

## Report on Major English- and Thai- Language scholarship on Thailand's ethnic Chinese in the post-1945 Era: Themes, Approaches, and Shortcomings

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### Abstract

This essay attempts to examine major contributions to scholarship on Thailand's ethnic Chinese in the post-1945 era. Excluding the introduction and conclusion, it is divided into four parts: the first part "Visiting Skinner" briefly reviews the major work of Skinner, highlighting its central arguments; the second part "Revisiting Skinner" deals with scholarship in response to Skinner's work, both negative and positive; the third part "In the economic dimension" deals with the economic activities of Thailand's ethnic Chinese; and the fourth part "Ties with China(s) and Chinese agency" deals with work central to the interaction between China(s) and the overseas Chinese. This essay is aimed at providing the overview of the main arguments, approaches, implications, shortcomings, as well as potential future research.

**Keywords:** Overseas Chinese Studies, Chinese in Thailand, Assimilation

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The study of ethnic Chinese<sup>1</sup> in Southeast Asia (or *Nanyang* in Chinese) begun long before World War II (Suryadinata, 1989:4). Scholarship on Thailand's ethnic Chinese, however, seems little, compared to those in Malaysia/ Singapore and Indonesia. *The Chinese in Thailand* by Dr. Kenneth Perry Landon was the only major book on the Chinese in Thailand in the prewar era (ibid:6). Nevertheless, after the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949, the emergence of new Southeast Asian nation-states, as well as the growing prevalence of the social science disciplines, the study of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia underwent a transformation in the postwar era (Cushman, 1989:221-222). This transformation reflected changes implicit and explicit in fruitful research on that issue. Consequently, contributing to this phenomenon, literature on Thailand's ethnic Chinese has increased, though varied in themes and approaches from time to time. This essay attempts to examine major contributions to scholarship on Thailand's ethnic Chinese in the post-1945 era; it is divided into 6 parts, including the introduction and conclusion, to provide the overview of these main arguments, approaches, implications, shortcomings, as well as potential future research.

### Visiting Skinner

Among literature on Thailand's ethnic Chinese, Prof G. William Skinner's publications come first to mind for their valuable contribution to that study. This part, therefore, briefly reviews the major work of Skinner, highlighting its central arguments.

In the pioneering work *Chinese Society in Thailand: An analytical History*, Skinner set up a solid historical framework of the Chinese society in Thailand, collecting scattered materials various in languages. Moreover, in this book he made a challenging argument that the Chinese do assimilate. In Thailand, access to elite status, intermarriage, and state's

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<sup>1</sup> There are several terms to address the ethnic Chinese who live outside the PR China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. In this article, interchangeably I use the terms Chinese, ethnic Chinese, and overseas Chinese, which includes their descendants who were born in Thailand (that I significantly use the term Sino-Thai).

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pro-assimilationist policies encouraged the Chinese assimilation into Thai society. For example, on the social structure, the elite in Thailand has always been Thai, upward mobility carried the Chinese in the direction of Thai society. Meanwhile, there are also no sharp differences in physical appearance between the Chinese and Thai. This situation, Skinner argued that, made full assimilation possible (Skinner, 1957:299-300). While the Thai tend to dominate in government, professions, and agriculture occupations, and the Chinese tend to dominate in commerce and finance, and industrial and artisan occupations, class structure shows diversity of the Chinese in Thai society, such as Chinese businessmen in high (new elite) and mid-high classes, Chinese artisans in mid-low class, and Chinese unskilled laborers in lower class. The interesting thing is that Chinese businessmen in (new elite) high class and Chinese laborers in lower class were those who most assimilated into Thai society, while Chinese middle class is the major class that maintains Chinese way of life and supports Chinese education.

Despite attempts to protect Chinese education, the Thai government promoted pro-assimilationist policies to Thai-ify Chinese education. The Thai government had nationalized curricula and staffs in Chinese schools, as well as limited their financial sources. As a result, the total number of Chinese schools in Thailand and their enrollments decreased considerably. Therefore, without a Chinese education, grandchildren of Chinese immigrants at the present become Thai (ibid:381).<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that the book *Chinese Society in Thailand: An analytical History* was written in the 1950s, the time that many Southeast Asian countries were in the middle of nation-state building process. In order to stabilize the state, the Thai government used pro-assimilationist policies to promote national integration. The policies aimed at non-Thai people, whose majority are the ethnic Chinese. Only if the Chinese adopted Thai way of life, they were regarded as Thai, regardless of their place of origin, and therefore they could enjoy some legal benefits as Thai nationals. However, unlike in Malaysia, the national

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<sup>2</sup> While there had been minor relaxations after 1955, it can hardly revive Chinese education in Thailand at all.

policies seemed to be Anti-Chinese than to be pro-assimilationist. Priority was given to the indigenous Malaysian to compete with Malaysian Chinese who dominated Malaysian economy. This led to tensions, conflicts, and finally became a racial problem in Malaysia. In Thailand, the absence of racial conflicts between the Chinese and the Thai does not mean the complete assimilation, it may be argued, however, that the pro-assimilationist policies helped shorten than widen a gap between the Thai and the Chinese.

