

Thai immigration in united states



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\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [History of Thai Immigrants in US](#) \n \t
2. [Thai Lives in US](#) \n \t
3. [Thai Culture by the Immigrant Group](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Throughout the history, America is considered as the destination for a stream of immigrants from various parts of the world. Immigration plays a significant role not only in making America's development possible but also in shaping American society. High rates of migration from distinctly different places in the world reflect and also shape a lot about the basic nature of American society and economy. They came to make new lives and livelihoods in the New World, and their hard work benefited themselves and their new home country. The immigrant group not only comes from European countries, but also comes from Asian countries. Thai immigrant is also considered as one of the largest group of Asian immigrants in United States. They flee from their mainland to the various destinations in United States. Some immigrants settle down there, but some just stay for a while and leave this country. This paper will cover three parts which are the history of Thai immigrants in US, Thai immigrant lifestyle in US (destination choices and employment and occupation pattern), and Thai culture represents by immigrant group (assimilation, tradition and beliefs, cuisine, religion, and family unit).

History of Thai Immigrants in US

In Thai history, there was no evidence of Thai immigrants to US until 1961. The beginning point of Thai immigration to United States started during the Vietnam War. At that time, the official American military arrived to Thailand in order to settle down the US stationed troops and prepare for war in Vietnam. US military supported Thai military programs in terms of financial support. Moreover, money that came in the country from military tourism changed the living standard of Thai people at that time. After interacting with the American soldiers, Thais saw that United States was full of opportunities in both education and economics, and immigration to this country can lift up the living standard (Immigration History of the Thai to the United States, n. d.). Apart from these factors, the immigration law of US at that period is attractive to the new coming immigrant. In 1965, U. S. enforced the immigration and nationality act which aims to support family unification. It also aims to encourage U. S. citizens in the U. S. to patronize their family members as a new immigrant. This seems to be the important opportunity for Asians who are the citizens of U. S. to bring their family members. Moreover, it makes immigration become easier for Asian especially Thais. However, in fact, the target group of this immigration act is the European immigrants, but as a result, there were lots of Asian immigrants pour in to the country which was never happen before (Asian Nation, n. d.). In 1970, around 5, 000 of Thais immigrated to United States with the ratio of three women to one man. Most of immigrants were composed of medical doctors, business men, and wives of U. S. military. We can assume that the ratio of three women to one men come from wives of U. S. military (Immigration History of the Thai to the United States, n. d.). The <https://assignbuster.com/thai-immigration-in-united-states/>

immigrant of Thai ancestry also includes the Thai Dam and other ethnic groups from the northern Vietnam and Laos (Megan Ratner, 2011).

According to J. S. Lindberg, Thai immigration is categorized into three stages which are pioneer migration, group migration, and mass migration. The first stage or pioneer migration is a few of educated, middle class Thais who flee to U. S. around two postwar decades. The second stage or group migration is immigrants who entered U. S. in the period of the change in American immigration laws. This stage has stable increase in numbers and gradually changes in composition of the immigrant flow. The last group is mass migration which is the transition to the third stage. In this stage, number of Thais who got nonimmigrant visas is stable. (Jacqueline Desbarats, page 303). The unprecedented increase in number of Thai immigrant continues many decades until it reached 44, 000 immigrants in 1980, and 64, 000 immigrants in 1990 (Thai American, 2011). Thai immigrants in US came in both legal and illegal status. However, there was Refugee Act in October 28, 1977 in order to legalize the illegal immigrant. Its provision is “ to permit the permanent resident status for Indochinese refugees who were physically present in the United States for at least two years, and were admitted into the United States during specified periods of time” (US Citizenship and immigration service, page 5).

Thai Lives in US

Since Thai immigrated to United States, two largest communities of Thai immigrants are in Los Angeles and California. The number of Thais in California is approximately 32, 064, and Thais in Los Angeles are around 19, 016. Moreover, other significant concentrations are in Hollywood, between

Hollywood and Olympic boulevards and near Western Avenue. Thais are also found in New York City which has population around 6, 230 and in Texas with 5, 816 populations (Megan Ratner, 2011). The largest concentration runs along Hollywood Boulevard between Normandie Avenue and Western Avenue in Hollywood which is called " Thai town". It located in Los Angeles. This city is also the first largest and only Thai town outside Thailand. There are lots of homes and businesses of Thai immigrants scatter around the city. Most of them came to Los Angeles for educational opportunity, and some of them decided to settle down there and open their own businesses.

