

The Transnational Migration Process of New Chinese Migrant Traders in Bobae Market, Udon Thani, Thailand¹

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Abstract

This article is based on a recent study of the transnational migration process of new Chinese migrant traders who moved from their home country to Udon Thani, Thailand. Using the methodology of qualitative research, including in-depth interviews as well as participant and non-participant observation, the study found that the migration process of these traders has been reshaped by many changes. Under current circumstances, the migrant traders seek not only opportunities and economic benefits; their own needs, personal desires and other varied complex factors are also major drivers in their migration. The new transnational migration model consists of three groups of Chinese migrants who use one of the following means: 1) social networks, 2) the assistance of the Bobae Market, and 3) their own efforts. The transnational migration process of these three groups is entirely different from that of the older Chinese immigrants, and it reflects the negotiation and bargaining power of the new traders these days. They are no longer victims of oppression they no longer lack power in negotiation and bargaining. Furthermore, they have more opportunities and various choices in life than the past generation did.

Keywords: migration process, transnational migration, new Chinese immigrant traders

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษากระบวนการย้ายถิ่นข้ามชาติของผู้ค้าชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นใหม่จากมาตุภูมิสู่ตลาดโนบีเบจังหวัดอุดรธานี ใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพในการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การสังเกตการณ์แบบมีส่วนร่วมและไม่มีส่วนร่วม ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าเกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงในกระบวนการย้ายถิ่นข้ามชาติของผู้ค้าชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นใหม่ ในสถานการณ์ปัจจุบันผู้ค้าชาวจีนมิได้อพยพมาเพื่อแสวงหาโอกาสและผลประโยชน์เชิงเศรษฐกิจเท่านั้น แต่แรงผลักดันที่สำคัญยังได้แก่ ความต้องการจำเป็น ความปรารถนาส่วนบุคคล และปัจจัยที่ซับซ้อนอื่นๆ รูปแบบการย้ายถิ่นข้ามชาติของผู้ค้าชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นใหม่ที่มีการย้ายถิ่นข้ามชาติผ่านการแนะนำของเครือข่ายทางสังคม กลุ่มที่สอง ผู้ค้าชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นใหม่ที่มีการย้ายถิ่นข้ามชาติผ่านการซักซ่อนจากทางตลาดโนบีเบจัง และกลุ่มที่สาม ผู้ค้าชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นใหม่ที่มีการย้ายถิ่นข้ามชาติด้วยตนเอง โดยกระบวนการย้ายถิ่นของผู้ค้าชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นใหม่ทั้ง 3 กลุ่มนี้มีความแตกต่างกันอย่างสิ้นเชิงจากชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นเก่าและยังสามารถสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงอำนาจในการต่อรองของผู้ค้าชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นใหม่ในปัจจุบันที่ไม่ได้เป็นผู้ตอกย้ำได้สถานการณ์ที่ถูกบีบบังคับ หรือขาดอำนาจในการต่อรองอีกด้วย หากแต่เป็นผู้ย้ายถิ่นข้ามชาติที่มีโอกาสและเต็มไปด้วยทางเลือกในเชิงวิถีที่มากกว่าผู้อพยพชาวจีนในอดีต

คำสำคัญ: กระบวนการย้ายถิ่น การย้ายถิ่นข้ามชาติ ผู้ค้าชาวจีนอพยพรุ่นใหม่

Introduction

The Chinese first began immigrating to Thailand in the 13th and 14th centuries and have had good relations with the Thais since then (Skinner, 2003). Thai and Chinese cultures are intermingled in numerous ways through the daily lives of people in Thai society (Skinner, 2003; Duan, 2015). The Chinese have important roles in Thai society and its economy that cannot be overlooked (Skinner, 2003; Santasombat et al, 2012; Janthranusorn, 2010). Moreover, the process of globalization has made the world connected, and lessened the power of the nation state on the border (Ritzer, 2015). This has resulted in the migration of many people throughout Thailand, especially in the Northeast, which is a

strategic area of social, cultural and historical interest. This area has also numerous economic opportunities in the midst of the growth of the Mekong Sub-region.

