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## “One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts”: Expressions of Cross-Cultural Communication

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*This paper examines the phenomenon of “One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts” (OHGWQ), early 21st-century quilts made by American families to commemorate their adoption of a Chinese child. Since 1994, the single largest source for international adoptions in the United States has been the People’s Republic of China. Indeed, between 1999 and 2012, nearly 70,000 children of ethnic Chinese descent joined thousands of American families. During that same period, however, adoption from China, which began as a relatively quick and easy process, became progressively longer and more difficult. To cope with this lengthening, unpredictable, and sometimes emotionally turbulent process, parents began to make OHGWQ, which have roots in a northern Chinese patchwork practice and spread rapidly through the China adoption community via the Internet. This paper traces the development of the OHGWQ, examines the Chinese and American antecedents that served as sources for the new practice, and assesses the meanings that parents and others have assigned to the quilts and the process of making them. At the same time, the paper is intended to serve as a model for how we can use quilts as metaphors for socio-cultural phenomena—in particular, changing attitudes about how adopted children should be integrated into American society and how Americans view Chinese culture in general.*


 quilt scholars can successfully pursue research on a number of strata. Single-quilt, quiltmaker, or artist studies provide a micro-level view of quiltmaking. Larger studies of single groups, whether geographical,



cultural, or religious, represent another stratum of quilt research and can be helpful in lending context to more narrowly focused studies. Much of the past 35 years of quilt research has focused on these two strata. Fewer scholars, on the other hand, have studied quilts on a more global level, especially in terms of cross-cultural interaction, with one notable exception being the tracing of connections between quilting practices within the Western world, particularly the British-influenced world. As the field of quilt studies continues to expand, however, scholars are increasingly examining how quilts can represent points of contact between widely different cultures.<sup>1</sup> Together, these studies enhance our understanding of quilts *as a whole*, by revealing an accurate and nuanced picture of the various and overlapping global quilting contexts. Building upon other recent cross-culturally focused research, this study of “One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts”—quilts that contain both Chinese and American cultural elements—promotes the idea of quilts as a metaphor for the ways in which cultures encounter each other, view each other, influence each other, and change each other.

“One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts” (OHGWQ) are made by American families to welcome their adopted Chinese children; therefore, they represent a point of contact between two distinct cultures. Using the story of a single family as a touchstone, this essay will not only describe the quilts and their makers, but will tease out the various cultural strands that come together to create this wholly new tradition. In the end, the essay will assess the importance and meaning of this practice on a number of levels, from individual/family to socio-cultural.

### ***China Adoption***

When Jennifer and Jason Kainz of Minnesota submitted their paperwork late in 2007 to adopt a child from China, they thought it would be a six-month process (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> In 2008, however, the Beijing Summer Olympics, an outbreak of avian flu, and a massive earthquake in Sichuan Province conspired to dramatically slow down all Chinese adoptions. Three years later, the Kainzes finally traveled to China to bring home their eleven-month-old daughter, Addison. Although their adoption was affected by the specific events of 2008, their story, especially the long wait, is similar to many other China adoption stories.



Figure 1:  
Jason, Jen, and Addison  
Kainz with their One  
Hundred Good Wishes  
Quilt, May, 2013. Photo  
taken by the author.

Since 1994, the single largest source for intercountry adoptions (ICA) in the United States has been the People's Republic of China. Between 1992, when China first officially allowed international adoptions, and 2005, when these adoptions peaked, the number grew from 210 to 7,903. Most recently, in 2012, 2,696 children were adopted from China, nearly a third of all United States ICAs. Between 1999 and 2012, 69,326 children of ethnic Chinese descent became part of thousands of American families.<sup>3</sup>

This precipitous influx of Chinese children significantly altered the overall character of U.S. intercountry adoption. Quite naturally, it also signaled momentous change for individual American families like the Kainzes; the availability of thousands of orphaned or abandoned Chinese children meant that more parents could adopt. Indeed, the year 2004 saw the greatest number of ICAs in American history—22,991—thirty-one percent of which were from China.<sup>4</sup>

Intercountry adoption is by its nature an involved and sometimes onerous process. Wait times can be lengthy, with paperwork and an in-depth home study taking up to several years to complete. In addition, since about 2005, the Chinese governmental agency responsible for international adoptions, the China Center for Children's Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA), has taken progressively longer to process adoptions. Official statistics for adoption processing times are unavailable, so adoptive 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.<sup>5</sup> The Kainzes' three-year wait fell in the midst of this period.

