The Impacts of ACFTA on Export of Thai Agricultural Products to China

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Abstract

The ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) was the first FTA with external parties to be signed by ASEAN. This agreement included three components, namely, goods, services, and investment. Before the Trade in Goods Agreement was put into force in 2005, Thailand and China signed an agreement on Accelerated Tariff Elimination under the Early Harvest Programme (EHP), which focused on agricultural products and was implemented in October 2003. Since then, the bilateral trade between Thailand and China is steadily increasing. The agricultural products are the main export product between China and Thailand. For understanding the impacts of ACFTA on Export of Thai Agricultural Products to China, this article will describe the utilization of ACFTA preferences for export and how many tariff reductions under ACFTA. The scope of the agricultural products in this article covers 2091 tariff lines of both unprocessed and processed agricultural products. The content of this article consists of 3 parts: 1) The Benefits of ACFTA for Thailand; 2) The Opportunity of ACFTA for Thailand, and 3) Other trade barriers for Thailand. The benefits of the ACFTA are analyzed by comparing the tariff rate of China for ASEAN members in 2018 with the MFN tariff rate of China for WTO members. The opportunity for further improvement is presented in terms of the utilization of the FTA arrangement by Thai exporters and the top 10 categories (by HS 2 digits) of agricultural products exported from Thailand to China as well as an assessment of FTA impacts on major products in each category.

Keywords: ACFTA, Thai Agricultural Products, Export, China

Introduction

China is the world's leading economy, with a population of over 1.4 billion people. Also, China is the largest trading partner with Thailand since 2013 and the top three foreign investors since 2016. Thailand's exports to China is accounted for nearly 12% of the entire country's exports. Under the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA), Thailand gains from expansion in both trade and investment, significantly.

The Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between ASEAN and China was signed in November 2002, which provided the legal basis for ASEAN and China to negotiate further agreements leading to the creation of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area

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(ACFTA) by 1 January 2010. The ACFTA was the first FTA with external parties to be signed by ASEAN.

Trade in Goods Agreement, Trade in Service Agreement and the Investment Agreement under the Framework Agreement of Comprehensive Economic Cooperation were concluded and signed on 29 November 2004, 14 January 2007 and 15 August 2009, respectively. In August 2014, ASEAN and China decided to upgrade the ACFTA.

The Agreement on Trade in Goods was implemented in July 2005 and has been revised twice in 2006 and 2010. Under this agreement, participating countries are committed to reduce and/or eliminate tariffs under five different schedules. These products are organized into five different lists:

- 1) Early Harvest Programme (EHP)
- 2) Normal Track, which is further subdivided into Normal Track 1 and Normal Track 2
- 3) Sensitive Track, which is further subdivided into Sensitive List and Highly Sensitive List

EHP allowed for the accelerated reduction of tariffs on certain products before the onset of the FTA. The program reduced tariffs on these products over three years to 10% by 2004, 5% by 2005, and zero tariffs by 2006.

For the Normal Track, all tariff lines in this category have been eliminated by ASEAN-6 (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) and China as of 1 January 2012. For Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam, tariff elimination will have to be completed by 1 January 2015, with some flexibility afforded to eliminate tariffs on products not exceeding 250 tariff lines by 1 January 2018. (ASEAN, 2015)

In the past, agricultural products are the main export product between China and ASEAN, especially Thailand. (Praisakuldecha, 2017: 23) Hence, tariff reduction under the EHP covers agricultural goods in the customs tariff schedule Harmonized System (HS) codes 01 through 08 (live animals, meat and other edible animal parts, fish products, dairy products, fowl eggs, live trees, vegetables and fruit, and edible nuts).

Thailand and China anticipate the potential gain for trade in goods specifically under the customs tariff schedule codes 07 and 08 by embracing fruits and vegetable lines of products. On 18 June 2003, an "Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand on Accelerated Tariff Elimination under the Early Harvest Programme" has been concluded. Both parties were first among ASEAN countries to agree upon the elimination of the tariff on all items under tariff schedule codes 07 and 08 as of 1 October 2003. Singapore subsequently signed this agreement as well. (DTN, 2008)

Trade between Thailand-China

Since the ACFTA went into effect, while Thailand got the advantage form EHP especially for agricultural products, the bilateral trade between Thailand and China is steadily increasing. In 2018, the bilateral trade volume between Thailand and China was US\$80.14 billion, up 8.7%. Among these, Thailand's exports to China were US\$30.18 billion, up 2.3%; its imports from China were US\$49.96 billion, up 12.9%. However, Thailand has always trade deficits with China. The deficit was US\$19.79 billion in 2018, as shown in figure 1.