Chinese people began to settle in Udon Thani province about 120 years ago, and the number living in the Northeast increased fourfold between 1919 and 1937, when transportation between provinces became linked by roads and rails which were convenient for the movement of people and goods (Skinner, 2003; Jiang, 1992). Moreover, the establishment of a U.S. Air Force base in Udon Thani province in 1961 was critical in stimulating economic development. For these reasons, many Chinese who were good at business used this opportunity to settle there (Pattha, 2007) and became a major force of economic development in the province. In 2004, after the establishment of Bobae Market in Udon Thani province, more than 100 households of new Chinese migrant traders migrated to run multinational businesses. The interesting point is that Udon Thani is not a national economic center, but an area of economic opportunity near the border area. Previous research studies have not focused on the new generation of Chinese immigrants choosing to live in Udon Thani, but rather on the Chinese living in the Thai-Lao border area (Sirirphon, 2013; Kiratinnavanat, 2014). There is a new social relation dimension to these new Chinese migrant traders. Through globalization, socio-economic conditions have changed, influencing the ways in which people live in the modern era and causing changes in the pattern of migration. The present article examines the migration process of new Chinese migrant traders in the context of globalization, which has resulted in the movement of capital, money, goods, information, ideas and transnational immigrants (Giddens and Richard, 2006: 50-51).

This study employed the concept of transnational migration, which is based on the sociological theory of the structural-functional group (Brettel and Hollifield, 2015: 1-36). This concept is based on a critique of the limitations of two mainstream concepts used to analyze and understand migration. The first is the neoclassical school, which focuses on economic equilibrium, also known as the push-pull theory,

according to which people decide to migrate for economic reasons. The second concept is the historical structure school, which focuses on macro-level factors such as oppressive social structures, political decentralization and unequal economic conditions in the global economic and capital system (Ruenkaew, 2009). Both concepts focus only on economic factors at the structural level and ignore agency at the individual level. Since various conditions apart from economic factors need to be taken into account for migration, the sociological approach emphasizing transnational migration was chosen for this study. This approach attempts to harmonize the two concepts mentioned above by considering international migration as a form of interaction migration, which can explain the migration process more deeply. The migration process, according to Castles and Miller (1993), can be divided into three main stages: pre-migration, mid-migration and post-migration. It also details the subdivision of migration, including the economic, political, social, cultural, and legal systems. The influence of economic, political and legal systems is evident both nationally and internationally (Castles and Miller, 1993; Chantavanich et al., 1998). The transnational migration framework will lead to the presentation of information and the analysis of the data from the field study.

Data from academic documents, research studies, textbooks and academic articles in Thai, Chinese and English concerning the migration process of Chinese migrants were collected. In addition, the researcher administered in-depth interviews with 25 key informants who had migrated into the area as new Chinese migrant traders after the year 2004 and lived in Bobae Market. Because they had little knowledge of the Thai language and were unable to communicate in Thai, the researcher interviewed them by using Chinese. Participant observation and non-participant observation were also used to analyze the phenomena happening at the present.

The transnational migration factors of new Chinese migrant traders

The transnational migration factors of new Chinese migrant traders are complex. Previous studies emphasized economic factors and found that most of the migrants went to the destination area with the hope of increased economic opportunities and better quality of life (Skinner, 2005; Sasanasuphinte, 2011; Tantijariyapan, 2012). However, the study of Bobae Market presents new factors behind the immigration of the traders. An example can be seen in the circumstances of QingYang, a 40-year-old trader selling accessories at Bobae Market who immigrated from Shan Xi, a small town in northwest China. He explained, *“Now the economy in China is very good, but the competition is very stiff and so we decided to do business abroad. We cannot compete in China. Running a business at this market is less stressful”* (QingYang [Pseudonym], 2016). This statement reflects the migrants’ desire to escape from the competitiveness and high pressure in Chinese society, as well as the problems associated with a large population of 1,367 billion people (Li, 2016) and the unemployment rate which increased from 4.7 percent in 2014 to 5.1 percent in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). All of these factors prompted Chinese traders to migrate out of the country.

Similarly, GuangYi, a 46-year-old trader from a rural area in Jiang Su province who had worked in the clothing business in China for more than 20 years, observed, *“In Udon Thani, the market is good, so I can make a greater profit”* (GuangYi [Pseudonym], 2016). This is the attraction factor according to the push-pull theory. There is also a driving force, which is the promotion policy of the country of origin aiming to develop professional skills for the immigrants. Local governments in China have a policy of promoting work abroad, reflecting the fact that the government recognizes the importance of the people who are going to work abroad and tries to boost their confidence. An example is ZhiLin, a 30-year-old trader from a rural area of Hu Nan province in central China, who explained, *“We attended English training held by*

the municipality for people who want to migrate to foreign countries” (ZhiLin [Pseudonym], 2016). In addition, the destination countries also have policies supporting migration. In Thailand, for example, the procedures for obtaining a business visa are not complicated and a work permit to invest in Thailand can be obtained easily and quickly. These factors contribute to the intensification of transnational migration.

