

# **Beyond Education:**

## **The Livelihood Strategies of Chinese Accompanying Mothers in Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

In the context of globalization, an increasing number of Chinese families choose to send their children to Thailand for international education, forming a unique social group known as “accompanying mothers”. This research specifically investigates how these mothers achieve economic survival through informal activities while navigating legal ambiguity and social barriers. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining an online questionnaire survey (151 respondents) and semi-structured interviews (13 participants). The study aims to answer the following questions: What informal economic strategies do Chinese accompanying mothers adopt? What legal and social risks do they encounter? How can these challenges be addressed? The study found that accompanying mothers maintain economic independence and realize their self-worth through informal economic activities such as real estate investment, purchasing on behalf of others, private tour guiding, catering businesses, and translation services. However, these activities largely exist in a legal gray area, facing visa restrictions and tax compliance issues, and are mainly confined to the Chinese community, which may lead to social isolation from the local population. This research recommends that the Thai government adjust its policies concerning foreign accompanying families and provide legal pathways for entrepreneurial or investment. At the same time, it is suggested that accompanying families develop a thorough understanding of local laws and regulations and plan sustainable long-term economic models to avoid legal risks and promote social integration. Future research could

explore the impact of policy on the economic activities of accompanying mothers, as well as how their legal economic participation can be encouraged through policy optimization and targeted support.

**Keywords:** Chinese accompanying mothers; Informal economy; Chinese diaspora in Thailand; Economic survival strategy

## **Introduction**

Globalization is a process of continuous expansion and intensification, describing the increasing interconnectedness of the world across multiple domains including the economy, culture, politics and education (Waters, 2001; (Berry, 2008). From the historical perspective, globalization can be broadly divided into five phases (Steger, 2020): the prehistoric period (10,000-3,500 BC), the premodern period (3500-1500 BC), the early modern period (1500-1750 AD), the modern period (1750-1970 AD) and the contemporary period (after the 1970s). Since the 1970s, the pace of globalization has accelerated markedly, driven primarily by three key factors: political transformations, the expansion of multinational cooperations, and rapid advancement in digital technology (Crafts, 2000; Scholte, 2017; Westphal, 2002). These developments have had far-reaching effects on various aspects of society, especially education, creating unprecedented opportunities and challenges for cross-border learning and cultural exchanges (Knight, 2004; Spring, 2008; Burbules & Torres, 2013).

Education serves as both a driving force and an outcome of globalization (Spring, 2008). On the one hand, globalization has facilitated the sharing of educational resources and the adoption of international curricula (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Spring, 2008); on the other hand, the internationalization of education has contributed to increase the cross-border student mobility (Marginson, 2016; Peña-López, 2015).

In China, the impact of the internationalization of education has been particularly pronounced. Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy, the rapid development of the national economy and the improvement of living standards have enabled a growing number of Chinese families to send their children abroad in pursuit international education opportunities (Henze & Zhu, 2012). This trend has not only at the higher education level but has also gradually extended to basic education, leading to the emergence of the so-called “young learner study abroad” phenomenon (Waters, 2006; Henze & Zhu, 2012).

In recent years, the number of young Chinese students studying abroad has increased significantly. Unlike adult students who can manage academic and daily life independently, young learners often require the companionship and support of family members due to their age and development stage

(Cheng, Fan, & Liu, 2017). Although there is no official definition of who should act as the accompanying guardian, mothers most commonly assume this role. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese family values, where mothers are typically regarded as primary caregivers, bearing the majority of childcare responsibilities (Ho, 1986). The emergence of accompanying mothers thus represents a cultural continuity within the broader context of globalization. As a distinct social group, their primary role is to support their children's overseas education by providing emotional support and everyday care (Connelly, Roberts, & Zheng, 2012).

