

## CREATING NEW MEANING FOR MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE NAKHON SI THAMMARAT PROVINCE, THAILAND

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**Abstract:** This qualitative research paper examines the creation of meaning for Myanmar's migrant workers. It uses structured interviews of 37 key informants specifically selected for the purpose, including Myanmar's migrant workers, Thai friends, entrepreneurs, employers, and government officials. The collated data was analysed, and related issues were synthesised, compiled, and presented descriptively. The results indicated a need for the following: (1) Building social and cultural relations by communicating in more than two languages, exchanging food and dress cultures & traditions, diversifying beliefs and traditions, intensively following Buddhist teachings and participating in sports and recreation to develop good relationships with community members; (2) Occupational skills and knowledge collaborations, exchanging work techniques, developing skill potential by acquiring supplementary work to gain experience, and displaying courteousness toward colleagues; (3) Creating opportunities and common goals shareable with other workers and creating rules and accords with multicultural societies; and (4) Focusing on self-reliance and security in life and earning adequate income and savings for financial security. It also includes understanding savings creation, fostering moderation and self-reliance, building a career, and earning additional income without harming others.

Keywords: Creating meaning; Creating new meaning; Myanmar migrant workers.

### Introduction

Myanmar's migrant workforce refers to the cross-border migration of labour across the Thai-Myanmar border. The migrants facilitate interactions with other cultures over the course of their employment. This phenomenon is old and enduring. Today, migration also relates to trade and investment liberalisation (Kerdmongkol, 2007), making Myanmar's migrant workers integral to the body of migrant workers travelling, in large numbers, from Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) countries to work in Thailand. This appears as labour for those who wish to come to work, mainly for an economic reasons (Nimnual, 2013). The labour situation has also been transformed by the creation of the Asean Economic Community or "AEC", leading to labour shortages in Thailand. It has caused Thai employers to employ Myanmar migrant workers to meet their labour needs and drive the economy. Thus, Myanmar migrant

workers have been employed as workers in all major provinces in Thailand, constantly creating cultural regions and imprinting their identity in their settlement areas (Numnuan, *et al.*, 2021).

In the Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, specifically, 11,661 skilled and unskilled Myanmar migrant workers are working legally (Nakhon Si Thammarat Provincial Employment Office, 2020). The influx of Myanmar migrant labour follows a Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries, permitting the analysis and resolution of work-related labour issues. Semi-skilled workers are put to work on production lines, that requires basic job skills, while the unskilled workers, who are lower-level workers, are not experts and work with instructions provided by a supervisor. These laborers are patient, diligent, and paid meagre wages compared with their Thai counterparts (Bhumorn & Tantiwiphawin, 2020). Therefore, it is practical to replace Thai workers with them,

increasing the number of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand. Moreover, the process of registration for Myanmar migrant workers provides opportunities for employers and migrant workers working illegally to be recognised. Once the applications are considered, the Labour Ministry issues temporary work and residence permits for them to work in Thailand. They also help improve their working styles and methods to align their skills with those required in the country. In this manner they can successfully replace Thai workers (Achawanijkul, 2003; Samkoses, 2016)

However, Myanmar workers experience unfavourable work conditions in Thailand and in some cases unfair treatment by Thai organisations. There are several recent studies by Phungsoonthorn & Charoensukmongkol (2019). that prove foreign migrant workers that developed an emotional attachment to the workplace in the new country were less likely to leave the workplace, although they were a minority group in the organisation. Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn's (2022) research clarifies that the Creativity Quotient may be insufficient to successfully tackle discrimination in the workplace. Rather, there must be an organisational climate that supports the racial diversity of foreign migrant employees. The findings of Aung, *et al.* (2020) highlights the need for gender-inclusive health promotion, screening of non-communicable diseases, risk behaviours, and the timely education of migrant workers on health. It may assist authorities in devising strategies extending health and universal health coverage to the migrant population. However, the observation of Myanmar migrant workers from a single perspective is nothing new. It is necessary to reflect on and review the Myanmar migrant workers' lives in Nakhon Si Thammarat over the past few decades. This includes discussing new ways of "creating a new meaning" or "creating acceptance" for them, which recognises and understands the new general social and cultural contexts (Phothisita, 2021). Familiarity increases with the duration of work. It is

necessary to create a gradual build-up and grow at all levels until it has completely stabilised in a multicultural society. It simultaneously prepares to comprehend the limitations of coexistence to resolve conflicts and develop best practices for everyone's mutual benefit. Developing social connections that facilitate a consensus between two parties, under fair laws, with effective law enforcement and guidelines promoting ethics for a friendly coexistence is required (Rungmanee, 2017; The News Agency of Hfocus, 2017). Being conscious of Myanmar's migrant workers' livelihoods and community adaptation in times of social and economic change, community coexistence agreements for multicultural societies has been drawn up to address conflicts between local communities and the Myanmar migrant workforce (Shouchupol, *et al.*, 2017). However, clearly understanding community and sectors is crucial, as it helps policymakers to formulate and implement strategies more objectively and effectively (Said & Roslan, 2022)

