

Adult relatives' understandings of the migratory loss experiences of their Chinese immigrant elders and their support strategies.

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Abstract

This study explored adult relatives' understanding of migratory loss experiences of their Chinese immigrant elders and the strategies they use to support their elders in Australia, and in particular in Adelaide, South Australia. While there is general agreement that migration brings about losses and grieving reactions, less is known about how the Chinese family, with its unique cultural characteristics, plays a critical role in the experience of elderly immigrant family members. Ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief experienced by Chinese immigrant elders were the major loss and grief theoretical lines of inquiry in the study. In addition to loss and grief there was an examination of the strategies adult relatives use to support their elders. Participants were recruited through Chinese associations and networks. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the data were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The results were classified into six themes: (1) loss experienced by immigrant elders as seen from the perspective of their adult relatives; (2) immigrant elders' reactions to loss as seen from the perspective of their adult relatives; (3) ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief experienced by Chinese immigrant elders; (4) the effects of living in a new country; (5) strategies used by the participants to support their immigrant elders, and (6) the adult relatives' views about the most important supports for their immigrant elders living in Australia. The study contends that migratory loss experiences of Chinese immigrant elders is greatly influenced by Chinese culture. The strategies that adult relatives use to support elders' migratory grief is also shaped by Chinese culture, and affects their immigrant elders' migratory loss experiences and the reactions to loss. A discussion around a support model for Chinese immigrant elders is offered and implications and suggestions for future research are proposed.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed.....

Date.....14/01/2019.....

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1 Introduction

Australia has a long history of migration, and immigrant populations are growing rapidly. A 2016 census report shows that 6.1 million or 26 per cent of the total Australian population were born overseas, which is higher than the United States (14%), Canada (22%), New Zealand (23%) and the United Kingdom (13%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017). Additionally, nearly half of all Australians were either born overseas or had at least one foreign-born parent. Chinese make up the third largest immigrant population among Australia's foreign-born population, after those from the United Kingdom and New Zealand. In 2015–2016, Mainland China became the second largest source of immigrants to Australia behind India (Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs, 2018). At the end of 2016, 509,555 Chinese-born people were living in Australia, equivalent to 8 per cent of Australia's overseas-born population and 2.2 per cent of its total population, which is 80 per cent more than in 2006 (ABS, 2017). Around 1.5 million or 6 per cent of Australians nominated that they have at least one parent born in China and Australian residents identifying themselves with Chinese ancestry made up 5.6 per cent of those nominating their ancestry at the 2016 census, about 1.2 million people (ABS,2017).

Additionally, the number of older immigrants of non-English-speaking backgrounds in Australia has been growing at five times the rate of the Australian-born aged population in recent years. There are two groups of elderly immigrants: those who migrated young and grew old, and those who migrated to the host country when they were already comparatively old for the purpose of family reunion (Hugo & Thomas, 2002). The proportion of elderly Chinese immigrants among Australia's older population, those aged 65 years and over, has grown significantly in the last three

decades, from 0.3 per cent in 1981 to 1.1 per cent in 2011 (ABS, 2012). This growing population of aging immigrants requires Australian society to understand what it means to be an elder immigrant in Australia. It is also worth noting that immigrant seniors are generally more vulnerable than non-immigrant elders, and require more care and support in order to optimally readjust to an environment different from that of their country of origin (Saadat Mehr, 2013). At the same time, some immigrant seniors bring their own resources and achieve personal growth in the host country.

The experience of immigration can have a great influence on the well-being of immigrant populations, and grief and losses incurred during the process have been well recognized. For example, a large number of studies which focus on the experiences of immigrants from mental health, psychological and sociocultural perspectives illustrate that the experience of immigration involves various forms of loss, including not only loss of tangible possessions but also of the familiar, such as language, cultural attitudes, values and social networks (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). It is also well recognized in the psychology literature that the experience of loss invokes a grief experience and has a considerable effect on people's psychological state. This is particularly so for immigrants who are unable to move on from immigration-related grief and who are therefore at risk of mental illness and psychological distress (Casado, Hong, & Harrington, 2010; González & González, 2008; Mui & Kang, 2006).

Recently, specific attention has been focused on immigrant families and children with the aim to improve their well-being and adjustment (García Coll & Marks, 2012). Indeed, well-being and acculturation of immigrant families and children within their host countries are very important because families are the primary social context in which issues associated with immigration are negotiated (Dimitrova, Bender, & Van

de Vijver, 2014). Focusing on immigrant families is a way to better understand the changes in family dynamics during immigration so as to better identify the risk factors and protective factors. Some studies further explore the transnational family's experience, with particular focuses on the strategies that immigrant families use to care for their elders in their home countries as well as their experience in coping with transnational deaths and bereavement (Nesteruk, 2017; Wilding & Baldassar, 2009). However, studies on immigrant families have been rather infrequent, as has the influence of different cultures on the role of elderly immigrants in influencing family dynamics.

For example, Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism, centrality of family and hierarchical relationships (Xu, Xie, Liu, Xia, & Liu, 2007). Furthermore, filial piety, the fundamental concept of care in Confucianism, which has great influence on Chinese value systems, prioritizes self-sacrifice, respect for parents, obligation and devotion to family (Koh & Koh, 2008; Wong, 2006). Thus, there is an assumption that Chinese immigrant families would like to provide support for their elderly immigrant family members and, due to this fact, the relatives' understandings of loss and grief experienced by their elders can not only reflect their elders' experiences of immigration, but also can reflect the potential for successful supporting strategies within Chinese families. In order to better understand the migratory loss experience of Chinese immigrant elders, a theoretical perspective on loss and grief will be reviewed first, then losses and grief resulting from immigration will be discussed, including the influence of Chinese culture on the grieving process among elderly Chinese immigrants.

In summary, the aim of this study is to gain an understanding of how adult Chinese family members recognise and identify the loss and grief experiences of their elderly immigrant parent or grandparent. It seeks a deeper description of elderly Chinese immigrants' experiences during the process of immigration as viewed by their child or grandchild. The study aims also to understand the strategies that Chinese families use to support their elders, in order to provide practitioners with insights into culturally appropriate assistance.

2 Literature review

2.1 Theoretical perspectives on grief and loss

2.1.1 The nature of loss and grief

Loss is an inevitable experience of all beings and grief is a normal reaction to the loss (Rando, 1984). Rando (1984) defines grief as a dynamic process involving psychological, social and physical reactions to the loss of something or someone important, and as a necessary reaction that helps people to accept the loss and move on with their lives. Hooyman and Kramer (2006) further argue that cultural diversity and norms as well as social contexts can have a profound influence on grief responses in terms of the perception of loss and the capacity to deal with grief. In general, there are two types of losses people experience, physical and symbolic. Physical losses refer to the loss of a loved one and/or personal possessions; while symbolic losses refer to abstract losses, which are often not recognized as losses, such as loss of relationships, social status and identity (Rando, 1984). Although death might be the ultimate loss, it is not the only loss that is felt so profoundly that one fears the grief might never completely end. Doka (2002) points out that humans are attached not only to other humans but also to their surrounding environment, such as their home and

community, their jobs, organizations, beliefs, and so on. All forms of grief require emotional adjustment to the consequence of loss.

2.1.2 Different models of the grieving process

Theoretical models of grief have evolved from stage theories to more task-oriented theories (Rothaupt & Becker, 2007). Parkes' (1965, 2014) stage theory, Stroebe and Schut's dual-process model (1999) and Worden's (2010) revised tasks theory are reviewed in this study as representative works which can help us understand how perspectives on grief and support for grievers have changed over time. In addition, growth theory and continuing bonds perspectives, two major fundamental developments of the last two decades are discussed.

Parkes (1965, 2014) describes four phases of grief: 1) numbness, 2) yearning and searching, 3) disorganization and despair, and 4) reorganization. According to Parkes, in the numbness phase, people who have just experienced a loss are stunned by the loss, often exhibiting different degrees of denial. In the second phase, people try to recover what they have lost. Anger, restlessness, irritability, disbelief, tearfulness and an effort to keep a clear visual memory of the loss may be present at this stage. In the third phase of disorganization and despair, the experience is one of identity discontinuity. People have given up the attempt to recover and accept the loss, but emotional struggles continue, while depressive symptoms and disinclination to look towards the future can be apparent in this phase. In the final phase of reorganization, people have broken their attachment to what they have lost and started to establish new relations with others. They are able to feel interest in life and move on in life without what has been lost.

Stroebe and Schut (1999) developed the dual-process model of grieving, and the central position of this model is that grieving persons alternate between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented dimensions. Loss orientation focuses on the loss and involves grief work on such issues as separation distress, appraisal of the meaning of the loss, and relocation of the loss in a world without its presence. Restoration orientation involves skill mastery, identity change and other psychosocial transitions and changes. Stroebe and Schut further argue that oscillation between these two dimensions has an adaptive regulatory function.

Worden (2010), in the latest edition of his book, revises the final task, and describes four tasks of grief: 1) to accept the reality of the loss; 2) to process the pain of grief; 3) to adjust to a world with the consequence of the loss; 4) to find an enduring connection with the loss in the midst of embarking on a new life. First, in the task of accepting the reality of the loss, people who have experienced loss vacillate between reality and the belief that a reunion is still possible, and searching behaviour is a common part of this task. The opposite of accepting the reality of loss is denial, such as denying the facts associated with the loss, and avoiding the meaning and impact of the loss or the irreversibility of the loss (Dorpat, 1973, as cited in Worden, 2010). In the second task of processing the pain of grief, people may experience physical pain as well as emotional and behavioural pain associated with the loss. During this process, the second task can be complicated by an unsupportive social system, and therefore sometimes people hide their feelings and deny the pain that is present. Third, in the task of adjusting to a world with the consequence of the loss, there are three areas of adjustment that need to be addressed. Firstly, the external adjustments, or how the loss affects one's everyday functioning; secondly the internal adjustments, or how the loss affects one's sense of self; and thirdly the spiritual adjustments, or how the loss

affects one's beliefs, values and assumptions about the world. In the fourth and final task of finding an enduring connection with the loss in the midst of embarking on a new life, people need to find ways to memorialize; that is, to remember what they have lost but still go on with their life. Worden highlights that grieving is a fluid process and is influenced by the nature of the loss; and, therefore, his four tasks are not fixed stages. In other words, they can be revisited and worked through again and again over time, and sometimes a person can be dealing with aspects of more than one stage at the same time.

Continuing bond theory is one of the most significant developments in this field, and has increasingly gained acceptance among grief researchers (Wright & Hogan, 2008; Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). It argues that a continued relationship with the deceased is another way in which people integrate their grief, which challenges some of the popular models of grief that require the bereaved to break the bond with the deceased (Klass et al., 2014). Since then, other studies have shown that ongoing bonds with the deceased are not associated with poor adjustment, and sometimes are beneficial for grievers in terms of maintenance of self-identity, reassurance and a sense of peace, better day-to-day management, and tolerance of the uncertainty and ambiguity of life and death (Fleming & Robinson, 2001). It is important to note that, despite the acceptance of continuing bonds theory, it does not mean that maintaining bonds is a better way of coping with grief (Klass, 2006). This is an important clarification as grieving involves entering a personal path where reactions, responses, challenges, and coping styles may vary from one griever to another.