Thailand has recently emerged as a prominent destination for international students, attracting a substantial number of Chinese students and their accompanying mothers. Its geographic proximity to China, cultural affinities, and relatively affordable cost of education have made it a favorable choice for many Chinese families (Chansiri, 2008). As of 2023, Chinese students accounted for nearly 60% of the total international student population in Thailand\*. A considerable proportion of these students are minors, the majority of whom are accompanied by their mothers, who provide essential educational and emotional support for their children's stay abroad.

This study explores how these Chinese accompanying mothers construct informal economic lives under structural constraints. The main research objectives are as follows: (1) to identify the types of informal economic activities engaged in by Chinese accompanying mothers; (2) to examine the legal, social, and cultural barriers they face; and (3) to assess the impact of these activities on their long-term social integration and well-being.

The paper is divided into six main sections: literature review, methodology, profile of participants, analysis of economic activities, legal and social challenges, and conclusion and policy recommendations.

## Literature review

With the continuous advancement of globalization, more and more immigrants are no longer explained by the traditional linear model of “emigration-immigration-assimilation”. As a supplement to traditional migration theory, the theory of transnationalism emphasizes that immigrant individuals can establish and maintain continuous social, economic and cultural connections between two or more countries ((Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) further pointed out that transnationalism is not only a physical cross-border flow but also includes the construction of a

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\* <https://monitor.icef.com/2024/04/the-rise-of-alternative-destinations-thailand-poland-and-the-philippines/>

“transnational social space” (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Immigrant individuals achieve synchronous life in “here” and “there” through technology, capital, information and emotional networks. Portes et al. (1999) emphasized that transnational practices include economic activities such as remittances, and social activities such as family care, maintenance of cultural identity, and political participation (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999). Transnationalism theory has also been gradually used to explain the phenomenon of educational migration and accompanying study in the family unit.

At present, there is limited academic literature focusing specifically on accompanying mothers in Thailand.

The article by Jiangyu, L., Sisi, G., & Siriphon, A. (2023) analyses the concepts of reproductive mobility and the living economy among Chinese educational migrants. The research highlights that Chinese families are willing to invest substantial financial resources to send their children abroad for education, positioning this demand as a significant facet of global transnational mobility. The study further reveals how Chinese mothers actively manage family life projects through educational investments, thereby shaping a “living economy”. The phenomenon of accompanying mothers in Chiang Mai is interpreted as a spillover effect of the intense educational competition in China. Families opting for international education in Chiang Mai are referred to as “education escapees”. Through transnational migration, these families not only improved educational opportunities for their children but also construct new living environments for themselves.

Siriphon, A., & Li, J. (2022) examined the transnational migration experience of Chinese middle-class families in Thailand. The study found that these families navigated visa regulations and the complexities of transnational life by employing flexible strategies and building robust social networks. Although the role of mothers was not the central focus, it can be inferred that they played a crucial role in both family migration process and in supporting their children’s education. For instance, many mothers not only facilitated access to better educational resources but also developed new professional opportunities by engaging in local educational initiatives and community activities.

A subsequent study by Siriphon, A., & Li, J. (2023) further investigated the migration of Chinese middle-class families to Thailand for their children’s international education. Within this context, mothers were found to play a vital role in providing childcare and support. This form of migration is framed as a manifestation of Chinese transnationalism and strategic family planning. Mothers demonstrated a high degree of adaptability, adjusting their familial roles and economic activities in accordance with new environmental demands. However, the study did not delve deeply into the specific challenges faced by “pei

du mamas” (accompanying mothers), such as cultural adaptation, language barriers, and the emotional burden of separation from extended family and support systems.

Li, J., & Siriphon, A. (2022) explores the strategies adopted by Chinese migrants, particularly parents, to cope with visa restrictions in Thailand. The research discussed various approaches to securing legal residence, including enrolment in educational programs and participation in long-stay schemes. Migrants were shown to adopt multiple identities, cross borders frequently, and rely on personal networks to meet shifting legal and social needs. Although this article did not focus explicitly on mothers, the broader issues are undoubtedly relevant to them.