The study also found that some people migrated to achieve their inner aspirations. An interview with Wei, a Chinese female migrating from a small town in Zhe Jiang province, near Shang Hai in eastern China, reveals that she did not have previous experience traveling outside the country. *“I saw that my friends who went to work abroad could dress stylishly, get a job, travel, and earn a lot of money. I secretly envied them. I wanted to go abroad, too”* (Wei [Pseudonym], 2016). Her statement reflects the desire of many Chinese women to live a more modern and luxurious life. Similarly, YueRu, a trader from a rural area who finished Grade 12 and recently settled down with her husband to do business in Thailand, stated, *“We are more comfortable living in Thailand. We live well and do not have to do rice farming. I feel freer here than I did living at home. If we were in China, we could only plant rice and do housework because we have no other skills to compete with others”* (YueRu, [Pseudonym], 2016). From this statement it can be seen that the migrants have more freedom in Thailand than in China and hope to escape the social system or the old circumstances in Chinese society. It is difficult for the new middle class in China to compete in the new economic system of Chinese society since they are tied to traditional agricultural production, and have to compete with people who have had more educational opportunities and live in urban areas. For these reasons, rural people with a low educational background have fewer social opportunities.

In addition, some informants wanted to have new experiences in life. LiWen, a modern trader with a bachelor’s degree and technological skills who migrated from Guang Zhou, a large city in the south, explained, *“We are the new generation, so we do not have to stay at home with the same old things. We want to travel and explore*

the world” (LiWen [Pseudonym], 2016). It can be seen from this statement that the current generation of immigrants want to break out of their monotonous life and experience new things. They have the necessary skills to do so. This is the internal force that can drive people to follow their dreams. This new generation no longer needs to be attached to the “home” or the homeland (Giddens, 1981: 90-108).

The transnational migration factors of new Chinese migrant traders are diverse because they evolved under changes in the social-economic context over time. Thus, migration cannot be considered only in the economic dimension or push-or pull-factors. Instead, the varied dynamic conditions and unique characteristics of current immigrants should be considered.

The transnational migration process of new Chinese migrant traders

In the study the transnational migration process of new Chinese migrant traders consisted of three main stages with three groups of immigrants. At each stage, there were overlapping connections. The transnational migration pattern of the new traders varied according to the ways in which they migrated, which can be classified into three types.

1. Through the introduction of social networks

Before migrating the new traders often had relatives or friends who were doing business abroad or in China. The new traders had good social networks with those operating businesses overseas, which provided good examples for starting businesses, as well as for adapting to new social conditions and enhancing the quality of life. Social networks consisted of relatives, friends, people living in the same homeland or those running similar businesses. Consequently, the new Chinese migrant traders looked forward to conducting business and living abroad as recommended by their relatives or friends. They could escape from their original way of life to have adventures and experience the challenges of living in a new place.

An interview with a 24-year-old woman from a small town in Zhe Jiang province who followed her brother to Thailand illustrates this point. *“My brother had operated a business in Lao since I was a kid. We usually met only at weddings or funerals, but every time we met, I listened to him talk about his experiences in running a business abroad. I wanted to follow him to a foreign country and he said that he was willing to facilitate everything for me because he had experience, capital and resources”* (LiLi [Pseudonym], 2016). This story demonstrates that social networks can facilitate all aspects of migrating, such as providing information about migration and business operations as well as practical advice about day-to-day life in a foreign country. Direct experiences were passed along to those who wished to migrate. In addition, migrants often contacted people in the networks informally. Usually they tried to eat together and meet or celebrate with close friends and build trust through a variety of ways, including meeting at major festivals, such as Chinese New Year, the Ching Ming Festival, and weddings, funerals, and seasonal rituals within the community. These occasions were the key areas of building networking, which became an important starting point in the exchange of information.

