Racism-Housing-Wellbeing: the triangle for Chinese Immigrants in New Zealand?

Chinese man Wong Ah Poo Hoc Ting arrived in 1842 in New Zealand (NZ) in an unconventional way as the first officially-recorded Chinese immigrant. More gold miners came after paying a “poll tax”, but suffered hardship and prejudice. More Chinese have migrated to NZ since it opened its doors to skilled migrants in 1987. Many local media articles have portrayed Chinese buying up properties in Auckland and blamed Chinese for housing crisis in recent years. In 2015, the Labour Party of NZ used “Chinese sounding” names from one real estate agent’s sales figures and claimed 30% of properties were sold to Chinese, implying that the buyers were contributing to NZ's housing crisis. Conversely, Statistics NZ released data for the first time in 2018 which showed that only 3% were sold to foreign buyers. Many questions were raised about this finding, but no national registration data was available to clear the blame on Chinese.

My study looks at the housing experiences of recent Chinese immigrants in NZ using semi-structured interviews and discussions of their photos reflecting their housing journeys. NZ’s old, damp and mouldy housing stock has affected immigrants’ well-being. They lose dignity and feel depressed while staying at temporary places. They reported many reasons for moving frequently while trying to settle in NZ. Finding another rental place and shifting again caused stress. If home ownership is secured, they tend to be happier and have better well-being, but dislike on-going house maintenance work. Some have experienced discrimination when looking for rentals or purchasing their own homes. NZ media portrayals of Chinese buyers of residential properties have annoyed many Chinese immigrants; interviewees often call it racist or unfair. It is clear that housing experiences are part of Chinese immigrants’ settlement in NZ, and housing is closely related to their well-being. However, racism is still hurting them.

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