

Adaptation to Thai Citizenship: A Case Study of Thai-Chinese Yunnan, Mae Fah Laung District, Chiang Rai, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Chinese Yunnan migrated into Thailand through Myanmar for different reasons, and have settled in mountainous areas in northern Thailand especially Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand. **Objective:** The study aimed to understand the development and adaptation to the new environment and obtaining Thai citizenship among the Chinese Yunnan. **Methods:** A validated question guideline was used for gathering the information and an in-depth interview was done with 24 key informants including male and female of different age categories. **Results:** We found that after passing through the 3rd generation, Chinese Yunnan have become Thai-Chinese Yunnan completely, integrated aspects of Thai culture, education, politics, trade and enjoy the same rights as Thai people. Currently, they feel themselves Thai and proud of to be Thai. However, most of Thai-Chinese Yunnan still maintain some Chinese identity through local language, local food, traditional and cultural patterns. **Conclusions:** After passing for years, the Thai-Chinese Yunnan are completely become Thai but still maintain their cultures and some life styles.

Keywords

Chinese-Yunnan, Adaptation, Citizenship, Culture

Introduction

In 2017, Thailand has approximately 66 million people [1] living in different regions. There are differences in race, religion and culture because different ethnic groups existed on their own prior to the formation of Thailand and ever since, more ethnic groups have moved and settled in Thailand for several reasons [2, 3]. These differences have not engendered conflicts in the Thai society but rather developed to be the new beautiful Thai identity. This really reflects Thai community nowadays.

The difference in identity or characteristics or lifestyle according to regions has its own history. These integrated characteristics are presented in terms of culture, language and life style. Transportation and trade are significant tools that stimulate the interaction among the members. Interaction exists in other activities such as tourism, education, politics and it is the origin of social integration and beauty of Thailand.

The development of identity of northern region of Thailand has passed and cumulated through long and various history including social war, immigration,

belief, motivation, unique geography, and characters of ethnic populations [4]. There are several ethnic groups living in this area; Akha, Lahu, Hmong, Yao, Karen, Lisu, and Yunnan Chinese [4, 5]. Most of them migrated from south China for different reasons and routes to Thailand. Chinese Yunnan migrated into northern Thailand due to civil war in China [6-16], and a large proportion moved to Thailand for economic and agricultural reasons.

The main routes of migration were moving from south China to northern Myanmar and moving down to northern Thailand [3]. Chinese Yunnan, Akha, Lahu, and Lisu used this route for their migration. Finally, they settled in Mae Fah Laung, Mae Sai, and Mae Suai districts, Chiang Rai province. Another group, Hmong, and Yao, moved down to Thailand through the northern part of Laos.

Chinese Yunnan are Chinese who live in south China, Yunnan province [2]. Social and political conflicts were major causes of migration. These have been already documented in several sources of information [17]. Most of the stories regarding the

migration are documented in the first and second generations of the Chinese Yunnan. The first generation is the Chinese army and the second generation is their children, some was born in China, some were born in Myanmar, while some were born in Thailand after they settled in their village. The third generation are the children of the second generation, and most of them were born in Thailand.

Mae Fah Lung is one of the districts in Chiang Rai. Hundred percent of people in Mae Fah Luang are the hill tribe people including Chinese-Yunan. There are 4 different sub-districts; Doi Tung, Mae Sa Long Nok, Mae Sa Long Nai, and Therd Thai sub-district. Almost 80,000 Thai populations are living in Mae Fah Luang district, and 40.5% are Chinese Yunnan. This study aimed to understand the adaptability of Thai-Chinese Yunnan in all generations to develop their own identity to be Thai citizens completely. The objective was also to understand the culture, economics, education, and lifestyle of Thai-Chinese Yunnan particularly in Mae Fah Luang district, Chiang Rai province, Thailand.

Methods

A qualitative method was used to gather the information by in-depth interviews among the key informants. Information regarding history, adaptation, lifestyle, education, trade and economic system, interaction with other ethnic groups, language and culture in the process of becoming Thai citizens were collected and interpreted. The ways to maintain their own culture of Chinese Yunnan in Thailand were also used for interpretation.

Twenty-four key informants were invited for interview, 12 males, 12 females. Four participants aged <25 years (two males and two females), 8 participants aged 26–40 years old (four males and four females), 8 participants aged 41–60 years old (four males and four females), and 4 participants aged >60 years old (two males and two females). All participants were selected from Thai-Chinese Yunnan 4 villages in Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai Province.

Eleven-question guideline was developed and used for data collection. The questions were focused on a history of migration, steps of migration from China to Thailand, trading and economic system, educational system in a village, language and culture while adapting to Thai traditional pattern and religion, transportation, access to health care system, politics and administration system in a village, rights to access public resources and services, and attitude to Thai Royal Institution.

Questions had been tested for validation before use in the field by having comments on the quality of the content of questions from three external experts. Three selected participants were asked the questions in the pilot phase.

