



Contemporary family sponsorship and older parent reunification immigration under New Zealand's neoliberal immigration regime

Liangni Sally Liu¹ · Guanyu Jason Ran²

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Abstract

A neoliberal immigration regime often takes an “economic” lens to frame and reframe immigration regulation based on a rational cost–benefit analysis of what immigration might bring to immigration-receiving countries. Under such a regime, skilled and business immigration is framed as an “economic” immigration category, which can channel in financial and human capital, while family and international humanitarian immigration is regarded as a “social” immigration category assumed to produce immigrants who are more dependent and not able to bring immediate and direct economic gain for immigrant-receiving countries. In New Zealand (NZ), such a neoliberal trend is very much alive within its contemporary immigration policy development. The paper aims to illustrate the neoliberal trend of NZ immigration policy that relates to the entry of immigrants' family members, especially the older parents. In order to achieve this goal, a detailed review of the evolving NZ family immigration policy over the last three decades and a descriptive analysis of NZ family immigration intake will be presented. By combining the policy review and descriptive analysis together, the paper can inform a better understanding of how the neoliberal immigration regime has had an impact on the patterns of family immigration in NZ.

Keywords Family immigration · Immigration policy · Immigration regime · Neoliberalism · New Zealand

✉ Liangni Sally Liu
l.liu2@massey.ac.nz

Guanyu Jason Ran
jason.ran@wintec.ac.nz

¹ School of Humanities, Media and Creative Communication, Massey University, Albany Campus, Auckland, New Zealand

² Centre for Health and Social Practice, Waikato Institute of Technology, Hamilton, New Zealand

Introduction

Neoliberalism is a political ideology that advocates market-oriented reform of policies, aiming at eliminating price controls, freeing market capitalism, lowering trade barriers; and more importantly, reducing government spending in order to increase the role of the private sector in the economy and society (Bockman, 2013). In today's society, neoliberal thoughts play an unprecedented role in shaping governments' decision- and policy-making, including immigration policy-making (Comaroff, 2011). A neoliberal immigration regime often takes an "economic" lens to frame and reframe immigration regulation based on a rational cost-benefit analysis of what immigration might bring to immigration-receiving countries. It promotes the idea that through the immigration of wealthy and skilled people, a society can maximise its profit as these immigrants can effectively contribute to its market (Mulvey & Davidson, 2019). Under such a regime, skilled and business immigration is often framed as an "economic" immigration category, which can channel in financial and human capital, while family and international humanitarian immigration is usually regarded as a "social" immigration category assumed to produce immigrants who are more dependent and not able to bring immediate and direct economic gain for immigrant-receiving countries (Bedford & Liu, 2013). The consequence is that skilled and business immigrants are often welcomed, but immigrants from the "social" immigration category are seen as a by-product of skilled and business immigration and should be kept as low as possible. In the New Zealand (NZ) context, such a neoliberal trend is very much alive within its immigration policy development in the past three decades (Collins et al., 2019; Simon-Kumar, 2015).

Empirically, this paper aims to illustrate the neoliberal trend of NZ immigration policy that relates to the entry of immigrants' family members based on sponsorship, especially the older parents of adult immigrants. In order to achieve this goal, a detailed review of the evolving NZ family immigration policy over the last three decades and a descriptive analysis of NZ family immigration intake will be presented. By combining a policy review and descriptive analysis together, the paper can inform a better understanding of how the neoliberal immigration regime impacts on the family immigration in NZ, especially the reunification immigration of older parents based on sponsorship provided by their adult immigrant children.

The paper draws on empirical evidence of policy shifts and selection outcomes to argue a case about the enlarged disparity between family immigration demands and increasingly restricted opportunities for the entry of older parents of adult immigrants in NZ. Although the geo-political context of this paper is NZ, it can serve as a powerful reference to and meaningful comparative parameter for other studies on family reunification immigration in other social, political, and cultural contexts. It can make a contribution to the a deeper understanding of the challenges of coping with the increasing demand for places for older parents of adult immigrant children in family reunification categories of immigration policy in most Western immigrant-receiving countries that have social welfare systems

providing support for the older population. It is also relevant to addressing the fiscal challenge that originates from population ageing; a challenge that is proven to be one of the most difficult and contentious areas of policy formulation in many welfare societies (Bedford & Liu, 2013).

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part is to review and analyse the changing policy that relates to the entry of immigrants' family members with a particular focus on the old parents of adult immigrants. The choice of this focus has two reasons. Firstly, how this group of immigrants have been perceived and treated in the immigration policy narrative is an important indicator of how neoliberal the NZ immigration regime is. Secondly, compared with other family immigration categories, the Parent Category has gone through more frequent changes over time. This policy analysis is contextualised within the overall framework of the key transitions in the immigration policy in NZ since 1987 when the country abolished the traditional source-country preference (i.e. Great Britain) and proclaimed a liberal philosophy of selecting immigrants based on personal merits (Burke, 1986). The paper adopts this narrative approach because we believe that it is impossible to discuss the evolution of NZ family immigration policy without addressing the overall policy context and the broad immigration policy transitions over the last three decades. The second part of the paper is a statistical analysis based on the data of resident decisions by financial year from Immigration New Zealand (INZ)¹ (<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/statistics>). This analysis aims to map the numbers of residence approvals under each immigration category by NZ's top 10 immigration source countries. The analysis results can show (1) The significance of family immigration, (2) The variation of using different family immigration categories for immigration purposes in different immigrant groups, and (3) The impact of immigration policy changes on family immigration.

Family immigration policy review and analysis

Initial framing of family immigration policy

The Immigration Policy Review 1986 made by the Fourth Labour Government's² Minister of Immigration was perhaps one of the most significant immigration policy reviews in NZ during the twentieth century. It laid the foundation for major changes in the 1987 Immigration Act and is the introduction of a new immigration policy that removed the long-established source country preference (i.e. Great Britain) and started to select immigrants based on their financial and human capital (Bedford

¹ Immigration New Zealand (INZ) is an agency within the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) that is responsible for border control, issuing travel visas and managing immigration to NZ. Its previous version was called New Zealand Immigration Services (NZIS).