Another important paradigm shift in the study of grief is personal growth theory, which posits that grieving individuals follow a pathway through grief that leads to personal

growth (Wright & Hogan, 2008). Subsequent research indicates that adults experience personal growth as a result of grieving the death of a loved one. Regardless of the cause of death, the bereaved adults experience despair, detachment from others and confusion about who they are without the loved one and subsequently experience personal growth, indicating that a personal transformation has resulted from their suffering (Hogan & Schmidt, 2002; Hogan, Greenfield, & Schmidt, 2001). Social support was found to mediate the suffering to help the bereft find new meaning and purpose in life. The pathway ends when the bereaved has more good days than bad ones and has reached a point where they can let go of some of the intensity of their grief and begin to experience personal growth, as evidenced by becoming more hopeful about the future and more forgiving, compassionate, and tolerant of themselves and others. In other words, it means that, although hope is lost in the beginning of grief, through caring and nonjudgmental support from others hope can be regained. However, it is necessary to note that this theory also recognised that some bereaved persons become mired in grief and detachment and do not work through the process to find meaning, purpose and personal growth (Wright & Hogan, 2008).

Despite the variety in the models that have been developed to provide insight into the experience of grievers, some common points can be found among them, which enable people to better understand the grieving process. Specifically, loss orientation in the dual-process model includes the first two phases and part of the third phase of Parkes' model, which also incorporates the same tasks that Worden outlined in his first and second tasks. The restoration-orientation approach is consistent with part of the third phase in Parkes' model, and has some common points with Worden's third and fourth tasks. Furthermore, Worden (2010) notes that the tasks are not linear, and people can

go back and forth, dealing with them as needed. In other words, different people might not grieve in the same way, and individual difference should be recognized in the grieving process. Various factors contribute to individual difference in grieving losses, and the nature of the loss and social variables are significant factors that affect the grieving process (Worden, 2010). This perspective could help us better understand the losses and grief related to immigration, and why culture can play an important role in the grieving process. Worden's revised task model reflects developments in the field in the last twenty years, which emphasize the shift from universal stages to the recognition of personal pathways; from relinquishing ties to revising and renewing relationships; from viewing grief as affect to recognizing the multiple ways in which people react when faced with loss and how these reactions might be influenced by culture, gender and spirituality; and from passively coping with loss to finding possibilities for growth (Doka, 2007; Worden, 2010).

2.2 Theoretical perspectives on grief associated with migratory loss

2.2.1 Definition of migratory loss

As mentioned before, the process of migration itself has specific consequences for the immigrant's mental health. Immigration is different for each migrant, as both internal psychological aspects and external contextual factors play important roles in how the experience of immigration will be integrated (Casado et al., 2010; González & González, 2008; Mui & Kang, 2006). Even though the stories of migration are as varied as the immigrants themselves, they all share one characteristic: the experience of loss (Akhtar, 1999).

In a growing number of studies on immigration, migratory loss is defined as separation and uprootedness from physical and symbolic possessions or states resulting from

immigration-related relocation and resettlement (Arredondo-Dowd, 1981; Gitterman & Knight, 2018). It is well recognized that these emotions are a necessary experience of all immigrants, regardless of whether the migration process is forced, unexpected or anticipated. In the last three decades, a considerable amount of literature has shown that the experience of immigration entails various forms of lifelong losses that include not only tangible material losses but also loss of the familiar, such as language, culture, values and social networks (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Gitterman & Knight, 2018). For example, immigrants often lose shared values, traditions, native songs, familiar food and social status, as well as significant relationships (Yaglom, 1993; Akhtar, 1999, as cited in Henry et al., 2009). Marlin (1994) also argued that the immigration process involves massive losses of loved elements in the abandoned culture such as the familiar patterns of being and relating to people; there is a sense of loss of self-identity as well, resulting from the loss of the mother language (Mirsky, 1991).

2.2.2 Migratory grief and psychological distress

There seems to be a general agreement that migration brings with it a grieving process since loss is inherent in migration, and grief is the usual reaction to loss (Akhtar, 1999; Gitterman & Knight, 2018; Martinez & Martinez, 2006). It is also noted that migratory grief has particular characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of grief; it is partial, recurrent and multiple (Martinez & Martinez, 2006). It is partial because the object of grief, the country of origin, does not disappear completely, and there is always the possibility of reunion. While the grief is partial, it does not mean that it is less important. It is recurrent because the ties to the home country are always present, reminding the immigrant of what he or she has lost. Finally, it is multiple because

migration carries with it numerous losses, including family, friends, language, culture, landscape, social status and contact with one's ethnic group, among others.

With the recognition of migratory loss and grief, a growing number of psychoanalytical and psychological studies in the last two decades focused on the relationship between migratory grief and mental illness or psychological distress (Bekteshi, Van Hook, Levin, Kang, & Van Tran, 2017; Girgis, 2018; Walter & McCoyd, 2016). One group of researchers undertook qualitative studies exploring the expressions and process of grieving over the loss of culture, people and things left behind in the homeland as a result of immigration among various groups, including Polish (Aroian, 1990), Southeast Asian (Detzner, 1996; Weng, 2017), Cambodian (Eisenbruch, 1991), Arab (Henry, Stiles, & Biran, 2005), Bosnian (Keyes & Kane, 2004), and Egyptian groups (Girgis, 2015). Then another group of quantitative studies focused on the significant effects of migratory grief on psychological distress among different immigrant populations in the United States. Ahn (2005) identified risk factors for depressive symptoms among Korean elderly immigrants; Brener (1991) explored the relationship between losses, acculturation and depression in Mexican immigrants; and Khawaja and Mason (2008) suggested predictors of psychological distress in South African immigrants. Bhugra and Becker (2005) reviewed the impact of migration on mental health and emphasized the influence of losing cultural norms, social support systems and self-concept during the migration process on immigrants' mental well-being.

These researchers have pointed to the universality of the migratory grief experience among different immigrant populations and identified some risk factors for mental illness and psychological distress. However, to some extent these studies have overlooked the effects of cultural background on immigrants' perceptions associated

with immigration, which can influence the ways that they express their experience of migratory grief. Meanwhile, ambiguous loss (Boss, 1991, 2009, 2016) and disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989, 2002) were rarely considered from a cultural perspective in those studies. It is worth noting that there is some ambiguity in all loss which can complicate individuals' grief experience (Boss & Carnes, 2012; Perl, 2016; Solheim & Ballard, 2016). Individuals might also experience disenfranchised grief due to the nature of migratory loss and different value systems, and this is another important concept that needs to be considered (Casado et al., 2010; Kanwal, 2018). Therefore, ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief associated with migratory loss need to be given more attention and focus as these concepts provide more insight into the grieving process associated with migration.

2.2.3 Ambiguous loss

Boss (1991) defines ambiguous loss as loss linked to a lack of closure, with the two basic types of ambiguous loss being physical and psychological. Physical ambiguous loss refers to situations where the loved object is physically missing but psychologically present due to lack of proof of the loss, such as a father who is missing in action. Psychological ambiguous loss refers to situations where the loved one is still around physically but is cut off from expressing feelings and emotions to their loved ones, as for example when a partner is suffering from dementia. Boss (1991, 2009) further points out that someone who suffers from ambiguous loss might experience tremendous stress and potentially carry a severe psychological burden for a prolonged period of time. Immigration can involve elements of both types of ambiguous loss. Beloved people and places are left behind, but they remain keenly present in the psyche of the immigrant. Meanwhile, the stress of adjustment and homesickness can

leave some family members emotionally unavailable to others (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2005; Solheim & Ballard, 2016). Falicov (2005) also points out that ambiguous losses of language, loved ones, and native culture and rituals create unique challenges for immigrant families, often resulting in an incomplete recovery from mourning which can reverberate across generations. Some studies have further identified the elements of ambiguous loss experienced by immigrants. Specifically, the long-lasting dream of returning home, the separation of immigrants from their loved ones, the attempt to adjust to a new value system and striving to preserve their cultural identity from their home country (Perez & Arnold-Berkovits, 2018) reinforce the gap between physical absence and psychological presence.

2.2.4 Disenfranchised grief

Doka (1989) defines disenfranchised grief as “the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported” (p. 4). Disenfranchised grief occurs when individuals experience a loss but are unable to express their feelings since the loss is not recognized or the grieving behaviours and emotions are not socially acceptable. According to that description, migratory grief can be disenfranchised in different ways (Doka, 2002). First, the relationship between an immigrant and his/her home country is often unrecognized and at times misunderstood. Secondly, the expectation that immigrants, especially voluntary immigrants, should feel good about having successfully migrated and not feel sad about the losses, and should eagerly and happily adjust to their new host country, prohibits societal recognition of grief expressions (Berry, 1987; Gitterman & Knight, 2018). Third, many migrants, especially if undocumented, are invisible and unrecognized grievers. Finally, migratory grief is often disenfranchised when

immigrants' grief expressions are not recognized due to the different ways in which the immigrant mourns.

Doka's (2002) concept of disenfranchisement focuses on the role of society in determining whether a griever's loss is acknowledged, and society's role in supporting the griever through a process of mourning. Kauffman (2002) expands this notion to include self-disenfranchisement, which is defined as the situation "when one disallows the recognition of grief without any actual outside input" (p. 61). Therefore, migratory grief can be disenfranchised by societal ethos as well as self-disenfranchisement, and either one can support the other to reinforce the disenfranchisement.

2.3 The role of Chinese culture in the grieving process

It is recognized that sociocultural concepts shape and inform the behavioural patterns of a group of people. Similarly, the experience and expression of grief are shaped by the social context, in which the understanding of what has been lost, grieving rituals and cultural construction of a griever's ongoing relationship with the lost can differ (Rosenblatt, 2001; Walter & McCoyd, 2016).

Chinese culture, being collective in nature due to the profound influence of Confucianism, is well-known for its emphasis on family relationships and support; therefore, the importance of family is a core social value among the Chinese population (Liu et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2007). Family provides the individual with his/her frame of reference, personal identity and emotional security. As McLaughlin and Braun (1998) have suggested, while working with terminally ill Chinese patients, practitioners must remember that decision making will be group-oriented as the family is paramount in Chinese culture. In addition, filial piety as the fundamental concept of care in Confucianism (Koh & Koh, 2008) demands respect and obligation to aging parents,

an emphasis on harmony, honouring the family name, and a devotion to family (Wong, 2006). Children are expected to be considerate and attentive to their parents' desires, and to sacrifice their own interests for the well-being of their elderly parents (Liu et al., 2018; Li, 1985; Lan, 2002 as cited in Wong, 2006). "Saving face" is another very important cultural value, and when family duties have not been adhered to, the shameful or improper behaviour affects not only the individual, but also the entire family lineage (King, 1991). Foner (2005) and Lee, Ryu, Xu and Halsall (2017) argue that, although family and kinship patterns might change in the process of immigration, cultural meanings and social practices that immigrants bring with them from their home countries contribute to the construction of a new family pattern.

An in-depth study which interviewed 40 Chinese immigrants in the United States concluded that family support played an important role in their immigrant life (Xie, Xia, & Zhou, 2004). Qin and Xia (2015) point out that Chinese families can be closer and tighter after losing someone they love and that mutual support is an important coping strategy in the grieving process. A study among Chinese-American elders also revealed that a supportive family environment is essential to minimize the negative effects of acculturation-related stress on the emotional well-being of Chinese-American elders (Sun, Gao, Jiang, & Coon, 2014). Therefore, the value of filial piety in Chinese families is of great importance in assisting elderly family members when they deal with migratory grief.