Prior to the interview, participants consented to have the conversations recorded. All recorded tapes were translated to text before analysis. Tapes were destroyed once the translation was completed. Steps of

data collection: village heads were contacted for their approval. Key informants were purposively selected from targeted four Chinese Yunnan villages. Five researchers were assigned to interview, two could speak Chinese, and one was a Chinese Yunnan. After passing the first round of the interview, 2 participants were contacted for second round of interview, and another were asked for the third round interview before getting saturated information.

Stages of analysis started from the first round of interview by observing participants' interaction with the researcher including their manner, followed by content analysis which was done by five researchers who had different experiences and educational backgrounds.

Results

Several factors presented below, reflect the ability of Chinese Yunan to adapt to Thai-Chinese Yunan among those living in Mae Fah Luang district.

a) Reasons for migration and settling in Thailand

There are three waves of migration to Thailand of the Chinese Yunnan. The first wave was forced by the civil war in China. The second wave was the migration of the relative of the people from the first wave. Bad weather and difficulty in trade in China caused the last wave then they had personal intension to move into the new place for settling and farming.

An 80 years old woman said "I was born in China, and moved to Myanmar at 18 years old, and at 40 years old had settled at Therd Thai sub-district, Mae Fah Luang district, Chiang Rai, Thailand. At the beginning, we had a small number of households, just a bit more than 10 families. Currently, many people here, including other tribes.

An old women gave more information;

"...most people here are the hill tribe Thai Yai, Akha, and Chinese-Yunnan".

Another woman said,

"My original family came from China, but I was born in Myanmar. I have both Thai and Myanmar ID card. I moved here, Thailand, while I was 19 years old. I heard that in Thailand, they had a better job and money. These were the reasons for moving to Thailand".

An old women said that,

"I moved to Thailand because we had a civil war in China, I moved from China to Myanmar and then moved to Thailand. In China, we had a very difficult living condition during the civil war. We could not find food. It is similar with other children, in any places they could provide food, we went there."

The woman further revealed that some families moved to Thailand under the help of Mr. Chan (Mr. Chan was known as "Khun Sa" (The king of heroin).

She said that her husband was in Mr. Chan's army. Mr. Chan supported her family a lot and provided the land that is used by her family. She has now a small coffee shop, Khun Sa Coffee Shop. Before moving into Thailand, Khun Sa fought with the army of Myanmar.

She said that after settling at Mae Fah Luang, she feels happy and safe every day. She has been settled at Mae Fah Luang almost 40 years. She speaks a little Thai but she is fluent in Thai yai.

She said,

"While I first moved to Thailand, I already got old. I have never been schooling, but I support all my 6 children to attend both Thai and Chinese schools. They all are good in Thai and Chinese communication."

An old woman added,

"When I was young, I sold SALAPAO (Chinese food). Now, I do nothing. My kids support and take care of me".

An old man said,

"I moved to Thailand long time ago by walking. At the beginning, I had it difficult because I could not speak Thai. I worked as a Chinese teacher in this village, but no longer. I also brought Chinese herbs from China to sell to the people living here."

b) Adaptability and getting Thai national identification card (ID card)

The adaptations of Chinese Yunnan in Thailand were found in several forms in different age categories. Among those aged > 60 years old, there was little adaptation or little difference with those people in China. Those aged 41-60 years know Thai culture better than those aged >60 years. Those aged >40 years old, understood and practice as general Thai people. However, those aged <25 years old, have little understanding of Chinese traditional practices and culture especially those that passed through a Thai school. However, we found that a family relationship and structure are major factors to maintain the Chinese's cultures such as cooking, chopsticks use, and religious rituals.

Those who had Thai ID card were regarded as Thai citizens. 100% of those aged < 25 years old have Thai ID card, and everyone has the right to access all public services in Thailand such as educational and health care systems, and right to vote for any politician. However, some of those aged >60 years old do not have Thai ID card as such lack the right to access or participate in public activities, except access to the health care system which is free of charge.

An old man said,

"I have no Thai ID card, but whenever I visit a doctor in a hospital, I got exception of paying a fee. I applied to get a small allowance for elderly people from the government office; they told me that I will get a right

shortly. I feel very happy. However, all my kids, they have Thai ID card."

An old man added,

"Even I have no Thai ID card but I can visit many places. I visited my old family and friends at Beijing, China many years ago."

c) Social, cultural, and traditional patterns

Most Chinese families in Mae Fah Luang have maintained Chinese tradition and culture. Many new families still follow the traditional patterns through the yearly festivals such as respect for the elderly people in their family and community, and praying for their predecessors, cracker use for religious rituals, grave cleaning and praying festival.

An old woman said,

"I am similar to other Chinese. I have to pray in several traditional celebrations. All my family members will come back in Chinese New Year festival, I know everything in Chinese traditional patterns and celebrations. However, many of my kids do not clearly understand. They are now working in big cities. They know little!"

Many of original traditional patterns and celebrations have been more and more ignored and less practiced and remembered. It is going to end when the old Chinese people pass on.

A middle aged man said,

"Many traditional patterns have long gone, some patterns are very complicated, and little kids do not like it. Most children have been sent to good schools in the city, they will come back to the village once a year and so do not understand these patterns."

