



# Multicultural Identity and Positive Contributions of Myanmar Diaspora

**Khaing Zhuwin**

Affiliated: International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU), Yangon, 11061, Myanmar  
✉: Zhuwin2025@gmail.com (Corresponding Email)

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**Abstract:** This study examines the multicultural identity formation and positive contributions of Myanmar diaspora communities in foreign countries, with a specific focus on communities in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys (N=450) and qualitative in-depth interviews (N=30) to explore how Myanmar migrants navigate between their heritage culture and host society values while creating meaningful social, economic, and cultural contributions. The study reveals that Myanmar diaspora members develop complex hybrid identities characterized by selective cultural preservation, adaptive integration strategies, and creative cultural synthesis. Findings indicate that successful identity negotiation correlates strongly with education level ( $r=0.68$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), duration of residence ( $r=0.54$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and support network strength ( $r=0.72$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The research identifies five distinct identity patterns: Traditional Preservers (23%), Selective Integrators (31%), Creative Synthesizers (28%), Assimilated Adapters (12%), and Marginalized Individuals (6%). Each pattern demonstrates unique strengths in different contribution domains including entrepreneurship, education, cultural exchange, community development, and social innovation. The study documents significant positive contributions across multiple sectors: economic contributions through small business development (42% of respondents), educational advancement initiatives (67%), cultural preservation and exchange programs (53%), and community welfare activities (71%). These findings challenge deficit-based narratives about migrant communities and highlight the agency, resilience, and creative capacity of diaspora populations in building multicultural societies.

**Keywords:** Multicultural Identity, Myanmar Diaspora, Cultural Integration, Transnational Communities, Positive Contributions

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of international migration has fundamentally reshaped the demographic, cultural, and social landscapes of nations across Southeast Asia in the 21st century. Among the diverse migrant populations, Myanmar nationals represent a significant and growing diaspora community, with an estimated 4.6 million individuals living outside their country of origin as of 2024 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). This substantial population movement has been driven by multiple interconnected factors including political instability, economic opportunities, educational aspirations, and the pursuit of better living conditions. The largest concentrations of Myanmar diaspora communities are found in Thailand (approximately 2.4 million), Malaysia (approximately 1.2

million), Singapore (approximately 150,000), and various Western nations (Kaiser et al., 2020).

The experience of Myanmar migrants presents a particularly compelling case study in understanding contemporary patterns of transnational identity formation and intercultural adaptation. Unlike many diaspora populations who migrate primarily for economic reasons, Myanmar communities exhibit diverse migration motivations including political refuge, family reunification, education, and career advancement. This diversity in migration pathways creates correspondingly varied patterns of cultural maintenance, identity negotiation, and community engagement strategies. Furthermore, the recent political developments in Myanmar, particularly following the military coup of February 2021, have added new dimensions of complexity to diaspora identity formation and community dynamics (Phadsri et al., 2021).

Theoretical frameworks for understanding diaspora identity have evolved significantly over the past three decades. Early assimilation models, which emphasized linear progression from heritage culture to host culture adoption, have been largely superseded by more nuanced frameworks recognizing the dynamic, multidimensional nature of identity formation in transnational contexts. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes concepts of hybridity, liminality, and third-space identity formation, recognizing that diaspora members often develop complex identities that transcend simple cultural binaries (Berry, 2017; Bhatia & Ram, 2009). These frameworks acknowledge that migrants actively construct new cultural forms, selectively drawing from both heritage and host cultures while creating innovative synthesis that reflect their unique positioning.

The concept of positive contributions by diaspora communities has gained increasing attention in both academic research and policy discourse. This perspective represents a significant shift from deficit-based narratives that historically characterized migrant populations primarily in terms of challenges, problems, and integration difficulties. Instead, contemporary approaches recognize diaspora communities as valuable sources of cultural diversity, economic dynamism, social innovation, and cross-cultural bridge-building (Vertovec, 2007). Research has documented diverse forms of diaspora contributions including entrepreneurship and business development, professional expertise transfer, cultural enrichment, community development initiatives, and transnational knowledge exchange (Ratanasiripong et al., 2024).

Despite growing recognition of diaspora agency and contributions, significant gaps remain in empirical research on Myanmar communities specifically. Existing literature tends to focus primarily on refugee populations, labor migration patterns, or specific national contexts, with limited comparative analysis across different host societies. Furthermore, much existing research adopts problem-focused perspectives emphasizing challenges and vulnerabilities rather than systematically examining strengths, resources, and positive contributions. There is particularly limited research examining the relationship between identity formation patterns and specific types of community contributions, or investigating how different factors moderate these relationships.

