their own, outsourced the quilt's construction to someone with adequate skills, in many cases, a family member or friend. The informants who performed no sewing, however, still felt as though they were an intimate part of making the OHGWQ, via their coordination of the project, creation of a OHGWQ website, or production of an accompanying good wishes scrapbook. In the making of such an intimate, family-focused, and potentially therapeutic object, the desire to be recognised as a single, autonomous maker is trumped by the yearning/need for teamwork. David Gauntlett positions such processes in this way: "[in the craftworld, unlike the artworld], making is still connecting—with materials, other people, and the world—but in gentle and quiet ways, with no need for grand celebratory announcements" (2011, p. 66). OHGWQ maker-hood, therefore, aligns with larger ideas about crafting—existing in a number of states ranging from single-maker to group project, but always with the primary goal of making connections (focus on process) rather than strengthening egos (focus on product).

In-betweenness also relates to the theme of imagining, an activity that,

for OHGWQ informants, centred on two distinct ideas: quilts and China. For many adoptive parents, quilts were symbolic mediators between past and present. Quilts allowed them to “make connections with other women who quilt [and to] make meaningful connections to legacies of women (both familial and non-familial) who have engaged in quilting generations before them” (Stalp 2008, p. 57). Informants also regarded quilts as objects that protect and soothe in both physical and emotional ways, and spoke of imagining their daughters being wrapped in and sheltered by their OHGWQ. For adopting parents, the metaphorical power of textiles like OHGWQ makes them ideal in conceptualising a link to their daughter and in representing their deeply felt desire to welcome her to her new home. Indeed, it is textiles’ “ability to absorb, enfold and contain, expand, and tie together, [which] make them important symbols” and a “central part of human consciousness,” particularly when it comes to ideas of generativity, ritual, and, most germane to the OHGWQ phenomenon, comfort (Gordon 2011, p. 18).

OHGWQ also stood between the U.S. and China, forming a bridge between the two cultures. Especially within the twenty-first-century ICA context, wherein adopting parents are encouraged by social workers, adoption agencies, and even the Chinese government to integrate elements of their child’s birth culture into everyday family life, the Chinese roots of OHGWQ were important to informants. Containing elements of both U.S. and Chinese culture, the OHGWQ could serve—thanks again to the ubiquity of textile-based metaphor—as a conceptual link between disparate entities. The metaphorical language that associates textiles with “connection, wholeness, and strength” is sometimes derived from “making cloth, as in weaving, and other times ... comes from the practice of joining or fitting many separate bits of cloth together, as in pieced quilts or other patchwork” (Gordon 2011, p. 25). Thus, everyday language contributes to our ability to easily conceive of stitching together unrelated cultural traditions—in this case, American quilts and Chinese talismanic patchwork—much in the same way many cultural observers now view American society as a “patchwork quilt” rather than a “melting pot” (Abrams and Ferguson 2004-2005, p. 67, Mandiberg 2012, p.

458, Showalter 1991, p. 169).

Within the thesis' final theme of connecting, OHGWQ acted as a link between informants and other important people. For instance, adopting parents longed to feel a connection to their child, despite the fact that they rationally comprehended the difficulty of doing so. As an incremental activity that kept the organiser busy during "the wait," the OHGWQ project provided a feeling of agency and motion that otherwise might have been absent. In some ways, adopting parents exist in a similar limbo to that of Victor Turner's ritual initiates, a state "frequently likened to death ... to darkness ... to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (1977, p. 95). The OHGWQ project, however, gave adopting parents a way to move *through* the in-betweenness of being a potential parent. Still, when the adoption process seemed to stall or fail, some informants could only associate the OHGWQ with the pain and frustration they currently felt. Inspiring such contradictory feelings echoes the way in which David Parkin argues that transitional objects can simultaneously embody refugees' comforting memories of pre-displacement life *and* the pain of their currently dislocated existence, which includes the understanding that they may never be able to return, and that "resettlement [may] ... never [be] achieved by that person or that group" again (1999, p. 314). In many ways, the quilt project was symbolically situated in between adopter and adoptee and, in a fascinating reversal of Winnicott's (2005) conception of the transitional object, symbolised the process of moving from "not her" to "her."

