FORGING A NICHE FOR CHINESE WOMEN: RECONCEPTUALISING CHINESE MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

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By mapping the world of women, patterns are revealed that is often obscured in statistical tables or historical narratives. Women, both in the past and present, have participated in labour migration. Indeed, certain migration systems are almost exclusively composed of women, for example, domestic workers, entertainers and marriage partners from Asian countries. Today women are significant and active participants in the increased scale and diversity of international migration. In Canada and the United States, as in Australia, women now constitute the majority of immigrants.[1] This shift to a majority of women as immigrants in many migration systems is related to several developments, including immigration policies that favour family reunification, migration systems that specifically target women as workers, and changes in the social and economic status and roles of women across many cultures.

In Australia, the United States and Canada, and in many other countries where

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[1] J. Seager and A. Olson, *Women in the World: An International Atlas* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).

women outnumber men immigrants, the increased flows are directly related to the increased contribution of women migrants from Asian sources.[2] From the mid 1980s on women have outnumbered men immigrants to Australia and the numbers of women migrants from Asian countries are clearly the signifier of important changes from established patterns of migration.

This paper will analyse the historical discourse on the modes of migration from both a western and a Chinese perspective. The site of the investigation is the migration of women of Chinese ancestry to Australia. Firstly, I will identify shifts in Chinese women's migration to Australia within the context of global migration patterns. Secondly, I will add a new dimension to the accepted Chinese interpretations of the patterns of Chinese migration that are male specific and ignore gender and class difference. Thirdly, I will establish an argument that reveals the complexities of differing experiences for women of Chinese descent that problematizes the construction of paradigms of migration.

Gender and Global Migration

Overwhelmingly, migration studies have focussed on economic and political explanations. These realms have been the spheres of men. People on the move were men on the move. Women migrants' economic and social contributions were considered trivial as they were routinely viewed as dependents of male migrants or as passive participants in migration. One of the difficulties in tracing these alternative explanations of immigration is the official invisibility of women -- they are so rarely documented.

Migration paradigms in the form of legal parameters, institutional frameworks, and labour and human movement patterns are conceptually represented as economically and male driven.[3] Chinese migration is no different. Earlier Chinese migrants to Australia were spurred by global developments in which Chinese themselves were only marginal and powerless players, and the images of John Chinaman as the toiling labourer was indicative of this process.[4]

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[2] G. Hugo "The Feminisation of immigration" in M. Wooden et al, *Australian Immigration: A Survey of the Issues* (Canberra: AGPS, 1994).

[3] G. Battistella & A. Paganoni, *Asian Women in Migration* (1996).

[4] J. Ryan, *Ancestor: Chinese in Colonial Australia* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995).

In the past, women have been assumed to be passive followers in the process of migration. Increasing overseas research [5] and tentative early work in Australia [6] is indicating that this is not the case. It is important to document the active roles of women as well as men, or to recognise joint agency when it is the case.

As mentioned, in Australia, the United States and Canada, and in many other countries where women outnumber men immigrants, the increased flows are directly related to the increased contribution of women migrants from Asian sourcesAmongst immigrants from Asia, females predominate while the opposite is the case amongst immigrants from all other regions.[7] Female settlers outnumber the number of male settlers in almost every year since the mid 1980s, among the Malaysia, China, Singapore and Taiwan-born with exception of 1985-6 (China) 1989-90 (Malasyia) and 1990-91 and 1993-4 (Taiwan).[8] Coghlan dismisses the agency in women for these changes, claiming that:

> Under the family reunion programme more females immigrate than males, as at times males emigrate first, find employment and accommodation, and subsequently send for their remaining nuclear family members. In addition, some single ethnic Chinese males in the diaspora travel to China or Taiwan to search for potential spouses, and later sponsor their new partners to emigrate to Australia.[9]

The basis for these explanations are not made clear in Coghlan's work and the findings are not consistent with the fact that women have outnumbered men for over a decade.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of gender, Australia, 1991.

	Hong Kong		Malaysia		PRC		Singapore		Taiwan	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Number	28896	29995	34877	37773	41605	37068	11409	13150	5811	7147
Median age	26.4	28.4	29.4	32.3	37.8	40.3	29.9	31.8	21.8	
Gender ratio*	96.3		92.3		112.2		86.8		81.3	

* The gender ratio is the number of males per 100 females.

