The role of Gender, Patriarchy and Culture in the Asian female travel experience

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Copyright Statement

Abstract

Title: The role of Gender, Patriarchy and Culture in the Asian female travel experience

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This study provides a unique insight into the travel experiences of Asian female tourists, a topic that to date has received limited consideration within the tourism literature. It is often suggested that travel experiences are socially constructed, therefore it is difficult to separate women's travel experiences from their sociocultural living situation. Social and cultural interactions are gendered, hence gender plays a crucial role in travel experiences. Considering the rapid growth of tourism in Asia, there has been a shift in academic interest in recent years in tourism within the Asian context. Yet there remains much to be understood about the experiences of Asian female travellers.

The aim of this study is to explore the link between tourism, gender and patriarchy with the focus on the Asian female tourist experience. In order to meet the aim of the research, this study adopts an interpretivist approach and a feminist lens to analyse and interpret the data obtained from narrative interviews with 15 Asian women.

The findings are delineated into two main themes: *the influence of tradition and culture on gender roles in Asia* and *the relationship between culture and the Asian female travel experience*. This study highlights the significance of gender roles and socio-cultural traditions in Asian women's lives and their influence on their travel behaviour and experiences. The study demonstrates that travel is used as a coping mechanism, as a tool for women to negotiate resistance, empowerment and self-transformation, and a vehicle for contributing to social change for women in Asia.

The findings suggest that the relationship between culture and Asian women's travel experiences is complex and multifaceted. Prior to this study, the socio-cultural aspects of Asian women's travel experiences have received limited consideration thus this study makes an important contribution to knowledge on the significance of socio-cultural traditions in influencing the Asian female tourist experience. A conceptual framework highlights the influence of culture and patriarchy on the Asian female tourist experience.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

List of Abbreviations

DMO - Destination Marketing Organisation

NOW - National Organisation for Women

PDI -power distance index

UN - United Nations

UNDESA -United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNISTRAW-United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

UNSD -Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat

UNWTO -United Nations World Tourism Organisation

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of study

1.1.1 Gender in tourism

Gender shapes many aspects of our lives, including our experiences as tourists (Swain 1995). Tourism is a phenomenon constructed out of gendered societies, which means that all aspects of tourism-related activities embody gender relations (Kinnaird et al. 1994). As expressed by Aitchison (2001, p.134), tourism cannot be considered solely from the business perspective, but as a "powerful cultural arena that is shaped by gendered representations of places, people, nations and cultures." This suggests that gender plays a crucial role in shaping our travel and leisure experiences; 'gender' refers to a more complex socio-cultural construct between women and men rather than one's biological differences (e.g. male or female) (Pritchard 2001). The theory that gender differences exist has long been studied in the social science context (Royo-Vela et al. 2008) such as in criminology (Burgess-Proctor 2006), consumer behaviour (Caterall and Maclaran, 2001) and management (Broadbridge and Simpsons 2011). Tourism and leisure scholars have also acknowledged the importance of gender and gendered structures of power in affecting traveller behaviour and leisure experiences. Gender research has been increasingly prominent within leisure and tourism studies.

Interest in the affiliation between gender and leisure has led to an increase in studies within the last three decades. Gender research developed in leisure studies and eventually permeated into tourism studies. Since the mid-1990s, gender has been widely discussed in the tourism literature. Prior to that, gender was rarely discussed in tourism research until the mid-1970s. One of the earliest studies to discuss gender and women's travel experiences was Smith's (1979) research on women's travel and decision-making. Since then, a plethora of studies in gender on tourism have been conducted since the 1980s (i.e. Deem 1982; Freysinger and Flannery 1992; Henderson 1994; Jackson and Henderson 1995; Pritchard and Morgan 2000; Pritchard 2001; Aitchison 2005; Wilson and Little 2008) as a result of the emerging

awareness of gender issues following the second wave of women's feminist movements in the west (Burgess-Proctor 2006).

Where gender is concerned, history shows that during the increase in exploration in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries (Robinson 1990), when world exploration and colonial projects were at their peak, travel was considered a privilege predominantly undertaken by men and a few women from the upper classes travelling as companions to men (Harris and Wilson 2007). Opportunities for leisure are often divided along gender lines where gender becomes a limitation in travel decisions. Traditionally, the western image of a traveller was often promoted as being male (Leontidou 1994). It was said to 'augment a man's prestige but it diminished a women's reputation' (Khan 2011, p.108), and was considered to show an inappropriate lack of modesty if women travelled independently (Craik 1997; Khan 2011). As a result, few women had the opportunity to travel. Unfortunately, even with modernisation and globalisation, this perception still persists in many parts of the world, especially in Asia where patriarchal culture has a strong hold, such as in East Asia where society revolves around patriarchal power due to the widespread influence of Confucian ideology (Tsai 2006).

Gender is often viewed in a patriarchal context, which refers to a male dominance of society, influencing social relations and power structures (Millett 1971). Patriarchal systems are dominated by men and male concerns, and work to subjugate and disempower women in economic, social and political ways (Andermahr et al. 1997). While patriarchy plays a leading role in women's oppression (Ray 2008), patriarchal structures vary from one society to another. This is due to differences in class, religion, region, ethnicity, caste and social cultural practices (Ray 2008; Tsai 2010). This suggests that the concept and practice of patriarchy are constantly evolving and are subject to change, depending on the influences of traditional values, cultural practices and contemporary socio-cultural trends in different societies. Cultural values and practices not only influence social interaction and behaviour (Triandis 1994), but also play significant roles in economic and social growth. Cultural norms prevailing in many parts of Asia are used to perpetuate the subordinate position of women socially and economically

(Fung 2000; Tsai 2006). Patriarchy has become a traditional value that is deeply rooted within the identity of oriental Asian societies (Fung 2000).

1.1.2 Defining Asia

Asia by physical definition is the largest of the world's continents covering approximately 30 percent of the total land area, including the Eurasian supercontinent, which is the western portion of the Asian continent (National Geographic 2020). It is also the world's most populous continent with roughly 60 percent of the total global population (National Geographic 2020).

According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the assignment of countries to specific groupings adheres to the "standard country or area codes for statistical use" or commonly known as the M49 standard which are compiled by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat (UNSD) primarily for statistical publications and databases (UNSD 2020). As this standardisation of categorising countries is widely accepted, the geographical area of the countries which are included as "Asia" in this study adheres to the definition and categorisation provided by the UNSD (2020) guidelines stated above. Based on geographical and continental regions of this standard, Asia consists of 48 countries in total, which are further divided into five sub-regions: Central Asia, Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, and Western Asia (UNSD 2020).

The table below (Table 1.1) lists the countries categorised in each of the sub-regions.

Central Asia	Eastern Asia	South-Eastern Asia	Southern Asia	Western Asia
-Kazakhstan -Kyrgyzstan -Tajikistan -Turkmenistan -Uzbekistan	-China (including Hong Kong & Macao) -Democratic People's Republic of Korea -Japan -Mongolia -Republic of Korea	-Brunei Darussalam -Cambodia -Indonesia -Lao People's Democratic Republic -Malaysia -Myanmar -Philippines -Singapore -Thailand -Timor-Leste -Viet Nam	-Afghanistan -Bangladesh -Bhutan -India -Iran (Islamic Republic of) -Maldives -Nepal -Pakistan -Sri Lanka	-Armenia -Azerbaijan -Bahrain -Cyprus -Georgia -Iraq -Israel -Jordan -Kuwait -Lebanon -Oman -Qatar -Saudi Arabia -State of Palestine -Syrian Arab Republic -Turkey -United Arab Emirates -Yemen

Table 1.1: List of countries in Asia (adapted from UNSD, 2020)

Although Asia from a geographical perspective is clearly defined, in terms of identity Asia is multifaceted. 'Asia' as a concept was contemplated in ancient Greek literature, as far back as the 5th century BC, and was a term used to indicate the massive unexplored land to the east of Europe (Knight and Heazle 2000).

Based on Bowring's (1987) definition, the concept of "Asia" is derived from European sources as a counter to the image of the west. Bowring (1987) states that Asia is used as a contrasting view to the western world to describe a non-European identity. Therefore, 'Asian' is not an identity that was created by people in Asia, but a label that was placed on them by the west. From a western perspective, this concept of Asia brings about a negative connotation of the population in the region.

‘Asia’ was only thought to have developed a common identity in reaction to European colonisation of the region (Bowring 1987).

‘Asian’ identities are invented and imagined by Westerners to describe what they believe to exist in the East, hence, Asia was a concept constructed as a homogenised entity (Bui et al. 2013), and this simplified concept of being Asian is overgeneralised. Defining and interpreting Asian values and their gender implications is complicated and subject to one’s social situatedness (Knight and Heazle 2000). However, Asia covers a vast geographical area and there are differences in the degree in which different regions are developed. The notion of ‘Asian’ as an identity is often used in conjunction with culture, traditional beliefs and religious practices. Nevertheless, scholars have generally recognised the collective nature and shared values of Asian communities which are based on achieving social harmony and order, filial piety and respect for power of authority (Sheridan 1999; Prideaux and Shiga 2007).

1.1.2.1 Asia and tourism

The current economic and social development in Asia has had a significant impact on international tourist trends in recent years. With the rapid expansion of Asian economies, the tourism industry in Asia has flourished within the last few decades and has reshaped the course of the tourism and hospitality industry (Winter 2009). The ‘Asian wave’ phenomenon has altered the face of tourism within and beyond the Asian Pacific region (Winter 2009; Leung et al. 2011). The Asia-Pacific region has seen the fastest economic growth in the world with more than 5% or higher growth annually since the year 2000, occupying 35% of the world’s economic output, with a combined GDP of USD 30 trillion. This economic development is largely driven by China, which is the largest economy in Asia and second largest in the world, contributing to 45% of Asia’s economic output (UNWTO 2019).

1.1.2.1.1 Asia as a tourist destination

The Asia-Pacific region has the second highest international arrivals and is the second most visited region, after Europe. Of all the world's regions, the Asia-Pacific region has expanded extensively in international tourist arrivals since 2005. UNWTO Asia Tourism Trends (2018) show that international tourist arrivals in Asia-Pacific grew 6 % in 2017 to reach 323 million. In 2018, the Asia-Pacific region recorded a 7.3 % growth in tourist arrivals, yielding 348 million, 23.7 million more tourists compared to the previous year's tourists and approximately one quarter of the world's total (UNWTO 2019).

From 2010 to 2018, tourist arrivals in the Asia-Pacific region has had a steady growth of an average of 6.6 % per year, compared to the global average of 5.0 % (UNWTO 2019), marking a consecutive year of growth in tourist arrivals. Tourist arrivals in the Asia-Pacific region accounts for 30% in 2018, earning USD 435 billion in international tourism receipts in 2018.

Asia itself has had a tremendous growth in tourism, with its share of international tourist arrivals increasing from 16% of the world's total in 2000 to 25% in 2018 (UNWTO 2019). Of the world top ten rankings for international tourist arrivals, two Asian destinations are featured: China, occupying the fourth place with 63 million arrivals and Thailand at ninth place, with 38 million arrivals in 2018 (UNWTO 2019). The following largest Asian tourism destinations are Hong Kong (China), Malaysia, Macao (China) and India. It is expected that by 2023, China will further consolidate its position as the top destination in the Asia-Pacific region (UNWTO 2019).

Most of Asia's international tourist arrivals have been concentrated on the Eastern part of Asia, with 49% of international tourist arrivals in North-East Asia, which represents 46% of Asia Pacific's international tourism receipts, while 37% of international tourists arrivals in South-East Asia represent 33% of international tourism receipts in the Asia-Pacific region (UNWTO 2019). This is fuelled by growing global purchasing power, increased air connectivity and enhanced visa facilities (UNWTO 2019).

1.1.2.1.2 Asia's potential as an outbound market

The Asia-Pacific region plays an important part as a source market as well, contributing to both regional and international destinations. The region produced 335 million international travellers in 2017, spending USD 502 billion, 37% of the world's total (UNWTO 2018) and this reached 359 million in 2018, spending USD 524 billion, an increase of 7% from 2017 (UNWTO 2019). This was a ninth consecutive year of growth in Asia Pacific's outbound tourism since the global economic crisis in 2009. This growth in tourism expenditure on the part of the Asian outbound market is attributable to the rapid expansion and strength of the economic conditions in the region and rapid urbanisation, leading to the rise of the middle class. This contributes to the growth in infrastructure development and air connectivity which have boosted international travel within Asia as well as other regions (UNWTO 2019).

China leads the Asia-Pacific region, being the main contributor to the development of the travel industry in Asia (Zhou 2010), as well as globally in outbound travel, with a steady annual double-digit growth in tourism expenditure since 2004 (UNWTO 2019). It was found that in 2016, 5.7 million Chinese tourists travelled to Europe (UNWTO 2019). Chinese travellers made a total of 150 million trips abroad in 2018 and remains the world's largest spender, representing one fifth of international tourism spending. As tourist expenditure in China continues to grow, it has reached USD 257.7 billion in 2018 (UNWTO 2019). The economic growth in the region, and the ease and convenience of air connectivity, travel facilitation, and infrastructure development have led to a surge in both inbound and outbound tourists in the Asia-Pacific region (UNWTO 2019).

Considering that Asia is increasingly becoming a promising market for travel and tourism and the massive economic potential for the region, tourism researchers are increasingly aware of the significance of the Asian travel market. It is therefore not surprising that there has been an increase in scholarly attention in recent years towards that region (i.e. Lin et al. 2013; Zhao et al. 2014; Tajeddini et al. 2017). However, this new academic interest in the Asian market is largely concentrated towards the business and marketing aspects of tourism. Therefore, this study aims

to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on the travel behaviour and experiences of female Asian travellers.

1.2. Rationale for the study

1.2.1 Academic rationale

Travel and tourism research has witnessed remarkable growth and diversification over the last forty years (Li and Xu 2015). The pioneering study by Swain (1995) on gender in tourism opened up a wide range of research possibilities from a point where gender issues were virtually non-existent in tourism research. Since then, tourism scholars have acknowledged the importance of gender relations in constructing travel experiences and tourist behaviour. However, even though this area of study has been gradually increasing, it still remains significantly marginalised (Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2015). With the increasing interest in gender in tourism research, one challenge remains, which is that while gender is included in tourism studies, it if often used as one of the many variables to show that studies have taken gender into account, rather than focusing on gender or gendered experiences as a concept (i.e. Khan 2011).

Studies about women, gender and leisure are dominated by western perspectives (Henderson and Shaw 2006; Henderson and Gibson 2013; Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2015). The leisure experiences of Asian women cannot be compared with those of western women because of cultural differences (Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag 2015). The travel experiences of Asian female travellers are different from those of western women. Both travel experiences and gender are socially and culturally constructed (Aitchison 2005a), an understanding reflected in Henderson and Gibson's (2013) call for the inclusion of socio-cultural dimensions, such as ethnicity and religion, alongside gender. Henderson and Gibson (2013) acknowledge the growing and continuing focus on gender and leisure in non-western countries, though the amount of focus remains small.

In response to the scarcity of research in this area, this study seeks to contribute to the gendered tourism experiences of Asian female travellers by exploring the link

between gender, patriarchy and travel experiences of Asian female travellers. This study highlights that Asian women's travel experience is located within a paradigm which acknowledges that social, cultural and political interactions are gendered, in which gender is an intangible aspect of a tourist experience described as a system of culturally constructed identities that interact with socially structured relationships in the division of labour and leisure, sexuality and power between women and men (Swain 1995). This area of study on the cultural aspects of the travel experiences and the behaviours of Asian female travellers has received limited scholarly consideration.

When compared to women in the west, it is perceived that Asian women are often regarded by Asian societies as being more vulnerable and dependent (Teo and Leong 2006; Yang et al. 2017). Within the Asian context, women's travel experiences are related to the position of Asian women within their patriarchal community and the cultural backgrounds of the female travellers themselves such as experiencing a lack of approval on their decision to travel and being subjected to gender stereotypes (Seow and Brown 2018). It is difficult to separate women's travel experiences from the cultural situation that women are embedded in (Wilson and Little 2005). These travel constraints are socially constructed and therefore, in this study, a socio-cultural context is considered as a central focus.

Through understanding the cultural aspect of Asian society, this study attempts to investigate the link between gender, patriarchy and travel experiences by exploring how Asian women's socio-cultural backgrounds influence their travel behaviour. In order to understand the socio-cultural factors that influence Asian female travel experiences, there is a need to first explore the cultural and societal aspects of the Asian community. There are three major religious practices within the Asian community: Confucianism, Islam and Hinduism (which will be discussed further in the literature review chapters) which contribute to the Asian social structure. These predominantly patriarchal societies affect the behaviour of Asian female travellers and influence their perspectives on leisure decisions. Research in relation to gender, behaviour and the tourism experiences of Asians as travellers is limited, therefore, this study aims to address the gap in the field of tourism research, by exploring how culture influences the travel behaviour and experiences of Asian female travellers.

1.2.2 Industry rationale

Asia's tourism potential has sparked considerable interest within tourism research as seen in the rise of recent studies associated with the region. While the rise in Asian tourism research is notable, the region has gained recognition not only as a tourist destination but also as a future outbound market (Winter 2009). Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of understanding the travelling behaviour of Asian female tourists and the need for the industry to recognise the values of the female and non-western markets.

The benefit of market segmentation lies in a tourist destination being able to accommodate the needs of a particular group of travellers and in doing so, gain competitive advantage over other destinations. With the arrival of the 'Asian wave', the potential of Asia as an outbound market is increasingly recognised (Chang 2015). China as a leading force in the Asia-Pacific region alone accounts for more than half of Asia's tourism expenditure and generates almost one fifth of the world's international tourism receipts (UNWTO 2019).

By focusing on a particular target market, for instance, Asian female travellers, this study attempts to illustrate the importance of understanding the socio-cultural background of various target markets. This study offers an insight into the travel behaviour and decision-making process of Asian female travellers in regard to the rising Asian female traveller market. By exploring the cultural backgrounds of Asian female travellers, this study also aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding for service providers and tourism marketers to identify the needs of this growing market segment and to develop a more specific and effective marketing strategy to cater to this market segment. In essence, there is a need for the tourism industry as a whole to incorporate greater gender, racial and cultural sensitivity in training, service delivery and product designs.

Considering the recent emergence of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and its devastating effects on tourist arrivals, it is now more important than ever that tourism marketers are aware of their market segments as tourism trends are

expected to change, in accordance with post pandemic policies for social distancing and travel restrictions.

1.2.3 Personal rationale

The choice of this research topic is one that is very close to my heart. In my own experience of growing up in a strictly hierarchical Asian background, my life has always been full of restrictions and gendered stereotypes. Cultural traditions and religious practices are fundamental to the success of the Asian community in maintaining order and harmony. Women in Asia are expected to behave in a certain way to portray their submissiveness and loyalty to their community and their family. A woman's life, bound by gendered stereotypic views and cultural expectations, is destined to be within the household. Growing up in a hierarchical environment, my life was a constant struggle to escape the confinements of a culture that was familiar yet smothering. Throughout my life, I was faced with the challenge of the desire to make changes to the situation I was born in, but I was constantly held back by my upbringing and a sense of loyalty to my roots. This did not stop me from challenging my own upbringing while resisting the patriarchal rules inflicted upon me. Eventually, this struggle towards independence and freedom strengthened my position as a feminist researcher within the study.

My personal interest in and love of travelling are the main motivation for the choice of research topic. I wanted to understand how Asian women negotiate their travels with a patriarchal upbringing. As an Asian female traveller myself, I understand the influences of cultural background and the role it plays in travel behaviour and decision making. The lack of societal approval to travel has negatively affected the quality of my own travel experiences. Throughout, my decision to travel, especially to travel solo, my family has always been the loudest voice of concern. They were constantly terrified I would be harmed or sexually harassed. This is because of the existing preconception in the Asian community that women, especially young women, are not suitable to travel alone as they are viewed as reliant, weak and incapable of decision making without a male companion. Asian men who have

travelled solo are admired for their courage and masculinity, whereas for an Asian woman such as myself, travelling alone is considered inappropriate or “wild”.

Travelling is a journey full of self-growth and transformation, where a woman becomes more empowered and self-governed, something the Asian culture frowns upon intensely. Too often I have been subject to utter disbelief that an Asian woman would exhibit any sign of confidence. Nothing is more appalling than a confident woman aware of her worth. From my own experience and observation as a female traveller, the Asian conservative perception undermining of women is difficult to ignore. However, the fact that this does not stop Asian women from travelling is evidence of their resistance towards tradition and culture.

It is through my own personal experience that inspired me to explore how Asian culture affects travel behaviour and experiences, therefore my experiences will no doubt play an important role as a researcher position. The reflexivity of the researcher will therefore be discussed in Chapter 4, the Methodology.

1.3 Aim and objectives

While studies on tourism and culture exist, there is a lack of clarity on how gender, patriarchy, cultural background and/or cultural identity influence travel behaviour and experiences, especially within the Asian context. Therefore, to address this gap in the literature, this study’s aim is as follows:

To explore the link between tourism, gender and patriarchy, with the main focus on the Asian female tourist experience.

In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were established:

1. To examine the theories of gender, patriarchy and feminism.

2. To critically appraise the literature on the female tourist experience.

3. To explore the cultural background and upbringing of Asian female travellers in a patriarchal society

4. To investigate the impact of patriarchy and cultural background on Asian female tourists' travel behaviour and experiences.

5. To examine how Asian women's travel experiences might equip them with the potential to be agents of social change within their own community

1.4. Structure of thesis

Chapter 1 provides an introductory background to the research where the rise of research on gender in tourism and tourism in Asia is acknowledged, as is the growth of the tourism market in Asia. This chapter also highlights that tourism is a gendered and a socially constructed experience, focusing mainly on gender and the socio-cultural influences of Asian females and their travel experiences. While highlighting the gaps within the literature on gender, travel behaviour, travel experiences within the Asian context, this chapter also outlines the research's aim and objectives to address the gaps.

Chapter 2 addresses the first objective of the study by firstly examining the key theories of gender, patriarchy and feminism. This chapter explores the various definitions of gender and highlights the development of gender and patriarchy theories. The chapter further explores the waves of feminism in the west. This provides an understanding of key issues within each wave of resistance. This chapter also highlights the lack of research on Asian women in western feminist scholarship and addresses the importance of cultural and traditional practices in the Asian community by examining the evolution of feminism and women's movements in Asia. By discussing women's resistance within Confucianism, Islam and Hinduism, this helps provide a clearer understanding of women's position within a patriarchal society.

Chapter 3 addresses the second objective by discussing the literature on the development of women in leisure studies, as well as relevant leisure themes. As the aim of this research is to understand how gender, patriarchy and culture influence the travel experiences of Asian women, this chapter aims to establish the fundamental links between gender, patriarchy, culture and women's leisure. This

not only enhances the understanding of these domains but also allows the researcher to gain insight to how these factors influence Asian women's travel experiences. The chapter starts by discussing the relationship between leisure and tourism, and proceeds to discuss the stages of development within women's leisure studies and reviews leisure themes relevant to the study. The chapter continues to discuss Asian female tourist experiences, highlighting the socio-cultural influences that affect travel experiences and behaviour.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodological aspects of the study in which an interpretive qualitative approach is adopted. The chapter covers the theoretical underpinnings of the study and justifies the use of narrative inquiry. It discusses the approach to interviews and the sampling methods used. Data analysis is detailed and the issues of trustworthiness of the research and its limitations are explored.

Chapters 5 and 6 contain the findings and discussion of the study. Chapter 5 addresses objective 3 in which Asian women's cultural upbringing and background are explored, while Chapter 6 addresses objectives 4 and 5, by discussing how patriarchy and culture affect the travel experiences of Asian women, as well as their potential to become agents of social change.

Chapter 7 offers the conclusion to the thesis. A review of the findings is provided with respect to the objectives of the study, and the original contribution of the research is articulated. The implications for practice and recommendations for future research are identified. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the research journey.

Chapter 2: Gender, patriarchy and feminism

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on gender, patriarchy and feminism relevant to this study, and offers a discussion of feminism and the women's movement in Asia. As gender is a fundamental aspect of feminism and patriarchy, this chapter begins by firstly reviewing gender and its relevant definitions. The chapter then discusses definitions of gender through social constructions and explores the ways in which gender identity and stereotypes are formed through socialisation. The chapter moves on to explore the concept of patriarchy and establishes links to feminism. It touches on western feminism and discusses the visibility (or invisibility) of Asian women within western feminist scholarship. The next section addresses the significance of cultural and traditional practices in feminist movements in Asian societies and the evolution of the women's movement under Confucianism, Islam and Hinduism.

2.2 Definitions of gender

The concept of sex and gender was introduced by psychologist Robert Stoller. In his book *Sex and gender,* Stoller determines that although 'gender' and 'sex' have been used interchangeably, there is a distinct difference between these two terms. He states that "sex and gender are not inevitably bound" (Stoller 1968, p. vi). While sex is the biological difference between men and women, based upon anatomical difference, gender is a psychological phenomenon associated with behaviour, feelings, thoughts, and fantasies.

Stoller's (1982) work also associates gender identity with masculinity and femininity, proposing that the development of masculinity and femininity is affected not only by biological factors, but also social factors such as the relationship between mother and child. Other studies also suggest that gender is expressed in ideologies of masculinity and femininity that interact in socially structured relationships (Spence and Buckner 1995; Jackson et al. 2008).

Ann Oakley (1972) suggested that it is more appropriate to consider men and women simply being the opposite ends of a single continuum and it has been proposed that the binary split between men and women may itself be a social construction. Just as sex is considered as a continuum, gender can also be seen similarly, whereby femininity is placed at one end and masculinity at the other, and people placed along it. The idea of a gender continuum may be problematic because it assumes that masculinity and femininity are opposites as the two genders are placed at opposite ends of the continuum. This is because one is not masculine or feminine but rather one performs a combination of various characteristics that could be understood to be either feminine or masculine or both depending on the context and relationship and purposes (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995). Therefore, the question is, does being more masculine mean being less feminine? What if the continuum does not exist as a single continuum, but each human is considered to have certain amounts of masculinity and femininity at any given time? However, whether gender is considered a single or double continuum, these approaches both constrain masculinity and femininity to pre-existent notions of gender (Reeser 2010).

While being biologically male or female is unquestioned, this often does not fit with an individual's actual masculinity or femininity. Masculinity should not be considered the only representation of a male body and femininity of a female body. For example, in some countries, communities and identities exist that offer some space for alternative gender identification such as transvestites in Brazil, 'ladyboys' in Thailand, hijras (men who identify themselves as a third gender) in India or transvestites in the USA (Jolly 2002). These people often define themselves as gender benders, gender-blenders, bi genders or simply describe their identity more loosely using the umbrella concept of transgender (Morgan 2017), resulting in the "development of new identities that depart from the medical constructions of transsexuals and transvestite" (Wickman 2003, p.41). The challenge to see gender beyond a duality of masculinity and femininity has been recognised in the recent shift in politics and academia (Marchbank and Letherby 2014). Studies on gender fluidity have been represented in various fields in recent years such as in health

(Galentin 2017), media and entertainment (Egner and Maloney 2016), culture and literature (Perreira 2017).

Gender fluidity and queer theory are important elements of gender research and are significant in the understanding of gender identities and sexualities. They provide a basis for discussions of gender issues and feminism, and how feminism works to include the experiences of queer women. Queer studies are heavily based on Foucault's (1980) influence on how language and discourse can provide ways of portraying femininity and masculinities, thus creating a plurality of femininities and masculinities (Connell 2002). Queer theory is a segment of academic thought that focuses on the construct of gendered and sexual identities and categorisations (Callis 2009) and is built upon disciplinary and cultural work that has been produced particularly in ethnography, history, sociology, literary criticism, women's studies and cultural studies (Code 2002). Queer theory is not about a specific gender identity but rather a discursive process in which the embodied identity is critiqued. Research in queer theory and gender fluidity has gained recognition in the past decade, alongside the need for awareness, inspiring documentaries such as "genderquake" and "Queer Britain" in attempts to investigate attitudes towards gender fluidity in the UK. However, due to its western centric nature, conversations on queer sexuality in Asia or the non-western discourse more generally have difficulties avoiding being associated with western formulations (Wilson 2006). Nevertheless, there has been an emergence of studies on queer Asia (Wilson 2006; Yue 2017; McLelland 2018; Tang 2019). Due to Asia' geopolitical situation, most of the literature is limited to a regional context (Chiang and Wong 2017). Rather than being mediated through a specific area, there is a need to rethink and explore the linkage and commonalities across the various regions in Asia.

2.2.1 Defining gender through social constructions

According to The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UNISTRAW) (2017), an organisation within the United Nations (UN) system, gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities and

attributes that a given society at any time considers appropriate for women and men. This suggests that gender is a taught behaviour, learnt through the process of socialisation. Gender is the social difference between a woman's role and a man's role determined by society and culture (Connell 2002). This social role is the expected behaviour associated with a person's status, determined by the social norms within their society (Lindsey 2015) which allows a society to organise people's lives in consistent ways. Social norms can be defined as "informal rules shared by groups or societies that guide behaviour and have positive and / or negative consequences that help make the behaviour more or less self-correcting" (Heywood 2011, p.442). The segregation of gender between men and women is so common that it becomes a part of daily lives. Aligning with these established norms enables people from different social statuses to interact with appropriate and expected behaviour. This concept of gender as socially constructed is particularly relevant within the context of this study, as the patriarchal nature of Asian communities places men and women into stereotypical gender roles according to societal norms, which encourages women's subordination (Sultana 2010).

Gender differences can also be defined as how women and men live out their femininity and masculinity according to socio-cultural needs (Hashim 2006). As a result, these gender norms become the generally accepted roles and responsibilities imposed on women and men which are created and accepted by societies and culture. This includes expectations in relation to behaviour and demeanour. Gender distinctions have become so prominent that it is considered scandalous when people do not follow the rules (Connell 2009). Gender, like social class, race and religion is a significant social cleavage and it is important to analyse it to understand social inequalities, oppression and unequal relationships between men and women. Gender differences are developed over the life span in which boys and girls are raised and educated (Ellemers 2018). Other scholars suggests gender identities develop during adolescence, as this is the time individuals begin to explore and define sexuality more deeply when considering their gender identity (Pollock and Eyre 2012; Morgan 2013). One result of gender socialisation is the formation of gender identities, which is one's definition of oneself as a man or women or neither (i.e. cisgender, genderqueer) (White et al. 2018). However, the existence and

increasing cultural acceptance of such gender identities reflects that traditional labels (i.e. male, female, heterosexual, homosexual) are perceived as limiting because individuals experience gender identity in more complex ways (Galupo et al. 2016).

Gender identity has a strong effect on how individuals dress or behave as measured by "normative" standards. When normative role behaviour becomes too rigidly defined, it caters to the development of stereotypes. Stereotypes often reflect the general expectations of members of particular social groups. Across different domains, gender stereotypes impact on the expectations of men and women (Ellemers 2018). Gender stereotypes reflect the primary standard by which men and women are judged in their social performances. For example, assertiveness is seen as an indicator of greater agency in men while warmth and caring for other are signs of the communal attributes of women (Kite et al. 2008). While biological differences may not have been primarily used to define gender, it may still set the stage for shared beliefs about the characteristics and gendered traits of men and women.

The physical appearances of men and women is often associated with gendered expectations (Jackson 1992). Both women and men are inclined to evaluate women in terms of their appearance rather than their accomplishments while men are not evaluated in this manner (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). While body image affects men as well in terms of masculinity (Olivardia 2007; Davids et al. 2019), women are considered to be more susceptible to society's perceptions of physical appearance (Ellemers 2018). In a working environment, women are perceived as less competent and their appearance receives more scrutiny than their abilities (Cikara et al. 2011).

Gender stereotyping in parenthood also perceives men and women differently. When men and women became parents, the expectation is that caring for their children will be women's main priority while their careers and ambitions are less encouraged. (To 2013). However, when men take on their role as fathers, their perceived ability as workers and breadwinners is not negatively impacted. These implicit expectations impact on the job and career opportunities of women and men.

A study of the work-life balance of 40,000 employees in 36 countries found that working men and women reported similar issues in balancing work and family life, where women were found to be at a disadvantage compared to men (Lyness and Judiesch 2014). Although there is evidence that women can care for their family as well as display ambition and high performance at work (see Treviño et al. 2018), women and men are still evaluated differently in regards to career development, which in turn accumulates into substantial gender inequalities in the course of a life span.

Stereotypes that often denote negativity are used to justify discrimination against members of a group, resulting in sexism which is the belief that women are inferior to men (Lindsey 2015). Men are also not immune to the negative effects of sexism, but the various social inequalities are more often experienced by women compared to men (Evans 2017) as the status imposed upon them is more stigmatised compared to men (Lindsey 2015). The unequal distribution of power between women and men is the product of the social ordering of gender. This form of sexism is perpetuated by systems of androcentric social structure leading to the marginalisation of women (Hill and Marshall 2018), known as patriarchy. Sexism is reinforced when patriarchy and androcentrism combine to perpetuate beliefs that gender roles are expectations applied to individuals on the basis of their biological sex (Boehnke 2011) and the notion is therefore unyielding**.** Gender stereotypes are so deeply embedded in society that research shows in recent years, that people still perceive strong differences between men and women on stereotype components as they did 30 years ago despite the participation and acceptance of women and men in non-traditional roles (Haines et al. 2016). Thus, even though attitudes towards men and women have become more egalitarian over the years, with legislations in place to enforce gender equality, gender stereotypes continue to shape society's judgement and behaviour. Nevertheless, the fact that gender is socially constructed, means that gender is amenable to change. However, to eliminate gender inequality, "one cannot overlook how masculine hegemony becomes a successful strategy for subordinating women" (Barrett 1996, p.140).

2.3 Patriarchy

Gender often denotes a hierarchy, in which one gender is more dominant than the other. Often, men dominate not only women but also younger men. Central to feminist ideology, particularly radical feminist thought, is the idea that society is patriarchal (Lewis 2017). Patriarchal society gives priority to men and to some extent limits women's rights. It is viewed as a prime obstacle to women's development (Sultana 2010), thus it is necessary to understand the system which has led to women's oppression and subordination (Acker 1989).

2.3.1 Patriarchy from a feminist perspective

'Patriarchy' means the rule of the father, or patriarch, which is traditionally used to describe a male dominated family, where the father (or patriarch) is head of the house and other household family members including women, children, other younger men and domestic servants who all live under the rule of this dominant male (Sultana 2010). The concept of patriarchy is closely related to that of gender roles in which patriarchy is a set of social relations between men and women, or a hierarchical system of solidarity among men ensures their dominance over women (Bhasin 1993; Jaggar and Rothenberg 1993).

Mitchell (1973), a feminist psychologist, uses the word patriarchy to "refer to kinship systems in which men exchange women " (p.24). Walby (1990) describes patriarchy as a system containing the notion of biological determinism whereby men are positioned in a dominant position by nature and women in a subordinate one. However, in more recent times, patriarchy refers to male domination, and the power relationship by which men dominate women, especially within a patriarchal family system where the man's role as breadwinner is clearly distinguished from the role of the woman as homemaker (Kim 2018). A patriarchal society gives priority to men and to a certain extent, limits women's rights. It is suggested that patriarchy refers to a social structure in which the patriarch is a single determining cause of women's oppression (Ray 2008).

The term patriarchy implies that it is a universal and historical form of oppression in ways in which society has defined gender. Such inflexibility results in some research rejecting patriarchy as a concept altogether (Barrett 1980; Rowbotham 1982). However, this has been criticised for not being able to deal with historical and cross-cultural variations in the forms of women's subordination (Walby 1990; Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). Conceptualisations of patriarchy have evolved to include concepts of intersectionality. Contemporary studies suggest that patriarchy is not constant and is subject to change. Gender relations are dynamic: the nature of control and subjugation of women varies from one society to another. Patriarchal structures can change across regions: the oppression that women face may be different in a developing country compared to developed countries (Ray 2008). While the subordination of women may differ in terms of its nature, certain characteristics such as control over women's sexuality and her reproductive power cut across class, ethnicity, religions and regions and are common to all patriarchal systems (Jha 2012).

Lerner (1986) argues that male dominance over women is not "natural" or biological, but the product of a historical development begun in the second millennium B.C., in the Ancient Near East. Patriarchy in humans, as Lerner (1986) explains, derives from two concepts: first the traditional meaning referring to a system based on Greek and Roman law, placing a male figure as the head of the family with absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female relatives. The second, explaining patriarchy in a wider context, refers to the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance not only over women and children within the family, but also over women in society in general. It implies that men hold the power in all the important institutions of society while women are deprived of access to such power. Patriarchy in the context of this study, addresses women's subordination in both aspects, as the role of the family in sustaining patriarchy is important in this study. Therefore, it is important to include familial as well as socio-cultural factors.

Although in general, feminist theorists have rejected the notion that gender norms are biological, there has been a traditional search for biological explanations of gender roles. Heywood (2012, p.233) states that patriarchal ideas "blur the

distinction between sex and gender and assume that all social distinctions between men and women are rooted in biology or anatomy". Scholars such as Smuts (1995), while admitting that most research rejects the role of biology in the origins of patriarchy, argues that the analyses of patriarchy should address patriarchy from its evolutionary roots and the evolution of male motivations to dominate female sexuality. She goes on to state that feminist theory and evolutionary theory are both fundamentally focused on similar issues regarding power, mainly on who gets it, how it is obtained, how it is used and its consequences. She hypothesises that patriarchy is rooted within a pre-hominid past where it is a product of reproductive strategies shown by male primates, which modern humans have extensively replicated. Potts and Campbell (2008) agree with Smuts' (1995) notion that patriarchy is rooted in human evolution and derived from ancient hunter-gatherer societies, Accordingly, gender differences are often seen as deeply rooted in evolution and hard wired, reflecting the different roles and survival values. However, this account does not adequately represent current scientific insights (Ellemers 2018). Recent research suggests that the division of gender roles in hunter-gatherer societies may be more egalitarian than is often portrayed (Dyble et al. 2015).

Furthermore, patriarchal ideology exaggerates the biological difference between men and women (Sultana 2010), often celebrating men's masculinity and overlooking women's femininity, concurrently imposing character stereotypes on society, and asserting the perception of men's dominance over women. Feminist theorists argue that although biological differences might lead to difference in gender roles, they should not become the basis of a sexual hierarchy where men are dominant (Sultana 2010). Hence it is important to acknowledge that patriarchy is man-made and has developed according to the social, economic and political processes in society.

The concept of patriarchy remains central to a feminist understanding of society (see Hadi 2017; Clover et al. 2018). Therefore, addressing patriarchy, which is perceived as the original source of inequality, discrimination, and sexual harassment, is fundamental in ensuring that women are free from marginalisation and inequality (Tsai 2010). The origin of patriarchy can be traced to different

factors, forcing feminists to differ in their approach to understand patriarchy and adopt different strategies to overcome it. Notwithstanding the differences in ideologies between feminist groups, there is unity in rebellion against the hierarchical relationship between men and women. Within the context of this study, it is imperative to emphasise the link between patriarchy and feminism given the impact of patriarchy on women's daily lives and the role of empowerment in resisting patriarchal control.

