



TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

NEW CHINESE MIGRANTS IN THAILAND AND THE PERCEIVED IMPACT ON THAI PEOPLE

Sivarin Lertpusit

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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New Chinese Migrants in Thailand and the Perceived Impact on Thai People

By Sivarin Lertpusit

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Approximately 110,000–130,000 new Chinese migrants reside in Thailand in 2022. They are comprised of five categories: entrepreneurs, employees, students, accompanying family members and lifestyle migrants.
- These migrants contribute to the Thai economy but also precipitate negative impacts as well.
- Some stay and work in Thailand illegally, and some engage in unlawful business practices.
- Five positive impacts include business cooperation, economic circulation, sources of Chinese-speaking manpower, technological transfers and a cross-cultural environment.
- Five perceived negative impacts are bad public mannerisms, occupying of local jobs, competition in business, control of businesses and tarnishing of Thailand's reputation.

New Chinese Migrants in Thailand and the Perceived Impact on Thai People

By Sivarin Lertpusit¹

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese Open Door Policy implemented in the late 1970s resulted in new patterns of Chinese migrations. Following the Going Out Policy (1999) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (2013), around 688,000 new Chinese migrants had emigrated to Southeast Asia by 2020.² The characteristics of new Chinese sojourners differ from those of traditional Overseas Chinese in that they come as more well-educated middle-income earners and adapt well to the relocation.³

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² See more information in Zhuang Guotu and Wangbo Wang, “Migration and Trade: The Role of Overseas Chinese in Economic Relations between China and Southeast Asia”, *International Journal of China Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2010): 174–93; and Leo Suryadinata and Dorcas Gan, *Concepts and Patterns of Chinese Migration, with Reference to Southeast Asia*, Trends in Southeast Asia, no. 15/2022 (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2022).

³ Gregor Benton and Hong Liu, *Diasporic Chinese Ventures: The Life and Work of Wang Gungwu* (Routledge, 2016); Pál Nyíri, *New Chinese Migrant in Europe: The Case of the Chinese Community in Hungary* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 9–34; Zhuang Guo-tu and Wang Wangbo, *Migration and Trade: The Role of Overseas Chinese in Economic Relations between China and Southeast Asia* (2010), pp. 176–83; Sylvia Ang, *Contesting Chineseness: Nationality, Class, Gender and New Chinese Migrants* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022), pp. 40–42.

The US-China trade war in 2018 and the Coronavirus outbreak in late 2019 aggravated anti-Chinese sentiments in many nations.⁴ Xenophobia⁵ against Asians rose in Europe and the United States, and along the BRI routes, resistance to the Chinese became more obvious in the domestic politics of host countries.⁶ In Central Asia, the advent of Chinese entities has been regarded to be potentially exploitative. In Singapore, newly arrived mainland Chinese are often regarded as “Others” by Singaporean Chinese.⁷

In Thailand, Sinophobic sentiments have been increasingly expressed on social media. Over the past few years, hashtags that criticize the Chinese government, such as #MilkTeaAlliance (a coalition between Thai and Taiwan youth movements), #StandingWithBright (protecting a famous Thai actor regarding the Taiwan issue), #StopMekongDam (opposing the building of power dams on the Mekong River) and #Onechina, have been introduced to connect transnational youth, democratic and human rights

⁴ Leonard Schild, Chen Ling, Jeremy Blackburn, Gianluca Stringhini, Yang Zhang, and Savvas Zannettou, “Go Eat a Bat, Chang!?: An Early Look on the Emergence of Sinophobic Behavior on Web Communities in the Face of COVID-19”, *Psychological and Behavioral Science* 56 (2022): 472–90.

⁵ Xenophobia arises from negative views towards outsiders, which are frequently the result of migration. The fundamental sense is based on the belief that one’s own country is superior to others. Locals concerned about their own prosperity in a mixed-culture community and their share of public goods may eventually perceive it as a public security danger. See more details in Anouk de Koning and Wayne Modest, “Anxious Politics in Postcolonial Europe”, *World Anthropologies* 119 (2017): 524–26; and Yakushko Oksana, “Xenophobia: Understanding the Roots and Consequences of Negative Attitudes toward Immigrants”, *The Counseling Psychologist* 37 (2009): 36–66.

⁶ Dongshu Liu and Li Shao, “Public Opinion Backlash Against China’s International Expansion”, *Journal of Contemporary China* (2021), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3789779>

⁷ See also Sebastien Peyrouse, “Discussing China: Sinophilia and Sinophobia in Central Asia”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 7 (2016) 14–23; and Sylvia Ang and Val Colic-Peisker, “Sinophobia in the Asian Century: Race, Nation and Othering in Australia and Singapore”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45 (2022): 718–37.

movements.⁸ These hashtags trended online for some time during 2019 and 2022. In addition to the unfavourable perception of China as a nation, there have been personal and news reports of unfavourable behaviour exhibited by Chinese individuals, such as inappropriate behaviour in public spaces, and aggressive job and business competition.⁹

To an extent, social media trends have affected China-Thailand ties. For instance, the Chinese embassy in Bangkok stated on the embassy's Facebook page that "the One China Principle is irrefutable [...] the recent online noises only reflect [the] bias and ignorance of [the noise] makers, and does not in any way represent the Thai government's stance or Thai people's mainstream public opinion."¹⁰

Thailand's importance to China should be recognized by virtue of the presence of traditional overseas Chinese and the growing commercial ties between the two countries over the last decade. At present, the country has over 7.5 million citizens of Chinese descent.¹¹ Regarding economic

⁸ The younger generation's opinion of Chinese is nuanced. They are liberal and individualistic and demonstrate their commitment to democracy and human rights. From their encounters with the issues of Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan, they obviously prefer democratic countries because of the ideals of political freedom and people's rights.

