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# **Exploring and recognising the influence of migration experiences of Chinese migrant women carers: Strategies to improve palliative care access for Chinese families.**

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## Background

- The Chinese speaking population is the largest non-English speaking language group in Australia and area of this study.
- In Australia about 870,000 self-identified as having Chinese ancestry (ABS, 2011).
- Within Sydney (including study area), about 360,000 self-identified as having Chinese ancestry (ABS, 2011).



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# Chinese Immigrant women in Australia





## Background-what is known

- Limited research information concerning the influence of migration experiences on Chinese women carers' approach to utilizing palliative care support services.
- The experience of migration is one of major upheaval, dislocation and losses linked to adjustment stressors in the new socio-cultural, language and economic environment.



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## Aim

- To explore the influence of migration experiences on Chinese women carers;
- To identify barriers towards utilizing palliative care support services in Sydney, NSW.
- Method: Qualitative Design: an explorative, descriptive qualitative framework.
- Data collection: Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with twelve Chinese women carers at home. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.



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## Participants in the Study

- 12 female carers
- Aged:35-75 years
- Language-Mandarin, Cantonese and English
- Relationship to patient:
  - Wife: 5
  - Daughter:5
  - Daughter-in-law:2

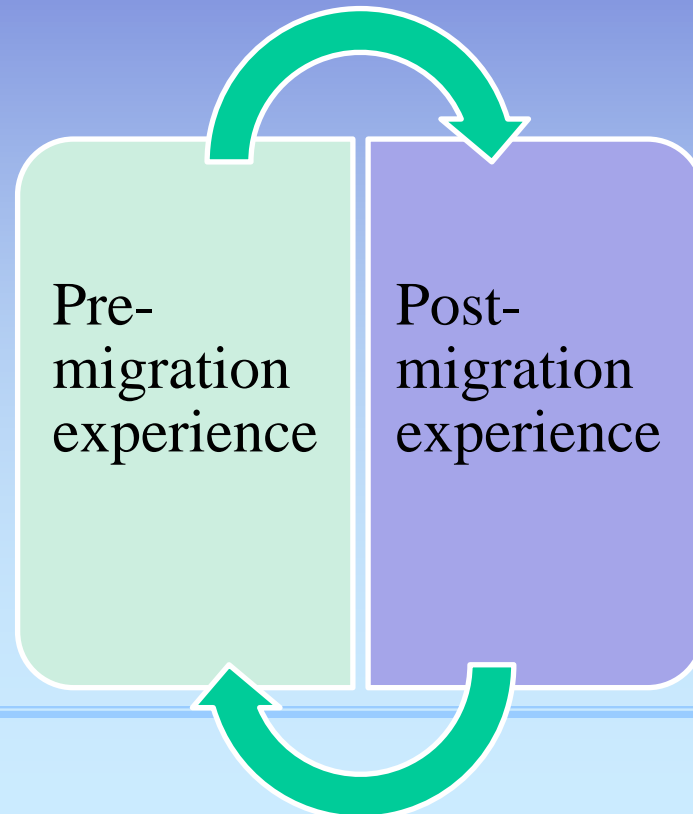
Countries of origin:

Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia  
and Indonesia.



## Study Findings

Migration was a profound life-changing event, involving multiple complex transitions with a significant impact on the Chinese women's carer role.







## Pre-migration experiences-decision to migrate

- Varied among carers
- Imbued with personal meaning
- Taken despite separation from family and social networks, familiar surroundings and culturally determined behaviour
- Taken within context of high uncertainty
- Often marked by limited choice yet *activated* by courage to uproot to Australia



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## Pre-migration experiences – decision to migrate

*Millions [of Chinese] were really **forced to leave** China because of war with the Communists. My Father escaped from China to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek's army in 1949. My parents **left everything behind** in China and we were **separated from their families forever**. Taiwanese people were very different, different language and customs, more Japanese... So, they were unwelcoming towards the Han. There was a lot of conflict and Han Chinese were considered mainlander foreigners, the new minority population. (May, carer to father).*



## Pre-migration experiences – decision to migrate

**Alice** migrated from Mainland China and recalled reasons underlying decision to migrate,

*I was very **reluctant to leave** my parents alone, but the political situation was so unsafe and they (parents) convinced us to leave. So, my husband and I decided go to Australia with our children.*



## Pre-migration experiences – decision to migrate

*There were always problems with China and life was getting more **politically unsettled and insecure** in Taiwan. The future seemed **discouraging** there. Because of their experiences in going to Taiwan my parents were very nervous and couldn't reconcile with the changes happening in Taiwan. I think these were really important reasons for the decision to come to Australia. They wanted to **keep the family safe and together.***

*(May, migrant from Taiwan).*



## Pre-migration experiences – decision to migrate

Zhū lì reflected upon the approaching loss of her husband and she remembered the initial loss yet determination to make the move,

*We came to Australia because of problems for Chinese in Malaysia. The **political disturbance** made us decide to move the children to Australia. It **wasn't easy** leaving our family and friends behind, **but we felt we had to**. But my husband had to **return** to Malaysia because of problems with the government with his business.*



## Pre-migration experiences – decision to migrate

*Actually we chose to go [to Australia]. We felt there **more opportunities** for our son and of course for ourselves. My **parents** came here to be with us later. Because they are **old** and **nobody** looking after them [in China]. Now Mum needs me and must care for Mum. It is our **custom** that the **young ones** are **looking after the old ones**.*

(**Bella**, carer to mother and migrant from Mainland China).