In addition to *Chinese Society in Thailand*, in the article *Change and Persistence in Chinese Culture Overseas: A comparison of Thailand and Java* Skinner again attributed the success of Chinese assimilation in Thailand to the role of politics, since in Java overseas Chinese still considered themselves Chinese, while in Thailand they were completely assimilated to Thai society. Relevant to this discussion, he focused on differences in the assimilation of overseas Chinese in Thailand and Java in the light of receiving societies, rather than different Chinese speech-groups.<sup>3</sup>

First, Skinner introduced ethnic confidence or cultural vigor. When confronting western expansion, Thailand retained her independence but Java was colonized by the Dutch. Accordingly, the Thai and Thai culture remained secure and vigorous. People who contact the Thai were assimilated and absorbed in Thai culture, no matter what origin they were. By contrast, the Javanese would feel inferior, and developed into a race-based society. Second, he stated the different features of social structures that favored/ hindered assimilation in Thailand and Java: (1) The elite stratum was indigenous/ non-indigenous, affecting social mobility. In Thailand the elite was Thai, and therefore overseas Chinese tended to move to Thai society. But in Java, since the elite was non-Javanese, overseas Chinese tended to move away from Javanese society. (2) The stratification position dealt/

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<sup>3</sup> Most Chinese immigrants to Thailand were Teochiu, while most of those to Java were Hokkien. However, Skinner argued that these two adjacent groups differ hardly at all. His argument can be challenged by China-centered scholars. In this perspective, some groups of ethnic Chinese are particular, which significantly need individual attention. For example, Hakka study, Teochiu study and Hokkien study, therefore, emerge rapidly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Chinese-speaking countries.

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did not deal with ethnic status. In Thailand there were Thai in every class, but in Java classes were basically divided by ethnic groups: Dutch, Chinese (as middle class) and Javanese, which carried from high to low legal and social disability. There should be no necessity for the Chinese to assimilate to Javanese society. (3) The Chinese had to reside in restricted areas/ were allowed to reside freely. The segregation of the Chinese in Java hindered assimilation. On the contrary, the freedom of movement of the Chinese in Thailand, even in remote Thai villages, promoted assimilation. (4) There were/ were not institutionalized procedures for leaving the Chinese group. The offspring of Chinese immigrants in Thailand can choose to be Chinese (under jurisdiction of Chinese headmen) OR Thai (under Thai patrons), but not in Java. The grandchildren of Chinese immigrants in Java become Peranakan who merge Chinese and Indonesian elements into a new identity. Third, in addition to ethnic confidence and social structure, religion also played an important role in assimilation. Skinner argued that Buddhism in Thailand was much easier for the Chinese to engage with, compared to Islam in Java. Thus, religion was not an obstacle to the Chinese to assimilate in Thai society.

However, some changes in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the 1920s had interrupted the developments of assimilation. Those changes were (1) the increasing numbers of female Chinese immigrants (2) the rise of Chinese nationalism and (3) the emergence of Chinese schools and communities. In Thailand more and more offspring of Chinese immigrants considered themselves Chinese rather than Thai. Meanwhile in Java such trend helped create a group of "Totok" Chinese who were more Chinese rather than Peranakan. Moreover, when Chinese nationalism was growing, the modern indigenous nationalist movement developed and brought "anti-Sinicism". This was different in degree of discrimination. Skinner explained that discrimination based on culture encouraged assimilation in Thailand, but discrimination based on race discouraged assimilation in Java.

Finally, after the colonial regime when indigenous people can move to elite stratum, local-born Chinese in Java are becoming similar to those in Thailand. Skinner here

concluded that “in the long run, the only future of the local born Chinese in most of Southeast Asia is to assimilate completely to indigenous society”(Skinner, 1973:412).