2.4 Feminism, a brief introduction

Feminism is defined as an awareness of patriarchal control and of the exploitation and oppression of women in their sexuality, labour and fertility within the family, work environment and society in general (Khan and Bhasin 1986; Rawat 2014). Feminism represents a conscious action by women and men to transform their present situation within their society. In her book, *Feminism is for everybody*, Bell Hooks (2000) defines feminism as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression. Essentially, feminism is a struggle to achieve equality, dignity and rights for women over the control of their lives within the private and public spheres.

Feminist theorists initially share four common concerns (Jaggar and Rothenberg 1993). Firstly, they seek to understand the gendered nature of all social and institution relations. Secondly, gender relations are related to other inequalities in social life, such as family, education and welfare, work and politics, culture and leisure, which are socially structured in terms of relations of gender, power, class, race and sexuality. Thirdly, gender relations are not viewed as a natural process, but as a product of historical and cultural forces. Lastly, feminist theorists are explicitly political about their advocacy for social change.

Although feminists accept that the goal is to end sexism by empowering women (Lindsey 2015), there are disagreements on how the goal should be accomplished. It is noted that even though most people support equal rights, and participate in equal rights activism, they do not consider themselves as feminists (Scharff 2019), while some advocates of gender equality argue that men cannot be feminists, but

rather considered as pro-feminist (Lingard and Douglas 1999). Feminism is not grounded in gender, rather in a commitment to the resistance of gender biasness and sexual oppression (Pritchard 2014). Nevertheless, one aspect to be highlighted is that despite the differences in opinions, advocates of gender equality are united in their struggle against the unequal and hierarchical relationships between men and women (Ray 2008).

Feminism has never been a unified body of thought as there are many ways that feminism can be contemplated. One of the mainstream ways of measuring feminism is according to political or ideological orientation. Feminism emerged as an ideology associated with the contemporary women's liberation movement of the late 1960s. Within the last four decades, there has been a rise in feminism, gender equality and women's rights; feminists address a range of issues such as female suffrage, decision making rights on reproduction, legalisation of abortion, equal rights to employment, education rights, rights to own property and abolition of domestic violence (DuBois 1975; Andrews 1993; Begum 2012; Collier 2014; Chen et al. 2018; Altınova et al. 2019; Sutton and Borland 2019). Resistance has become a primary characteristic of feminism which has been mapped in three primary waves of thinking, classified as feminist empiricism (liberal feminism), standpoint feminism (Marxist feminism) and post structural feminism (radical feminism). It is not the intention of the study to cover feminist theories in detail, however, the following section addresses these waves of feminism to provide an understanding of the development of women's resistance to gender discrimination.

2.4.1 The waves of feminism in the West

Feminism began to trend as a series of "waves" with Martha Weinmann Lear's article published on March 10th 1968, entitled "The second feminist wave" in the New York Times. Lear analysed the effort of the National Organisation for Women (NOW) which was barely two years old in March 1968. Lear's article is remembered as a revolutionary commentary about the 1960s women's movement that reached a national audience. After that, the wave metaphor caught on. It became a useful way of linking the women's movement of the '60s and '70s to the women's

movement of the suffragettes, it became a new chapter in a grand history of women fighting together for their rights. Over time, the wave metaphor became a way to describe and distinguish between different eras and generations of feminism. This section briefly explains the four waves of feminism in the West. In highlighting the main aims and achievements of each wave.

The aim of the four waves of feminism was to gain gender equality in basic human rights. The four waves of feminism are distinguishable by specific time periods and by the specific theme each one was focused on. The first wave of feminism occurred during 1840 to 1920. In the course of the 19th century, the vote gradually became central to feminist demands and was seen as a symbol of recognition of women's rights to full citizenship and as a way to reform women's lives (Walters 2005). Hence the first wave of feminism was a social movement towards women's suffrage and women's rights. The suffragists achieved only a small amount of victories, yet these would prove to be an invaluable in winning over public opinion.

Towards the early 20th century, women in the West had achieved legal and civil equality to some extent, for example women over the age of 30 were allowed to vote. This was as a result of the complex situation during the first world war which allowed women the opportunity to work outside of their homes (Walters 2005). The second wave of feminism ranged from the late 1950s to the 1980s, started to focus on issues dealing with social justice and equality for women. Feminism is mostly associated with 'second wave' feminism as 'first wave' feminism focused mainly on suffrage and legal obstacles and was criticized for not achieving its complete aim. However, the second wave emerging after the second world war, was more diverse, as it included a wider range of issues such as civil rights, anti-war, sexuality, race. 'Gender' is a concept widely attributed to second wave feminism where sex (biological difference) and gender (cultural construct of roles) were the issues that were emphasised. Queer women felt themselves side-lined in the women's movement and the gay liberation groups. Some lesbians claimed they were central to women's liberation because "their very existence threatened male supremacy at its most vulnerable point" (Walters 2005, p.107). This was vital to the women's movement as it challenged the stereotypical view that all households should be heterosexual and the common belief in dominant male/ passive female

role (Walters 2005). Within the second wave of feminism, some radical feminists were in favour of a revolutionary change, while others such as liberal feminists were interested in opportunities to obtain equality with men (Flannery 2001).

The third wave of feminism (1988 to 2010) included some of the ideas of the second wave but expanded the definition of feminism beyond the experiences of white middle-class heterosexual women (Shaw and Lee 2009; Baumgardner 2011). During the third wave of feminism, there was increased recognition that whereas western feminists have faced obstacles of sexism and social and political inequalities, women in third world countries are faced with additional issues within their own society. These women often confront issues of sexism in the form of deep rooted local beliefs and practices which are often associated with religion, class, caste and ethnic biases (Walters 2005).

The fourth wave of feminism began in 2013 and is defined by technology and characterised by the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr and blogs to challenge misogyny and further gender equality (Cochrane 2013). Fourth wave feminism is an opportunity for women to raise their voice online. Issues that have been focused on include harassment, campus sexual assault and rape culture.

While the fourth wave of feminism is most contemporary, Asian women's lives are still heavily influenced by sociocultural traditions and practices, which put them in a delicate position. They are often faced with the challenge of having to choose tradition over striving for equality. However, Asian women are also found to have embraced the fourth wave of feminism, for example, with the help of technology and the internet, feminist movements such as the #MeToo movement have also permeated into Asian societies (Ho and Tsoi 2018).

2.4.2 The (In)visibility of Asian women in western feminist scholarship

This section does not aim to dismiss the contributions of feminist writers in the West but rather, to further reinforce the discourse that feminism is located in various

different contexts, hence the works of western feminist writers may not be directly applicable to women's studies in the East.

Within feminist discourse, the issues of sensitivity to cultural specificity and differences have been debated (Hirschmann 1998; Chen 2007). On the one hand, it is important to recognise that context, specificity, and difference are important to a successful feminism discourse. On the other hand, where cultural relativism is recognised, it is also a difficult path towards eliminating the oppression of women because the "culture" that is preserved is a patriarchal one which does little to change the position of women (Hirschmann 1998). This predicament is not only exhibited in western white middle class feminist interpretations of western women of colour and lower social class, but also western feminist responses to the situations of women in non-western cultures (Hirschmann 1998).

The narratives of East versus West may be viewed to be in contrast with one another, but they are both entities of social cultural imaginations constructed through mutual symbolic, material and self/other representations (Ang and Stratton 1995). This understanding of non-western feminism parallels Said's (1978) concepts of Orientalism. Said (1978) describes Orientalism as being an occidental theory based on the perspectives the West has of its oriental counterpart. Within the concepts of Orientalism the social-cultural imagination of the West (the 'Occident'), and the non-western 'other' (the East or the 'Orient'), are complete opposites, with the West being seen as economically and socially advanced while the 'other' (in which Asia is included) is viewed as being backwards (Said 1978). Said pointed out that western scholars' construction of the Oriental image is one of thought, in which an entire region is perceived as one homogenised culture. Said recognised that such a construction of the image of the East was an inadequate representation of the true constitution of the Orient, thereby leading to a reoccurring bias within western scholarship regarding the East. With that in mind, this study seeks to construct a voice for self-presentation in an attempt to resist a cliched depiction of Asian women as a non-feminist "other".

Feminist researchers argue that Asian women are both visible and invisible within western feminist theory depending on how Asian women are categorised (Chen

2007). Chen (2007) states that Asian women are not included within western feminist discourse as women in general are represented by white middle-class women, and women of colour are represented by black women. The invisibility of Asian women is a result of feminists' indifference to the differences among women. The western feminist discourse that attempts to include Asian women often associates these women with cultural stereotypes such as submissive, timid, unenlightened and constrained by Asian traditions and values (Chen 2007).

Western feminists pay great attention to sexual and physical perspectives, hence, they wear a distorting lens when observing women in Eastern countries (Ming and Qi 1999). When researching feminism in the East, the interest of western feminists concentrates on specific customs such as foot binding (Blake 1994; Cummings et al. 1997), female circumcision (Wilson 2013) and restrictive dress codes such as veiling in Middle Eastern countries (Laube 2010). Such descriptions are often deprived of proper historical facts, causing a confusion of ancient customs with modern realities, and leading to false assumptions (Ming and Qi 1999). Narayan (2000) critiques the selectivity with which femininity and cultures are depicted in non-western discourse. In her study she addresses the problem of selective labelling as categorising cultures into "package pictures of cultures", "neatly wrapped packages, sealed off from each other possessing sharply defined edges or contours, and having distinctive contents that differ from those of other 'cultural packages'" (Narayan 2000, p.1084). Categorising cultures into distinctive "packages" allows socially dominant groups to affirm the preservation of particular cultural and traditional values, depicting a culture's dominant cultural norms of femininity as a representation of the culture, therefore obscuring historical variations and contemporary changes in cultural practices (Narayan 2000). Take for example the practice of veiling. The West has considered the practice of veiling in the Middle East as a barbaric source of women's inequality. However, the complexity of this practice is largely misunderstood as some Muslim women not only voluntarily participate in veiling but defend the practice as well (Hirschmann 1998). In this manner, agency is often misinterpreted as oppression. As such, the depiction of culture through selective labelling not only facilitates the construction of the submissiveness of Asian femininity and characterising Asian women as

unquestioning followers of their cultural norms, but also portrays a contrasting picture of western culture as a progressive one that is less discriminatory against women.

It is important to realise that western feminist views of Asian women may be ill-informed ethnocentric representations. There is no one integrated feminist theory which encompasses all race, class national and cultural interests. Therefore, feminism will inevitably develop in different directions. This study acknowledges that cultures should not be treated as distinctive 'sealed packages' arranged in a hierarchal manner where western cultures are above Asian cultures. With this in mind, this study recognises that there is a need to reconceptualise different cultures' understandings of feminism.

Feminism has occurred in different parts of the world at varying times and in a different intensity. However, with the arrival of technology and social media, women around the world are now more connected than before. Challenging the assumptions that feminism and feminist movements are western interventions, it is argued that feminism is not a privilege of the West but has roots in other areas of the world as well (Chen 2007). Feminism is a global resistance to different forms of women's oppression in different contexts. Women's movements in Asia have become more prominent with the influence of western feminism. However, this study acknowledges that different regions of the world embrace feminism in a different way. Asian women may perceive feminism and empowerment differently than western feminists due to the cultural differences that influence their lives. Therefore, to further understand Asian women's journeys towards empowerment and gender equality, the next section will firstly review the history of feminism in Asia and discuss how feminism and women's movements have manifested in different regions of Asia.

2.5 The significance of culture, religion and traditional Asian values

Culture can be regarded as an ideology, or imply the expression of ideology (Tsai 2010). It also refers to the customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group (Henderson and Ainsworth 2003). Triandis (1994)

emphasizes cultural influences on social behaviour and how people interact. The way in which people relate to each other can differ significantly depending on different culture. The influence of culture and tradition on women's lives has implications for leisure not only in the western world but for women all over the world (Tsai 2010). The transfer of western values to the East, for instance can be inappropriate and will need to be modified to suit local conditions as women do not exist as a homogenous group (Teo and Leong 2006; Yang et al. 2016). However, not all values from the West have negative impacts. Western culture exerts a strong influence on sexual equality, which in some Asian countries has raised issues of self-awareness and women's rights, for example in Taiwan (Tsai 2010), India (Mehta 2016) and the Middle East (Golley 2004) .

Cultural and religious values play decisive roles in Asian economic growth and social conditions. Despite modernisation and economic development, Asian gender values have remained anachronistically stable (Fung 2000; Tsai 2006). Culturally, a patriarchal tradition is deeply rooted in the oriental Asian societies such as China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Similarly the Islamic tradition in Malaysia, Indonesia and Middle Eastern countries continues to suppress women's participation in the public sphere (Fung 2000). However, recent studies show that despite the strict patriarchal upbringing, many Asian women have resisted their culturally imposed expectations to change their current situation, such as choosing to stay single for the sake of career advancement rather than acceding to societal pressures of marriage (Gaetano 2014).

The relationship between culture and feminism is a complex and delicate one. Culture has an impact on gender equality because all cultures are permeated by practices and norms that often perpetuate gender inequality. This can be explained through the application of Hofstede's differences (Hofstede et al. 2010). By investigating the cultural difference between regions, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding towards why gender inequality exists more intensely in certain regions. The issue of gender inequality in a society can mainly be analysed from the perspectives of power distance index (PDI). Power distance is the degree of unequal distribution of power between a person at a high level and person at a lower level in society. PDI is concerned with human inequality. A high-power distance

culture will reject advancements towards gender equality and support the preservation of male dominance. Meanwhile lower power distance cultures support equality as a human value and this includes the empowerment of women. The PDI in almost all of the Asian countries is high, which means that Asian culture tends to accept the power coming from a person in a dominant position without justification.

To further understand the roles that culture, tradition and religious practices play in the evolution of Asian women's leisure opportunities in the Asian context (which will be discussed in the following chapter), it is important to firstly understand the evolution of women's position in different cultural settings. Religion and culture exist in close relation, where religious practices occupy an integral role in cultural traditions (Beyers 2017). For this reason, culture and religion must be viewed as relatives. There are three main religions that inform Asian culture and beliefs and are vital to the evolution of feminism. They are: Confucianism, which covers most of East Asia and Southeast Asia (i.e. China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Macau, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia etc); Islam, which covers West Asia and parts of Southeast Asia (i.e. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Malaysia); and Hinduism, which covers Central Asia, South Asia and parts of West Asia. It is important to note that it is unrealistic for the study to represent the whole of Asia, given the diversity in ideologies, gender practices and cultural values across the vast geographical region. Therefore, for the purpose of simplicity, this section reviews Asian feminism and women's movements according to the region's cultural and religious practices. By outlining the historical progression of feminism and women's movements within the context of their religious and cultural practices, this chapter intends to construct a setting which contributes to understanding and contextualising the background and cultural aspects of the environment in which Asian women are brought up.

2.6 Women's movement in Confucian society

Confucianism and feminism are two conflicting ethical systems. On the one hand feminism is a relatively new and fast developing philosophy that is regarded as

inherently antipatriarchal, on the other hand Confucianism is an established traditional philosophy that is typically patriarchal (Tao 2000). Confucianism was developed from the teachings of a Chinese philosopher, Confucius over two thousand years ago.

Women in a Confucian society generally suffer because of their low status (Li 2000). This is a result of the institutionalised and deep-rooted ideology and practices of Confucianism. Confucianism is androcentric and promotes sexual inequality (Jiang 2009). For years, this philosophy has helped maintain the patriarchal social order in the East and parts of Southeast Asia. Abusive behaviours and mistreatment of women were not uncommon (Li 2000). The oppression of women in pre-communist China were well known as one of the worst in human history (Jiang 2009). For example, foot binding and polygamy were common practices throughout traditional China. Although these practices were ultimately banned, sexual discrimination still prevails in China.

Traditional Confucian society was constituted by the teachings of Confucius which conforms to an essentially male value system. There was an unequal distribution of power in which the male element was dominant and the family was patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal (Thornton and Lin 1994; Leung 2003). Women were believed to be temporary family members and had no claim to inheritance and property. This patrilocal system was rooted in the Ancient Chinese clan systems; patriarchal authority made sure that only sons carried on the patrilineage whereas daughters when married, had to leave her home to join her husband's household (Leung 2003;Moktan and Subranmaniam 1998). In ancient Chinese history, almost every other Chinese dynasty practiced the oppression of women under patriarchy under the strong influence of Confucianism, apart from the Tang Dynasty (Chen 2014). The influence of Confucianism had a serious impact on the behaviour of women and the roles they were expected to play in ancient China (Menke 2017).

Patriarchy was a defining feature in traditional Confucian society; it imposed profound oppression on women and deprived them of political, economic and social rights (Jie and Kanji 2003). Economically, they were entirely dependent on their male relations. The birth of a daughter was considered a disappointment and raising

them was a waste of resources. Daughters, when they reached a suitable age, were sent off to another family in marriage, therefore, raising a daughter is like "watering another man's garden" (Rai 1992, p. 20). Family inheritance was passed to male heirs, and women had no say on marriage decisions (Jie and Kanji 2003). The imperial Confucian construction of women as subjects in society is defined by her relationship with the men in her life (father, husband and sons) thus confining women to a secondary position within the family and community. For example, in traditional Chinese practices, girls as young as five were forced to have their feet forcibly bent with cloth, so that their feet remained bound for the rest of their lives (Li 2000; Menke 2017). This forces women to limit their activities outdoors and reinforced the androcentric idea that women belonged inside the house (Li 2000; Jie and Kanji 2003).

One important factor that brought an end to these sexist rituals in Chinese history was the reformist movement at the end of the 19th century by a small group of intellectuals who had been exposed to western ideas. These intellectuals introduced not only a democratic social system but also advocated equality between men and women, in marriage, education and labour participation (Li 2000). This occurred at a time when China faced military and political crisis from inside and outside the country. The Opium Wars (1839-42) forced China to open up to foreign trade, which brought in foreign ideologies (Menke 2017). In the 20th century, the founding of the republic in 1911 gave rise to a feminist movement which aimed for the equality of men and women, including the right for women to be politically involved (Jie and Kanji 2003). This was called the May the fourth movement and is considered China's first feminist movement (Li 2000). The issues arising at this point were usually women voicing their need for freedom and to break away from the restrictions of traditional family constraints, freedom to participate in political affairs and the liberation from traditional arranged marriage.

Influential scholars such as Liang Qi Chao called for the emancipation of women, better female education and women's participation in nation building by arguing that the fall of the nation lies in the lack of women's education (Hong Fincher 2014). Chinese feminist He Yin Zhen (1884-1920) called for the abolishment of the rule of men and the introduction of equality (Liu et al. 2013). He Yin Zhen was a vital

character in the feminist movement in China as she was often seen as a catalyst for the movement. He Yin Zhen's concern was primarily the relationship between patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism and gender inequality; she was not afraid to challenge tradition (Menke 2017). She criticised Confucian teaching that men were more superior than women and recognised that society was in need of change.

The 1949 communist revolution was a key event in improving the status of women in China. The communist party reasoned that the key to success was its ability to offer economic means to peasants and freedom to women (Leung 2003). It made a firm commitment to ensure gender equality (Menke 2017) which propelled women to fight for their own liberation alongside the liberation of their nation (Li 2000). While Confucianism promoted gender inequality, the communist party strove for gender neutrality. The party was committed to not only negotiating gender differences but to also desexualising men and women (Leung 2003). New rights for women were implemented, including the marriage law of 1950 (Jie and Kanji 2003) while prostitution, child betrothal, arranged marriages and concubinage were outlawed (Li 2000). However, some women were sceptical about the party's commitment to change. Ding Ling (1904-1986) took issue with cases of divorce, stating that divorce rarely benefitted women and the reasons for divorce were often attributed to them, and they became targets for gossip if they remained unmarried while working in the public sphere (Menke 2017). Such ideas showed that traditional Confucian ideology still remained within the mentality of Chinese people even under Mao Zedong's efforts to improve equality. The dramatic changes since the cultural revolution have had inconsistent impacts on the women's movement and status in China. On the one hand, Chinese women made progress in gender equality but on the other, women's status was still extremely low (Li 2000). Women still did not receive equal rights to men, for example, when land was redistributed to all peasants during the land reform movement, it was distributed only to men (Stacey 1983). Chen and Dilley (2002, p.119) commented that Chinese women merely became "vessels of class ideology, sexually neutralized revolutionary militants".

The reform movement at the end of 1970s brought about China's shift to a market economy and an opening up to global capitalism, including foreign investments for

the first time. However, the impact of the reform on women was not positive. In rural areas the de-collectivisation of agriculture played a role in restoring a traditional sexual division of labour, thus raising new constraints for women to be employed (Wolf 1985). Deng Xiao Ping's reform increased the discrimination against women in terms of employment and rewards and pressured them to withdraw from the workforce. The new policies viewed women as the weaker gender who needed protection and support, causing women to quit their jobs and to return to household work (Leung 2003).

During the communist era, the Chinese government celebrated gender equality and credited the nation's productivity to the female workforce. However, in the 1990s, gender inequalities deepened as China's economic reform progressed, dismantling the party mandated system of equal employment for men and women (Hong Fincher 2016). In summary, China's gender equality development had never truly left the patriarchal ideology as Confucian patriarchy was replaced by democratic patriarchy and then by patriarchal socialism (Stacey 1983).

Gender inequality still exists in the East and the Southeast today, where the traditional Confucian views of dependant and submissive women are still warranted (Zhang and Liu 2012). For example, the phenomenon of the 'leftover women'. The term is used to describe professional single women in their late twenties or older who prioritise their career and education above marriage. This phenomenon is created by the intense pressure from family and friends to get married in order to avoid being 'leftover' (Hong Fincher 2014). The emergence of marriage markets such as the Shanghai marriage market in China also portrays the disturbing reality of China's dating scene (Tacon 2013). Handwritten advertisements of women (and sometimes men) are displayed by their parents at the market to compete for a prospective spouse. The race to get married is real and is heightened by media. In 2011, the All China Women's Federation posted a quote on their website that encouraged women to not further their education to appear more appealing to suitors as girls do not need a lot of education to be married into a rich and powerful family. Rather than praising young women for their education and success, China prefers to shame them as 'leftover women' in an attempt to encourage them to get married (Menke 2017). The usage of this word shows the

lack of progression in gender equality in China despite the efforts of previous generations.

Women in China face a number of social challenges including sexual harassment and discrimination in education and employment (To 2013). However, by embracing the fourth wave of feminism, women in China are able to emulate the actions of feminists in the West. The #MeToo movement was brought to China by Luo Xixi when she posted on Weibo (Chinese social media) revealing she had been harassed by her PhD professor, which ultimately got him sacked (Fernando 2017).

The biggest threat to feminism in China is the Chinese authorities. In 2015, a group of five women known as the 'feminist five' were arrested for handing out stickers about sexual harassment ahead of international women's day (Menke 2017). Social media accounts of 'Feminist Voices', China's leading feminist organisation was banned and removed after posting on the women's march in the United States (Fernando 2017). However the arrest of the Feminist Five (Li Maizi whose birth name is Li Tingting, Wei Tingting, Zheng Churan, Wu Rongrong, and Wang Man) sparked the creation of a powerful new symbol of feminist dissent against a patriarchal authoritarian state (Hong Fincher 2016). Although the arrest of the Feminist Five was a traumatic event, they have continued to strive for gender equality. Lu Pin, a prominent Chinese feminist, the former chief editor of China's feminist website 'Feminist Voices', also showed support to the Feminist Five.

Resistance against societal norms is not a recent phenomenon. A custom that dates back to the early 19th century, women in the southern part of Guangzhou would vow to remain a "Zishunu" (self-combed women), leaving home for work without the need of marriage. While some see it as a rebellion against strict Confucian patriarchy, it is more complex than it appears. Superficially, refusing to marry may seem like a phenomenon of rebellion, but there is an emphasis on their relationship with their natural family and very traditional Confucian values such as filial piety (Branigan 2014). Currently, China's feminists operate in a hostile environment. The odds are stacked against these women who are contributing to the fight against gender inequality, but as Rey Chow states, "the collapse of tradition would find its most moving representations in the figures of those who are traditionally most

oppressed, figures that become 'stand- ins' for China's traumatised self-consciousness". (Chow 1991, p.170). However, with the growth of technology and social media, China's feminist movements have not only survived the intense crackdown operated by the Chinese government, they have grown against all odds. Hong Fincher (2019) reports that women are opposing China's oppressive views of women and the country's policy which incites gender inequality, as well as sharing information and voicing their anger towards sexism on the internet.

2.7 Islam and women's rights

Religious practices occupy a substantial role in people's lives and have been found to be strong predictors various aspects of important (Tarakeshwar et al. 2003). Feminists regard religion as a source of women's oppression citing that women are often presented in religious texts as subordinate (Hashim 1999), and religion is used to justify and maintain men's dominance in society. Within Islamic society in Asia, there is a hierarchy whereby men have power over women and elderly men and women have power over younger men and women (Joseph 1996). However, Islam as a religion does not discriminate against women, and considers men and women to be equal in God's sight and they are expected to fulfil the same religious duties (The Oxford Islamic studies 2020). Muslims accept life as being "God's will" (Mir-Hosseini 2006). Complete surrender to God through prayers, faith, fasting during Ramadan and pilgrimage to the holy land of Mecca are the pathways to follow in order to live according to God's will. However, these pillars of Islamic teachings frequently blur the lines between religion, culture and leisure (Livengood and Stodolska 2004).

Women and men are spiritually equal, and were created equally for similar purposes in life. Islam does not differentiate men from women in relation to social responsibilities; they are seen to complement each other. Neither does Islam confine women to the house (Zeenah 2008). Nevertheless religious practices are subject to change. To understand how religion affects women's lives, one must "address the ways in which religious symbols are manipulated by both men and women in everyday life, as well as in institutional settings" (Lazreg 1988, p.95).

Different interpretations lead to different implementations of the Islamic teaching that results in misunderstanding gender roles in various Islamic states. One example is the enforcement of the guardianship law in Saudi Arabia, which under the pretence of protecting Muslim women has stripped them of their freedom and rights (Alshahrani 2016). A woman's life is controlled by her male guardian (normally a father or brother) from birth until death. Every adult woman in Saudi Arabia, regardless of social class is affected by the "male guardianship" policies, a set of informal practices that prevent women from making decisions without the presence or consent of a male relative (Alshahrani 2016). Feminist activist Wajeha Al-Huwaider (2009) notes that the Quran does not stipulate that the guardianship system should be used to deny people's rights. The barriers faced by many Saudi women are linked to the male guardianship system, such as the ability to travel or pursue their education or career abroad. Women require a male guardian's approval and permission to travel outside the country, thus limiting women's their ability to participate in leisure activities (Human Rights Watch 2016). Traditional Islamic law experts believe that male guardianship is a responsibility bestowed upon men, while contrary to conventional beliefs, the system is not meant to constrain or oppose women's rights.

Within the Arab world, feminism is often viewed as the result of western intervention in the Middle East, thus, it has been opposed and regarded as an "alien import". In reaction to western imperialism, feminism is seen as improper and irrelevant to the Arabian people and to their culture (Golley 2004). Some western human rights ideals in relation to gender (or equality in gender roles) are not accepted by Muslim communities which tend to retain most of their traditional values and practices, especially regarding gender roles. Women face opposition from their own society in terms of the emancipation, especially in the Middle Eastern countries. Feminism is argued to be a product of decadent western capitalism that alienates women from tradition, religion and culture (Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007). A study conducted away from the Middle East, on the modernisation of Muslim women in Malaysia, by Osman (2013), revealed that even with women's rights and policies in place, the government and society in Malaysia rejects western ideals on gender equality. However, Golley (2004) noted that

feminism, though fiercely opposed, was not an import from the west but an inevitable result of the changes which encompassed all aspects of life. He further argues that feminism was born because of the diminishing traditional feudal system and the rising modern capitalist way of life. Under the new capitalist system, the transformation of social structures has an inevitable impact on women (Golley 2004).

In the Islamic states and Muslim communities around the world, gender division discussions often highlight segregation and women's confinement to the private sphere and exclusion from activities outside of the home (Osman 2013). While formal education is seen as improper for women, religious education however is considered important in ensuring that Muslim women become desirable wives. For example, in Malaysia, some Muslim parents consider formal education to be impractical for their daughters (Musa 2010). Keeping women at home is also a practical expression of Islamic or Arabic identity against the expanding influence of western culture. As a result, women are considered less qualified because they lack education and exposure to life in the public sphere (Golley 2004). Muslim women are often faced with the conflict between their faith and their rights, as many Muslim women are highly religious. Their faith is grounded in a patriarchal interpretation, which they struggle to reconcile with the Islamic ideals of justice and equality (Gearey 2011). Any discussion around increasing women's freedom and mobility through education is usually perceived as a pernicious western idea (Hamdan 2005).

While there has been a recent revival in the debate on women and Islam, it is still largely intended to address the West's perception of Muslim women (Ahmed-Ghosh 2015). Western concepts of feminism often differ from those of Islamic feminists. Islam particularly has a reputation of being anti women and supporting a segregated social system. Many Muslims disagree with such a view, stating that the Quran provides rights for women, far exceeding the rights which secular legal systems provide.

The history of feminism and Islam is associated with conflict and mistrust (Hashim 1999), stemming from the real and perceived economic, political and theological

threats which the Islamic and western social system have posed to each other. Muslims often reject the notion of feminism because the feminist emphasis on equal rights is at odds with Islamic teachings on specific roles for men and women (Afshar 1997). Many Muslim women face a painful choice between their Muslim identity, their faith or their new gender awareness as religion provides Muslim women with a sense of belonging (Mir-Hosseini 2006).

Islam is not unique in having androcentric interpretations that have grappled with covert and overt sexism within its own sacred text. It is impossible to refrain from putting one's own biases and experiences on the world we interpret (Mir-Hosseini 2006). In many religions, sacred texts have been used to marginalise women, and Muslim women are facing a similar struggle. Much of what is followed today is based on the interpretations of scholars dating back hundreds of years rather than the literal teachings of god. Reinterpretation of the text is a controversial issue, but it will allow Islamic feminists to challenge the current patriarchal situations (Mir-Hosseini 2006).

Some might argue that Islam is a religion which provides men with status, control and authority over women, however activists have made efforts to reinterpret the Islamic sources, suggesting that these can be read as fully supportive of equal rights for women (Hashim 1999). Towards the twentieth century, Muslim women have come to realise that there is no coherent link between patriarchy and Islamic ideals, and no contradiction between feminism and faith (Mir-Hosseini 2006).

In the late 1980s, the emergence of a new consciousness and gender discourse of feminism was clear. One version of this new discourse is Islamic feminism. Islam and feminism are two conflicting forces, thus joining the two terms seems challenging. The term was first coined by Iranian activist Ziba Mir-Hosseini, who called for women to be allowed to work in universities (Khattab 2017). In 2009, Islamic feminism was promoted at a conference in Malaysia organised by the Musawah Movement, a global movement for equality and justice in a Muslim family (Khattab 2017). By advocating a brand of feminism that takes Islam as its source of legitimacy, these feminist voices are able to challenge the hegemonic patriarchal interpretations of the Sharia. This places Islamic feminism in a

prominent position to bring about a much needed paradigm shift in Islamic law by exposing the inequality embedded in the misinterpretation of sharia (Mir-Hosseini 2006).

With this growing feminist discourse, the situation of women in Islamic states is moving towards gender equality. For example, in Saudi Arabia, a gradual expansion of women's rights began under the reign of the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who in 2013 appointed 30 women to the Shura Council, his highest advisory body. Two years after that, women were allowed to vote for the first time and run in municipal elections (Sanchez and France-Presse 2016). One of the biggest steps towards empowering women was a move to allow women to drive, ending the reign as the only nation in the world where women were forbidden from getting behind the wheel of a car (Alexander 2017). However, conflicts arise between traditional Islamic beliefs and practices and the pressure for a more secular oriented modernism (Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007). Gender equality has not been received well in Islamic regions and efforts to raise awareness have received resistance. As Saudi Arabia's Crown prince Mohammed bin Salman makes public displays of giving women rights, the country is also arresting women's rights activists. The bold reform was accompanied by a brutal crackdown on women's rights activists as activism is forbidden in the monarchy (Morris 2018). For example, Loujain al Hathloul, one of Saudi Arabia's high-profile feminists who focused on women's rights to drive and on ending the country's restrictive male guardianship system was arrested. She was one of many arrested in the campaign against feminism in Saudi Arabia. Asma Lambert, a well-known Moroccan feminist, was forced to resign from her position in the Mohammed league of Scholars due to her support for equality for women (Lindsey 2018). This issue remains a controversial topic in the Arab and Muslim world. Nevertheless, there have been improvements in women's political empowerment and participation to make their voices heard (Islam 2019). Muslim women are moving away from being powerless victims of patriarchal and paternalistic societies to explore their potential as agents of social change (Salehi et al. 2020). Though gender inequality is embedded in Islamic patriarchal culture (Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007), some societies have shown a movement towards gender equality. The most recent case is a feminist revolution

in the kingdom of Java, where its current ruler, Sultan Yogyakarta, is making changes to adapt to changing times, most significantly making his title gender neutral and passing the reins of leadership to his eldest daughter (BBC 2018a). However, these changes are still faced with opposition from male royal relatives as they do not accept the rule of a female leader in an Islamic Kingdom.

2.8 Hinduism, caste and the feminist movement in India

India's population is mainly Hindu, but India is also home to citizens practising Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism and many other religions. Since its independence in 1947, Indian's constitution guarantees religious freedom and prohibits gender and caste-based discrimination. In order to accommodate the country's religious diversity, India implemented secularism to assure the right to religious freedom and the cultural practices associated with it. However, ensuring religious freedom also affirms gender inequality through the patriarchal practices associated with various religions (Parashar 2008; Mehta 2016). There are studies acknowledging the existence of religious-based gender inequality (Mitra 2008; Parashar 2008). Hinduism is patriarchal like most religions, but like Islam, Hinduism contains many feminist ideas that are overlooked, often deliberately by male Hindu Leaders and activists. Gendered social structures across religions see men as superior to women (Williams 2011). To varying degrees, religious laws give fewer rights to women than men (Parashar 2008), despite women's equality being written as a constitutional law (MacKinnon 2006; Parashar 2008; Williams 2011).

Indian society is characterised by caste and religious diversity. The caste system is one of the most enduring practices in India, dating back to as far as 3500 years. The caste system is hereditary in nature and is governed by strict hierarchical social classes consisting of Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and Dalits, the untouchables. Caste is associated with a person's relative degree of purity or pollution and social status. Inter caste marriage is socially unacceptable as there is a large difference in status between upper and lower caste. Women in the lower caste are often in situations that maintain their poverty, and hence constitute a barrier to class mobility (Jain 2005; Mitra 2008; Parashar 2008). However, scholars

such as Nadkarni (2003) claim that the fundamental teachings of Hinduism do not support the practice and principles of the caste system. He argues that the caste system was developed out of necessity for socio-economic sustainability. However, in regard to women, Mackinnon (2006, p.195) claims that Indian society is "male dominated, both economically and socially" and women are inadvertently placed in a dependent role, irrespective of class and religion.

Even though caste-based discrimination is prohibited in the Indian constitution, there are still provisions for discrimination, particularly in education and employment (Gangoli 2007). Caste also directly affects the discourse on gender in India. Indian feminists are concerned with the caste system because of the recognition that gender and caste are inter-defined in community life (Davar 1999). Gender in this sense is about power and power relations, while the caste status controls that power, therefore, how a society processes caste will inadvertently affect gender (Davar 1999). Indian feminism consists of mostly upper caste Hindu women, while Dalit and tribal Indians (who occupy the lowest caste) are still marginalised and continue to suffer inequality and sustained poverty (Manorama 2006).

There is a distinction between pre-independence and post-independence women's movements in India. The pre-independence movements were essentially about social reforms initiated by upper caste men while the post-independence movement demanded gender equality, gender-based labour division and highlighted the oppressive nature of existing patriarchal structure (Gangoli 2007). During the pre-independence period, what is known as the 'women question' was raised primarily by elite upper caste Hindu men and included issues such as women's education, widow marriages and campaigning against sati (a ritual where a widow is forced to take her own life after her husband's passing) (Gangoli 2007). However, the emerging nationalist movements that resisted colonial interventions of gender relations made these campaigns internal matters to be decided within the community (Sen 2000). In the 1920s, localised women's associations were formed and began to working on issues of women's education and livelihood strategies (Sen 2000).

Understanding feminism in India has led to the claim for an 'indigenous feminism' which is rooted in the country's post-colonial past. Kumar Jayawardena, a Sri Lankan feminist, historian and founder of the Indian Associations of Women's Studies in 1981, defined feminism in India as "embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change the system" (Jayawardena 1986 cited in Corrin 1999). For her, the understanding of feminism originated from the belief that equality and social justice is infused in the blood of the independence movement generation. She asserts that this movement emerged as the result of the formulation and consolidation of national identities Similarly, Indian feminist Vina Mazumdar (1927-2013) associated the anti-imperialist struggle of the national movement with the awareness of women's issues. She suggested that the struggles for equality and justice for women was similar, if not identical to the struggle for the independence of the country.

Mainstream feminism in India tends to focus on issues such as child marriages, sex selective abortion, and dowry related violence. It was not until the late 1970s that feminist groups focused on violence against women. Feminist movements in India posed a challenge to established patriarchal institutions, such as the family, dominant social values and structural and legal interventions in the area of violence against women (Gangoli 2007), including sexual violence against marginalised women such as the rape of the Dalit (the untouchables), tribal or Muslim women (Kurian 2018). In the 1990s, India's economic liberation triggered an unexpected shift in the country which brought about questions on women's freedom and choice. The arrival of western companies on the one hand opened up job opportunities for women in urban India and on the other brought about the influence of western feminism through media (Kurian 2018).

Scholars have highlighted that India is reluctant to implement laws to eliminate patriarchy or gender inequality (MacKinnon 2006; Parashar 2008). Feminists feel cornered as they have to choose between their commitment to gender equality and their resistance to state power (Dutta and Sircar 2013). However, the 2012 fatal gang rape of 23-year-old student, Jyoti Singh, in Delhi became the tipping point for an unprecedented number of youths protesting and rallying for women's unconditional freedom. These young feminists have asserted that women have

absolute right to their choices, their bodies and their movements in public space. Hence after three decades since the last amendment of the penalty code for rape provisions in 1983, Singh's brutal assault and murder catapulted the movement into the mainstream, generating the public momentum required to realise law reform in 2013 (Kotiswaran 2017).

The challenges that the feminist movement now faces stem from the vast diversities within India. Feminism within India is divided along class, caste, sexuality and disability, and as parts of India develop at a faster rate, an increased social and economic inequality is giving rise to new problems like sexual harassment in the workplace and on public transport (Bagri 2013). Although attention has been brought to sexual abuse in India's largest film industry, Bollywood (BBC 2018b), it is doubtful that the #MeToo movement in India will have the same evolution as in the United States. In addition, many Indian feminists have rejected the movement, claiming that it is impractical since most of India has no access to the internet. Furthermore, feminists in India recognised that one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish is changing men's perceptions and underlying attitudes toward women which many advocates claim is necessary for a permanent end to the violence, abuse and persecution of women in India (Bargi 2013).