² The Labour Party or Labour is a social-democratic political party in NZ, and one of the two major parties in NZ politics. It is considered as a left wing and social liberal political party in NZ. The other major party is the National Party which is considered as a right wing and conservative political party.

et al., 1987). This immigration policy change was a part of the Fourth Labour Government's effort to embark on a radical path of economic de-regulation to revitalise the economy (Trlin, 1992). Along with this economic perspective, another clear objective of this new immigration policy was "to strengthen families and communities" (Burke, 1986: 7). Trlin made a comment on the family reunification immigration policy in the Immigration Policy Review 1986 as the policy was "with respect to aged parents, adult children and siblings" (Trlin, 1992: 7). One significant requirement for family immigration, especially the entry of immigrants' older parents was the "centre of gravity" principle.³ This principle regulated that the parents of NZ residents or citizens would be considered for entry "if more family members are resident in NZ than in their home or any single third country" (Burke, 1986: 22). Furthermore, if the number of children in the home country and NZ was evenly balanced then the parents could elect to join their family in NZ (Trlin, 1992). This principle had lasted as a fundamental point underpinning parents' immigration until the 2012 policy change.

When the National government came to power in the 1990s, it maintained the previous Labour Government's programme of economic deregulation and accentuated it by encouraging immigration. A point-based system was introduced in 1991 for immigration admission in NZ (Trlin, 1997). Points were awarded based on age, qualifications, work experience, sponsorship by family members or community groups, a job offer, and settlement and investment funds.⁴ The point system shifted the focus from obtaining immediate economic and financial benefit from new immigrants to a greater determination to secure human capital from immigrants. It was supposed to be a "key instrument" to attract a greater number of "quality migrants who would make a positive contribution to economic and social development"

³ The full explanation of a family's "centre of gravity" principle in NZ is if: 1) the principal parent applicant has no dependent children, and the number of a couple's adult children lawfully and permanently in NZ is equal to or greater than those lawfully and permanently in any other single country, including the country in which the principal applicant is lawfully and permanently resident. A family's centre of gravity is also in NZ if: 1) the principal applicant parent has dependent children, and the number of his or her adult children lawfully and permanently in NZ is equal to or greater than those lawfully and permanently in any other single country, including the country in which the principal applicant parent is lawfully and permanently resident, and the number of their dependent children is equal to or fewer than the number of their adult children who are lawfully and permanently in NZ. This principle was removed in 2012 for those who could meet one of the asset/income thresholds for entry under Tier 1 when the two-tier selection system was introduced.

⁴ The National Government came into power in 1991 and introduced a more open policy to welcome migrants from various regions. The National's 1991 policy changes primarily featured the introduction of a revised Business Investment Category (BIC) to replace the previous Business Immigration Policy (BIP) and the encouragement of skilled immigration via a General Category (GC). The GC involved a points-based selection system. Points were awarded based on age, qualifications, work experience, sponsorship by family members or community groups, a job offer, and settlement and investment funds. Those who could obtain points around the upper 20 s qualified for automatic permanent residence. Whether the applicant had a definite job offer or a plausible business development plan no longer counted. Settlement funds of NZ\$100,000 also carried an extra point. The GC was divided into two sub-categories—the GSC and the General Investment Category (GIC). Applicants under the GSC were assessed on employability, age and settlement factors, while applicants under the GIC scored points on the basis of capital.

(Trlin, 1997: 5). The targeted potential immigrants were those with tertiary education who were young and had a track record of gainful employment (Ip, 1995).

While the economic immigration flow kept going, family immigration continuously appeared on the agenda of immigration policy making and adjustment. In the 1991 policy, a formal Family Category was established, which covered three situations: marriage to a NZ citizen or resident; a de facto or homosexual relationship; and the case of parents, dependent children, and single adult siblings and children (Trlin, 1997). All of these possible ways of family immigration were based on sponsorship provided by the immediate family member(s) who had been NZ permanent resident(s) or citizen(s).

Obviously, right from the very beginning of the establishment of the family category under the INZ policy, immigrants' older parents are included in the category of family members who could be sponsored to come to this country as residents. This is quite social-liberal compared with many other countries where only nuclear family members (i.e. spouse and child) are defined to belong to the family immigration category, such as Sweden and Netherland (Borevi, 2015; Robinsky, 2013). Some scholars commented that the social-liberal family immigration policy during the early 1990s was largely influenced by a social-liberal model of citizenship, emphasising a full range and equal "social rights" for all citizens and even permanent residents (McMillan et al., 2005: 78). Under this model, immigrants' older parents were not only allowed to immigrate to NZ but also entitled to social services and welfare provision.

Balancing the "social" and "economic" immigration

This new selection system brought in a substantial immigrant gain to NZ, both as skilled and business immigrants, mainly from Northeast and Southeast Asia (Bedford et al., 2002). The new policy resulted in a large inflow of new Chinese migrants from various regions, which was a cause of a strong political and public backlash in the mid-1990s and a serious tightening-up of policy in 1995, including the English language requirements (Ip, 1995). The policy changes plus the onset of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, did deter overall Chinese immigration for a while (Liu & Wu, 2018). Having received sharp criticism to the impact of the 1995 policy change on business immigration and a net migration loss, the government instituted a number of changes to the selection requirements in 1997 and 1998 to try to remedy the immigration decline. With the policy relaxation, a high level of Chinese immigration was quickly re-established. Together with this scenario, it was discovered that by the end of 1998, the number of approvals for "social" immigrants (including immigrants who are granted for residence under the Family Sponsorship Stream and International/Humanitarian categories) was over the approved number of "economic" category immigrants (including immigrants who are granted for residences under the

Skilled/Business Stream) for the first time (Bedford et al., 2005). Concern over the increasing proportion of “social” category immigrants was raised in New Zealand Immigration Services (NZIS)⁵ 1997 review of immigration policy, as noted:

In these circumstances, economic migrants become the “balancing item” within the overall immigration target. The lower the target, and without numerical controls on social category migrants, the lower the percentage and actual number of economic migrants (New Zealand Immigration Services, 1997: 17).

