MIGRATION AS FEMINISATION

Chinese women’s experiences of work and family in contemporary Australia

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Throughout the Western world, governments have increasingly viewed migration through the lens of economic efficiency. In the era of globalisation, they argue, migrants should be selected on the basis of their skills and qualifications. Australian governments have been strongly committed to this policy direction, and over the last two decades, have reoriented the country’s migration program from the recruitment of unskilled labour to targeting educated professionals. The current Liberal-National Coalition government claims that this policy redirection has paid off, with migrants more skilled than ever, and successfully contributing to the economy. The government bases these claims on research conducted by scholars of migrant employment, who equate high levels of human capital with successful employment outcomes. Using the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA), these researchers show that migrants with qualifications and English language ability have higher rates of labour force participation, lower unemployment, and higher occupational attainment and incomes, compared to their less skilled counterparts.

This thesis critically analyses this ‘success story’ narrative. It argues that the focus on human capital has overshadowed exploration of other important factors shaping migrants’ employment experiences, including the gender and birthplace of new arrivals. This thesis shows that male and female migrants, and migrants from English versus non-English speaking backgrounds, can have very different experiences of working in Australia, regardless of their skills or occupational histories. I highlight the importance of these factors by investigating the experiences of Chinese women in Australia today. Using in-depth interviews with women from China and Hong Kong, and quantitative data from the Australian census and LSIA, I show that Chinese women’s employment experiences in Australia do not conform neatly to the prevailing ‘success story’ promoted by the Government and migration researchers.
Migration to Australia causes a widespread reduction in Chinese women’s paid work. While it is normal for men to seek work immediately after arrival, women find that migration intensifies their domestic workloads, while depriving them of sources of domestic support, such as relatives and hired help. Consequently, for Chinese women, migration often means moving from full-time to part-time jobs, or withdrawing from the workforce entirely. In the process, they experience a ‘feminisation’ of roles, as they shift from being ‘career women’ to fulfilling the traditional ‘female’ roles of wife and mother. Thus migration and settlement are highly gendered, and the household context is crucial for understanding migrants’ employment experiences.

Among those women who are in the labour force, employment outcomes vary substantially by birthplace, pointing to the cultural specificity of human capital. Although both mainland Chinese and Hong Kong migrant women tend to be highly educated, mainland women achieve far poorer outcomes than Hong Kong women. Hong Kong women, with their relatively good English language skills and officially-recognised qualifications, are generally able to secure comparable jobs to those they had in Hong Kong, although they often have problems advancing further in Australia. Meanwhile, mainland women tend to have poorer English skills and greater difficulty in having their qualifications recognised, and thus suffer often dramatic downward mobility, moving from highly skilled professions to unskilled, low-paid and low status jobs in Australia. Thus this thesis demonstrates that the value of human capital is context-dependent. It can only be valorised in a new labour market if it is sufficiently culturally compatible with local standards.

Therefore, the experiences of Chinese migrant women complicate the ‘success story’ that dominates discussions of migrant employment in Australia. Ultimately, the prevailing economistic approach fails to see the diversity and complexity of migrant experiences. We need to see migrants as social beings, whose settlement in a new country is crucially shaped by their gender and birthplace, and broader institutional factors, which determine how human capital is used and rewarded. This is the mission of this thesis.
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Preface

I arrived in Australia as a child migrant from Hong Kong in 1979. At that time, the term ‘multiculturalism’ was relatively new in Australia, although in practice, Australian society had been multicultural for a long time. Since the 1970s, issues around migration, multiculturalism and migrant settlement have become permanent fixtures in both popular debates and academic research in this country.

Having grown up in Sydney as an ‘ethnic’, surrounded by a wide circle of migrant families, I have always been interested in the lives of people who uproot their lives to settle in foreign lands. I began this thesis after working with migrant women for several years, in various paid and voluntary roles in migrant community organisations. I had listened to many stories about the processes of migration and settlement, about problems encountered and victories won, about personal challenges and personal transformations.

To me, these experiences were a fascinating and important part of Australia’s multicultural heritage. And yet, in much of the national discourse, migrants tended to be portrayed one-dimensionally – either as the source of social problems like crime, unemployment or racial tension, or conversely, as an economic resource to help propel the Australian economy into the global marketplace. I found it hard to reconcile these crude portraits with the lives of migrants I knew and worked with.

I undertook this project to explore the rich complexity of migrant women’s lives in contemporary Australia, to examine how their experiences challenge or complicate prevailing discourses about new arrivals in Australia. In the process, I had many of
my own ideas about migrants and migration challenged and complicated: while the experience of interviewing Chinese women was often familiar, at other times, it was joltingly surprising. Overall, the experience was extremely illuminating and enjoyable, and I am indebted to all my respondents who so generously shared their time and stories with me.

Many other people helped guide this project to fruition, and I am extremely grateful to all of them, especially: Caroline Alcorso, Debbie Carstens, Pamela Cawthorne, Eve Chen, Leanne Cutcher, Ghassan Hage, Qifen Huang, Peggy Ho, Rita Lai, Jane Lee, Margaret Moussa, Kim Neville, Joy Paton, Greg Shapley, Ben Spies-Butcher, Matthew Steen, Ian Watson, Dorothy Wong, and my supervisor, Gabrielle Meagher.
Around the world, more people are on the move than ever before. Today 175 million people live outside the country of their birth, more than double the number in 1970 (United Nations 2002: 10). While people migrate for many different reasons – fleeing conflict or persecution, to re-unite with family members, for better employment opportunities, and so on – in the last two decades, Western governments have increasingly viewed migration according to economic criteria, and have been increasingly selective in their admissions policies. In this age of globalisation, governments claim, migrants need to be selected on the basis of their ability to contribute economically to the country. Thus by the early 1990s, most traditional migrant destination countries had introduced legislation placing greater emphasis on migrant skills (United Nations 2002: 21).

An established migrant destination country, Australia is strongly committed to this economistic philosophy. It was one of the first countries in the Western world to introduce a ‘points test’ for prospective migrants (Reitz 1998), and in the last decade, has shifted the balance of its migration program from humanitarian to economically-based admissions. As a result, the Australian government claims, recent migrants’ employment outcomes are better than those of earlier generations of migrants, and both the nation and migrants themselves benefit from the successful integration of new arrivals into the Australian labour force (Ruddock 2002).
This positive portrait of migrant employment in Australia is supported by scholars of migration who, informed by human capital theory, argue that the higher the level of migrants’ skills, the more successful they are in the labour force. They argue that compared to low skilled migrants, highly educated professional migrants are more likely to be labour force participants, have lower unemployment rates, and higher status occupations and incomes (Cobb-Clark 2000, 2001; Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999; Richardson et al 2001, 2002; VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999, 2000). Thus educated migrants add to the skill base of the workforce, contribute to government coffers through taxation, and those establishing businesses create employment for other Australians. In the last decade in Australia, migration policy and research have coalesced neatly to present a powerful ‘success story’ narrative about skilled migration. Sharing an economistic approach, Australian politicians and researchers have defined migration as desirable when it adds to national productivity, and undesirable when it constitutes a drain on the public purse (Liberal-National Coalition 2001).

This thesis critically analyses this economistic approach to migration. Firstly, it looks at whether there might be factors other human capital that help shape migrants’ employment experiences. In particular, drawing on earlier Australian research on migration, it examines the role of gender, ethnicity and culture in the workforce (Castles et al 1986; Collins 1991; Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988). In doing so, it complicates the prevailing success story, with its overwhelming focus on skills and qualifications. For example, why do educated professionals from English-speaking countries have substantially lower unemployment rates than those of equally educated professionals from non-English speaking countries? Why do migrant women’s labour force participation rates fall more than men’s do after migration? This thesis explores whether gender and ethnicity might well influence migrants’ employment outcomes independently of human capital levels.

Secondly, this thesis complicates the success story narrative by supplementing quantitative research with in-depth qualitative analysis. Current studies, relying on quantitative survey data, cannot tell us how migrants themselves actually experience the process of working and settling in a new environment. Quantitative research can provide comprehensive data about large numbers of people, but we cannot hear in
their own words what motivates respondents to make particular decisions and how they feel about particular processes and outcomes. Without this information, it is hard to judge what the patterns and trends in the survey data actually mean for the people at the centre of the research. For governments, this makes it hard to devise policies pertaining to migration and migrant settlement. For example, does migrant women’s reduced labour force participation reflect a deliberate choice not to work or unsuccessful job search? What policy changes would be needed to increase migrant women’s labour force participation? In order to answer these questions, we need to talk to migrant women themselves, and understand how they experience the process of settling in Australia.

This thesis aims to address these gaps in the orthodox understanding of migrants’ employment experiences in Australia today. This means moving beyond the economistic, human capital approach, and incorporating social and cultural research questions, focusing particularly on gender, ethnicity and culture. It means augmenting quantitative survey data with qualitative data gained from talking with migrants themselves and listening to their accounts of working and settling in a new country.

To achieve these aims, I have focused on the experiences of Chinese women in contemporary Australia. Concentrating on women allows me to foreground gender as a central theoretical principle, and as Pedraza (1991: 303) notes, provides ‘the necessary linkage of micro and macro levels of analyses’. In interviewing women, the household context and the role played by family concerns in shaping employment and settlement naturally come to the fore. Focusing on women highlights the complex relationships between the public world of employment and the private world of the home, allowing us to see work in its broader context.

This research focus is part of a wave of scholarship on migrant women redressing the traditional gender imbalance in migration research. Before the mid-1970s, research on international migration rarely mentioned gender (Pedraza 1991). The traditional portrait of the migrant featured the male breadwinner venturing abroad to seek his fortune, later joined by his wife and family, or returning to his homeland with cash in hand. Therefore, research on migration has traditionally been dominated by studies of men’s activities and experiences. However, in the last two decades, there has been
increasing interest in the international migration of women. In part this reflects the increasing numbers of women crossing national borders, not only to join spouses abroad, but to take up employment opportunities themselves. It also reflects the efforts of feminist scholars, who have struggled to establish women and gender as legitimate research subjects. This thesis owes much to these efforts and builds on their scholarly and political direction.

In concentrating on the Chinese population, I aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of one migrant community in contemporary Australia, and thus explore ethnicity and culture as organising principles of social life. In the last two decades, the shift from European-based migration to Asian migration has been one of the most significant changes in Australian society. And as Coughlan (1989: 300) has commented, compared to Canada and the United States, there has been very little research conducted about Asian migration to Australia, partly because of an ‘absence of a critical mass of Asian-Australian scholars’. Chinese migrants comprise the largest Asian migrant population in Australia, and are one of the fastest growing groups among new arrivals to the country. However, as I discovered, the Chinese community is far from unitary, and people sharing a common ethnicity can be culturally distinct in important ways. Thus focusing on Chinese migrants – and comparing experiences of Hong Kong and mainland Chinese migrants – allows me to explore the role not only of ethnicity, but of more complex cultural differences and cultural capital in the experiences of migrants in Australia.

Chinese migrants typify the new generation of educated, professional migrants granted entry to Australia on the basis of their occupational skills. How do they fare in the Australian labour market? Do they conform to the prevailing success story about skilled migration to Australia? How do Chinese women fare in comparison to their menfolk, and in comparison to Australian women more generally? In this thesis, I document Chinese women’s employment experiences in Australia, examining their labour force participation, occupational mobility, and their changing attitudes towards work and family life. I explore how migration to Australia changes Chinese women’s roles and identities within their families, how it often results in a re-orientation away from the world of paid work, and towards the domestic sphere of the family, a process I have called ‘feminisation’.
In examining the employment experiences of Chinese women in Australia, this thesis explores whether human capital may be more context-dependent than orthodox research assumes. Comparing the experiences of women from Hong Kong and China, I delineate different forms of human capital, and also the ways in which forms of human capital are differently received in the Australian workforce. Not all skilled migrants are equally able to use their skills after arrival, and this thesis highlights the importance of ethnicity, culture and gender in shaping migrant employment outcomes.

As Chapter 1 outlines, this thesis uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine Chinese women’s employment experiences in Australia. Data from large-scale surveys such as the Census and the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) provide a useful backdrop to the qualitative findings derived from interviews with women from Hong Kong and China.

The rest of the thesis comprises two parts. Part 1, *Australian Migration: Economics, Culture and Gender*, consists of three chapters, and examines the modern history of migration to Australia, migration policy, and research on migrant employment in Australia. Part 2, *Chinese Women in Australia: Feminisation of Roles*, comprises four chapters, and explores Chinese women’s experiences of work and family in Australia today.

Part 1 begins with Chapter 2, which provides a historical overview of Chinese migration to Australia, outlines the recent waves of migration from Hong Kong and China, and provides a demographic and human capital profile of these recent Chinese migrants. It also introduces and profiles the respondents interviewed for this thesis.

Chapter 3 examines the history of Australian migration policy, discussing how the policy has been shaped by concerns about human capital, ethnicity and gender. It shows that Australia’s migration program has undergone tremendous change in the last 50 years, from recruiting European, unskilled migrants to perform manual labour to attracting highly skilled professionals, increasingly from Asia. However, while policy changes have dramatically altered the class and ethnic profile of new arrivals to the country, the gender dynamic of Australian migration has seen more continuity. As was the case 50 years ago, women still tend to be admitted on the basis of family...
relationships rather than independently. This pattern has important ramifications for
the subsequent settlement experiences of men and women.

Chapter 4 introduces the current literature on migrants and employment in Australia. This literature, informed by human capital theory, presents a ‘success story’ narrative about the positive employment experiences of recent skilled migrants to Australia. This chapter offers a critique of this literature, showing that it fails to address three crucial questions: whether recent skilled migrants encounter a ‘transferability gap’ which prevents them from being fully rewarded for their human capital; whether ethnicity shapes migrants’ employment experiences independently of human capital endowments; and whether gender shapes experiences independently of human capital levels. My answers to these questions challenge the efficacy of an economistic approach that examines human capital in isolation from broader social and cultural factors.

Part 2 of the thesis explores these questions in relation to Chinese women migrants from Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Chapter 5 documents the occupational mobility of these women, showing that although highly educated, mainland Chinese women commonly suffer downward occupational mobility after arrival in Australia, while Hong Kong women tend to experience blocked mobility. In neither case do women’s experiences of integrating into the Australian labour market conform neatly to the ‘success story’ narrative prevalent in the current literature on migrant employment in Australia.

Chapter 6 offers an explanation for Chinese women’s experiences in the workforce, using the concept of ‘human-cultural capital’ to show that skills and qualifications are not automatically transferable across national borders. Rather, the extent to which they are recognised and rewarded in the new country depends on the extent to which they are culturally compatible with local standards. Focusing on linguistic and educational capital, this chapter shows that the cultural repertoire of Hong Kong migrants is far more transferable to an advanced Western country like Australia than that of PRC migrants.
While Hong Kong and PRC migrants arrive in Australia with quite distinct ‘human-cultural capital’, Chinese women are united by their gendered experiences of migration and settlement. As Chapter 7 explains, migration to Australia results in a ‘feminisation’ of women’s roles. Not only is migration extremely disruptive to family life, but it also means a loss of previous sources of domestic support, such as relatives and hired domestic help. Consequently, Chinese women experience an intensification of domestic workloads, which leads many to reduce their participation in the labour force, or withdraw completely. Thus the proportion of Chinese women engaged in part-time work increases dramatically after migration, as women struggle to balance work and family responsibilities. In this sense, their labour force participation comes to mirror that of the general female population of Australia.

While reduced paid employment and ‘feminisation’ of roles are often experienced as negative processes, the last chapter explains that women do not feel that these processes are entirely negative. In fact, Chapter 8 shows that women appreciate many aspects of Australia’s work culture, which allows them greater personal freedom – the Hong Kong women gain freedom from the culture of stress and overwork that ruled their lives prior to migration, while the PRC women gain freedom from the stifling regulation and control of their careers and lives exercised by the mainland Communist government. Additionally, both groups report that the challenges of life in Australia compel them to become more independent, and thus migration engenders considerable personal growth among these women, a change they view with pride.

These are the paradoxes of adapting to life in a new country. Arriving as highly educated, career-oriented professionals, Chinese women are rarely able to advance their careers in Australia. Instead, they find themselves fulfilling more traditional female roles within the household. This is a source of great frustration for many women, as they suffer a premature truncation of their careers. However, as they reorient their energies toward the domestic sphere of the home, in many cases, their priorities change, so that other considerations, such as more free time and greater personal autonomy become more valuable. Migration has not only changed women’s life opportunities, but also the way in which women view life itself.
Ultimately, the complexities, contradictions and subjective experiences of migration and settlement can only be captured with a research approach which transcends the economistic outlook that examines experiences through the lens of human capital theory. Contemporary Australian research into migrant employment experiences enjoys access to unprecedented amounts of quantitative data. However, this thesis shows that a very different and more complex portrait of migrant experiences can be generated by broadening the research focus to incorporate social and cultural concerns, and the accounts of migrants of their own experiences.
CHAPTER 1

METHODS AND SOURCES

This thesis relies on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, namely, in-depth interviews with Chinese women in Australia, and descriptive statistics derived from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia, the Census and other data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This chapter outlines and explains the methods and sources I have used.

Qualitative Methods and Sources

Qualitative data for this thesis was gathered through in-depth interviews with Chinese women migrants in Australia. I interviewed 44 women, 22 from Hong Kong and 22 from the People’s Republic of China (PRC). I chose these two birthplaces as they represent the largest Chinese migrant populations in Australia.\(^1\) Although a sample of 44 cannot be representative of the total population of these groups, it does allow for an adequate range of demographic characteristics and experiences to be covered (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the profile of my respondents, compared with the total population of Hong Kong and PRC-born migrants in Australia). A sample of 44 is also appropriate for the detailed qualitative data analysis required of in-depth interviews.

\(^1\) Numbers of migrants from Taiwan are considerably lower. In 2001, the China-born population in Australia was 142,780 and the Hong Kong-born population was 67,122. Meanwhile, the Taiwan-born population was only 22,418 (ABS 2003a).
I decided to use in-depth interviews because while there is abundant quantitative data on migrant experiences in Australia, there is very little that examines these experiences from the perspective of migrants themselves, especially migrant women. We may know statistically that Chinese women have relatively low labour market participation rates, for example, but understanding why, what implications this has for women and their families, and what should be done about it, requires researchers to talk to the women themselves (see also Cawthorne 2001).

After all, migration is not just about material benefits and costs, and economic success or failure; it is a fundamental psychological, emotional and cultural experience, potentially challenging and disrupting migrants’ sense of who they are, and their values and priorities. As Yeoh and Khoo (1998: 167) note, migration allows people, freed from old ties, to ‘rework the premises upon which they attempt to manage their material and social existence, adopting or rejecting new values and where necessary retaining or even stretching the old’. Qualitative research is essential to explore these subjective aspects of the migration process.

**Data Collection**

I conducted interviews between March 2001 and April 2003, mostly in respondents’ homes. A minority were interviewed in other locations, including friends’ homes, workplaces, a café, and a school. In seven cases, interviews were conducted by telephone. More than half (28) of the respondents were interviewed in English. The remainder were interviewed in Cantonese (10) and Mandarin (6), in most cases with the assistance of an interpreter.²

Most of the interviews were recorded (with the respondent’s consent) using a mini-disc recorder. In a minority of cases, I took short-hand notes during the interview (in

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² Interpreters were present at 13 interviews. The Mandarin interpreters comprised a community worker (who had recruited the respondents in question) and a personal friend (who again had recruited the respondents). In interviewing Cantonese speakers, I was accompanied by my mother (a native Cantonese speaker) in all but three interviews, which I conducted myself (I am able to understand Cantonese at an advanced level, but am slow in my spoken Cantonese).
one case because the respondent did not wish to be recorded). Each interview was later transcribed in Microsoft Word.

Interviews were semi-structured and typically lasted one to three hours. The interview schedule comprised a combination of closed- and open-ended questions covering the following areas (see Appendix for full interview schedule):

- personal information (age, country of birth)
- family background (occupation of father and mother)
- educational and occupational history in home country
- details of migration to Australia (when, why, visa category, networks)
- employment history in Australia
- details about current job (working conditions, remuneration, feelings about, relationships with co-workers, etc.)
- comparisons with employment in home country
- details about family (marital status, children, husband’s occupation, etc.)
- household dynamics (division of household labour, decision-making, etc.)
- comparisons with household dynamics in home country
- feelings about personal freedom and independence, compared with home country
- impressions of Australian society and local Chinese community
- general assessment of settlement experiences and plans for the future

The open-ended questions, and semi-structured nature of interviews allowed respondents to provide detailed accounts of the aspects of their experiences they felt to be most significant. This style of interview is best suited to gaining rich, high quality description from respondents, who are allowed to take questions on paths they choose rather than those pre-determined by the researcher. After all, a key goal of qualitative research is to understand how individuals interpret events and experiences.

In all interviews I sought to create an atmosphere conducive to free discussion of respondents’ experiences and reflections. I believe that my being female and Chinese assisted greatly, and respondents often asked me about my background and history, which allowed for a more trusting relationship. At some interviews, being
accompanied by my mother (as translator) was advantageous in that respondents saw me in a less threatening persona (‘daughter’ rather than ‘researcher’) and felt more comfortable discussing their lives.

The method of recruitment of research subjects was crucial to gaining good quality qualitative data. I recruited respondents using the snowball technique, whereby respondents were asked to recommend other Chinese women to be interviewed. The initial interviewees comprised members of my own personal networks, including family friends and clients of community organisations with which I had been involved.3

The snowball technique did not generate a random sample. However, the personal nature of the questions required willing and cooperative respondents with whom the researcher could build up a rapport and adequate level of trust. This was much more likely to be the case where respondents had been introduced to the researcher by a mutual friend or contact.4 As Watson (1993: 416) writes, the demands of research involving long tape-recorded interviews ‘usually rule out conventional survey approaches to sampling where the interviewer is obliged to cajole his/her pre-selected subject into cooperation’.

All respondents lived in Sydney at the time of interview. I chose to focus my field research on Sydney because of its significant role as a migrant destination. As the financial and commercial centre of Australia, Sydney now attracts approximately 40 per cent of the national migrant intake, even though it houses only 20 per cent of the total national population (Healy and Birrell 2003: 65). By contrast, the rest of New South Wales receives a miniscule proportion of international migrants: only 8.7 per cent of the migrants who settled in New South Wales between 1996 and 2001 were located outside of Sydney in 2001 (Healy and Birrell 2003: 65). Consequently, Sydney is now Australia’s most multicultural city, with 32 per cent of its population born overseas in 2001 (Healy and Birrell 2003: 68).

3 These community organisations included Asian Women at Work, which represents Chinese and Vietnamese labourers, and Immigrant Women’s Speakout Association of NSW, the state’s peak organisation for migrant and refugee women. I had been a regular volunteer for both groups.

4 All respondents were given a Subject Information Statement outlining the nature and purpose of the research, and informing respondents that their names would not be published, and that they could
Chinese migrants, though found throughout Australia, are concentrated in the major cities, especially Sydney and Melbourne. In 2001, more than half of the total Hong Kong (54 per cent) and China (57 per cent) born populations in Australia lived in Sydney (Healy and Birrell 2003: 66). As the next chapter explains, within Sydney, the Chinese migrant population is highly dispersed, with Hong Kong migrants generally found in affluent northern suburbs and mainland migrants in less affluent western and south-western suburbs. The residency of my respondents largely conformed to these patterns.

As outlined below, the qualitative focus on Sydney was complemented with use of national quantitative data, which provided a broader context within which to understand the experiences of my respondents.

**Data Analysis**

My analysis of the qualitative data was guided by the principles of grounded theory. Grounded theory was introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, who defined it as ‘the discovery of theory from data’ (1967: 1). Later, Strauss and Corbin (1998: 12) explained that grounded theories, because they are derived from data, ‘are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action’ (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 12). Unlike the logico-deductive model of theory generation, which starts with a theory, logically deduces some implications, formulates hypotheses, and then develops tests to verify or falsify the truth of hypotheses (Ezzy 2002: 7), grounded theory should not be influenced by pre-conceived theories but should emerge from data. Authors like Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Giddens (1976) have argued that the traditional logico-deductive approach generates scholarship that does not reflect real social life. They argue that for more valid results, analysis must begin at the level of the individual, taking his or her definition of the situation into account. ‘[O]therwise we are left to work with preconceived notions or categories that may have no meaning to the individual, producing useless information in the end’ (Statham et al 1988: 5).

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withdraw from the project at any time. All respondents signed a consent form at the time of interview. Both the Subject Information Statement and consent form were available in English and Chinese.
My research method conformed to the principles of grounded theory in that my interviews were semi-structured and allowed respondents to raise issues they felt to be significant. Rather than pre-determining the parameters of the interview exchange, my interview questions were open-ended, and in interviewing, I allowed respondents to interpret questions as they wished. However, of course these exchanges were not free of existing ‘theory’ – the concerns of the research project and the research design inevitably reflected my own ideas and interpretation of the subject matter.

As Ezzy (2002: 10) argues, the practice of grounded theory ‘often appears to proceed on the basis of an assumption that the researcher is a tabula rasa, who will absorb and understand the meanings of the subjects of the research unfettered by any of the researcher’s previous understandings.’ In practice, researchers can never be free of the influence of preconceptions, and need to be conscious of how these preconceptions may influence research. For example, during the course of my fieldwork, I became conscious that I assumed that my PRC respondents had to come to Australia to ‘escape’ the restrictive political climate in their homeland, and had asked questions such as ‘why did you want to get out of China?’ It was only when one interviewee responded animatedly that not everyone wanted to ‘get out’ of China, and that China had an unnecessarily negative reputation in the West, that I realised my preconceptions had shaped my phrasing of interview questions.

Conscious of the potential influence of my existing ideas, in analysing the data, I sought to allow theory to emerge from the data by generating categories from respondents’ own words, before assembling a more abstract or general interpretation of experiences. Following the processes of grounded theory (Creswell 1998), data analysis proceeded from open coding (identifying categories, properties, and dimensions) through axial coding (examining conditions, strategies, and consequences) to selective coding around an emerging story line.

1. **Open coding**

I began data analysis through a detailed line-by-line reading of the interview transcripts, generating initial codes (or categories) based on significant aspects of respondents’ stories, whether they were actions, events, feelings, or circumstances.
Where possible, I labelled the codes using the words of respondents themselves. At this stage, there was a huge number of codes, which (because they were so closely based on respondents’ descriptions) did not necessarily reappear from transcript to transcript. For example, in explaining their reasons for migrating to Australia, interviewees stated that Australia was ‘clean’, had a ‘good environment’, had ‘lots of space’, and was a ‘beautiful country’, just to name a few responses. Although there are obvious similarities between all of these responses, at this stage, I kept them as separate codes in order to reflect respondents’ words as closely as possible. Thus open coding generates ‘representational’ codes (Dey 1999: 121).

2. Axial coding

At this second stage of analysis, I grouped codes together which were conceptually similar or related and gave them a group name. Axial coding involves making connections between codes (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 96), aiming to integrate codes around the axes of central categories (Ezzy 2002: 91). So for example, at this stage, I created a category called ‘Australian environment’, which included the initial codes cited above. After axial coding, I had many fewer codes, and each was broader in scope than the initial categories, as they were one level removed from the words of respondents themselves. At this stage, codes began to perform a heuristic function, as opposed to just a representational one (Dey 1999: 121).

3. Selective coding

Selective coding focuses on selecting core categories which are key to the analysis, systematically relating them to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 97). Thus at this stage, ‘Australian environment’ became one category expressing respondents’ reasons for migration, along with ‘husband’s career’, ‘political repression’, and others. I began to relate the categories to each other, for example, by examining how often each was cited, and which respondents cited which ones, and therefore developing a hierarchy of ‘reasons for migration’.
While these three stages broadly describe the process I followed, in practice, the analysis was less mechanical than the description may imply. While I have distinguished between ‘representational’ and ‘heuristic’ functions of categories, in practice, ‘heuristic’ concerns inevitably invade any attempt at generating purely ‘representational’ categories. As Dey (1999: 146) writes, the ‘code first, think later’ approach cannot normally work where conceptualisation and underlying cognitive models are present even in the most elementary tasks. Dey explains (1999: 258):

Even the activity of indexing [coding] is not aconceptual, as any librarian will testify. An apparently mechanical procedure, such as numbering all lines of text for identification purposes, actually involves conceptualizing text in terms of lines rather than words, sentences, paragraphs or user-defined units of analysis. Categorization may proceed at different levels, with different purposes and degrees of flexibility…but it remains nonetheless a method of conceptualizing the data.

Accordingly, in my project there is a more hermeneutic relationship between theory and data. While grounded theory seeks to derive theory from data, my conclusions reflect a more fluid, continuous movement from pre-existing interpretive frameworks to the data. This is arguably a more accurate description of grounded theory in any case. After all, as Strauss and Corbin (1998: 58) argue, ‘analysis is not a structured, static, or rigid process. Rather it is a free-flowing and creative one in which analysts move quickly back and forth between types of coding, using analytic techniques and procedures freely and in response to the analytic task before analysts’.

Despite this fluidity and the influence of researchers’ preconceptions on data analysis, analysis informed by the principles of grounded theory can be rigorous. Qualitative analysis does not easily conform to the natural science model of rigour, which emphasises internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity, because this model assumes that research findings can accurately reflect an external objective world (Ezzy 2002: 52). Rather, qualitative analysis may be assessed using an ‘interpretive model’ of rigour (Gubrium and Holstein 1997), which emphasises:

- scepticism – of the quality of common sense and quantitative understandings of social life
close scrutiny – getting ‘close’ to the world of the people being studied and noticing the detail of their experiences and interpretations

thick description – research should provide a rich, clear and nuanced description of social life

focus on process – social life as continuously actively constructed as part of a process that constructs and transforms social life

appreciation of subjectivity – social life made up of meanings, interpretations and feelings

tolerance for complexity – social life and contemporary culture are a complex web of significations and interpretations

Allowing theory to emerge from data, grounded theory generates research which is rigorous in the ways outlined above. My data collection and analysis, in seeking to uncover the experiences and interpretations of respondents based on their own accounts, allowed for rich descriptions of respondents’ lives which were understood as complex, changing and a reflection of respondents’ own feelings and interpretations of the social world.

Quantitative Methods and Sources

This thesis extensively uses descriptive statistics, primarily from the Australian Census of Population and Housing and the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA).

Quantitative Data Sources: The Census and LSIA

The Australian Census, conducted every five years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), is the most complete statistical portrait of the nation. It is a vital source of information on migrant populations in Australia, especially their geographic distribution, age and sex, qualifications, labour force activity, income levels, and English proficiency. This thesis uses both published census data and unpublished data purchased from the ABS.
Census data were supplemented with LSIA data, which provide much more detailed information about migrant experiences, not only in Australia but also in their home country. Commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), the LSIA is the most comprehensive survey of migrants in Australia. It surveyed 5,192 primary applicants (the person upon whom the approval to migrate was based), and also included 1,837 migrating unit spouses (partners who were part of the same migration application as primary applicants).

The survey targeted migrants entering Australia between September 1993 and August 1995, surveying them three times: six months (wave 1), 18 months (wave 2) and three and a half years (wave 3) after arrival. Table 1.1 shows the dates of the collection waves of the LSIA.\(^5\)

**Table 1.1: Dates of the Collection Waves of the LSIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1</td>
<td>March 1994 to December 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td>March 1995 to February 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3</td>
<td>March 1997 to February 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DIMIA 2002b

There was some attrition between the Waves of the LSIA. In Waves 2 and 3 of the survey, some respondents were unable to be tracked or refused to be surveyed, while others were overseas or deceased. Consequently, Wave 3 included only 3,752 primary applicants (72.3 per cent of the original sample) and 1,443 spouses (78.6 per cent of the original sample).

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\(^5\) DIMIA also conducted a second LSIA, targeting migrants entering Australia between September 1999 and August 2000. However, I have limited my analysis to the first LSIA, which is more comprehensive than the second: it has a larger sample size (LSIA2 surveyed only 3,124 primary applicants), and surveyed respondents three times as opposed to LSIA2, which only has two waves. Thus LSIA2 only covers migrants’ first 18 months in Australia, while LSIA1 shows experiences over the first three and a half years in the country.
Among Chinese respondents, Wave 1 of the LSIA included 414 primary applicants and 175 spouses from China and Hong Kong. As Table 1.2 shows, the majority of the primary applicants were male, while women comprised most of the spouses.6

Table 1.2: Number of primary applicants and migrating unit spouses from China and Hong Kong by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>China-born</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary applicants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>213</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Migrating unit spouses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Wave 1

The LSIA is an extremely rich dataset and, as discussed in Chapter 4, is used in much of the contemporary research into migrants and employment in Australia. It is particularly valuable in that it allows for a longitudinal comparison of experiences, particularly comparing experiences before and after migration. Thus we are able to compare employment outcomes of migrants in their home country with their outcomes in their first few years in Australia. At each wave of the survey, the LSIA provides detailed information on important labour force variables such as labour force participation, occupation, income, qualifications assessment and use, and job satisfaction. There is also data on health, housing arrangements, use of support services, English language proficiency and learning and perceptions of Australia.

The LSIA allows for detailed comparisons of migrant experiences, both longitudinally (that is, between the waves of the survey, or between the surveys themselves), and between different groups of migrants. However, because there are no data for the

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6 These figures represent the actual number of respondents interviewed in Wave 1 of the LSIA. However, the data presented in this thesis is based on a weighted sample, which more accurately reflects the total population of migrants entering Australia during the target period. Also, where longitudinal data is presented, the sample is restricted to respondents present in each Wave. Consequently, the number of respondents included in the various tables in this thesis will vary.
general Australian population, the LSIA does not allow us to compare migrant experiences with that of the native born. As Cobb-Clark (2001b: 469) notes, ‘While comparisons can be made between different types of immigrants…it is not possible to say anything about immigrant status *per se.*’ Therefore in this thesis I frequently cite LSIA data together with broader ABS data, such as the census and labour force surveys.

Another limitation of the LSIA is its focus on recent migrants only. All LSIA respondents entered Australia in 1993 or later, and reflecting the changes to migration selection criteria, are much more highly educated and in some cases, wealthier, than earlier cohorts of migrants to Australia. Thus the LSIA cannot be used to study ‘migrant experiences’ in general, but only experiences of recent migrants. Again, LSIA data must be supplemented with broader data if we are to understand the experiences of migrant populations in Australia. Thus in this thesis, a combination of LSIA and ABS census data provided a comprehensive portrait of migrant experiences in Australia, allowing for comparisons between different migrant groups (for example, by birthplace and gender) and between migrant groups and the general Australian population.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Throughout this thesis I have used descriptive statistics. LSIA and census data were generally available in SPSS (Statistics Package for the Social Sciences) and Excel formats respectively. While most of the required census data were simply extracted from Excel spreadsheets, analysing LSIA data was more complex. In order to obtain reliable data from the LSIA, I had to select only certain cases, weight them, and frequently re-code variables.

The longitudinal feature of the LSIA is extremely valuable in examining migrants’ experiences in a new country. This thesis frequently compares responses at Wave 1 with those at Wave 3. However, because of the attrition between the waves, I had to limit longitudinal analysis to only respondents present in each wave. Cases also had to be weighted to ensure that they accurately represented the population of migrants.
entering Australia during the target period of the LSIA. Finally, in the course of analysing the survey data, I frequently re-coded complicated variables into more usable ones (for example, re-coding detailed occupational categories into simpler ones), and conducted cross-tabulations to compare experiences by birthplace and gender.

In most of my quantitative data analysis, I have disaggregated data by gender and birthplace (for example, China-born versus Hong Kong-born). Additionally, as LSIA data were divided into primary applicant responses and migrating unit spouse responses, I was able to compare experiences on the basis of this visa applicant status. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 7, this is significant because migrating unit spouses, the majority of whom are women, can have quite different settlement experiences to primary applicants. Where appropriate, I have included data for the whole Australian population for comparative purposes.

**Conclusion**

Research on migration has frequently been divided between qualitative studies based on small, often unrepresentative samples, whose findings are rich in detail but relate only to a specific group of people, and quantitative studies based on large, representative samples which can demonstrate broad-scale trends, but which cannot explain how social life is experienced by people – in other words, the ‘lives behind the numbers’ (Statham et al 1988: 4). In using both in-depth interviews and large-scale quantitative datasets, I have sought to overcome this problem. My qualitative data provide rich, personal accounts of migration and settlement, while the quantitative data provide a broader context within which to interpret and understand my respondents’ experiences.
PART 1

Australian Migration: Economics, Culture and Gender
Migration has been a crucial part of Australia’s modern history. More than ten million migrants have settled in Australia since 1788. Proportionally this is the second highest rate of migration in the world, after Israel (Burnley 2001: 27). Since the beginning of mass migration after the Second World War, migration has accounted for about 40 per cent of Australia’s population growth (Murphy 1997: 1). In 2001, 22 per cent of Australia’s population was born overseas, and 20 per cent spoke a language other than English at home (ABS 2003a).

While Australia is clearly a migrant society, migration has always been greatly contested in national political discourse. Founded on the near genocide of the indigenous population, Australian nationhood has often been ideologically constructed on the denial of cultural difference. While the early colonial period was characterised by great cultural diversity, with British convicts and officials sharing the colonies with continental European settlers, Pacific Islanders, and Asian merchants and sojourners (Birmingham 1999), at the time of Federation in 1901, the new nation was imagined as exclusively
Anglo-Saxon, as symbolised in the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, or the ‘White Australia Policy’. International migration to Australia continued after Federation but was regulated to conform to strict racial criteria, which were gradually loosened over the twentieth century in order to fulfil population targets. By the middle of the twentieth century, official policy was still committed to keeping Australia ‘British’ while simultaneously facilitating the entry of thousands of Eastern and Southern European settlers.

With the formal abolition of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s, governments promoted a new image of Australia as ‘multicultural’, and have since welcomed newcomers regardless of their ethnic background. Consequently, Australia’s non-European population has grown dramatically in the last three decades. However, this has not been uncontroversial, with ‘race debates’ periodically igniting Australia’s political discourse, fuelled by racially-based fears and anxieties over the cultural diversity of contemporary settler arrivals (e.g. Blainey 1984; Hanson 1996).

In addition to the transition from White Australia to multiculturalism, migration policy has also shifted its economic orientation, from its recruitment of unskilled migrants to perform manual labour in the early post-war period to its current emphasis on educational and occupational qualifications. Migrants’ human capital – deliberately ignored until the 1970s – is now the primary basis for migrant selection. Indeed, successfully attracting the world’s highly skilled migrants is now said by governments to be a crucial part of enhancing the Australian economy’s international competitiveness. These policy changes are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The Chinese have played a distinctive role in the history of migration to Australia: their experiences effectively highlight the various phases of modern Australian migration policy. First brought to Australia as cheap ‘coolie’ labour in the mid-nineteenth century and then arriving in large numbers during the Gold Rush, the Chinese – having inspired the White Australia Policy – were subsequently excluded for much of the twentieth century. In the last 20 years however, they have been welcomed as part of Australia’s push for increased skilled migration, which has been drawn primarily from Asia.
This chapter documents the modern history of Chinese migration to Australia over the last 200 years, but focuses particularly on the last 20 years, when numbers of Chinese entrants escalated dramatically, especially from Hong Kong and mainland China. This is followed by a profile of my respondents, women from Hong Kong and China who provide personal narratives of contemporary Chinese migrant experiences in Australia.

Modern International Chinese Migration

_Throughout China’s history, there have been peoples who have become Chinese as well as Chinese who have become other peoples, both within and outside China’s long and moveable borders. Never, however, have the numbers of Chinese ready to become other peoples been so great as during the twentieth century._

_(Wang Gung-Wu 1998: 13)_

The modern Chinese diaspora is one of the largest and most geographically dispersed in the world. The PRC Government estimates that there are 30 million ethnic Chinese living outside of China (Thunø 2001: 910), and they are to be found on every continent in the world. In some countries, Chinese communities number in the millions and comprise a substantial portion of the national population, for example, in Malaysia, Indonesia and other South-east Asian nations. In many Western countries, such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, they are among the largest and longest-established non-English speaking migrant groups.

Migration has long been a feature of Chinese life. As Wickberg writes (1994: 68), ‘The Chinese are among the world’s great migrating peoples. Indeed, the history of their country can be seen as a process of migration, settlement, and control over the region that is now China across the span of many centuries.’ The modern history of China has been characterised by incessant upheaval, associated with Western and Japanese imperialism, popular rebellions, dynasty collapses and transitions, warlord struggles, civil warfare, and most recently, the turbulent history of the People’s Republic of China. Population
pressures, food shortages and poverty have also been perennial features of life for the majority of the Chinese populace. Migration, either internally within China, or abroad, has been a common means of adapting to this political turmoil and economic hardship.

Many of China’s emigrants have historically left from the southern-most province of Guangdong. This coastal area had most exposure to Western influences during the nineteenth century, and was also a centre of political refuge for rebellious armies and defeated emperors, who often had few reasons to remain in China (Choi 1975: 4). And, like other areas in China, southern Chinese villages were subject to the political and economic hardships of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This period marks the beginning of modern Chinese migration to Australia. At the end of convict transportation, Chinese were brought to Australia as ‘coolie’ labour in the 1840s. These were primarily men of peasant background, landless labourers and the urban poor who accepted contracts to work abroad for a fixed period (Fitzgerald 1997; Wang 1991). The discovery of gold in the 1850s brought thousands more from southern China and Hong Kong, hoping to make their fortunes on the goldfields of New South Wales and Victoria. The 1861 Colonial Census recorded 38,258 China-born persons in Australia, comprising 3.4 per cent of the total population. At this time the Chinese were the second largest migrant group after those from the British Isles (DIMIA 2003c).

In the 1880s, as gold-mining declined, the Chinese population began pursuing other forms of employment. Market gardening became the most important occupation, accounting for around 30 per cent of all working Chinese males in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland by 1901 (Choi 1975: 29). With the increasing urbanisation of the Chinese population, occupations such as cabinet-making, laundry and produce-distributing also became important in the late nineteenth century. By the mid-1880s Chinese workshops accounted for about one quarter of all the workshops in Sydney (Fitzgerald 1997: 84).

In the wake of the Gold Rush, anti-Chinese legislation was introduced by the colonies to curb the level of Chinese migration, and the enactment of the White Australia Policy in
1901 decisively ended Chinese entry to Australia. While some categories of Chinese—such as students, merchants and chefs—were exempted from the new law (Choi 1975: 41), for the vast majority of Chinese, the door to the ‘new gold mountain’ was now closed. Consequently, the China-born population dwindled from 29,907 in 1901 to 6,404 in 1947 (DIMIA 2003c).

It was not until 1950 that Chinese migration was re-established, with the introduction of the Colombo Plan, which provided educational opportunities for Commonwealth nations in the region. The Plan saw Chinese students arrive from South-east Asia and Hong Kong, many of whom stayed or returned permanently to Australia in the 1970s, eventually playing a significant role in the leadership of the Chinese community in Australia, particularly in Sydney (Fitzgerald 1997: 49).

Until the latter half of the twentieth century, Chinese migration was overwhelmingly male. The restriction of female migration was enforced in both the sending and receiving countries. In China, traditional family practices and the importance of lineage meant that women were forbidden to leave because of the threat this would pose to continuing the family line in the ancestral village (Choi 1975: 13). Male migration was expected to be temporary, with earnings remitted to the home village and regular visits home to the family. This became known as the ‘commuting’ or ‘sojourning’ system, whereby migration was not for settlement, but for the accumulation of wealth for the family (Choi 1975; Rolls 1992; Wang 2000).

In Australia, a 1905 amendment to the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act forbade the migration of wives and dependents of existing migrants. Only wives of well-established merchants were admitted, and then only for short periods, usually six months. In some cases, wives of Chinese migrants were deported (Choi 1975: 40). While the government reasoned that such a restriction was necessary to prevent the escalation of non-European populations in Australia, in the case of the Chinese, this would have been highly unlikely; regardless of prohibitions on female migrants, tradition dictated that Chinese women rarely left their home villages.
Chinese women did not begin to arrive in Australia in substantial numbers until the late 1950s. The Chinese Communist government’s virtual abolition of private land rights had disrupted traditional family-lineage inheritance practices, and restrictions on mobility ended the traditional sojourning pattern, sparking the permanent emigration of whole families. Concurrently, the Australian Government decided to grant naturalisation rights to the Chinese, allowing for sponsorship of family members to migrate (Choi 1975: 57, 63).

Therefore, the Chinese population in Australia was characterised by a dramatic gender imbalance well into the twentieth century, as Table 2.1 records. During the nineteenth century, Chinese migration was virtually entirely male, and the greater gender balance of the early twentieth century is largely a product of the significant decline in male migration.

Table 2.1: Number of Chinese in Australia by gender, 1861-1966

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Females as % of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>38,247</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38,258</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>28,307</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28,351</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>38,274</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>38,533</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>35,523</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>35,821</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>29,153</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>29,627</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>21,856</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>22,753</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>16,011</td>
<td>1,146</td>
<td>17,157</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>9,311</td>
<td>1,535</td>
<td>10,846</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>6,594</td>
<td>2,550</td>
<td>9,144</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>9,150</td>
<td>3,728</td>
<td>12,878</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>14,237</td>
<td>6,145</td>
<td>20,382</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>15,406</td>
<td>7,875</td>
<td>23,281</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Choi 1975: 22, 42

In the 1970s, after the dismantling of the White Australia Policy and the Australian Government’s formal recognition of the PRC, Chinese migration increased rapidly in
numbers as well as in diversity. The end of the Vietnam War saw thousands of refugees arriving in Australia, many of ethnic Chinese background. And the increasing emphasis placed on professional skills in Australia’s migration program also facilitated the migration of middle-class Chinese from Hong Kong and other industrialised East Asian countries. Thus Chinese migration spanned a wide spectrum, from the ‘boat people’ of Vietnam to the wealthy ‘yacht people’ of Hong Kong and Taiwan (Fitzgerald 1997: 50).

Today, Chinese migration comprises a significant component of the Australian migration program, with Chinese arriving from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and others parts of the global Chinese diaspora. In the 2001 census 556,600 persons claimed Chinese ancestry in Australia, 74 per cent of whom were first generation migrants (ABS 2003e).¹ Chinese was recorded as the most commonly spoken non-English language in Australia, with more than 400,000 persons speaking Chinese at home (primarily Cantonese or Mandarin) (ABS 2003a).² As the two largest Chinese populations in Australia, this thesis focuses on migrants from China and Hong Kong. The following sections outline the recent history of migration to Australia from Hong Kong and China.