⁹ News reports on illegal job seizures have been appearing for years; in 2014, for instance, Thai tour guides pushed Thai police to take action against illegal Chinese guides (Wassayos Ngamkham, "Illegal Chinese Guides Threaten Thai Guides", *Bangkok Post*, 22 August 2014). In 2016, the Department of Employment arrested illegal workers in Huaykwang District. Sixteen Chinese people were captured ("Wipe out Chinese in Huaykwang for Illegal Work", *Nationtv*, 31 August 2016). Another case involved more than seven Chinese individuals working in the tourism sector in Phuket without a work permit (Eakkapop Thongtub, "Phuket Immigration Task Force Busts Wedding Photographers from China", *Phuketnews*, 10 January 2019).

¹⁰ Facebook page Chinese embassy Bangkok, 14 April 2020.

¹¹ Leo Suryadinata, "A Rising China Affects Ethnic Identities in Southeast Asia", *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 2021/74, 3 June 2021; and Sittithep Eaksittipong, "The Patriotic Thai-born Chinese: Their Historical Consciousness and Defined Democracy", *Journal of Human Science* 16 (2015): 112–57.

connections, China surpassed Japan as Thailand's most important trading partner in 2013, with a trade volume of US\$63,870 million. At US\$99,818 million, the trade volume with China in 2022 remains in the top spot.¹²

Based on the ISEAS survey in 2021, Thais perceived China as the most influential economic power (84.7 per cent) and as possessing the most political and strategic influence (58.8 per cent). However, Thai perceptions of Chinese influence are more of apprehension than welcome.¹³ The ASEAN-China survey 2022 conducted by the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI) about perceptions of China's influence revealed that 54 per cent of Thais were "concerned" about China's influence and only 25 per cent considered it "welcome".¹⁴

These survey findings approximate findings made in this study (average score 4.5 out of 5). The author conducted in-depth interviews with local Thais and Chinese migrants. The qualitative research approach is used in the study. While data from government bureaus, research papers, credible news agencies, observation and interviews are the primary sources of information, the findings are based on interviews conducted in 2017–22 with thirty Chinese migrants, and twenty-two Thais who are associated with the new Chinese. These include businessmen, representatives from business associations in tourism, agriculture and real estate, government officers and researchers.

Additionally, an online survey of 160 Thai citizens was done to assess the general consensus of Thais towards new Chinese migrants. Thais first and foremost highlight the economic benefits arising from the presence

¹² The Office of the Permanent Secretarial, Ministry of Commerce, "Statistics on Thailand's Trade", <https://tradereport.moc.go.th/Report/Default.aspx?Report=TradeThCountryTrade> (accessed 25 December 2022).

¹³ ASEAN Studies Centre, "The State of Southeast Asia Survey Report 2021", ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, 10 February 2021, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-State-of-SEA-2021-v2.pdf>

¹⁴ "ASEAN-China Survey 2022", Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI), <https://www.aseanchinasurvey.com/section2a/satisfaction-level-on-the-overall-people-to-people-connection-between-asean-and-china> (accessed 20 November 2022).

of new Chinese migrants. However, concerns over economic and social consequences are also expressed, along with suggestions on how local business owners and government bodies can help alleviate the issue.

CATEGORIES OF NEW CHINESE MIGRANTS

New Chinese migrants in Thailand, unlike the traditional overseas Chinese, are perceived as transient and temporary. They are more diverse in terms of education, social status and economic background. Immigration Bureau data in Table 1 show that there are 110,000–130,000 Chinese migrants in Thailand in 2022. Foreigners typically enter Thailand on a tourist visa and then extend their stay by applying for other visas based on their intended purpose of stay, such as retirement, work permit or investment.¹⁵

In terms of location (Figure 1), Chinese people who extend their visas tend to do so in major cities such as Bangkok (18,142), Buriram (9,623), Chonburi (8,409), and Chiang Mai (8,351). Be that as it may, a substantial number of Chinese renewed their visas in the border provinces such as in Tak (10,563), Nan (4,105), Payao (4,097), and Chiang Rai (3,148).

This paper categorizes new Chinese migrants in Thailand into five groups: entrepreneurs, employees, students, accompanying visa holders and lifestyle migrants. While some groups of new migrants, such as students, employees and entrepreneurs, integrate into Thai society by learning the Thai language, others, particularly the parents of overseas students, do not.¹⁶

¹⁵ The extension visa procedure necessitates the submission of additional documents to ensure compliance with Thai legislation. For instance, those working in Thailand must be approved by the government and fit the quota regulation (four local employers per one foreign work permit with the minimum specific employment rate).

¹⁶ Aranya Siriphon and Fanzura Banu, “The Nature of Recent Chinese Migration to Thailand”, *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 2021/168, 22 December 2021.

