

Chapter 4

Migration and Hope

(Case Study of Five Townships in Mon State and Yangon)

4.1 Socio-Economic Impacts of Migrant Workers in Mon State

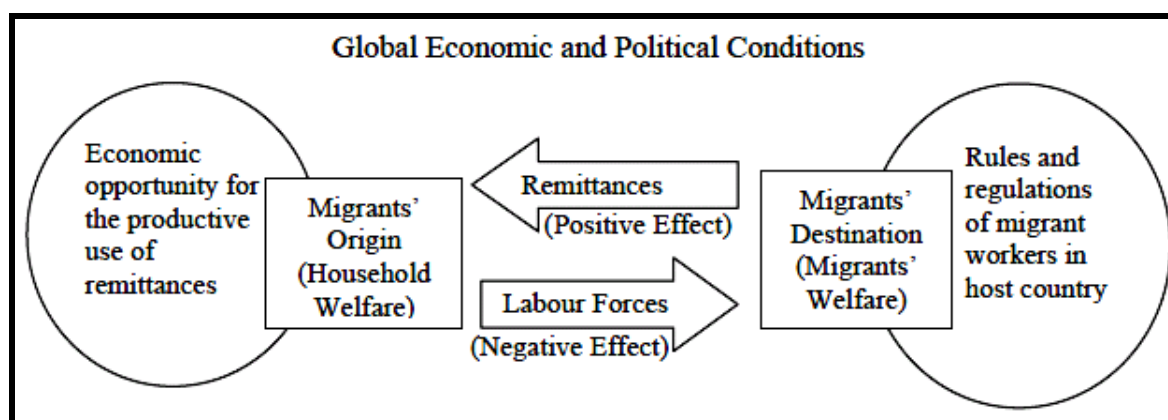
Impacts that a migrant worker can bring to his/her community can vary depending on their conditions and can be both positive and negative. A healthy migrant worker with quite a lump sum of saving might impact his community by changing the view of working in the foreign country. Migration can have an impact on both individuals and community as a whole. They can impact not only the place of origin but the destination as well. At places of origin, impacts can be seen on income, consumption, education, health, and broader cultural and social processes. The nature and the extent of impacts depend on who moves, how they fare abroad and their proclivity to stay connected, which may find expression in flows of money, knowledge and ideas. In general, the largest impacts at places of origin are felt by the households with an absent migrant (UNDP, 2009).

There are 215 million international migrants in the world with an estimated remittance flow to developing countries of US\$ 325 billion in 2010 (World Bank, 2011). Compared to foreign aid, remittances form a stable external financial sector for possible development uses in many developing countries (Lakshman & Ratnayake, 2007). However, the economic and social effects of migration are controversial. As Taylor (2006) points out, some researchers claim that the inflow of remittances contributes to a reduction in inequality within the migrants' communities of origin, whereas others have argued that remittances have the effect of increasing inequality. People migrate depending on their social, economic, cultural, and political differences.

Regarding the effects of migration, neo-classical theory states that individuals from poor households migrate because of the possibility of better earnings (Haas,2007). To link this condition with the altruistic theory of remittances, it is assumed that the inequality among poor communities is likely to decline because of the increased income in poor households. Turnell, Vicary, & Bradford (2008) also mentioned that there is a direct impact of remittances on the poverty alleviation of individuals and their households. Portes (2009) also claims that the remittances decrease inequality because the majority of remittance recipient households are poor. Therefore, for a migrant coming from an agricultural household, the remittance incomes can contribute to not only supporting the household consumption but also to other income generation activities.

Generally, when talking about impacts of migrant workers in their community of origin, most people are only interested in how much do migrant workers make. And for the migrant-sending country as well, the remittances of migrants contribute to the GNP of the country. Many other effects of migration that impact the community of origin are less emphasized. The contribution of these migrants in their host countries' productivity is also under-evaluated in most cases. The experiences and knowledge gained abroad can impact the society of migrants' origins in many positive ways. There is a strong need to raise public awareness on migration and positive and negative effects of migration as the more the public pays attention to income and not other factors, the more they are vulnerable to trafficking and smuggling (Soe Nandar Linn,2011).

Figure 4.1 Factors influencing the welfare of migrants working in overseas and migrant-sending countries



Source: Soe Nandar Linn, CDCE, Research Associate, “A Pilot Study on the Characteristics of Migrant-Sending Households in Southern Mon State of Myanmar” (October, 2011)

Most migrant-sending households in Mon state believed that their health, education, social, and economic conditions are improved due to the effect of a household member working overseas. Remittances sent by the migrants are vital in improving the livelihood and socio-economic status of the families. However, the major drawback for most migrant families is the education level of their children or themselves. The improvements in education are less than that of the other sectors. The study shows that young people are motivated to migrate rather than completing their schooling because of the unemployment problems that occur even after they graduate.

The scarcity of the right type of employment and the right type of job for fresh graduates inside Myanmar make more and more people to look for employment opportunities outside the country. It is not surprising that more overseas job searching companies and brokers are ever increasing as more people are willing to migrate when they see remittances made from other family members or friends working overseas. It is obvious that migration contributes to the

country economy. According to World Bank (2011), Myanmar received US \$154 million from remittances of migrants outside the country in 2010. This figure may not be accurate as this does not include the remittances sent by irregular migrants through illegal and informal channels.¹

Table 4.1 Remittances inflow in Greater Mekong Sub-region (US \$ million)

Countries	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Remittances as a share of GDP, 2009 (%)
Cambodia	133	140	138	177	200	297	353	325	338	364	3.00%
Lao PDR	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.00%
Myanmar	117	106	85	118	131	116	125	150	137	154	0.40%
Thailand	1,252	1,380	1,607	1,622	1,187	1,333	1,635	1,898	1,637	1,788	0.60%
Vietnam	2,000	2,714	2,700	3,200	4,000	4,800	5,500	7,200	6,626	7,215	7.00%

Source: Migration and Remittances Factbook, World Bank (2011)

In the individual household level, most households in the region gained from migration. Though it may not be monthly, most of the families received remittances regularly, either quarterly or once per two months or sometimes biannually. Some families received a small amount of remittance monthly. This is most obvious in the case when the migrant family has small children as young as 3 years old and the mother or householder is incapable of making regular earning. The amount of remittance per time ranges from 70,000 kyats to 500,000 kyats (close to \$80~ \$600) and in times, remittances from migrants who are working at bigger factories or better working environment are close to 1,200,000 to 1,500,000 kyats every two- three months.² The following table conducted by ILO in 2009 shows that most Myanmar migrants in

¹ The informal channels include sending money through traders and alike, migrant workers in the same community while they return home for a short visit.