Based on the discussion above, this research looks at the migrant worker issues from a different perspective. It poses the research question of "How do Myanmar migrant workers in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province create value?" and considers individual workers self-reliance and desire for stability in life. It helps create opportunities, common goals, career skills, and collaborations that build social and cultural relationships. This study's findings will improve the quality of life of Myanmar migrant workers and create new meaning for them, as well as provide a model, for migrants living abroad. This study can also be used for policy presentations to relevant agencies to improve their understanding of migrant worker issues.

This research uses a theoretical study method, using principles and ideas from documents, books, and research about human needs (Maslow, 1943; Khaenamkhaew, *et al.*, 2019) to define the conceptual framework of this research, with the following details. (Figure 1 Conceptual framework)



Figure 1: Conceptual framework  
(Adapt from Maslow, 1943; Khaenamkhaew, *et al.*, 2019)

### Materials and Methods:

This research involves a qualitative case study (Sutheewasinon, & Pasunon, 2016), and its scope extends across the Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, which is situated in southern Thailand, where Myanmar migrant workers travel in search of job opportunities (Office of Foreign Workers Administration, 2018).

Thirty-seven participants were selectively identified, based on theories developed on specific groups of data (Sutheewasinon & Pasunon, 2016), which were:

- 1) 7 Myanmar migrant workers, including Myanmar migrant workers legally working in the Nakhon Si Thammarat Province for at least 10 years.
- 2) 3 Thai friends being native residents of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province and having worked with Myanmar migrant workers for at least 10 years, and who have become familiar with caring for them like their own families.
- 3) 5 entrepreneurs or employers who are entrepreneurs or employers that have employed Myanmar migrant workers in the Nakhon Si Thammarat Province continuously for at least 10 years.
- 4) 6 government officials who are responsible for caring for and managing Myanmar

migrant workers in the Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. In proper ethical fashion, the rights of these key respondents, from the beginning of the data collection process until the presentation of the research results, has been protected. Informants possess the right to skip or not answer any questions that they were uncomfortable with or found embarrassing and those that they cannot answer or were unsure about (Cheawjindakarn, 2018).

This research paper used a structured interview form for its 37 key informants, that include Myanmar migrant workers, Thai friends, entrepreneurs or employers, and government officials (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The structured interview form consisted of three parts which were:

- 1) General information of the respondents.
- 2) Questions about creating a new meaning for Myanmar migrant workers. This includes advancing social and cultural relations, career skills, and collaboration; creating opportunities and common goals; developing self-reliance and stability in life; and
- 3) An assessment of the problems that have arisen or may yet arise and recommendations. The processes to assess the quality of the tools were as follows:

- 1) Seek advice from experts to examine the created tools
- 2) Bring the interview form to assess data collection
- 3) Bring the interview form to improve and make appropriate changes to it to interview key informants.

Data collection: Details of data collection are as follows:

- 1) Study related documents and other research by the researcher, and collect data and basic information.
- 2) Manage the creation of a new meaning for Myanmar migrant workers. Firstly, the researcher will personally contact the participants to explain the research purpose, its benefits, the procedures involved, the interview date, and the estimated interview duration. This would include attaching informational documents that would prepare the participants for the interview. The researcher also applied for the approval of official documents to collect research data and presented these official documents to the key informants to be interviewed about creating meaning for Myanmar migrant workers.
- 3) The researcher collected data using structured interviews with Myanmar migrant workers, Thai friends, entrepreneurs, employers, and government officials that included a total of 37 participants.

The data was collected until the saturation point (Gill, 2020). The procedure consisted of

- 1) Preparation for the interview: Before the interviewing phase, this researcher began the process by scheduling a date, time, and place to interview the informant.
- 2) Conducting the interview: It included establishing familiarity with the interviewee, stating the purpose of the interview, explaining the reasons, and requesting permission to interview to create meaning for Myanmar migrant workers in

Nakhon Si Thammarat province based on four issues: building social and cultural relations, career skills and collaborating, creating opportunities and common goals, being self-reliant and having a stable life.