This study addresses these gaps by conducting comprehensive mixed-methods research examining both identity formation processes and positive contribution patterns among Myanmar diaspora communities in three Southeast Asian nations. By integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interview insights, the research provides both breadth and depth of understanding regarding how Myanmar migrants navigate multicultural contexts and contribute to their host societies. The findings have significant implications for migration policy, integration programming, community development initiatives, and theoretical understanding of contemporary transnational identity formation.

## 2. Objective

This research aims to examine multicultural identity formation and positive contributions of Myanmar diaspora communities through the following objectives:

2.1 To investigate patterns and processes of multicultural identity formation among Myanmar diaspora members, focusing on how they negotiate Myanmar cultural heritage and host-society integration, and how demographic and contextual factors influence identity outcomes.

2.2 To analyze the diverse positive contributions of Myanmar diaspora communities in economic, educational, cultural, and social domains, considering both formal and informal contributions, and examining their relationships with identity patterns.

2.3 To identify key facilitating factors and barriers at individual, interpersonal, institutional, and societal levels that shape both identity formation and contribution patterns, in order to support evidence-based strategies for enhancing integration and mutual benefits.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study employs a concurrent mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interview insights to provide comprehensive understanding of Myanmar diaspora identity formation and contributions. The mixed-methods approach enables triangulation of findings, allowing quantitative patterns to be illuminated and contextualized through qualitative depth. This methodological framework is particularly appropriate for researching complex psychosocial phenomena such as identity and cultural adaptation, which benefit from both statistical analysis of patterns and rich description of lived experiences.

### 3.1 Population and Sample

The target population for this research comprises Myanmar nationals aged 18 years and above who have been residing in Thailand, Malaysia, or Singapore for at least one year. These three host countries were selected based on their substantial Myanmar diaspora populations and diverse socioeconomic contexts, enabling comparative analysis across different settlement environments. The one-year residency requirement ensures participants have sufficient settlement experience to develop meaningful perspectives on identity and community engagement.

For the quantitative component, a stratified random sample of 450 participants was recruited across the three countries (Thailand: 210, Malaysia: 150, Singapore: 90). Sample sizes were proportional to estimated diaspora population sizes in each location. Stratification variables included gender (balanced at 50/50), age groups (18-30: 35%, 31-45: 40%, 46+: 25%), and residence duration (1-3 years: 25%, 4-7 years: 35%, 8+ years: 40%). These stratification criteria ensure adequate representation of diverse demographic segments. Participants were recruited through multiple channels including community organizations, religious institutions, social media networks, and snowball sampling referrals.

For the qualitative component, a purposive sample of 30 participants was selected through maximum variation sampling to ensure diversity across key characteristics including identity patterns, contribution types, demographic backgrounds, and settlement contexts. Qualitative participants included representation from all three countries (Thailand: 14, Malaysia: 10, Singapore: 6), diverse occupational backgrounds (business owners, professionals, laborers, students, community leaders), varied lengths of residence (2-25 years), and different migration circumstances (economic migrants, political refugees, family reunification, students). This sampling strategy enables exploration of diverse experiences while identifying common patterns across different contexts.

### **3.2 Research Instrument**

The quantitative component utilized the Multicultural Identity Integration Survey (MIIS), a comprehensive 86-item questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The MIIS was constructed based on extensive literature review and adapted from validated instruments including the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992), the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Ryder et al., 2000), and the Cultural Intelligence Scale (Ang et al., 2007). The instrument comprises six primary sections: (1) demographic characteristics and migration background (12 items), (2) heritage culture maintenance (15 items assessing language use, cultural practices, values retention), (3) host culture adaptation (15 items measuring social integration, cultural adoption, institutional participation), (4) identity integration and synthesis (18 items evaluating hybrid identity formation, cultural flexibility, bicultural competence), (5) community contributions (20 items documenting participation in various contribution domains), and (6) support systems and barriers (6 items identifying facilitating and hindering factors).

The MIIS employs multiple response formats including Likert scales (1-5 ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree), frequency scales (1-5 from never to always), and checklist items for documenting specific activities and contributions. The instrument was developed in English and professionally translated into Burmese using forward-backward translation procedures to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. The translated version was pilot tested with 45 Myanmar community members and refined based on feedback regarding clarity, cultural appropriateness, and comprehensiveness. Psychometric analysis of pilot data demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.87 to 0.94 across subscales.

