



**Myanmar – Can the Economical Phoenix Rise Again  
from the Perspective of Myanmar Gen Z Living in Thailand**

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**ABSTRACT**

With the fate Myanmar has to face and the changes that the government created, it is a huge challenge to bring Myanmar's economy back to its old shine again. Regardless of the political usurpation, the new generation is always a hope for recovering the future of the country that passed through the war. Therefore, the perspective of Myanmar's new generation who are living in Thailand is studied. The study focuses on how the new generation views to their country, and their idea of improving their country economic. This work also gave a deep insight of future business in Myanmar from the perspective of the new generation who are living abroad. Grounded theory was used for data analysis. Focus group interview was employed for collecting qualitative data. The result found that most of the Myanmar new generation do not have intention to return motherland in these two or three years due to the feel insecure of safety. This also effects to the selection of the preferred field of study including the job seeking and their place of living in the future. There are two different ideas of the future economic based on the direction of democracy of the country. If the democracy is not well established soon, the economic will be suspended for a period of time perhaps 10 years or more. Most of the finance will be supplied by those new generations who are living and working abroad by sending the money back to their families. On the other hand, if the democracy is returned to the country soon within two or three years due to the fact that Myanmar still need the support from outside, there are four potential business sectors that are the light of economic growth, i.e., financial, education, healthcare, hospitality and tourism sectors.

**Keywords:** Myanmar, Economic, Future Business, Perspective, Gen Z.

**1. Introduction**

Myanmar is located in the South East Asia, with borders in the west to India, in the north to China and in the south to Laos and Thailand. More than 40 percent of the space in Myanmar is old-growth forest and the south of Myanmar locate next to the Indian ocean. The community language is Burmese and the capital is Naypyidaw since 2005, which is placed in the center of country landscape. Myanmar is located in the monsoon region of Asia. The raining season is from May until October, and the average temperature is 27 degrees above zero. The current population of Myanmar is approximately 54 million. There are eight ethnical group. Bamar is with a huge distance



the biggest one, followed by Shan, Kayin, Rakhine, Mon, Kayah and Kachin, respectively. The main religion in Myanmar is Buddhism, with over 88 percent. The median age is very young with 29 years (Worldometer, n.d.). After 50 years of a military led government, the National League of Democracy (NLD) formed a new democratic government for Myanmar in 2015. But still Myanmar is historically not well-connected to neighbors and globally. Nevertheless, the new democratic government starts to develop its ties with neighbor countries. But not only the relationship globally is a big challenge for the Myanmar government, the intense ethnic conflict inside the country is also a challenge, which the government cannot solve it yet. Furthermore, the Coup d'état in February 2021 army-drafted constitution had changed the democracy system of Myanmar again. In summary, Myanmar has currently encountered two challenges, i.e., the unstable of civil-military contest and ethnic conflicts (De and Raychaudhuri, 2017). Myanmar is a country full of diversities. Due to that fact, there are also a lot of minorities, who are worried that they will fall into the background in a democratically system. Therefore, Myanmar is known for its ethnic conflicts. The ethnic groups are spread over the whole country and every group controls a different part of the country.

Myanmar was once one of the most promising economies in Asia. Through a lot of challenges from the military regime over 50 years, Myanmar's economy regress into one of the weakest in Asia. Although there is a new hope for the economy through the election in 2015, the Coup d'état in February 2021 has made the economy soon be in tatters in addition to Covid-19 crisis. According to the quote mentioned by Mahatma Gandhi that "Strength does not come from physical capacity, it comes from an indomitable will", it is interesting to see the perspective of those new pupils who will conquer the country in the future. With the huge challenges to bring Myanmar's economy back to its old shine again, the perspective of Myanmar Gen Z people who are living in Thailand is studied. Gen Z people is those who was born between 1997 and 2015. In the next 10 or 20 years, this group of people will become a main taskforce for the country especially those who graduated from abroad. From the discussion with focus group, we found that most of the administrative role in government and high position in business are those people who graduated from abroad especially most of them graduated from Thailand. They will become the new pupils who drive the future of Myanmar.

## 2. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are: 1) to study how the Myanmar new generation views to their country, and 2) to find out the deep insight of future business in Myanmar from the focus group's point of view.

