

New Chinese Diaspora, Parallel Communities and Transnational Experience : Case study in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

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Abstract

The chapter examines new Chinese diaspora sojourning in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand, aiming to understand whether or not, the new Chinese diaspora have socially and culturally embedded into Thai society and cultures, and if so, how and what social formations have been created. Conducting research by quantitative and qualitative methods, the chapter has found that new Chinese diaspora could possibly find their own capacity, to socially form a parallel community, a self-organized community in Thai locality. The parallel community is created under the conditions that new Chinese diaspora have encountered with distinctive challenges in locality, which on one hand, they have been obstructed by language barriers, communication skills and social competence. On the other hand, the prejudices and stereotypes importantly engendered by relatively positive and negative images towards Chinese people circulated within Thai locality are the major challenges that they have been encountering with in their social life in Chiang Mai. Under these conditions, the new Chinese diaspora have enhanced distinct social relations, and transnationally experiencing both inclusiveness and exclusiveness within Thai locality during their transient mobility.

The chapter argues that the parallel community created explicitly within the emerging religious sphere and extended social communications in digital sphere have indicated their cosmopolitan sociability in dealing with such barrier conditions and their social life associating to Chinese circles in host country. The Christian-based spaces and its process in a parallel community have allowed new Chinese diaspora to transnationally experience both Chinese belonging in a foreign land, and differently cosmopolitan spirituality and moral values in Thai locality whereas having more freedom to attach with. But for the Buddhism-styled spiritual case, the opportunity of utilizing Han-Chinese ethnicity has provided new Chinese diaspora the opportunity to experiment worldly Buddhism in Thai locality while receiving assistance of Thai-Chinese locals to overcome Thai language and culture barriers.

Keywords:

New Chinese Diaspora; Parallel Community; Transnational Experience; Chiang Mai

Introduction

The rise of recent Chinese migration travelling throughout the world has been witnessed intensively since 1990 onward. Chinese emigration from mainland China (PRC), according to United Nation (UN.), covers 4.22 million in 1990 and found double time increase to 9.96 million in 2019. In Asian region, it is increased from 2.8 million in 1990 to 4.97 million in 2019 which the highest number is in Eastern Asia, mainly in Hong Kong, Macao, North/South Korea, and Japan (United Nation, 2019).¹ This migration situation includes recent Chinese mobility into Thailand where is the second country of Southeast Asia. Thailand receives Chinese citizens to stay sojourning, with the amount of 77,581 Chinese in 2019, more than double time in 2005 of 33,311 Chinese citizens (United Nation, 2019).²

Some scholars (e.g., Chan and Koh, 2018) have asserted a new trend in Chinese emigration starting from the mid-2000s involving a new wave of Chinese migration characterized by transnational mobility, identifying diversified forms of migration resulted in rapidly diverse contexts associated with global flows, state influences and neoliberal tendencies. Chan (2018:211-221) found that new Chinese emigrants today, for example sophisticated young Chinese generations and other groups, have emigrated to pursue individual development, career advancement, education abroad and international work experiences. They have formed various relationships with China and their respective host countries.

The situation of recent Chinese mobility, a new trend in Chinese emigration mentioned above could be seen explicitly in Chiang Mai province of Thailand, especially recent Chinese migrants who sojourn in Chiang Mai for several reasons of; economic, business and commerce, leisure relaxation, birth tourism-led and lifestyle migration, and International education. This paper explores recent Chinese mobility to Chiang Mai, especially those who live in transience (Gomes, 2017), which means Chinese citizens from PRC temporarily mobile to the expected host countries (here-the case of Chiang Mai), and those whose their living practices and activities happen in a specific of time to serve their travelling goals. The chapter studies several categories of Chinese sojourners which include business people, entrepreneurs, staffs, international students, study parents etc. It aims to understand how the new Chinese diaspora in Chiang Mai province have socially (dis) embedded into the Thai society and cultures.

¹ United Nation (Population Division, Department of Economics and Social Affair) See more detail from <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/index.asp> (retrieved September 20, 2019)

² United Nation (Population Division, Department of Economics and Social Affair) See more detail from <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/index.asp> (retrieved September 20, 2019)

We deploy conceptually two notions; cosmopolitan sociability (Schiller et al, 2011) and parallel communities³ (Gorchakova, 2011; Gome, 2017) to our research. The notion of cosmopolitan sociability consists of forms of competence and communication skills that are based on human capacity to create social relations of inclusiveness and openness to the world. Schiller and her team (Schiller et al, 2011) proposes that mobile people, migrants, diaspora and their mobile practices do not only create their own possibilities of cosmopolitanism as openness, but they also encounter the limitations of the particular pathway they have fabricated within specific circumstances. In this sense, cosmopolitan sociability reflects a set of practices, an ability of active participants in enacting and embedding within social relations and practice-based identities. The forms of cosmopolitan sociability are possibly challenged or facilitated in different historical contexts and locations that aims to find aspects of shared human experience including aspirations for a better world. Hence, the notion of cosmopolitan sociability allows us to understand conditions and difficulties that new Chinese diaspora have been encountering in enacting and embedding with the emerging social relations in the host country, and the outcome of new practices they create and share their transnational experience.

The notion of parallel communities shed light to explain how the Chinese diaspora create a sense of community perceived distancing from local society. The parallel communities also contribute to understand how new Chinese diaspora inhabit where they occupy, and newly experience the host country, but may be not necessarily integrate with them. According to Gomes (2015; 2020), her case study of international students in Australia do not successfully integrate into Australian society because of the failed interaction with the host society and culture. Consequently, Asian international students have formed a parallel society, a self-organized group, making use of social networks and entertainment media, and exclusively made up of fellow international students who primarily come from the home nation and the Asian region, in order to share a sense of belonging in a foreign country. While this parallel society allows international students to create a sense of community in Australia, its side-effect is a perceived social distance gradually away from local society (Gomes, 2015; 2020).

Methodologically, the chapter uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather data and information. The quantitative method is online survey, by distributing questionnaires to selected groups of Chinese sojourners in Chiang Mai ranging from 6 months to 8 years which reflects noticeably the different time periods of short-term and long-term stay

³ The notion of parallel communities is coined by the sociologist Wilhelm Heitmeyer with respect to the integration deficits of immigrants in Germany and then is applied in other West-European countries of immigration. (please see more debate in Nadezda Gorchakova (2011)).

that the new Chinese diaspora have been spending in Chiang Mai. “Wenjuan Wang”, one of the most influential questionnaire websites of China is the online channel we used for gathering information. We received 220 responses of survey sampling. Apart from quantitative research, we also applied qualitative method by observing and interviewing Chinese diaspora sojourning in Chiang Mai in different groups; study parents, entrepreneurs, staffs, and etc. The selected informants have been observed and interviewed during the fieldwork from 2018-2019 to collect information about their life history, mobility patterns, mobile living experiences and point of views toward Thailand and Thai people.

In this chapter, we sometimes use the term recent Chinese diaspora switching to Chinese sojourners. This is because we look at their international migration in a period of growing transnational practices which is being as “continuous” rather than “completed” or permanently settling in host countries. The sojourner aspect arises from, on one hand, the nature of new Chinese diaspora in Chiang Mai who usually travel back and forth between Chiang Mai and Mainland China. On the other, it is the assumption that their stay is temporary, and when the purpose of their visit is achieved, they usually return home, or find more inspiration to move. This migration situation and their mobile practices are also corresponded with so-called transient migration process (Gomes, 2017; Gomes et al, 2017:7-11; Xiang, 2017: 3-5). Some scholars (e.g., Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Ady, 1995) use the term “sojourner” to describe travelers who live in-between society and culture. Some examples of sojourner categories include business people, overseas students, technical experts which sojourners are distinctive to more long-term intercultural travelers such as immigrants and refugees (Wade, 2001).