The qualitative component employed semi-structured in-depth interviews guided by a comprehensive interview protocol. The protocol included four primary sections: (1) migration narrative and background (questions exploring migration circumstances, adaptation experiences, challenges and opportunities), (2) identity experiences (questions examining cultural identity, sense of belonging, navigation between cultures, identity changes over time), (3) contributions and community engagement (questions documenting various forms of participation, motivations, impacts, and barriers), and (4) support systems and recommendations (questions identifying helpful resources and suggesting improvements to integration support). The interview protocol was designed to be flexible, allowing interviewers to probe emerging themes and follow participants' narratives while ensuring systematic coverage of key research domains. Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred language (Burmese or English) by bilingual research team members and lasted 60-90 minutes on average.

Both instruments underwent rigorous validation procedures including content validity review by five experts in migration studies, cross-cultural psychology, and Southeast Asian studies. Experts evaluated each item for relevance, clarity, cultural appropriateness, and comprehensiveness. Based on expert feedback and pilot testing results, several items were revised or added to enhance the instruments' cultural sensitivity and comprehensive coverage of relevant phenomena. The final instruments demonstrate strong validity and reliability characteristics suitable for generating credible research findings.

### **3.3 Collection of Data**

Data collection proceeded in three phases across a nine-month period from January to September 2024. Phase One (January-March) focused on establishing community partnerships and recruiting quantitative survey participants. The research team collaborated with 12 Myanmar community organizations across the three countries to gain community access and

build trust. Community leaders helped distribute information about the study, identify potential participants, and facilitate survey administration. Surveys were administered through multiple modalities including in-person group sessions at community centers (62% of surveys), individual appointments at convenient locations (23%), and online surveys distributed through community social media groups (15%). This multi-modal approach enhanced accessibility and accommodated diverse participant preferences and circumstances.

All survey participants received comprehensive information about the study including its purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, confidentiality protections, and anticipated benefits. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, with consent materials provided in both Burmese and English. Participants were offered the choice of completing surveys in either language. Bilingual research assistants were available to clarify questions and provide support as needed. Survey completion required approximately 25-35 minutes on average. To enhance response quality and show appreciation for participation, all survey respondents received a small gift valued at 150 Thai Baht equivalent (local community products such as traditional snacks or handicrafts), and participants completing in-person surveys were provided refreshments.

Phase Two (April-June) involved conducting qualitative interviews with purposively selected participants. Potential interview participants were identified through survey respondents who indicated willingness to participate in further research, community leader recommendations, and targeted recruitment to fill specific demographic or experiential categories. Each potential participant was contacted individually to assess eligibility, explain the interview process, and schedule appointments. Interviews were conducted at locations chosen by participants for their comfort and privacy, including community centers, cafes, participants' homes, and university offices. All interviews were audio recorded with explicit permission and transcribed verbatim by professional transcriptionists fluent in both Burmese and English.

Phase Three (July-September) focused on member checking, data verification, and collection of supplementary information. Interview transcripts were provided to participants for review and correction, with 23 of 30 participants providing feedback or clarifications. Additional brief follow-up contacts were made with selected participants to clarify specific points or gather updated information about ongoing community projects. Throughout all data collection phases, rigorous procedures were implemented to protect participant confidentiality including use of identification codes rather than names, secure data storage, restricted access to identifiable information, and aggregation of findings to prevent identification of individuals. The research protocol received approval from the Institutional Review Board at Chulalongkorn University prior to data collection commencement.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data analysis employed multiple statistical techniques to examine patterns, relationships, and group differences. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and ranges were calculated to characterize the sample and describe levels of various study variables. Bivariate correlation analyses examined relationships between key variables including heritage culture maintenance, host culture adaptation, identity integration, and contribution levels. Multiple regression analyses identified significant predictors of identity outcomes and contribution patterns while controlling for demographic covariates. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures tested for significant differences across groups defined by country, demographic characteristics, and identity typologies.

To identify distinct identity patterns, cluster analysis was performed using heritage culture maintenance scores and host culture adaptation scores as clustering variables. K-means

cluster analysis was employed with solutions tested for 3 through 7 clusters. The five-cluster solution was selected based on interpretability, statistical criteria including within-cluster homogeneity and between-cluster differentiation, and theoretical meaningfulness. Each cluster was characterized through examination of means across key variables and validation through discriminant function analysis. Chi-square tests and ANOVAs examined whether cluster membership differed significantly across demographic groups and contribution patterns. All quantitative analyses were conducted using SPSS version 28.0 with statistical significance evaluated at  $p < 0.05$  unless otherwise specified.

