

**THAI CULTURAL STANDARDS FROM MYANMAR
PERSPECTIVES**



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore the Thai cultural standards from the perspectives of Myanmar.

Cultural Standards Method, a qualitative research approach, is a methodology that is used to compare the differences between two cultures only by observing through experienced behavior of the people in one culture that work in another different one. It can help to identify more subtle differences of two cultures which seem very similar on the surface.

Thai cultural standards identified according to the interviews with 8 Myanmar people are as follows: stricter time management, Thai hospitality, high important of family, importance of personal relationships, bureaucracy and indecisiveness, preference of using Thai language, unreal smiles, and similar Asian culture.

KEYWORDS: National Culture, Cultural Standards, Thailand, Myanmar

32 Pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the nature of the business environment has become more and more globalized by interconnecting to the international level than in the past. This environment offers enormous opportunities while as it can also create substantial obstacles to be effective organization with high complexity of the situations such as ambiguity, multiplicity and interdependence etc.

Thailand is known as for the cultures of mostly easy-going and hospitable. Buddhism is the national religion by the majority of Thai people which results a great respect to elder people. These Thai cultures have significantly influence on the work place in the organizations and the people management.

Myanmar (formerly called Burma) is one of the Southeast Asia largest nations and it has been transformed into democracy. Political restrictions and economic difficulties have been persisted to Myanmar more than 60 years. In 2016, the first civilian president has elected in Myanmar by the time a military dictatorship which has been more than 50 years finished.

Both poverty and opportunities make Myanmar people to seek jobs in neighboring countries, mostly Thailand, where lots of jobs are available. As the Thai economy boomed, there is a high demand for employment. This push and pull factors between job seekers from Myanmar and many jobs availability in Thailand are benefit to each other. It makes a lot of Myanmar people to work in Thailand over several years.

When Myanmar people come to Thailand and meet with Thai people who are different backgrounds to work together, there have been some difficulties to communicate and understand each other. Being Asian countries, these two countries have a few similar cultural characteristics but also some differences. Difficult to understand can impact negative on international teams that are dealing

with cross-culture which create conflict situations related to the behavior influenced by the cultural norms and standards.

The purpose of the paper is to investigate the differences between Thailand and Myanmar cultures to identify Thailand cultural standards from a Myanmar perspective. This paper uses a method to research the cultural differences which is “Cultural Standards Method”. Using a critical incidents methodology, the study analyzes both the common and unique experiences of 8 Myanmar people who have working experience in Thai culture.

After this introduction, the paper explains about the literature review of Myanmar and Thai culture. And it also explains the cultural standards research for the qualitative data collection and briefly discuss about why the paper prefers to use the cultural standards method to study for cross-cultural interactions than the cultural dimensions.

Moreover, the paper describes the stages to collect the data and to avoid certain biases which can occur in the qualitative research: narrative interview, critical incidents, inductive categorization, preliminary cultural standards, evaluation of the results and relative cultural standards.

Results based on the paper have potential in helping for Myanmar people for better understanding of the bilateral cultural situations with Thais. Additionally, findings from the study also provide useful insights for understanding the different styles of working which can be barriers or obstacles to a teamwork success and to recognize and manage cross-cultural teams effectively and the basic ground suggestions for people who plan to work for Thai companies in the future.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today many societies are multicultural and so many companies collaborate across geographic and cultural boundaries. Therefore, the need for understanding cultural differences and sharing cultural information is obviously important in the globalization era.

2.1 Historical and Culture context of Myanmar and Thailand

Myanmar, formally called Burma, is one of the Southeast Asia countries which bordering China, Thailand, Laos and India. In 1948, Myanmar was granted independence from British colony after a long struggle of fighting with British power of colony and also the invaders of Japan. Aung San who is Myanmar National Father, fought for the independence of country and democracy. However, it became under military dictatorship in 1962.

In 2011, the first civilian government was installed after a 2010 general election when leader Aung San Su Kyi took over the country and officially ended nearly 50 years of military's control over country. Myanmar has been under transition to democracy with the improvement of country's human rights records and foreign relations under civilian government. Moreover, it has led to ease of trade and other economic sanctions despite the continuous criticism of the government's unfair treatment of ethnic minorities. (Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar>)

Thailand is a country that is bordered to Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. In spite of comparatively changes in leadership, it can be considered as a regional power in SEA and a middle power in global affairs. Moreover, high level of human development makes the country to the second-largest economy in SEA and the 20th-largest by PPP. In addition, the country is classified as a newly

industrialized and manufacturing, tourism and agriculture are the main sectors of the economy. Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country that has never been colonized by European power. (Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thailand>)

2.2 Definition of Culture

The word “**culture**” has many definitions, so it is critical to point out those that are relevant or applicable in the context of the paper which is national culture. Research on the culture showed that every country belong to a unique culture that contains values, attitudes and behaviors which can be used to analyze and explore the similarities and differences among demographic variables (Rokeach, 1979; Hofstede, 1984).

According to Kluckhohn (1951), culture or national culture “consists of historically derived traditional values that become patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting within human groups.” House et. al. (2004) research on culture in 62 countries indicated that culture was socialized in each country, with citizens possessing unique values, attitudes and behavior that distinguished on society from another.