The chapter is organized in three parts; The first and second parts are the contextualization that new Chinese diaspora have been encountered with. The first part explores group classification of new Chinese diaspora sojourning in Chiang Mai which reflects mainly in business and education domains. The first part also examines why new Chinese diaspora select Chiang Mai to serve their travelling goals and destination. The second part is to contextualizes what positive and negative images about China and Chinese citizen seen by Thai people in different groups and in what way prejudices and discrimination engendered by the images are operated, and how it impacts to new Chinese diaspora in their social life in Chiang Mai. The third part focuses on whether or not, Chinese diaspora have socially and culturally embedded into Thai society, and if so, how and what forms have been created. The chapter explains the social formation of a parallel community, a self-organized group, is created and practiced. Taking examples of the two religious-based spaces and online Chinese parents’

groups, it indicates cosmopolitan sociability in creating the parallel community in order to deal with such barrier conditions and their social life circulating within Chinese circle in host country. However, while the Christian-based spaces and its process in a parallel community have allowed new Chinese diaspora to transnationally experience cosmopolitan spirituality and moral values more freely in Thai locality, the Buddhism-styled spiritual case has utilized the Han-Chinese ethnicity to embed new Chinese diaspora into Thai locality in which the assistance of Thai-Chinese locals help them to overcome Thai language and culture barriers.

Classification of New Chinese Diaspora Sojourning in Chiang Mai

According to our gathered information and official documents (various types of visa extension from Chiang Mai Immigration office of Thailand during 2016 – 2019), we have identified Chinese citizens recently travelling to Chiang Mai in two main different categories and its objectives of; 1) those who engage in business domain, and; 2) those who engage in oversea education domain.

In business domain, at least 2 group types are found. Firstly, *Chinese companies and individual entrepreneurs* refer to Chinese sojourners who came for business purpose and self-employment, for example, individual entrepreneurs, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), staffs of Chinese companies, business people who conduct tourism-related activities, e-commerce, retail trades on Thai products to serve Chinese customers in China. Some may set a company and register it under the Foreign Business Act B.E.2542 (A.D 1999) of National Law in several types of 100% company from China State-owned enterprise (SOE), SME companies, or 51-49% working with Thai partners or Thai companies. According to the Department of Business Development (2019), we found 1,650 Chinese companies registered under the Foreign Business Act B.E.2542 (A.D 1999) during 2016-2018, ranking the fourth city following Bangkok Chonburi and Samut Prakan of Thailand (see the table 1).

Table1 China's companies registered under the Foreign Business Act B.E.2542 (A.D 1999) of Thailand by region and popular provinces during 2016-2018 Source: Department of Business Development, https://www.dbd.go.th/dbdweb_en/main.php?filename=index Updated on July 9, 2019				
Province	2016	2017	2018	3 years total number
	amount	amount	amount	
Bangkok	4,705	4,317	7,313	16,335
Chonburi	629	764	1,560	2,953
Samut Prakan	674	628	1,184	2,486
Chiang Mai	389	429	832	1,650
Phuket	258	309	627	1,194
Rayong	176	192	346	714

The second group in business domain is *staffs working for official and private institutes* – for example, staffs and teachers working for the Confucian institutes (CI), Chinese teachers working for private schools or Chinese language institutes. According to Li (2020) there are around 200 CI staffs in Chiang Mai in 2019. While there are 58, 39, 41 Chinese teachers, professors, experts working for government educational institutions, and the amount of 134, 84, and 123 Chinese teachers, professors, experts in private educational institutions in the year of 2016, 2017, 2018 accordingly (see the table 2).

In education domain, we refer to several types of Chinese students enrolling in different education levels; Chinese students in Thai universities, and pupils ranging from kindergarten to upper levels of elementary and secondary education studying in 21 International Schools in Chiang Mai. Especially, these Chinese pupils are usually accompanied by their guardians, popularly called *peidu mama* (陪读妈妈) in Chinese, or “study mother”, or other family members (father, grandparents, relatives) who normally travel with Chinese kids for oversea education. The numbers of Chinese pupils enrolling at the 21 Chiang Mai International Schools (kindergarten to high school levels) are continuously increased, approximately 2,000 students in 2019. There are 874 study mothers/study parents only in the half year of 2019 (see the table 2). The number of Chinese students studying at the Colleges (undergraduate /graduate) and short courses in Chiang Mai is more than 2,000 students which the number of those who attend educationally at the Chiang Mai University is 1,129 Chinese students in 2019.

Table 2 Number of Chinese visitors, getting different types of Thai Visa extension at Chiang Mai Immigration office during 2016 - September 2019				
Visa type/ year	2016	2017	2018	Jan-Sept 2019
Tourism purpose (4) visa on arrival at CM immigration office	1,285	1,687	2,267	2,041
Study in government educational institution / in private educational institution	1,634/1,427	1,946/ 1,855	2,085/2,424	881/2,332
family member of an alien who has been permitted a temporary stay in the Kingdom for study in an educational institution (11)	424	642	877	874
family member of an alien permitted a temporary stay in the Kingdom (20)	75	115	132	106
Retirement (22)	117	180	322	402
Business necessity (1)	320	282	308	284
Teachers, professors, experts in government educational institutions / in private educational institutions	58/134	39/84	41/123	45/93
conducting training or research in a university or research institute	77	81	40	6
perform duties in public charitable organization, foreign private company, foundation, association, foreign chamber of commerce, Thai Chamber of Commerce, or Federation of Thai Industries (21)	80	49	33	60
receiving medical treatment, attending rehabilitation, or taking care of a patient (25)	10	37	23	42

Why Chiang Mai? : Locating Chiang Mai in Chinese Imaginaries

Unlike the new Chinese diaspora in Bangkok, Thailand (please see Lee, this volume), Chiang Mai province attracts new Chinese diaspora in respect to the attachment of natural and cultural environments, no matter of seeing it in reality or imaginaries constructed by Chinese social media. In reality, Chiang Mai is the second-largest city in Thailand where generally and physically have natural and cultural diversities of different natural and cultural landscapes; beautiful old city, ancient temples and places and mountainous villages of more than 9 ethnic groups around and outside the city. For Chinese tourists and travelers, Chiang Mai for many years has been one among other popular tourism destinations, ranking the third city following Bangkok and Phuket of Thailand. In Chinese imaginaries, since the year 2012 when the Chinese blockbuster road trip movie, “Lost in Thailand” was succeeded in promoting Chiang Mai, millions of Chinese tourists and travelers have been travelling to see itinerary filmed in the movie. This reflected Chinese geopolitical imaginaries about Northern Thailand (Mostafanezhad, and Tanya, 2018), and thus developed Chiang Mai tourism generating mixed returns for Thai economy (Brzeski, 2013).

By collecting questionnaires surveys, and literature review, as well as information gathering from online Chinese websites discussing about Chiang Mai, the chapter has found several reasons attached Chinese people visiting Chiang Mai. However, for this chapter, all reasons are treated as such “narratives” and representations that reflect Chinese imaginaries toward this city. There are two particular narratives that Chinese travelers imagine about Chiang Mai. The narratives are formed through travel tips, through popular online sources and their own friends’ words of mouth. Social media in Chinese contexts has played the important role in the formation of representation. The first narrative is *Manshenghuo* (màn shēng huó -- 慢生活), meaning of slow life, and the second is *Maicun*, (mài cūn-- 迈村), meaning of Chiang Mai village where Chiang Mai is named as part of Chinese living in Chiang Mai.