To deal with the anxieties this complicated and increasingly prolonged process can produce, adoptive parents have formed a variety of support groups that assist families before, during, and after their adoption experience. Organizations such as Families with Children from China (FCC) provide information about adopting from China and offer parents a venue for asking questions and sharing experiences. Parents have also used online networking tools to share information with each other. For instance, Adoptive Parents in China, a Yahoo Group (a private online chat board), was founded in 1999 and currently has nearly 18,000 members.<sup>6</sup> Helping prospective parents negotiate adoption procedures is one important function of these types of groups.

### *One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts*

While procedurally-focused modes of assistance play a critical role, parents also have relied on grassroots emotional support and celebratory efforts to help them cope with the adoption process. One of these is the creation of a commemorative object called a "One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt" (OHGWQ). Made from fabrics donated by family members, friends, and internet acquaintances (many of whom also have adopted Chinese children), the OHGWQ is thought to embody the good wishes of all of these donors.

Jen Kainz encountered the idea of making a OHGWQ in the months while she and Jason were waiting for Addison's adoption to finalize. She saw the OHGWQ described on an adoption-related website and, even though she had never made a quilt before, she decided to start the project, knowing she could count on the assistance of her mother, a quiltmaker. She sent out letters to family and friends asking them to contribute a meaningful fabric to the project. As many other OHGWQ makers do, she also asked for a wish (written on a notecard, etc.), which she would eventually include in a scrapbook. Jason Kainz, who was less directly involved in the creation of the quilt, set up a private website where family and friends could follow the couple's adoption process. He also included a page describing their OHGWQ project and asking people to contribute.



While the Kainzes chose to keep their project largely private, soliciting fabrics only from people they knew intimately, others have opened their quilt up to a larger community, publishing information about their OHGWQ on publicly-viewable websites and weblogs (“blogs”). Hundreds of these individual sites exist on the web and serve as a way for adoptive parents to introduce the concept of OHGWQ to others, invite people to participate in the project, and document the project as it progresses.<sup>7</sup> Although some of these sites have now been inactive for a decade or more, as a whole they represent the enthusiasm with which adoptive parents have embraced the idea of the OHGWQ.

Another way to solicit OHGWQ contributions is to join an online discussion group and communicate with other quiltmakers that way. A members-only Yahoo Group called “100 Good Wishes Quilts,” dedicated specifically to sharing information about these quilts and facilitating fabric exchanges, was founded in December, 2002. In June, 2006, the site hit its peak of activity, with nearly 1,800 message postings, most of which discussed the exchange of “squishes” (a combination of “square” and “wish”).<sup>8</sup> Many parents clearly have seen this project as a way to make a quilt that includes the fabrics and good wishes not only of their close family members and friends, but also of other adoptive parents they likely have never met.

The preponderance of web-based primary source information about One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts suggests that it has largely been an Internet phenomenon. At least one print book has been published about them and an episode of the PBS kids’ show, “Arthur,” even addresses the topic, but these all appeared after OHGWQ had already become popular on the web.<sup>9</sup> The earliest website I could find devoted to the quilts, now defunct, documented a group of OHGWQ made in 2000.<sup>10</sup> Another website that presented OHGWQ from an early date—OriginalQuilts.com—is an online store that will assemble your OHGWQ for you after you have gathered all of your fabrics. The earliest quilt shown on that site is from 2001 and the most recent is 2012. The website also provides a description of the origin of the practice of making a OHGWQ:

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 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. The quilt 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.<sup>11</sup>

Many, if not most, of the hundreds of OHGWQ websites and blogs I have visited have used a variation of this paragraph to describe their project. The 100 Good Wishes Quilts Yahoo Group even provides a Microsoft Word template solicitation letter that includes nearly identical language. Additionally, many of the hundreds of OHGWQ represented on the web have a similar aesthetic: a simple, one patch-style quilt (with or without sashing). These overlapping visuals and texts suggest that the source(s) of the OHGWQ phenomenon of the early 2000s were limited in number. Definitively isolating them, however, may be impossible given the decentralized nature of the World Wide Web.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear, however, that the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts made by adoptive parents for the last ten-plus years did not spring from a vacuum. As mentioned above, web descriptions point to a Chinese origin, an idea that will be explored later in this essay. More immediate antecedents, however, can be found in homegrown American quilting traditions.