The review led to the next significant change in immigration management and policy in 2001 after the Labour Government returned to power in 1999. With the Labour Government determined to open the immigration door even wider, it introduced the New Zealand Immigration Programme (NZIP)⁶ and established a managed entry regime between 2000 and 2001. The programme manages residence approvals and was structured in three immigration streams, including the Skilled/Business Stream, the Family Sponsorship Stream, and the International/Humanitarian Stream. The managed entry regime on the other hand regulated that the Skilled/Business Stream was allocated 60 per cent of the government’s total target for residence approvals, while the Family Sponsorship Stream was allocated 30 per cent and the International/Humanitarian Stream with 10 per cent (Bedford et al., 2005). Here one can see that the suggestion of keeping a good balance between “economic” immigrant approvals and “social” immigrant approvals in the 1997’s NZIS policy review had been well pursued. It was the first time that the NZ immigration regime started to regulate the “economic” and “social” streams of immigrants based on actual numerical terms (Bedford & Liu, 2013). The emphasis on “economic” migration signalled a clear shift of immigration policy orientation from social-liberalism to neoliberalism, which focuses on economic output from immigration (McMillan et al., 2005; Simon-Kumar, 2015).

Apart from the 2001 package of policy changes, there were certain stratifications in immigration category design promoted by the government. The enactment of the Government’s initiative for “work to residence” in April 2002 and the Job Search Visa (JSV) in November 2002 showed the government’s changing interest from encouraging permanent settlement immigration, to facilitating transition for people with temporary work permit status and student visa/permits who wished to obtain residence (Bedford, Ho and Lidgard, 2005: 20). This trend has been continuing and evidenced by the introduction of a variety of temporary work visas in the following years, including the “talent visa”, “POL (Priority Occupation List) work permit”, “talent work visa”, “essential skills work visa”, “long term skill shortage list work visa”, and “post-study work visa”. These new visa categories were evidence that

⁵ NZIS is an agency within the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) that is responsible for border control, issuing travel visas and managing immigration to NZ. It was later renamed as INZ.

⁶ The New Zealand Immigration Programme (NZIP) contained residence goals set by the NZ Government to meet NZ’s ongoing skills requirements and humanitarian commitments. The programme was renamed as the New Zealand Residence Programme (NZRP) in July 2006.

while both permanent and temporary migration policy was pursued in New Zealand, increasing priority was given to meeting demands for skilled labour and international students through temporary migration policy.

In December 2003, a new selection system that involved two-stages of applications was introduced. This new system shifted the way the points system worked from passive acceptance to active selection of immigration applications. It replaced the “pass” mark system with a process whereby people who qualify above a certain level of points (at least 100 points) submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to a selection pool, from which they are then invited to apply. Points were allocated on the basis of age, qualifications, a skilled job or offer, the regional location of the job offer, work experience, and identified skills shortage. This system came about in a context in which successful settlement outcomes of migrants were recognised by the government as more important than numerical and economic outcomes (Bedford, Ho and Lidgard, 2005; Bedford & Spoonley, 2014). Since, then, this system has remained in the NZRP, but it was not applied to immigration categories under the Family Sponsorship Stream until 2012 when a two-tier system was introduced.

As demonstrated above, INZ policy has been constantly refined and re-defined; however, regardless how the policy emphasis shifted from one to another, the factors of human capital and economic investment in recruiting immigrants have not changed much (Bedford et al., 2010). While this neoliberal ideology was well advanced, it needs to be pointed out that there was new discourse emerging in immigration policy-making – that is “a shift in emphasis in policy from a focus on numerical targets towards settlement outcomes” (Bedford et al., 2005: 1). Settlement and integration support were promoted and seen as a key pillar to ensure a better settlement outcome of immigration. These trends accelerated a full formation of a neoliberal immigration regime that is in favour of highly skilled and business immigrants over family and social immigrants.

One step further towards a neoliberal immigration regime

The progressive neoliberal construction of the family immigration policy in NZ can be further evidenced in the policy change of the Family Sponsorship Stream after the National Government returned to power in 2008. Prior to 2018, in the *Review of Family Sponsorship Policies* for the Labour Government Cabinet early in 2007, the Minister of Immigration (Hon Cunliffe) recommended that “while the [family] stream performs an important social role, it is critical that policies also be considered through an “economic lens” (Cunliffe, 2007: 7). This review led to a critical change in the policy of family immigration. Firstly, the Family Sponsorship Stream was divided into two sub-streams in May 2007: the Parent, Adult Child(ren) and Sibling Stream (PASS) and the Partner and Dependent Children Stream (PDCS). Under the first stream, there were three sub-categories: the Parent Category, the Sibling Category, and the Adult Child(ren) Category. Under the second stream, there are two sub-categories: the Dependent Child(ren) Category and the Spouse/Partners Category. Secondly, although the overall family sponsorship stream had a notional ceiling of 30 per cent of all residence approvals before May 2007, there had been no specific cap on the numbers of parents, adult children, and siblings. However, the

2007 policy change capped these categories with actual numbers. It meant that when the limit; namely, the cap was reached, no further visas would be granted in that visa class in the programme year. The Parent Category was given approximately a 4,000 quota per year. In addition, the 2007 policy change also included requirements of a minimum income for sponsors (i.e., NZ\$33,675 per year) and an increased length of time a migrant sponsor would have to support their old parents without access to benefits from 2 to 5 years.

These two changes were a deliberate attempt to prioritise the entry of immediate family members; namely, overseas-born partners and dependent children, while limiting the entry of older family members who were dependent, had relatively low workforce participation, and had a high tendency of welfare dependence (Cunliffe, 2007). Compared with immigrants admitted under the skilled and business categories, old parents of these immigrants were assumed to have much higher levels of welfare dependency and demand for health and medical provisions. These rationales were documented in detail in some official government papers and reviews. For example, in the background paper prepared for the Cabinet Policy Committee in May 2007, it was estimated that “the net savings in benefit expenditure at current rates from the proposal to extend sponsors’ support of parents from two to five years would be \$16.163 million per annum” (Cunliffe, 2007: 2). In the report of *A Comprehensive Overview of Family-Sponsored Migration* (09/87071, 30 September 2009), the Department of Labour reported to the National Government’s Minister of Immigration, Jonathan Coleman with reference to data on costs by age and gender in 2007/08, that.

Even when based on the lowest level of superannuation (\$519.72 per fortnight) parent migrants can cost \$100,000 each in superannuation over their lifetime. Combining this figure with potential health costs means each parent migrant can equate to around \$200,000 (Department of Labour, 2009: 8).