**Emigration from Hong Kong: Escaping the 1997 handover**

Modern Hong Kong itself is an immigrant society, comprised largely of mainland Chinese emigrants leaving China to escape war and turmoil. This was particularly the case after the Second World War and the Communist victory in China in 1949, when tens of thousands of Chinese emigrated to Hong Kong. As a British colony (from 1841 to 1997), Hong Kong offered greater stability and economic opportunities to those leaving the mainland. Bringing with them skills, capital and labour-power, these mainlanders fuelled the colony’s industrialisation and modernisation (Haggard and Cheng 1987: 107).

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¹ Of those who claimed Chinese ancestry in 2001, 25 per cent had been born in China and 11 per cent in Hong Kong, followed by Malaysia (10%), Vietnam (8%), Indonesia (4%), Singapore (4%), Taiwan (3%) and Cambodia (2%). 26 per cent had been born in Australia (ABS 2003e).
While Hong Kong’s population had been built on mass immigration, the 1980s marked a new phase in population movement, when the looming handover of Hong Kong from Britain to the PRC sparked a mass *emigration* from the colony. Hong Kong residents had a long-standing mistrust of the mainland Communist government, and the 1984 Joint Declaration of the British and Chinese governments regarding the 1997 transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese control generated a crisis of confidence in the colony (Findlay and Li 1998; Lary *et al* 1994). Concerns were further escalated by the Tiananmen Square massacre of pro-democracy protesters in 1989, which shocked the Hong Kong population, and sparked demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong residents.

Although the Chinese government had agreed to preserve Hong Kong’s legal, economic and social systems for 50 years under the ‘one country, two systems’ formula, many Hong Kong residents feared that the handover would seriously disrupt life in the colony. There was widespread concern that the transfer would disrupt social, political, and financial institutions, create problems with legal and administrative structures, and threaten civil liberties, all of which would negatively impact the economy, the education system, and Hong Kong’s way of life generally (Chan 1990; Cheng and Lo 1995; Mak 1991; Wong 1993).

In this climate of uncertainty, thousands of residents began leaving the colony, at least for long enough to secure citizenship in a Western country, as an ‘insurance policy’ should their fears about Chinese rule be realised. The Hong Kong government estimates that the level of emigration increased from an average of approximately 20,000 per year between 1980 and 1986, to around 60,000 in the early 1990s, peaking at 66,000 in 1992 (Skeldon 1995). The significance of the handover in emigration decisions is evident in Pe-Pua *et al*’s study (1996) of Hong Kong migrants in Australia, 83 per cent of whom stated that their reason for leaving was based on the political uncertainty surrounding the handover. Many respondents cited the Tiananmen incident as a portent of the type of unrest that could occur after 1997 (Pe-Pua *et al* 1996: 22). Similarly, in the LSIA, 70 per cent of primary applicants from Hong Kong cited ‘climate, political stability’ as a reason for

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2 In 2001, Chinese languages eclipsed Italian, which had been the most commonly spoken non-English
CHAPTER 2  CHINESE MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA AND MY RESPONDENTS: A PROFILE

migrating to Australia, while 26 per cent cited ‘escape of war or political situation’ (unpublished LSIA1 data).³

This emigration was concentrated among the educated middle-class, who had had the most direct exposure to Western countries, for example through tourism or family members studying overseas, and were able to secure visas elsewhere. A 1990s survey of more than 1,500 Hong Kong residents showed that well-educated professionals in their 20s and 30s, along with those anticipating a worsening political, economic and social situation, were those most likely to intend emigrating (Lam, Fan and Skeldon 1995). By the late 1980s, there was widespread concern about this unprecedented brain drain, with fears that the large outflow of professional skills and investment would threaten Hong Kong’s economy and quality of life (Mak 2001: 3).

Emigration was so widespread that by the 1990s, a ‘culture of emigration’ had emerged in Hong Kong (Inglis and Wu 1994; Lary et al 1994). While this culture had been evident in Chinese sojourning patterns of the nineteenth century, modern information flows and personal mobility developed it even further in late twentieth century Hong Kong. Lary et al (1994: 414) argue that an ‘emigration industry’ developed in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s, offering all manner of goods and services, from magazines devoted to the problems of migration to specialist consultants for prospective emigrants. In the 1990s, they explain, there were ‘daily articles on Australia and Canada in the Hong Kong press, with such headings as “News from the Maple Woods”’ (Lary et al 1994: 414). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, more than 140 migration agencies were established in Hong Kong, assisting residents with attaining foreign citizenship (Findlay and Li 1998: 696).

Emigration directly or indirectly affected so many people’s lives in Hong Kong that ‘new social forms’ developed, involving farewell parties and often altered household patterns for the relatives remaining in Hong Kong (Lary et al 1994: 413).

³ In answering this question in the LSIA, respondents could cite multiple responses. The four most commonly cited responses, in order, were ‘Climate, political stability’; ‘Better future for family’; ‘To join family/relatives’; and ‘Escape of war or political situation’ (unpublished LSIA1 data).
Of the emigrés who left Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s, the vast majority settled in either Canada, Australia or the US (Mak 2001; Skeldon 1995). In choosing their destination, many viewed Australia and Canada as more relaxed than the US, offering a safer environment for raising families. Australia also had the added advantages of a mild climate and relative geographic proximity to Asia.

Hong Kong emerged as one of Australia’s top ten migrant source countries to Australia in 1986-87, with a settler intake of 3,400. Migration from Hong Kong peaked between 1990 and 1992, when it was the second largest source of migrants after the UK (BIPR 1994). More than 75,000 Hong Kong settler arrivals entered Australia between 1984 and 1996, representing the largest source of skilled Asian migration to Australia (DIMIA 2003c).

The Hong Kong migrants who arrived from the mid-1980s may be contrasted with earlier waves of migrants from the colony. Previous generations of Hong Kong migrants tended to have arrived under the family reunion program, and were less educated and skilled, or were former students who had studied in Australian universities. By the late 1980s, the majority of Hong Kong migrants were independent migrants admitted on the basis of their credentials, skills, or wealth (Pookong and Skeldon 1994: 185).

However, as seen in Table 2.2, not all of these migrants have stayed in Australia, with the 2001 census recording 67,122 Hong Kong-born persons in Australia (ABS 2001). The census figures below suggest that net migration from Hong Kong has stabilised. Fuelled by concerns over the 1997 handover, the mass emigration from Hong Kong was a concentrated and finite phenomenon which has now ended.
Table 2.2: Hong Kong-born population of Australia, 1901-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census year</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1,554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>3,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>4,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>5,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>8,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>15,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>28,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>57,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>68,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>67,122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zhao 2000b; ABS 2002

Emigration from China: The pursuit of freedom and opportunity

For much of the latter half of the twentieth century, emigration from the PRC was virtually impossible. The Chinese government strictly monitored individuals’ movements even within China through the Household Registration System, which forbade people from unauthorised travel outside their defined region of residence. Attempting to leave the country was a punishable offence.

However, as the Chinese government began easing restrictions in the 1980s, emigration from China became a possibility for some. By the late 1980s, the government’s ‘open door policy’ and the increasing world demand for a skilled workforce led to the widespread emigration of students in their 20s and 30s, many of whom would never
return to China. The students were drawn to the West not only by educational opportunities, but also by the promise of political and personal freedoms, career opportunities and a better life (Fung and Jie 1996: 4).

Thus in the late 1980s, Australia received its first substantial wave of migration from China since the nineteenth-century Gold Rush. Before 1988, there were less than 38,000 mainland born Chinese in Australia (Fung and Jie 1996: 1). However, with the more open climate on the mainland, the Australian educational services industry recruited thousands of Chinese students to Australia, mainly to study English. After the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, the Hawke Labor Government granted special permanent visas to the approximately 20,000 PRC students in Australia, and about 22,000 more arrived in the 12 months after the incident, most of whom were also eventually granted permanent residency (Fung and Jie 1996: 1). These former students and their families – sometimes known as the ‘Tiananmen Square generation’ (Ommundsen 2001) – now make up an important segment of the PRC-born population in Australia.

Among mainland Chinese migrants to Australia surveyed in the LSIA, political factors constituted the primary reason for emigrating: 55 per cent of PRC primary applicants stated ‘climate, political stability’ as a reason for migrating to Australia, while 22 per cent cited, ‘dislike of social conditions in former country’ (unpublished LSIA1 data).4

As Table 2.3 shows, the 2001 census recorded 142,780 China-born persons in Australia (ABS 2003a), an increase of 29 per cent from the 1996 census, and a 46 per cent increase from the 1991 census (DIMIA 2003c). In the space of just one decade, the China-born population of Australia almost doubled in size, to become the sixth most common birthplace of the Australian population in 2001 (ABS 2003a).5

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4 Family-oriented reasons were the other prominent responses, with a substantial proportion of respondents citing ‘To join family/relatives’ and ‘Better future for family’ as reasons for migrating to Australia (unpublished LSIA1 data).

5 The top five birthplaces in 2001 were Australia, the UK, New Zealand, Italy and Vietnam (ABS 2003a).
Table 2.3: China-born population of Australia, 1861-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census year</th>
<th>China-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>38,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>28,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>38,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>36,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>29,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>20,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>15,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>8,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>6,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>10,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>14,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>17,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>17,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>19,542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>25,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>37,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>77,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>111,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>142,780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zhao 2000a; ABS 2002

**Chinese Migrants in Australia:**

**A demographic, geographic and human capital profile**

Australia’s Hong Kong and mainland Chinese populations share many characteristics apart from their ethnicity. Both are relatively recent arrivals in Australia, having migrated in the last 20 years, are generally well-educated, and are concentrated in large cities. However, they differ in the mode in which they migrated to Australia, with Hong Kong migrants tending to arrive as skilled migrants while PRC migrants are more likely to arrive as family migrants or students. Their settlement patterns within cities are also distinct, with Hong Kong migrants residing in more affluent suburbs relative to mainland
Chinese. The following profile, drawn on data from the 2001 census and the LSIA, provides a context within which to interpret Chinese migrants’ settlement experiences in Australia.

The Hong Kong-born population is one of the youngest in Australia, with a median age (in 2001) of 33.9 years, compared with 46.0 years for all overseas-born persons, and 35.6 for the total Australian population. The China-born population is older, with a median age of 40.9 years (DIMIA 2003c). In both communities, women outnumber men: females comprise 51.5 per cent of the Hong Kong-born population, and 53.4 per cent of the PRC-born population (DIMIA 2003c). This partly reflects the ‘astronaut family’ phenomenon common in Chinese communities, whereby some men spend much of their time continuing their work in the home country while their wives and children live in Australia (see Pe-Pua et al 1996).

Hong Kong and PRC migrants tend to migrate to Australia under different visa categories. As Chapter 3 explains, migrants to Australia enter via three main streams: family reunion (the preferential family category), skilled (comprising the concessional family, business skills and employer nomination, and independent categories), and humanitarian. Among LSIA respondents, as Table 2.4 shows, Hong Kong migrants were more likely to enter in the skill stream than in the family stream, while the reverse was true for mainland migrants. In particular, the vast majority of mainland Chinese women entered through the family stream. The proportion of humanitarian entrants was negligible.7

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6 This is higher than for the total Australian population, which is 50.6 per cent female (ABS 2003a).
7 The LSIA does not include those who arrive on student visas, which is a common mode of entry for Chinese migrants in Australia.
Table 2.4: Visa categories of primary applicants from Hong Kong and China (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa Category</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
<th>China-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (N=147)</td>
<td>Female (N=115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferential Family</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concessional Family</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business skills &amp; employer nomination</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Wave 1

Migrants from China and Hong Kong tend to be highly educated, with a sizeable proportion in both groups coming from professional backgrounds, with high levels of qualifications and work experience. Table 2.5 shows 2001 census data on the educational qualifications of migrants from China and Hong Kong – in both cases, the proportion with higher qualifications was approximately double that of the total Australian population. Chinese women in particular were very highly educated compared to the total Australian female population.

Table 2.5: Highest educational qualification of migrants from Hong Kong and China, and total Australian population (aged 15 years and over), 2001 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
<th>China-born</th>
<th>Total Australian population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (N=29,343)</td>
<td>Female (N=31,603)</td>
<td>Male (N=62,471)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree or higher</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma, Advanced</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No post-school qualifications</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unpublished ABS census data
Recent migrants from Hong Kong and China are even more highly educated. In the LSIA, as Table 2.6 shows, the vast majority of primary applicants from Hong Kong and China had post-secondary qualifications.

### Table 2.6: Qualifications of primary applicants from Hong Kong and China (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Qualification</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
<th>China-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree or higher</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma, Advanced Diploma or Certificate</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No post-school qualifications</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N=566

Source: LSIA1, Wave 1

Despite these high levels of education, migrants from both Hong Kong and China tend to have lower employment rates than the total Australian population, as Table 2.7 shows. In particular, PRC women had an employment rate in 2001 that was 10 percentage points lower than that of all Australian females. The reasons for these low employment rates are explored in Chapters 5 to 7, which present more detailed data on Chinese migrants’ employment experiences.

### Table 2.7: Labour force status of migrants from Hong Kong and China, and total Australian population (aged 15 years and over), by gender, 2001 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour force status</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
<th>China-born</th>
<th>Total Australian population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in labour force</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2003a
As seen in Table 2.8, migrants from both Hong Kong and China have settled primarily in Australia’s most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria, followed by Queensland and Western Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
<th>China-born</th>
<th>Total Australian population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DIMIA 2003c; ABS 2002

Like most migrants, those from Hong Kong and China have overwhelmingly settled in large cities, in particular, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Overall, as Table 2.9 shows, more than half of both populations reside in Sydney, although they are found in different areas of Sydney. The Hong Kong migrants are concentrated in the affluent northern areas which have a higher than average index of socio-economic advantage, while the PRC migrants are more likely to be found in Sydney’s western and south-western areas which are more likely to have a lower than average index of socio-economic advantage.
Table 2.9: Selected geographical settlement data, Hong Kong- and China-born persons, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
<th>Advantage/ disadvantage of LGA</th>
<th>China-born</th>
<th>Advantage/ Disadvantage of LGA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% living in Sydney</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 5 local government areas of residence in Sydney</td>
<td>Hornsby 1143.28 Canterbury 964.88</td>
<td>Baulkham Hills 1142.48 Parramatta 1030.64</td>
<td>Ku-ring-gai 1213.44 Auburn 948.08</td>
<td>Ryde 1102.08 Fairfield 915.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Healy and Birrell 2003: 66; ABS 2002; ABS 2003f

*The index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage is part of the Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) constructed by the ABS using 2001 Census data. Scores have a mean of 1,000: the higher the score, the greater the level of advantage and the lower the level of disadvantage.

The contrast between the affluent suburbs where Hong Kong migrants are concentrated and the lower income suburbs of the PRC migrants points to the divergent socio-economic profile of these two groups. While both groups are generally well-educated, this does not translate into similar earnings profiles. The relatively high levels of income enjoyed by the Hong Kong migrants are not generally shared by the PRC migrants. This divergence is a major theme of this thesis, and is explored more fully in Chapter 5.

**My Respondents: A demographic, geographic and human capital profile**

As described in Chapter 1, I interviewed 44 Chinese women residing in Sydney, 22 from Hong Kong and 22 from China. This section introduces my respondents by presenting basic data on their age, duration of settlement in Australia, area of residence, and educational qualifications. The significance of these characteristics will be discussed in Chapters 5 to 8, which document and analyse Chinese women’s settlement experiences in Australia.
The respondents were aged between 29 and 54 at the time of interview, with the Hong Kong respondents generally older than those from China. While the majority of the Hong Kong respondents were in their 40s and 50s, all of the PRC respondents were in their 30s or 40s. The age profile of my PRC respondents resembles that of the general China-born population in Australia, but my Hong Kong respondents are considerably older than the general Hong Kong-born population, whose median age in 2001 was 34 years.\(^8\)

Of the 44 respondents, the majority (34) were married or in a de facto relationship at the time of interview. Five were divorced, and the remainder had never been married. Altogether, 35 respondents had children: 19 had only one child, 12 had two children, and four had three children. In age, the children ranged from babies under one year old to adults in their late 20s.

Reflecting the total Hong Kong and mainland Chinese populations in Australia, my Hong Kong respondents tended to have been in Australia longer than their mainland counterparts. While the median length of time the PRC women had spent in Australia was five years, for the Hong Kong women, it was 12 years.

The Hong Kong and PRC respondents followed different paths of entry into Australia, with the Hong Kong women more likely to have migrated through the skill stream and the PRC women more commonly arriving through the family or student streams. Overall, women arriving through family reunion tended to be the primary applicant for migration, mostly because their husbands were already in Australia (often having entered through the skill stream themselves) and sponsored their migration. However, those arriving through the skill stream were more likely to be spouses of primary applicants.

It is important to resist drawing direct links between migrants’ visa category and their level of occupational skill. Many skilled migrants – particularly women – enter through family reunion because under the migration admissions regimes of many countries,

\(^8\) This biased sample is a product of the snowball recruitment technique, whereby existing respondents recruited others within their peer groups, thus resulting in a certain degree of similarity in some demographic characteristics. While the bias may be unfortunate, achieving an accurate representative sample is generally not possible with such a small sample size.
including Australia, it is generally easier to be sponsored by a family member than to demonstrate compliance with the strict and complex criteria of skill stream migration (see Kofman 2000; Man 1995). Similarly, student visas are generally easier to obtain than skilled visas – most of my respondents arriving as students did so in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre, when the Australian Government granted thousands of permanent visas to mainland students, as discussed above. PRC nationals arriving as students in Australia are generally already tertiary-educated, and enrol in English or post-graduate courses. Therefore, the skill profile of my respondents does not equate simply to the proportion arriving as skilled migrants. Indeed, as discussed below, my PRC respondents were more highly educated than the Hong Kong respondents, even though the Hong Kong women were more likely to have arrived through the skilled migration program.

My respondents lived throughout the Sydney metropolitan area, though the Hong Kong women were concentrated in the affluent northern part of Sydney, while those from China were more likely to reside in the low- to middle-income western and inner-western suburbs. This is in line with residency patterns of the total Hong Kong and PRC migrant population in Australia, as seen in the 2001 census (see Table 2.9 above).

Hong Kong and PRC respondents also differed in their educational profiles, with the mainland women generally more highly educated than their Hong Kong counterparts. Of the PRC respondents, only four did not hold a post-secondary qualification, compared to ten of the Hong Kong respondents.

Table 2.10 presents a summary of the characteristics of the Hong Kong and PRC respondents.
Table 2.10: Summary of profile of Hong Kong and PRC Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Hong Kong Respondents</th>
<th>PRC Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( N=22 )</td>
<td>( N=22 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Mostly 40s and 50s</td>
<td>Mostly 30s and 40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median length of residence in Australia</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most common visa categories</td>
<td>Skill (Independent) and Family Reunion</td>
<td>Family Reunion and Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most common local government areas of residence</td>
<td>Baulkham Hills and Ryde</td>
<td>Parramatta, Ashfield and Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most common educational qualifications</td>
<td>High school certificate and Bachelor degree</td>
<td>Bachelor degree and Diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even within this preliminary profile of my Hong Kong and PRC respondents, we can begin to see different patterns in the settlement experiences of these two groups. In particular, the Hong Kong women generally live in more affluent areas relative to the PRC women, despite the fact that the latter group was much more highly educated. However, the Hong Kong women were generally older and had been in Australia for longer than their mainland counterparts, which may partly explain these patterns.

**Conclusion**

Chinese migration has been part of Australian history for the last 200 years. However, the last few decades have seen a dramatic escalation of Chinese migration to Australia, particularly from China and Hong Kong. The end of the White Australia Policy, the transfer of Hong Kong sovereignty from Britain to China, and the easing of migration policies on the mainland have all produced the recent mass migration of Chinese to Australia. Largely excluded for much of the twentieth century, Chinese now comprise a substantial portion of Australia’s migration intake, and have significantly enhanced the cultural diversity of Australia’s major cities, especially Sydney.
As primarily recent arrivals, Chinese migrants tend to be from well-educated, professional backgrounds, with a strong history of labour force participation. As the next chapter explains, Australian governments have tightened migration policy over the last 20 years to increase the human capital levels of new entrants. The human capital profile of Chinese migrants reflects this policy trend. Thus the class origins of most Chinese migrants are very different to those of earlier generations of European migrants, who tended to be from working-class or peasant backgrounds. This is significant because as educated professionals, Chinese migrants often have dramatically different experiences of migration and settlement into Australian society relative to earlier migrants recruited to perform unskilled labour. For example, Chinese women, accustomed to playing an active role in the labour market, generally experience migration very differently to migrant women who had never done paid work before arriving in Australia. This is explored in Chapter 7, which examines Chinese women’s reorientation from the world of work to that of the family.

However, the Chinese are not a homogeneous group, as shown above in the basic profiles of Hong Kong and PRC migrants. These two groups differ in their mode of arrival in Australia, with Hong Kong migrants more likely to enter via skill-based migration, while PRC migrants rely more on family-based and student migration. This partly reflects their different levels of economic resources, also seen in their patterns of geographical settlement in Sydney. While the Hong Kong migrants are concentrated in affluent areas of the city, PRC migrants are more likely to be found in low to middle-income suburbs, despite their professional backgrounds. As Chapter 5 explains, migrating to Australia has a different impact on the social status of the two groups, with PRC migrants often experiencing acute downward mobility, while the effect on Hong Kong migrants is much milder. Thus it is difficult to speak about a unitary ‘Chinese’ population in Australia. While they share a common ethnicity, PRC and Hong Kong migrants are culturally different in important ways. These cultural distinctions can mean dramatically different settlement experiences. As Chapter 6 explains, the two groups, while both Chinese, have very different cultural repertoires, which lead to different employment patterns.
This chapter has provided a historical, demographic, geographical and human capital profile of Chinese migrants in Australia, providing a context within which we can understand the settlement experiences of women migrants from Hong Kong and China. It has also identified the key concepts and variables which will become significant in the rest of this thesis. In particular, human capital, culture and gender are the significant ideas which shape my analysis in the following chapters. The next chapter highlights the importance of these three concepts in the history of Australian migration policy over the last century.
CHAPTER 3

AUSTRALIAN MIGRATION POLICY

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN MIGRANT SELECTION

Since Federation, Australian governments’ migration policies have profoundly shaped the growth and character of the nation’s population. This chapter documents the evolution of Australian migration policy over the last century, showing how governments have sought to meet economic and cultural objectives by adjusting migration selection criteria. Key criteria have been applicants’ labour-power, ethnicity and gender: over the last century, governments have altered (or maintained) these criteria in accordance with broader policy objectives.

Throughout Australia’s modern history, migration has been closely tied to governments’ economic objectives. The majority of migrants have been selected on the basis of their labour-power. However, over the last 50 years, governments have dramatically changed the skill profile of migrants. In the early post-war period, the demand for unskilled labour for industrial production and construction generated the so-called ‘factory fodder’ migration 1950s and 1960s. Since the 1980s however, migration policy has encouraged the entry of skilled professionals. Skilled migrants, governments now argue, are crucial to enhancing the Australian economy’s international competitiveness in an age where
high quality human capital is said to be the key to the success of organisations and nations. The first part of this chapter outlines the shift in policy emphasis towards skilled migration. Chapter 4 discusses the implications of this shift for migrants’ employment experiences in Australia today.

Another major change in twentieth-century migration policy has been the shift from the White Australia Policy to a ‘colour-blind’ approach. Australian governments’ over-riding cultural objective after Federation was to maintain the ‘Britishness’ of the new nation; thus all non-Britons (and later non-Europeans) were excluded from migrating to Australia for most of the century. Since the 1970s, under the banner of multiculturalism, migration policy no longer discriminates against applicants on the basis of ethnicity. However, as discussed in the second part of this chapter, the legacy of White Australia may be more profound than official multiculturalism would suggest. These ideas are elaborated in Chapter 6, which discusses the role of ‘human-cultural capital’ in the settlement experiences of Chinese migrants in Australia.

Despite these changes in skill and ethnic criteria, the last part of this chapter shows that there has been profound continuity in the gendered effects of migration policy. Women have historically migrated as dependents and spouses, and continue to do so today. In part this gender difference in migrants’ mode of entry into Australia reflects preferences in migration admissions policies. Today, while migration policy has no explicit gender stipulations, the government’s definition of ‘skilled’ migration still results in more men being admitted on economic grounds while more women are admitted for family-related reasons. The gendered nature of migration has profound implications for migrants’ subsequent settlement in Australia, as Chapter 7 shows.

**The Shift to Skilled Migration**

While governments have always used migration to recruit labour required by the economy, the type of workers selected has changed dramatically in recent decades. In the
early years of mass migration after World War II, governments virtually ignored migrants’ overseas-gained qualifications and skills. Assuming that the Australian economy required unskilled labourers, they recruited migrants to fulfil this role, without consideration of their previous work experience or skills. Between 1947 and 1952, Displaced Persons from refugee camps in were classified as ‘labourers’ if they were male, and ‘domestics’ if they were female, regardless of their occupational background (Jupp 2002: 17).

During this period, migrants were allocated to unskilled jobs in manufacturing, construction, agriculture and mining, and their employment was heavily regulated. The first waves of post-war refugees were brought out under work-contracts: in return for a free passage, they had to work for two years in employment designated by the Australian government. Thus the government could direct migrants to work in its own preferred projects (for example, the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme) or advertise the availability of migrant labour to employers (Collins 1991: 54; Ozolins 1993: 36). Governments were guided by executives from the building, shipping, airlines, iron and steel and automotive components industries, who participated in migration planning and advisory councils, ensuring that new entrants would fill gaps in the labour market (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988).

This preference for manual workers lasted from 1947 to 1972, resulting in high numbers of European migrants being employed as tradesmen or labourers. By 1976, 61 per cent of male employed Greeks were in these occupations, 63 per cent of Italians, 77 per cent of Yugoslavs, 69 per cent of Maltese and 61 per cent of Poles. This compared with 37 per cent of the Australian-born and 45 per cent of the British-born. At the other end of the occupational spectrum, 10 per cent of the Australian-born were professionals, but, for example, less than 2 per cent of the Greeks (Jupp 2002: 30).

Despite their employment in low skilled occupations, these early post-war migrants often had high levels of educational and occupational qualifications. Collins (1991: 56) notes that while only 7.4 per cent of Eastern European refugees were ‘labourers’ prior to migration, in Australia, approximately 60 per cent found themselves in labouring jobs.
‘University professors, surgeons, lawyers and artists were to be found on the production lines, digging ditches, sweating it out in the coke ovens or labouring in the tunnels,’ he writes (Collins 1991: 56). In fact, throughout the post-war period, the migrant labour force has on the whole, always had higher levels of qualifications than the native-born (Hassan and Jamrozik 1996: 6).

However, migrants’ qualifications were rarely considered or recognised until the last two decades. Since the 1980s, Australian governments, like those of many other advanced industrial countries, have increasingly emphasised the importance of attracting the most highly qualified migrants because of the assumed economic benefits they bring. As Rosewarne (2001: 73) puts it, ‘Migration policy has been formulated to facilitate the admission of the cadres of international capital, with managers and professionals enjoying ease of entry.’ Across the Western world, the comparatively liberal admissions regimes that existed prior to the 1970s have been replaced with much more restrictive regimes (Rosewarne 2001). How has such a radical shift in policy occurred? The next section documents policy changes in Australia since the 1970s, showing how governments have gradually adapted policy instruments to refine their capacity to select skilled applicants for migration to Australia.

The 1970s: Introducing skills in admissions criteria

The Whitlam Labor government (1972-75) introduced the idea that migrants should possess skills in demand in Australia. Under the Structured Selection Assessment System (SSAS), migration officials were instructed to use an approved list of occupations in demand to rate applicants on a five-point scale from ‘very good’ to ‘not favourable.’ The other part of the assessment considered personal and social factors, including attitudes, lifestyle, and appearance, using the same five-point scale (Hawkins 1989: 105).

However, as Reitz notes, this list of occupations in demand did not actually result in more highly skilled applicants being chosen for migration. Rather, occupations in demand often tended to be low in skills. ‘In fact, the selection criteria based on
occupational demand resulted in many highly skilled and professional applicants not meeting the test. Many professional categories in Australia were in a state of oversupply’ (Reitz 1998: 80).

In 1979, the Fraser Coalition government (1975-83) replaced the SSAS with a more detailed points system, the Numerical Multi-factor Assessment System (NUMAS), which was intended to give greater weight to absolute skill levels. However in fact, even the NUMAS gave only a few points for high skill levels or education. Out of 100 points, only ten were based on skills and education. A university-educated professional would receive ten points for these qualifications, while a person who attended but did not complete secondary school, working in a clerical occupation, would receive five points – overall the difference was not very significant (Reitz 1998: 81).

Overall, the selection systems introduced in the 1970s had few major effects on the skill profile of migrants. In part this is because the economic recession of the 1970s dramatically reduced overall migration levels. Birrell and Birrell (1987: 100) show that the average skill levels of migrants increased only because professionals were least affected by the reduced migration admissions. By the end of the decade, skilled migrants still comprised only a minority of the intake, with family migrants making up the bulk of entries.

The 1980s: Economic rationalism and human capital in migrant selection

Family reunion migrants continued to dominate the migration program during the 1980s, though the proportion of those entering in the family stream fell from around 80 per cent of the annual intake at the beginning of the decade to around 60 per cent by the end. Meanwhile, migration on economic or skill grounds rose from around 20 to 40 per cent of the program (Ruddock 2002: 3).
In 1982 the NUMAS was replaced by the Migrant Assessment System, which allocated more points to applicants’ skills and did result in the entry of substantially larger numbers of skilled migrants (Reitz 1998: 81). Between 1984-85 and 1988-89, there was a six-fold increase in the number of skilled migrants and a ten-fold increase in business migration, compared with only a 55 per cent increase in family migration. Brewer notes that in 1988-89, the migration intake was, on average, ‘27 per cent more skilled and five years younger than the total population’ (1990: 3).

With the Labor governments of Hawke (1983-91) and Keating (1991-96), public policy in general shifted in line with the imperatives of ‘economic rationalism’, which emphasised budgetary constraint and economic efficiency (Pusey 1991). Meanwhile, the OECD emphasised that the future workforce would need to be more highly educated to be productive in a ‘post-industrial’ society (Jupp 2002: 37). Thus the skills focus in migration was strengthened, with the government arguing that a skilled, multicultural population was better placed to respond to the challenges of a changing international economy. The 1988 FitzGerald Report (Committee to Advise on Australia’s Immigration Policies) was instrumental in redirecting migration policy towards enhancing ‘human capital’ rather than the manufacturing workforce, and towards a focus on the ‘quality’ of migrants rather than humanitarian concerns with family or asylum (Jupp 2002: 49).

Asian migration was particularly targeted as beneficial for strengthening trading ties with the booming ‘tiger’ economies. The influential Garnaut Report on Australian relations with North-east Asia stated, ‘Migration has a pivotal role to play in helping Australia to get maximum benefit from the growth of East Asia’ (Garnaut 1989: 300). While thousands of Indo-Chinese refugees had been allowed entry to Australia following the Vietnam War, the 1980s saw the ascendancy of skilled East Asian migration. As Freeman and Betts (1992: 74) point out, ‘the argument for Asian immigration now rested, not on a moral obligation to share with the poor, but on an economic need to try to forge stronger links with the rich’.
The 1990s and beyond: The most ‘highly targeted’ program yet

Most recently the Howard Coalition government (1996-) has decisively shifted the balance of the migration program towards skilled migration and away from family reunion. This shift parallels changes in other advanced countries. During the 1990s, debate over family reunion emerged in European political arenas, and many states sought to reduce this form of migration by tightened admissions criteria (Eurostat 1995). Concurrently, several European countries have in recent years facilitated the entry of highly skilled migrants (Kofman 2000: 47).\(^1\) In the US and Canada too, human capital has gained increasing prominence in migration admissions policy (Reitz 1998).

The Australian Government proudly heralds its reorientation towards skilled migration as a significant achievement. During the 2001 Federal election campaign, the Liberal-National Coalition proclaimed, ‘Australia’s skilled migration program is properly targeted to meet Australia’s labour market and economic needs…Under the Coalition, Australia’s most recent migrants are younger, better skilled and more likely to get employment than ever before’ (Liberal-National Coalition 2001: 7).\(^2\) Announcing the 2004-05 migration program, the Federal Government asserted that it was delivering ‘the largest Skill Stream in Australia’s history’ at around 77,000 people (Vanstone 2004).

As Jupp (2002: 150) notes, by 1999 non-economic factors had been largely eliminated from the points system. And the ‘passmark’ for skilled visa categories is regularly lifted by the government to ensure the selection of increasingly higher skilled migrants (Vanstone 2004). In addition to passing the points test, skill-based immigrants must meet ‘basic requirements’: they must be under the age of 45, be proficient in English at the vocational level, have post-secondary qualifications recognised by Australian authorities as suitable for their nominated occupation, and meet Australian requirements for (and

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\(^1\) For example, in the UK, the number of work permits (required by nearly all non-EU citizens) more than doubled from 1987 to 1997 (Home Office 1998).

\(^2\) This policy orientation is shared by the Labor Opposition. In 2002, Labor politician Mark Latham condemned the ‘unskilled migration’ of the 1970s and 80s, which had ‘not been a success in Australia’, resulting in ‘welfare dependent migrant communities in middle and western Sydney’ (Latham 2002).
have recent experience in) an occupation set out on a skilled occupations list (DIMIA 2003a).

In 2002, the federal government (Ruddock 2002: 2) proudly noted that independent skilled principal migrants admitted in the previous 12 months:

- were younger – approximately 63 per cent of principal applicants were aged 18-29, compared to 51 per cent in 1994-95
- had better English language skills – about 90 per cent of principal applicants achieved maximum points for English, compared to 83 per cent in 1994-95
- held qualifications in national shortage – 40 per cent were on the migration occupations in demand list
- almost half had obtained their qualifications from an Australian educational institution.

Both skill and family migrants are expected to be economically self-sufficient upon arrival in Australia. Since March 1997, new arrivals – with the exception of humanitarian entrants – have been prohibited from receiving practically all income-support payments (including Special Benefit) for the first two years after migration (DIMIA 2003d). A limit was also placed on the entry of parents of migrants, reducing the average age – and therefore the economic cost – of family-based migrants (Richardson et al 2001).

As a result of these policies, migrants now have a higher educational and occupational profile than ever before, as seen for example, among Asian migrants, in Table 3.1.

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3 As Australia’s income support system is non-contributory, migrants were previously eligible (after six months in the country) for benefits such as unemployment, housing, family support and other assistance.
Table 3.1: Educational and Occupational Profile of Persons aged 15 years or over, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>% with post-secondary qualifications</th>
<th>% (of those employed) in administrative, managerial or professional jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jupp 2002: 37

Figure 3.1 below shows the gradual shift in emphasis, from the late 1980s, from family to skilled migration.
Clearly the skill profile of migrants to Australia has dramatically altered in the decades since the beginning of post-war mass migration. Migrants, previously brought to Australia to perform unskilled labour in factories and large public works, are now sought to add to the professional skills base of the Australian workforce. This shift has paralleled changes in the structure of the workforce itself: with the decline of the manufacturing sector and the rise of professional services, the skill requirements of jobs in general have increased. However, as Table 3.1 showed for Asian migrants, recent entrants’ skill levels still far exceed those of the total Australian population.

As the underlying principles of migration policy have evolved, from valuing migrants as unskilled labourers to seeking educated and professional migrants, policy instruments have evolved to enable an increasingly selective admissions regime based on skills. These policy changes have succeeded in dramatically altering the employment profiles of migrants to Australia. Thus once stereotyped in the public imagination as Greek or Italian greengrocers or manual labourers, migrants are now just as likely to be imagined as Chinese or Indian computer programmers and engineers. Issues around migrants’ human capital underpin the concerns of this thesis, as it explores the skills profile of recent
migrants and the extent to which they are able to use these skills in the Australian workforce.

**From White Australia to Multiculturalism**

**Ethnicity and migration policies**

While Australian migration policy has progressively tightened entry criteria to select skilled migrants, it has simultaneously relaxed previously restrictive racially-based criteria for entry. The abolition of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s saw the removal of racially-based admissions criteria. As Jupp puts it, ‘Instead of being the “most British” country in the world [Australia] began to proclaim itself as the “most multicultural”’ (2002: 1).

For more than a hundred years, Australian migration policy was based on a commitment to a ‘White Australia’. Even before the White Australia Policy was enacted shortly after Federation, the colonies introduced anti-Chinese migration restriction acts following the influx of Chinese during the mid-nineteenth century Gold Rush. The 1901 Immigration Restriction Act expelled the Pacific Islander ‘Kanaka’ labourers from Queensland sugar plantations and excluded Chinese and other non-European migrants (Collins 1991: 9). The Act prohibited entry to migration applicants who failed to write a passage of fifty words in a language chosen by the immigration officer, who also dictated the test (Choi 1975: 39). The White Australia Policy was strengthened by the 1903 Nationality Act, which prohibited the naturalisation of non-Europeans. Together, such policies largely succeeded in excluding non-Europeans for three-quarters of the twentieth century.

Committed to maintaining an ethnically homogeneous society, Australian governments preferred British migration. After the Second World War, Australia’s first Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, promised that ‘for every foreign migrant there would be ten from the United Kingdom’ (cited in Collins 1991: 10). But insufficient British migrants were available and, concerned to boost Australia’s population (the ‘populate or perish’
imperative), governments admitted large numbers of Displaced Persons from Eastern Europe. This was followed in the 1950s with the admission of Southern Europeans, particularly from Italy and Greece. The White Australia Policy had been loosely interpreted to include these migrant groups, but maintained its exclusion of non-Europeans. By 1947, the Census recorded only 0.25 per cent of the population as non-European, excluding Aborigines, who were not counted in official statistics until the 1960s (Jupp 2002: 9).

While Southern Europeans were allowed to settle in Australia, they were expected to assimilate into the prevailing Anglo-Celtic society. The Federal Government’s assimilation policy stipulated that new migrants should abandon their native languages and cultural traditions and speak only English and follow ‘Australian’ cultural practices. As Jupp (2002: 22) puts it, ‘Assimilation would be complete when nobody noticed the newcomer.’

In 1972, migration policy became ‘colour blind’ (Jupp 2002: 35), as the government introduced a policy based on ‘the avoidance of discrimination on any grounds of colour of skin or nationality’ (Collins 1991: 26). This paved the way for increasing Asian migration to Australia. The settler intake of Asians has increased from about 10 per cent in 1971 to about 40 per cent since the 1980s (Jupp 2002: 35). The 2001 Census recorded Vietnam, China and India as the most significant Asian birthplaces of the Australian population, among the overall top ten birthplaces of the population (ABS 2002).

As Figure 3.2 shows, among recent settler arrivals, the United Kingdom continued its dominance, but all other significant source countries were outside of Europe, with Asian countries particularly prominent. Thus, in the last three decades, the ethnic profile of migrants to Australia has dramatically changed, from primarily European settlers to the current dominance of Asian settlers.
Figure 3.2: Top 10 Countries of Birth, Settlers arriving from 1 June 2000 to 31 May 2003

![Bar chart showing countries of birth with India, China, and South Africa at the top, followed by Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Iraq, and Sri Lanka.

Source: DIMIA 2003b]

Increasing Asian migration has formed part of the overall increase in migration from non-English speaking countries. In the last 50 years, the proportion of the Australian population born in non-English speaking countries has more than doubled, as Table 3.2 shows.

Table 3.2: Australian population born in non-English speaking countries, 1954-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Percentage of total Australian population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>519,851</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1,338,194</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1,512,499</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,560,405</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lalich 2003: 4
The abolition of the White Australia Policy was followed by the introduction of multiculturalism as the official approach to migrant settlement into Australian society. As opposed to its policy predecessor of assimilation, which sought to erase cultural difference, multiculturalism officially recognises cultural diversity as legitimate and desirable. In the words of the Federal Government (DIMIA 2003e):

> Australian multiculturalism is the philosophy, underlying Government policy and programs, that recognises, accepts, respects and celebrates our cultural diversity. It embraces the heritage of Indigenous Australians, early European settlement, our Australian-grown customs and those of the diverse range of migrants now coming to this country.

While ethnicity is no longer included in migration selection criteria, and there is official recognition of the virtues of cultural diversity, radical critics of multicultural policy argue that ethnicity continues to be a basis for inequality in Australian society (Castles 1992; Fincher et al 1993; Jamrozik et al 1995). They argue that while multiculturalism accurately describes the demographic profile of Australians today, the practices of Australia’s ‘core institutions’ cannot be characterised as genuinely multicultural, as they still operate on British, American, and to a lesser extent, Western European models. Multiculturalism is ‘visible and audible in the streets, markets and shopping arcades, in eating places and workplaces, in the architecture of some buildings and in art galleries, but not in the Anglo-Australian power structure embedded in these core institutions’, suggest Jamrozik et al (1995: 163).

These critics argue that the government, media, education system, legal system, labour market and other ‘core institutions’ of Australian society generally operate to the disadvantage of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, because of the continued dominance of Anglo practices and values, as seen, for example, in the

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4 It is worth noting here the conceptual distinction between migration policy and migrant settlement policy: while migration policy is concerned with regulating the entry of people into Australia (for example, through migrant selection criteria), migrant settlement policy concerns migrants’ post-arrival experience, with governments funding such services as English language training, migrant resource centres, and so on. It also expresses the Federal Government’s ideological vision about the place of migrants in Australian
exclusive reliance on the English language. Jupp (2002: 19) suggests that despite being ‘colour blind’, even the migration policy continues to display remnants of British preference: the easy access for New Zealanders; the working holiday visas, issued mainly to young people from Britain; the importance of English competence in selection criteria; and the maintenance of the largest overseas migration post in London.

The shift from White Australia to multiculturalism is perhaps the most dramatic change in the history of Australian migration policy. A policy that began with the objective of creating a homogeneous Anglo-Celtic population at the beginning of the twentieth century eventually produced one of the world’s most ethnically diverse populations by the century’s end. The opening up of the policy to accept migrants of any nationality or ethnicity has seen a dramatic increase in non-European migration over the last three decades, and Asians in particular have been prominent in the waves of migration to Australia in recent years. Nevertheless, the historic preference for Anglo settlers has left its mark on Australian society, and migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds often face distinct problems upon settlement in Australia. The role of culture and ethnicity in shaping migrants’ settlement experiences is a key theme of this thesis.

**Breadwinners and Spouses**

**Gendered migration policies**

In the post-war period, despite the economic imperatives of Australian migration policy, admissions regimes have rarely resulted in the entry of just individual workers. Rather, the migration program has been based on the permanent settlement of migrant families. In contrast with the guest worker and other labour migration programs common in other parts of the world that focus on the temporary migration of individuals, Australian migration policy has long been structured around the entry of households rather than individuals. Dependent family members are granted visas along with primary applicants
who have met migration selection criteria. Governments’ emphasis on the family has rested on a highly gendered understanding of migration and settlement, one which has generally targeted men as the ‘ideal’ migrants – initially for their capacity for manual labour, and later for their occupational skills – and included women as dependent spouses. As Boyd (1989: 659) argues, ‘The presumption of males as breadwinners and females as dependent spouses can be built explicitly into immigration policy.’

The origins of the permanent-settler orientation in Australian migration may be found in the ‘populate or perish’ imperative which guided the migration program from the earliest days of Federation. Jupp (2002: 11) summarises the attitudes of the time:

If vast and empty Australia were to be held by the British settlers it must not only be defended but also have enough human resources to defend itself. If the land were to be exploited it must have enough farmers, labourers and miners to work it. The clarion call of the national anthem – ‘For those who come across the seas we’ve boundless plains to share’ – was no joke.

These attitudes were strengthened by the experience of war, as seen in the then Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell’s defence-based rationale for migration in a 1945 speech:

If Australians have learned one lesson from the Pacific war…it is surely that we cannot continue to hold our island continent for ourselves and our descendants unless we greatly increase our numbers. We are but seven million people and we hold three million square miles of this earth’s surface…much development and settlement have yet to be undertaken. Our need to undertake it is urgent and imperative if we are to survive… (Calwell 1972: 97).

From the end of World War II to the early 1970s, the Australian government actively recruited young, able-bodied men to work in manufacturing, agriculture, mining and major construction projects. Their capacity for manual labour made these men the ‘ideal migrants’. Advertisements to attract migrants made claims such as, ‘There’s a man’s job waiting for you’ (Fincher 1995: 211).
In addition to their productive capacity, young men were favoured because they had young families or were at the right age for family formation. An officer employed by the Immigration Department in 1970 reflects on the profile of the ideal migrant: ‘we were looking for somebody 30 to 35 with a wife and a couple of kids because that was the stabilising factor’ (cited in Fincher et al 1994: 22). Another officer who worked for the Department in the 1960s remarks, ‘With young families, the emphasis was on the family unit. Young children who would assimilate and integrate into Australia’ (cited in Fincher et al 1994: 22).

Within this policy framework, women were valued according to their marital status and child-bearing capacity. Thus criteria for women’s migration applications specified only their age (younger than 35 if single), and their literacy (not required if wives) (Fincher 1995). Young women without families were viewed with suspicion by the Immigration Department, as they were seen as potential sources of ‘moral’ problems (Fincher 1997: 224). Such sentiments are evident in the remarks of one senior immigration official in the mid-1960s:

I think that the safest immigration is the one caused by nominations of migrants already in Australia. After all, a nomination engages the legal responsibility of the nominator and this goes a long way towards avoiding possible dangers of mis-use of assistance to bring in females who could be used as prostitutes (Department of Immigration file 65/46611, cited in Fincher 1997: 224).

Another Department file of the 1960s argues against the entry of single women for their own ‘welfare’:

A basic problem in any programme for the migration of single women other than as members of a family group or on the sponsorship of close relatives is that of providing living accommodation under conditions that ensure their moral welfare (Department of Immigration file 69/70582, cited in Fincher 1997: 224).

Yet another file notes the need to protect single women from their less ‘moral’ male compatriots in Australia:
there are special problems of supervision (in the moral sense) for Yugoslav, Spanish and Italian girls and to a lesser extent for Greek girls, because their countrymen tend to try and take advantage of their ignorance of language, customs, etc., in the early period after their arrival (Department of Immigration file 69/71003, cited in Fincher 1997: 225).