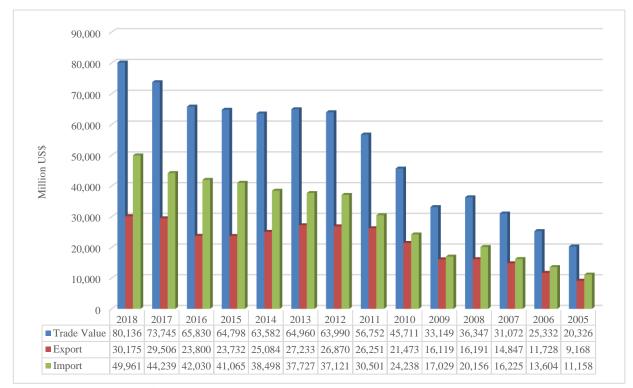


Figure 1 Trade Value between Thailand and China

Source: Information and Communication Technology Center, Ministry of Commerce (2019)

In terms of export product structure, if grouping Agricultural products and Agro-industrial products together, there are nearly 25% or one-fourth of Thailand's product structure export to China. It has created economic value for the agricultural sector and farmers, which are the majority of the Thai population. Their increased income also helps to create value-added to the domestic demand chain and other manufacturing supply chains in the consumer and tourism sectors. Therefore, promoting exports of agricultural and processed agricultural products to China is important not only to the export sector, but also to the economic and social structure of Thailand.

In 2018, the main export product of Thailand which using ACFTA preferences was Mixtures of natural rubber latex with synthetic rubber latex (HS 400280), Durians (HS 081060), Manioc (HS 071410), p-Xylene (HS 290243), Polymers of ethylene (HS 390190), Manioc starch (HS 110814), Gearboxes and parts thereof (HS 870840), Guavas, mangoes, and mangosteens (HS 080450), Other aromatic hydrocarbon mixtures (HS 270750) and Polycarbonates (HS 390740), etc.

Benefit and Opportunities of Thai Agricultural Product in ACFTA

The scope of the agricultural products in this article covers both unprocessed and processed agricultural products. They correspond to code 01-24 (from live animals to prepared foodstuff), 40-46 (from rubber to wood), 50-53 (from silk to cotton), and 70 (pearls) in the HS system. The benefits of the ACFTA are analyzed by comparing the tariff rate of China for ASEAN members in 2018 with the MFN tariff rate of China for WTO members. Whereas, the opportunity is presented in terms of the utilization of the FTA arrangement by Thai exporters, the top 10 categories (by HS 2 digits) of agricultural products exported from Thailand to China, and an assessment of FTA impacts on major products in each category.

1. The Benefits of ACFTA for Thailand

There are 2,091 tariff lines at HS 8 digits level in the 36 categories of agricultural products (HS 2 digits) mentioned above in the Chinese tariff schedule. Under the ACFTA agreement, the zero percent tariff rate has been applied to 1,951 of those 2,091 tariff lines (93%) by 2018. In comparison, the average MFN rates in these categories for WTO members without FTA agreement with China still range from 4% to 30%, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Chinese Tariff Schedule for ACFTA members and MFN