It can be said that Skinner’s approach to the overseas Chinese has played a crucial role in explaining the development of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand. Besides the methodology that has become standard for overseas Chinese studies, the so called Skinnerian “Assimilation Paradigm” has influenced most of scholars studying Thailand’s ethnic Chinese in the 1970s, for example, Boonsanong, Guskin, and Galaska (Cushman, 1989:231-236). However, from the early 1980s to the present, the end of cold war, the start of globalization and the emergence of PR China as world power offer overseas Chinese more choices rather than complete assimilation to the local society. In other words, this trend will offer changing perspectives on the study of overseas Chinese as well.

Another important issue that Skinner focused on is the role of Chinese organizations. In *Chinese society in Thailand*, he stated that in the Chinese community in Bangkok, speech- group Chinese associations have played an important role in the community’s protection, when government policies ran counter Chinese interests. Because the more effective the intracommunity self-control, the less interference from the Thai (Skinner, 1957:320), Chinese associations also perform social control and mediation functions within the community. He further argued that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Tianhua hospital had integrated the various speech groups into a single structure. Moreover, their Chinese leaders tended to be those who were accepted in both Thai and Chinese communities, in order to more effectively deal with the Thai government. In another major work, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community in Thailand*, Skinner again demonstrated the pattern of Chinese community leadership in Bangkok. He argued that the structure of the Chinese community was combined by economic interests. The leadership of the Chinese community was based on wealth, prestige and power; it was exercised through organizations such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Chinese associations when help was needed. Skinner proposed two case studies of actions on

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behalf of leaders of the Chinese community, i.e., the negotiation of the alien registration fee with the Thai government in 1951, and the Saphan Lueang fire relief in 1952. The Chinese leaders with close business and personal relations with Thai officials were best suited to deal with the government on the community's behalf. Yet, because of internal divisions within the Chinese community seen in disputes among political groups (pro- Kuomintang versus Pro-Peking) and speech groups (Teochiu versus others), the Chinese leaders were not able to work effectively.

The Chinese organizations in Thailand discussed by Skinner seem to have the same pattern in Lawrence Crissman's thesis. In *The Segmentary Structure of Urban Overseas Chinese Communities*, Crissman proposed a generalized model of Chinese communities that can be divided into segments in terms of surnames, native places, speech groups and so on. These segments can be interlocked and overlapped, so did their leadership based on wealth, prestige and power. Though they stated the differences of speech groups, both Skinner and Crissman emphasized that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce functioned as the representative for the entire Chinese community. However, they hardly examine the conflicts within these organizations, or focus on why and how the bottom Chinese need to follow their leaders. Therefore, further explanation on internal politics as well as the relationship between leaders and followers will help the better understanding of Chinese organizations in vertical dimension.

Today the Chinese are no longer aliens in their host country. One may question whether or not the structure of Chinese organizations stays the same. In Thailand, regardless of the decline of China-born Chinese population, the Chinese organizations still exist. However, the role of Chinese organizations tends to somewhat differ from those in previous day. Rather than focusing on the Chinese community's protection, the Chinese organizations become social get-togethers for commercial purpose. They offer channels for their members to enjoy recreation, exchange information, and meet new people in business

sector both within and cross national boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the Chinese organizations seem to engage more in socio-cultural activities to promote Chinese culture. For example, they propose scholarships to students mostly in Chinese schools; they organize Chinese New Year festival and Chinese singing competitions.

### Revisiting Skinner

While it has so strong influence on the study of Chinese in Thailand (Cushman, 1989:222), the Skinnerian assimilation paradigm from the 1980s on, however, began to be challenged by questions and criticism for its shortcomings in one way or another. Meanwhile, there is also an attempt to discuss the neglected features of Skinner's thesis that does not concern assimilation. Thus, this part deals with scholarship in response to Skinner's work, both negative and positive.

First of all, the findings of work by the 1980s show a fresh perspective on the assimilationist thesis that somewhat differed from Skinner, such as Cristina Szanton's work on the Chinese and their descendants in Sri Racha, a growing industrial town in Central Thailand. Her article *Thai and Sino-Thai in small town Thailand: Changing patterns of interethnic relations* examines intermarriage, the correlation between self-identification and occupation, and Sino-Thai middle class. Szanton argued that there was much weaker pattern of increasing intermarriage over generations. In fact, there was much higher rate of intramarriage, Sino-Thai in Sri Racha tended to marry other Sino-Thai. Moreover, both the Thai and the Sino-Thai in the town tended to define Chineseness in terms of degree of commercial orientation and business success. Surprisingly, many Sino-Thai with small-scale stalls or shops wanted to send their children to Chinese schools in Taiwan to run small businesses more successfully in Thailand. This situation showed that the Chinese, Sino-Thai, and their children have become important components of Thai middle class. In fact, the Sino-Thai have come to dominate the flourishing "new" middle bourgeoisie in Sri

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<sup>4</sup> For more discussions on Overseas Chinese Associations in the new era, please see Liu Hong's "Old linkages, New Networks: The Globalization of Overseas Chinese Voluntary Associations and its implications" in *The China Quarterly*, no.155 (Sep. 1998), pp. 582-609.