Source: ABS 1991 Australian Census in Ho Chooi Hon and J. Coghlan (1997).

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[5] R.J. Simon & M. de Ley, "The work experience of undocumented Mexican women migrants in Los Angeles", *International Migration Review*, vol.28 winter (1984); M. Boyd, "Migrant women in Canada: Profiles and Polcies", *Report for Immigration, Canada and Status of Women* (1987).

Unpublished official data reveals that there are substantial differences in the ratio of females to males in the various categories under which settlers enter. Females predominate in the family categories, males in the skill, humanitarian categories. Although on the surface, regulations are gender neutral, their application could be discriminatory and the outcomes inequitable. This is particularly the case in relation to refugee and family reunion regulations that sometimes exclude women in extended family structures, and indeed in de facto marriages and partnerships, from eligibility for entry to Australia. Moves to reduce the family reunion category will also have serious implications for women.

The 1986 Australian census has become a yardstick for the evaluation of ethnic populations because it contains information-linking birthplace with 'race'. The identification of people of Chinese ancestry amongst immigrants from East, Southeast Asia and elsewhere is clearly limited in subsequent censuses which only include birthplace. The 1986 census data on ancestry and birthplace reveal the ten birthplace groups which have the highest proportions of their populations of Chinese ancestry: Taiwan (93.3 percent), Hong Kong and Macau (84.6 percent), the People's Republic of China (76.2 percent), East Timor (61.0 percent), Malaysia and Brunei (60.6 percent), Singapore (42.7 percent), Cambodia (40.7 percent), Vietnam (33.9 percent), Indonesia (27.4 percent) and Laos (18.0 percent). In the subsequent 1991 census, which included birthplace and not ancestry, analysts have used these percentages as a guide, along with data on languages spoken at home, to estimate the proportion of Chinese amongst these émigré countries. These calculated estimates have been utilised in the following discussions.

The 'White Australia' policy was formally discarded in 1973 as a new Labour Government became intent on improving Australia's international image and refuting charges of racism from both home and abroad. Since the 1970s the number of immigrants the Australian government permits to settle in Australia is determined by

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⑥ L.M. Lim, "The status of Women and International Migration", Paper, Meeting on International Migration Policies and the Status of Female Migrants, United Nations (1989); G. Hugo, "Immigration and Adaptation of Asian Women in Australia", *Proceedings of the U.N.* Meeting, International Migration Policies and the Status of Female Migrants, San Miniato, Italy (1990).

⑦ M. Wooden et al, *op cit.*

⑧ J.E. Coghlan, "The changing characteristics of Chinese migrants to Australia during the 1980s and early 1990s" in E. Sinn, *The Last Half Century of Chinese Overseas* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998).

⑨ *Ibid.*

domestic, economic and political factors, and international political pressure. [10] Economic fluctuations resound in immigration decisions and sectional interests of perceived powerful political groups partially determine the annual level of immigration. Coghlan identifies three international political factors influencing Australian immigration policies: international humanitarian commitments, maintenance of Australia's (perceived) favourable image overseas and regional security.[11]

The magnitude of change in the widening range of source countries, especially increasingly large-scale Asian immigration over the last three decades, reflect a 'quantitatively indeterminate mix of economic and political expediency and humanitarian concern'.[12]

Local exigencies in their birthplace, and changing entry formula in the last decade have resulted in the numerical increase of women from these countries. Difference in the percentage of female immigrants is distinctly identifiable from Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, PRC, Singapore, and Taiwan from 1982 to 1995. Over the last decade, immigrants born in these six countries make up one-seventh of Australia's total immigrant intake. Hong Kong and Malaysia have invariably been the principal source of Chinese immigrants to Australia since the early 1980s. Numbers have fluctuated, clearly reflecting economic trends both in Australia and in the Asian regions. It may well be that the difficulty of entry for women under the 'business' and points systems leave the family reunion programme as their only alternative, with the exception of refugee status, to be accepted to Australia. Fincher et al clearly identifies that 'skill' assumed prominence in the selection processes and women were marginalised in that they were not recognised as having skills that characterised the ideal migrant women.[13]

From the breakdown of the White Australia policy, Australia's immigration programmes, and the eligibility criteria have been modified and adapted in response to political and economic needs. The four broad eligibility categories are economic, family, refugee and 'other' immigrants. In the case of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan,

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[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] P. Ongley & D. Pearson, "Post 1945 International Migration: New Zealand, Australia and Canada compared", *International Migration Review*, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, Fall (1995).