Asian women's struggle against gender inequality can be seen throughout many parts of Asia. Gender inequality in the familial, social and economic structures of Asian society is built on a foundation of patriarchy, sexism and misogyny. As demonstrated in this section, Asian women have fought tirelessly against gender discrimination throughout history and through countless obstacles, have achieved many milestones of achieving gender equality. It is crucial to understand the history of women's movements in Asia as it allows us to have a deeper appreciation of the fight against gender discrimination. Religious practices and culture are intertwined in a traditional society and change is slow on the social front in Asia. Nevertheless, there is still a need to listen to the voices of women from different cultural backgrounds that are calling for culturally specific responses to men's dominance and discrimination against women.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter first set out to achieve the first objective of the study which is to examine the theories of gender, patriarchy and feminism. Gender was defined through a continuum spectrum with femininity at one end and masculinity at the other. However, this did not concede with the theories of gender fluidity as a gender could not be seen as a single entity. Gender was also defined through social constructions, whereby the formation of gender identities is developed through the normative socio-cultural standards. The formations of these gender stereotypes dictate the behaviour of men and women and are used to justify discrimination and subordination of women. The theories of patriarchy were discussed to explore the roots of patriarchy. Patriarchy is further discussed alongside feminist theories to enhance the understanding of the marginalisation of women. The theories of feminism were introduced to help gain an insight into women's struggles to achieve equality. However, this study highlights that feminist studies commonly did not include Asian women, and even if Asian women were introduced in the studies, western feminists often saw them in a stereotypic and backwards manner.

However, this chapter acknowledges the gap in the literature where the scarcity of Asian perspectives in gender and feminist scholarship needs to be addressed. Hence, this chapter continues to highlight the need to reconceptualise Asian feminism to emphasise the importance of culture within discussions of feminism. The chapter charts the progress of feminism in Asia and the influence of culture and religious practices. An exploration of the progression of women's movements in Asia enables a deeper understanding of the cultural component of Asian feminism.

With the understanding of gender, patriarchy and feminism theories, as well as women's movements in the context of Asia, the next chapter will attempt to establish the fundamental links between these domains and women's leisure and tourism experiences.

Chapter 3: Leisure, tourism and female travellers

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the link between leisure and tourism and identifies the stages of development within women's leisure studies. The chapter reviews themes in tourism and leisure related to gender and travel that are relevant to this study. The next section discusses the constraints faced by female travellers and how women negotiate these constraints. Following that, the chapter reviews the literature on women's travel motivation and the benefits of travel. This section reveals that women travel primarily to escape from their home environment and to seek self-development. Lastly, the chapter reviews the literature on Asian female travellers, highlighting the socio-cultural influences that affect their travelling behaviour and experiences.

3.2 Leisure and tourism

Leisure refers to different types of recreation activities. Throughout the early and mid-20th century, leisure was often studied as part of research on families and local communities (Roberts 2010). Leimgruber (2013) discusses leisure with a time distance model, distinguishing leisure activities into three categories: short, medium and long-range. According to Liemgruber (2013), the term tourism refers to long range activities. Leisure can also be defined as time away from work, work here referring to paid employment. However, this definition of leisure is quite problematic as many women work unpaid in the home (Henderson et al. 1989).

Historically, leisure travel was a privilege undertaken by men (Harris and Wilson 2007) and only a minority of women from the upper class were able to afford the privilege, funds and social status to travel (Robinson 1990). The traditional western image of a traveller was often promoted to be men (Leontidou 1994). Leisure opportunities have long been divided along gender lines where gender itself becomes a limitation in making travel arrangements and decisions (Wilson and Little 2005). Leisure has different meanings for men and women (Arab-

Moghaddam et al. 2007) who engage in different levels of leisure activities (Jackson and Henderson 1995). The differences between men and women's access to and experiences of leisure reflect the gender division of society and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles (Aitchison 2005a) and women have often focused on the disadvantaged position they face in leisure activities and opportunities in comparison with men (Qiu et al. 2018).

The dimensions of tourism and leisure are integrally related, and these terms have always been used indiscriminately (Cohen 2010). Researchers have attempted to establish the nature of the relationship between tourism and leisure and have indicated that with these two interrelated fields, the concepts developed in one field may be used in another (Ryan 1994; Carr 2002). Even though these two fields are often perceived to be consisting of a single field of study, they differ conceptually and theoretically (Carr 2002).

Historically, leisure and tourism studies depart from different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, and have formulated varying research problems and programmes (Cohen 2010). As Smith and Godbey (1991, p.93) commented, the "traditions of recreation and leisure studies have historically ignored tourism". From an education perspective, "leisure studies" has emerged as a freestanding entity, while tourism is viewed as a specific discourse (Walle 2010).

Fedler (1987) stated that some scholars have assumed that leisure and tourism are separate entities, differing between the dimensions of home (day to day leisure) and away from home (tourism), assuming that the experiences sought when travelling are the complete opposite of those at home (Fedler 1987). Fedler (1987) also pointed out that a common problem was conceptual, posing a challenge to specifying any theoretical relationship between leisure, tourism and recreation, which in turn resulted in a lack of understanding of the association between the three domains.

Others argued that tourism is a "special" form of leisure, having its own special characteristics but sharing behavioural and experiential factors (Cohen 1974; Leiper 1990; Ryan 1994). It is noted that in the past, travel was not perceived as a leisure activity because according to Cohen (2010), leisure activities are normally

conducted at home or within an individual's ordinary space, whereas tourism involves a break in routine and travelling across an individual's ordinary space. Leisure activities are often repetitive and shorter in duration while tourism activities involve long periods of time and are unique.

Scholars have pointed out that understanding the relationship between leisure and tourism is crucial as the psychological and behavioural influences on participation in leisure and tourism activities are often shared (Moore et al. 1995; Carr 2002; Brey and Lehto 2007). To elaborate on this, Carr's (2002) study introduces a leisure and tourism continuum model, as shown in figure 3.1. Carr (2002) explains the relationship between leisure and tourism through attitudes, norms, personalities, and habits of individuals. He found that despite differences in behaviour, individuals tend to exhibit commonalities in deep rooted habits and beliefs from their everyday lives in the tourism context. In figure 3.1, the similarities and differences in leisure and tourism behaviour can be observed. One end of the continuum shows the leisure behaviour exhibited by individuals in their home environment which are influenced by their residual culture. On the other end however is the tourist behaviour influenced by tourist culture. This shows that, the residual culture and tourist culture both influence travel behaviour to a certain degree. This is particularly relevant to this study as it shows that cultural influences in the tourist's home environment are partly responsible for the behaviour exhibited when travelling.

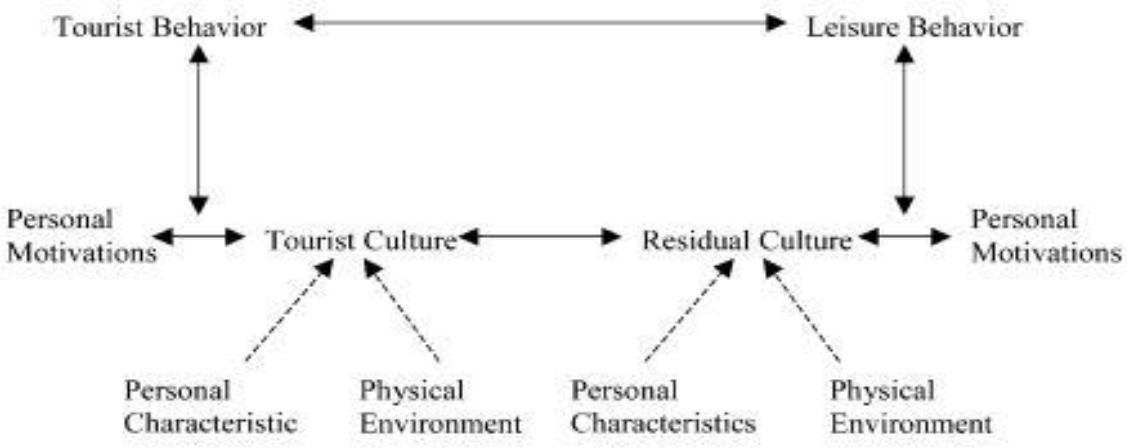

Figure 3.1: The tourism-leisure continuum model (Carr 2002, p.976)

Other scholars echo Carr's (2002) study. For example, Brey and Lehto (2007) highlighted the influence of an individual's habitual behaviour and leisure preferences on their travel choices. In a series of studies, Chang and Gibson (2011; 2015) also examined the leisure-tourism connection using the leisure involvement of individuals. They found that individuals habitually involved in leisure activities are more likely to behave in a similar way in the tourism context.

Tourism involves travelling to a specific place for leisure purposes. Tourism scholars often define tourists as leisure travellers, such as Cohen (1974, p.533), who depicted a tourist as a "voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experiences". Pearce (1982) further developed Cohen's work by categorising five different types of tourists, namely environmental traveller, high contact traveller, spiritual traveller, pleasure first traveller, and exploitative traveller. However recently, the definition of tourist has begun to include travelling for business as well (Goeldner and Ritchie 2012).

It could be said that travel undertaken in relative freedom as a pleasurable rewarding activity falls under leisure (Smith and Godbey 1991), however, it is difficult to conclude with precision where and under what circumstances tourism experiences become leisure experiences.

Although this study focuses on tourism, it does not ignore the underpinning leisure concepts that support tourism. Indeed, there is a plethora of literature on gender research in tourism, and these studies stem from the wider scope of leisure literature. Therefore it is important to acknowledge the interconnections between leisure and tourism and the impact on tourism research by leisure scholars.

3.3 Stages of development in women's leisure studies

Research on women and leisure initially emerged approximately four decades ago (e.g. Deem 1982; Gregory 1982) and it continues to evolve to highlight leisure and its meaning for women through cultural, theoretical and methodological perspectives. The literature has since evolved to include studying women and

leisure in the context of post-structuralism (Henderson 2013). Research on this perspective is focused towards deconstructing traditional texts, such as the meaning of symbols and language and structures such as leisure. Post structuralism offers another way of studying how knowledge is produced, as well as a way to critique the structuralist assumption that there is one specific truth (Henderson 2013). A post structuralist approach states that, to understand a concept such as leisure requires systems that produce the knowledge (Henderson 2013), as a post structuralist approach may emphasise multiple identities, the reflexive self, and the breakdown between concepts such as benefits, constraints (Jordan and Aitchison 2008) and the many meanings of being a woman which could have implications for leisure. Power relationships and their relationship with gender are critical when considering post structuralist perspectives (Aitchison 2005b).

The evolution of women's leisure studies originates from recognising the social justice surrounding the oppression and deteriorating quality of life for women (Henderson 2013). Tetreault (1985) originally proposed the feminist phase theory. This theory includes five common stages of thinking about women which are: male scholarship, compensatory scholarship, bifocal scholarship, feminist scholarship and multifocal or relationship scholarship. The feminist phase theory has been adapted into other fields, particular in leisure. Henderson (1994) adapted the feminist phase theory into five stages describing the past and potential of leisure research and Aitchison (2001) later expanded on her findings. Their studies identified five initial stages in leisure research: *the invisible women, the add women and stir, sex/ gender differences, women only,* and *gender*. A sixth stage was added later on relating to studies on *intersectionality* which involves the exploration of gender, race, class and other identities including sexuality and the acknowledgement of the evolving complexities of women, gender and leisure (Henderson and Gibson 2013). Although this study, with its cultural components, could be seemingly affiliated with this last stage, the direction of the study does not aim to use the concepts of intersectionality, but rather, relies on feminist perspectives to focus on how the patriarchal nature of Asian culture influences travel experiences and behaviour.

In a leisure context, feminism is a philosophy and practice that embodies equality and empowerment for women, seeking to eliminate a sense of 'invisibility' of women. The evolution of feminism in the leisure field has its origins in women's rights. In the first phase of women in leisure, women were considered *invisible* because of how little they were written about (Henderson 1992). The second stage was labelled *add women and stir*, which notes that women and gender were not central to the research discussions but rather were an addition (Henderson and Gibson 2013). Gender is no longer a category to be added to research, but it is integral to the development of leisure studies. The third aspect of leisure studies addresses *sex/gender differences*, focusing on the differences between men and women in leisure. For example, Khan's (2011) study on the constraints on leisure opportunities in India found that women faced more leisure constraints compared to men. The fourth phase of leisure studies focuses on *women only*, such as investigating women's leisure experiences without comparing them to the experiences of men. This aspect of leisure studies, viewed from a feminist perspective, is important to understand leisure more broadly by focusing on specific groups of women such as solo female travellers (Wilson and Little 2003; Wilson and Little 2005; Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Wilson and Harris 2006; Wilson and Little 2008; Myers 2010; Brown and Osman 2017; Seow and Brown 2018; Osman et al. 2020) and group travellers (Gibson et al. 2012; Berdychevsky et al. 2013; Khoo-Lattimore and Gibson 2015; Berdychevsky et al. 2016; Yang et al. 2016).

The fifth phase of leisure studies focused on the discussions of *gender* and its implications was evident in studies on femininity and masculinities, as well as gender roles. This study is situated in this stage where leisure is discussed in relation to gender roles in which the perception of femininity restricts women's leisure opportunities. The final and most current stage of focus in leisure studies is intersectionality. Intersectionality focuses on the interconnection of different social categories including gender, race, sexuality, class, age and ability (Choo and Ferree 2010). Intersectionality portrays how feminism has a broader scope than addressing issues of gender and women. The metaphor of intersecting multiple categories of oppression was first introduced and elaborated by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a black feminist legal scholar. Yet, intersectionality has had a long history in black

feminism prior to that. By the time Crenshaw introduced intersectionality as a metaphor to critique discriminations in law and social movements, the concept of 'intersections' was already circulating in antiracial feminist thought (Carastathis 2014). Carbin and Edenheim's (2013) study criticizes the concept of intersectionality on an epistemological and ontological aspect, stating that the vagueness of the concept, which has led to its popularity, promises to overcome all issues within feminist research. As Crenshaw herself revealed in an interview, although intersectionality has had a wide reach, it has not been a very deep one (Carastathis 2014).

3.4 Leisure themes

Henderson and Gibson's (2013) integrative review on leisure studies has identified several themes relevant to women and leisure. They are resistance and empowerment of women through leisure, feminist framework, international culture descriptions, social support and friendship, family physical and mental health and social inclusion. Of all the leisure themes identified by Henderson and Gibson (2013), this chapter focuses on the empowerment and resistance of women through leisure as the most relevant to this study. Studies on the empowerment of women through leisure represent a response to previous research on women's constraints to leisure opportunities. Leisure constraints remain an important aspect of leisure studies, particularly in feminist research. Studies on how women view leisure activities in comparison to men, and the barrier limiting their leisure activities has received considerable attention. Most of the literature focuses on understanding how gender influences constraints (Henderson et al. 1989; Jackson and Henderson 1995; Henderson and Gibson 2013) with comparisons across different countries and cultures (Venkatesh 2006; Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007; Khan 2011; Qiu et al. 2018). Women's leisure constraints remain an important focus and will therefore be reviewed further in the next section.

Previous studies which focused on women's constraints (Jackson and Henderson 1995; Koca et al. 2009), and the lack of entitlement (Henderson and Dialeschki 1991) have evolved to viewing leisure as opportunities for resistance. Oppressive

power faced by women may lead to struggle, resistance and empowerment (Jordan and Aitchison 2008; Berdychevsky et al. 2013a). This theme is particularly relevant in the Asian context. Resistance and empowerment are evident in Asian women resisting stereotypical gender roles. Recent studies on Asian solo female travellers (Yang et al. 2016; Seow and Brown 2018; Yang et al. 2018) discovered that in spite of the oppression faced, Asian women were eager to resist gender norms by travelling alone and as a result, they felt empowered by their decision. This shows that research seems to be moving away from the focus on negative aspects of leisure constraints to a more positive emphasis on empowerment.

3.5 Female traveller constraints and resistance

Constraints in leisure refers to the factors which hinder the ability to participate, spend time and to attain desired levels of satisfaction in leisure activities (Jackson and Henderson 1995) and factors that affect an individual's leisure preferences, decision making process and leisure experience that lead to an inability or reluctance to participate in leisure activities (Jackson et al. 1991).

The literature reveals that women face a considerable amount of constraints on their leisure which men are free from. Gender has a substantial influence on leisure opportunities, in which tourism is included, as gender can act as a limiting factor in travel arrangements and decision making (Wilson and Little 2005). Henderson and Dialeschki (1991) reveal that women believe they have no right to leisure, with this lack of entitlement preventing them from realising their potential for leisure.

Pritchard and Morgan (2000) argue that the gendering of tourism experiences is grounded in complex multidimensional cultural, social, and historical systems where specific configurations of power inflect women's experiences. Wilson and Little (2008) state that travel experiences are gendered, sexualised and socially and culturally constructed (p.183). Gender differences in leisure constraints are conceptualised as a representation of the underlying unequal power distribution and women's oppression in a patriarchal society (Wilson and Little 2008). For example, Khan's (2011) comparative study of gender and travel in India notes that women's

leisure opportunities are more restricted due to familial responsibilities and strict social norms.

Another constraint that women face is gender-based violence of which women and girls are generally the primary targets (United Nations Population Funds 2008). Wilson and Little (2008) used Valentine's (1989) concept of the 'geography of women's fear' to understand how women perceived certain travel destinations as risky. Certain areas or countries are deemed dangerous for women to travel to, especially when travelling alone because of local attitudes towards female travellers. Seow and Brown's (2018) study on solo female travellers revealed that certain destinations are considered unsafe and off limits. This is because solo travelling may be seen as inappropriate and unsafe in certain cultures. In Brown and Osman's (2017) study on western female travellers in Islamic destinations, it was found that women's travel experiences were heavily influenced and altered to an extent by unwanted male attention and sexual harassment and in order to safeguard themselves, the women found the need to adapt and conform to local gender roles and behaviour, whether dress code or having a male travel companion. Livengood and Stodolska (2004) underlined the embeddedness of leisure activities in the social, religious and political environment. Arab-Moghaddam et. al.'s (2007) study on the leisure of Iranian women found that their main constraint was the lack of infrastructure to allow them to safely attain leisure opportunities. These constraints reflect the social structure and the government's lack of concern, most likely exacerbated by cultural issues associated with the role of women in public.

For women as travellers, it is almost impossible to escape the risk of being objectified in the form of unwanted male attention and sexual harassment, therefore, female travellers often practice self-surveillance (Jordan and Aitchison 2008). Jordan and Aitchison (2008) state that to maintain self-preservation, a female traveller cannot be the flaneuse that she wants to be while travelling, hence limiting her opportunities for leisure activities. Female tourists are more vulnerable to certain types of risks, such as sexual harassment and assaults while using tourism space (Kozak et al. 2007; Yang et al. 2016).

The male gaze instils fear and uncertainty in women (Berdychevsky et al. 2013a) and to avoid this sexualised gaze, female travellers often remove themselves from public view, thus reducing their opportunities to meet the local community and other travellers. As Vera-Gray (2018) states, women are used to safeguarding themselves due to the high incidence of violence against women. Safeguarding is a reoccurring theme in studies on female travellers (see Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Berdychevsky et al. 2016). Women have adopted many measures to keep themselves safe, due to fear of attack. For example, women tend to limit their use of public space when they are away from home (Wilson and Little 2008) or modify their behaviour and the way they dress to conform to local norms (Brown and Osman 2017). In addition, female tourists have to adapt the way they travel, such as avoiding backpacking in certain regions (Teo and Leong 2006) and restricting their movements to certain times of the day, avoiding night outs alone (Brown and Osman 2017; Seow and Brown 2018; Osman et al. 2020), Brown et al. (2020) found that women are constrained by their perceptions of risks and vulnerability when walking alone on holiday. This perception of fear prevails among female travellers as their use of public space continues to be regulated by a patriarchal structure that dictates what 'appropriate' female travel behaviour should be (Brown and Osman 2017).

Physical appearances can also be a mediating factor. Seow and Brown's (2018) study on solo Asian female travellers states that Asian women feel particularly vulnerable when travelling to western countries with different cultural backgrounds. In their study, female travellers felt harassed due to their different physical appearances and mannerisms. This suggests that Asian female travellers face culture specific constraints. Yang et al. (2016) notes that these risks are amplified because of the Asian ideology projected upon them.

While subordination is culturally embedded, it deprives women from fully indulging in leisure activities. Asian women believe their duty is to their family and the leisure time that they take for themselves will undermine traditional teachings (Tsai 2006). Despite social oppression, studies have found that Asian female travellers have shown resistance against traditional Asian gender norms through

travelling. This allows women to escape from their oppressive environment, to transform themselves, leading to empowerment.

Studies on female travel constraints have evolved to viewing constraints as opportunities for resistance and liberation from social norms and domestic responsibility. In other words, leisure provides a space for women to challenge the dominant discourse of oppression (Wearing 1998). Oppressive power faced by women may lead to struggle, resistance and empowerment (Jordan and Aitchison 2008; Berdychevsky et al. 2013a). Shaw (1999) suggests that people are free to choose the leisure activities that reaffirm their present or desired identity (Butler 1995; Kinnaird and Hall 2000). Berdychevsky et al. (2013a; 2015) suggest that tourism can represent a liminal space in which women are able to resist the gendered expectations for their social and sexual behaviour. Their study found that women were able to experience sexual freedom with steady or casual partners when they were on holiday, offering them the freedom to explore alternative sexual behaviour away from the restrictions of their home environments (Berdychevsky et al. 2015).

The world of tourism has been described as a space of potential resistance and negotiation for women (Wearing and Wearing 1996; Warner-Smith 2000). Resistance is particularly relevant in leisure studies in the Asian context as these cultures are particularly centred around gender expectations and cultural norms (Tsai 2010). Recent studies show that Asian female tourists are resisting the stereotypical gender expectation of what is deemed inappropriate female behaviour. For example, Seow and Brown's (2018) study revealed that Asian female travellers resisted cultural expectations by simply choosing to travel alone. Yang et al. (2016, 2018) also found that Asian female travellers continue to resist socio-cultural barriers when embarking on their solo trips. In spite of the oppression they faced, Asian women were eager to resist gender norms by travelling alone and as a result, felt empowered by their decision. Leisure was considered empowering and transformational and it is interesting to note that women were resisting traditional gender norms in order to gain opportunities for leisure.

3.6 Female travel motivations and benefits

Travel motivations are thought to be psychological and biological needs that direct individual behaviour and activity (Dann 1981; Yoon and Uysal 2005), and are considered the driving force that influence travel behaviour (Devesa et al. 2010). Studies have shown that women travel for various reasons, whether in all female travel groups or as independent travellers. The most common push factor for women to travel is to escape (Butler 1995; Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Poria 2006; Wilson and Harris 2006; Berdychevsky et al. 2013b; Seow and Brown 2018).

It is also important to note that travel motivations evolve during an individual's life cycle (Gibson et al. 2012). For example, Stone and Nichol's (1999) study on older female solo travellers in the United Kingdom cited that women travel to escape from the mundanities of their usual domestic environment. Small's (2005) study on women in their 40s with children under the age of 15 reports that although leisure time with family offered a good opportunity for family bonding and improved relationships among family members, these women also yearn to escape their domestic roles as mothers and carers.

Poria's (2006) study on Israeli lesbian women also revealed that women travelled to escape from social pressures. Women who travelled in all female groups noted that by travelling as a group, these female travellers not only escaped their restrictive gendered roles but also had an opportunity to reconnect with their female friends and enhance their sense of well-being (Berdychevsky et al. 2013). However, apart from escape, Junek et al. (2006) found that other benefits of travelling in all-female groups included an increased sense of security and time for self-indulgence in a more relaxed atmosphere in the absence of competition and the tension caused by male company. Escape was particularly apparent to solo female travellers who regarded travelling as a means to get away from society (Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Wilson and Harris 2006), from the societal pressure of everyday life and relationships and to be free from domestic responsibilities (Seow and Brown 2018).

Women are more likely to enhance their independence when travelling alone (Riley 1988). In Wilson and Harris's (2006) analysis of the travel experiences of solo female travellers, they discovered that female travellers perceived their travel to be

'meaningful' from a spiritual and psychological perspective. They perceived meaning in their search for self-identity and self-empowerment, which in turn increased their self-confidence and self-esteem. The transformational effects of travel are noted by other studies on solo female travellers. For example, McNamara and Prideaux (2010) in their attempt to profile solo female travellers, found that the aim of travelling alone was to challenge and empower themselves and extend beyond one's comfort zone. Chiang and Jogaratnam's (2006) study meanwhile found that seeking self-development was the least influential motivation to embark on a solo journey, rather their study revealed that seeking adventure was the main motivation.

Although it is revealed that women travel in search of autonomy, empowerment and self-transformation, recent studies suggest that these previously established motivations are not the primary motivation for women to seek solo travelling. Seow and Brown's (2018) study revealed that although solo travel had a great effect on self-development, it was seen as a post travel benefit rather than a pre-travel motivation. Yang et al.'s (2016) study on risk perception in Asian solo female travellers also notes that independent travel provides a transformative experience whereby solo travel changed their initial perception on travelling alone. In a more recent study, Yang et al. (2018) demonstrates how Asian solo female travellers achieve self-transformation through empowerment and negotiating risks during their travel.

3.7 The Asian female traveller

Articles about women, gender and leisure are still predominantly written by women from western countries and studies on different cultural backgrounds have been lacking (Henderson and Shaw 2006; Henderson and Gibson 2013). Women are not homogenous in character and therefore the leisure experiences of Asian women cannot be incorporated under that of western women because of cultural differences (Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag 2015). Henderson and Gibson (2013) acknowledge the growing and continuing focus on gender and leisure in non-western countries, particularly Asian and middle eastern countries. Some conceptual perspectives

adopted for studies in the west may not be applicable when explaining the social structure and values inherited in non-western countries. For example, Iranian women had constraints to leisure similar to women in the west but the difference was the lack of opportunities and facilities (Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007). Although similarities occur across cultures, knowledge originating from non-western countries may cause researchers to re-evaluate traditional academic assumptions on leisure for women and men. The exploration of different perspectives and interpretations from non-western countries can further strengthen the understanding of the potential value of leisure for all people (Roberts 2010). Hence, gender scholars in tourism have suggested a culture-sensitive approach when studying non-western women's travel experiences (Henderson and Gibson 2013).

Robert (2010) suggests that Asian leisure concepts differ from western leisure concepts. The value of leisure in Asia is perceived as a state of mind, rather than an activity. People in Asia are more inclined to seek pleasure, happiness, life satisfaction and gratification through participating in leisure activities (quality over quantity) such as travelling. They draw upon their cultural heritage to achieve harmony with nature (see Wang and Stringer 2000) and the contemplation of the inner self as a route to quality leisure experience (Gim 2009).

Travel experiences and gender are socially and culturally constructed (Aitchison 2005a). Thus the travel experiences of Asian female travellers are assumed to be different from that of the travel experiences of western women (Teo and Leong 2006; Yang et al. 2016). Travellers from western countries tend to travel out of a need of personal growth while Asian travellers travel to escape social constraints (Huang 2007)

In research on Asian female traveller experiences, travel behaviour appears to be a popular research topic. This includes travel motivations (Li et al. 2011; Raj et al. 2015), the tourist gaze (Li 2015; Zhang and Hitchcock 2017), travel and leisure constraints (Tsai 2006; Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007; Qiu et al. 2018), gender differences in traveller behaviour (Khan 2011; Kim et al. 2013) and most relevant to this study, the influence of Asian gender norms and cultural identities on female

travel behaviour (Teo and Leong 2006; Tsai 2006; Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007; Zhang and Hitchcock 2017).

A narrative review by Yang et.al (2017) provided a comprehensive discussion of the literature on Asian female travellers. They reviewed the historical and contemporary travel experiences of Asian women through a post-colonial feminist lens as they claim most Asian countries have once been colonised in one way or another or have experienced neo-colonisation. Tourism studies have also found that the western colonisation of Asian countries has affected the way people behave. For example, Osman et al.'s (2019) study on Vietnamese female travellers found that the effects of colonisation and history of war can lead to a sense of lower self-esteem which affects travel experiences.

Reviewing the literature through a post-colonial lens seems to assume that all studies on Asian female travellers are in some ways socially and culturally stained by western colonisation. In Yang et al's (2017) study, the literature is assumed to be influenced by western culture through the process of colonisation, whereas many countries in Asia (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iran, Japan, Thailand, Nepal, Bhutan, China) have not been colonised.

Asian scholars recognise that Asia is evolving, however they have contrasting views on the development of leisure within Asia. Using China for example, some scholars like Ma and Liu (2009) deplore westernisation and call for a reaffirmation of the reinvigoration of traditional values while other scholars condemn traditional values such as Confucianism (Tsai 2006) and emphasise the influence of traditional values on the constraint of women's leisure and travel experiences. The travel motivations of Chinese women are also diverse. While some women travel for pleasure (Zheng and Fan 2007), others travel for knowledge and to reaffirm their social status (Li et al. 2011) or to escape from social expectations and domestic responsibilities (Zhang and Hitchcock 2017). However, Confucian traditions within their patriarchal social structure remain a barrier to women's' mobility and their travel experiences (Guo 2014; Zhang and Hitchcock 2017).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the development of society and the raising awareness of women's rights have intensified in recent years. Asian women have

realised the importance of leisure activities and have exhibited a desire to step out of the boundaries that tie them to the house (Qiu et al. 2018). In addition, studies show that Asian women are becoming more ambitious and trying to challenge traditional femininity where women are portrayed as submissive, passive, weak, dependant and restricted to leisure activities that are homebound (Golley 2004; Tsai 2010; Mehta 2016). Women in Asia have found ways to overcome their position within a discriminatory society. They have used a variety of strategies to navigate and resist these systems. For instance, Asian women still chose to travel solo despite the practice being viewed as inappropriate (Yang et al. 2016; Seow and Brown 2018).

Even in modern times, however, many Asian women still willingly accept their oppression as a societal norm as it is thought to keep the harmony within society (Tsai 2006). The exploitation of women at home and at work clearly hinders their opportunities for leisure as they often lack the time, transport and income to participate in leisure activities. However, research has recognised that societal oppression and subordination carry a detrimental impact on mental health (see Zhang and Liu 2012). Despite facing inequality in leisure opportunities and often regarded by Asian societies as vulnerable when travelling compared to western women, Asian women still choose to partake in leisure activities (Teo and Leong 2006; Yang et al. 2016).

The gendered leisure space provides a stage or microcosm of reality to investigate the power relations underpinning the leisure experiences of Asian women. While women in Asia have begun to embrace leisure and travel, they generally continue to face challenges relative to their position in society, but ethnicity, race and religion and class (or caste in India) are additional attributes to consider. Thus, travel experiences and constraints are not experienced uniformly by people of different cultural and demographic backgrounds. Therefore, there is a need to pay more attention to societies with different cultural characteristics because the literature shows that although studies on Asian tourism are on the rise (Winter et al. 2009), research on Asian female travellers is still generally absent from the international tourism discourse (Yang et al. 2017).

3.8 Conclusion

The link between tourism and leisure is a complex one and the two terms have been thought to be interchangeable. However, this chapter reveals that while tourism and leisure have similarities, they are different in terms of concept and theory. This does not mean that leisure and tourism are completely separate entities because they share psychological and behavioural influences in terms of participation in leisure and tourism activities.

The stages of development in women's leisure studies are highlighted in order to understand how leisure studies evolved from the stage where women were practically non-existent to being a central focus. In doing do, several themes were identified in women's leisure studies, however, the chapter focused on that most relevant to the study: resistance and empowerment. By critically appraising the literature on the female tourist experience, this chapter fulfils objective three of the study.

Women face more constraints to leisure opportunities when compared to men due to the patriarchal structure in which women are confined to the private sphere. Women are also prone to gender-based violence, however, the literature reveals that women find ways to safeguard themselves when travelling, including avoiding public places or changing their behaviour and dress to blend into the local environment. The literature also highlights women's resistance to social constraints and gender expectations, especially among Asian women who choose to travel solo. Women's search for empowerment remains one of the main travel motivations, alongside escape. Women travel mainly to escape oppression and gendered responsibilities faced in their home environment. However, they travel solo for a transformative adventure that develops independence and self-worth.

The review on Asian female travellers highlights the influence of cultural values that restrict women's mobility and maintains their subordination. Scholars suggest that some gender stereotypes continue to impact on the travel experiences of Asian women. While some uphold traditional values, others condemn these patriarchal attributes and gender inequalities. The chapter highlights the need for a culture

sensitive framework when studying Asian female travellers. Few studies have explored the experiences of Asian female travellers who have succeeded in breaking out of their socio-cultural bubble, highlighting a significant new area of research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological process of the study. The first section describes the aims and objectives of the research, followed by the research paradigm which guides the study, making references to the ontological, epistemological and methodological stances taken and how these stances govern the study. The second section explains the employment of a feminist approach towards the study followed by a rationalisation of my role as a feminist researcher. Following that, the chapter discusses the research methodology adopted in conducting this study. This chapter also reveals the in-depth interview process in data collection followed by the adaption of thematic analysis in the data analysis process. Lastly this chapter discusses the ethical considerations, trustworthiness and limitations of the research methodology.

4.2 Research aim and objectives

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to facilitate a constructivist/inductive approach to explore the social interactions and cultural background that influences travel experiences of Asian female travellers.

Aim of the study:

To explore the link between tourism, gender and patriarchy, with a focus on the Asian female tourist experience.

Objectives:

1. To examine the theories of gender, patriarchy and feminism.

2. To critically appraise the literature on the female tourist experience.

3. To explore the cultural background and upbringing of Asian female travellers in a patriarchal society.

4. To investigate the impact of patriarchy and cultural background on Asian female tourists' travel behaviour and experiences.

5. To examine how Asian women's travel experiences might equip them with the potential to be agents of social change within their own community.

4.3 Research philosophy and approach

Research requires an initial stage of choosing an appropriate research philosophy and approach in order to achieve the research aims and objectives. This is crucial as it gives direction to the ongoing research. Morrow (2005) states that understanding the paradigms underpinning one's research is important as they define the research methods that are adopted, and it sets the stage to evaluate the standards of the research. Wambui (2013) states that methodology is gendered, with quantitative methodology associated with positivism, scientific, objectivity, statistics and masculinity while qualitative methods have generally been associated with interpretivism, non-scientific, subjectivity and femininity. A research approach depends on how a topic is studied and how the research objectives can be accomplished, such that the findings are credible. Every researcher has their own views on what constitutes truth and knowledge. These views guide the researcher on his/her thinking, beliefs, and assumptions on society and frame how they see the world around them.

A paradigm is a way of describing a world view by philosophical assumptions about the nature and form of social reality. The term "paradigm" was first introduced by Thomas Kuhn in the 1960s. He stated that a paradigm can be seen as "a world view that represents the beliefs and values in a discipline and that guides how problems are solved" (Kuhn 1962, p. 45). Those common beliefs define the nature of the world and have to be accepted by members of that particular discipline (Pickard 2007) and agreements about how problems should be understood and addressed (Schwandt 2001).

However, Kuhn's ideas have been criticised for a lack of consensus in meaning. Masterman (1970) critiqued Kuhn's work for being too broad in the uses of his

paradigm concepts. Kuhn (1974) responded to this lack of clarity about the meaning of paradigms by discussing the issue in a lengthy postscript that was added in later editions of his book (see Kuhn 1974). Morgan (2007) states that the term paradigm has multiple meanings and it is easy for social scientists to talk about paradigms and mean entirely different things. For example, Patton (1982 p.190) noted that "mind shifts back and forth between paradigms, referring to paradigms as frameworks on research designs, measurement, analysis and personal involvement". Schwandt (1989) meanwhile referred to paradigms as 'worldviews', and the beliefs about the nature of reality, knowledge and values.

In Guba and Lincoln's earlier work (1985), they initially labelled and compared two fundamental paradigms, generally known as positivism and constructivism, which also refers to non-positivism. In their later work, Guba and Lincoln (2008) expanded their list to five paradigms that included critical theory, post positivism and participatory research. However, the extension of their work poses questions on what constitutes a paradigm. A paradigm is based on what can be known about (ontology), the ways of knowing (epistemology), the ethics and value system regarding the knowledge that is known to be true (axiology) and how to go about finding out knowledge (methodology) (Patton 2002).

To ensure a strong research design, researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their own beliefs about the nature of reality (Mills et al. 2006). Krauss (2005) suggests that subjecting such beliefs to an ontological interrogation will illuminate the epistemological and methodological possibilities that are available. After reflecting on the different classifications of research paradigms, I found the framework by Guba and Lincoln (2008), presented in table 4.1, particularly useful to help clarify the structure of inquiry and methodological choices.

	Ontology (the nature of reality)	Epistemology (how knowledge can be generated)	Methodology (methods used to construct knowledge)	Axiology (what is known to be true)
Positivist	Naïve realism- real reality but apprehend able	Dualist/ objectivist: Findings true	Experimental/ manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	Propositional knowing about the world is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable
Post positivist	Critical realism- real reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable	Modified Dualist/ objectivist; Critical Tradition/ community; Findings probably true	Modified experimental/ manipulative; critical multiplism; Falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	Propositional knowing about the world is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable
Constructivism/ non-positivist	Relativism – local and specific constructed realities	Transactional/ Subjectivist; created findings	Hermeneutic/ dialectical	Propositional, transactional knowing is instrumentally valuable as a means to social emancipation, which is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable
Critical theory	Historical realism - virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values crystallized over time	Transactional/ Subjectivist; value mediated findings	Dialogic/ dialectical	Propositional, transactional knowing is instrumentally valuable as a means to social emancipation, which is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable
Participatory (study's contribution)	Participative reality - Subjective-objective reality, co-created by	Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended	Political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the	Practical knowing how to flourish with a balance of autonomy, co-

	mind and given cosmos	epistemology of experiential, propositional and practical knowing: cocreated findings	practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context	operation and hierarchy in a culture is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable

Table 4.1: Intersection of research paradigms (Adapted from Guba and Lincoln 2008; Aliyu et al. 2014)

Table 4.1 shows the ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological assumptions of a researcher's paradigm (Guba and Lincoln 2008). Ontology relates to whether we believe there is one verifiable reality or whether there are multiple socially constructed realities (Patton 2002). Epistemology inquiries into the nature of knowledge and truth. Epistemology aims to answer the question on what can be known, what are the sources of the knowledge, how reliable are these sources, and whether the knowledge acquire has truth. Furthermore, it inquires into the investigation and methods used to acquire the knowledge.

Both positivism and post-positivism are regarded as a research strategy that is rooted in the ontological principle that reality is free and independent of the observer and that its properties can be measured through scientific observations (Gray 2013). Positivist researchers stand by the notion that the universe conforms to permanent and unchanging laws and rules, hence these scholars have independent and objective analysis towards the view of the universe (Aliyu et al. 2014). Given these assumptions, positivists generally favour scientific objectivity in their approach in research, adopting deductive quantitative methods (Guba 1990; Walle 1997).

As Bryman (2007) states, there are various versions of positivism which overlap. However, due to its rigid characteristics, positivism has been described as a failure for modern philosophies as it appears to be weak and lacking foundation (William and May 1996). Hughes and Sharrock (1998) show that one of the biggest mistakes of positivism regards some of the assumptions made about scientific enquiry. Science typically does not begin from observation, but from theory to make observation comprehensible, thus even observations become deductive and 'theory laden' (William and May 1996).

The two most significant notions that contrast with positivism are constructivism and interpretivism (Aliyu et al. 2014). The aim of this study is to explore how cultural background influences travel experiences. Thus, my research approach relies on understanding the way Asian female travellers bring meaning to their travel experiences in regards to their cultural background. Considering that the study looks at truth as a social formation that is subjective, a constructivist/ interpretivist approach is deemed suitable to fulfilling the aims and objectives of this study.