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Racha in 1970s. Thus, Szanton suggested that the Chinese in Central Thailand are conceptualized as an economic middle class in term of class.

In addition to Szanton's work, a collection of articles on the Chinese of Thailand, *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand*, is another publication that deals with the Skinnerian Assimilation paradigm, too. It attempts to explore an always-problematic question to the study of Thailand' ethnic Chinese: Who are the Chinese in Thailand? <sup>5</sup> In the first chapter of *Alternate Identities*, Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun's *Rethinking assimilation and ethnicity: the Chinese of Thailand* examines the research literature on assimilation in general, and of the Chinese in Thailand in particular. Critical of the Skinnerian thesis for its one-sidedness, Chan and Tong argue that assimilation is a two-way process in the long run, which will leave the Chinese with something Thai and the Thai with something Chinese. Factors are shown to suggest so, for example, (1) Most Chinese in Thailand are not monolingual. In fact, they are bilingual and different languages are used in different social situations (2) Chinese education persists. By now Chinese has become an important language to do business in Thailand (3) The Chinese associations continue to exist. (4) There is strong class awareness, according to occupations. Sino-Thai tend to be the middle in Thai society. Moreover, intra-marriage among Sino-Thai appears as class preference. (5) Chinese traditions are widely practiced, such as ancestor worship, and Chinese New Year celebration. (6) There are many Chinese newspapers, and many young people began to read them. However, some of proposed evidence is still debatable, such as bilingualism and the growing circulation of Chinese newspapers. In fact, the article did not account for the influence of Thainess among the Chinese in Thailand.

Besides the assimilation controversy, Kasian Tejapira, a prominent Sino-Thai scholar, has criticized the Skinnerian paradigm as a product of Thai racialized discourse during the Nation-State era. In the article *Pigtail: A Prehistory of Chineseness in Siam*,

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that there is no official criteria in defining who is regarded as Chinese. A variety of bases provides different criteria led to different answers to the definition of Chineseness.

Kasian indicates that the pigtail, not a sign of Chineseness as Skinner claimed, was made to mean different things to different people in different times and places. Chinese immigrants with their pigtails arrived in Siam before the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; Skinner claims that the Chinese who wore pigtails would identify with Chinese and need to pay the Chinese Poll tax. On the contrary, those who cut off pigtails would be accepted by the Thai, and seek out a Thai patron. However, according to Kasian's analysis, there were the Chinese with pigtails who were not considered Chinese. In fact, there were also a non-Chinese with a pigtail in Siam.

The Chinese, when subordinated into *Moonnai-Phrai* (masters-serfs) system in social order, as with Lao, Khmer and other minorities in Siam, were defined as Thai. This category of Chinese was called *Jin Phrai* (serf Chinese) or *Jin Khunnang* (Chinese master). In addition to this category, the Chinese who did not engage with *Moonnai-Phrai* (masters-serfs) system yet paid poll tax were called *Jin Phukpi* (wrist-tagging Chinese). However, both categories had nothing to do with pigtails. Therefore, Kasian confirms that Chinese integration into Siam was not determined by cultural assimilation into Thai society, but by their political assimilation into the phrai-based *kingly state*. Moreover, for the sake of opium smoking, opium addicts turned to wear pigtails despite their ethnicity. Such a category was called *Jin Plaeng* (fake Chinese), people with pigtail who did not consider themselves Chinese in anyway. Thus, similar to its meaning in China, Kasian concludes that a pigtail in Siam was made to mean different things to different people in different times and places. In addition, it can be further asserted that, for King Rama IV and Rama V, the Chinese were just one ethnic group among the multi-ethnic subjects of Siam; however, for King Rama VI, they were “outsiders” of Thai raced-monopolized imagined community. Therefore, Kasian argues that Skinner's error in the interpretation of pigtail was because Skinner fell into the trap of Thai racialized discourse and then ignored the possible existence of a Sino-Thai culture and community.