The economic lens to construct parent immigration in NZ was further refined by the Minister of Immigration in a paper for the Cabinet’s Domestic Policy Committee early in 2011. In the paper, the Minister proposed a refocusing of parent policy “to better support the attraction and retention of skilled migrants” (Coleman, 2011: 1), but he also indicated that “parents sponsored by high-contributing sponsors, or who bring a guaranteed income or fund, will have a high priority for NZ residence. They will also have more flexible eligibility criteria and reduced processing times” (Coleman, 2011: 1).

These recommendations led to the final approval of the enforcement of the two-tier selection system in the Parent Category by Cabinet in May 2011, starting from July 2012. Similar to the two-stage EOI system that was introduced for skilled immigrant selection in December 2002, people seeking entry under the Parent Category are also required to submit an EOI before making a formal application to enter NZ. Furthermore, the EOIs must be submitted with reference to criteria applying to two tiers of entry, with Tier 1 having a much higher financial requirement for sponsors than Tier 2. The sponsor adult child or his/her partner under Tier 1 should demonstrate that his/her individual annual gross income is at least NZ\$65,000 or a minimum combined annual gross income of the sponsor adult child and his/her partner

as NZ\$90,000, while the income threshold for a sponsor adult child under Tier 2 is NZ\$33,675 per annum. However, applicants under Tier 2 have to meet an additional requirement – that is the applicants cannot have any adult children living in the country where they live lawfully and permanently at the time of the application (Bedford & Liu, 2013).

The rationale behind the new EOI policy under the capped Parent Category is to monitor the number of EOIs in the pool, quantify the EOIs under the Tier 1 and Tier 2 schemes, and give Tier 1 priority over those submitted under Tier 2 criteria. Unlike the system that applies to skilled migrants, where EOIs stay in the pool for a maximum of three months, in the case of the Parent Category, EOIs can stay in the pool for an extended period of time. They are considered strictly in order of date of entry into the pool and the waiting time for sponsored parents to be granted permanent residence is much longer than before. As for applications submitted before 16 May 2012 under the previous Parent Category, they are re-assessed to be categorised as either Tier 1 or Tier 2. The queue for applications under the previous policy is estimated to be five years, while the waiting time for applications under Tier 2 is up to seven years (Bedford & Liu, 2013).

Apart from the different financial thresholds and assessment priority for applicants under Tier 1 and Tier 2, another major difference of the 2012 policy change from the previous Parent Category was the “centre of gravity” principle. As mentioned before, this principle had previously underpinned the family reunification system and had been enforced ever since a major review of immigration policy in 1986 (Burke, 1986). However, this principle was removed from the 2012 policy change. Parents seeking entry under Tier 1 are not subject to the “centre of gravity” test, while parents under Tier 2 have to meet more restricted requirements of the residence place of all their adult children if they have more than one child.

Additionally, another significant change in the Parent Category under the two-tier selection system was that the sponsors would be responsible for covering any costs to the government for their parents (e.g., medical costs) for 10 years whereas the previous regulation only required the sponsors to do so for five years. Bedford and Liu pointed out that “for the first time in the history of NZ’s family immigration policy, income/wealth of parents and/or their adult sponsors has become the defining selection criterion” (Bedford & Liu, 2013: 30). This policy clearly reflects the shift “towards a stronger economic focus on the costs and benefits of a migration policy stream” (Bedford & Liu, 2013: 25). The rationale of these changes is that parent migrants impose fiscal costs to NZ because most of them are highly likely to have low labour market participation, high rates of benefit uptake, and high health costs (Office of the Minister of Immigration, 2016).

Approaching a full formation of a neoliberal immigration regime

In a Cabinet Paper (October 2016), the Minister of Immigration articulated that since there were about 4,000 people who had applications being processed or had already been approved this financial year; it would take two years to clear the current caseload. In addition, there was a queue of around 4,000 Parent Category EOIs

that had not been selected yet. Based on these facts, the Minister of Immigration proposed to temporarily close the Parent Category (Tier 1 and Tier 2) for at least two years, starting from 11 October 2016 (Office of the Minister of Immigration, 2016). Whether this immigration category would be re-opened or not was unknown, depending on further policy review over the next two years (Woodhouse, 2016).

It is worth mentioning that the 2016 policy change in the Parent Category was a part of the NZ government's overall aim of cutting down the residence approval numbers. The reason for this cutting-down was that the immigration volume reached a historical new peak around 2016/2017. The overall cutting-down aimed to reduce the total number of residence approvals to the range of 85,000–95,000 from the previous range of 90,000–100,000 over the next two years (till June 2018). To achieve this goal, firstly, the immigration bar was lifted for the Skilled Migrant Category (SMC). The required total points for applying for residence under the SMC increased from 140 to 160, and the average band score of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for the applicants also increased from 5 to 6.5. Secondly, the scale of family immigration intake was reduced, especially the capped family immigration categories. The targeted quota for these categories was reduced from 5500 to 2000 per year (Woodhouse, 2016).

With the close-off of the Parent Category, there were only two other visa schemes allowing the old parents of adult immigrants to come to NZ for family related immigration or to visit. The first is an investment immigration plan called Parent Retirement Resident Visa (New Zealand Immigration, 2020b), and another is a short-term visitor visa called Parent and Grandparent Visitor Visa (New Zealand Immigration, 2020a). The former requires significant funding resources to support the application. According to the INZ website, to apply for a Parent Retirement Resident Visa, by the time of application, the old parent of adult immigrants needed to have a guaranteed annual income of NZ \$60,000 or more and NZ \$1 million or more to invest in NZ for at least four consecutive years, plus another NZ \$500,000 or more savings in the bank account to guarantee the settlement. The Parent and Grandparent Visitor Visa, grants the old family member multiple entries to NZ without a significant financial threshold but only allows them to stay for up to six months at any given time, with a maximum total stay of 18 months every three years. Apparently, due to the substantial financial requirement, many immigrants are unable to bring their old parents to NZ through the Parent Retirement Resident Visa. However, if they had to rely on the Parent and Grandparent Visitor Visa for family reunifications, all family reunifications would be only fragmented and temporary.