Lan, X., & Siriphon (2020) addresses the challenges faced by mothers, particularly accompanying mothers, within the context of patriarchal interpretations of Christianity. These women experience tensions stemming from traditional gender roles, navigating their identities as wives and mothers, while also managing intra-family conflicts and marginalization within both the household and religious institutions. Despite such challenges, they demonstrated remarkable resilience, striving to improve marital stability, family cohesion, and their personal circumstance by engaging with church teachings. Their religious commitment often served as a coping mechanism and a means of negotiating structural family constraints.

Zhu, J., Liu, Z., & Shen, X. (2024) focused on the cultural constraints, social barriers, and adaptive strategies employed by Chinese accompanying mothers in Thailand. The study found that these mothers faced numerous challenges in integrating into Thai society, including language barriers, social exclusion, and the problem of balancing family obligations with personal ambitions. To cope, they adopted flexible strategies, such as building support networks via social and participating in local community activities. For instance, some mothers joined churches or educational support groups, providing not only improved educational access for their children but also fostering new social networks for themselves.

In summary, transnationalism provides a powerful theoretical tool for understanding the lifestyles, economic strategies, and social adaptation of Chinese accompanying mothers. The phenomenon of educational migration among China’s middle-class families exemplifies the redistribution of educational resources in globalized context. It also underscores the multifaceted roles and challenges encountered by mothers during transnational migration. While, accompanying mothers are central to the educational trajectories of young overseas students, their contributions are often undervalued, and they remain largely invisible in both academic discourse and policy-making. Their experiences are shaped by restrictive immigration frameworks and sociocultural marginalization. Nevertheless, these mothers actively develop survival strategies to maintain a degree of economic independence.

This research aims to examine the economic practices adopted by accompanying mothers in Thailand, thereby revealing how they negotiate space for themselves within the constraints of existing legal and social structures.

## **Methodology and Data**

This research uses a mixed-methods design. There are two main sets of empirical data in this study.

The first dataset was derived from an online questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was distributed via “Wen Juan Xing”, the earliest and currently the largest online platform in China for surveys, assessments and polling. The survey link was shared across several WeChat groups, inviting Chinese accompanying mothers residing in Thailand to participate. The questionnaire collected information on the participants’ basic demographics (e.g., age, education, and economic status), accompanying experience (e.g., duration of stay, and children’s education), and economic survival strategies (e.g., engagement in local economic activities). A total of 151 valid responses were obtained.

The second dataset was gathered through fieldwork conducted in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, the two main research sites selected for this study. Bangkok, as the capital of Thailand, hosts numerous high-quality international schools, while Chiang Mai appeals to many Chinese accompanying families due to its relatively lower costs of living and favorable natural environment. Through purposive sampling, the researcher first established contact with several accompanying mothers who had resided in Thailand for an extended period. Following initial interviews, fieldwork was conducted from April to September 2024. Participants were then invited to refer other eligible accompanying mothers, using a snowball sampling technique. This approach allowed for the expansion of the sample size and access to participants from diverse backgrounds. In total, 13 participants were included in the fieldwork component.

Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling. All participating mothers met the inclusion criteria: their children are currently enrolling in international schools or similar educational institutions in Thailand, mainly kindergartens, primary, junior or senior middle school; they had been accompanying their children for over one year; and they are willing to participate and able to share detailed personal experiences and reflections. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant, and each session lasting between 30 minutes and one hour. The interviews explored topics included migration motivations, accompanying experience, and personal livelihood strategies. Additionally,

during fieldwork, the researcher also took part in some of the mothers' daily activities to gain richer, more three-dimensional data on their social interactions.

This study strictly adhered to academic ethical standards. All participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and participated voluntarily. They were granted the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants' identities were kept strictly confidential, and all findings were anonymized in reporting. The researcher pledged to maintain objectivity and fairness throughout the research design, data collection, and analysis processes. Furthermore, care was taken to avoid any language that might be offensive or discriminatory, and to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the data presented.

