Chapter 1

Exploring the Hybridisation of First and Second-Generation Migrants’ Identities
The hybridisation of beliefs and values is a pertinent force in the construction of migrant individuals’ identities, across both first and second generations. This notion of hybridisation has been extremely apparent in my micro experience, often resulting in conflict between the normative gender roles and expectations within my culture, as opposed to the implicit and explicit empowerment of women I experience from my Western society. Through my research, I sought to discover whether this hybridity was commonly experienced by Chinese-Australian girls and women, and the factors which had contributed to the somewhat dichotomous messages conveyed through the respective cultures.

While it may be partly accurate, aspects of Western culture, particularly popular culture, commonly depicts Chinese culture as strictly patriarchal, enforcing “seclusion... and a subordinate role” for women. Whilst this portrayal is largely flawed, only drawing from selective periods of history, it is telling of the perception of inherent differences between the gender messages conveyed by Chinese and Western cultures. A semi-structured interview with Rachael*, a 48 year-old Hong Kong woman, suggested the importance of tradition in defining women’s roles in Chinese culture: “women have a defined role... coming from ‘ancient wisdom’”. She defined these as originating from Confucian values and historical forces, asserting that they “benefit men... making women less

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2 Ibid.
3 Budani, Donna. Patriarchy and Gender, created 2009. Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology, hosted by University of Delaware, USA. Last accessed 22/05/2012 at <http://www.udel.edu/anthro/budani/patriarchyandgender.pdf>
* Names changed with permission
4 In-depth Interviews (Chinese Women, Hong Kong- Rachael*) Conducted 11/04/2012
important”
This view was also evident in focus groups conducted with Chinese-Australian adolescent girls, which demonstrated their perceptions of Chinese society as being largely patriarchal. “Chinese society [in terms of gender equality]... isn’t even where Australia was in the 1970s” was suggested by one participant, alongside ideas that “there was no such thing as feminism [in China]” and that Chinese society was “all male-

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5 Ibid.
6 Focus Group 1 with 15-17 year old Chinese-Australian adolescent girls, conducted 03/04/2012- Anya*
7 Focus Group 3 with 15-16 year old Chinese-Australian adolescent girls, conducted 04/04/2012- Lillian*
dominated"⁸. This was affirmed in my questionnaire findings, conducted with 120 Chinese-Australian adolescent girls, with 66% of respondents believing the rights and opportunities of Chinese women are significantly less than that of men⁹, hence demonstrating the notion of patriarchy in Chinese culture has been internalised by both generations of women.

However, upon further primary and secondary research, these views proved too simplistic in explaining the interrelation of micro and macro forces in defining Chinese gender perceptions. As with all social constructs, gender values in Chinese society have been created through various historical, cultural, and political forces; it is only through an exploration into how this process has been conceptualised¹⁰, that a holistic understanding may be attained. Contrary to the association of Chinese culture with ‘strict patriarchy’ by both myself and my focus groups participants, the PRC government has, at various times, historically endorsed a rhetoric of equality (especially throughout the 1980s), attempting to downplay notions of gender difference and separation¹¹. Although this rhetoric of equality often did not match the subjective experiences of women¹², it has served to enforce some aspects of macro gender equality in Chinese society. As my expert interview with Dr Christina Ho * revealed, “Chinese [gender] values have become much more similar to Western society than appears”¹³. She proposed the increasing Westernisation undertaken by the government during the 1980s as essential to consider, as the Chinese government began to enforce ‘women and men being the same’ during the 1980s, based upon their economic aims.¹⁴.

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⁸ Focus Group 3 with 15-16 year old Chinese-Australian adolescent girls, conducted 04/04/2012- Sherry*
⁹ Questionnaire Results- 120 Chinese-Australian adolescent girls aged 14-18, conducted 22/02/2012 - 29/02/2012
* Name used with permission
¹³ Expert Interview with Dr. Christina Ho (Senior Lecturer at University of Technology Sydney), conducted 13/04/2012
¹⁴ Ibid.
* Name changed with permission
Chinese women indicated the significance of both ‘traditions’ and the distinct government enforcement of ‘equality’ in forming their personal gender values. However, a divide between experiences in the personal and public spheres was also revealed through various interviews. Anita*, a 52 year-old PRC woman, suggested internal familial treatment often differed greatly from expectation of women in the public sphere, particularly regarding employment. Historian Elisabeth Croll supports this, suggesting ideals of women’s equality originated from a ‘top-down’ government approach, with the subjective social experience contrasting this rhetoric. This enforcement of equality for largely economic means is considered a result of Westernisation, where ‘Western’ values were promoted by the Chinese government alongside a desire for economic growth and expansion. This resulted in women being encouraged to pursue a role beyond the domestic sphere, an aspect of continuity from the 1949 Cultural Revolution, in which ‘sameness’ between the two genders was enforced. An interrelation of historical and cultural forces has therefore shaped Chinese women’s internalisation of gender values; although alongside female subservience, women are now being increasingly designated the double-burden of work and home.

Upon migration, however, these roles are seen to shift. Despite Chinese society typically being viewed as more gender-restrictive than Western societies, my interviews and expert interviews revealed migration has actually resulted in a ‘feminisation’ of women’s roles. This idea was first raised in my interview with 54 year-old Hong Kong woman Elise*, who suggested migration has limited her opportunities and participation in the public sphere: “coming to Australia has meant I don’t have much to do outside the home- from having a full-time office job, I am now a stay-at-home mum.” Dr Christina Ho’s 2004 work Migration as Feminisation confirms this experience to occur on a macro level.

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15 In-depth Interviews (Chinese Women, PRC- Anita*) Conducted 29/04/2012
16 Croll, Elisabeth, op. cit., p114.
18 Ibid., p190.
*Name changed with permission
20 In-depth Interviews (Chinese Women, Hong Kong- Elise*) Conducted 19/03/2012