During the migration, those immigrating through the introduction of social networks were often provided with assistance by relatives and friends in applying for visas or even booking plane tickets as well as learning how to fill in the immigration card and pass through the checkpoints. For instance, LiLi recalled, *“My brother took me to the tour company providing the visa service. It was like a middleman company. I just prepared a photo, ID card and passport, filled out the basic information and paid for the service. After waiting for about 15 days, the business visa was sent to me. It was very convenient. After I got the visa, my brother booked plane tickets and taught me how to book online. I had not known about it before. And when I packed my bags, my sister-in-law reminded me that the weather in Thailand was very hot, so I should not take heavy jackets with me because I would not have to use them. Without the help of my brother and sister-in-law, I would not be here”* (LiLi [Pseudonym], 2016).

These traders often chose to travel by plane and hold a legal business visa for the migration into Thailand. Intimacy and trust among people in the social networks played a very important role in the migration process. Close interactions helped to reduce anxiety and boost confidence since they didn't have to worry about being deceived. As a result, their transnational migration was smooth.

When traveling to the destination area, another trader, GuangYi, who had had experience in trading clothing for more than 20 years, explained, *“Family members and I do similar types of business. We can help each other. When I came to Thailand, I just followed the path that was already laid out. They just helped me. I did not have to start a new business. My relatives recommended me to the people involved in the business. They also taught me how to do it”* (GuangYi [Pseudonym], 2016). His experience demonstrates how new Chinese migrant traders migrating through the introduction of social networks often helped to run the business or expanded the existing business of the network. They did not have to start a new business. Therefore, their need to adapt was not so great because they often interacted with relatives and people in the same social network or those involved in their business. Since in doing business, there is a need for people who can be trusted to be assistants, to expand the business, or to serve as business partners, these social networks helped those who wanted to migrate. As LiLi said, *“When I moved here, I only talked to family members at home and Thai people whom I worked with because I couldn't speak Thai. Actually, I wanted to have Thai friends, but I had no time to meet new people and I felt that by just living with people around me, I could live comfortably. I didn't need to know anyone else”* (LiLi [Pseudonym], 2016). These comments indicate that the Thai language ability of new Chinese migrant traders who migrated through the introduction of the social networks was at a basic level. They could use it only for basic discussions or in trading and so it could not lead to close relationships with people in the destination area. With strong social networks, however, these people did not need to focus on interacting with people in the destination area and they could still live comfortably.

These traders received close attention and were taken care of by social networks throughout the migration period, from the pre-migration period, through the migration period and when they reached the destination area. The networks also provided ongoing support, both in daily life and in doing business. Thus, life for these new Chinese migrant traders immigrating through the introduction of social networks was not as difficult as it had been in the past. A study by Skinner (2003) and Wongjittapoke (2001) points out that old Chinese migrants had struggled in many ways, including adapting before immigrating, traveling during the migration as well as adjusting to live and run a business in the destination area. Because of the relatively strong social capital or the social networks providing care and support throughout the transnational migration process, the previous studies often mentioned that migrants selected brokers or agencies that helped in migration (Chamaratana, 2011; Sasanasuphinte, 2011; Siriphon, 2013). However, the results in the present study reveal that there was mutual benefit on both sides. The migrants received help from and trusted the social networks, while the networks helped the immigrants with the migration process in order to allow new traders to come to the destination area.

Through the assistance of the Bobae Market

Before migrating to Thailand, all of those who migrated through the encouragement of Bobae Market had previously operated businesses in Chinese markets in Lao PDR. By the end of 2004, the owner of Bobae Market saw the opportunity to build a commercial space in Udon Thani. The market was planning to expand to accommodate Chinese traders. The Chinese traders operating businesses in Lao PDR were persuaded through a project-planning meeting and those who wanted to migrate were taken to explore the Bobae Market in-person. They saw the project preview and expected to earn a greater income with better facilities from the economic expansion in Thailand, the systematic management of the market and a good structure supporting the future

development of business. Another advantage was that the location near the Thai-Lao border, which had numerous opportunities that attracted them to Bobae Market. XueLiang, a middle-aged man who used to run a business in Lao PDR, explained, *“At that time, Bobae Market was enthusiastic in inviting us to move to there. Many formal and informal meetings were held to describe the project and there was an interpreter to translate for us. There were trips to take people interested in moving across the border to study and explore the real area at Udon Thani”* (XueLiang [Pseudonym], 2016). This statement shows that the market facilitated all aspects of the migration, including transferring the business and operating transnational migration for the Chinese traders.