As for the first narrative, Zhujun Tao (Tao, 2019: 99-116) found that Chinese tourists and travelers use the word of *Manshenghuo* to represent Chiang Mai as “a city for relaxation and recreation.” The formation of imagined representation is linked comparatively to their routine lives in China where living with a fast-paced urban life, and hopefully to get a temporary escape/break for their daily routine. There exists a common pattern of representation of Chiang Mai, especially among Chinese tourists and travelers, describing Chiang Mai as adjective *Youxian*, meaning relax, leisure, and at ease. While Chiang Mai as noun *Manshenghuo*, means slow life where people could live a simple life as they wish and do not

have any particular work to finish. It also represents a temporary retreat, especially for tourists who live and work tiredly and chaotically in China.

The *Manshenghuo* narrative that Chinese imagined about Chiang Mai is depicted as a colorful destination that can fulfill a variety of needs. It echoes with the images of local foods (Northern-styled), nice natural views, air cleanliness and cultural diversities. Teparit Maneekul and his team (Teparit et al, 2019) applied text mining research and content analysis to examine Chinese tourists' perspectives toward Chiang Mai circulating in Chinese websites, mainly *Baidu*, *Weibo* and *Mafengwo*. The research team found that such narratives are all about natural beauty, distinctive cultures (local and Buddhism), varieties of delicious, and exotic local foods. While Chinese tourists and travelers could find natural places to be appreciated, the city is somehow modern to serve their objectives of shopping in good-quality Thai products and/or western brand-named ones. It also shows the narratives about Thai local people who are hospitably easy-going, and friendly to strangers (Teparit et al, 2019).

Apart from that, the narrative about ethnic Chinese ancestors migrating to Thailand and Chiang Mai also attracts Chinese young generations to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors who moved to Thailand in the early 20th century, when waves of immigrants fled from China to seek fortune and happiness in the Land of Smiles. The story telling about their ancestors, said during their childhood, -- did hard work in Thailand and contributed to Thai economy and send money back home--, are all destination trips to be sought out for travelling for Chinese young generations.

Another narrative reflecting Chinese imaginaries about Chiang Mai is *Maicun*, literally meaning of the Chiang Mai village. Maicun is coined generally by not only Chinese travelers, but also particularly by new Chinese diaspora living in Chiang Mai recently. The Chiang Mai village is narrated imaginatively in two-layered meanings. The first means modern city and infrastructure covering in Chiang Mai is relatively lower than the same scale city in China. This is because Chiang Mai is the second largest city in Thailand but it parallelly contrasts to Shanghai or Guangzhou, or Shenzhen etc. where many new Chinese diaspora residing in Chiang Mai come from. Comparatively, the municipal constructions in those cities of China are much more advanced than Chiang Mai. Therefore, *cun* or "village" here implies lower level of modernized development of Chiang Mai in comparing to the same scale cities of China. Secondly, Maicun implies "Chiang Mai Village", being as "friendly geographical settings", in 2 aspects. The first aspect is "natural environment" that are not yet overdeveloped, allowing Chinese sojourners find warm weather, grass land and mountainous views with clean water and air (except the smog in the city during dry season), tasty and qualified foods and fruit varieties.

New Chinese diaspora, convinced in comparing to China in terms of chemical agriculture and typically fake food industries, think imaginatively that those of Thailand is safer than those in China. The second aspect is “human environment” that Thai people represents those human living in rural area, characters of persons who have warm-hearted behaviors, and much more humane to the living surrounding, welcome strangers with the smile neighbors, no discriminating and dangerous risk. In this regard, the “Chiang Mai Village”, in Chinese imaginaries implies the expected peaceful rural living when living in Chiang Mai.

Chinese Imaginaries Versus Thai Perspectives

This part contextualizes what positive and negative images about China and Chinese citizen are viewed by Thai people. These positive and negative images become a rhetorical discourse portrayed within Thai official discourse and then in Thai mainstream. We traced back to historical contexts, as such a contextual condition in order to understand a result of China and Chinese portrayal within Thai society. There are two levels to be discussed; firstly, brotherhood narrative is reflected and stimulated within the Thai official discourse; secondly, it is ordinary Thai perspectives which currently depict China and Chinese portrayal in both negative and positive aspects. We also explain the results of the previous brotherhood narratives and the emerging Chinese images in Thai and global trends.

Narrative on “Sino-Thai Brotherhood”

The first perspective in Thai society is the rhetoric of generous big brother/ or brotherhood circulating politically within Thai diplomatic discourse. The brotherhood narrative has been discussed in Thai official interests for decades in developing China-Thailand friendship, especially to point out to the associated interests of security and economic dynamism. The brotherhood narrative usually refers to both countries which have long been creating deep ties through long historical and cultural links. However, it is emphasized selectively and is continued in diplomatic relations between China and Thailand when it is related to the issues in which the two nation-states share the same perspectives.

Tungkeunkunt and Phuphakdi (2018) suggest that brotherhood narrative was formulated articulately after the huge influx of Chinese citizens flowing to Thailand during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the political controversy was appeared over Chinese loyalty to the Thai kingdom. The Thai government during the time implemented the complete assimilation toward overseas Chinese into Thai society. But after that, the

brotherhood narrative, as a diplomatic one, has been changing through time following the tidal current of China-Thailand relationship intersecting with US-global politics. For example, after 1949 Communist Party, China-Thailand relationship was tense and anxious. China was seen as a national threat to Thailand when Thai elites were suspicious of China in supporting communist insurgencies in Thailand. But the changing relationship in a warmer and closer one with China appeared after 1980s onward. Tungkeunkunt and Phuphakdi (2018) propose that the discourse of Sino-Thai brotherhood widely utilized, and became the diplomatic discourse after 1970s when Thai state ended hostility and moved toward peace with China under the tidal current of changing US international relation. Within the global situation related to Thai international relation with China and US, Thai state and policymakers, including the Thai Royal House needed to find valid and reasonable evidence to support the policy change so that it made sense to convince Thai citizens. Then, the brotherhood discourse replaced the antagonistic behaviors generated by the Chinese engagement during the Communism war periods against the CPT in Thailand (Tungkeunkunt and Phuphakdi, 2018:609).

During the reform and opening-up after 1980s onward, China's domestic politics, economic improvement, and the changing Chinese foreign policy were shifted, especially in regard to the international affair. These contexts, appeared under economic rise of China, led China to portray itself as a peace-loving nation, and the warm international cooperator. The emerging portrayal of China like this is an attempt to remove the images of a 'Threat' of the renewed great power -- the "Red threat" -- to the world, drawing a new portrayal into a convincing "good neighbor" and being a responsible power. China's soft power (Nye, 1990), -- practically in providing humanitarian assistance, multi-dimensional cooperation with neighboring countries of economic partnership, and Chinese traditional culture to soften the "red threat" images through cultural diplomacy--, has destabilized the fear and anxiety of the reemerging national power among Southeast Asian countries and other regions, and has helped softening the political environment in the regions.

One example of China's soft power applied in Southeast Asian countries is financial assistance which the Chinese state during the financial crisis in 1997 helped providing the Southeast Asian countries solutions, while US government, the other great power remained silent. As a result, China has gained more trust with the Asian countries, even though some Asian countries (e.g., issues of Sri Lanka and Chinese debt trap (Moramudali, 2019, May 14),

the South China Sea's territorial dispute between China, the Philippines and Vietnam etc.)⁴ may paradoxically respond in different levels and dimensions of international relations. But, for Thailand, the Thai governments has smoothly broadened its engagement with China in many areas of trade, economy, military, education, etc. (Chinwanno, 2008; Tungkeunkunt and Phuphakdi, 2018: 597-621).