### *The American Context for One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts*

Although Jen Kainz had not made a quilt before, quilts have resonant meaning for both herself and her husband Jason. In Jen's case, she was thinking of the legacy the OHGWQ would represent: "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 Addison's that she can pass down to her children."<sup>13</sup> Jason's family also has a history of quilting, which means a great deal to him: "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... 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."<sup>14</sup> For Jason, quilts are a comforting, everyday object, something you could "fling on the floor and [you could] lay on it and roll up in it and watch a movie in it." Many Americans share these emotionally positive experiences and warm feelings for quilts, and throughout history Americans have often turned to quilting to mark special occasions and express powerful emotions.



Quiltmaking as an act of commemoration and expression of community has a long history in the United States. 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.<sup>15</sup> 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 organizations.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> More recently, quilts have been made to honor the deaths of soldiers in various fields of combat.<sup>18</sup> Probably the most famous recent commemorative quiltmaking effort is the NAMES project, honoring victims of the AIDS epidemic.<sup>19</sup>

OHWGQ fit squarely in this history of making quilted textiles to commemorate an important family or community event. It makes sense that parents—whether they have previous quiltmaking experience or not—have turned to a quilt tradition in marking the momentous occasion of their adoption of a Chinese child.

### *Chinese Antecedents to the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt*

Echoing the words of the OHGWQ Yahoo Group, among other websites, Jason Kainz wrote on his and Jen's adoption website a description of their quilt project:

In the northern part of China there is a tradition of making a Bai 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.<sup>20</sup>

In Mandarin Chinese, *bai jia bei* literally means, “one hundred families quilt,” which certainly seems to describe a community-based quilt project. Colloquially, however, the phrase can be used more loosely. The phrase *bai jia*, “one hundred families,” often simply means “many people,” as in “many people quilt.”<sup>21</sup> Although patchwork has probably been made in China from donated fabrics, it is likely that most people use the *bai jia bei* phrase to





Figure 2:  
*Bai Jia Bei*, made by Pan  
Kai Li, Wang Jian Village,  
Shaanxi Province, People's  
Republic of China, d.  
2013, 34.5 inches x 35  
inches, International Quilt  
Study Center & Museum,  
2013.020.0001

simply describe the scrappy or patchwork nature of a textile. Indeed, on a recent research trip to northwest China, members of the International Quilt Study Center & Museum curatorial staff met craftswomen who made what they called “*bai jia bei*.” These pieces were constructed entirely from new, rather than donated fabrics (fig. 2).<sup>22</sup> In addition, a *bai jia bei* made thirty years ago for a baby boy—which the museum acquired during this trip—also appears to have been constructed from a limited number of fabrics, not the range one would expect from “one hundred,” or even “many” families (fig. 3). 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.<sup>23</sup>

The concept of a “quilt” is also problematic in the Chinese context. Several Chinese textile scholars and dealers confirm that the western definition of a quilt—a bedcovering made from three layers held together with quilting stitches—does not generally exist in China.<sup>24</sup> What is more common is a multi-layered bedcovering consisting of a decorative cloth “envelope” (similar to the European notion of a duvet) within which a warm and practical filling (a blanket or loose batting, for instance) is inserted. These bedcoverings are used among the majority Han people as well as among many of the fifty-five ethnic minority groups. So when the Chinese word *bei* is translated as “quilt,” this can lead to the misleading notion that quilts as we think of them in the West are also common in China.



Figure 3:  
*Bai Jia Bei*, made by a Mrs.  
 Ma of Gansu Province,  
 People's Republic of  
 China, c. 1980, 21 inches  
 x 21 inches, International  
 Quilt Study Center &  
 Museum, 2013.021.0001

While quilted bedcoverings are rare in China, the techniques of quilting and piecing (patchwork) are not. Quilting is most often seen in padded clothing or, more rarely, in armor and babies' lap cloths/diapers.<sup>25</sup> Patchwork, on the other hand, has been more widespread and used for decorative as well as practical purposes. Nancy Berliner, curator of Asian Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, confirms this: "The Chinese patchwork, while often padded, is not 'quilted' in the same manner as American quilts. The 'quilting' aspect is not as important a craft as the patchwork."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, 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).<sup>27</sup> Although common, patchwork was used more frequently in the creation of costume and religious textiles—particularly Buddhist—than in bed coverings (fig. 4). Patchwork robes, known as *jia sha*, were commonly worn by Buddhist priests and were intended to demonstrate a commitment to asceticism. A non-religious patchwork garment, the Ming dynasty (1368–1644 CE) *shuātianyi*, or "paddy field garment," has been documented in paintings, although none are known to have survived to the present day.<sup>28</sup> The *shuātianyi* was a women's patchwork gown that reflected the era's tendency towards novelty in fashion; its irregularly pieced fabrics



