

# Exploring the role of housing in China's social transformation

Lingnan University's new Centre for Social Policy & Social Change gathers experts to uncover key challenges facing governments and households in China in today's rapidly changing world.

Earlier this June, Lingnan University launched a two day symposium together with City University of Hong Kong and Shanghai University of Finance and Economics to explore 'The Role of Housing in China's Social Transformation'.

Professor Ray Forrest from Lingnan University, with Professor Ngai Ming Yip from City University of Hong Kong, and Professor Jie Chen from Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, led a group of professors from China and around the world to discuss their findings on the fundamental subject.

The rapid development of China over the last few decades has triggered monumental changes in many aspects of social and economic lives, and housing is perhaps the domain where changes have been the most intense and far-reaching. Nonetheless, land and housing policy have been highly skewed towards homeownership and real estate interests with the rapid increase in house prices exacerbating the already worsening income and wealth gap, and housing quality between homebuyers and those who rent.

In light of this, professors of the symposium have launched investigations to critically evaluate the issue. Professor Lian Hongping from Beijing Normal University explored 'The Beijing dream: Housing differentiation and experiences of young, middle-class Beijingers', and identified key factors that younger Beijingers that are climbing the career ladder face.

"The Beijing youth face many housing challenges today. My study shows that the housing market is extremely marginalized," says Lian. "Only a handful of young Beijingers, such as those who work in the government sector, have access to public housing. Parental support and marriage also has a big impact. Those who have parental support are in an entirely different situation, while for those who do not, marriage is a common way to access their own housing," continued Lian.

Professor Zhu Jin from University of New South Wales' Faculty of Built Environment, explored the 'Policy Ambiguity and Commercial Property Converted Apartments in China'. "The uncommon homeowner

protest in Shanghai in mid 2017 which captured extensive overseas media attention really highlights the existing problem," says Zhu. "Residents were outraged by changing regulations on apartments converted from commercial buildings. Such apartments have become an important form of housing in China's major cities, and this episode of unrest really shows homeowners' concern over insecure tenure."

"Housing issues are at the heart of China's changing society and economy. The rise of home ownership has had tremendous positive impacts but has also produced new and deep inequalities. This is a complex problem which is exactly why our Centre for Social Policy and Social Change has brought the issue into the spotlight.," says Professor Forrest.



Professor Ray Forrest

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