HS	Description	Tariff Lines	0% Tariff by 2018	% of 0% Tariff	MFN Tariff	MFN Average
01	Live animals	70	70	100	0-10	5.71
02	Meat	79	79	100	10-25	18.38
03	Fish and crustaceans	257	257	100	2-17.5	10.47
04	Dairy produce; natural honey	39	39	100	0-25	14.59
05	Products of animal origin, nes	43	43	100	0-20	12.51
06	Live trees and other plants	31	31	100	0-23	8.65
07	Edible vegetables	122	122	100	0-13	10.90
08	Edible fruit and nuts	92	92	100	0-30	18.33
09	Coffee, tea, and spices	48	43	90	2-30	13.17
10	Cereals	36	21	58	0-65	28.47
11	Products of the milling	35	25	71	5-65	25.94
12	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	116	116	100	0-30	9.71
13	Lac, gums, resins	21	21	100	0-20	12.05
14	Vegetable plaiting materials	10	10	100	4-30	9.40
15	Animal or vegetable fats	96	85	89	8-30	13.01
16	Preparations of meat, of fish or of crustaceans, mollusks	61	61	100	5-23	10.64
17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	19	12	63	8-50	30.95
18	Cocoa and cocoa preparations	11	11	100	8-22	11.00
19	Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk	23	23	100	10-30	18.91
20	Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts	100	95	95	5-30	20.28
21	Miscellaneous edible preparations	23	22	96	3-35	21.35
22	Beverages, spirits and vinegar	27	27	100	0-65	21.59
23	Residues and waste from the food industries	30	30	100	2-15	5.35
24	Tobacco	12	4	33	10-57	29.42
40	Rubber and articles thereof	110	105	95	0-25	11.62
41	Raw hides and skins and leather	60	60	100	5-14	9.26
42	Articles of leather; articles of animal gut	26	26	100	8-20	15.27
43	Fur skins and artificial fur	20	20	100	10-23	17.60
44	Wood and articles of wood	176	116	66	0-20	3.73
45	Cork and articles of cork	8	8	100	0-10.5	5.11
46	Manufactures of straw, of esparto or of other plaiting materials	24	24	100	9-10	9.08
50	Silk	28	28	100	6-10	8.75
51	Wool, fine or coarse animal hair; horsehair yarn woven fabric	59	50	85	5-38	12.35

Table 1 Chinese Tariff Schedule for ACFTA members and MFN (Cont.)

HS	Description	Tariff Lines	0% Tariff by 2018	% of 0% Tariff	MFN Tariff	MFN Average
52	Cotton & fabrics	129	125	97	5-40	8.95
53	Other vegetable textile fibers; paper yarn and woven fabrics of paper yarn	43	43	100	3-12	7.30
71	Pearls	7	7	100	21	21.0
	Total	2091	1951	93		

Source: Department of Foreign Trade (2019)

As in the category of "Edible Fruits and Nuts" (HS 08), a Thai exporter can export all kinds of fruit (100% of the tariff lines) to China at a zero percent tariff rate. It gives Thai exporters with a competitive edge against exporters from other WTO member countries without FTA agreement with China, who would bear an average tariff rate of 18.33% (ranging from 0% to 30%).

In the case the tariff rate is higher than a zero percent, the rates for ACFTA is still lower than those of MFN for the same tariff line. In the example of "Cereals", the tariff rates for ACFTA ranges from 5% to 50% (out of quota), compared with 65% for MFN without FTA agreement with China (Table 2).

Table 2 Example of Cereals: ACFTA vs. MFN

HS	HS 8 Digits	Description	2018 Tariff (%)	MFN Tariff (%)
	10011100	Seed of durum wheat	5	65
	10011900	Durum wheat	5	65
	10019100	Wheat or marlin seed excl. durum wheat	5	65
	10019900	Other wheat or marlines	5	65
	10059000	Maize excl. Seed	50	65
	10061011	Long grain seed, in husk (paddy or rough)	50	65
	10061019	Other rice seed, in husk (paddy or rough)	5	65
10 Cereals	10061091	Long grain, in husk (paddy or rough)	50	65
	10061099	Other rice, in husk (paddy or rough)	5	65
	10062010	Husked (brown) long grain	50	65
	10062090	Other husked rice	5	65
	10063010	Semi-milled or wholly milled long grain	50	65
	10063090	Other semi-milled or wholly milled rice	5	65
	10064010	Broken long grain	5	65
	10064090	Other broken long grain	5	65

Source: Tariff Reduction Schedules: China, asean.org (2019)

2. The Opportunity of ACFTA for Thailand

Many Thai exporters took the opportunity offered by the ACFTA. The utilization of FTA arrangement may be measured by the proportion of exports with the "rule of origin" certificate, which is necessary for applying the FTA privilege. Thailand's FTA using is the highest proportion of ASEAN. In 2018, by using ACFTA preferences for export worth US\$17.63 million, up 24.7%. Exercise ratio of 89% of the total export value, which increases by 14% from the previous year. (Table 3).