## 3. Materials and methods

There are 40 Myanmar participants included for focus group study with the grounded theory methodology. The study adopted a pragmatic, qualitative methodology using focus group interviews. We recruited Myanmar students of Gen Z aged between 18-24 years old (born between 1997-2003) who were studying



Bachelor's degree in Thailand. Some of the participants were living in Thailand and some were living in Myanmar due to the Covid-19 situation.

Data was collected using the established focus groups practice (Barbour and Morgan, 2017). The topics covered in the focus group discussions were the updated situation inside Myanmar country, the economics, the politic-related issue, and their perspective towards the economy in the future. The interview questions had been ethically reviewed by the authorized ethical committees. The participants used English as a language for the discussion. The discussions were held in both private room and online video call.

A modified form of the process recommended by grounded theory (Glaser and Holton, 2007) was used for data analysis. The validity and reliability of the results were checked with three experts in economics and business-related fields (local Myanmar community members) in order to establish the trustworthiness of the data analysis process, the emerging codes, constructed themes and the final results. There is a limitation to access to the government policy maker to interview or validate the result due to the disclosure of information during unstable situation in Myanmar.

#### 4. Results

Table 1 shows the demographic information of participants. All participants totally agreed that the main factor which seizes economic development the most is politics. With the army-drafted constitution, it is currently difficult to see the future direction of the country. The second important factor is the ethnical conflict which has long story and cannot be resolved easily. The third one is the country policy in term of government support, trading, finance, infrastructure including labor market.

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Gender (n, %)	Male (18, 45%), Female (22, 55%)
Age	mean = 21.45
Place of birth (n, %)	Shan (16, 12.8%), Yangon (12, 30%), Kachin (7, 18%), Mandalay (4, 10%), Kayin (1, 3%)
Source of family income (n, %)	Employment (23, 57.5%), Self-employment (9, 22.5%), Property (3, 7.5%), Transfer (4, 10%), Other (1, 2.5%)

From the focus group's point of view, the SWOT analysis of Myanmar in term of economy development can be summarized as in Table 2.



Table 2: SWOT analysis of Myanmar for economy development

<p><b>Strength</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● High Export in natural resources</li> <li>● Low taxes</li> <li>● History in arts and crafts</li> <li>● High diversity among the country</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weakness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Too high labour force in agriculture</li> <li>● Large trade deficit</li> <li>● Infights between ethnical groups</li> <li>● Weak educational standard</li> <li>● Workforce lack expertise and exposure</li> <li>● Poor Infrastructure</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Democratic government start changing the country</li> <li>● New rules for foreign Investment</li> <li>● Tourism Sector start to increase</li> <li>● Infrastructure can be built up</li> <li>● More foreign Investments since the integration in international markets</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Unstable socio-economic</li> <li>● Black market developed in Myanmar</li> <li>● Natural disasters</li> <li>● Less educational awareness</li> <li>● Tension from ethnical conflicts</li> <li>● Possible boycotts</li> <li>● Big uncertainty because of the young government</li> </ul>

90 percent (36 participants) of the focus group do not have intention to return motherland in these two or three years after graduation due to the feel insecure of the safety. Their parents want them to continue living abroad although the businesses inside the country do not have much change except the tourism industry. The rest 10 percent (4 participants) want to return home just for only taking care their families. 80 percent prefers to seek for the scholarship for continuing their study or finding good paying job and want to live in Thailand, while 10 percent prefers to seek better opportunity abroad. There is no change for the preferred field of study except hospitality and tourism since they are unsure of future business in Myanmar.

All of them agreed that the country still has hope of future economics when the democracy has been returned to the people with the well-structured of democratic and no-corruption government. From the focus group's point of view, there are two different ideas of the future economic based on how fast the democracy will return to the country.

1) From the perspective of 24 participants (60%) agrees that the democracy will not be well-established soon due to the unrighteousness of the current military leader who seize the power. The economic will be suspended for a period of time perhaps 10 years or more. Most of the finance will be supplied by those new generations who are living and working abroad by sending the money back to their families.