Figure 4:  
Patchwork mandala, Tibet,  
made of Chinese Ming  
(1368-1644) or Qing  
(1644-1911) Dynasty  
fabrics, 30.5 inches x 30.5  
inches, International Quilt  
Study Center & Museum,  
2011.042.0001

(similar to a crazy quilt format) certainly distinguish it from other costume of the day.<sup>29</sup> Decorative patchwork garments—aprons and head coverings in particular—also have a long history in the Jiangnan Watery Region near Hangzhou and Lake Tai in eastern China.<sup>30</sup>

A well-known historical garment known as the *bai jia yi* (“One Hundred Families Robe”) provides a possible link between Chinese patchwork traditions and the idea of a *bai jia bei* as espoused by the modern day OHGWQ makers. The robe is composed of hundreds of patches—tessellated squares, rectangles, triangles, diamonds, or hexagons (fig. 5). It is often embroidered with auspicious symbols and motifs, such as the twelve symbols of the zodiac, the *ba gua* (eight-sided representation of the Daoist trigrams), and the *wu du* (“five

Figure 5:  
*Bai Jia Yi* (“One Hundred Families Robe”), late  
19th century, arm span: 39.5 inches, Saint Louis  
Art Museum, Gift of Julius A. Gordon and Ilene  
Gordon Wittels in memory of Rose Gordon  
112:1989.



Figure 6:  
Bai Jia Yi, detail.

poisons,” an ironically propitious set of symbols), (fig. 6). It makes sense, then, that the robes were made as spiritually protective garments, particularly for male children. Textile scholar Valery Garrett writes that one 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.”<sup>31</sup> 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.”<sup>32</sup>

A number of *bai jia yi* exists in both public and private collections.<sup>33</sup> In addition, *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 shows a boy wearing a blue and white diamond-patterned *bai jia yi*. An early Qing dynasty kesi curtain panel at the Beijing Arts and Crafts museum depicts boys at play, some who wear diamond-, square- and hexagon-patterned *bai jia yi*.<sup>34</sup> Brocade-woven fabrics from the Qing dynasty with the so-called “Hundred Boys” motif sometimes feature boys wearing *bai jia yi*.<sup>35</sup>

One way in which the *bai jia yi* concept might have been introduced to western audiences 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 first and 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.<sup>36</sup>

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 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.<sup>37</sup>

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

The creators of the adoption-focused One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt practice seem to have taken various aspects of existing Chinese patchwork traditions—with particular emphasis on the spiritual protection associated with patchwork and especially the *bai jia yi*—and used them as inspiration for a new one.

### *Assessing Meaning and Metaphor in One Hundred Good Wishes Quilts*

Historian Ken Ames has proposed that "things [objects] constitute one of the most significant classes of human behavior and accomplishment,



Figure 7:  
Screen shot of the "Mia's  
One Hundred Good  
Wishes" blog. [http://mias-  
quilt.blogspot.com/](http://mias-quilt.blogspot.com/)

and, therefore, one of the most valuable kinds of historical document."<sup>38</sup> Folklorist Michael Owen Jones expands upon this notion with the concept of "material behavior," which "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."<sup>39</sup> Through the process of making a One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt, parents engage in material behavior, assigning a variety of meanings to the act of making a quilt to commemorate their adoption of a Chinese child.

On a very basic level, making a OHGWQ is a coping strategy, a way to pass time while waiting for an adoption to go through. As Jen Kainz said, "it just made the wait more endurable knowing that we were *doing* something." Other parents have expressed the same sentiment on their blogs, for instance, "It keeps the maker of the quilt (me) busy during the LOOOOOOOOONG wait until the adoption is finalized and you can go pick your wee one up."<sup>40</sup> Sometimes bloggers talk about the process in a humorous fashion: "I figured while we wait for LOA [letter of acceptance] this would be a perfect time to start [a OHGWQ], plus the retail therapy [i.e. shopping] has [got] to stop LOL [laugh out loud]!"<sup>41</sup>

Other parents use their blogs to comprehensively catalog the "squishes" as they arrive, again pointing to the therapeutic role that making a



OHWQ plays. One blog, “Mia’s One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt,” created by “Special K,” a woman in the midst of her adoption process, documented all 117 squishes she’d received starting on July 23, 2006 and ending nearly a year later on June 19, 2007 (fig. 7). Every entry includes information about the person who donated it and a brief description of their fabric and wish, a format that dozens of other OHGWQ blogs also follow.<sup>42</sup> This presentation mode gives the blogger the chance not just to “pass time” with the methodical documenting of squishes, but also to recognize and thank all of the people involved in the project.

