

Chinese Transnational Migration in the Region: An Update

James K. Chin

The University of Hong Kong



The Number of Chinese Overseas

- 1960s: 12.7 million
- 1985: 22 million
- 1999: 33 million
- 2009: 45 million
- It seems that more than 20 million Chinese have migrated to other countries from mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan over the past 30 decades.

Where Are They from?

- Historical Migrant Sending Regions
- Three Major Migrant Sending Regions
 - Central Fujian (the Fuzhou region in particular)
 - South Zhejiang (Wenzhou and Qingtian)
 - Northeast China provinces
- Migration Snow Ball Has Been Spreading to Inland Provinces and Remote Frontier Regions

Why Suddenly the New Chinese Transnational Migration Emerged in the late 1970s?

- The emigration ban that had been in effect for 40 years on the mainland was finally lifted by the Chinese government in the late 1970s
- Western countries changed their migration policies in the hope to attract skilled foreign labours to work in a certain service sectors
- Coupled with the family chain migration, push-and-pull factors lead more and more Chinese youths to emigrate countries overseas

Migration Direction Has Been Slightly Changed

- Historically, countries of Southeast Asia were the traditional and major destinations
- New Chinese migrants target at economically developed countries in North America and Europe
- On the other hand, South America, Africa and Middle East have become the new migration destinations
- Southeast Asia is not the leading receiving region anymore

Four Types of New Chinese Migrants

- Student migrants and visiting academic staff
 - More than one million students and scholars had left China by 2006
- Business migrants
 - Investment migrants, commercial representatives, traders and peddlers
- Contract worker migrants
 - So far about 3.75 million Chinese contract worker migrants are working in different countries overseas. Of them, more than 200,000 are in Southeast Asia.
- Unskilled labour migrants and farmers

Chinese Emigration to Southeast Asia since 1980

- Two small new transnational migration waves prior to 1978
 - Thousands of young intellectuals from frontier provinces of southwest China smuggled across the border to join the armies of Community Party of Burma
 - Thousands of Jinjiang Hokkiens smuggled into the Philippines after 1975

Chinese Emigration to Southeast Asia since 1980

- The large scale migrant flow from China to Southeast Asia, nevertheless, did not come into view until the mid 1980s. Thailand and the Philippines were the two major destination countries during this period.
- The years following 1992 saw another group of wealthy Chinese moving into the Islands from Fujian when the Philippine government announced a new investment migration policy.
- It is estimated that currently there are around 150,000 new Chinese migrants in the Philippines and majority are illegal migrants.

Chinese Emigration to Southeast Asia since 1980

- In the mid 1990s, another wave of new Chinese migrants flowed into Southeast Asia.
- Singapore government tried her best to attract quality Chinese migrants from Malaysia, Hong Kong and Australia due to the rapid decrease of ethnic Chinese in the country.
- Quality secondary school students have purposely been attracted by the Singapore government from mainland China since the mid 1990s with financial subsidies being provided by the government or government-linked enterprises.
- It is estimated that currently there are 250,000 to 300,000 new Chinese migrants working and living in Singapore while annually about 80,000 contract workers are imported from China.

Chinese Emigration to Southeast Asia since 1980

- In Malaysia, overstayed tourism migration, marriage migration, student migration and contract worker migration are the four major transnational migration patterns.
- Currently 20,000 to 40,000 Chinese labours are illegally working in the country.

Chinese Emigration to Southeast Asia since 1980

- In mainland Southeast Asia, new Chinese migrants could be seen in most of the countries, especially in Burma, Cambodia and Laos.
- Apart from businessmen, a huge number of Chinese contract workers are working for the different infrastructure construction projects financed by the Chinese government.
- Many plantations owned and operated by new Chinese migrants from Sichuan, Hunan, Guizhou and Yunnan have quietly emerged in the villages of Golden Triangle region bordering with China.