During the process of migration, these traders often chose to travel by bus since the distance between Vientiane, Lao PDR and Udon Thani, Thailand is not very great. The market issued a business visa for Chinese traders who intended to relocate their businesses and migrate to Udon Thani. Not only did it take care of the traders in migrating into the country, it also facilitated the movement of goods to the new area as well. The market contacted trucking companies and arranged areas or warehouses near the market for the Chinese traders. This service facilitated comprehensive migration and was a great incentive.

After migrating to the destination area, these Chinese traders continued doing the same business as before. They received good care for the market in setting up their businesses. They were assisted in every aspect of the move such as the provision of staff interpreters to keep track of Chinese communication problems. There were special rules for Chinese traders and they were given the information in Chinese. Consequently, they were no longer worried about running a business. In addition, migrating into Bobae Market allowed them to see business expansion channels in other provinces, such as Phitsanulok, Chaiyaphum and Loei. They often chose to contact other Chinese traders who had migrated from Lao PDR like them since they used to live in the same country and had similar life experiences and businesses. They could become a business network in the future. Since these traders were used to living abroad, they did not have to adapt very much.

These traders were merchants who migrated through the persuasion of the market. They were well served and assisted throughout the migration process from the pre-migration period when they were still in Lao PDR, during the migration and after they migrated to Udon Thani. The provision of good and complete care and services was an important impetus for their migration because it strengthened their confidence and reduced difficulties throughout the migration process. This reflected the market-driven business strategy that changed from one that was waiting for the traders to one that approached them and persuaded them to enter the market. The market also provided services so that the traders were able to migrate to Thailand easily. It was a very successful way to bring transnational migration to a new destination.

The transnational migration through their own efforts

The new Chinese migrant traders immigrating through their own efforts had often operated businesses in China before migrating. They were mainly businesspeople aged 25-45. They were in the process of building their reputations after having run their businesses for a considerable amount of time. As one trader said, *“I had not planned to migrate to Thailand before because there was no way to get here. I had no friends here. And I did not have any information about it. I started searching on the Internet. I did not know Thai. So I decided to visit Thailand. At least, the culture is close and the Thai people are kind”* (LiWen [Pseudonym], 2016). These remarks demonstrate that he, like many traders, did not rely on others. They searched for information, often from the Internet, which is available in Chinese. They also had a good attitude towards Thai people and Thai society. They were often confident, willing accept risks, and they wanted to do business in a foreign country. Initially, the method used to find areas with better opportunities was to travel to various areas to seek investment opportunities. They obtained tourist visas and booked plane tickets by themselves to explore the real world without any guidance.

The new Chinese migrant traders immigrating through their own efforts often traveled by plane, reflecting their economic status and the fact that they chose to travel in areas where economic growth was appropriate for long-term investment. They focused on medium-sized cities and tried to find areas suitable for their businesses. They also planned for future business expansion. New Chinese migrant traders surveyed the new destinations before immigrating. They often traveled to explore the areas by bus or van in order to view the areas closely and learn the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks of doing business there. Traders surveyed the areas for 1-3 months to find the right business area. Bobae Market was an option for them because it had a good management system, infrastructure and facilities and it was ready for business development. In addition, the market is large, Udon Thani is also close to the border, and Thai and Lao customers cross it to trade. Chinese traders recognized these opportunities and business channels. Moreover, Udon Thani has an international airport and a good health care system. For these reasons, the traders choose it as their destination, returned to China to obtain their business visas and prepared for transnational migration to the destination area officially.

When migrating to the destination area, these traders were assisted by the market and so they could apply for a work permit easily. They also received recommendations about renting shops within the market and about the trade laws and regulations. The good structure, management system and service of the market facilitated the establishment of business operations of these traders who came through their own efforts. Yanjin, age 29, a high school graduate from a small town in Guang Dong province in the South is an example. “*When I first came to the market, it was difficult for me,*” he said. “*I needed to contact the market by myself. But fortunately, the market staff could communicate in Chinese. I also had to find an apartment by myself without help from anyone. There were many things I had to face and I had to make adjustments in my everyday life as well*” (YanJin [Pseudonym], 2016). From this statement it can be seen that since there was no one to assist in communicating with people in the destination

area, the traders in this group were trying to adapt and learn about Thai culture in order to build and maintain relationships with others, including Thais and other Chinese traders in the destination area. These efforts led to the exchange of information and the building of social networks. Because the migrants could not depend on others, self-reliance was required. Compared with those who migrated through the persuasion of the market, they found it more difficult since they were alone, with no social networks to provide information or facilities or organizations that could accommodate and assist them. However, their economic status was relatively good and they had enough capital. Therefore, they migrated confidently on their own, reflecting their power in negotiation and bargaining which was completely unlike what earlier generations had experienced.