Constructivism (or social constructivism) is an ontological position that emphasises the importance of social phenomena which are produced through social interaction, while interpretivism is an epistemological stance where in order to respect the differences between object and natural sciences, the researcher's views and lived experience are incorporated into the research process (Ponterotto and Grieger 2007; Bryman 2015). Constructivists contend that meaning is constructed, not discovered, where different individuals will construct meaning differently, even when faced with the same phenomenon (Crotty 1998).

The distinction between interpretivism and constructivism is that constructivists are more fundamental and radical, and they broaden their ontological observations to all facets of reality or truth while interpretivists are restricted to social truth reality (Creswell 2013). Constructivists believe that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual rather than it being an external unit (Ponterotto and Grienger 2007). Ponterotto and Grienger (2007) state that meaning is hidden and brought to the surface through deep reflection, which is encouraged through the interaction between researcher and participant. Interpretivism is seen as a paradigm that opposes positivism. An interpretivist researcher advocates that there is no universal truth. Interpretivists believe that reality is socially constructed (Creswell 2013). According to Henning et al. (2004), the interpretivist paradigm emphasises experience and interpretation. It is concerned with meaning and it seeks to uncover the way individuals understand their world. The interpretivist researcher attempts to discover and to understand how people's subjective interpretations of reality affect the formation of their reality (Chen et al. 2011) and interpret from their own outline of orientation and reference. The view they hold is uncommitted and

impartial. The interpretative approach favours non-positivistic qualitative methods towards the analysis of text, events and human behaviour (Jamal and Hollinshead 2001) while emphasising the importance of understanding people's perspectives of their lives (Ritchie et al. 2013). Constructivism and interpretivism focus on the individual's participation in culturally organised practices, face to face interactions, and meaning is constructed from individual experiences. These paradigms can provide a unique insight into the travel experiences of Asian women. My own personal experiences as an Asian female traveller, combined with a deep understanding of the cultural background and patriarchal upbringing in an Asian society, may shed light on these experiences.

This study aims to explore the experiences of Asian women as travellers (in relation to their social background). It is thought that an interpretive approach is more suited with the research process of this study, as this study emphasises the interpretation of their cultural background and travel experiences. The research approach of this study relies upon understanding how Asian women view their travelling experiences, hence it is open to interpretation and construction of meaning on the researcher's part.

Social reality has a meaning for people and therefore people's action is meaningful (Bryman 2015). This study requires a paradigm which encourages depth, narrative and complexity of data, to allow Asian women to speak about how their ethnicity, cultural background and upbringing and life in a patriarchal society affect or constrain their travelling experiences in their own words. Recent research on Asian female travellers (i.e.Yang et al. 2018) employed a similar direction adopted to this research where constructivist/ interpretivist approach was implemented to analyse participants' narratives. Therefore, the most appropriate research paradigm for this study is the constructivism/ interpretivism approach.

4.4 Adopting a qualitative feminist approach

Apart from establishing that this study will be conducted within the constructivism/ interpretivism paradigm, the study also takes a feminist approach. In contrast with the quantitative approach, qualitative research has been viewed by many feminists

as more compatible with feminism's central tenets or capable of being adopted to said tenets (Bryman 2015). The characteristics of qualitative research allow women's voices to be heard, reducing the exploitation of women in the course of fieldwork, and eliminating the objectification of women, allowing the emancipatory goals of feminism to be realised (Bryman 2015). There are a number of feminist approaches such as liberal, radical, socialist, standpoint, black, postmodern, postcolonial and psychoanalytic. However, what all these feminist approaches have in common is that the focus is on gender inequalities and power (Tong 2009).

Feminist research has often been characterised as qualitative research conducted by women, for women (Edwards and Holland 2013) but feminist research can also be done by men adopting feminist perspectives. Feminists have emphasised the importance of social context, insisting that feminist methods should be contextual, focusing on women as a whole and not on the individual in isolation, deprived of social interaction and relationships with others (Wambui 2013). Feminist epistemology emphasised that the differences in gender are identified by examining the social and power structures in operation (Henderson 2013). Feminist research has disputed that the assumption of science is objective and value free. However, it is claimed that feminist philosophy is inconsistent as feminist ideas and values such as political, cultural and social factors including gender, challenge scientific objectivity (Crasnow 2014).

Feminist researchers believe that the positivist approach is not always the best way to study women. Feminists have also criticized traditional positivist quantitative research in which people are studied as "objects like subjects" (Unger 1983, p.11). Furthermore, the relationships between participants and researcher were often disregarded while the concerns and interest of participants were subordinate (Campbell and Schram 1995). Feminist and cultural studies were the driving force behind this epistemological alternation move away from positivism, ideologically shattering the traditional division of science and politics (Megías et al. 2017).

A feminist approach is appropriate in this study because the study is based on women's experiences and employing a feminist approach shines a light on the social issues and trends in relation to women that might otherwise be overlooked.

The process of feminist qualitative interviews poses a major challenge to male dominated ideas on the desirability of a scientific, unbiased, value free and objective interview. Oakley (1981 cited in 2016) contended that detached uncontaminated interviewing practices are impossible and morally indefensible. She argued that a non-hierarchical engagement between researcher and researched should be the feature of generating knowledge. Oakley also raised the idea of reciprocity where the researcher gives something of themselves to their participants as a feature of feminist interviews. This emphasises the role of the researcher in building empathy, reciprocity and rapport with the participants. Using a feminist approach in this study is important because of the region in which the participants are from. This is because the established patriarchal social norms within Asian culture causes women's voices to hold less authority and to be less appreciated. For that reason, adopting a feminist approach helps to give voice to women who have been unheard or silenced. It ensures that Asian women's voices are not only heard, but amplified and recognised, thus enhancing their agency.

4.5 My role as a feminist researcher

I was brought up to think the word 'feminist' reeked of insecurity. A woman who needed to prove that she was equal to a man might as well be shouting out how smart and brave she is because a woman who truly was did not need to do so. However, the moment I start to notice the blatant inequality in our worlds, it became hard to switch off. Before I knew it, I had changed my mindset and had started calling myself a feminist and did my duty to educate others. Some people from my community back home in Malaysia are taken back when I inform them that I am a feminist because they see feminism as an aggressive term (i.e. man hater). Feminism seems to carry a negative connotation and is not an easy concept for everyone to understand, especially those who are unwilling to forgo their privilege.

I grew up in Malaysia, where the three main races are Malay, Chinese and Indian. I am of Chinese descent, where Confucian teaching is the norm and patriarchy was an accepted way of life. This was true of the other main races (Malays and Indians) who practised patriarchal system as well. The Malays are Muslims and a majority

of the Indians are Hindus. Therefore, aligning with the three religious practices reviewed in Chapter two, there is no doubt that I was brought up in a strictly patriarchal society. According to Hofstede's (2010) culture dimensions, Malaysia has a power distance index of 104, the highest in Hofstede's list. Hierarchy and power relations were the norms in our society and male authority was unquestioned.

As a woman growing up in hierarchical society, my life was a swirl of negotiating my independence away from my culture that was suffocating me. That I had somehow 'become westernised' was a common slight, and as all Asian feminist are aware, translates into a woman being assertive in claiming equal rights to a man, which is taboo in our culture. The premise is that no man will want to marry an independent outspoken woman; the end goal for every family is to have their daughters married off, (hopefully) before they lose their virginity.

Before I embarked on my academic journey, I was unaware that I might become a feminist. I realised soon enough that in striving for my independence, I was challenging my own upbringing and I realised how the culture and society I was brought up in had restricted my life. Feminism on the other hand gave me the power to make changes to my life. When I began my research on feminism however, feminist works were mostly written by white feminists which made me look at feminism as a white women's privilege and supremacy. I wanted to shape my own views of feminism in which culture becomes a focus of feminism.

Being an Asian feminist in a western environment can be a difficult experience. Apart from the obvious sexism, there is also racism to contend with: most eminent is the stereotypic views that Asian women are docile and submissive by nature. My experience as an Asian woman is that whilst it is important to get the minority groups to shout louder about getting representation, it is not until their narrative is understood and mainstreamed by the majority that the conversation can move forward.

I realised that my personal interest in and love for travel have influenced my choice of research topic. I have always wanted to understand how Asian women negotiate their travels within a patriarchal cultural background and to explore their travel experiences.

The interviewing process has to be a means towards a parity and equality. The researcher's role in a quantitative study is theoretically non-existent, participants act independently of the research. However, in qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is crucial in the investigation. The researcher is considered an instrument in the data collection process (Lincoln and Denzin 2003). Data is mediated through this human instrument rather than through questionnaires, software and machineries. I therefore need to acknowledge the relevant aspects of self, including biases and assumptions, expectations and experiences to improve my ability to conduct the research. As the involvement of the researcher is eminent in a narrative research, the research process cannot be value free because the researcher's value will always impact upon the research. Reflective accounts and biographical details can never truly be objective because they represent a construction on the part of the researcher (Greenbank 2003). Throughout the progress of this research, this is something I am conscious of. To eliminate potential biasness, several steps are taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Collecting data can be complicated if participants experience emotions of shame, embarrassment and discomfort due to suppressive social conditions, therefore rapport becomes important. Being an Asian means that I am able to communicate with my participants and to build rapport because of the commonalities in terms of culture and traditional values that my participants and I share. My Asian ethnicity and gender has been a great advantage in this study because the participants feel more comfortable in articulating individual experience if faced with an individual who is culturally similar. Hence, moving the conversation to a collective view often made them feel empowered when they realised that their experiences were shared (Rolin 2009).

4.6 Research methodology

The methodology summarises the research process and how the research proceeds. A research methodology is chosen starting with a choice of research paradigm that informs the study. The methodological process is guided by philosophical beliefs

on the nature of reality and knowledge, values as well as the theoretical framework that informs the research (Chilisa and Kawulich 2012). Methodology addresses how the researcher gains knowledge emerging from the ontology, epistemology and axiology assumptions (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Some paradigms can be associated with certain methodologies. For example, a positivist paradigm is typically assumed with a quantitative methodology, while a constructive or interpretative paradigm uses a qualitative methodology. On the other hand, this assumption is not universal as an interpretative study may still utilise a quantitative methodology.

4.6.1 Qualitative approach

Qualitative research is a research strategy that often emphasises words rather than numbers, which are usually associated with a quantitative analysis of data (Creswell 2013). Qualitative inquiry which focuses on meaning in context requires a data collection method that is sensitive to the underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data (Merriam and Tisdell 2015).

Bryman (2015) states that qualitative research is concerned with certain noteworthy features, such as the inductive nature of the relationship between theory and research, the interpretivist epistemological position, which underlines the importance of understanding the social world through the examination of the perspectives and interpretation of the world by the participants.

There are five main characteristics of qualitative research which are appropriate to this research study. They are: natural setting, understanding the meaning of the data, researcher as a key instrument in data collection and data analysis, the inductive nature of the research and data being descriptive (Hatch 2002; Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Creswell 2013; Merriam and Tisdell 2015).

Firstly, qualitative methods allow researchers to study things in their natural settings and to make sense of or interpret phenomena and the lived experiences of real people in real settings (Hatch 2002; Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Merriam and Tisdell 2015). This trait is paramount in this study as it allows me to not only

observe the words of the participants, but also, the way they speak and their non-verbal cues. The aim of qualitative research is to understand phenomena in real life settings and introduce flexibility into the research process (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Secondly, qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their world (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). The key concern of a qualitative researcher is to understand a phenomenon from the participant's perspective. The researcher keeps a focus on the meaning that the participants hold and not the meaning that the researcher brings to the study (Creswell 2013). I adopted an interpretivist feminist influenced research paradigm. It was important to allow the women interviewed to speak of their lives and experiences in their own voices and on their own terms.

Thirdly, qualitative researchers collect data through examining documents, observing behaviour, interviewing participants and tend not to use questionnaires (Creswell 2013). The primary point of interest in qualitative inquiry is the understanding of a phenomenon of interest from the perspectives of those understudy. The researcher who is responsive and adaptive is the main means of collecting and analysing data (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). The researcher acts as the 'human instrument', and inadvertently brings to the research setting his/her own assumptions and beliefs. The researcher's own personal experiences and feelings are deemed significant data for understanding the social world that is being studied. It is important to identify the researcher's preconceptions and interests as these shape the collection and analysis of data. Some scholars argue that the "subjectivity" of the researcher can be seen as a benefit as it results in a unique configuration of the data (Heron and Reason 1997). In the case of this study, as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, I can observe that my research is very much influenced by a feminist agenda to explore the lives of women in patriarchal Asian societies and to investigate the implications for tourism behaviour and experiences.

The fourth characteristic of qualitative research is that the research process is inductive in nature. Qualitative methods are often used when little is known about the topic, and there is a lack of a theory or the existing theory is inadequate in

explaining a phenomenon (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that the researcher enters the research process by uncovering assumptions. Patterns, categories and themes are built up by organising the data into abstract units of information, instead of deductive testing hypothesis such as in positivist research. Having said that, qualitative research does not follow a strict sequence (Maxwell 2013). Traditional deductive methodologies in deriving research questions and hypothesis from theoretical models fail to manage the diversity of data (Flick 2014). Instead of starting research with a theory, this study employs inductive strategies that use detailed readings of data to derive concepts, themes through interpretations made from the raw data (Thomas 2006) and to explore the multiple meanings of the participants interviewed. There are no theories or hypothesis applied in the beginning of this study and the unstructured approach allows me as the researcher the freedom to alter the direction of the study based on the data obtained.

The last characteristic of qualitative research is that it is richly descriptive. Qualitative research uses words and pictures rather than numbers to convey a phenomenon, where data is more likely to be collected in the form of descriptions of the context, the participants involved and the activities of interest (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). In this study, significant quotes from the participants are used to provide authenticity and validity to the research.

Based on the characteristics listed above, it is argued that qualitative methods are more appropriate for feminist research as they reveal the experiences of women in contemporary society (Wambui 2013). In an analysis of articles on leisure and gender from 1983 to 2013 by Henderson (2013), the qualitative approach, and especially in-depth interviews have been used the most as research methods. Hence, the continued use of qualitative approach to study women and gender indicates the success of qualitative data in highlighting individual voice. Employing a feminist approach brings an epistemic advantage in which I will be analysing and interpreting the data from a woman's point of view.

4.6.2 Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is an approach to the collection and analysis of data that is sensitive to a temporal sequence of participants' accounts of their own lives and emphasises the stories that people employ in their accounts of events (Bryman 2015). Narrative inquiry uses the stories people tell to analyse them in various ways in order to understand the meaning of experiences as stories are how people communicate and make sense of their experiences and the world around them (Bryman 2015).

Riessman (2008) observes that narratives are not only focused on the present but may also relate to long periods of time (for example an entire life story). Riessman (2008) sets out three levels of inquiry and analysis in narrative research, which are stories told by research participants, interpretivist accounts by the researcher and the reader's reconstruction of the interpretation in which they are also known as data collection, data analysis and write up. The aim of narrative interviews is to extract the interviewees' reconstructed accounts between events and context (Bryman 2015). The narrative account should be viewed in terms of the functions that the narratives serve for the interviewee (Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

Andrews et al. (2004) state that narrative analysis is not only a way to find out how people frame, remember and report their experiences but it is also a way of generating knowledge that disrupts old certainties and allows the researcher to glimpse the complexity of human lives. The narratives can add details to the researcher's understanding and insight. I concluded after much careful consideration, that narrative inquiry would be the method best suited to achieve the aim and objectives of my study, namely to explore the link between tourism, gender and patriarchy with a focus on Asian female travellers. This study relies on the participants' narrations of not only their travel experiences, but also their individual life experiences as Asian women. Through this, I felt I would be able to understand how culture, religion and everyday lived experiences influence the Asian women's experience of travel.

4.6.3 Data collection

The two major forms of qualitative interviews are semi structured and unstructured interviews (Edwards and Holland 2013). In a semi structured interview, the researcher has a list of questions or topics that are to be covered in the interview. An interview guide is normally used but there are flexibilities in how and when the questions are asked according to how the participants respond. The researcher will probe answers to pursue a discussion on a topic opened up by the participant to ensure the continuation of the dialogue. In an unstructured interview, the researcher has clear aims for the study, but the importance of the method is to allow the participants to narrate from their own perspectives using their own understanding and frame of thought. This method allows flexibility in the researcher's response to the participants and the development of unexpected topics that emerge.

Considering the explorative nature of the study, an unstructured interview method was adopted for the data collection, using an initial open question where the participant was prompted to embark on their narrative. Generally, the participants were requested to talk about themselves and their life story. This first narration was not interrupted by questions from the researcher, rather instead was encouraged by paralinguistic expressions of interest to continue narrating. Participants were also asked to talk about their decision to travel and their experiences of travel. Follow up questions were asked according to the direction the interview took.

4.7 Sampling methods

A total of fifteen participants were invited to join the study from July 2018 to March 2019. A combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was adopted in the selection of participants for this study.

Purposive sampling referred to the process in which the researcher purposefully seeks out the relevant participants who meet the purpose of the research aims and objectives and are able to offer knowledge on the social phenomenon studied (Bryman 2015). Purposive sampling however does not allow generalisations. The participants chosen were required to fulfil the following criteria:

1. They are female over the age of 18
2. They are of Asian descent
3. They have travelled overseas at least once
4. The purpose of travel is for leisure and not business

Snowball sampling is a technique in which the researcher initially samples a small group of people relevant to the study. These participants use their network to nominate other appropriate participants who meet the eligible criteria for the study (Bryman 2015). This is an integral part of ethnography which involves spending time with the group under study but it is also useful in contacting hard to reach groups and individuals such as Asian women with the relevant travel experience. Noy (2008) points out that snowball sampling is often presented as a strategy to be employed when probability sampling is not feasible.

Sample size is a common question in qualitative studies. However, in qualitative studies, it is not a question about how many is enough but is dependent on the nature and design of the study, the aims and research questions and the underlying philosophical stance. The concept of data saturation is often used as a guide for the number of interviews that should be conducted, especially where researchers are using an interpretivist approach (Edwards and Holland 2013). This is done by continuing to sample and identify themes until the participants are no longer saying anything that the researcher has not heard before. Thus, the number of participants is determined by the range of meanings and themes rather than a demographic representation of the different types of people. However, this could prove to be difficult because sampling, data collection and data analysis have to be combined, it is not possible to specify how many interviews are needed in advance. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest a sample of between 15-30 respondents is common in research which aims to identify themes.

With the use of snowball sampling, the prospective women interviewed for the study were initially identified through the author's own contacts and network, and more participants were invited to participate in the study through these initial interviewees. However, it was found that after several interviews, the demographics and economic situations of the participants tended to be rather similar. They were

mostly highly educated, young women in their 20s and 30s. In an effort to widen the range of travel experiences and backgrounds, I attempted to seek women with a broader age range. However, it was found in this study that age did not alter the coerced compliance of conformity to societal norms, neither does it govern the participants' decisions to travel.

4.8 Participant demographics

The interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved. A total of fifteen women of Asian descent participated in this study. They ranged from age twenty-three to sixty-four years. All the participants were born and raised in Asian countries, though several of the participants may have emigrated from their country of origin and settled in a western country. The women in this study came from different faiths and beliefs. The majority of the participants claimed to be religious while one participant stated that she was an atheist. Participants from the same region seemed to be more inclined to practice the same beliefs. However, some of the participants who originated from Malaysia were of different faiths and religion due to the multifaith make-up of the country.

The women in this study were all highly educated. Several of the participants had post graduate degrees and the lowest level of education was a diploma. Most of these women had obtained their degrees overseas. Travelling overseas, especially to western countries, is costly, therefore these women were relatively privileged in terms of their financial and economic situation. As shown in table 4.2, the three most popular regions for Asian female travellers are UK/Europe, South-East Asia, and East Asia. Each of the women interviewed had travel experiences in both Asian and western countries. This was not listed as one of the criteria that needed to be fulfilled but came as an unintentional benefit while analysing the data, allowing a comparison of travel behaviour and decision making between visiting the two regions and adding to the richness of the data.

I asked each participant at the end of the interviews if they could see themselves as a flower, what would it be. I noticed that the participants would name their favourite flower, and would proceed to express how beautiful yet strong and resilient these

flowers are. Historically, flowers are presented in helping communicate human emotions, in which different flowers could mean a different emotion. Therefore I found flowers suitable as pseudonyms for participants because it gave the participants a voice in representing themselves. It was an interesting experience to see the way these women saw themselves. For example, the participant who chose to be named Rose described herself as classy and refined like a rose, yet feisty, with thorns. Detailed information on the participants can be viewed in table 4.2.

Pseudonym	Age	Nationality /Country of residence	Countries visited	Level of education
Lily	31	Malaysia / UK	UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, France, Italy	Postgraduate
Peony	64	Malaysia	UK, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, France	Undergraduate
Daisy	25	Vietnam	Australia, UK, Spain, France, China (Taiwan, Hong Kong)	Postgraduate
Sunflower	32	Korea / UK	Italy, UK, Portugal, France, Thailand	Postgraduate
Rose	27	India	UK, China (Shanghai), Singapore	Postgraduate
Orchid	43	Malaysia / UK	Singapore, UK, Jordan, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, France, Netherland, Canada, Japan, Iceland, Finland, Spain, USA, China (Taiwan)	Undergraduate
Baby's-Breath	26	China (Taiwan)	Singapore, USA, Canada, Malaysia, China, Korea, Iceland, Norway, UK	Postgraduate
Jasmine	28	Thailand	UK, USA, Netherlands, Italy, France, Norway, Switzerland, Australian, Japan, China (Taiwan)	Postgraduate
Plum	25	Vietnam	UK, China, Philippines, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Austria, Czech Republic, Belgium, Croatia	Postgraduate
Tulip	27	Vietnam	UK, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Hungary, Austria, Finland, Thailand, Cambodia, China, Singapore, Malaysia.	Postgraduate
Sakura	52	Japan / UK	USA (Guam, Florida), Indonesia, China, Singapore, Malaysia, Brazil, Iceland, Greenland, Ireland, Scotland, France, Egypt, Mexico	Diploma
Lotus	32	Malaysia / Netherland	Vietnam, Thailand, Germany, Singapore, Indonesia, China (Hong Kong)	Undergraduate
Posy	29	China (Taiwan)	USA, UK, France Australia, Japan, Croatia, Latvia	Postgraduate
Lilac	26	Indonesia	Mexico, Australia, China (Hong Kong), Malaysia, Singapore,	Undergraduate

			Cambodia, Japan, Korea, France, Netherlands, Belgium, UK	
Lavender	23	Thailand	Malaysia, Japan, UK, France, Italy	Undergraduate

Table 4.2 Participant profile (Source: Original)

4.9 Conducting the interviews

Adhering to the ethical guidelines from Bournemouth University, the participants were contacted via email to invite them to take part in the study. A participant information sheet (PIS) (see Appendix A) detailing the aim and objectives of the study was attached to the invitation email. Broad areas of questioning were highlighted as few of the participants were keen to know more about the study. This assured them of their ability to answer the questions as well as reflect on their background, upbringing, and travel experiences.

Prospective participants were then contacted by telephone or video call to ensure the confirmation of their participation in the study and to give them the opportunity to make any inquiries regarding the study. This initial contact was crucial as it served as an ice breaker and allowed the first steps in building rapport. For the women who fulfilled the criteria and were interested in participating in the study, a time and place convenient for both the participant and researcher was arranged to conduct the interview. Several of the overseas participants were not available for interviews in person, therefore, a time was set up to conduct the interviews via video. For the overseas participants, arranging a time that suited both the participants and researcher was difficult due to the time difference and their availability.

Prior to the main data collection process, a pilot study was conducted. A pilot study is an essential stage of the research conducted to identify potential problems areas and deficiencies in the research prior to implementation during the full study (Hassan et al. 2006; Kinchin et al. 2018). In this study, a pilot study was conducted at the initial stages of data collection which yielded preliminary findings. The pilot study produced five preliminary findings (*Gender expectations, patriarchal upbringing, resistance, self-preservation* and *freedom*) which provided a foundation whereby the main themes were founded. The pilot study identified

several weaknesses in the initial interview process which was rectified and improved. The pilot study also improved my sample recruitment strategy to include participants from a wider age range, as well as prepared me for the challenges during the main data collection phase, particularly when faced with participants who were initially less engaging.

Before the interview, the participants were asked to read through the participant information sheet (PIS) again to familiarise themselves with the interview process, and sign the participant agreement form (PAF) (see appendix B) to confirm that they voluntarily gave permission for the interview to be digitally recorded and for their data to be included in the thesis. This process lets them know they are free to withdraw and are under no obligation to continue the interview if they felt it was causing any harm or discomfort. The participants were also informed that at any time during the interview, they could request that the interview be paused, or ended. To ensure confidentiality, the interviews were conducted in a private setting approved by the participants. Before the formal recording of the interview, time was spent in informal conversation with the participants, talking about life experiences, mutual interests, and background. These informal conversations sometimes shared over a meal or hot beverage served as an icebreaker between the researcher and the participants who were virtually strangers.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, the interviews can be lengthy and emotionally straining. A narrative interview guide was prepared to preserve the holistic nature of the participants' stories (Jones et al. 2013). Riessman (2008) states that the researchers should let the storyteller talk without interruptions and questions are used to provide a trigger so that the story teller continues to elaborate on the issues they raised. Employing a narrative inquiry approach to the qualitative interview allows the participants to tell their personal stories openly and freely and sometimes this may lead to the participants feeling overwhelmed. Therefore, the participants were allowed to rest if they felt they needed a break mid interview. To minimise distress associated with interviews, Corbin and Morse (2003) suggest that interviews must be adapted to suit the needs of the participants including taking breaks or postponing emotionally distressing discussions to allow the participant to calm down. Only one out of fifteen participants requested that the interview be

paused while she recollected her thoughts before continuing the interview. This participant showed signs of becoming unnerved during the interview. She was visibly upset while recounting her troubled past and requested that the recording be paused to give her time to regain composure. I reminded her that she could withdraw from the interview if she wished but after a few minutes she insisted that she wanted to her story to be heard. It was important to provide the participants with ample time to process their thoughts and reflections to ensure that the participants maintained control over the interview. The role of the researcher here is maintaining the equilibrium of the conversation and containing any emotion.

The interviews were intended to allow the participants to lead the conversation so that they had control of the interview process and were able to narrate their story freely and in their own terms. The interviews started with one main question: *what was it like growing up as a girl in (country they were born and raised in)?* This question aimed at allowing the participants to tell their life stories. The participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and they were free to answer based on their personal experiences. Each interview was approached with the view that these women were unique individuals, therefore required different questioning style. Remaining sensitive to these differences, the tone of the conversation used throughout the interviews needed to be continually reassessed. In addition, a range of probes were used throughout the interviews when the participants' narratives needed to be clarified.

I found that in some of the interviews, I was mirroring the communication style and language of the participants in order to establish a higher level of trust. The ability to match speech patterns, body language and attitude are the rules of any normal conversation and are encouraged in qualitative interviewing (Minichiello 1991).

The interviews came to an end when the participants were satisfied that their stories and experiences had been recounted. They were asked if they had further comments to add. When they had no further comment, the participants were thanked for their participation and informed that they may be contacted again in the near future for further involvement in the study. The participants were grateful that they were able to tell their stories, and some felt relieved after sharing their more hidden

experiences. Several of the participants noted that this was the first time they had had the opportunity to speak out about their experiences of living in patriarchal society thus interview provided them a chance to reflect on their lives.

4.10 Data Analysis

The interviews lasted between 52 minutes and 2 hours 15 minutes. All were digitally recorded and fully transcribed by the researcher. The process of data analysis is complex, not linear and reliant upon the researcher working in a systematic and orderly fashion (Holloway and Wheeler 2002). The data analysis process requires bringing order to the data, categorizing into patterns and descriptive units, then looking for the relationship between them. Riessman (2008) outlines four main methodological approaches which cut across different types of narrative research which are: thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis and visual analysis. In this study, the data were analysed using thematic analysis which focuses on the content of the narrative rather than the structure of how it is told (Riessman 2008). Riessman (2008) notes that thematic analysis is close to grounded theory but keeps the story intact and uses prior theoretical concepts. Thematic meanings and understanding of the focus of the narrative are emphasised over words or language. Language is therefore viewed as a resource rather than the topic of the inquiry.

Braun and Clarke (2006) divide the process of conducting thematic analysis into six stages: familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, categorising the codes into themes, reviewing themes, defining the themes and producing the report. These stages are presented in the table below (table 4.3).

Phase	Description of analysis
Familiarising oneself with data	-Narrative preparation -Reading transcripts multiple times
Generating Initial codes	-Coding interesting features of data in a systematic order -Collating data relevant to each code
Categorising codes into themes	-collating codes into potential themes -gathering data relevant to themes
Reviewing themes	-checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts -reviewing data for additional themes -Generating a thematic map
Defining and naming themes	-Refining each theme -generating names for each theme that presents a clear definition and representation of the data
Producing the report	-selecting vivid and compelling extract samples -final analysis of extracts -Relating the analysis back to research question, aims and objectives and literature reviewed

Table 4.3: Thematic analysis adapted to this study (Adapted from Braun and Clarke,2006)

Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis. Thematic analysis involves the discovering, interpreting and reporting patterns and clusters of meaning within the data. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility as it is independent of theory and epistemology (Braun and Clarke 2006). Due to its flexibility, some have argued that thematic analysis is just a generic method of data analysis (Ryan and Bernard 2000). However, I found this method most suitable to organise the data into themes.

Analysis in interpretivist qualitative research involves categorising the data into themes and categories which form the building blocks of conceptualisation (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Holloway and Wheeler (2002) describe data analysis as iterative

as the researcher is required to move back and forth from the collection of data, and back again refining the questions they ask of the data. This makes the analysis of qualitative data time consuming and often demands patience on the researcher's part.

To analyse the qualitative data, the audio recordings were transcribed to create a full verbatim transcript of the interviews. The transcriptions of the data came from a total of 22 hours of audio recording resulting in fifteen transcripts. Comments were added to the margins of the transcription including non-verbal cues, body language and tone of voice were added where appropriate. The transcriptions were carried out as soon as possible after each interview when the information was still fresh. The next stage was familiarisation with the data. In order to familiarise myself with the data, I listened to the audio recordings of the interview and reread the transcriptions in their entirety multiple times to immerse myself in the data as a whole before categorising the data into parts. I opted not to use any computer software to assist in analysing the data as using computer software may result in the loss of meanings and inference in the data (Creswell 2013).

After familiarising myself with the data, the coding stage was completed through scrutinising the transcripts where reoccurring words and phrases were highlighted in different colours and noted in separate documents. Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that a code is an effective label that captures a key analytical data and conveys that to the researcher. The documents were reviewed multiple times to ensure I did not miss any relevant data. Once all the data were coded, I placed clusters of similar codes into potential themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how a theme captures the relevant data in relation to the research question and represents a patterned response within the data. The next stages of 'reviewing themes' and 'defining themes' were carried out simultaneously. This stage of the data analysis required reflexivity, critical thinking and deep comprehension of the data. As a result, the finding chapters reveal the experiences of being a woman in a patriarchal Asian society and how it affects their travelling experiences, as well as the women's potential in becoming agents of social change.

Through thematic analysis, two overarching themes were identified from the narratives of fifteen Asian women. These themes formed the basis for each findings chapter. The first findings chapter (Chapter 5) discusses the influence of tradition and culture in gender roles, (objective 3) and the second findings chapter (Chapter 6) discusses the relationship between culture and the Asian female travel experience (objective 4) and women's role in social change (objective 5). These themes were further broken down into sub-themes.

4.11 Ethical considerations of the research

Ethical considerations reflect how a researcher treats their participants (Ritchie et al. 2013). Ethical guidelines are required to ensure no harm comes to the participants (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Prior to the commencement of data collection, I completed an ethics checklist which was approved by Bournemouth University's research ethnic committee, in line with university regulations. . The importance of ethics in a study with a sensitive topic such as exploring the cultural aspect of a participant's backgrounds cannot be underestimated.

Given the sensitivity of the research area, a strict protocol was adhered to, in order to minimise psychological and emotional distress to the participants. Prior to the start of each interview, the participants were informed of the research process, and the potential emotional risks associated with the interviews. A consent form (PAF) and an information sheet (PIS) were presented to the participants before the interviews. This allowed the participants to familiarise themselves with the interview process. They were further informed that they were free to withdraw from the interview if they felt any discomfort during the interview process. The participants were also informed that their narratives would be digitally recorded for the purpose of transcription and data analysis.

The interviews can be lengthy and emotionally straining due to the depth of the participants' narratives. Each participant was assured that if they felt distressed or uncomfortable during the interview, they could take a break, end the interview or reschedule. None of the participants withdrew from the interviews; however, emotional distress was evident through tears, sighs, long pauses and changes body

language and posture. Only one participant out of fifteen requested a few minutes to pause the interview. The interview was only continued when she has had time to recollect her composure.

It is important to acknowledge that when researching topics that may induce vulnerability in the participants, the morality of the research must be prioritised. Given the sensitive nature of the research, the role of the researcher here is to maintain the equilibrium of the conversation. However, as a researcher, it is also essential to acknowledge that recounting negative experiences may inadvertently raise mental health issues that could carry repercussions beyond the research process. Therefore, upon completing the interviews, I thanked the participants and offered comfort to the participants who showed distress during the interview. A few days after the interviews, I made contact with the participants to thank them again and to check on their mental well-being.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the study as to protect their identity. Anonymisation is a challenge to deal with in data collection. Anonymisation is essential for confidentiality but often does not guarantee confidentiality. Therefore data needs to be managed in a way that the risk of any possible unintended identification of a participant is treated with importance (Flick 2014). The participants in my study were assured that the information given during the interviews would remain private and confidential and they or other parties mentioned during the interview would be anonymous (Holloway and Brown 2012). I ensured that the participants' real names were not shown in the transcripts for the purpose of confidentiality. Quotations and excerpts which were extracted from their narrative were used in the findings chapter and each participant was given a pseudonym in order to maintain anonymity. Transcripts and recordings from the interviews were stored in a password protected file and the printed transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet. A list of the participants' profile and their pseudonyms were kept separated from transcripts, recordings and interpretations of the materials.

4.12 Trustworthiness of research

Trustworthiness in interpretivist research is widely debated, particularly in assessing the quality of research (Carcary 2009). The researcher bears the responsibility of convincing the academic community that the analysis and findings of the study are systematic, objective and worthy (Lincoln and Guba 1985). It is important that this research is recognised and understood as legitimate by researchers, practitioners, policy makers and the public. Trustworthiness allows researchers to persuade readers that the findings of research are worthy of attention (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessments criteria of validity and reliability. These trustworthiness criteria are considered pragmatic choices for this study because it is aligned with a constructivist paradigm. Therefore, aligning with the techniques proposed by Lincoln and Guba's (1985), I adopted a number of strategies that allowed me to achieve trustworthiness in my study. The table below is a summary of Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criteria and the techniques for achieving them.

Criteria	Techniques
Credibility (internal validity)	Prolonged engagement Persistent observation Triangulation (sources, methods, investigators) Peer debriefing Negative case analysis Referential adequacy (archiving of data) Member checks
Transferability (external validity)	Thick description
Dependability (reliability)	Overlap methods (Triangulation of methods) Dependability audit (Audit trail) - examining the process of the inquiry (how data was collected; how data was kept; accuracy of data)
Confirmability (objectivity)	Confirmability audit - examines the product to attest that the findings, interpretations & recommendations are supported by data
	Reflexivity

Table 4.4: Trustworthiness criteria and techniques (Adapted from Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

4.12.1 Credibility

Credibility is similar to internal validity in positivist research, and refers to confidence in the truth of the findings (Holloway and Wheeler 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that credibility of research is determined when readers are confronted with an experience they can recognise. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested a number of techniques to address credibility including activities such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing (to provide external check on the research process), examining referential adequacy (checking preliminary findings and interpretations against raw data), and member checking (testing the findings and interpretations with participants).These techniques are a guide and not all are applicable to each qualitative study. In order to establish credibility in my study, I undertook member checking.

Member checks, also known as participant validation, allows participants the opportunity to check whether the final report accurately reflects their social world (Patton 2002). Member checks are at the heart of the credibility criteria (Lincoln and Guba 1985). A qualitative researcher is required to include the voices of their participants in the analysis and interpretation of data. The purpose of doing member checks is to eliminate researcher bias when analysing and interpreting the data. Therefore, to increase the trustworthiness in this study, the data were sent back to the participants towards the end of the data analysis of this research. The participants were asked to go through their transcriptions to ensure that the transcriptions were an accurate reflection of their interview. They were asked to make changes if they were unhappy with the transcription.

4.12.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of the qualitative research can be transferred to other context with a wider population (Tobin and Begley 2004). Qualitative inquiries are often specific and applicable to a particular environment, or a small group of individuals, hence it is difficult to demonstrate that the findings are applicable to other situations and populations. The researcher

doesn't know to which site the findings can be transferred to but it is the researcher's responsibility to provide thick description so that those who seek transfer the findings to their own site can judge the data's transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Thick description refers to rich and extensive set of details concerning the methodology and context of the research being presented in the final report that enables judgments on how well the research context fits other contexts (Li 2004). This means that thick description involves a detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context (Holloway 1997). To ensure transferability, the data collected in my study had to be "thick" descriptive data about the participants' feelings about their patriarchal upbringing and cultural roots and the impact on travel.

4.12.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the study's findings. It involves evaluating and interpretations of the findings of the study to make sure that they are supported by the data. To achieve dependability, I had to ensure that the research process was logical, traceable and clearly documented (Tobin and Begley 2004). One way that a research can demonstrate dependability is to provide an audit trail of the research process. The audit trail also provides confirmability of the study (Tobin and Begley 2004).

Qualitative researchers use an audit trail to establish the rigor of a study by providing details of the methodology, data analysis and the analytical decisions that lead to the findings (Wolf 2003). A study is considered auditable when another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail. In order to develop a detailed audit trail during my research, I created and maintained a log of all research activities and decisions, as suggested by Carcary (2009). Keeping a research diary from the start was central to my reflexivity and understanding of the data. The interview process was physically and emotionally draining, and it was important to reflect on that.

Documents such as raw data, recordings, interviews and observation notes were kept for the cross-checking purposes.

4.12.4 Reflexivity

Qualitative inquiry is often dependent on the subjectivity of the researcher, where the researcher draws on their own values and background to understand the meaning their participants bring to their narration. The researcher's pre-existing knowledge is an essential resource of the research. Qualitative researchers emphasise on the inter-subjectivity, becoming the bridge between subjectivity and objectivity, where the understanding of the participants and researcher increases due to shared experience and values (Holloway and Brown 2012). This also means that the researcher is able to empathise with the participants, however, the researcher must identify the boundaries of their own assumptions and examine their own perceptions because qualitative research is strongly affected by these assumptions. Reflexivity allowed me to recognise my own biases in the data collection and interpretation. For example, the findings highlighted the positive impacts of a patriarchal society in which women's role in encouraging gender stereotypes and oppression, was an unexpected finding which had challenged my own assumptions and provided a unique insight. I recognised that my own experience and assumptions could shape the analysis of the data. However, it was important to ensure that the participants' voice was prioritised above my own subjectivity while reporting the findings.