Thus in the post-war period, admissions criteria were based around ‘breadwinners’, the financial supporter of the family, who were, by policy definition, male. Those with young families were favoured, allowing for the entry of women primarily as wives and mothers.\(^5\)

In the mid-1980s the term ‘breadwinner’ was replaced by the gender-neutral ‘Principal Applicant’\(^6\) (Fincher 1997: 226). Principal Applicants are the migrants who meet the government’s eligibility requirements, and may be male or female. As we have seen, since the 1970s, these requirements have increasingly emphasised educational and occupational skills rather than physical capacity. However, this has not altered the dominance of men among those granted independent migration visas. In practice, men are more likely than women to possess the educational and occupational skills required in migration selection criteria. As Fincher (1995: 212) argues,

Most points are awarded for people who have been employed or trained in those occupations in which men are most likely to be found, both in Australia and overseas, such as managers and administrators, professionals, paraprofessionals and tradespersons. No admission points for skill are awarded for the occupations of clerk, salesperson, plant or machine operator or labourer, the first two of these occupational categories being the ones in which women are heavily concentrated. No points are given for domestic labour.

In addition, men are more likely than women to have the requisite work experience and be able to show a record of career advancement, because they have not taken time out of

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\(^5\) This gendered migration regime can also be seen in Britain, where policy ‘exemplified profoundly sexist assumptions’ (Kofman 1999: 276). In British migration law, women have tended to be seen as dependents (Lee et al 2002: 617), and until 1989, were unable to sponsor the entry of husbands and fiancées (Kofman 1999: 276). For a long time in most European states, women did not officially have the right to work in the initial period after arrival, increasing their dependence on men (Kofman 1999: 278).

\(^6\) In 1996 the term ‘principal applicant’ was replaced by ‘primary applicant’.
the workforce to bear and rear children (Fincher 1997: 226). Men are also more likely than women to possess better English language skills, another important selection criterion.

Thus while the criteria for gaining a visa as a primary applicant are formally gender-neutral, in practice, the majority of female primary applicants enter Australia on the basis of family relationships, for example, as wives or fiancées. Male primary applicants are much more likely to enter on the basis of their human capital attributes under the skilled migration stream. As Cobb-Clark (2001a: 7) writes, ‘Australia’s points test is generally used to select male rather than female immigrants as women are disproportionately likely to enter as accompanying family members for whom no selection criteria apply.’

Kofman (1999) suggests that internationally, family reunion has been categorised as quintessentially female, with women finding it more difficult to be accepted in skill migration or humanitarian streams of migration. Thus across Europe for example, women comprise the majority of family reunion migrants. Thobani (2000: 39) and McLaren and Dyck (2004: 43) argue that the introduction of the point system in Canada also constructed two gendered categories of migration in that country – the masculine, economic agents who contribute to the economy, and the ‘unproductive’ feminine, family class. Creese and Dowling point out that despite gender-neutral admissions criteria, the definition of ‘skills’ so central in countries like Australia and Canada ‘is embedded in male breadwinner norms and masculine privilege’ (2001: 6).

These gendered categories are evident in data on visas granted by the Australian Government. As Table 3.3 shows, among migrants entering Australia during the early 1990s, women were almost twice as likely as men to enter on a family-based visa, while men were almost three times more likely than women to enter on a visa based on individual skills.
Table 3.3: Visa category by gender, Primary Applicants, 1993-95 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa category stream</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family stream</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill stream</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=5,192

Source: LSIA1, Wave 1

Chinese migrants to Australia are no exception to these patterns. Among migrants from Hong Kong and China, the majority of Skill stream migrants are men while the majority of Family stream migrants are women, as Table 3.4 shows.

Table 3.4: Migration stream by gender for migrants from Hong Kong and China, 1 January 1991 – 31 December 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>25,938 (62%)</td>
<td>16,037 (38%)</td>
<td>41,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>8,374 (33%)</td>
<td>17,280 (67%)</td>
<td>25,654</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DIMIA Settlement Database, data extracted on 26 April 2002

This pattern is also evident among my respondents. As discussed in the previous chapter, a minority of women migrated as independent primary applicants, with most arriving as spouses of a skilled or business migrant, or under the family reunion program. The minority of respondents who migrated as skilled primary applicants possessed professional skills deemed by the Government to be in demand, such as nursing, information technology and business services.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) However, migrants’ visa categories do not necessarily correlate perfectly with their actual skill levels. As noted in the previous chapter, many skilled women migrate as spouses or under the family reunion category simply because this is easier than applying as skilled migrants themselves. Among my respondents, many who had arrived under the family reunion category, or as students, were highly educated with solid professional work histories.
In general then, while women tended previously to be granted entry to Australia as spouses of manual labourers, today they often enter as spouses of skilled migrants or on the Family Reunion program. In each case, women generally arrive in Australia on the basis of their family relationships rather than on the basis of their own skills or attributes. Therefore for women (arguably more than for men), migration is very tied to family dynamics, relationships and roles. This can have far-reaching consequences, with the settlement experiences of men and women often starkly different.

**Conclusion**

Over the last century, Australian migration policy has reflected governments’ economic and cultural objectives. Migrant selection has been particularly guided by criteria relating to labour-power, ethnicity and gender. This has led to distinct waves of migration, and different groups of migrants settling in Australia, who are distinguished by their class origins, human capital and ethnicity. In particular, the working-class and peasant background European labourers of the early post-war period have now been largely replaced by educated professionals from Asia. However, the gendered aspect of Australian migration has seen much more continuity: women have always tended to migrate as family-members rather than independently, and continue to do so today.

While this historical overview clearly shows the importance of labour-power, ethnicity and gender in Australian migration, analysis of migrant settlement in Australia often ignores the role of ethnicity and gender, in favour of an almost exclusive focus on human capital concerns. The next chapter shows that a human capital approach dominates most of the current Australian research on migrants and employment, at the expense of an exploration of how ethnicity and gender may also shape settlement experiences. The rest of my thesis aims to fill these gaps in the literature, exploring the role of ethnicity, culture and gender in the settlement experiences of Chinese women in Australia today.
As the last chapter outlined, Australian governments have reshaped the country’s migration program over the last two decades to increase the emphasis on migrants’ human capital. The Howard Coalition Government claims that this emphasis on skills has paid off, with recent migrants achieving better employment outcomes than previous cohorts, rather than being a drain on the public purse. These arguments are supported by current Australian research into migrants and employment, which links migrants’ human capital levels with employment success. This literature argues that the recent tightening of migration selection criteria has produced migrants who are more skilled than ever, and who have high rates of labour force participation and occupational attainment, and low unemployment.

This chapter outlines and assesses the prevailing ‘success story’ about skilled migration, and identifies gaps in this literature, which ignores the broader social concerns of earlier research on migrants and employment. It argues that a more complex portrait of migrant experiences is warranted, considering evidence of some migrants’ downward mobility after arrival in Australia, particularly among women and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.
Migrants and Employment: The current success story

Over the last 30 years in Australia, there has been continuing popular and academic interest in the question of how migrants fare in the workforce. In the 1970s and 80s, discussions about migrants and employment centred around the concentration of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) in low skill, low paid jobs. NESB migrants appeared to be ‘industrial cannon fodder’, recruited to Australia to perform unskilled labour (Collins 1991). There was also much concern over high unemployment rates in some migrant groups, largely a result of economic recession and the decline of the manufacturing sector, which had previously provided a substantial portion of migrant jobs (Castles et al 1986).

However, since the late 1980s, the discourse of migrant disadvantage has been largely supplanted by discussions about the apparent success of professional and business migrants. As a result of the Federal government’s increasing emphasis on professional qualifications and skills in the migration program, migrants’ human capital endowments have increased, apparently resulting in higher labour force participation rates and better employment outcomes.

Current Australian research on migrant employment experiences is dominated by studies presenting a ‘success story’ narrative of recent, mostly highly skilled, migrants achieving increasingly positive outcomes in the Australian labour market. These are generally economic, quantitative studies based on the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) (Cobb-Clark 2000, 2001a; Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999; Richardson et al 2001, 2002; VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999, 2000).

Most of these contemporary studies follow a human capital approach to analysing migrant employment. Typically embraced by economists and quantitatively-oriented sociologists, the human capital approach emphasises attributes of individuals such as qualifications, skills, knowledge, and work experience. Investments in human capital include schooling, on-the-job training, and any other activity that increases the ‘resources in people’ (Becker 1975: 9). Human capital theory assumes, given market demand, a
direct, causal relationship between individuals’ accumulated human capital and their labour market outcomes.

Essentially an ‘application of neo-classical economics to labour markets’ (Wooden 1994: 220), human capital theory has become the prevailing wisdom within academic and business circles for explaining the economic success of individuals, firms and nations (McBride 2000; McLaren and Dyck 2004). In a recent report on the ‘well-being of nations’, the OECD (2001: 17) notes that ‘changing economic and social conditions have given knowledge and skills – human capital – an increasingly central role in the economic success of nations and individuals’. And in the field of business administration, as Nordhaug (1993: 17) writes, there has been ‘a silent shift from focusing predominantly on physical and financial capital to focusing on human capital’.

Human capital theory came to prominence in the 1970s in the writings of economists such as Mincer (1974) and Becker (1975) to explain differences in earnings between individuals. Human capital theorists argued that earnings reflected individuals’ investment in education and training, with investment decisions determined by the expected rate of return in the labour market. As Psacharopoulos (1996: 278) explains, the concept of human capital involves ‘a simple trade-off between sacrificing something today for the sake of having more tomorrow… Such rate of return is very similar to the one firms use to decide whether or not they would enter a particular investment venture, and it can be compared with the interest rate on bank deposits or the yield of equities in the stock market’.

Human capital theorists see differences in individuals’ income levels as a product of their differential investment in human capital, which explains inequalities based on gender and ethnicity. Gender inequalities and segregation in the workforce result from women choosing to make smaller investments in their human capital relative to men, and preferring to ‘invest’ in family-oriented matters. Therefore they are unable to compete with men in the workforce (Mincer and Polachek 1980).
Applied to migrants, as Wooden (1994: 220) notes, human capital theory proposes that ‘differences in pay, occupational status, probability of employment, and so forth, between immigrants and natives reflect differences in the average productive capabilities of the two groups’. Thus if migrants are concentrated in low paid, inferior jobs, it is not because of social factors such as discrimination, but because of their individual shortages of human capital. The experiences of these migrants are explained by their lower levels of educational qualifications, work experience, and inferior English language proficiency. Migrants, therefore, are treated no differently from the native born with the same human capital endowments (Blandy et al 1977; Evans and Kelley 1986; Wooden 1994).

Human capital-oriented studies of migrant employment typically use multivariate statistical analysis to examine how individual attributes of migrants affect their labour market outcomes. Earlier studies explored whether migrants’ endowments were rewarded at different rates to those of the Australian-born, with most concluding that after an initial adjustment period, they were not. Current human capital-oriented research tends to compare migrants’ employment outcomes with those of other migrants, rather than with the native-born. This reflects the reliance of current research on the LSIA, which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, does not provide comparisons with the total Australian population. Consequently, these studies draw no conclusions on whether migrants are disadvantaged, but they continue to link employment outcomes directly to human capital attributes, often noting that migrants’ human capital is well utilised and rewarded in the labour market.

The next section will outline the main findings in the current literature on migrant employment, focusing on the LSIA-based studies. I then identify some gaps in this literature, arguing that a more complex portrait of migrant experiences is warranted, one that acknowledges downward mobility after migration, and examines variations in outcomes according to birthplace and gender.
The LSIA Studies: Education, language and employment success

Current research into migrant employment is dominated by studies based on analysis of the LSIA. These studies show that migrants with higher levels of human capital perform better in the labour market than those with lower levels. Human capital is operationalised as educational qualifications and English language ability. Thus it is argued that migrants with higher levels of qualifications and English proficiency achieve better outcomes in terms of employment and unemployment rates, earnings, and occupational status.

For example, in their analysis of LSIA1, Cobb-Clark and Chapman (1999: 11) show that migrants with a higher or post-graduate degree were up to 10 percentage points more likely to be labour force participants than those with a technical qualification. VandenHeuvel and Wooden (2000: 64) note that in Wave 3 of LSIA1 (three and a half years after arrival), those with a degree were more than 20 percentage points more likely to be in the labour force than those with no post-secondary qualifications. In terms of language ability, VandenHeuvel and Wooden (2000: 64) show that almost three quarters of LSIA1 migrants with good English speaking skills were in the labour force, compared with only about half of those with poor English speaking skills. Additionally, the probability of being unemployed was five times greater for those who had poor, rather than good, English speaking skills.

While authors within this literature emphasise education and English ability as the two key determinants of labour market success, in many of the studies, visa category is used as a proxy for these human capital attributes. Skill stream migrants are more likely to have high levels of human capital, as they have met criteria relating explicitly to qualifications, English language ability, age, and other factors influencing their employability in Australia.¹ Family reunion and humanitarian entrants are not subject to these requirements, and thus tend to have lower levels of human capital.

¹ The Skill stream within the Australian migration program includes the Skilled-Australian linked, Independent, Business Skills and Employer Nomination Scheme categories.
Thus the authors highlight the close association between the visa category under which migrants enter Australia and labour market outcomes, with migrants entering in the skill stream typically outperforming those in the family and humanitarian streams. The former had higher labour force participation rates, lower unemployment rates, and higher incomes and occupational status (Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999; Richardson et al 2001; VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999, 2000; Williams et al 1997).²

These studies also attempt to show the importance of human capital endowments in comparing the experiences of LSIA1 (cohort 1) migrants with LSIA2 (cohort 2) migrants. Subject to the tighter migration admissions criteria of the late 1990s, cohort 2 were more highly educated and had better English language skills than cohort 1. This reflects the increased intake of migrants in the skill stream and a reduction of those in the family stream. The proportion of entrants admitted in the skill stream rose from 35 per cent in LSIA1 to 50 per cent in LSIA2. Meanwhile, family stream entrants fell from 49 per cent to 41 per cent (Cobb-Clark 2001a: 11).

The comparative studies of LSIA1 and LSIA2 respondents (Cobb-Clark 2001a and Richardson et al 2001) describe in detail the improvement in human capital levels between the two cohorts, summarised in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Educational and occupational qualifications of Cohorts 1 and 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cohort 1</th>
<th>Cohort 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% with post-graduate qualifications</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with less than year 12 schooling</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% working in a professional occupation prior to migration</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Richardson et al 2001: 7; Cobb-Clark 2001a: 12.

² Humanitarian entrants are often singled out as the key group performing badly in the labour market. These migrants, normally accepted as refugees fleeing persecution in their former countries, tend to have lower levels of education and English language ability. The LSIA studies show that once in Australia, they
English language ability also increased between LSIA1 and LSIA2. Among the majority of skill migrants, there was a 10 to 15 percentage point increase in the proportion reporting that they spoke English as their only or best language and substantial falls in the proportions saying they could not speak English well or at all (Richardson et al 2001: 8).

Endowed with higher educational and English language skills, cohort 2 are shown to have achieved better employment outcomes than the earlier entrants. As Table 4.2 shows, cohort 2 had higher labour force participation rates and lower unemployment.

**Table 4.2: Labour force participation and unemployment rates of Cohorts 1 and 2 (6 months after migration) (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cohort 1</th>
<th>Cohort 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour force participation rate</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cobb-Clark 2001a: 24

In addition, cohort 2 were able to integrate faster into the labour market than cohort 1. Eighteen months after arrival, almost half of cohort 1 were employed, while for cohort 2, the same proportion were already employed after just six months in the country (Richardson et al 2001: 9).

Once employed, cohort 2 reported higher levels of occupational status than did cohort 1. After migration, 51 per cent of cohort 2 worked as associate professionals, professionals or managers and administrators, compared with only 39 per cent of cohort 1 (Richardson et al 2001: 12). Cohort 2 also earned higher incomes than cohort 1. Indeed, amongst two key skill stream categories (Concessional Family/Skilled-Australian linked and Independent), the level of income almost doubled between LSIA1 and LSIA2 (Richardson et al 2001: 13).

generally experience financial difficulties, relying mostly on social welfare payments as their main source of income and experiencing a slower integration into the labour market (Richardson et al 2001).
In addition to changes in migrant selection criteria, the improvement in migrants’ employment outcomes is also explained by the improvement in general labour market conditions at the end of the 1990s,\(^3\) and changes in income-support policy which, as described in the previous chapter, excluded most immigrants from social welfare payments for the first two years after arrival. Unable to access unemployment benefits and other payments, cohort 2 were more likely to actively pursue employment.\(^4\)

Overall, this literature concludes that by the late 1990s, migrants’ human capital (in the form of education and English ability) had improved substantially, enabling them to achieve better labour market outcomes than previous cohorts of migrants. As Richardson \textit{et al} note (2002a: x): ‘Australia, and the migrants themselves, are better off in two ways in terms of the human capital that has been acquired with the migrants of Cohort 2. The first is that the total level of human capital is very high. The second is that substantial use is being made of that human capital in the workplace.’

The Federal Government has enthusiastically accepted this very positive portrait of recent migrants’ employment experiences, arguing that the policy implications are clear – skilled migration should be emphasised over family and humanitarian migration, because of the numerous economic advantages gained from the entry of highly qualified and employable individuals. As DIMIA’s ‘Fact Sheet’ on Migrant Labour Market Outcomes (2001a: 2) states, findings from LSIA1 and LSIA2 ‘strongly suggest that a program which is weighted more towards skilled migration will have better overall labour market outcomes and thus a better economic impact than a program which is weighted towards family reunion migration. Recognising these factors, the Australian Government has shifted the balance of the migration program towards skilled migration (the Skill Stream) and away from family reunion (the Family Stream)’. Information published by DIMIA draws an unequivocal connection between LSIA findings and the merits of the skills orientation of the migration program, and the Department itself sponsors LSIA-based

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\(^3\) As Richardson \textit{et al} (2001: 7) note, between September 1993 and February 2001, unemployment fell from around 9 per cent to 6.5 per cent, and employment rose by approximately 1.26 million people, or 16 per cent. Correspondingly, between LSIA1 and LSIA2, there was a halving in the proportion of respondents who attributed their unemployment to insufficient jobs (Richardson \textit{et al} 2001: 11).

\(^4\) Richardson \textit{et al} (2001: 9) show that six months after arrival, reliance on government payments fell from 36 per cent for cohort 1 to 11 per cent for cohort 2; meanwhile reliance on wages and salaries rose from 31 per cent of cohort 1 to 51 per cent of cohort 2.
research projects.\(^5\) It also notes that LSIA findings have ‘been used in economic modelling to assist in the planning of the migration program and in gauging the impact of migration on Commonwealth and State budgets’ (DIMIA 2002c: 36).

Clearly there is a case for arguing that migrants with higher levels of skills and English language ability will be more successful in the labour market than other migrants. However, does this necessarily mean that migrants’ human capital is being fully utilised and rewarded in the Australian labour market? Are these positive outcomes experienced by migrants from the full spectrum of source countries, or are they limited to those from particular regions or countries? Are positive outcomes experienced by both male and female migrants?

These questions – about the utilisation of migrants’ skills, and differences between migrants based on birthplace and gender – were key concerns of earlier research on migrant employment in Australia (Campbell et al 1991; Collins 1991; Fincher et al 1993; Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988). This earlier literature discovered that many migrants had difficulty in fulling transferring their skills and qualifications to the Australian labour market, and that employment outcomes varied according to migrants’ birthplace and gender. Migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly women, often experienced downward occupational mobility after migration to Australia.

This literature contrasts markedly with the current LSIA literature, which presents a much more positive portrait of migrant employment experiences. Partly this reflects the different questions asked by the two schools of research. While the earlier literature attempted to show how migrants fared in the Australian labour market relative to the rest of the population, and thus determine whether they were disadvantaged (because of their ethnicity or gender), the current literature compares the experiences of different cohorts of recent migrants, to determine what individual characteristics are associated with employment success. The former sought social explanations for migrants’ experiences,

\(^5\) The website of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs lists the LSIA amongst its ‘Current Research Projects’, and virtually all of DIMIA’s publications concerned with migrant employment are based on LSIA data (DIMIA 2002a).
while the latter views these experiences as products of primarily individual characteristics.

The LSIA is a good source of data for examining the extent to which the problems identified in the earlier literature still exist for recent migrants to Australia. However, the methodological approach of the current LSIA-based literature avoids these concerns. Thus there would appear to be substantial gaps in the current literature on migrant employment experiences in Australia. Does migration to Australia result in downward occupational mobility? Do ethnicity and gender influence employment outcomes, and if so, how? The next section explores these questions, and the results complicate the ‘success story’ told by the LSIA studies.

Complicating the Success Story
Transferability gaps, ethnicity and gender

This section explores the concerns of the earlier literature on migrant employment in Australia, using the LSIA data, but asking different questions to those of the existing LSIA studies. I examine three main questions:

1. Do migrants face a ‘transferability gap’?

While the LSIA studies emphasise improvements in migrants’ employment outcomes with duration of settlement in Australia, there is almost no comparison of migrants’ outcomes in Australia with outcomes they had achieved prior to migration. This comparison is significant because earlier research had pointed to the existence of a ‘transferability gap’ which often prevented migrants from being fully rewarded in Australia for their overseas-gained skills and work experience. This ‘transferability gap’ meant that migrants often suffered downward occupational mobility after arrival in Australia. My analysis below includes pre- and post-

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6 My own analysis of LSIA data is based on LSIA1. I have relied only on the first survey for consistency with the literature under discussion, most of which uses only LSIA1.
migration comparisons to explore whether recent migrants also face a ‘transferability gap’.

2. **How does ethnicity influence migrants’ employment outcomes?**

Earlier literature pointed to different employment outcomes of migrants from English-speaking background (ESB) and non-English speaking background (NESB), with the former generally having higher employment rates, lower unemployment rates, and obtaining higher status, higher paid jobs. Some studies also found that among NESB migrants, those from a Commonwealth country outperformed those from other countries. I use LSIA data to examine whether these patterns exist among recent migrants to Australia.

Variations according to ethnicity point to the importance of cultural factors in explaining labour market experiences. This section shows that not all types of human capital are equally transferable, and that definitions of human capital are culturally specific. Thus the concept of ‘human-cultural capital’ (Nee and Sanders 2001) may be better equipped to explain the employment outcomes of different ethnic groups.

Chapter 5 explores these issues in relation to the Chinese community, examining the importance of birthplace in migrants’ employment outcomes. In particular, it shows how Chinese women from Hong Kong and China are differently affected by the ‘transferability gap’, which results in downward and blocked occupational mobility.

3. **How does gender influence migrants’ employment outcomes?**

Earlier research on migrant employment experiences highlighted the different experiences of men and women, and located individual experiences within a household context. The LSIA studies rarely discuss the different experiences of male and female migrants, and in most cases, analysis is limited to experiences of migrants who entered Australia as primary applicants, ignoring migrating spouses.
The majority of these spouses are women, who, migrating as dependents, often have quite different employment experiences to (male or female) primary applicants.

As the family investment theory suggests, women are often ‘secondary workers’ within the migrant household, whose careers are sacrificed for the sake of the human capital investment of the male ‘primary worker’. My analysis of LSIA data shows that women, particularly spouses, achieve inferior employment outcomes relative to their male counterparts.

Chapter 7 explains the gendered migration and settlement experienced by Chinese migrants in Australia. After migration, many Chinese women reduce their paid employment, sometimes leaving the workforce altogether. Within their jobs, family responsibilities constrain the nature of their work, preventing them from accepting or pursuing career opportunities. Ultimately, many women reorient their energies and identities away from the world of work and towards the domestic sphere of the family.

While the LSIA studies focus on human capital attributes, disaggregating LSIA data by demographic factors like ethnicity and gender provides a more complex picture of migrant employment experiences. In some instances, these concerns are evident in the LSIA studies, but are discussed very briefly. When the studies do include data on pre- and post-migration mobility, or disaggregate results by birthplace or gender, the outcomes are more complex than the studies’ conclusions suggest. However, because such concerns are marginal to the primary goal of comparing migrants’ experiences by visa category, these complexities are not reflected in the studies’ conclusions.

Post-migration Occupational Mobility

Existing LSIA studies generally focus on migrants’ experiences after arrival in Australia, comparing different cohorts’ outcomes, and examining how outcomes change with the length of residence in the country. They conclude that outcomes improve over time,
noting that employment rates, occupational status and income rise, and unemployment rates fall. For example, VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999: 15) note that between Waves 1 and 3 of LSIA1, 17 per cent of respondents held a job with a higher skill level, while only nine per cent held one with a lower skill level. In addition, the proportion of respondents reporting earning no income fell from 26 per cent to five per cent (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999: 17). Meanwhile, the overall unemployment rate halved over the same period (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999: 14).

While the studies analyse outcomes with duration of settlement in Australia, there is almost no comparison of migrants’ outcomes in Australia with their experiences prior to migration. Yet there are often dramatic changes in employment outcomes associated with crossing borders. When the issue is examined, there is much evidence of downward occupational mobility. The study of LSIA1 by Williams et al (1997) is rare in its comparison of pre- and post-migration employment outcomes. Williams et al show that less than half (43 per cent) of those employed prior to migration were employed within six months of arrival in Australia. Of those who were employed, most occupational mobility was downward, leading Williams et al (1997: 24) to conclude that there had been some ‘skill loss’ over the immigration process.

Similarly, Richardson et al (2001: 40) note that in LSIA1, ‘All occupations saw more downward than upward mobility in the transition to the Australian labour market.’ Downward mobility was most evident among managers and administrators, half of whom were working as sales, trades, clerks, machine operators and labourers at Wave 1. Compared with pre-migration experiences, the proportion of migrants (in LSIA1 and LSIA2) working in the top three occupational categories in their first six months in Australia fell 15 to 16 per cent. Additionally, in LSIA1, the proportion of respondents working as labourers quadrupled from four to 16 per cent (Richardson et al 2001: 40).

Although this data clearly indicate downward mobility among recent migrants, Richardson et al do not examine this, merely noting that overall, the ‘quality’ of the migrant intake in both cohorts was high (2001: 43). However, the discrepancy between
migrants’ occupational attainment pre- and post-migration suggests that their high levels of human capital are not being fully rewarded in the Australian labour market. This is one of the few negative outcomes reported in this study, and yet Richardson et al do not discuss it further.

These oversights are unfortunate because the LSIA includes a great deal of data on respondents’ pre-migration experiences. Wave 1 of the survey included many questions about employment circumstances in the 12 months prior to migration, such as occupation, use of qualifications, job satisfaction, and so on. These could easily have been used to contextualise migrants’ experiences in Australia in the light of what they had achieved in their home country.

When one does examine the LSIA data in this way, there is a clear portrait of downward mobility. This can be seen in the occupational data as well as other variables such as employment and unemployment rates, use of qualifications, and reported job satisfaction. As Table 4.3 shows, migration to Australia resulted in a dramatic fall in employment rates and a rise in unemployment rates, even after three and a half years of settlement.

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7 The top three occupational categories, as defined by the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations, are: managers and administrators, professionals and associate-professionals (ABS 1997a).
Table 4.3: Employment and unemployment rates, primary applicants and migrating unit spouses, before and after migration to Australia (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>12 months prior to migration</th>
<th>6 months after arrival</th>
<th>3½ years after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary applicants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Migrating unit spouses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

* The large proportion in this category partly reflects the popularity of studying among migrants.

After arrival, migrants were less able to secure jobs in which they frequently used their qualifications. Prior to migration, around three-quarters (74 per cent) of primary applicants with post-secondary qualifications had jobs in which they used their qualifications all or most of the time. After three and a half years in Australia, this applied to only half (51 per cent) the respondents. Migrating spouses fared even worse: prior to migration, 75 per cent reported using their qualifications all or most of the time. After three and a half years in Australia, this proportion had fallen to 47 per cent (unpublished LSIA1 data). Among the LSIA studies, this fall in qualifications use is noted only by VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999: 41), who acknowledge that it constitutes ‘a considerable wastage of skills among our employed immigrants’.

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8 However, as Richardson et al (2001: 11) and Cobb-Clark and Chapman (1999: vi) note, only a small percentage of respondents cited non-recognition of qualifications as a major obstacle to obtaining a job. This could indicate that although migrants had their qualifications officially recognised, this did not necessarily result in employment that allowed them to use these qualifications often.
Given the emphasis placed on educational qualifications as a predictor of labour market success, this discrepancy raises questions about how significant qualifications actually are if migrants are equally likely to be employed in jobs that do not use their qualifications often. This suggests that after arrival in Australia, a substantial proportion of migrants are not able to fully realise their human capital, a conclusion which sits uneasily with the overall ‘success story’ narrative of migrant employment experiences.

Data on migrants’ subjective perceptions of their jobs also questions the extent of the ‘success story’, with reported job satisfaction declining after migration to Australia. Prior to migration, 68 per cent of primary applicants and 73 per cent of spouses liked or loved their jobs. After three and a half years in Australia, those proportions had fallen to 58 per cent and 53 per cent respectively, a fall of ten to 20 percentage points. Meanwhile, over the same period, there was a ten to 20 percentage point increase in the proportion of primary applicants and spouses who were merely indifferent about their jobs, describing them as ‘OK’.9

The next section presents the substantial literature on the ‘transferability gap’ faced by many skilled migrants upon entering the Australian labour market. This literature shows that the transfer of migrants’ qualifications and experience is often hindered by lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, the devaluation of overseas experience, discrimination and other factors. Are these significant factors in the employment experiences of recent migrants? The LSIA studies would be better equipped to answer this question if they adequately examined mobility before and after migration.

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9 Obviously, this is a highly subjective account of employment experiences. It could be argued that some migrants, for nostalgic reasons, might over-state how much they liked their jobs prior to migration, and thus give a misleading picture of longitudinal change. However, it could also be argued that migrants tend to over-state their current happiness in a new country, in order to justify the decision to migrate. (As discussed in Chapter 8, some of my respondents attempted to put a positive ‘spin’ on their current lives for this reason). This data should be interpreted with these considerations in mind.
The ‘Transferability Gap’

Among human capital theorists, some acknowledge that migrants may not be able to perfectly transfer their skills across national boundaries. In other words, there is a ‘transferability gap’. These migrants experience a lower return on their human capital, and are thus disadvantaged in the labour market. Transferability reflects knowledge of the host society’s language and culture, the comparability of the sending and host countries’ education systems, industrial structures, and lastly, institutional factors such as recognition of qualifications and registration.

These ideas about transferability emerged alongside evidence that many skilled migrants to Australia were experiencing downward occupational mobility. As Birrell et al. (2001: 32) note, only 38 per cent of the university-educated migrants who arrived in Australia between 1986 and 1991 had been able to find employment at the professional or managerial level by 1991. By 1996, this had only increased to 40 per cent, indicating very little occupational progress had been made.¹⁰

Authors attribute the ‘transferability gap’ to such factors as the lower return on overseas education (Evans and Kelley 1986; Friedberg 2000; Tram-Nan and Nevile 1988), non-recognition of overseas gained qualifications by the government or employers (Beggs and Chapman 1988; Chapman and Iredale 1990) or the devaluation of migrants’ overseas work experience (Friedberg 2000; Stromback 1984, 1988). They cite various reasons to explain these practices, including preference for the native born, lack of knowledge about overseas education and training systems, prejudice, inadequate processes for formal recognition of overseas-based qualifications, and migrants’ lack of local experience and English proficiency (Iredale 1997: 100). Consequently, migrants, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, may be disadvantaged in the labour market.

¹⁰ However, rather than endorsing a ‘transferability gap’ theory, the authors attribute this partly to the recession of the early 1990s, and the less stringent selection criteria in place which did not consider migrants’ English language capacity or whether their skills were in demand in Australia (Birrell et al 2001: 32).
Empirical studies documenting the ‘transferability gap’ proliferated during the late 1980s and early 1990s, carried out by economists and sociologists presenting primarily descriptive statistics to show widespread downward occupational mobility of skilled migrants in Australia. In a survey of 800 communications industry workers, Baker and Wooden (1992) found that 70 per cent of migrants with qualifications obtained overseas did not use their qualifications in their current job, and concluded that non-recognition of qualifications may have been partly responsible for the relatively high rates of ‘invisible underemployment’ within some migrant groups. Chapman and Iredale (1990) found that only 39 per cent of formally skilled migrants subjected their overseas qualifications to official assessment, and of these, only 42 per cent had them recognised as being equivalent to Australian qualifications. However, they also found that those who had their qualifications recognised did not subsequently earn more than those who did not. They write, ‘It is apparently the case that, independently of overseas skills acquisition, Australian employers perceive NESB country immigrants as being very similar’ (1990: ii).

While current studies argue that higher levels of education result in superior employment outcomes, several Australian studies in the 1980s found an inverse relationship between education levels and labour market outcomes, because of the difficulty in transferring advanced qualifications and skills across national borders. Beggs and Chapman (1988) found that more skilled migrants actually performed worse than their less skilled counterparts. In their study, male migrants with low levels of education received higher incomes than equivalent Australian born workers. But as migrants’ level of education increased, their wage position and employment status deteriorated relative to that of the Australian born. Beggs and Chapman attribute this in part to non-recognition of post-secondary qualifications.

Similarly, Kelley and McAllister (1984) found that while less educated Mediterranean migrants (with less than four or five years of education) generally had higher status occupations than similar Australians, those with above average education (over the then nine year average for the Australian born) were the most disadvantaged, receiving

---

11 Invisible underemployment refers to instances where tasks performed do not fully utilise the capabilities
notably worse jobs than their Australian peers or even other migrants. Stromback (1984) also found that many migrants from non-English speaking countries received low returns to additional education and work experience compared with the Australian born and migrants from English speaking backgrounds. As Stromback notes, ‘the more highly educated can be expected to have a larger proportion of country specific skills which are not easily transferred’ (1988: 12).

North American studies have also found that the knowledge and abilities of higher skilled migrants tend to be underutilised. There is evidence that many university-educated migrants in the US and Canada find jobs well below the status of those they had prior to migration, reflecting problems in the transfer of their skills (Min 1988; Reitz 2001; Salaff et al 2002, 2003). Not only do migrants have to be adequately qualified for a job, but they must also pass the informal tests of organisational gatekeepers, who assess the eligibility of migrant applicants against the local institutional patterns with which they are familiar (Salaff et al 2002).

These results sit uneasily with the positive conclusions of the LSIA studies, which link higher levels of human capital with superior outcomes. While tighter migration selection criteria have succeeded in raising the human capital profile of recent entrants, this does not automatically equate to greater transferability of skills into the Australian workforce. Indeed, when one does compare outcomes before and after migration, there is evidence of downward mobility which may indicate a continuing ‘transferability gap’. The LSIA studies’ emphasis on post-migration outcomes precludes any examination of transferability problems new migrants might face.

**Ethnicity and Employment**

While the LSIA studies provide extremely detailed comparisons of migrants’ employment experiences based on their visa category and level of occupational and English language skills, there is virtually no discussion of ethnicity in any of the studies.
Despite the fact that these are studies of migrants, data on ethnicity and birthplace are rarely presented in the LSIA literature.

For example, in VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999: 116), birthplace data appear only in the Appendix to describe characteristics of the LSIA respondents (1999: 116). In the rest of the study, results are almost always disaggregated only by visa category. Similarly, Richardson et al (2001: 19) include birthplace data in their introduction of the LSIA respondents, but the rest of the report compares outcomes almost exclusively by visa category or LSIA cohort (i.e. LSIA1 respondents versus LSIA2 respondents). Cobb-Clark and Chapman (1999: 24) present data on English language ability disaggregated by region of origin, but birthplace is not included in discussion of migrants’ employment outcomes. Cobb-Clark (2001a) makes no mention of ethnicity or country of origin at all.

This exclusion of ethnicity is a major departure from previous literature on migrant employment in Australia, which saw birthplace as a key explanatory factor. For example, comparisons were commonly made between migrants from English and non-English speaking countries. Invariably, the former achieved better employment outcomes than the latter (Castles et al 1986; Collins 1991; Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988).

My own analysis of LSIA data confirms the salience of migrants’ country of birth, showing that those from English speaking backgrounds (ESB) achieved considerably better outcomes than those from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Further, within the NESB group, migrants from Commonwealth countries outperformed those from other countries. It is important to note that employment differences between ESB and NESB migrants were substantially smaller prior to migration. Both groups tended to be successful labour market participants prior to migration. While ESB migrants generally maintained positive employment outcomes after migration, this was much less likely among NESB migrants. Therefore, migration to Australia increased the employment outcomes gap between the groups.

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12 English-speaking countries are classified as the UK, Ireland, the US, Canada and South Africa, while other countries are classified as non-English speaking.
These patterns are evident in data on employment and unemployment rates, occupational status, and use of qualifications. As Table 4.4 shows, although migration reduced employment for both groups, the magnitude of the fall was greater for the NESB migrants. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of ESB primary applicants increased only slightly, unlike NESB unemployment, which after three and a half years, was four times the pre-migration rate.

**Table 4.4: Labour-force status of primary applicants from ESB and NESB, before and after migration (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before migration</th>
<th>3½ yrs after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESB</td>
<td>NESB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( N=799 )</td>
<td>( N=2,953 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in labour-force</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

This division between ESB and NESB migrants is also evident in ABS labour force data, as Table 4.5 shows. In 2001-02, the labour force participation rate of ESB migrants was 10 percentage points higher than for NESB migrants, while their unemployment rate was lower than that of not only NESB migrants but also the Australian-born population. These data indicate that it is not just recent NESB migrants who achieve inferior employment outcomes. Rather, these patterns hold for NESB migrant populations as a whole in Australia.
Table 4.5: Unemployment and labour force participation by birthplace, 2001-02 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Labour force Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in Australia</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born overseas</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly English speaking countries</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other than mainly English speaking countries</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2003d

LSIA data also show that migrants from ESB are much more likely to be employed in the upper echelons of the labour force in Australia, while NESB migrants are more likely to be found in lower status jobs. As seen in Table 4.6, the pre-migration occupational profile of the two groups was very similar. However, while migration generally enhanced the occupational status of ESB respondents, NESB respondents suffered a dramatic fall in the proportion employed in these jobs. After three and a half years in Australia, the proportion of NESB migrants in the top three occupational categories was almost 30 percentage points lower than the proportion of ESB migrants in these jobs. Meanwhile, after three and a half years, four times as many NESB migrants were employed as labourers compared to pre-migration levels, and the proportion of NESB labourers was more than three times the proportion of ESB labourers.
Table 4.6: Occupational status of primary applicants from ESB and NESB, before and after migration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before migration</th>
<th>3½ yrs after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESB</td>
<td>NESB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=683</td>
<td>N=2,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers and administrators</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate professionals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales &amp; personal service workers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant &amp; machine operators &amp; drivers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

After migration, ESB migrants were more able than NESB migrants to find jobs in which they could use their qualifications, as Table 4.7 shows. This is despite the fact that prior to migration, NESB migrants were more likely than ESB migrants to have used their qualifications very often.

Table 4.7: How often use qualifications, primary applicants from ESB and NESB, before and after migration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before migration</th>
<th>3½ yrs after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESB</td>
<td>NESB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=503</td>
<td>N=1,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the time/very often</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3
NESB and ESB migrants also experienced different changes in levels of job satisfaction. Migration had no effect on the reported job satisfaction of ESB migrants: around 20 per cent reported that they ‘loved’ their jobs both before and after migration. In contrast, the proportion of NESB migrants who reported loving their jobs halved from 27 per cent to 14 per cent (unpublished LSIA1 data, Waves 1 and 3).

The clear distinction between ESB and NESB migrants would appear to confirm the importance of migrants’ English language ability in employment success. As native English speakers, the ESB migrants have an undoubted advantage over the NESB migrants in the Australian labour market. However, it is likely that the advantage stems from more than just the ability to speak English. This is even acknowledged by Richardson et al (2001: 12), who note that even after controlling for English language ability, those from the UK, Ireland and North America still had a greater chance of being employed in Australia. As the next section describes, broader cultural factors need to be explored to explain differences in employment experiences of ESB and NESB migrants.

Within the NESB group, outcomes vary according to whether or not migrants come from Commonwealth countries.13 As former British colonies, Commonwealth countries typically have British-type institutions and more widespread use of the English language than other countries. Thus migrants from Commonwealth countries tend to achieve better outcomes than those from other countries. For example, as Table 4.8 shows, migrants from Commonwealth countries had a substantially higher employment rate and a lower unemployment rate than migrants from other NES countries.

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13 This analysis is limited to countries in Asia. In this sample, Commonwealth countries are: Malaysia, Burma, Singapore, Hong Kong, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Non-former British colonies are: Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan.
Table 4.8: Labour-force status of Asian primary applicants from Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries, 3½ years after arrival (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commonwealth country</th>
<th>Non-Commonwealth country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=637</td>
<td>N=1,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in labour-force</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Wave 3

The two groups also had different occupational profiles. As Table 4.9 shows, those from Commonwealth countries were more than 25 percentage points more likely to be found in the top three occupational groups, and much less likely to be employed as labourers, relative to migrants from other NES countries.

Table 4.9: Occupation of Asian primary applicants from Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries, 3½ years after arrival (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commonwealth country</th>
<th>Non-Commonwealth country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=410</td>
<td>N=505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers and administrators</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate professionals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales &amp; personal service workers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant &amp; machine operators &amp; drivers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Wave 3
Finally, those from Commonwealth countries were more able to find jobs in which they could use their qualifications. As seen in Table 4.10, they were ten percentage points more likely as migrants from other NES countries to have jobs in which they used their qualifications very often, and 26 percentage points less likely to have jobs in which they never used their qualifications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commonwealth country</th>
<th>Non-Commonwealth country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$N=370$</td>
<td>$N=301$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Wave 3

Other studies have also noted the different outcomes of migrants from Commonwealth countries relative to migrants from other NES countries. For example, in an analysis of migrants’ qualifications recognition and employment, Iredale and Niveson-Smith (1995) report that recent NESB migrants from countries where English is widely spoken or British type institutions exist – Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Fiji and the Philippines – had significantly more positive experiences than other NESB migrants.

Mak (2001: 17) argues that Hong Kong migrants are potentially advantaged in the Australian workforce because British rule in Hong Kong led to English language prevalence and a higher education system compatible with that of Australia. In her study of 111 Hong Kong professional and managerial migrants in Australia, Mak observes that non-recognition of overseas gained qualifications was a relatively minor problem, affecting only ten per cent of her sample. She suggests this is partly due to the ‘common British origin of the Australian and Hong Kong education system’ (2001: 64).
As Jayasuriya and Kee (1999: 41) note, most migrants from the Commonwealth countries in Asia ‘are probably among the most well-informed about systems of law and other socio-political institutions in Australia because they share a common inheritance of a British colonial past’. Furthermore, often coming from the major metropolises of Asia, these migrants tend to be highly urban, Westernised and cosmopolitan in outlook.

In his study of the managerial workforce in Australia, Watson (1996) argues that to move smoothly into managerial jobs, applicants need to possess the cultural capital of either the Australian born, or migrants from the former British Empire. He notes that migrants from India, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Hong Kong are more successful than other NESB migrants at gaining jobs within the upper echelons of the Australian workforce (1996: 33). O’Loughlin and Watson (1997: 16) explain that qualifications from Commonwealth countries are a source of cultural capital, operating as ‘a kind of flag of approval which re-assures Australian employers that they will find the bearer of these qualifications “amenable” to the informal culture of their workplace, as well as an (assumed) guarantee that the qualifications are reliable.’ While migrants from countries outside of the former British Empire may hold similar or identical qualifications, these are likely to be devalued by employers who equate familiarity with merit and security.

Clearly migrants’ employment outcomes are heavily shaped by where they come from. As we have seen, ESB migrants generally achieve better labour market outcomes than NESB migrants, and within this latter group, migrants from Commonwealth countries outperform those from other countries. While this variation is to some extent captured in the LSIA studies’ comparisons of migrants according to English language ability, language ability per se is not the only determining factor. Rather, as the next section shows, language is just one part of migrants’ ‘human-cultural capital’. ESB migrants and those from Commonwealth countries do better than other NESB migrants in the Australian labour market not just because they know how to speak English better, but because their cultural backgrounds in general, and their educational and occupational histories, allow them an easier integration into the Australian labour market. The next section examines these factors in more detail.
Human-cultural Capital

I think some ethnicities fit into Australian culture more easily...I’m sure my English neighbours had less difficulties with it than me, although they say they also had adjustment problems...but from my point of view their migration is more like moving house...

(Croatian migrant, cited in Colic-Peisker 2002: 157)

While human capital attributes are clearly important in explaining migrants’ employment outcomes, migrants with similar human capital profiles often achieve dramatically different employment outcomes in Australia. As we saw in the LSIA data above, ESB and NESB migrants had similar occupational achievements prior to migration, but after arriving in Australia, the experiences of the two groups diverged substantially. And within the NESB group, migrants from Commonwealth countries invariably outperformed those from other countries.

This section argues that in order to achieve employment success, migrants need not just human capital, but also the cultural resources and knowledge to effectively deploy their human capital. On the demand side, governments and employers are more willing to accept and reward migrants’ human capital when they are comfortable and familiar with their educational and occupational histories and culture. This is what distinguishes native-English speaking migrants, and to a lesser extent, migrants from Commonwealth countries, from other NESB migrants.

These concerns point to the cultural specificity of human capital: what migrants to Australia need is not simply human capital in a generic sense – they need attributes that are culturally compatible with Australian definitions of human capital. For this reason, following Nee and Sanders (2001), I prefer to use the term ‘human-cultural capital’, which anchors the analysis of individuals’ human capital within a broader cultural context. In doing so, I draw on the work of French theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that individuals’ life chances are shaped not just by their economic capital (money and financial assets), as economic theory would suggest, but also by their possession of
**cultural capital**: resources such as credentials, linguistic competence, sense of style, and other cultural assets which may be used in everyday life.

Bourdieu uses the notion of cultural capital to argue that the bourgeoisie are able to reproduce their social position not only because of their possession of economic capital, but also their investment in cultural practices and the education of their children. In Bourdieu’s work on education, cultural capital explains why middle-class students outperform working-class students: the education system values and inculcates dispositions and behavioural attributes (for example, a manner of speaking) which are already possessed by the middle-class children, who are rewarded for what they already know. The working-class students, on the other hand, have to refine their inherited dispositions in order to succeed in a system defined according to middle-class values and behaviour.

Bourdieu (1986: 243) delineates three forms of cultural capital: in the *embodied* state, that is, ‘in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’; in the *objectified* state, ‘in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.)’; and in the *institutionalised* state, ‘a form of objectification’ resulting in such things as educational qualifications. As Carter puts it, cultural capital provides individuals with an ‘ability to “walk the walk” and “talk the talk” of the cultural power brokers in our society’ (2003: 138).