As discussed by Tungkeunkunt and Phuphakdi (2018: 597-621), the result of rhetorical discourse on the Sino-Thai brotherhood has not been only utilized effectively by the Thai state and official bureaucracy. But it has also been employed dispersedly by the three different levels of Thai actors; 1) Chinese and Thai leaders who have selectively adopted the discourse to highlight friendship and strengthen ties for economic cooperation from time to time; 2) Chinese and Thai governmental agencies emphasize the discourse when especially having the programs of official exchange to gain knowledge and improve mutual understanding; 3) The Thai public, especially Business Associations, Chinese Chamber of Thailand, and Chinese Associations of Thailand that hope to gain beneficially from the economic rise of China, engages the brotherhood discourse to take benefit in trade, foreign investment, and a peaceful international environment.

Two-sides of Stereotypes About Chinese in Ordinary Thai Perspectives

As absorbed by the Sino-Thai brotherhood narratives for several decades, the Thai mainstream, together with the Chinese-preferred attachment among several old waves of overseas Chinese and their descendants in Thailand, have acceptably learned of how Chinese and China become Sino-Thai brothers, '*Jin Thai Pi Nong Kan*'. Within the ordinary Thai perspectives, the brotherhood narrative has engendered good feeling among the Thai people in general favor Chinese and China as one of Thai's *Pi Nong*, the brother country that helps Thailand in many aspects, and in reality. However, when examining current situation of huge Chinese tourists and travelers flowing to Thailand and all over the world, it is found that the narrative on Sino-Thai brotherhood appeared in Thai mainstream has been currently conceived paradoxically. Chinese tourism, and images about Chinese tourists appeared in Thailand and all over the world are connected stimulatingly and repeatedly to the two-sided paradoxical images which somehow negatively stereotype all Chinese citizens travelling oversea.

⁴ Find more detail and conflict background at the <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea> and <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/article/2186449/explained-south-china-sea-dispute> (retrieved June 22, 2020).

The first is “positive portrayal” about Chinese flow to Thailand, a big frame of narrative toward economic contribution. The image is identified by those Chinese *Pi Nong* mentioned above, and China government in reality have helped stimulating Thai economy in several sectors that Thai people engaged with. China and Chinese travelers are seen as a new opportunity of Thailand which assist to generate revenue and to get more advantages in accelerating Thai economic improvement. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), it has proved in reality that Chinese tourists and travelers have increased Thai economy in almost every economic sectors. For example, tourist revenue in Thailand had risen 3% to 1.93 trillion baht in 2019 which composed of the number of 10.99 million Chinese visitors in 2019.⁵ This means in contrast that Thailand actually has been relying hugely on Chinese tourists and travelers to contribute to Thai tourism economy and service sector.

The second is “negative portrayal”, “a fool but rich”, and “uncivilized manners” which is considered as negatively stereotyping “Chinese” tourists and travelers travelling to Thailand and throughout the world. “A fool but rich” refers to Chinese consumers who could simply buy extremely expensive items with/without considering the real price, or some Chinese who happily buy material things to give a meaning of life in material possession. Uncivilized manners refer to those Chinese who misbehave such civilized manners and break legality, for example, break legal and civil regulations, drop garbage, queue-jumping, flouting traffic laws when driving, riding bicycles, or parking cars, etc. This stereotype also includes narratives of such rude and uncivilized actions appeared inside and outside Thailand that Thai ordinary people usually claimed conceivably, for example, act violently, commit offensive acts, speak loudly when grouping together, fussy and high-demanding personalities. Although some particular manners arise from culture-related behaviors, the two negative portrayals have resulted extendedly impacting to not only Chinese tourists, but also to Chinese residents when interacting with Thai locales, both negative and positive dimensions.

Besides the negative portrayals about Chinese tourists conceived by Thai ordinary people, the negative images have been extended to economic sectors when Thai and Chinese business people conducting a business partnership. For example, the stereotype about Chinese seen as selfishness and cheating alike has often been brought up among Thai business people. Misconducting business, frauds and scams, including unfair cut are considered as such dismissive Chinese images in Thai perspectives. One Thai informant among others said that “Chinese businessmen not only cheat Thai and other foreigners, but they cheat their own

⁵ More detail at <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/1842844/foreign-tourist-arrivals-up-4-in-2019>(retrieved June 25, 2020).

Chinese people, for example, producing fake foods, cheating and robbing Chinese tourists in Thailand when conducting tourism-related business here.” (interviewing Noi, June 25, 2019)

Contrastingly to positive images to Chinese and China among Thai people, such negative images actually suggest a “threat”, rather than opportunity for Thai business people’s perspectives. Taking the cases of *Huai Khwang* district in Bangkok of Thailand (Lee, 2021 this volume) and growing numbers of tourism-related business conducted by Chinese business people and entrepreneurs in Chiang Mai and other touristic cities, the arguments and yelling among the Thai people reflects an “anxiety” that Thai traders and entrepreneurs have seen the proliferation of Chinese entrepreneurs, business people, --who may have stronger financial support, entrepreneurial skills, and Chinese-based-market opportunity--, would hurt Thai businesses throughout the supply chains, beginning from manufacturing to wholesale centers and community shops (Banterng, 2017:1-10; Tungkeunkunt, 2013:1-9).

Such negative portrayal over Chinese citizens in Thailand sometimes were shifted from “representation” into its reality and practices when Thai police officers arrested Chinese sojourners for accusing of cheating businesses (with or without Thai coordinators) or pursuing illegal business activities. For example, two Thais and one Chinese national were arrested in 2018 for allegedly serving as nominees for a Chinese-owned tour company on the Island of Koh Samui⁶. Another case was in Chiang Mai in 2019 when Thai polices, reportedly assisted by Chinese police officers, arrested a group of Chinese nationals using Thailand as a locational base for an online gambling operation⁷.

Chinese Portrayals in Thai Locality and its Impacts to New Chinese Diaspora

The two-sides of stereotypes, positive and negative images about Chinese diaspora viewed by Thai perspectives constructed rhetorically through Thai social media and publicity have been enacted apparently in term of social discriminations. The response of new Chinese diaspora in Chiang Mai regarding these stereotypes and discriminated behaviors is worth to examine what is happening to their sojourning lives in Chiang Mai when interacting with Thai locales under the prejudice and stereotype conditions.

According to our 220 online respondents, -- who mainly are Chinese parents living in Chiang Mai--, the survey indicated that only 18.64% responds that they never been through

⁶More detail at <https://www.chiangraitimes.com/crime-chiang-rai-thailand/three-arrested-in-koh-samui-accused-of-cheating-businesses/> (retrieved June 21, 2020).

⁷ More detail at <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1510486/six-chinese-held-online-gambling-operation-busted> and More detail at <https://www.bangkokpost.com/learning/advanced/1093148/new-wave-of-chinese-coming-to-live-in-thailand> (retrieved June 22, 2020).

discrimination, and it is joyful to hanging with locals. 55.91% of respondents said that “Thai people are nice, and it is normal to be discriminated, ever so they do not care and no need to be shocked”. But the number of 19.09 % have encountered with discrimination appeared by Thai people. Within this 19.09 percentage, 15% of them described the discrimination in a sense that Thai people show their impression to western over Chinese. While 6.36% of Chinese respondents do not care about those discriminated behavior, 3.64 % have been through discrimination, and they felt hurt, but did nothing because of language barriers, and only 0.45 % have been through discrimination, and then they reacted by fighting back and won.

New Chinese Diaspora and Social Discrimination in Thai Locality

As indicated by the survey mentioned above, nowadays it has affected consequently Chinese sojourners living in Chiang Mai when encountering with the rhetorical images and contexts in reality. Apart from the survey, some Chinese mothers in our interview mentioned that discriminated behaviors appeared in other public areas, --for example those in international schools, or local markets--, have emotionally impacted their living. Some example in the local market is resulted in several cases of Thai traders have been deceiving Chinese parents with simple tricks, e.g., selling Thai products and charged them with fraud, or lure them to buy too expensive Thai items, even worse by ripping them off trickily (interviewing Yelin, October 7, 2018).