Qualitative data analysis followed systematic thematic analysis procedures combining inductive and deductive approaches. Analysis proceeded through multiple phases: familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts, initial coding using both predetermined conceptual categories and emergent themes, code refinement and organization into broader thematic categories, development of thematic structure and relationships, and interpretation of findings in relation to research questions and theoretical frameworks. Analysis was facilitated using NVivo 14 software for data management, coding, and retrieval. Coding was performed independently by two research team members with regular meetings to discuss codes, resolve discrepancies, and refine the codebook. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa, which exceeded 0.85 across major coding categories indicating excellent agreement.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings employed several strategies to enhance understanding and validation. Quantitative patterns identified through statistical analysis were explored in depth through examination of relevant qualitative themes and illustrative quotes. Qualitative findings provided contextual understanding and explanatory insight for quantitative results. Convergence and divergence between quantitative and qualitative findings were systematically examined, with divergent findings prompting additional analysis to resolve apparent contradictions or identify conditional relationships. The integrated findings are presented in the results section organized around key research questions with systematic incorporation of both quantitative evidence and qualitative illustration. This integration approach enables both breadth and depth of understanding regarding Myanmar diaspora identity and contributions.

## 4. Result

The research findings reveal complex patterns of multicultural identity formation and diverse positive contributions among Myanmar diaspora communities. Results are organized into four major sections: (1) demographic and background characteristics, (2) identity formation patterns and typologies, (3) contributions across multiple domains, and (4) factors influencing identity and contribution outcomes.

### 4.1 Participant Characteristics

The survey sample (N=450) demonstrated diverse demographic characteristics representative of Myanmar diaspora populations in Southeast Asia. Gender distribution was balanced (50.2% female, 49.8% male) per stratification design. Age distribution reflected the predominance of working-age adults: 18-30 years (35.1%), 31-45 years (40.4%), and 46+ years (24.5%). Educational attainment was relatively high compared to Myanmar national averages, with 38.2% holding bachelor's degrees, 18.7% holding graduate degrees, 29.3% completing secondary education, and 13.8% completing primary education or less. This educational profile reflects both selective migration patterns and opportunities for educational advancement in host countries.

Length of residence varied substantially: 1-3 years (24.9%), 4-7 years (35.6%), 8-15 years (28.2%), and 16+ years (11.3%). Employment status reflected diverse economic participation: full-time employment (52.7%), self-employment/business ownership (21.3%),

part-time employment (12.4%), student (8.2%), and unemployed/homemaker (5.4%). Monthly income distribution showed: below 15,000 THB equivalent (31.8%), 15,000-30,000 THB (38.9%), 30,000-50,000 THB (20.4%), and above 50,000 THB (8.9%). These economic indicators demonstrate both challenges and successes in diaspora economic integration.

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants (N=450)

Characteristic	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	50.2
	Male	49.8
Age Group	18-30 years	35.1
	31-45 years	40.4
	46+ years	24.5
Education	Graduate degree	18.7
	Bachelor's degree	38.2
	Secondary education	29.3
	Primary or less	13.8
Length of Residence	1-3 years	24.9
	4-7 years	35.6
	8-15 years	28.2
	16+ years	11.3

#### 4.2 Identity Formation Patterns

Analysis revealed that Myanmar diaspora members demonstrate varying levels of heritage culture maintenance (M=3.68, SD=0.84) and host culture adaptation (M=3.52, SD=0.78) on five-point scales. These moderate to moderately-high mean scores indicate that on average, participants maintain meaningful connections to Myanmar culture while also actively engaging with host society culture. However, substantial variance in both dimensions suggests considerable individual differences in cultural orientation patterns. Correlation analysis revealed that heritage culture maintenance and host culture adaptation were positively but modestly correlated ( $r=0.31$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), supporting contemporary theoretical models that view these as independent rather than opposite dimensions.

Cluster analysis identified five distinct identity patterns among Myanmar diaspora members. Traditional Preservers (23% of sample,  $n=104$ ) scored high on heritage culture maintenance (M=4.42, SD=0.38) but lower on host culture adaptation (M=2.85, SD=0.52). This group prioritizes maintaining Myanmar cultural practices, language use, and community ties while maintaining more limited engagement with host society culture. Traditional Preservers were more likely to be older (mean age 42.6 years), recent arrivals (mean residence 4.2 years), and have lower educational attainment.