[13] R. Fincher et al, in H. Adelman et al (eds) *Immigration and Refugee Policy: Australia and Canada compared* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

gender differences are small and economic migrants are more pronounced than family reunion migrants. Refugees from Hong Kong and Macau are believed to be the children of Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese born in Hong Kong and Macau refugee camps. This is not the case with migrants from Malaysia and Singapore. Currently, the proportion of Malaysia-born family immigrants is about 1.5 greater that economic migrant. The small number and proportion of refugees from Malaysia are principally Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese refugees born in Malaysian refugee camps. Despite contemporary political, social and economic differences between Malaysian and Singapore born the figures reveal similarities in the composition and predominance of family immigrants.[14]

A range of factors influence the settlement decision of immigrants. Nuclear or extended families may influence residential choice. Pre-arranged employment opportunities will be a factor for economic migrants, and refugees will be influenced by government decisions in migrant hostels or voluntary assistance by groups, friends or relatives. Migrants may be attracted to areas where there is already a concentration of fellow expatriates. Migrants from Hong Kong and Macau have consistently chosen New South Wales for settling since the 1980's. The recent decade has seen Queensland become an increasingly attractive location, for instance Hong Kong migrants increasing from 8.1 percent in 1982-3 to 24.1 percent in 1992-3, surpassing Victoria as the second most popular state of initial residence. China-born immigrants closely mirror the Hong Kong born with the greater proportion (47.5 percent in 1983-84 up to 56.4 percent in 1991-2) choosing New South Wales with Queensland increasingly attracting China-born residents.[15]

Malaysian-born migrants, predominantly family immigrants, select Victoria, closely followed by New South Wales and Western Australia. One third of Singapore migrants, also mostly family migrants, have selected Western Australia. Although Coghlan identifies business needs as relevant to this choice, anecdotal evidence suggest that the close proximity of Perth, and the subsequent cheap and fast plane flights, makes family communications, and business interactions a factor for these migrants in their selection of settlement.

Taiwan-born migrants reflect quite a fluctuating pattern. While there has been a steady decline in Victoria preferences, New South Wales's figures fluctuate from a

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[14] Coghlan & Ho, *op cit.*

[15] *Ibid.*

high of 54.1 percent in 1982-83 to a low of 28.8 percent in 1983-4. The greatest shift has been the increase of migrants selecting Queensland, which has seen quite a dramatic increase of 9.0 percent in 1982-3 to 46.7 percent in 1991-2.

Contextualising Chinese women in Chinese migration paradigms

The global movement of women from Asian birthplaces adds a new dimension and configuration to the patterns of migration identified by Chinese scholars. These previous studies have not included a gender interpretation of migration flows, but rather, traced dominant global male movements.

Eminent scholar Professor Wang Gungwu, who is foremost in analysing global movements among Chinese, describes the changing patterns of Chinese emigration.[16] He identifies four distinct patterns over the last two hundred years, which, he claims, may overlap but are quite easily identifiable. The first and earliest period was the 'trader' pattern which Wang Gungwu terms *Huashang* (Chinese trader) which included merchants and artisans. Families often followed these men, to work with and support business in new locations, especially Southeast Asia. This pattern was discernible before 1850, and was joined by a second wave after this period, of the Chinese coolie pattern (termed *Huagong*). Men on labour contracts were commissioned to work in newly established colonies all over the world. This labour scheme, which replaced the old slave system, was stamped out by the 1920s, and a feature of this pattern was its temporary nature.