On the other hand, the emphasis on harmony and devotion to family in filial piety can contribute to risk factors in the grieving process. Research indicates that, in collectivist cultures, people tend to focus on the needs of others, rather than on themselves, with such behaviours exacerbated in times of grief and loss (Chow, 2010). This emphasis

on others was evident in a study which focused on Chinese widows in Canada, in which the main concerns of the respondents were the burdens, responsibilities and busy life of their relatives, especially their children. Many widows chose to hide their own practical and emotional needs in order to reduce any potential burden on their families (Martin-Matthews, Tong, Rosenthal, & McDonald, 2013). In this study, the experience of migratory grief among elderly Chinese immigrants remained unrecognized by their families and, therefore, those elders were less likely to receive support from their family members.

The elderly who migrate into a new country for family reunification are more likely to experience disenfranchised grief. Many countries, including Australia, have adopted a healthy immigrant program, which means health screening is required by the host country, and only those who meet the health requirements before immigration will be selected for entry (Kennedy, Kidd, McDonald, & Biddle, 2015). This contributes to the healthy immigrant hypothesis that immigrants are able to adapt well to their new cultural and social environment (Alati, Najman, Shuttlewood, Williams, & Bor, 2003). This hypothesis could lead, however, to a failure to recognize vulnerability among elderly immigrants who come to Australia under the Family Reunion Program. An elderly person's loss may thus go unrecognized and further contribute to their disenfranchised grief.

Moreover, the conflicts between migratory grief and the happiness of a family reunion, when elderly immigrant parents reunite with their children in particular, can further contribute to ambiguous loss. Thomas (2003) argues that, although reuniting elderly parents with their adult children in the host country seems to be an attractive proposition, the outcomes are diverse. The sense of loss felt by elderly parents might

be suppressed by them and conflicting feelings of grief and happiness can lead to feelings of ambiguity around their migratory loss. The same finding was identified by Chan and Seet (2013), who noted that Chinese elderly parents as dependents are expected to be happy because they are provided with a blissful retirement with the family instead of being left behind in China.

2.3.1 The role of adult relatives' understandings in their elders' grieving process

Support within families is important for people who are grieving their losses (Sun et al., 2014; Xie et al., 2004). Worden (2010) further notes that satisfaction with the support is more important than mere availability of social support. This means that adult relatives' understandings of the losses and grief experiences of their elderly immigrant family members contributes to satisfaction with the support, while the lack of understanding or misunderstanding can lead to ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief experienced by their elders, as discussed earlier.

An immigrant's entry into a new country is always a challenging and stressful event. The Chinese family, with its unique cultural characteristics, plays a critical role in the experience of elderly immigrant family members. This study therefore focuses on the adult relatives of elderly Chinese immigrants and their understandings of the migratory loss experiences of their immigrant elders in order to help identify the meaning of migratory loss among the Chinese immigrant community. Ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief experienced by their immigrant elders will be a line of inquiry in the study as well as the strategies relatives use to support their elders. The findings can begin to provide human service practitioners with evidence-based ideas about ways to support Chinese immigrant elders in a culturally sensitive manner.

3 Research design

3.1 Methodology

The present study attempts to focus on adult relatives' understanding of the migratory loss experienced by their immigrant elders in order to help identify the various meanings associated with migratory loss among the Chinese immigrant community. The major epistemological stance inherent in this study is that social reality is not singular or objective, but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts, and is therefore best studied within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, this research utilizes a qualitative approach as it seeks to understand human experience from the perspective of those who experience it.

Within the qualitative research paradigm, research seeks to identify the unique truths grounded in firsthand experiences, in order to extend and enhance conceptualization and to sensitize practitioners to their occurrence (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). It assumes that the best way to understand people's subjective experience is to ask them about it, and then listen carefully to them (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

As the purpose of this research is to understand the subjective world of elderly Chinese immigrants, as seen from the perspective of their adult family members, the author has chosen to use a methodological approach known as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to Patton, phenomenology asks, "How do people make sense of the world?" (1990, p. 88). On the other hand, IPA goes beyond this to ask, "How do people make sense of this experience?" (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, its object is to understand lived experience and to explore the meanings participants attach to particular experiences (Smith & Osborn,

2003). In using IPA, the researcher both highlights the experience of a certain phenomenon from the perspective of the participant and then interprets the meaning of that experience as understood by the participant. By listening to these adult family members, the intention is both to capture their experience as they live with these elderly immigrants and to make sense of it, and so to come to an appreciation of their lived reality.

3.2 Data collection procedure

This research utilized semi-structured interviews, as suggested by Alston and Bowles (2012) who argue that semi-structured interviews can be the most appropriate instruments for exploratory research. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) report, semi-structured interviews provide a way to get specific information where the interviewer guides the discussion by asking specific questions. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) recommend asking approximately six general questions, because asking too many questions tends to exhaust people while too few does not allow them to give enough detail. In addition, the goal of the interview design is to ensure that the answers are thoughtful and give evidence of full consideration of a particular topic, and to obtain answers that convey a range of feelings, as well as realistic descriptions of a phenomenon.

It is also important to build in routines of self-evaluation while carrying out interviews, especially for this researcher, who is a Research Higher Degree student with limited interviewing experience. This process is important not only to identify what is not working but to remember and recognize what is working well. The researcher conducted a pilot for this study with one practice interview with a friend, whose mother-in-law from China was living with her family in Adelaide, to test the questions. While

doing this practice interview, it became apparent that some questions needed to be adjusted and more details provided so that the participants could better understand the questions. For example, while asking the question “Do you think moving to a new country affects their well-being?” the researcher was asked what was meant by “well-being”. The researcher explained that the question aimed to find out if moving to a new country made her mother-in-law happier or not. This practice enabled the researcher to review those questions and think of alternative ways to ask the questions so that participants could better understand them. Interview questions pertinent to the topic of this thesis included:

1. Have you noticed your elderly family member(s) missing China/feeling stress, etc.?
2. If they miss China and feel stress ..., what are the reasons for them choosing to stay in Australia?
3. Do you think moving to a new country affects their well-being? To what extent?
4. Have you ever tried to give some support to help elders cope with those feelings (missing their home country, feeling sad ...)? What are the strategies?
5. Are there any other resources you know about which are available for elders to cope with losses? What are they?
6. What do you think is the most important support for Chinese immigrant elders living in Australia?

Additional prompts and follow-up questions were added for later interviews after the researcher noticed that certain concepts relating to the topic were gaining prominence. An example of an added question born out of one of the interviews is: “What did your parents usually do in their free time when they were in China, and then after moving

to Adelaide?” Immediately following each interview, detailed field notes with observations and reflections were written.

3.3 Setting

The interviews for this research were conducted in Adelaide. They were all face-to-face interviews at a place convenient to both participant and researcher and where privacy could be maintained. Most of the interviews took place in the meeting room of Chinese Welfare Services, while two of the interviews were conducted in participants' offices.

3.4 Participants

This research utilized a purposive sampling technique which advocates the selection of a specific cohort with lived experience of the issue to be addressed (Alston & Bowles, 2012). Specifically, this research aimed to investigate adult relatives' understandings of the migratory loss experiences of their immigrant elders, and to identify the strategies that adult relatives have used to support their immigrant elders. As this study was conducted in an Australian context, it used the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) definition of Chinese immigrant elders, namely those who are now over 65 years, regardless of whether they migrated young and grew older in Australia or whether they came to Australia under the Family Reunification Program when they were already over 65 years. A sample of adult relatives of elderly Chinese immigrants was selected, who could provide insights around the issue of migration of their elderly Chinese relatives. Adult relatives include adult children, adult family members in their extended family or close friends of the family. In order to gain access to respondents, the researcher sought permission from two Chinese communities before the research began. Adopting a conservative estimation of the sample size, using information

sourced from the Chinese Welfare Service and the Adelaide Chinese Christian Community, there are at least 200 adult relatives in Adelaide.

The participants in this research were adult relatives of elderly Chinese immigrants, which includes children, grandchildren, extended family members, and close friends. The participants were all from China and currently living in Adelaide with legal status. The researcher communicated the aims of the project to the Chinese Welfare Organization, through which links with elders' adult relatives were established. Potential participants were approached using advertisements (flyers) which were posted at the Chinese Welfare Service (see Appendices 1). By doing so, participants were given a basic idea of the purpose of the study and what their participation would entail, and the contact details of the researcher were provided on the flyers. Participants indicated their willingness to be involved in the project through contacting the researcher via email or phone. Then a letter of introduction, information sheet and consent form were sent by email or by post. Consent was sought in writing (see Appendices 2, 3 and 4). Participants brought their signed consent form with them to the interview or they were asked to sign it before the interview began.

After screening participants for appropriateness to enter the study and obtaining informed consent, the researcher conducted a 30- to 60-minute, face-to-face, semi-structured interview. Although English is the second language of both the researcher and participants, the language used in this study was English in all interviews as one of the requirements for recruitment was proficiency in English. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants.

Six participants were interviewed in this study. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants by age, relationship with their elderly relatives, the age of their immigrant

elders and the time their elderly relatives migrated to Australia. The relationships between participants and their elders were varied. Two of them talked about their parents, one talked about his grandmother, one talked about her aunt, one talked about his mother-in-law, and one talked about her very close friend who was living with her and whom she called “aunty”. Participants’ ages were from the 20s to 50s, and their elderly relatives were from the 60s to 80s.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant’s Pseudonym	Age	Relationship to Elderly Relatives				
			Elderly Relative’s Age	Elderly Relative’s Age	The Year Elderly Relatives Moved to Australia	
Kevin King	50s	Father	85	Mother	81	1994
Lin Yao	30s	Father	77	Mother	76	2014
John Zheng	40s	Mother-in-law	72			2015
Edward Shan	20s	Grandmother	77			1993
Chris Wang	20s	Non-biological aunt	65			2012
Lea Wu	20s	Aunt	67			2015

3.5 Ethical considerations

In order to minimize any ethical risks, this project sought and received ethical clearance from the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC). Participants were treated according to the ethical principles for research involving human subjects. The Interviewees were given a letter of introduction and an information sheet before entering the study, so they were fully informed about the purpose and context of the research, about confidentiality, about

anonymity, and about the ways in which the information that they provided would be used. Consent forms were sent by email or a hard copy was sent by post. Consent was obtained in writing. Participants either brought their signed consent form with them to the interview or they were asked to sign it before the interview began. Participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time during the study, or that they could also omit answering any of the questions. Finally, they were informed that there was a counselling service available if they found themselves in distress due to their participation in the project.

All personal details, transcripts and digital recordings of interviews were stored securely and treated as confidential. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to hide their identity and data collected was carefully checked for accuracy before analysis.

3.6 Data analysis procedures

As mentioned in the methodology section, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data once it had been collected. By this means, the overarching question asked of participants was how they make sense of the experience of their elderly relatives in their adjustment to life in a foreign country. The data was analysed using a process of thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data, was used to explore the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following transcription, the responses to the open-ended questions were read several times to identify potential conceptions and ideas. Then themes and sub-themes were developed and compared.

Data was analysed at Flinders University. The thematic analysis process followed six steps, as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interview content, and then read and re-read the transcripts and listened to the audio recordings to check for accuracy. Potential conceptions and ideas were noted. This step enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content of the interviews and to be familiar with all aspects of the data. Once familiar with the data, the researcher began to identify segments of text that contributed to potential codes, and wrote memos about emerging categories and common themes. Data relevant to each code was collated. The next step was the interpretive analysis of the collated codes. Relevant data extracts were sorted according to overarching themes. At this stage, the researcher identified the repeated ideas in each separate transcript and combined the repeated ideas from all transcripts into a list for the entire research sample. The repeated ideas were then organized into themes. For example, ideas like “misses the food”, and “misses her brother and friends in China” were sorted as experience related to migration; while “I have the responsibility to look after them when they are getting old”, and “they prefer to stay with me so they moved here” were sorted as the reason for migration. Fourth, the researcher reviewed the themes that had been identified in order to check the themes in relation to the coded extracts and overall data set. The fifth step was to refine and define the themes and potential sub-themes within the data. Ongoing analysis and repetitive review were done to further enhance the identified themes. Finally, the researcher transformed the analysis into writing by using extract examples that related to the themes, research questions and literature. Due to the small sample size in this research, all steps were done manually.