After three years, on 21 October 2019 the Parent Category was closed, with the NZ Government finally announcing that the Parent Category would be re-opened to accept applications from February 2020. However, the re-opened Parent Category carries new regulations with much higher financial requirements for sponsors. Firstly, the two-tier system has been changed to a single system. Secondly, the number of people who can get the residence visa under the Parent Category is reduced to 1,000 annually from 2,000 annually. Lastly, the new policy enforces much higher financial requirements for the adult immigrant-child sponsors. If one person sponsors one parent, the income threshold doubles the NZ median income, which is about NZD\$106,080 per year. The income threshold for one sponsor to sponsor

two parents is NZD\$159,120. If a sponsor and his/her partner want to sponsor two parents, the income threshold is NZD\$212,160 (New Zealand Immigration, 2019). As can be seen, achieving the residence visa for the old parents of adult migrants through family sponsorship has become increasingly difficult in NZ.

The policy analysis above highlights the fact that the contemporary NZ immigration regime has progressively pursued a neoliberal discourse in which skilled and business immigration is favoured, while family immigration is constantly discouraged. Such policy discourse is a significant manifestation of a nation's ambition for further economic growth in which skilled and business immigrants are viewed as an important resource to channel in human and financial capital to the immigrant-receiving countries, while low skilled labour immigrants and dependent family members of skilled and business immigrants are regarded as a burden for host countries' welfare and health support systems (Borevi, 2015; Czaika & De Haas, 2013). The tightening-up of the policy of the Parent Category is a particular arena through which increasing neoliberalism-led immigration programmes can be testified. The policy analysis also reflects the soaring tension between the state's claim for more control in immigrant selection, welfare distribution, and increasing demand from immigrants of moving out of their countries of origin to seek new lives in "desired places" of the world. NZ is one of these places.

It can be concluded that the progressive shift of family immigration policy, especially the policy of the Parent Category in NZ has been from inclusive to exclusive. Namely, the previous policy intended to ensure a certain scale of parent immigration because of the consideration of family need. However, this approach has gone through a fundamental change under the government's desire of establishing a neoliberal immigration regime. The primary reason for such a change is economic. Concern over welfare and health costs among those dependent family members is central for the NZ Government's reconstruction of the concept of "family" and right of the legal insider (namely, the sponsor) who has a legal tie to the country and also involves a moral claim of the insider/sponsor (Bonjour & Kraler, 2015). This reflects exactly a neoliberal approach towards immigration in which economic ambition from immigration takes over some important social values of being a family, how to be a family and what makes a better family from various cultural perspectives. Under this immigration regime, the value of having families and creating better family lives for immigrants has been overlooked, and the government is applying double measurements and treatments to its citizens with and without migration backgrounds. As Bedford and Liu argued, one class of citizens is those who can have the opportunity to have their parents living in the same country, and another class is those who cannot have the same opportunity to do so (Bedford & Liu, 2013).

Family immigration in NZ: A descriptive analysis

The following analysis is descriptive and looks at the numbers of immigrants approved for entry under different immigration streams/categories between 1997/98 and 2018/19. The data is from INZ's data of resident decisions by financial year (<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/statistics>). The

analysis focuses on the top 10 immigrant source countries of NZ (i.e., the United Kingdom, South Africa, the United States of America, China, India, South Korea, the Philippines, Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga). These 10 countries have provided more than 80% of the migrants approved for residence in NZ since 1997/98. Through analysis of the residence decision data by financial year, the significance to NZ of family immigration from these countries can be identified, some major variations of the usage of different immigration pathways among these top 10 source countries can be shown, and the impact of the immigration policy changes on family immigration can be revealed.

The general picture

To examine family immigration to NZ, it is necessary to employ a comparative framework and compare immigration streams/categories to understand its position in the whole immigration landscape of NZ. Table 1 shows that between 1997/1998 and 2018/2019, 826,872 permanent residents were approved under the New Zealand Residence Programme (NZRP). Approximately 83.78% (692,830) of these approvals were from the top 10 countries. Among the total number of residence approvals from the top 10 countries, 33.65% (233,169) are Family-sponsored migrants, 56.15% are Skilled migrants, 3.99% are Business migrants, and 6.20% are migrants in the International Humanitarian category. As can be seen, the Family Sponsorship Stream contributes substantially to immigrant arrivals from the top 10 immigrant source countries, following the contribution made by the Skilled Category. Within the Family Sponsorship Stream, residence approvals under the Spouse Category account for the largest proportion, approximately 17.97% (124,474), while the Parent Category is ranked as the second channel for residence approvals, accounting for approximately 9.83% (68,098).

Table 1 also shows that the proportion of residence approvals under the Parent Category varies significantly by nationality. Table 1 shows that the total number of residence approvals under the Family Sponsorship Stream for the top 10 countries is 233,169, while China has the greatest number (62,560) of residence approvals within this immigration stream, followed by the United Kingdom (UK) (43,215) and India (35,294). This top rank was followed by two Pacific Island countries—Fiji (21,889) and Samoa (20,026). The remaining countries have a small share of the total number of residence approvals under this immigration stream. As for the residence approval under the Parent Category for the top 10 countries (68,098), China also contributed the largest number (28,820), followed by the UK and India.

Variations in the shares of residence approvals by immigration category and nationality

In addition to looking at the absolute numbers of residence approvals of the top 10 countries, this analysis also pays attention to the percentage of residence approvals under different immigration categories by each top 10 country. Results show that there are major variations in the proportions of residence approvals under each

Table 1 Approvals for Residence of Top 10 Immigrant Source: Immigration New Zealand: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/statistics-Source-Countries-by-Nationality-and-Migrant-Stream/Category,1997/98-2018/19>