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In another article *Imagined Uncommunity: the Lookjin Middle class and Thai Official Nationalism*, Kasian examines the complexities of relationships between Chinese and Thai, and of *lookjin* identities in Thailand in the pre-war decades. Stimulated by Benedict Anderson's discourse on the imagined community, Kasian argues that Siam is an imagined uncommunity of multiethnic groups, whose majority is Thai. However, King Rama VI considered that the only way to turn imagined uncommunity into modern Thai state was to let it be dominated culturally and politically by the Thai race. Thus, discourse on (official) Nationalism was introduced by Rama VI in order to assimilate minorities, especially the Chinese into Siam. In fact, since the Chinese played an important role in Thai economy, the main reason to assimilate the Chinese was to prevent them from transforming their economic power into political and thence state power (Kasian, 1997:79). Many attempts were made to achieve this goal, for example, the definition of Thai identity based on a very selective reading of Thai traditional culture and history, and the writings of Rama VI that alienated Chinese as "Jews of the Orient". Because of assimilation policy in long run, Thai-Chinese relationships were transformed to patron-client relationships between Thai bureaucrats and military elites and the Chinese business class eager to obtain prosperity. However, their economic achievement, by drawing cheap labor and natural resources to support the growth of urban areas and the state, also developed another uncommunity between the city and the countryside in Thailand. Apparently, many Chinese or Sino-Thai businesses were under political patronage of nationalist governments.

In response to Thai official nationalism, *lookjin* learnt to play Thai, some turned right, yet some turned left. From Kasian's contrasting examples of *lookjin*, the former was Prasit Kanjanawat; the latter was Piatoe. While Prasit was a well-rounded businessman and a successful politician in the modern Thai state, Piatoe became a *lookjin* communist. Sent to area 6 of Bangkwang, Piatoe learnt Thai language and different political conception from interactions with Thai Bowardej rebels in prison. Adopting many Thai names such as Phayab Angkhasing, Prapanta Virasakdi etc, he was, in fact, the spokesman of Thai communist party.

Finally, Kasian argues that the majority of *lookjin* have transformed themselves and their offspring into a significant plurality in the new multiethnic national urban middle class (ibid:86). They are of Chinese descent educated in Thai language, but cannot control the state even though their survival and prosperity depend much on state policy. However, there have been more politicized *lookjin* against the state since the early 1970s. Meanwhile, the uprisings of October 14, October 6, May 1992, the opening up of PR China and the renaissance of Chinese cultural awareness offer *lookjin* more political space, especially *lookjin* intellectuals armed with variety of mass media. They are imagining a new Thai national community, which is not the same as in King Rama IV's notion.

It may be asserted that Kasian strongly emphasized the role of politics in explaining the political assimilation of Chinese into the Thai state. He may, however, ignore other possible aspects. Thailand's middle class, in fact, constituted not only *lookjin*, but also other minorities such as *khaek* (Thailand's ethnic indian). *Khaek* people also played an important role as middleman in Thai society.<sup>6</sup> While the *lookjin* middle class claim to be a subject of nation-building process, those *khaek* remain silent. So who are the real outsiders in Thai society? Moreover, Kasian simply viewed "Prasit Kanjanawat" as one of *lookjin* who played Thai to take advantages for political purpose. This view shows his failure to examine Prasit's more sophisticated roles in shaping Thai politics and advocating the Chinese community.

Furthermore, in order to move beyond Skinner's mere focus on the Chinese in Bangkok, the study of Chinese in provincial Thailand appeals. Suthiwong Pongpaibul et al's *Jinthaksin: Withi lae Palang* [The Chinese in Southern Thailand: Ways and Power] is one of such approaches to illustrate how the Chinese in Southern Thailand possess particular characteristics that differ from those in Bangkok and other regions in Thailand. Central to

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<sup>6</sup> Thai light literature and entertainment circles portray *khaek* as mean renters, collecting their debt from the poor in Thai slums. It is also said in Thai proverb that if you see a snake and a *khaek* at the same time, hit the *khaek* first.

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those particular characteristics, the article mainly discusses three issues: economic development, urban development, and diversity in culture.

In the area of economic development, the article states that the Chinese make use of local resources smartly, with their Chinese-style knowledge, to do business. Unlike the Thai who expand the power through patron-client relationship, the Chinese tend to expand the power through economic activities. In order to reach the ultimate goal—monopoly, they also know to create political patronage facilitating their business. In fact, some of the southern Thai Chinese even have a connection with Bangkok Chinese as well as overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, to help support their business, too. In addition, the southern Thai Chinese tend to prefer intra-marriage to consolidate their business.