When the workplace is led by the globalization to be more interaction, it is critical to understand, aware and response how workplace cultures differ. As a result of cultural different have negative influence on the organization’s performance by decreasing employee engagement, losing key talent and failure to achieve critical milestones etc., ,

On the other hand, if the acting people are aware of the culture similarities and difference, it can increase productivity by success integration with key performer who can generate more profit and less distraction which can be the competitive advantage of the organization.

In 1991, Alexander Thomas defined cultural satandards as follows:

Cultural standards combine all forms of perception, thinking, judgment and behavior which people sharing a common cultural background rate as normal, self-evident, typical and binding for themselves and for others. Thus, cultural

standards determine the way we interpret our own behavior as well as the behavior of others. They are considered “basic”, if they apply to a variety of situations and determine most of a group’s perception, thinking, judgment and behavior. Furthermore, they are highly significant for perception, judgment- and behavior mechanisms between individuals. (Thomas, 1993, p.381, as cited in Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002:3)

2.3 Hofstede’s Cultural Theory

Different countries have their unique characteristics of culture and so it is difficult to contrast each other. Theory of cross-cultural dimension by Hofstede (0000) is adopted to analyze the culture differences between Thailand and Myanmar. Hofstede identified four cultural dimensions originally which are power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. **Power distance** represents the extent of a culture’s acceptance and/or power inequality among members of an organization or society. **Individual and collectivism** describes the main focus of culture which is about either the importance of the individual or the group.

Masculinity and femininity represents the extent of role divisions between men and women as being the dominant values of culture. **Uncertainty avoidance** represents the degree to which members of an organization or society feel threatened by and try to avoid future ambiguous or uncertainty situations for culture. The last dimension, “long-term orientation which originally called Confucian Dynamism, was added in later research with Michael Bond (Hofstede & Bond 1998).

2.4 Key differences of Myanmar and Thailand culture by Hofstede's cultural dimensions

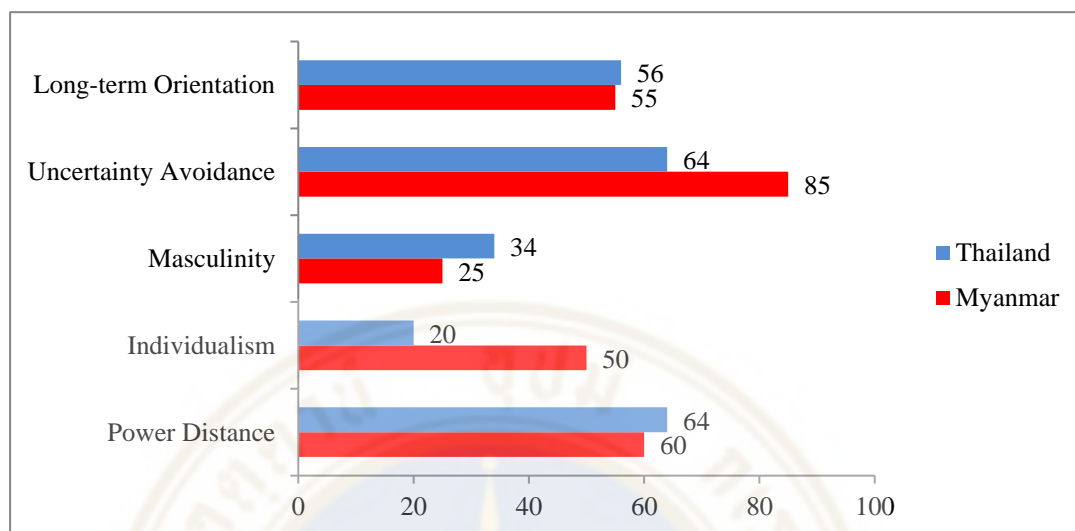


Figure 2.1 Hofstede's cultural dimension index comparing Myanmar and Thailand (Takeshita)

2.4.1 Power Distance

Power distance describes the degree to which inequality among people in the population of a culture is considered normal. It explains the acceptance of uneven distribution of power and is reflected by the degree of centralization and autocratic environment within an organization or society. In Power Distance Index (PDI), high PDI means the hierarchy or ranking is an important part of the society and unequal distribution of power is an advantage. On the other hand, people in the countries with low PDI value equality and democracy.

Myanmar PDI is slightly lower than Thailand PDI by 4. Myanmar PDI 60 indicates the low level of acceptance of inequality in society. After opening the borders of Myanmar to international in recent years, it has changed to higher power distance. When borders open, the foreign investments' invitation and tourism had made the ways into Myanmar. It means that there has been more acceptances of the important of hierarchial society as more available jobs. According to Rarick, (2006), the PDI score was only 24 when the time before open the borders. So it can

be seen that Myanmar people have been shifted to the acceptance of more hierarchical society when the country becomes more modernize and industrialize.

Thailand PDI 64 which means that inequalities within society are accepted. It is reflected by the hierarchy system in most of the organizational society. To be specific, this high power distance reflects is a result of the long history of King and Emperor as leader of the country and the seniority system which is the first priority for government and state-own enterprise.