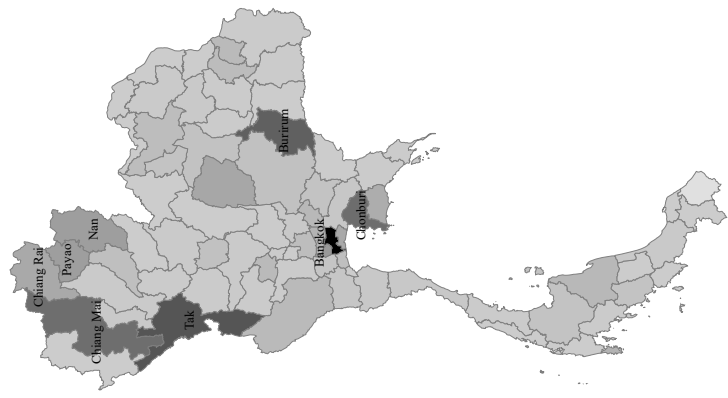
Table 1: Visa Extensions for Chinese, 2019–22: Reasons and Numbers*

Year	Retire	By-Laws	Travel	Work	Dependent	Medical	Study	Labour	Invest	Teach	Total
2019	5,864	1,197	41,814	17,633	11,047	606	29,032	7	6,609	3,414	117,223
2020	5,470	10,062	16,858	16,320	10,132	13,043	18,098	5	6,093	2,133	98,214
2021	4,529	22,740	2,719	12,754	9,636	3,804	8,416	6	8,357	1,842	74,803
2022	4,054	64,853	4,570	9,614	7,725	564	9,673	3	7,809	1,947	110,812

Note: *January to September 2022.

Source: Immigration Bureau, 2022.

Figure 1: Concentration of Visa Extensions on Chinese Passports, by Province, 2022



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Source: Mapping by the author based on data from Immigration Bureau, 2022.

The first category is small company owners, traders, and medium and large investors. These are all examples of entrepreneurs. There were the first to migrate to Thailand following the Chinese Open Door Policy, in search of investment and business opportunities. In fact, Thailand has become attractive for Chinese entrepreneurs in sectors such as tourism, medical services, fruit and agriculture production as well as real estate. Chinese tourists have increased dramatically from 4.64 million tourists in 2014 to 11.1 million tourists in 2019 (28 per cent of foreign visitors), generating revenues of over US\$17,120 million.¹⁷ China remains the most important market in agriculture, with an export proportion of 35.22 per cent.¹⁸ These businesses target Chinese consumers and eventually lure Chinese investors to Thailand.

Currently, 21,246 Chinese investors have invested in Thai legal entities in Bangkok, Chonburi, Chiang Mai and Phuket (valued at US\$13,785 million).¹⁹ In the meantime, large-scale investment through the Board of Investment (BOI) stands at seventy-two projects worth US\$995 million in 2022.²⁰ Most Chinese investors come to Thailand intending to start a business, but some start microbusinesses while attending university there.²¹

¹⁷ The Office of the Permanent Secretarial, Ministry of Tourism Statistic, “Revenue from International Tourists in 2019”, 28 June 2020, <https://data.go.th/dataset/tourism-receipts-2019> (accessed 25 December 2022).

¹⁸ Department of Trade Negotiation, “Exporting of Agricultural Products to FTA Countries in the First Quarter 2021”, May 2021, <https://rb.gy/xedjv7> (accessed 7 December 2022); and Office of Agricultural Economics, “Foreign Trade Database”, <https://rb.gy/xedjv7> (accessed 7 December 2022).

¹⁹ Department of Business Development, “Foreign Investment in Thai Registered Enterprises”, <https://datawarehouse.dbd.go.th/index> (accessed 20 December 2022).

²⁰ Board of Investment, “Foreign Direct Investment Statistics 2022 (January to September)”, <https://www.boi.go.th/upload/content/Summary9mth2022.pdf> (accessed 20 November 2022).

²¹ Interviews with ten Chinese entrepreneurs (Anonymous), Bangkok, Thailand, July–September 2017.

The second category is employees who work in businesses, industries, schools, government agencies and others.²² Some attend Thai educational institutions and are fluent in Thai, while others work for Chinese organizations and businesses, as teaching volunteers, interpreters in hospitals or shopping malls as well as engineers or labourers in Chinese construction projects. Some studied or worked as teaching volunteers in Thailand before deciding later to stay longer. The motivations for working in Thailand vary. In my interviews, for example, Ann and Aum wanted to prove their competence and worthiness in their respective professions, Ling stated that he left China due to the competitive pressure in Chinese society. At the same time, Sing Sing and Seal chose to reside in Thailand due to attractive pull factors—a less stressful lifestyle, a liberal capitalist economy and society, no restrictions on purchasing automobiles and properties, affordable living expenses, appropriate public goods and accessibility to health services.

Students in elementary, secondary, vocational and higher education, as well as those in informal study programmes, comprise the third group. As a result of the Thai government's promotion of the Chinese language and its support of collaborations between Chinese and Thai institutions, a significant number of Chinese travel to Thailand to enrol as students. According to the Immigration Bureau, the number of Chinese students increased from 5,743 in 2012 to 29,032 in 2019 before dropping to 9,673 in 2022. Chiang Mai (3,172), Bangkok and its outskirt provinces (3,241), Phuket (349), Chiang Rai (337), Nakhon Ratchasima (284), and Khon Kaen (255) are the most popular destinations for Chinese students. Students at the tertiary level are the most numerous.

The fourth group includes accompanying visa holders. These stay with family members residing in Thailand and include parents of international school students. These parents send their children to Thailand to pursue

²² Interviews with nine Chinese employees (Anonymous), Bangkok, Thailand, July–September 2017 and eleven Chinese employees (Anonymous), Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, Thailand, August–October 2020.

an internationally recognized degree. As evident from my interviews,²³ their preference for international schools in Chiang Mai is based on the “international” environment the schools provide, the academic curricula and the low fees.