Reflexivity is a concept in research referring to the acknowledgement of the input of the researcher in the study. Reflexivity is an important part of qualitative inquiry, particularly in this study because it is through the reflection that qualitative researchers acknowledge the value and beliefs that they bring in actively co-constructing the study. Reflexivity entails a sensitivity to the researcher's culture, political and social context (Bryman 2015). Self-reflection was an important part of establishing rigour in this study. During my attempts at self-reflection, I came to realise how much my personal experience and biases influenced my choice of research topic. This research topic is close to my heart in many ways. It was always

a personal calling for me to understand how culture and a patriarchal upbringing affect Asian women, whether in their travel experiences or in their personal lives. As an Asian woman myself who grew up in a patriarchal environment, I felt a close connection to the topics that were discussed during the interviews. There were many things that my participants had shared with me that were similar to the way I had been brought up. Throughout this study, I kept a reflexive journal to record my personal reflections as a human instrument in the study.

The self is always present in a qualitative research but as a qualitative researcher, one has to be accountable for the choice of data to be prioritised and its subsequent interpretations (Holloway and Wheeler 2002; Holloway and Brown 2012). With that said, it is impossible for qualitative researchers to exclude themselves completely from data collection, analysis and reporting. However, qualitative researchers must take a stance to their work when it is completed. For example, during the first interview I conducted, I realised that my participant showed signs of apprehension when questioned about their upbringing in detail. They required a lot of encouragement and assurance before they started to open up. After the interview, I proceeded to have a reflective session to assess the previous interview, noting down what went wrong and how I could improve. This process assisted me in overcoming similar challenges in following interviews. As I proceeded with the next interview, I noticed similar apprehensive behaviour in my participant. I realised that in order to continue with the interview, I had to make the situation more comfortable. As the interviews were usually carried out in cafes, I offered to have a break during the conversation, either with a meal or drinks. With that, the participant felt more at ease and the narrative flowed more smoothly, without interruptions. The interviews process can become emotionally demanding, therefore, it was crucial that I took time to reflect on this.

4.13 Limitations of the research

There are a number of limitations associated with this study that needed to be addressed. Firstly, the small sample is acknowledged as a limitation though this aligns with the qualitative approach. While the relatively small sample was justified

in that depth, richness and meaning were sought, it is difficult to generalise these fifteen Asian women's experiences to a broader population of Asian female travellers. Furthermore, this was a study of women travellers who were born and raised in Asian countries; it would be difficult to assume that all travellers of Asian ethnicity would experience travel in the same way. However, for this study, generalisation was not the aim of the study.

Although the sampling strategy was well thought out, it is acknowledged that it may be that only women who have been significantly affected by their patriarchal upbringing agreed to participate in the study. This may have created participant bias, which may impact the findings of the study. The sensitive nature of the subject at times made it difficult to access women who were willing to openly share their experiences with another person. There was also a fear of identification as some of the content that participants shared was very personal and controversial. Although necessary steps were taken to ensure participant confidentiality, it is possible that some women were put off from participating in the study through fear of being identified.

Another unexpected limitation of the study was in the search for participants from an Islamic background. Chapter two reviewed the feminist movements in Asia associated with Confucianism, Islam and Hinduism. While participants from Confucian and Hinduism backgrounds were willing to participate in the study, women from an Islamic background did not show the same enthusiasm. Given that they initially showed interest in participating in the study, they almost always rejected being interviewed in the end. Most of the Middle Eastern women I had approached were married, and they felt they had to obtain permission from their husbands to speak about their cultural background. In the end, I found myself either being rejected or ghosted. I found it puzzling that these women felt the need to obtain permission from their husbands in order to participate in my study. Perhaps this is a norm in patriarchal Islamic society. The only Muslim woman who agreed to participate in this study was single and not from a Middle Eastern country.

The language barrier was also noted as one of the limitations of the study. Although all the interviews were conducted in English, for all the participants, English was

not their native language. Their backgrounds varied from many different Asian countries. During the interviews, some questions had to be translated into their native language in order for the participants to fully understand the questions asked. This may led to some questions being lost in translation, which could have affected participants' responses and hence the data quality could have been affected as well.

4.14 Conclusion

This chapter presents an interpretivist, qualitative, and feminist research paradigm that guides and informs this study of Asian female travellers. This study adopted an inductive approach to data collection through the use of narrative inquiry. This method allowed for women's voices to be expressed in their own words and terms. A total of fifteen Asian women from various backgrounds and nationalities participated in this study to generate an understanding of the role of gender, culture, and patriarchy in Asian women's travel experiences. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. A thematic framework was produced to illustrate the main themes and sub-themes, showing two main themes: *the influence of tradition and culture on gender roles in Asia* and *the relationship between culture and the Asian female travel experience.* The data are presented in the following chapters, where the structure is true to the narrative form. It was my intention to take the readers on a journey to explore what life was like for an Asian woman growing up in a patriarchal environment and to explore how that affected their travelling experiences. Issues of research trustworthiness and reflexivity were discussed in an effort to ensure that the findings were credible. The study's limitations were also outlined.

Chapter 5: The influence of tradition and culture on gender roles in Asia

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter two, changes in the era of globalisation have led to the birth of women's movements in Asia. They have opened up new opportunities to contemporary Asian women that were previously not accessible. While the social status for women have changed over the decades, women in Asia are still confined by gender expectations and traditional gender roles and stereotype. This chapter explores the lives of Asian women within a patriarchal society and focuses on the roles of gender expectations, patriarchy, and culture. Through the narratives, the chapter analyses tradition and culture as the driving force behind the implementation and perpetuation of gender roles and expectations.

This chapter aims to address the study's objective three in examining the cultural background and upbringing of Asian women in a patriarchal society. Firstly, this chapter explores the impacts of traditional culture and religious beliefs on the women's gender roles within a patriarchal society. Following that, the chapter examines the socially imposed stereotypical roles of women's domesticity and the appropriate marital age for Asian women.

This chapter investigates how gender stereotypes not only affect women's perception of what it means to be feminine, but also how women perceive men's role as the breadwinners. This chapter also analyses women's role in patriarchy, particularly how women as mothers influence upbringing and female submission in a patriarchal society. Lastly, this chapter discusses the preferences of sons to daughters and how Asian parents are willing to go to great lengths to obtain a son.

By exploring the cultural issues highlighted by the participants, this chapter allows readers to have a deeper understanding of how Asian women's lives are shaped by their strict culture and traditions. This chapter in turn acts as a basis to further understand the role of culture and patriarchy in Asian female travel experiences and behaviour.

The thematic diagram below (figure 5.1) offers an overview of the themes and subthemes of this chapter but it should not be interpreted as hierarchal in nature.

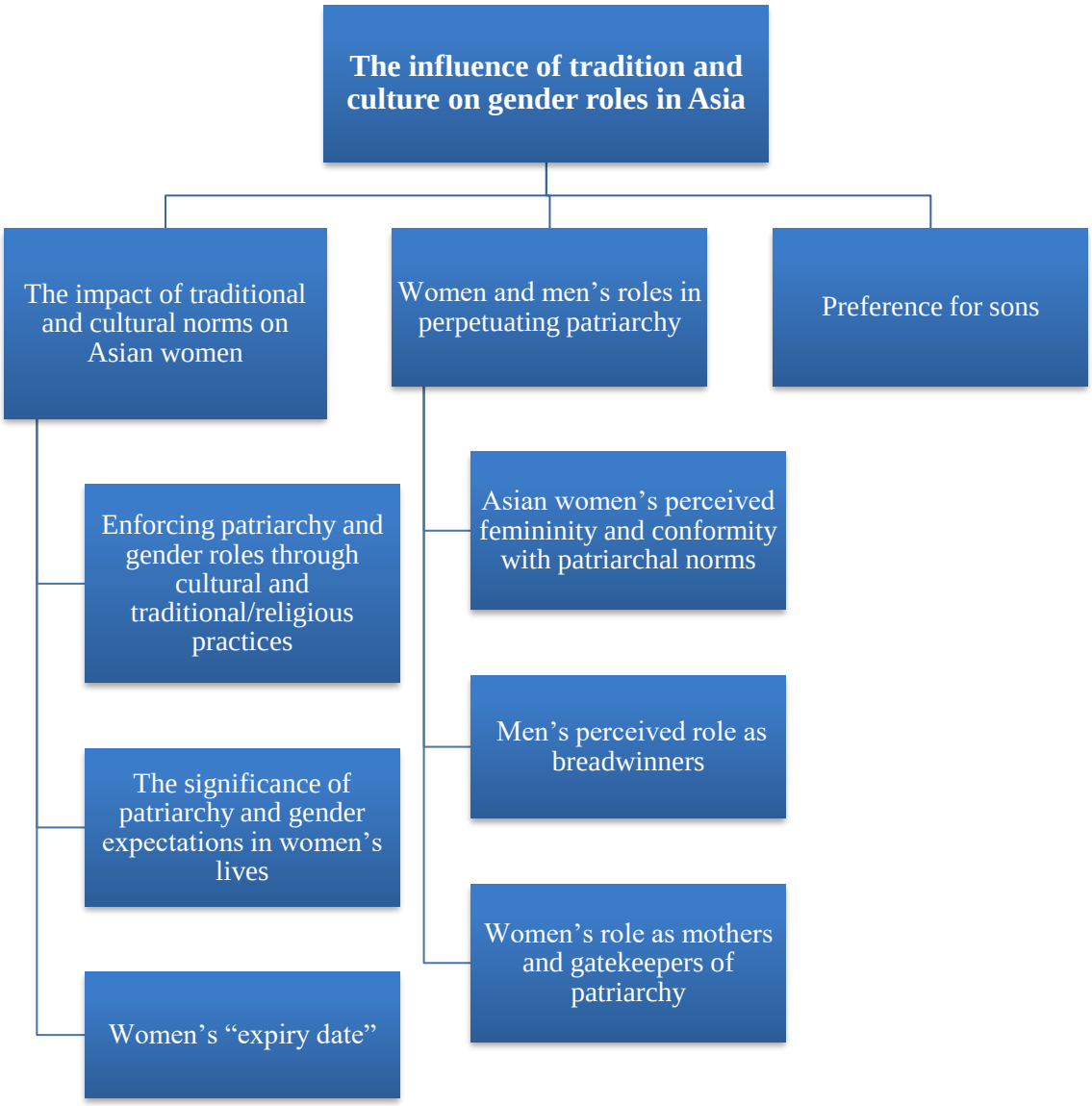

Figure 5.1: Thematic diagram for chapter 5 (Source: Original)

5.2 The impact of traditional and cultural norms on Asian women

This first subtheme that emerged was the impact of traditional and cultural norms on Asian women: analysis showed that participants' lives are significantly

governed by them. Patriarchy and gender roles were particularly compelling aspects of these women's lives and were highlighted repeatedly. These restrictions meant that Asian women bound by tradition were expected to behave within their gendered roles.

5.2.1 Enforcing patriarchy and gender roles through cultural and traditional/religious practices

Patriarchy is an intangible element of traditional cultural practices and beliefs that are held by members of the community, often spanning from one generation to another (Lerner 1986). The concepts of patriarchy and its effects on modern society have been discussed in Chapter two (section 2.3). The persistence of patriarchal values in Asia continues to pose an obstacle for women's advancement in the economy, education and human rights (Joseph 1996; To 2013). Throughout the conversations with the participants, cultural and traditional values were central topics, representing a constant throughout their lives. Some participants consider gender discrimination to be an inseparable attribute of a conservative society. Rose explained how society used culture and tradition to rationalise gender differentiation:

> *"In the villages, what happens is that, it's a very conservative kind of society, so equality there is almost a taboo... Everything is automatically related to the culture, tradition and every time there's a question achieving equality, for example, why women are not given the same chances, it is immediately silenced. Like I say it (gender inequality) is so deeply embedded into the system into the entire society that has become a very normal thing. Men will always be on the top…"*

This study found that Asian women were obliged to follow many strict unwritten societal rules that were typically passed down from one generation to another. The participants found that their role within their community was strictly based on societal perceptions of specific gender roles. Using culture and traditional values as justification, women were expected to behave and dress in a certain way. Rose stated:

> *"As a girl, as an Indian, as a Hindu, there are certain rules you need to follow, things you need to do...Constantly they'll (*people within the community*) say you have to wear a certain type of clothes for a particular function, or behave a certain way. You have to wear a 'purdah' because you know you don't want to show your boobs like that in front of everyone. So, there's a lot of restrictions in respect to clothing… I don't know how society made up all these rules in the first place but now all they (*society*) say is 'according to our culture, this is what girls do, and what boys do'. So, they blame everything on the culture, saying this is what our culture says so this is what we have to do."*

In the excerpt above, Rose mentioned that she is a Hindu, and briefly commented on the concept of "purdah", which is a veiling system practiced by Muslims and Hindus. Although physically, the veil is used for modesty purposes, it is historically and culturally a form of social control over women (Feldman and McCarthy 1983) and an instrument to seclude women from public places, which leads to the restriction on women's mobility and control over their decisions (Paul 2020). Thus, the concept of 'purdah' entails more than restrictions on women's dressing and mobility. Although Rose did not explicitly talk about how Hinduism has contributed to gender discrimination, it can be noted from the interview when Rose mentioned as a Hindu she believed religion to be interconnected with culture. She highlighted how deeply patriarchy and traditional values are embedded in her life. Religious laws may not always directly enforce women's oppression, these social practices are deeply rooted in a culture that condones and even encourages gender discrimination.

Religion and culture are related to patriarchy in a way that they are used to maintain patriarchal structures. The patriarchies within religion rely on specific masculinities and femininities to reproduce themselves. Patriarchal constructs of social practices are also supported by religion as most religious practices regard male dominance (Ray 2008; Littlejohn 2017). The culture of patriarchy is not static, but varies in different cultures and religions across time and space (Ray 2008).

Other participants reiterated their experiences of how religion and faith reflect patriarchy and are used to maintain patriarchal structures within society. For example, Sunflower described how Confucianism served as the backbone of

patriarchy to encourage the oppression of women who were expected to behave in a certain way within the private as well as the public sphere:

> *"It is just the tradition that is practiced all over the country. For us, it is Confucianism. I think because of that (*the teachings of Confucianism*), they felt the need to have a man to lead the family. According to Confucianism, they didn't think women and daughters could do the things that sons could do. As women, you cannot really express yourself with your own opinion. Another example is in the working environment, your managers are normally men. For example, like the senior top management are always older and aged men, there are no women on the top. These men tend to be more traditional, as in they follow the laws of Confucianism. So speaking up for yourself would be a problem. I've done it sometimes to my male bosses, they told me off for questioning their authority as men."*

As stated in chapter two (section 2.6), Confucianism impacts on the fundamental design of social structure, culture and values. Sunflower confirmed the perpetuating influence of Confucianism in promoting patriarchy and assigning gendered roles for women. The lives of women in East Asia continue to be restricted, even in the modern world (Littlejohn 2017). Sunflower stated that because of Asian society's strict adherence to Confucian traditions, women are not only restricted in terms of obtaining top positions in management but also within their working environment. This is because the teachings of Confucianism isolate women from the public realm, women are incapable of serving in prominent positions (Schuman 2015). Women are assigned to domestic affairs such as childcare, motherhood and household work while men handle public affairs (Chan 2000). This remains a problem in modern day Asia because most working women in East Asia are in minor positions that hold extremely limited opportunities for promotion to higher ranks in the corporate world (Schuman 2015).

Another participant reiterated how religion is used to restrict feminism movements and women's rights. Lilac expressed how society degrades women who stand up to inequality while misusing the teachings of Islam to justify gender inequality.

> *"Those women that stand up for their rights, they will be mocked as social 'Warriors', mocked as rebels trying to go against the norm. I think it is the dogma of religion as well, because they will bring up things like, Islam does not encourage feminism and use this narrative to further demonise people*

*and would probably label them as agnostic for instance. They (*society*) would try to correlate that the reason why people march for equality is because we don't have god in our hearts, and we don't understand the role of women based on God's scriptures. And in actual fact Islam does not encourage women's oppression, but people often use religion to strengthen their stand."*

Inglehart and Norris (2003) examined the connection between Islam and patriarchal values and provided evidence for Muslim support of patriarchal values. Their study suggests that socialisation under Islamic norms ingrains patriarchal values as an attribute of Muslim identity. Although it was found that a large proportion of Muslims elevate patriarchal values as cultural norms within their society, it is thought that education and employment can undermine these patriarchal values (Alexander and Welzel 2011; Kostenko et al. 2016).

However, the societal interpretation of patriarchal values is not an inherent element of Muslim identity (Alexander and Welzel 2011). Lilac explained that religion in fact does not encourage inequality and that Islamic teachings do not discriminate men and women. Thus there is awareness of the distinction between religious teachings and cultural conformity. Some studies argue that patriarchal values are not pronounced among Muslim communities because of Islam's inherent affinity to patriarchy, but rather because Muslims are socialised under a patriarchal 'structure' that characterise Muslim societies for other reasons than Islam (see Moghadam 2003; Ross 2008). Nevertheless, other studies show that Islamic discourse, often used as a justification to oppress women, can also be used to empower them (Moghadam 2002; Masoud et al. 2016).

This section reveals how gender roles and stereotypes have been enforced through the practice of religion and traditional values. Participants acknowledged the difficulties in growing up in an environment where gender oppression and discrimination have become normalised in Asian society. It is noted that the notion of a male dominated social structure reaches across religions and to varying extents, religious laws give fewer rights to women when compared to men (Williams 2011). A rigid patriarchal religious structure continues to obstruct the support for gender equality because religion is still used as a guideline to safeguard patriarchal influences (Glas et al. 2018). Through the narrative of the participants, it was found

that religion and culture are frequently used to justify gender inequalities and evoking traditional cultural beliefs about how women should behave. Using religion as a defence, Asian societies continue to perpetuate patriarchal values into everyday lives. Moreover, the participants found that questioning traditional norms would be challenged.

5.2.2 The significance of patriarchy and gender expectations in women's lives

The previous section discussed the influence of religious and traditional practices in Asian women's lives. While women in Asia practiced different faiths and religions, patriarchy remained a focal point in the participants' narratives. In this study, the participants noted how patriarchal system condones segregation of gender roles for men and women. Using her mother as an example, Orchid explained that women in her community were expected to sacrifice their career after marriage. She stated that although her mother's compliance with domesticity was common among Asian women, it was not her mother's own choice to choose family over career but rather external pressure from her in-laws to perform her duties. It is common for women in Asia to be expected to prioritise their duty as mothers and wives as society dictates (Zhu 2010; Gaetano 2014):

> *"My mum was a homemaker, she didn't work much. She used to work when she was much younger. To be truthful other families in Malaysia as soon as they start having children, mums will stay at home to look after the kids and dads will work… That is what is to be expected of a normal family… To have mums that stay at home, it's acceptable as a norm... I had a feeling growing up that my mother felt she did not have an equal ground because she did not have any income… It was not particularly her choice, there was a lot of conflict that happened with my dad's family. But judging from the way that she reminisces about her early years of adulthood she probably would have preferred to carry on working. She would have enjoyed the social side of having a career and having her own friends."(Orchid)*

Some participants were brought up to think that a women's formal education was not as prioritised as their preparations towards fulfilling their role as wives and mothers in the future. It was a common belief that daughters were a waste of money, resource and time to raise as they would one day be married out to their husband's

family and they will eventually serve their husband's family instead of their own (Rai 1992). A few participants mentioned how women were not encouraged to pursue higher education because women's perceived roles as mothers and wives are prioritised above education:

> *"It was not expected for girls to have high education, that's why they did not continue school, they (mostly) stopped at standard 6 (*UK - Year 6 Primary School*), because it was not important that they went to school. It was a waste of money. They were going to be married out, and their husbands are supposed to take care of them. When they get married, they don't need to work, they work at home. Their duty was to have children, take care of the children, take care of their husbands." (Peony)*

> *"For a girl it is like, you can study but education is not placed very important. So, girls are supposed to grow up as wives, they are supposed to be mothers. Those are the important things, you can't really have a career, because the main aim would always be to have a family, to take care of your husband, and basically be a support to the family, so basically you are not the breadwinner, but it is really hard to choose one from the other." (Lily)*

This study notes that in a patriarchal society where girls are raised to be primarily mothers and wives, it is difficult for women to choose to prioritise their own career path over a family life. Women are expected to behave according to societal norms including in terms of their education and occupation choices. In this study, many participants shared this sentiment, they felt that they were constantly faced with the predicament of having to choose to conform to societal pressure or seek their opportunity for career success. This finding echoes recent studies on the 'leftover women' phenomenon (see To 2013; Gaetano 2014; Hong Fincher 2014; Ji 2015). Growing up in a patriarchal society, the participants revealed the double standards between men and women on the issue of career and family. While it was acceptable for men to be career oriented and the main provider of the family, women were less inclined to be seen in that position. As Plum explained:

> *"The society will think that in our culture women have to do the housework and men are the ones that provide money into the family. If the wife gets a better career or earns more money than the husband in the house, society will think that this is a failed marriage. Society would think that the woman will be not as happy as another wife who has a husband that can provide more*

money for her. They assume that the woman who has a husband who earns more money will be the happier one."

Plum continues to reveal society's derogative perception of women who have more successful careers than their husbands:

> *"If a woman that focuses only on career, she might think that she's happy, like she has an achievement, but society will think like, why does she have to focus on career? Why is there no one beside her, all her friends will have families and she will just be alone. They (*society*) think it's not the ideal for society, it's not normal for a girl… Society will look at them differently as if these people are failures as women. And they will be alone. Die alone."*

In a patriarchal system, men and women behave differently because they have been taught to think of masculinity and femininity in ways that determine their differences (Sultana 2010). Patriarchy encourages male domination and female subordination in education, economy, and culture (Hapke 2013). This study also found that women's occupational opportunities are perpetually suppressed by the notions of marriage and their inevitable role. Lily, having experienced this situation herself, articulated how her education and career path were faced with objections due to the pressures of her family and society to "settle down" and fulfil her gendered role as a wife and mother:

> *"As a girl, I was expected to do certain things, it's not just my parents who put the pressure on me, like living in a patriarchal society, people question, like why aren't you married? And at 30! So, when I told my father I was coming to the UK to study my master, he was totally against it. And he gave me all kinds of excuses like, where are you going to get a husband with a master's degree or higher? And I told him I don't have to get married if I didn't want to, it's not like I have to… And he says well you are getting older and you have to settle down one day. Your husband is supposed to take care of you and not the other way around, and it's just things like that that puts pressure on me… I would rather be successful in my education than be married and have to sacrifice my career. Marriage can wait, I need to build up myself first before thinking of settling down."*

In this excerpt, Lily revealed that the difficulties of balancing family responsibilities with professional and personal goals can lead an otherwise emancipated career women to feel ambivalent about marriage. Marriage remains a gendered institution supported by cultural norms. There is a fear that they will not be able to balance

their private and public responsibilities. All participants agreed that their society (especially their parents) have emphasized the importance of settling down to building a family. Parents act as the main culprits to exert considerable control over women's marital choices. This is significant because Asian women tend to take their parent's opinions and expectations into consideration in their marriage plans (To 2013).

The participants were also taught that a woman's life was not complete unless she is married. The importance of marriage has been placed above the women's career opportunities. Some of the participants believe that higher education will allow women to have a higher chance of independence and therefore will empower them to break away from the continuing cycle of patriarchy. However a study in India shows that the education level of women has little impact on improving the subservient position of women (Rawat 2014). Although the women in this study highlighted the challenges they faced in career and education opportunities, it was revealed that all of the participants in this study were well educated. All of them have received tertiary level education and several had successful careers and businesses of their own at the time the interviews were conducted. Perhaps this is evidence of Asian women's awareness of gender equality, representing an emerging defiance against their patriarchal upbringing. This finding mirrors Gaetano's (2014) study in which Asian women challenge normative gender roles by creating new identities as independent educated women.

However, unlike Gaetano's (2014) study, not all the participants interviewed intentionally chose career over family or vice versa. Although these women were faced with cultural challenges, they managed to overcome the adversities by negotiating their way within a patriarchal system, in which they "bargain(ed) with patriarchy" (Kandiyoti 1988, p.274). Patriarchal bargaining was first coined by Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) in her study on how women dealt with constraints from the patriarchal system in order to survive. Kandiyoti argues that women can either challenge patriarchal constraints or find alternative ways in order to exercise their power.

Referring to the excerpt above, Lily's comments also highlighted that age is a seemingly crucial factor in the discussions of marriage and women's roles. Age and marriage seemed to be subjects that are frequently linked in the participants' discussions regarding fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers. This leads to discussion in the next section on the predicament of choosing career or marriage.

5.2.3 Women's "expiry date"

Over recent decades, there has been a rise in the number of single unmarried professional women in Asia (Jones 2005). In line with the improvement in women's education and labour market participation, many Asian societies have witnessed a notable decline in marriage (To 2013; Gaetano 2014). This phenomenon is particularly prominent in East Asian countries such as China (To 2013; Gaetano 2014; Hong Fincher 2014), Japan (Rich 2019), and South Korea (Jeffery 2019). Even in the era of modernisation and rapid socioeconomic development, marriage remains near universal in Asia. Asian women are still expected to be married or risk stigmatisation from society. Asian women are taught to believe they have an "expiration date", a marriageable age and are expected to marry by a certain age (Gaetano 2014).

In this study, some of the participants felt that they were pressured to maintain the status quo, sometimes at the price of individual autonomy. Living in a patriarchal society, these women were not only expected to embrace femininity, to look a certain way, they also had to behave within the confines of societal approval, for example: prioritising their role of wife and mother above education and career and to be married by a certain age. Although Asian societal concepts are slowly progressing towards modernisation, education and career for women are sometimes side-lined to emphasise family and marriage. Even though the women in this study were highly educated, the majority of the participants have internalised their gendered roles as mothers and wives: society dictates that any matter that interferes with these roles should be disregarded.

Tulip said that there was an age limit to be considered for marriage; any woman who was still single after that was considered unusual and would be pressured to get married:

> *"Talk(ing) about marriage in traditional family life and about my female cousin's experiences. For example, in my hometown when my cousin reached 27, it is considered really old. Comparing the normal age that she should get married which is like 22, latest 24 years old, but when she reached 26 years old, it is considered really awkward and unusual. So, people say she was lucky enough to get married at 27… But the society as a whole, ideally still behave the same traditional way, even now they are getting more concerned and more worried that women are getting more independent, more ambitious, more successful in their career, and women are getting married in an older age, or even some choose not to marry."*

However, age is not viewed in the same way when it comes to men and women. Although both women and men age at the same rate, the participants in this study highlighted that their age is often held against them. Sunflower shared her experiences within her community:

> *"Men they think it is ok to get older, but they think women shouldn't get older. I mean physically because men, they don't see other things more than physical appearances. For example, normally men in Korea think that there is a certain age for women to get married which should be younger than the men… For example, they think that men could get married after 30 or 40 and above after getting a career, but compared to that, women should be less than 28. For example, if you don't get married after 30, people will keep asking you why not, but they tend to ask more to girls, not to boys, mentioning that we are getting old, we're not getting any younger 'you can't get a husband that age', they consider this age as old. They think that women lose their good qualities when they get older. I don't know what they actually think but they seem to think that women will lose their qualities after 30."*

Sunflower revealed that age hypergamy is shown to exist within Asian cultures. Older single men with successful careers are considered eligible while women of the same age were considered 'leftovers'. This phenomenon of women over 25 years old who are still single are called "leftover women" (剩女) (Hong Fincher 2014). In 2007, The Chinese Ministry of Education first coined this term pointed out that this phenomenon is due to the overly high expectations of marriage partners (Hong Fincher 2014). This is not true however, it reinforces the formidability of the

Chinese patriarchal structure that led to discriminatory gendered constraints that barred most professional women from marriage (To 2013).

The women in this study all faced this predicament as they negotiated their commitment to their career and to the marriage market. The participants demonstrated their frustration with conflicting gender identities and expectations. As modern women, they are drawn towards pursuing a career to become independent. It is interesting to examine how they deal with this "trade off" of career and marriage, where certain actions and traits could benefit their career and boost their chances of professional success while at the same time damaging their chances in the marriage market. This finding echoes Ji's (2015) study on 'leftover' women in Shanghai, where women struggled to accept gender roles while preserving their financial independence. The women in this study also felt the pull of conformity and the need to follow the traditional path of marriage and family.

The phenomenon of educated professional women marrying later in life is also found in western societies, sometimes seen as a result of individualisation, a concept developed by Giddens (1993). As shown in section 5.2.2, the individualistic desire to attain higher education and greater career opportunities itself is a motivation for participants to delay marriages. This mirrors the findings of Raymo's (2003) study which reported that delayed marriages among Japanese women are attributed to educational and economic factors. However, even after attaining a higher education, this study shows that the participants still expected to comply to societal norms in order to pursue the traditional path of choosing marriage over career.

Nevertheless, this study suggests that Asian women, under patriarchal constraints, can either be passive or active agents: some women are able to bargain with the patriarchal system through delaying marriage in order to pursue their education and career, while others choose to succumb to societal pressures without resistance.

5.3 Women and men's roles in perpetuating patriarchy

As mentioned in the previous section, it was found that Asian women were constantly finding ways to negotiate their lives within a patriarchal construct. While some women were able to achieve economic independence in the public sphere, they were still compelled to adhere to their gender role in the private sphere. This suggests that ultimately, Asian women can never truly escape the pulls of conformity. The following section explores perceptions of femininity and conformity towards patriarchal norms. It further discusses men and women's role in perpetuating patriarchy in which men's expected roles as patriarchs and breadwinners are demonstrated while women's roles as mothers in a patriarchal society are discussed.

5.3.1 Asian women's perceived femininity and conformity with patriarchal norms

The participants in this study talked extensively about women's conventional role within a patriarchal system and how gender roles had impacted on their lives. The influence of society's gender expectations was found to affect Asian women, not only in terms of how they behave but also how they present themselves physically. These women were supposed look a certain way and behave within the confines of societal approval of what is 'feminine'. Although femininity and masculinity should not be constrained by pre-existing notions of gender (Reeser 2010), in this study, society's perception of "femininity" seems to be an important aspect of how women's role is determined. This study showed that women in Asia are restricted and frustrated by cultural expectations of 'femininity'. Peony reiterated the impacts of gender roles and the skewed perception of femininity that affected her growing up as a child:

> *"Girls were not allowed to do certain things because they were not lady-like… Girls were restricted because we were considered weaker than boys… When I was a young girl, I was not allowed to demand a lot of things. I was quiet, I was bullied… When I got older and started dating, all the rules and stigma of how a girl should behave, or how a boy should behave, it all came in, because if you don't conform to it, you don't do those things, you are*

abnormal, boys would not date you. And that's our greatest fear, that the boys don't want to date you. A girl should always behave what is expect, shy, decent, docile, laugh like a girl, it was ridiculous."

Peony alluded to certain sets of behaviour for boys and girls. In a patriarchal ideology, femininity and masculinity assigns different roles, rights and responsibilities to women and men (Sultana 2010). It is a topic that was emphasized by the participants throughout their conversations. The meanings of femininity are borne through social interactions, in which people construct their own understanding of it (Blumer 1969). However, femininity in this study was often associated with weakness and vulnerability, as women were perceived as being the weaker gender.

Peony went on to recall how even after reaching adulthood, she was still expected to be submissive to men, in this case – her ex-husband. She recounted how her achievements in her career were not acceptable as it undermined her ex-husband's capabilities:

*"A girl should be good, obedient, sit at home, sew, do needle work, help to cook, learn how to cook… so that I will be a good wife for my husband… We (*Asian women*) become door mats, we are lost in our tradition. We were told that women are weaker and had to listen to their husbands…As for me, I am trapped in a tradition that has been passed down, generation to generation. Even though I was better than him and he couldn't accept it, that ruined the marriage. It was not acceptable in my ex-husband's point of view… It didn't please him. He wanted a typical Chinese wife that listens to her husband. But I'm not."*

The above excerpt underlines the patriarchal ideology within a familial situation in which Peony was forced to accept that in her culture women were meant to be submissive to men. In this study, Peony was not the only participant who experienced sexism within her family. However, other participants who shared similar experiences of discrimination did not share Peony's feeling of discontent. For example, Orchid explained that even though she was capable of handling herself, she enjoyed how men provided her protection:

"I like it when my brother becomes protective of me, I like that feeling of being protected, I am the weaker sex and my brother is protecting me. I like

> *the feeling so it's a bit conflicting in a way… There will come a time the boy will have to treat you like a girl. The girl should always be submissive to boys, it is no longer a time for a need to prove myself, I liked being treated like that. Like how a boy should treat a girl. It no longer becomes a challenge to be better than them."*

Orchid accepted the patriarchal notion that women are the weaker sex and in need of protection. Radke et al. (2018) argues that it is not only men who display sexist attributes; women are just as likely to be involved in perpetuating patriarchy. Their study found that women adopt misogynistic attitudes simply because life is easier that way. Perhaps this is the reason why Orchid endorsed this type of sexism because she feels supported rather than restricted by it.

Radke et al. (2018) identified women who support patriarchy as "benevolent sexists" because they relish the benefits of being protected. They have been taught since birth that women are born to be submissive to men. They believe that it is within the natural order that men are more dominant, and women should be submissive. Orchid was not the only one who supported the perpetuation of sexism in a patriarchal society. Daisy reiterated how the hierarchy between men and women is universally accepted:

> *"Society sees men as the dominant and women as submissive because it is the natural order of the world, like Yin and Yang. Some people think that if women become dominant then it can disrupt the natural order… Men are the leaders for a reason, which is because they are stronger, like as in physically, so they are born to protect women... We shouldn't go against the natural order because we are born in this way, and it is easier to just follow it (traditional views of gender stereotypes)."*

The women in this study acknowledged that they were brought up thinking that this was the norm in society, and to accept that male dominance was simply a way of life. They have become desensitised to the subject of gender discrimination. This is because traditional gender roles have been nurtured in their culture for so long that they become an integral part of their identity. Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men are always in the dominant, or masculine role while women remain in the submissive or feminine role (Jagger and Rothenberg 1993).

Women who support the existing hierarchy acknowledge their low position in society as legitimate; they are comfortable in their lowly status because this obligates men to cherish and protect them, therefore they are reluctant to challenge the status quo. This presents a huge challenge to feminist movements as this attitude may discourage women from participating in collective action to eliminate patriarchy and to achieve gender equality.

Another reason for acceptance could be due to fear of ostracism by the community. The women in this study have the understanding that in Asian countries, societal pressure to conform is enormous. The participants voiced their fears of being censured for resisting societal expectations. Baby's Breath talked about how women were afraid to rebel against the patriarchal system; she was very aware of the consequences of resistance. When asked what would happen if she voiced her antipathy towards the government's patriarchal systems, she replied:

> *"Maybe I'll be killed! Because if I start to tell people (*to rise against patriarchy*), I will start some movement on women's rights, that kind of things. It's very hard for the government to control these things. And the society will become a chaos. And because of such chaos, I will be arrested, and will be executed by firing squad! The government will think that if the person who leads these movements is dead then these movements will not happen. Just like North Korea now, you cannot have your own opinions. You have to listen to others. and do what others say. Just like that, I think north Korea is the best example. (laughs) Or, Just like China. I think China now is still like this, you cannot say something about fighting against policies and laws, right? If you are overheard talking about these things you will be arrested."*

Baby's Breath was referring to China's attempt to silence a nascent feminist movement by arresting five feminist activists protesting against sexual harassment on public transport. China is a country where control is key; there is no press freedom and there is the highest internet surveillance and internet censorship in the world (Hong Fincher 2018). In her book *Betraying big brother*, (2018) Leta Hong Fincher explained how gender equality and feminism played into the political situation in China. Another participant, Lilac, also expressed her frustration with the political situation regarding feminist movements in her home country:

> *"I feel very angry about that because when I see news every single day on how sexual harassment happens everywhere, (and) women are brushed off because you're not supposed to act in a certain way. For example, the movement of feminism, I became interested in it when I started college because back then I used to take part in debate competition and feminism topics came up. That's when I realise that the issue is so deep rooted that as a woman sometimes, we don't realise that we are in a cycle of patriarchy , and it feels wrong because we (*the society*) are so in tuned in terms of technology but social issues they are supposed to be really simple, equality is not supposed to be this hard to achieve."*

Both Baby's Breath and Lilac viewed the acceptance of and conformity to stereotypical gender norms as a forced act of compliance. It is interesting to note that while all of the participants were aware of the marginalisation they faced in a patriarchal society, these women have distinctly different ways of negotiating their lives within these confines. On the one hand, as mentioned with Orchid and Daisy, some women viewed their submission to gender roles as normal and universally accepted, even enjoying the perceived benefits of their submissive role. On the other hand, women like Peony, Baby's Breath and Lilac revealed feelings of discontent with the misogynistic gender norms imposed upon them. This finding is important in revealing that women from Asia with similar patriarchal upbringing have such contrasting views towards patriarchy and conformity to stereotypical gender norms, whether freely or forcefully.

Being a hierarchical and generally collectivist society, Asian cultures value conformity above individuality (Kim and Markus 1999). The findings show that although the participants were aware of the marginalisation they faced, they were more likely to conform to societal norms, to avoid the negative consequences (i.e. being ostracised or arrested). Surprisingly, only two (Baby's Breath and Lilac) out of the fifteen participants spoke specifically about women's rights movements and only one used the word "feminism" to describe the fight to achieve gender equality. This could be due to the other participants' lack of awareness and comprehension of international women's rights movements and knowledge of current events as well as their reluctance to be involved in the fight for equality for fear of being reproached. The majority of participants only spoke about gender inequality at a

familial level. This suggests that there is a need to educate women to be advocates of gender equality.

Another unexpected finding was that during the interviews, the participants were reluctant to voice their dissatisfaction with the gender inequality that they face on a daily basis. Even in an environment that ensured confidentiality, they were apprehensive about revealing their sentiments on this sensitive subject. Hence, the process of building a rapport with the participants in the early stages of the interview was crucial in allowing the participants to feel comfortable and safe.

5.3.2 Men's perceived role as breadwinners

As mentioned in previous section, gender roles are core elements within a society, and these cultural values do not only affect women but men as well. It was found in this study that although participants believed that women are equal to men, at the same time they still recognised men as the main breadwinner in the house. The participants believed that in traditional Asian societies, men are expected to provide food and security for the family, and it is their role and responsibility to get a higher education and a good career to be able to provide for his family. This finding mirrors Mu and Xie's (2014) results in a higher probability of status hypergamy, in which women with a high education would choose a husband with similar or higher economic status. The participants acknowledged that they were taught since young that women were to rely on men, therefore a potential partner needed to be someone who can provide for them in the future.

Thus, this study shows that Asian men face expectations even though they may receive many privileges in a patriarchal society. When asked about her point of view in regard to finding a partner, Daisy explained how education and income level are important factors in the dynamics of the relationship:

> *"No, I would not look for a guy with a lower income or education from me, because it will look like a shame, not compatible, if the wife has higher income than her husband… Because of this, I don't think I will further my education after this, because I already have a high level of education and I would like*

to find a husband with similar or higher education than me, so that he can be the provider of the family... if not, don't think my parents will approve of it either, my future husband will need to earn enough money to support the family. My parents will make sure my husband is suitable for me."

Coincidently, all the participants in this study have obtained higher education. Yet, it is interesting to see that in today's Asian societies, parents still harbour the notion that only a husband with a higher educational and economic status will be able to play the role of breadwinner (Mu and Xie 2014). On the one hand, parents encourage the economic competitiveness of their daughters by financing their higher education, but on the other they still expect their daughters to observe traditional gender roles by leaving the breadwinning role to their husbands. For example, in Daisy's excerpt, she highlighted the importance of her parent's approval of her choice of future partner.