Data was collected through a Myanmar migrant worker interpreter using Thai language. The interpreter translated for the Myanmar migrant workers during the interview. The interviews were conducted on Saturdays, Sundays, or public holidays between 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm. The interviews were between 30 and 45 min long and was conducted at the informant's residence. A voice recorder was used while conducting the interview, and permission was obtained to use a camera. Helpful illustrations were also used during the interviews to inform interviewees about various details, including recorded images and sounds. The interviewees were assured of their confidentiality, and if, for any reason, the interviewee was unwilling to be recorded using video or audio recordings, the researcher complied with their wishes and did not record them (Cheawjindakarn, 2018).

Data analysis: Key data obtained from the structured interviews with 37 key informants provided a detailed and complete context to the phenomena under review and provided definitions for obscure concepts (Phongboriboon, 2010). Analytics helped link issues, synthesise, compile, and present research findings (Phothisita, 2021).

## Results and Discussion

This study uses a theoretical study method, and principles and ideas from Maslow's book and other research on human needs (Maslow, 1943) and Khaenamkhaew, *et al.* (2019) were adopted as detailed below:

### **Building social and cultural relationships:**

The Myanmar migrant workers built social and cultural relationships. This is a culture that is compatible and prepared to coordinate relationships for efficiency within and outside of work. The coexistence of ethnic diversity is noticeable, whether it be "community people",

“Myanmar workers”, or “friendly workers”. The Thai and other nationals also created places of exchange that satisfied the needs of the Myanmar migrant workers and reflected their lifestyles and cultures according to their environment. This is a class consciousness that transcends racial boundaries, ethnic prejudices, and cultural differences that arise out of coexistence and opportunities for social relations.

**Use of language for communication:** Myanmar migrant workers use language to innovate and promote mutual acceptance. Language is crucial for social relationships and necessary for communication. Myanmar migrant workers can use it further for their cause. Learning a second language, while simultaneously on their own with dignity would facilitate communication with employers or interpretation to convey the job requirements to co-workers and ensure fewer on the job errors. Nowadays, Myanmar migrant workers are learning to understand and speak Thai, communicate with employers, learn the language from other Myanmar migrant workers, watch YouTube videos and Thai movies, or listen to Thai music. They are, thus, able to grasp the Thai language faster, and several Myanmar migrant workers can now read and write in Thai.

**Cultural exchange through food:** Myanmar migrant workers’ food consumption choices are conveniently available, wherever and whenever. They value cleanliness and always prepare fresh food. Vegetables, fruits, and meats are purchased from the wet market. They have a trailer next to where food is sold to cook food. This ensures that Myanmar migrant workers exchange food cultures with their Thai counterparts and will accept Thai food. However, they continue to maintain their own food culture, especially on important Buddhist days or special occasions, cooking noodles, Chinese desserts, or other local foods that are a part of their cuisine as a form of food culture exchange. This induces mixed eating behaviour, creates “friendships” centred around food, which lead to increased commercial activity. It reflects an understanding of each other’s culture and denotes an implied acceptance of the exchange of food cultures.

**The dress culture:** Myanmar migrant workers’ attire can adapt to various occasions, depending on the context, place, and season. It reflects the charm of their dress culture. When working, Myanmar migrant workers wear long pants, boots, long-sleeved shirts, and safety hats that cover their bodies, protecting them from work hazards. When at home or during non-working hours, they dress comfortably, with men usually wearing a sarong and tank top and women wearing sarongs and shirts with various printed designs. However, for festive occasions or important Buddhist days of merit, they dress more elaborately in hand-woven sarongs or their local travel wear. Some of them also prefer to shop at department stores and dress up in fashionable clothes like Yeast pants, t-shirts, and sneakers. Myanmar migrant workers have adapted their apparel to the customs of the society they inhabit, wearing an appropriate attire for the occasion, place, and time, creating values, and choosing clothing that satisfies their “needs” and integrates the “beauty of their dress culture”.