Usually, the OHGWQ contributors come from many different areas of the blogger’s life, from close family and friends to internet acquaintances they have never met. For instance, Special K’s very first entry documents the fabric sent by another blogger, someone she initially only knew through the internet but eventually met and became friends with: “This [fabric] is from Connie of the Somewhere in China blog. I started following her blog. We became e-mail pen pals after that. Then, since we only live 45 minutes away from each other, we decided to meet in real life. She’s great! I see a friendship that will last for many years.”<sup>43</sup> Dolly Garnecki, author of the “Traveling with Baby” blog, expresses a similar appreciation for OHGWQ community-building: “How beautiful to welcome our new daughter by wrapping her in the love and goodwill of a community of family and friends. Creating an heirloom of blessings that can be passed down to following generations, this is a project that envelopes a community. I LOVE this tradition!”<sup>44</sup> This same sense of using the OHGWQ project to build or reinforce community is echoed on Jason Kainz’s website:

Last February we invited over a hundred families to share in this special keepsake for our daughter. Addison received special wishes from Africa, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin and of course Minnesota.

This quilt is a special way of showing Addison how much she was wanted before she came into our family. Every night she will go to bed under a huge support system filled with love.<sup>45</sup>

As Jason’s words indicate, the OHGWQ symbolizes community support, not just for the parents as they go through the adoption process, but equally



importantly, for a child who has not yet joined the family and is being adopted from a completely different culture on the other side of the world.

A particularly potent meaning of these quilts becomes apparent when we consider their cross-cultural nature. As discussed above, the OHGWQ is a hybrid object, bringing together longstanding American commemorative quilting practices with the spiritually-protective nature of specific Chinese patchwork objects. While defaulting to a community-based quilting project seems natural for Americans, incorporating folk traditions from other countries, especially ones without ties to dominant (i.e. white, European-derived) American culture, is not.

Indeed, the history of western appropriation of Asian design and cultural motifs is one based on a tendency to aestheticize and essentialize Eastern cultures; in other words, reduce those cultures to a narrow set of images and characteristics. *Chinoiserie*, the Western use of stereotyped Chinese imagery to evoke an exotic effect, had a strong influence on American popular culture and decorative arts, including quilts, over a period of several hundred years.<sup>46</sup> And while the OHGWQ's Chinese origins may be confused or indistinct, what the makers of these quilts all seem to share in common is a genuine desire to move beyond the surface, to "do something that was with her culture," as Jen Kainz put it, referring to making the quilt for her daughter, "... [because], you know, it's important to know where you're from."<sup>47</sup> Adoptive parents' desire to have their children retain a connection to their birth culture is especially surprising when we review the history of international adoption in America.

The origin of intercountry adoption in the United States stemmed largely from the need to find families for thousands of orphaned children in post-World War II Europe.<sup>48</sup> 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," in which parents attempted to "circumvent racism by encouraging a de-coupling of the child from her birth culture."<sup>49</sup>

A new model emerged in the 1990s with the influx of children adopted from China. Labeled 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 what are called “homeland tours,” in which adoptive families visit the region, town, or even the specific orphanage from which their child originally hailed. Many adoption agencies explicitly encourage the immersion approach. Jen Kainz said that part of their motivation for making a OHGWQ was that engaging in Chinese cultural activities “was strongly encouraged to us by the adoption agency.”<sup>50</sup> This emphasis on retaining strong connections with the child’s country of birth is a new development, one that likely paved the way for the OHGWQ phenomenon.