Table 3 Thailand's Utilization of ACFTA

Unit: billion US\$

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Δ%
Total export of eligible product	11.5	11.1	14.0	15.6	15.3	14.4	15.1	18.6	19.9	6.8
Actual utilization	7.4	9.4	11.3	14.0	13.1	11.4	11.1	14.1	17.6	24.7
Ratio (%)	64	84	81	90	85	79	74	75	89	

Source: Department of Foreign Trade (2019)

In the categories of agricultural products, the opportunity of ACFTA is best utilized by Thai exporters in the cases of rubber, wood, fruit, vegetable, milling products, cereals, and fish & crustaceans, etc., as reflected by the value of export from Thailand to China (Table 4). Among these, the export products that are steadily increasing included Edible fruit & nuts (HS 08), Products of the milling industry; starches; inulin; wheat gluten (HS 11), fish and crustaceans, mollusks (HS 03).

Table 4 Top 10 Categories of Thai Agricultural Products Exported to China

Rank	HS	Short Description	Value in 2016 \$1000	Value in 2017 \$1000	Value in 2018 \$1000	% of Thai Export to China	% of China's Import	% 0f Thai Export
		All products	23575031	29365124	29686491	100.00%	1.39%	11.89%
1	40	Rubber and articles thereof	3689780	5794902	4756055	16.02%	28.13%	30.70%
6	44	Wood and articles of wood	1355727	1651770	1349913	4.55%	5.42%	51.92%
9	08	Edible fruit & nuts	524737	659591	1007862	3.40%	11.61%	36.77%
11	07	Edible vegetables	1109139	1076666	903717	3.04%	44.35%	73.66%
12	11	Products of the milling industry; starches; inulin; wheat gluten	544718	543916	739482	2.49%	62.64%	47.11%
13	10	Cereals	475995	570733	548131	1.85%	9.46%	9.62%
15	03	Fish and crustaceans, mollusks	135079	160698	261174	0.88%	2.25%	13.33%
17	21	Miscellaneous edible preparations	184105	226191	228662	0.77%	7.03%	9.98%
23	17	Sugars & confectionery	154897	173716	147532	0.50%	10.37%	5.15%
26	23	Residues and waste food industries; prepared animal fodder	117526	82195	128834	0.43%	3.39%	7.12%

Source: WTO, trademap.org (2018)

The opportunity of ACFTA can also be assessed by examining the gap between the tariff rate of ACFTA with those of MFN for major products (HS 4 digits), which account for more than 50% of the product category (HS 2 digits). The mark of "S" is assigned to the products with "Significant" gap between the rate of ACFTA and the rate of MFN, the mark of "M" to indicate a "Medium Significant" gap, the mark of "N" to indicate "No Significant" gap (Table 5).

Table 5 The Impacts of ACFTA to Top 10 Thai Agricultural Products Exported to China

Rank	HS2	Short Description	Major Product HS4	Short Description	% Value 2018	ACFTA Tariff	MFN Tariff	Impacts^
1	40	Rubber and articles	4002	Synthetic rubber	45	0	mostly 5.7	S
1	40	thereof	4001	Natural rubber	41	*20	20	N
6	44	Wood and articles of wood	4407	Wood sawn	89	0	0	N
9	08	Edible fruit and nuts	0810	Durian etc.	57	0	30-14	S
11	07	Edible vegetables	0714	Cassava etc.	98	0	mostly 13-5	S
12	11	Products of the milling	1108	Starch	96	0	20-10	S
13	10	Cereals	1006	Rice	100	50-5	65	M
15	03	Fish and crustaceans	0306	Shrimp etc.	89	0	mostly 15-5	S
17	21	Miscellaneous edible preparations.	2106	Food preparations, n.e.s.	86	**0	mostly 20-10	S
23	17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	1701	Cane sugar	86	50	50	N
26	23	Residues and waste from the food industries	2301	Flours of fish	65	0	5-2	M
28	20	Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts	2208	Preparation fruits & nuts	55	***0	mostly 30-15	S
29	41	Raw hides and skins and leather.	4104	Hides and skins of bovine	53	0	8-5	S

Remarks: ^ S: Significant, M: Medium Significant, N: Not Significant

*0% for 40013000, **except 5% for coconut juice, ***except 5% for pineapple

Source: Compiled by researcher with data from WTO trademap.org; ACFTA Tariff Rates of China

For examples, the major products in the category of "Rubber and Articles" (HS 40), which ranked No. 1 in all export from Thailand to China, has two major products: "natural rubber" (HS 4001) and "synthetic rubber" (HS 4002), which account for 41% and 45% of the export value of this category (HS 40). The product "synthetic rubber" is assigned the sign of "S", indicating a significant impact of ACFTA because the zero percent tariff rate is significantly lower than the MFN rate of 7.5% in most cases.