**Diversity of beliefs and traditions:** These are two different issues. In contrast, belief could refer to “negative attitudes”, where people are prejudicially disliked, and an erroneous view is presented on issues of prominence in a large and complex society. Diversity in beliefs and traditions is engendered by the differences in beliefs, races, customs, and habitats of Myanmar migrant workers compared with Thai natives, but the similarities also exist, in many respects, because of their shared cultural roots and include their belief in the following:

- 1) The existence of hell and heaven; hence they visit temples, pay homage to monks, meditate, etc.
- 2) Karma or actions and the need to perform good deeds.
- 3) Offering a cup of cooked rice before Buddha’s image for worship, Dharma, and Sangha. This is so that throughout the day, they can perform their jobs smoothly and easily and receive necessary sustenance.

- 4) Invoking angels for good weather for farming to produce good yields
- 5) Worshipping ancestors' spirits to help their children get jobs, have careers, prevent destitution, and live a modest and generally good life.
- 6) Worshipping Buddha images in their homes by decorating them with flowers, incense sticks, and candles, believing that this would bring prosperity.
- 7) Maintaining good health by drinking a popular folk liquor before dinner because they believe it helps develop an appetite and reduce aches and pains.
- 8) Family meetings and focusing on family, especially on important days like Songkran Day and New Year's Day, and thereafter, arranging shared activities and celebrating with the entire family at their native places.

#### **Practicing the doctrine of Buddhism:**

Buddhism includes doctrinal beliefs that provide explanations through various anecdotes. Faith in the doctrine and strict Buddhist teachings are believed to bring peace to life. Myanmar migrant workers strongly believe in the Buddhist doctrine. Particularly on holidays or significant days in Buddhism, the Myanmar migrant workers offer food to Buddhist monks and pay them homage at temples near their accommodations as a mark of respect to their deceased loved ones. However, on days when they do not go to the temple, they pay homage to monks, pray, and offer obeisance before Buddha's altar in their homes.

#### **Sports and recreation to build relationships:**

Fun after-work activities are organised in the evenings, on a lawn or open area, to develop good relationships among the community people between Myanmar migrant workers and their colleagues from Thailand. It helps them to mix and develop friendships while engaging in recreational sports like football and takraw. Myanmar migrant workers often participate in local sporting events or sports within the community since some are skilled and good at sports. Their Thai friends, therefore, invite them

to join in a sport, without regard to nationality, which builds strong and lasting relationships between the community and its migrant workforce. Such activities also make the body strong and disease-free, and helps them adapt to the environment and develop new friendships in society. Generally speaking, playing sports produces smiles, laughter, and openness to good perspectives, bringing increased happiness to a group and creating meaning for Myanmar migrant workers.

This researcher believes this fosters cultural compatibility in ethnic diversity to reflect interrelated lifestyles and cultures, consistent with studies conducted by Courtright, *et al.* (1989), Chaithong (2013), and Nakaray & Benjarongkij (2018). They concluded that once Thailand joined Asean, it would become a region inhabited by an ethnically diverse people. As predicted, there was an influx of people, including Myanmar migrant workers coming to work and live with Thai workers, leading to communication between different cultures. It also reflects the two cultures' attitudes, each maintaining its own unique identity, including cultural expression and lifestyle, while also adapting to survive in a new society and environment.

**Occupational skills and cooperation:** As Myanmar migrant workers surge in from neighbouring countries over the years, both legally and illegally, an increasing number of people require training in working skills, obtaining a career that benefits Thailand and helps Myanmar migrant workers by augmenting their work potential. This also creates the need for a collaborative effort between international agencies to exchange knowledge for developing working skills and careers recognized by various countries. This even gives meaning to labour, with fellow workers from all countries connected by an international labour network. The creation of knowledge through practice promotes knowledge competence and a positive attitude toward working and becoming a job expert. Myanmar migrant workers recognise the value of creating meaning according to the

social coexistence rules and a global perspective based on a belief in human nature. It cannot be altered by race, colour, gender, language, religion, national origin, or social status but depends on everyone's rationality, everywhere and at all times to positively impacts society by creating equality and increasing the potential for community development and social networks based on the following details.

**Acceptance and exchange of work techniques:**

Myanmar migrant workers exchange work techniques to become more effective and efficient according to the current employment situation. Most of them initially worked as general laborers, performing tasks according to their employer's orders and gradually expanding to specialized work, according to their improved expertise, while also following orders. If the job requires skilled workers, the employer would first observe a labourer at work to understand his potential for developing that skill. A work incentive was also offered, like a wage increase, if they successfully developed into craftsmen. This motivated Myanmar migrant workers towards the work and the exchange of knowledge that would help them augment their skill set. They welcomed the experience of working as craftsmen and becoming proficient at their tasks through practice and when facing any difficulty, they immediately consulted co-workers or employers. This indicates the development of an operator's competence by functioning effectively and providing the Myanmar migrant workers knowledge, understanding, and willingness to accept and exchange techniques for working competently. Business establishments or their employers are better equipped to attend to the work requirements, including gauging future changes according to the actual employment situation. They would prosper by permitting the Myanmar migrant workers to exchange necessary working techniques.