2.4.2 Individualism

Individualism index is the degree of the interdependence a society maintains among its members. People are supposed to take care of themselves and their family only in individualist society. However, in collectivist society people belong to “in groups” which look after them in exchange for loyalty. Thailand scored 20 while Myanmar scored 50 which means that Thailand is a highly collectivism country which concerns about the organizational achievement more than individual. Most Thai are rarely argued and only communicate with “Yes” in order not to lose face and they are very sensitive about not to feel shamed in front of people. (Retrieved from: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/thailand/>)

In contrast, Myanmar remains in the middle of individualism and collectivism. It means that it is difficult to determine whether the country is more individualistic tendencies or collective tendencies. This dilemma problem likely arises from the location where the data was collected. For rural areas, collectivism results are more common especially in villages where people are tight and rely on neighbors highly. But in the cities where individual wealth is likely to increase and the hierarchy is more important, individualism can take place. (Takeshita: Myanmar 5 Dimensions of National Culture)

2.4.3 Masculinity

This dimension shows the importance attached to their goal and the fundamental issue is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (Masculine) or liking what you do (Feminine). A high score which is masculinity indicates that the society is driven by competition, achievement and success. A low score (feminine)

means that the most important values in society are caring for others and quality of life.

Thailand and Myanmar scores 34 and 25 respectively which can be as considered as Feminine society. It indicates that a society is very assertiveness, competitiveness and more traditional male and female roles within an organizational society. It shows that people are strongly concerned about the quality of life and conduct business softly and more concern about good personal relationships and taking care of others who are weak.

It also means that both countries are more feminine countries in spite of shifting to a more hierarchical society. The truth for high power distance would be leaning on masculine way of thinking; however, it is not for both Thailand and Myanmar. The reason is that both countries possess its own uniqueness which rest on the essence of Buddhism. Over 90% of people are Buddhist which stress the notion of giving more than one takes. Moreover, Buddhism consists of mainly the four noble truths that describe greed and desire to cause suffering. So people's need to acquire material goods and money remains low because of religion although power inequality is high. (Niffenegger, Kulviwat & Engchanil, 2006)

2.4.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

The Uncertainty Avoidance index measures the degree to which individuals of society feel threaten by ambiguous or unknown situations. Thailand scores an intermediate 64 while Myanmar scores 85 which indicate a preference for avoiding uncertainty.

In other words, Myanmar people are taking risks very lower and uncertainty avoidance is higher than Thai people. One reason might be the power struggles of government officials with bribery makes the citizens feel that people who in charge are not truly helping the citizens, but just helping themselves and their family. Therefore, citizens tend to or want to avoid uncertainty at least the aspects where they can control for their lives. (Takeshita: Myanmar 5 Dimension of National Culture)

2.4.5 Long-term Orientation

According to Hofstede (2005), Long-Term Orientation is defined as “the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, particularly perseverance and thrift.” In contrast, Short-Term Orientation as “the fostering of virtues related to the past and present- in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of face and fulfilling social obligations.” Myanmar and Thailand scores slightly differences which are near the middle with scores of 55 and 56. Both countries are Buddhist societies where Buddhism deals essentially with virtue and wisdom. Children are taught to think ahead about their future and parents believe that education is a form for the long-term prosperity of their children. Furthermore, employees are staying in one organization for a long time is common because of a sign of long-term commitment and stability of their life. (Niffenegger, Kulviwat & Engchanil, 2006)

2.5 Respecting Myanmar Culture in the Workplace

The following are some information that can help Thai business working in Myanmar to respect Myanmar culture and to avoid problems in the workplace and with local communities based on cultural misunderstanding. (Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations)

- When greet someone, address men as “U” (older) or “Ko” (younger) and woman as “Daw” (older) or “Ma” (younger) depending on their relative age and position. “Saya” and “sayama” (teacher male/female) is also a useful term for an educated person whose name is difficult to remember or pronounce.
- If the message is important, check whether you say has been understood or not. Myanmar people may not feel comfortable to admit that they do not understand.
- Do NOT greet people by holding two hands, palms together in front of the chest. This is for greeting or listening to monks.
- Do NOT touch people’s head, cheeks or hair and do not pass objects over their head because head is considered sacred.
- Do NOT point or touch objects with feet because feet as the lowest part of the body and so considered as unclean.

- Myanmar is a conservative society which concern about dress codes, especially the length of the skirt for women. In religious building such as temple, monastery etc., knees and shoulders should be covered.
- Allow staff to take casual leave to attend religious or other ceremonies if operational requirements permit. “Tha-ye-na-ye” (community participation at births, weddings, funerals and donation ceremonies) is an important part of Myanmar culture.
- Myanmar people don’t speak frankly if they believe that this might hurt another’s people. Even they are angry with you, they may still smile.
- Myanmar has many ethnicities and religions. So need to take time to understand about the diversity in the workplace and ensure that religious and cultural preferences are respected and that there is no discrimination.

2.6 Respecting Thai Culture in the Workplace

There are some information that can help Myanmar people working with Thais to understand and respect cultural differences that can avoid the problems of cultural misunderstanding. (Williams, 2018)

- Traditionally, Thais greeting is showing the sign of respect. The young one usually offer by pressing the hands together and bowing their head and then say “Sawatdi khrap/ kha” before the older responds.
- Face is an important consideration for Thai people. They are very careful if they make negative comments about someone or criticize them directly. One thing that must be cautious is that even casual comments or sayings which are critical of the king or the military government might cause you in trouble.
- Do wear appropriate clothes which covered the shoulders, legs and cleavage when visit temples, as regarded very respectful.
- Do stand up when the national anthem is being played to show great respect.