## Pre-migration experiences - impeding carers' utilizing support

early socialisation in a collectivist culture, traumatic experiences of dislocation and loss embedded primacy of family and self reliance

*In China, my whole family lived on a farm in Sichuan for many generations...Then, the communists confiscated our farm and we had to escape and ended up in Guangdong.*

*It was very **traumatic**, we were **never all together again**. Oh, it was a very **different life**. Hard, had to start from the bottom, learn a **new language**-Cantonese, not Mandarin. We were treated as **outsiders**. Survival was **tough**, but the **family was strong and endured**... (Alice, carer to husband).*



## Post-migration

- Lack of knowledge of new cultural environment
- Limited English-language skill
- Limiting employment opportunities / exposure to Australian society /support services
  
- Transplanted cultural beliefs and values hampering carers from utilizing support services



## Post-migration experiences -

**Carers described the need to economically survive, impeding exposure to Australian society and support services**

*We **expected** to have some **problems**. I spoke **English** at an **elementary standard**, so had to have intensive **English Language lessons**. Everything was so **unfamiliar** and we **had to learn every small detail...** **Very unsettling**. I just had to get a jobs in factories to get some money into the family. You have to understand that **nothing prepares** you for how **hard** it will be. (Alice).*



## Post-migration

*Oh, naturally, it was **very difficult at first**, but the **family was together**. The life was very different, but we were set on getting ahead. The **language** was a **big problem** and I took up English language classes right away. ... **had to adapt to...**the Australian social life was much less formal than what we were accustomed to. **I took any jobs**. I just had to so I could **practice my English** and learn **the Australian ways**. (May).*



## Post-migration experiences

*I thought it was going to be fairly simple to become accustomed to living here, but it wasn't the case. It was very difficult to adjust to so many things. The language barrier was a problem. I could speak English, but not the Australian way. I just had to keep going.*

(Zhū lì, carer to husband and migrant from Malaysia).



## Post-migration-transplanted cultural beliefs impeding support services -

- Decisions to be carers primarily determined by Chinese cultural and social values.
- Family expectation and responsibility - a female role, they were culturally obliged to take on.

*“Han Chinese culture and traditions are very very strong. We have grown up **being taught about our Chinese cultural thinking**. Ah, even though I’ve been in Australia for a long time, **I still follow**”. (May)*





## Post-migration-Ingained cultural beliefs

*“A Chinese wife usually takes care of her husband.  
The Chinese have always kept their traditions”.*  
(Zhū lì).

*“I have been here for so many years now. But, I do  
give lot of support to my parents, because of my  
Chinese background”.*  
(Lee, carer to father and migrant from Mainland China ).



## Post-migration-Carers' attitudes to support services

*They [hospital staff] often offered [services], but I said no. It's too disturbing for my husband having strangers in the house. Anyway, it's a family problem I must manage. You still don't forget your background. After all I've grown up in China and received my education from China and I've been influenced by Chinese culture. We're taught to respect the family and care for our ill family members. These are old and good traditions.*

*I'm a traditional person.* (Alice).



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## Post-migration-Carers attitudes to support services

*Help was offered from the hospital several times, but I refused because it's up to the family. **My father is very private and does not like people coming into to wash him or care for him, just us.** (May).*



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## Post-migration-Carers' attitudes to support services

*Noo, Noo! **Chinese** are **very private**. They are a bit **shy** to approach for help and to ask for help. They got **pride** and they don't want handout to get things. So they **don't ask**. They do not ask for hand outs. It is **no the custom**. (Flora).*



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## Post-migration -Carers' attitudes to support services

*Yes, in the hospital, yes, often. They [the doctors and nurses] were very good. Yes they asked [if I wanted help], but I say **I'm okay**.*

*(Stella, carer to husband and migrant from Hong Kong).*



## Post-migration-

### Cultural issues- privacy shame and stigma

*There are friends, but they're really **just social friends**. We play Mah-jong and cards games...**not acceptable to ask for help**. Best to **keep things separate**. My husband's illness is for me to manage. He's a proud man". (Zhū lì).*

*Nooo (I won't ask friends for help). They're **busy with their own lives, have their own worries**. They don't need to know my problems, now. My husband is very Chinese. He wouldn't like it. He **deserves the privacy and respect**. (Alice).*





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## Post-migration- Carers' attitudes to support

*I won't bother friends and disturb them. I think this is my own responsibility... not to give to someone else. Out of respect for my Father. I don't talk about the details of his illness. It's family business. Our's is a small community.* (May).



## Implications and Recommendations

- The research may provide information concerning Chinese women's migration experiences and how they impact on carer role.
- Publishing findings in Journal articles.
- Presenting findings at Conferences.
- Development of assessment tool to be used in palliative care services to influence policy.



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## Implications and Recommendations

- Essential for comprehensive and sensitive assessments of migration histories by nurses.
- Referral to culturally appropriate psycho-social support.
- Continuing association with Chinese community services and building closer links with the broader Chinese community.
- *This provides a clearer understanding of cultural barriers to support services and an intercultural bridge in clearing barriers.*