Furthermore, financial crisis in 1980 caused numerous Thais came to Thai Town and seek for jobs. In 2002, there were around 80, 000 Thai immigrants in this city which also includes Thai Chinese population. Because of the influx of Thai immigrants, Los Angeles seems to be the 77th province of Thailand. In Thai town, there are numerous Thai restaurants, glossary stores, markets, silk shop, massage spa, book stores, and import stores (Thai Town, 2011). Everything from Thailand can be found there. Thai Town is established by the Thai Community Development Center (CDC) which is to provide tourists to the town for benefiting those Thai businesses in that area, and to promote this community as a cultural haven. The community promotes Thai culture by celebrating Songkran Festival (Thai New Year's Day) every year. The festival is set on the first Sunday in April. This festival is an important day of Thai culture, food, and entertainment which can gather Thais and tourists together. The activities in the festival include fruit and vegetable carvings, Thai painting and handicraft demonstration, and Thai folklore program. In 2008, there were more than 100, 000 people joined the festival, in which the number of participants increased as a tenfold in only five years since the first

celebration started. This is a great chance to give visitors and locals to experience the diversity of Thai Town, and also to support the local economies in the area (Preserve America Community, 2009). In the same year, Thai Town in Los Angeles was also awarded a Preserve America Community by the White House. This means a lot for the community because it increases the visibility of Thai Town for nationwide, and represents the cultural and historical significance of Thai. Thai town will be received government funding for promoting their culture and activities (Thai Town Designation, n. d.). Apart from the destination points of Thai immigrants, employment and occupation pattern of Thai immigrants are different from other groups. They owned numerous kinds of business such as gas stations, travel agencies, beauty shops, grocery stores, and restaurants. The occupation characteristics of Thais are focused to grocery stores and restaurant more than other kinds of business which is composed one-third of all Thais businesses. The occupation pattern of Thai immigrants also affects the residential mobility in US. According to Jacqueline Desbarats, “ as Thais become better-integrated in the American community, it is likely that their employment opportunities will diversify and that the residential pattern will become more dispersed” (page 316). Moreover, the jobs available for new Thai immigrants also provide various services to the community.

Thai Culture by the Immigrant Group

Even though, immigration to US led to experience the new culture and new way of life, Thai immigrants still chose to remain their own valuable tradition. They learned to adapt well to fit in the new social norm and the new practices in society. Because of their flexibility in the new society, the result

is that the first generation of American-born Thais can be easily Americanized. However, the acceptance of the American way of life in this new generation influenced their parents to accept more about American way. American thinks that Thais are too flexible and lacking of newness. They identified Thais by noticing their common expression, mai pen rai, which means never mind or does not matter. Some of them think that this phrase shows the reluctant to develop thought. Furthermore, the relationship in Thai family is still important though they are in United States. Thai family structure represents togetherness. Family members are defined and named based on the relation, their age and the side of family. When Thai immigrants come to settle in United States, these kinds of thing seems to be disappeared from Thai family because of the American society. Thais also maintain their traditions, customs, and beliefs of their native lands. We can see from the most common tradition which is greeting gesture (wai). In Thai tradition, children have to show their respect to the elders by “ wai”, and the elder will smile in a return. Their ways of life in United States are similar to their own land. They do believe in one proverb which is that do good and you will receive good; do evil and you will receive evil (Megan Ratner, 2011). Thai immigrants not only maintain their own tradition and custom, but their religion was also remained. The belief in Buddhism did not gradually disappear from Thais' lives. In 1970 Thai immigrants started to form temples in Los Angeles and Washington, D. C., and in the same year, Ven. Phrakhru Vajirathammasophon (Thai monk) of Wat Vajirathamsathit in Thailand came to teach Buddhist sermon and to perform Buddhist ceremonies. Most of Thais believe in Theravada Buddhists which its root comes from India. There were many temples that were created by Thais in US such as Wat Thai in LA and <https://assignbuster.com/thai-immigration-in-united-states/>

Wat Thai in Washington D. C. Thais and other Asians in US still carry on the religious ceremony like ordination ceremony. Young men who reach the age of twenty will ordain for several days or a month in order to requite their parents and shows that they are ready for marriage (Wendy Cadge, 2005). After Thai immigrants visited United States, they also bring Thai cooking style to this country as well. Thai food seems to be one popular choice in many cities. Thai cuisine is popular in United States, and there are many Thai restaurants throughout the city. Thai cooking style uses only a few ingredients, but they give the priority to the taste of food as an important factor, and they also use the seasoning ingredients in their food. The main dish of Thai cooking style is rice. When Thais talk about rice, they usually mean food. They are accustomed to spoon instead of fork and knife. Food for Thais also means the work of art. The method that represents art is in the fruit or vegetable carving. The pattern of carving shows Thai style of painting and Thai lives. (Megan Ratner, 2011).

To recapitulate, Thai immigrants are one group of Asian immigrant in United States which is one factor that shapes United States. They bring the new way of life and new culture to this country. As I read through the information, I think that Thais are well adapted and flexible in various situations. Although, they can accept new thing in society, they still remain their valuable culture and inherit to the next Thai generation.