The product "natural rubber", however, is assigned the sign of "N", indicating no significant impact of ACFTA because the 20% tariff rate in most cases is almost the same as the MFN rate.

The major products in the category of "Cereal" (HS 10), which ranked No. 13 in all export from Thailand to China, has only one major product: "rice" (HS 1006), which accounts for 100% of the export value of the category (HS 10). The product "rice" is assigned the sign of "M", indicating a medium impact of ACFTA, because the 5-50% tariff rate (out of quota rate) is lower than the MFN rate of 65%. Thai rice exporters, however, may enjoy a one percent tariff rate if they obtain the quota (5.32 million tons per year for a few countries in the world) from China.

Among the 39 major products (HS 4 digits) of all categories of agricultural products, 32 products are with significant impacts of the ACFTA, hence have high opportunities for Thai exporters in terms of the advantage of the low tariff. Two products, Cereals (HS 1006) and Residues of food Industries (HS 2301) received medium impacts. Meanwhile, five products received no significant impacts because both ACFTA Tariff and MFN Tariff was reduced to

zero percent included Natural rubber (HS 4001); Wood sawn (HS 4407); Cane sugar (HS 1701); Cigarettes (HS 2402) and Agglomerated cork (HS 4504).

3. Another trade barrier for Thailand

Besides that, the tariff barrier still exists in some products mentioned above. There are still limitations or Non-Tariff Barriers (NTB) in the ACFTA, including quota and licenses, monopolistic measures for local products in China, and technical measures, which can be summarized as Table 6.

Table 6 NTB Existing under ACFTA

Category	NTB	Example of China
QUOTA &	Import quota or tariff quota	Wheat, corn, rice, sugar, cotton, wool
LICENSE	Import licenses	Pre-import licensing of Food
MONOPOLISTIC	Channel for imports	Exporters and importers registration
MEASURES	Compulsory national services	Role of COFCO
	Product characteristics requirements	CCC: China Compulsory Certificate
TECHNICAL	Marking, Labelling & Packaging requirements	Pre-packaged food, GB7718-2011
MEASURES	Testing, inspection and quarantine requirements	Sanitary & Phytosanitary Certification
	Special customs formalities	Customs clearance delays

Source: Author's Compilation

For example, quota restrictions in China for cereal products, such as wheat, allows import quotas of 9.63 million tons, which 90% are quota under Chinese enterprises. Corn has a quota of 7.20 million tons, which 60% are quota under Chinese enterprises. Long-grain rice has a quota of 2.66 million tons, which 50% is a quota under Chinese enterprises. Medium-short-grain rice provides import quota of 2.66 million tons, which 50% is a quota under Chinese enterprises.

Therefore, in the case of rice products, Thailand now still facing trade barriers in terms of tariff-rate quotas, which became a limitation for Thai rice export to China since it is restricted to importers with import quotas only. In addition, most of the quotas are under Chinese enterprises, resulting in the monopolization of import quotas and causing the small importer lacking opportunity or having to buy import quotas from the large Chinese enterprise, which raises the cost of exporting to China.

Currently, China has set quotas for agricultural and processed products (Table 7). Thai product export to China which are still affected by the import quotas such as cotton, rice, sugar, and wool.