The project also was located between sets of adopting parents, who sought each other out online for both fabric swapping and general information exchange. Online, an adopting parent could "connect and communicate with others, and ... be an active participant ... both giving and receiving ideas, feedback, and support," while also being able to "be noticed, recognized, and heard" (Gauntlett 2011, p. 106). The OHGWQ Yahoo group, in particular, was a critical online platform for the development and spread of the OHGWQ phenomenon in the early to mid-2000s, but informants also cited it as a place where they could vent about their adoption process or otherwise receive

support they needed in emotionally critical moments.

In essence, this thesis has argued that their in-betweenness enables OHGWQ to connect ideas, cultures, and people. The act of working on a OHGWQ helped informants make the abstract idea of their daughter more concrete. It also pushed them to think specifically (and critically) about the importance of incorporating Chinese culture into their American family life. Finally, the OHGWQ project created real connections among adopting parents and between adopting parents and pre-existing support communities.

Contributions and future directions

In describing and exploring informants' experiences of making a OHGWQ, this thesis resonates with the work of scholars like David Gauntlett, who examine and promote less formal or professional notions of maker-hood. Inspired to create a commemorative quilt regardless of previous sewing experience, adopting parents collaborated with others to bring the project to fruition, thereby engaging in a form of what Gauntlett calls "everyday creativity." Their act of creation existed not as the result of years of solo practice or training—which has traditionally been the focus of disciplines such as art history—but as an output motivated by a feeling, one that, through the co-participation of others, also contained some of Illich's "conviviality," or the "creative intercourse among persons" (1973, p. 11). For OHGWQ makers, the process, which included the input and handiwork of people other than themselves, was equal in importance to the product. Making, in this context, departs from the modernist emphasis on individual genius, aligning more closely with twenty-first-century, internet-facilitated notions of collaborative DIY and Web 2.0-style interactivity.

Such discussions of making and creativity are especially pertinent in the discipline of quilt studies. As with the majority of traditional American quilts, OHGWQ follow a block-style construction—a repeating unit-based format that sometimes calls into question the presence of creativity. Janet Berlo, however, calls out the hypocrisy in doubting the creative capacity of quiltmakers:

When artists in other genres (poets, for example, conforming to the unyielding formal conventions of a sonnet or a haiku) work within the “confines” of their chosen medium, it is not judged as a limit on creativity. Why should it be so for the quiltmaker?

(2003, p. 23)

OHGWQ makers, who often work as a group rather than singly, may appear to blindly follow the conventions seemingly pre-established for the American quilt genre and OHGWQ sub-genre—block-style, reliant on pre-existing patterns, and utilising fabrics designed specifically for quilting—but in reality, they continually make choices, as individuals and in tandem with others, that affect the final outcome (which, as noted above, may include an incomplete quilt). Within this paradigm, OHGWQ makers, and quiltmakers more broadly, “are compelled to improvise, not because they are operating *on the inside* of an established body of convention, but because no system of codes, rules and norms can anticipate every possible circumstance” (Hallam and Ingold 2007, p. 2). Improvisation as an inherent component of making is key to discussions of OHGWQ and of quilts, generally.

In addition to contributing to larger discussions of maker-hood, this thesis also brings the material culture of adoption to the fore. Adoption and ICA have been discussed, critiqued, and dissected from nearly every disciplinary, professional, and personal standpoint. As cited throughout this thesis, scholars have debated the legal and geo-political ramifications of ICA, social workers have assessed the impact of TRA on families and communities, and adoptees themselves have weighed in on the legitimacy and personal costs/benefits of ICA. But the ways in which material culture intersects with adoption have rarely been analysed. By identifying the intimate role OHGWQ-creation played for informants during their adoption process—helping pass the time, create community, reinforce interpersonal bonds, etc.—this thesis takes a step towards understanding where objects can fit into discussions of adoption. For informants who felt stuck in a seemingly endless waiting period and who simply wanted to be united with their adoptive child, the in-betweenness that OHGWQ came to both represent *and* mitigate is one

indicator of the powerful part material culture can play in adoption.