The fifth category is “lifestyle migration”. Those placed here include many who moved to Thailand for reasons unrelated to work or school. There are many Chinese retirees in several provinces around Thailand such as Chonburi (1,158), Bangkok (903), Chiang Mai (383) and Chiang Rai (132). Chinese migrants with Thai retirement visas increased from 1,027 in 2012 to 5,864 in 2019, followed by a slight reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic (4,054 in 2022).

Furthermore, the number of retirees is expected to increase following the latest long-term visa initiative (ten-year visa) launched by the Board of Investment in September 2022. In response to the increasing number of Chinese applicants for elite cards (luxury long-term visa privilege), the recent policy targets wealthy Chinese retirees and digital nomads.²⁴ However, some in the fourth and fifth groups do aspire to relocate to other countries should their children’s education and living conditions in Thailand not meet their expectations.

While most new migrants apply for the correct visa types, some of them reside and work illegally in Thailand. In the case of the Chinese, 7,656 of them were arrested in 2014 for such crimes (an increase from 4,224 in 2010). As such, the number of new Chinese migrants cannot be precisely stated because of inadequate data. The following section explores the illegal practices that feed the negative perception of new Chinese migrants in Thailand.

²³ Interviews with Melody, Echo and Su (Anonymous), Chinese parents who accompanied their child to attend international schools in Chiang Mai, Chiang Mai, Thailand, August–October 2020.

²⁴ “Kon Jeen HaeKo ‘Elite Card’ Thai Puemkun Lung COVID rabadralogsong Nai Jeen [More Chinese Applied for “Elite Card” after the Second Wave of COVID-19 in PRC]”, VoiceTV, 27 June 2020, <https://voicetv.co.th/read/dDr1y-6V2> (accessed 15 February 2023).

NEW CHINESE IN “GREY AREAS”

Tourist and student visas are often abused. A study visa only requires proof of enrolment into an accredited academic institution such as a university, public/private school or language institute. According to a news report, and as revealed in interviews with new Chinese migrants and Thai entrepreneurs, several incidents of people using student visas to work and manage businesses in Thailand have been exposed among construction engineers and managers.²⁵ Some work illegally even while only holding tourist visas. My informants mention that illegal workers include²⁶ Chinese construction labourers who generally are confined to their worksites, merchants who operate in many marketplaces—such as Yaowarat and Huaykwang, also known respectively as the traditional and new Chinatown in Bangkok—and traditional doctors who primarily registered for tourist visas and then renew them on a regular basis.

Some foreigners also possess an official Thai ID card obtained through illicit means, a practice facilitated by corrupt government personnel in remote areas²⁷ and in provinces where ethnic communities are in the process of obtaining Thai citizenship. For example, a Chinese tour guide was arrested in 2019 for having a forged ID card, and a similar case was uncovered involving a Chinese businessman in October 2022.²⁸ Some

²⁵ Interviews with ten Chinese entrepreneurs (Anonymous), Bangkok, Thailand, July–September 2017.

²⁶ Interviews with Wee (Anonymous), a Thai translator working in a Chinese factory in Prajeenburi, Bangkok, 8 October 2017 and Qing (Anonymous), a Chinese person living near Bangrak community, Bangkok, 19 September 2017.

²⁷ The reported case was “Chiang Mai Officials Steal Thai Identity for Chinese Woman”, *Thaiger*, 14 December 2022, <https://thethaiger.com/news/national/chiang-mai-officials-steal-thai-identity-for-chinese-woman> (accessed 5 June 2023).

²⁸ “Jab Guide Sao Jeen Suam Bat Prachachon Plom [Arrested Fraudulent Tour Guide on Thai ID Card]”, Thai Channel 8, 23 May 2019, https://www.thaich8.com/news_detail/81983 (accessed 8 November 2022); and “TM Jab Chaojeen Plom Batt [Immigration Bureau Arrested Chinese Fraud on Thai ID Card]”, *Matichon*, 9 November 2022, https://www.matichon.co.th/news-monitor/news_3664659 (accessed 12 November 2022).

abuse other laws by engaging in business nominations and business scams.

Business nominations by foreigners violate the Foreign Business Act (1999) in using Thais to hold shares on their behalf.²⁹ Generally, nominee businesses are ones whose owners have someone else register the company on their behalf, typically to avoid scrutiny and to attain privileges such as land possession. Politicians, government officials and foreign investors are the most likely to engage in such illegal practices.

In 2022, the Ministry of Commerce's Department of Business Development investigated and found that 148 businesses had been accused of being business nominees. In October 2022, some Chinese businessmen were charged with such nominations involving nightclubs in Bangkok and Chonburi provinces. They were also accused of drug distribution and gambling.³⁰ In fact, business nominations have been practised for a long time, initially in the fruit trading and tourism sectors.³¹ The emergence of these "grey market" businesses and unlawful activities has had a huge impact on the local economy.

²⁹ See more in Press Release 2022, Business Governance Division, 22 November 2022, https://www.dbd.go.th/news_view.php?nid=469423193 (accessed 10 February 2023).

³⁰ Greg Raymond, "Chinese Illicit Influence Scandals in Thailand", East Asia Forum, 24 December 2022, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2022/12/24/chinese-illicit-influence-scandals-in-thailand/> (accessed 27 December 2022); Wassayos Ngamkham, "Tuhao Nominee Grilled", *Bangkok Post*, 7 December 2022, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2454465/tuhao-nominee-grilled> (accessed 27 December 2022).