A third wave of migration identified was the Chinese sojourner (*Huaqiao*) pattern that encompassed the two former groups but included those teachers, journalists and other professionals who went out to promote greater awareness of Chinese cultural and national needs from the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Both the two previous patterns were brought under its umbrella by its ideological feature. The principles were clear, Chinese, wherever they were, were part of the Chinese nation and should remain loyal to their country. They must therefore 'have

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[16] Rather than cite the numerous publications on this topic by Wang Gungwu, and further scholars who have analysed his findings in the light of specific place/time studies, three particular articles will suffice to provide the pertinent points. Wang Gungwu, "Patterns of Chinese Migration in Historical Perspective" in R.J. May and W.J.O'Malley (eds), *Observing Change in Asia: Essays in honour of JAC Mackie* (Bathurst: Crawford House Press, 1989). Wang Gungwu, "Upgrading the Migrant: Neither Huaqiao nor Huaren" and "Introduction: Migration and new national identities" in E. Sinn (eds), *op cit.*

their consciousness raised, and, if necessary, adequately politicized in order to ensure that the political loyalty was fully understood'. In many ways, the aims of the Chinese communist government since the 1980's has followed similar lines to encourage financial and professional investment in China.

The new and fourth pattern, and directly relevant to the period following World War Two, removed the focus of Chinese migration from Southeast Asia to the Americas and Australasia, and part of Western Europe. The *Huayi*, representing the fourth pattern, were foreign nationals of Chinese descent. All three patterns of migration produced such naturalized or foreign-born Chinese. But this particular pattern is when *Huayi* in one foreign country migrated or re-migrated to another foreign country. Wang Gungwu stresses the examples of this pattern:

> Southeast Asians of Chinese descent who migrated to Western Europe, North America and Australia during the past three or four decades, especially since the 1950s when south Southeast Asian nations made those of Chinese descent feel unwanted.

On the one hand, the new Southeast Asian nations wanted no more Chinese immigrants, of whatever kind. On the other, the United States, Canada and Australia opened its doors to Chinese students and liberalised its Chinese immigration laws and quotas. A feature of this pattern is that it is strongly represented by well-educated professionals who are a more cosmopolitan kind of migrant than any other kind of Chinese. Wang Gungwu claims that being professionally well trained and mobile they can settle down quickly almost anywhere that is non-discriminatory. He rightly predicts in 1989 that in a period when their professional skills appear to be needed in a modernizing China, there may be a stimulus for them to re-open contacts with the country of ancestral origin.

All these patterns are identifiable in Australian history, and descendants, or representatives of these patterns continue to contribute to the complex relationships between Chinese, and non-Chinese, in Australia. What is important to point out, is that the profusion of studies into patterns and terms for people of Chinese ancestry, has not included a gender analysis, but is overwhelmingly about men migrants, traders, settlers, and trans-migrants. It is fair to say that the earlier pattern of Chinese coolies (*Huagong*) was almost exclusively dominated by men. Receiving countries nominated men as a physically strong labour force for the newly developing regions. Women were deterred from leaving China for fear that families would be lost, and in western nations numerical evidence reveals the small number of Chinese women in the late nineteenth century.

Table 2: Male and Female Population in Australia 1861-1966

Census Year	Male	Female	Percentage of Women
1861	38247	11	0.0
1871	28307	44	0.2
1881	38273	259	0.7
1891	35523	298	0.8
1901	29153	474	1.6
1911	21856	897	3.9
1921	16011	1146	6.7
1933	9311	1535	14.2
1947	6594	2550	27.9
1954	9150	3728	28.9
1961	14237	6145	30.1
1966	15406	7875	33.8

Source: C.Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia*,
(Sydney University Press, 1975).

Huaqiao pattern, sojourner, also encouraged few females, although as the table above reveals there was an increase in the number of females in Australia based on the Australian born Chinese women, and the small number of women from China who had arrived prior to restrictions. There were distinct class distinctions where successful merchants were allowed their wives to stay for specific periods.

Chinese traders (*Huashang*) are the continuous threads through the centuries. Today's merchants, says Wang Gungwu, are the Chinese global businessmen. Wang Gungwu writes that the

> *Huashang*, [the trader, merchant] was and still is the basic pattern of emigration...I venture to suggest that, with notable specific exceptions, future Chinese migration will be based on the *Huashang* pattern and supplemented by the new *Huayi* pattern, with some features of the *Huaqiao* pattern surviving here and there.

