

Yunnanese Chinese in Myanmar: Past and Present

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- There is a long history of Chinese activities in Myanmar. The largest wave of Chinese migration to Myanmar (then British Burma) occurred in the nineteenth century; it brought two major regional groups of immigrants: the Hokkien/Cantonese who took the maritime route and the Yunnanese who took the overland route across the border.
- The Yunnanese community in Mandalay has been well established at least since the mid-eighteenth century, mainly due to cross-border trade. Mandalay remains an important centre for Yunnanese Chinese in northern Myanmar.
- After the Second World War, many Chinese entered Myanmar for political, military and economic reasons. They often settled in the northern hills and eventually moved down to lowland towns. Since the late 1980s, some of them have further moved to southern Myanmar, especially Yangon.
- Yangon Chinatown has been traditionally shared between the Hokkien and the Cantonese Chinese since colonial times. Recent years have seen the arrival and establishment of wealthy and influential Yunnanese, and the community is fast becoming the biggest group of ethnic Chinese in the former capital of Myanmar.
- Chinese language education has been better maintained by the Yunnanese in the north than by their southern counterparts during the post-war period despite numerous difficulties. This has resulted in a major division, in terms of language proficiency and cultural outlook, between the Yunnanese Chinese in the north and the Hokkien/Cantonese Chinese in the south.

- The Chinese in Myanmar hold a common and strong victim's discourse although the emphasis is different between the north and the south.
- It is hard to differentiate between anti-Chinese and anti-China sentiments in the country. Nonetheless, the Yunnanese generally are not too concerned about the recent anti-Chinese/anti-China sentiment; they also hold different opinions on many China-related issues from Myanmar intellectuals and the general public.
- The general resentment against ethnic Chinese in Myanmar may be exploited in the country's future political tussles.