³¹ See more in Enze Han, *Non-State Chinese Actors and Their Impact on Relations Between China and Mainland Southeast Asia*, Trends in Southeast Asia, no. 1/2021 (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021); Watcharee Srikham, "Impact of Chinese Traders (Lhong) on Longan Farmers in Transition: A Case Study of Sripradu Village, Maepang Sub-district, Phrao District, Chiangmai Province", *Journal of Humanity and Social Science Ubonratchathani University* 10 (2019): 125–62. More data are from an interview with a community head who is the owner of longan farms and longan small market, Lamphun, Thailand, 22 August 2020.

IMPACT OF NEW CHINESE MIGRANTS ON THE ECONOMY

Perceived Positive Impacts

In the survey on Thai attitudes towards China conducted by the author, 63.3 per cent of respondents strongly agreed that China is a country with a high potential for economic growth. Eighty per cent agreed that China offers important opportunities for Thailand in the current global trade scenario, which is hampered by both trade conflicts and violence in numerous places. The top selected positive attitudes towards China were the growth of the digital economy (55.6 per cent), technological advancement (49.4 per cent), and economic development (46.9 per cent). Thais see the influx of Chinese migrants as beneficial, and at least five positive outcomes were most commonly cited during the interviews. These are increased business cooperation, greater activity in the local economy, more sources for the Chinese-speaking workforce, the sharing of innovative technologies, and the promotion of cross-cultural understanding.

Thai entrepreneurs would rather tap into the benefits of doing business in the Chinese market than worry about the growing presence of Chinese investors in the country. During my interviews, informants from the real estate, fruit processing, and tourism industries³² highlighted the mutual benefits of business partnerships with foreigners. They mentioned that exporting to China necessitates the involvement of Chinese business

³² Interviews with Maeluang (Anonymous), a longan farmer and owner of a small longan market, Lamphun, Thailand, 22 August 2020; Somsak (Anonymous), a dried fruit factory's manager, Chiangmai, Thailand, 22 August 2020; Kritsada Poodaeng, Director of Fruit Entrepreneur in Northern Thailand, Zoom, 26 November 2022; Tayat Kaijanajittra, Director of Rayong Real Estate Association, Zoom, 6 December 2022; Meesak Chunharakchot, Director of Chonburi Real Estate Association, Zoom, 7 December 2022; Phum (Anonymous), representative of Phuket Tourism Association, Zoom, 18 November 2022; Satianpong, an entrepreneur in hotel business in Phuket, Zoom, 19 November 2022.

partners who are better plugged into the Chinese economy and culture. In addition, Chinese investors potentially assist local entrepreneurs in financing product designs that meet the taste of Chinese consumers.

One example is the fruit processing industry where Thai entrepreneurs have demonstrated that Chinese businessmen understand the Chinese market clearly, and Thai exporters do not. According to interviews with factory owners and the Association of Northern Fruit Industry,³³ Chinese consumers value most the consistency of quality and sweetness of their dried fruit products. Unfortunately, the traditional dehydrating machines utilized in Thai small- and medium-sized factories are incapable of meeting this Chinese criterion. This is something that Sino-Thai joint venture factories that invest in advanced machinery suited for mass production can do. They successfully manufacture products based on standards set by Chinese consumers.

Secondly, Chinese migrants have helped stimulate the local economy and create new job opportunities. Expats, retirees, digital nomads and the parents of international school students are all important consumers in the Thai economy.³⁴ The money they spend each day helps the local economy and spurs related industries. For instance, according to the manager of a private language school named OKLS, the need for Thai language classes among Chinese expats working in electric vehicle industries, financial institutions and e-commerce companies has been rising rapidly in recent years. Additionally, the health and lifestyle industries also gain from the presence of Chinese retirees and digital nomads who prefer to extend their stays in Thailand due to the high quality yet low cost of the country's medical and wellness services.

³³ Interviews with four entrepreneurs in the fruit industry, Thailand, August 2020 and November 2022.

³⁴ Interviews with twenty new Chinese migrants, Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, Thailand, July–September 2017 and September–October 2020; a school director, Payap International School, Chiangmai, Thailand, 30 September 2020; Panida Wettap, OKLS manager (language school), Zoom, 29 November 2022; two scholars (anonymous), professors in a public university, Thailand, November 2022.

The third advantage is that new Chinese migrants in Thailand provide a ready supply of Chinese-speaking workers, which greatly benefits employers. There has been a rise in demand for Chinese-speaking educators, translators and intermediaries, as the country's economy grows closer to China. Initially, the lack of proficient Chinese-speaking workers was an issue in Thailand. Employers solved the problem by establishing direct contacts with educational institutions. For example, Sombunwit School, a trilingual school, and King Power signed an MOU with the Faculty of Arts at Huaqiao University to annually recruit trainees and Chinese teachers. Furthermore, the informants stated that they prefer Chinese students because of their fluency in dealing with Chinese customers and their ability to adapt to Thai culture. Meanwhile, some businesses prefer to employ Chinese to serve their Chinese clients. The medical and legal services require a native and well-trained translator. The readily available Chinese workforce in Thailand reduces the need to import skilled Chinese labour.³⁵

Fourth is the advanced technological transfers between private and government enterprises. The property development industry benefits from Sino-Thai joint venture construction projects through the transfer of advanced construction technology and innovations in materials brought from China. Meanwhile, government-to-government projects promote technology and knowledge transfer, such as the introduction of electric vehicles (EV), electronic commerce (e-commerce) and high-speed trains. The Chinese government and the Ministry of Education have also boosted their cooperation with Thai academic institutions. For example, the Banpai Vocational School and the Wuhan Railway Vocational College of Technology have teamed up to offer a joint curriculum in railroad logistics and system administration. Another example is the

³⁵ Interview with Vitchuda, a trilingual school manager, Bangkok, Thailand, 28 September 2017; Min (anonymous), HR manager of a shopping mall targeted Chinese customer, Bangkok, Thailand, 18 September 2017; and Watcharin, a Chinese exchange programme coordinator, Huaqiao University, Bangkok, Thailand, 4 September 2017.

establishment of a master's degree in Thai-China digital technology e-commerce between Chiang Mai University and its Confucius Institute.