The evidence of women outnumbering men from Asian birthplaces to Australia, United States and Canada must question this assumption. Furthermore, what part do women merchants and traders play within this pattern? While traditional Chinese business practices have favoured men, increasingly, women of Chinese descent are

active in international businesses, and are establishing their own successful networks and commercial enterprises. Women with bilingual skills are also utilising past networks in China to form partnerships and alliances in the PRC. Clearly, women did not contribute to earlier *Huashang* patterns, but their small but increasing role and presence must be identified in any suggestion of a continuing *Huashang* pattern. Numerically, the stronger patterns of female Chinese migration, outweigh the *Huashang* and must be included in new configurations.

It is the *Huayi* - transmigration - pattern where women of Chinese descent cannot be ignored. The *Huayi* in one foreign country migrate to another foreign country, such as the Southeast Asians of Chinese descent who migrated to Western Europe, North America and Australasia during the past three or four decades. The Huayi, who have transmigrated, and are mostly educated professionals, are far removed from the coolie labourers of the previous century:

> ...this *Huayi* pattern of migration is strongly represented by well-educated professionals who are a more cosmopolitan kind of migrant than any other kind of Chinese. Many are doctors, engineers, scientists, economists, lawyers, accountants, educationists, administrators and business executives.

These well-educated professional trans-migrants formed the basis for a call for the 'upgraded migrant' who deserves a new historical recognition and context. There is little doubt that women have not been 'upgraded' into these debates. On one level, men as the principal applicant into countries such as Australia, have their professional qualifications evaluated, while their female dependents do not. Therefore the *Huayi* pattern cannot account for the contribution of women within this pattern. Secondly, if this is the contemporary 'new wave' of Chinese migration, it ignores the movement of women of Chinese descent and their particular migrant patterns. The patterns of *Huayi* focus on the recent prominence of business migrants. There needs to be a new term that does not diminish the profile of women of Chinese ancestry yet takes into account the numerically large categories that are dominated by Chinese women-unskilled workers, family immigrants, and refugees. Particularly, the lower-socio-economic group of refugees must be recognised. 33.9 percent of Vietnamese, 40.7 percent of Cambodians and 18 percent from Laos, acknowledge their Chinese ancestry.

To add weight to the argument for supporting 'family' migrant patterns within the global configuration of Chinese migration, are the figures that reveal that in the last decade male and female migrants from Malaysia, Singapore, and the PRC have

predominantly come in the 'family' immigration programme of entry to Australia rather than the economic stream of entry. [17] Coghlan comments that 'currently the proportion of Malaysia-born family immigrants annually settling in Australia is about 1.5 times greater than the proportion of economic migrants' with Singapore and the PRC demonstrating similar pattern changes to 'family' status immigrants despite the very varied country backgrounds of these immigrants. [18]

Complexities of migrant criteria for women

A further dimension to the complexities of Chinese women migrants is that although these women may come as family migrants or refugees, these categories fail to recognise the significant qualifications and work experience of many of these women. The failure to officially recognise some of these qualifications is one part of the problem, [19] the other is the principal applicant is the male, and the wife's qualifications and experience often fail to be acknowledged.

Although women from Asian source countries migrate to Australia as dependants; in the family programme; or as domestic or blue-collar workers, many have substantial education and work experience. On average, the proportion of Asian-born women with university degrees is significantly higher than that of Australian born women, and a smaller proportion of Asian-born women had left school at a young age.

Table 3: Percentage of women in Australia with tertiary qualifications:

Australia born	7.8 %
Overseas born	9.9 %
Asia born	17.1 %
South East Asia born	15.0 %
Other Asia born	24.5 %

The findings of the BLMR support these figures although the breaking down of their statistics into only English/non English speaking categories prevents close analysis. The occupational distribution of females with a tertiary qualification reveals

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[17] J. E. Coghlan, *op cit.*

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] G. Hugo, *op cit.*

that the overseas born are under-represented as professionals and over-represented as para-professionals.   This is especially evident for females born in non English-speaking countries - 56.1% of those with a tertiary qualification are employed as professionals and 5.5% as para-professionals. These figures contrast sharply with the 70.5% employed as professionals and 4.6% employed as para-professionals for Australian-born females.[20] Certainly, the indications suggest a high level of professionals amongst women from the Southeast Asia region. These qualifications were frequently not recognised, and, despite persistent public reportage of high academic achievement for migrants from Asian countries in Australia, there seems an ethnic intolerance of such credentials.