Other case studies appeared at an international school where is supposed to be such a place that students and families could develop a multicultural sense in terms of absorbing and experiencing cosmopolitan understanding among foreigners and/or strangers. Instead of learning multicultural differences and/or overcoming these cultural differences, Chinese parents we interviewed found that they have been excluded from foreign and Thai families when having social events at the school. Some Chinese families in Chiang Mai have experienced Thai people differentiate Chinese nationals from Euro-Americans foreigners, and show their apprehension to the latter over Chinese.

“Thai parents even well-treated Euro-Americans families over Chinese ones. Unbearably, there was a Sunday market event at school when a school request of family’s members of students to join in the event by making food, setting shop and share activities. We, peidu mothers were excited to attend this event. But when the time came, we realized that it was difficult to join with since other families left us to organize only our own Chinese groups. They, Thai and foreign families, excluded us from them. They thought Chinese families who participate the events would make

noise and annoying. So, we could do nothing, just join our Chinese groups and only one time to be learned with.” (interviewing Yang Li, 32 years old, May 1, 2019)

Sometimes, discriminated behaviors are appeared by ignorant behaviors, miscommunication and misunderstanding and then, spread by word of mouth in Thai public. As narrated by Lai, a 35-years old Chinese resident in Chiang Mai;

“I know Thai language, I heard Thai people say many rude critics on Chinese people in many places and many times. I feel sorry for myself and our Chinese friends and sometimes get angry of those Thai critics when that happened. Most Chinese people cannot understand Thai, which makes Thai people always go “free style” of cursing when they are unhappy with Chinese people’s rudeness. Many words appeared about Chinese to be heard all the time, for example, “army”, “invasion”. These words are discriminated. Chinese are all faster learners; we can fit in the local society very fast. As long as Thailand provides a platform, they will be peaceful with the others. When heard those words, I was unsatisfied and I kindly went to discuss with those Thai who criticized Chinese. To exchange like this, sometimes it changed their view on Chinese.” (interviewed May 5, 2019)

Sometimes, a situation encountered between Chinese and Thai people usually originates from no enough information and misunderstanding, but the negative images and discriminated behaviors which take root earlier become an acceleration of such a conflict issue without realizing the real situation. Take a case study of a misunderstanding at one international School, Mr. Wang, a 40 years-old male Chinese father, a head of WeChat groups of Chinese parents in Chiang Mai, gave an example in 2019. There was a peidu grandma, Xinxin’ grandma, “tearfully” complained that her granddaughter was bullied by his classmates and then the headteacher from the kindergarten at the international school. When the news was circulated within WeChat group, all members suddenly were angry and declared that “Chinese cannot be bullied”, or “this is race discrimination”, or “Chinese are always biased”. After the very heated discussion, this conflict was solved by relevant groups of people; parents committee, and the School committee. It turned out that it was not so as Xinxin’s grandma complained. But actually, her granddaughter started that conflict with another kid, and grandma was anxious since she could not understand what was happening, and how to negotiate with the headteacher at school.

As learned by the case, Mr. Wang, as the Head of WeChat study parent group, concluded that

“we should not listen to only one side otherwise we could not know the truth. It is not 100% about discriminated dispute but many things involved. So, we should actually try to understand and investigate overall situation before judging and deciding any negative actions.”

By examining this case, it indicates clearly that the case is not just a situation of misunderstanding and less information. But the conversation and words of Chinese members circulating within WeChat group (“Chinese cannot be bullied”, or “this is race discrimination”, or “Chinese are always biased”) reflects the cause of problem, -- negative images and discriminated behaviors over Chinese--, taken root among new Chinese diaspora appeared within Thai society.

“Discrimination Chain” of Chinese

However, the chapter has found that not only Thai people have sometimes discriminated Chinese sojourners in Chiang Mai, but also Chinese residents (recent Chinese diaspora), especially those new Chinese pioneers who arrived 10 years earlier (2010) interacting with newcoming Chinese sojourners, have often done so. There is a word “discrimination chain” (鄙视链--bǐ shì liàn) among Chinese parents, describing new Chinese pioneers living in Chiang Mai claim Chinese newcomers that the newcomers are not polite, or too noisy or even misconducted doing business.

As expressed by Mr. Wang, a 40 years-old study father in Chiang Mai, he narrated such Chinese portrayal under the discrimination chain among the Chinese,

“We found sometimes Chinese newcomers behaved unappropriated here. They would be blamed by the Chinese pioneers. But it should not be in a sense of looking down upon them. Instead, we should give them some support and help. But at the same time, as you may know, those Chinese newcomers have formed their “island culture”, which mean relatively isolate to the outside world because we don’t have to get involve in. So, the newcomers may have nothing to rely on us. The circle of support may depend on the network we co-develop.”

Another expression is Wang Jun, a 22 years-old Chinese student. She mentioned further that

“...In China and other places in the world or even in Chiang Mai, we could find some Chinese businessmen produce poison food, fake products to be sold in the markets or lure customers by exaggerated advertising. I feel ashamed for these terrible behaviors, and I don’t want to be regarded as one of them...”.

Regarding these two claims, it is worth to notify that discrimination chains appeared among the Chinese outside China may not associate only those who arrived 10 years earlier, as the Chinese pioneers, interacting with new Chinese sojourners. But it suggests the top of iceberg among the Chinese people and China’s hierarchical societies today. It may indicate the current social contexts of China and its social distance, differentiation of economic classes which Chinese travelers in different background -- who could now flow outbound everywhere-- have often done discrimination chains when enacting with those Chinese in different economic and social class backgrounds.

Necessarily Embedding Thai Cultures and Locality? : Why?

This part examines whether or not, the Chinese diaspora have socially embedded into Thai society and cultures, and if so, what forms have been created. Under the conditions mentioned above on both positive and negative images, and prejudice discrimination, recent Chinese diaspora have enhanced distinct social relations, and transnationally experiencing both inclusiveness and exclusiveness within Thai cultures and locality during their transient mobility.

According to our 220 online respondents, we also found interesting responses on how Chinese and Thai may engage socially and culturally with each other. The online survey indicates that engaging with Thai people may be not necessary. There are two main reasons regarding this, according to our survey. The first reason is because of their social life in Chiang Mai. The survey shows that 47.73% select to socialize with only parents and kids in Chiang Mai, and 26.82% select to hang out with WeChat group of Chinese friends living in Chiang Mai. The rest of them have their own social life with Chinese fellow (6.36%), relatives (2.73%), and work partners (2.27%). Only 14.09% of Chinese parents show they have their own social life with Thai and other foreign friends in Chiang Mai.

The second reason is Chinese respondents could not freely engage with Thai cultures and locality. This is because 1) language barrier (55%), 2) difficulties in socializing with locals (18%). When facing Thai language barrier, Chinese respondents think learning Thai language is necessary (70.4%), but only 20.45% of them decided to learn Thai. Some Chinese respondents think there is no need to learn Thai (15.91%), while some respondents think English communication may be enough to communicate with (30.91%). Regarding Thai cultures and their learning, it proves that engaging with Thai people may not be necessary, and/or they may relatively select to engage with Thai cultures and in locality. This is because 65% of Chinese respondents said that they know Thai cultures and prohibitions by observation and respect to Thai cultures, but they treat local cultures equal to all foreign friends and cultures. While 24.09% respond that they show their respect to Thai cultures, but keeping their own styles of living, and not to force themselves to socialize with locals and Thai cultures. The 4.55% of Chinese respondents prefer not to socialize with local cultures. Only 6.36% of Chinese respondents know Thai cultures well and communicate with Thai people deeply.