### **Profile of Chinese Accompanying Mothers**

According to the questionnaire data, the participants in the research were primarily ages between 26 and 45 years old. This age distribution is closely aligned with the educational needs of their children, reflecting that these mothers tend to relocate to Thailand during critical stages of their children's education. The majority of participants were married; however, a notable proportion were single mothers, highlighting the strong commitment and determination of this group in investing in transnational education.

Most accompanying mothers had received higher education, indicating their relatively strong adaptability, education awareness, and cultural literacy. A large number came from one-child or two-child families, a trend evidently shaped by China's family planning policies and associated educational investment strategies. In most cases, the mother alone accompanied the child to Thailand, though some families also involved grandparents in caregiving roles. This underscores not only the central role of mothers in transnational education but also the intergenerational support that characterizes many Chinese families' educational strategies.

Although the allocation of household expenditures varied among families, living costs and educational expenses were the two primary categories of spending. This reflects the essential relatively high tuition fees charged by international schools in Thailand, families typically spent between 200,000 to 300,000 Chinese yuan per year on education alone. Such figures suggest that these households generally possess upper-middle-class economic standing.

In terms of visa types, the majority of accompanying mothers held accompanying (dependent) visas, accounting for approximately 70% of the sample. This indicates that the most mothers formally immigrated to Thailand in support of their children's overseas education. Some participants extended their legal stay through enrolment in educational programs, thereby fulfilling the dual purpose of accompanying their children while pursuing personal development. A smaller proportion held work visas, enabling them

to engage in paid employment. This not only alleviated financial pressure but also illustrated their professional skill sets and capacity for economic participation. A few held Thailand Elite Visas, highlighting an alternative strategy for securing long-term residence. Overall, the diverse visa types adopted reflect the strategic flexibility and agency of these women in adapting to local immigration systems and supporting their families' transnational educational goals.

Renting apartments emerged as most common housing arrangement, offering flexibility and suitability for the temporary nature of accompanying children abroad. Villa, though more expensive, were chosen by some families due to their more spacious and comfortable environments---particularly among those with stronger economic means. A smaller number of families opted to purchase property, thereby securing long-term housing and demonstrating confidence in their continued stay in Thailand.

In summary, Chinese accompanying mothers generally exhibit high level of education and economic competence. Through the flexible use of visa categories, prudent financial planning, and varied housing strategies, they are able to provide sustained and effective support for their children's international education.

## **Economic Activities and Survival Strategies**

Although accompanying mothers generally possess a certain level of financial security, the long-term nature of their stay in Thailand is often marked by substantial amounts of free time and a psychological void stemming from their shift in social role. As a result, many seek to enrich their lives, expand their social network, and realize personal fulfilment through participation in economic activities (Lee & Park, 2010). However, due to restrictions associated with dependent visas, formal employment is typically not permitted, prompting many to engage in informal economic activities (Huang & Yeoh, 2005). These activities not only help them to utilize their time meaningfully but also generate supplementary income and a sense of personal achievement.

According to the questionnaire and the interviews, the economic strategies of accompanying mothers fall into four categories:

1. Investment: buy real estate.

In recent years, the Thai real estate market has attracted significant interest from Chinese investors, especially in cities such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phuket, where property is often viewed as a stable form of asset allocation (Pholphirul, & Rukumnuaykit, 2009). Factors like relatively low housing prices, high rental yields, and consistent demand from international tourists have made rental investments



increasingly attractive (Phiromyoo, 2011). Some accompanying mothers who with strong financial strength have purchased apartments or condominiums and leased them via platforms like Airbnb to tourists or short-term Chinese residents. They often manage bookings, welcome guests, maintain properties, and even promote their listings through word-of-mouth within social circles. This investment model can not only bring stable income but also provide them with the possibility of long-term residency in Thailand.