**Developing skill potential:** This refers to Myanmar migrant workers' ability to perform or increase their task capacity. They would need to upskill according to the job requirements for this and develop new skills and potential through

training. Besides, Myanmar migrant workers often undergo training to increase self-esteem, which helps them to achieve their goals.

**Ignoring work and doing it willingly:** Myanmar migrant workers are generally diligent, patient, and punctual. They are agreeable to any form of work, indiscriminate about the types of jobs they are asked to undertake and often produce consistently good quality results. They will even perform work or jobs that Thai workers refuse, like work involving the vicinity of foul smells, grime and filth. They are always willing to work and are not choosy about whom they work with.

**Building knowledge and experience:** Myanmar migrant workers constantly try to practice their skills by themselves. This makes their work even more beautiful and refined, whether it is brickwork, plastering, painting, or anything else. This is also partly due to their long-term work experience until they can create a career and earn increased income. Gaining knowledge and experience generally leads to changed social status, and modified social roles. They bring this knowledge and experience into practice to become proficient in its use.

**Goodwill toward fellow workers:** Long-term coexistence has developed an invariable understanding among co-workers. Myanmar migrant workers frequently display generosity and kindness of spirit. They rush to help their fellow workers and community and do so consistently and willingly, like teaching fellow workers how to perform a task. Either Myanmar migrant workers or workers of other nationalities become interpreters for employers or foreigners by communicating in English. They also interpret for newly arrived Myanmar migrant workers and simplify their work with fellow workers from all nationalities. This makes them an invaluable asset to their employers and much loved by their community.

**Diligence and awareness about roles, duties, and responsibilities:** Working diligently results in good work and is extremely satisfying for Myanmar migrant workers and the organizations or establishments employing them. This has

helped them advance at work and fostered a perspective that Myanmar migrant workers are hardworking, patient, simple, punctual, and accept hard work. Although certain jobs required less expertise, they were always determined to excel and followed instructions until their employers were satisfied with their work and can trust them with more complex tasks. This occurs after developing familiarity with the job and working at it for a long time. This also allows employers to plan and seamlessly manage time.

This is consistent with the studies by Paitoonpong (2014), Choutridsanawong & Jadesadalug (2013), Pimonratnakan & Sungruga (2017), and Aenihon (2018). They concluded that knowledge was being created to develop labour competency. Regarding the reasons for creating tasks and performing planned operations accurately, they focused on connecting economic systems, not impacting the problems of Thai workers or the problem of overburdened employees. The migration of Myanmar migrant workers should not be viewed negatively because, while the migration benefits the livelihoods of the workers, it also has a positive impact on the economy of both the country of origin and the host country. However, knowledge must be enhanced by means that support economic, social, and cultural changes. Connections must be made through a working network to coordinate with international agencies and exchange knowledge on skills and occupational development, where Myanmar migrant workers accept and exchange techniques for effective working according to the actual employment environment. It would also include developing their potential by learning new techniques and accumulating experience through training and real practice, before, during, and after work. Myanmar migrant workers are responsive to work and undertake jobs Thai workers are not willingly do. They can work with everyone and soon become highly skilled technicians. The author believes that Myanmar migrant workers have developed their work potential to gain experience through practice until they understand their job better.

Coupled with their diligence, acceptance of a job, and willingness to work, it can be said that without Myanmar migrant workers, certain jobs would never get done. This was also the viewpoint expressed in studies by Foundation of Arom Phongphangan (2016), Phramahapaeng (2013), and Jadesadalug & Iimbunsung (2017). They concluded that attitudes towards Myanmar migrant workers has changed, and Thai citizens believe that Myanmar migrant workers are not usurping their jobs. Thailand's reliance on Myanmar migrant workers is an economic necessity that follows a shortage of Thai workers. The Myanmar migrant workers willingly perform assigned duties, reach and leave work in a timely manner and sets an example for others. However, their system of rational and working skills needs to be adjusted according to the current needs, which could develop potential by developing pre-employment training skills through upgrading labour skills, standard tests, and skills training for workers to facilitate a more standardized skillset. This implies the upskilling of Myanmar migrant workers to meet the needs of the labour market of Thailand in the future as well.

