

International Retirement Migration of Westerners to Thailand: Well-Being and Future Migration Plans

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Abstract : Following the 'Golden Age of Welfare' which enabled post-war prosperity to European citizens in 1950s, the world has witnessed the increasing mobility across borders of older citizens of First World countries. Then, in 1990s, the international retirement migration (IRM) of older persons has become a prominent trend, in which, it requires the integration of several fields of knowledge to explain, i.e. migration studies, tourism studies, as well as, social gerontology. However, while the studies of the IRM to developed destinations in Europe (e.g. Spain, Malta, Portugal, Italy), and the IRM to developing countries like Mexico, Panama, and Morocco have been largely studied in recent decades due to their massive migration volume, the study of the IRM to remoter destinations has been far more relatively sparse and incomplete. Developing countries in Southeast Asia have noticed the increasing number of retired expats, particularly to Thailand, where the number of foreigners applying for retirement visa increased from 10,709 in 2005 to 60,046 in 2014. Additionally, it was evident that the majority of Thailand's retirement visa applicants were Westerners, i.e. citizens of the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and the Nordic countries, respectively. As such trend just becoming popular in Thailand in recent decades, little is known about the IRM populations, their well-being, and their future migration plans. This study aimed to examine the subjective wellbeing or the self-evaluations of own well-being among Western retirees in Thailand, as well as, their future migration plans as whether they planned to stay here for life or otherwise. The author employed a mixed method to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data during October 2015 - May 2016, including 330 self-administered questionnaires (246 online and 84 hard-copied responses), and 21 in-depth interviews of the Western residents in Nan (2), Pattaya (4), and Chiang Mai (15). As derived from the integration of previous subjective well-being measurements (i.e. Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), Global AgeWatch Index, and OECD guideline on measuring subjective wellbeing), this study would measure the subjective well-being of Western retirees in Thailand in 7 dimensions, including standard of living, health status, personal relationships, social connections, environmental quality, personal security and local infrastructure.

Keywords : international retirement migration, ageing, mobility, wellbeing, Western, Thailand

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