- Don't deface Thai money which is considered as disrespectful behavior. Even stepping on it is considered as damaging the reputation of the royal family.
- Don't touch people's head because they are the highest part of the body and it is believed that touching heads will cause bad luck.
- Do use the right hand instead of left hand because Thai people often believe that the right hand as their symbol of nobility. Therefore, when people are passing something or shaking the hands, they use their right hands.
- Don't point anyone or anything with feet because it is considered rude in Thailand.

There are a lot of similarities between Thailand and Myanmar working cultures. Firstly, both countries are strongly rooted by the Buddhism and so it is the official religion of both. Secondly, their body language and physical contact such as not touching the head of people, not pointing anything with the feet etc. are quite the same. Lastly, both countries have similar social interaction and workplace culture such as avoiding a loss of face and really take care of not to hurt others.

Based on the Hofstede's work value differences model, the culture of Thailand and Myanmar is the one which is relatively hierarchical, feminine and moderately long term orientation. Thus both in Thailand and Myanmar, the opportunities for women are equal and both countries' society is composed of an ordered series of different classes and power has been hold by only a few people at the top who tend to make all the decisions.

Therefore, in order to compare cultures which seem very similar on the surface, we need a research instrument which allows the researcher to go more into detail and explore the experiences of people who have direct contact with the 2 cultures. This helps to explore more subtle differences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Primary Data Collection Method

Although the information from the literature review chapter is analyzed as a secondary data from theoretical aspects, there is no concrete example related to culture differences between Myanmar and Thailand in daily life. Due to the gap in the literature review on culture factors between two countries, this paper aims to identify the similarities and differences among two groups and interpret the effects of cultural dimensions from their perspectives.

Qualitative research methodology is adopted as a key approach for this research because it could be used to examine the attitudes, feelings and motivation from business people who are working for international business (McDaniel & Gate, 2013). This method of collecting data is in-depth interview.

3.2 Interview Method

The majority of data collection will result from interviews conducted by using Cultural Standards Method.

3.2.1 Sample and Procedure

In order to assess the cultural dimensions, a convenience sample of 8 Myanmar citizens was selected. The sample consisted of a group of people who worked for Thai company in Bangkok, Thailand and another group of people who work for Thai company in Yangon, Myanmar. The interview conducts in Burmese because Myanmar is predominately a Burmese-speaking country.

Cultural Standards Method is a methodology for exploring cultural differences. There are very much different factors between cultural standards method and other cultural dimensions such as Hofstede (1984) or Trompenaars

(1993). For instance, the cultural standard methods use to compare the differences between two cultures only and so it cannot be applied to the comparison of cultural differences between several countries. Moreover, Culture Standards Method uses the qualitative research that can generate the information to identify the cross-cultural context by observing through experienced behavior. (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002:3)

On the other hand, in most cases of other cultural dimensions, they are quantitatively measured and they do not directly predict the actual problems emerging in business and management encounters. To be specific, Hofstede's cultural dimensions describe the simple information of more than 40 countries but there is no much differences between some countries. (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002:3)

However, it should be reminded that cultural standards are not a complete description of a culture too. They are the ways of looking at and interpreting the experiences of the culture of certain individuals, members of target groups. But it is also keep in mind that these cultural standards are analyzed and developed by the people daily experienced from the past which can regard as typical intercultural interactions. These short stories or brief description of the particular situations that people remember as being meaningful (positive) in their experience or negative experiences are called *critical incidents*. It allows tracking the experiences at various times rather than at a certain time of the cross-cultural experiences.

Narratives allow the researcher to approach the test person's experiential world in a more comprehensive way. A narrative is characterized as follows:

First, the initial situation is outlined (how everything started), then the events relevant to the narrative are selected from the whole host of experiences and presented as a coherent progression of events (how things developed), and finally the situation at the end of the development is presented (what became). (Hermanns 1995, p.183, as cited in Uwe Flick 2002:96)

According to Hermanns (1995), the following are the basic principles to collect the data in the narrative interview. Firstly, the interviewee is asked to

present the past situation of an interest area. And the interviewer's (narrator) task is to make the interviewee tell the story or event of the area of interest in question. In addition, the narrator's task is to observe the structural factors from the beginning to the end whether a story is consistent or not. (as cited in Uwe Frick, 2002:97)

The followings are the stages of analyzing qualitative research by Lamnek (1995).

The Explanatory Stage

The intention of this stage is to stimulate the participants' main narrative by breaking ice, making them feel comfortable and relax about the situation and interaction with the interviewer.

The Introductory Stage

According to Schutze (cf. 1997), the interviewee should give a general idea about the context of the investigation, interest area and the main objective of the interview in order to avoid the dominance of story-telling and the development by the narrator.

The Narrative Stage

If the interviewee starts a narrative, it is important for the quality of the data that this narrative is not interrupted or obstructed by the interviewer, for instance with questions (e.g. 'Who include in this situation? '), directive interventions (e.g. Could this problem not have been managed in a different way?) or evaluations (That was not a very good idea of yours!).

Instead, the interviewer, as a listener, must signal (e.g. by reinforcing 'hm's or ahh), or nonverbal feedback, such as nodding, that he or she emphasizes with the narrated story, the perception of the narrator and is trying to understand it. Thus, the interviewer supports and encourages continuing the narrator until its finish (Uwe Flick, 2002:97). The more detailed information of the story is presented, the better the investigation results.