**Goals and acceptable coexistence:** Since the economies of neighbouring countries are not conducive to obtaining work, it inculcates a need among the people to increase their chances of employment or earning a better income elsewhere. This is the case with Myanmar's migrant workers who are strong and observe mutual benefits by working in Thailand. Here, they can express opinions and receive news from Myanmar, possibly creating new meaning and shared value. This is explained below.

**An acceptable role:** Myanmar migrant workers, residing in the country for a long time, created a gradual build among a multicultural society and equipped themselves to coexist in this environment. This ensured the reduction of negative feelings by Thai workers toward Myanmar migrant workers, and they began treating them as colleagues. The Myanmar migrant workers are not at all scary or obnoxious and are significant in Thai society.



- 1) They dress properly and are safe colleagues.
- 2) They are punctual, reach work early, take breaks at noon, and stay with the workday ends.
- 3) They are responsible workers and aware that if they need to stop working for any reason, they inform the supervisor in advance.
- 4) They are organized and diligent, i.e., they respect the job regulations, work quickly and easily, are obedient, and live harmoniously like a family.

**Mutual benefit:** Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand positively influence the community and are linked to development. This is because they constantly promote economic growth in Thailand and maintain their market competitiveness. Faced with a shortage of certain type of labour and increasing business expansions, Thai employers must hire Myanmar migrant workers to fill the labour gap caused by the shortage of Thai workers. Myanmar migrant workers, however, must be supervised according to a clear work policy without any alteration to the legality that permits their work in Thailand. They are diligent and execute their work. Thus, they are favoured by employers, and in the future, there might even be more Myanmar migrant workers employed in Thailand.

**Developing rules and collective agreements:** Myanmar migrant workers coexist in a multicultural society and understand the limitations of coexisting among entrepreneurs, community members, and workers. Therefore, a practical guide becomes extremely necessary to maintain a good community spirit. These fair and equitable guidelines include rules and regulations and agreements to work together harmoniously. These also include dressing appropriately during and after work hours, refraining from quarrelling, using drugs, and drinking alcohol during or after work hours. Activities like desisting from littering and disturbing others during leisure time, etc., also must be followed for a harmonious community to exist. If the rules are broken, then by collective consensus, penalties would be imposed

according to the severity of the transgression and policy recommendations that would alleviate conflicts in coexistence. It includes promoting good practices and a willingness to foster building social relationships and a good atmosphere. This is done considering the need for fair and effective law enforcement along with guidelines for promoting ethics and ensuring friendly coexistence.

This follows the concepts discussed by Sornsri (n.d.), The Company of Thansettakij Multimedia (2016), Krishnajuta (2007), and Khamhom (2014). It can be concluded that efforts must be made to create an understanding of Myanmar migrant workers rather than discouraging and compelling them to leave since the number of Myanmar migrant workers could be similar to or outnumber the Thai workers. If one followed traditional thinking, the labour force had a small base. However, it benefited Thailand's economic system by increasing its production capacity. Myanmar migrant workers are agreeable to all jobs, diligent and patient, and stay consistent in their jobs, strengthening the Thai workforce. However, they must integrate with all agencies and sectors to gain international standing, which would clearly and concretely be based on understanding and respecting the rules, regulations, and laws. This is because everyone deserves equality and dignity, and people should not be discriminated against based on their economic status or social standing.

**Self-sufficiency and security in life:** This is the need to augment job opportunities and incomes, including retaining savings to be used later. Following is a detailed discussion of the same.

**Earnings and savings:** Myanmar migrant workers work to earn and partially save to secure their finances and the futures of their families. This would include saving money to remit to their parents in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for building a house or other expense. However, the amount of this monthly remittance is uncertain and dependent on their monthly income and overtime pay. It is admirable that Myanmar migrant workers can plan their futures so well.

**Sufficiency, frugality, and self-reliance:** Myanmar migrant workers can be economical and self-reliant in their daily lives. This is because working in Thailand, which is not their homeland, and living far from their families, they know that their jobs are unstable and are unsure about their duration. This makes them as economical and self-reliant as possible. They reduce expenses, by cooking for themselves instead of buying a bag of food and mending damaged clothes to reuse them eliminating the expense of a new set of clothes. In their free time, they walk to the markets to buy local fish or vegetables that can be cook and eat economically. These were some of the basic steps they have taken that has made them self-reliant.