Many Chinese traditional patterns have been integrated with other tribal pattern in a village. A middle aged woman said,

"I always join in praying in Buddhist temple with my friends."

d) Occupation, tourism and trade

Most Chinese Yunnan work in the trading section with their own small grocery in the village. However, many of them plant tea tree. Tea had been brought from China while moving down. All families tea visitors.

Trading food is common among the Chinese Yunnan, starting with selling noodle which is made by them. Chinese bun is famous in the villages.

A large proportion of Chinese Yunnan prefer to work in rice and corn farms. In the beginning after settling in Thailand, families used horses as a major vehicle. Currently, a car or a pickup is used for transportation.

Long time ago, a specific currency called "TAAB" was used in all trade sectors. It was kept in a

private place or buried under the ground if they had got a large amount.

Currently, Mae Fah Luang district has been promoted as one of the significant places for tourist activities. Many kinds of tea have been planted in this area and are major sources of tea exporting from Thailand.

e) Education and Educational system

Today, all new age-generations of Chinese Yunnan are educated in both Thai and Chinese school system. Chinese junior high school is available in Mae Fah Luang district, Chiang Rai province. The children from all ethnic groups who are living in this area have access to Chinese schools which is appreciated by the parents. The children attend Thai school from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm Monday to Friday, and in the evening they attend Chinese school from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm. All infrastructures in the Chinese school were provided with support from the people from People's Republic of China and Taiwan PROC. All Chinese teachers come from People's Republic of China with the support of Chinese government. 8-10 teachers are provided as support from China each year. As for the children, the major objective of studying Chinese is to use it for their future businesses.

A young man said,

"I am now studying in the university and major in Chinese business, I am very happy!"

f) Access health system

A 30-bed Mae Fah Luang hospital and more than 5 health promoting hospitals are available for people in the villages. Accessing health care system is very much better than previous days. It is highly convenient and easy access to health care services free of charge.

In early days, untrained Chinese doctor provided care for people in these areas. Nobody knew about the doctor, but they had no choice. These days people prefer to get care and treatment from Thai health system.

A middle-age woman said,

"I was diagnosed with hypertension, and have to meet a doctor every month. However, I do not pay for care and treatment."

g) Rights and participation in politics

Chinese Yunnan have equal rights in all public services including politics. They participate freely from village to national levels. Chinese Yunnan also have the right to use land for any purpose.

An old man said,

"Even I have no Thai ID card, I have the right to buy land for farming, but you know many years ago, we do not need to buy land but you can occupy land freely".

All Chinese Yunnan have the right to participate in politics from the local or village to the national levels.

A woman said,

"I voted my favorite person while we had election."

However, a middle-age woman said,

"I have no Thai ID card. I married a Thai person, and all two kids of mine have Thai ID card. They have full rights to access educational system; the first one had already graduated with a university degree."

h) Perception to Thai citizen and loyalty in Thai Royal Institution

Mae Fah Luang district is located in the most remote areas in Thailand. Therefore, many projects under the support Thai Royal Family particularly from King Bhumibol Adulyadej Rama 9 and from Somdet Phra Srinagarindra Boromarajajonnani or Somdet Ya have been introduced for improving health, economic and wellbeing for people living in these areas.

The Chinese Yunnan present their loyalty to Thai Royal Family through many occasions. While anyone from the Thai Royal Family visits these areas, many people present to their beloved king and family.

An old man said,

"I was so sad when I heard the news of passing away of our beloved king last year. I went to Bangkok to pray for our beloved king earlier this year with many people from our villages and many people from villages nearby".

An old man added,

"I was supported with a big land from the king when I arrived in Thailand. We love him very much."

Discussion

Chinese-Yunnan people in Thailand moved down from south China and settled in northern Thailand along the border areas. After three generations, they completely adapted to Thai society and obtained Thai citizenship. They become Thai citizens both physically and otherwise.

Most Thai-Chinese Yunnan have been certified Thai citizen but there remain a few who do not have Thai identification card. Thai Act "Certifying for Thai Citizenship" No.10 states that those who were originally born outside Thailand and those who are holding Chinese citizenship will not be granted Thai citizenship [19].

Due to living in remote areas in Thailand, access to public services including educational and health care systems are still difficult. Apidechkul, et al. [20] reported that many hill tribe people including Thai-Chinese Yunnan faced a difficulty in access to health care system. They are also facing many health problems including some serious diseases such as tuberculosis

(TB), and HIV/AIDS [21, 22]. Moreover, major non-communicable diseases are also acting as causes of morbidity and mortality in these population currently [23].

Conclusion

Thai-Chinese Yunnan at Mae Fah Laung district, Chiang Rai province, Thailand have a great adaptability to be Thai citizen completely after 3 generations. Nowadays, everyone has equal access to all public resources including health care service, participating in political activities, and freedom in choosing their job. However, they still maintain their own culture, traditional patterns, and language throughout the family and community structure and system from old to new generation.

The most significant point is they have got support and kindness from all Thai Royal families especially the king Rama IV. All Thai-Chinese Yunnan love him and his family. This reflects the identity of Thai nationality and Thai citizen eventually.

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