While an argument could be made that OHGWQ represent only a superficial understanding of Chinese culture, it can also be argued that they represent a strong desire to learn more about China. Indeed, sociologist Amy Traver has shown in her research that adoptive parents frequently consume Chinese cultural objects in an attempt to “become ‘Chinese’” themselves.<sup>51</sup> 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.”<sup>52</sup>

Another byproduct of the current generation of adoptive parents’ openness to facilitating Chinese cultural activities within their family might be that their children will grow up interested in many different cultures, not just their birth and adoptive cultures. Indeed, this is an explicit hope of Jen and Jason Kainz as they contemplated the relationship between their daughter, Addison, and the son they were in the process of adopting when I interviewed them, Tovin. When referring to how they would approach introducing Chinese culture to Addison and Tovin, 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.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the fact that based on appearances alone, One Hundred Good



Figure 8:  
One Hundred Good Wishes  
Quilt, December 2012.  
Courtesy Maggie Hackman.

Wishes Quilts may simply look like another American block-style quilt, what they represent for the makers, the international adoption community, and American society in general is significantly more (fig. 8). The makers craft an object that represents a way for them to cope with the difficult and lengthy adoption process, that serves as a symbol of the community of support for themselves and their child, and that signals their enthusiastic embrace of their child's birth culture. The OHGWQ also represents a significant shift in the American adoption community's approach towards integrating Chinese children into American culture, one that is more holistic and broad-based than what was seen in previous attitudes. In the end, the One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt, in its own small way, can serve as a metaphor for the openness and engagement that will likely be necessary for cultural communication in our global twenty-first century.

### Notes and References

- 1 Some studies with a cross-cultural focus that already exist include: Marin F. Hanson and Janneken Smucker, "Quilts as Manifestations of Cross-Cultural Contact: East-West and Amish-'English' Examples," *Uncoverings* 24 (October 2003): 99–129; Phyllis S. Herda, "Creating a New Tradition: Quilting in Tonga," *Uncoverings* 21 (October 2000): 57–78; Michigan State University, *To Honor and Comfort: Native Quilting Traditions*, ed. Marsha MacDowell and C. Kurt Dewhurst (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1997); Robert Shaw, *Hawaiian Quilt Masterpieces* (Westport, CT: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1996); Marin F. Hanson, "Exotic Quilt Patterns and Pattern Names in the 1920s and 1930s," *Textile: The Journal of Cloth & Culture* 4, no. 2 (Summer



- 2006): 138–163; Janneken Smucker, Great Plains Art Collection, and People’s Place Quilt Museum (Intercourse, Pa.), *Amish Crib Quilts from the Midwest: The Sara Miller Collection* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003). See also Joyce Hammond’s essay on Polynesian *tifaifai* in this volume.
- 2 Jen and Jason Kainz, unpublished interview by the author, April 28, 2011.
  - 3 “Statistics | Intercountry Adoption,” [http://adoption.state.gov/about\\_us/statistics.php](http://adoption.state.gov/about_us/statistics.php); Kay Johnson, “Politics of International and Domestic Adoption in China,” *Law & Society Review* 36, no. 2 (January 1, 2002): 387.
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  - 5 “CCAA Updates & Referrals - China Adopt Talk,” <http://chinaadopttalk.com/ccaa-update-and-referral-histories/>; accessed June 17, 2013.
  - 6 “A-parents-china : Adoptive Parents China,” <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/a-parents-china/>; accessed June 17, 2013.
  - 7 To view some of these weblogs simply type “One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt” into an internet search engine.
  - 8 “OHGWQ: 100 Good Wishes Quilts,” <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OHGWQ/>; accessed June 30, 2013. The fact that group members used the word “square” (as in “fabric square”) rather than “block,” suggests that many were not originally quiltmakers.
  - 9 Teresa Orem Werner and Nathan Tremlin, *A Quilt of Wishes* (Centennial, CO: Lifestest Publishing, 2005); “Mei Lin’s Bai Jia Bei - Arthur Wiki,” [http://arthur.wikia.com/wiki/Mei\\_Lin%27s\\_Bai\\_Jia\\_Bei](http://arthur.wikia.com/wiki/Mei_Lin%27s_Bai_Jia_Bei), accessed June 30, 2013.
  - 10 Multiple attempts at contacting the author of the website have failed. The URL of the site was: <http://members.cox.net/~joannanorman/quilt/photos.html>
  - 11 “100 Good Wishes Quilts,” [http://www.originalquilts.com/100\\_good\\_wishes\\_quilts.htm](http://www.originalquilts.com/100_good_wishes_quilts.htm), accessed June 30, 2013.
  - 12 One source and/or conduit for the spread of the OHGWQ phenomenon likely was the OriginalQuilts.com website. Many of the quilts on that site look similar to each other, following the One Patch format. Additionally, the owner of OriginalQuilts.com was a co-founder of the OHGWQ Yahoo Group. To date, however, the owner has declined to be interviewed.
  - 13 Jen and Jason Kainz interview.
  - 14 Ibid.
  - 15 Barbara Brackman, *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, 1989), 20; Jessica F Nicoll and Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, *Quilted for Friends: Delaware Valley Signature Quilts, 1840–1855* (Winterthur, Del: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1986).
  - 16 Carolyn Ducey and Jonathan Gregory, *What’s in a Name: Inscribed Quilts* (Lincoln, NE: International Quilt Study Center & Museum, 2012); Jonathan Gregory, “Wrapped in Meanings: Quilts for Families of Soldiers Killed in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars,” *Uncoverings* 31 (December 2010): 161–204; Sarah Rose Dangelas, “The Cultural Significance of the Block Island Woman’s