Less engagement of Chinese people with Thai local people is also illustrated by how they ask their favor to help taking care of kids when being away. Among 220 Chinese respondents, 50.45% rely only on themselves and self-management when being temporal absence. However, some respondents have formed “family community”, networking with Chinese close friends who could help taking care of their kids when necessary. They could ask a support from close friends built naturally (31.82%), or neighbors who take care of kids for each other (12.73%).

When considering their social and cultural activities in everyday life practices in Chiang Mai, it shows that Chinese residents are not likely engaged much socially and culturally with Thai people and localities. Instead, when they feel lonely and may need help from someone in Chiang Mai, they have found common places; online and offline to fit in and to support. Hence, creating a “parallel community” among the new Chinese diaspora in Chiang Mai along with local embeddedness in Thai locality is worth to examine in particular.

The Social Formation of “Parallel Communities”

The online survey mentioned above has suggested several reasons why they may not necessarily engage in Thai locality, and/or may relatively select to engage with Thai cultures in locality; 1) their social life in Chiang Mai circulating with Chinese circle, and 2) barriers in language communication skill and especially difficulties in socializing with locals.

Under the conditions and difficulties mentioned above, both Chinese individual and groups usually build and maintain their own social and cultural networking spaces, commonly engaging with Chinese circles and connections. Some Chinese newcomers have participated with already well-established Chinese social and cultural institutions through their own Chinese networks. For example, several informal clubs of Chinese study parents in Chiang Mai could help connect Chinese families, both old ones and newcomers whom their kids attend schools. Religious organizations are another social space that Chinese families, including students, intellectuals, business people residing in Chiang Mai have been experiencing and sharing a sense of Sino-based community in Chiang Mai.

This chapter exemplifies the emerging religious sphere and extended social communications in digital sphere, illustrating the creation of “parallel communities” in dealing with such barrier conditions and living their social life circulating within Chinese circle in host country. The parallel communities, here, do not only function to support new Chinese diaspora to connect with Chinese circles, to give them a sense of Chinese belonging in host country. But the religious sphere and extended social communications in digital sphere situated in a more religious/digital freedom of Thailand, as examples of parallel communities, have importantly provided them an opportunity to freely dialogue, experiment, experience, and learn more cosmopolitan knowledge in different spirituality and moral values, in which their social world is to be more open during their transient mobility. Furthermore, the social formation of parallel community has not only provided them socially and emotionally foster their transient mobile livelihood. But the parallel community formation has presented a result of their “cosmopolitan sociability”, meaning of an ability of active Chinese participants in enacting and embedding within distinct social relations appeared under the specific circumstances they encountered in Chiang Mai.

Next part will exemplify the parallel community created by new Chinese diaspora groups; online-offline informal clubs organized by Chinese parents who accompany their kids to Chiang Mai; and religious-based organizations (Buddhism and Christian based organizations) established/ and participated by new Chinese diaspora including students, intellectuals, business people residing in Chiang Mai.

Example of Online-Offline Informal Clubs: Chinese parents Group

Based on our online survey, Chinese social media –WeChat– takes a very important role for Chinese life living everywhere in the world. WeChat does not only provide Chinese parents information about oversea study before they came to destination, Chiang Mai. But

WeChat social media also help them as the main channel to provide local information (44.09%), posted by Chinese influencers. Besides Chinese social media, Overseas Chinese social circle (29.55%) and English social media (21.36%) are significant for them as well. Only 5% of Chinese respondents ask the favor from local social circle. Therefore, they prefer WeChat to communicate and collect useful information, and building up a new Chinese network from WeChat group. 84% of Chinese respondents use WeChat application to learn immigration policies and news intensively.

In Chiang Mai, we have found several informal clubs of Chinese study parents that connect Chinese families whom their kids attend Chiang Mai International schools. The informal Associations could be treated as a “social group” for Chinese sojourners residing in Chiang Mai or elsewhere. These informal clubs usually link Chinese members with the WeChat social media, providing updated information about changing immigration regulations, and schooling issues. The leaders of clubs and associations actively help facilitating newcomers to deal with obstacles or other issues at schools when needed.

The largest informal club of Chinese study parents in Chiang Mai is called “the Group of Consultation on Studying in Thailand” (泰国留学咨询群, *tài guó liú xué zī xún qún*). It is the largest nonprofit counselling platform initiated by Mr. Potato, a Chinese study father, who was working at the Microsoft company. There are approximately 1,000 members who registered within the WeChat group, and use this online platform to acquire information, chatting, asking any questions.

Interestingly, the group members usually utilize the “online library” menu to search for information that they need and ask questions to other members in the same group. Our research team exported the chatting records from October 2018 to October 2019, which having more than 60,000 pieces of information from approximately 1,000 members. The most frequently read articles of this group are for example, “Study abroad, what should be considered to start with? How to consult and ask questions?” All topics that discussed within the group are, for example, international schools and education, all kinds of visa, especially non-ED visa and retired visa, guidance for living in Chiang Mai, driving licenses, international hospitals, bank account, international logistic service, and mobile services, etc. These WeChat platforms actually play a significant role as a free of charge counselor and mutual assistance system. Chinese families, especially newcomers rely on the online platform to overcome any challenges from the new living environment. This kind of mutual assistance community mostly was

established online due to its convenience and approachability, and act offline for actual assistance if having any conflict.

Hence, it could realize that the technological advancement fortunately could help not only facilitate information and chatting when living faraway, but it also results in helping to socially form the corresponding “social group” practiced by new Chinese diaspora. Within this emerging social formation, an online-offline social networking sphere is found in which the convergence of Chinese diaspora in “here”, “there”, and “anywhere”, with the same purpose, come to join.

The WeChat group formation practiced by new Chinese diaspora do not only connect virtually in the air, online social media. But the informal clubs and organization, the WeChat group platform, has come to be such a helpful group helping in reality, as an example in 2019, the case of Xinxin’s grandmother mentioned earlier. The very heated discussion went viral over WeChat group, and all members were angry and declared that “Chinese cannot be bullied” which would have lifted the conflict situation from “individual issue” level into a “national” one. However, “the Group of Consultation on Studying in Thailand”, connected via WeChat, and being represented as a social group of Chinese diaspora in Chiang Mai, has taken a major role in negotiating with the international school, finding out what happened. Some parents who are good at English and Thai laws even volunteer themselves to provide free of charge service for Xinxin’s grandmother. The leader of the WeChat group could help gather parent committee, and school committee to meet each other, attempting to solve the conflict.

Incidents like the above case often happened to the transient life from China, especially in education field when encountering with different difficulties and cultural conflicts. It is an ongoing issue for those who live in a foreign land. The Chinese diaspora, as seen by the case of study parent group, have formed the WeChat group, as one social mechanism of “social group” connecting via online internet, to help them. Hence, WeChat group is operated actively and practically, transferring word chatting, discussion and its own actions arising from the online platform enacting into active offline real life.

Examples of Religious-based Social Spaces

Besides Chinese study parents Associations or Informal clubs narrated above, religious organizations; e.g., temples and churches are another social space that Chinese families, including students, intellectuals, business people residing in Chiang Mai have been experimenting, experiencing and sharing a sense of Sino-based community. But this time within this social space, it is connected by religious curiosity, especially those religious

engagement which could not find easily often in China regarding the control of Chinese regime over religious issues.

The result of our interview has found interestingly the two main religious-based organizations, the Buddhism-styled spiritual place and other two Chinese Christian Churches, where recent Chinese diaspora residing in Chiang Mai, for example, Chinese study parents with their kids, students, retirees, business people, usually spend their free time with. Their attendance in religious activities is usually in addition to their everyday life practices of, for example, regular school-to-home dropping off and picking up time, regular schooling time, and working etc.

