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# (U//LES) Chinese Illegal Migration Adapting to Enforcement Measures along the US Southwest Border

(U//FOUO) *This article analyzes Chinese illegal migration trends along the US Southwest Border. Chinese nationals are the second largest nationality of migrants from the Eastern Hemisphere apprehended at the US Southwest Border, behind only Indian nationals, and also comprise the largest number of asylum recipients in the United States.*

(U//LES) Chinese migrant apprehensions at the US Southwest Border almost doubled in FY 2016 and were at the highest level in 10 years, though Chinese migrants made up less than one percent of all US Southwest Border apprehensions.[1] We assess that Chinese migrants are adapting to US enhanced measures to detect fraudulent visa applications, and with smugglers' assistance increasingly are attempting overland entry from Mexico.

(U//SBU) Chinese migrants historically have requested asylum after arriving in the United States via air using fraudulent documents, but interagency efforts over the past several years to detect fraudulent documents have made this tactic more difficult, according to US Consulate Shenyang.[2] US Consulate Chengdu also noted in March 2016 that risk analysis software has made it increasingly difficult for visa applicants from areas in China associated with fraudulent travel, such as Fujian, to obtain visas.[3]

» (U//SBU) Chinese migrants have adapted to these efforts by obtaining visas from countries with lax visa requirements, particularly Mexico and Ecuador, to gain entry into Latin America and eventually enter via the US Southwest Border, according to the US Consulate Shanghai.[4] The number of Chinese nationals encountered along the US Southwest Border increased in from 1,300 in FY 2015 to 2,500 in FY 2016.[5,6]

» (U//LES) Among those apprehended, many previously had been denied a visa. For example, in the San Diego sector, 75 percent of the Chinese migrants apprehended between September 2015 and March 2016 had been denied a US visa, according to US Border Patrol officials in San Diego.[7]

## (U//FOUO) *Fujian: China's Migration Hub*

(U//LES) *China-based human smugglers, commonly referred to as "snakeheads," have capitalized on China's growing domestic wealth to establish global networks and move migrants to North America and Europe. Chinese migrants are considered "high priority" clients by smuggling groups operating throughout Latin America because of the high fees smugglers are able to charge.*[8] *The high cost of service for Chinese migrants also increases their vulnerability to trafficking and illicit activities.*

» (U//LES) *Snakeheads have charged as much as $70,000 per person for facilitating travel to the United States, according to a body of CBP interviews of detained Chinese migrants.*[9,10,11,12]

» (U//LES) *Snakeheads are prevalent in the province of Fujian—which is located directly across the strait from Taiwan. Fujian has a long history of smuggling and is a major source for worldwide migration of Chinese nationals, dating back to China's opening in the 1980s. The Fujianese view human smuggling as a necessary mechanism for social mobility and the area is heavily reliant on overseas remittances, according to US Consulate Guangzhou.*[13] *CBP interviews reveal that a majority of the Chinese migrants apprehended at the US Southwest Border originate from Fujian.*[14,15]

» (U//FOUO) Most Chinese migrants are unable to pay the initial smuggling fees and are commonly moved on credit, making them more susceptible to indentured servitude and human trafficking once they arrive in the United States and are expected to pay off their debt, according to a US-based private intelligence company.[16]

(U//LES) Chinese migrants shifted their entry points along the border in the past year, likely due to Mexico-based smugglers adjusting their routes and tactics to adapt to Mexican and US law enforcement pressure, contributing to sudden increases in Chinese apprehensions across different sectors of the US Southwest Border.

» (U//LES) Chinese migrants have admitted to CBP officials on the US Southwest Border of using human smugglers to arrange direct air travel to Mexico and to help facilitate illegal entry into the United States.[17,18,19]