The analytic process also involved revisiting the literature from related fields after new concepts that required interpretation were identified in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Based on the participants' descriptions, the researcher noted emerging concepts that were worthy of discussion in this study. Subsequently a review of the literature on grief theories, ambiguous loss, disenfranchised grief and Chinese culture was undertaken again. With a more solid understanding of these concepts, the researcher started to gain a new perspective on the participants' responses and language and then updated the literature section. This process was helpful in transforming meanings from implicit to explicit and in facilitating a more accurate interpretation of the data. The researcher then re-read the interview transcripts to make sure that all significant concepts and ideas had been noted. In order to ensure conformability, the researcher compared copies of transcripts, observational field notes, and data analysis documents from time to time while new literature was being reviewed. In the next section, some interesting and common points that were observed during interviews are presented, and a personal reflection on these interesting points is discussed as well.

4 Results

4.1 Observations

During the interviews, some common phenomena emerged which provided another perspective on understanding the experiences of elderly Chinese immigrants from the viewpoint of their adult relatives.

The first thing that the researcher observed was that all of the participants were open to answering the questions, but when they were asked "Do you think moving to a new country has affected your family member's well-being and if so to what extent?" almost

all of them thought about this question a long time before responding to it. At the first two interviews, it was thought that the reason might be because the participants did not understand this question due to the word “well-being”. The question was then asked in different ways, for example, “Do you think living here, your parents feel happier or not and why?” or “Do you think your mother-in-law’s life has changed a lot or not and why?” However, the researcher found that the participants still needed more time to think about this question than the other questions. While reflecting on this point, it seemed that possibly they had never thought about this question before, or they had never been asked about this issue before. This question required them to recall a past life and think about the current life of their elder relatives. Another possible reason was that, while recalling their elder relatives’ experiences, participants might also have struggled about whether to share their opinions, especially if they thought their elder relative had experienced something unpleasant. This possible reason was also reflected in the next interesting finding observed during interviews.

After thinking about how to answer this question, four of the six participants responded to the question by starting with positive experiences, and emphasizing the positive aspects of their elder relatives’ living in the host county, such as there being a better welfare system and a great environment. That could certainly have been the reality of their immigrant elders’ experiences. But, when the researcher asked follow-up questions like “Could you give me some examples?” only a few examples were given. It seemed that a better welfare system and a great environment were what the relatives thought the elder immigrants should enjoy, rather than something they have noticed in their elders’ daily life. Additionally, while answering the first two questions, the participants provided more details and examples about how their elders missed something or someone in China, as well as the social isolation, language barriers and

transport issues that their elders experience in the host country. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the participants answered some questions selectively. It is worth considering whether this internal information selection mechanism also influenced the participants' understandings of their elder relatives' experiences.

The third point that might be meaningful is that all the elderly relatives in the study had moved to Australia under the Family Reunion Program. In other words, participants in this study were discussing their relatives who had immigrated to Australia in later life to live with them rather than those elders who had been former migrants and aged while living in Australia. As this study welcomed all adult relatives of elder Chinese immigrants no matter when or how they moved to Australia, it was interesting to note that all elder relatives of the participants in this study came under the Family Reunion Program.

Another interesting observation was made before the interview began while the researcher was screening one potential participant for her appropriateness to enter the study. The participant, "Lea", expressed her willingness to participate for an interesting reason. Her aunt, who was the elder immigrant, asked Lea to participate in the study. As Lea explained: "My aunty wants me to come to talk to someone about her life in Australia. Actually, she wants her daughter to come also, who is my cousin. But she is too busy so my aunty asked me to come." Again, the reasons why the elder asked her relative to share her experience caught the researcher's attention.

4.2 Findings

The participants shared their understandings of their elder Chinese immigrants' experiences related to migration. Migratory loss and grief experienced by their elder immigrant relatives were observed by these study participants at different times. They

also shared the strategies they used to support their elders as well as details about specific supports they provided to their elder immigrants. Some clear culturally specific trends in how adult relatives understand their elders' experiences emerged. Their commitment to support and how they supported their elders appeared to be further influenced by cultural notions of obligation.

4.2.1 Loss experienced by immigrant elders as seen from the perspective of their adult relatives

Loss of food

One of the main types of loss was around familiar food. All participants mentioned that the main food in their family is still Chinese traditional food, and most of their elders could not get used to Western food. As Chris mentioned, when her friend missed the traditional food "she would find something similar, and cook it". Chris added: "although they sometimes cook pasta, they still cook it in Chinese way".

Loss of relationships

Loss of relationships was highlighted by each participant as well. Almost every participant stated that their elders missed someone, either their family members such as siblings or parents, or their old friends in their home country. As Lea remarked about her aunt:

She missed her friends so much, those who used to meet with her almost every day in China. Because they all liked dancing, they almost met every day to go square dancing. Now she has nothing to do, she is very lonely.

When being asked what her parents usually did when they were in China, Lin also said: “My father used to play chess with his friends or the neighbour, it was his main hobby. Now he only can talk to me or my mum.” Additionally, the loss of the ability to build relationships in the new environment has resulted in the elders’ further missing previous relationships. All participants mentioned that their immigrant elders were unable to build relationships with their neighbours due to the language barrier. Their elders also found it difficult to maintain contact with other Chinese people here due to transport issues because they could not drive.

Loss of social status

Although the participants did not explicitly identify a loss of social status that was experienced by their immigrant elders, it was implied several times during the interviews. When talking about what her friend did when she was in China, Chris described: “They owned a very big restaurant, it even had a band and singer at dinner time. But they sold it before they came here, now they did not do anything.” Edward also mentioned “My grandma was from a high-class family in China.” Even though the participants did not give more details regarding the change of social status that their elders experienced, it was easy to understand that the social status of those elders had changed considerably.

Loss of self-identity

Similar to the loss of social status, the loss of self-identity was not directly mentioned by the participants. Again however, some comments implied that their immigrant elders had experienced a loss of self-identity. For example, Lea said that her aunt sometimes felt she had become a ‘nobody’:

She felt she was still young when she was in China because she could do anything that young people do; but now she always says she can't do anything, just like a very old mother who needs to be looked after.

Lin mentioned that "after showing them again and again where a place is and how they can get there", her parents feel they "are so useless, they could not remember it ... they are very frustrated about that".

Loss of culture

The participants in this research observed their elder relatives' loss of culture but did not seem to place great importance on it. Only one participant talked about the loss of culture which had been experienced by her immigrant elder relative. Lea mentioned in her conversation that her aunt used to go to square dances with friends, which was a very popular activity among middle-aged and elderly Chinese women, but there are no square dance activities here. Her aunt also had complained about the atmosphere when celebrating the Spring Festival in Australia: "It is not the same as the festival in China where we had many things to do such as ancestral worship, visits to extended family and friends. Here we just have the dinner on the Chinese New Year Eve."

4.2.2 Immigrant elders' reactions to loss as seen from the perspective of their adult relatives

Elders should have accepted the loss and been able to seek recovery

Although all participants agreed that their elder immigrant relatives experienced many difficulties such as language barriers and social isolation in the host country, some of the participants believed that their elderly relatives should have accepted the loss and been able to recover. Because their relative was involved in the decision-making

process, the participants thought their elders should have understood and prepared for life in the host country.

When John was asked why his mother-in-law came to join his family four years ago, he said: “Before we decided to move to a new country, she had already decided to join us when she got old. Actually, she was quite supportive of the idea [of migration].” Therefore, in John’s view, his mother-in-law had been ready for the new life a long time ago, and it was her choice to leave her old life behind.

Kevin made a similar comment on his parents’ immigration: “They moved to Hong Kong from their hometown in Mainland China when they were young, so they were fine to move to a new country as well.” In those participants’ views, since their elder relatives had made the decision to migrate to a new country they should have accepted the loss, and recovered by maintaining contact with their family and friends in their home country.

Elder immigrants might deny the loss and hide their feelings

While some participants had a positive attitude to their elders’ reactions to migratory loss, two participants expressed other views. Lin indicated her concern about her parents during the interview: “I had actually asked them before, if they were happy here.” She asked this because she found that her parents sometimes felt frustrated when they encountered difficulties in the host country. She had tried to communicate with her parents and reported that they just said they were fine. It worried her. Edward also mentioned that he asked his grandmother if she would like to seek more information and reported that she “never talked about it as if nothing had changed, but things are changed. She does not like to talk about it.” Chris also shared the experience of her friend, saying: “she always tells me that she likes the lifestyle in a

developed country ... she can talk to her mum on the phone when she misses her”, although sometimes “she was crying in the kitchen as she missed her mum”. In some participants’ view, even though they have noticed their elders’ reactions to loss, their elders denied the loss, and did not want to share their sad feelings with their relatives.

Hardship in the host country triggers grief and yearning

Some participants also addressed the grief and yearning that arose when their immigrant elder relatives had to deal with hardships in the host country. Lea described her aunt’s experience:

She was very disappointed when she found nothing she liked. She wanted to find some groups like a square-dancing group, but she could not find it. I suggested that she join a local dancing club, but she could not speak English.

After that, Lea said: “My aunty kept complaining that it is so boring here.” Lin also mentioned that her parents felt frustrated when they found that they could not become familiar with the environment quickly enough. John described another example which might have triggered the grief and yearning that his mother-in-law experienced: “Sometimes my wife and her mother had some conflicts, mainly because of different views around children’s education, and my mother-in-law would say ‘I want to go back [to China].’” As seen in this case, conflicts between immigrant elders and their relatives can create hardship in the host country and it is something they have to deal with due to living together. This hardship might trigger elders’ grief and yearning.

The ongoing weighing of losses and gains

Although the various phrases, tasks and stages in different grief models were evident in discussions with participants, there was an ongoing weighing up of losses and gains

which was observed during interviews. While talking about the losses and grief that their elder immigrant relatives might have experienced, all participants discussed what their elder relatives had gained from migration. However, some of the participants also kept weighing up the losses and gains. When the participants were asked the question: “Do you think moving to a new country affected your elder immigrant’s well-being?” almost every participant started with the positive aspects that their elders had gained from the move such as a better environment and welfare system and being able to live with their children. But they also reported many losses that their elder relatives experienced as the result of migration. According to the participants’ responses, it might be true that, although their elder immigrant relatives experienced losses, they also appreciate the gains from moving to the host country. The weighing up of losses and gains was a common theme experienced by their elders according to the participants. As Kevin stated: “They missed many things, but they have many relatives here, so they feel that is okay.”

Lin also mentioned losses and gains:

We have discussed this before, whether they feel happy here. They told me that they feel happy as long as they can stay with me. But I know it does not mean that they wanted to give up their things in China.

Chris’s aunt was in a similar situation. As Chris said: “She loves the lifestyle in this developed country ... but she sometimes cries as she misses her mum.” It is difficult to decide if the ongoing weighing up of losses and gains is one way that those immigrant elders coped with migratory grief; however, it seems that it is a common phenomenon among them, and that their adult relatives are more likely to emphasize the gains despite the recognition of their losses.