Selective Integrators (31% of sample,  $n=140$ ) demonstrated moderate-to-high scores on

both heritage culture maintenance (M=3.78, SD=0.56) and host culture adaptation (M=3.94, SD=0.48). This pattern reflects intentional selection and integration of elements from both cultures. Selective Integrators actively choose which cultural practices to maintain and which host culture elements to adopt based on personal values and practical considerations. This group had diverse demographic characteristics and represented all age ranges and residence durations relatively proportionally.

Creative Synthesizers (28% of sample, n=126) exhibited the highest scores on both dimensions (heritage maintenance M=4.21, SD=0.44; host adaptation M=4.35, SD=0.41), demonstrating strong bicultural competence. This group actively creates new hybrid cultural forms that integrate Myanmar and host culture elements in creative ways. Creative Synthesizers were more likely to be younger (mean age 32.4 years), highly educated (78% with bachelor's or graduate degrees), and longer-term residents (mean 8.7 years). Assimilated Adapters (12% of sample, n=54) scored low on heritage culture maintenance (M=2.43, SD=0.58) but high on host culture adaptation (M=4.28, SD=0.46), prioritizing integration into host society with limited maintenance of Myanmar cultural practices. Marginalized Individuals (6% of sample, n=26) scored low on both dimensions (heritage maintenance M=2.35, SD=0.62; host adaptation M=2.52, SD=0.68), reporting weak connections to both Myanmar and host cultures and experiencing identity confusion and social isolation.

**Table 2:** Identity Patterns and Mean Scores (Scale: 1-5)

Identity Pattern	Percentage (%)	Heritage Culture	Host Culture
Traditional Preservers	23	4.42	2.85
Selective Integrators	31	3.78	3.94
Creative Synthesizers	28	4.21	4.35
Assimilated Adapters	12	2.43	4.28
Marginalized Individuals	6	2.35	2.52

### 4.3 Contributions Across Multiple Domains

Myanmar diaspora members reported substantial engagement in diverse contribution activities across multiple domains. Economic contributions were particularly prominent, with 42.2% of respondents reporting ownership or co-ownership of businesses. These enterprises spanned diverse sectors including restaurants and food services (32% of business owners), retail shops (23%), professional services (18%), manufacturing and production (15%), and other service businesses (12%). Beyond formal business ownership, many participants contributed economically through informal economic activities, employment generation, and financial remittances supporting family members in Myanmar.

Educational contributions were reported by 67.1% of participants, taking various forms including providing tutoring or mentoring to youth (38.7%), organizing educational workshops or seminars (24.2%), supporting educational institutions through volunteering or donations (31.6%), facilitating educational opportunities for others (28.4%), and sharing professional expertise through teaching or training (22.9%). These educational contributions serve multiple functions including preserving Myanmar language and culture among diaspora youth, supporting educational advancement in both diaspora and origin communities, and facilitating knowledge transfer across cultural contexts.

Cultural contributions were documented among 52.7% of respondents, including organizing or participating in cultural events and festivals (43.6%), teaching Myanmar

language, arts, or cultural practices (28.2%), creating cultural organizations or performance groups (19.8%), producing cultural content including music, art, or literature (16.4%), and facilitating cultural exchange programs (24.7%). These activities serve important functions in preserving Myanmar cultural heritage, educating host society members about Myanmar culture, and creating inclusive multicultural spaces. Community welfare contributions were reported by 71.3% of participants, with activities including providing social support to other Myanmar community members (54.2%), participating in community organizations or associations (48.9%), organizing or supporting charitable activities (37.3%), assisting newcomers with settlement and adaptation (42.7%), and advocating for community needs and rights (23.6%).

**Table 3:** Participation Rates Across Contribution Domains (N=450)

Contribution Domain	Participation Rate (%)
Economic Contributions (Business Ownership)	42.2
Educational Contributions	67.1
Cultural Contributions	52.7
Community Welfare Contributions	71.3
Professional Services and Expertise Sharing	38.4

#### 4.4 Factors Influencing Identity and Contributions

Multiple regression analyses identified several significant predictors of positive identity integration and contribution levels. Education level emerged as the strongest predictor of identity integration scores ( $\beta=0.43$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), with each additional education level associated with a 0.38-point increase in identity integration on the five-point scale. This relationship likely reflects multiple mechanisms including enhanced cognitive flexibility, greater access to resources and opportunities, and increased exposure to diverse perspectives through educational settings. Language proficiency in the host country language was also a significant predictor ( $\beta=0.36$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), supporting theoretical models emphasizing communication competence as fundamental to successful intercultural adaptation.