There is clearly some overlap between Bourdieu’s concept of *cultural capital* and what is generally included within the idea of *human capital*. As Nee and Sanders (2001: 392) point out, ‘Both human and cultural capital refer to human competence that is acquired through formal and informal education.’ In particular, as seen above, the current literature on migrants and employment operationalises human capital in terms of *educational qualifications* and *English language ability*. Both credentials and language are discussed by Bourdieu within a cultural capital framework – credentials form part of *institutionalised* cultural capital, while linguistic ability forms part of *embodied* cultural capital.
As a composite concept, Nee and Sanders (2001) use ‘human-cultural capital’ to capture the cultural competence of migrants that is not included in the orthodox understanding of human capital. They explain, ‘Familiarity with the customs and language of the receiving society, its high- and middle-brow cultural forms, educational degrees and professional credentials that are fully transferable are examples of human-cultural capital that can yield profit in the majority society’ (2001: 392). ‘Human-cultural capital’ recognises that migrants’ ‘human capital’ may only be valorised as such when it is culturally compatible with local definitions of human capital.

The two key variables in human capital literature on migrant employment – qualifications and English ability – are not generic attributes that hold the same cultural meaning around the world. Rather, their worth in a particular country is culturally-specific. The way human capital theorists understand qualifications and language is inadequate because they see these attributes as purely objective, technical, instrumental. What they miss is the social, cultural and political context within which human capital attributes are situated. Qualifications and language ability are only recognised as forms of human capital when they conform to the prevailing conception of what constitutes legitimate qualifications and legitimate language ability.

While human capital theory focuses exclusively on the supply side – what endowments individuals have to offer in the market – a human-cultural capital approach shows that individuals’ skills only have a meaning to the extent that they are recognised as such by others in society. In other words, supply side factors only have meaning in the context of the structure of demand. Without recognition, individuals’ capacities – their (human or cultural) capital – ceases to exist. Therefore, the value of credentials is shaped by the extent to which they are recognised as legitimate competence within the Australian labour market. And the extent to which migrants speak ‘good English’ is very culturally specific, dependent not only on speakers’ grasp of grammar and other technical rules, but also their accent and cultural knowledge of how to apply technical skills within specific social situations.
In a new cultural environment, the value of migrants’ human-cultural capital depends on how efficiently they can deploy their resources, as well as the extent to which this deployment is recognised in society. Clearly for many migrants, their accustomed modes of acting in society will not necessarily achieve the same outcomes in a new cultural environment. Their ways of speaking, interacting with others, seeking employment, and all manner of everyday practices need to be adjusted to achieve the intended outcomes. Chapter 6 explores these factors in more detail in relation to the Chinese community in Australia.

Because they do not examine migrants’ ethnicity or country of origin, the LSIA studies cannot examine how employment outcomes are shaped by these cultural factors. The different outcomes of ESB and NESB migrants, and the differences between those from Commonwealth countries and those from other NES countries, point to the role played by migrants’ cultural assets and resources, which allow their human capital attributes to be more readily recognised and rewarded in the Australian labour market.

**Gender and Employment**

In addition to ignoring ethnicity, the LSIA studies generally include little examination of the different employment outcomes of men and women. Typically, comparisons are made between individuals on the basis of occupational skills, English ability or visa category, which are seen as the major determinants of employment success. However, these factors also vary systematically with gender: relative to women, men generally possess higher levels of occupational and English skills, and thus are more likely to have entered through the skilled migration program. As feminist scholars have long argued, these patterns reflect broader social structures, that in turn shape every facet of migrant settlement.

Additionally, most LSIA studies examine outcomes for *primary applicants only* (e.g. Cobb-Clark 2000; Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999; VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999, 2000), ignoring the experiences of migrating-unit spouses, the vast majority of whom are
women (80 per cent in LSIA1). Migrants who enter Australia as spouses are dependent upon primary applicants, and therefore can have dramatically different employment experiences. In excluding these respondents, the LSIA studies ignore the experiences of a large cohort of migrants, and remove individuals from their household context.

Cobb-Clark herself notes (2001a: 474), ‘Although one of the primary strengths of the LSIA data is their ability to capture all individuals within the primary applicant’s household, the experiences of migrating-unit spouses and immigrant families have been relatively under-studied.’ And Cobb-Clark and Chapman note that in focusing only on primary applicants, they have ‘ignored the fundamental role of households in the immigration process’ (1999: 28), in particular, ignoring ‘interdependencies between members of households with respect to labour market decisions and outcomes’ (1999: vi). However, even when authors in this literature acknowledge the limitations of examining only experiences of primary applicants, they do not explain this methodological decision.

VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999) include in their sample only primary applicants who participated in all three waves of LSIA1. Men are slightly over-represented in this sample (comprising 53 per cent), but there are substantial gender differences according to visa category, with men vastly outnumbering women in all the skill-based categories (for example, men comprised 85 per cent of Business migrants and 77 per cent of Independent migrants), and women (62 per cent) outnumbering men in the Preferential Family category (VandenHeuvel and Wooden, 1999: 116). These gender differences within visa categories are also noted by Cobb-Clark and Chapman (1999: 2). Given the gender disparities among groups of visa-holders, are there independent gender-based explanations for the groups’ different employment outcomes? The LSIA studies’ emphasis on human capital attributes precludes any investigation into this question.

In fact, there is evidence of gender effects, independent of other variables. For example, while labour force participation rates clearly vary according to visa category, within each

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14 This exclusive focus on primary applicants is also evident in much of the literature on skilled international migration, for example research on inter-company transfers, which largely ignores experiences of accompanying spouses (generally women) (Kofman 2000).
visa category, women’s participation rates are consistently lower than men’s. At Wave 3 of LSIA1, Independent (skilled) visa holders’ participation rates were 95 per cent for men and 87 per cent for women; for Preferential Family visa holders, rates were 77 and 46 per cent respectively (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1999: 27). Thus even when women were skilled migrants, they were still less likely to be in the workforce than their male counterparts.

Within the LSIA literature, Cobb-Clark is exceptional in her discussion of gender differences in employment outcomes (Cobb-Clark 2001a; Cobb-Clark and Connolly 2001; Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999). Her studies note that women tend to have much lower labour force participation rates (approximately half) than do men (Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999: 10). In the mid-1990s, while migrant men’s labour force participation rate (79 per cent) was higher than that of the total male population (73 per cent in August 1995), migrant women’s (44 per cent) was lower than that of the total female population (54 per cent) (Cobb-Clark and Chapman 1999: 10).

My own analysis of LSIA data (Tables 4.11 and 4.12 below) clearly shows that men and women achieve quite different employment outcomes in their first few years in Australia. LSIA data show that while migration to Australia results in an initial fall in the labour force participation rates of male and female respondents, after three and a half years in the country, men are much more likely than women to be labour force participants. Overall, as Table 4.11 shows, three and a half years after arrival in Australia, among primary applicants, the proportion of employed women had fallen by around 25 percentage points, and the proportion engaged in ‘home duties’ doubled over the same period.
Table 4.11: Main activity of female and male primary applicants, before and after migration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>12 months prior to migration</th>
<th>3½ years after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=3,753

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

The fall in labour market participation is also dramatic for spouses of primary applicants. As Table 4.12 shows, even after three and a half years in Australia, the proportion of employed female spouses was almost 20 percentage points lower than pre-migration levels. This was accompanied by a substantial increase in the proportion of women reporting their main activity as ‘home duties’. Male spouses’ employment rates also fell, while their unemployment rates rose almost five-fold.

Table 4.12: Main activity of female and male spouses, before and after migration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>12 months prior to migration</th>
<th>3½ years after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=1,409</td>
<td>N=1,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3
At one level, migrating spouses perform poorly in the workforce compared to primary applicants because they have lower levels of human capital: households normally nominate as primary applicant the person with the highest human capital and therefore most likely to be granted a visa. However, this inequality is reinforced by migration policy itself: while the qualifications of primary applicant are assessed before arrival in the new country, spouses usually have to wait until much later to submit their qualifications for assessment. In the meantime, they are more likely to accept lower-skilled employment upon arrival.

Broader ABS data show that lower labour force participation is not restricted to recently arrived migrant women. In 2001, the participation rate of NESB women migrants (44 per cent) was 13 per cent lower than that of Australian-born women (57 per cent) (ABS 2003a). This is a reversal of earlier patterns: prior to the 1980s, NESB women consistently had higher participation rates than locally-born women. For example, in 1973, married NESB women’s participation rate was 48 per cent, compared to 37 per cent for Australian-born married women (Alcorso and Harrison 1993: 33). From 1980, while the participation rate of Australian-born women rose, for NESB women, it actually fell (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996: 10).\textsuperscript{15}

Women’s comparatively low workforce participation after migration is also reflected in their lower income levels. As Figure 4.1 shows, after three and a half years in Australia, women were around three times as likely as men to have no income, and those with incomes had lower incomes than their male counterparts.

\textsuperscript{15} This partly reflects the decline of jobs in the Australian manufacturing sector, which historically was a large employer of migrant women.
Figure 4.1: Total weekly income, Female and Male Primary Applicants, 3½ years after arrival

For those in the workforce, men tended to be found in higher status occupations compared to women. For example, after three and a half years in Australia, 34 per cent of male primary applicants were employed as managers, administrators or professionals, compared to only 25 per cent of females. At the lower end of the occupational hierarchy, the proportion of female primary applicants working as labourers was five percentage points higher than for males (unpublished LSIA1 data). In both cases, the ‘gender gap’ in occupational attainment was smaller prior to migration, indicating that migration is associated with a widening of the gender difference in occupational status.

It is clear that there are gender differences in employment outcomes for recent migrants. After migration, women are much less likely than men to be in the workforce, even in cases where they were admitted as skilled migrants. Once in the workforce, men tend to be employed in higher status occupations than women. These factors largely explain the gender differences in migrants’ level of income, with men tending to earn more than women. While the LSIA studies differentiate employment outcomes on the basis of visa
category and skill levels, there is evidence that regardless of human capital endowments, there are independent gender-based differences in employment outcomes.

The gendered nature of migrants’ employment experiences has been widely documented. Literature about migrant women’s employment in Europe, the US, Asia and Australia consistently highlights the reduction in women’s paid work after migration, their downward occupational mobility and deskilling, and the heightened barriers they face in the workforce relative to male migrants (Campani 1997; Salaff and Greve 2003; Yeoh and Khoo 1998). For example, in Yeoh and Khoo’s study of migrants in Singapore, the proportion of women in paid work dropped from 81 per cent before migration to only 45 per cent after. In contrast, there was no change in employment status among the male migrants. Of the women who had taken up paid work, the majority were in part-time or flexi-work (1998: 167).

The next section presents literature examining migrants’ employment experiences within the context of the household. As Cobb-Clark and Crossley (2001: 12) argue, migration research needs to move beyond a simple analysis of individuals to consider entire immigrant households. ‘After all, immigrants migrate and live in households and, furthermore, immigration policy typically results in the selection of households rather than individuals.’ The next section argues that we cannot adequately explain the different outcomes of men and women without locating them within an analysis of migrant households and household settlement strategies.

**The Household Context: Migrant women as ‘tied movers’ and ‘secondary workers’**

Within migrant families, women’s careers are often considered secondary. This reflects women’s tendency to migrate for family reasons, in contrast to men, who are more likely to migrate as independent, skilled migrants, as shown in the previous chapter (see Table 3.3). This means that upon arrival, men’s employment generally assumes priority within migrant families, while women’s primary responsibility is to facilitate the settlement of the family into a new environment, with their employment considerations assuming
secondary status. As such, the skilled migrant ‘success story’ is likely to look very different for men and women. As the data above demonstrate, men and women achieve very different employment outcomes after migration to Australia. In sideling demographic attributes such as gender, and in some cases, completely ignoring the experiences of migrating spouses, the LSIA studies cannot inform us about how male and female migrants’ experiences differ, and thus fail to recognise the gendered nature of migration and migrant settlement.

Such an omission is surprising given that even economists using a human capital approach have acknowledged the gendered aspect of migration and migrant employment, particularly in the form of the *family investment theory*. The family investment theory seriously challenges studies that neglect migrants’ household context, arguing that within migrant households, the experiences of ‘secondary workers’ (mainly women) are crucially shaped by the labour market activities of (mainly male) ‘primary workers’. This section outlines this theory and discusses the social implications of this gendered division of labour, presenting sociological research that anchors the analysis of migration decisions within the *social relations of migrant households*.

The gendered nature of migration has long been recognised. Even in his seminal ‘push-pull’ theory of migration, which views migration as an individual response to negative ‘push’ factors at the point of origin and positive ‘pull’ factors at the destination, Lee (1966: 51) noted that ‘not all persons who migrate reach that decision themselves. Children are carried along by their parents willy-nilly, and wives accompany their husbands though it tears them away from environments they love.’ Houstoun *et al* (1984: 919) also suggested that, with the exception of domestic workers, women ‘generally migrate to create or reunite a family’.

Mincer (1978) was among the first economists to model migration decisions in a family context. Mincer argued that women are often ‘tied movers’ who migrate for the sake of their families, even when this entails a personal sacrifice. Mincer theorised that migration occurs when the net family gain from moving is greater than the net loss of any one family member. Because of men’s higher market earning power, it is normally women
who become the ‘tied’ partner (Mincer 1978: 753; see also Lichter 1982; Sandell 1977). As tied movers, migrating wives experience reduced employment and earnings and labour force withdrawal. Generally, migration is more disruptive to women’s career trajectories than to men’s. As Mincer (1978: 771) writes, ‘Tied migration ranks next to child rearing as an important dampening influence in the life-cycle wage evolution of women.’

Subsequent economic scholarship on family migration developed the family investment theory, which argues that women who migrate with their families are less likely to invest in their human capital compared with male migrants (Baker and Benjamin 1997; Chiswick and Miller 1994; Cobb-Clark and Crossley 2001; Duleep and Sanders 1993; Long 1980). The theory predicts that migrant families facing credit constraints adopt a household strategy for financing human capital investment. This results in a gendered division of labour in which the partner with ‘labour market comparative advantage’ (normally the male) invests in host-country specific human capital, particularly through further study, while the other partner (normally the female) engages in paid work to finance the current consumption of the household (Cobb-Clark and Crossley 2001: iii).

Rather than reducing their paid employment, the family investment theory argues that women, as ‘secondary workers’, actually engage in more paid work than men, who, as the ‘primary workers’, are engaged in investing in human capital to improve their future employment prospects. Women forego their own investment in human capital to finance that of their husbands, and thus initially take up better paying, but ‘dead-end’, jobs (Cobb-Clark and Crossley 2001: 1). As Duleep and Sanders (1993: 677) conclude in their study of migrants in the US, ‘a woman’s decision to work is affected by whether she has a husband who invests in skills specific to the US labor market, and also by the extent of that investment’.

The family investment strategy results in changes in earnings between migrant family members over time. Male migrants tend to have lower earnings immediately after arrival,

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16 In the tradition of human capital theory, Mincer does not examine why men invest in human capital more than women. Human capital investments are viewed as individual decisions, not influenced by, for example, socialised behaviour and expectations, which can lead to different ‘choices’ by men and women.
but relatively high earnings growth over time (Cobb-Clark and Crossley 2001: 2), while migrant women are more likely to work, work longer hours, and have higher earnings compared to their native-born counterparts. However, women’s jobs, while initially better paying, offer little prospect for advancement, so women’s relative earnings decline over time (Cobb-Clark and Crossley 2001: 13; Long 1980).

The family investment theory has not been conclusively demonstrated empirically. Long (1980) and Baker and Benjamin (1997) found that migrant women in the US did work more hours than native-born women, in conformity with the theory. Similarly, Remennick (2003: 710) describes migrant women in Israel postponing their own professional adjustment to provide for the family during men’s professional study. However, MacPherson and Stewart (1989), Chiswick and Sullivan (1995) and Cobb-Clark and Connolly (2001) found the opposite – that participation rates for migrant women (in the US and Australia) were lower than those for native-born women. Meanwhile, the hours worked by migrant women in Canada were not significantly different to those worked by native-born women (Worswick 1996). Many studies have also shown the effect of young children in reducing women’s participation rates (Cobb-Clark and Connolly 2001; MacPherson and Stewart 1989; Schoeni 1998).

I argue that the family investment hypothesis partly accounts for the experiences of migrant women. Women are clearly ‘secondary workers’ within migrant families to the extent that they are less likely to use their human capital and commonly suffer downward or blocked mobility. However, in Australia, quantitative and qualitative data show that migrant women currently tend to work less, not more, than their male counterparts and native-born women. The common experience of migrant families is one in which the husband/father, as the primary applicant for migration, adopts the role of the breadwinner, leaving wives to assume primary responsibility for the household and childcare activities. This would seem to correspond more to Mincer’s theory of tied movers.\(^{17}\) Other studies confirm the salience of the tied mover theory, showing that people – generally married women – who migrate for the sake of someone else’s career generally

\(^{17}\) In Australia this is likely to reflect the strict entry criteria which advantages those who have already completed their education, and are therefore less likely to need to study in Australia. Migrants to Australia, male and female, are increasingly ‘job-ready’ upon arrival.
experience reduced labour force participation and downward mobility after migration (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Maxwell 1988; Shihadeh 1991; Smits 1999).

Regardless of their explanations of women’s migration and settlement experiences, none of this economistic literature provides much insight into the social context within which migration decisions are made, nor the social implications of the patterns examined. Given the adverse effects of migration upon women’s employment, Mincer notes that it ‘may be seen as “social oppression” from a private point of view’, but emphasises that this interpretation fails to recognise that migration maximises ‘family welfare’ (1978: 757). Ultimately, he assumes that the benefit accrued by the family by migrating is more important than the cost imposed upon women.

Sociological literature on gender and migration decisions takes a more critical approach, documenting how women’s ‘tied’ migration reflects their subordinate status within the household, and showing that migration can be disempowering for women, reducing their opportunities for paid work and increasing their dependence upon their male partners. In this literature, migration decisions are analysed within the context of hierarchical gender relations within households (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1991, 1996; Boyd 1989; Yeoh and Khoo 1998). Rather than resulting from individual calculations of the costs and benefits of migration implied in mainstream models such as the ‘push-pull’ theory, or calculations as to ‘family welfare’ which assume a unitary household, sociologists have seen migration decisions as reflections of the unequal distribution of power within households, such that migration is often male-initiated, and generates most benefits for men.

Fincher et al (1994: 79) argue that women’s tendency to migrate as spouses of primary applicant men suggests that ‘women may bear disproportionately the inevitable social, economic, physical and emotional disruption of the immigration process.’ In other words, the number of women migrating because of family reasons ‘raises the question of how many are giving up their own familial, social and occupation networks, their culture and language, in the interests of the male partner’ (1994: 79).
Similarly, Lee et al (2002: 613), examining settlement experiences of Chinese women in Britain, suggest that when families migrate for the purpose of men’s further study, women primarily bear the costs of the ‘family’ investment strategy. ‘In principle, the men’s pursuit of a postgraduate qualification forms part of a familial strategy of advancement. In practice, women tend to bear the brunt of anxieties, social isolation, responsibilities and sacrifices required in order for the familial strategy to succeed’ (Lee et al 2002: 613). In their study, ‘college wives’ gave up their full-time paid work to manage the household, carrying the main burden of domestic tasks, childcare, and liaising with people such as school authorities and doctors. ‘Family routines, leisure activities, place of residence, home visits, and consumption patterns were largely dictated by the husband’s needs, i.e. to attain the best possible academic result within the shortest period of time’ (Lee et al 2002: 613).

Bonny and Love (1991: 346) also find that migrating for a partner’s employment is ‘almost exclusively a female phenomenon’, and argue that this transforms women from independent persons to secondary or ancillary supporters of male partners in their primary occupational roles. However, they suggest that this need not be detrimental to women’s own employment activities, since their skills, aptitudes and resources can facilitate their adaptation to the new situation.

Clearly, family migration decisions are shaped by prescribed kinship and gender roles, and by the hierarchy of power within the household. Even when migration may enhance the economic welfare of the household, households may not be unified over the decision, and migration may result in dramatically different outcomes for men and women. In focusing predominantly on individual human capital attributes, and in most cases examining only the experiences of primary applicants, the LSIA studies remove migrants from their household contexts, within which gender roles are key in shaping employment outcomes for men and women. The importance of gender and the household context are examined further in Chapter 7, which explores the gendered migration and settlement experiences of Chinese women in Australia.
Conclusion: The dearth of social research

Current research in Australia is dominated by studies of economic criteria. Since 1996, there has been a dearth of research on migration and settlement which has not used an economistic, human capital approach. In part this is a product of the Howard Coalition Government’s abolition of key institutions which previously facilitated more socially-oriented research, such as the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, and the under-funding of other public agencies, such as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, whose statutory functions and responsibilities have been severely curtailed by funding cuts (Jayasuriya and Kee 1999: xiii; Jupp 2002: 55).

As Jupp notes, ‘There has been almost no “social” or “cultural” research funded directly by the Commonwealth in recent years’ (2002: 62), and advocacy, access and equity monitoring, and social and economic research are ‘greatly diminished’ (2002: 78). As Kofman (2000: 56) argues, research on skilled international migration is ‘resolutely economic’ and ‘needs to be less compartmentalised and more integrated, recognising the breadth of human experience’. As this chapter shows, economic criteria and human capital alone cannot explain migrants’ experiences in a new country. In order to gain a full understanding of their experiences, we need to situate migrants within broader contexts, recognising the important role played by culture and ethnicity, gender, and the household context.

While in the US there is vigorous debate about the desirable composition of the migration program, in Australia there is virtually no questioning of the government’s human

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18 This erosion of institutional research capacity is mirrored in the area of the status of women. Upon its election, the Howard Government significantly downgraded and restructured the Women’s Bureau in the Department of Employment, Education and Training, so that it no longer provides research and policy advice on the labour force status of women in Australia (Pocock 1998: 581).

19 Only a minority of migrant admissions to the US are based on occupational skills. However, there has recently been growing advocacy for a more skills-based migration admissions system. Duleep and Regets (1996b: 219) note that calls for reform of the US migration system have been spurred on by three economic concerns: (1) a perceived increasing disparity between the educational attainments of migrants and the native born; (2) regardless of these educational differences, an increasing disparity between the initial earnings of migrants and the native born; and (3) a fear that migrants are taking jobs away from the native born, particularly lower skilled natives. This has produced much discussion over the relative merits of each
capital orientation in migrant admissions. While the administration of the humanitarian migration program is hotly contested, there is no critical examination of the overwhelming emphasis placed on human capital in the rest of Australia’s migration program.

Migration policy is becoming increasingly selective, and screening out those with insufficient human capital. While the government has proudly proclaimed the successes of this policy orientation, especially emphasising the positive contribution of skilled migrants to the Australian economy, the research upon which these proclamations are based is extremely narrow in focus. My own analysis of LSIA data has uncovered much that complicates the prevailing ‘success story’ of recent migrants. Earlier literature had documented and analysed migrants’ downward mobility after arrival in Australia, especially for female migrants and those from non-English speaking backgrounds. These concerns are all conspicuously absent in the current prevailing literature, and ones which the rest of my thesis explores.

Confirming the salience of the ‘transferability gap’ encountered by many migrants, the next chapter documents the occupational mobility experienced by Chinese women after migration to Australia, presenting quantitative and qualitative evidence of their downward and blocked occupational mobility. It shows that while the ‘success story’ narrative may reflect the experiences of some Chinese migrants, for others, re-establishing careers in Australia is a much more difficult process.

approach, including a critique of the skills emphasis which has not been seen to the same extent in Australia (e.g. Gallo and Bailey 1996).

A more visible aspect of this selectivity is the escalation of ‘border protection’ measures to reject asylum seekers not entering through the ‘proper’ channels.
PART 2

Chinese Women in Australia: Feminisation of Roles
As we saw in the previous chapter, current research on migrant employment in Australia is dominated by a ‘success story’ narrative that equates high levels of human capital with labour market success. Using a human capital approach, most researchers argue that migrants’ employment outcomes improve with the level of individual skill. Thus with the Australian Government’s increasing emphasis on human capital in the migration program, recent migrants, more highly skilled than ever, are achieving better employment outcomes than earlier generations of less skilled migrants.

As Chapter 2 outlined, the Chinese population in Australia comprises relatively recent arrivals. Although a minority can trace their ancestry to the days of the nineteenth century Gold Rush, the bulk of Chinese migrants in Australia arrived during the last two decades, during the ascendancy of migration policy which has increasingly selected migrants on the basis of their skills. So how do the experiences of Chinese migrants fit within the prevailing ‘success story’ of skilled migration? This chapter documents Chinese women’s
experiences of work in Australia, arguing that the ‘success story’ masks substantial diversity in migrant employment outcomes. While the experiences of some Chinese women approach the successful outcomes portrayed in the LSIA studies, there is also much evidence of downward mobility.

‘Career Women’: Women’s employment in Hong Kong and China

Women in both Hong Kong and China have a strong history of engagement in paid work. In Hong Kong, this was a result of the colony’s industrial development, oriented firstly around light manufacturing, and then around services, both of which were substantial employers of women. In China, women’s workforce participation was a result of government design: encouraging women into the labour market was a major part of Chinese communist ideology and practice.

Since the early 1960s, the Hong Kong economy has maintained a strong demand for women’s labour. With a burgeoning economy initially specialising in light industry, Hong Kong women’s labour force participation rates grew steadily in the post-World War II decades. By 1961, 40 per cent of women were official labour force participants (Constable 1997: 24). During the 1960s and 1970s, garment, textile, plastic, electronic, and wig manufacturing accounted for the jobs of 85 per cent of working women (Constable 1997: 24). In the 1970s, while light industry continued to grow, the service sector – including wholesale, retail, import and export trade, hospitality, business services, and social services – added to the demand for women’s labour. By the 1980s, the service sector offered good employment opportunities for women, especially those with a high school or tertiary education.

More generally, women’s labour force participation in Hong Kong has been supported by a consistently buoyant economy and shortages of labour. Declining birth rates, restrictions on flows of mainland Chinese migrants and the ‘brain drain’ of professionals moving abroad all contributed to labour shortages in the late 1980s and 1990s, creating
abundant employment opportunities for local workers. Until the recession of the late-1990s, unemployment rarely exceeded two or three per cent (Man 1997: 196). The shortage of professionals in particular caused many employers to become relatively gender-blind. Educated women therefore have been able to enter managerial and administrative positions, enjoying good salaries, attractive fringe benefits and promotions (Man 1997: 194).

In 2002, 52.5 per cent of Hong Kong’s women were labour force participants (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2003b). The Hong Kong Government boasts that women fill 23 per cent of directorate level positions, up from just nine per cent in the early 1990s (Hong Kong Government 2001). And within the civil service, women comprise 48 per cent of the Administrative Officer grade, the professional administrators who form the core of the government’s policy and decision-making processes, up from 16 per cent two decades ago (Hong Kong Government 2001).

On the mainland, 50 years of government policy encouraging women into the workforce has generated almost universal female employment in urban areas. During the Cultural Revolution, women were redefined by official ideology from wives and mothers to workers, and were trained and channelled into traditionally ‘male’ occupations (Croll 1995; Rofel 1994; Wolf 1985). As Hooper (1998: 179) describes, the Chinese housewife disappeared from public discourse: ‘Women were portrayed as workers, peasants, and less often as professionals and officials, contributing to the building of “new China.”’ By the 1980s, 90 per cent of urban women were working, making female labour force participation in urban China among the highest in the world (Bauer et al 1990). Those women not in paid work have generally had low levels of education, mostly primary school or less. Therefore non-working women are ‘not only against social norms but are also associated with a low educational status in urban China’ (Zhou 2000: 449).

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1 This does not mean that there is no sexism in the Hong Kong labour force. In particular, non-professional women such as secretaries and blue-collar workers often confront blatant sexism. For example, recruitment advertisements for secretaries typically specify a preferred age (usually between 20 and 25), and women risk being laid off for requesting maternity leave (Man 1997: 194).
Even in the current period of reform, guaranteeing women’s right to employment remains official government policy. The government ‘protects the right of women to work on equal terms with men, applies the principle of equal pay for equal work to men and women alike, and gives special protection to women during the menstrual period, pregnancy, maternity and breastfeeding’ (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2002: 10). The policy further states that the government and ‘all sectors of society’ will ‘develop and expand’ the fields and trades for women to work in, and conduct training for women (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2002: 10). The government’s low wage policy also encourages women to work because it is almost impossible for a family to survive without two wage earners (Stockman 1994: 766). In 1995, the labour force participation rate for women (between 15 and 64 years of age) was 80.4 per cent (ILO 2003). And unlike many Western countries, China has no established arrangements for part-time work, meaning that women and men both tend to work full-time (Bian and Logan 1996: 748; Stockman 1994: 766).

In the last two decades, China’s economic boom, based on industrialisation in Special Economic Zones, increasing numbers of foreign owned companies and joint ventures, and a growing service sector, has further expanded the number of jobs for women in cities and in dynamic rural regions. Young urban professional women working for foreign companies are emerging as a new elite in China, particularly because of their good language skills. Private sector work has also become highly gendered in that even clerical jobs are portrayed as glamorous, feminine and modern. In the late 1990s, the term ‘white collar beauty’ emerged to describe young women’s private sector careers, high incomes and high consumption patterns (Zheng 2000: 75). During this period in Shanghai, for example, women constituted almost half the personnel staff in foreign enterprises, and one third of the representatives, the top position for Chinese in foreign companies (Zheng 2000: 74).3

2 Within Chinese universities, foreign language departments have been among the few with more female than male students because foreign language mastery has long been viewed as an ‘innate female strength’ (Zheng 2000: 75).

3 Meanwhile, young urban educated men are more likely to work in the public sector. In fact, young professional couples in urban areas commonly establish a gendered division of labour in which the wife works in a foreign company and the husband is in a government or academic job with less income but higher security and more welfare benefits (Zheng 2000: 76).
Together with decades of ideological emphasis on women’s roles in the workforce from the Chinese government, these factors have produced a great attachment to paid work for Chinese women. As Zhou expresses it, ‘paid employment is an indispensable part of womanhood for contemporary mainland Chinese…The current generation of Chinese women grew up believing that working outside the home is the only way of life. They regard working as the prime and only indicator of gender equality while accepting other forms of subordination’ (2000: 449).

Clearly there is a strong tradition of women being active in the workforce in both Hong Kong and China. However, this is not to deny the workforce gender segregation in these two societies. In Hong Kong, women are under-represented in the upper echelons of the workforce (as managers, administrators, professionals and associate professionals) and on average earn less than men (Westwood et al 1997). In China, occupational gender segregation and wage differentials between men and women have been less pronounced than in other countries (Whyte 1984), but even before the current period of reform, women were under-represented in the higher status state-owned sectors of industry and over-represented in collective work-units, which tended to be smaller and less able to provide services and benefits to members. Women also tended to earn only 80 to 90 per cent of men’s wages (All China Women’s Federation 1991: 239, 320; Whyte 1984: 217). Today, the expanding private job market is more highly gendered, with women channelled primarily to the service sector and secretarial jobs while men are recruited for technical and managerial positions (Zheng 2000: 71). Nevertheless, in both the Hong Kong and mainland societies, it has long been regarded as natural for women to be in paid work. Consequently, Chinese women in Australia can often feel that migration reduces their employment opportunities. The following sections document the occupational mobility experienced by Chinese women, using both quantitative and qualitative data.
Occupational Mobility in Australia: Quantitative evidence

This section uses LSIA data to compare Chinese migrants’ employment outcomes in Australia with their pre-migration experiences. Data on occupational status, use of qualifications, job satisfaction and income levels show that employment experiences after migration are much more diverse than those portrayed in the existing LSIA studies. In particular, outcomes vary considerably by gender and birthplace. This is also shown in 2001 census data, which provide a broader portrait of Chinese migrants’ employment experiences in Australia, and allow for comparisons with the general Australian population.

Occupational mobility among migrants is seen most clearly in longitudinal data on occupational status. As Table 5.1 shows, the majority of LSIA respondents from both Hong Kong and China were employed in skilled jobs prior to migration. Immediately after migration, all groups, regardless of gender or birthplace, suffered downward occupational mobility. However, after three and a half years, outcomes had improved for some groups, particularly Hong Kong women: a greater proportion of this group were employed in high skilled jobs than had been the case prior to migration. However, migration clearly had the most dramatic impact on PRC women, who suffered a dramatic fall in occupational status – the proportion of those employed in skilled positions fell by almost 40 percentage points. Among Chinese men, migration also had mixed results: the change in PRC men’s occupational attainment was minimal, while Hong Kong men suffered considerable downward mobility.

---

4 Care should be taken in interpreting the results for the female respondents, as the sample sizes are very small at Wave 3 (N=27 for China-born; N=28 for Hong Kong-born). This reflects the low labour market participation rates among women after migration, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. In particular, while these figures show a slightly higher proportion of Hong Kong women than Hong Kong men in high skilled jobs, the Census figures below (Table 5.2) show the opposite relationship. Given the much larger population size of the Census, the latter picture is likely to be more accurate.
Table 5.1: Occupation of primary applicants from China and Hong Kong, before and after migration (% of those employed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>In 12 months prior to migration</th>
<th>6 months after arrival</th>
<th>3½ years after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female High skill*</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low skill**</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male High skill</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low skill</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* High skill comprises managers, administrators, professionals, associate professionals and tradespersons
** Low skill comprises clerks, sales and personal service workers, plant and machine operators and drivers, and labourers

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

Census data on occupational attainment also show variations by gender and birthplace. Overall in 2001, as Table 5.2 shows, men had higher status jobs than women, and Hong Kong migrants outperformed mainlanders (and the total Australian population). For example, amongst the high skilled jobs, Chinese men outnumbered Chinese women by almost 20 percentage points (by comparison, the gap for the total Australian population was only 10 percentage points).

Comparing outcomes by birthplace, migrants from Hong Kong (both male and female) were much more likely to be employed as professionals, relative to mainland migrants and the total Australian population. However, even the high achieving Hong Kong population was less likely than the general Australian population to be found in occupational elite of managers and administrators. Like Australian women, Hong Kong women were also concentrated in service-related jobs. Meanwhile, the proportion of PRC migrants in professional and managerial jobs was similar to that of the total Australian
population, although PRC women were also over-represented in production and labouring jobs.

Table 5.2: Occupation of migrants from China and Hong Kong, and the total Australian population, 2001 (% of those employed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>China-born</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
<th>Total Australian population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=34,907</td>
<td>N=28,505</td>
<td>N=16,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers &amp; administrators Professionals</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate professionals</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons &amp; related workers</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced clerical &amp; service workers</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate clerical, sales &amp; service workers</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate production &amp; transport workers</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary clerical, sales &amp; service workers</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers &amp; related workers</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described/not stated</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unpublished ABS census data

How should we interpret these patterns of occupational attainment? As Chapter 2 outlined, Hong Kong and PRC migrants tend to have much higher levels of education relative to the total Australian population: the proportion of Chinese migrants with higher qualifications is approximately double that of the general population (unpublished ABS 2001 census data). Thus we might expect to see them occupying higher status positions in the workforce. For the Hong Kong migrants, this is clearly the case. However, the fact
that PRC migrants’ occupational attainment is not noticeably better than the general population (and is worse for women, especially at the lower end of the workforce), demonstrates that they are not receiving the same rewards for their qualifications as are their Hong Kong counterparts or the general Australian population. This suggests that the downward mobility suffered in the first years of settlement in Australia (as seen in Table 5.1) may have a lasting impact on PRC migrants’ careers.

Patterns in occupational mobility are also reflected in the frequency with which migrants report using their qualifications in their jobs. As Table 5.3 shows, in their last jobs prior to migration, the vast majority of respondents, especially women, used their qualifications often or very often. After three and a half years in Australia, there was a sharp fall in this figure, especially among women. PRC women fared worst, with a 50 per cent fall in the proportion reporting that they used their qualifications often or very often, and a large increase in the proportion who never used their qualifications.

Table 5.3: How often use qualifications in job: primary applicants from China and Hong Kong, before and after migration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In last job in former country</th>
<th>3½ years after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=209</td>
<td>N=150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often or often</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often or often</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

The LSIA also asked respondents how they felt about their jobs, both in their former country and in Australia. The results provide a personal expression of occupational
mobility. As Table 5.4 shows, the majority of primary applicants had positive feelings about their last jobs prior to migration, particularly those from China: approximately three quarters of PRC migrants reported liking or loving their jobs. However, after migration to Australia, the proportion of respondents with positive feelings about their jobs fell substantially, especially among PRC women, the majority of whom either didn’t care about their jobs or disliked their jobs.

Table 5.4: Feelings about job: primary applicants from China and Hong Kong, before and after migration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In last job in former country</th>
<th>3½ years after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=265</td>
<td>N=150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like or love job</td>
<td>China 73, Hong Kong 64</td>
<td>China 36, Hong Kong 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job is OK</td>
<td>China 12, Hong Kong 22</td>
<td>China 57, Hong Kong 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t care or dislike job</td>
<td>China 15, Hong Kong 14</td>
<td>China 7, Hong Kong 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like or love job</td>
<td>China 78, Hong Kong 57</td>
<td>China 67, Hong Kong 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job is OK</td>
<td>China 16, Hong Kong 36</td>
<td>China 25, Hong Kong 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t care or dislike job</td>
<td>China 6, Hong Kong 7</td>
<td>China 8, Hong Kong 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

Unfortunately the LSIA does not include data on respondents’ income levels prior to migration, so it is not possible to assess whether migration had any impact on respondents’ income. However, after migration, levels of income varied according to birthplace and gender. As Figure 5.1 shows, during the first three and a half years of settlement in Australia, a greater proportion of the China-born were found in the low income brackets, whereas the Hong Kong respondents outnumbered mainlanders in the upper income brackets.
Figure 5.1: Weekly income, Primary applicants from China and Hong Kong, 3½ years after arrival

![Income Distribution Chart]

Source: LSIA1, Wave 3

Income patterns were also heavily differentiated along gender lines. After three and a half years in Australia, women were more than twice as likely as men to have no income, and the distribution for women with incomes was skewed towards the lower earnings brackets, as seen in Figure 5.2. This reflects the fall in employment among women after migration, and the downward occupational mobility experienced by many of those who were employed. Men’s incomes tended to be higher, with men more than three times as likely as women to be in the top income bracket.
Figure 5.2: Weekly income, Primary applicants from Hong Kong and China by gender, 3½ years after arrival

Source: LSIA1, Wave 3

Census data also show variation in income levels by birthplace and gender, with those from Hong Kong earning substantially more than those from China, and men earning more than women. This is evident in Figure 5.3, which uses 2001 Census data. For both birthplaces, women were more likely than men to report earning no incomes, or incomes below $300. Meanwhile, the proportion of men outnumbered that of women in each income category above $700 per week.

The high proportions of Hong Kong migrants reporting low or no incomes reflects the large number of students included in this population. This was not as significant a factor for the China-born, however, suggesting that this group was more likely to be employed in lower paid jobs, or relying on income support.\(^5\) This scenario is also suggested by the comparatively small proportions of PRC migrants (especially women) in the higher

\(^5\) In 2001, 25 per cent of the Hong Kong-born were attending an educational institution, compared with less than 15 per cent of the China-born (DIMIA 2003c).
income categories. The income distribution for the China born is clearly skewed towards the lower end of the earnings spectrum. In contrast, although many Hong Kong migrants enjoyed very meagre weekly incomes, there were also sizeable proportions in the higher income categories. This suggests that among those in employment, the Hong Kong migrants earned more than the PRC migrants.

**Figure 5.3: Weekly individual income of Hong Kong- and China-born persons by gender, 2001**

![Weekly individual income of Hong Kong- and China-born persons by gender, 2001](chart.png)

Source: Unpublished ABS census data

Thus quantitative data show that Chinese migrants often have problems finding skilled employment in the Australian labour market. Problems are particularly pronounced for PRC women, who experience downward occupational mobility, reduced job satisfaction, and fewer opportunities to use their qualifications. Many Hong Kong women experience upward occupational mobility after migration, but like their mainland counterparts, also suffer reduced job satisfaction and reduced opportunities to use their qualifications. Labour market outcomes are also highly gendered, with women from both Hong Kong and China tending to achieve inferior outcomes relative to men.
Data from the LSIA and Census clearly complicate the skilled migrant ‘success story’ that prevails in current research on migrant employment in Australia. While the LSIA studies discussed in the previous chapter invariably conclude by highlighting the positive employment outcomes achieved by recent migrants, this optimistic portrait masks the diversity of outcomes between different migrant groups, and between men and women. While portions of the Hong Kong-born population achieve outcomes approaching this ‘success story’ narrative, for the PRC migrants, there is strong evidence of a ‘transferability gap’ which prevents many from being adequately rewarded for their human capital. Clearly, the successful transfer of skills and knowledge to a new country is far from automatic, even for highly qualified migrants who have been successful professionals in their home country.

These quantitative results are paralleled in my qualitative research findings on Chinese women in Australia. The next section documents these outcomes, while the next two chapters present some explanations for these results.

**Occupational Mobility after Migration: Qualitative evidence**

Like the quantitative data presented above, qualitative data from my interviews with women from Hong Kong and China also show the diversity in employment outcomes experienced by Chinese women in Australia. While both groups felt they had made career sacrifices in migrating to Australia, the Hong Kong women were usually able to continue their careers after migration, while the PRC women suffered often dramatic downward mobility.

Prior to migration, the majority of my respondents were accustomed to playing an active role in the labour market. Most, particularly those from China, were well educated, and took pride in their career achievements in their home country. Many spoke fondly of their former jobs – they were proud of their achievements and in some cases, considered themselves part of the national elite in their field. For instance, Nicola proudly described her achievements as a teacher in a prestigious school in Hong Kong:
I had a really good job before – teaching in an international school is just about the best teaching job you can get. … the things I’m really proud of are my excursions I organised. I took my Year 11 students to the Himalayas to go hiking for three weeks – we went to Annapurna next to Everest… And we also went to Atlanta to see the Olympic Dream Team, and spent a month in Miami. I used to do lots of excursions.

Such experiences were particularly common among respondents from China, who had often been in jobs that were a source of pride and satisfaction. Luqing, a primary school teacher, described her school’s status as a ‘key institution’: 6

Our school was a special school, like a selective school – open to the public, any time. Often people from Beijing and Shanghai would come to visit, and every term other schools from all sorts of different areas would come and see what we were doing…Everyone want to come to our school.

Leila, a sports instructor in a mainland Chinese university, spoke of how she established her reputation in her department:

I was young and had lots of energy… My supervisor…gave me lots of responsibilities, really wanted to help my career. Students would change from other classes into my classes…Now my supervisor is 84, still at [the] university, and I still keep in contact with her – talk to her two hours on the phone. When new people come to the department, she uses my story as a model for others – how to build your career.

Jian, an engineer, told me of her achievement in gaining a place in a prestigious Science course in a university, only three years after the Cultural Revolution. Jian said that in China she was ‘always very proud’ of her work, considering herself part of an elite that performed important work in China’s modernisation effort:

6 ‘Key institutions’ (sometimes referred to as experimental schools) have operated in China since the early 1950s (with a break during the Cultural Revolution) as models of experimentation and best practice. They have had greater resources and more highly qualified staff than regular educational institutions, and entry is very competitive, with high academic scores required (NOOSR 1996: 6).
We are special…All our classmates they get into the university…I had friends all working in this…It was a big plant – about 3,000 people. We make videos and TVs. I analyse the metal materials. I’m really proud.

Many respondents from both China and Hong Kong identified strongly with their jobs, having worked hard to gain qualifications, and investing much time and energy into achieving their goals at work. In many cases, it was clear that they considered themselves part of a national elite, influential and respected among colleagues and the broader society.

For most women, whether they were from Hong Kong or China, migration to Australia meant having to sacrifice careers. As Chapter 7 discusses, many women left the workforce after migration to assist their families settle in a new environment. When they returned to work, they often did so part-time, structuring their paid work around their family responsibilities. In seeking work, most women had difficulties gaining positions in Australia that were comparable to those they had left behind. In some cases, they accepted lower positions in their field; others changed their occupation or industry completely. Many women spent lengthy periods unemployed. It was rare for them to simply arrive in Australia and continue along their previous career trajectories. Thus some kind of career sacrifice was experienced by the vast majority of my respondents. However, the extent of this sacrifice differed along lines of nationality. My qualitative data supports the quantitative evidence that women from Hong Kong achieve better labour market outcomes than their mainland counterparts.

Among my respondents, women from Hong Kong were generally able to continue their careers, though many felt unable to advance beyond this level. In other words, they experienced blocked occupational mobility. Women from China tended to fare worse, experiencing often dramatic downward occupational mobility. It was not uncommon for women with professional backgrounds to find themselves in unskilled jobs in Australia, particularly immediately after migration. Women from China were also more likely than their Hong Kong counterparts to be unemployed. Thus while most respondents in both groups believed that migration meant a sacrificing of their careers, the degree of the sacrifice varied.
Measuring Mobility

Measuring occupational mobility is a complex process, and one which eludes attempts to define an ‘objective’ or ‘scientific’ approach. The ‘desirability’ of a job is a subjective concept dependent on level of job satisfaction, remuneration, responsibility, skills utilised, flexibility of work arrangements, and other factors. Any attempt at a generalised measure of mobility will inadequately reflect these complexities. However, as an approximation, I have used the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO), consistent with the LSIA studies discussed earlier.

In analysing the occupational mobility of my respondents, I compare their occupations prior to migration with the occupation they held at the time of interview, using the ASCO to calculate whether they experienced upward, downward, or no occupational mobility. This is a basic technique which does not consider respondents’ subjective perceptions of their employment status. In some cases, for example, respondents’ old and new occupations fell within the same ASCO group (for example, university lecturer and secondary school teacher are both within the ‘Professionals’ group), but the shift in occupation was experienced as downward mobility. In other cases, changing occupations within an ASCO group (for example, from registered nurse to family counsellor) was experienced as upward mobility.7

In assessing mobility, I have concentrated on respondents’ occupations at the time of interview. This does not usually fully represent their employment experiences in Australia because respondents’ earlier jobs were often very different in status to those they held at the time of interview. Tables 5.5 and 5.6 provide data on respondents’ initial jobs in Australia, providing some sense of their occupational trajectories after migration.