Table 7 Quota Tariff of China 2019

Category	HS	Normal Tariff	MFN Tariff	Quota Tariff
	10011100	180	65	1
	10011900	180	65	1
	10019100	180	65	1
Wheat	10019900	180	65	1
	11010000	130	65	6
	11031100	130	65	9
	11032010	180	65	10
	10051000	180	20	1
	10059000	180	65	1
Corn	11022000	130	40	9
	11031300	130	65	9
	11042300	180	65	10
Cotton	52010000	125	40	1
Cotton	52030000	125	40	1
	10061021	180	65	1
	10061081	180	65	1
	10061089	180	65	1
	10062020	180	65	1
	10062080	180	65	1
	10063020	180	65	1
Rice	10063080	180	65	1
	10064020	180	10	1
	10064080	180	10	1
	11029021	130	40	9
	11029029	130	40	9
	11031931	70	10	9
	11031939	70	10	9
	31021000	150	50	4
Chemical Fertilizer	31052000	150	50	4
	31053000	150	50	4
	17011400	125	50	15
	17019100	125	50	15
Sugar	17019910	125	50	15
~8	17019920	125	50	15
	17019990	125	50	15
	51011100	50	38	1
	51011900	50	38	1
	51012100	50	38	1
Wool*	51012900	50	38	1
	51013000	50	38	1
	51031010	50	38	1
	51051000	50	38	3
Wool Strip**	51052100	50	38	3
Woor Burp	51052900	50	38	3
	31032700	50	30	J

Remarks: *Quota tariff is 0% for Australia & New Zealand

**Quota tariff is 0% for New Zealand

Source: Customs Tariff Commission of State Council: Tariff Quota 2019

Furthermore, there are other FTA agreements between China and other countries (or regions). At the moment, China has 16 FTA agreements and seven special privilege agreements with LDC (Least Developed Countries) (Table 8). Thai exporters belong to No. 2 ASEAN Region (AS) and may have the same tariff privilege as exporters from ASEAN countries under ACFTA. However, some Thai products may have tax privileges less than other LDC, which inevitably affects the advantage of Thai products in exporting such products to China.

Table 8 Chinese Arrangement of FTA (1-16) & Special Privilege for LDC (17-23)

No.	Code	Countries/Regions
1	AP	Bangladesh, India, Lao, South Korea, Sri Lanka
2	AS	ASEAN
3	SG	Singapore
4	PK	Pakistan
5	CL	Chile
6	NZ	New Zealand
7	PE	Peru
8	CR	Costa Rica
9	CH	Switzerland
10	IS	Iceland
11	KR	South Korea
12	AU	Australia
13	GE	Georgia
14	HK	Hong Kong
15	MO	Macao
16	TW	Taiwan
17	AP2	Bangladesh, Lao
18	LD	42 LDC: Ethiopia, etc.
19	LD1	41 LDC: Ethiopia, etc.
20	LD2	38 LDC: Ethiopia, etc.
21	KH	Cambodia
22	MM	Myanmar
23	LA	Lao

Source: Customs Tariff Commission of State Council: Tariff Schedule 2019

Conclusion

The impacts of ACFTA on Export of Thai Agricultural Products to China could be reflected by the utilization of ACFTA preferences for export and how many tariff reductions under ACFTA. Thailand's utilization of ACFTA is the highest proportion of ASEAN. In 2018, Thai exporter using ACFTA preferences for export worth US\$17.63 million, up 24.7%. Exercise ratio of 89% of the total export value, which increases by 14%. from the previous year.

By examining both unprocessed and processed agricultural products, the Chinese tariff schedule under the ACFTA agreement, the zero percent tariff rate has already been applied in 1951 out of those 2091 tariff lines (93%) by 2018. In comparison, the average MFN rates in these categories for WTO members without FTA agreement with China still range from around 4% to 30%.

Among the 39 major products (HS 4 digits) of all categories of agricultural products, 32 products are with significant impacts of the ACFTA, hence have high opportunities for Thai exporters in terms of the advantage of the low tariff. Two products are with medium impacts, and five products are with no significant impacts.

However, the tariff barrier that still exists in some agricultural products. There are still limitations or Non-Tariff Barriers (NTB) in the ACFTA, including quota and licenses, monopolistic measures for local products in China, and technical measures. There is some Thai product export to China, which is still affected by import quotas such as cotton, rice, sugar, and wool.

Furthermore, China currently has 16 FTA agreements and seven special privileges agreements with LDC (Least Developed Countries). These might be the reason why some Thai products may have tax privileges less than other LDC, which inevitably affects the advantage of Thai products in exporting such products to China.

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ACFTA ASEAN-China Free Trade Area

EHP Early Harvest Programme

FTA Free Trade Area

HS Harmonized System Codes
LDC Least Developed Countries
MFN Most Favoured Nation
NTB Non-Tariff Barriers

WTO World Trade Organization

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