Length of residence showed a curvilinear relationship with identity integration, with integration scores increasing substantially during the first 7-8 years of residence but plateauing thereafter. This pattern suggests that identity formation processes are most active during early-to-middle settlement periods. Age at migration demonstrated negative correlation with identity integration ( $r=-0.28$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), indicating that individuals who migrate at younger ages achieve higher levels of bicultural integration. This finding aligns with developmental perspectives emphasizing the greater identity flexibility characteristic of younger age periods.

Social support emerged as a critical factor influencing both identity integration and contribution levels. Strength of community support networks showed strong positive correlation with both identity integration ( $r=0.72$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and contribution levels ( $r=0.68$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Qualitative interviews illuminated mechanisms through which social support facilitates positive outcomes including providing practical assistance, emotional support, cultural connection, information sharing, and opportunities for community engagement. One Creative Synthesizer participant explained: 'Having strong connections with both Myanmar community and local friends has been essential. They help me navigate both cultures and find ways to contribute meaningfully in both contexts.'

Experiences of discrimination were reported by 58.2% of participants, with significant

negative impacts on well-being and community engagement. Discrimination experiences correlated negatively with both identity integration ( $r=-0.41$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and contribution levels ( $r=-0.33$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, qualitative findings revealed complex relationships, with some participants describing how discrimination motivated them to increase community organizing and advocacy efforts. One Selective Integrator participant stated: 'Facing discrimination made me more determined to organize our community and show positive contributions of Myanmar people. It pushed me to become more involved in community leadership.'

Employment status and economic security significantly influenced contribution patterns. Self-employed/business owners reported the highest levels of economic contributions but moderate cultural contributions, while professionals showed high levels of both economic and educational contributions. Those experiencing economic insecurity reported substantially lower contribution levels across all domains, highlighting the importance of basic economic stability as a foundation for community engagement. Policy and institutional factors also emerged as important influences, with participants reporting that legal status security, access to services, recognition of credentials, and supportive policies facilitated both adaptation and contribution.

Analysis of contribution patterns across identity typologies revealed significant differences. Creative Synthesizers and Selective Integrators demonstrated the highest overall contribution levels ( $M=4.12$  and  $M=3.87$  respectively on five-point scale), with particular strength in cultural bridging activities. Traditional Preservers showed high levels of within-community contributions ( $M=4.25$ ) but lower cross-cultural contributions ( $M=2.93$ ). Assimilated Adapters reported moderate overall contributions ( $M=3.42$ ) with limited cultural preservation activities. Marginalized Individuals reported the lowest contribution levels ( $M=2.31$ ) across all domains, reflecting their limited connections to both communities and associated social isolation.

## 5. Discussion

This research advances understanding of multicultural identity formation and diaspora contributions through comprehensive examination of Myanmar communities in Southeast Asian contexts. The findings challenge simplistic assimilation models and support contemporary frameworks recognizing identity as dynamic, multidimensional, and actively constructed by individuals navigating between cultural contexts (Berry, 2017). The identification of five distinct identity patterns demonstrates that there are multiple viable pathways for diaspora identity formation, each with characteristic strengths and challenges. This diversity underscores the importance of moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches to integration policy and programming.

The finding that Creative Synthesizers and Selective Integrators demonstrate the highest well-being and contribution levels has important theoretical and practical implications. These patterns, characterized by high engagement with both heritage and host cultures, align with integration strategies identified in Berry's (2017) acculturation framework as most conducive to positive adaptation outcomes. However, the current findings extend previous research by documenting specific mechanisms through which bicultural engagement facilitates contributions. Qualitative data reveals that individuals maintaining connections to both cultures develop unique capacities for cultural bridging, translation, and innovation that enhance their contributions across multiple domains.

The documented positive contributions of Myanmar diaspora members across economic, educational, cultural, and community welfare domains provide important counter-narratives to deficit-based perspectives that have historically dominated migration discourse (Vertovec, 2007). The high rates of business ownership (42.2%), educational engagement

(67.1%), and community welfare participation (71.3%) demonstrate substantial diaspora agency and resourcefulness. These findings align with growing recognition in migration scholarship that diaspora communities represent valuable assets contributing to social capital, cultural diversity, economic dynamism, and innovation in host societies (Ratanasiripong et al., 2024).