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7 I focus on occupational status because this is the variable about which I have the most data. I am unable to use income, for example, firstly because some respondents were reluctant to provide me with this information, and secondly, because subjective interpretations of what constituted a ‘good’ income differed so dramatically between those from Hong Kong (accustomed to very high levels of income) and those from China (accustomed to very low levels). Labour force participation rates are also problematic. While a high labour force participation rate is conventionally assumed to be an indicator of labour market success, for many of the women in my sample, this is not an appropriate assumption because they voluntarily withdrew from the labour market to pursue non-paid roles in the household. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.
The ASCO-based measures of occupational mobility offer a basic overview of the labour market outcomes of my respondents, but the more detailed meanings of these outcomes can only be conveyed by examining the qualitative data more thoroughly.

**PRC Respondents: Downward occupational mobility**

*You know, we got not too bad job in China. But here we just work very hard and you know, live not too good. The prospects here are not too good.*

*(Lily, a former college teacher, now unemployed)*

The theme of downward mobility is common in research on PRC migrants’ experiences in Western countries such as the US, Canada and Australia (Fung and Jie 1996; Salaff *et al* 2002, 2003; Zhou 2000). These studies note that while PRC migrants are mostly highly educated and have professional backgrounds, they often find themselves in poorly paid, low-skill work after migration. For example, in her study of PRC women in New York City, Zhou (2000: 450) found that despite their diverse occupational backgrounds in China, upon arrival in the US, the occupations of the women became relatively concentrated, particularly in the garment industry, restaurants and other services. ‘Even women with a high level of education in China find themselves in these sectors due to the need for immediate income. It is not unusual to encounter Chinese doctors, artists, professors, or engineers working in restaurants and garment shops,’ Zhou writes (2000: 451).

In Salaff *et al*’s research (2002, 2003) on PRC professionals in Canada, few found jobs in exactly their line of work. While nearly all their respondents (90 per cent) were full or semi-professionals in China, only a third were able to find jobs at this level in Canada. None were able to move upwards (Salaff *et al* 2002: 455). PRC women fare especially badly after migration, and Salaff *et al* suggest that migration decreases the gender equality within couples. In China there was ‘considerable job equality’, with husbands and wives holding the same status jobs in more than half the couples studied. After migration, this was the case for only a minority of couples (2003: 451).
Fung and Jie (1996) document the ‘professional degradation’ of PRC students who come to Australia to pursue post-graduate degrees. While many of them had been teachers, accountants, government employees and engineers in China, after arriving in Australia, the vast majority were employed in low skilled, low paid jobs, often by other Chinese migrants. ‘They had no alternative to doing whatever jobs they could find, regardless of their talents, experience and Chinese qualifications’, Fung and Jie write (1996: 8). In 1992 it was estimated that 80 to 90 per cent of these students were washing dishes in Chinese restaurants, cleaning toilets and floors in office buildings and, in the case of women, sewing garments at home or working in sweatshops (Fung and Jie 1996: 8).

Fung and Jie note that in 1996 there were more than 700 PRC-trained nurses in Australia, some of whom had been chiefs of nursing sections in Chinese hospitals. However, none were working as nurses in Australia because their qualifications were not recognised. ‘A few were lucky enough to have found jobs in nursing homes’ (Fung and Jie 1996: 8). Artists fared no better: ‘Some singers who were household names in China sang in bars, clubs and restaurants for a mere pittance, dancers performed in street shows and artists drew portraits on pavements. It was depressing and demoralising’ (Fung and Jie 1996: 9).

Among my PRC respondents, while a minority found jobs comparable to those they left behind in China, the majority of my respondents from China experienced downward occupational mobility, as seen in Table 5.5.

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8 Mobility was calculated by comparing ASCO categories of pre-migration and current jobs. ASCO categories comprise: 1 (Managers and Administrators), 2 (Professionals), 3 (Associate professionals), 4 (Tradespersons), 5 (Advanced clerical & service workers), 6 (Intermediate clerical, sales & service workers), 7 (Intermediate production & transport workers), 8 (Elementary clerical, sales & service workers), and 9 (Labourers). In some cases, although the ASCO category is the same, the designation of downward mobility considers the respondents’ subjective assessment of their occupational mobility.
Table 5.5: Occupational mobility of PRC respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years in Aus</th>
<th>Last occupation in China</th>
<th>Initial occupation in Australia [years in job]</th>
<th>Occupation at time of interview</th>
<th>Mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No mobility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>Waitress, cleaner, kitchen assistant [1]</td>
<td>Accounts assistant</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Computer operator</td>
<td>Sales assistant [2]</td>
<td>Sales/advertising officer</td>
<td>3 (\rightarrow) 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei-lin</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Management trainee</td>
<td>Waitress &amp; clerk [10]</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Downward mobility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Registered nurse</td>
<td>Waitress [4]</td>
<td>Waitress</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>University lecturer</td>
<td>High school teacher [5]</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Company director</td>
<td>Factory worker [5]</td>
<td>Unemployed &amp; studying at TAFE</td>
<td>1 (\rightarrow) 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Video editor [1]</td>
<td>Small business operator</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin-li</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Small business operator [1]</td>
<td>Small business operator</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>University sports instructor</td>
<td>Cleaner, factory worker [8]</td>
<td>Small business operator</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td>Cleaner [1]</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luqing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Primary school teacher</td>
<td>Clothing outworker [1]</td>
<td>Small business operator</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei-fang</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Business manager</td>
<td>Unemployed [2]</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1 (\rightarrow) N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Small business operator</td>
<td>Waitress [&lt;1]</td>
<td>Sales assistant</td>
<td>5 (\rightarrow) 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>University music instructor</td>
<td>Private tutor [2]</td>
<td>Private tutor</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>University lecturer</td>
<td>Hotel room service attendant [2]</td>
<td>Community worker</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ying</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td>High school teacher [1]</td>
<td>Waitress</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yun</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Nurse’s assistant &amp; factory worker [1]</td>
<td>Library assistant</td>
<td>2 (\rightarrow) 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Downward Mobility

The majority (15 out of 22) of my PRC respondents experienced downward occupational mobility after arrival in Australia. Among these women, it was common to see professionals such as teachers and university lecturers working as clothing outworkers, cleaners and other low skilled labourers. Two particular professional groups are prominent among those experiencing downward mobility – educators and engineers. As Table 5.5 shows, nine of the PRC women were employed as teachers, lecturers, instructors or engineers prior to migration.

**Educators:** Migration researchers have noted that migrants in the ‘social professions’ – for example, educators and journalists – can experience particular difficulties transferring their qualifications across national borders because of the culturally-specific character of their work. Remennick (2003) describes this as the ‘cultural dependency’ of professions, that is, the attachment to local language, mentality and cultural codes. In contrast to engineering, technical and scientific occupations which are ‘culturally neutral’, ‘social professionals’ have the hardest time ‘applying their talents on a different cultural soil’ (Remennick 2003: 717). Thus educators from non-English speaking countries can have significant problems in having their qualifications recognised in Australia, and face the choice of either regaining their qualifications locally or changing careers.

Of the eight educators among my PRC respondents, only one, Melissa, was able to continue her career, and to a large extent this is because her expertise was in martial arts, a tradition introduced to Australia by the Chinese. Two other respondents continued teaching, but in lower status jobs, shifting from university to high school teaching (Jackie) and from university to private tuition (Ruth). The other PRC educators gave up their teaching careers altogether, sometimes taking up low-skilled jobs like waitressing and clothing outwork. For example, Leila, who, as we have seen, was a successful university sports instructor in China, found that her degree in Education was not

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9 Birrell and Hawthorne (1997) and Mak (2001) also found (though for Hong Kong migrants) that teachers and engineers were among those who had difficulties continuing their careers in Australia (together with managers, lawyers and accountants). Meanwhile, nurses, medical practitioners, and computing professionals had more satisfactory employment outcomes.
recognised in Australia. After migrating to Australia in her 40s, and unable to finance further study, she was forced to take up low skilled work, and spent eight years as a cleaner and factory labourer in Sydney. At the time of interview, she and her husband made a living from a home-based network marketing business. Leila was very proud of their business, but clearly missed teaching, telling me about the many former colleagues and students that she still kept in touch with.

Even the women who were able to continue teaching felt that they had sacrificed their careers in migrating to Australia. For example, Jackie was a former university language lecturer in her 30s, who migrated to Australia in 1997. Her degree in Education was not recognised in Australia, so she spent her first two years in Australia completing a Diploma of Education in a Sydney university, supported by her husband who was working as an academic. At the time of interview, she was teaching Mandarin in a Sydney private school. Though she thought it was a good job, she still felt it was a step backward, as she had already made the transition in China from high school teaching to university teaching, and clearly preferred the latter. She explained:

> When I was working in China, first [I worked in] high school and then university. But now I’m back to high school – I feel I’m going backwards. Ten years, I’m going backwards. So I just – secretly I feel – maybe after two years, after my English is better, I’m back to university. I want to maybe do PhD or maybe teach in the university. All this is just dream – I don’t know.

**Engineers:** Although engineering is based on recognised international technical standards, migrant engineers often face a different problem: in many Western countries, engineering is a ‘protected profession’ (Salaff *et al* 2002: 454) in which entry is tightly controlled by industry associations and organisations. Moreover, there are simply not enough engineering jobs available for new arrivals. Compared to industrialising migrant source countries such as China and Russia, destination countries like Australia and Canada lack the industrial sector that would employ migrant engineers (Remmenick 2003; Salaff *et al* 2002). Thus these migrants suffer from an industrial mismatch between the labour markets of their old and new homelands.
Neither of the engineers in my sample were able to continue their careers after migration. Even though their qualifications were officially recognised, they were unsuccessful in their job searches, citing their outsider status (being foreign and female), and simply the lack of suitable jobs in Australia. As we saw earlier, Jian was extremely proud of her career as a metallurgical engineer in China. However, she told me that while China was a large industrialising country with many jobs for engineers, Australia and New Zealand (where she first migrated) were ‘small countries’ without the heavy industry sectors to employ engineers. While China had steel plants, Australia and New Zealand ‘import everything’, she said. After two years of fruitless job-hunting in Australia, she and her husband had bought a suburban corner store, which also allowed Jian to take care of her two school-aged sons.

Jin-li, who came to Australia in 2000 with a Masters degree in engineering and extensive experience as a chemical engineer, told me that engineering jobs were difficult to find in Australia, and that many of her friends, though highly educated, gave up job-searching and eventually opened their own business:

I had ten years experience in China. But I am a chemical engineer and Australia doesn’t have many chemical industry, so it’s difficult to find jobs… My husband is also an engineer but he didn’t find a good job, so we decided to open the shop [an internet café]… I have many friends come from China, they have Masters degrees, but still it’s difficult to find a good job. Many friends do small business.

While their occupational backgrounds were substantial barriers for these teachers and engineers, downward mobility was the result of other factors too, including their ‘human-cultural capital’ (explained in Chapter 6), and their household circumstances (explained in Chapter 7). Overall, the experience of downward mobility was enormously frustrating for all of these women, and while a minority had accepted their new careers as an unavoidable ‘reality’ for migrants in Australia, others planned to improve their employment prospects through further study, often after their children were older.
No Mobility

Of the five PRC respondents who did not experience downward mobility, all were relatively young (in their 20s or early 30s) when they migrated, and three (Julia, Lucy and Mei-lin) had gained qualifications in Australia. For example, Julia, an interpreter in her 30s who migrated to Australia in 1996, supplemented her overseas-gained Bachelor of Arts with a Masters degree in Commerce from an Australian university. This allowed her to move from her initial job in Australia as a Chinatown waitress to becoming an accounts assistant in an Anglo-Australian owned company. Similarly, Mei-lin left China in 1987 with a Bachelor of Engineering, and work experience as a management trainee. After arriving in Australia, she had completed a Masters degree in Economics and at the time of interview, was undertaking a PhD, enabling her to work as a university tutor in her department.

However, even though these women were relatively satisfied with their jobs in Australia, they could not be said to have experienced upward mobility, despite their high levels of education. In some cases, they were able to begin new careers, and in others, to regain their occupational status after several years of low-skilled work.

Overall, the most common scenario for PRC respondents was one of loss of occupational status – the majority of my PRC respondents experienced unequivocal downward occupational mobility. This downgrading often left them frustrated and saddened. Confident in their qualifications, experience and skills, they came to Australia expecting to productively use their knowledge and abilities. Consequently, they were often shocked and confused when such opportunities did not emerge.

'I think living here, I got more stress':
PRC women’s precarious working lives in Australia

Ironically, although PRC migrants often experience downward mobility, their Australian jobs are almost invariably higher paid than what they were accustomed to in China. All
my respondents, even those working in jobs that were unskilled and poorly paid (by Australian standards) told me that their incomes were much higher in Australia than they had been in China. However, they were quick to emphasise that this was deceptive because the comprehensive employer-provided welfare common in China did not exist in Australia.

Although China is undergoing rapid economic reform, most PRC migrants are more or less accustomed to the communist system of life-long employment and occupational welfare, which guarantees all citizens a basic standard of living. From the 1950s China has had a system of occupational welfare which provides ‘cradle to grave’ benefits and services to urban state-sector employees. Dubbed the ‘iron rice bowl’, the system has provided, through one’s work unit or danwei, heavily subsidised housing and health insurance, retirement pensions, cash and in-kind subsidies, collective facilities and services such as nurseries, staff canteens, and clinics, and, in large units, schools and hospitals (Lee 2000; Sheng 1991; Stockman 1994; Walder 1991). This means that in spite of low wages, urban employees can maintain a comfortable standard of living. For example, state enterprises control about half of all the urban housing stock in China (Lee 2000: 8) and state workers depend on their danwei for heavily subsidised living quarters, with rents typically absorbing under 1.5 per cent of the average family income (Lee 2000: 15).

By contrast, in Australia, PRC migrants are confronted with a private labour market, and expensive housing, child-care, education, and basic everyday items. This higher cost of living is a source of anxiety for women from China, trying to manage household finances on often very low wages from insecure part-time and casual jobs. All my respondents from China noted that while wages were higher in Australia, the higher cost of living meant that they were not always better off. For example, Ruth, working as a private music tutor at the time of interview, felt that although her earnings were lower in China, she felt a greater sense of security:

In China the money is not like here, but you can manage your life. You don’t worry – like your home. In China I have a unit and I don’t have to pay anything. But here, you have the home loan every week, bills.
These sentiments were echoed by Sai, a former university lecturer whose danwei provided her with accommodation, education for her children, canteens and other services:

In China, you get not much pay, but the price, everything is low, for example, I needn’t buy a house. The university give me a unit – three bedroom unit – for free, to live. You can send your children to school – that’s free. You get your money, only buy food or living things. That’s different. Here you get more money but you pay your house, pay your children to go to good school. Yeah, that’s different… I think living here, I got more stress. But in China, not much stress.

In addition, Sai felt that there was much greater job security in China, compared to her Australian job in the community sector, which was dependent upon recurrent short-term funding from the Federal Government:

Sometimes I worry for my future. For example if this job, the government cut the funding, I lost the job. But in China, if you get this position, nobody can touch you, you do it all your life. So you never worry. Every month you can get your pay. You don’t need to worry anything. Here that’s the difference.

Jane, a former company executive, agreed that working in China was more secure because the government guaranteed your position and wage. In Australia, Jane had only been able to secure casual jobs in clothing factories, and was unemployed at the time of interview.

In China you’re guaranteed a wage, whether you work or not – it’s government owned. In Australia, you only get paid if you work… The other thing is in China, working is not so stressful, you don’t have to worry about as much. Here, you worry about your job, you worry about whether your boss might sack you tomorrow. In China, there’s none of those worries.  

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10 Translated from Mandarin
Thus not only did PRC women lose their careers by migrating to Australia, in most cases, they felt they had lost the financial and social security they had enjoyed in China, even though their jobs had been poorly remunerated. Although they were highly educated and successful in their careers in China, they were generally not able to continue their careers in Australia, and as a consequence, often felt their lives in Australia to be profoundly precarious.

**Hong Kong Respondents: Blocked occupational mobility**

Hong Kong respondents were typically more successful than their mainland counterparts. In most cases, Hong Kong women who chose to pursue paid work had few problems gaining suitable jobs relatively quickly in Australia. However, while they were able to find suitable employment, they were rarely able to advance beyond this initial level. As Table 5.6 shows, simply maintaining occupational status was the most common experience among these women, while a minority experienced upward or downward mobility.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) Three respondents are classified as ‘N/A’ because one migrated as a student at a young age, and the other two voluntarily left the workforce to concentrate on domestic responsibilities
Table 5.6: Occupational mobility of Hong Kong respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years in Aus</th>
<th>Last occupation in Hong Kong</th>
<th>Initial occupation in Australia [years in job]</th>
<th>Occupation at time of interview</th>
<th>Mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upward mobility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Secretary [15]</td>
<td>Administration officer</td>
<td>6 ▼ 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Accounts clerk</td>
<td>Accounts clerk [12]</td>
<td>Accounts manager</td>
<td>6 ▼ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No mobility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Civil servant</td>
<td>Civil servant [1]</td>
<td>Civil servant</td>
<td>2 → 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Secretary [22]</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>6 → 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
<td>Registered Nurse [7]</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
<td>2 → 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td>High school teacher [2]</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td>2 → 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Laboratory technician</td>
<td>Laboratory technician [6]</td>
<td>Laboratory technician</td>
<td>3 → 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shulan</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sales assistant</td>
<td>Waitress [13]</td>
<td>Waitress</td>
<td>8 → 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
<td>Family counsellor [8]</td>
<td>Family counsellor</td>
<td>2 → 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Downward mobility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Factory supervisor</td>
<td>Factory worker [20]</td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>7 ▼ 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td>Waitress [14]</td>
<td>Waitress</td>
<td>2 ▼ 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Unemployed [1]</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2 ▼ N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Travel agent</td>
<td>Home based child carer [10]</td>
<td>Home based child carer</td>
<td>3 ▼ 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N/A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Systems analyst</td>
<td>Programmer [3]</td>
<td>Not in labour force</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Admin. assistant</td>
<td>Not in labour force [6]</td>
<td>Not in labour force</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Accountant [20]</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Upward mobility

Only four of my 22 respondents from Hong Kong had achieved a higher occupational status at the time of interview in comparison with their pre-migration jobs. All had been in Australia for more than ten years, and Jenny and Nancy had been promoted (from secretary to administration officer and from clerk to accounts manager, respectively) after more than ten years of service in their respective companies. Mary and Lisa had moved from factory work to being community workers for the Chinese community. For these two, being Chinese and having worked in factories were significant factors in enabling them to change careers, as they were expected in their new jobs to be able to assist other Chinese migrants going through experiences at work similar to those they themselves had encountered.

Downward mobility

Five Hong Kong respondents experienced downward mobility after arrival in Australia. Three, Belinda, Angela and May, had moved from professional or semi-professional jobs in Hong Kong to unskilled labour in Australia, citing poor English language skills as their main barrier to finding better jobs. Their jobs (factory work and waitressing) had minimal English requirements, and even after 15 or 20 years in the country, these women had not been able to improve their English enough to change occupations.

The other two respondents, Rose and Sarah, had very good spoken English skills, but experienced downward mobility for family-related reasons. Both women withdrew from the labour force upon arrival in Australia to care for their children, and experienced difficulties finding work when they decided to re-enter the labour force. Rose gave up her career in the travel industry and instead became a home-based child-carer, earning very low wages, but financially supported by her husband’s earnings. Sarah, an accountant, decided on full-time mothering after an unsuccessful job search, and at the time of interview, was waiting for her young son to start school before again seeking work.
No mobility

The most common experience of the Hong Kong respondents was neither upward nor downward mobility. Just under half (ten out of 22) simply maintained their occupational status after migration. Most were able to find jobs in Australia very similar or identical to their previous jobs, experiencing no difficulties with qualifications recognition (although three had no post-secondary qualifications). Two respondents, Michelle and Susan, had studied in Western countries, which undoubtedly made their qualifications more transferable to Australia. Two other respondents, Nicola and Wendy, secured their jobs after completing further study in Australia – the former gaining a Diploma of Education in order to teach in NSW schools, and the latter pursuing a counselling course to become a family counsellor. The majority of this group (eight out of ten) were also aided by their good spoken English.

While they were happy to be able to use their skills in Australia, women in this group, often very career-oriented in Hong Kong, typically felt that their opportunities for advancement were substantially reduced in Australia. Even those who had been in Australia for more than ten years had not been able to improve their occupational status. They had no problems moving horizontally into other organisations, but this did not entail any career advancement. Additionally, many said that Australian salaries were lower than what they had been accustomed to in Hong Kong.

Overall, aside from the four cases of upward mobility described above, virtually all my Hong Kong respondents agreed that leaving Hong Kong meant sacrificing superior remuneration and career prospects. In part this is because Hong Kong’s workforce is more hierarchical than Australia’s, and educated people enjoy more openings for senior professional and management positions (Mak 2001: 101). To some extent this reflects the smaller proportion of people with post-secondary qualifications in Hong Kong. In 2003, almost half (49 per cent) of Australia’s working age population (15 to 64 years) held a post-secondary qualification (ABS 2003c), compared with only 21 per cent in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2003b). Therefore the rewards of tertiary education are relatively higher in Hong Kong than in Australia, and qualified
workers are able to proceed relatively quickly up the organisational ladder into senior positions (Mak 2001: 101). Tertiary-educated professionals enjoy high salaries and benefits like housing, low income tax rates, status and occupational prestige (Pe-Pua et al 1998: 286). \(^{12}\)

Hong Kong’s buoyant economy has also enhanced the employment prospects of educated professionals. As mentioned above, until 1997, Hong Kong had consistently low unemployment and a high demand for professionals. Surveying professionals in Hong Kong in the mid-1990s, Li et al (1995) found that most cited career opportunities as the reason for staying in Hong Kong, despite the widespread emigration of their compatriots.

The shortage of skilled workers channelled many educated women into the workforce. As Mak and Chung wrote in 1997, in Hong Kong, ‘it is economically unwise for well-educated women to forgo earnings and stay at home’, particularly when domestic help is affordable (1997: 28). In the 1980s and 90s, tertiary educated women in Hong Kong had labour force participation rates of between 70 and 80 per cent (Mak and Chung 1997: 22).

My Hong Kong respondents often spoke of the opportunities they felt they had missed by emigrating. Sally was an accountant in her 50s who had spent most of her adult life in Australia. Nevertheless, she told me she considered returning to Hong Kong during the 1980s, when the emigration of professionals had opened up increasing numbers of attractive jobs:

> Probably I would have a better career in Hong Kong, because during the 80s there’s lots of migrants – the brain drain, they call it. Actually a few friends or my husband’s colleagues were asking us whether we would like to go back to Hong Kong at that time – it was so easy to get jobs if you’re a professional. So of course career wise, pay wise, it would be better [in Hong Kong].

\(^{12}\) Additionally, Lau (2003: 384) suggests that as a society of migrants with a short history, Hong Kong ‘does not have an entrenched upper class that can bar the ambitious people from moving up the social ladder’. In contrast, in Australia, as described in Chapter 4, elite occupations are dominated by the Australian-born or migrants from English-speaking backgrounds.
A former travel agent who arrived in Australia in 1986 with her husband and three children, Rose was working as a home-based child carer at the time of interview. She spoke of how compared to Hong Kong, it was much more difficult to earn money in Australia:

Q: What about financially – are you better off here or were you better off in Hong Kong?

Financially of course, Hong Kong is much better because the salaries are higher and you can find jobs easily, earn money easily. Here it’s very difficult, especially for Chinese people, you can’t – well, especially once you are over 40, people find you are too old already in here [laughs]. And it’s very hard for Chinese to find jobs, I feel.

Similarly, speculating about what her life would have been like in Hong Kong if she had not migrated, Anita, a systems analyst, said that, ‘given the opportunities at that time, if I had stayed on, I would have become a manager earlier and have a better career path.’ In Australia, after regaining her pre-migration occupational status after six years in the workforce, Anita had decided to be a full-time mother and housewife at the time of interview. While she was happy with her decision and enjoyed taking care of her three-year old son, she emphasised that she felt Australia did not offer as many opportunities to women, compared to Hong Kong, whose labour shortage had prevented employers from discriminating against suitably skilled women.

These findings parallel those in the literature about Hong Kong migrants’ employment experiences, in which the decline in income and career opportunities are major issues. In Mak’s survey of 111 Hong Kong migrants in Australia, while five out of six respondents were able to obtain employment within six months of job search (2001: 101), only a small proportion reported achieving a promotion to a more senior rank. ‘These included previously well-established professionals and administrators who had to start all over again at an entry professional or administrative grade in Australia,’ writes Mak (2001: 101).

Mak suggests that for Hong Kong migrants, there are greater barriers to career advancement than to simply finding a job. She writes, ‘The real test of re-establishing
careers as immigrants lies beyond getting started and involves finding the path to achieving career advancement in a foreign country where the chances of and rules for success are different’ (Mak 2001: 101). In other words, Hong Kong migrants’ biggest problem is not *downward* mobility, but *blocked* mobility – they do not have to work in lower status occupations (like many of the mainland Chinese migrants), but do confront a ‘glass ceiling’ within workplaces that prevents them from advancing any further in their careers.

Mak claims that about one third of Hong Kong migrants arriving in Australia in the early 1990s might have returned to Hong Kong, partly out of frustration regarding employment and career development (2001: xii). Some would have been lured back by Hong Kong employers’ overseas recruitment exercises to repatriate emigrants with professional and managerial skills. With the unprecedented emigration of professionals in the 1980s and 1990s creating widespread fears of Hong Kong’s economic decline, it has not been uncommon for former employers in Hong Kong to offer promotions or bonuses to emigrants to encourage them to return (Pe-Pua *et al* 1996: 41). Migrants’ awareness of these possibilities increases the opportunity cost of staying in Australia.

Inferior remuneration after migration is also a common theme in many studies about Hong Kong migrants. As Pe-Pua *et al* (1996: 41) note, even when Hong Kong migrants to Australia are successful in gaining jobs comparable to those they left behind, their salaries may be three to six times lower than those they had previously. Similarly, when Mak (2001: 51) asked her Hong Kong respondents to compare their standard of living in Australia compared to that in Hong Kong, a majority (66 per cent) stated that their standard of living in Australia was lower than in Hong Kong. Only one per cent reported a higher standard of living. The remainder stated that it was about the same (2001: 51).

Thus women from Hong Kong clearly experience blocked occupational mobility. Their problem is not in obtaining suitable employment in Australia – most are able to relatively quickly secure jobs comparable to their previous jobs (though more poorly remunerated). However, once employed, they have great difficulties achieving promotions to higher positions – advancement that many, based on their previous workforce experience and
continuing news about the Hong Kong economy – would have assumed probable had they stayed in Hong Kong.

**Conclusion**

In contrast to the prevailing skilled migration ‘success story’ presented in Chapter 4, Chinese migrants in Australia have not achieved unambiguously successful outcomes in the labour market. Rather, there is considerable diversity within their employment experiences, varying according to birthplace and gender. Overall, Hong Kong migrants are more successful in transferring their occupational skills to Australia, and experience greater career continuity after migration, while PRC migrants often suffer substantial downward mobility. Quantitative data also clearly show the gender difference in employment outcomes among Chinese migrants, with men tending to perform better than women in the Australian labour market.

What determines migrants’ employment outcomes in Australia? Why do migrants from Hong Kong and China have such different labour market experiences? Why do men consistently achieve better employment outcomes compared to women? The next two chapters present some explanations for the employment experiences of Chinese migrants in Australia, examining firstly, the transferability of skills and the cultural component of human capital (Chapter 6) and secondly, the household context – domestic constraints on women’s labour force participation (Chapter 7).
chapter 6

human-cultural capital: linguistic and educational capital in a new society

As we saw in Chapter 4, the dominant Australian literature on migrant employment uses a human capital approach to explain labour market outcomes, particularly focusing on migrants’ linguistic and occupational skills. However, as I have argued in the last two chapters, this approach fails to recognise that human capital is not always transferable across national borders. Many migrants, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, face a ‘transferability gap’ which prevents them from being fully rewarded for their human capital in a foreign labour market. As the last chapter showed, this was particularly evident among my mainland Chinese respondents, who often experienced downward occupational mobility.

This chapter explores ‘transferability’ more fully, examining the cultural specificity of human capital in relation to Chinese women’s experiences in Australia. As I argued in Chapter 4, the extent to which migrants’ human capital is recognised and rewarded in a new country depends crucially on the degree to which it is compatible with local definitions of human capital. Thus I use the concept of ‘human-cultural capital’ (Nee and Sanders 2001) to anchor human capital within a cultural context.
Applied to Chinese women in Australia, this chapter shows that the human capital of Hong Kong migrants tends to be much more compatible with Australian definitions of human capital compared to that of mainland Chinese migrants. Hong Kong migrants’ better employment outcomes reflects not just their greater endowment of occupational and linguistic skills, as the human capital approach assumes. Their skills are part of a much broader cultural repertoire – for example, familiarity with Western, commercial cultural forms, and career trajectories that are relatively compatible with those prevailing in the Australian labour market. In contrast, mainland Chinese migrants are hampered by their dramatically different cultural repertoire – reflected in their less-transferable qualifications and employment experience, and comparatively poorer English ability.

This chapter explains why Hong Kong and mainland Chinese women experience such different employment outcomes in the Australian workforce. Focusing on English language ability and educational qualifications, it delineates the different human-cultural capital profiles of the two groups, which lead to different levels of social recognition and different labour market outcomes. I focus on linguistic and occupational skills as they are key determinants of employment success (and are the two main variables in the human capital-oriented literature). However, as Chapter 4 explained, human-cultural capital can encompass much more; it can include every aspect of an individual’s worldview, style and disposition. These more general attributes are discussed at the end of this chapter, but for the most part, I believe that the key factors shaping Chinese women’s employment experiences are well captured in the two variables of linguistic capital and educational capital.

**Linguistic Capital: English ability among migrants in Australia**

Language is at the heart of adjusting to a new country for most migrants. The significance of language in migrants’ settlement is affirmed by sociologists, economists, linguists, teachers, and by migrants themselves (Burnett 1998: 37). In Australia, virtually every aspect of settlement hinges upon migrants having some technical English language ability. English is not only the official language of the law
and government, but is also the primary language of the economic, social, cultural, and educational life of the nation. As Tait et al (1990: 1) put it, in Australia ‘the rules of success are written in English’.

Language problems are widespread among migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds in Australia. As Table 6.1 shows, in the 2001 census, substantial proportions of migrants living in Australia reported not being able to speak English well or at all. This applied to more than 30 per cent of male and female migrants from China, Korea and Vietnam.

**Table 6.1: Percentage of migrants not able to speak English well or at all, selected birthplaces, by gender, 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2003a

English ability clearly varies according to birthplace and gender. As Table 6.1 shows, migrants from former British colonies such as Hong Kong, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka were much less likely to have poor English compared to the other non-English speaking countries. (Migrants from the Philippines, a former US colony, also had good English). This data also shows that female migrants had worse spoken English
skills than their male counterparts. In some birthplace groups, women were more than ten percentage points more likely than men to have poor spoken English.\(^1\)

Among recent migrants, Table 6.2, based on LSIA data, shows that while English skills improve over time, more than one third of respondents (37 per cent) still had poor English after three and a half years in the country.

**Table 6.2: How well English spoken, Primary Applicants, 6 months and 3½ years after arrival (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>6 months after arrival</th>
<th>3½ years after arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N=2,599)</td>
<td>(N=2,541)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not well</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

Among these recent migrants, English language difficulties were the biggest obstacle to gaining employment, with about one third of LSIA1 respondents citing this problem at each Wave of the survey (Richardson *et al* 2001: 11). As Chapter 4 outlined, LSIA data show that migrants with good spoken English skills generally have lower unemployment, higher labour force participation, and higher occupational status than those with poor English skills. Clearly, migrants’ command of the English language plays a crucial role in their settlement into the Australian labour market and society.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) It is important to note that these figures are based on self-rating of language ability. It may be the case that men over-rate their English ability while women under-rate their ability.

\(^2\) However, the level of English required in the workforce obviously depends on the nature of the work being done, and how urgently workers are needed in an industry or organisation. For example, in Salaff *et al*’s study of PRC migrants in Canada (2002), there was no difference in English ability between those who succeeded in finding a professional job, and those who did not. ‘At the time of this study, demand was greatest in computer-related jobs, and those that had suitable experience were hired regardless of their language skill,’ they explain (2002: 456). In Australia, it has been argued that the importance of English language skills for employment has been exaggerated. Stromback (1988: 16) suggests that some employers make unrealistic demands for English fluency, reducing the pay-off to migrants from improving their language skills. Wooden (1994: 262) also speculates that the persistence of poor English language skills among some migrants may reflect the low returns available in terms of earnings and employment prospects.
Among Chinese migrants, as Table 6.1 showed, those from China were more than twice as likely as those from Hong Kong to have poor spoken English, with women tending to have worse English than men for both birthplaces. To some extent, Hong Kong migrants have better English because they tend to have lived in Australia longer than their mainland counterparts, as discussed in Chapter 2. But it also reflects broader differences in the teaching and use of English in Hong Kong and China. More than a century of British rule established the prominence of the English language in Hong Kong: English was taught in all schools and was one of the official languages of government (Li et al 1995). Most secondary schools in Hong Kong still give instruction in both English and Chinese, and examinations in most subjects may be taken either in English or Chinese (NOOSR 1995: 7). At the tertiary level, English is the medium of instruction in virtually all institutions, with the exception of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where students are still expected to know both languages (NOOSR 1995: 15).

By contrast, fewer mainland Chinese have learnt English during their education, or used English at work. The usual medium of instruction in the PRC education system is Mandarin (although national minority groups use their own languages). Students learn simplified Chinese characters, with the Pinyin system of transliterating Chinese characters into the Roman alphabet introduced in the early years of schooling (NOOSR 1996: 4).

Of the foreign languages taught in PRC primary and high schools and universities, however, English is the most common, and English tuition is becoming increasingly widespread. In 2001 the Ministry of Education announced that school pupils would start formal English lessons in grade 1 (ages six to seven), whereas previously English classes had started in grade 3 (McDonald 2003). The National College Entrance Examination – completed at the end of senior secondary school – requires one paper in a foreign language, and graduation from tertiary level institutions usually requires a specific level of proficiency in a foreign language (NOOSR 1996: 4). Public education programs are also used to teach English to the general community.³

³ In fact, there has been an explosion of interest in learning English, which has become the latest craze in many urban areas. For example, two years ago, city authorities in Beijing launched the ‘Beijing Speaks English Program’ (in anticipation of the 2008 Olympics), which teaches English through public lectures, festivals in parks and historic places, and competitive speaking and singing. There has also been a proliferation of private language schools and TV shows teaching English (McDonald 2003).
However, these initiatives are very recent, and most PRC migrants in Australia would not have had such widespread exposure to English.

Thus among Chinese primary applicants surveyed in the LSIA, while the vast majority reported having learned English prior to migrating, those from Hong Kong had generally spent many more years studying English than those from China. This is seen in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: English study among Primary Applicants from China and Hong Kong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>China-born</th>
<th>Hong Kong-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who had learnt English prior to migration</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=333</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who had studied English for 10 years or more</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=231</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Wave 1

This pattern was also evident among my respondents. While a majority of the Hong Kong women had good spoken English skills, this was true for only a minority of the PRC respondents, as Table 6.4 shows.

Table 6.4: Level of spoken English of my PRC and Hong Kong respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of spoken English</th>
<th>PRC respondents N=22</th>
<th>Hong Kong respondents N=22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, this gap in English ability between Hong Kong and mainland migrants is a significant factor in the two groups’ different employment experiences. Coming from a former British colony in which English was widely used, Hong Kong migrants are much better equipped to adjust to life in Australia, relative to mainlanders, who are
much less likely to have had the same level of exposure to English. Nevertheless, despite their technical competence in English, Hong Kong migrants also experience language problems after migration, stemming from their unfamiliarity with the particular vocabulary and grammatical rules of Australian English. As the next section argues, full linguistic competence relies on not just a technical mastery of a language but also cultural knowledge of how the language is used in particular social contexts.

**Technical and Cultural Linguistic Competence**

Linguistic competence may be viewed as comprised of both technical and cultural competence. Naturally, technical competence – understanding the vocabulary and grammatical rules of a language – is the formal foundation for verbal communication. However, verbal communication rarely follows just formal rules. Rather, it is highly culturally-specific, and effective communication requires a ‘cultural linguistic competence’. This is a useful way to understand Chinese migrants’ experiences: while PRC migrants are often disadvantaged by a simple lack of technical competence in English, Hong Kong migrants, who generally have high levels of English competence, tend to be disadvantaged by their lack of cultural competence. This difference results in very different settlement experiences.

The importance of technical linguistic competence has long been recognised by the Australian Government. Since 1948, when the Federal Government introduced the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), migrants to Australia from non-English speaking backgrounds have been offered free, basic English tuition to assist their integration into Australian society. Since 1992, migrants have been entitled to up to 510 hours of English language tuition, to enable them to attain ‘functional English’, or a level of English sufficient for social and some employment purposes (AMEP 2002). The AMEP is widely acknowledged as playing a central role in the successful settlement of large numbers of migrants in Australia, not only providing language skills, but also minimising migrants’ isolation and alienation.

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4 These figures are based on my assessment of respondents’ conversational English ability, formed in
Nevertheless, the program is not universally effective in providing migrants with technical English competence. Some migrant community leaders have argued that 510 hours is insufficient for migrants with languages radically different to English. As Tzannes (1999) argues, ‘To accord the same number of hours to migrants whose first language is in the same script as English with for example, Asians and Arabic-speaking people who use a different script cannot be right.’ Tzannes further notes that Australian diplomats need an average of 1,320 hours to reach a functional level in some languages with a non-Roman script. This means that many migrants continue to have poor English skills even after completing their 510 hours of tuition.

Other migrants never even enrol in English classes. Currently a quarter of the migrants and refugees arriving in Australia without English proficiency do not take up their AMEP entitlement (Young et al 2003: 13). The AMEP has always functioned as a settlement service provided immediately after migrants’ arrival in the country. Under the current regime, to access their 510 hours of tuition, migrants must register for a course within three months of arrival, start classes within one year, and complete courses within three years of their arrival or grant of permanent residence (AMEP 2002). Many migrants fail to meet these criteria because their priority immediately after arrival is to seek employment to support their families. It is generally difficult to complete an English course while also engaging in paid work, and many migrants cannot spare the time and lost income required to study.

Despite the recognised importance of technical language skills for successful settlement, many migrants in Australia have yet to reach this linguistic standard, and issues around migrants’ access to English tuition have remained contentious since the 1970s. For thousands of migrants in Australia, lack of adequate technical language skills continues to reduce employment opportunities as well as their capacity to integrate fully into the social and cultural life of the country. As we will see below, this was the case among many of my mainland Chinese respondents.

However, technical linguistic competence is not the end of the story. In order to be fully effective, technical ability has to be supplemented with cultural competence, for example, knowledge of how English is used in Australian settings and what types of communication are appropriate in particular social situations. Beyond a purely
technical knowledge of the language, factors such as accent, use of slang, the ability
to engage in jocular exchanges, and so on, are crucial to effective communication and
social interaction. As Creese and Kambere (2002) suggest, language fluency is
socially constructed, and for migrants, the ‘colour of your English’ is crucial in
communication.

Effective communication requires not only technical language skills, but knowledge
of prevailing norms about appropriate linguistic exchange. As Bourdieu argues, ‘A
linguistic situation is never purely linguistic’ (1993: 67). In order for your words to
count, ‘you must not only say the grammatically correct words, but the socially
acceptable words’ (1993: 79). And acceptability is defined by the conformity of
words ‘not only to the immanent rules of the language, but also to the intuitively
grasped rules that are immanent in a “situation”, or rather a certain linguistic market’

Thus in Australia, the linguistic ability of migrants is only recognised or valorised to
the extent that it conforms to the rules of social acceptability within Australian social
settings. This is evident in workplaces, where effective communication requires more
than simply technical knowledge of English; it requires knowledge of communication
rules, styles, and etiquette that are culturally-specific (Clyne 1994: 208). As Colic-
Peisker (2002: 158) suggests, the requirements of workplace communication blur the
line between ‘purely’ linguistic and cultural competence.

This is well illustrated in Hawthorne’s study (1994) of NESB migrant engineers in
Australia, which shows that in the recruitment process, cross-cultural issues are far
more important than factors like technical English language competence and the level
of professional skills. She shows how many migrant job applicants perform poorly in
interviews, not because they are inadequately qualified, but because they are
unaccustomed to the culture of Australian job interviews. For example, in some other
countries, interviews are simply about demonstrating technical ability, without the
overt self-promotion and emphasis on personal presentation that figures so highly in
Australia. Thus many migrants in interviews may fail to make a good impression
because they misunderstand the purpose of the exchange (Hawthorne 1994: 63).
Another crucial aspect of linguistic capital is accent. Collins (1996), Creese and Kambere (2002), Davila et al (1993), Hawthorne (1994), Richmond (1991) and Watson (1996) have all documented the ‘accent penalties’ suffered by accented bilingual workers. For example, Watson’s study (1996: 44) of the managerial workforce in Australia found that job applicants with ‘heavy foreign accents’ or non-fluent English were often screened out during the telephone inquiry stage. Hawthorne (1994) similarly found that NESB migrants were rejected by potential employers not because of language ability (many had completed their schooling, and even tertiary studies, in English), but because of their accent and intonation. She notes that the problem was so widespread that in the early 1990s, the Institution of Engineers Australia’s Sydney Division considered involvement in an accent modification course, run by a speech pathologist, for unemployed South Asian members. ‘These engineers faced a dilemma that no ESL classes in Australia were designed to cater to high-oracy immigrants with an excellent knowledge of English but [with] accent differences’ (Hawthorne 1994: 61).

The importance of cultural linguistic competence at work has increased in recent years with changes in communications technology and organisational practices. Cope and Kalantzis (1997: 105) argue that as formal, written memos and notices are replaced by more informal communication and interaction, such as email, migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds can find it more difficult to engage in everyday exchanges, which now require higher levels of cultural skills. ‘For people who are outsiders to a cultural context, informal discourses are much harder to engage in than formal discourses,’ explain Cope and Kalantzis (1997: 106). In their workplace study, Cope and Kalantzis (1997: 106) note, ‘it is only the workers of non-English-speaking backgrounds who still take the notices on the noticeboards seriously and who read every memo avidly. Much of the communication in the organisation, however, is now being carried by informal networks – team interactions, gossip, social events’.

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5 However, foreign accents may also be placed within a hierarchy of desirability. Colic-Peisker (2002: 152) argues that ‘some foreign accents, such as American or French, may be prestigious, connecting the speaker with places of “popular desire”, while others may associate the speaker with places commonly perceived as “backward” and “uncivilized”’. While for some migrants, a foreign accent may constitute powerful cultural capital, for others, it symbolises a lack of cultural capital.
Clearly, purely technical linguistic competence is insufficient for effective communication in complex social environments such as workplaces. In demanding linguistic exchanges such as job interviews, and in the increasingly important informal conversations that comprise everyday workplace exchanges, technical linguistic competence must be supplemented with a cultural competence that enables people to fully understand others’ remarks, and assess what kinds of communication are required in particular situations. This knowledge is clearly culturally specific.

The process of gaining cultural linguistic knowledge may never be completed for many migrants – they may never be fully accepted as legitimate speakers of Australian English. Even when they have perfect grammatical English, having learnt English belatedly and methodically in the school system, migrants may never possess the natural ease with the language that is possessed by those who grew up in an Australian environment from their earliest days. In Bourdieu’s words, migrants lack the ‘self-certainty which accompanies the certainty of possessing cultural legitimacy, and the ease which is the touchstone of excellence’ (1984: 66).

Of course it is not just migrants’ own abilities that determine how effectively they are able to communicate in a new environment. As many NESB migrants have noted, in many situations, there is little tolerance of ‘non-local’ English speech on the part of native speakers, and little willingness to alter one’s speech to facilitate migrants’ understanding (Colic-Peisker 2002; Dell’Oso 1987). As Creese and Kambere (2002) document for African women in Canada, it is not technical competence that hinders communication, but migrants’ unfamiliarity with ‘localized’ English. They note that speakers of ‘Canadian English’ appeared to find the syntax, tempo, and elocution of ‘African English’ more difficult to follow, but rarely felt obliged to make any extra effort in trying to comprehend what was being said. Rather there seemed at times to be a ‘willful refusal to understand’ (Creese and Kambere 2002: 12).

This was the problem cited by many of my Hong Kong respondents. As non-native speakers of English, and being unfamiliar with Australian English, Hong Kong migrants can be frustrated in their attempts to integrate into Australian workplaces and other institutions, particularly in everyday conversations and informal socialising. In contrast to mainland Chinese migrants, those from Hong Kong have high levels of technical English competence, but are disadvantaged by their lack of cultural
competence. The next section explains the different linguistic competence of my respondents.

**PRC Respondents: The challenge of living in a new language**

As Table 6.4 showed, almost half (10 out of 22) of my PRC respondents had poor spoken English skills. Their lack of English severely hindered their employment opportunities, limiting them to unskilled work. Only seven respondents had good spoken English, and while they were generally able to secure professional jobs, these were still lower in status than their jobs in China. Overall, English language ability correlated broadly with respondents’ level of education and the length of their residence in Australia.

Among the seven PRC respondents with good spoken English, six had a university degree (two majoring in English), and one had a college Diploma. However, among the ten respondents with poor English, only three had been to university. Most of the others had a college Diploma, and three had a high school education or less. However, while university graduates were more likely to have good English, studying at university was no guarantee of English competence. As Ruth, a university music instructor said, ‘When I came here I couldn’t speak one word of English… Because in my area of study – in Music – noone had to learn English’.6

Even those respondents who had studied English at a tertiary level had not necessarily become fluent. In fact, the low standard of English teaching in China was commonly recognised and a source of amusement for many of my respondents. For example, Lily laughed as she told me that she had worked as an English teacher in China after graduating from the Foreign Language University, despite the fact that her English was obviously ‘not good’. Similarly, Luqing stated that although she had studied English as part of her teaching diploma, when she arrived in Australia, ‘you could say I didn’t know any English’. Yun, too, arrived in Australia with very poor English despite having spent two years learning English via distance education with a Shanghai university. She said, ‘I can read but not getting used to ears – I can’t understand, people say can I help you? I don’t know what they talk about!’ As Jackie,
a high school teacher, explained, language teaching in China does not equip students with conversational skills: ‘First we learn is grammar, second is reading and writing. So we never practise speaking and listening.’