Continuing bonds

Although no participants directly mentioned the concept of continuing bonds (Klass et al., 2014), it was one main theme found in the interviews in terms of reactions to migratory loss. As mentioned earlier, migratory grief is partial and recurrent because the object of grief, that is, the country of origin, does not disappear completely, and the ties to the home country are always present. This might be the reason why continuing bonds were clearly observed. Immigrant elders engaged in various forms of continuing bonds with their home country, as reported by the participants, including telecommunications, travel and other actions to maintain the bond with China. All participants mentioned that technology was used in their elder immigrant relatives' daily life to help them stay connected with family and friends and with life in China in general. Particularly, access to the Internet enabled elder immigrants to watch Chinese TV programs, and to visit Chinese websites. As Edward described: "We brought the TV for my grandmother, so she is able to watch some Chinese drama ... my father bought her a smart phone several years ago, so she can have face-to-face communication with her family members in China." All participants reported similar ways in which their elders keep in touch with friends and family in China.

Travel was another way their elders maintain their bonds with China. John mentioned that his mother-in-law goes back to China at least once every two or three years, and Lea also said that her aunt went back "almost twice a year to visit her friends and other family members". Chris's aunt also went back to China once a year, and stayed there for at least one month to look after her mother. Kevin's parents and Edward's grandmother had not gone back to China in the last ten years, but they used to go back quite often.

Although the participants' immigrant elders spent most of their time in Australia, they engaged in many other activities to help maintain their bonds with China. The most common action was to cook traditional food. As Chris described: "When she missed the traditional food, she would look for the similar food and cook it in Chinese way." Lin also mentioned cooking: "My parents would cook Chinese food at home, as my father could not get used to Western food." In addition to having traditional food, keeping traditional customs and retaining social habits were other actions to maintain bonds. As Kevin mentioned, "they liked to celebrate all the Chinese festivals and go to yum cha every weekend as they used to do in Hong Kong".

Personal growth

Personal growth was mentioned during interviews when the participants were discussing the effects of migration on their elder immigrant relatives' lives. Saadat Mehr (2013) and Masten (2016) argue that, although immigrant elders are generally more vulnerable than non-immigrant elders, they also bring their own resources and can achieve growth in the host country. Kevin mentioned his parents' previous experience:

My father used to work in Africa, so he had been used to a life of moving to somewhere new ... the same as mum, they moved to Hong Kong from Mainland China when they were young. It is their life.

From Kevin's perspective, his parents' previous experience helped them get used to their new life in this host country. Chris and John mentioned the language program that their elder immigrant relatives attended, which could be regarded as one example of how immigrant elders actively sought resources to overcome barriers and engage in life in the host country. Lin also described her parents' current life: "They are trying

to get familiar with the environment, so they can get out without me. Now they can take a walk around and sometimes go to hiking in a national park nearby my house.”

4.2.3 Ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief experienced by Chinese immigrant elders

Ambiguous loss (Boss, 1991, 2009)

According to the participants’ responses during the interviews, they observed both physical and psychological ambiguous loss experiences of their immigrant elders (Boss, 2016; Connidis, 2015; Solheim & Ballard, 2016). These included ambiguity in their relative’s new roles, the times they returned to China, the physical absence of home and psychological re-connection, and the attempt to adjust to a new culture while preserving their cultural identity from their home country. Some participants reported that their immigrant elders who had their own parents in China worried that because of their absence they would be unable to fulfil their moral responsibilities to care for their aging parents should they become ill or even die. Lin noted:

My parents live with me now, but I know they also worry about my two grandfathers, my mum’s dad, and father’s dad, as they are both over 90. Just as they believe that I should look after them when they are old, they also believe that they should look after their own fathers, but now they cannot.

A similar sentiment was experienced by Chris’s aunt: “she loves the life here, but she misses her mum a lot. She believes that she should spend more time to look after her mum.”

The participants observed their elder immigrants’ sense of uncertainty and worry about their family members, especially parents and siblings in China. The elders mainly

worried about the health situation of their parents and siblings, and also about whether they received good care from other family members. As Lin shared: “although my parents have their siblings looking after my grandfather, my mum always worries about that and whether they will look after my grandpa carefully, or if my grandpa is well.”

Chris described her aunt:

one day I saw she was crying in the kitchen ... after several days, she told me that because her mum was sick, and she doesn't know if she is fine or not ... although other family members in China told her that her mum was okay.

Most elder immigrants, as reported by the participants, were able to talk with and see their family members and friends in their home country via communication tools; however, they sometimes still felt upset because of their absence, and because they were unable to participate in some important family events, and be supportive on those occasions. As Lea said: “My aunty was very sad because she was unable to attend her niece's wedding although she actually can see many photos and videos of the wedding posted on WeChat [a social media app]”. Chris also mentioned: “My aunty visits China every year and stays there at least one month to look after her mother, but she still feels sad because most of the time she only can talk to her mum via a phone.”

The participants noticed that their immigrant elders visited China less frequently as they became older, or they did not visit China anymore. The participants believed that the main reason was because their elders were getting old, and they were physically unable to travel on long journeys.

Kevin explained why his parents had not visited China in the last ten years: “they also worry about their health. If they get sick in China, who will look after them, and they

don't have medical insurance there." Therefore, although Kevin believes that his parents would love to visit China once every two or three years as they used to do, they are no longer able to do that due to health considerations.

Although the immigrant elders are trying to engage with the new environment; at the same time, they would also like to maintain their cultural identity from their home country, including the language used at home, traditional food as their daily meal, and celebrating Chinese festivals. This might contribute to their ambiguous loss. Chris noted: "She likes the lifestyle here ... but she still behaves in a Chinese way." In terms of food, she added: "She sometimes cooks pasta, but cooks it in a Chinese way." Kevin also mentioned that "we celebrate Western festivals, such as Christmas ... we also celebrate Chinese festivals."

Disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989, 2002)

As mentioned before, all participants recognized that their elder immigrant relatives experienced some losses and they noticed some of their reactions to the losses. The participants understood that the relationships between their elders and other family members and friends had undergone some changes due to migration. However, the meaning of the changes for the immigrant elders could easily be misunderstood by the participants because most participants believed that, although their immigrant elders were physically absent from China, they were still able to maintain their relationships with family and friends there by telecommunications and travel. As Lea mentioned: "I don't know why she is so sad about not being able to go back. She can talk to them via WeChat, it is the same." John also noted: "She spends a lot of time on iPad to talk to her friend, so I think she is fine."

Meanwhile, some participants also believed that, considering the gains resulting from the move, the sacrifice was worthwhile; therefore, they did not consider the lost relationships between their immigrant elders and family and friends in China were important. Edward believed that: “The most important thing for my grandmother is to look after my aunty [her daughter]. That is why she chose not to go back.” John also shared his view: “They agree that living in Australia would be better for the kids [their grandchildren], and my wife is their only child, so they were prepared for that, the move.” Lin also talked about her parents: “For them, staying with me is the most important thing in their lives, so they have to give up something.”

Although no participants clearly stated that their immigrant elders should feel happy and be eager to adjust to life in Australia, they all believed that it was their immigrant elders’ own choice to migrate to Australia, and emphasized the positive aspects of migration as well as the efforts they themselves had made to bring their elders to this country. Those responses imply that the participants expected their immigrant elders to feel happy and to adjust eagerly to the new host country of Australia.

Chris mentioned: “I think she is very happy to live here ... they are proud of their son because he finished his degree here and then brought them here.” Lea also said: “she should be able to get used to the life here; otherwise, she could have chosen not to come”.

Some participants did not recognize that their elders’ reactions could in fact be reactions to mourning their losses. When asked what might be the most important support for his mother-in-law, John responded: “She would like to have more community programs for children so she can meet with other Chinese grandparents, and do something by herself.” Besides being a way for this elder to have more social

opportunities, it also could be a reflection of the fact that the elder was mourning the loss of her personal space as well as the loss of her social life. As Chris noted: “She told me earlier that she went to supermarket because she was too lonely to stay at home. Before that, I didn’t know why she always went to supermarket.”

While discussing the reasons for their immigrant elders staying in Australia, not surprisingly, all participants noted that being able to stay with their child was the main reason. They also mentioned other reasons such as a better living environment, the welfare system, and better educational opportunities for their grandchildren. Some of the participants also pointed out that staying with children when parents grew older was a part of Chinese culture.

Lin said:

Actually I asked them before about this question. They told me that because I am here ... you know it is part of our culture that when parents are getting old they live with their children so that their children can take care of them.

Kevin also commented:

My parents got their visa with my sister’s sponsor ... but they lived in Hong Kong until I finished my degree there. And when I got my visa as a skilled immigrant, then they came here to Australia with me. Since then, they have lived with me.

4.2.4 The effects of living in a new country

In addition to the losses experienced by their immigrant elders, the participants also shared their thoughts about other effects on their relatives of living in the host country

of Australia. The language barrier was highlighted by all participants as the main obstacle for their immigrant elders to engaging in a social life in Australia. Edward described his grandmother's life here: "She likes being social, but language is a big problem." Lin also shared similar comments on her parents' daily life: "They cannot speak English, so they even cannot talk to our neighbours."

Social isolation as a result of the language barrier was mentioned by all participants as well. When being asked what their immigrant elders usually do in their daily life, almost all participants described similar things such as doing housework, gardening, going shopping, helping to look after grandchildren, and watching some Chinese drama or other TV programs. After hearing participants' descriptions of their immigrant elders' daily life, it is not hard to understand why social isolation worried the participants. Their immigrant elders' daily life is almost limited to contact within the family. Although some of them go shopping sometimes, the reason is that "They don't need to speak English when they go shopping" or "She has nothing to do at home, so she went to the supermarket." Although Edward believed that "My grandmother has some Chinese friends", he thought it did not mean a great deal because "they are not close". John provided another reason for his mother-in-law not participating in community activities: "She had some surgery earlier and so she couldn't walk for very long." John felt that a physical problem was the reason why his mother-in-law was isolated from the community. Some participants also felt that their elders were staying at home because they could not drive. For example, Edward believed that for his grandmother, "transport would be the main concern if she wanted to participate in some activities".

It was interesting that, compared to the negative effects on their elders of living in a new country, the participants seemed to be more willing to share the positive aspects of their elders' life in Australia. Being able to stay with their children was considered the most important positive aspect and was mentioned by the participants again and again. As this was the main reason for staying in Australia, all participants believed that it was beneficial for their immigrant elders to live with their children so they could be looked after when they get old. Some of them repeated the same points several times as they answered the question why their elders chose to stay in Australia. All participants believed that they had the responsibility to take care of their elders, and their elders were willing to be looked after by them. As John stated, his wife was the only child in her family so before they migrated to Australia they had already decided to also bring his parents-in-law. From his perspective, living with her family was beneficial to his mother-in-law as she could receive care from her only daughter's family. Lin shared the same idea: "It definitely is good for them. I can look after them here. If they need any help or support, I am here ... I should look after them when they get old."

A better living environment was mentioned by all participants as being important. Chris described her aunt: "She loves the environment here, the fresh air and food security." Lin also highlighted that her parents "really enjoy the gardening, they can grow some vegetables themselves". Although Edward's grandmother thought "Adelaide is too small" and "a bit boring", she still believed that compared to China "the environment is much better" as "China is still underdeveloped in her mind".

A good welfare system, including excellent aged care and medical care, was another positive aspect that the participants emphasized as contributing to their elders' life. As

Chris mentioned: “they don’t have any financial stress because the aged pension is enough for them”. Lin described the medical service as very good, stating: “The government can even provide an interpreter when they go to see a doctor.”