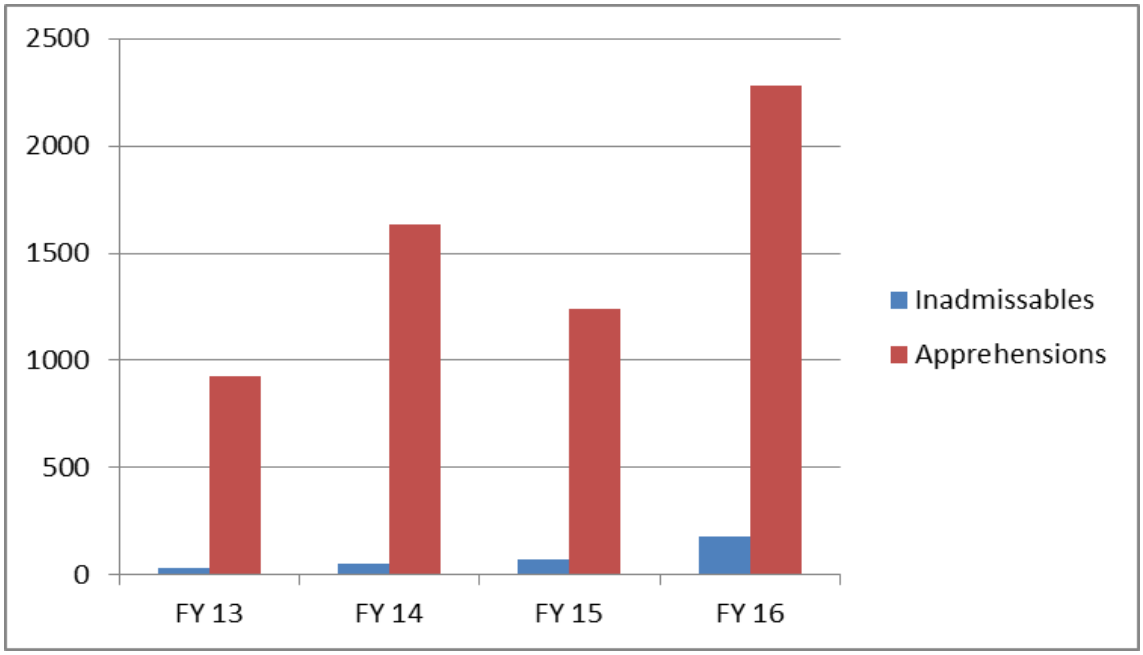
» (U//FOUO) Prior to September 2015, most Chinese migrants crossed into the United States near the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Sector. Beginning that month, however, smugglers began rerouting migrants to enter between California ports of entry, according to CBP data.[20,21]

» (U//LES) A February 2016 Mexican Government surveillance operation in Tijuana identified Mexican citizens of Chinese descent and Chinese nationals living in Mexico as part of a smuggling organization responsible for moving Chinese migrants across the US Southwest Border.[22,23] Probably in response to this effort, Chinese migrants since May 2016 have shifted back to crossing near RGV, suggesting the smuggling networks have the capability of operating in different areas along the US Southwest Border.[24]

(U) ***Analysis of Alternatives***

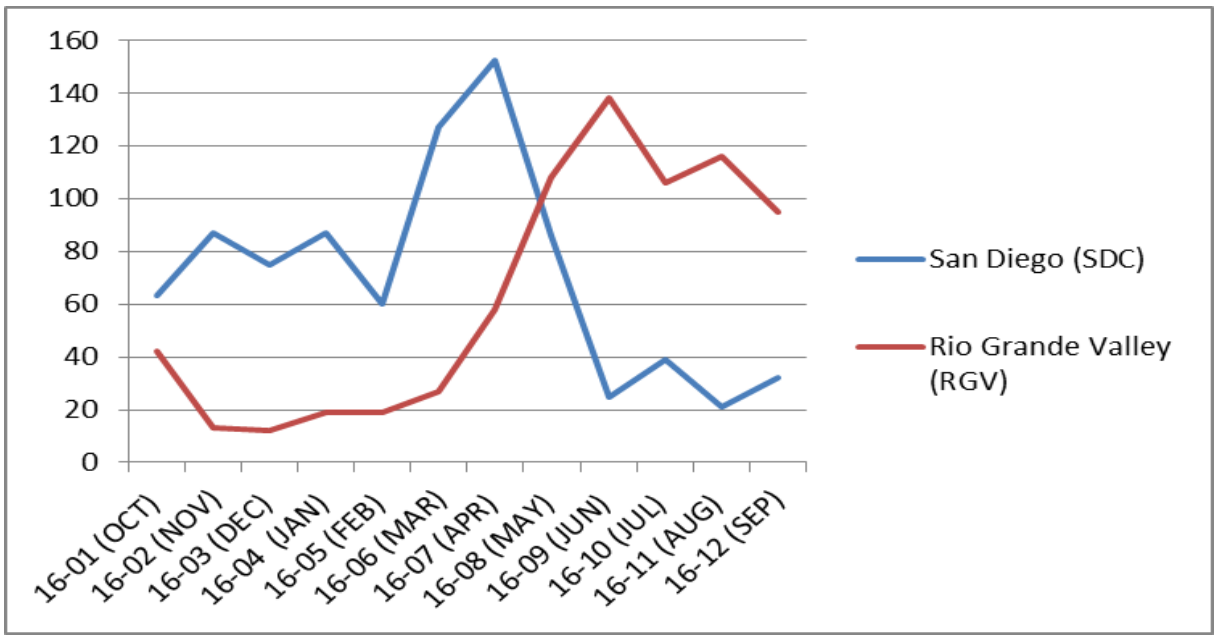
(U//FOUO) *We have considered the possibility that the shifts in Chinese border apprehensions across US Border Patrol sectors could be influenced by reasons other than law enforcement activity. Migrant perceptions that there are variations in processing times for asylum claims at different points of entry across the US Southwest Border could contribute to shifts in migrant flows, as Chinese migrants likely are seeking to be quickly processed and released from immigration custody, but we lack information to confirm this as a trend. Other factors, such as travel costs and flight availability, could influence arrival points in Mexico and effect where Chinese migrants are directed to cross the US Southwest Border, but we lack information to confirm this is occurring.*