The Chinese contribute to urban development in many ways. For example, they transformed rural areas into urban areas; they built up the transportation system, which facilitated trading; and implicitly their economic activities helped prevent local Thai from being Communist.

The article argues that the Chinese are well integrated into the southern society, rather than making conflicts. However, in some cases do not suggest so. Since the Chinese have strong connections with local civil servants and the Thai government, they tend to distort local resource allocation, which finally lead to conflicts between the Chinese and the local Thai. This distorted resource allocation may be one of causes that stimulate violence in the Southern provinces.

Though a good starting point, much evidence hardly shows that the Chinese in Southern Thailand are different and unique, such as the role in economic development, intra-marriage and the establishment of political patronage. Similarly, it is unfortunate that the volume made no use of the fact that, unlike Bangkok where Teochiu dominated, the Southern Thailand is dominated by the Hokkien and Hakka, who to some extent were Malaya or Penang oriented, to support the arguments.

Apart from criticism on Skinner, however, there is an attempt to reread Skinner's work from different fresh perspective rather than focusing on the assimilation thesis. In *Beyond the Assimilation Fixation: Skinner and the Possibility of a Spatial Approach to Twentieth-Century Thai history* Michael Montesano argues that the fixation [on a single theme of assimilation] has led scholars to “overlook both the richness and, in the light of his later interest in regional systems in Chinese history, and the suggestiveness of Skinner's early work” (Montesano, 2005:187). The article, therefore, introduces the Skinner-inspired spatial approach to the study of Thai history. It develops a two-factor regional-systems model to illustrate the changing patterns of Thai regional system, and the role of Chinese as human agency in shaping that system. The first factor indicates population density, population density of Chinese nationals, size of administrative districts, and concentration of commercial bank branches per square kilometer by provinces. The second factor indicates municipal population, proportion of Chinese nationals in the population, and commercial bank branches per capita. By the spatial approach, there were surprising findings. For example according to the first factor, there is a sharp contrast between regional system in 1937 and 1947. As shown in 1937 Phuket and Pattani were cores, however, in 1947 both cities became peripheral. Another example is that according to the second factor, central plains show instable characteristics, which contrast to common knowledge that central plains in Thailand were and are stable one. For some surprising findings, the article suggests future research rather than discussion.

#### **In the economic dimension**

To understand Thai economy as a whole, focus on the ethnic Chinese is significantly needed, since they have participated and dominated the Thai economy for long time. The study on economic activities of the Chinese is important in explaining the development of Thai economy, as well as of Chinese community. Thus, this part deals with the economic activities of Thailand's ethnic Chinese.

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Literature on Chinese economic activities is generally done by economists, many of which put the light to the political patronage—the subject however first discussed by Skinner, an anthropologist. Skinner argued that in postwar decades economic nationalism is one of the major themes of the administration. Attempts to Thai-ify economy were (1) economic assistance to, and vocational education for ethnic Thais; (2) economic restrictions on aliens; (3) expansion of state's role in industry; and (4) encouragement of semi government “Thai enterprises” in commerce and finance. However, rather than a limited Chinese retreat, the government's economic Thai-ification program helps greatly establish the alliance between Chinese merchants who seek security and the Thai ruling class who can offer protection. In Sino-Thai alliance development, therefore, the political patronage shows that Chinese merchants profited from the political protection and special privileges offered by the Thai ruling class, while the Thai ruling class gained wealth and economic power from the Chinese in return (Skinner, 1957: 360-362, 1958: in Chapter 5 and 302-305). It can be further noted that the top-level Sino-Thai business alliance still remain permanent feature of Thailand's socio-economic structure.

Not only in Bangkok where the Chinese dominate the business sector, but also in provincial Thailand have the Chinese participated in economic activities. Yoko Ueda's *Sino-Thai entrepreneurs and the Provincial economies in Thailand* examines the role of Sino-Thai entrepreneurs on economic activities in provincial Thailand. The article argues that the Sino-Thai have contributed to the economic development of provincial Thailand. Their mobility has brought in know-how and techniques to the provinces. In the financial sector, trust and credit of social network help to mobilize and allocate resources when state policies driven by Bangkok Chinese tycoons distorted their resource allocation. On Sino-Thai entrepreneurs in the provinces today: generation change and identity part, Ueda makes an argument that “if the generation change from the second to the third becomes increasingly apparent, the provincial economies will possibly take on a different look” (Ueda, 2001:174). Then she draws to the conclusion that “this can lead to an expansion of business networks within the provinces and beyond national boundaries” (ibid:174). However, contrary to her optimistic prediction, my preliminary observations show that the

younger generations have little interest in inheriting their parents' business, and small scale businesses tend to be replaced by bigger modern trade. \*\*This provincial economic development suggests that (1) The Sino-Thai entrepreneurs are moving away from industrial sectors; they tend to be more interested in multinational companies based in Bangkok. (2) In case the Sino-Thai inherit their parents' business, they tend to transform family-run enterprise into joint ventures in order to reduce risk, accumulate capital and strengthen business. And (3) The migrants from rural villages in Northeastern Thailand will be recruited to work as cheap labours for modern trade instead of local people.

Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker (eds)'s *Thai Capital after the 1997 Crisis* examines the transformation of Thailand's domestic capitalism in and after the 1997 crisis. Though none of the chapters exclusively concentrates on the Chinese, much of this book deals with Thai capital that the Chinese dominated over all. In the 1970s free from foreign competition, a small number of family businesses prospered. In the transition of the 1980s, many of the external barriers on trade, investment and finance were removed. The first stage brought huge benefit to Thailand's domestic capital—the great boom of 1987-1996 (Pasuk, 2008:2-5). However, in the 1997 crisis when transnational capital spread over Thailand, around a quarter of Thailand's major business families were badly damaged, while three-quarters of firms survived in some form (ibid:267-277). Most joined foreign partners and became multinational firms; only a few could invest outward and become transnational firms. This changing phenomenon has implied the transformation of Thailand's ethnic Chinese. The first and second generation of the Chinese used to be traders and industrialists. However, their third and later generations tended to become white collar workers in multinational firms, since they have received a better and modern education. The economic development in Thailand, therefore, suggests that the Sino-Thai will be divided into English and non-English educated, unlike China-oriented and Thailand-oriented in the past.



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### **Ties with China(s) and Chinese agency**

The interaction between China(s) and the overseas Chinese is another important issue in overseas Chinese studies. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Qing government and later the Republic of China claimed the overseas Chinese as loyal citizens. During the cold war, both the PR China and Taiwan tried to seek support from and expand its influence on the overseas Chinese, at the same time with the interference of the US to prevent "Red China" communism in the host countries where those overseas Chinese resided. Today when the cold war is over, the role of overseas Chinese in the interactions between them or their host countries and China(s) is still significant in political and economic aspects. Thus, this part deals with work central to this theme.

In the article *China, Thailand and the spirit of Bandung*, David A. Wilson examined the political relations between PR China and Thailand from 1949 through 1959. These relations are conditioned by historical, geographical, and social factors. In historical perspective, Thailand had tried to avoid diplomatic relations with China. In geographical perspective, border areas, lacking in communication, are a good setting for infiltration and subversion. In social perspective, the Chinese minority with economic power is a source of tension and friction with the Thai leadership. The Chinese Government developed a variety of foreign operations, which may be grouped into three categories: (1) communist party relations; (2) non government organizations and persons called "people's diplomacy, including trade relations; (3) formal government to government relations—the most important within the context of Wilson's essay was the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung.

The Bandung Conference manifested the Afro-Asian world's major idea, the belief in a nation-state as anti-colonial and anti-imperialist, developing its community's organizational structure. Although aiming to exclude the United States from Asia and to gain the dominant position in the continent, China made clear the search to build Asian solidarity and peace. As a result, China represented a great new Asian power. At the same time, the Thai delegation led by Prince Wan had a chance to discuss with the China

delegation led by Zhou Enlai. Prince Wan argued that Thailand's adherence to SEATO was purely defensive, and questioned matters such as "so called persons of dual nationality". In regard to dual nationality, Zhou affirmed that China was prepared to settle the matter along the lines of the treaty which had just been signed with Indonesia, that is, the overseas Chinese must choose either nationality of their country of residence or of China. If one chooses to become a citizen of one's country of residence, then he/she should be loyal to the country of residence, and should not have political relations with China.

Accordingly, the Bandung conference influenced the Thai government in several ways (Skinner 1957: 379-380). China supported the Communist insurgents inside Thailand and attempted to influence Thai politics through pro-Peking sentiment in the Chinese community (Wilson, 1967b:114-116), while the Thai government combined with the U.S. This led to the anti-imperialist appeal among educated Thais, for example, leftist politicians, and newspapermen. Moreover, there were trips of Thai travelers to Mainland China, sponsored by nongovernmental organizations. These trips were part of people's diplomacy to promote peace. Meanwhile, the Chinese government tried to develop trade contacts with Thailand, and regarded this development as a sign of Thailand's neutralism.