4.2.5 Strategies used by the participants to support their elder immigrant relatives

The responses to the question about how the participants support their family member were varied. Some participants responded immediately and shared their strategies, listing the supports they have provided to their immigrant elders; while other participants thought about this question for quite a while before answering it. One participant asked for clarification of the question and then, after the explanation, just gave an irrelevant answer. However, some participants did mention strategies they used to support their immigrant elder. The strategies they used can be categorized into four types: social, cultural and emotional strategies.

Social strategies

Some participants noted that companionship was very important for their immigrant elders and that the language barrier and transport were the two main reasons why it was difficult to achieve. They believed that they should spend as much time as possible with their elders. As Lin explained: “they don’t know how to get to the market because they don’t understand English, and they cannot drive. So I would like to do something together with them.” Chris also mentioned: “sometimes I will go with her as an interpreter”. Lea also believed that the way she could help was:

To spend more time with my aunty because she knows nothing about Adelaide, not even that there is a Sunday market nearby her house. So sometimes I would

just take her to somewhere to have brunch or go shopping. Just to show her some places that she might be interested in.

Some participants also mentioned searching for resources to open more social opportunities. Kevin pointed out that he “would look for some groups for them, so they can talk to other people with the same background regularly”. He also supported his mother to “do some voluntary work in a Chinese organization” as he believed that “she could make some friends, which is good”. Lin shared a similar experience: “I also looked for some activities that my parents could participate in where they could talk to other Chinese people and make some friends.”

Assisting immigrant elder relatives to engage in social activities included introducing these elders to other adult relatives and friends, created some opportunities for them to make friends. Lea described this strategy:

Sometimes I take my aunty to some activities with my friends to have lunch or a barbeque. I know she likes to talk to people. Sometimes she also invites my friends to her place. I think it is good, at least she has someone to talk to when she is alone.

Chris’ aunt got support from Chris’s Chinese housemates, as Chris described: “She loves to talk to our housemates because she can talk to us in Chinese. She sometimes cooks food for us as well.”

Cultural strategies

Cultural support included eating traditional cuisine, and attending some cultural events. Edward noticed that his grandmother missed the traditional Chinese snacks, so he would buy some for her. Chris did the same thing, saying she would “buy some

for her, or tell her where she can get the food". Kevin provided a similar support but in a different way, not only focusing on food, but also on his parents' former habits. As he reported: "We have yum cha [traditional southern Chinese cuisine] every weekend as they did in Hong Kong." In addition to traditional food, some participants also believed that celebrating some Chinese festivals was necessary and important. Kevin mentioned that his family would celebrate all the Chinese festivals, providing more opportunities for all his relatives in Adelaide to get together.

Some participants also highlighted that they support their immigrant elders to visit their home country regularly. Lea noted: "It is very important for my aunty to visit China. She can visit her friends and other family members. You can see how happy she is when preparing for the visit." Chris also highlighted the importance to her friend of staying in China for at least one month every year as this was her only opportunity to look after her mother in China. Although Kevin explained that his parents had not been able to visit China in the last ten years due to health concerns, he still believed that "they would be very happy if they could visit China".

Emotional strategies

Although there were no participants who directly pointed out the emotional support they provided to their immigrant elders, some relevant examples were given which could be considered emotional support. The participants either openly discussed feelings and thoughts about living in Adelaide with their elders, or they did not mention any feelings about migration, thinking that this would help their elders to feel better. Lin was one who openly discussed matters with her parents, asking them: "Do you feel happy to live here?" She believed that it was important to understand her parents'

feelings in order to help her give them support when necessary. In contrast, Lea avoided discussing such feelings with her aunt. As she said:

Sometimes I don't mention anything happening in China, especially family events, because I know she will be very upset that she is not able to attend. I also try not to say boring things about Adelaide. She has complained about it a lot and I don't want to remind her about it.

Another indirect emotional support activity which was mentioned by two participants was to give elders some "tasks" to reduce the feelings of loneliness. John believed that it was good for his mother-in-law to help look after her grandchildren: "She can spend some time with my kids. It keeps her busy, and she enjoys it." Kevin used the same strategy by supporting his mother to do some voluntary work. Lin also shared her experience about how to encourage her parents: "To go hiking, as there is a national conservation park nearby my house. Otherwise, they had nothing to do. It is also good for their health."

Material strategies

Material support was mentioned by all participants, which was another support strategy. The material support described by the participants included financial support and technological products. Lin mentioned that, in order to support her parents to visit China regularly, she "Would like to give them some financial support" as she knew that "They want to go back but sometimes they feel it is kind of wast[ing] money. The ticket is not cheap for them." Technological products such as smart phones, iPads and TVs were also important support provided to immigrant elders. As mentioned many times before, the participants believed that those products enabled their immigrant elders to

keep in contact with family and friends in China, and be able to keep up to date with the news in China.

4.2.6 Adult relatives' views about the most important support for their immigrant elders living in Australia

At the end of the interview, the participants shared their thoughts about the most important support for their immigrant elders living in a host country. It was interesting that most participants focused more on community support while answering this question. Some of them mentioned that there were community services or group activities customized for older immigrants. Language, transport, location and cost of those services were the main concerns discussed by the participants. Lea shared her idea:

If there were some group activities for Chinese immigrant elders, I think they would love to go. It does not need to be very fancy activities, only a place they know when they can go and where they can meet with others from China. They might be able to make friends or even just share anything. It is much better than just staying at home alone.

Lin also said:

if there are some activities for people from the same background nearby my house, I think they would be very happy to attend. Transport is a problem for them to get somewhere, as they cannot drive and don't know how to take the bus there.

Lin also gave some suggestions about the location of services: "as you know, almost every suburb has a community centre or community services. If there were some

services available in each suburb for people like my parents, that would be good.” Edward shared the same concern about the need for transport for his grandmother to attend activities. He added: “I think cost is another problem, as she does not want to spend extra money. As I said, she doesn’t have financial stress, but she likes to save money.”

In addition to community services, access to information was another concern shared by the participants. Lin stated:

I know there are some services available because I did lots of research. I looked for the information online and in Chinese newspapers, so I know that. But if only we could get that information at the beginning, I mean when my parents arrived. Then we could clearly know what services are available. Getting the information is very important.

When speaking about community services, Edward said that he did not have any information about them, and said, “If there are some services, I think I would like to tell my grandmother and encourage her to go.”

5 Discussion and conclusion

The participants in the study expressed an understanding of their relatives’ loss and grief experiences which not only reflected their elders’ experience of immigration, but also revealed the potential for supportive strategies within Chinese families. The findings from this research align with the theoretical perspectives on migratory loss and grief. The findings also support the existence of a cultural norm that Chinese immigrant families would like to provide care for their elderly immigrant family members. Additionally, distinctive features of ambiguous loss and disenfranchised

grief that Chinese immigrant elders experienced are found in this research despite the happiness of reunion with immediate family.

5.1 Migratory loss and grief experienced by immigrant elders as understood by adult relatives

Migratory loss experienced by immigrant elders was noticed by the participants in this study. All participants shared their understandings of the loss experiences of their immigrant elders as a result of migration. The losses they observed included the loss of food, of relationships, of social status, of self-identity and of culture. Among these the loss of food and relationships were most clearly identified by all participants. These findings are consistent with previous studies on migratory loss which identify that the experience of immigration entails various forms of lifelong losses that include not only tangible material losses but also loss of the familiar (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Girgis, 2015). Different types of loss are mentioned by other studies, such as the loss of shared values, of native music and songs, and other loved elements (Henry et al., 2009; Marlin, 1994), but these were not reported by the participants in this study. This does not mean that their immigrant elders did not experience other kinds of losses, but rather that these losses might be imperceptible, or that the participants might not have observed their immigrant elders' losses of this kind. Warnes and Williams (2006) argue that those who move internationally in late life to live with close relatives have received much less attention in research. Studies on transnational families focus more on how immigrant families care for their elders in their mother countries. Elderly immigrants as important agents in immigrant families have been largely overlooked (Nesteruk, 2017; Wilding & Baldassar, 2009). The same phenomenon might also exist

within immigrant families because some adult relatives could easily overlook their immigrant elders' loss due to the fact that a family reunion had been achieved.

The participants described manifestations of grief that their elders experienced as the result of migration. Various phrases, tasks and stages from different grief models were reflected in their immigrant elders' reactions to migratory loss. Some participants believed that their immigrant elders had accepted the reality of their situation and started seeking recovery, while others thought that their elderly immigrant relatives still denied the reality and tried to hide their feelings. At the same time, some participants also realized that hardships in the host country of Australia triggered their immigrant elders' grief and yearning, while others noticed that the constant weighing up of losses and gains was an ongoing process in their immigrant elders' life. Those findings are consistent with Worden's (2010) theoretical perspective on grief. He highlights a process where individuals go back and forth among the tasks of grieving as they live with loss. He stressed that a number of factors contribute to individual differences in grieving losses.

Continuing bonds and personal growth experienced by immigrant elders were also observed by all participants in this study. These findings correspond to the nature of migratory grief because the object of grief, the country of origin, does not disappear completely, and ties to the home country are always present. In this way migratory grief is partial and recurrent (Martinez & Martinez, 2006). In the adult relatives' view, their immigrant elders are able to maintain contact with their home country via travel, telecommunication and access to the Internet, and they provide support to help their elders to maintain this contact. All of them indicated that they had bought some high technology products such as smart phones and TVs which can help their immigrant

elders to keep in contact with other family members, as well as keep up to date with the news in their home country. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the participants in this study believed that continuing bonds with the home country are of benefit to their immigrant elders.

Personal growth by their elders was noticed by many participants, including the relative's willingness to learn English, and to adjust to the new environment as well as to accept the changes. In this study, the participants believed that the personal growth that was achieved by their immigrant elders was the result of social support and past personal experiences of adaptation. This confirms the finding from the literature that, although immigrant elders are generally more vulnerable than non-immigrant elders, and require more care and support in order to readjust to a new environment, at the same time they also bring their own personal resources (Van der Wurff et al., 2004).

Ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief experienced by Chinese immigrant elders

Previous studies have found that transnational families experience ambiguous loss due to the separation from their original families or relatives in their home countries (Solheim, Zaid, & Ballard, 2015; Nesteruk, 2017). However, this study has shown that, even if they live with immediate family members in a host country, immigrant elders still experience ambiguous loss, and that in some cases their grief may be disenfranchised.

One cause of ambiguity is the struggle to maintain new roles in the host country while fulfilling responsibilities in the home country. This struggle is especially pronounced for those elders who left their parents in their home country. In these situations, the elders play the role of parents in their host country; but because of this, they are not

able to take the responsibility as children for their own parents in their home country. This is consistent with previous research which indicates that physical absence of family members results in a feeling of chronic loss accompanied by grieving and mourning, and that immigrants feel anxious when their parents experience health crises which require their physical presence in the home country (Falicov, 2007; Senyürekli & Detzner, 2008; Perl, 2016). In this study, many participants noticed that their immigrant elders worried about being unable to fulfil their moral responsibility to care for their own aging parents due to being absent. The separation from relatives in their home countries led to ambiguous loss (Solheim et al., 2015; Solheim & Ballard, 2016).

Not knowing about the situation of family members in their home country also contributed to ambiguity. Although the immigrant elders were able to keep in contact with family members in their home country, they still worried that these family members might remain silent about their true situations and feelings. This indicates that, although the advance of technology makes it possible for immigrant elders to have face-to-face communication with their relatives at home, it cannot replace the real-life interactions and intimacy of shared family life. Despite the existence of continuing bonds among the elders, it did not mean that maintaining bonds was a complete coping strategy (Klass, 2006) but rather this study illustrated that ambiguity can coexist with continuing bonds.