² Although \$1 is equal to 780 kyats at the time of interview, most people were calculating with 1000 kyats per dollar, which was closest to the market exchange rate that lasted for many years.

Thailand sent home about 30,000 baht³ .

Table 4.2 Total amount of money sent home by Myanmar migrants in Thailand (2007-2009)

Total amount of money sent (Baht)	% of Myanmar migrants
</= 10 000	15.8
10 001-25 000	27.5
25 001-50 000	34.2
>50 000	22.5
Total	100
Median⁴	30 000
Mean⁵	34 534
Minimum	1 500
Maximum	64 800
N	120

Source: ILO (2009)

³ Baht= Thai currency; estimated exchange rate was about 30 baht to one US dollar in 2009.

⁴ Median refers to a measure of a central location. It is the value of the middle observation in an array of the dataset (ascendant or descendant).

⁵ This mean is calculated by trimming the minimum (1500) and maximum amount (64 800).

4.2 Field Study and Data Collection

To comprehend the migration-related problems and the current state of migration (especially irregular), four different surveys were conducted.

For the first part of the study, interviews with 15 Pwe-sars and 20 overseas employment companies in Yangon were conducted between July and September of 2009 with a help of two other research associates. From the interviews, most Pwe-sars shared similar or same background, expertise but differed in experience. Six out of 15 Pwe-sars were between 27-35 years of age where the rest were in their forties. They were all Bamar ethnicity. Among the interviewed overseas-employment companies, 12 of them were owned by Chinese-descent traders, six belonged to returned migrants and two were owned by former sailors.

The second study was conducted briefly in March 2010 with 35 Pwe-sars in Mon state. Interviewees were introduced and recommended by a highly respected Mon Pwe-sar in Yangon. Some of them provided details of their networks and how they were operating their daily businesses and brokerage at the same time. The interviews took place with 15 Pwe-sars from Mawlamyine, six from Mudon, four from Thanbyuzayat, five from Kyaikmaraw, five from Thaton Township. All Pwe-sars were Mon ethnicity and have lived inside Mon state all their lives. Only four of them have been to overseas themselves while the rest operate overseas job searching through their networks of friends and relatives.

The study collected the third set of data through a survey questionnaire distributed to 200 households constituting 804 members in Mawlamyine, Thanbyuzayat, Kyaikmaraw, Mudon and Thaton townships of Mon state. The survey was conducted between June and October 2011. The questionnaire presented information about the number of family members and the number of

family members able to work, the type of occupation in Mon state, monthly income, the number of family members working overseas, the amount of remittance received per month, the monthly expenditure (food, education, transportation, health care, leisure, rent, electricity and water bills, telecommunication, debts, others), and surplus.

They also provided information on migration experience, number of years working in overseas, and their choice of migration facilitator, duration of process for migration, cost and the level of risk associated with each facilitator. According to the migrants, generally they used three types of facilitators: a Pwe-sar who was a family member or relative of a migrant, an Overseas Job Broker who was also a Pwe-sar but from outside of migrants' community, and an Overseas Employment Company that was a legal firm working as an agent for countries that signed MOUs with Myanmar government and that were of interest to Myanmar migrant workers .

The fourth study was conducted in August 2011 with 16 randomly selected Mons living in Yangon, among which seven were trying to migrate to Korea and nine had worked overseas. This survey required a collaboration of a team of researchers lead by a lecturer in the Yangon Institute of Economics. The interviewees provided detailed descriptions of each migration route they took and are planning to take. Due to time constraints and difficulties in accessing sources of information, not all townships were covered for the study although a large and comprehensive sample of households would have been preferred. However, the townships selected for the study have been recognized by the Myanmar government as the most concentrated areas for internal migrants and potential international migrants, with the highest numbers of workers that have migrated to Thailand.

Moreover, informal interviews made with villagers from Balu-kyun who are currently in Thailand provide a sharp insight to the lives of Mon migrant workers in Thailand. All these

townships have several state-owned industries such as paper mills, sugar mills, plate factories, rubber factories, tire factories, a power station and a shipyard (Modins, 2002). Because of geographical advantages, people from Mon state, especially the young people, have more favorable opportunities to seek jobs in Thailand or Malaysia than those from other parts of the country. Migrants from these townships are found to have the highest rate of trade and other forms of communications with Myawaddy (the border town in Kayin State), Dawei, Myeik and Kawthaung (emerging industrial cities with major foreign investment companies).

4.2.1 General View of Five Study Townships in Mon State

In this study, five major townships from Mon state, which are Mawlamyine, Thanbyuzayat, Kyaikmaraw, Mudon and Thaton, were selected to:

- inspect the nature and characteristics of households with history of migration
- find out the impacts of migration in the migrant-sending villages
- understand the changes in the society subsequent to the return of migrant workers and the perception of the family members and the community
- investigate the role of Pwe-sars and migrant brokerage companies in the flow of migration from Mon state

Mawlamyine, being the capital of Mon state, is always crowded with traders and visitors from all over the country. It is the third largest city in Myanmar with the population close to 300,000. Once known as Moulmein, it was a thriving teak port and an administrative capital of British Lower Burma. Currently, it is known for being a gateway for trade routes of Thai products from Myawaddy-Mae Sot border pass to other parts of Myanmar. Mawlamyine is also one of the major connection points for the East-West Corridor of the Greater Mekong Sub-region