The final advantage is that increased interactions between Thais and Chinese improve mutual understanding and contribute to international integration. Supported by *Hanban*, Chinese teaching volunteers abroad play an essential role in teaching the Chinese language and promoting greater cultural understanding. There were 15,485 Chinese volunteers deployed across Thailand before COVID-19. Individual Chinese who live, work or study in Thailand also serve as cultural ambassadors for their home country. In addition, they contribute to the creation of a global environment and to new standards for the community. For instance, the director of Payap International School in Chiang Mai³⁶ asserts that Chinese parents are exceptionally involved in the school's activities. Meanwhile, Chinese students' active attitudes towards learning and their strong academic performance contribute positively to the overall learning atmosphere in the school.

Perceived Negative Impacts

Despite the positive aspects, Thais are cognizant of the drawbacks of the influx of new Chinese migrants. The source of these negative attitudes, to some extent, pertains to the illegal activities of some Chinese. This section illustrates the negative impacts in five areas: social discrimination, job grabbing, business competition, business dominance and damage to Thailand's reputation.

Improper social mannerisms of Chinese—both long and short stayers—are the first mentioned factor that contributes to discrimination against them in Thai society. According to my survey respondents, the reason for their negative attitude towards Chinese is in terms of their

³⁶ Interviews with a school director, Payap International school, Chiangmai, Thailand, 30 September 2020, and with Melody, Echo and Su (Anonymous), Chinese parents who accompanied their child to attend international schools in Chiang Mai, August–October 2020.

public behaviour (3.09 of 5). This result corresponds with the dislikes posted on social media such as overtaking queues, being noisy and untidy, and being disrespectful of Thai culture.³⁷ Instances of Chinese scrambling to collect food from a buffet tray, as well as a Chinese woman who expressed her discontent by exhibiting childlike behaviour and writhing on the ground while in a police station.³⁸ Such clumsy public displays disrupt social discipline in public spaces and, to some extent, destabilize social norms. The belief that the pandemic spread from China has made the situation much worse.

The fear of Thais losing their jobs to the Chinese is the second drawback. Recruitment in many competitive industries, including tourism, retail and education has been found to favour Chinese nationals over Thai nationals. For example, Chinese travel businesses allegedly continue to use Chinese nationality tour guides,³⁹ which is illegal. The occupation of a tour guide is 1 of 39 jobs that only Thai citizens can legally partake in.⁴⁰ As a result, some locals consider this as proof that Chinese people are indeed snatching Thai jobs.

³⁷ Several public posts were published on the Pantip web board, a well-known platform for Thai people, containing keywords such as Chinese etiquette, spitting, no queuing, and loud noises. The aforementioned subjects were also covered by news agencies, for instance, the Manager Online's 18 October 2006 report titled "Unveiling the Manner of Chinese People" (<https://mgronline.com/china/detail/9490000129913>) and the article titled "The Old Politics and the Negative Perception on Chinese Behaviour" by *Matichon* (https://www.matichon.co.th/politics/news_908015), 7 April 2018.

³⁸ PPTV, "Chinese Competing for Shrimp Buffet in a Hotel in Thailand", 27 May 2016. <https://shorturl.at/hxE05> (accessed 3 June 2023); *Morning News*, "Arrested the Head of a Chinese Gangster", 11 April 2023, <https://shorturl.at/hxE05> (accessed 3 June 2023).

³⁹ Thaipublica, "Associations of Chinese (language) Tour Guide Gather to Drive the Protection on Illegal Foreign Guide", 12 April 2016, <https://thaipublica.org/2016/04/anti-chinese-guide/> (accessed 5 June 2023).

⁴⁰ Decree on Prohibited Occupations, 1979, Ministry of Labour, https://www.mol.go.th/employee/occupation_prohibited (accessed 16 December 2022).

Wage differences between Chinese-educated Thais and Chinese individuals reflect the competition between Thais and new Chinese migrants. Thais who graduate with Chinese-language degrees often earn between THB18,000 to THB25,000 a month (US\$530–US\$735). A Chinese graduate, on the other hand, can expect to earn between THB22,000 and THB30,000 (US\$647–US\$882), according to my survey and comparisons across job-hunting platforms.⁴¹ In addition, the labour market is populated by Chinese who receive subsidies from Chinese agencies, for example, to be volunteer teachers.

The third unfavourable impact is the intense commercial rivalry from the increasing number of small Chinese firms, the use of nomination, extension of business networks and imbalanced advancements in technology. In comparison to other foreign investors, Chinese entrepreneurs invest in smaller-sized firms and these directly compete with local small-medium entrepreneurs.⁴² As noted earlier, some Chinese businesses use Thai nationals as “nominees” in their illegal operations to bypass restrictions and take advantage of the benefits available to Thai citizens. Furthermore, Chinese businessmen are viewed as competitors due to their expertise in corporate operations, networking and innovativeness in cutting-edge technologies. Tourism and e-commerce are industries where Chinese enterprises have an advantage over Thai entrepreneurs. Currently, Chinese visitors to Thailand can utilize Chinese

⁴¹ Sivarin Lertpusit, “Migratory Factors and Patterns among New Chinese Migrants in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, Thailand”, *Journal of Humanity and Social Science Ubonratchathani University* 13, no. 2 (July–December 2022): 137–66.