**Creating a career and earning additional income:** Myanmar migrant workers create a career and earn additional income without troubling others. They use holidays or free time to offer their services for palm piercings, cleaning houses, etc., while a few of them will even sort garbage, collect cans, bottles, etc., to sell as scrap and earn additional income. Sometimes, when a large amount of local fish and vegetables are available in the market, some of the Myanmar migrant workers will resell it to fellow Burmese or Thai workers at an affordable price. Similarly, when returning from Burma during the festive season, they often bring goods like Tanaka, betel nuts, and orchids from their homeland and sell them in Thailand through shops that are similar to small grocery stores to Myanmar migrant workers and the Thai people. Thus, this helps develop the community without inconveniencing others so that the community becomes a partner in the production of goods and services, with Myanmar migrant workers displaying worthy attitudes regarding working hard to earn a living.

This is consistent with studies by Pheap & Sripokangkul (2017), Sornsri (n.d.), Plungsricharoensuk (2008), and Krishnajuta (2007), which concluded that need increases the chances of finding employment and a lucrative source of income. This would include being able

to save money. Thus, this group of Myanmar migrant workers strove to accumulate capital or income by working abroad and brought in additional income through multiple economic activities and channels.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study on creating a new meaning for Myanmar migrant workers, based on a case study of the Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, can be concluded as follows.

**Building social and cultural relationships:** Building social and cultural ties creates cultural compatibility. It includes a readiness to harmonize relationships built on ethnic diversity for amicable coexistence among the community and the Myanmar migrant workers in a manner that reflects their lifestyles and related cultures. These relationships transcend borders of ethnic differences and ethnic bias. In terms of using language to communicate, Myanmar migrant workers know more than two languages but use their language to communicate among themselves. This allows them to communicate as interpreters by firstly learning from their fellow Myanmar migrant workers and then by using YouTube, watching Thai movies, or listening to Thai music to understand and communicate fluently in Thai with their employers. While an integrated food culture exchange exists, Myanmar migrant workers maintain the food consumption culture of their cultural roots. They also dress beautifully according to the occasion, place, and season but convey the beauty of their outfits in an integrated manner. They have their faith and diverse traditions but live harmoniously with their Thai counterparts because of their similar cultural roots. It includes the intensive practice of Buddhist teachings since Myanmar migrant workers adhere strictly to them. When persuaded by their Thai friends, Myanmar migrant workers also participate in sporting events as recreation and foster good relationships with their community.

**Vocational skills and collaboration:** It includes promoting competency and developing potential

expertise and an international perspective, believing that human beings can develop and positively impact society. The knowledge and skills gained from working together for long change certain social statuses. Myanmar migrant workers are courteous to fellow workers and regard them as family. This compels them to commence teaching jobs and function as interpreters for employers or fellow workers until they endear themselves to their employers and fellow workers alike. They are diligent, aware of their roles and responsibilities, and trustworthy to their employers.

**Creating opportunities and shared goals:** Myanmar migrant workers have gradually developed into a multicultural society. This reduced the negative feelings that Thai workers harboured toward Myanmar migrant workers and considered them friends. They no longer consider Myanmar migrant workers as obnoxious or scary and cooperate to build an amicable relationship. This is primarily because the conduct of Myanmar migrant workers is acceptable from several aspects, including their manner of dress according to work regulations, their punctuality, their perseverance and their work compatibility with their colleagues. This has the benefit of ensuring economic development and maintaining a competitive advantage it also remedies the shortage of Thai workers and offers more employment opportunities to Myanmar migrant workers.

Regarding the creation of rules and agreements in a multicultural society and restrictions on the coexistence of entrepreneurs, the community people and Myanmar migrant workers are collaborating to foster a sense and space for decency and friendliness, thus, living

harmoniously like one large family. future Violations of rules and agreements would be penalised according to the severity of the offense. The authors agree that Myanmar migrant workers have created a mutually beneficial environment with their Thai counterparts and depend on each other as fellow laborers and as companions governed by certain rules and agreements.

**Self-sufficiency and security in life:** Myanmar migrant workers earn an income and partially save it as financial collateral. They plan for the future and can manage economically and moderately. They are self-reliant and can secure a job or earn additional income without hassling others. Our findings prove that most of them are determined to work diligently, act responsibly, rely on themselves, and generate income by personal means.