It is pertinent to point out that these ideals are culturally influential. It may be linked to particular social and popular imageries of what it means to be a 'man'. Daisy's statement also mirrors other studies indicating that both men and women express less acceptance for men who choose to be stay at home fathers when compared to men with employment (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005). This is crucial for men because it relates to how they see their ability to provide for the wife and family as an expression of their masculinity (Cheng et al. 2015). This conventional ideology of masculinity is widely noted in traditional Asian families, where the normative structure places men as the head of the house and as the main provider, supported by their wives whose role in the family is to attend to domestic work and childcare (Cheng et al. 2015).

All the participants noted how their fathers would automatically take up the role as primary breadwinner and overall decision maker in the family and their mothers naturally became followers. Their fathers were identified as the 'leaders' of the house and their mothers would not only become the 'follower', but also reinforced their husband's position within the family. Lavender recalled how her father was the primary decision maker of the family and her mother would support the patriarchal structure in the family:

> *"My father makes the decisions. My mum will give the authority to my dad. She will ask him or just let him decide what to do in everything even in little things she will talk to my dad. I think it's just a culture. But mostly my dad takes over... Women are not allowed to work outside they only do housework and cooking and take care of the children properly. Men are the only ones who go out to work and earn money for the family."*

Lavender was not the only one that tied her father's dominance to her culture. Jasmine reiterated Lavender's sentiments on how the rest of the family were not allowed to give a different opinion in the fear of getting into an argument:

> *"She (*my mother*) is a follower to my dad and my dad is the leader. We have to listen to him. We cannot show our opinion because we are always wrong... even if she doesn't like she has to be quiet otherwise it will become a fight… It is the culture. It is the value that women have to follow, women have to listen to their husbands. Yeah, that is the rule, it's a very strict rule. A good woman should be like this and like that, a good follower."*

Traditional Asian culture prescribes strict gender roles where fathers act as breadwinners and family patriarchs while mothers take on caregiving roles (Sodowsky et al. 1995). This study reveals similar findings, where the hierarchy within the Asian household is often very rigid, having the patriarchs at the forefront as the breadwinner and main decision maker of the family. The participants felt traditional views of gender roles were encouraged and "culture" is often used to justify their father's dominance within the household. All the participants agree to a certain extent that this is true in terms of their own family structure, highlighting that their father's dominance in the family contributes to the nurturing of gender stereotypical behaviours between sons and daughters.

Jasmine and Lavender revealed that their mothers also played a crucial role in supporting the patriarchal structure within their family. Their mothers did not only encourage their father's domineering position but also reaffirmed their own position as subservient to their husband, thus inadvertently setting an example in perpetuating women's submissive behaviour within the familial context. This finding is particularly interesting because studies on patriarchy (as reviewed in Chapter two) are mostly focused on how a society's patriarchal structure is upheld by men and male concerns. Rarely are women considered as an accomplice in

perpetuating the practices of patriarchy. This issue will be addressed in the next section.

5.3.3 Women's role as mothers and gatekeepers of patriarchy

This study shows that the behaviour of dominance and submissiveness portrayed by parents are inadvertently picked up by their children. At an early age, a parent's perceptions of gender roles and ideology eventually mould their children's attitudes towards gender roles within the family (Halpern and Perry-Jenkins 2016). The participants in this study agree that within their familial structure, their parents reinforced traditional views on gender roles between men and women.

In the previous section, the women in this study acknowledge that their fathers were particularly influential in nurturing gender stereotypical behaviours compared to their mothers. Fathers are rigid in their expectations of sons and daughters (McHale et al. 2003). The participants frequently mention how their mothers acted as role models in preparing the women in this study to fit into their roles as future wives and mothers. This study revealed that it was not only men who maintained the patriarchal structure; women also played a part in ensuring the perpetuation of a male dominated society. The women in this study spoke about how their mother's indifference or support towards patriarchy and women's oppression had impacted on how gender stereotypes were communicated to them. One example of this is shown in Peony's account of her mother's relationship with her father and how it impacted on the way she is compelled to treat her husband:

> *"Seeing my mother doing everything she can to please my father, as a typical Chinese wife, steeped in deep tradition, should do. That is what I see in a relationship and even now that I'm married, I have that responsibility in me, to please my husband and I have a responsibility to take care of my husband... My mother wanted to instil that if you treat your husband well, he will never leave. So, she teaches her daughters to love their husbands, "kow-tow" to them so they will never leave. We become doormats... But how my mother treated my father put a great impact on me. She treats him like god because he is the breadwinner... It sort of brainwashed me to be like my mom."*

Peony's experience with her mother had significantly moulded her perceptions of how a woman should behave in life. As mentioned in the last section, women are rarely acknowledged for becoming gatekeepers of patriarchy, continuing to teach younger women to *"act as women should"* (Posy),or show them the *"proper way a girl should behave"* (Jasmine*)* so that one day these women will become the classical ideal wives for men. Rose narrated the way her mother meticulously groomed her to become the ideal wife:

> *"My mother, as I mentioned to you, had told me from the beginning that I have to learn how to cook how to sweep, how to mop my house, wash dishes, wash clothes and all of these things. My mum has told me that if I don't do it my future mother-in-law will blame her for not teaching her daughter how to be the ideal wife... and tell (her) "you have not taught your daughters well." So from the beginning it is not just me but we (*the girls in my family*) are brought up in such a way that, like it's preparing yourself for the future, after your wedding you have to take up all these roles as wives and mothers, so you have to start learning from it right now."*

Despite that, a mother's indifference towards female oppression also contributes to shaping her children's perception of gender. Lotus explains how her mother's indifference led her to being forced into stereotypical gender roles:

> *"My mother didn't make it any better, she didn't stand up for us, she also kind of echoed what they said about the fact that basically having daughters is not worth it. I think my mother was always very scared of my father for her whole life she was always a very timid person, so I don't know.* (loud sigh), *it was a very horrible way to grow up…my own mother gave me some advice that as a woman, try to find a very relaxed job so you have time for your family when you get married…she always encouraged me to be a teacher is the easiest job in the world you work half the day and the rest of the time you can spend with your kids… as a woman you should make time for family even though I didn't even have a boyfriend then, to them you know as a woman you are expected to have children, expected to get married one day and you should find a job that is easy enough for you do have time to look after your family, so yeah…"*

Peony reported that when comparing her parents in terms of instilling gender roles, she highlighted mother's role in her upbringing:

> "*All my life, my father was the head of the family, he played the part very well in getting us educated and making sure we were raised properly. Ironically though, throughout my life I have never felt that my father imposed any rules about how girls should behave. It was always my mother who instilled these rules on us (*her daughters*). She insisted we behave in a certain way and would scold and punish us if we didn't do as we were expected to."*

The participants in this study revealed that both parents influence their children's gender identities. Although their fathers were the main breadwinner and head of the family, their mothers played a more powerful role in maintaining conformity to traditional norms. In the excerpt above, Peony specifically mentioned that it was her mother, and not her father who instilled stereotypical gender roles on how girls should behave. This finding echoes Tsai-Chae and Nagata's (2008) study on the perception of traditional values of Asian American students. They also found that mothers were more likely to transmit traditional values to their children, sometimes creating conflict between parent and child.

Studies on parent-child relationships have shown how parents' beliefs on stereotypical gender roles impact on children's perceptions. Most highlight that a father's role is more prominent in perpetuating traditional gender roles while mothers are depicted as more nurturing and egalitarian in terms of their child's gender identity (see Kulik 2002; Apparala et al. 2003; Donnelly et al. 2016; Kollmayer et al. 2018). Studies that report mothers as having the main influence on gender roles (i.e. Mead and Erikson 1949; Gelman et al. 2004) have been few and far less prominent, particularly within the Asian context.

Women and their contribution in endorsing patriarchy are often overlooked. Patriarchy, as deep rooted as it is within homes and in broader society, creates continuous obstacles for women to achieve equality. Furthermore, patriarchy is not a recent phenomenon but took a period of over 2,500 years to develop and was formed by both men and women (Lerner 1986). Patriarchy manages to adapt and find expressions in a changing social environment, especially in terms of the buy-in from women in maintaining this phenomenon. Ananya Roy, in her 2014 TEDxMarin talk "Patriarchy-power and gender in the 21st century", articulates women as "being the chief of staff of patriarchy".

5.4 Preference for sons

As previously mentioned, Asian countries have strong commonalities in their familial systems. Asian society largely relies on a kinship system, which is rigidly patriarchal (Das Gupta et al. 2003) where patrilineality and patrilocality are widely practiced. The findings in this study revealed that daughters, though loved and treated as a member of the family, were often secondary compared to sons. Interestingly, when asked about gender bias within the family, participants with male sibling tend to react differently to participants without male siblings. Participants with male siblings referred to instances of discontent where they were treated differently from their male siblings. Peony recalled how her brothers were given preferences in all aspects of growing up:

> *"My mom placed a lot of importance on the boys… She thinks that boys are more important than the girls, the boys rule and the girls obey. So, my mom favoured the boys a lot. Boys get better food… the good parts are given, the meat, are given to my brother. She (*my mother*) feels the boys are more important and they should be treated like emperors. We (*my sister and I*) feel left out, angry at not being given the best. It was always boys first. Even for clothes the boys get them first, the best clothes, yours can wait, always the boys first. It is obvious there's resentment, I didn't like it at all… they got better food than we did, always ignored and the boys weren't."*

Peony felt that the preference her mother and grandmother showed towards her brother often led her to feel not worthy of their attention, contributing to her resistance towards gender discrimination.

Traditionally, the preference of sons over daughters arises from a belief that only male descendants could pass down the blood line, therefore sons were preferred over daughters (Westley and Choe 2007). In an Asian family, a son is considered a pension plan, an asset and a future breadwinner and caregiver who will look after their parents while daughters are a burden to raise and waste of resource (Das Gupta et al. 2003). It is extremely rare that a daughter would inherit assets or land (Das Gupta et al. 2003). This constrains women's ability to be economically sustainable without attachment to a male relation. Patrilocality is also practiced in most Asian countries, where women who are married will eventually become a part of her

husband's family (Westley and Choe 2007). Married women tend to look after their in-laws instead of their own parents.

Peony was not the only one that felt deprived of her elders' attention because she was born a girl. Baby's Breath and Sunflower felt the same way when their grandparents showed obvious favouritism towards their brothers even though their brothers were born after them:

> *"They (*my grandparents*) preferred my brother, taking a simple example. There was once my grandfather bought a special toy, when he came back, he only gave it to my brother. At that time, I felt disappointed. I felt that we were all his grandchildren but why didn't he buy it for me. So, I asked him straight on why he didn't buy one for me, he told me it is because my brother is a boy, I didn't ask why, but I know my grandfather prefer my brother to me." (Baby's Breath)*
>
> *My grandmother of course thought my brother was more important, not only me but all my sisters. If we come back late from school, she would wait, but she wouldn't like to get up from her sleep to do something for us. We didn't expect it either, but she would get up from bed straight if my brother came back to the house late, then she had to prepare some food for him. My brother could have everything he wanted when he was younger. We (sisters) were not happy about it. We always thought it was discrimination. We just always felt, like we are the second to him. I think we just felt the environment was not fair." (Sunflower)*

Both participants, it is important to note, highlighted that it was their grandparents who had showed favouritism towards their brothers. However, their parents did not seem to show the same level of preferences towards their son. Perhaps through modernisation and exposure to western gender equality ideas, there has been some social change whereby modern parents treat sons and daughters with equal importance.

Another situation where sons are prioritised over daughters is when a limited financial resource is available. Baby's Breath describes the predicament her grandmother had to face:

> *"I think that my Grandma feels that this is one of her biggest regrets, that she didn't get the opportunity to have a good education during her time because they were poor. Maybe she feels that women are always the party who have to sacrifice their future for the sake of their family, and men were able to*

study and build their own careers. But in my time, this generation, if you are rich enough, both girls and boys are able to get education. Not like in her time, where girls can only stay home and obey her husband's decisions."

Interestingly, Sakura shared a similar sentiment when talking about her grandmother:

*"When my mother decided to work as a hairdresser, my grandmother, did not stop her, which I think this is rare in my culture. I think that my grandmother, saw the benefit in women contributing to the household. Because my grandmother quit her job right after she got married and I think she regretted it. But it was after the war and there were no jobs for women when (*the*) men came back from war"*

In both Baby's Breath and Sakura's cases, women were deprived of an education and a career because of a scarcity of opportunities at that time. In many parts of Asia, parents with limited financial resources prioritise sons. As a result, priority for resource opportunities such as education, sons will be favoured over daughters (Rafferty 2013). This contrast in the differential treatment of daughters and sons is generally not practiced in wealthier countries (Leaper 2014).

The driving motivation in producing sons is to continue the family bloodline by whatever means possible. A man without sons may adopt a son from another male kin, or take another wife or concubine that will be able to produce a son (Das Gupta et al. 2003). One of the participants had encountered this situation in her own family where her elderly parents were so desperate to have a son that they spent a relatively large fortune across a span of several years on invitro and surrogacy. Plum experienced first-hand how the urgency to obtain a son had drained her parents of their entire finances:

"My parents still want to have a son at their age, even though they already have two daughters. When a family has only daughters, growing up, we as daughters will get married, and we will move to our husband's house and serve husband's family. That's why my mum and my dad still want a son even though they are both in their late 50s…. My mum cannot have a pregnancy anymore due to her age, so they got a surrogate mother to do it. It has been many years and they spent a lot of money but at last now they have a baby boy."

Plum explained why her parents' decision to spend years and a fortune to be able to have a son is justified:

> *"If my baby brother gets married one day my parents will still have him in the house with his wife because his wife will move to his house and they will have kids in his house. So my parents feel like they gain kids are not giving kids away like me and my sister when we get married. This is because of our culture…. My dad's worry is that if my sister and I get married, our husbands will take our properties, because if the properties pass onto me and my sister, our husbands will probably take control of it and my dad is afraid to lose it to other people, but if they know that my father has a son and he will pass the properties to my brother instead of me and my sisters then they will not be greedy about it."*

As Plum explained, fathers without sons suffer a personal grief at their linage coming to an end. They feel a sense of disappointment at letting down their ancestors for failing to carry on the family name (Das Gupta et al. 2003). Aside from the grief, there is also a considerable public humiliation for men who do not have sons. Plum described how her father was frequently teased and taunted by other men for appearing in public spaces without a son:

> *"I think that societal pressure has an influence on their decision as well. My dad's friend will tease my dad that he doesn't have a son to do all these things (going for communal gatherings) with. They ask him 'so why do you have to work hard and earn all that money when you don't have any sons to pass it down too. Instead you will have to give it to your son in law'."*

The comment of "*this is because of our culture"* was made by all the participants in general. Most of the participants acknowledge that for daughters, there will always be a discrepancy in the way they are treated in comparison to their brothers. The data also revealed that participants who were first born daughters were more likely to have younger siblings. This was perhaps because their parents' desire for a male heir would drive them to attempt a second or third child. This was an unintentional finding while profiling the participants. Although the participants did not speak directly about their sibling constellation, it was still relevant in highlighting preferences for sons in Asian families.

The study also revealed that most of the participants who emphasized how their parents and/or grandparents showed preference to their brothers are those

originating from East Asian countries. This is perhaps due to the region's shared heritage of patriarchal Confucian influence. Extreme son preference has been found to be particularly prevalent in countries with Confucian influence for over 2000 years (Arnold and Kuo 1984). In traditional Asian families, it is believed that the family line can only be carried by male descendants. These strong patriarchal values which are rooted in tradition, promoted gender inequality and parental desires and preferences for sons (Stacey 1984).

This study revealed that although there is awareness of gender inequality in Asia, little effort has been made to change the fundamentals of the family system in order to make daughters equally as valuable as sons to their parents. Sons typically receive more parental investment in their families with both males and female offspring, regardless of birth order (Guo et al. 2018).Women's lives have been improved in material ways but their position within the family has remained unchanged (Das Gupta et al. 2003).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides an insight into the life of Asian women in patriarchal societies. The roles of culture and tradition were discussed in relation to how they frequently become the justification behind perpetuating gender discrimination. From this study, it can be seen how the enforcement of traditional gender roles affects the lives of Asian women, restricting their experiences when compared to men. Religious norms were also used to as a tool to marginalise women, even though religious teachings do not advocate women's oppression. Participants were expected to settle at a certain age, and under family and social pressure, they faced the predicament of choosing career over family or vice versa.

As independent modern women, the participants felt constrained by the traditional institution of family, yet at the same time they enjoyed its support, and most did not feel like sacrificing family for career. This finding was particularly fascinating because even though all the participants acknowledged the existence of gender

discrimination within their society, they had contrasting views on how Asian women negotiate their lives in a patriarchal society. While some participants chose conformity to social norms, others chose to challenge gender expectations by delaying marriage to pursue their career. In terms of finding a partner, they stated that their desired future partners should be economically stable and able to provide for the family, and not on a lower income and education level than them.

The study also found that traditional gender roles restricted women to certain stereotypical views on what it is to be "feminine" such as behaviour and physical appearances. Although this mostly involved women, men were also affected. They were the designated breadwinner and head of the household. Apart from culture and tradition, parental upbringing also played a vital role in nurturing gender stereotypes. It was found that fathers as patriarchs were the authoritative figure in the family. Members of the family including mothers were expected to follow and not question their decisions. Interestingly, some of the participants revealed that their mothers not only supported a system that seemingly disadvantages them, but also encouraged their daughters to follow gender stereotypical activities. This was an interesting finding because, although the participants viewed their fathers as the head of the family, their mothers were the biggest influence in maintaining the patriarchal structure within the household. This finding highlights women's role as mothers in the perpetuation of patriarchy in Asian societies.

The last section of this chapter discussed the preferences of sons over daughters. Sons were preferred as it was believed that only they carried the bloodline to the next generation. It was revealed that Asian parents were willing to go to great lengths to obtain a son. Nevertheless, with globalisation and western ideologies of gender equality, there is a possibility of social change as modern parents are beginning to value daughters as much as sons. A financial and emotional dependency on men carries implications for leisure and travel. This is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: The relationship between culture and the Asian female travel experience

6.1 Introduction

This study reveals that the socio-cultural context, both home and abroad, had great impact on the women's lives and their travel decisions, opportunities, and overall experiences. For the fifteen women of Asian descent interviewed in this study, the primary feature of their narratives was the socio-cultural elements that impacted not only on their travel experiences but also on their lives. This chapter fulfils the fourth objective of the study which is to investigate the impact of patriarchy and cultural background on Asian female tourists' travel behaviour and experiences. This chapter is categorised into three main sections according to the stages of travel: pre-travel, during travel and post travel.

The "pre-travel" section includes any socio-cultural factors that affect the participants before they commence their travel, set in the context of their everyday lives. The findings in this section reveal the constraints from their families and their society on their decisions to travel. This section also highlights the women's defiance against social expectation and preconceptions that women are weak.

Following that, the "during travel" demonstrates the struggles these women face during travel. Travel was used to escape from the socio-cultural restrictions they faced back home and provided the participants with the space for self-growth, empowerment and freedom. The section addresses the fears and vulnerabilities faced during travel and the participants' negotiation strategies to overcome those challenges.

The third section presents participants' "post travel" reflections. It analyses how travel impacted on their lives. This section addresses the fifth objective of this study which is to examine how Asian women's travel experiences might equip them with the potential to be agents of social change within their own community. It was found that upon returning from their travels, these women continued to resist socio-cultural expectations, and they acted as agents of social change in an attempt to

resist the patriarchal structure in their home country. However, there was also an indication of acceptance within the participants' narrative.

Figure 6.1 offers an illustration of the three sections and their sub sections:

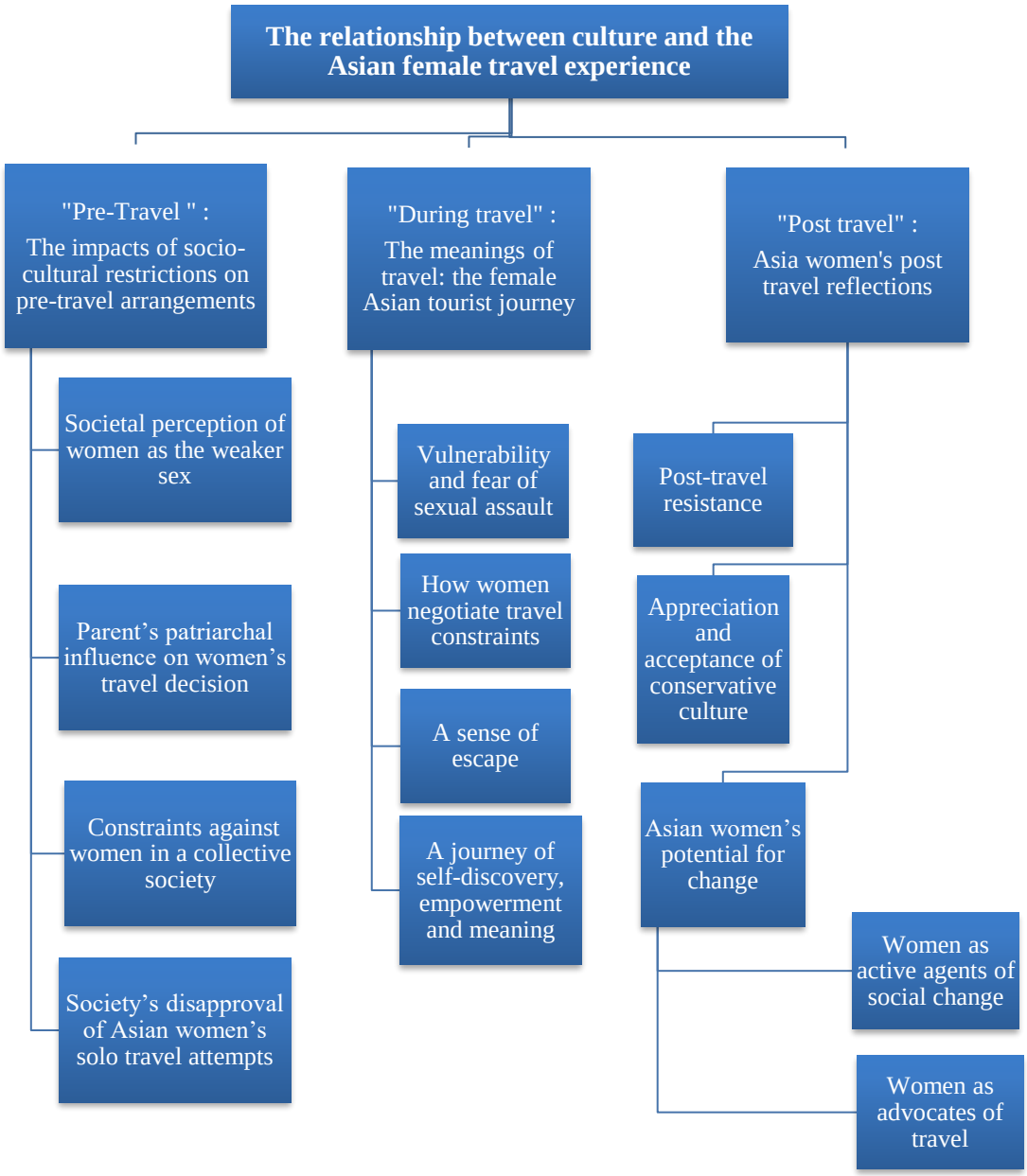

Figure 6.1: Thematic diagram for chapter 6 (Source: Original)

6.2 The impacts of socio-cultural restrictions on pre-travel arrangements

Prior to departure, the women in this study acknowledged that the patriarchal environment that they grew up in affected their behaviour and decision-making process. At the pre-travel stage, they revealed that the main constraints that they face before departing was regarding the appropriateness of their travel abroad. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these women felt constantly subjected to gender stereotypes. The primary socio-cultural restriction was associated with the social expectation of what is deemed appropriate female behaviour.

6.2.1 Societal perception of women as the weaker sex

The participants felt restricted by the perception of their family and community that travelling was inappropriate for women. They spoke of how the community's perception of women as the weaker sex affected their travel decisions. As Lilac explained:

> *"I think there is still the perception in society that women are still weaker and are more susceptible to harassment, and I think this upbringing does affect the way I travel. Even when we want to travel, we are always told (by family and friends) that as a girl, it is much more dangerous to go outside your country. I would want to travel anywhere in the world, but at this point I don't think I'm ready enough for that, because it's so embedded in my brain that it's not going to be safe if I'm travelling as a girl."*

Women were perceived to be more susceptible to dangerous situations and were exposed to gendered risks. Hence, as women, it was perceived to be more risky to travel away from their home environment thus diminishing their will to travel. This perception of being weaker than men instilled a feeling of vulnerability and self-doubt. Even for women with a history of travel, self-doubt and fear can lead to a considerable lapse of time between travels. One participant who used to travel as a backpacker reported she didn't feel she could do it again:

> *"I used to go backpacking… It has been a few years since I went on a trip that is not for work. I always use busy as an excuse, but actually, I am also scared sometimes… my family keeps telling me all these stories about girls*

getting raped when they go travelling, makes me feel like the world is so dangerous… and I feel it takes a lot of confidence and courage to get back out there. I want (to) go backpacking again, but I don't think I'm brave enough anymore." (Baby's Breath)

When asked about their family's views about their travel decisions, Lily pointed out that the fear of being targeted for sexual assault was the main concern:

*"My family didn't support my decision to travel alone because (*they*) think that it's more dangerous to travel alone as a girl, because it will increase the chances of getting raped…As girls, they (*family*) think we cannot defend ourselves like men because physically we are not strong enough… There is always this fear that we might be targets for kidnapping and getting murdered."*

Fear of being vulnerable is focused on the pre-travel stage where the perceptions of women being the weaker gender contribute to fear prior to departure. This feeling of fear and vulnerability during travel has been noted in several studies on female travel experiences (see Wilson and Little 2005; Wilson and Little 2008; Brown and Osman 2017). Asian women are generally more restricted in terms of freedom of mobility due to the society's overall impression of women's inability to handle themselves if they face problems during travel (Teo and Leong 2006; Yang et al. 2015; Yang et al. 2016; Seow and Brown 2018). Therefore, this skewed perception on women's capabilities limits Asian women's travel opportunities.

6.2.2 Parents' patriarchal influence on women's travel decision

In this study, the participants identified their parents as the main challenge to overcome their pre-travel stage. Parents are often insistent on the strict maintenance of traditional patriarchal values, which potentially affects participants' travelling decisions. One participant had to refrain from telling her parents that she would be travelling as she was afraid her parents would disapprove:

"I waited until the last minute before I went away so I just told my parents I'm going to Jordan… they asked me where it is and if it is somewhere in the middle east? I say it was really safe and don't worry… I know they will disagree with my decision… because they think Jordan is very dangerous… I didn't want to (have) conflict with them." (Orchid)

Asian societies are largely considered to be collectivistic and have high regard for their collectivist family ties (Hofstede et al. 2010). In a collective Asian family, filial piety is still considered a virtue; it lays the foundation for the parent-child relationships (Kim et al. 2015). Even as adults, the participants in this study still held their parent's approval in high regard.

Some participants stated that growing up in a collective Asian community had nurtured their dependency on their families. These women regarded their parents as overly protective and controlling. As a result, they believe that their lack of independence affected their pre-travel arrangements. Rose explained how her lack of confidence discouraged her initial plans for solo travelling:

> *"I am very much dependent on my family and friends to come with me because it's not safe to travel alone, I was always scared because I kept wondering what if I get lost…. As a girl, I've always been protected, and I've always been told (*by my parents*) that if a girl goes anywhere by herself, she has to go with someone and because it's very dangerous for a girl. Because of that I think I am very scared to go anywhere, especially by myself. (*As a result*) I'm afraid of travelling solo. I don't feel comfortable travelling alone because I'm scared and I don't know what kind of people that I will meet and what kind of experiences I will get. In case of any emergency, I wouldn't be able to handle the situation."*

Asian parents have often been described as controlling and authoritarian (Chao 1994). Many of the participants revealed that they were brought up with either one or both authoritarian parents. They mostly identified their fathers as the breadwinner and head of the family. Hence, their father as the patriarch of the family played a crucial role in their self-esteem and mental well-being. The participants also noted that growing up in an authoritarian environment caused their lack of confidence and low self-esteem, hence affecting their travel decisions as well. Lotus shared her experiences growing up in such an environment and how it had affected her as an adult:

> *"I would say that because of how I was brought up, I've always been afraid… I've always been told by my parents, that because I am a girl, I won't be able to handle myself if I get into trouble…. Growing up (*as*) a daughter, my father used as much misogynistic concepts to destroy my self-confidence… Sometimes (*I'm*) very anxious and I don't dare to leave the house… And there*

*are days that I don't even leave the house to go out and eat, if I have anxiety I will just end up sitting there and not going out so actually my anxiety really affects me from stepping out of my house. It also really held me back from travelling… (*As a result of) *being brought up in an extremely patriarchal family. So far, I have not travelled alone because I'm too scared to do it… Generally because the way I was brought up, I become generally very scared and anxious, I can't even leave the house unless I make plans and I have to meet someone at a certain time then I have no choice but to leave the house…"*

The quote above demonstrates the effect of Lotus's traumatic upbringing in an extremely patriarchal and authoritarian environment that she endured from her childhood and which lasted well into adulthood. Studies have shown that children who grow up in authoritarian homes often become anxious or withdrawn and suffer from low self-esteem (Russell et al. 2010; Alt 2015; Singh 2017). Lotus's situation was perhaps an extreme example, but it shows the possible detrimental effects of a patriarchal upbringing on a woman's mental health and decision making. Alt (2015) states that authoritarian parenting does not foster autonomy in children. The patriarchal influence in on society has branded women as the weaker gender and the notion of travelling, especially solo travelling, is a foolish endeavour. Lotus later acknowledged that travelling with others for both work and leisure purposes forced her out of her comfort zone, but she still did not feel comfortable enough to travel alone.

6.2.3 Constraints against women in a collective society

As stated above, most Asian cultures are collectivist in nature. Collectivism refers to a culture that privileges family and the community. This implies that Asian societies are conformist where the needs and goals of society are prioritised above those of the individual. An individual is expected to yield to their designated gender roles within the community, which implies that Asian women are expected to prioritise their loyalty to their families in performing their roles and responsibilities (Joseph 1996; To 2013; Lindsey 2015).

Each of the women in this study acknowledges that they were encumbered by the stereotypical views of women's multitudinous roles as mothers, partners, wives and

carers. Due to their gendered responsibilities, they admitted that their opportunities to travel were limited. As the oldest participant in this study, Peony talked about how caring for her family had hindered her travel opportunities:

> *"As a wife and mother, I have to put them (*husband and children*) first, I have no time for travel, if I leave, who will take care of my husband, with his heart condition."*

It was particularly difficult for the women in this study to leave their social roles and to travel as it was seen as a sign of rebellion against societal norms. They were expected to suppress their urges to rebel against societal norms. Those who refuse to conform to the norm were threatened, manipulated and often ostracised. Women are expected to be family orientated in Asian societies, hence remaining in the private sphere where their responsibilities are towards the household (Raymo et al. 2015). As one participant recounted:

> *"I always question why aren't men and women equal? Why my brothers can go (*travelling*) on their own and my parents won't let me do that? They (*parents*) say to me, a woman's place is at home and we shouldn't go running away from our responsibilities… One day you will be married, and you have to learn (to do) housework, become a mom and take care of the children, otherwise you will be scolded…" (Rose)*

Within a patriarchal society, Asian women are burdened with responsibilities of stereotypical gendered roles such as motherhood and childcare which restricts their mobility (Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007; Khan 2011; Gao and Kerstetter 2016; Qiu et al. 2018; Seow and Brown 2018). However, this study found that through travelling, participants could be relieved of their roles and responsibilities back home, albeit temporarily. In this way, travelling was seen as a way to oppose traditional gender norms because it allowed women to escape their social responsibilities. Previous studies on female travellers show similar findings, whereby women travel to escape social expectations (Wilson and Little 2005; Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Wilson and Harris 2006; Berdychevsky et al. 2013b).

6.2.4 Society's disapproval of Asian women's solo travel attempts

Solo travelling was a common topic raised when the participants spoke about travelling. The study reveals that "solo travelling" became a prominently controversial subject where the participants discussed the ramifications they faced when they had chosen to travel alone. Before embarking on solo travel, participants were condemned for their dissenting behaviour. For example, Tulip and Lily both recounted how their decisions to travel alone were reprimanded by their families:

> *"I was criticised for my decision. I was called reckless, and selfish, putting myself out there… My parents definitely did not approve of it. They didn't think I was smart enough to handle myself, even though I was very careful... I just think, well if I were a guy (*they*) wouldn't have felt like that." (Lily)*

> *"I didn't tell my family that I was travelling alone. But in the end, they found out when I came back. They had scolded me, saying I was irresponsible and a liar. They didn't trust me again. So, the next time I wanted to travel they made sure to track my every move. It was super depressing." (Tulip)*

In this study, it was found that travelling, especially travelling solo, was an uncommon practice for Asian women. This finding agrees with previous studies on Asian solo female travellers where compared to other forms of travel practice, solo travelling is widely portrayed as a tourism practice with a western origin, in which solo travellers, originate from western developed countries, travel to less developed countries in the east and south in search of exotic life changing experiences (Teo and Leong 2006; Bui et al. 2013).

The women in this study noted that travelling solo was seen as acting out of the norm. It was considered unacceptable as it was viewed as a result of being "westernised". Lily explained how her decision to travel solo was considered normal in western countries but was not accepted in Asian countries:

> *"Travelling, especially when you want to travel alone is more or less a foreign concept in Asian countries. Only westerners do that. I can say that Asian people prefer to travel as a group, better yet if it is a tour package. Because the reason Asians travel, I think is a sign that you are privileged enough or rich enough to afford going abroad. Travelling abroad for reasons other than to show off back home is normally less. Like when I told my parents*

I want to travel solo to rediscover myself, they dismissed my idea completely. They asked me if I was influenced by my friends in the UK."

In relation to their travel decisions, the participants acknowledge that their families and friends became their biggest barriers and challenge to overcome. This was particularly apparent to women who chose to travel alone. Hence, announcing to their family and friends that they had planned to embark on a solo journey had become a tedious process. For most of the participants, their parents were the main protesters against solo travelling. One participant shared:

*"My parents would definitely object to that (*travelling alone*). They'll definitely say no… and they would keep asking why I want to travel alone because they see it as too risky to travel alone… they (*parents*) said that it wasn't safe, and as girls, it way too dangerous to travel alone... when they couldn't stop me, they threaten to take my passport." (Lilac)*

Rose shared similar sentiments regarding her parents' disapproval of her travel choices:

"I don't think my parents will allow me to go travelling alone in the first place. They wouldn't directly say it to me, but they would probably convince me otherwise. They are very scared of my well-being and scared of what will happen if I go alone. Will I be able to handle (myself) in difficult situations or not…"

Another participant found that it was easier to lie rather than tell her family the truth regarding her travel:

*"The first time I decided to travel by myself, to Singapore and Malaysia, I had to lie to my parents that I went with a group, they didn't know that I went alone, until now they still don't know. Yeah... (*laughs*) I couldn't tell them that I travelled by myself, even though it was just to Malaysia and Singapore. Because I knew that if I had told them the truth, that I will travel by myself, they will try to keep me at home… And when I was in UK, I went to three places and almost all the time I have never told my parents that I was going to travel." (Tulip)*

The fact that Tulip had to hide the truth of her solo adventure from her parents points out the perception in many Asian societies that travelling alone was considered inappropriate (Seow and Brown 2018; Yang et al. 2018). This

disapproving response can be associated with the perceived notion that Asian women should observe their place as home makers in society.

Participants who chose to travel alone were criticised for their decision as travelling without a companion (male or female) was not an option favoured by most Asian societies. Rose explained how her parents had insisted a male relative or friend accompanied her on her travels:

> *"If you decide to go somewhere (*travelling*), you weren't allowed to go alone. You will have to be accompanied by one of you male relatives… or have a "brother" to accompany you… Even if it's a younger male, they would accompany me to ensure I'm ok when I'm away from home, then my parent will be like, 'ok, she's safe with somebody because she's going with a boy'."*

Tulip shared a similar experience:

> *"They don't think it is safe enough, for young ladies to travel around by herself. It should be at least in a group and there should be a man together with her… They will raise their concern and get more worried… Yeah that's why they react this way. They (*parents*) tried to keep me at home. They don't think it is safe enough, for young ladies to travel around by herself."*

These excerpts pointed out that in many Asian societies, it is inappropriate for women to travel alone. The women in this study were often encouraged to travel with a male companion as it was perceived to be a safer option. Women were seen as weak and a target for sexual harassment, hence having a male companion would provide protection and ward off unwanted male attention. Brown and Osman's (2017) study revealed similar findings where female travellers with male companions felt safer and protected against sexual harassments than those without male companions.

It was not uncommon that the women in this study faced disapproval from their home societies, especially their parents. Out of all the women in this study, only one participant was found to have parents who supported her decisions to travel. Posy expressed how she considers herself "*one of the lucky ones*" to have supportive parents. She went on to explain that:

> *"because my parents are very open minded, and they don't really mind what I do and encourage me to do all sort of things. They don't restrict me because*

of the fact that I'm a girl…. a lot of my friends from other Asian countries, I can see how bossy and restricting and how 'naggy' their parents are. I'm really really lucky…. I do see the way that I travel is different compared to the way that my friends travel because my upbringing is different, yes definitely different."

Compared to her peers, Posy noted that the reason her parents did not disapprove of her travel decisions was because she claimed that compared to other Asian countries, equality is becoming an important aspect in her country (Taiwan). Taiwan is the first and only region in Asia to legalise same sex marriage, a tremendous step in equality and LGBT rights (BBC 2019). However, another participant from the same region shares a vastly different experience on gender equality when comparing equality in her country with a western country:

"If a woman wears sexy clothes, like when I was travelling in the UK, we see it all the time. Like the clothes they wear show off half their boobs, and people there don't see it as an issue. But in Taiwan, it is regarded as scandalous. People here might take pictures of you and upload it online, and then criticise you, make you feel bad. Or more serious, sexual harassment occurs. Taiwanese believe that is not proper and they say why must you wear so revealing? Allowing others to see your body. But I believe people should have freedom to do what they want, but society won't allow it, so who should we follow? Ourselves or society?" (Baby's Breath)

Some studies suggest that although women in Asia are progressive, traditional Asian mentality prevails. For example, Tan and Abu Bakar's (2016) study on contemporary female travellers in Singapore shows that Asian traditional values of conformity are still prioritised. It is important to note that all the participants in this study come from rather privileged backgrounds - as in they are generally well educated, financially and economically able to travel. Individually, they are modern and highly adaptable people. All the women in this study have travelled abroad at least once in their adult lives, therefore exhibiting non-conformist behaviours while still attempting to maintain the balance between loyalty to their family and their own freedom.

6.3 The meanings of travel: the female Asian tourist journey

Studies on female travellers have acknowledged that women are consistently confronted with a narrative of domesticity and confinement to their roles as wives, mothers and caregivers, - a reoccurring theme in women's lives (Wilson and Little 2003; Wilson and Little 2005; Seow and Brown 2018). From the previous section, it was evident from the women's narratives that they still struggled with traditional expectations of their gendered responsibilities of domesticity. The findings revealed that women's pre-travel decisions and experiences were linked to socio-cultural elements.