Length of residence in Australia was the other key factor in the level of respondents’ English ability. Six of the seven respondents with good English had been in Australia for five years of more, compared to only five out of the ten women with poor English. However, there is no automatic correlation between length of residence and language ability: three respondents still had poor English after more than ten years in Australia.

This was partly because only about half the respondents with poor English had completed English classes in Australia, despite the Federal Government’s provision of 510 hours of free tuition. As described above, it is often difficult for new migrants to combine employment with learning English, and many of my respondents, having to work full-time to support their families, had no time to take English classes. For example, Luqing said it was always her ‘dream’ to study English in Australia, but after arriving, she could not afford to take time away from her job to study.

Inadequate English skills seriously hampered my PRC respondents’ job searching. Of the women with poor English, only one (a private music tutor providing piano lessons in Mandarin) had a professional job, despite the fact that most were from professional backgrounds in China. The others were working in unskilled jobs, such as factory work or waitressing, or were unemployed. For example, Lily, unable to continue teaching in Australia, had studied Tourism Management at TAFE hoping to change her career, but found that prospective employers did not return her phone calls: ‘Maybe they heard me, not too good English’, she reasoned. At the time of interview, she had switched her focus to child care, and was about to embark on another TAFE course. Unable to work in her original occupation, it was clear that Lily

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6 Translated from Mandarin
7 Writing in the *China Daily* recently, Caroline Portsmouth, an English instructor at Sichuan University, argued that English teaching in China was handicapped by the emphasis on rote-learning, rather than verbal communication: ‘Every year thousands of students emerge from schools and universities, some with years of English study behind them, and yet most are unable to actually use the language…Current English teaching methodology in the nation’s classrooms, including many prestigious establishments, can, for the most part, be fairly compared to the discredited system of learning adopted by candidates to the Mandarin examinations of bygone days – memorizing then reciting in order to pass set tests’ (Portsmouth 2003).
lacked direction, continually changing her career aspirations, limiting herself to occupations that did not require high levels of English competence. She explained:

I think child care doesn’t need a lot of English. And I could open a family, child care centre. I think it’s good for me because I have a baby, and I could look after my baby. Maybe later, if I can have a license to open a centre, I could rent a big house. That’s my idea. I just think about it. I don’t know if I can do or not. I also want to study librarian. I just choose something doesn’t need a lot of English.

A former accountant in China, Wing-hoi also spoke of limiting her focus to jobs which did not require good English skills:

My English wasn’t good and so I decided to work as a seamstress, because you don’t need to be able to speak much English to sew. As long as you have some skills in it, the basics...I want to [work in accounting], but my English isn’t good enough yet. Even if I want to I can’t. Of course you want to work in your own area, but if your English isn’t good enough, how can you?8

Those respondents with good spoken English tended to secure professional jobs. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, even those with professional jobs had suffered downward mobility in comparison to their pre-migration occupations. Their lack of confidence in English was one factor holding them back. For example, Jackie, who had exchanged university teaching in China for high school teaching in Australia, said she was always ‘nervous’ teaching native-English speakers. Yun, a former librarian, had resigned herself to reaching only the position of library assistant in Australia, because she felt that her English skills would not allow her to adequately perform duties of her former position. She added that ‘Probably in China I feel confident – this library job is mine, nobody can take it. I feel confident. But in Australia it’s [a] second language, I can’t.’

Thus, even those respondents with quite adequate spoken English skills lacked confidence in their language abilities. More commonly however, PRC respondents did not have sufficient English language skills to enable them to pursue employment in Australia comparable to what they were accustomed to in China. The language barrier

8 Translated from Cantonese
prevented them from continuing their previous career trajectories in the Australian labour market. The experiences of these PRC migrants affirm the importance of English language ability in shaping employment outcomes. However, as the next section shows, simple technical linguistic competence is not the key factor in explaining the experiences of all migrants. Hong Kong migrants face a different language challenge – that of cultural linguistic competence.

**Hong Kong Respondents: The challenge of being non-native speakers**

Socialised in a former British colony, Hong Kong migrants have had much more exposure to English relative to their mainland counterparts. However, Hong Kong migrants are non-native speakers of English, and so often find it difficult to engage fully in informal conversations and interactions in Australia. Many of my Hong Kong respondents felt that this constrained their workplace interactions with native English-speakers and sometimes limited their career opportunities. While the human capital approach measures linguistic knowledge in a functional manner, understanding the experiences of Hong Kong migrants requires a broader analysis not just of technical language ability, but also the cultural knowledge to apply technical skills in particular cultural and social settings. Thus Hong Kong migrants’ language skills are better understood as human-cultural capital.

Only a minority of my Hong Kong respondents (five out of 22) had poor spoken English. These women tended to be from working-class backgrounds. None had been educated beyond high school, and most worked in supervisory roles in Hong Kong factories prior to migration. After migration, they were disadvantaged by their lack of English and the much smaller number of factory-based supervisory positions in Australia. Consequently, they generally found themselves in poorly paid unskilled work. All of these women had been in Australia for more than ten years, but like many of the mainland women, had not been able to improve their language skills.

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9 There are parallels here with the PRC engineers discussed in Chapter 5. Both engineers and factory supervisors find their employment opportunities heavily restricted in Australia, where such industrial positions are much rarer than they are (or have been) in China or Hong Kong.
because of the need to work full-time to support their families. Their husbands generally worked in low-paid jobs, so the household required two full-time incomes.

Most of my Hong Kong respondents (15 out of 22) had good spoken English skills, having learnt English extensively in high school and further studies. Like the PRC respondents with good English, these Hong Kong women tended to be better educated than those with poor English. All but three had a post-secondary qualification, and most had professional jobs both before and after migration. With years of English study behind them, they arrived in Australia well equipped to effectively integrate into the workforce and society. For example, Su-lin, a Hong Kong nurse, came from an internationally-oriented family who insisted that she be educated in English from a young age.

It was my father’s decision to send me to the English school… my father was very determined because he thought it would give me a better future, because of the popularity of English, and it was the official language of the government.

In fact, being English-educated did enhance her career opportunities, as it was her superior English language skills that resulted in Su-lin being chosen over her colleagues to study and gain work experience in London. Her UK experience later eased her transition into the Australian nursing workforce.

Nicola’s case also illustrates the prevalence of exposure to English in the Hong Kong education system and workforce. At university, Nicola majored in Chinese/English translation, and was extremely proud of her language skills. During her first job as a music reporter, she often interviewed foreign musicians in English. She was also well-travelled, having taken regular trips to North America and around Asia, as well as visiting Australia several times before migrating. Her skills and experience had helped her secure a teaching job in an elite Hong Kong school, as we saw in the previous chapter. After recounting how she had been offered jobs from two prestigious Sydney schools, she described what she saw as her advantage in the workforce, compared to a mainland Chinese friend, who had had more problems finding work in Australia: ‘She has a different story – she’s from mainland China. Hong Kong is a lot more westernised than mainland China. My culture is a lot more Western and modern.’
Thus only a minority of my Hong Kong respondents cited inadequate English language skills as a barrier to gaining employment. The more common complaint was that being a non-native English speaker prevented them from fully integrating into the social life of the workplace or advancing in their careers. Most did not lack technical English skills – they had no problems obtaining suitable jobs and performing their duties in their jobs. What they lacked was the cultural knowledge surrounding technical English language knowledge. This knowledge made the difference between simply doing the job and functioning as a fully culturally integrated member of the organisation.

As non-native speakers of English, Hong Kong migrants speak English with a foreign accent, may mispronounce words, and fail to understand terms and expressions culturally-specific to Australia, particularly slang. Therefore Hong Kong migrants often feel frustrated by their inability to engage in the range of linguistic practices required to integrate into the daily social life of the workplace. This can prevent them from making the most of career opportunities or feeling a sense of belonging at work. For example, although Susan was satisfied with her job as a business analyst, she felt that she was unable to engage effectively in office networking and promote her achievements to colleagues:

I think maybe here you may have disadvantage…because [of] the language barrier. I think to me it’s one of the reasons, because I’m not very outspoken. Somehow it will be a disadvantage because, basically you cannot sell yourself to make people recognise your performance.

For others, non-native speaker status resulted in feeling marginalised in the everyday life of the workplace, as they found it difficult to integrate into the culture of the organisation. Mary, a community worker, stated that she sometimes felt left out of conversations with colleagues, which did not necessarily prevent her from performing her duties, but excluded her from social interaction:

My English isn’t that good so when people talk fast I can’t keep up, so it’s like discrimination because some people prefer not to talk to me. And at some events, it’s like the people who can speak English have such a good time talking to each other, so I
end up just sitting there [laughs]…I tell myself not to worry, just say what’s important – maybe others are talking about other things anyway.¹⁰

Similarly, Su-lin, who as described above, was educated in English, said that she only noticed her imperfect command of English during social interactions at work, rather than during the course of work itself:

I always think Hong Kong nurses [are well prepared] wherever they go. The only problem with me is language. Most of the time when I know it’s not important, I just ignore it, or just smile. But in nursing, conversations are basically always the same. In Hong Kong we had to learn English for diagnosis. The doctors always wrote in English, and the medications are written in English. So it’s not a big problem, except the Australian accent. And sometimes they talk fast.

Other women were very conscious of their Hong Kong accent, which they felt sometimes reduced their employment opportunities. For example, during her job search, Sarah said prospective employers seemed uninterested in her application after speaking with her on the telephone. ‘I think language is a factor…when they hear what you are saying, if they find that your accent is different [they are not interested],’ she stated.

Thus in workplaces dominated by an Anglo-celtic culture, Hong Kong migrants can keenly feel their cultural difference. It has often been noted that the organisational culture that prevails in most workplaces in Australia can alienate women and migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. For example, Sinclair (1994: 7) writes of Australia’s essentially masculine ‘executive culture’, whether manifesting as an older patrician elitism, or a youthful larrikinism, and based on shared ‘generational signifiers’ like ‘the war’, which excludes migrants as much as it does women. Watson (1996) similarly argues that managers from non-English speaking backgrounds often feel marginalised by Australian sporting and drinking cultural practices.

These themes emerged in Susan’s experiences with working in Australia; she stated that while she was happy with her job, she took her workplace purely as a site of work, without pursuing social interaction:

¹⁰ Translated from Cantonese
I feel [my colleagues] don’t discriminate [against] you but however, you cannot – working with them is just [a] working relationship, it’s what I’ve found. It is hard to really mingle into their society, their own circle. Because maybe we don’t have their culture, let’s say, I don’t know much about sports [laughs], I don’t enjoy going out to the pub, you know.

Q: So sometimes do you feel you’re left out?

Sometimes I may have this kind of feeling, but…it’s just a job, and working environment, and if you have a clear objective what you are doing…it’s quite OK. I come here to work, to make my living basically…the working relationship is perfectly good, fine. But I would not expect [it] to develop more than that.

Similarly, Margaret said that while she had rarely had any problems with her colleagues, she did not feel she could often fully participate in their informal conversations, particularly because these often comprised ‘joking around’, sarcasm and humour:

sometimes I found it very hard...because the Australians – they are sometimes very humorous...they are more humorous than us. Because we are more serious, I think. We don’t joke as much...It’s just their culture.11

Clearly, Hong Kong and mainland women’s differing levels of English competence created different sets of problems in the labour force. Women from China were generally disadvantaged by their lack of technical language competence: most had not studied English extensively, and sometimes arrived in Australia knowing no English at all. This was a serious barrier to obtaining good employment. The women from Hong Kong faced a different problem: they generally had good technical skills, having studied English throughout their schooling and often having used it in their previous employment. However, they felt disadvantaged by their non-native speaker status: although their technical skills were satisfactory, they lacked the cultural knowledge with which to deploy these skills in particular social situations.

11 In contrast, in her study of Croatians in Western Australia, Colic-Peisker (2002: 157) found that many worried about their outgoing communication style. One migrant commented:

Australians are more reserved, not as outgoing as Europeans. We Croatians tend to speak more loudly, we interrupt each other, talk at the same time, wave arms and gesticulate...this can be interpreted as a lack of manners...I had to modify my communication style in order not to be misinterpreted.
This difference highlights the complexity of linguistic ability. While researchers of migration conventionally see language as a generic skill be plotted on a linear scale from ‘very good’ to ‘poor’, for example, the experiences of the Hong Kong migrants suggest that this is too simplistic. Language is not a generic, perfectly transferable skill, but is highly culturally specific. There is clearly a cultural component to this ‘human capital’ attribute. This explains why migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, even when they have a technical mastery of the language, rarely achieve the employment outcomes that locally-born persons or migrants from English-speaking backgrounds do. Linguistic competence is much more than simply technical mastery. This is a major oversight of the prevailing research on migrants and employment, which relies on a too-simplistic human capital approach. And it is not just language that the human capital approach treats too simplistically. The next section explores the cultural component of another key human capital attribute: educational credentials.

**Educational Capital**

In the Australian labour market, the value of overseas-gained qualifications varies enormously. As we saw in Chapter 4, many researchers have documented and discussed the non-recognition of overseas qualifications. This section argues that far from being objective markers of competence, credentials are highly culturally-specific. In other words, the transferability of credentials depends crucially on the extent to which local authorities perceive them to be *culturally compatible* with local standards and requirements. Credentials that are not seen to be compatible are effectively devalued – they cease to exist as human capital for their bearers. This assessment process is not a strictly technical, objective procedure, but is culturally loaded. Salaff *et al* (2002: 453) describe the assimilation of migrants into a new labour market as a ‘negotiation of meanings’. Thus the role of qualifications in migrants’ employment experiences cannot be fully understood through a human capital approach. Qualifications are better viewed as part of migrants’ *human-cultural capital*.

This explains why migrants from Hong Kong and China, though both highly educated, achieve such different employment outcomes in Australia. This section
explores the very different Australian reception of credentials from Hong Kong and China. PRC migrants face a general incompatibility between their educational and occupational experiences and Australian standards, meaning that their credentials frequently go unrecognised in Australia. By contrast, there is a much higher educational and occupational compatibility between Hong Kong and Australia, meaning that Hong Kong migrants are able to make a much smoother transition into the Australian workforce.

There are two distinct aspects to the recognition of overseas qualifications: while the Federal Government\(^\text{12}\) provides official recognition of qualifications, in practice, such qualifications are subject to the informal assessment of individual employers in the labour market. In recent years, of the overseas qualifications that have been submitted for assessment, the majority have been assessed as equivalent to Australian credentials. For example, 78 per cent of primary applicants in the LSIA who submitted their qualifications for assessment had them assessed as at the same level as the Australian equivalent. Only 15 per cent were assessed as being at a lower level, and five per cent were assessed as requiring training. A similar pattern was evident for migrating unit spouses: 69 per cent of qualifications submitted were assessed as being at the same level, 20 per cent at a lower level, and eight per cent as requiring training (unpublished LSIA\(^1\) data, Wave 1).

Recognition and valuing of qualifications by employers is a more complex process. In practice, even qualifications that have been recognised by the Australian government are not necessarily given full recognition in the labour market. As Groutsis (2003: 74) explains, there is a gap between Australian public policy objectives around minimising wastage of migrant skills and labour market practices which fall short of this ideal. This is particularly the case in powerful professions such as medicine and engineering, in which industry bodies can use accreditation and certification processes to restrict the entry of newcomers (Groutsis 2003; Salaff et al 2002).

\(^{12}\) The National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) is the key public institution responsible for the assessment of overseas qualifications, with assessment also carried out by other government bodies, such as State Departments of Education, and industry bodies, for example, the Institute of Engineers, Australia.
Overall, the extent to which qualifications are recognised by employers, and to a lesser degree, governments, depends on the perceived cultural compatibility of migrants’ credentials, which reflects two key factors:

1. **Migrants’ educational and occupational history**: qualifications are viewed not in isolation, but in the context of their bearer’s overall educational and occupational trajectory. In professional occupations, an officially recognised qualification must be supplemented by a ‘recognised’ career trajectory, within recognised institutions and industries. As Salaff and Greve (2001) argue, credentials and careers within the professional workforce can become ‘institutionalised’, with ‘institutionalised credentials’ providing ‘a set of expectations of what people can perform, their expected salary, and other requirements’ which are part of the common knowledge of their industry. When job applicants fall outside of the institutionalised pattern, as do many NESB migrants, they can meet barriers of entry into professions and firms (Salaff and Greve 2001: 2). Having gone through this ‘institutionalised pattern’ is therefore a source of human-cultural capital – only by following the pattern can job seekers meet the specific cultural codes of local professions and firms.

2. **The relative value of migrants’ occupational field**: the occupations that are considered valuable differ between countries, and thus migrants who may have been considered part of an occupational elite in their home country may find that their skills are devalued in a new country. This is especially the case among migrants moving from industrialising to advanced capitalist countries. For example, engineers from countries like China, armed with skills and experience in heavy industry, will find a much smaller market for their talents in Western countries like Australia, where information technology and business skills are considered much more valuable (Remmenick 2003; Salaff et al 2001, 2002). Even if such migrants receive official government recognition for their qualifications, these credentials may still be devalued in a labour market which considers them to be incompatible with local standards and requirements.

Thus in recruitment processes, employers generally feel more comfortable with applicants whose educational and occupational histories are familiar, and whose occupational fields coincide with those considered valuable in the local economy.
This tends to advantage migrants from English-speaking or Commonwealth countries, with which Australian employers are more likely to be familiar, and those from advanced capitalist countries, where occupational elites are more likely to correspond with those of Australia.

How does this shape the employment experiences of migrants from Hong Kong and China? As we have seen, Hong Kong migrants’ familiarity with English and Western culture gives them an advantage in the labour market over their mainland counterparts. The next section explains that they are further advantaged by the general cultural compatibility of their credentials, unlike PRC migrants, whose credentials and occupational histories are more likely to be considered incompatible with Australian standards and requirements.

**PRC Respondents: Educational and occupational incompatibility**

The previous chapter outlined the downward mobility suffered by PRC migrants, particularly women. In addition to the language barrier described above, Chinese women’s educational and occupational history and experience are often seen as non-compatible with Australian standards. There is little familiarity among Australian authorities of the PRC education system or labour market. Nor are the prestigious fields of study in China recognised as such in Australia. This means that mainlanders’ qualifications are often unrecognised or devalued in the Australian labour market, posing a major institutional hurdle to pursuing skilled employment.

The Australian Government has frequently refused to recognise qualifications gained in China. In part it has attributed this to the difficulty in assessing qualifications from an education system that has been highly unstable over recent decades. In its profile of the PRC education system, the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR 1996: 3) explains that the political and social upheaval of the Cultural Revolution had an ‘extreme impact’ on the education system: schools and universities were closed, teachers either detained or dispersed to the countryside, and facilities and teaching materials damaged or destroyed. Meanwhile, high school curricula were determined by revolutionary management committees and emphasised political thought, practical experience, military training and physical education. It continues,
‘The quality of instruction deteriorated and assessment was based on political activities and cooperative practical problem-solving. No formal examinations or grades were given and certification for studies undertaken during this period was not issued until 1979-80’ (NOOSR 1996: 3). It was not until 1977-1980 that the education system stabilised and assumed its present structure (NOOSR 1996: 3).

NOOSR additionally notes (1996: 7) that the education system in China is closely linked to the labour market, with all graduates, until the 1990s, allocated to a work unit (such as a factory, hospital, government department, school or university). As such, graduates have often been issued documentation relating primarily to employment rather than educational programs undertaken. This makes it difficult to assess what level of study graduates have reached.

These problems can make it extremely difficult for PRC migrants to gain official recognition for their qualifications, even when they may be equivalent or similar to an Australian counterpart. In the mid-1990s, Fung and Jie (1996: 14) argued that the downgrading of qualifications from the PRC appeared to be a ‘common practice’ in NOOSR. They claimed that NOOSR was particularly biased against qualifications in the vocational, technical and distance education sectors of the Chinese educational system.

Although these are post-secondary qualifications received on the successful completion of two to four years’ training, they are assessed by NOOSR to be equivalent to Australia’s Year 12 at best. For example, a hard-earned certificate from the prestigious Chinese Broadcasting and Television University is assessed to be equivalent to a Higher School Certificate, as is a certificate from a well-established teachers’ college. Degrees awarded under China’s unique Higher Education Self-Teaching System are simply not recognised. In China, this system is the most difficult way for mature adults to earn a degree because of its extraordinary hard examinations. People who have successfully gone through that ordeal are highly regarded in China (Fung and Jie 1996: 14).13

13 The latest NOOSR guidelines on PRC qualifications (NOOSR 2003) appear to assess such credentials more generously. Most sub-degree level qualifications awarded in or after 1981, and involving two or more years of study are assessed as comparable to an Australian Certificate IV, Diploma or Advanced Diploma. Others, such as sub-degree level teacher education qualifications, and self-study examination qualifications, are assessed on a case-by-case basis.
In many cases, Australian authorities’ non-recognition of qualifications effectively ends PRC migrants’ careers, even when they may have had years of professional experience in their field. This problem confronted many of my PRC respondents. In most cases, non-recognition of qualifications prevented women from even seeking jobs in their field. Others spent months or years re-gaining Australian equivalents of their qualifications in order to seek work in their previous occupation. For example, Sai, a university Law lecturer in China, stated that she gave up her career after migration because neither her Bachelors or Masters degrees in Law were recognised in Australia. However, still wanting to teach, she decided to study Education part-time, and while working as a community worker for the Chinese community, she completed Bachelors and Masters degrees in Education, hoping to teach in a language college, a position she was still seeking at the time of interview.

Jackie, a high school teacher, also completed an Australian qualification after failing to have her Chinese Bachelor of Education recognised. However, studying for a local Diploma of Education substantially delayed her employment in Australia, and even with a local qualification, she was not able to gain a job as senior as the one she had left in China. She stressed that migrating to Australia was like taking a ‘step backward’ in many ways:

> Everything’s starting from the beginning, like my qualification – they said, oh, overseas qualification, not local, so they said they can’t give me any job, and also they said I had no local experience.

Even when the qualifications of PRC migrants are officially recognised by the government, they may be devalued in practice in the Australian labour market because of China and Australia’s very different industrial structures, which generate different ideas about which fields of study are prestigious and valuable. As discussed in Chapter 5, the engineers among my PRC sample were not able to continue their careers after migration because of Australia’s small engineering sector. They are one example of an occupational elite in China who lose their status in an advanced industrialised country like Australia. While in China, science and engineering are considered the most prestigious fields of study and employment, Australian
occupational elites are more likely to be found within the business and commercial world.\textsuperscript{14}

This mismatch between two different labour markets can rob migrants of not just their jobs but their occupational identity. For example, Salaff and Greve (2001) note that in China, technocrats have a strong sense of identity. Urban careers in China are heavily based on technical knowledge, and engineers and scientists see themselves as playing a unique role in national economic development. ‘As leaders in their professions, they proudly see themselves as crucial to the future of a modern China,’ explain Salaff and Greve (2001: 11). However, in advanced Western countries, these skills may not be highly valued, and may even be seen as primitive and unsophisticated.

The engineers among my PRC respondents faced this precise dilemma. Jian, who, as we saw earlier, was a metallurgical engineer who had worked on large government industrial projects, told me of her educational achievements in Science, a prestigious area in post-Cultural Revolution China:

\begin{quote}
[It was] very hard to get into the university… About one twentieth person to get into the university – very hard to get in. After the Cultural Revolution, we are the third year to get into the big test and go to the university… At the time people were thinking – do the Science – very best [people], they were clever, do the Science.
\end{quote}

However, after migration, although Jian was able to obtain official recognition of her Bachelor of Engineering, and enrolled to do a Masters degree in Engineering, she was told by the university staff that she was unlikely to find suitable employment in her field in Australia. As the next chapter explains, Jian felt that being a woman, as well as being a Chinese migrant, hindered her job prospects in engineering in Australia.

A fellow mainlander, Melissa, faced a similar problem of occupational devaluation, although in a very different field. Melissa was a martial arts instructor who was very proud of her history as an elite sportsperson in China. She had trained in \textit{Wushu} (a

\textsuperscript{14} Remennick (2003: 704, 713) documents a similar phenomenon among Soviet-trained engineers attempting to find work in Israel. The specialisation of these engineers reflected Soviet economic policies emphasising the development of heavy industry, such as mining, metallurgy, machine building, and chemical and petroleum production. After migration to Israel, which had very little heavy industry, many had to retrain in computing and high technology areas in order to apply for jobs.
popular martial artform in China) from the time she was hand-picked by a professional sports team at the age of 13.

I was interested in Wushu from when I was young... The Chinese professional sports team – they started looking for some children to do professional team sports, and they found me in a small town, and brought me to the big city to...be on a professional team... From that I went to a lot of states in China and overseas, competing in competitions. I won silver medals.

After migration, although Melissa was able to teach in a Sydney martial arts school, the work did not have the same significance in Australia. In China, Wushu is taught at all levels of education, from primary school to university, and practitioners are well-respected professionals. Melissa herself was a well known and highly regarded practitioner who was regularly invited to perform demonstrations at major public events. However, in Australia Wushu is only studied on a casual basis as a recreational hobby or curiosity. ‘I don’t know any Australian people understand Wushu,’ Melissa said. ‘I introduced it to them, I told them it was martial arts. They say, oh, karate, tae kwon doe. I said no, Wushu is very different. I had to demonstrate it to them.’ Like Jian, Melissa’s skills were officially recognised in Australia, but they had an entirely different cultural significance there than they did in China.

One exception among the PRC respondents was Julia, who as the last chapter explained, was one of the few mainland respondents not to experience downward occupational mobility. Julia’s educational choices were not devalued in Australia. Among the youngest of the PRC women (in her early 30s), Julia had started her university career at a time when English and commerce-related subjects had become more fashionable in China. When I asked her why she decided to major in English Literature at university, she replied:

Well when you choose your major you have to think about your interests and strengths, and how it will affect your career. Studying English in China is the same as studying IT here, because China is looking to more international trade, so they need more bi-lingual workers. I also did a minor in public relations and that also helped me get a job.

Julia’s decisions provided a firm foundation for her career after migration. Although she had worked as an interpreter in China, in Australia she had switched her focus to
accounting and had completed a Master of Commerce majoring in accounting. At the time of interview, she had recently secured an accounting job in the tourism industry, and was one of the few PRC respondents who were satisfied with their career progression in Australia.

Clearly though, for the majority of mainland respondents, there was an often fundamental mismatch between the educational and occupational cultures and values of China and Australia. Thus in the majority of cases, PRC women’s career prospects were constrained by a combination of the non-recognition of their qualifications and the devaluation of their occupational fields.

Hong Kong Respondents: Educational and occupational compatibility

Compared to their mainland counterparts, Hong Kong women are advantaged in the Australian labour market by the relatively high level of compatibility between the two countries’ education systems and the occupational skills valued in both societies. While a small minority of my Hong Kong respondents had problems with non-recognition of qualifications, most were able to effectively use their skills in the Australian workforce, particularly those with experience in business or information technology, as these occupational skills are highly coveted in both Hong Kong and Australia. Hong Kong respondents were also much more likely than their mainland counterparts to have studied in a Western country, which greatly eased their transition into the Australian workforce.

Among my 22 Hong Kong respondents, three (two teachers and a nurse) had experienced problems gaining official recognition of their qualifications. Like the PRC educators, the Hong Kong teachers were unable to transfer their qualifications to Australia. For example, Nicola was an Bachelor of Arts graduate with eight years experience as a high school teacher in Hong Kong. However, as this did not meet NSW standards for school teaching, Nicola spent her first year in Australia completing a Diploma of Education. She accepted the need to gain this Australian qualification, but was frustrated at being charged as an overseas student, because she
had yet to gain permanent residency, and at having to pay several hundred dollars to take an English language test. As described above, Nicola’s previous jobs in Hong Kong had routinely required English language skills, and her spoken English was excellent.

The uni wouldn’t even believe I could speak English! They said I had to do a test. I had to pay $600 or $700 to do a test, which of course I passed and did really well in... [and then] I had to pay overseas student fees...I was really upset because I was training so I could contribute to Australian society, and there were lots of others in my class from overseas who were going to go back to their countries. I was going to stay, so I thought it was very unfair. I had to pay very expensive fees – it was $13,000 for one semester. Especially when I wasn’t making any money and I had a baby at the same time.

Despite some respondents’ problems with qualifications recognition, most were able to transfer their skills after migration. In most cases, Hong Kong migrants’ education was generally compatible with Australian educational standards. Like Australia’s, Hong Kong’s educational institutions are based on the British model, and until 1997, regular checks were conducted to ensure comparability of educational standards between Hong Kong and British schools. Sample papers were sent to the UK each year to check parity between secondary school examinations (NOOSR 1995: 7).

Hong Kong’s tertiary education sector also attaches great importance to the maintenance of internationally recognised standards in education. NOOSR notes that academic standards are high, ‘so the relative standing of recognised higher education institutions in Hong Kong is not a critical factor in the assessment of tertiary qualifications for general employment purposes’ (NOOSR 1995: 23). NOOSR continues, ‘It is perhaps indicative of the strength of higher education in Hong Kong that the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, which admitted its first students in 1991, is already seen as an emerging major institution at the international level, due to the financial resources, the infrastructure and the quality of academic staff which it enjoys’ (1995: 23). Thus Australian authorities tend to be relatively familiar with the educational histories of Hong Kong migrants.

Hong Kong migrants’ occupational histories also tend to be familiar to Australian employers. Hong Kong has long been recognised as a global city and hub of
international commerce and finance. This means that Australian employers are generally able to understand and assess Hong Kong migrants’ work experience. The organisations they were employed with, the projects they undertook, and their overall career trajectories are much more familiar to Australian authorities relative to those of PRC migrants. In some cases this occupational recognition is institutionalised in special agreements between Hong Kong and Australian organisations. For example, the Hong Kong Society of Accountants (HKSA) has a ‘mutual recognition agreement’ with CPA Australia (the Australian association of chartered practising accountants) and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (an international accountancy body) (HKSA 2003). In Australia, the HKSA is one of 12 overseas professional bodies recognised by CPA Australia, and one of only two from a non-Western country. Membership of these – together with a recognised degree – is usually sufficient for admission to CPA Australia (CPA Online 2003).

In addition to general institutional compatibility, Hong Kong migrants are advantaged by the fact that both the Hong Kong and Australian labour markets value similar occupational areas. For example, migrants who had pursued information technology and commerce to meet the demand for these skills in Hong Kong found that their skills were also in demand in Australia. This is evident in the case of Alice, who began her studies at Hong Kong University in the early 1990s. Alice chose computer science because ‘it was the hottest subject’ at the time. At the height of the IT boom, with an international shortage of skilled IT professionals, studying computer science was widely perceived as a guarantee of a lucrative career. Alice subsequently completed a Masters degree in Quantitative Analysis for Business, supplementing her technical skills with business knowledge. These credentials formed a solid foundation for her career in the Hong Kong civil service, where she had reached a very senior managerial position by the time she was in her late 20s. In Australia, she was able to continue this work, securing a transfer to the Sydney office of a Hong Kong government trade promotion body.

Similarly, Susan chose to study commerce because she believed this would open up career opportunities in the business world, and said that her degree had in fact ‘helped quite a lot’ in securing jobs. Having studied accounting, finance, human resource management, marketing, and computer programming, she said her degree provided a good foundation for jobs in the corporate sector. In Australia, she had been able to
expand her career aspirations to include liaising between IT and managerial spheres, in the role of a business analyst.

Additionally, some Hong Kong respondents had studied in a Western country prior to migration, giving them invaluable exposure to foreign cultures and ways of life and broadening their outlook. Susan, for example, completed her high school and university studies in Canada before returning to Hong Kong to work. She said that after living in Canada, she enjoyed ‘Western culture’, and migrated to Australia because it offered a Western way of life, and compared to Canada, geographical proximity to Hong Kong. In Australia, Susan was able to use her contacts to secure a job in the same company she had worked for in Hong Kong, and experienced few difficulties adjusting to the Australian workforce:

To me, there isn’t much difference [between working in Hong Kong and Australia]. Because I think the culture in Hong Kong – [my company] is an international company, so the culture is quite similar.

Anita, a systems analyst, had also studied abroad, gaining a degree from a British university. When I asked her why she decided to study in the UK, she replied that she ‘wanted to get away from home. It was an opportunity to see the world’. Having worked in the UK for a major British company, she and her husband had already been granted right of abode. However, she chose to migrate to Australia instead because she thought there would be more opportunities than in England, which she felt was more of a ‘closed society’ for Asians. Having already lived in a Western society, and being British-educated, Anita was well equipped to adjust to Australian life. She explained the advantages of coming from Hong Kong vis à vis the mainland:

Although Hong Kong is an Asian country, it is an international society, because we were brought up in a British system. We’re exposed to more before coming here. China is totally different to the West.

Similarly, Su-lin chose to study nursing partly because she believed it to be ‘an international profession’. She explained,
At that time I love the job and I was thinking of the prospects of nursing being useful world-wide, chance to go somewhere. I didn’t have any definite plans to go anywhere but just thinking that this profession might enable this type of work.

Her assumptions were realised when she was able to study and work in a London hospital, before gaining a skill migration visa to Australia on the basis of her nursing credentials. In fact, Su-lin was one of the few among my respondents (six out of 44) who were skilled primary applicants in the migration process, rather than migrating on the basis of their family relationships. Her qualifications placed Su-lin in an advantaged position, but it is evident that these credentials were just part of an educational and career trajectory which was predisposed to being well received in Australia. Having had a life-long cosmopolitan disposition, and having gained crucial skills in order to pursue this outward orientation, Su-lin’s cultural repertoire already included many of the skills required for successfully adapting to life in Australia.

Thus not only was there a high level of perceived compatibility between Hong Kong and Australian educational and occupational standards, but more broadly, many of my Hong Kong respondents arrived in Australia with a great deal of cultural knowledge gained from having been educated within a Western-based education system, and socialised in a highly cosmopolitan, internationally-oriented society.

**Conclusion: Communism vs cosmopolitanism**

The different employment experiences of women from Hong Kong and China clearly cannot be explained through a human capital approach alone. Although both groups tend to be highly educated, their qualifications are received very differently in Australia. The PRC migrants encounter serious problems having their qualifications recognised by Australian authorities, and face devaluation of their occupational skills, which often lose the social and economic significance they had in China. Meanwhile, the qualifications and occupational skills of Hong Kong migrants are much more compatible with Australian standards, easing their transition into the Australian workforce. Linguistically too, Hong Kong migrants are advantaged over PRC migrants as they have had greater exposure to the English language. Unlike the PRC migrants, they tend to have a technical mastery of English. Nevertheless, Hong Kong
migrants suffer from a lack of cultural knowledge of Australian communication practices, and as non-native speakers of English, find their employment opportunities constrained by the language barrier.

These differences in linguistic and educational capital point to the dramatically different cultural repertoires of Hong Kong and PRC migrants. This is not surprising given that the modern histories of these two societies could hardly be more different. On the mainland, decades of Communist rule, national self-isolation, and rigid centralised control over almost every aspect of daily life created a collective disposition that could not be further from the cosmopolitan, commercially-oriented, individualistic mentality fostered in British-controlled, advanced capitalist Hong Kong.

Thus Hong Kong and PRC migrants are divided by profound differences in personal disposition, outlook and self-presentation, which all influence settlement experiences in a new country. This chapter has explored two key aspects of migrants’ ‘human capital’, in the form of occupational and linguistic skills, locating them within this broader cultural context. It has argued that far from being objective, transferable attributes, these skills are better seen as part of a larger cultural repertoire, which in a new country, is received and rewarded by local authorities only to the extent to which it is recognised as socially legitimate or compatible with local standards.

Chinese women’s employment experiences in Australia clearly reflect individuals’ human-cultural capital. However, these individual attributes and skills are only part of the story. Migrants are rarely just individual agents whose fortunes depend solely on how their own personal attributes are received in the labour market. Rather, they exist within households, and the household context can play a significant role in shaping employment experiences. This can be particularly so for women, who must balance paid work with unpaid domestic responsibilities. For Chinese women in Australia, the household context crucially influences the type of employment sought, and whether or not paid work is pursued at all. These concerns are explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 7

THE HOUSEHOLD CONTEXT: GENDERED MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

The previous chapter examined the role of migrants’ human-cultural capital in shaping employment experiences, focusing particularly on occupational and linguistic skills. However, migrants’ employment outcomes cannot be understood just by examining their individual attributes and skills. More commonly, migrants’ experiences reflect their household contexts. While for men, this household context may provide the domestic support for them to work full-time throughout their careers, women’s household roles pose more constraints on their employment. This means that men and women typically have very different employment experiences. As Chapters 4 and 5 showed, migrants’ employment experiences are highly gendered. Male migrants are more likely than female migrants to be the household’s ‘primary worker’, and thus have higher rates of labour force participation and higher status occupations and incomes. They may also experience less downward mobility after migration compared to women and thus enjoy greater career continuity across national borders.
Chinese migrants are no exception to these patterns. While women from Hong Kong and China have quite different human-cultural capital profiles, they are united by their similar gendered experiences of the Australian labour market. Chinese women’s jobs tend to be part-time and of a lower status than what they had been accustomed to prior to migration. Among my respondents, family responsibilities significantly constrained employment opportunities. Ultimately, migration to Australia often increased gender inequality within Chinese households, causing women to take up more traditional ‘female’ roles than they had done in their home countries.

This chapter explores the gendered aspect of migrant settlement, examining two distinct processes.

1. First, I argue that the act of migration itself is gendered. As outlined in Chapter 3, migration policies have historically treated male and female migration applicants very differently, and today, still facilitate largely different modes of entry for male and female migrants. This chapter explains that migration is commonly a male-initiated activity, with many women migrating as dependent spouses or ‘tied movers’. This has significant implications for subsequent settlement in the new country, with men and women adopting different roles in meeting work and family responsibilities. While male migrants typically adopt the position of the household’s breadwinner, female migrants often find their domestic role expanded to meet the challenges facing families settling in a new environment.

2. Second, this gendered division of labour is exacerbated by another process, that of assimilation into gendered Australian labour market practices. Feminist scholars have long documented the highly gendered character of the Australian workforce and women’s ‘double burden’ of paid and unpaid work (Baxter et al 1990; Game and Pringle 1983; Pocock 1998, 2003). Upon arrival in Australia, Chinese women quickly find themselves facing the same problems, leading to their concentration in part-time work or withdrawing from the workforce completely.
Consequently, many women ultimately reorient their energies and identity away from the world of employment, and towards the domestic sphere of the family. The next section documents this decline in women’s paid work, followed by the dual explanation for this pattern, examining the act of migration itself, and the assimilation of Chinese women into the gendered practices of the Australian labour market.

The Decline in Chinese Women’s Paid Work

After migration to Australia, Chinese women reduce their labour market role. As we have seen, Chinese women frequently face downward or blocked occupational mobility in the Australian workforce. And as this chapter shows, many leave the workforce entirely or shift from full-time to part-time work, reorienting their energies toward the domestic sphere of the family.

Researchers on migrant employment in Australia have documented NESB migrant women’s low labour force participation, relative to Australian born women and ESB migrant women (Teicher et al 2003; VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996). In 2001, as Table 7.1 shows, the labour force participation rate of migrant women from non-English speaking background was more than ten percentage points lower than that of locally-born women and women from English speaking countries.

Table 7.1: Labour force participation rates of women by birthplace (aged 15 years and over), 2001 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Labour force participation rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English speaking countries</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English speaking countries</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2003a
Among Chinese migrants, LSIA data show that while women from Hong Kong and China had high levels of employment prior to migration, this changes dramatically after arrival in Australia. As seen in Table 7.2, after migration, a much smaller proportion of women from Hong Kong and China was employed, while the proportion engaged in home duties increased substantially. This was particularly the case for PRC respondents, only a minority of whom were employed after three and a half years in Australia.

Table 7.2: Main activity of female primary applicants from Hong Kong and China, before and after migration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity</th>
<th>12 months prior to migration</th>
<th>6 months after migration</th>
<th>3½ years after migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=156</td>
<td>N=158</td>
<td>N=157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

Among migrating unit spouses, the proportion of employed women fell even more dramatically after migration, as Table 7.3 shows. After three and a half years in Australia, only a minority of women from both groups were employed. Again, an increased proportion took up home duties after migration, instead of paid work.
Table 7.3: Main activity of female migrating unit spouses from Hong Kong and China, before and after migration (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main activity</th>
<th>12 months prior to migration</th>
<th>6 months after migration</th>
<th>3½ years after migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>China</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hong Kong</strong></td>
<td><strong>China</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Waves 1 and 3

A fall in employment levels was also present among male primary applicants\(^1\) from China and Hong Kong: prior to migration, the vast majority (approximately 85 per cent for both groups) were employed. After three and a half years, while Hong Kong males had suffered only a small decline in the proportion employed (79 per cent), for the China born, just over half (55 per cent) were employed (unpublished LSIA1 data, Waves 1 and 3). Thus Hong Kong males were far more successful in gaining employment than their mainland counterparts. However, at each Wave of the survey, both groups of men were more likely than their female counterparts to be employed.

Moreover, there is evidence of a widening of the gender gap in employment rates. For example, while the proportion of Hong Kong respondents in employment was very similar prior to migration (84 per cent for women, 85 per cent for men), after three and a half years in Australia, this gap had widened considerably (55 per cent for women, 79 per cent for men).

Census data show that Chinese women have a lower labour force participation rate than their male counterparts, and the total Australian population, as seen in Table 7.4. In 2001, the participation rates for Hong Kong- and China-born women were both more than 10...
percentage points lower than for their male counterparts, and up to eight percentage points lower than for all Australian females (ABS 2003a).²

Table 7.4: Labour force participation rate for the Hong Kong- and China-born and total Australian population (aged 15 years and over), by gender, 2001 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong-born</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China-born</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Australian population</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2003a

Clearly, migration commonly entails a reduction in women’s paid work in favour of home duties. This is particularly so in the period immediately after migration, during which a sizeable proportion of migrant women are not in the workforce at all. However, in many cases, the pattern continues long after arrival in Australia, with migrant women in general having a lower labour force participation rate than both migrant men and the total female Australian population. Chinese women are no exception to this pattern: although they tend to be highly educated and accustomed to an active labour force role, migration to Australia means a decline in labour market activity, and an escalation of their domestic responsibilities.

What causes these shifts in employment activity? The next sections outline two mechanisms by which Chinese women find themselves reorienting their energies away from work and towards the household.

¹ The sample size for male spouses is too small to produce reliable results.
² In the case of the Hong Kong women, the comparatively low LFPR is related to the large numbers of students included in the census. As mentioned in Chapter 5, a quarter of all Hong Kong-born persons in Australia were studying in 2001, compared to 15 per cent of the PRC-born (DIMIA 2003c).
Step 1: Gendered Migration

In many ways, the act of migration itself causes the decline in women’s labour force activity. This section shows that women are often ‘tied movers’ who migrate to accompany their spouses. Within migrant households, it is often the male who makes the decision to migrate, and his career assumes priority over his partner’s. Meanwhile, migrant women often find themselves expanding their domestic activity as wives and mothers, as a response to the disruption to family life engendered by migration.

Who decides to migrate? Migration as male-initiated

A family’s decision to migrate permanently to another country is often taken by the male within the household.³ Migration is often part of men’s strategies for career advancement, as they take advantage of better employment and educational opportunities abroad. While women sometimes migrate to further their careers, qualitative and quantitative evidence shows that female-initiated permanent settler migration is much less common. As discussed in Chapter 4, this reflects the uneven power relations that tend to exist within households, with men’s status as head of the household founded on traditional gender ideology, their economic power, and their privileged status relative to women under migration admissions regimes in many Western countries.

Many researchers of migration have documented the tendency for migration to be male-initiated (Chattopadhyay 1997; Halfacree 1995; Lee et al 2002; Shihadeh 1991; Smits 1999; Yeoh and Khoo 1998). For example, in Yeoh and Khoo’s study of migrants in Singapore, 77 per cent of female respondents states that the move was initiated by the demands of their spouse’s employment, compared to only five per cent of men (1998:

³ The labour migration of women has been widely documented, especially the migration of young women to work in industrial production and service industries (Cheng 1999; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Lim and Oishi 1996; Phizacklea 1983; Sassen-Koob 1984). However, in these cases, women typically migrate alone, and are not permanent settlers, instead remitting earnings to their families at home. Moreover, their migration sometimes reflects a ‘family’ decision rather than their own, with households taking advantage of employment opportunities for young women abroad. In contrast, this chapter concerns the permanent settler migration of households, which is more likely to be male-initiated.
165). The primary role of men in migration decisions is also reflected in ‘stage migration’ where members of the family migrate at different times. In the vast majority of cases, stage migration consists of men migrating first and making arrangements for employment and accommodation, with women and children following weeks, months or years after (see Lee et al 2002: 614).

This literature on the gendered character of migration shows that because so often the purpose of migration is to further men’s careers, it reduces women’s employment status and increases their dependence on their spouses. For example, researching Chinese women in Britain, Lee et al (2002) found that men were generally the primary applicants for migration, and sometimes arrived several years before their wives and children. They note that women were often placed under ‘immense pressure’ to migrate in order to keep the family unit intact. One woman who migrated because of her husband’s business opportunities recalled the pressure from her husband. ‘He called again and again. In fact, I did not want to come. I had my job and a house in Hong Kong. I did not want to adapt to a new environment’ (cited in Lee et al 2002: 614).

Similarly, Madden and Young’s survey (1993) of 500 migrants to Australia found that in a sizeable minority of cases (15 per cent), respondents (the great majority women) were solely reliant on their spouses for information about Australia. Madden and Young (1993: 6) note, ‘This places a woman in a dependent position in that she has to trust that she would experience life in Australia the way the man perceives it. There is much evidence that this is not the case – that women’s and men’s settlement experiences can be quite different.’

Examining migrant settlement services in Australia, Young et al note that the many migrant women who came to Australia as spouse migrants faced problems of isolation. ‘Without exception, they relied on their husbands for information and support when they arrived in Australia. Generally their husbands worked – and the women found themselves socially isolated’ (2003: 14).
Among recent migrants to Australia, LSIA data show the gendered nature of migration decisions. Table 7.5 shows that even among primary applicants only, men were ten percentage points more likely than women to state that it was their idea to migrate to Australia. Meanwhile, almost double the proportion of women compared to men reported that it was their spouse or partner’s idea to migrate.

Table 7.5: Whose idea to migrate to Australia, primary applicants by gender (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=1,786</td>
<td>N=1,967</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your spouse/partner</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You and your spouse/partner together</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other relative</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Wave 1

The gender gap was also evident among LSIA1 primary applicants from China and Hong Kong, as shown in Table 7.6. Among this group, women were three times more likely than men to say that migration was their spouse or partner’s idea.