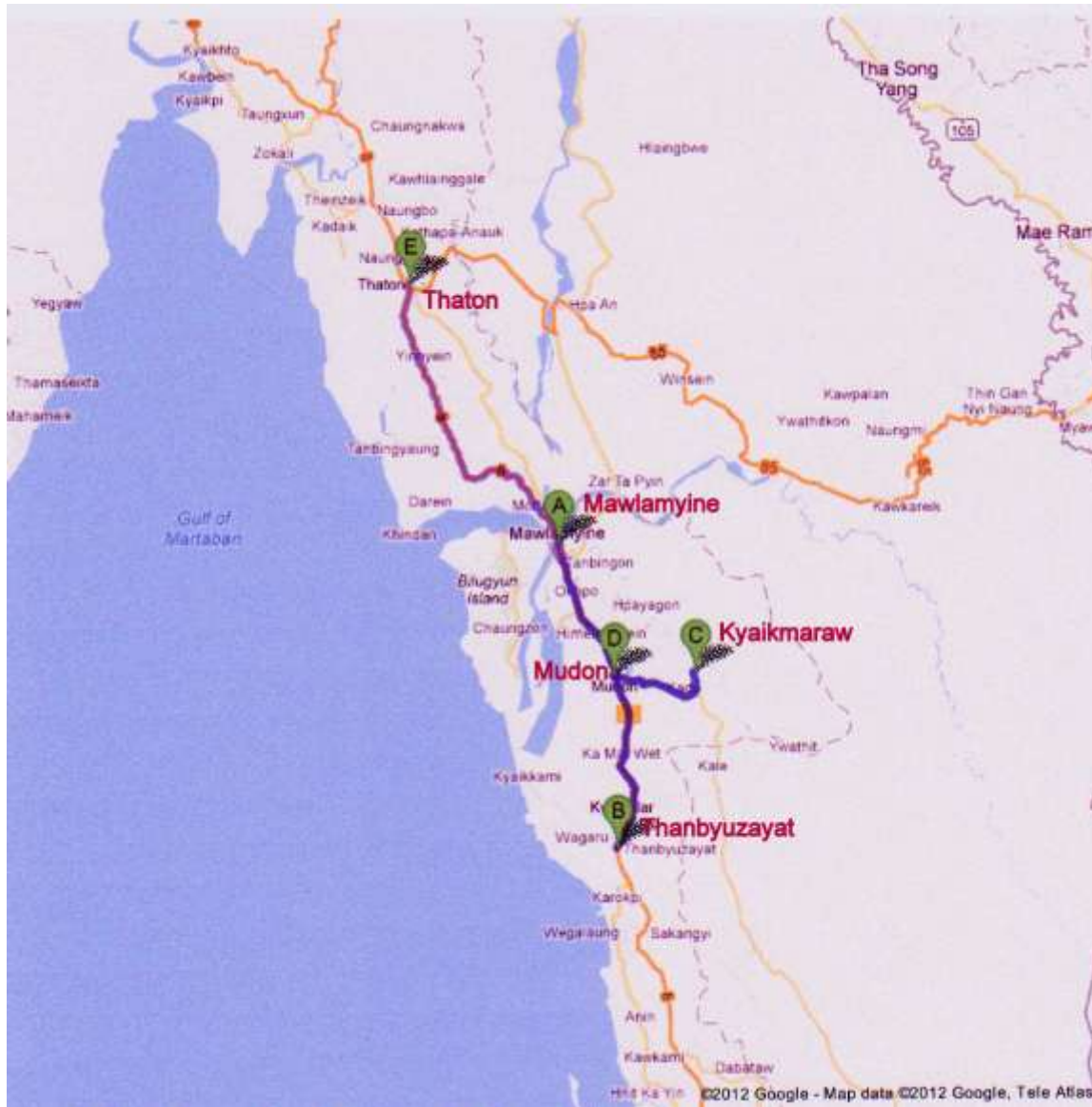
(GMS)⁶, which is the direct land route between the Indian Ocean (Andaman Sea), and the South China Sea.

Thanbyuzayat, located 64 kilometers south of Mawlamyine, is a township known for its landmarks. A war memorial here holds the graves of 3,770 British, Australian, Dutch and Gurkha prisoners-of-war who died while constructing the infamous "death railway"⁷ under supervision of Japanese forces during the Second World War. Locals in this area are heavily dependent on farming and rubber plantations. Another township in this study, Kyaikmaraw, is also a touristic area where it hosts the famous Kyaikmaraw pagoda and other natural hot springs. Located 24 kilometers southwest of Mawlamyine, it attracts many internal migrants particularly with cement factories, palm tree businesses and abundant of arable land.

⁶ The East-West Corridor connects Mawlamyine-Myawaddy in Myanmar, Mae Sot-Phitsanulok-Khon Kaen-Kalasin-Mukdahan in Thailand, Savannakhet-Dansavanh in Lao PDR, and LaoBao-Hue-Dong Ha-Da Nang in Vietnam.

⁷ A railway line 175 miles long starting from Thanbyuzayat to eventually link up with Bangkok was begun during 1943 while the Second World War was at its height. A total of 331,000 including 270,000 civilians and 61,000 Allied prisoners-of-war were impressed into service by Japanese authorities to toil under harsh conditions in difficult terrain and malarial environment resulting in the deaths of thousands and the application of this gruesome epithet to the project.

Figure 4.2 Survey Areas in Mon state



Source: Map-Google

The fourth township Mudon, is a small township of diverse ethnicity located in the west of Kyaukmaraw. Chinese, Indians and Karen ethnicities are among the major groups living in Mudon. This township offers a variety of job selection and one of the major industries there is weaving. Many women internal migrants come here to find a job in weaving and textile business

that is expanding at rapid rate. The fifth township Thaton is one of the oldest cities in Southeast Asia that is a home to ancient Mon civilization. With thousands of rubber acres and abundant natural resources, it attracts many internal and international migrants.

Additionally, all these townships have several state-owned industries such as paper mills, sugar mills, plate factories, rubber factories, tire factories, a power station, and a shipyard (Modins, 2002). Because of geographical advantages, people from Mon state, especially the young people, have more favorable opportunities to seek jobs in Thailand or Malaysia than those from other parts of the country. Migrants from these townships are found to have the highest rate of trade and other forms of communications with Myawaddy (the border town in Kayin State), Dawei, Myeik and Kawthaung (emerging industrial cities with major foreign investment companies).