## 2. Trade: cross-border trade of Thai goods using social media.

Thai beauty products, health products, latex pillows and other products have always been popular products in the Chinese market due to their affordability, high quality and large market demand\*. Living in Thailand allows these accompanying mothers to directly inspect and verify product quality, thereby earning the trust of customers in China. Utilizing WeChat Moments, WeChat groups or *Xiaohongshu* (Little Red Book), they promote products, attract customers through personal networks, and arrange delivery via human couriers or cross-border logistics. Some mothers have established direct connections with local factories or wholesale suppliers in Thailand to reduce costs and create stable supply chains.

## 3. Religious activities: purchasing amulets and performing religious rituals for customers.

Thailand's rich Buddhist heritage has also led to a booming amulet market, both domestically and in Chinese market (Su, Pimchangthong, & Run, 2024). In recent years, with the spread of social media, the trend of collecting and wearing Thai amulets in China has grown rapidly (Jinasot & Numtong, 2024) with many believing that amulets bring wealth, career success and personal charm. At the same time, there are many well-known temples in Thailand, such as White Dragon King Temple, Wat Arun, Wat Saeng Kaeo Phothiyan etc., which attract numerous Chinese pilgrims seeking spiritual blessings. Many Chinese believe that through rituals which can bring good luck, eliminate disasters, and enhance career or emotional luck. However, due to time, distance and other factors, for those believers unable to travel to Thailand, which has given rise to the demand for intermediary services as amulet procurement, Buddhist worship, and Tai Sui appeasement rituals (to pacify or make peace with God of the Year) on behalf of others. Accompanying mothers are well positioned to fulfill this demand by liaising directly with temples and amulet shops, offering product showcases through livestreams or photographs, and explaining the efficacy, provenance, and rituals associated with each item. Upon receiving an order, they visit the temple, perform the necessary rituals (including offerings of incense, flowers, and lighting candles), and provide photo or video documentation to reassure customers. Service fees vary widely, ranging from a few hundred to several thousand Chinese Yuan depending on the nature of the ritual.

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\* <https://www.scb.co.th/en/personal-banking/stories/business-maker/cbec-in-china>

4. Service: providing private tour guide services, translation and medical assistance services. Thailand, as a popular tourist destination in the world, has attracted a large number of Chinese tourists (Rodyu, & Wetprasit, 2018). Due to the language skills and familiarity with local conditions, some accompanying mothers use their local life experience to work part-time as private tour guides (local guides) in the Chinese community to provide customized travel services. This service is more flexible than traditional travel agencies, the price is more transparent, and the degree of personalization is high, so it is favored by travelers.

With the expansion of the Chinese community in Thailand, and increased Chinese investment, tourism and education-related activities, the demand for translation services is growing. Mothers who are proficient in Thai often accompany Chinese patients to hospitals and act as medical interpreters. Others assist Chinese clients in making appointments for beauty treatments and receive commissions for such services. Besides, educational translation including school visits and enrolment procedures is another growing niche. At the same time, some mothers have gone a step further by leasing commercial spaces and opening Chinese restaurants to providing authentic Sichuan cuisine, Cantonese cuisine, Northeastern cuisine, etc., which cater to students, families and the broader Chinese diaspora. Use WeChat and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) for promotion and rely heavily on word-of-mouth recommendations. Services are mainly included dine-in, family gatherings, and delivery.

In general, the informal economic activities of Chinese accompanying mothers in Thailand have developed into a relatively self-contained economic ecosystem that centers on the Chinese community and is largely facilitated through digital platforms especially WeChat, and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book). Whether through real estate investment, cross-border e-commerce, tourism services, translation, and catering, these activities reflect their adaptive survival strategies under visa restrictions. In meeting the needs of the Chinese diaspora, these mothers simultaneously create opportunities for social integration, self-realization, and financial independence within their home country.