- Christian Temperance Union Quilt of 1931,” *Uncoverings* 24 (October 2003): 49–74.
- 17 Cuesta Benberry, “White Perspectives of Blacks in Quilts and Related Media,” *Uncoverings* 4 (January 1983): 60.
  - 18 Gregory, “Wrapped in Meanings.”
  - 19 Lawrence Howe, “A Text of the Times: The NAMES Project,” *Uncoverings* 12 (December 1991): 11–31.
  - 20 “Myadoptionwebsite.com - International Adoption Web Sites and Announcements,” <http://www.myadoptionwebsite.com/addison/quilt.htm>, accessed June 30, 2013.
  - 21 “Baijia | Definition | Mandarin Chinese Pinyin English Dictionary | Yabla Chinese,” <http://chinese.yabla.com/chinese-english-pinyin-dictionary.php?define=baijia>; Dafeng Hui, “The ‘Hundred Surnames’ of China Run into Thousands,” *Nature* 448, no. 7153 (August 2, 2007): 533–533.
  - 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 partners at the Xi’an Jiaotong University Art Museum have not yet found any references in Chinese-language sources, either.
  - 24 John Vollmer, email message to author, July 17, 2011; Chris Hall, email message to author, March 22, 2011; Teresa Coleman, email message to author, July 11, 2011.
  - 25 Stevan. Harrell et al., *Mountain Patterns: The Survival of Nuosu Culture in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 28; University of Hawaii at Manoa et al., *Writing with Thread: Traditional Textiles of Southwest Chinese Minorities* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawai’i Art Gallery, 2009), 367; Tomoko Torimaru, *One Needle, One Thread: Miao (Hmong) Embroidery and Fabric Piecework from Guizhou, China* (University of Hawaii Art Gallery, 2008), 37.
  - 26 Nancy Berliner, email message to author, January 31, 2009.
  - 27 Chung Young Yang Embroidery Museum, *Design: When the Lines Meet* (Seoul: Chung Young Yang Embroidery Museum, Sookmyung Women’s University, 2005), 201.
  - 28 Xun Zhou and Shanghai Shi Xi Qu Xue Xiao, *5000 Years of Chinese Costumes* (San Francisco CA: China Books & Periodicals, 1987), 167.
  - 29 Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 48–49.
  - 30 Qingjiong Zhang, Tengting Ge, and Yanju Cao, “Patchwork, Functions and Origin of Clothing for Women in Jiangnan Watery Region of China,” *Asian Social Science* 5, no. 2 (February 3, 2009): 77–83.
  - 31 Valery Garrett, *Chinese Dress: from the Qing Dynasty to the Present* (Tokyo: Rutland, VT: Tuttle Pub., 2007), 181.
  - 32 John Vollmer and Art Institute of Chicago, *Clothed to Rule the Universe: Ming and Qing Dynasty Textiles at the Art Institute of Chicago* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), 69.



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- 37 “Bai Jia Bei Quilting Forums,” <http://forums.about.com/n/pfx/forum.aspx?nav=messages&webtag=ab-quilting&tid=62170>; accessed December 21, 2011.
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- 50 Interview with Jen and Jason Kainz.
- 51 Amy Traver, "Home(land) Décor: China Adoptive Parents' Consumption of Chinese Cultural Objects for Display in Their Homes.," *Qualitative Sociology* 30, no. 3 (2007): 201.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Jen and Jason Kainz interview.