⁴² The Department of Business Development reports that Chinese entrepreneurs rank first (21,246 enterprises) based on the number of foreign shareholders in Thai companies, followed by Japanese entrepreneurs (10,160 enterprises) and Singapore shareholders (6,775 enterprises) Department of Business Development, “Foreign Investment in Thai Registered Enterprises”, <https://datawarehouse.dbd.go.th/index> (accessed 20 December 2022).

applications such as Alipay,⁴³ which promotes Chinese company clusters. Small-medium Thai enterprises lack these resources and contacts to compete. Another case occurs in the e-commerce industry where the Chinese government promotes Cross-Border E-Commerce (CBEC) as a pathway to facilitate online trade between China and ASEAN.⁴⁴ Additionally, offshore warehousing and logistic advancements have enabled Chinese online traders to out-compete Thai merchants.⁴⁵

The fourth negative impact is the domination of “Chinese” money in the tourism and agriculture industries, where business nomination is also prevalent. The dried longan industry is a prominent case study for this. According to prior studies and my interviews with entrepreneurs in the fruit industries, Chinese merchants already control more than half of the fruit trading activities in the Chanthaburi and Chiang Mai provinces. Moreover, they typically have extensive trade networks in the Chinese market, which consequently allow for their domination of the fresh longan trade and price control.⁴⁶

⁴³ Somruedi Banchongduang, “Alipay Predicts Jump in Mobile Payments”, *Bangkok Post*, 2 February 2023, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2511241/alipay-predicts-jump-in-mobile-payments> (accessed 3 June 2023).

⁴⁴ Cao Li and Wang Qianzheng, “Robust Cross-border E-commerce Cooperation”, *Beijing Review*, 18 July 2022, https://www.bjreview.com/Opinion/Voice/202207/t20220718_800301129.html (accessed 3 June 2023).

⁴⁵ Aranya Siriphon, Pagon Gatchalee, and Jiangyu Li, “China’s Cross-Border E-Commerce: Opportunities and New Challenges of Thailand”, *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 10 (2021): 1–14.

⁴⁶ Committee on the Commerce, Industry and Labour, Secretariat of the Senate, *Domination of Foreign Capital in Fruit Market in Chanthaburi Province* (Bangkok, 2016) https://www.senate.go.th/document/Ext11833/11833834_0003.PDF (accessed 31 October 2022); Watcharee Srikham, “Impact of Chinese Traders (Lhong) on Longan Farmers in Transition: A Case Study of Sripradu Village, Maepang Sub-district, Phrao District, Chiangmai Province”, *Journal of Humanity and Social Science, Ubonratchathani University* 10 (2019): 125–62.

Tourism is another heavily monopolized sector. The increase in Chinese tourists in Thailand has pulled in Chinese investments. Some Chinese businesses conduct unlawful zero-dollar travel tours to Thailand. As a result, Chinese tourists are forced to acquire or spend money on pricey goods or services provided by Chinese tour enterprises. The money in tourism therefore mostly benefits Chinese business alliances that run hotels, restaurants, buses, boats, sightseeing tour agencies, souvenir stores and even souvenir-manufacturing enterprises.⁴⁷

Another area with increased Chinese capital flow is real estate. The Chinese have the ability to buy a large number of condominiums in Thailand. Between 2018 and 2022, Chinese property owners in Thailand accounted for an average of 55.3 per cent of all foreigners holding condos in Thailand. Due to this surge in demand, the average price of condominiums in Bangkok has risen from THB48,000 per square metre in 2001 to THB128,600 in 2021.⁴⁸ Chinese people not only buy real estate but also invest in real estate in major cities including Bangkok, Chonburi, Phuket, Chiang Mai and Surat Thani. They are the third-largest foreign investors in real estate-related industries in Thailand, after Japan and Singapore. Increasing real estate prices and a rise in Chinese investment in the real estate sector made ownership more difficult for Thais.

Fifth, illegal tactics such as zero-dollar tourism which is practically operated by Chinese and Thai business nominees have harmed Thailand's reputation. The nominated enterprises operating in Thailand are wrongly recognized as Thai, under Thai law. This is especially crucial when complaints are made by tourists about the improper mannerisms and behaviour of "Thai" companies. There are stories about zero-dollar

⁴⁷ Chairuk Kaewprommarn, "The Problems of Low Cost Tourism and Its Impacts to Thailand", *National Defence Studies Institute Journal* 4 (2015): 38–50. More information came from interviewing mentioned tourism enterprises and associations.

⁴⁸ Statistics from Real Estate Information Center, <https://www.reic.or.th/> and Data Warehouse by the Department of Business Development, <https://datawarehouse.dbd.go.th/index> (accessed 12 July 2023).

tours forcing Chinese clients to buy pricey souvenirs, and these have developed scepticism about Thai businessmen and their manipulative sales tactics. Another case that hurts Thailand's reputation was the boat disaster in Phuket in 2018. The disaster was caused by boats being overloaded with disregard to storm precautions, and in violation of safety regulations. A total of forty-seven Chinese tourists died.⁴⁹ The Thai vice prime minister blamed Chinese tour operators for the accident and for using Thai nominees to legalize their business. The statement went viral and resulted in a precipitous drop in Chinese travellers to Phuket in the following months.⁵⁰

In summary, the attitudes of native Thais towards Chinese migrants stem from a variety of factors. The positive component stems from their ability to strengthen the local economy and promote multicultural integration. At the same time, unlawful practices and business competitiveness by some of them have produced animosities against them.