Another interesting point was that these new Chinese migrant traders transferred money back home through the Internet application called ALi Pay. It is a modern method that had never appeared in the migration process of Chinese immigrants before. It can be done without having to leave home and without having to pay fees. Money can be transferred within seconds. It is fast, convenient and safe. Moreover, previous studies suggested that Chinese immigrants often chose to establish a Chamber of Commerce or set up various foundations in the destination area to strengthen the social relationships between older Chinese immigrants and the people in the destination area, maintain the social networks, and expand business in the destination area (Wongjittapoke, 2001; Fu, 2003; Tang and Huang, 2007; Zhang, 2006; Skinner, 2003; Institute of China Studies, 2008). Nevertheless, the new traders created social networks to assist in migration or to further develop their own business. They did not build social networks with the community or the destination area.

Discussion and conclusion

The three transnational migration patterns demonstrate that the new Chinese migrant traders were different from the older generation of

immigrants. The transnational migration process was more diverse than in the past. The old immigrants often fled from unstable social conditions in China, such as wars or natural disasters (Sukolartanametee, 2012; Jiang, 1992; Skinner, 2005; Chantavanich, 1991). The new traders, however, had the power to make the decision to migrate by themselves in order to seek areas of opportunity where they could increase their income and improve their quality of life. They were not victims under pressure, they did not flee or lack bargaining power; they had opportunities and choices in life.

The transnational migration patterns of these immigrants were different from those in previous research studies (Skinner, 2003; Suppayasam, 2007; Duan, 2015; Siriphon, 2013). Many previous studies emphasize the importance of kinship in the form of associations or chambers of commerce, which are large social networks to facilitate systematic international business operations (Jiang, 1992; Li, 2010; Tang and Huang, 2007; Zhang, 2006; Skinner, 2003; Manomaiviboo, n.d.). Previous studies mention that the immigrants often relied on commercial agencies or brokers to help them migrate to the destination areas. These immigrants faced risks and had to pay a substantial amount of money to brokers. This pattern of immigration had both legal and illegal aspects to it (Chamaratana, 2011; Siriphon, 2013; Sasanasuphinte, 2011).

The present study, however, found that among the new migrant traders, some depended on relatives, while others were dependent on social networks such as a group of friends who helped them migrate into the destination area. There was no broker or agency; thus, the cost was reduced as they did not have to pay compensation for the migration. Moreover, there was a change in the pattern of financial transactions. These immigrants transferred money by using Internet applications instead of going to the bank. This was unlike the transfer of money of older Chinese immigrants who usually carried their money directly to the other parties, or later transferred money from their bank accounts through a commercial agency (Skinner, 2003; Zhang, 2006; Duan, 2015). It is evident that new traders had the ability to create their own

relationships between the original area and the destination area because they had the power of choice and knowledge about living conditions. Consequently, they did not need to rely on agents or brokers in any aspect of the process of migrating or transferring money.

New Chinese migrant traders came from diverse parts of China. They had a medium amount of capital and they could earn more money than ever. Their economic status was quite good. Moreover, they were former traders, unlike previous migrants who came from low-income backgrounds and often had working-class jobs such as laborers, tailors or street-side food hawkers (Skinner, 2003; Zhuang, 2008; Wongjittapoke, 2001; Duan, 2015). The relatively high social status and the capital of the new traders enhanced their ability to make decisions. They also had more bargaining power in the migration process. In addition, their skills and abilities determined and affected the patterns of migration process, which were different from those in the past.

Changes in the social context, economic conditions and political policies of Thailand and China in the globalization era caused changes in the transnational migration process of new Chinese migrant traders which led to the new patterns of migrating. The migration was not only for seeking opportunities and economic benefits at an advantageous level in trading and business; there were many other conditions and inner desires driving the migration. The means of travel in the migration process changed from traveling by boat to traveling by air, which made travel fast and comfortable. It also led to interpersonal interactions and the creation of social networks. This is also different from the past in that the migrants were not attached to the destination. Thus, it can be seen that new Chinese migrant traders are no longer victims fleeing oppression nor disadvantaged groups who lack power in negotiation and bargaining; they are the new transnational immigrants with numerous opportunities and choices in life.

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