## **Legal and Social Challenges**

Although the Condominium Act grants foreigners the right to purchase condominiums in Thailand, it also imposes specific limitations. Foreign ownership in a condominiums development must not exceed 49% of the total floor area or number of units. Regulations concerning the purchase of standalone houses or

villas are significantly more stringent, typically requiring complex legal procedures to purchase<sup>\*</sup>. Therefore, the use of Thai nominees or company structures to complete the transaction is very common. In addition, according to the State Administration of Foreign Exchange of China<sup>\*</sup>, the permitted uses of foreign exchange under personal current accounts include private travel, overseas education, official and business trips, visiting relatives, medical treatment abroad, trade in goods, non-investment insurance, consulting services and other clearly defined major categories. However, it cannot be used for overseas real estate, securities investment, purchase of life insurance and investment-linked insurance is strictly prohibited under capital account controls. These limitations, coupled with quota regulations, make the use of funds originating in China for overseas property purchases cumbersome and difficult. The phenomenon of accompanying mothers purchasing property like a house or condominium in Thailand may, therefore, reflect certain peculiarities in the execution of informal or semi-formal immigration strategies.

The import and export of goods necessitate a valid business license and subject to customs supervision. In particular, against the backdrop of China tightening its oversight of cross-border e-commerce, many informal purchasing agents face increasing compliance challenges, including taxation and regulation of goods circulation. Besides, the Thai government has also been stepping up enforcement against foreign nationals conducting business without proper license. Individuals found in breach may face fines or, in more serious cases, the revocation of their visas.

Although religiously affiliated economic activities, such as the sale of amulets, can offer substantial profit margins and market popularity, they are not without risks. The Thai amulet market is highly mixed in quality; some unscrupulous vendors sell high-quality replicas as authentic temple-blessed item. This creates the possibility that accompanying mothers may unknowingly sell counterfeit products, potentially triggering disputes related to consumer rights.

Furthermore, religious artefacts especially amulets are often subject to strict import controls in certain jurisdictions. Cross-border mailing of such items may lead to confiscation or the imposition of high tariffs. Given the spiritual significance of Buddhist rituals, customers are more sensitive to the authenticity of services and the perceived effectiveness of religious practices. As a result, accompanying mothers need to cultivate customer trust through long-term word-of-mouth reputation and consistently high-quality services. The commercialization of religious activities has always been a controversial issue globally. The intertwining of commercial interests with sacred practices are viewed by some religious communities as a

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<sup>\*</sup> <https://www.siam-legal.com/buying-a-condominium.pdf>

<sup>\*</sup> <https://www.safe.gov.cn/neimenggu/file/file/20200228/fa90770027ed4d919de981c09bc25751.pdf>

violation of sanctity of faith. When religious rituals or objects are commodified, it may undermine their spiritual value and provoke ethical or moral concerns among believers.

In addition, Thai law strictly prohibits foreigners from working as tour guides. Only Thai citizens with official guide license are permitted to provide such services<sup>\*</sup>. Therefore, informal guiding activities conducted by accompanying mothers infringe upon the legal rights of local tour guide industries and may be subject to complaints or legal investigation.

Operating a restaurant in Thailand requires proper business registration. However, accompanying mothers typically hold visas that do not permit legal employment or entrepreneurial activities. Consequently, many of these restaurants must be registered under the names of Thai partners or citizens, which carries risks in terms of property rights and ownership security. The Chinese restaurant industry in Thailand is also becoming increasingly competitive, and rising costs in raw material, rent and labor further reduce the livelihood of successful entrepreneurship.

Translation services, particularly in specialized fields require high language skills. Not all accompanying mothers possess the required expertise, especially when it comes to medicine or law which demand a high degree of language proficiency and domain-specific knowledge. Miscommunication or errors in professional settings may lead to serious consequences, and customers often have stringent expectations for both the accuracy and confidentiality of such services. Building trust and maintaining a long-term client base is therefore essential and requires consistent delivery of high-quality interpretation.