Nationality	Total No. of residence approval	Family sponsorship sub-categories											
		No. of Family sponsorship approval & % of family sponsorship approval to its total residence approval	No. of partner-ship/spouse approval & % of partner-ship/spouse approval to its total residence approval	No. of parent approval & % of parent approval to its total residence approval	No. of child approval & % of child approval to its total residence approval	No. of other approval (Sibling, family quota, humanitarian, etc.) & % of other approval to its total residence approval	No. of skilled approval & % of skilled approval to its total residence approval	No. of business approval & % of business approval to its total residence approval	No. of International/humanitarian & % of International/humanitarian approval to its total residence approval				
<i>Asia</i>													
China (PRC)	132,846	62,560 47.09%	24,375 18.35%	28,820 21.69%	3655 2.75%	5710 4.30%	53,096 39.97%	15,690 11.81%	1500 1.13%				
India	108,087	35,294 32.65%	20,213 18.70%	10,614 9.82%	1731 1.60%	2736 2.53%	71,587 66.23%	385 0.36%	821 0.76%				
South Korea	27,433	6558 23.91%	4113 14.99%	1292 4.71%	538 1.96%	615 2.24%	14,775 53.86%	5,841 21.29%	259 0.94%				
Philippines	54,439	12,163 22.34%	8623 15.84%	1297 2.38%	1834 3.37%	409 0.74%	41,709 76.62%	56 0.10%	511 0.94%				
<i>Pacific</i>													
Fiji	51,048	21,889 42.88%	9825 19.25%	6464 12.66%	1872 3.67%	3728 7.30%	23,968 46.95%	695 1.36%	4496 8.81%				
Samoa	45,262	20,026 44.24%	7966 17.60%	2027 4.48%	9158 20.23%	875 1.93%	679 1.50%	0 0.00%	24,557 54.26%				
Tonga	20,251	10,346 51.09%	5990 29.58%	2039 10.07%	1450 7.16%	867 4.28%	1866 9.21%	27 0.13%	8012 39.56%				

Table 1 (continued)

Nationality	Total No. of residence approval	Family sponsorship sub-categories						No. of skilled approval & % of skilled approval to its total residence approval	No. of business approval & % of business approval to its total residence approval	No. of International/humanitarian & % of International/humanitarian approval to its total residence approval
		No. of Family sponsorship approval & % of family sponsorship approval to its total residence approval	No. of partner-ship/spouse approval & % of partner-ship/spouse approval to its total residence approval	No. of parent approval & % of parent approval to its total residence approval	No. of child approval & % of child approval to its total residence approval	No. of other approval (Sibling, family quota, humanitarian, etc.) & % of other approval to its total residence approval				
<i>Other countries</i>										
United Kingdom	153,101	43,213 28.23%	30,230 19.75%	10,255 6.70%	1519 0.99%	1209 0.79%	105,160 68.69%	3268 2.13%	1460 0.95%	
South Africa	74,491	10,823 14.53%	3990 5.36%	4814 6.46%	1314 1.76%	705 0.95%	62,501 83.90%	525 0.70%	642 0.86%	
United States	25872	10297 39.80%	9149 35.36%	476 1.84%	532 2.06%	140 0.54%	13716 53.01%	1,173 4.53%	686 2.65%	
Total top 10 residence Approval	692,830	233,169 33.65%	124,474 17.97%	68,098 9.83%	23,603 3.41%	16,994 2.54%	389,057 56.15%	27,660 3.99%	42944 6.20%	
Total NZ residence approval	826,872									

* The category of International Humanitarian includes a number of immigration schemes, including 1995 Refugee Status, Refugee Family Support Tiers, Refugee Quota, Sect. 61, Sect. 35a, Pacific Access, Samoa Quota, and others

immigration category by nationality. Table 1 shows that for people from the UK, South Africa, the United States of America (USA), the Philippines, India, and South Korea, the Skilled Category was used to obtain permanent residence more than the other categories. This is highlighted by all six countries that had more than 50% residence approvals under the Skilled Category from their respective total number of residence approvals. This rank is followed by Fiji and China. Both countries' residence approvals under the Skilled Category accounted for just below 50% of their total number of residence approvals (46.95% for Fiji and 39.97% for China).

However, when examining the overall Family Sponsorship Stream, particularly the Parent Category, percentage analysis presents a very different story. Tonga has the highest percentage of residence approvals under the Family Sponsorship Stream (51.09%), while the percentage of China's residence approvals under this stream is also significant (47.09%). This was followed by Fiji (42.88%), Samoa (44.24%), the USA (39.80%), and India (32.65%). Other countries had a relatively small share of residence approvals under the family stream. The Philippines and South Africa had the smallest percentages of residence approvals under this stream, with 22.34% and 14.53% respectively, both were well below the average percentage of family migration among the top 10 countries (34.68%).

For all sub-categories under the Family Sponsorship Stream, China has the highest share of its total number of residence approvals under the Parent category (21.69%) among the top 10 source countries, followed by Fiji (12.66%), Tonga (10.07%), and India (9.82%), while the UK (6.70%), South Africa (6.46%), South Korea (4.71%), Samoa (4.48%), and the Philippines (2.38%) have rather smaller percentages – all are below the average of 8.08% under this category for the top 10 countries. The lowest percentage is found with the USA, with only 1.84% of its total number of residence approvals under the Parent Category. The significant percentage of Chinese who are in the Parent Category may relate to filial piety, in which living together with elderly parents and taking care of them is an important value in Chinese Confucian culture and tradition, even today (Bedford & Liu, 2013). However, the highest percentage of residence approvals under the spouse category was found with the USA (35.36%), followed by Tonga (29.5%8), the UK (19.75%), Fiji (19.25%), and India (18.70%).

Major findings

Three major findings emerged from this descriptive analysis. Firstly, the force of immigration under the Family Sponsorship Stream cannot be under-estimated. Table 1 shows that family migration is ranked as the second major pathway for NZ's immigrant inflow (33.65% of the total number of residence approvals).

Secondly, there were major variations between countries in the percentage of residence approvals under the Family Sponsorship Stream. Compared with the three Pacific and two Asian countries (China and India), the UK and South Africa – the two English-speaking immigrant source countries contribute much less to the immigrant intake under the Family Sponsorship Stream, especially under the Parent, Dependent Child, and Sibling and Adult Child Categories. The USA has a higher

percentage of residence approvals under the Family Sponsorship Stream (39.80%), but the Spouse Category makes the major contribution to its total approvals under this stream, which accounts for 35.36%, while the share of resident approvals under other sub-categories of the Family Sponsorship Stream is nominal. This phenomenon again reflects Asian and Pacific Island cultural differences from the West—that is, that unified family life involved with both nuclear and extended families is an important cultural value and practice in many Asian and Pacific Island countries. This cultural value can be found in immigration. Apart from children and spouses, Asian and Pacific migrants are much more willing to bring other immediate family members (older parents and siblings) into their destination countries. Family-related chain migration, an “old fashioned” immigration pattern is still very common among Asian and Pacific migrants.