**Suggestions:** Relevant agencies should take charge and act. The Labour Ministry should regularly provide welfare and skill development schemes for Myanmar migrant workers and Thai workers according to the requirements of various industries, coordinating with the Social Development and Human Security Ministry. In local communities, Myanmar migrant workers and workers from other countries must come to an understanding regarding the matter of living a multicultural society. Participation in the integration of Myanmar migrant workers with all agencies and sectors, according to clear and concrete international standards, should be promoted. These research findings can also be used for academic and administrative purposes as a body of knowledge that cultivates future development, which can be summarised as follows:

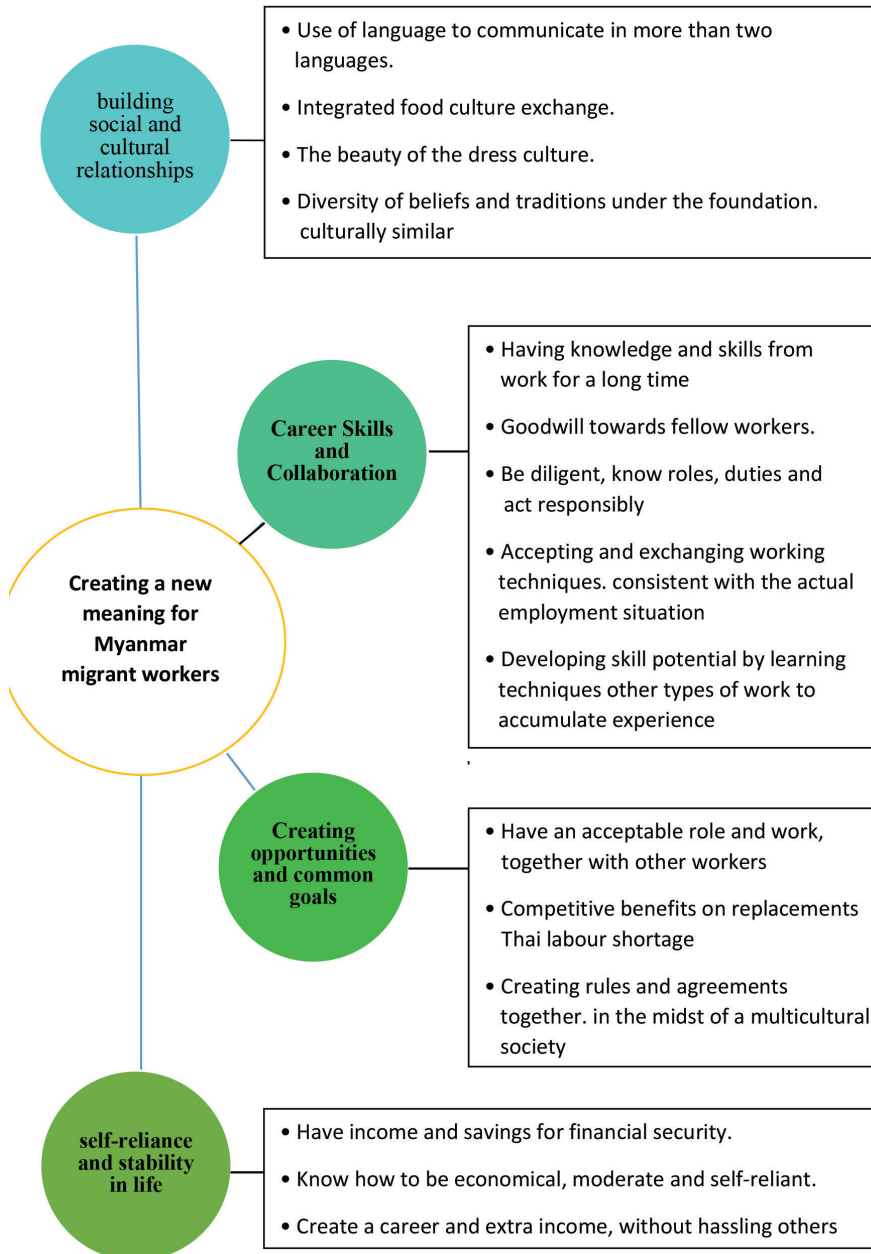


Figure 2: Creating new meaning for Myanmar migrant workers  
(Adapted from Maslow, 1943; Khaenamkhaew, *et al.*, 2019)

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