One village from each township was selected and with the help of local monasteries and officials, households with migration history and those who are planning to migrate in these selected villages were identified for the survey. Forty households from each village were selected from the overall sample size. The household survey questionnaire included questions on household characteristics, detailed accounts of household monthly expenditures, amounts remitted to the households within 12 months, and the perceptions of household members on their financial improvement after the migration. Most interviewees turned out to be females.

Description of study villages

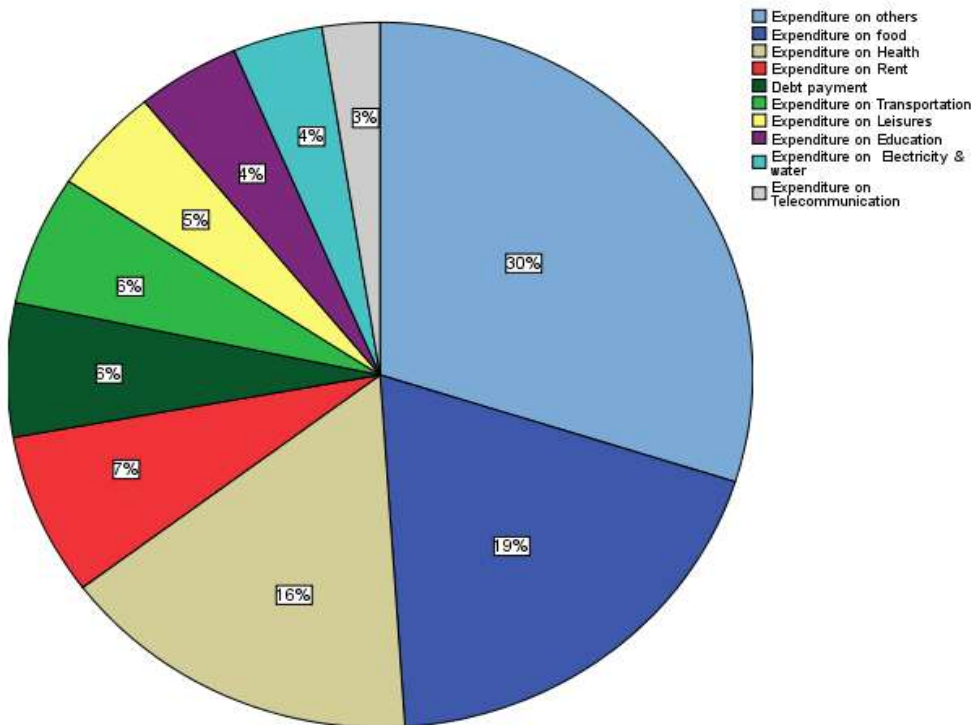
Description	Village A	Village B	Village C	Village D	Village E
Household	7,830	2,230	1,895	1,250	855
Population	36,890	15,820	7,300	6,500	5,750

Source: Author's survey data

4.2.2 Survey Findings in Five Selected Mon Townships

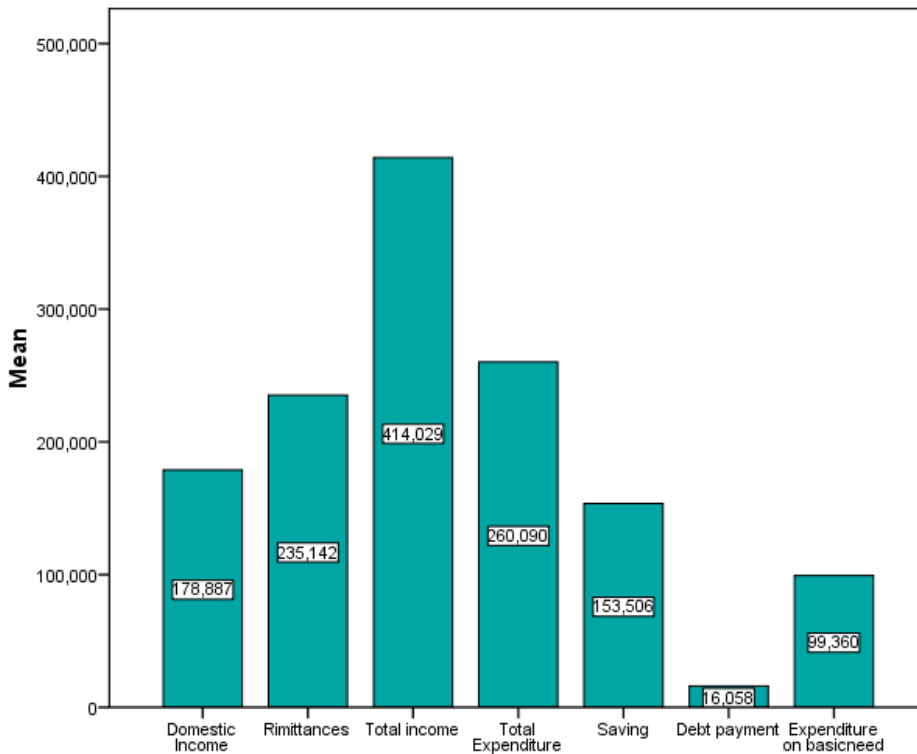
The first finding in the survey emphasized that household expenditure effects migration. As shown in Figure 4.3, migrant families spent the highest on food and health care while they spent only four percent on education and six percent on debt payment. Figure 4.3 shows that the average total expenditure exceeds domestic income. It can be analyzed that if there is no remittance, they could not make ends meet. The average saving of migrant workers' household is more than 150,000 kyats per month. Households use their 20-40% of total expenditure on food on average. For those households that have 40-60% of expenditure on food, the remittance is more than 120,000 kyats per month.