Finally, in identifying the OHGWQ's constituent cultural threads, this thesis has shown that widely diverse traditions can combine to create a wholly new textile practice. By introducing the little-researched topic of Chinese talismanic patchwork alongside the better-understood subject of American commemorative quilts, the thesis has given new perspectives on how cultural hybridity can occur, especially within the twenty-first-century, internet-rich context. At the same time, as this study's informants seemed to appreciate, OHGWQ, while inspired by authentic cultural practices, are also at least partly an "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm 2012) developed by the China adoption community itself. In the final analysis, having a Chinese pedigree was less important to informants than other considerations, as summarised by Lucia:

I would like to think that [the OHGWQ] has ... Chinese roots.

That's a nice idea to me. I just don't know. If I was going to be very honest, more than that ... is that it's kind of this symbolic and ritual way of piecing together all these different parts of [our daughter's] life and our family's life.

Lucia's metaphor of "piecing together" all the different parts of her daughter's life clearly parallels the quilt's physical construction process, but it also points to the conceptual complexity of the OHGWQ topic.

This complexity suggests another role OHGWQ could conceivably play in the future: connecting the quilt's recipient, the adoptee herself, to some of the tools she will need to form and re-form her self-identity, a process both researchers and transnational/racial adoptees advocate. Becoming familiar with her adoptive community is part of that process and can be facilitated by interacting with the quilt. Amy, who adopted an older child, described the experience of introducing the quilt to her daughter this way:

We had the quilt out, but she didn't know the significance of it just yet because she did not speak English. I saved the scrapbook back for a couple months [until] at least she [had] met a couple of the family members. She still didn't really speak English, but I could point to pictures and try to get her to

understand that there were a lot of people involved in making it. While Amy's reminiscence describes the elementary process of an adoptee learning simply *who* is a part of her adoptive community, one could envision the act eventually extending into deeper explorations of what it means to be adopted and to live in a transracial family, how it feels to live as a minority in a predominantly white community, what aspects of Chinese and American cultures are personally resonant, etc. Because of its multivariate in-betweenness—connecting people to history, people to cultures, and especially, people to people—the OHGWQ is surely flexible enough to accommodate these kinds of wide-ranging musings.

Importantly, their material nature, in particular their “textility,” also bestows them with qualities potentially conducive to an adoptee's exploration of identity. OHGWQ informant Shannon's description of the multiple ways she now views the quilt speaks to the richness of their tactile, comforting, and metaphorical nature:

You can look at it with a couple of different sets of eyes now. You can look at it like [it's simply] your kid's favourite lovie ... I looked at it as she sort of snuggled up in it, and [to me] it's just a snuggly thing. [But] then I'll look at it and I'll realize ... I often will look at it and think about how many people are actually ... when she's just wrapped up in it, how many people are wrapped around her. I feel that all the time with that quilt. I mean, it really represents all the people who held my hand during the wait.

Attfeld's (2000) analysis of Winnicott's baby blanket—referenced in Chapter 5 in relationship to the idea of a “transitional object”—makes the case that textility is an integral characteristic of the blanket, not an irrelevant property that could be replaced by any other. Textiles' *specific* and somewhat contradictory nature of tactility, softness, resilience, and vulnerability are what make them the prototypical object for a baby's transition away from dependence on her mother. Adoption, however, confounds Winnicott's transition in that an adoptee has been physically removed from her mother—a forced transition that results in an absence extraordinarily difficult to reconcile.

Within that context, Bollas' (1978) concept of the *transformational* object becomes all the more poignant in that an adoptee has been permanently separated from the person who represents the object's original, i.e. her birth mother. By making and presenting her daughter with a OHGWQ, however, an adoptive mother can use textiles' wrapping and textural properties to give comfort and signal support of a community, both of which can help the adoptee search for ways to transition and transform on her own.