Significantly, there was little occupational progress for immigrant women with their period of residency. This is attributed to 'the existence of sex segregation in employment, a lesser incentive for success in the labour market, and the possibility of their being trapped in certain low level occupations where their skills are not enhanced. [21] On the other hand, females with tertiary qualifications born in non-English speaking countries are over-represented as clerks (18.9%) and as labourers and related workers (4.3%) compared to the Australian-born females (10.3% and 1.1% respectively).

The 1991 Census statistics clearly indicate that China born women are much more likely than men from China to be on the lower income range of $16000 and are well above the percentages of the total Australian figure for this low income range. Among China born 48.1% of males have incomes of $16000 or less, and females 64.2%. This may be compared with the total Australian-born population: males 38.45% and females 60.6%. Numerically, those born in Indochina are by far the largest group of all the Asian-born settlers. If the Indochina-born are excluded from the Asian-born settlers, quite a different pattern of personal income distribution emerges. This is particularly noticeable among the highest income category.[22]

On the other end of the scale only 8.1% of all China-born men in the work force are Managers and Administrators and only 5.2% of China born women. There are

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[20]   "Bureau cf Labour Market Research 1986", in *Labour Market and Employment Characteristics* (Canberra: AGPS, 1992), p.59.

[21]   BLMR in *Labour Market* (1992), p.59.

[22]   C. Inglis et al (eds), *Asians in Australia: The Dynamics of Migration and Settlement* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992).

only 1.4% males and 1.9% females in Public administration and Defence and these are predominantly in secretarial areas.

One would expect that the Hong Kong-born would return better employment figures, due to their better proficiency in English. However, 50.7% males received an income of $16000 (China-born 48.1%). Among Hong Kong-born there are significantly more females, 56.1% who have an annual income of $16000 or less. There are high numbers of Manager/administrators from Hong Kong-born with 12% males and 6.5% females, with marginally higher figures in Public Administration and Defence: 4.2% males and 5.3% females, than the China-born. Statistics show that those in Public administrations are wage and salary earners.[23]

Statistics can too often reflect migrants as 'victims' and personal interviews reveal that for some women of Chinese ancestry waged work can provide liberation from traditional patriarchy, and business ventures can provide the basis for personal development skills and business training.[24]

Importantly, the 1990 Labour Force Survey reveals that females from non-English speaking countries are more likely to be employers or self-employed than those from other birthplace groups. These figures reveal that 4.3% are employers and 8.0% self-employed compared with the Australia-born females: 3.6% employer and 7.3% self employed. The findings demonstrate that females from English speaking countries are less likely to be employers or self-employed.[25]

AGPS claims this propensity for females from non-English-speaking countries to be employers or self employed may be a clear indication of their desire to succeed in a new country and a need to become financially secure, I believe there is sufficient evidence to suggest that with women from Asian countries it is more likely a response to their lack of choices in the labour arena, the restrictions to menial duties, overt discrimination in personnel relationships and the lack of opportunity for advancement. As Ien Ang has commented in another context, 'they', as seen as 'others' can take charge of their own destinies in a world not of their own making.[26]

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[23] "Market and employment characteristics of immigrant women in Australia" (1992), pp.47-52.

[24] D. Ip and C. Lever-Tracy, *Women in Migration* (Conference BIR, University of Melbourne, 1991).

[25] See also *Labour Market and Employment Characteristics of Immigrant women in Australia* (Canberra: AGPS, 1992).

[26] Ien Ang "I'm a feminist...but...'Other' women and postnational feminism" in B. Caine & R. Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian Femininisms* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin).

Importantly, data from the 1986 Census suggests that women with little or no proficiency in English are competing as employers or self - employed women. This evidence suggests that getting a wage or salaried position for these females may be more difficult than starting a business.[27]

Table 4: correlation of proficiency in English and employment

Proficiency in English	Employer %	self employed %	wages earners %	Total %
Speaks English				
Very well	6.2	9.0	83.1	100%
Well	6.0	11.4	80.1	100%
Not Well	4.3	10.2	83.7	100%
Not at all	5.1	10.1	80.7	100%
Total	5.8	10.0	82.4	100%

Birthplace clearly had a significant influence on English proficiency, which in turn affected job opportunities and social interaction.