2) From the perspective of 16 participants (40%) have a hope that the democracy will be returned to the country soon within two or three years. This is because of the world awareness and Myanmar cannot stand alone in the world. They still need to seek for help from the other countries or international organization especially this period of time where Covid-19 is highly effecting. Therefore, the military government will be pressured to return democracy as much as they can in order to receive the help from outside.

The researcher also can decode four potential business sectors that are the light of their economic from the perspective of the focus group as follows.

#### 4.1 Financial Sector

The financial sector will rise through the poverty in the Myanmar population. People who do not live inside a city mostly have less money and in illness. They do not have enough money to get help. With a lack of financial institutes, families who encounter the financial problem have to get help from the private services. Those services often offer credits with a way of high fees. Not only a lack in credit institutes, but also a lack in tax institutes. There are still many people in Myanmar who do not pay taxes, and there is a possibility that those institutes work closely with the government to rise the country's wealth (Eschborn and Göth, 2018). The focus group mentioned that this is the promising sector that can be developed easily due to the demand of the people. People are demanding for concrete finance system and investments but need strong policy from the solid government that cannot be revoked.

#### 4.2 Education Sector

This sector is strongly focused for a long time by the previous governments since it has the strongest deficit. The professional workforce is scarce and needs to be taken into account rapidly. If the government wants to develop the country, the human resource is the key factor for the success. The government need to build up a basis essential thing for development in Myanmar. Previous government planned to allow private companies to enter the market of education in Myanmar, but it was suspended by the current ruler indefinitely. Especially the demand for private schools is high, cause of the different teaching style and more professional lecturers (The Economist, 2017). Several participants of focus group have initiated the Facebook Page and website to introduce the information of studying abroad to the new pupils. Among new generation, it is very popular for going to study abroad. However, majority of the people inside the country still have low income. Therefore, the standard education inside the country is also demanding and need to be improved rapidly.

#### 4.3 Healthcare Sector

All participants in focus group agreed that Myanmar has a bad healthcare system. Healthcare is compulsory to be developed for the well-being of the workforce both domestically and internationally. The country needs to build up several basic facilities for the healthcare and well-being of the people since a good healthcare



system is essential for development. This sector needs to get special grants and make it easy for private companies to enter the market for rapid investment (Bowyer et. al., 2021). That is a result for a huge demand of taskforces related to this field in the future, although the democracy is not settled yet.

#### 4.3 Hospitality and Tourism Sector

The Myanmar's new generation believes that this sector will bloom the most after the crisis has been resolved. The demand of travelling is extremely high during the NLD government. It became a main industry of Myanmar within recent years. However, after the Covid-19 arises, the tourism industry has been suspended. Moreover, the Coup d'état in February 2021 had made the situation even worse. However, the tourism industry can be recovered within a glance if everything is alright. The feel insecure of safety is not much a problem for the new trend of travelers. With the trend of self-travelling has been rising continuously, especially for the popular destination like South East Asia. Myanmar is probably not that popular as other travel destination yet due to the ethnical conflicts and the poor infrastructure, but it will be a big game changing if the country reopens and the infrastructure is constructed. Unseen things inside the country will be revealed. With the new development of the market, it has less competition when comparing with other South East Asia country, which main economic sector is tourism. This means that the country is, for example, still not flooded with hotels which would be a good market gap to build up the business. Nevertheless, even if the trend of traveling has not reached Myanmar yet, there is still fast rising competition, especially in the tourism sector (Than, 2019).

#### 5. Conclusion

Myanmar is a country with a lot of uncertainty. Although the country has a few strengths, some strengths are probably the most interesting issue for the entrepreneurs such as low taxes. Also, Myanmar has a lot of opportunities. It is still the blue ocean where the foreign investments still opened but need to trade of with the political, law and regulation's uncertainty. However, in the current state, the deficits are stronger than the benefits for investing in this country. There are too many uncertainties for Myanmar yet, therefore there will be mostly a high risk by investing in this country. The unstable socio-economic and the tension from ethnical conflicts are still a big current challenge. There will be no guarantee how the ruler acts to certain situations. Also, the population structure and economic structure has still marked from the long-lasting military regime. There are many weaknesses that Myanmar has to overcome, including the infrastructure and the weak educational standard. For entrepreneurs, the workforce is probably too weak and miss the expertise to build up a whole company. However, Myanmar needs to find the right track for the country itself first.



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