More Chinese individuals will move to Thailand both temporarily and permanently as a consequence of internal changes in China's social structure, slowing economic growth after COVID-19 and a more welcoming policy of foreigners in Thailand.

To maximize the advantages to Thai society and mitigate the negative impact that comes with the influx of new Chinese migrants, Thai people and Thailand's state organizations must adapt swiftly. Government agencies must help local businesses improve their competencies and improve their transparency and efficiency.

⁴⁹ *Bangkok Post*, "Prawit Blames Tour Operators for Boat Disaster, 10 Still Missing", 9 July 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1500414/prawit-blames-tour-operators-for-boat-disaster-10-still-missing> (accessed 20 February 2023).

⁵⁰ John Reed, "Tourism Was a Powerful Economic Engine in Thailand. Then a Boat Full of Chinese Sank", *Financial Times*, 23 August 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2019-08-22/tourism-was-a-powerful-economic-engine-in-thailand-then-a-boat-full-of-chinese-sank> (accessed 6 June 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on immigration data, there were 110,000–130,000 new Chinese migrants in Thailand in 2022. This paper has categorized them as businessmen, employees, retirees and digital nomads, students, and family members. They are more particularly settled in Bangkok, Chonburi, Rayong, Phuket, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Tak, Buriram and Khon Kaen.

Among these groups are those who may be classified as “grey zone” migrants. These, to an extent, engage in illegal activities such as visa fraud and criminal activities like drug distribution and gambling.

In general, Thais perceive new Chinese migrants as both neutral and beneficial. According to the results of surveys conducted by ISEAS, FPCI and the author, Thais have a favourable attitude towards China, economically and culturally.

The study considers both the perceived positive and negative impact of new Chinese migrants. The positive benefits to Thailand lie in Sino-Thai corporate cooperation, heightened economic activity, technology transfers, availability of Chinese-speaking workers, and cultural interactions. On the other hand, the negative impact of this migration is seen in terms of job grabbing, increased business competitiveness, undesirable social behaviour, business domination and Thailand’s reputation as a tourism hub.

Finally, corruption in Thailand’s bureaucratic structure and the country’s loose legislation are often commented upon.

LISTS OF INTERVIEWEES

Note that while interviewees consented to the inclusion of their personal data and interview content, interviewees' real names have been concealed to protect informants' privacy. Consequently, unless the persons are public figures and consented to their names and positions being mentioned, pseudonyms have been used.

Name/Anonymous	Occupation	Location	Date
<i>Thai National</i>			
Raqhiri Chumhapantarak	Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Suan Dusit University	Bangkok	21 August 2016
Linda Suwarndee	Vice-director of International Affairs, Kasem Bundit University	Bangkok	5 April 2017
Watcharin (Anon)	Chinese exchange programme coordinator, a university	Bangkok	4 September 2017
Jittapa Chaiyapanya	Head of Thai language department and lecturer, Burapha University	Chonburi	4 September 2017
Pornitip Kaiboribun	Director of International Student Education Center, Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University	Nakhon Pathom	7 September 2017

continued on next page

Name/Anonymous	Occupation	Location	Date
<i>Thai National</i>			
Min (Anon)	HR manager of a shopping mall targeted Chinese customer	Bangkok	18 September 2017
Wiyada Nimsombun	School manager, Somboonvit School (trilingual school)	Bangkok	28 September 2017
Wee (Anon)	Thai translator in a Chinese factory in Prajeenburi	Bangkok	8 October 2017
Maeluang (Anon)	Longan farmer and owner of a small longan market	Lamphun	22 August 2020
Somsak (Anon)	Dried fruit factory's manager	Chiang Mai	22 August 2020
Anu and Tom (Anon)	Representatives from Chiang Mai Tourism Council and Northern Tourism Association	Chiang Mai	29 August and 24 September 2020
Narvinder Abuja	School director, Nakompayap International School	Chiang Mai	30 September 2020
Chatchai	President of Chiang Rai Industrial Council	Chiang Rai	9 October 2020
Kritsada Poodaeng	Director of Fruit Entrepreneur in Northern Thailand	Zoom	26 November 2022
Phum (Anon)	Representative of Phuket Tourism Association	Zoom	18 November 2022

Satianpong (Anon)	Entrepreneur in the hotel business in Phuket	Zoom	19 November 2022
Panida Wettap	OKLS manager (language school)	Zoom	29 November 2022
Bin and Aim (Anon)	Lecturers in a public university	Zoom	6–7 December 2022
Tayyat Kaijanajittra	Director of Rayong Real Estate Association	Zoom	6 December 2022
Meesak Chunharakchot	Director of Chonburi Real Estate Association	Zoom	7 December 2022
<i>New Chinese migrant</i>			
Lee, Xin, Quan, Yu, Min (Anon)	Chinese teachers	Bangkok	June–July 2017
Dong, Lin, See, Jin, Ann, Qu, Lim, Qee, Hong, Eric, Susan, Frey, Adel, Zoon (Anon)	Chinese entrepreneurs and employees	Bangkok	June–July 2017
Alex (Anon)	A Chinese government agency in the Chinese embassy in Bangkok	Bangkok	10 September 2017
Qing (Anon)	Chinese person living near Bangrak	Bangkok	19 September 2017
Bing, Michel, Waren, Tina, John, Tong, Peat, Aum, Huang (Anon)	Chinese entrepreneurs and employees	Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai	August–November 2020

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