Also relevant to OHGWQ, Attfield further posits that because textiles are both "ephemeral and durable, withstanding years of wear, laundering and change of use from coat to clip rug and from curtain to patchwork quilt," this makes them the perfect metaphor for the "provisional nature of the contemporary sense of self-identity" (2000, p. 132), which must be able to react and adjust according to changing influences and circumstances. Within the specific context of ICA/TRA, the concept of transnationality—in which the "*trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something" (Ong 1999, p. 4)—and its flexible approach to national and cultural identity become especially applicable. Given its physical and metaphorical flexibility and its multi-cultural roots, a OHGWQ could be seen as an aide to a Chinese adoptee in negotiating the interim nature of her identity, which was initially informed by a unique set of external—transnational, transracial, and transcultural—circumstances, but which is hers to assemble anew, stitching it together based on the social, cultural, and historical influences surrounding her.

None of this can be known, however, until adoptees talk about OHGWQ themselves—a next step in this research. By asking recipients to describe their experiences of growing up and living with their OHGWQ, I will be able to begin ascertaining what the quilts mean to them *actually*, not hypothetically. Relevant questions to ask might be: "What is your earliest memory of the quilt?" "What fabrics have you been most drawn to?" "Which of the people represented on the quilt do you have a connection to and about whom do you have the strongest feelings or memories?" "In what ways have you interacted with the quilt over the years?" and "How do you use the quilt

today?" It is probable that each recipient's relationship to her OHGWQ has changed over time and it is also possible that the quilt's meaning has faded as the adoptee has grown older, much as is often the case with childhood objects. Their potential to shift in significance as the recipient's life and outlook evolve is another aspect of the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt's in-betweenness that make it a thing worthy of continuing study.

APPENDIX A

Frequently used terms and acronyms and frequently cited organisations/websites:

- Adopting parent (when talking about them in the past, while they were in the adoption process)
- Adoptive parent (when talking about them any time in the present)
- In between (adverbial use)
- In-between (adjectival use)
- OHGWQ (One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt or Quilts)
- ICA (intercountry adoption)
- TRA (transracial adoption/adoptee)
- IRL (in real life)

- 100 Good Wishes Quilts Yahoo Group:
<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/OHGWQ/info>
- Adoptive Parents China Yahoo Group:
<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/a-parents-china/info>
- Original Quilts:
http://www.originalquilts.com/100_good_wishes_quilts.htm
- Families with Children from China:
<http://www.fwcc.org/>
- 100 Good Wishes Quilts Project 2000 (now defunct)
- China Adopt Talk (now defunct)

APPENDIX B

List of Informants (First names and general location only) and images of their quilts (if not pictured elsewhere in the thesis):

A	B	C	D	E
Name	Location	Discovered via	Interview date (m/d/y)	OHGWQ maker(s)
1 Aimee	Ohio	Referred by Kristine and Sam	9/29/2012	Made the quilt for Kristine and Sam
2 Amy	Illinois	Personal blog	3/19/2013	Mother-in-law and aunt
3 Christine	Virginia	OHGWQ yahoo group	10/29/2012	Self
4 Cybil	New Jersey	OHGWQ yahoo group	3/2/2013	Mother-in-law
5 Denise	California	Referred by Michele L.	3/22/2013	Self (quilt top); hired a professional for quilting
6 Dolly	Virginia	Personal blog	12/7/2012	Not completed -- she will make it herself
7 Jen and Jason	Minnesota	Personal blog	4/28/2012	Self (Jen) and mother; hired a professional for quilting
8 Karen	Tennessee	Social media posting	12/7/2012	Not completed -- she started it and will finish it soon
9 Kristine and Sam	Ohio	Personal blog	9/26/2012	Hired a professional quiltmaker
10 Lauren	Florida	Referred by Lucia	3/3/2013	Hired a professional quiltmaker
11 Lisa and Pam (Lisa's mother-in-law)	Maryland; Oregon	Quilting forum	3/27/2013	Lisa coordinated the project; Pam sewed the quilt
12 Louise	New York	Referred by a non-interviewee	3/1/2013	Mother started it (pieced the strips) but couldn't finish it. A friend from her children's school finished it.
13 Lucia	Maryland	Personal blog	3/1/2013	Not completed -- her mother will make it
14 Maggie	Pennsylvania	Referred by Michele K.	3/18/2013	Husband's aunt
15 Martha	Illinois	Personal blog	4/1/2013	Not completed -- she will make it herself
16 Michele K.	New York	Personal blog	3/5/2013	Self
17 Michele L.	Pennsylvania	OHGWQ yahoo group	3/16/2013	Self (quilt tops); hired a professional for quilting
18 Shannon	Massachusetts	Personal blog	3/22/2013	Self (quilt top); hired a professional for quilting