Overall, according to the Thai law, those holders of accompanying visas, elite visas or student visas are generally not permitted to engage in paid employment while residing in Thailand. The majority of the aforementioned informal economic activities lack formal business registration and legal authorization. They occupy a gray area and are largely sustained through social trust and market reputation. Once reported by local residents or peers, they may face administrative penalties or even jeopardies their visa status and renewals. Moreover, the predominantly inward-facing nature of these economic activities, which primarily serve a single group, the Chinese community, without widespread cultural integration and sharing may lead to social isolation and exclusion, and exacerbation of intercultural tensions. In addition, as the number of accompanying families increases, the Thai government may further tighten oversight of such “informal economy”, raising concerns over their long-term viability and sustainability.

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<sup>\*</sup> [https://www.doe.go.th/prd/assets/upload/files/alien\\_th/e90980ef8b675e525737e753acc2726e.pdf](https://www.doe.go.th/prd/assets/upload/files/alien_th/e90980ef8b675e525737e753acc2726e.pdf)

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study aims to explore the livelihood strategies of Chinese accompanying mothers in Thailand, placing them in the context of transnational mobility and informal economic activities, and revealing how they seek economic survival in the face of legal ambiguity and social marginalization while assisting their children to receive international education. Through a mixed-method research design, this study presents a multi-dimensional picture of the living practices of this group.

This study finds that their economic activities are mainly concentrated in real estate investment, purchasing and resale, private tour guides, catering business, and translation services. These activities not only enable them to maintain a degree of economic independence but also provide platforms for social engagement and personal fulfilment. Social media platforms, particularly WeChat and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book), play a pivotal role in facilitating the economic participation of accompanying mothers. These digital tools assist in promoting products and services, cultivating client bases, and establishing trust-based networks. Notably, their economic engagements are largely confined within the Chinese community in Thailand, giving rise to a distinct “accompanying economic circle” that operates somewhat independently of mainstream local economic activities.

Although such activities help accompanying mothers assert economic independence and expand their social circles, they largely operate in legal gray area, constrained by visa restrictions, regulatory ambiguities, and tax compliance issues. As the Thai government increasingly seeks to regulate informal economic sectors, the sustainability of these survival strategies may face new uncertainties. The inward-facing nature of these economic practice, mainly concentrated in the Chinese community, which may also lead to isolation from the local society and hinder broader cultural integration.

The role of accompanying mothers in Thailand is not merely that of passive supporter; rather they demonstrate active adaptation and strategic coping capability throughout their transnational experience, reflecting typical characteristics of transnationalism. They live in Thailand geographically; their economic activities are highly dependent on the Chinese market. The construction of this “transnational social space” allows them to have a certain degree of flexibility and autonomy in cross-border life.

During their residence in Thailand, accompanying families should seek to fully understand local real estate laws, visa and business regulations in order to minimize even avoid legal risks caused by information asymmetry. Moreover, long-term financial planning is essential. Reliance on short-term or informal income sources may not be viable or sustainable. Accompanying families could consider compliant investment avenues or formal entrepreneurial ventures as more stable alternatives. Through lawful and

regulated economic activities, which may ensure their own economic security and contribute positively to the Thai society and economy.

## **Recommendation**

In order to better manage and guide the economic participation of this transnational group, the Thai government can consider establishing legal entrepreneurial or employment paths for accompanying families through revising the economic management framework. By optimizing visa policies, spouses or parents holding accompanying visas can be allowed to engage in small-scale business activities and legal employment if they meet the conditions. In addition, strengthen the popularization of legal knowledge and compliance guidance for accompanying families. The government, through the Ministry of Education, the Immigration Bureau, local governments and communities, regularly provides legal seminars, entrepreneurship guidance lectures or multilingual manuals. At the same time, providing clearer entrepreneurial or investment pathways and transparent regulatory guidelines will further help foreign families comply with the local legal framework.

These measures will help reduce illegal economic activities while attracting high-quality foreign residents with investment conditions, thereby strengthening Thailand's socioeconomic structure.

Future studies may focus on how Thai policy frameworks affect the economic participation of accompanying mothers or families and explore mechanisms through which policy optimization and institutional support could foster their lawful engagement in the host economy.

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