By deploying the notion of “cosmopolitan sociability” (Schiller et al, 2011), the cases of recent Chinese diaspora in Chiang Mai who actively participate religious activities with these two religious-based organizations, has illustrated their competence forms and communication skills that are based on human capacity to create social relations of inclusiveness and openness to the world. In this notion, both religious-based organizations become a social space whereas gathering a sense of Sino-based community belonging outside China. The utilization of Chinese language, ritual and belief, normative cultures could be shared and be appropriated culturally. But the most importance is the capacity of Chinese diaspora themselves which they could find a pathway of experientially learning cosmopolitan knowledge and openness to the world appeared through their participation in new religious-social space when transient mobility.

To participate with religious practices under their worldly spiritual curiosity, the situational practices could appear only under a specific contextualization that, on one hand, the challenged context of “religious gaze” in China regarding Chinese government control over religions has constrained their curiosity about the outside world, limiting them to freely explore different spirituality and moral values. On the other hand, Thailand and their mobile living when away from home has provided new Chinese diaspora the favorable context of “religion freedom” and openness scheme, to produce an optional process among other processual pathways in experiencing the worldly spiritual knowledge, at least in a moment of transient living. Hence, the religious sphere and extended social communications in digital sphere situated in the more freedom in Thailand have allowed them to freely take part in dialoging, experiencing, and later gaining cosmopolitan knowledge of different spirituality and moral values, which is to be more open to the world whilst spending their transient time of oversea living.

Here, we will exemplify the cases of newly religious spaces originated and participated by new Chinese diaspora. The religious space could indicate as, on one hand, a “parallel community” providing them social and emotional supports during their transient mobility in dealing with such barrier conditions and their social life circulating within Chinese circles in Thailand. On the other hand, the parallel community formation has reflected a result of their “cosmopolitan sociability”, an ability of active Chinese diaspora in Chiang Mai in experientially sharing with distinct social relations under both the encountered specific constraints, and the possible aspirations for openness.

1) Chinese Christian Churches: Religious Freedom and Openness

Christianity and Chinese Christian Churches in Chiang Mai, particularly the new ones established to serve new Chinese diaspora, could be seen as a set of practices, an ability of active participants, in creating a parallel community which do not only support recent Chinese diaspora to connect with Chinese circles but also give them to freely take part in experiencing and discussing different spirituality and moral values.

The chapter found at least two Chinese Christian Churches under the Protestantism doctrine newly establishing for the new Chinese diaspora living in Chiang Mai. The first church is the ‘Home of love’ Church (爱之家, ài zhī jiā). It was established in 2009, by a couple of American-Chinese Christian leaders, and a pastor from Singapore. The second is the Chiang Mai Chinese Christian Church (CMCCC--清迈华人基督教会, qīng mài huá rén jī dū jiāo huì)

According to fieldwork information collected by Lan (2020) and Ping (2020), the first church, the “Home of love”, has approximately 60-80 Chinese members. It is mainly popularized among the Chinese student group who enrolled in Thai universities in Chiang Mai. The “Home of love” Church, as it named, reflects its objectives, which does not only an attempt to gather new Chinese students into Christian embracement, but the church also provides the members a sense of warm feeling at home. In order to receive the blessing love of god, and particularly to feel like being at home in China, the church, apart from bible study, organizes warm activities related to Chinese cultures and using Chinese language to all church activities. For example, the Church provides regular bible teaching in Chinese language but modifying the stories telling regarding closely to Chinese student life in a foreign land; how to find peace and warm heart in a stranger place; how to be away of lonely and homesick feeling; how to achieve in education by giving them best examples.

Besides the bible teaching, the church practically organizes meeting with the same group of students, sharing their positive and negative experiences in Thailand, together with other social activities relating to Chinese cultural senses; e.g., Chinese styled food and joint-

cooking, singing worship songs, setting a party during Chinese festivals (Spring holiday, Mid-Autumn festival, the dragon boat festival). Although all activities are guided to support members spiritually, the church has helped support materially in terms of Chinese students' difficult living in oversea education. For example, the supports at the newly arrivals in Chiang Mai are provided; picking up at the airport, helping to find the proper accommodation, warm welcoming new students at the church. When studying international program is difficult with English language and western culture/Thai culture in Chiang Mai, the church arranges an English training course including western-styled manner class to be learned. These courses could assist Chinese students, as the church members, to achieve the difficult English homework and familiarize them with western styled class/ Thai language classes. In this sense, the church has combined material needs of the members with the spiritual support together, guiding Christian members to overcome difficulty in their daily lives overseas.

The second Church popularized among Chinese diaspora in Chiang Mai is the Chiang Mai Chinese Christian Church (CMCCC --清迈华人基督教会, qīng mài huá rén jī dū jiāo huì). It was established originally in 2015, as a branch of Chinese version of the Chiang Mai Grace church (恩典教会—ēn diǎn jiāo huì). But in 2017, the CMCCC decided to separate the church, finding new location in Hang Dong district to set up an independent church. This is because of the increasing new Chinese members, approximately 100 members which include several groups of Chinese families, intellectual, students, retirees and business people.

Our interviewing with Chinese families at the CMCCC found that there have been old members and newcomers of Chinese families attending the Church activities every Sunday, and during their free time on weekday when kids are at school or off-working. On Sunday, they usually bring their children to join the Church service. Apart from gathering during the prayer meeting, children join activities, e.g., bible learning courses in Chinese is provided by the Church. The bible courses for kids are taught by volunteering mothers or father, members of the church. Other Chinese families attend the prayer meeting, consultation or group meeting before having lunch together at the church.

Similar to the Home of Love church, all activities at the CMCCC are operated in Chinese language; for example, bible teaching, Sunday service peaching, online-offline information gathering and receiving in Chinese language, cooking Chinese foods, celebrating traditional Chinese festivals together. Although several groups of Chinese newcomers visited the church at first for their own objectives; for example, Chinese businessmen visited the church for business networking and information connection, students find more Chinese friends and observe new moral knowledge they want to know curiously what they could not

find in China, the church gradually integrated them into the spiritual learning working through religious activities. The activities allow the members to feel like home during away from home, helping each other so as never did in China with those who are not family, relative, or friends. Then, their curiosity is observed, their actions are experimented, and finally some attendants decide to convert fully to be a Christian. Some Chinese may be in the process of pondering to conversion which needs more time to be surely act. But whether or not Christian conversion, both churches have shared in common in providing a common place, which socially and culturally engaged with Sino-based identification; language, and culture.

However, we also found how new Chinese diaspora has been experiencing some limitations of a particular pathway in learning cosmopolitan knowledge. It is illustrated by an example of religious/Bible understanding. Although religious space provides material support to include them into a Sino-based religious group, the possibilities of translating bible doctrine into their own China background-based interpretation is often found curiously.

As Lan (2020) suggested, when Chinese attendants visited the Christian church first time and attempted to understand the bible, sometimes they found strange and unfamiliar explanation since what they learned in China is relatively socialism-based religious knowledge guided by the Chinese regime. Although the religious revival has been done in China during the past decade, the Chinese government has still controlled over religions and beliefs in China, and even more intensively suppressed under the Xi Jinping regime if those house churches of formal, and acceptable religions are not registered under the Chinese authorities. Especially, Christianity which is recognized by the Chinese regime as westernized ones become a sensitive issue in China along with other religions, like Islam. These religions are discouraged to be learned and practiced in China. But when mobile living appeared among the new Chinese diaspora, their curiosity is observed with the pragmatic purposes. Therefore, modification for Chinese Christian then could be appropriated, adopting its value into their mobile living. Some case study, Ms. He, a 40 years-old study mother, shared her experience that

“In China, we never learned anything about Christianity or other religions. We only studied Marxism, or evolution theory in relating to our understanding about how human being is existed and where human came from. When attending the church at the beginning, there was not convincing at all, until doubt is explained, scientific knowledge was added up in explaining human life, but importantly gathering Chinese for meeting each other to have warm greeting and hearted-felt activities were the touching there for me.” (Interviewing May 5, 2018)

2) Buddhism-Styled Spirituality: Experimenting Religion in Thai Locality

The Christian-based organization mentioned above have illustrated the emerging religious spaces among new Chinese diaspora, being as a parallel community practiced in host country. This parallel community aims to socially and emotionally support new Chinese diaspora to connect with Chinese circles, giving a sense of Chinese belonging in a foreign land by working through religious activities. However, under participating the Christian-base process, new Chinese diaspora have experienced more cosmopolitan knowledge in different spirituality and moral values which could not find often in China.