Figure 4.3 Household Expenditure



Source: Author's Survey

Figure 4.4 Budget and Expenditure of Households (in kyats)



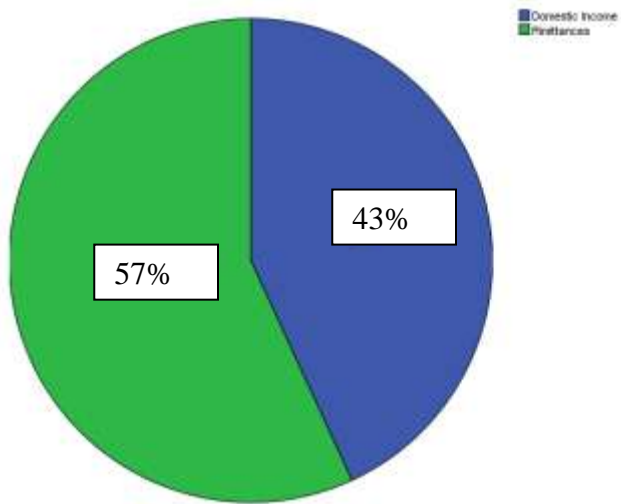
Source: Author's Survey

Migrant families rely heavily on remittances. As Figure 4.5 shows, 57% of total income come from remittance by migrant workers, domestic income contribute only 43% of total income. 84% of the households in the survey use 'hundi' remittance system⁸, which is informal money transfer system operated by agents. 12% of remittance recipients use official banks for money transfer, while two percent receive money through 'lu-gyone,' someone who is a friend or from the work place that is visiting or returning back to Myanmar. These 'hundi' agents are either in their villages or villages nearby which makes it easier for migrant families to access. The fee for 'hundi' system utilization is 5% of the amount transferred. Some agents provide

⁸ The duration of money transfer may take 2 to 7 working days.

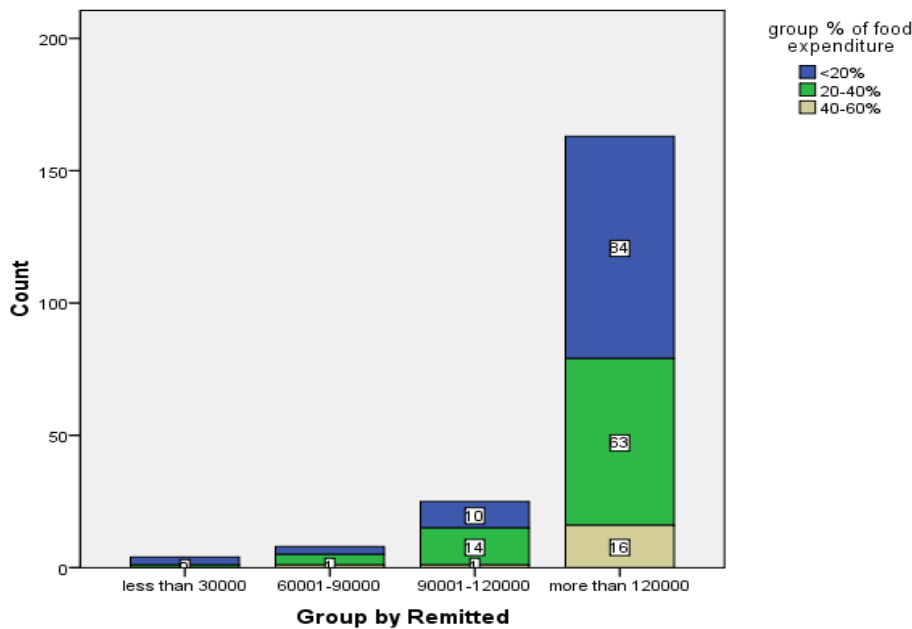
door-to-door service and the fee is already included in the service charge. Figure 4.6 shows the amount of remittance received by households, grouped according to the food expenditure.

Figure 4.5 Domestic Income and Remittance of Migrants' Families in Mon State



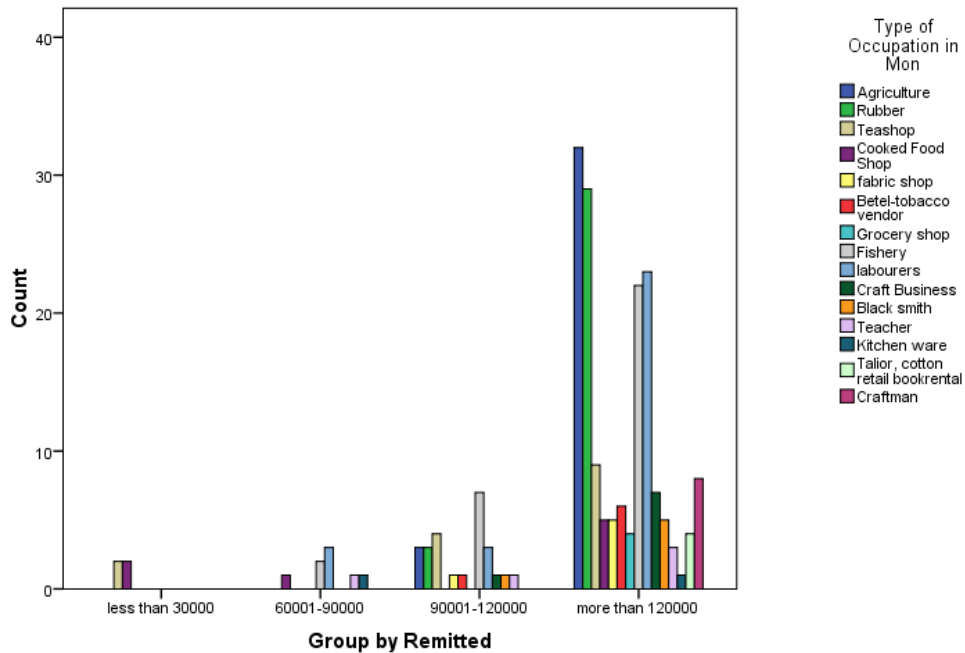
Source: Author

Figure 4.6 Migrants' Family Group by Remitted (based on food expenditure)