Table 5: Percentage distribution of English Language proficiency
by country of birth and gender, Australia, 1991.

Spoken language proficiency	Hong Kong		Malaysia		PRC		Singapore		Taiwan	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Only speaks English	8.9	8.3	30.0	29.6	5.5	6.7	49.7	47.6	1.7	3.5
Speaks English well	75.2	71.8	65.2	62.9	48.83	40.6	48.1	48.1	57.1	50.3
Doesn't speak English well	14.0	16.6	4.1	6.0	35.6	33.3	1.4	3.2	36.4	39.6
Number	22966	24237	29445	32682	39746	35535	9587	11547	3942	5458

Source: ABS 1991 Australian Census in Ho Chooi Hon and J. Coughlan (1997).

Supporting the statistics of the AGPS that females from non-English speaking countries became employers or self employed agents are numerous studies, particularly based on census findings. These finding clearly indicate evidence that men and women of Chinese ancestry are over represented in the employer category.[28]

[27] *Labour market, op cit.*, p.52.

[28] Inglis et al, *op cit.*

These general findings are supported by a more focussed study of 144 small and medium Asian business owners (104 of Chinese ancestry and 40 of Indian ancestry) in 138 businesses in Australia.[29] In nearly two fifths of these the survey found women centrally involved and playing a primary or equal role in management and decision making. In a large majority of cases this management positioning is in the context of a family firm, owned and operated jointly with husbands and sometimes other relatives. These findings have important implications for the *Huayi* pattern.

Ip and Lever-Tracy challenge existing data and publications, in particular the notions of the submissive Chinese worker and the patriarchal relationship in business and they reveal that in family and collectively owned businesses many women from Asia display independent, professional and managerial practices. It would appear from this study that once removed from the constraints of Western businesses, women of Chinese ancestry could flourish within self employed or employer roles.

For the most part theorists of ethnic economic activity based on family and community networks have focussed on men, and for the most part ethnic women are seen as subservient to the patriarchal demands of the ethnic family. Kinship can be an important mediating factor in the economic adaptation of the individual and of the group. Portes and Borocz [30] have emphasised the significance of individual networks as a basis for understanding the patterns of migration flows and Inglis and Wu have reinforced these findings adding that 'kinship constitutes the most significant basis for developing such networks among Asian groups.[31]

For Chinese, overwhelmingly the household is seen as a unit of production, seeking to maximise its resources and embracing all family members.[32] Furthermore, the kinship may be extended to kin in the emigre area. How the social dynamics of household decisions are determined and the socio-economic context and interrelationship between work and home, are significant areas in need of close investigation. Analyses conducted in such a spirit need to investigate the power relationships and consumption patterns within the family and their evolving strategies.[33]

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[29] D. Ip and Lever-Tracy, *op cit.*

[30] Portes and Borocz (1989).

[31] C. Inglis et al, *op cit.*

[32] D. Ip and Lever-Tracy, *op cit.*

[33] *Ibid.*

Summary

Clearly from the examples offered above, we see that women from Asian countries, particularly of Chinese ancestry as they compose the majority within these source countries, differ substantially in education, language proficiency, professional and work experiences. Their experiences also differ from their menfolk. There are also a myriad of other differences not discussed here that are based on age, differing generations of women, religion, socio-economic circumstances, birthplace, family, and the personal experiences that shape their lives.

The commonality that women of Chinese ancestry do have is that they do not sit easily in the western migratory patterns of 'family', 'refugee', 'dependents' and so forth. The substantially higher number of women with higher education backgrounds, for instance, is camouflaged within the migratory process and discourse. The Australian government's immigration policies may be gender neutral, but there is sufficient evidence to question the gender neutrality of practical application and outcomes of the migration programmes.

The nexus between Chinese women's migratory patterns, and their male counterparts, is difficult to identify. The evidence suggests there is a powerful argument for a re-examination of existing discourses on contemporary Chinese migratory patterns and the formulation of a more inclusive paradigm. The global impact of the contemporary migration of women of Chinese descent cannot be ignored. The reasons for the changing directions from a predominantly male migration to a pattern skewed in favour of women of Chinese ancestry, need to be examined carefully. I believe these findings may have significant implications on how we address and reconceptualise the migration of peoples of Chinese descent.