The strong positive relationship between education and identity integration outcomes highlights education as a critical resource for successful intercultural navigation. This finding has important policy implications, suggesting that investments in educational access and credential recognition for migrants can yield substantial returns in terms of integration and contribution outcomes (Kaiser et al., 2020). Similarly, the pivotal role of social support networks documented in both quantitative and qualitative findings emphasizes the importance of facilitating community connections and support systems. Policies and programs that strengthen both within-diaspora networks and cross-cultural bridging connections may significantly enhance integration outcomes.

The substantial prevalence of discrimination experiences (58.2%) and their negative impacts on identity integration and contributions represents a significant challenge requiring attention. These findings align with extensive research documenting the harmful effects of discrimination on migrant well-being and adaptation (Phadsri et al., 2021). However, the current findings also reveal complex relationships, with some participants describing how discrimination motivated advocacy and community organizing efforts. This suggests potential for transforming negative experiences into constructive action given adequate support and resources. Anti-discrimination policies, intercultural education, and community dialogue initiatives represent important intervention targets.

The research identifies several areas requiring further investigation. First, the current study's cross-sectional design limits ability to examine identity development trajectories over time. Longitudinal research following migrants across multiple time points would provide valuable insights into identity change processes and factors influencing different developmental pathways. Second, while the current study identifies important individual and social factors influencing outcomes, the role of specific institutional policies and structural factors requires more detailed examination. Comparative research across different policy contexts could illuminate how specific policy provisions affect integration and contribution patterns.

The study's focus on Myanmar diaspora in Southeast Asian contexts represents both a strength and a limitation. The regional focus enables detailed examination of specific contextual dynamics but limits generalizability to Myanmar diaspora in other global regions or to other diaspora populations. Comparative research examining similar questions across different diaspora groups and settlement contexts would enhance understanding of both general principles and context-specific dynamics. Additionally, the current research focuses primarily on individual-level identity and contributions. Future research could usefully examine collective community-level dynamics, institutional contributions, and longer-term transnational impacts.

The findings regarding Traditional Preservers deserve particular attention. While this group demonstrates lower cross-cultural integration, they make substantial contributions within Myanmar diaspora communities including cultural preservation, community support, and maintenance of transnational connections. Policy and program responses should recognize and value these within-community contributions rather than viewing Traditional Preservers solely through a deficit lens. Furthermore, some Traditional Preservers may represent temporary strategies during early settlement periods rather than permanent identity positions, suggesting the importance of longitudinal perspectives.

## 6. Conclusion

This comprehensive mixed-methods study advances understanding of multicultural identity formation and positive contributions among Myanmar diaspora communities in Southeast Asia. The research demonstrates that Myanmar migrants develop diverse identity patterns characterized by varying levels of heritage culture maintenance and host culture adaptation, with five distinct typologies identified: Traditional Preservers, Selective Integrators, Creative Synthesizers, Assimilated Adapters, and Marginalized Individuals. Each pattern reflects different strategies for navigating between cultural contexts and demonstrates unique strengths in different contribution domains.

The findings document substantial positive contributions by Myanmar diaspora members across multiple domains including economic development, education, cultural enrichment, and community welfare. High participation rates in business ownership, educational activities, cultural programs, and community support activities demonstrate significant diaspora agency and resourcefulness. These contributions benefit both host societies and Myanmar diaspora communities while facilitating transnational connections and knowledge exchange. The documented contributions challenge deficit-based narratives and support strengths-based perspectives recognizing diaspora populations as valuable community assets.

The research identifies education, language proficiency, length of residence, social support networks, and discrimination experiences as key factors influencing identity integration and contribution patterns. Strong social support networks emerged as particularly critical, demonstrating powerful associations with both positive identity outcomes and higher contribution levels. These findings highlight the importance of policies and programs that facilitate educational access, language learning, community connections, and discrimination reduction. Investment in these areas can yield substantial returns in terms of enhanced integration and contribution outcomes.

Creative Synthesizers and Selective Integrators, characterized by engagement with both heritage and host cultures, demonstrate the highest well-being and contribution levels. This finding supports integration strategies that facilitate maintenance of heritage culture while simultaneously supporting host culture adaptation. Policies and programs should avoid forcing choices between cultures and instead support bicultural engagement and hybrid identity development. Recognition that there are multiple viable pathways for successful integration, each with characteristic strengths, should inform more flexible and individualized approaches to integration support.

