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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

Anne MacGibbon Henderson

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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.

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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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