This section focuses on the experiences and struggles women face during travel. It addresses the fears and vulnerability the participants faced during travel and how they chose to embrace their fears by using it them as a learning opportunity to negotiate their travel. It then shows how travelling was used as a means of escape by participants, allowing them to remove themselves from the socio-cultural restrictions they faced at home. Participants indicated that travelling provided them with an opportunity for self-discovery, while gaining their independence gave them a sense of empowerment and freedom.

6.3.1 Vulnerability and fear of sexual assault

The participants recognised that travelling involves varying degrees of risks. They spoke about how their travels were constrained by fear. Many spoke about the feeling of being conspicuous when they were travelling as they felt they were constantly under the male 'gaze'. These women reported feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious, whether when travelling alone or in groups. Several participants viewed being sexually assaulted as the main concern for women when travelling, as the following excerpts show:

> *"I have not travelled alone, but even as a group of girls, people still stare at us, especially men. You know like with those eyes, like they are thinking to do bad things. Makes us feel uncomfortable, unwelcomed. When we are outside, as women, we have to be careful" (Lavender)*

> *"When I'm travelling alone, I do fear of robbery, rape and harassment from men, I do fear, the most frightening would be rape, I fear that. Sometimes we become target to be kidnapped… because of how we look, we are Asians, and our size is smaller. And I think that makes people think we are more vulnerable... I think if I get kidnapped, I would be the one to suffer, raped, sold as a prostitute. Or a slave*." *(Peony)*

Peony highlighted that Asian women attracted more unwanted attention because their Asian appearance sets them apart and makes them more vulnerable. Feelings of fear were also related to the participants' own perceptions that they were more vulnerable compared to men. Peony noted how travelling with a man made her feel more secure:

> *"If I'm travelling alone the fear is greater, than with a group, with a man especially... When people see you with a man they tend to leave you alone… if I am travelling with a man, then people are not going to disturb me, rape me or try to do bad things to me when there is a man… Because men will not get all that, they won't aim the danger at men, but at the women…"*

This perception of vulnerability limited the enjoyment of their travel experiences. Sunflower shared Peony's feelings about travelling with men to make their journey more secure:

> *"If I had a man with me, I would feel safer. It's just something natural that men and women are given different physical forms. I would feel safer if I'm travelling with a man."*

The women in this study gave their accounts of unwanted sexual harassment. They were convinced that the public space is dominated by men and that "*it is men's world"* (Lavender). This finding agrees with studies suggesting that the tourism space is largely dominated by men and male concerns, therefore women are exposed to gendered risk such as sexual harassment (Jordan and Gibson 2005; Wilson and Little 2008). While travelling in the tourism space that privileges men, this study further highlights that the participants felt they were exposed to gendered risk. They felt helpless and constantly sexualised by men, especially when they were travelling alone. According to Brown and Osman's (2017) study, sexualised male attention is a serious constraint on women's ability to fully enjoy their travel. The participants were aware that physically they were weaker than men and that awareness heightens their sense of vulnerability. These women often reiterated how

careful they were during their travels but were often condemned if they became victims of sexual harassment. One participant recounted how her friend was blamed for being sexually assaulted during a solo trip:

> *"I had a friend who has been assaulted when she travelled alone. Instead of being sympathetic, the mentality surrounding it would be, what did she do to get herself in this situation? Did she wear something revealing? Did she go out at night? Was she hanging out with boys? Did she get drunk? Did she not take care of her drink? Did she put herself in a position that entices men to rape her? People don't think the other way around , like boys should be educated to not even go there, it doesn't matter if someone is wearing something revealing, yea, you can look but that doesn't give you the permission for an assault if the girl doesn't give consent." (Lily)*

In this study, the participants recognised that travelling involves varying degrees of risks and conclude that it is important to "*be smart about your actions"* (Daisy). The narratives thus far show that most of the participants were aware of the risks of travelling away from their home countries, particularly if they had chosen to travel alone. This finding echoes previous studies on the constraints facing solo female travellers (Wilson and Little 2003; Wilson and Little 2005; Harris and Wilson 2007). However, in contrast with previous studies, the participants in this study were apparently not deterred by these constraints. Moreover, a sense of serendipity was evident. Posy shared her thoughts on this:

> *"Travelling to me is my own freedom and it's really hard for me to imagine why people make so much planning before they go because you don't really know what's going to happen out there and if something happens, then it happens. You just have to suck it up and change plans anyway."*

Another participant talked about how they would accept it and move on even if they were in a bad situation:

> *"When you travel you are away from all your comfort, and if something bad happens, you can't blame others…. Because you already made the choice to go, so you have to be responsible for it." (Tulip).*

The findings in this study so far revealed that fear was the main constraint during travel, a reoccurring subject discussed by participants. This finding echoes several other previous studies on women's travel constraints (Wilson and Little 2003; Wilson and Little 2005; Harris and Wilson 2007; Wilson and Little 2008; Khan

2011; Yang et al. 2016; Brown and Osman 2017; Qiu et al. 2018; Seow and Brown 2018; Yang et al. 2018; Osman et al. 2020). The women in this study also acknowledge that their journey away from home would inadvertently generate risks. Risk is perceived to occur in varying degrees during travel (Yang et al. 2018) and is often unavoidable. Nevertheless, the women in this study were apparently not deterred by these risks. However, distinct from previous studies, this study revealed that participants processed and conquered their fears through acceptance.

6.3.2 How women negotiate travel constraints

As noted in the section above, fear and vulnerability during travelling impacted on the participants' travel experiences. This fear was not only present during travel but also during the pre-travel process. Before travel, this fear stemmed from the women's own self-doubts about their capabilities and lack of confidence, but feelings of vulnerability surfaced during travel.

The women in this study did not let fear hold them back from pursuing their travels. Some women thought of fear not as a barrier, but as a tool to become better versions of themselves. One participant shared how putting fear into perspective allowed her to achieve her travel:

> *"Being away from home, I think there is always risks. Yes, sometimes I am scared, but I think to myself, 'you can't let this feeling stop you from doing things you like'. I think fear is good, it is your body's own reaction to protect yourself. It just depends how it is channelled…. Once you know you can do it, you can become more confident, you can become a better person." (Lily)*

Another participant recognised that fear kept her in check. Rather than hiding behind it, she used her fears to make herself more focused when travelling:

> *"I do feel a bit scared when travelling most of the time. Or maybe I am just scared to travel alone. But since my separation, I do things on my own so travelling on my own has become, a norm. I still feel scared, but I know when I'm travelling alone, I become very focused. I don't laze around, I'm afraid to miss my plane. I check my passport many times when I travel alone, make sure the time is right, organise everything. Flight times and all. Travelling*

alone is scary, but I'm proud of myself. Proud that I can do it on my own." (Peony)

However, when asked about fears associated with travelling abroad, some participants argued that there was no difference between home and away. This assumption actually helped the women in this study deal with their fears as they felt that sexual assault could occur just as easily while travelling abroad as it might be back home. Lilac shared her thoughts on this:

> *"I think it (*gender oppression*) is an unfortunate phenomenon that happens everywhere. It is just the degree of it that is different. Talking about how women are oppressed, talking about women being sexually harassed, rape, it is an occurrence that still might happen when you travel to the West… But in Indonesia women are so under privileged that it does not permeates your mind when you talk about it. I would say that the rate of rape and sexual harassment cases are just as bad but the degree of the trauma that happens due to the cases would be greater in Indonesia because they can get killed, or raped it's not just being catcalled. It's much more serious than that."*

For some of the participants, the difficulties faced during travelling were taken in their stride and viewed as opportunities to learn new skills. For example, a difference in culture may be daunting at first but the participants used this to their advantage to gain new knowledge and understanding towards another culture different from their own:

> *"When I go to a more developed country, sometimes it's quite scary. I see the way people behave. It's very different from where I come from… When I meet new people, I struggled because of communication, the way they talk here is so fast and I realise I need to learn quickly." (Lavender)*

Most of the participants refused to be bound by fears of assault. They found ways to deal with the challenges they faced. Some participants responded to fears by changing their way of travelling. It is important to note that they did not avoid travelling altogether but only avoided travelling to certain regions due to the reputation of the countries. They preferred to stay away from certain regions of the world where they thought it would be dangerous travelling as women. Sunflower noted that she would not travel to Islamic countries for fear of being harassed:

> *"I am aware of certain gender issues and I wouldn't go to Arabic countries, as far as I know they are really different in terms of treating women and men, because of Islam. If a woman goes there, they will have to follow the rules there. For example, women have to hide everything, the way they dress, and men don't have to do that so those things. If I know that certain countries or places , they have no respect for women , or if you go to someplace, men just come to you and try to hit on you even though they have not met you before, then I wouldn't choose to go to that kind of places."*

This finding reflected Brown and Osman's (2017) study on western female travellers in Islamic countries in which the Islamic socio-cultural context directly impacts on the treatment of female travellers who are expected to conform to gendered norms for women in Islamic society. Sunflower's understanding of gender oppression faced by women in Arabic countries discouraged her intentions of visiting.

Other participants shared Sunflower's apathy towards travelling to countries where they did not feel welcomed. In addition to facing gender discrimination, the participants also reported that in some countries, racial issues were as prevalent as gender issues. Peony reported her experience of being discriminated against by local people not only because she was a woman but also because of her Asian appearance:

> *"In future, I think I will avoid western countries when I travel. I felt very intimidated when I travelled (*to Europe*) the last time. Like in France, people there make you feel strange. Even in Australia, they make you feel like Asians are a lower class. But in France, they are rude, because I am a foreigner. The way they look at me, especially the men. They are not friendly, sometimes they harass me, calling names. They were rude to me until they saw my husband was an English man, then their attitude to me change, I get that in UK as well. I feel that they are not nice to me because I am Asian… So, racism plays into these situations as well."*

This feeling of conspicuousness within the public space adds to a fear of being under the surveillance of the male gaze. During their travel, these women felt they were not entirely free to experience liminality and freedom associated with the tourist experience because it was impossible to escape the objectification and sexualisation from men (Jordan and Aitchison 2008).

The participants felt isolated and unwelcome in a foreign country not only because of their gender but also because they looked different from the locals. These xenophobic responses from the host negatively affected their travel experiences. Recent studies on Asian female travellers have also noted similar findings in terms of the conspicuousness of appearing Asian in a foreign country. Seow and Brown's (2018) study found that Asian women felt targeted in a sexual way because of the way they looked, while Yang et al. (2018) stated that Asian women were discriminated against and threatened by local people.

When faced with harassment and unwanted attention from men, these participants decided that they would avoid travelling to the country or region where these harassments were likely to occur. They negotiated their travel by planning their journeys carefully, choosing to travel to another country instead. It should be noted that the participants did not abandon their travel plans entirely but rather opted to make travel arrangements with more vigilance and to gain more knowledge of the region before travelling.

6.3.3 A sense of escape

The participants revealed that throughout their lives, they had been deliberately moulded to be future wives and mothers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, traditional gender expectations in Asian cultures were to be strictly abided by. However, these women wanted to be viewed as something other than the roles they were designated for. Travelling was a means to escape reality and to adopt another role (even if temporary) while allowing them to remove themselves from the restrictive situation at home that they were trapped in. For example, one participant stated:

> *"I was very excited to go somewhere outside the country because I was very frustrated and controlled at home. Every time anybody says something to me, it was always to push me down. They would make me feel like I'm a bad person and a bad woman. I was always upset when I was at home I just wanted to escape. So, when I finally escaped and came to UK, I was happy initially, like finally I was happy I wasn't constrained anymore." (Rose)*

In Rose's situation, travel was used to remove herself from her current situation. It was a way for her to escape her own reality, albeit for a short amount of time. It was enough to relieve her of the restrictions of her home society. Sunflower shared similar experiences:

> *"I really feel free from those things… I don't have to be submissive and listen to all the men, especially at work... Sometimes I feel free that I can speak up what I feel often, whenever possible… for example, when I'm here in UK or travelling in Europe I feel more freedom even in daily life as well, things like how I dress back in Korea. Everyone looks at you, (*even*) what you're wearing, and they will comment on that."*

Apart from that, some of the participants noted that travelling allowed them to escape from their daily routine, giving them the time and space to reflect on their lives. Sakura noted that:

> *"I think (*travelling*) is fun! Just for a few days, but it was wow… I just wanted to enjoy (*being away*). I wanted to go abroad more to escape the routine. To relax, enjoy, not working. Escape from normal life, away from people I know…Sometimes life is stressful, like work and family life, I go away to give time to myself."*

Studies have shown that travelling can provide women with escape from day to day routines (Wilson and Harris 2006; Harris and Wilson 2007). Although some participants did travel to escape daily routines, in this study, the participants did not overly emphasize this as their main motivation to travel. Instead, when asked about what travelling meant to them, the participants often used the word "freedom" to describe how they felt while travelling. Freedom in this sense did not only refer to freedom from their daily life, such as work and chores, but more significantly, to escape from their gendered responsibilities and expectations as wives, mothers and carer. Jordan and Gibson (2005) state that within the tourism space, women have the ability to practice resistance to gendered stereotypes. To travel would mean that these women had the opportunity to see themselves as something other than their expected roles in society.

For the women in this study with partners or children, escape provided them a space and time in which they were able to be free of their duties to care for others. As the

oldest participant in this study, Peony shared her views on how gendered domestic responsibilities impacted on her travel experiences:

> *"Sometimes, I feel like I need to get away…. Feel like I need to go somewhere different, where I can be me, not a wife, not to cater to my husband's needs all the time…. Yes, of course I enjoy my retired life at home with my husband. But it does get a bit stifling... I am a mother for almost 40 years and also a grandma now. I LOVE being a grandma and being with my children and grandchildren. But in some ways, I also want some adventure, I felt I missed out a lot as I got married very young when I should have been travelling to see the world… Now I'm older and retired, I just want to travel I just want to be free, to be with the girls again. I feel young again!"*

It is important to note that these women did not resent motherhood or being in relationships. They saw these roles as part of their life which had brought them joy and love. However, they did resent being associated with only their gendered roles in society (Freysinger and Flannery 1992).

In this study, travel was also a means to obtain some personal space in a time of liminality. For some of the women in this study, the decision to travel was made during a time of change in their life when their self-identity was in question. These transitioning points are referred to as 'fateful moments' (Giddens 2008, p.112) in people's lives where they are most likely to reflect on life decisions as these will have repercussions for the next stage of their lives (Desforges 2000). In the previous chapter, it was found that within the Asian context, women were expected to settle by a certain age and devote themselves to family life. Those who fail to abide by such expectations were often branded "leftover women" (To 2013; Hong Fincher 2014).

In this study, the participants revealed that they continuously used travel as a method to escape societal expectations for them to settle down, in an attempt to postpone or avoid marriage. The findings show that the opportunity to travel provided some participants with the space and time needed to reflect on their life altering choices. This is more apparent to younger participants like Plum who was still single. She stated that:

> *"My parents they start getting worried about my marriage situation, my relationship status. They always ask me if I have any boyfriends and tell me*

to get married… I feel like it's so rushed, I need time to think… I tell my parents I want to go travelling before I get married, because, once you are married, then you have children, you can't travel anymore… In my society, people in the community most of them will think about me like as if I'm selfish, but it's my own life, sometimes I don't care… Every time my parents talk about finding a husband, I say to them, I'm going travelling, let's talk about it after that."

Another participant who chose to remain unmarried, travelled abroad so that she could escape the stigmatisation she faced from her community for her choice to delay settling down:

"Most of the women my age have already got married and have children. Sometimes if women don't get married at the age, they are looked at with a bias. For me, I get teased as well because I choose not to be married… But it's different when I travel away. I am still the same age but people in western countries don't think that it is strange that I'm not married, that's why I want to travel, to get away from people asking me on this marriage topic. I needed the space to think before I decide (whether or not) to get married." (Jasmine)

This finding agrees with Gibson's (2012) study that women's travel is associated with transitions in life stages. The transitional points of these women's life stages brought about a longing for disconnection from community bonds and the societal pressures they faced (White and White 2004). Travel provided a neutral space for the participants to reflect on their life decisions. In this study however, the opportunity to travel was perhaps used as a last opportunity to gain independence and freedom before they are expected to transition into a new phase of life and to accede to the impending notion of 'settling down'.

Previous studies of women's travelling experiences have also noted that 'escape' was one of the main motivations for women to travel (Henderson 1990; Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Bianchi 2016), particularly when they choose to travel solo. The findings in this study support previous studies addressing women who travel and their desire to escape and to find their own autonomy (Jordan and Gibson 2005; Wilson and Little 2005; Wilson and Little 2008; Bianchi 2016). However, previous studies on travel benefits concentrated on women travellers from western countries; less is known within the Asian context. Therefore, in the next section, this study

aims to analyse women's search for self-discovery, autonomy and empowerment within the Asian context.

6.3.4 A journey of self-discovery, empowerment and meaning

The participants reflected on their travelling experiences in many ways. Through travelling, the participants often described their travel experience as "*liberating* "(Lily, Lotus), and as an *"eye opener*" (Tulip, Lotus). Apart from 'escape' being one of the main reasons to embark on their travels, participants also revealed their desires for their journey to be "*meaningful*" (Lily) and recognised their travel as a search for self-identity. Many participants found that travelling not only represented a getaway, but they also felt that in order for them to rediscover themselves, they needed to break away from the confines of society:

> *"It was liberating to get away from all that (societal pressures) … I felt like I could be myself away from all that restriction… to be out of that bubble. you leave all that behind and just be yourself when you travel." (Lily)*

Travelling also gave participants a space for reflection where they felt free to just be themselves:

> *"In a way I like to travel… because I am free to express myself. To do what I do without people telling me that a woman shouldn't behave in a certain way." (Peony)*
>
> *"I thought maybe this is the chance to be myself, a new person." (Rose)*
>
> *"When I was travelling, when I was away, I can just be myself." (Lilac)*
>
> *"To me, travelling gave me a lot of freedom. Just be my own self, without thinking of what others think." (Lily)*

Travel is more than just a movement from one destination to another, it is often regarded as a meaningful journey of self-discovery. Previous studies on women's travel in tourism have underlined the transformative potential of international travel, in terms of solo travelling (Mehmetoglu et al. 2001; Wilson and Little 2003; Jordan and Gibson 2005; Little and Wilson 2005; Wilson and Little 2005; Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Chu-Yin and Jogaratnam 2006; Wilson and Harris 2006; Myers 2010; Yang et al. 2016; Andreia and Carla 2018; Seow and Brown 2018;

Yang et al. 2018), but also in all women travel groups (Gibson et al. 2012; Berdychevsky et al. 2013b, 2016). Travelling can also be transformative for international students (Brown 2009; Prazeres 2017) and young backpackers (Noy 2004; Xie 2017; Matthews 2014).

Participants found that travelling made them feel autonomous and independent. While back in their home countries, they lived quite protected lives, once they ventured out on their journey, they had to manage their own travel arrangements, and conquer their own insecurities. They became more at ease and confident in relying on themselves. As Lilac described:

> *"I become braver and more independent. Because if you don't expose yourself by literally going somewhere else, you will never learn to be by yourself, to be independent… There is so much you can learn about yourself if given the chance… I become less worried about people doing bad things to me when I'm walking down the street for instance. I enjoy being out of my comfort zone, I also feel quite empowered, confident that I can manage myself even if things go bad."*

Relating to the search for identity, the women in this study underlined a sense of empowerment, independence and confidence they gained while travelling. Through dealing with challenges, negotiating constraints during travel, and resisting societal expectations, they acquired a newfound strength and endurance which empowered them to accomplish things that would have otherwise been overlooked. Empowerment for many women was linked to the ability to make their own decisions and be in control of their own actions (Wilson and Harris 2006). Sunflower noted how she managed her own travel itinerary:

> *"I think I became more independent. Many times, I had to leave my travelling group to find a direction and to arrange accommodation, so I become more independent. I have more confidence in trying out new things because when travelling I will go to new places, new countries, new cultures. So since I have quite a lot of experiences in trying out new things, I am more confident about other things as well. I'm more confident to stand up for myself I can give my opinion compared to before, when I was living in Korea."*

Travelling gave the participants the opportunity to take control and to make their own decisions while relying on their own skills. Sunflower's remarks on empowerment and self-development through travelling were shared by other

participants who reported a similar feeling of freedom and accomplishment. Lily shared her excitement about travelling abroad:

> *"When you travel, it's like a kid moving out of parent's house, moving away from home. You experience things that, you give yourself so much more confidence, because you know you can do, without people telling you that you can't do it and you will get harassed or face discrimination. So, you leave all that behind and just be yourself when you travel. Out of that bubble."*

Apart from gaining confidence, being away from home gave these women the freedom to rediscover themselves, an opportunity the participants noted that they would have never had at home. One participant shared her sense of self-discovery:

> *"(*Travelling*) was the best time of my life! I had a chance to become more independent, more freedom, and the most important thing is that I had the opportunity to explore myself, to know more about myself, and grow up to the person I am today… I would never have the courage to do the things I do now, if I didn't travel…" (Tulip)*

Peony also described her added courage when travelling to a foreign country:

> *"After my travels to UK and Europe, I become more daring and not afraid… I'm more independent, more exposed. The first time I travelled I was scared of white people, I felt intimidated. But now I feel like I can communicate better with different people."*

Some participants were ecstatic to discover a feeling of independence which could not have been achieved if they had not left their comfort zone. For example, Orchid spoke about the change in her life as a result of this newfound confidence:

> *"My travels made me feel proud of the fact that I am able to be independent in a foreign country because of my travel experiences and also because being an independent woman who has higher education, who has been exposed to the world, I have the confidence to do all that by myself. I feel empowered, even if I'm not travelling with my husband, I am not completely useless, I can find my way. I am able to book my own hotels and find my own way and have confidence doing it all alone."*

Milstein (2005) notes that travellers undergo a journey of self-discovery when they are removed from their comfort zone which forces them to test their resourcefulness and re-evaluate their self-understanding. Wearing and Wearing (2001) stated that travellers have the potential to change and develop their identity throughout their

journey. Female empowerment through travel has been explored in various studies, particularly on solo travel (Jordan and Gibson 2005; Wilson and Little 2005; Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Wilson and Harris 2006; Wilson and Little 2008). However, few studies have examined how travel leads to women's empowerment in the Asian context. Hence, this study contributes to the knowledge gap in proving a unique insight into how women's travel brings about empowerment and self-development in Asian women. This study also reveals and emphasizes that self-discovery and empowerment were not the main motivation to travel, rather a benefit of the participants' encounters with the adversities they faced on their travels. This newfound confidence and independence are particularly significant to the women in this study due to the perceived status of women in Asian societies in which the patriarchal structure deems women to be weak and highly dependent on their family, especially their male relatives (Teo and Leong 2006).

6.4 Asian women's post travel reflections

This section discusses how travel impacts on participants' lives and their post travel reflections. As stated in the previous section, it was found that through travelling, these women felt that they were temporarily relieved from the confines of gender expectations and domesticity. Effectively, the very act of choosing to travel, especially travelling solo, opposes the gender norms of patriarchal societies because travelling takes women away from their responsibilities and domestic duties at home. The findings revealed that this act of defiance continues even after the participants return home. However, while resistance was evident, there was also an indication of acceptance of the conservative nature of the patriarchal structure back home. These feelings of acceptance can be viewed as a coping strategy and as a form of self-preservation. Upon returning home, this study revealed that women who had experienced empowerment and self-growth advocated a change in the social situation back home. They acted as agents of social change in an attempt to improve gender equality. This finding addresses the study's fifth objective in examining Asian women's potential to be agents of social change. In addition, they encouraged other Asian women to travel as rite of passage for self-growth.

6.4.1 Post travel resistance

This study shows that Asian female travellers have the capacity to gain independence and self-worth through travelling, and reveals that travel becomes a means of resistance. Resistance to societal norms is a common theme in leisure studies in relation to women's empowerment (Shaw 2001). Resistance refers to an individual's or a collective's ability to reject the dominant ideologies and structures which limits freedom (Dionigi 2002). Leisure itself has been viewed as a potential site of women's resistance (Freysinger and Flannery 1992; Wearing 1994; Shaw 2001; Wilson and Harris 2006; Seow and Brown 2018). Some leisure activities such as adventure and outdoor sports can create spaces where women are able to recreate or resist gendered roles of women as mothers, wives and carers (Wearing and Wearing 1996).

Resistance to societal norms seemed to be particularly important for women in this study, who in general were raised to prioritise their gendered roles in life, that is to marry and have children, stay at home and be a support to their husbands (Liu et al. 2013). Through the process of leaving home, the participants not only sought to escape societal expectations as demonstrated in the previous section, but upon returning, they used their travelling experiences as an inspiration in finding ways to resist their social expectations. Peony, who had travelled to western countries, realised the gravity of oppression against women in her home country:

> *"It is not easy to find the opportunity to travel when I'm back at home… Back home, people will say things about you like how you are irresponsible for leaving your family behind. Sometimes they brand you as selfish... When you travel, you see the freedom that other women experience, and if you can't experience that in your own country because you are trapped in tradition. Everything you do, there is a strict rule on how to do it, when you should do it, there is always people enforcing those rules… But I see women in western countries, they are not trapped in old fashion thinking, they are free, and we should be too, why not... (*So*) now I want to travel more, maybe out of spite, to rebel and resist these traditional thoughts about women."*

Travelling is seen as not only a set of experiences or activities, but also a space for women's resistance to dominant discourses which keep them in submissive

positions in society (Wearing 1994). In this study, travel was seen to reinforce the participants' resistance towards gender stereotypes. Travelling, especially to western countries, allowed participants a much broader view of the world and of cultures different from their own. This allowed the participants to change their mentality on how women should behave, as Baby's Breath noted after observing the community's responses towards women's behaviours abroad as compared to women in her own country:

> *"The main point here is that people should have freedom to do what they want, and if the weather is hot why can't I wear less clothes? Right? I feel that the biggest difference between the culture in Taiwan and in overseas is that people look at you with a different view. And in Taiwan I feel very uncomfortable."*

In addition, after returning from their travels, the women in this study were not only changed in mentality, but also physically. For example, Sunflower chose to exhibit resistance by changing her way of dressing:

> *"I think it's because of the culture here in Europe, they don't really care about what other people do, regardless of gender but I really think that's good. I'm really changing in terms of dressing myself. Here (*in Europe*) I don't have to worry, and I don't have to watch out like if I'm in Korea. I don't have to think about what to wear. When I am back, I start to think, why should I care? Just dress like how I do when on holiday… I can wear things like bikini and summer dress… I feel I should (*be able to*) do whatever I want to do."*

It should be noted that in this study, most of the participants highlighted that they were aware of the power structures in their country. Foucault and Gordon (1980) suggested that power is not static and should not only be viewed as repressive but also as an empowering force. While the patriarchal power structures exerted on Asian women caused their oppression, these women were able to engage in resisting such structure. In this study, travelling was a way for the women to regain power for themselves.

As stated in previous studies on female travellers, societal oppressive power leads to struggle, empowerment and resistance (Jordan and Gibson 2005; Jordan and Aitchison 2008; Berdychevsky et al. 2013a). Contrary to previous studies on Asian solo female travellers such as those by Seow and Brown (2018) and Yang et al.

(2016), resistance was not a main motivation to travel. While there is evidence of resistance, this does not mean that all the participants were consciously resisting societal gender expectations while choosing to travel. Resistance, in most of the women's narratives, developed after the participants had returned to their home countries. Participants became aware of the oppression that they had believed to be the norm after travelling abroad to western countries where equality was seen as a right and not a privilege. As stated in Shaw's (2001) research, individual's resistance can be developed without prior intent. In this study, resistance to gender norms was therefore a by-product of travel.

However, the core idea of this theme is not whether resistance was intentional, but rather, that the autonomy that these women seek while travelling was clearly evident in their narratives. While the women narrated their travelling experiences around resistance towards the oppression and restrictions they face in their home country quite differently, this study finds that all individual acts of resistance come together to form a collective resistance against Asian society's patriarchal ideologies. Using the ability to travel, the women in this study were able to demonstrate how as a collective body, Asian women are able to resist the societal norms that limit their ability to attain empowerment.

6.4.2 Appreciation and acceptance of conservative culture

While the findings of this study demonstrate women's resistance, these is also evidence of acceptance within the narratives of the participants who acknowledge the oppression women faced back home, but choose to tolerate and accept certain aspects of patriarchy that are favourable to women.

After returning from travelling, Lavender shared how she felt the gender stereotypes in her home country were acceptable because they are a part of her Asian culture:

> *"When I came back (*from travelling*), it makes me appreciate what we have at home. Yes, it is not perfect, there are sometimes still many things women can't do. But it's not all that bad, I think. Maybe there are reasons why women are protected like that…. Because physically we are weaker than men, so it is*

their job to protect us… Our country is conservative in many ways, but that's part of our culture as Asians."

Another participant explained how even though gender equality is protected by law, the government does not enforce it, therefore women's oppression is still the norm:

"We all know about equality, but society is so deep in patriarchy that education won't make any difference… As women, we do try to make changes to the gender issues in India but it is impossible to get very far. People say why do you bring shame to your family? And there are cases where women are even more assaulted when they try… there are threats made… I think it is better to lie low, and just accept, so we won't be killed… (Rose)

From the excerpts above, Lavender justified the stereotypical views of women as the weaker sex because Asian culture endorses women's physical shortcomings. This was perhaps a result of the fear of sexual harassment by men during her travels which led her to believe that she was safer under male protection. Rose's statement reveals that patriarchy is so deep rooted in society, that women have to learn to negotiate with patriarchy as a coping strategy. It was found in this study that even though resistance was apparent, a small number of participants admitted that tolerating certain aspects of patriarchy gave them control over their survival.

Some of the women in this study also reported that when travelling abroad, they were not only exposed to a different gendered culture, but also saw its negative side. This made them appreciate their conservative home culture. One participant shared her experiences of culture shock while living short term in a western country:

"I think it is more like culture shock, like when I was in Boston for two months for a short course, I went to a baseball game, the atmosphere and the ambiance of the stadium was really different from the atmosphere compared to Taiwan. Some strange things happen that would never happen in Taiwan, American women started stripping, like flashing their boobs when their team won. I was shocked but I guess that is their culture. I'm quite open minded but even that was just too much for me... I respect other's culture, but I still prefer the conservative attitude of people in Taiwan." (Posy)

Culture Shock, as stated by Posy refers to the anxiety caused by loss of familiar surroundings and exchanges (Oberg 1960). Culture shock is generally studied amongst the Asian international student community (Hu 2008; Anjalin et al. 2017).

However, the findings in this study showed similarities to studies on Asian international students because while travelling in a foreign country, some women in this study found it difficult to adapt to an alien culture. Even after spending a significant time in the United States, Posy was still not able to fully embrace western culture. She described herself as an open-minded modern woman but the experience of culture shock during her trip made her appreciate the conservatism of the Asian culture.

Asian women have been taught since young to behave and present themselves in a certain way, hence, some western countries were seen as being promiscuous, which is undesirable in Asian culture. While the study shows the presence of resistance, this study discovers that Asian female travellers also overcome social challenges through acceptance. This finding mirrors recent studies on risk negotiation of Asian solo female travellers (see Yang et al. 2018) in which Asian women are obliged to accept oppression due to underpinning cultural values. In this study, the participants revealed that they believed it is because patriarchy is so deep-rooted in Asian culture that women who chose to stand up for their rights are shamed by the majority of people in society. These women are considered immoral and westernised, and are bent on destroying the family-oriented culture of the region. Women in this study were taught to stay silent and suffer by abiding to the submissive role of women in the region in order to keep the honour of their families intact (Ahmad et al. 2004). Some participants reported that they accept and appreciate the conservative patriarchal systems back home out of necessity, a kind of self-preservation. In fact, travelling enabled women to become independent and active agents in determining their own pathway, and to eventually act as active agents of social change as they extend their knowledge to their social circles.

6.4.3 Asian women's potential for change

6.4.3.1 Women as active agents of social change

Some of the participants acknowledged that while travelling had given them the opportunities to experience a life away from the restrictive clutch of society, it also enabled them to experience alternative approaches to gender roles in the countries

they travelled to. This study found that upon returning from their travel, the participants became aware of the gender inequality issues in their own countries.

The subordination of Asian women was not always consciously recognised. From young, girls were told to tolerate harassment, including offensive comments and abuses. Hence, assault and abuse towards women become an acceptable norm in Asian countries, and even encouraged to some extent, as reported by one participant:

> *"Women are very prone to abuse in this country because it was thought to put them in place, to not ask question. There is even a law that says wives can be punished if they didn't obey their husbands." (Rose)*

Another participant described how issues of gender equality are disregarded by the authorities:

> *"I think it's not just that society and culture is bad enough for women but it's also the government having no effort to change that, because reality speaking, if the policies are not enforced, then women would still be vulnerable to violence... Even in our schools, gender equality is being overlooked. If you're a child, the only people that you're mingling with are your parents or your teachers, but both of these do not support the idea of equality… So how can the young generation understand that both genders should be treated equally…It is up to us women to realise that we can make a change, we can teach other people, our children, maybe that will stop the discrimination against women." (Lilac)*

Although there are laws in place against violence, victimisation, marginalisation, and discrimination against women, it is not always enforced effectively. For example, a recent study in Indonesia shows that domestic violence still makes up the largest proportion of gender-based violence, by 96% (Afrianty 2018). In the absence of support from the authorities, agency often emerges, not as an individual act, but collectively to resist subordination and oppression (Afrianty 2018). Most of the women in this study have taken it upon themselves to make a difference. They believe that educating the public is important in the process of social change as one participant describes:

> *"There are a lot of things that need to be changed in this country, if the government are not enforcing the equality rules, then maybe it is time we do it ourselves, teach the younger generation to see things from each other's perspective, make them become aware of these gender issues…. Maybe I'm not able to change a lot of people but for the people around me, I'm trying to change their perspectives of the women in this country." (Rose)*

Although Rose was aware of her limitation as an individual voice, that did not stop her from attempting to educate her social circle on gender issues. Tulip agreed that as women who have had the privilege to be exposed to other cultures, they should educate and empower other women in their community:

> *"I think women who have been abroad, like study overseas or travel to western countries should use what they learnt and become role models of society, for the younger generation here… Women need to guide other women to get their own independence from their family." (Tulip)*

While there is evidence in the study that the women interviewed were constrained by a lack of resources and support, as well as their stereotypical social status as being less than men, these constraints did not determine their ability to travel. These women chose not to see themselves as victims of societal oppression. Previous studies revealed that Asian women became agents of social change because they no longer wanted to be perceived as "victims of misery waiting to be rescued" (Ramanath 2018, p. 103). Such women are now taking on roles as agents of change more actively, to put their voices out there to attempt to negotiate a change in various fields such as housing environment (Ramanath 2018), legislation (Luke and Munshi 2011; Afrianty 2018), and social status (Salehi et al. 2020).

The findings in this study demonstrate the potential of the transformative power of travel and tourism in propelling Asian women into their roles as agents of social change. The study revealed that Asian women who have experienced empowerment through their travelling experience took small steps in inducing change within their social circle and their community. Having an active role in the community empowers individuals, as well as reinforcing the support of individuals for each other and for their community, resulting in decreased inequality and more social cohesion (Griffiths et al. 2009).

6.4.3.2 Women as advocates of travel

Towards the end of the interviews, the participants each gave their own statements on how travelling had affected them, individually and as members of society. In their narratives, all the participants acknowledged the benefits of venturing away from the comforts of home. While stepping out of their comfort zones can often be a journey of self-discovery and meaning (Wilson and Harris 2006), it can also be an intensely emotional experience that changes perceptions, not only of themselves but also on how the women in their community can benefit from travelling. The women in this study also highlighted the importance of travelling to improve women's state of mind and encouraged other women to travel.

The participants believed that relocating geographically was comparable to a symbolic act of leaving the safety and comfort of their own society. Lily highlighted that the physical act of crossing international boundaries was simultaneously a step away from the physical and emotional boundaries of comfort and familiarity:

> *"It's more than just removing yourself from your comfort zone. It is the feeling of finally realising how big the world is and how small your home can be. And I'm not saying this as geographically small, but more in how disconnected socially we are from the rest of the world… (Travelling meant that) my boundaries were being tested, not just physical boundaries like flying country A to country B, but like how much am I willing to accept things that are different from what I'm used to…"*

Boundaries indicate where something stops and another thing begins, but here, "boundaries" were simultaneously used literally, as in physical borders of countries, and also metaphorically to indicate where self-reflection begins. The movement of people is important because it is related to the reconstruction and renegotiation of the self (Galani-Moutafi 2000).

These women believed that the distance between the home and the destination created the space and place which are crucial for self-reflection. A few of the participants in this study encouraged other women to travel to places where the host culture was different from their own. They believed that women who are exposed

to diverse cultures would be able to gain a better understanding of things. Jasmine shared her thoughts on travelling:

> *"(*Travelling*) will give women something that cannot be found in their own country, they will see a wider community and wider world and sometimes it gives them a different angle to see things." (Jasmine)*

Another participant agreed that travelling enables women to broaden their views on social issues:

> *"I think travelling in general is very important especially to women because travelling opens your eyes how people in different country do things and how they live their lives, how other country works because those things will reflect on yourself and make people think in different ways. I think travelling is very important because a person shouldn't restrict themselves to just one place, yeah, it's really crucial that women should travel." (Posy)*

Lilac stated that being in a foreign country allows one to take a step back and view the gender issues in their own country in a different light:

> *"I think it's really important for women to travel because in some way that is the only way to learn that your own society is messed up. You can learn a lot from the internet and all that but unless you really experiencing it you don't really know. Like what is the true meaning of liberation and being free… I think (travelling) gives a push for women to really question about things that our society does to us."*

Lilac highlighted that even though the internet provides a lot of information on gender issues in Asia, travelling outside of the country would give women the opportunity to examine the social issues retrospectively and to build a better understanding of gender roles.

Peony, on the other hand, considered travelling as a form of cultural distancing to allow her to remove herself from the restrictive culture at home:

> *"In a way I like to travel to more western countries because the culture is so different from Asian countries…. The distance seemed to be more cultural than physical, going to a country with a completely different culture... I am freer to express myself. To do what I do without people telling me that a woman shouldn't behave in a certain way. I can be a different person."*

Having visited and lived in multiple countries (both in the East and West), Peony explained that crossing borders was not just a geographical act. Peony preferred to visit western countries where she felt the constraints of her home society would not be able to reach her. Several of the participants who had the same intentions as Peony also travelled to regions with completely different cultures. It was their belief that being farther away from home meant embracing different cultures and value systems. The perception of cultural distance allowed participants to be immersed in another culture. Cultural distance refers to the extent to which the original culture differs from that of the host destination (Ahn and McKercher 2015). The findings in this study differ from previous studies on cultural distance which show that Asian tourists were more likely to choose to travel to culturally similar destinations (i.e. Jackson 2001; Ng et al. 2007; Yang and Wong 2012). This was perhaps a way for the participants to distance themselves from their original identity and to evade the conforming stereotypical views on how Asian women should behave.