The overseas Chinese became the focus of the political controversy. During 1955-1958 the Chinese in Thailand were beset by a triple pull on political loyalties from Peking, Taiwan, and Bangkok (ibid: 104). However, much allegiance is held by the people who dominate the community through its organizations. Therefore, the struggle has been between pro- and anti- Peking Chinese. Zhou's offer of dual nationality was premature; however, it was psychologically helpful (ibid: 106-107).

The state relations between Thailand and China, however, declined rapidly. With the coup of September 1957 and second coup of October 1958 led by Field Marshal Sarit, Thailand was mainly under the protection and support of the U.S. and sustained steady economic growth. However, Cambodia's recognition of PR China made the Thai government into strong anti-neutralist activities in Thailand. Meanwhile, under dictatorship leftist politicians and newspapermen were jailed, Chinese schools were closed, and

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several Thai and Chinese language newspapers shut. Furthermore, in response to reaction of PR China, the Thai government declared against the Chinese government and banned the import of all products of mainland China. These actions, therefore, brought the spirit of Bandung to an end.

In conclusion, during the cold war, though the US intended to isolate China from Asia, however, the Bandung Conference made US's intention incomplete. In fact, there was an attempt to develop economic and trade relations as well as people's diplomacy to China.

However, China and Thai relations were much characterized by political and ideological considerations. Despite the attempt, it lasted for short period, and even let alone the socio-cultural exchange.

In addition to the cold war period, William A. Callahan's *Beyond cosmopolitanism and Nationalism: Diasporic Chinese and Neo-Nationalism in China and Thailand* examines the dynamic interaction between Chinese, Thai and Sino-Thai identity, and the mutual production of domestic and international politics in the present day. It argues that both China and Thailand, in term of Neo-nationalism, have used the overseas Chinese as a resource to construct "a nationalist self" and "a foreign other". In Thailand, the Chinese can be national, transnational, or provincial, according to their economic culture.

Callahan's approach to scholarship on this theme is much based on theories of International Relations. The interaction between interactions between China(s) and Thailand's ethnic Chinese is much studied in political aspect; however, in the economic and cultural aspects it is understudied. \*\*During the cold war, the fear of communism, tensions in Thai politics and lack of sources led to a stereotype fallacy that Thailand had no connections with the PR China. Against this background, accounting for uncovered stories (such as the hidden Thai hostage during the second Phibul regime) is important in rewriting the history of Sino-Thai relations. Moreover, not only PR China, but also in a wider context as Chinese speaking world should future research on Thailand's ethnic Chinese engage with. As the door to China was shut after 1949, the windows to Chinese matters elsewhere

opened. The Chinese in Thailand may obtain information about China through different channels from Chinese agencies such as Hong Kong or Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Future research, therefore, should emphasize the significant role of the Chinese in connecting China and Thailand together rather than emphasize a clear-cut disconnection between the two countries.

### Conclusion

In sum, scholarship on Thailand's ethnic Chinese in the post-1945 Era has been developed from the prewar era and has reflected in quality and quantity. That the world has been transforming from the nation-state era to Multi-culturalism era shows significant sign of future research's direction. It might be questionable what approach will be mainstream in the 21st century, and whether such approaches will help to refresh our understanding of subjects we treat or not. However, there are many opportunities in improving the study of overseas Chinese in Thailand. First, many areas are understudied especially in cultural dimension. For example, studies on literature by the Chinese in Thailand are not yet taken; studies on religions of the Chinese are very few; research on Chinese education are more narrative than analytical. Moreover, studies on specific aspects should fill in gaps left by previous scholars' research on the Chinese in Thailand. For example, studies of Chinese speech groups, of Chinese in rural versus urban areas, of Chinese in high/ middle/ lower classes, as well as of internal politics within Chinese organizations will broaden and deepen the knowledge of Chinese in Thailand. Finally, multi-language ability and interdisciplinary perspective will ultimately facilitate doing the research. It should be noted that good command of English, Thai and Chinese languages is an important tool for the study of Thailand's ethnic Chinese, since most influential work was written in English, while archival materials were written in Thai, and primary sources concerning with the Chinese were written in both traditional and simplified Chinese. Furthermore, my experience shows that graduates from department of languages gained considerable information but could not interpret or analyze such information to conduct research. Meanwhile, graduates from

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department of history, political sciences, and so forth relied too much on secondary sources, some of which are inaccurate. To produce quality research, study programs that instill in graduates with multi-language ability and interdisciplinary perspective should be encouraged in universities. Therefore, future research on overseas Chinese in Thailand still has potential to grow.

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