**(U//FOUO) Total Chinese Nationals Inadmissible and Apprehension Arrivals on the US Southwest Border FY 2013 to FY 2016[25,26]**




*(U//FOUO) Inadmissible category excludes crewmembers encounters and is only comprised of Chinese nationals that have arrived at land Ports of Entry (POE). Chinese migrants encountered at the US Southwest Border have typically crossed the border between POEs, possibly to avoid longer processing and detention times, according to US Border Patrol officials in San Diego [27], suggesting smugglers are aware of US immigration practices.*

**(U//FOUO) Selected Border Apprehensions of Chinese Nationals-FY 2016[28]**




*(U//LES) Prior to September 2015, most Chinese migrants utilized flights into Mexico City and later arrived in the Rio Grande Valley sector to claim asylum. Starting in September 2015, smugglers began rerouting migrants on flights into Tijuana and directing Chinese migrants to cross in the San Diego sector, according to CBP reporting.[29] Since May, Chinese migrants have shifted back to crossing near the Rio Grande Valley.*

(U) **Source Summary Statement**

(U//FOUO) *We base our assessment that Chinese migrants are adapting to stricter visa restrictions and opting to cross the US Southwest Border in order to request asylum on US diplomatic reporting from China, official CBP data, and a review of interviews by CBP personnel in San Diego. We have **high confidence** in the diplomatic and CBP reporting because of US officials' direct access to Chinese visa applicants and migrants, but we lack the data needed to confirm that this is the main reason for illicit migration through Mexico, giving us **moderate confidence** in this assessment*.

(U//LES) *We base our assessment that human smugglers are adapting to law enforcement pressure and moving Chinese migrants to different sectors of the US Southwest Border on official CBP data, a review of CBP interviews of Chinese migrants, and conversations with CBP personnel in San Diego. The limited intelligence collection on smuggling activity in Mexico involving Chinese nationals, gives us **moderate to low confidence** in this assessment because we lack information on the exact networks, routes, and tactics used to move Chinese migrants into the United States*.