The Investigative Stage

In the investigation stage, if the interviewer feels that the important parts of the narratives have not finished yet or the situations that have remained unclear, he or she can complete and clarify the doubts by asking another generative narrative questions. For example, "You told me about the situation of culture shock

when you moved from A to B. But I did not quite understand well how you responded it. Could you please tell me that part of the story in a little bit more detail why you did it?”

However, the narrative character of the interview should be the same and the main objective of this stage is for more description and argumentation by using “how” question and then followed by “why” question aiming at more explanation or additional information which is beyond the situations that participants told.

The Assessment Stage

The assessment stage is the final part and so the narration should be finished. In order to collect the data correctly, the interviewer and some narrators should assess and interpret the narrative events in a particular order.

The outcomes of the recorded interviews are narrative text material that consists of many short stories which is critical incident. These short stories have to examine with the qualitative content analysis in order to extract typical behavior patterns. And this qualitative analysis is summarized into categories which are grouped in an inductive logic. These categories are the basis for cultural standards. By comparing the situations, similar outcomes such as relevant background and associated to a specific behavior, are placed into same category. Interpreting the narrative data gathered helps to define the *cultural standards*-the final bilateral categories.

Lastly, the study is undertaken by the same or preferable existing literature in two or three counterpart cultures in order to overcome problems which are possible cultural bias and the sampling bias. If there are some incidents which are not appropriate reflection in this counterpart section, it should be more detail inspection for the results.(as cited in Rabalo, Kainzbauer & Durao, 2013:31)

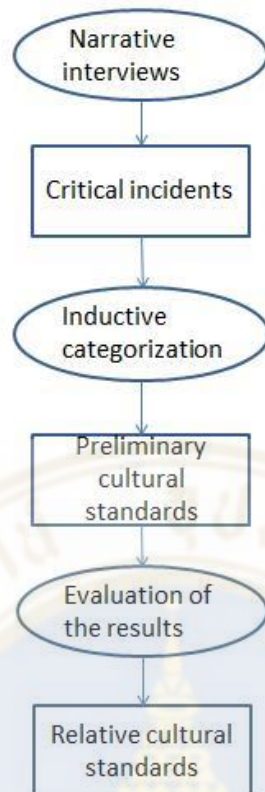


Figure 3.1 Cultural Standard Methodology (Brueck and Kainzbauer, 2002: 8)

Table 3.1 Interviewee List

Code	Position	Nationality	Work Place	Experience	Gender
A	Medical Coordinator	Myanmar	Bangkok	3 years	Male
B	Medical Coordinator	Myanmar	Bangkok	4 years	Male
C	Customer Service	Myanmar	Bangkok	8 months	Female
D	Customer Service Specialist	Myanmar	Bangkok	2 years	Female
E	Administrative Assistant	Myanmar	Yangon	3 and half years	Female
F	Senior Marketing Communication	Myanmar	Yangon	3 years	Female
G	QA Specialist	Myanmar	Yangon	3 years	Female
H	Hygienist	Myanmar	Yangon	3 years	Male

List of Open-ended questions

1. Please describe your experience of working with Thais (since when, in which role, who are you interacting with in Thailand)
2. What is your impression for working with Thai people? Please share some stories
3. What surprised you about working with Thais? (or what frustrated you?) Please give examples of situations you experienced.
4. Describe the prefer management style for working with Thai people.
5. When working with Thai people, what is your preferred relationship with them?
6. Have you ever felt excluded based on your culture in Thailand? If yes, in which situation? (focus on culture only)
7. Please share some difficulties or barriers that disrupt your work when working with Thai people.
8. What is the best or worst thing about living in Thailand?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share?
10. Do you have any recommendations for people from Myanmar who are planning to work with Thais? (tips for working with Thais)

3.3 Research Framework

The information of Thai culture comes from the primary data from interview while Myanmar culture results from secondary data. Finally, Thai cultural standards as identified from Myanmar perspective results as illustrates in the research framework.

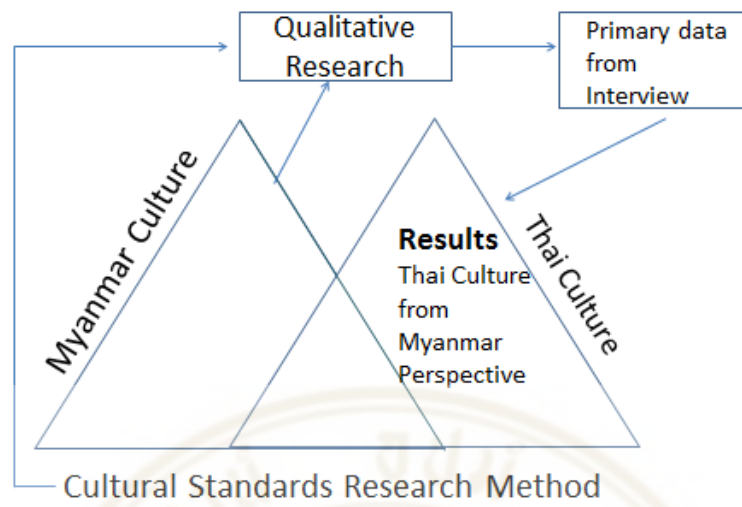


Figure 3.2 Research Framework

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

The research design used non-random sampling. The main characteristic for the select participants is that they have to be Myanmar people who are working with Thai people. There are two types of participant, one is Myanmar people who live in Myanmar and working for Thailand Company and another is Myanmar people who live in Thailand and working for Thailand Hospital.