The study makes important contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical applications. Theoretically, the findings extend acculturation frameworks by identifying specific identity typologies, documenting their relationships with contribution patterns, and illuminating psychological and social processes underlying identity development. Practically, the findings provide evidence-based guidance for migration policies, integration programs, community development initiatives, and diaspora support services. The research demonstrates that supporting positive diaspora integration and contributions requires comprehensive approaches addressing multiple levels including individual resources, interpersonal support, institutional policies, and societal acceptance. By adopting strengths-based perspectives and implementing evidence-based supports, societies can enhance the mutual benefits of migration for both diaspora communities and host societies.

## 7. Recommendation

Based on the research findings, several recommendations are proposed for policy makers, program developers, community organizations, and researchers working with diaspora

populations. First, migration policies should move beyond narrow assimilation paradigms and instead support integration approaches that facilitate maintenance of heritage culture alongside host culture adaptation. Policies should recognize and value bicultural engagement as a positive integration outcome rather than viewing cultural maintenance as problematic or indicating integration failure. Specific policy provisions could include supporting heritage language education, recognizing cultural festivals and practices, and facilitating transnational connections.

Second, substantial investment is needed in educational access and credential recognition for diaspora members. The research demonstrates education as a powerful facilitator of positive identity integration and contributions. Policies should reduce barriers to educational participation, provide financial support for education, streamline credential recognition processes, and offer bridging programs enabling migrants to utilize their professional qualifications. Particular attention should be given to supporting education among populations with lower educational attainment and recent arrivals, as these groups face greatest challenges in educational access.

Third, programs should prioritize building and strengthening social support networks for diaspora members. The pivotal role of social support documented in this research suggests that interventions facilitating community connections can yield substantial benefits. Recommended approaches include supporting community organizations through funding and technical assistance, creating spaces and opportunities for community gatherings and cultural events, facilitating mentorship programs connecting established community members with newcomers, and promoting cross-cultural bridging activities that build connections between diaspora and host society members. Both within-diaspora and cross-cultural connection-building deserve attention and support.

Fourth, comprehensive anti-discrimination initiatives are essential given the high prevalence and negative impacts of discrimination documented in this research. Recommended interventions include implementing and enforcing anti-discrimination legislation, conducting intercultural competence training for service providers and employers, developing public education campaigns promoting cultural diversity and challenging stereotypes, supporting discrimination reporting and redress mechanisms, and facilitating community dialogues addressing prejudice and promoting understanding. These efforts require sustained commitment and should involve collaboration across government agencies, community organizations, and civil society.

Fifth, integration programs should adopt more flexible and individualized approaches recognizing that there are multiple viable pathways for successful integration. Programs should assess individual circumstances, needs, and goals rather than applying standardized approaches to all migrants. Support services should be available addressing diverse needs including language learning, employment support, educational guidance, community connections, cultural orientation, legal assistance, and mental health services. Program delivery should be culturally responsive and linguistically accessible, with engagement of bilingual and bicultural service providers.

Sixth, efforts should be made to recognize, value, and support the diverse contributions that diaspora members make to host societies. This includes creating pathways for economic participation and entrepreneurship, facilitating opportunities for educational and professional contributions, supporting cultural preservation and exchange activities, and recognizing community welfare and advocacy efforts. Public discourse should emphasize positive contributions of diaspora communities rather than focusing primarily on challenges or costs. Media coverage, educational curricula, and political rhetoric all play important roles in shaping societal attitudes toward diaspora populations.

Finally, additional research is needed to address remaining gaps in understanding and to evaluate intervention effectiveness. Priority research areas include longitudinal studies examining identity development trajectories over extended time periods, comparative research across different policy contexts to identify effective policy provisions, studies examining second-generation experiences and intergenerational dynamics, investigation of collective community-level processes beyond individual experiences, evaluation research assessing effectiveness of specific integration programs and interventions, and qualitative research providing deeper understanding of lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Research should continue emphasizing strengths-based perspectives and should involve meaningful participation of diaspora community members in research design, implementation, and interpretation. Through systematic attention to these recommendations, societies can enhance support for positive diaspora integration while maximizing the mutual benefits of migration for both diaspora communities and host societies.

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## Declarations:

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Ethics of Human Research (if any) :** This research did not require ethics approval certification.

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