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The Settlement of Skilled Chinese Immigrants in New Zealand: Issues and Policy Implications for Socioeconomic Integration

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Policy
at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand

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2002

Dedication

With love, to my Scottish-New Zealand mother, who taught me that
“stones from other mountains can polish our jade”.

可 他
以 山
攻 之
玉 石

ABSTRACT

Changes in New Zealand's immigration policy, particularly the points system introduced in 1991, have facilitated the entry of large numbers of skilled immigrants from Northeast Asia. The emphasis in the points system on employment and settlement factors suggested that skilled immigrants who met the requirements would not experience settlement problems or would be significantly less likely to do so. Unfortunately, the reality was rather different. Many immigrants, especially those who were visibly different and/or from non-English speaking backgrounds, were failing to secure employment in their professions or, indeed, in any positions at all, with consequent negative effects on other aspects of their settlement.

This thesis examines the importance of English language proficiency in immigration policy and its role in conjunction with other factors in the settlement experiences of skilled immigrants from China. Policy changes over the period 1986-1998 are examined and the specific language requirements are analysed, along with their operationalisation. The role of English language proficiency and other factors in the settlement process are then examined via a longitudinal study of a panel of skilled Chinese immigrants who took up residence (mainly in Auckland) between August 1997 and August 1998.

Three main conclusions are reached in this study. First, the English language proficiency requirement, promulgated as a necessary prerequisite for successful settlement, was undermined by its manipulation as a tool to regulate the entry of certain groups of skilled applicants. Second, the expectation that skilled immigrants who met the English language and other selection requirements would be able to find suitable employment without post-arrival assistance failed to take into account the negative effects of various institutional, social and personal factors. Finally, the failure of immigrants to secure any or suitable employment had serious ramifications for their acquisition of further English language proficiency, social participation and socioeconomic integration. The findings presented in this thesis support the need for a balanced, well integrated institutional structure of immigration that includes not only a policy to regulate the entry of immigrants but also policies designed to meet their post-arrival needs and intergroup relations in a multicultural society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While the researching and writing of this PhD was a long and rather solitary journey spanning five and a half years, it was not a journey that could have been completed without the help, assistance and support of many people. I should like to acknowledge here all those who, in one way or another, made it possible for me to complete this journey

First, may I offer special thanks to my supervisors, Associate Professors Andrew Trlin and Noel Watts for their guidance and support along the way. They kept me on track if I wandered and provided valuable guidance and feedback on my work. I am especially indebted to them for putting in so many hours during the last months, at a time when Andrew was recuperating from ill health and Noel should have been enjoying his retirement. I should also like to thank others in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work for their support and assistance: Dr Monica Skinner for the editing work on the SPSS data, inputting the 1999 data, her proof reading of final copy and being such a good colleague; Dr Martin Tolich and Dr Jocelyn Quinnell for being sounding boards on social participation and employment, and social policy; Heather Hodgetts for masterful word processing of the transcriptions and references and her ongoing encouragement; and the other secretaries and academic staff for their cheerful assistance and support. A thank you also to: Suellan Woods for transcribing the Round 3 interviews, and Glennis Wallbutton and Dr Ted Drawneek of Computer Services at Massey University for the entry and SPSS formatting of data from the longitudinal questionnaires.

Thanks are also due to: the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for approving the project; the Foundation for Research Science and Technology for its funding of the New Settlers Programme, of which the longitudinal study of the Chinese formed a part; and the New Zealand Immigration Service, which allowed access to its files, assisted in the recruitment of the sample and provided other help and information along the way (special thanks to Stephen Dunstan for his assistance, and to the staff of the Records Section for drawing so many files from archives).

Finally, but certainly not least, I must acknowledge those who helped in the recruitment of the longitudinal panel and the 36 panel members and their families without whose support this study would not have been possible. Thanks are due to Professor Paul Spoonley for referring me on to one of his postgraduate students, Sylvia Yuan, who provided so many of the names and contacts for the construction of the longitudinal panel; Sylvia's enthusiasm and support played a very special part in this research. The assistance of Wong Song Lam and all the others in Auckland who supported the research and endorsed my endeavours to recruit panel members are also very much appreciated. And those in the panel, who gave the time each year to complete the questionnaire, who welcomed me into their homes and provided hospitality along with information, I cannot thank enough. I hope sincerely that this research does them justice and contributes to the improvement of policies which affect their settlement and socioeconomic integration.

Anne Henderson (2002) *The Settlement of Skilled Chinese Immigrants in New Zealand: Issues and Policy Implications for Socioeconomic Integration.*

Two changes made, both on Contents pages:

p.v

Entry corrected:

Immigration policy: an institutional structure of migration 33

p.vi

Entry originally omitted, added:

Strategies to cope with unemployment 302

These 2 corrections to the list of contents were to assist readers who might use the thesis. I am very sorry that this action inadvertently caused problems.

Anne Henderson
20 Nov. 2003

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