All the selected participants which are 8 people (5 women and 3 men) have professional experiences from 2 different areas. For the participants who live in Myanmar, the interview was conducted by face to face conversation. For people who live in Thailand, the interview was conducted via phone call. Many of the participants would like to share their working experiences with Thai people and so they were easily convinced for interview and share a lot of their precious experiences.

After conducting the qualitative research, the summary of the data findings of Thai cultural standard from Myanmar perspectives are analyzed as follows:

- Stricter Time Management
- Thai Hospitality (High importance of Friendship and Family)
- Importance of Personal Relationships
- Bureaucracy and indecisiveness
- Preference for using Thai Language
- Unreal smiles
- Similar Asian Culture

4.1 Stricter Time Management

Punctuality or lack of it is very important aspect of the cultural standard. In Myanmar, it is okay to expect punctuality in some professional situations but don't be offended if it is with a friend, a colleague. During the interview, the majority of participants (6 out of 8) mentioned about the attitude of Thais towards time is that punctuality is appreciated and always expected to arrive on time to meetings and social gathering among the more educated Thais.

Participant (G) said that “My manager often advisable and do check the traffic jams and road situation which can cause the late appointment. Moreover, he always expects employees to arrive on time and so meeting can start on time. He is also ready to be there on time and sometimes even earlier which he mentions as a standard of good manners. On the other hand, the late people to arrive are usually Myanmar employees and even for the social gathering like company dinner is a place where late is at most half an hour.” Participant (H) noted that “When we had meetings, Thai people who are higher position are always on time and punctual attendance is essential but most of Myanmar employees appeared 10 to 30 minutes late.”

Participant (D) mentioned that “From Thai perspective, punctuality is enforced very strictly. However, their view of time is shaped by their attitude of acceptance. Generally, the likelihood of being on time for Thai people is made important and in keeping their appointments, meetings, Thai people desire a certain amount of punctuality more than Myanmar people.”

Both of the cultures have different views about the time according to the different background of culture. According to the interviewees, Thai people perceive that being punctual is not only showing the responsibilities and respects others but also showing the reliabilities. So, punctuality seems to be a basic characteristic for Thai people.

4.2 Thai Hospitality

Most participants (5 out of 8) responded the question in positive ways about their impression for working with Thai people. They said about the Thai

hospitality culture that include friendliness, smile, and kindness, warmly welcoming and helpful if they can. Participant (A) said that “When I started working in Thailand, all colleagues are helpful. Although I was the only one Myanmar in the department and also I can’t speak in Thai and thus I was worried to communicate and work with them. However, they made me feel like working with friends who share valuable information about the business condition that I am not familiar. Moreover, they suggested me where should I visit and what should I do during weekends. Sometimes they brought me to nice restaurants after working hours. All of these kindness and helpful style make me feel comfortable working with them and enjoy my life in Thailand.” Participant (B) also mentioned that “My family has been working in Thailand for years and now we have a baby and I plan to stay longer in Thailand and so my baby can experience the beautiful Thai hospitality culture.” Another participant (F) noted that “There is a little difference between two countries. In Myanmar, people are not very much willing to help strangers; there is more distance between people in the beginning. But in Thailand, there is less distance between in the beginning with the help of their friendliness and it makes it easier when it comes to the business negotiation even if we just met for short period of time. That is a great experience for me in Thailand.”

Participant (D) mentioned that “Most Thai people always show consideration for another. This usually means that no disturbing someone even if their behaviors are not correct. For instance, someone is smoking somewhere that they should not do even if it bothers people won’t say anything unless they are told to enforce the rule by an employer. Thus, Thai people do not like sharing their direct feelings about something if these feelings are negative. They try and always smile unless there is a serious problem.” Another participant (C) said that “Thai people are very fun-loving. It can be negative in that they don’t like to do something that is not fun although some are really hard-working. By the way for fun-loving, they like to get together, eat together, gossip, drink and party and do fun things.”

4.3 High importance of Family

Another cultural standard that participants mentioned is about the importance of the family relationships. For most of Thai people, family is very important for their life. Participant (F) said that “My manager always go back to Thailand once a week to meets his family members. He always talks about his family when we are free and he is very proud of his two daughters who graduated from famous university. We all know about how he closes with his family members and respect them. One day, I was really surprised what he did. He had the meetings the whole day but he flew to Chiang Mai in the evening to celebrate his mother’s birthday. The next morning after spending the time with his family, he came back to Myanmar to work. He said that he just wanted to share at least one night with family members to celebrate the birthday.”

However, there is a similar thing that share two countries mentioned by the participants are that children are encouraged to live with their parents until they get married. And they rarely start their life independently up to their age is mid-20s especially in Myanmar.

4.4 Bureaucracy and Indecisiveness

Half of participants said that Thai organizations are bureaucratic that formed of a pyramidal command structure management which is very organized with a high degree of formality when operate and decisions are made through an organized process. Participant (B) noted that “There is a policy about registration to see the doctor which is the patient needs to show their identity card and register at the reception. I follow this rule for a long time but one day, I came to the reception and told them to register the patient’s information by showing his passport without him. I told them that the patient was coming now and arrive in a few minutes and but they refuse to register it and told that it was breaking the rule. The patient has the reason and so he requested me but it failed and we lost the patient.” Another participant (E) told that “A few weeks ago, the company prepared to buy some things to prevent Covid 19 and so I wrote a proposal that include the list of the things which needs for the company and budget. The management did not approve

immediately and by the time when they allowed me to do, most of the things are already sold out and there were only a few left that are very expensive. The company was costly nearly 5 times than before because of the delay decision. This slow decision making contributes to inefficiency and costly for company and steal time from other important tasks for me.”