Several participants who had pursued their education abroad agreed with Peony's statement on how distancing oneself away from the comforts of home can bring about a much-needed change in their state of mind. Tulip for example, shared her thoughts:

> *"I think travelling is important for everyone not just women, especially those living with traditional families with conservative thoughts, I think women should be more exposed to travelling so that they can explore themselves and become more independent and get more interpersonal skills. They can be more daring to make their own decisions and lead their own lives."*

Tulip revealed how studying abroad had changed her:

> *"That is why when I was deciding on a university to study my masters, I wanted to be as far away from Vietnam as possible. As an international student in UK, I was finally able to find my true self, and realise I can be brave and independent, I can do so many things on my own."*

Relocating to an unfamiliar place can bring about a powerful journey of self which is both transformative and reflexive (Brown 2009). As an international student, Tulip found that removing herself from the comfort of a culturally familiar environment forced her to test her resourcefulness.

Li's (2010) study shows that time spent in a culture different from one's own allows travellers to rediscover their sense of self and hidden talents and beliefs which would otherwise remain hidden in the familiarity of home. Within the narratives of the women interviewed, this study found that travel not only facilitated the construction of dynamic and meaningful experiences, but also provided an opportunity for Asian women to share their renewed sense of self with other women in their community upon returning from their travels. Exposure to other cultures different from their own allowed participants to develop new identities and to accept the new values and practices that they had discovered during their travels. These new cultural experiences would be passed on from one individual to another within their society. This study further highlights that the participants believed Asian women should make it a point to travel and venture out from the confines of home. Travelling had made a significant impact in terms of the participants' self-worth, hence these women reported that they would encourage all women to travel if they are financially able to do so.

6.5 Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate the link between Asian women's patriarchal upbringing and their travel experiences. Overall, the findings underline that women in Asia are constantly subjected to traditional social expectations of what is appropriate for women. This study reveals that traditional perceptions of women as weak, vulnerable, and unable to handle themselves intensely affected women's travelling experiences, behaviour and decision-making. These traditional values encountered an opposing trend towards non-conformist contemporary values leaning towards equality and a yearning for freedom. This study demonstrates that participants risk disapproval and alienation by travelling, thus reflecting their defiance against conformity to traditional Asian gender norms. The findings in this chapter highlight the different aspects of the participants' journey in three different stages (pre-travel, during travel and post-travel). It was found that the socio-cultural elements influencing Asian women's travel experiences were evident in all three stages of travel.

In the pre-travel stage, the findings reveal that the main constraint faced by Asian female travellers was the inappropriateness of their decision to travel. The perception of women as the weaker sex informed society's disapproval of Asian women's travel decisions, as well as participants' low self-esteem, insecurity and self-doubt.

Fear and vulnerability during travel were paramount with sexual harassment and assault being participants' main concerns during travel. This finding supports the works of Jordan and Gibson (2005) and Wilson and Little (2008) on gendered risks of female travellers. However, the findings also revealed that some of these gendered constraints were no different than the ones they faced at home. Interestingly, with that frame of mind, the participants showed a sense of serenity and acceptance in facing fear, using it as a learning opportunity. The findings suggest that Asian women often found ways to negotiate their travels, supporting works of Seow and Brown (2018) and Yang et al (2016). The findings also demonstrated the benefits and motivations for travel, which included travelling to escape from gendered responsibilities and travelling as a journey of self-discovery, empowerment and meaning. This finding supports numerous works on travel motivations of female travellers (Jordan and Gibson 2005; Wilson and Little 2005; Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Wilson and Little 2008; Bianchi 2016; Pereira and Silva 2018) and extends the work of Yang et al (2016), Seow and Brown (2018) and Osman et al. (2020) on Asian female travellers.

Participants' post travel reflections revealed that resistance was highlighted as a way to challenge societal oppression. The findings demonstrated that upon returning home, the participants attempted to regain some sense of power to take control of their life discourse. Resistance was seen as an unintentional by-product of the participants' self-growth during travel; it was not the main motivation to travel. Contrastingly however, the findings also revealed that there was an element of acceptance of and appreciation for the conservatism of the patriarchal system.

Having said that, this study revealed that after travelling, twelve out of the fifteen participants developed a realisation for the need for change in their own community. This finding demonstrates the extend in which the transformative effect of women's

travel experiences have altered their state of mind and equipped them with the potential and capabilities as agents of change within their own community. Due to the lack of legislative support for combating women's oppression and abuse, these women took it upon themselves to promote social change in an attempt to raise awareness and educate their community on gender equality. The findings also revealed that most of the participants chose to travel to countries with completely different cultures as an attempt to disassociate themselves from Asian cultures. In this study, the transformative potential of travel is acknowledged, and hence participants encouraged other women to travel abroad to develop self-growth and empowerment.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the link between tourism, gender and patriarchy with a focus on Asian female travellers. By adopting a narrative approach, the study provided a unique insight into the lives of Asian women living in a patriarchal society and a deeper understanding of the role of patriarchy and culture in their travel experiences.

This study demonstrates the influence of patriarchy and culture on Asian female travel experiences. In addition, the coupling of a feminist perspective and a narrative approach has yielded particularly interesting results. It provided a privileged view of women's lives in Asia. Adopting a feminist perspective enabled the voices of these women to be heard on their own terms within a patriarchal environment where their voices tend to hold less value.

It is acknowledged that there is an increase of interest in tourism within the Asian context. Prior studies on tourism and gender exist; however, research on Asian female travellers has failed to emphasize the role of culture and patriarchy in travel decisions and experiences. This study emerged out of a lack of clarity on how gender, patriarchy, cultural background and/or cultural identity influence travel behaviour and experiences, especially within the Asian context.

This chapter will present the main conclusions of this study by reviewing the themes and findings that were derived from data analysis. From these findings, a conceptual framework has been developed to present an understanding of the role of tradition and culture in the travel experiences of Asian female travellers. Following that, the implications for practice and recommendations for future research are highlighted.

7.2 Key conclusions

This study offers a rare insight into the influences of culture and tradition on Asian women's lives and travel experience. This study presents the findings in two main

overarching themes: *the influence of tradition and culture on gender roles in Asia* and *the relationship between culture and the Asian female travel experience.* The first theme fulfils the third objective of the study which is to explore the cultural background and upbringing of Asian female travellers in a patriarchal society. This theme informs the second theme, which fulfils the fourth and fifth objective, to investigate the impact of patriarchy and cultural background on Asian female tourist's travel behaviour and experiences, and to examine how Asian women's travel experiences might equip them with the potential to be agents of social change within their own community.

7.2.1 To explore the cultural background and upbringing of Asian female travellers in a patriarchal society

The first theme demonstrated the impacts of traditional and cultural norms on Asian women's lives and found that each individual was affected in their own unique way. The study shows that the patriarchal system in Asian society reinforces stereotypical gender roles for men and women through many unwritten societal rules that participants are obliged to follow. Religious and traditional practices (such as Confucianism, Islam and Hinduism) are used to rationalise and enforce the perpetuation of patriarchy and gender discrimination.

Participants shared the various ways in which oppression was experienced within their society, namely in education and career opportunities. This was because Asian women are expected to prioritise marriage and family, but if they choose to remain single to pursue their education and career ambitions, they risk facing stigmatisation. This finding echoes To (2013) and Hong Fincher's (2014) studies on unmarried women being labelled as 'leftovers' from society.

The perception of women's oppression in Asian society is often subjective to how women perceive their world. The findings revealed that there are two contrasting perceptions on patriarchy and gender discrimination. While patriarchy and gender discrimination are considered restrictive and oppressive to some, others are receptive of patriarchal ideologies, seeking the benefits associated with the perception that they are weaker, and therefore require protection. Thus, by

remaining in a submissive position, they believe that they benefit from the shelter of patriarchy. Asian women's subjugation to gender stereotypes is often due to the fear that they will be ostracised from their society, hence women are compelled to maintain the status quo, even at the price of individual autonomy.

It was found that mothers played a crucial role in supporting a male dominated society. Even though fathers are acknowledged to be the head of the family, the participants revealed that it was in their mothers' responses (or indifference) towards their fathers' rule that traditional gender roles were advocated. This finding reaffirmed women's submissive position within a familial context. Mothers who choose to perpetuate female submission inadvertently become gatekeepers of patriarchy. This is a significant finding because studies on gender rarely acknowledge women's role in perpetuating patriarchy and male dominance.

In this study, it was revealed that some women yielded to patriarchy as a method of self-preservation, and to ensure that their lives are easier in a marginalised environment. These women have become desensitised to marginalisation because traditional roles have become a part of the formation of their Asian identity. However, this study revealed that contemporary Asian women are leaning towards attaining higher education in an effort to achieve a higher chance of independence which will perhaps empower them to break away from the perceptual cycle of patriarchy.

The study finds that Asian gender norms are not only prescribed to women but also to men, whereby men are more 'treasured" in Asia because of the perceived tradition that only male descendants can pass down the blood line. Hence, the study reveals the extent of the Asian community's preference for sons, whereby male heirs are preferred to daughters. In countries where resources are limited, the preference for sons leads to daughters being deprived of educational opportunities.

7.2.2 To investigate the impact of patriarchy and cultural background on Asian female tourists' travel behaviour and experiences

The first theme puts into perspective the degree to which Asian women's lives are governed by culture and tradition. This creates a backdrop for the impacts of patriarchal society on women's travel behaviour and experiences. The findings were presented according to three stages of travel, namely pre-travel, during travel and post travel.

Fear was a central topic in this study, primarily in the *pre-travel* and *during travel* stages. Fear was the main travel constraint due to the cultural perception of women's susceptibility to gendered risks. Fear of being vulnerable in the pre-travel stage was focused on Asian society's perception that travelling was seen as inappropriate because women are perceived to be the weaker gender and there was an overall impression of women's inability to handle themselves when issues arise during travel. This finding mirrors Yang et al. (2016) and Seow and Brown's (2018) work. This perception instilled a feeling of vulnerability and self-doubt and contributed to a restriction in terms of freedom of mobility. Another aspect of fear in the pre-travel stage was related to societal disapproval, particularly if participants chose to travel solo. This is because travelling solo is widely portrayed as a tourism practice with a western origin, an uncommon practice for Asian women.

It was found that parents cultivated a strict maintenance of traditional patriarchal values, which potentially affects the participants' travelling decisions. Within the Asian collectivist context, filial piety and parental influence are highly regarded, hence priority is given to the family and the community as a whole. This implies that Asian women are expected to perform their gendered roles and responsibilities in their community. Their choice to travel meant that Asian women were leaving their social roles, and this was seen as a sign of rebellion against societal norms. Several participants reported that women who chose not to conform to social norms in their society were threatened and ostracised. Asian women's pre-travel arrangements were often challenged by society's expectation for women to be contained within gendered expectations.

The findings also revealed that fear and vulnerability prevailed in the *'during travel'* stage. It was found that the fear of being targeted for sexual assault was the main concern. This finding echoes the work of Jordan and Gibson (2005) and Wilson and Little (2008) on gendered risk. Participants reported that they felt targeted and exposed to the male 'gaze' because of their Asian appearance. This heightened their sense of vulnerability, thus limiting their opportunities for leisure. The findings further suggest that there is a complex process in regard to the participants' decision making. It is noted that Asian women attributed their insecurities and low self-esteem to their restrictive upbringing which had nurtured their dependency on their family. It is believed that their lack of independence fuelled their fears and vulnerability during travel.

However, it was found that few participants were not deterred by fear, rather, a sense of serendipity was evident. This study shows that some Asian women chose to overcome their fears by accepting that these gendered constraints were just as likely to occur at home. Interestingly, this finding reiterates the fact that some participants were accepting of gender oppression in a patriarchal society. This finding supports Carr's (2002) work on residual culture in tourist behaviour. Acceptance in this study was a means of negotiating the constraints of fear during travel which was not perceived as a barrier, but rather a learning opportunity for the women in this study to become better versions of themselves.

The findings also demonstrated the benefits and motivation of travel. Travelling provided participants with the opportunity to escape their reality and to adopt another role, albeit temporary. Travelling enabled women to liberate themselves from their restrictive home environment. Escape here essentially not only refers to physically escaping from mundane daily routine, but also to acquiring freedom from stereotypical gender expectations and responsibilities. This finding extends the work of many tourism researchers on female travel motivations (i.e. Henderson 1990; Chiang and Jogaratnam 2006; Bianchi 2016).

However, it is also noted that these women did not entirely resent their gendered roles in society but resented that it was the only identity that they were associated with. Therefore, travelling allowed them to acquire a new identity and an

opportunity to see themselves as other than mothers and wives. Some participants also discovered the liminality of travel, which afforded them a neutral time and space to reflect on their life decisions. This is particularly significant, especially for unmarried Asian women, who travelled to escape society's stigmatisation of unmarried women and the pressure of marriage. It is during these transitional points in women's lives which brought about a disconnection from social bonds and the chance to redefine themselves. Travelling provided them with a last opportunity to gain independence and freedom before transitioning into a new phase of life.

This study notes that Asian women regarded travelling as a search for meaning and self-identity. While facing various travel constraints, participants acknowledged the transformative power of travelling and the underlining sense of empowerment and independence. Travelling was not merely a movement from one destination to another, but a journey of self-discovery and autonomy. It was reported that travelling forced them to remove themselves from their comfort zones to test their resourcefulness, as well as to re-evaluate and improve their abilities.

Resistance to societal norms is an important aspect of women's struggle for gender equality. This is noted in Asian women's *post travel* reflections. Travel experiences served as an inspiration for some women to resist social norms in a patriarchal society. Travelling, especially to countries with different cultures allowed women to retrospectively re-evaluate the patriarchal structure within their own society. Contrary to the works of Seow and Brown (2018) and Yang et al.'s (2016), resistance was not found to be a main motivation but rather a by-product of travel. Nevertheless, the findings reveal that women's individual acts of resistance come together to generate a collective resistance against women's oppression in Asian societies.

Some women chose an alternative to resistance. Upon returning home, some women noted a new-found appreciation of the conservative nature of Asian societies because western culture was perceived as promiscuous. However, such acceptance and tolerance also existed for some as a necessary self-preservation strategy that arises due to the women's fear of being ostracised and stigmatised for being different, and due to the lack of law enforcement against the violence,

marginalisation and discrimination against women. Nevertheless, in the absence of support from the authorities, it was found that agency often emerges in a collective effort to resist oppression.

7.2.3 To examine how Asian women's travel experiences might equip them with the potential to be agents of social change within their own community

The impact of Asian women's subordination was not always consciously recognised. Upon returning from travelling, most of the participants became more conscious of the gender inequality issues in their own countries and took a stand to make a difference. They refused to see themselves as mere victims of societal oppression. Although they were aware of their limitations as individuals, that did not stop them from attempting to educate their social circle on gender awareness in the process of social change. The findings demonstrate the transformative power of travel as a potential driving force in encouraging Asian women to become agents of social change. Asian women may adopt an active role in the community, which is empowering and mutually supportive, in the end contributing to decreasing gender inequality.

These participants acknowledged that travelling had improved their state of mind. Crossing boundaries and stepping out of their comfort zones can often involve a journey of self-discovery and meaning. 'Boundaries' were not only physical borders, but they were perceived in metaphorical terms to indicate a start of a new journey in life. The perception of cultural distance allowed participants to be immersed in another culture. Such new cultural experiences could be passed on from one individual to another within their society.

7.3 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to the current body of literature on Asian female travellers with a focus on the role of gender, patriarchy and culture in the Asian female travel experience. In this section, the study's contributions are delineated into two areas.

7.3.1 Methodological contribution

This research adopts a narrative inquiry with a feminist perspective to explore the influence of patriarchy and cultural and traditional practices on the travel experiences of Asian female travellers. Such a combination is not commonly used within tourism studies. The incorporation of a feminist perspective to the narrative approach allowed the study to glean rare and valuable insights into the cultural influences on the travel experiences of Asian female travellers.

Conducting interviews using a feminist perspective was crucial in understanding women's experiences in a patriarchal environment. It gives voice to women who have often been unheard or silenced. The feminist perspective also emphasises the role of the researcher in data collection and analysis, therefore my role as an Asian feminist researcher contributes to the insight gained through the research.

7.3.2 Theoretical contribution

This study supports earlier studies on travel benefits such as escape, self-discovery and empowerment (Noy 2004; Jordan and Gibson 2005; Wilson and Harris 2006; Bianchi 2016). The western literature on escape is often focused on travelling to escape the mundanities of everyday life (Wilson and Harris 2006; Harris and Wilson 2007). However, in this study, Asian women travelled predominantly to escape their stereotypically preconceived gendered responsibilities. Additionally, unlike western studies on female travellers which emphasise their journey of self-discovery through overcoming challenges that arise from travelling to less developed countries, this study revealed that Asian women found a sense of self-worth through challenging traditional and cultural norms.

From a feminist perspective, leisure has been viewed to be a potential site for resistance for women. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on resistance in women's leisure. However, the findings differ from previous studies as the participants' resistance to patriarchal structures was not a travel motivation but rather developed as an unintentional by-product of their self-growth.

Linked with concepts of power, negotiation and agency, this study further contributes to feminist studies in revealing that Asian women's resistance to patriarchal structures and male dominated spaces can lead to the development of forms of power and agency. The findings show that Asian women position themselves as agents of change because they did not want to be perceived as mere victims of oppression.

This study also contributes to theories of patriarchy by highlighting women's role in perpetuating patriarchy. Prior studies on patriarchy in Asia are predominantly focused on women's oppression and their role in resisting gender discrimination (Hapke 2013; Vrushali 2013; Rawat 2014). This study demonstrated that it was not only men, but women were equally involved in maintaining the patriarchal structure, in which mothers played a crucial role in maintaining and even encouraging gender stereotypes.

Gender and tourism have sparked considerable interest within western academic circles. However, less is known about gender and tourism in Asia. This study upholds the critique of western centrism in tourism research. By exploring the cultural aspects of the Asian female travel experience, this study contributes to research on female travel experiences from an Asian perspective. Referring to the conceptual framework below, the findings provide a better understanding of the travel experience and decision-making process of Asian female travellers.

The conceptual framework (Figure 7.1) below encapsulates the travel experiences of Asian female travellers.

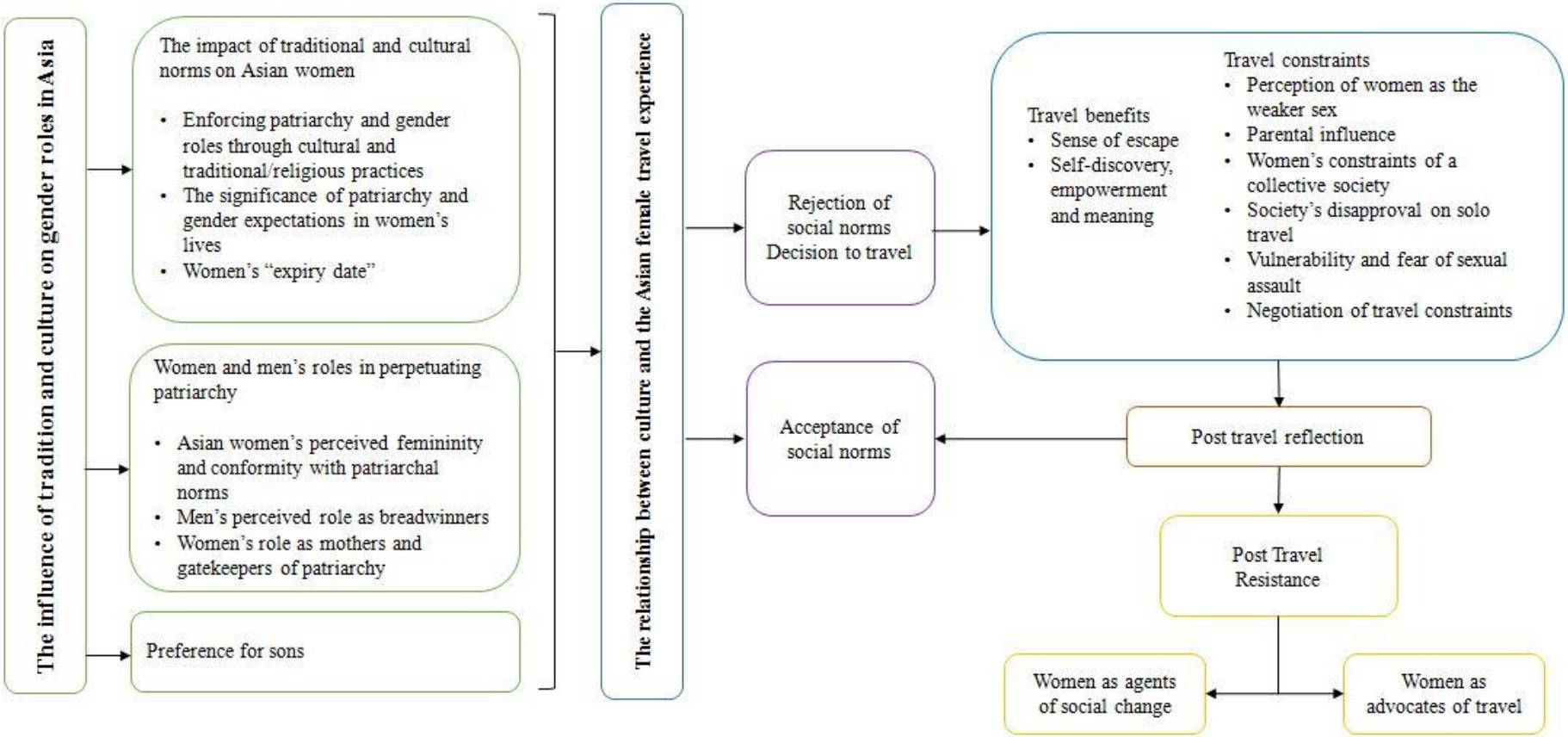

Figure 7.1 Conceptual framework (Source: Original)

To demonstrate the adaptability of the conceptual framework, the participants' travel experiences are mapped below:

The participants have had a lifetime of experiencing gender oppression growing up in a patriarchal society, in which gender roles were enforced and rationalised through cultural and religious practices. These stereotypical gender expectations restrict women's positions to the household as well as prioritising marriage and their gendered roles as mothers and wives. In a patriarchal structure, both men and women play crucial roles in perpetuating patriarchy. The participants recognised that within a familial context, both parents strictly conformed to societal norms. Some participants noted that their mothers played a more significant role in encouraging gender expectations. This highlights women's role as gatekeepers in perpetuating patriarchy. Parents in Asian societies showed preferences for sons as it is believed that the family's bloodline would only be passed down by male heirs.

Although the participants were aware of the oppression they faced, it was extremely difficult to escape conformity. Some participants were inclined to adhere to social expectations and accept their place in society as submissive to men because resistance was met with negative consequences. This demonstrates that Asian women's experience in a patriarchal society is complex as an individual's conformity to social norms is often due to self-preservation and not of their own volition.

In this study, travelling was sometimes used as a means to reject social norms and to be relieved from gendered responsibilities. In addition, travelling often provided a sense of escape, self-discovery, freedom and empowerment. However, a number of travel constraints was also highlighted such as fears and vulnerability which occurred before and during travel. Such feelings stemmed from an oppressive upbringing in which society labelled women as weak and unable to cope with travel, thus disrupting women's pre-travel arrangements. This shows that a patriarchal upbringing affects Asian women's decision-making process as well.

Upon returning, the participants were able to appraise the situation back home retrospectively. While travelling to culturally diverse regions had a resounding effect on most participants, others criticised western culture as promiscuous, which

strengthened their acceptance of social norms back home. For most participants, travel provided the confidence to resist societal expectations and allowed them to redefine themselves. This experience compelled them to educate other women on women's rights and to the benefits of travel. This finding demonstrates the potential of Asian women to act as agents of social change in an attempt to resist gender discrimination.

This study contributes to knowledge on Asian female travellers in providing a greater insight into the role of gender, patriarchy and culture in Asian female travel experiences. The findings illuminate the significance of culture and tradition in the travel experiences and behaviour of this group of travellers. This study does not intend to be representative of all Asian female travellers, nor does it generalise from this group of travellers. It may be suggested that the findings could be transferable to other Asian contexts, but that inference is left to the reader.

7.4 Implications for industry

Tourists' viewpoints are essential in the assessment of a tourism destination's competitiveness. Given the resources that tourists need to allocate to reach a destination (i.e. time, money and effort), the expected return in terms of fun, relaxation, new knowledge, experience and memories are important elements to be considered. This study offers an insight into the needs, motivations and experiences of Asian female travellers, and it is these insights that enable providers to cater successfully to this market by provide a more fulfilling travel experience.

Notwithstanding the impact of COVID on tourism, the Asian travel market is growing exponentially. In response to prospects of long-term growth, destination market organisations (DMOs) and travel providers should target this rapidly growing market with larger investments. It is unlikely that the rise of economic growth and disposable income in Asian countries will diminish, therefore the travel and tourism industry needs to plan to take advantage of this market trend.

The findings in this study provide industry players with the information needed to further develop safety measures for female Asian travellers. In this study, fear of

gender-related risks is found to be prevalent during travel, particularly for Asian women travelling solo. It was found that the fear of sexual harassment is one of the main travel constraints for Asian female travellers. The finding indicates that there is a need for DMOs and travel providers to be aware of female travellers' needs and to prioritise promoting a safer travel space for Asian female travellers to ensure they are safe and secure while travelling. Destination operators should provide safety information for solo female travellers, especially when they first arrive, in particular, regarding public transportation and emergency services contacts. Such information will equip them with knowledge of the local neighbourhood so that they can decide if it is safe for women to explore alone.

In the age of technology, social media and digital marketing are powerful marketing tools. To help local businesses to increase their competitive advantage, DMOs could provide the necessary technical and financial assistance to support the development of digital marketing. This enables tourism and hospitality providers to improve their reach and booking potential by utilising this platform to engage with potential customers and provide them with relevant information on the local community and safety issues. This could be accomplished by promoting tourism destinations by posting online reviews from previous solo female travellers on their websites or through reviews site such as TripAdvisor to give potential customers a better idea on what to expect. The personal experiences of past travellers provide more authenticity in setting the scene for future travellers. This will reduce the feeling of vulnerability when arriving in an unfamiliar destination.

Travel providers and destination operators could involve local women in running women-friendly tour groups to create a safer environment in which solo female travellers might feel more at ease. This may not only give a different perspective, but also helps deliver a more authentic experience. Smaller tour groups specifically for solo female travellers could be organised to create a friendly environment in which like-minded women can meet each other and make new friends. This would enable female travellers to share their stories and exchange experiences with one another, in turn enhancing their journey of self-discovery.

The findings in this study reveal that travelling is no longer just about getting from one destination to another, it is also a significant form of self-expression and self-actualisation. As travellers crave new and novel experiences, hospitality and tourism providers need to rise to the challenge and go beyond the standardised products and services to offer a lasting 'share-worthy' experiences to their guests. Furthermore, Asian female tourists should not be treated as a homogenous group, thus, a one-stop approach is no longer valid in the travel market. With travel becoming an important means of self-expression, travel products and services need to be more personalised. Tourism and hospitality operators should diversify their products and services to meet the multiple demand characteristics of these new market segments. For example, DMOs could provide incentives to encourage tourism and hospitality providers to work together as partners in offering special deals for solo travellers by scrapping single-room supplements to entice solo travellers. In this way, they do not feel penalised for travelling solo, which can be a huge disincentive to booking. Restaurants can also provide an environment and services in which solo travellers can co-create memorable experiences, such as providing seating for solo diners near the bar to allow solo guests to interact with members of the staff. Travellers who enjoyed their experiences would more likely become loyal customers to a particular brand. Hospitality providers could also develop specific accommodation packages catered to the female traveller market segment, such as female-friendly floors in hotels, equipped with specialised amenities and taking extra measures to ensure the safety of their female guests travelling alone or in groups.

The emergence of new high growth markets in Asia involves changes in the cultural characteristics of existing visitor patterns. This presents a new demand for the development of appropriate language and cultural skills as countries such as China take up a growing share of international tourism flows. It is important for DMOs to rethink their business model and develop new policies to equip tourism and hospitality providers with the skills to accommodate the growth of Asian outbound tourists. Although China remains the main contributor to the outbound market in Asia, industry players should not underestimate the potential of other developing Asian regions such as South-East Asia. The dramatic increase in Asia's outbound

tourism implies that travel providers and DMOs catering to the Asian travel market segment can benefit financially by training their staff in cross-cultural communication skills to ensure that staff are well versed in adhering to the norms of Asian cultures. This could be accomplished by fostering cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity among staff who may be unfamiliar with other cultures' norms. By understanding the cultural aspects of the travel behaviours of Asian female travellers, tourism providers will be able to focus on more specific marketing strategies and provide more comprehensive services towards this market segment.

The findings demonstrate how deeply traditional patriarchal values are embedded in Asian society. It is extremely difficult for women in Asia to achieve equal rights. Hence, there is need for the tourism industry to address the status quo of the male-dominated workforce and to challenge the gender stereotypes and conservative cultural mindsets which perceived men as more capable than women. This could be done by implementing strategies and policies on a national and regional level in promoting decent work for women across different aspects of the tourism sectors to increase women's employment in the tourism workforce, and recruiting Asian women in high level employment. This allows the tourism industry to narrow the gender wage gap, which enables women to gain more financial independence. Asian women can be empowered politically and socially through tourism, thus, become less restricted by gender stereotypes. Hence, gender equality strategies for the tourism sector are essential for women's empowerment and promoting gender equality.

The findings in this study reveal how Asian women's travel opportunities are still, to an extent, restricted by the patriarchal influences in their home societies. Solo travelling in particular is largely unacceptable and seen as an act of rebellion. To improve Asian societies' perceptions of solo female travellers, outbound tour operators could increase their efforts to educate and raise public awareness to the advantages of solo travelling and to promote solo travelling as a means to gain freedom and independence. This will not only improve Asian women's travel opportunities, but also boost women's position in the wider society.

7.5 Recommendations for future research

This study demonstrates that there is a need for greater scholarly attention on Asian female travel experiences. Given that this field of research is still emerging, it is apparent that there are many aspects that need attention.

This study provides a comprehensive insight into the influence of cultural and social norms on Asian women. However, analysis revealed an unexpected finding in regard to the effects of gender expectation on Asian men. Leisure has contrasting meanings for men and women (Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007), therefore future research on the male Asian travel experience would generate useful insights.

It is acknowledged that a small sample size may pose a limitation to the study. The sample in this study, though small, is considered common in qualitative research which prioritises the depth of experience (Braun and Clarke 2006). This study acknowledges that with a relatively small sample, it is difficult to generalise Asian women's experiences to a broader population of Asian female travellers. Asia covers an immense geographical area and there are extensive cultural differences depending on the extent to which different regions have been exposed to different stages of modernisation. Given the plethora of different cultures in Asia, reducing the notion of 'Asia' to a specific culture or region is not appropriate. Therefore, future research is recommended to consider a larger sample size to accommodate the multiplicity of cultures in Asia.

The findings indicated that Asian women who resisted social norms are stigmatised and labelled as rebels of society. Therefore, it is recommended that future research could explore this area of Asian women's resistance with stigmatisation as a focus of analysis. Using stigmatisation theories (i.e. Goffman's theory and Link and Phelan's stigmatisation model) would facilitate the understanding of behavioural conformity in the Asian community and the effects of stigmatisation on non-conforming groups. Stigmatisation could also be studied from a tourism perspective, in which Asian tourists are discriminated against and stigmatised due to their physical differences from their western host.

This study also brought to light women's potential for creating social change. Although feminism is considered a western concept, this study shows that some Asian women are rising against traditional values to challenge gender inequality. Generating a clearer understanding of the cultural constraints that are preventing Asian women's emancipation could lead to a greater understanding of how to protect Asian women from gendered risks such as sexual harassment. Such knowledge could be shared to a wider audience beyond academia to raise awareness on women's struggle. This study highlighted the understanding of women's gender-related travel experiences within the Asian context. Tourism and gender studies have been concentrated in western perspectives. This study acknowledges that although non-Asian perspectives on Asia are also relevant in understanding gender in Asia, there seems to be a struggle to relate Asian scenarios to the gender theories generated by Western scholars due to the specificity of the Asian cultural context. Therefore, this study calls for more research on Asian tourism by Asian scholars.

This study has contributed to tourism scholarship on Asia by building an important foundation for future research on the link between culture and Asian female travel. This area of study has not received much research attention thus far, therefore more research is called for. This study's findings have opened up a variety of avenues for research, not only within tourism, but also in the broader leisure studies.

This study has filled gaps in the literature on gender and tourism in terms of showing how gender, patriarchy and culture affect Asian female travel experiences and behaviour. However, it is acknowledged that the participants in this study share a similar background and level of education. Therefore, one recommendation for future research is to consider using an intersectionality approach to investigate Asian women's travel experiences. The challenge of understanding and researching the intersections of multiple inequalities has been a key focus in a range of social science disciplines. However, there has been less engagement with intersectionality within leisure scholarship. Adopting an intersectionality approach allows researchers to give voice to marginalised groups, and to engage with cultural diversity in a way that recognises the plurality of experience.

7.6 Reflections on the research journey

In chapter one, I introduced my personal reasons for choosing the research topic. Looking back before I commenced my journey as a PhD student, which now seems like a lifetime away, I admit that I was not prepared for the hardship and dedication required to achieve my goals. Having completed my masters with a distinction, I felt I was ready to face anything head on, I wanted to challenge myself and to take my academic journey to the next level.

My PhD journey was a very humbling one. There were many difficult times, too many to count when I felt that this was an infinite journey whose end was nowhere to be seen. When I first started on my PhD journey, it seemed like a monumental task. I am now excited about the prospect of completing future research projects as I believe there is much more to be done in the area of Asian female travel experience. Completing this study has been extremely challenging yet rewarding and it has increased my passion in this area. I am eager to improve my research journey and I do believe that this study will take me even further in my academic journey.

The process of data collection had a significant impact on me. The participants recounted with such detail their individual pathways growing up in a patriarchal environment, demonstrating the effects of the discrimination they faced in their home societies and on their travel experiences. I felt truly fortunate to have been trusted by the participants who were more than willing to share their struggle and personal stories with me. As a feminist researcher, I felt a great honour and privilege in bearing the responsibility for making their individual voices heard.

During the PhD journey, I had the opportunity to present my study at a number of gender and tourism conferences, including the most recent one in Auckland, New Zealand (CAUTHE 2020). The experience was daunting but sharing my preliminary findings with fellow academics provided me with the confidence and knowledge needed to further improve my thesis. The experience I had presenting my study in the presence of many like-minded academics also gave me a different perspective on my academic journey and I am extremely excited about my future in academia.

Now, after three and a half years, I am nearing the end of my PhD journey. The journey from PhD proposal to submission of thesis has been a long and gruelling one. I cannot deny that there were many times where I was tempted to give up. Many times, the feeling of helplessness and depression overwhelmed me, and caused my anxieties to resurface after many years of repression. I am naturally introverted and relish my own company. Hence, it was extremely difficult for me to seek help for my mental wellbeing because I was always apprehensive due to the stigma of mental issues in an Asian upbringing.

Even towards the end, when the imposter syndrome set in, it was particularly difficult for me to find that motivation to push on. Thankfully, I am an extremely fortunate person, in that I have unlimited support and love from my supervisors, my family and friends as well as my partner. These wonderful people refused to give up on me, and they were the driving force behind pushing me towards the submission of my thesis. My PhD stretched me intellectually and emotionally, but I am immensely proud of what I have achieved and actually enjoyed much of the journey.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

The title of the research project

The role of gender, patriarchy and culture in the Asian female travel experience.

Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

The aim of this research is to explore the role of gender, patriarchy and culture in the travel experiences of Asian female travellers.

Why have I been chosen

You are invited to participate in a study to explore the role that gender, patriarchy and culture play in the travel experiences of Asian female travellers. You are selected as a participant because you fulfil the criteria of this this study, which are:

- Female over the age of 18
- Of Asian descent
- Have overseas travelling experience

This research intends to recruit 15 participants.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a participant agreement form. You can withdraw from the interview at any time and without giving a reason and we will remove any data collected about you from the study. Once the interview is finished you can still withdraw your data up to the point where the data has been analysed and has become anonymous, so your identity cannot be determined.

What would taking part involve?

The interview will take a place in a mutually agreed location. Travel expenses will not be reimbursed. The interview typically will last between 45 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes depending on the flow of the interview. You will be interviewed individually, firstly with an opening question, followed by additional questions based on your answer.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will contribute to the tourism literature by providing new knowledge on the influence of Asian culture on the female tourist experience. Participating in this study is not anticipated to cause any disadvantage or discomfort.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

You will be asked an opening question regarding your life as an Asian woman in your country, and subsequently, additional questions will be asked based on the direction of the conversation. Your responses will be directly relevant to the aim of the research.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recordings of your interview will be used only for analysis. Verbatims and anonymised quotes may be used in conference presentations and academic publications. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

How will my information be kept?

All the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current Data Protection Regulations. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications without your specific consent.

All personal data relating to this study will be held for 5 year after the award of the degree. BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU password protected secure network where held electronically. Except where it has been anonymised, we will restrict access to your personal data to those individuals who have a legitimate reason to access it for the purpose or purposes for which it is held by us.

The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data. Anonymised data will be added to BU's Data Repository (a central location where data is stored) and which will be publicly available.

If you have any questions about how we manage your information or your rights under the data protection legislation, please contact the BU Data Protection Officer on dpo@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact

Primary researcher:
Dana Seow, PhD Student, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University
dseow@bournemouth.ac.uk
Supervisors:
Dr Lorraine Brown, Associate Professor, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University
lbrown@bournemouth.ac.uk
Dr Anya Chapman, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University
achapman@bournemouth.ac.uk

In case of complaints
Any concerns about the study should be directed to Dana Seow. If your concerns have not been answered by Dana Seow, you should contact Professor Michael Silk, Deputy Dean of Research & Professional Practice, Bournemouth University by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk

Finally

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Appendix B: Participant Agreement Form

Participant Agreement Form

Full title of project:
The role of gender, patriarchy and culture in the Asian female travel experiences

Name, position and contact details of researcher:
Dana Seow, PhD Student, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University
dseow@bournemouth.ac.uk

Name, position and contact details of supervisors:
Dr Lorraine Brown, Associate Professor, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University
lbrown@bournemouth.ac.uk
Dr Anya Chapman, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University
achapman@bournemouth.ac.uk

In this form we ask you to confirm whether you agree to take part in the Project. We also ask you to agree to some specific uses of your identifiable information, which we will only do with your consent.

You should only agree to take part in the Project if you understand what this will mean for you. If you complete the rest of this Form, you will be confirming to us that:

You have read and understood the Project Participant Information Sheet and have been given access the BU Research Participant Privacy Notice (https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy)

You have had the opportunity to ask questions;

You understand that:

- Taking part in the research will include being interviewed and being record (audio) on the basis that these recordings will be deleted once transcribed.
- Your participation is voluntary. You can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason, and you are free to decline to answer any particular question(s),
- If you withdraw from participating in the Project, you may not always be able to withdraw all of your data from further use within the Project, particularly once we have anonymised your data and we can no longer identify you.
- Data you provide may be included in an anonymised form within a dataset to be archived at BU's Online Research Data Repository
- Data you provide may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.

Consent to take part in the Project	***Yes***	***No***
I agree to take part in the Project on the basis set out above	☐	☐

Signature

_____		_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____		_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

This Form should be signed and dated by all parties after the participant receives a copy of the participant information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated participant agreement form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.