Source: Author's survey

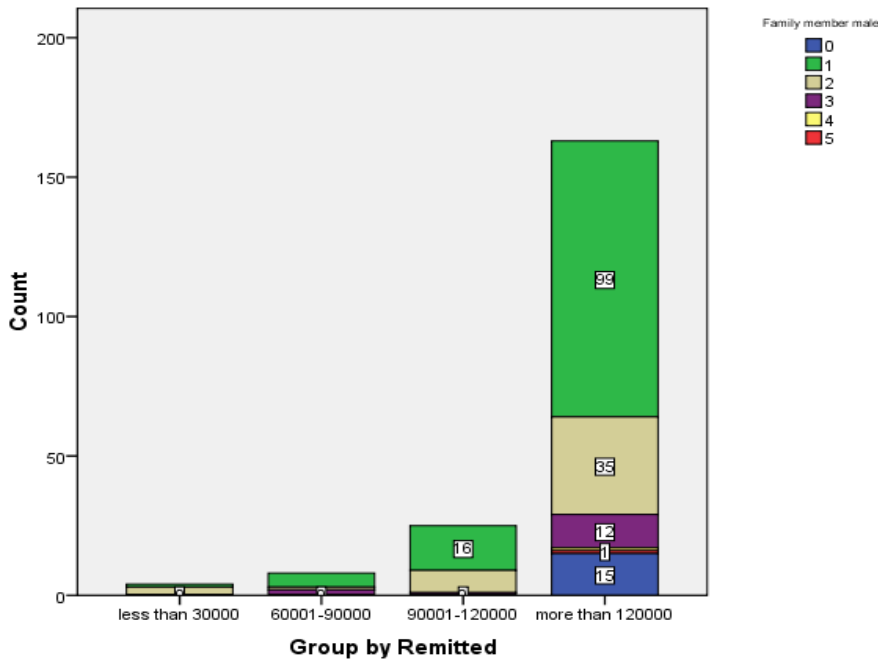
Figure 4.7 Migrants' Family Group by Remitted (based on family occupation)



Source: Author's survey

Figure 4.7 shows those migrants who sent remittance less than 30,000 kyats are from shopkeeper groups. This shows that unless migrant workers are from households that have fairly good income, they rely heavily on remittances. It is also important to notice that migrant families in Mon state that have less male members tend to rely more on remittances. Most families interviewed have their male family members working in Thailand. Those who remained in the villages were either students or elderly that are not of the age to be in the workforce (15~65). It is also found that some students from these families between the ages of 13-15 were working part-time at comic book stores, grocery shops and late-night tea-shops, three or four days a week. Their wages varied from 800 kyats to 1500 kyats per day, and also depends on the number of customer visits. Figure 4.8 shows the amount of remittance received and number of male in migrants' families.

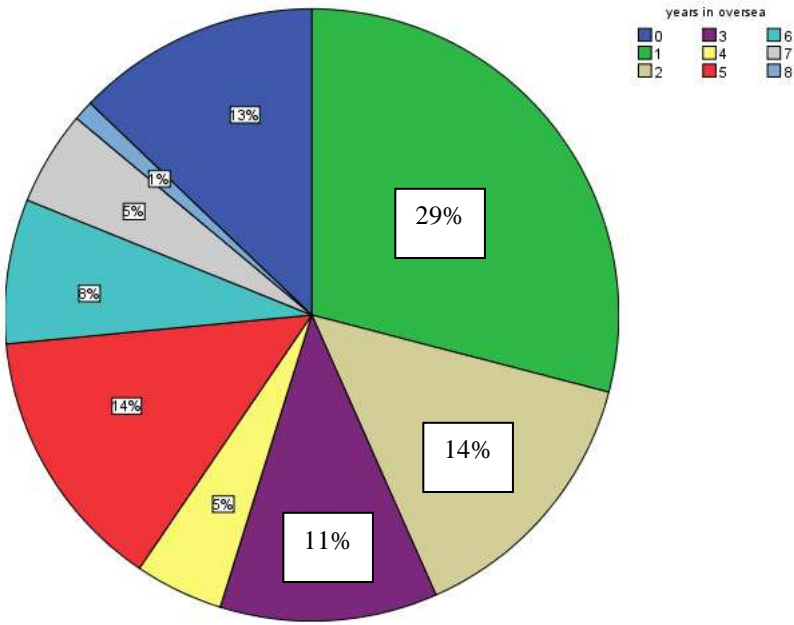
Figure 4.8 The Amount of Remittance and Number of male family members ratio



Source: Author

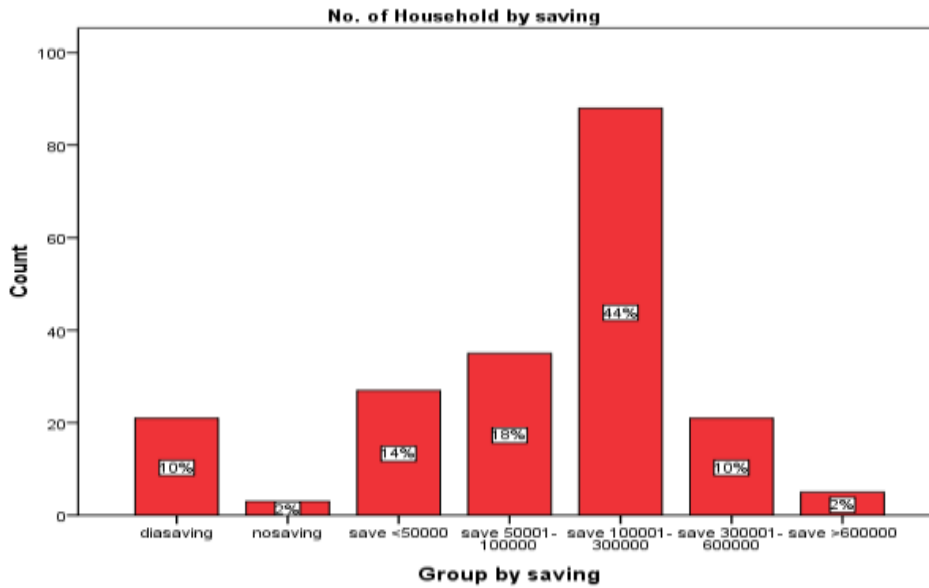
The number of years spent overseas by migrant workers also helped explain the socioeconomic conditions of migrant families. Almost every household in the interview had a migrant worker who has spent at least a year in Thailand and some had returned to Mon state around the time of the interview. It can be analyzed that six percent of migrant workers stayed seven or eight years in overseas. Half of the migrants have stayed less than three years in oversea. It shows that after making certain amount of savings and experienced overseas, migrant workers tend to return to place of origin. From the collected data, it can be analyzed that migrant workers were saving more in Thailand than when they were working in Mon state. This can be due to the fact that their travel documents were kept by the Pwe-sar / agent and they could not go out of their workplace / factory compound. Many migrant workers have their families in Mon state sent clothes, foods and most of the necessities in order to avoid spending extra in Thailand.