As Solheim et al. (2015) argue, uncertainty about the future is often increasingly experienced as a loss among immigrants. In this study, uncertainty about the future was mainly the result of not knowing whether they could keep returning to China as they aged. As some participants indicated in their interviews, although their immigrant

elders were willing to visit China, they were not able to do so or afraid to do so due to the risks they might face, such as health concerns and financial worries. It would appear that aging itself can increase the sense of ambiguity. It might be one key difference between immigrant elders and other older people.

It would seem from this study that the ambiguous loss experienced by Chinese immigrant elders has several distinctive features. First, all of them had an element of choice in the decision to migrate, which led to the ambiguous loss. Secondly, they received continued support from their family members in the host country, which is different from most examples of ambiguous loss discussed by Boss (1991, 2009, 2016). Thirdly, immigrant elders as described by their adult relatives in this study knew where and how to contact family members and friends in China and continued to be in touch with them regularly even if the contact decreased with age. Those features seem to be able to mitigate the ambiguity in immigrant elders' loss experience.

The findings in this study show that immigrant elders are likely to receive support from adult relatives when they live with their immediate family. Although it is argued that families' support provides a protective buffer against the pain of loss (Solheim et al., 2015), the findings in this study indicate that family support can also contribute to the disenfranchisement of grief. Firstly, the relationship between immigrant elders and family and friends in the home country was recognized in this study but could be misunderstood, because most adult relatives believed that the pain caused by physical absence could be mitigated by telecommunication and travel back for visits. Additionally, some adult relatives also believed that, compared to the gains from the relocation, the sacrifice was worthwhile. Since the adult relatives thought that living with immediate family members in the host country is very beneficial for their immigrant

elders' well-being, they are more likely to overlook the loss of relationship experienced by their immigrant elders. According to Doka (2002), failing to recognize or misunderstanding the relationship between an immigrant and his/her home country is one way to disenfranchise the immigrant's grief. Adult relatives' misunderstanding of the impact of the loss experienced by their immigrant elders could disenfranchise their immigrant elders' grief.

Berry (1987) further proposes that the expectation that immigrants, especially voluntary immigrants, should feel good about having successfully migrated and not feel sad about the resulting losses but, be able to adjust happily to their new host country, can prohibit the recognition and expression of grief. The findings in this study are consistent with this perspective. The adult relatives liked to emphasize that it was their immigrant elders' choice to migrate to Australia, and they were more likely to highlight the positive aspects for their immigrant elders of living in Australia. Again, being able to live with immediate family members, especially with their only child, was thought to be the greatest benefit for their immigrant elders.

Self-disenfranchisement of immigrant elders was mainly manifest as the denial of loss experiences and hiding their feelings, according to their adult relatives' description. Kauffman (2002) introduced the notion of self-disenfranchisement, expanding Doka's notion of disenfranchised grief, by arguing that a griever might disallow the recognition of grief without any actual outside input. The findings in this study indicate that some immigrant elders deny their loss and hide their feelings.

5.2 The role of Chinese culture

Although grieving is influenced by the nature of loss which is a fluid process, and that individuals' reactions to loss can vary, it is widely recognized that the experience and

expression of grief are shaped by social context (Rosenblatt, 2001; Walter & McCoyd, 2016). The findings in this study demonstrate that Chinese culture plays a critical role in adult relatives' understanding of their immigrant elders' experience, which also has positive and negative influences. Specifically, the findings indicate that this Chinese cultural concept not only contributes to the resilience of Chinese immigrant elders when they are coping with migratory loss and grief, but also leads to elders' experience of ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief.

This study found that the strategies the participants used to support their immigrant elders are greatly influenced by the concept of care and filial piety in Chinese culture. It is obvious that adult relatives believe that they should responsibly take care of their elders, and that it is the main reason for their immigrant elders coming to the host country. This exactly reflects the concepts of care and filial piety in Chinese culture, which emphasize the obligation to aging parents (Wong, 2006; Liu et al., 2018). Filial piety as the fundamental concept of care in Confucianism also places an emphasis on harmony, on honouring the family name, and on devotion to family, which in this case includes contributing to the construction of a new family pattern in the host country (Koh & Koh, 2008). The similar finding was shown in this study as previous studies, which indicate that the value of filial piety in Chinese families is of great importance in assisting elderly family members when they deal with grief (Qin & Xia, 2015; Xie et al., 2004).

The concept of filial piety also contributes to the resilience of Chinese immigrant elders because immigrant elders have an element of choice in the decisions that shape their experience of migration. As respect for aging parents is valued in filial piety, Chinese immigrant elders are more likely to be involved in the decision-making process, and

their adult relatives will take their elders' future life into consideration. But this can also be regarded as one element contributing to anticipatory grief – grief that occurs prior to actual loss. Nesteruk (2017) highlights that anticipatory grief can be an important mitigating factor in the grieving process. In this study, it can be seen that involvement in the decision-making process about migration contributed to the immigrant elders' resilience, and that this process was deeply influenced by the concept of filial piety.

Since the availability of support played an important role in assisting people to deal with grief, adult relatives' continued support for their immigrant elders can be another contributor to their elders' resilience. The immigrant elders in this study received continued support from their family members in the host country. All of them lived with or very close to immediate family members. Worden (2010) argues that the nature of loss and social variables are significant factors in the grieving process, and other studies have shown that support within family is an important coping strategy in the grieving process, and that a supportive family environment can minimize the negative effects of acculturation-related stress (Qin & Xia, 2015; Sun et al., 2014). From this perspective, it is reasonable to suggest that adult relatives' willingness to support their immigrant elders, and the strategies they used, including social, cultural and emotional strategies, indicate that continued support for immigrant elders is available.

Adult relatives are more likely to understand some of their elders' feelings from a Chinese cultural perspective, which may enhance their empathy towards the pain, dilemmas and adjustment difficulties experienced by their immigrant elders. As discussed before, filial piety demands respect and obligation to aging parents. Therefore, immigrant elders come to the host country with their immigrant adult relatives so that the adult relatives can look after them when they get old. It is likely

that adult relatives can walk in their immigrant elders' shoes because they share the same cultural understandings. They are very likely to understand their aging immigrant parents' feelings about leaving their own parents behind in China. Many researchers in the field of family therapy suggest that empathy contributes to the expression and acknowledgement of other family members' feelings in the context of mutually shared experiences (Cacciatore, Thieleman, Killian, & Tavasolli, 2015; Hayes, Yeh, & Eisenberg, 2007). Being able to acknowledge a specific loss is important and is a necessary step in moving towards the fourth task described by Worden (2010): "to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life". In this respect, Chinese culture plays a role in enhancing adult relatives' understanding of and empathy towards their immigrant elders' loss and grief experiences, which is an important step in supporting their immigrant elders' coping with migratory loss and grief.

The findings in this study are consistent with the assumption that filial piety not only plays a supportive role in immigrant elders' experiences, but also contributes to their experiences of ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief.

The emphasis on living with their children, as found in this study, may further contribute to ambiguous loss being experienced by Chinese immigrant elders. Adult relatives stress the happiness of family reunions and might overlook other losses experienced by their immigrant elders as the result of migration. As noted by Chan and Seet (2013), Chinese elderly parents as dependents are expected to be happy because they are provided with a blissful retirement with their family in the host country instead of being left behind in China. However, the findings in this study are consistent with Thomas' (2003) proposition that, although reuniting elderly parents with their adult children in the host country seems to be an attractive proposition, the outcomes are diverse.

Elderly parents may suppress their sense of loss as they try to appear happy and the entwined feelings of grief and happiness can lead to feelings of ambiguity around their migratory loss.

The emphasis on harmony and devotion to family as encouraged in Chinese culture, on the other hand, contributes to risk factors in the grieving process for several reasons. First, as Gao (1996) suggests, people in Chinese family tend to focus on the needs of others rather than on themselves, and in this study some elders chose to migrate with their family not for themselves, but for other family members such as their grandchildren. They wanted a better education for their grandchildren or for their children to fulfil their responsibility towards them more easily. Some adult relatives suggested that, compared to the gains, the sacrifice was worthwhile for their immigrant elders, which might have been the determinant factor in the decision making. This means that, despite their involvement in the decision-making process, the elder migrant might have been focused mainly on family harmony and devotion to the family. A previous study indicates that grievers who emphasize others' needs over their own are more likely to hide their own practical and emotional needs in order to reduce the burden on their families (Martin-Matthews et al., 2013). Therefore, the experience of migratory grief among elderly Chinese immigrants may remain unrecognized by their families and be less likely to receive appropriate support.

Adult relatives' misunderstanding of the relationship between their immigrant elders and the things they loved in China could contribute to the disenfranchisement of grief. Since the adult relatives in this study recognized the losses of relationship and activities experienced by their immigrant elders, they tried to help by supporting their immigrant elders to maintain contact with family members and friends in China via

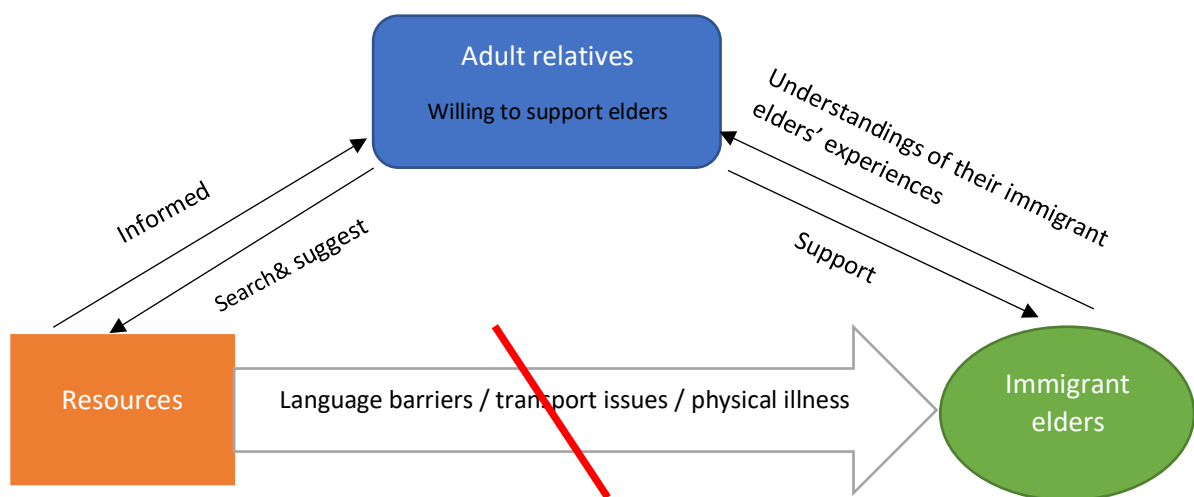
technological products. In doing so, some adult relatives might believe that their immigrant elders' loss experience has been mitigated by this kind of support. However, other studies point out that, although advances in communication technologies can alleviate the pain of separation by helping immigrant families to stay in touch psychologically with the ones left behind (Bravo, 2017), communication technologies cannot replace the satisfaction of face-to-face interactions and contact (Bravo, 2017; Skrbiš, 2008). The physical absence and subsequent longing can be the source of a lifelong experience of ambiguous loss (Boss, 1991, 2009). The failure to recognize the importance of physical contact can disenfranchise the immigrant elders' grief.