Thirdly, among the source countries with a developing economy, China demonstrates a distinctive pattern of family immigration. More specifically, this distinction relates to the Parent Category. The immigrants from some developing countries (such as Samoa and Tonga) intended to prioritise the immigration of their spouses and dependent children, which is in line with NZ’s current immigration regime that gives family reunification priority to immigrant’s spouses and dependent children rather than to their other dependent family members. However, as Table 1 shows, the highest number of residence approvals for people from China is under the Parent Category. Again, this reflects the strong value placed on filial piety in the Chinese culture, but also reflects that the better-off economic conditions in today’s China allow its nationals the financial ability to meet the increasing financial requirement to sponsor their old parents to immigrate. In addition, the “one-child policy”⁷ in China resulted in many families having only a single child. The only child of a family who immigrates to NZ through the economic stream will assume increasing responsibility to support their parents as they advance in age. One option for taking care of their ageing parents is to bring their parents to this country.

Lastly, apart from this cultural reason, economic conditions in these immigrant-sending countries seem to also play a major role in prompting family immigration. Compared with countries with relatively better economic conditions, immigrants from those developing countries seem to be much keener to move away from their homelands and find a foothold in developed immigrant-receiving countries as a family collective. This is largely due to a mixed driving force of both potential economic advances and the social benefits these immigrant families can obtain by participating in a more viable labour market and well-established social system with comprehensive welfare provision. From this analysis, one can perhaps argue that the centre-periphery model that implies an enduring trajectory of migration from Global South to North (Massey et al., 1993) has not changed much regardless of many current discussions about return migration and some unconventional immigration routes from

⁷ The “one-child policy” was introduced by the Chinese government in 1979 to combat that country’s overpopulation problem. The policy decrees that a couple should have only one child and inflicts penalties if a couple has a second child. This policy was abolished in 2015.

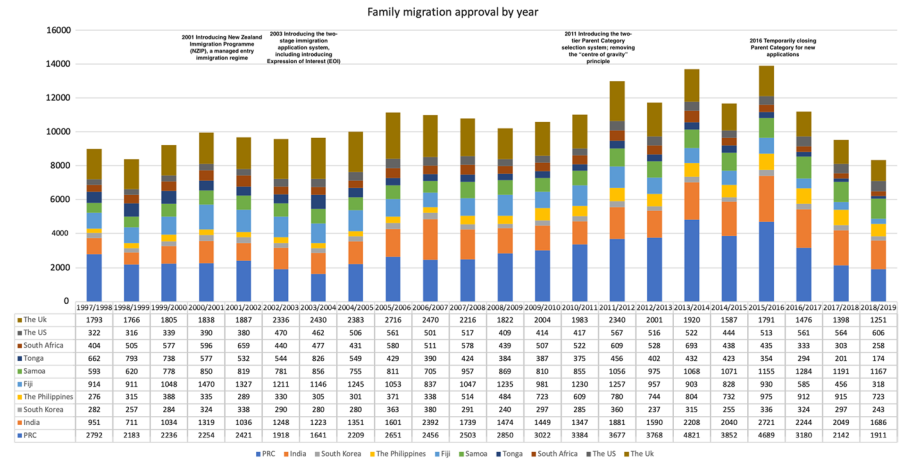


Fig. 1 Impact of immigration policy changes on family immigration. Source: Immigration New Zealand: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/statistics>. (Color figure online)

developed countries to developing countries, or from developing countries to other developing countries.

Impact of immigration policy changes on family immigration

Combining the policy review and the data analysis pursued above, Fig. 1 shows that the family immigration policy changes in NZ do impact the changing volume of family immigration.

As can be seen, China experienced a sharp drop in family immigration between 2002 and 2004 but started to climb back again around 2005/2006. The drop was mainly because of a series of immigration policy changes in 2002 and 2003 (Liu, 2018). These policy changes include, (1) An increase in the “pass” mark for the General Skilled Category (GSC), from 28 to 29, in September 2002, and then to 30 in October 2002; (2) An increase of the minimum IELTS score for the GSC from an average of 5 to 6.6 across all four bands and for the Business Category from an average of 4 to 5; (3) A compulsory requirement of a job offer issued by any NZ employer under the GSC; and (4) The introduction of the new selection system in 2003 that involved two-stages of application. These changes, especially the raised English language requirements and a job offer were big challenges for Chinese applicants to meet and subsequently resulted in reduced numbers of immigrants from China. Moreover, the overall reduction in the immigrant intake during this period also saw a decline in the volume of family immigration. In contrast, the policy tightening-up and changes had no negative influence on the immigrant intake from the UK and India. In contrast to China, the family immigration approvals for these two countries slight increased during the same time. This is perhaps because these two groups of immigrants were able to better adapt to the new policy for various reasons. The first is the linguistic advantage. While people from the UK

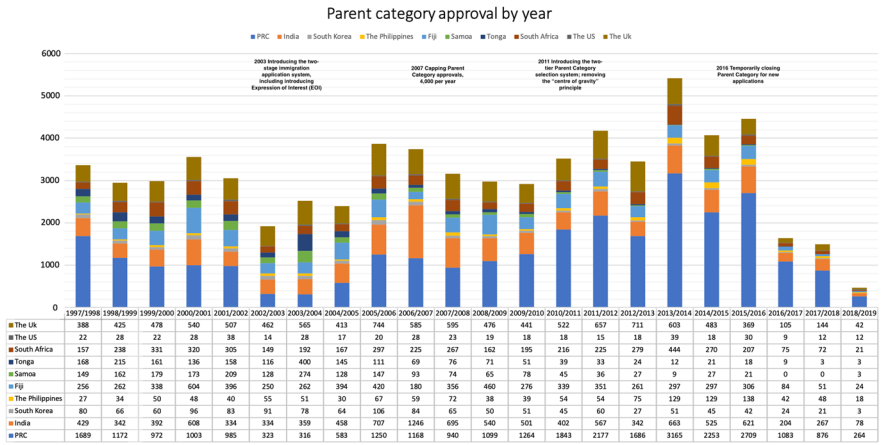


Fig. 2 Impact of immigration policy changes on parent immigration. Source: Immigration New Zealand: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/statistics>. (Color figure online)

are native English speakers, people from India also have better English proficiency given its colonisation experience with Great Britain. People from the UK, in particular, with its historical connection with NZ, have social and cultural capital that means relatively easy access to the NZ job market.