Figure 4.9 The Total Number of Years Spent in Overseas by Migrant Workers



Source: Author

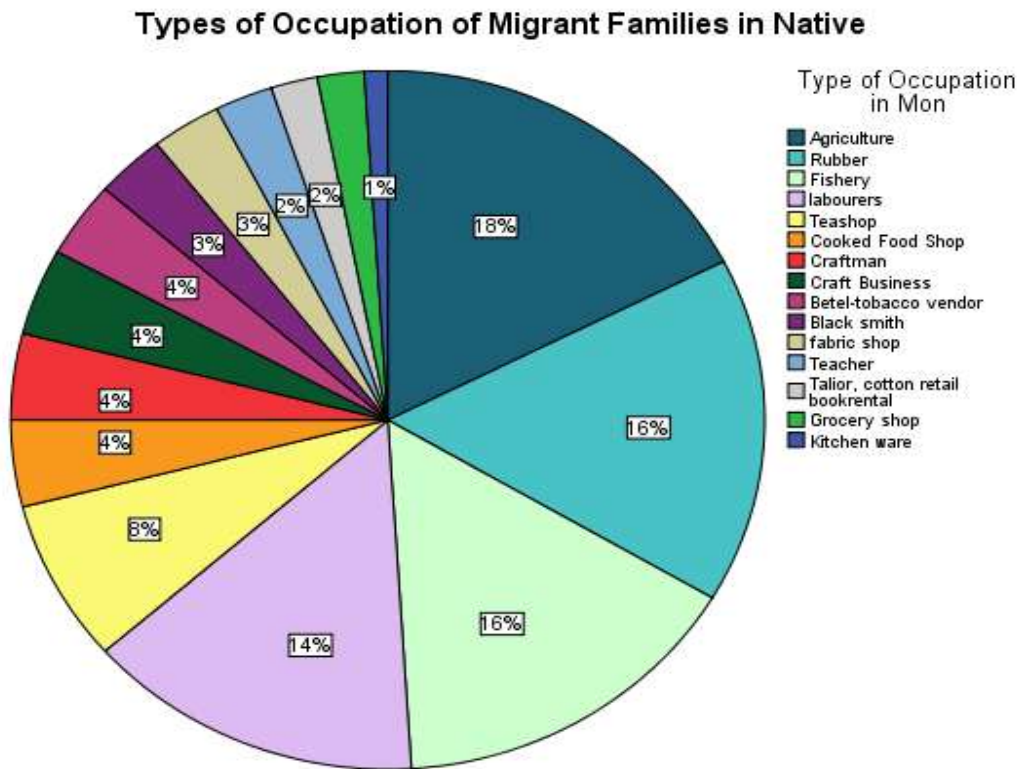
Figure 4.10 The Total Amount of Savings Made by Migrant Families



Source: Author

Figure 4.10 shows the savings made by migrant families. From the interviews, it is found that 10% of household were still in dis-saving where they spent more than they earned. Two percent are in breakeven condition while 56% of households could save more than 100,000 per month. From the figures, it can be analyzed that average remitted are negatively related to the household domestic income and the number of males in the household. This mean that if domestic income is low or no. of male in household are low, the remittance will be higher. Moreover, if debt payment is high, remittance is high. There is a positive interrelation between debt payment and remittance.

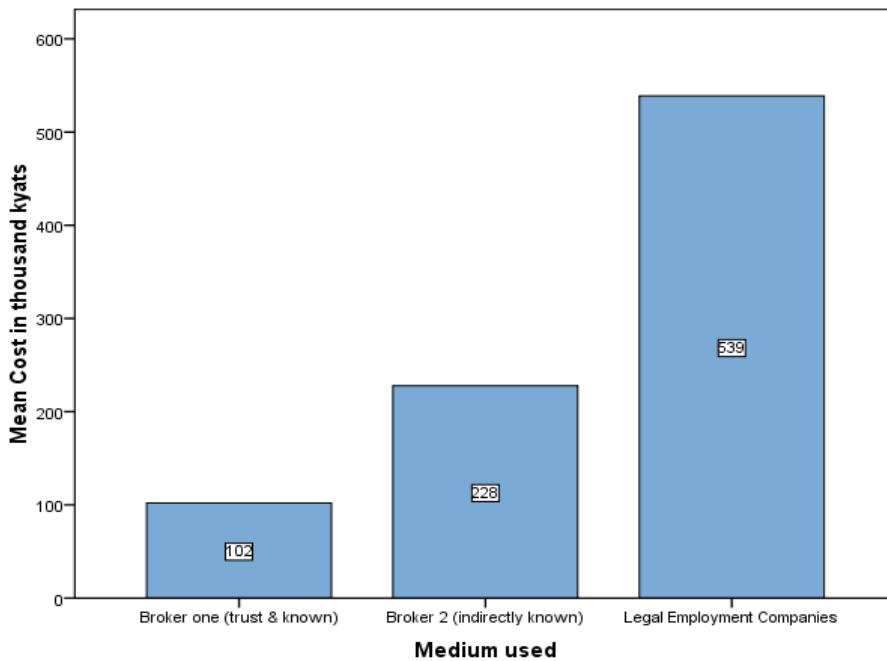
Figure 4.11 Occupation of Migrant Families and Returned Migrants in Mon State



Source: Author

Figure 4.11 shows various occupations that migrant families and returned migrants belonged to during the time of survey. Migrant families belonged to different occupations. Once migrant workers returned from overseas, they may either resume their old jobs or establish new businesses, depending on how much they have saved. The study also observed Mon migrants' choice of migration facilitators i.e., Pwe-sars, job brokers from other towns/ areas and overseas employment companies. Figure 4.12 shows that the difference in cost of migration among these facilitators plays a major role in migrants' decision over who they should look for. The average cost of migration charged by Pwe-sars (shown as "Broker one") was 102,000 kyats while the licensed overseas employment companies (shown as Legal Employment Companies) were charging 539,000 kyats per person for their service. The other illegal job brokers from different areas (shown as Broker 2) charged 228,000 kyats.