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4 Although migration visas are granted on the basis of the characteristics of primary applicants, this does not mean that the latter necessarily initiate the application to migrate. Rather, households nominate as the primary applicant the family member who most successfully meets migration criteria, for example, educational and occupational qualifications. In some Chinese families, women’s nursing qualifications (nursing is on the Australian government’s occupations in demand list) result in their being chosen as the primary applicant, even though migration may reflect a household strategy or the desire of the husband.
Table 7.6: Whose idea to migrate to Australia, primary applicants from Hong Kong and China by gender (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=157</td>
<td>N=183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your spouse/partner</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You and your spouse/partner</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other relative</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LSIA1, Wave 1

Male-initiated migration was very common among my respondents, particularly those from China, whose husbands often came to Australia to gain post-graduate qualifications and eventually find employment. In some cases, families migrated even against the wishes of the women, who felt they had no choice but to agree in order to keep the family together. Stage migration was widespread, with long periods of separation, during which the men worked in Australia while the women remained behind. In these cases, it was only after years of living apart that the women finally agreed to migrate to reunite the family.

For example, Ruth, a music instructor, stated emphatically that she had ‘no choice’ about migrating. Her husband wanted to come to Australia to do a Masters degree (after unsuccessfully applying to US universities). However, throughout the interview, Ruth said she often thought about returning to China. ‘If I have the chance, I would go back,’ she said.

Similarly, Sai, unable to continue her academic career in Australia, told me that she would prefer to be in China, but ‘had to come’ to Australia because of her husband’s work. Her husband, also a university lecturer, had come to Australia eight years before she had, so she was reluctant to consider an arrangement that would separate the family any longer.
Jackie, who, as we saw in previous chapters, shifted from university-based teaching in China to high school teaching in Australia, said that the decision to migrate was still a source of tension within her family. Her husband, also an academic, insisted on coming to Australia to complete a PhD. The family arrived in Australia in 1992 on her husband’s student visa, but Jackie was so despondent at not being able to find work that she and her young son returned to China for another five years.

After her husband had gained permanent residency in Australia, Jackie and her son finally migrated. As she put it, ‘in 1997 my husband applied for permanent residence in Australia, and we have it, so he said you must come to Australia – the visa is got. I said, OK, OK, I come.’ However, given the choice, Jackie stated emphatically, ‘I still choose China.’ She told me, ‘sometimes we argue about stay or go. This is the – like, big problem…coming to Australia is like backward – [I] studied in university and get job in high school, and then another ten years maybe I can go somewhere. But big thing for me is my family is together. But this is not depending on countries – it’s my husband who separates us.’

This tension between spouses over the decision to migrate was not as evident among my Hong Kong respondents. Sarah’s case was an exception. An accountant in Hong Kong, Sarah had not wanted to migrate to Australia, and emphasised that migration was her husband’s decision: ‘He decided. He decided because he liked the environment here. At that time he thought the competition in Australia is not so severe, it’s quite easy to get a job and then – just simple life.’ However, Sarah was more sceptical about the job opportunities in Australia, and reluctant to leave behind their lives in Hong Kong. At the time of interview, it appeared Sarah’s doubts were warranted as neither she nor her husband, an IT professional, had been able to find employment. She stated, ‘My opinion is – we are already in Hong Kong a long time. We established everything – we got a job. If we change the environment, you need to start again. It’s not easy. But at that time, he thought it would be easy, especially because of his field [of work]. He said his friends, his schoolmates, all got a job here, very easy… my husband convince me that he would get a job [laughs]…Now it seems the situation’s not like that.’
Altogether, almost a third of my respondents’ husbands migrated to Australia before they did, and only one woman arrived before her husband. Even when couples decided to migrate together, the men often arrived several weeks or months before their wives, and found employment and accommodation before the rest of the family arrived, to ease their transition into the new country. This was particularly common for my Hong Kong respondents:

My husband was trying to check the job market in here. So he was looking at the paper, he was applying for jobs and everything… So then once my husband got the job…I sold the house and I packed up everything, and I came with the [children] a couple of months later (Margaret, a secretary from Hong Kong).

My husband came here first, and then he stayed with [relatives] for a couple of weeks or something, and when he settle down and find the house, or unit, then we came over (Sandra, a laboratory technician from Hong Kong).

My first husband came to Australia a year and a half before me as a skilled migrant – he was working as a chef. So he sponsored me to come here (Lisa, a community worker from Hong Kong).

Although some of my respondents were dissatisfied or ambivalent about the decision to migrate, most were ultimately happy to have migrated, particularly as they thought that Australia offered a better natural and social environment for raising their children, and a better quality of life for the whole family. However, even when women migrated willingly, it was still their husbands that tended to take on the primary role, applying for the visa and arriving first in the country. These patterns facilitated a settlement process in Australia that was highly gendered. Because men are commonly the primary applicants for migration, and often migrate before the rest of the family to secure employment and accommodation, they assume a natural ‘primary status’ within the household in terms of employment and general knowledge of the new society.

This inequality is partly a product of the dynamics of migration policy itself. For example, as Chapter 3 showed, women arriving as spouses of skilled migrants are often at
a disadvantage compared to their husbands because few would have undergone the points test and qualifications assessment. Their husbands have already had their qualifications partially or wholly assessed prior to migration, have some knowledge about their employment prospects in Australia, and ‘may have papers in hand to start job hunting the day after arriving in Australia’ (Fincher, Foster and Wilmot 1994: 78).

In contrast, most accompanying spouses will not have had their qualifications assessed, and will not have the advantage of knowing how their skills may be utilised in the Australian labour market. They may find themselves spending months after arrival having their qualifications assessed, and in the meantime, being unemployed or working in jobs below their capacity and expectations.

In cases where men precede women in migrating, they typically have jobs by the time their wives arrive, or if they have not, the family’s priority is that he secures a job. Meanwhile, women’s primary responsibility is to ensure that the children settle smoothly into their new schools and social activities. Their own careers are considered only after these responsibilities are met. Thus they commonly experience a ‘feminisation’ of roles in that they find themselves fulfilling more traditional roles as wives and mothers, as opposed to income earners.5

'I give up my career because anyway I’m a woman':
Migration and mothering

As migration is commonly male-initiated, it becomes ‘natural’ for men’s employment to take precedence within migrant households. Often a strategy to enhance men’s careers, migration can bolster the status of men’s employment activities, at the expense of women’s. Women generally have primary responsibility for family maintenance, and

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5 In the labour process literature, ‘feminisation’ is defined as ‘a process whereby an association develops between the low status and rewards of jobs, and the fact that they are performed by women’ (Thompson 1989: 203). I am using the term in a broader way, examining the relationship between women’s paid and unpaid work, such that an escalation of women’s domestic responsibilities – the traditional ‘feminine’ role – can be understood as ‘feminisation’.
adjusting to life in a new country typically intensifies women’s domestic workload, both in terms of emotional and practical labour. Concurrently, in migrating, women often lose sources of domestic support, such as extended family members and hired domestic workers. Consequently, as several scholars of migration have noted (Creese and Dowling 2001; Man 1995; Ng 1982), the act of migration itself often results in an escalation in women’s roles as wives and mothers, and a reduction in their role as income earners.

As outlined in Chapter 2, Chinese women migrants tend to be highly educated and active labour force participants in their home countries. After migration, many experience a dramatic reduction in their role as income earners and career-women, and the concomitant enlargement of their role as housewives and mothers. The challenges of settling in a new country often meant a ‘feminisation’ of their roles: while they had often been career-oriented prior to migration, supported by paid domestic workers or extended family, the loss of these support structures, and the demands of organising everyday family life in a new country resulted in women changing their focus to the domestic sphere.

Researchers on gender and migration have shown that women migrants tend to bear the brunt of the loss of social and domestic networks engendered by migration (Eastmond 1993; Kay 1988; Man 1995, 1997; Meintel et al 1987; Rowland 1991; Yeoh and Khoo 1998). Migration tends to ‘nuclearise’ family structures because of the difficulty of sponsoring the migration of extended family members. Australia’s Family Migration program, for instance, is designed primarily for the migration of nuclear families. Spouses comprise the vast majority of Family stream entrants to Australia (74 per cent in 2002-03). Another 17 per cent in 2002-03 were planned for fiancés and children, with only seven per cent for parents, aged dependents, carers, orphan unmarried and remaining relatives (Ruddock 2002: 4). This means that the majority of migrants to Australia are forced to leave behind their parents and other relatives if these relatives are unable to

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6 Of course men, too, carry out settlement work, especially in cases of stage migration, where men arrive weeks, months or years before the rest of their families, and make arrangements for accommodation, children’s schooling, purchase a car, and so on. Often men’s work eases the transition for women and children. However, in these cases, while men are making arrangements for their families, they are not also (directly) responsible for caring for children and carrying out the emotional labour of family maintenance. This is typically a female responsibility.
qualify for entry themselves. In many cases, relatives, particularly elderly parents, are reluctant to migrate even if they are able to.

This ‘nuclearisation’ of the family can be dramatically felt by Chinese women migrants, who are typically accustomed to living in a very close-knit world of extended families and friends. Households in Hong Kong and China often include extended family members. In both societies, a sizeable minority – between 15 and 25 per cent (Lee 2002; Ma et al 1994) of households consist of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren, residing together, sharing finances, resources and household labour. Writing about Hong Kong, Man (1995: 313) explains the rationale for such arrangements: ‘This pseudo-extended family arrangement is as much an adherence to the Confucian ideal which stresses one’s duty to care for the old, as a pragmatic arrangement in response to the high cost of housing, and the shortage of provision by the state of subsidized homes for the aged. Very often, however, the arrangement could be mutually beneficial for all parties. The grandparent (typically the grandmother) or the unmarried aunt is provided for; in return, they are able to help out in housework and child care.’

In urban China, many young married couples live with their parents because of the severe shortage of housing. Relying on the government for provision of housing, it is common for workers to wait for many years before they are allocated their own apartments. In the meantime, many are forced to live with their parents, mostly the husband’s family. And, as Wong explains, because all women continue to work after marriage and motherhood, grandparents become the natural providers of child-care: ‘Shared living arrangements and the need for child-care reinforces intergenerational dependence’ (Wong 1998: 165). China’s early retirement age policy also allows grandparents to assist with child-care. Women often retire at age 50 and men at age 60 (Bian and Logan 1996: 747). This policy is designed to create employment opportunities for the younger population, but unintentionally also creates a pool of potential child-carers. Bauer et al (1990) found that as a result of these forms of assistance, the presence of young children (less than two years) did not have a significant impact on women’s employment patterns.
So common is the practice of grandparents and other relatives caring for children that migrants sometimes resort to leaving their young children in China, or sending them back to be raised by relatives (Zhou 2000: 453). Among my respondents, Julia, an accounts assistant, had sent her two year old daughter to China to be looked after by her grandfather. ‘It’s very common for Chinese to send their children back to China so the costs are lower. Also my dad can full-time look after her’, Julia said.

Many working women in Hong Kong are also supported at home by paid domestic workers. Middle- and upper-class Hong Kong households have hired domestic workers since the 1970s, when the Hong Kong government allowed foreign nationals, mostly from the Philippines and other South-east Asian countries, to enter the colony to work as ‘helpers’ (Constable 1997: 29). In 2003, there were approximately 250,000 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong, more than half of whom were Filipinos (Torres 2003). The popularity of domestics reflects the low wages they receive. In 2003, the Hong Kong Government cut the already low HK$3,670 (US$470) minimum monthly wage for foreign maids by HK$400 (Torres 2003). In some cases, Hong Kong women choose to work even when their income is only slightly higher than the cost of hiring a domestic worker (Constable 1997: 21). Hired domestic workers are much less common in mainland China, though increasing numbers of urban middle-class households employ such workers, who are mainly women from rural areas. In addition, state owned enterprises typically provide inexpensive child-care, and in some cases, assign domestic workers to assist households after the birth of a child.

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7 It is important to note that the hiring of a domestic worker does not generally absolve Hong Kong women of responsibility for household labour. While they may delegate tasks to hired workers, women still need to manage household labour, and are blamed by other family members if the work is not done adequately. A 1990s Hong Kong survey found that 72 per cent of wives, compared with four per cent of husbands, were responsible for household chores, while 14 per cent shared the tasks (Cheung et al 1997: 210). As Man argues (1997: 219), while domestic workers relieve middle-class women from daily household labour (thus polarising and dividing women along class and racial dimensions), this arrangement ‘does not resolve the problems posed by the separation of paid work and housework, and the relegation of housework to women’. Instead, it ‘diverts attention from the struggle for an equitable division of household labour between husbands and wives, the provision of socialized services, and more flexible work arrangements’ (1997: 219). Thus the employment of domestic workers reinforces the traditional gender division of labour (Lee 2002: 251).

8 The PRC Government is actively encouraging the growth of the fledgling domestic help sector to create jobs in urban areas. In 2000, China’s Vice-Minister of Labour and Social Security, Lin Yongsan, stated that the sector was expected to create at least 15 million jobs in the coming years (People’s Daily 2000).
The loss of these sources of domestic support after migration can therefore dramatically increase women’s domestic responsibilities. Not only do women have more housework to do, but domestic work becomes an isolated activity conducted exclusively within the nuclear family. Previously shared responsibilities become the sole responsibility of the wife/mother (Eastmond 1993; Kay 1988; Loo and Ong 1982; Man 1995; Meintel et al 1987; Pe-Pua et al 1996). Many of my respondents described their shock at suddenly being responsible for all the housework, and had to quickly acquire the skills to complete tasks that they had previously only managed, rather than actually performed. For example, Rose, who, as we saw earlier, gave up her career in the travel industry after migration, spoke about how she had to start cooking the evening meal in the middle of the afternoon, as her kitchen skills were so under-developed when she first arrived in Australia.

The first year [after arrival] I was so busy because I was not used to cooking, doing housework and all that, because in Hong Kong labour is cheap and I’ve got two maids to help me… So once I migrate here then I have to get used to doing housework, cooking and all that. And at the beginning I have to start the meal at three o’clock [laughs]. When I had to prepare the dinner, start three o’clock!

Sai, who, as we saw earlier, enjoyed generous occupational welfare as a university lecturer in China, said that her employer had assigned a live-in domestic worker to help her at home when she had her baby, so she too, never developed household skills.

In China it’s different. When I had a baby, I had a houseworker help me at home. All the time, seven days a week. So I needn’t do any housework. Even when I arrived here I don’t know any cooking. I don’t know how to sew…Now I do all the things [laughs]. Never get anybody to help.

For most of my respondents, the loss of domestic support occurred just at the time when it was most needed – immediately after arrival in Australia. These women had to cope with being solely responsible for domestic work at a time when their families were demanding most from them. The disruptions and emotional stress of migration experienced by all family members intensified the work of ‘mothering’ required of the
women. For example, Rose felt compelled to cease paid work after arriving in Australia in order to help her three children settle into the new country. Young adolescents at the time of migration, her children were not happy about moving to Australia, and Rose felt she should devote most of her time to providing them with emotional and practical support to help ease their transition. Therefore she decided not to seek employment, and instead was a full-time housewife during the her first two years in Australia.

Once I decided to come to Australia, I know I have to give up my career completely… doesn’t matter, I give up my career because anyway I’m a woman, so I’m a housewife, so I should take care of the children and the house and all that…I think it’s better to stay because at that time my children are not very happy, because they lost all their friends and they got nobody here. So they don’t like it, so I think I better stay at home.

It is interesting that Rose explains her decision by invoking gender roles, stating that the appropriate role for a woman is to take care of the children and the house. In Hong Kong, supported by two paid domestic workers, she had worked full-time and often attended work-related social activities in the evenings and on weekends. Only after migration did she feel that her proper role was within the home. Clearly, the act of migration itself heightened her domestic responsibilities, which ultimately changed her perception of her own gender identity – being a woman now meant being a housewife, whereas before she had been very much work-oriented.

When Rose did seek paid work in the travel industry, she was unable to find a job, saying that she had lost all her work connections, and that in the years she had been out of the workforce, a lot of things had changed – ‘everything is computerised and all that’. At the time of interview, Rose was working part-time as a home-based child carer, a job that was very poorly paid (she earned A$3.30 per hour, per child), but one she enjoyed nevertheless.

Wendy, a former nurse in Hong Kong, also stopped paid work after migration, spending the first two years ‘helping myself and my kids settle down here in Australia’. She said that helping her family adjust to life in a new country took up most of her time in this initial period. Away from her extended family, she struggled with having to take primary
responsibility for the children’s welfare, and with the general demands of life in suburban Sydney, especially learning to drive and navigating around the city. Although she had expected to be a full-time housewife in Australia, after the first two years, she began studying psychology and at the time of interview was working as a part-time counsellor for a Chinese community organisation.

Sarah, a former accountant in Hong Kong, had not done any paid work at all since arriving in Australia a year and a half earlier. She explained that as her baby was only a few months old when she arrived, she felt she needed time at home to take care of him and adjust to a new country. When she did seek paid employment after several months, she was unsuccessful, and so expected to continue being a full-time housewife and mother, at least until her son started school.

It is important to note that these women were able to choose to stay at home because of their family’s financial situation. Their husbands had adequately lucrative jobs which allowed the family to survive on one income, or they had sufficient savings to enable women’s non-participation in the labour force. Clearly, this option is only open to women whose families are not financially dependent upon their income earning capacity. Other respondents, whose families were not able to afford a full-time housewife, took up part-time jobs. Although they had typically worked full-time prior to migration, they shifted to part-time employment in order to help family members adjust to their new lives in Australia.

At the time of interview, most of my respondents were employed in part-time jobs, despite the fact that the vast majority had been full-time workers prior to migration, as shown in Table 7.7. For many, part-time work came after long periods out of the workforce, in the initial settlement period.
Table 7.7: Labour market status of respondents, before and after migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hong Kong respondents</th>
<th>PRC respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=22</td>
<td>N=22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-migration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-migration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* at time of interview

This reduction in the labour force participation of Chinese women migrants is documented in several western countries, including Australia, Canada, and the US (Lam 1994; Mak 2001; Man 1995, 1997; Pe-Pua et al 1996; Zhou 2000). For example, in her study of Hong Kong migrants in Australia, Mak (2001) found that migrant families generally preferred fathers to dedicate themselves to re-building their careers, while often ‘equally highly-qualified mothers’ sought part-time employment while raising children with a relatively limited use of child-care (Mak 2001: 58). Mak’s study found that the proportion of skilled migrants changing from full-time work in Hong Kong to part-time work in Australia was much higher among women than among men (2001: 35). Mak suggests that these working mothers preferred part-time employment ‘mainly out of gender role considerations, where they put their husbands’ careers and children’s needs ahead of their own careers’ (2001: 54).

Migration to Australia clearly engenders a dramatic change in women’s working lives. While they were accustomed to working full-time prior to migration, the disruption created by the act of migration, and the loss of domestic support, often necessitate an escalation of their domestic roles. Chinese women find themselves spending much more time at home providing emotional support to family members and re-establishing the daily operation of the household in a new context.

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9 Among the 30 mothers in Mak’s sample, only nine were full-time salary earners. Thirteen were part-time salary earners, while three ran their own businesses, and the remainder were unemployed, studying or full-time housewives (Mak 2001).
Clearly these work and family issues do not confront only migrant women. Feminist scholars in Australia and elsewhere have long documented the ‘double burden’ of women, and the strategies women employ to accommodate their paid and unpaid work responsibilities. In this sense, the reduction in labour force activity of Chinese women is not just a product of the migration process, but reflects their assimilation into the gendered structures of the Australian labour market.

**Step 2: Assimilation into the Gendered Australian Labour Market**

In migrating to Australia, Chinese women integrate themselves into the gendered practices of the Australian labour market. Feminist scholars have long argued that labour markets are gendered, and that overall women’s employment status is lower than that of men’s (Adkins 1995; Baxter et al 1990; Game and Pringle 1983; Mumford 1989; Pocock 1998, 2003; Walby 1990). In Australia, feminist researchers have refuted claims by orthodox economists and politicians (e.g. COSW 2002; Goward 1998a, 1998b; Moylan 1997; Wooden 1997) that women have benefited from the labour market reforms of the last two decades. They show that women are still much less likely than men to participate in the labour force, and those that do tend to work in different occupations and industries. Men and women are also distinguished by the number of hours they work each week, and consequently, tend to have different earnings profiles. Overall, women are much more likely than men to be employed in part-time jobs characterised by lower remuneration and occupational status compared to jobs in which men are concentrated.

These patterns in part reflect women’s ‘double burden’ of paid and unpaid work. Women have dramatically increased their participation in the workforce, from 25 per cent just after World War II to more than double that level today (55.7 per cent in November 2002) (Burgess et al 2003: 141). However, this growth in women’s employment levels has not been accompanied by significant re-organisation of domestic responsibilities. Time use studies show that between 1987 and 1992, for instance, men did not increase
their domestic activities overall, except for a slight increase in child-care (Bittman and Pixley 1997). The ABS Time Use Survey found that there is a 30/70 split between men and women in time spent on household work\(^\text{10}\) (Bittman and Pixley 1997: 96). Whether they engage in paid work or not, women are seen as responsible for household labour. As Pocock comments, the ‘cultural constructions of “proper mothers”, and “proper carers” have not changed commensurate with change in their roles in paid work. Many still think of a good mother as an ever-available generous carer’ (2003: 2).

Despite the vigorous public discussion in Australia about ‘family friendly’ workplaces (e.g. DEWR 2003; HREOC 2002), there is little evidence that parents are experiencing improvements in their ability to balance work and family responsibilities. As seen in Table 7.8, in 1995, more than twice as many employees reported that their satisfaction with work and family had decreased as those who said it had increased.

Table 7.8: Change in satisfaction with work/family balance over past twelve months (employees with dependants), 1995 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Working mothers bear the brunt of these work and family pressures, and employ various strategies to balance paid and unpaid work commitments. Consequently, women generally participate in the workforce in different ways to men. This has created a ‘mother track’ as opposed to a ‘career track’, in which women trying to combine work and family responsibilities take up lower status, lower paid jobs with poor career prospects (Hochschild 1997; Pocock 2000, 2003). In many cases, they leave the workforce entirely when they have children.

\(^{10}\) This is based on the broadest definition of domestic labour and includes ‘outdoor’ tasks like house maintenance and car cleaning, in which men specialise.
The different employment patterns adopted by mothers and fathers is evident in data on the working arrangements of couple families with children under 15 years. As seen in Table 7.9, in 2002, 37 per cent of mothers were not in the labour force, compared with only seven per cent of fathers. Meanwhile, 83 per cent of fathers were employed full-time, compared with only 23 per cent of mothers. The most common arrangement in couple families was for the father to be employed full-time and the mother employed part-time.

Table 7.9: Labour force status of parents with children ages under 15 years (couple families), 2002 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s labour force status</th>
<th>Employed full-time</th>
<th>Employed part-time</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Not in the labour force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s labour force status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the labour force</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2003e

Clearly, taking up part-time work is a common strategy among women trying to accommodate paid and unpaid responsibilities. In 2001, women comprised only 33 per cent of all full-time workers, and 71 per cent of all part-time workers (ABS 2001). Many of these part-time jobs are also casual: more than 30 per cent of employed women are in casual jobs (Watson et al 2003: 68).

While part-time and casual work can provide flexibility for juggling paid and unpaid responsibilities, it is also characterised by lower job security, status, career opportunities and remuneration relative to full-time permanent work (ACIRRT 1999; Baxter et al 1990; Lever-Tracy 1988; Sharpe 1987; Watson et al 2003). For example, while casuals comprised approximately half of all elementary clerical, sales and service workers (52 per cent) and labourers (46 per cent), they were only 15 per cent of all managers and administrators (ABS 1999).
Part-time workers also have less access to participatory mechanisms in the workplace, such as communication, meetings and consultations (Markey et al 2003), as well as important workplace processes such as training, promotion and bargaining (Pocock 1998: 587). As Pocock (2003: 5) argues, women’s concentration in part-time and casual positions has ‘entrenched the peripheral status of carers in many workplaces’.

These characteristics of part-time and casual work in Australia can hamper women’s ability to successfully combine work and family commitments. For example, in 2000, 64.3 per cent of Australian women employed full-time were entitled to some paid maternity leave, compared to only 24.5 per cent of part-time female employees (ABS 2003e). More generally, part-time employees have little control over start and finish times, and working hours are increasingly irregular, unpredictable and unsocial (Buchanan and Bearfield 1997; Charlesworth 1996; Heiler 1996), making it difficult to organise child-care and other domestic arrangements.

Not only are women more likely than men to be employed on a part-time or casual basis, they are also employed in different occupations and industries relative to men. In the mid-1980s, the Australian labour force was listed as the most sex segregated in the OECD (OECD 1984). There is little evidence of any substantial change since. As Table 7.10 shows, between 1984 and 2001, women increased their numerical dominance in the ‘caring’ industries of health and community services and education, and remained over-represented in the service-based industries of accommodation, cafes and restaurants and retail trade. In traditionally male-dominated industries, such as construction, mining and other trades, women increased their share of employment, but by 2001, were still under-represented.
Table 7.10: Percentage of women in the workforce by industry, 1984, 1995 and 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, Gas and Water Supply</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Storage</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Services</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and Business Services</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Administration and Defence</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Community Services</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Recreational Services</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Other Services</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2003b; Pocock 1998: 592

Occupationally, women in 2001 comprised the majority of clerical, sales and service workers, while being substantially under-represented as managers and administrators, tradespersons and production and transport workers, as seen in Table 7.11. Women’s under-representation in managerial and administrative jobs is particularly significant as people in these positions shape organisational policies and practices. While women comprised approximately half of the nation’s professionals in 2001 (and it should be noted that this category includes nursing, teaching and other traditionally ‘female’ occupations), they were a much smaller proportion of occupations with the greatest decision-making power.
Table 7.11: Percentage of women in the workforce by occupation, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>% female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers and Administrators</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professionals</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons and related workers</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Clerical and Service workers</td>
<td>88.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Clerical, Sales and Service workers</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Production and Transport workers</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Clerical, Sales and Service workers</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers and related workers</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All occupations</strong></td>
<td><strong>45.2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2003b

Women’s lower labour force participation and their concentration in part-time and lower paid jobs result in their lower level of earnings relative to men, as seen in Figure 7.1. In 2001, women were more likely than men to have no or low incomes, whereas men dominated all income categories above $500 per week.
The overall portrait here is of a highly gendered labour market. Women’s domestic responsibilities, and the relative lack of social provisions to help them combine paid and unpaid work, cause them to seek out part-time and casual employment, and commonly prevent them from investing in their careers as fully as men do. The segregation between men and women in the Australian workforce is seen in relation to employment status (full- or part-time, casual or permanent), industry and occupation of employment, and earnings levels. Overall, data on these variables show that women are more likely than men to be found in low-paid, low status, precarious employment.

Chinese women are no exception to these patterns. Upon arrival in Australia, they quickly assimilate into the prevailing culture of Australian work practices, such that they too find themselves concentrated in part-time or casual employment, in jobs that are generally lower paid and less secure than those of their male counterparts. As outlined in Chapter 5, women from Hong Kong and China are less likely than their male counterparts to be found in high status jobs such as managers, administrators and professionals, and more likely to be found in lower status jobs such as elementary service workers and labourers. Consequently, their income levels are substantially lower than
men’s. Like Australian women, Chinese women are also concentrated in traditional female-dominated industries such as retail trade and health and community services. The next section explains how this labour force participation is experienced by my Chinese respondents.

‘Maybe if I was a man...’: Chinese women’s double burden

In contrast to Australia, in Hong Kong and China, it is not uncommon for educated women to engage in full-time employment throughout their working lives, even when they have children, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter. After arriving in Australia however, few Chinese women can maintain this high level of paid work, as they confront the heightened demands on their time from family members adjusting to life in a new country, while also having lost sources of domestic support, such as paid domestic workers and extended family members.

Consequently, like many Australian women, Chinese women migrants usually strongly feel the disruption their family responsibilities cause to their careers. They often feel compelled to give up particular types of jobs or career opportunities, and within the jobs they hold, feel constrained by having to arrange their working lives around their household responsibilities. This frequently results in their shifting from full-time to part-time work, or leaving the workforce altogether. As such, their experiences come to mirror those of the general female population of Australia.

For example, Margaret, an executive secretary, was accustomed to working full-time and being financially independent in Hong Kong. This was possible even with two young

11 The two main exceptions to this are education, in which fewer Chinese women are employed, because of the difficulty in transferring teaching qualifications, and manufacturing, in which mainland Chinese women, unlike Australian women, are concentrated, because of the prominence of low-skill factory jobs in this industry (ABS unpublished 2001 census data).
12 This is not to say that similar constraints are not felt by working women in Hong Kong. Lee (2002: 255) shows that in Hong Kong the middle-class ethos is to prioritise men’s careers over women’s, and that women are generally less preferred as workers because of their family responsibilities. However, in combination with the difficulties of transferring skills across borders, Chinese women can find that family constraints have a larger impact on their careers in Australia.
children, because she had the support of a live-in domestic worker. In Australia, unable to afford domestic help, she was forced to give up her work when her third child was born.

So then my career stopped for about three, four years… I had three kids then, so I can’t work during the week, because I have to pick them up and do all the household work and everything.

When she did return to the workforce, the nature of Margaret’s secretarial jobs were defined by her child-care responsibilities, even to the extent that she found herself negotiating with one prospective employer for flexible hours before she had even secured the position. During the job interview, she requested working hours compatible with the school day:

Luckily, the one interviewing me, she also had a family…So I was telling her, my son, my kids are at the school just across the road. I said it would be good if I can pick them up – they finish at 3.15… So if I could work up to like 8.30 to 3.30. Of course you don’t have to pay me full wages, just pay me proportionally, so I don’t have to hire after school care, and it would really help me tremendously. So I gave them this term, and she was a very understanding lady, because she had a family.

Shu-lan, mother of three school-age children, also reduced her hours of paid work after migration, transferring from full-time work in Hong Kong to night-time shift work in Australia. At the time of interview, Shu-lan was working as a waitress in a 24 hour restaurant and bar between 9pm and 2am, ‘because when I work this shift, it means I can cook dinner for the kids, and then after they finish I can go to work.’

While my respondents often valued the flexibility offered by part-time work, they also acknowledged the limitations it placed on their career aspirations and even everyday workplace interactions. For example, Margaret felt she would never be able to regain her status in the workplace because part-time workers were ‘second-class’ workers in the eyes of colleagues. ‘You know if you are there whole day and everything, it’s better. If you are casual or part-time they don’t want to have close association with you,’ she said.
Similarly, Nicola, a part-time high school teacher, felt that she had sacrificed her career in migrating to Australia, because as a full-time employee in Hong Kong, she had felt ‘more belonging’ as well as having access to more support and resources. In Australia, at the time of interview, she was working in three part-time jobs, which included weekend and evening work, and was eagerly awaiting a full-time appointment.

Some respondents spoke of how family responsibilities precluded them from taking up potentially rewarding opportunities, such as establishing a small business. Several of my respondents had dreams of opening their own small business, but more often than not, such plans were thwarted by domestic responsibilities. For example, Belinda had worked as a waitress in her brother’s Chinese restaurant since arriving in Australia 14 years earlier. After the first five years, she tried to open her own restaurant, but closed it a few years later after her daughter was born. Not feeling able to care for her child and operate her own business, she resumed working in her brother’s restaurant. Belinda told me she could not even consider trying to open her own business now, although her engineer husband had recently established his own telecommunications business, installing cabling and telephone systems. Belinda offered this explanation:

“Maybe – I am a woman, so that’s why. Maybe if I [was] a man or I got the family background to support all that – maybe…”

Indeed, in addition to Belinda’s own job in the restaurant, she sometimes helped in her husband’s business, buying and collecting stock, passing on messages from customers, and so on.

Melissa, a professional martial artist, said her dream was always to open her own martial arts school. As we saw earlier, she was one of the few among my mainland respondents able to continue her professional career in Australia. Since arriving in the country in 1988, she had taught in another school in Sydney, slowly building up her clientele of students, but her family responsibilities prevented her from establishing her own school. She commented:
I didn’t try to make a big business of this job… I tried to [open] a business but I was too busy – I got two children. The children stopped it. If not for the children, I should have a big martial arts school by now! Maybe in the future.

Others stated that family obligations prevented them from pursuing particular employment opportunities, or prevented them from participating in some work activities because they were unable to work long hours. For instance, Susan, a business analyst from Hong Kong, was happy with her job, but felt that family responsibilities imposed a glass ceiling on her career aspirations. As we saw earlier, Susan graduated with a degree in Commerce from a North American university, and was well equipped for a career in the corporate world, having reached a senior position within a large multinational corporation before migrating to Australia. In Australia however, her career aspirations had shrunk.

Although I got some career aspiration, but due to family commitments, sometimes at the moment I take a job as a job – as a way of making a living. Not really so much on career, because I can’t spend ten, eleven hours in the office. I have to go – quarter to six I have to pack up and rush home, look after my family. So to me, it is just a job, but also at the same time, I try to move along gradually, very slowly. I can’t afford to be a career woman…

Susan explained that while her husband was happy for her to have a job, this did not release her from meeting her domestic responsibilities. She said her husband would be happy as long as ‘you can manage both sides’.

I think, our own culture, wife is expected to play more role in the family. Say, for example, even though sometimes my job requires me to go other states, like go to Brisbane or Melbourne, if I have a choice not to go, I won’t go, you know. My husband doesn’t feel comfortable if I always flying away. So, this is also a limitation on my career.

Sandra said that although she had worked in the same job for six years, she had not gained any new skills, partly because she was unable to take advantage of training opportunities because of family responsibilities. Although her employer funded employees to attend seminars or conferences, Sandra stated, ‘I think the most difficult thing is – you got a family, you can’t often attend.’
In some cases, respondents never made it past the interview stage, and blamed this on employers’ discriminatory assumptions. We saw earlier that Jian, an engineer from China, was disadvantaged by the lack of engineering jobs in Australia. When she did find a suitable job to apply for, she encountered incredulity among employers in both Australia and New Zealand, who seemed wary of female applicants for engineering jobs. In China, Jian said that women were always encouraged to pursue careers in science and technology, and that her mentor at university was a well-respected female academic. After migration however, she found that engineering firms were very unaccepting of female engineers:

the [employers] say – woman engineer – no, no, no! Like this…I think nothing wrong! In China, everyone can do – woman can do too! [laughs]. I explained to them, they said no, sorry. Actually I had one or two interview, I go to the company – they never had a woman’s toilet. This field you know, they think it’s men doing.

Jian never worked as an engineer after leaving China, eventually opening her own corner store.

In Sally’s case, assumed family responsibilities constrained her career ambitions before she even had a family. An Australian-educated accountant from Hong Kong, Sally had felt disadvantaged in her early career job interviews, because potential employers seemed preoccupied with whether she was going to start a family. ‘At one interview, they asked me if I was married or had a boyfriend! I was very angry about this,’ Sally said. Once she was in a job, she observed that her male colleagues were often promoted before their female counterparts, because employers assumed that women would want to leave and have children.

Although Sally was very ambitious at the beginning of her career, hoping to secure a job in a chartered accounting firm, after her children were born, she gave up her aspirations to care for her family. ‘I took their advice and left to start a family!’ she said. While raising her three children, she had worked in several accounting jobs, most recently as a contractor for companies and government departments. In contrast, her husband, also an
accountant, had achieved what had always been her goal – to work in a chartered accounting firm.

Ironically, although these women were often not able to use their human capital in the Australian labour market, in their domestic roles, they were crucial in enhancing the human capital of their children (see McLaren and Dyck 2004: 47). Much of the ‘mothering’ work they did revolved around facilitating and improving their children’s educational attainments, from choosing appropriate schools (especially getting their children into prestigious, highly competitive selective schools), hiring tutors and enrolling children in after-school lessons and activities to daily help with homework, driving children to and from school, visiting schools, and talking with teachers and other parents.

A key recurring theme in my interviews was respondents’ concerns for their children’s educational success, with women often discussing in some detail why they had decided to hire tutors for particular subjects and not others, the limitations of the Australian education system (‘not enough homework’, ‘too lenient’, and so on), and their own involvement with their children’s schools, from acting as an interpreter for other Chinese parents (Sally) to volunteering in the canteen (Meifang). The work of facilitating their children’s education consumed many hours of respondents’ daily lives, and many limited their own employment in order to devote more time to what they saw as securing employment success for the next generation.

Thus overall, Chinese women’s assimilation into the Australian workforce frequently means reducing participation in paid work. Like Australian women more generally, Chinese women’s employment experiences are highly gendered. They are commonly found in part-time and casual employment, and concentrated in occupations numerically dominated by women. Before migration, they had typically been accustomed to working full-time and often following highly career-oriented trajectories. In Australia, women’s careers were more constrained by domestic responsibilities, and the jobs they found themselves in often held little prospect for career advancement.
Of course this phenomenon is not restricted to women in Australia. As outlined in Chapter 5, migrant women’s experiences of downward mobility have been documented for many migrant destination countries (e.g. Lee et al 2002; Mak 2001; Man 1997, 1995; Zhou 2000). However, fewer studies have examined the personal implications of this shift on women’s sense of their own roles and identity. The next section outlines the personal implications of this ‘feminisation’ of women’s roles.

**Feminisation of Roles: Back to traditional gender roles**

International research shows that the shift in Chinese women’s roles after migration – namely, an increased domestic role at the expense of labour force participation – often changes the social relations of the household in a way women find disempowering. While Chinese men are typically able to consolidate their role as breadwinner and head of the household, women often feel, for the first time in their lives, a sense of dependence on their husbands, both economically and socially (Lary et al 1994; Man 1995, 1997; see also Yeoh and Khoo 1998). Some Chinese women are surprised to find that Australian norms about women’s roles seem more conservative than what they were accustomed to in Hong Kong and China, where mothers are expected to continue paid work, for example (Zhou 2000).

Among my respondents, this dependence was a source of some frustration, particularly in the early period of settlement. For example, Nicola, an ambitious young teacher, was accustomed to being extremely independent in Hong Kong, but after marrying an Australian and migrating to Australia to live with him, she found herself relying on him for everyday items:

I was really struggling when I first came…I wasn’t allowed to have a credit card or a mobile phone, because I couldn’t produce the documents to let them give it to me. It was so frustrating because in Hong Kong I had three credit cards, and a mobile, and email. I felt really dependent, when I was used to doing it all by myself. My husband was happy to pay but I didn’t feel good. The car was registered under his name, when I used to drive in Hong
Kong as well… I had a really independent role in Hong Kong, and that was reversed when I came here.

Ruth was in a similar position, having accompanied her husband who came to pursue a Masters degree at an Australian university. Arriving with virtually no English language skills, Ruth found herself unemployed and home-bound for her first six months, before advertising private music lessons to the Chinese community. In contrast, her husband gained a full-time job in accounting, and kept in touch with former classmates from university. Ruth said that because of her poor English and lack of employment, she found it very difficult to meet people, particularly non-Chinese Australians. Her husband’s better English made him the logical contact person for mainstream institutions, leaving her with very few opportunities to engage with English-speakers. ‘A lot of things in my home, my husband does it because of my English. So I don’t have contact with them,’ Ruth said.13

Others felt that their social circles had become centred entirely around their husbands, because they met more people through work or had been in Australia longer than they had. In their interactions with others, they were now primarily seen as wives rather than independent individuals. For example, Jackie, who, as we saw earlier, migrated to Australia five years after her husband, found that when she arrived, she slotted into his social circles, and did not have much time to develop her own. She felt that as an academic, her husband was in a better position to meet new people, relative to herself, limited to a small high school community. This meant that most of her social interactions were with wives of her husband’s friends. She commented,

I haven’t got any more close friends, my friends – just my friends. Most of friends are my husband’s friends…we have a lot of friends in China…[and my family] they’re all in China. So this is big problem.

Jackie was quite unhappy with the limited nature of her social circle, and was clearly frustrated that her friends were not people she herself had chosen. Throughout the

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13 Translated from Mandarin
interview, whenever she referred to ‘my friends’, she stopped abruptly to correct herself with the phrase – ‘my husband’s friends’.

Sarah, who as we have already seen, was unable to find suitable employment as an accountant, also found herself somewhat isolated in Australia, having migrated 12 months after her husband. While her husband, a computer programmer, had relatives in Australia and friends from a TAFE course he had completed, Sarah had only met other mothers in playgroups. She felt she would not be able to develop her own social networks until she had found paid work. Until then, she believed she could never be truly integrated into Australian society. In Hong Kong, Sarah had the help of a paid domestic worker and her mother-in-law, both of whom lived with her family. This allowed her to work full-time even after her baby was born. In Australia, however, a combination of child-care responsibilities and lack of success in the labour market resulted in Sarah’s total re-orientation from work to family life. As she said,

> You need to change, to adjust yourself, to change your attitude, change your focus. Then life is better, easier. Because it’s completely different…it’s different formats of life…When you work you will be free, away from your kids…The style here now is, you just focus on your baby. That’s all.

For some respondents, changes in gender relations within the household partly reflected what they saw as the dominant gender relations within Australian society. These women felt that working women in Australia generally faced heavier burdens compared to those in Hong Kong or China.

Margaret stated that upon arriving in Australia, she was struck by the gender inequality in Australian society – which was ‘even worse than Hong Kong’. She explained,

> When I first came, I found most of the housewives, they don’t work...so they rely so much on their husbands…all the senior jobs are occupied by the male, and even if you are female professional, you have to really prove yourself to be so much better than the male counterpart before you have equal pay or equal position… it’s very funny in the university or honour roll of HSC, you can see females were much better than the male counterpart.
But why is that? Because what I think is the female, they don’t have domestic help and they [are] more or less dragged down by raising a family. It holds their career life back, because they have to mind the kids and do everything at home, so they can’t work back, or can’t travel. Or...they don’t want to be so aggressive, because their priority is on the family, that’s why they give up their career. So this is one aspect I found that Australian society is still not equal.

Margaret said that in Hong Kong, people were accustomed to seeing women in positions of authority, particularly young, educated women, and that the phenomenon of young female ‘high flyers’ had been periodically documented in the Hong Kong media. In contrast, she said Australian employers seemed to be more conservative, and Australian women had less support at home from domestic workers or relatives, constraining their career ambitions.

Similarly, Susan’s experience of the Australian business world surprised her because so many Australian women seemed to leave the workforce after having children, a practice not common in Hong Kong:

I would think that the women in Hong Kong are more independent than the women here. Quite a lot of the women in Australia, I find, once they have children, they stop working. But whereas in Hong Kong, no matter what kind of job you have – you can have some clerical job, you can be a manager – but still a lot of women, even though they have children, they still keep on working, whereas in Australia, I found, quite a lot of my colleagues, their wives stop working once they have baby. This is what I observe.

Anita, a systems analyst from Hong Kong, explained that Hong Kong’s labour shortage inculcated a work culture that was very accepting of women in senior positions, particularly in the public sector. Australia, by contrast, was ‘still very much a man’s empire’, with women constrained by child-care responsibilities:

Hong Kong is a society in which you get more opportunities – before 1997. At the time, there’s a real lack of resources – they just grab whoever is able, they couldn’t discriminate. Another thing is the taxes are really low and most women can get domestic help...But here, after my boy is born, I decided to stay home and take care of him. I just can’t get a
domestic helper and I don’t want to put him in day care. And the tax is not attractive. If I go back to work as a manager, if I get a nanny, most of my wage would go to her.

Respondents from China expressed similar sentiments, stating that they felt that China offered greater gender equality in the workplace compared to what they had seen in Australia. For example, Jian, who was always encouraged to follow scientific pursuits, was proud to have studied under a renowned female scholar at university, and always believed that women could do anything that men could. In Australia, however, she was disappointed to observe that engineering seemed to be a ‘men’s field’.

Similarly, when I asked Ying, a former teacher, to compare the roles of men and women in China and Australia, she replied that in Australia, women were more ‘second class’:

[In China] It’s really easy now for a woman to go to the higher position, and always I feel very equal – the pay – if you the same time, the same qualifications, the same position – you got the same pay. And promotion. I never feel anything – the women are the second class. But I feel something in Australia. Those they always say ‘sweetheart’. It’s a polite way to do it, but actually it’s not real [laughs]. In looking for work you can always see the man in the higher position. I think China is much better.

Thus for many Chinese women in Australia, migration is associated with a feminisation of roles, as reduced employment and heightened domestic responsibilities are experienced as returning to more traditional gender roles, delineating men’s activities in the public sphere and women’s in the private sphere.

**Conclusion: Unmasking underlying gender inequality**

This chapter has shown the importance of gender and the household context in explaining migrants’ employment experiences in Australia. For Chinese women, migration often means an escalation in domestic responsibilities, reflecting the settlement work required to allow the family to successfully adjust to a new environment, and the loss of previous sources of domestic support, such as paid domestic workers and extended family
members. These new demands on women’s time and energy often cause them to reduce their level of paid work. It is not uncommon for Chinese women to leave the workforce altogether after migration, and those who do work often do so part-time and in lower status occupations than those they had prior to migration. In this regard Chinese women’s employment patterns mirror those of Australian-born women, who, in Australia’s highly gendered labour market, tend to work fewer hours and different occupations and industries relative to men. Ultimately, Chinese women in Australia can experience a ‘feminisation’ of roles, in which they find themselves fulfilling traditionally ‘female’ domestic responsibilities as opposed to being ‘career women’.

It is important to note that while Chinese women often find changes in gender roles in Australia disempowering, this does not necessarily mean that they enjoyed full gender equality prior to migration. Rather, work and family practices in Australia seem to expose the underlying gender inequalities in Chinese households, that prior to migration, were often masked by domestic arrangements. For example, Hong Kong women, and to a lesser extent, mainland women, relied heavily on paid domestic workers prior to migration, allowing them to pursue full-time jobs even when they had children. However, while this gave them more time, it did not relieve them of the responsibility for household labour. Child-care and housework were still seen as women’s responsibility, but in Hong Kong and China, women are frequently able to outsource this work to domestic workers, who are invariably female, or to mothers, mothers-in-law, and other female relatives. Thus the household division of labour is still highly gendered, but some of the wife/mother’s work is performed by other women.