After 2006, family immigration from China increased steadily and reached its first peak in 2013/2014 and its second peak in 2015/2016. This trend coincides with the increase in the overall immigration volume in NZ (Liu, 2018). Family immigration from India shows a similar trend to China. Unlike China and India, there was no significant fluctuation in the volume of family immigration from the UK before 2016. After 2016, volumes of family immigration from all source countries declined significantly. This is due to the complete closing-off of the Parent Category in 2016, which dragged overall family immigration down.

Figure 2 shows the changing volume of parent immigration, which is largely in line with the overall family immigration trend. China is the biggest contributor to parent residence approvals. It encountered a sudden drop in the volume of immigration under the Parent Category between 2002 and 2004 but started to climb back again around 2005/2006. After 2006, the volume of parent immigration increased steadily and reached its first peak in 2013/2014, and its second peak in 2015/2016. This was followed by a significant decline after 2016. The case of India is slightly different to China. The peak of its parent immigration occurred in 2005/2006. After the peak, it has never returned to its highest level.

Conclusion and discussion

There are several important points from this analysis that warrant highlighting. Firstly, although the Skilled Category is the major immigration route for NZ immigrant intake, the importance of immigration under the Family Sponsorship Stream, especially immigration under the Parent Category, cannot be underestimated. When the neoliberal immigration policy prioritises skilled and business immigration and discourages dependents of skilled and business immigrants, including immigrants' old parents, what needs to be recognised is that the tap of family reunification in immigration is hard to stop. Family reunification is an inevitable aspect in the contemporary immigration arena because it is often constructed upon the rights of the legal insider/sponsor who has a legal tie to the immigrant-receiving country and also the moral claim of the insider/sponsor from the immigrant-sending country. Secondly, the NZ Government has tried hard to use policy adjustments to regulate and limit parent immigration into this country, and thus to control the overall immigration inflow. As shown in Fig. 2, although both the introduction of the capped Parent Category in 2007 and the two-tier selection system in 2012 helped to reduce the magnitude of immigration of older parents, they did not diminish the demand for the entry of those older parents given the continuous immigration inflow under this category. It was not until 2016, when the Parent Category was closed off to new applications, that the number of the residents approved under the Parent Category began to drop significantly. In other words, in the INZ context, only lifting the application threshold may not necessarily slow down the intake number of family immigration, unless some more straightforward strategies are applied, such as capping the annual intake number or even more drastic solutions like a temporary close-off of applications. The more important point is that changes in the financial requirements for sponsors under the Parent Category in 2012 did have an impact on the mix of people of different nationalities that gained entry. Those lifted financial requirements have significant impact on who could afford to sponsor older parents. The Pacific and refugee immigrant families who had less financial capital had been hard hit (Bedford & Liu, 2013).

The family immigration policy review shows that addressing the fiscal challenge that originated from population ageing has become a critical consideration in the making of the family reunification immigration policy in NZ. This challenge is also relevant to most Western immigrant-receiving countries that have social welfare systems providing support for the older population (Bedford & Liu, 2013). In NZ, the cost of this support is met through a mix of tax-payer funded contributions and superannuation schemes linked with employment or investment in forms of insurance. As the share of old residents in the population increases and its related health care and welfare provision grows, managing the flow of older people into the population through immigration policy-making becomes a relatively easy solution. This policy analysis shows that the policy orientation of family immigration in NZ has gone through a fundamental change throughout the years. This can be especially seen through some radical changes to the parent immigration policy. In the beginning when NZ started a neoliberal immigration policy, a certain scale of

parent immigration was allowed based on respect for people's family lives; but starting from the new millennia, NZ began to actively regulate the proportion of family immigration by giving priority to nuclear family members (i.e., spouse and dependent children), while capping resident approvals for other dependent family members, especially the older parents of adult immigrants. These changes reveal what a neoliberal immigration regime is about—that is, to focus on the economic gain from immigrants, but overlook migrants' personal and family needs. What underpins such an immigration regime is the concern for potential negative economic costs of immigration on NZ.

The neoliberal immigration policy orientation could be harmful to NZ's future immigrant intake and sustainability. Under the circumstance of globalisation, it is incontestable that NZ needs skilled and business immigrants to come with their human and financial capital to contribute to its economic growth. To not allow the immigrants' old parents to enter this country would put off many prospective immigrants' desire to come to NZ. Potentially, the most negative economic impact of continuously lifting the threshold for the application of the Parent Category could be that the immigrants might go back to their original places, or somewhere else, to ensure family responsibilities are easier to manage. This will be a loss of human and financial capital for NZ.

Comparing these research findings with research in other national contexts, a neoliberalism movement in contemporary international immigration can be found. For example, Canada, Australia, and the USA used to have a tradition of favouring family reunification including immigrants' older parents in their immigration policies (Kofman, 2004). However, recent immigration policy development in all these three countries aims to strike a balance between economic immigrants and non-economic migrants, including family and refugees. In our neighbouring country, Australia, the current share of family immigration of the total immigration plan is about 32 per cent. This share is a significant drop from the historic peak of family immigration, which comprised around 70 per cent of the total immigration intake (Larsen, 2013). Similar to NZ, capping of the parent visas was introduced by Australia in 1993, and consequently the numbers have been increasingly restricted with priority given to spouses and dependent children. In Canada, recent policy changes have also tried to tighten up family immigration by enforcing a longer processing time (especially for parents) and a complicated application system (DeShaw, 2006). The USA's family immigration system is very different. It is based on per-country caps to allow quicker reunification with families, but there is a family preference system in which parents, spouses and unmarried minor children of US citizens are ranked at the top and have no limit of visa numbers for each category. Petitioners are essential, must meet certain age and financial requirements, and must be financially responsible for their family member(s) upon arrival in the USA. Applications by other family members or sponsored by US permanent residents receive low preference (American Immigration Council, 2019).

In general, over the last two decades, the composition of the immigration programme in these Pacific rim settlement countries has shifted to favour skilled immigration over family immigration. The rationale for this shift has been to maximise economic gains that have become generally accepted as synonymous with skilled

immigration. However, a number of studies have shown that both skilled/business and family reunification immigration have a positive economic impact on host countries (Bonjour & Kraler, 2015; Larsen, 2013). Perhaps older parent immigrants may not bring immediate economic gain for a host society, but they bring emotional anchor and important social and cultural capital for their adult children and/or grandchildren, which may translate into economic opportunities later.

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Declarations

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