The immigrant elders' grief may not be recognized by their adult relatives within a Chinese cultural context. In addition to the happiness of being able to live with their immediate family members in a host country, another common experience among immigrant elders is the belief that grandparents can fulfil family functions such as caring for grandchildren, and the multigenerational ties therefore become a valuable resource for families (Bengtson, 2001; Connidis, 2015). But caring for children can also be a challenge for older people (Chen, Liu, & Mair, 2011). There can be a struggle between "retirement choices versus intergenerational responsibilities", and "freedom to pursue one's own interests versus familial obligation" (Goodfellow, 2003, p. 12). Chinese immigrant elders who migrated to the host country for family reunion might have fewer choices in retirement and less freedom to pursue their own interests. It seems that the adult relatives in this study tended to stress the positive effects of caring for grandchildren for their immigrant elders. From the adult relatives' perspective, caring for grandchildren is beneficial to their immigrant elders' social life and emotional well-being. They might not be able to recognize their immigrant elders' grief for the loss of freedom and of personal choices.

5.3 The support model for Chinese immigrant elders

Various supports and strategies were discussed in this study by adult relatives either to help their immigrant elders cope with migratory loss or to enable them to better adjust to life in the host country. The main feature of the supports and strategies offered to immigrant elders was that they came mainly from relatives within immigrant families themselves. For resources utilized outside of the family system, the adult relatives became the intermediaries who linked the resources to their immigrant elders. These features can be shown in the model below.

Figure 1. The support model for Chinese immigrant elders



The model shown in Figure 1 highlights three key points. First, the supports provided to immigrant elders depend on the adult relatives' understandings of the loss and grief experienced by their immigrant elders. This means that the supports are not necessarily appropriate or beneficial for their immigrant elders as there might be a gap between adult relatives' understandings and their immigrant elders' real experiences. This can contribute to a disenfranchisement of the grief experienced by their immigrant elders in some cases. Second, adult relatives play a critical role in supporting

immigrant elders, especially in a Chinese cultural context. Regardless of whether the supports provided to their immigrant elders are appropriate or beneficial, it is the adult relatives who can provide the daily supports which are necessary for immigrant elders. Third, not all adult relatives have knowledge of the resources or services available for their immigrant elders. This might be because they believe it should be their own responsibility to look after their elders, so they have never tried to seek outside support, or they may simply not have access to the relevant information.

Utilizing this understanding, it is reasonable to suggest that in order to support Chinese immigrant elders appropriately their adult relatives should be the key connecting and coordinating persons.

6 Implications for social work practitioners

Since there is an increasing number of Chinese immigrants in Australia, the number of Chinese immigrant elders is likely to grow in the future. It would be helpful to have a deeper understanding of the role of Chinese culture in how Chinese immigrant elders are understood by their adult relatives in relation to their migration to Australia, and what supports are provided to their immigrant elders. This study provides some understanding around those experiences.

When social workers are involved in helping Chinese families that have older immigrant family members living with them, the following considerations might be useful to them in providing assistance. They can support adult family members to speak with their immigrant elders, and encourage these elders to share their feelings and thoughts from their own perspective on their life in Australia. Through this communication, loss and grief emotions can be made explicit. Social workers can help the family to be aware that each person's role within the family might have changed

due to migration. This may be particularly important when previously the immigrant elder was the senior family member and family advisor in their home country, and now in Australia they have become the dependant family member. Social workers can help the family to identify the emotional effect of these changes.

Social workers should realize that some immigrant families might be able to look for resource, while others believe the support in their families is their only available support. In this latter situations, social workers can help immigrant families recognize the importance of outside activities, and social workers can help them access available resources with the understanding of immigrant elders' cultural background and the interactional pattern in their immigrant families.

If social workers have more insights into the various loss and grief experience that emerged in this study, they will be able to support family members at every stage of migration from planning to settlement, with their potential reactions and responses to migration.

In working with Chinese immigrant elders, social workers should bear in mind that this group of elders' experiences are greatly influenced by their Chinese culture. The culture does not only affect the meaning of their loss, or grieving rituals, or their ways of mourning (Worden, 2010), but also affects who, where and how they receive support, and how the supports shape their experiences. As Wilding and Baldassar (2009) highlight, the cultural notions of obligation play a determinant role in care giving and this is an important element that should be considered when supporting immigrant elders.

Despite the awareness of culturally sensitive practice within the field of immigration, much emphasis is put on the effects of culture on an immigrant's individual or family

experience (Torres, 2001; Ward & Styles, 2005; Wilding & Baldassar, 2009). However, the findings in this study suggest that, in order to support Chinese immigrant elders appropriately, adult relatives should be the key contact persons. Although there is a need for culturally sensitive practice, it is worth noting that practitioners working with immigrant clients should be aware of the gap between practitioners' understandings and experience of a specific culture and the client's experience, since each individual experience is unique and clients from the same cultural context can have different experiences or different understandings of their experiences. Inappropriate supports based on the misunderstanding of immigrant elders' experiences might lead to further disenfranchisement of grief and reinforce the ambiguity in their loss experience.

This study illustrates that there is loss but also personal growth in migration. The resources brought by immigrant elders, in combination with a supportive family environment, can contribute to personal growth. There is a need to avoid the trap of seeing migrants as passive recipients because in fact immigrants are knowledge carriers and ultimately, they are the experts on their own needs, which is the key to engaging with migrants and unlocking resources at different levels.

7 Limitations

The participants in this study were a self-selected group of adults who were willing to talk about their understandings of the experiences of their immigrant elder family member or close family-like friend. They may differ in important ways from other adult relatives who did not volunteer because they were not interested in pondering this particular issue.

It might also be relevant that all immigrant elders discussed by adult relatives in this study migrated to Australia under the Family Reunification Program. It is possible that

there may be significant differences between the elders discussed in this study and other Chinese elders who migrated to Australia for different reasons. In other words, those who migrated at an early age might have different experiences from those who migrated to Australia as dependent elder parents.

In addition, there were different socioeconomic and educational levels among the participants, which could influence their understandings of their immigrant elders' experience.

Another limitation of the study is the small sample size. The study reported data from six interviewees. This study aimed to interpret adult relatives' understanding of migratory loss and grief experienced by their immigrant elders, and to identify the supports provided to their immigrant elders as well as the strategies adult relatives used. The results may not be generalizable to the larger population.

As this study focused on adult relatives' understandings of their elders' experiences, it is important to note that adult relatives' understandings of their immigrant elders' experiences might be different from the actual experiences of their immigrant elders. In order to better understand immigrant elders' experiences of migratory loss and grief it would be necessary to conduct another study with immigrant elders themselves, and to make a comparison with their adult relatives' understandings to identify any gaps between the elders' experiences and their adult relatives' view of the elders' experiences.

Finally, the level of skill of the interviewer can have a great influence on the results of semi-structured interviews (Alston & Bowles, 2012). The researcher who conducted the interviews is a recent graduate of the Master of Social Work course who does not yet have extensive interviewing experience.

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Appendix 1. Flyer for participant recruitment

VOLUNTEERS FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

NEEDED: Adult relatives of elderly Chinese immigrants

What is the purpose of this research?

This is a Flinders University student project, which aims to investigate adult relatives' understanding of migratory loss experiences of their elderly immigrant relatives, and the strategies they have used to support their elders.

Who can participate?

People who are over 18 years old and who have relatives who are Chinese immigrant elders.

What will be asked to do during the study?

You will be invited to attend a one-on-one interview with the researcher who will ask you a few questions about your understanding and views about the losses experienced by the elderly immigrant relatives in your family. The interview will take about 60 minutes.

How can I participate?

If you would like to participate or have any further questions about the study, please send an email to the researcher, a Flinders university graduate student:

Yingshi Shen: yingshi.shen@flinders.edu.au

Thank you.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, Project Number: 8006

Appendix 2. Letter of introduction



College of Education, Psychology and
Social Work

GPO Box 2100

Adelaide SA 5001

Carol.irizarry@flinders.edu.au

www.flinders.edu.au

CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter is to introduce Yingshi Shen who is a Graduate Diploma in Research Methods student in the College of Education, Psychology, and Social Work at Flinders University.

She is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of Adult relatives' understanding of migratory loss experiences of their Chinese immigrant elders and the strategies they used to support their elders.

She would like to invite you to assist with this project by agreeing to be involved in an interview which covers certain aspects of this topic. No more than one hour would be required.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Since Yingshi intends to make an audio recording of the interview, she will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed, and to make the recording available to other researchers on the same conditions.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or e-mail carol.irizarry@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Carol Irizarry

Dean (Education)

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Flinders University

GPO Box 2100

Adelaide SA 5001

Email: carol.irizarry@flinders.edu.au

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 8006). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix 3. Information sheet



Miss Yingshi Shen

College of Education, Psychology
and Social Work

Flinders University

Flinders Drive, Bedford Park SA
5042

E: yingshi.shen@flinders.edu.au

INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Adult relatives' understandings of the migratory loss experiences of their Chinese immigrant elders and their support strategies

Investigators:

Miss Yingshi Shen (student of Graduate Diploma in Research Methods)
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University

Supervisor(s):

Associate Professor **Carol Irizarry**
Dean (Education)
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University

Description of the study:

Migratory loss has been widely recognised as the loss that immigrants experience, which also can lead to psychological issues, especially among elder immigrants. Family support, as one important support source, plays a critical role in coping with loss and grief. The project will investigate adult relatives' understanding of migratory loss experiences of their immigrant elders and discuss strategies they use to support their elders.

Purpose of the study:

The project aims to investigate adult relatives' understanding of migratory loss experiences of their immigrant elders and what strategies they use to support their elders.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to attend a one-on-one interview with the researcher who will ask you a few questions about your understanding of migratory loss, and about your views about the loss experiences of the immigrant elders in your family, and the strategies you use to support them. The interview will take about 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with looking at the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed

(typed-up) and stored as a computer file and then destroyed once the results have been finalised. The interview is voluntary.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

As a result of the sharing of your experiences, recommendations will be made to improve the planning and delivery of future programs to help older Chinese migrants to this country.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

We do not need your name and you will not be identifiable in any reports or subsequent publications. Any identifying information will be removed and the typed file will be stored on a password protected computer that only the researcher and the project supervisor can access. Your comments will not be linked directly to you. While confidentiality is guaranteed, anonymity cannot be guaranteed on the basis that you will be interviewed at the organisations.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The investigator anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the investigator.

There are also some services available that might help you manage the potential burdens. Here are contact details of free support services:

- **Chinese Welfare Services of SA**

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Address: 224 Grote Street, Adelaide SA 5000

Phone: (08) 8212 2988

- **Multicultural Communities Council of SA**

Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5:30pm

Address: 113 Gilbert Street, Adelaide SA 5000

Email: mccsa@mccsa.org.au

Phone: (08) 8345 5266

How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions and you are free to withdraw at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate please read and sign the form and give it back to me before the interview.

How will I receive feedback?

Your individual interview transcript will be sent to you, and you have two weeks to give feedbacks to the researcher. After two weeks the interview transcript will be considered to be approved unless sufficient justification can be provided.

Outcomes from the project will be summarised and given to you by the researcher at your request.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 8006). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu

Appendix 4. Consent form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (Semi-structured interview)

Adult relatives' understandings of the migratory loss experiences of their Chinese immigrant elders and their support strategies

I consent to participate as requested in the information sheet for the research project on Adult relatives' understandings of migratory loss experiences of their Chinese immigrant elders and the strategies they use to support their elders.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained and no identifying information will be published, anonymity cannot be guaranteed on the basis that interview will be undertaken at the organisation.
 - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to me.
 - I may ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
6. I agree to the tape/record being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed.

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature..... **Date**.....

7. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the information sheet and agree to participate in the research as explained.

Participant's signature..... **Date**.....

Appendix 5. Interview transcripts

Individual interview transcript has been removed due to confidentiality.