*Prepared by I&A*

*Coordinated with CBP, ICE, Human Smuggling Cell, FBI, CIA, and SOUTHCOM*

[1] (U//FOUO); CBP; DOI 09 AUG 2016; (U//FOUO); CBP Border Patrol Apprehension Data, FY 2011-2016 (July 31, 2016); Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[2] (U); State; Shenyang 000246; 10 OCT 2012; (U); Interagency Efforts Contribute to the Crippling of the Chinese Student Visa Asylum Surge; Extracted information is U//SBU; Overall document classification is U//SBU.
[3] (U//SBU); Chengdu 000090; 10 MAR 2016; (U//SBU); Five Country Conference Partners in China Highlight Technology as Key to Mitigating Visa Fraud; Extracted information is U; Overall document is U//SBU.
[4] (U); State; Shanghai 000614; 31 OCT 2011; (U); Fraud Summary Shanghai (March 1, 2011-August 31, 2011) Country Conditions; Extracted information is U//SBU; Overall document classification is U//SBU.
[5] (U//FOUO); CBP; DOI FY 2016; (U//FOUO); CBP Border Patrol Apprehension and Inadmissible Data, FY 2016; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[6] (U//FOUO); CBP; DHS- RFI-00178-17; DOI 24 OCT 2016; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[7] (U//LES); CBP; HSIR-SDC-16-102006; 03 MAY 2016; DOI UNK; (U); Chinese Influx FY2016: San Diego Sector Threat Assessment; Extracted information is (U//LES); Overall document classification is U//LES.
[8] (U//FOUO); DHS; IIR 4 006 0620 16; 27 Feb 2016; DOI 30 DEC 2015; (U//FOUO); Peluche HSO Transporting UDAS from Central America, Turkey, and China into the United States; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[9] (U); Tatiana Sanchez; *Los Angeles Times: "*California sees surge in Chinese illegally crossing border from Mexico"; 7 JUN 2016; http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-chinese-border-california-20160607-snap-story.html; accessed on 7 JUN 2016
[10] (U//LES); CBP; FIR-CHU-16-4746787; 15 NOV 2015; DOI 14 NOV 2015; (U//FOUO); Chinese Nationals Apprehended in the Chula Vista AOR; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[11] (U//LES); CBP; FIR-CHU-16-4653151; 24 OCT 2015; DOI 23 OCT 2015 (U//FOUO); Four Chinese Nationals Apprehended in CHU AOR; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[12] (U//LES); CBP; FIR-RGV-14-2911094; 09 SEP 2014; DOI 05 SEP 2014; (U//FOUO); MCS ASID Custodial Interview Summary with Three Chinese UDA's; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[13] (SBU); Guangzhou 000776; 18 OCT 2014; (SBU); Country Fraud Summary China; Extracted information is U//SBU; Overall document is U//SBU.
[14] (U//LES); CBP; FIR-CHU-16-4653151; 24 OCT 2015; DOI 23 OCT 2015 (U//FOUO); Four Chinese Nationals Apprehended in CHU AOR; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[15] (U//LES); CBP; FIR-RGV-14-2911094; 09 SEP 2014; DOI 05 SEP 2014; (U//FOUO); MCS ASID Custodial Interview Summary with Three Chinese UDA's; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[16] (U); UNK; STRATFOR; "Organized Crime in China"; 19 AUG 2008; https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/organized-crime-china; accessed on 6 JUN 2016.
[17] (U//LES); DHS; IIR 4 012 0079 16; 08 SEP 2016; DOI 14-24 APR 2016; (U//LES); Smuggling Routes and Methods from China to the United States; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[18] (U//LES); CBP; IIR 4 042 0418 16; 16 JUN 2016; DOI 10 MAR 2016; (U//LES); Members of an Unidentified Church in China Facilitating Travel for Chinese Nationals Attempting to Illegally Enter the United States through Mexico; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[19] (U//LES); DHS; IIR 4 042 0179 15; 29 MAY 2015; DOI 01 MAR 2015; (U//LES); CBP - Chinese Nationals Apprehended near McAllen, Texas Provide Details of Their Travel Route to the United States; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[20] (U//FOUO); CBP; DOI FY 2016; (U//FOUO); CBP Border Patrol Apprehension and Inadmissible Data, FY 2016; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[21] (U//FOUO); CBP; DOI 18 MAY 2016; (U//FOUO); USBP Total Apprehensions by Sector - China, India and Nepal - Fy2006 to FY2016 TD; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[22] (U//LES); CBP; FIR-CHU-16-5381863; 17 FEB 2016; DOI 09 FEB 2016; (U//FOUO); Suspected Chinese Nationals' Smugglers Identified at TJ Airport; Extracted information is U//LES; Overall document classification is U//LES.
[23] (U//FOUO); Border Patrol-Intel, San Diego Sector; Email; 22 JUN 2016; DOI UNK; (U//FOUO); FYI Regarding Meeting; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[24](U//FOUO); CBP; DOI FY 2016; (U//FOUO); CBP Border Patrol Apprehension and Inadmissible Data, FY 2016; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[25] (U//FOUO); CBP; DOI 09 AUG 2016; (U//FOUO); CBP Border Patrol Apprehension Data, FY 2011-2016 (July 31, 2016); Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.

[26] (U//FOUO); CBP; DOI FY 2016; (U//FOUO); CBP Border Patrol Apprehension and Inadmissible Data, FY 2016; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[27](U//FOUO); Border Patrol Intel, San Diego Sector; Meeting; 20 JUN 2016; DOI UNK; (U//FOUO); Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall meeting classification is U//FOUO.
[28] (U//FOUO); CBP; DOI FY 2016; (U//FOUO); CBP Border Patrol Apprehension and Inadmissible Data, FY 2016; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
[29] (U//LES); CBP; HSIR-SDC-16-102006; 03 MAY 2016; DOI UNK; (U); Chinese Influx FY2016: San Diego Sector Threat Assessment; Extracted information is (U//LES); Overall document classification is U//LES.

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- ☐ Other:

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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