The relative absence of this option in Australia means that women are now responsible not just for managing, but also performing domestic labour. While men, not accustomed to doing domestic work, experience no change in their household duties, women experience a dramatic escalation in workload, which can lead to a re-ordering of gender relations in the household. However, this re-ordering may be seen as simply revealing an underlying gender inequality whose effects were previously disguised by domestic arrangements which gave women more time to pursue paid employment. The next
chapter explores women’s personal experiences of settlement more fully, and outlines the contradictory impact of ‘feminisation’ on women’s sense of freedom and independence.
CHAPTER 8

NEW FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE: THE PARADOXES OF LIFE IN A NEW COUNTRY

The last three chapters documented and explained Chinese women’s experiences of working in Australia, examining their downward and blocked occupational mobility and the reduction of their paid work in favour of domestic responsibilities. But despite these employment difficulties, for most of my respondents, settlement processes in Australia were not experienced as entirely negative. While Chinese women felt they had to a greater or lesser extent sacrificed their careers in migrating to Australia, they also gained greater freedom and independence, sometimes precisely because their lives were no longer heavily oriented towards paid work.

In Australia, women had more time to spend with their families, were less harried and stressed in their jobs, and had more freedom to shape their work and family life. Additionally, the escalation in their domestic responsibilities, though a burden and source of anxiety, also compelled them to become more independent. For many women, having to meet the challenges of family maintenance in a new country engendered substantial
personal growth. Having to take primary responsibility for the welfare of their families, often for the first time, they were forced to make decisions, learn new skills, and become more self-reliant than could have been possible had they not migrated to Australia. Their new-found independence then became a source of pride for many women as they reflected on their new ways of seeing the world and coping with problems. These are the paradoxes of shifting one’s life to a new country – challenges and rewards are closely intertwined, and aspects of everyday life that are experienced as a burden may also simultaneously be the source of new happiness.

In this chapter, I rely primarily on qualitative data gained from my interviews with Chinese women. The experiences and perspectives described in this chapter provide a deeply personal account of migration and settlement that only qualitative research can unearth. Ultimately, this is the aspect of the Australian migration story that is missing from mainstream economistic accounts: relying overwhelmingly on large-scale quantitative survey data on subjects who in research output are generally stripped of gender, birthplace and culture, the prevailing literature on migrant employment in Australia is singularly unable to understand how employment and other aspects of settlement are experienced by migrants themselves. This means that they are not able to understand the significance of the employment and other settlement patterns found among new arrivals. For example, migrant women’s reduced labour force participation after arrival is well documented. But under what circumstances do women experience this as negative, and when might it be experienced as positive? Without this knowledge, governments are unlikely to be able to meet policy objectives that depend on influencing individuals’ labour force participation choices, or that depend on understanding how migrants experience settlement in a new country more generally.

This chapter outlines the new freedom and independence gained by Chinese women in Australia that paradoxically, can stem from reduction of paid work and feminisation of roles. Migration means leaving behind work cultures characterised by stress and overwork (Hong Kong) and rigid political control (China). In Australia, Hong Kong women were happy to have more time to spend with their families and appreciated the less aggressive, competitive environments of Australian workplaces, while PRC women
enjoyed their greater freedom at work. Overall, the challenges and opportunities
generated by moving to a new country enhanced women’s personal independence, a
change that became a source of pride for many women.

What we gain: ‘More balance in our lives’

Despite the challenges of finding suitable employment and meeting increased domestic
responsibilities, the majority of the respondents were still happy to have migrated to
Australia. Largely this is because of the greater balance they felt they had in their
everyday lives: previously Hong Kong women had been frustrated with the dominance of
paid work in their lives, leaving them insufficient time to spend with their families; PRC
women had resented the centralised regulation and control of their paid work, leaving
little room for personal autonomy. In Australia, the women were frustrated at not being
able to advance their careers, but at the same time, often appreciated being able to work
part-time, a practice that is extremely rare in Hong Kong and China. Most also
appreciated what they saw as Australia’s more relaxed work culture, for example, shorter
working hours, and greater autonomy at work. Consequently, the women felt that their
lives were more balanced and healthy. For many, this compensated for their lower job
status and (for those from Hong Kong) their lower salaries. Paradoxically, although they
experienced downward or blocked occupational mobility, and despite the challenges of
combining paid and unpaid work, the women felt that in other ways, their working lives,
and their work/family balance, were healthier in Australia compared to Hong Kong or
China.

Work in Hong Kong and China: Overwork and over-regulation

The structure of working life in Hong Kong and China often seriously constrained my
respondents’ careers and personal lives. This section profiles the working lives of my
respondents prior to migration, which helps us to interpret their attitudes to employment in Australia.

As a world city and a hub for business in Asia, working life in Hong Kong is competitive, fast-paced, and characterised by long hours and demanding workloads. In 2000, more than half (55.4 per cent) of all employed persons in Hong Kong worked 45 hours or more each week. For employed women, the figure was 46.6 per cent (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2001). In a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service in 2000, nine per cent of respondents worked at least 12 hours a day. More than a quarter of respondents (26 per cent) considered their working hours to be long or very long, with most of these respondents stating that their working hours negatively affected their family life (Hong Kong Council of Social Service 2000).

Among recent Hong Kong migrants to Australia, working hours were even longer, with 70 to 80 per cent of primary applicants working more than 40 hours per week prior to migration, as Table 8.1 shows.

**Table 8.1: Hours worked per week in last job prior to migration, male and female primary applicants from Hong Kong (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours worked per week</th>
<th>Men $N=70$</th>
<th>Women $N=43$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40 or less</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-60</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 60</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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Source: LSIA1, Wave 1

This culture of long working hours was a source of discontent for many of my Hong Kong respondents. Long hours, demanding workloads and an overbearing emphasis on career-building took their toll on these women, particularly when they also had family responsibilities. For example, May, a supervisor in a garment factory who managed more than 500 employees, travelled daily between Hong Kong and Macao, organising
shipments of orders on tight deadlines. She described the frenetic pace of her job and the stress it caused.

I ran the factory in Macao – every morning I went to Macao, and every afternoon came back… In Hong Kong, the orders were very big – if you didn’t get them out, you didn’t sleep all night… We had to make sure all our orders made it on time to be shipped – because they wouldn’t wait for you… So it was quite stressful, hard work… You had to always be thinking about so many things, your brain would get old from the strain. Too chaotic!¹

Margaret, a secretary, described the prevailing culture of working beyond the officially stipulated hours within Hong Kong organisations:

In Hong Kong, you work long hours… There’s always lots of work and you work way beyond, after your official finishing time – like it’s nine to five, you often stay up till six or seven [and] you work five and a half days. Saturday morning you still have to go to work.

Despite her successful nursing career, Su-lin hated the pressure of Hong Kong life, with families needing two full-time wage-earners to meet expenses, and in which all employees were expected to be highly career-oriented.

In Hong Kong at that time, in nursing, you either work full-time or you don’t work. It was very difficult. In Hong Kong… you need a lot of money to survive. Both husband and wife have to work full-time – six days a week, overtime, shift work, without penalty rates. The culture was that you have to climb the corporate ladder, you’re forced to. When I had a young family, it’s very difficult for me… I had a lot of pressure. In the afternoon shift… I always have to hit myself to keep awake. It was too much.

Thus women from Hong Kong often felt trapped in a culture of overwork. As we saw in Chapter 5, Hong Kong’s workforce offers women many career opportunities. However, to take advantage of them, women have to work long hours and adopt a highly competitive, career-oriented outlook.
Respondents from China also had complaints about their jobs, but their main work-related problem was their resentment of bureaucratic regulation and political control. Many respondents stated that they had no choice over where they worked, with the government allocating workplaces, and that there was little scope for merit-based advancement, with all promotion based on personal networks and length of service. Overall, PRC women emphasised that there was no freedom for individual expression or initiative, with overbearing control over workplace activities.

As Chapter 5 explained, employment relations in China are not confined to the workplace. Rather, one’s work-unit provides many of life’s necessities, such as housing and other benefits. Another aspect to this system is rigid centralised control over job allocation, reflecting the Maoist ideology of the Chinese government which, from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s, saw labour not as a commodity, but as a national resource (Bian 1994). As Bian (1994: 971) explains, every Chinese citizen had the right to work, but during this time, private labour market rights had been virtually eliminated. After the Communist revolution of 1949, the government held monopoly control of urban jobs, and by the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), 95 per cent of urban jobs were state-assigned.

These policies inter-meshed with the strong Chinese tradition known as guanxi, which literally means ‘relationship’ or ‘relation’. Guanxi has long been recognised as a guiding principle of economic and social organisation in Chinese society (Bian 1997; Gold 1985; Zang 2003). Under communism, most goods – from basic necessities to jobs – were bureaucratically distributed, making personal connections a crucial mechanism for access to them. Thus government officials became the centre of personal networks: good guanxi with cadres was essential for job mobility (Bian 1994; 1997).

While policies of decentralisation in the 1980s resulted in increased self-employment and individual job applications in non-state sectors, even at this time, the state still controlled 80 per cent of the labour market (Bian 1994: 972). And despite the emergence of a

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1 Translated from Cantonese
private labour market in recent years, employment opportunities have still been
dependent on *guanxi* or network resources (Yang 2002; Zang 2003).

This *was* the system that prevailed when most of my respondents left China. As Chapter 5 outlined, many were proud of their career achievements, and had clearly been able to
use the ‘good *guanxi*’ of their family to secure positions and promotions in desirable
work-units. However, even when they had enjoyed successful careers, many women were
still frustrated at the lack of control they had over their working lives. For example, Mei-
lin, an engineering graduate, felt that in China, her work-unit controlled everything she
did in her job:

> …it doesn’t matter [what education you have] because when you’re assigned to work in a
work unit, everything’s done according to a certain system, which I don’t like. It was a
communist system…

Teachers in China have particularly felt this control over their work, because of their key
role in the socialisation of children. For example, Lily and Ying, both school teachers in
China, described the control exercised by the government over the whole education
system:

> The government arrange the teacher to [go to] which school, so they have no choice – it’s
all arranged by the government. Government wants you to go to number 19 school, you
have to go to number 19 school (Lily).

> In China I really feel the stress… the government very much control the school… they put
a lot of pressure on the teacher. The teacher has responsibility beyond the student in the
class – if [the students] have something wrong, they blame it on you. You didn’t do right
thing!… I don’t like that kind of political things. Just made me upset and depressed…The
government very much control the people working in school (Ying).

Thus the heavy hand of the state was an everyday presence in PRC workplaces. Like the
women from Hong Kong escaping from the culture of overwork that prevailed there, the
women from China hoped that coming to Australia would offer opportunities for greater
freedom to determine their own career plans and employment activities. The next
sections outline the benefits brought about by migration to Australia – the Hong Kong women gained time, while the PRC women gained freedom.

**Less stress, more time: Hong Kong women’s greater work/family balance in Australia**

Migration to Australia clearly has contradictory outcomes for Chinese women. Despite feeling that they had sacrificed their careers in migrating, Hong Kong women valued many aspects of Australia’s work culture, which they saw as more relaxed than what they had been used to. The shorter working hours of Australian workplaces gave them more time to spend with their families, and the less competitive and less regulated work environment freed them from stifling careerist expectations in Hong Kong.

Among my respondents, there was a recurring sentiment that while migration may have resulted in a career sacrifice, it also substantially enhanced one’s family life. They had more time for their families and a better quality of life in Australia. For example, Michelle, a nurse, said that had she stayed in Hong Kong, she would have received a ‘big promotion’ by now, but she still felt the decision to migrate was right, ‘because in Hong Kong you earn more money, but you don’t have family life’.

Wendy, a counsellor, concurred that although her family’s income was lower in Australia, this was more than compensated for by the increased time she had to spend with her family:

> I don’t think financially we are better off [in Australia], but it’s OK, you know I’m happy, financially, but also we’re happy that we actually have more time with our children. Especially my husband, he worked very long hours in Hong Kong but here because he’s in partnership, he has a little bit more time with his children…
Anita, a systems analyst, felt that both she and her husband would have had much better career opportunities in Hong Kong had they stayed there. When I asked her if she felt she had sacrificed her career in migrating, she replied,

In a way, but I know there’s a price for everything. I’ve gained a better lifestyle. I enjoy this kind of lifestyle in Australia. I’m much more happy here. Even though I had my career and much more money before…I didn’t really have time for my family in Hong Kong. I was working up to 16 hours a day. Ten to twelve hours was normal. I hardly have any weekend. Nothing except work… I think I have a better life, better weekends, more time with my husband. I also enjoy being a mum and staying at home. All these things I can’t get in Hong Kong.

Nicola, who as we saw earlier, left a good job in an international school in Hong Kong, told me it was ‘a really big decision’ to migrate to Australia. Although her previous job paid ‘three times higher’ than her current main job in Australia, she and her Australian husband had agreed it would be better to raise a family in Sydney. As the last chapter explained, Nicola said was still hoping to secure a full-time teaching job, but in the meantime, seemed to place a higher priority on domestic life:

Now we live in a beautiful house in Mosman next to the zoo. It’s really good for the baby… I really enjoy my life here. I think I’m really lucky. I don’t regret it now… When it’s busy, it’s really busy, but we can often just go and enjoy the sunshine and fresh air… Sitting on our verandah with the kookaburras and the sunshine, it’s like being in a café… I love it.

Similarly, Irene said that leaving her life in Hong Kong and migrating to Australia was a ‘very, very difficult choice’, and since arriving in Australia, she had not pursued paid work but rather focused on helping her two children in their final years of high school. However, she had no regrets about migration because she loved the Australian lifestyle and like Nicola, was able to move into an exclusive harbourside suburb – ‘next door to John Howard, the Prime Minister!’
Some women welcomed the opportunity to reduce their career aspirations, preferring to focus on their families over their paid work. For example, Su-lin appreciated the more relaxed approach to career-building that she found in Australia, where it was not assumed that women had to prioritise their careers above all else. She was happy that she was no longer primarily responsible for financing household expenditure, stating that there was ‘less pressure’ in being only the ‘supplementary’ income earner.

In Hong Kong there’s pressure from the hospital and your family to climb the corporate ladder and I know I would have to follow that pathway. But here’s there’s no burden. Most of the nurses don’t want to climb, which is my attitude. I can spend more time with the family… In Hong Kong I am the main breadwinner. But here I see it as supplementary. So it makes it less pressure.

Alice, a civil servant from Hong Kong, emphasised that in Australia, work concerns did not dominate all parts of one’s life, unlike in Hong Kong:

Generally everything is more relaxed [in Australia]. People here won’t talk about work after hours. Not like in Hong Kong, even after you finish work, if you go out with colleagues or friends, all they talk about is work, work, work. Here they talk about things to do with leisure, private life. In Hong Kong your work life takes over all other parts of life.

In adopting to their new lifestyles, it was clear that many of the women had changed their priorities and values in Australia. For example, Wendy noted that unlike Hong Kong residents, Australians took holidays throughout the year, especially during school breaks. This was a practice now adopted by her family too, who Wendy saw as ‘half way’ between the Hong Kong and Australian ways of life: ‘we are still hard working! [laughs]. But we’re aware that we have to enjoy life as well. So I think it’s not just the difference between Australia and Hong Kong. It’s a difference in myself as well.’

In other cases, women appeared to be trying to rationalise their new situations, and persuade themselves that their new domestic roles were rewarding. For example, Sarah, who had been in Australia for less than two years at the time of interview, was clearly trying extremely hard to re-orient her life towards domesticity. Accustomed to being a
career woman with few household responsibilities, she talked of how she was cultivating her interests in domestic activities such as cooking. When I asked her how she felt about her new domestic workload, she replied,

> You need to enjoy cooking – sometimes I look at the TV to see what the cooks make – make the dishes better, to understand the style of cooking here. Then it will be better. If you always say it’s a burden then it’s no fun.

Sarah said that although she had her ‘moods’, she had to try to see the positive side of full-time motherhood. While her baby had been mainly cared for by her mother-in-law in Hong Kong, now she told herself that it was good to be able to spend all her time with her son. She explained:

> You still try to find a way to get fun. Now you can take the baby all the time to the park. You can look at the birds, the wind [laughs]. Before, you won’t take your kids to the park and enjoy the whole afternoon, no.

Hong Kong women’s views on their lives in Australia clearly reflect a complex amalgam of factors. Many had resented their hectic, work-oriented lifestyles in Hong Kong and genuinely appreciated the increased family time they had in Australia. In addition, some had assimilated to some extent into prevailing norms in Australian society, such that they came to value time away from work to spend on holidays and with the family. For others, changes to personal priorities and values may have simply constituted a rational adjustment to the objective reality of their lives as housewives in Australia.
‘I come out and know who I am’: Chinese women’s new freedoms

As migrants cross borders, they also cross emotional and behavioral boundaries. Becoming a member of a new society stretches the boundaries of what is possible in several ways...One’s life and roles change. With them, identities change as well. (Espín 1999: 19)

Scholars of migration have often noted the potentially liberating effects of transplanting one’s life across national borders. Sometimes, it is argued, exposure to new values and practices, and being removed from families and familiar environments, open up new alternatives in terms of women’s identities (Espín 1999). Some migrant women find freedom in the anonymity and privacy of the new society, away from the watchful eyes of family and community, which previously regulated women’s everyday lives (Hirsch 1999).

This can be particularly pertinent for women from China, where government control and bureaucratic regulation touch most parts of everyday life. As Fung and Jie (1996: 9) argue, what mainland Chinese migrants enjoy most in Australia are ‘civil liberties, personal freedoms, the absence of political interference and the rule of law’. Many of my mainland respondents expressed their happiness to be in control of their own careers in Australia. Although they commonly experienced downward mobility, they were happy to be free from the bureaucratic and political regulation they were accustomed to in China. For example, when she worked as a teacher in a technical college in China, Mei-lin felt that excessive government control stifled individual initiative. In Australia, employed as a university tutor, she felt she was able to shape her own career.

[In China] you work for the government. You don’t have much incentive. You were assigned by the government to a particular position, so you just killing time to earn your pay. But here, I have my personal goal, I have a sense of career, so it’s different.
Julia, an accounts assistant, explained that migrating to Australia allowed her to pursue promotions based on merit, rather than having to deal with the political cronyism that constrained her career in China. Coming from a ‘no background’ family, she was glad to be freed from the network power plays that permeated working life in China.

To be promoted in China...you have to have good relations. Experience is one of the points but not the major one. If you have relations it’s easier to get promoted. If you know someone who knows someone at the top you can get opportunities. But in Australia, I like the fair competition. It’s not who you know.

Living in Australia had fostered Julia’s sense of independence, because she said that Australia’s open, commercial society depended on and rewarded individual initiative – from gaining a job to buying a house – she was no longer reliant on her family’s networks to achieve results. Australia had a ‘fair’ lifestyle, unlike China, where ‘it’s all about personal contacts’.

Wing-hoi, a former accountant, agreed, saying that in Australia it was possible to be fairly rewarded for your skills. Even though she felt her English was not good enough to allow her to work in her field, she still thought Australia offered workers greater freedom:

Overall I think Australia is fairer. You can use your background, your qualifications or skills to fight for your rights, get what you deserve. In China, you don’t have the right to do anything just because you’re skilled – you have to have connections... In Australia you have more freedom. In China, whatever the employer says goes. You have no say. Australia is more democratic.

Ying, who came to Australia on a teacher exchange, described the freedom she felt in her new workplace, as for the first time, she was given the autonomy to define her own tasks. Although this was initially a culture-shock for Ying, it ultimately resulted in her personal growth.

When I first came to Australia, I was a bit scared...And my boss – the way she do things is very different to China. In China the headmaster often tell you – you do this, and you go to
this area and do this – give you a really certain job. You use this book teaching – everything is correct. And this boss say – OK you come from China – what do you want to do?

…That’s first time for me. In China there’s always someone tell me what I should do… Never in my life I was treated like this! [laughs] But then I come out, and come out, and I quite enjoy this way. And this way help me to feel, to know who I am, what I stand for, and really help me to really stand on the ground to do something – actually it’s good way, you know.

For Ying, freedom from the ever present gaze of family, peers and colleagues – who in China, ‘all want to be your policeman’ – allowed her to develop her self-confidence, and strengthen what she called her ‘inner centre’. Migrating to Australia had allowed her to grow psychologically and spiritually. For example, although her father was an artist and she had had a life-long interest in painting, she never pursued this interest until she moved to Australia. At the time of interview, Ying had finished her teacher exchange program and, unable to find another teaching job, was working as a waitress in a local Chinese restaurant. However, she supplemented her income by selling her paintings at markets, and was developing new skills in painting, having recently joined a local painting club.

Every week we meet and paint and change information… I learn a lot from [the other members]. They’re Western style painting, watercolour. So I think I’m lucky in some ways. Though I lost my job and my financial security, I practise something I love – originally when I was a kid – I always wanted to do it, but never had the chance, until now… In Australia it’s a really good environment, because no-one’s telling me to do this or not do that. So I have plenty of time to paint, read, and I feel much healthier and happier. So that’s the main thing – I know my direction… And all this is just the means to help me on my journey. And I love it.

The theme of freedom was less prevalent among Hong Kong respondents, but some did talk of the greater ‘personal space’ they felt they had in Australia, away from Hong Kong’s work culture, and simply away from the expectations and norms of their social and familial circles. Life in Australia gave these women opportunities to pursue personal interests and define their own lifestyle. For example, for Wendy, migrating to Australia
meant more ‘personal space’ to explore her own interests. After arriving in Australia, she had been able to study psychology and counselling, and had become active in her local church.

Because I think because I don’t have many friends, and there aren’t as many shops around on the street, so I can have more time to myself, to do studying and maybe to read Bible or whatever. I’ve got the time – but in Hong Kong it seems like you never have enough time, I don’t know why.

Similarly, Sally felt that living in Australia allowed her to ‘be herself’ because she no longer had to constantly worry about how her behaviour would be judged by family, friends and neighbours.

You can more be yourself, because you’re more isolated in Australia, in a way. Instead of in Hong Kong, once you walk out of your door, your neighbours everywhere, people everywhere… But here, you more or less can be an individual. You are unlikely to be affected by other people’s influence… there’s less peer pressure – what car you drive, what clothes you wear, what job you have, how much money you have and that kind of thing. I think there’s less comparison, or less competition. So you can really be yourself more.

Clearly, Chinese women valued their new autonomy and freedom from the controlling forces in their lives in China and Hong Kong, whether from the government, employers or family. However, it is important to emphasise that for the mainland women, this sense of freedom always came with a degree of insecurity. As we saw in Chapter 5, women from China often felt that their lives in Australia were precarious, because of the insecurity of their employment and the lack of support structures which previously undergirded virtually all aspects of life in China. Thus while some respondents felt liberated by their freedom, others found it an empty freedom, as they lacked the resources in Australia to make anything of it.

This is evident in the words of Lily, a former teacher who came to Australia to see the ‘outside world’, and to build a new life. However in Australia, neither she nor her husband, a law graduate, could find acceptable jobs. At the time of interview, her
husband was working as a cleaner, and Lily, after doing unskilled jobs in a nursing home and at McDonalds, had decided to become a full time mother. When I asked her if she felt she had more or less freedom in Australia, she replied that although in China, she had longed for freedom, now without money, freedom had become much less important.

[In Australia] You can do anything you want! But I don’t want to do anything. When I was in China I thought, oh freedom is very nice, very good. I just long for that freedom. But here, I got the freedom, but in comparison with the other things, it’s not so important. The others are more important to me. I thought, this freedom is nothing for me. I don’t know how to explain. I suddenly found, if you want get freedom, you have to have money. If you no money, oh nothing. And earning money here is so difficult compared to China.

Mainland Chinese women’s lives in Australia are characterised by contradictory experiences, often simultaneously rewarding and challenging. Having escaped the daily political control of the Chinese government, women often greeted their new-found freedom with exhilaration and delight. However, leaving China also meant leaving the social structures which had guaranteed the necessities of life, which in Australia were replaced by widespread feelings of insecurity. Thus women’s satisfaction with their lives in Australia was often laced with ambivalence about the sacrifices entailed in migration.

‘Stronger to survive’: Chinese women’s new independence

You have to be very independent, because everything you face, you have to deal with. Noone can help you. My husband can’t speak English, my son is studying. During working hours, no-one can help me. I’m half-man, half-woman.

(Luqing, owner of a Chinese take-away restaurant)

Ultimately, the new challenges and responsibilities associated with migration often compel women to become more independent in their ways of thinking and everyday practices. Clearly this is a double-edged sword. As we have seen, the loss of family and
social networks and the intensification of household labour are sources of anxiety for migrant women. However, their challenging circumstances often result in women’s personal growth, as they develop the skills and mental strength to survive in a new environment.

Among my respondents, this personal growth often resulted from the shock of having to assume primary responsibility for the family’s welfare, and for tasks that were previously shared. As Chapter 7 explained, for many Chinese women, migration to Australia meant a dramatic enlargement of the mother/housewife role, which they were not always sufficiently equipped to perform. Basic tasks like cooking had to be rapidly learnt.

Many women also had difficulties negotiating life in the suburbs of a geographically large city, particularly when it came to chaperoning their children to their various educational and social activities. For many Chinese women, particularly from Hong Kong, who are accustomed to an efficient and safe public transport system, simply navigating and driving around Australian cities is a tremendous challenge (Pe-Pua et al 1996, see also Creese and Dowling 2001; Man 1997). Most Hong Kong women had never driven a car before arriving in Australia and consequently often had a very poor sense of direction. These were the biggest changes Wendy had to make to adjust to life in Australia:

I think the biggest change is – I have to drive my car, you know. I have to know my way, I have to learn to read the map and everything. In Hong Kong I mostly take the public transport and it’s easy…[Here it] was difficult, especially in the first year, because I couldn’t read maps at that time. And because my husband started to work, I think the next day after we come here… I have to take the kids here and there, and I have to know, you know, I have to know the way. So that was the most difficult part.

But ultimately, the challenges of learning these new skills and taking on new responsibilities engendered a higher level of independence in these women. For example, for Wendy, raising a family in Australia without her extended family meant that she had to become emotionally stronger and more independent to deal with having sole responsibility over making the crucial decisions about her family.
My mum, my own family’s not here… It’s really like, you know, you do it yourself, rather than asking advice and all this. I think it’s more emotionally I have to be more independent… especially when children were sick, I have to… really look after them myself and worry about them myself, rather than, you know, you got parents ringing, oh how are they, you know, or friends. That was difficult for the first few years.

Often, although the need to become independent resulted from challenging circumstances, women’s new-found independence was a source of great pride and satisfaction. Anita, for instance, found that migrating to Australia forced her to ‘open her mind’ to different ways of doing things. In particular, she believed that Australians are taught to be ‘more independent in their thinking’, in contrast to Asian societies, where people are encouraged to ‘obey orders rather than having their independent opinion’. For her, the process of settling in a new country made her much more independent, which was difficult but ultimately rewarding.

I think it’s good on the whole, but it’s not easy, especially in the beginning. Here I had to start everything from scratch. At one time I was supporting my husband while he was studying. I had to become more mature and independent. The journey wasn’t easy but I can say the outcome is good.

When I asked Rose what changes she had made to adjust to life in Australia, she said that life in Australia did not have as many ‘luxuries’ as it did in Hong Kong, but that this propelled her to learn to do things for herself, and ultimately find her own happiness.

[Here] I have to do all the cooking and the housework by myself. In Hong Kong I don’t have to do anything. Even though you just take a bath, the maid will prepare it, you just jump in [laughs]. So, I don’t know how to say it, but in a way, although I have to do all the work, I feel happy. I think I feel more happy here than in Hong Kong… I find myself more independent. Because when I was in Hong Kong, I [was] scared – I don’t like to do shopping all by myself. I always grab a friend with me and we go out. Even eating. But here, you have to do it. [So] I find I’m more independent.

Michelle agreed that she had become more independent after migration, precisely because everyday life in Australia was challenging compared to the conveniences of
Hong Kong and the security of having one’s family nearby. In Australia, migrants had to be more self-reliant; it was not possible to have someone else take care of one’s problems.

In Hong Kong, many things are very convenient, and you have your friends and relatives to depend on. But here we are by ourselves. You have to be very independent. Also things are not convenient here. Like if you want to call a plumber or someone like that you have to wait for a date, and go through the Yellow Pages, you don’t know who’s good and who’s not. There are different codes. It’s all very complicated…and you have to work that out yourself…[But] it’s good, because I think people should be independent. When things are too convenient you don’t have to make the effort yourself. You just don’t think! You just call somebody. In Hong Kong, things aren’t that expensive, so you call people to do the electricity or whatever. But here, you have to think how much to pay, and maybe you can try to do things yourself, and it’s good to try to do things yourself.

This echoes the sentiments of Marion, a Hong Kong woman who migrated to Canada (cited in Man 1997: 206):

In Hong Kong services are so easily available people never think of doing anything themselves. You call up a handyman even just to put up a picture, or screw on a light bulb. It sounds ridiculous, but that’s the reality there.

Many of my respondents commented that the need to rebuild social networks compelled them to seek out new friendships and develop greater personal confidence. Sarah, a young mother still trying to adjust to Australian life, said she had to become more sociable and outgoing after migrating, otherwise she felt she and her son would be ‘quite lonely’. For example, she said that for activities like the children’s playgroup, what you got out of it depended on how much you interacted with others: ‘it depends what’s your character. If you’re more open then it will be more easy for you to get more friends, in the church and playgroup. But if you’re not so active, then – maybe not’. This entailed a quite dramatic change in character for Sarah, who was previously very shy and quiet. She explained that she had even chosen her profession – accounting – because she thought it suited her quiet personality: ‘I’m not very outgoing person so, you can just sit quietly and
do the paperwork, don’t involve much association with people. Much easier for me to handle the figures.’ But in Australia, she had become more outspoken and had more confidence in her inter-personal skills.

Similarly, Mei-fang often felt quite isolated in Australia, and said she had to make a much bigger effort to establish friendships, starting to do things like volunteering at her daughters’ school canteen in order to meet other parents. As a result, she felt migration had changed her personality, and made her more gregarious.

I’m normally a very reserved person, not very outspoken. I wouldn’t go up to someone and just start talking to them, but now I try and say hello to everyone to try to meet people. I take every opportunity. Before I never approached people like this.²

Wendy also felt she developed her confidence from the need to meet new people.

I don’t have that many friends and relatives here…[so] I have to kind of really re-establish my social life here, especially the first few years. So I have to take a more active and assertive role in meeting people.

Thus migration to Australia generates new challenges and freedoms for Chinese women. Having lost family and social networks, confronting occupational de-skilling at work and the intensification of household labour at home, Chinese women’s settlement into Australian society is often stressful and exhausting. At the same time though, these very pressures compel women to become more independent, to become stronger to survive. As my respondents consistently told me, this new independence was simultaneously a burden and a reward.

² Translated from Cantonese
Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Chinese women’s experiences of work and family in Australia are often paradoxical. While the challenges of settling in a new country can be demanding and stressful, they also bring rewards. Overall, there are three main processes at work here. First, there are genuine trade-offs between work and family commitments: in prioritising their careers in Hong Kong and China, Chinese women had left themselves less time and energy for their families. In Australia, while they may not have chosen to curtail their involvement in paid employment, this change nevertheless brought about benefits in allowing women more family time. Second, in many cases, it was clear that women had changed their values as they adapted to a new – more ‘relaxed’ – environment. Away from the cultures of over-work and over-regulation, many women began to place a higher priority on pursuing ‘quality of life’, whether that comprised taking family holidays or spending time cooking meals for their families. Third, there is some evidence that women simply rationalised their current situation. Unable to continue their careers, they pragmatically re-identified with the domestic sphere, and convinced themselves that their lives as mothers and wives were worthwhile. Ultimately though, these challenges often engendered authentic changes in women’s sense of themselves and their abilities, as they became more independent not only in their daily tasks, but in their ways of thinking about themselves and the world.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has painted a very different portrait of migrant settlement experiences compared to that promoted by the Australian government. Within the prevailing ‘success story’ narrative, Australian migration is now economically efficient, both in the selection of the ‘best’ migrant applicants, and the productive utilisation of migrants’ skills in the local workforce.

However, this neat and happy story simplifies the complex reality that exists for most migrants to Australia. As we have seen, Chinese women migrants, like many migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, rarely conform to the ‘success story’, despite their high levels of human capital and professional employment experience. Migration to Australia is usually accompanied by a fall in labour force participation, and an escalation in domestic workloads. Those in the workforce normally experience downward or blocked occupational mobility – their careers are truncated at the peak of their working lives.

While the Australian government increasingly uses human capital criteria to screen out ‘uneconomic’ migrants, this fails to recognise that human capital is not automatically transferable across national borders. This thesis has shown that human capital is culturally specific: while migrants from English-speaking countries – and to a lesser extent, Commonwealth countries – may receive relatively straightforward recognition of their qualifications, skills and experience, this is not usually the case for migrants from other non-English speaking backgrounds.
As we saw in the experiences of PRC migrants, high levels of educational qualifications and strong employment histories do not necessarily translate into employment success in Australia if migrants do not also possess the cultural and linguistic skills to ensure that their abilities are recognised. And of course, credentials may amount to nothing if the government or employers devalue or refuse to recognise them. In contrast, Hong Kong migrants, coming from a westernised, advanced capitalist world city, have far fewer problems translating their skills and work experience into the Australian context. However, in the Australian labour market, they may still feel their cultural difference from the Anglo mainstream, and ultimately enjoy fewer opportunities for advancement than they might have expected.

These experiences suggest that the concept of human-cultural capital is better equipped than orthodox human capital approaches to explain the employment outcomes of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. The idea of human-cultural capital recognises that human capital is always deployed and received in culturally-specific contexts. What counts as human capital in one cultural setting may not be so valued in another. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, human-cultural capital allows us to go beyond a narrow individualistic approach that focuses exclusively on what skills individuals have to offer, and towards a more holistic, social analysis of how individuals negotiate the recognition of their skills in particular employment settings, and the culturally-specific values and assumptions of employers that shape their assessments of what attributes count as ‘capital’. Among my respondents, the human-cultural capital of the women from Hong Kong was clearly more compatible with Australian requirements than that of those from China.

While struggling to receive recognition for their skills and occupational experiences from the government and from employers, Chinese women simultaneously find their employment opportunities constrained by increased domestic responsibilities. Migration usually means a loss of sources of domestic support, at precisely the time when the work of ‘mothering’ is greatest, as women facilitate the family’s settlement into a new environment. Overall, this often leads to the ‘feminisation’ of women’s roles within migrant households.
While ‘feminisation’ is sometimes experienced as disempowering – successful careers are suddenly replaced by largely domestic concerns – the process also has more complex and unforeseen consequences. As Chinese women find their paid employment opportunities shrinking and their domestic responsibilities growing, they may turn to the domestic sphere as a new site of personal identification and fulfilment. This is often a welcomed opportunity to become less ‘work-oriented’ and to integrate into the ‘more relaxed’ Australian lifestyle. For others, it is simply a realistic readjustment to changed circumstances – unable to continue being ‘career women’, and unable to return to their country of origin, they rationally embrace their new lives as wives and mothers.

Understanding the complexity of women’s responses to their migration experiences clearly requires more than orthodox economistic approaches, which see individuals making rational, self-interested decisions. In some cases, migrant women’s reorientation toward the domestic sphere may be a purely rational strategy. However, in many other cases, women’s settlement experiences lead to profound changes in values, priorities and identity. ‘Feminisation’ of roles changes the way women see their various identities – as mothers, wives, household managers, and wage earners – and may lead them to redefine their ideas of womanhood itself. These are aspects of the migrant experience that we can only understand when we locate migrants’ decisions and actions within broader contexts, shaped by social and cultural factors as well as economic ones.

The stories of the Chinese women in this thesis offer a rich and revealing portrait of contemporary Australian migration. As my qualitative research findings have shown, migration is not simply a physical relocation, but clearly also involves psychological movement, as migrants’ sense of their own identity evolves as they shape their new lives in Australia. However, these stories also show that new identities are very often built on limited choices. It is a testament to the skills and strength of migrant women that they are so often able to effectively navigate unfamiliar and challenging environments to build new lives for themselves and their families.

But in many ways, these processes of rebuilding lives in a new country are made difficult by government policies and labour market and broader societal practices
which seriously constrain women’s choices. The experiences relayed in this thesis point to four main areas where policies and practices should be improved.

1. **Migrant Selection**

As this thesis has shown, women who migrate to Australia often do so as dependents of male primary applicants. The emphasis on skills in migrant selection, and the definition of skills, tend to privilege the entry of men as independent migrants. As we saw in Chapter 7, this can have important ramifications for subsequent settlement processes, with men’s careers taking automatic primacy within the migrant household, and women becoming ‘secondary workers’. This can lead to greater gender inequality within migrant families.

The human capital approach in migrant selection establishes a narrow conception of which migrant applicants will be best able to contribute to the Australian economy. In measuring productive ability through formal educational qualifications, current policy cannot recognise the capacity of migrants without formal qualifications to work productively in the labour force. In equating productivity with credentials, it cannot account for the productivity of the vast numbers of migrants and others who work productively in jobs that are labelled as ‘unskilled’, from cleaning and serving to sewing and typing.

The definitions of skill and human capital in current migrant selection policy also fail to capture the abilities of many women, who, as carers, play a crucial role in facilitating the effective settlement of migrant families, and in many cases, facilitate migrant families’ integration into community and social networks, for example, through managing children’s schooling. Ultimately, migrant selection policy cannot assess how ‘valuable’ migrants will be to Australian society through the lens of human capital theory. Governments who express pride in Australia’s history of migration should remember that the majority of Australia’s migrants have historically been ‘low’ in human capital, but are today recognised as having greatly enriched our society.
2. Migrant skill utilisation

The great irony about the importance of human capital in migrant selection, however, is that migrants’ human capital is so often wasted or under-utilised after arrival. As we have seen throughout this thesis, migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds frequently experience downward or blocked occupational mobility in Australia, because of their unfamiliarity with the Australian labour market, inadequate (or perceived to be inadequate) English language skills, and other problems transferring their skills and experiences into an Australian context.

Government policies have often exacerbated these problems. Since the late 1980s, governments’ growing commitment to economic efficiency and ‘user pays’ principles has seen services available to new arrivals decline dramatically. Many ‘transferability’ problems could be alleviated by well-funded and targeted services to enable migrants to pursue employment in their own occupational fields. These services might include intensive job searching assistance, expanded and paid English language training, work experience programs, and structured integration into professional networks and associations.

Instead, governments have steadily reduced services available to migrants, striving to reduce the ‘costs’ of migration. For example, the Keating Labor government introduced a six-month waiting period for all non-humanitarian migrants before they could access welfare services and benefits. In 1996, the Howard Coalition government extended this to two years. Migrants are now expected to be self-sufficient, and settlement agencies, such as Migrant Resource Centres, have had their funding significantly reduced (Action Now 2003). However, as governments seek to reduce the budgetary costs of providing settlement services, they fail to recognise that denying these services to migrants ultimately undermines economic efficiency as it undermines migrants’ ability to use their skills and knowledge in the Australian workforce.
3. Genuinely valuing diversity

Many of the problems encountered by migrants in finding suitable employment stem from the non-recognition or devaluation of their overseas-gained qualifications and experiences. As we saw in Chapter 6, this was particularly acute for PRC migrants, but is also felt by the majority of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. Many of these migrants are also excluded from jobs on the basis of their language ‘problems’, which in some cases, may constitute simply a non-native accent.

Yet Australian governments proudly proclaim the cultural diversity of Australian society to the international community, and multiculturalism is a key aspect of Australia’s image as a modern, cosmopolitan nation. Moreover, governments emphasise the economic benefits of multiculturalism through the concept of ‘productive diversity’. As Chapter 3 showed, in the 1980s, policy makers began to see migration as an important mechanism with which to boost the country’s international competitiveness. They argued that migrants, particularly those from Asia, possessed the business and social ties, and linguistic and cultural skills to facilitate Australia’s integration into this rapidly growing region. In the era of globalisation, Australia’s cultural diversity was now viewed as a source of ‘productive diversity’.

However, as we have seen, labour market practices often belie this official rhetoric, and many non-English speaking migrants understandably wonder whether cultural difference is truly valued when it comes to employment opportunities.

On the part of employers, genuinely valuing diversity would mean an increased openness to job applicants whose educational and occupational histories might not conform to local patterns, and whose cultural and linguistic repertoires differ from those of the locally-born. At the very least, governments should offer greater incentives for employers to abide by anti-discrimination laws, and strengthen mechanisms for action, for example, through the Human Rights and
Equal Opportunity Commission and the Anti-Discrimination Board, when racial and sex discrimination laws are breached.

4. Facilitating work/family balance

As this thesis has demonstrated, like Australian women generally, Chinese women’s employment opportunities are frequently constrained by domestic responsibilities. ‘Mothering’ and other household duties often prevented my respondents from taking up career opportunities, such as full-time jobs, training, and work-related activities requiring travel or time away from home.

Many changes to government policies and organisational practices could substantially assist parents in their efforts to balance paid and unpaid work. For example, Pocock (2003: 244) presents a powerful case for building a new ‘work/care regime’, comprising expansion of high-quality and affordable care for children, the elderly, sick and disabled, more flexible arrangements for working hours and leave, greater job security for part-time workers, and other measures which would allow for greater integration of work and care across the life-cycle.

Ultimately, changes that would enable all citizens to make genuine choices about their work and family lives would require nothing less than a thorough re-evaluation of social citizenship itself. The emphasis on productive skills in the migration program is just one reflection of a broader market-oriented conceptualisation of citizenship which increasingly defines a ‘worthy’ citizen as one who is economically productive. It is not just migrants who are defined as undesirable and a ‘drain’ on the public purse if they are not employed. Over the last two decades, this logic has been increasingly applied to many social groups, from single mothers to the long-term unemployed. The Howard government’s initiatives to compel these individuals to take up paid employment (as seen in the ‘work for the dole’ scheme) are just the most recent manifestation of this ideological predilection.

With regard to migration, we may ask: are migrants only valuable members of the society when they are employed? How can the economistic approach of the
Australian government recognise the caring work of women, for example? How can it recognise migrants’ contributions to the social infrastructure of Australian cities in the form of millions of dollars, volunteer hours and other ‘ethnic community capital’ (Lalich 2003)? How can it recognise the future contributions to be made by the children and grandchildren of migrants? Current policy’s preoccupation with human capital and economic efficiency draws extremely tight and constricting parameters around what we might consider to be valuable, and who we might consider worthy of the opportunity to contribute to our society.

These are just the most basic of the policy implications flowing from this thesis, and are offered to generate discussion about the current policy orientation of the Australian government. However, it is difficult to create the political space necessary for such discussions as long as contemporary Australian research is dominated by a human capital approach and economistic concerns. The idea that principles of economic efficiency should guide migration policy has infiltrated the ‘common sense’ of national political discourse. And this ‘common sense’ is regularly reinforced by research informed by a human capital approach to migration.

While Australian migration research of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s tended to reflect a diversity of methodologies, theoretical frameworks and policy concerns, this diversity has since been curtailed, which cannot but adversely affect political debate and policy making. Much of this has been the Australian government’s own doing. For example, in abolishing bodies such as the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the government has undermined its own ability to be informed by independent, broad-ranging research.

The experiences portrayed in this thesis demonstrate how important this kind of research is: simply asking different questions of official datasets such as the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) points to the complexity and diversity of migrant experiences which are ignored by orthodox studies relying on the LSIA. Adding qualitative research – talking with migrants about their lives – uncovers even richer complexities, contradictions and subjective experiences, which give us a profoundly different account of Australian migration.
Migration has been an integral part of Australia’s history. It has shaped and reshaped the social fabric of the nation, guided by governments’ policies and visions of how the nation could grow and prosper. Our current age of unprecedented international mobility offers migrant destination countries like Australia opportunities to benefit greatly from the diversity, strengths and abilities that migrants bring to the country. It also offers migrants opportunities to benefit from integrating into new societies and communities. However, not of all these benefits can be measured in terms of economic efficiency. Migration in Australia can only genuinely constitute a ‘success story’ when policy discussions and research overcome the extraordinary belief that economics can explain the world.
APPENDIX

Interview Schedule

1. Name
2. Age range (30s, 40s, 50s, etc)
3. What country are you from?

4. What work did your parents do?
5. What education did you have?
6. (For university graduates) Why did you choose that course?

7. What work did you do?
8. Did you work full time?
9. Why did you choose this area of work?

10. How long have you been here?
11. Did you migrate with your family?
12. Did you have any family members/friends already here?
13. Why did you come to Australia?
14. What visa category did you apply through, eg. skilled, business migration, family reunion

15. What was your first job in Australia?
16. How did you get that job?
17. What other jobs have you had since then?

18. Where do you work now?
19. How long have you had this job?
20. How did you get this job?

21. Do you like this job?
22. What are your hours
23. Working conditions, eg. premises, resources
24. Is it a well paid job?
25. Pay range $400pw, $500pw etc.

26. How do you get along with the other workers & managers?
27. Are any other workers/managers Chinese?
28. Did you know any of the workers or the managers before you started your job?
29. (If applicable) Are any of the customers Chinese?

30. (If applicable) Is it better to work for a Chinese employer or an Australian employer?
31. Would you say your job is a “woman’s job”?

32. How are you treated at work?
33. Do you belong to a union? Would you consider joining a union?
34. What role has the union played in your workplace?

35. How does this job compare with your previous jobs?
36. Have you had training or learnt new skills in any of your jobs?

37. Is working in Australia different to working in your home country? How?
38. Is this how you expected it would be like to work in Australia?
39. What do you think you’d be doing if you stayed in your home country?

40. What suburb do you live in? Have you always lived in that area?
41. Are you married?
42. Do you have children? How old are they? Where do they go to school?
43. What work does your husband do?
44. How does this compare with his work in your home country?
45. Does your husband agree with you working?

46. Who does the housework in your family? Cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc.
47. How are decisions made in your household?
48. Who would you say is the head of the household? Why?

49. Do you feel you are more or less independent in Australia?
50. As a woman, do you have more or less freedom in Australia?
51. Do you find that the roles of men and women are different here compared to your country?

52. Have you made any changes to adjust to living in Australia?
53. Has your social life changed since you came to Australia?
54. What would you like to see your children doing in the future?

55. Are you an Australian citizen?
56. What is your impression of Australian society?
57. Do you feel you are accepted in Australian society? Have you had any problems with racism or discrimination?
58. What is your impression of the Chinese community here?
59. Are you involved with any Chinese associations/organisations?
60. What kind of friends have you made here? Are they mainly Chinese or are they a mix of different people?

61. Overall, do you think you are better off in Australia?
62. What are your plans/hopes for the future?

Thank you very much!
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