According to the interviewees, Thai people give much consideration for uncertainty, reflected in their habit of unwillingness for taking risks. Therefore, business decisions are not quick because decisions need to pass many levels before being decided upon. Thai people seem lack of confident when making decisions and so it is often need to consult with many people before making a decision which takes a lot of time.

4.5 Preference of using Thai Language

In Thailand, although there are many international companies that run most of their operation in English, the accepted business language is Thai. When an English speaking person meets a Thai person, he or she should make the conversation in Thai first although the meeting is in English. All participants told that language problem is the big one facing when communicating with Thai colleagues. Participant (B) mentioned that “Language is the key to the self-identity of ours that can express our emotions, share our feeling, tell our stories, and convey complex messages and indeed knowledge. So language is our great mediator to relate and understand each other deeply. But when I started working with Thai people, it is really difficult to understand their English accent like their pronunciation is different with ours. So I needed to take at most 6 months to over this barrier by asking again and again and sometimes use dictionary if I did not understand at all.” Furthermore, another participant (F) mentioned that “It is ok to understand when we speak face to face but the most problematic time was when we had Skype meeting and did presentation from Thailand to Myanmar. Because of the language problem and also the internet connection, the meeting was just wasting time. Besides, when I was in Thailand, I am the only foreigner in the meeting and they all spoke in Thai and ignored me.” Next participant (D) who is working in

Thailand also mentioned that “People from my department can speak English well but the other departments can’t, even Human Resource Department. So all the letters that official announce about the business issues are written in Thai and the meetings as well. Therefore, I need someone to help me to translate them and sometimes I miss some information when everyone is busy to help me.”

Another dominant problem which participant (G) mentioned is that “Thai people commonly encountered as communication problem is high anxiety and stress when communicating with foreigners. I think they are lack of assertiveness especially in the meeting when dealing with foreigners colleagues. Despite of being able to express themselves, they never expressed their opinions. This might be because of inefficient English language skills. Also lack of confident that their counterparts could understand what they had spoken in English.”

Regarding the difficulties that encountered in communication with Thai people in English, participants stated that they had some difficulties in listening that is different accents and it seems the most frequent problem that has ever in communication.

4.6 Unreal Smiles

Another factor that most participants mentioned is non-verbal communication such as physical contact, personal space, gesture etc. They all agreed that there is no difference in non-verbal communication between two countries. Participant (H) said “When we meet someone, we usually handshake or offers a wai gesture for Thai people. And physical contact is acceptable but mostly for same gender. Although there are lots of couples at my company, no couple does public displays of affection such as holding hands or kissing. When there is a ceremony or donation, the monks are not supposed to make any physical contact with female employees.” Another participant mentioned that “Whenever we make a conversation, the general distance between people is about an arm’s length. But the distance is shorter when the conversation with our friends or someone who is very close with us. I think it is similar between two countries for personal space. But one thing that I experienced difference was about nodding and smiling. During

the meeting, when someone is talking about his ideas and opinions, Thai people often nod and smile at him. So, we as Myanmar employees thought that they understand, agree and happy about that ideas or opinions. However, it is not true. So, when I ask my manager, he said nodding does not always mean we agree or understand. It is just a gesture make for politeness. And also smiling does not indicate our happiness, sometimes it might be used in attempt to cover our awkwardness or upset, not to lose face. That same gesture is not representing the same for Myanmar people and so in the beginning, this unreal smile makes me uncomfortable.”

Thai smile is more complicated than it appears. So, if Myanmar people thought that Thai smile is showing the liking of something or someone, it was very mistaken. Actually, Thai smile is used to express one’s range of emotions without physically or verbally taking actions.

4.7 Importance of Personal relationships

Personal relationships are key success factors for dealing with Thai people and the level of closeness with Thai professionals may be an advantage if one wants to succeed in a reasonable length of time and not have too many problems in the workplace. Participant (E) mentioned that “My manager has a strong sense of security when dealing with his friends or associates whom he knows very well. Personal trust and respect are extremely important for him to work. He values work relations that are based in good part on trust than enforce contracts. So if there are two suppliers and one of them is someone who is introduced by someone who knows already and another is the stranger, he always chooses the first one.” Another participant (D) mentioned that “Face is very crucial in business interactions as Thai people always maintain their reputation and those of their business and others. My boss never confronts me publicly on work-related problem but do privately with another person who he thinks than can help to smooth things out. Furthermore, he always tries his best to avoid direct answers that make me hurt or unpleasant. So sometimes I feel that he is indecisive or not want to make a stand that can frustrate

me to him. But after I have a good relationship with him, I understand that he is saving our faces.”

The interviewees perceived Thai culture as very relationship oriented. Personal ties and trust seem to be very important for Thai people and they are always respectful when working with others. Moreover, trying to make good relationship is an important part of the negotiation process and also is an essential factor if want to success doing business with Thai people.