Amy's OHGWQ



One of Christine's OHGWQ



Cybil's OHGWQ



Denise's OHGWQ



Kristine and Sam's OHGWQ



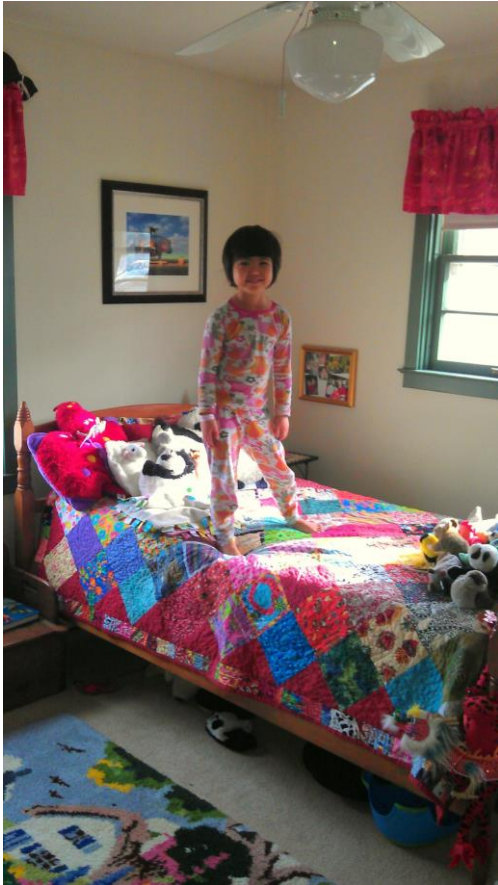
Laureen's daughter and her OHGWQ



Lisa's OHGWQ



Maggie's OHGWQ



Maggie's daughter and her OHGWQ



Michele L.'s daughters and their OHGWQ



Shannon's OHGWQ

APPENDIX C: Interview Guide

Content checklist

(Four major areas: Identification, Function, Community, Cross-Cultural)

Starter Question: “How did you get involved in making OHGWQ?”

IDENTIFICATION:

- Who, where, when
- How did you learn about OHGWQ? [Is “Bai Jia Bei” a known concept?]
- Why a quilt?
 - Family quilts
 - Meaning of quilts/sewing/textiles

FUNCTION (particularly emotional):

- Adoption process – easy, hard, long, etc.
- OHGWQ making process
 - How are you collecting the fabrics
 - Who has donated, where from, how many
- Favourite fabric
- Favourite wish
- Meaning during making
- Meaning now
- Materiality—comfort, etc.
- How will present to daughter
- PROCESS

COMMUNITY

- Adoption support groups, FCC, Yahoo listserv, etc.
- Others who have made OHGWQ
- Family/friends participation, did you **BLOG** (or just post to the Yahoo group?)

- Did this work for you?

CROSS-CULTURAL (CHINA)

- Why China?
 - Prior knowledge of China
 - Research about Chinese traditions
- Decorating/clothing in Chinese style
- Other Chinese traditions (ladybugs, etc.)
- Importance of retaining connections with China
- Roots of OHGWQ—importance of China connection

Wrap up: “Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your OHGWQ?”

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