For the Buddhism-styled spiritual place we examined, it may distinctive to understand the new Chinese diaspora in participating the Buddhism-styled spirituality in Thai locality. This is because several conditions and activities are more open for Chinese inclusion. Noticeably, the religious-based organizations are connected identically by using the Han Chinese identification, an ethnic identity rather than political identity. Hence, Chinese diaspora from PRC, or from Taiwan or elsewhere could participate the Buddhism worldly learning in Thai locality whilst familiarizing with Thai locals.

The example is a Buddhism-styled spiritual place, named 妙觉寺 Miào Jué Sì Compassion Foundation, or short name -- *Miaojuesi*. It was established in 2016 by Taiwanese Buddhist monks, and financially supported by Thai-Yunannese wealthy people in Chiang Mai who donated land for the spiritual building, and budget from Taiwanese network and donors. After establishment, the Buddhism-styled spiritual place becomes popular among Chinese diaspora from PRC. The Chinese newcomers found calm and relaxation to participate with. They usually take their children to attend Chinese writing and reading courses during weekends, while mothers spend relaxed time learning some activities; Thai language class, or flowers decoration class, including food making courses.

Miaojuesi is neither a purely traditional temple that practice and spread Mahayana Buddhism (大乘佛教, dà chéng fó jiāo), nor a simply overseas Chinese Association. But it is a complex of Buddhism education, charity association, and, become a Chinese social space connecting new Chinese diaspora to locality. Also, Miaojuesi is not a Buddhism temple under Thai Buddhism legality; it cannot be registered according to Thai laws as the founder is foreigners. Therefore, the founders decided to register the place under the name of “Compassion Foundation” which belongs to a foreign charity organization. The leading monk, *Jianzhi*, is from Taiwan, he manages all the Buddhism teaching, chanting scriptures, meditation, and other activities.

Jianzhi, the leading monk was graduated from Buddhism University and received his bachelor degree. He is highly respected by residential followers who address the leading monk respectfully as “*Shifu*” (师傅, the Master). *Shifu* usually gave “morning class” (早课, zǎo kè), “Enlightening class” (开示, kāi shì), “evening class” (晚课, wǎn kè) and sometimes meditation. When the *Shifu* sometimes went back to Taiwan, there are several *Dashixiong* (senior practitioners) help organize the regular spiritual activities. According to our observation, among the regular followers who attend everyday *Shifu*’s sermon, most of them are Thai citizens, elder generation of overseas Chinese, especially the Kuomintang (KMT) descendants from northern Thailand living in the City, and Chinese study parents from China.

As more and more Chinese families arrived in Chiang Mai, Miaojuesi began to help support those Chinese newcomers as doing a charitable activity of religious organization. One of the senior practitioners, *Zhuxin*, she is a Chinese peidu mother, or study mother, and a devout Buddhist, always encourages her son to do volunteer cleaning for Miaojuesi. She said it could cultivate his compassion and responsibility. As a pioneer of study mother in Chiang Mai, she knows how hard it is to survive in a foreign land, especially at the beginning everything needs resettled. After she mentioned the difficulty to the *Shifu*, Miaojuesi decided to open charitable language classes for the people, especially Chinese newcomers who need to learn.

One Thai residential follower who can speak Chinese very well teaches Thai to Chinese diaspora, and teach Chinese language to Thai locals who follow Miaojuesi. Later on, hundreds of Chinese newcomers joined in the elementary Thai language class and the later middle-level class. Thai followers also received Chinese language education from Miaojuesi. In the middle of 2019, for celebration of the first class’s graduation, Miaojuesi even organized a small friendship party plus a sale of goods for charity for both Chinese and Thai followers.

During the learning languages, Miaojuesi became a common place of bridging newcomers of Chinese oversea and Thai society, not only by language that they need to learn, but also Buddhist learning and chanting. Before the Thai language class begins, the students are required to chant “The Heart Sutra” (心经, xīn jīng) by following the teachers. After the language training went well, Miaojuesi continually provided flower art, clay figuring, painting and Chinese classics reading class for kids. These charitable activities are very practical for newcomers to make new friends, receive free language education, join in local charitable activities and experience the “real” Buddhism referring the constraint of religion in mainland China.

Along with the diversity of activities held by Miaojuesi, it was well known by more and more Chinese newcomers who became such potential supporters for this Buddhism-styled

spiritual place. Our research team was asked to make donation after joining in the Thai language training. It also organizes dharma assembly to pray for good and against evil. In some special dharma assembly, the followers can make big donation to eliminate guilt for the past life. One peidu grandma donated 15,000 RMB to Miaojuesi for her daughter, a peidu mother, to eliminate her sin of abortion two years ago. Not only the purposeful followers make donations, but also the ordinary ones make different kinds of donations. While money is still the most popular one, Miaojuesi even opened a WeChat wallet account for Chinese people to receive money donations; the donors can get a paper receipt if they want one. In 2019, Miaojuesi got enough money and bought another 24,749 square-meters land to build a larger meditation-center that could contain more than 250 attendants. The total budget for the building is 54,512,000 baht (US\$ 1.8 million). We do not know how much Chinese diaspora contributed to this number but the Miaojuesi was developed into a stabilized religious institute by Chinese diaspora who live in Chiang Mai.

The social groups and religious-based organizations, like this one, is connected identically by using the Han-Chinese-culture-identity circle, ethnic identity rather than political identity attached controversially. It means whether it is those of Taiwanese, Kuomintang (KMT), old wave of Thai-Chinese residents, or new wave of Chinese diaspora from PRC, from Taiwan or elsewhere, all people (at least Chinese speaking people) could come to join in Buddhism worldly learning, with the inclusiveness and openness views.

Conclusion

The chapter presents several conditions and difficulty of new Chinese diaspora sojourning in Chiang Mai, Thailand in socially and culturally embedded into Thai society. It regards to the encountered challenges and their Chinese circles of social life in Thailand; --the barriers of language competence, and especially prejudices and stereotypes engendered by relatively both positive and negative images circulating within Thai society--, which they have been encountering with. Under these conditions, new Chinese diaspora may not necessarily integrate into Thai locality, and/or relatively select to engage with Thai cultures in locality. Hence, we have seen how they socially form a “parallel community”, exemplifying in the emerging religious-based and online-offline-based spaces, in order to socially and emotionally foster their transient mobile livelihood.

Taking examples of the two religious-based spaces and online Chinese parents’ groups, it has reflected that new Chinese diaspora could possibly find their own capacity, to form a parallel community. When participating the Christian-based spaces and its process in a parallel

community, new Chinese diaspora have experienced not only a sense of Chinese belonging in a foreign land which operated through religious activities. But they have also experienced transnationally more cosmopolitan knowledge, learning different spirituality and moral values which Thai locality provided them more freedom to attach with. It is worth to note that, for the Buddhism-styled spiritual case, the condition of utilizing Han-Chinese ethnic identification, rather than focusing on citizenship has included new Chinese diaspora to experience the worldly Buddhism while receiving assistance of Thai-Chinese locals in order to overcome several cultural barriers in Thai societies.

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