4.8 Similar Asian Culture

4.8.1 Similar Working Style

Participant (C) mentioned that “Thai and Myanmar have similar working style although Thailand is more developed than Myanmar. We have similar working process such as working as a team for discussing and brainstorming for project or problem solving. We respect each other opinions, understand the process of working and collaborate when we work as a team. This makes our business more effectively and efficiently without time consuming.”

4.8.2 Similar Religion and Practices

Participant (G) mentioned about the religious that “More than 90% of Myanmar and Thais are Buddhist. So, Buddhism is a way of life that dominant everything we think or do. Religious practices, rituals and ceremonies have very much influence in the workplace. When our factory started operates, it had blessed by revered monks to be safe and run business very well. Large donations are given to monasteries each year for corporate or individual good indeed.”

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of the paper is to explore the culture differences that result from the encounter between people from Myanmar and Thailand from Myanmar perspective. The results of this research paper are the cultural standards of Thailand which are relevant for Myanmar and that can be a guideline for Myanmar people to interact with Thai people.

The followings are the Thailand cultural standards that are identified by Myanmar people:

- **Stricter Time Management:** Thai people have more strict time management compared to Myanmar people when concern about punctuality.
- **Thai Hospitality:** Hospitality is the trademark of Thai people who are brought up to take care of others and it is natural for Thai people.
- **Importance of Personal Relationships:** Maintaining a good profile or image is more important to Thais than Myanmar people. Thai people always avoid to lose face and try to look for compromise even in difficult situations. They show respect and avoid pressuring or forcing people.
- **Bureaucracy and indecisiveness:** Thai people feel security when they work together as a group. They also pay attention to uncertainty and avoid taking risks. So, when there is a need of making business decision, they often consult with several people that they are not very confident to make decisions alone. This may lead to a slow decision-making which is very lengthy to pass many levels for decision-making.
- **Unreal Smiles:** Thai people smile much of the time and these smiles have different meanings. It can mean to show amusement or to thank and sometimes it can be to show embarrassment. Thus, it needs to classify the different types of Thai smiles which have different kinds of meaning.

- Preference for using Thai Language: English is the most common spoken language after the official national language which is Thai. However, generally Thais have the limitations of English skills and also they are not very comfortable about speaking English.
- Similar Asian Culture: Myanmar people feel comfortable and happy working with Thai people because of the similar Asian culture such as similar working style and similar religion and practices.

All of these cultural standards are unique dimensions which do not link to existing cultural differences studies because they only represent relative bilateral perceptions.

There are some advantages of using the qualitative research method in this paper. It can differentiate the cultural differences with the greater depth in detail, especially the differences that might not be immediately obvious. The results show the subtle differences between cultures, as perceived by the people of one culture who have been dealing with people of the other culture. The critical incidents that derived from the narrative interview can be a basic to analyze the cultural standards and it can use as short case studies for the management training. All the information from the interview are based on the real life experiences of people and so these incidents give the valuable sources for the trainers who train the people to be aware of typical difficulties occurred in cross-cultural situation.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

The limitation of the paper is that the sample size of the paper is not enough to establish a thought on the Myanmar perception of the Thailand cultural standards. It needs many more participants that will have to create the better understanding of this perception in a whole. Moreover, the research analyzed only one side of the Myanmar perception for Thailand culture. So, it might be high interest to study the future research that conduct the both sides of the investigation and then compare the results. It would make to achieve a broader collection of thoughts that allow the different and deeper analysis of the cultural interactions between Myanmar and Thailand.

5.3 Recommendations

Understanding the culture differences between two countries is very critical for Myanmar companies and people that deal with Thai companies. Many Myanmar people understand that there are some differences in the working culture but only some people can adapt these cultures to fit into the organization culture. Therefore, by understanding and adapting the factors that result from this paper can make Myanmar companies to gain highly competitive advantages when they interact with Thai businesses. The recommended factors that should apply cultural sensitivity policies for Myanmar are as follows:

- Thai people are very hierarchical and decisions making process might be slow and so if Myanmar companies want to deal with them effectively, they should start with top management for quick decision making. When the executives recognize it, then it should do the more and more detail proposal to convince to the managers and supervisors for the negotiation process. Impatience should be avoided when dealing with Thai people.
- It is suggested to hire an interpreter to avoid the language barriers for the important situation in dealing with Thai business. In addition, as far as possible, individuals should learn Thai language to facilitate business interaction with Thai people.
- Thai people prefer the business partners who they can trust and respect. So, when Myanmar companies try to initiate doing business with Thai people, they should try to build good relationship slowly and be careful not to lose the face after one meeting. And it is really important that always be respectful and courteous when dealing with others as this leads to the harmonious relationships that necessary for doing business.

Generally, adaption is the most important successful factor in the international business. Therefore, it is suggested for Myanmar people that the needs of analyzing the differences between two cultures and learning how to adjust the own culture to adapt into the new culture is very important. For example, Thailand is a developed country and so there might be a lot of great strategies from the working culture of Thailand that can apply for the success of Myanmar companies. Thus, it is crucial to understand and analyze Thai culture of the workplace, then

apply some of these cultural characteristics might benefit to Myanmar companies. On the other hand, it can help to avoid the ones that make the business failure.

In summary, this research can be used as a tool not only for exploring the differences between Myanmar and Thailand business cultures but also for Myanmar companies and people to become more effective and more successful in the business interactions with Thai companies.



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