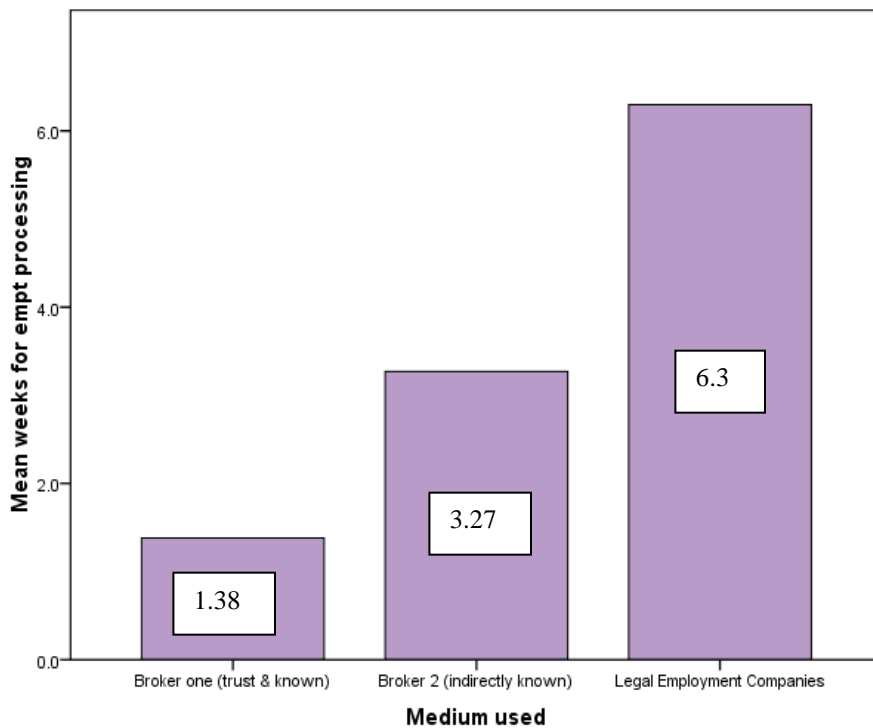
Figure 4.11 Cost of Migration by Different Medium



Source: Author

Likewise, the amount of time required to process migration was the shortest in Pwe-sars' case while the licensed companies involved a longer processing time due to complicated paperwork. Although the legal procedures are necessary for all migrant workers to work in decent working conditions and to have their rights protected, lengthy process adds more cost for migrants and their families. Mon migrant workers who were using overseas employment companies had to travel to Yangon and sometimes with children, to complete the paperwork. Depending on the duration of stay in Yangon, some of them had to borrow money from relatives and friends while some had to ask favors from friends' for a place to stay. Such difficulties discourage migrant workers from utilizing licensed companies in Yangon.

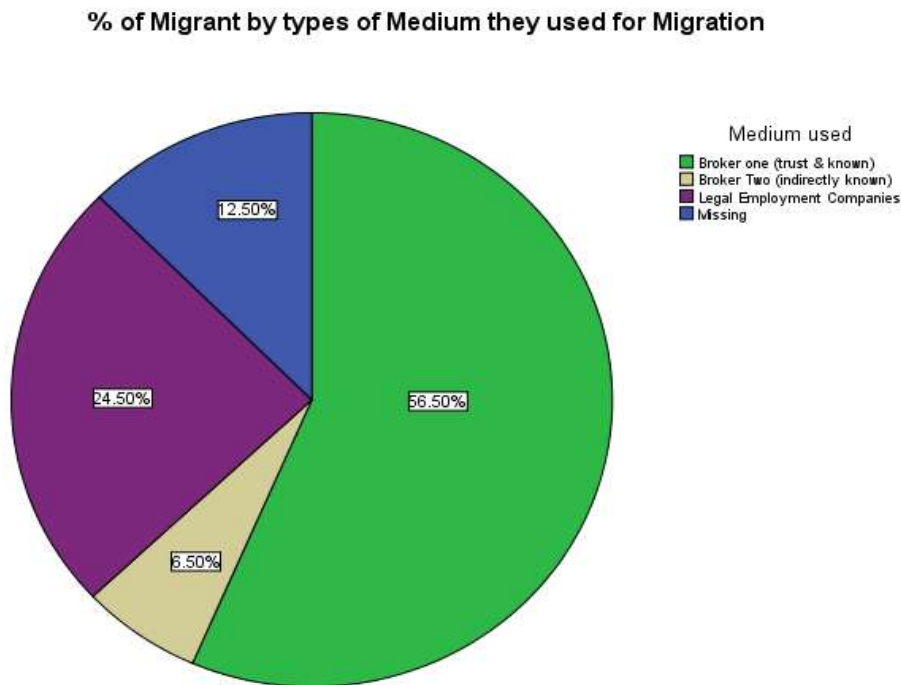
Figure 4.13 Total Number of Weeks required to process Migration



Source: Author

As shown in Figure 4.13, the average waiting time for migrant workers was 1.38 weeks (10 days) with Pwe-sars, 3.27 weeks(23 days) with other job brokers from different areas and 6.3 weeks (44 days) with the licensed companies. Using Pwe-sars not only saved costs but also time for Mon migrant workers. According to the migrant workers, Pwe-sars charged them 50% before they left Mon state and 50% after their arrival in Thailand at their designated factories. Although in some cases, Pwe-sars deceived migrant workers into paying them the full amount before the departure and left them during the process. Such Pwe-sars were precluded by the Mon communities in both Myanmar and Thailand and by looking after each other, Mon migrant workers continued to support migration with their social networks.

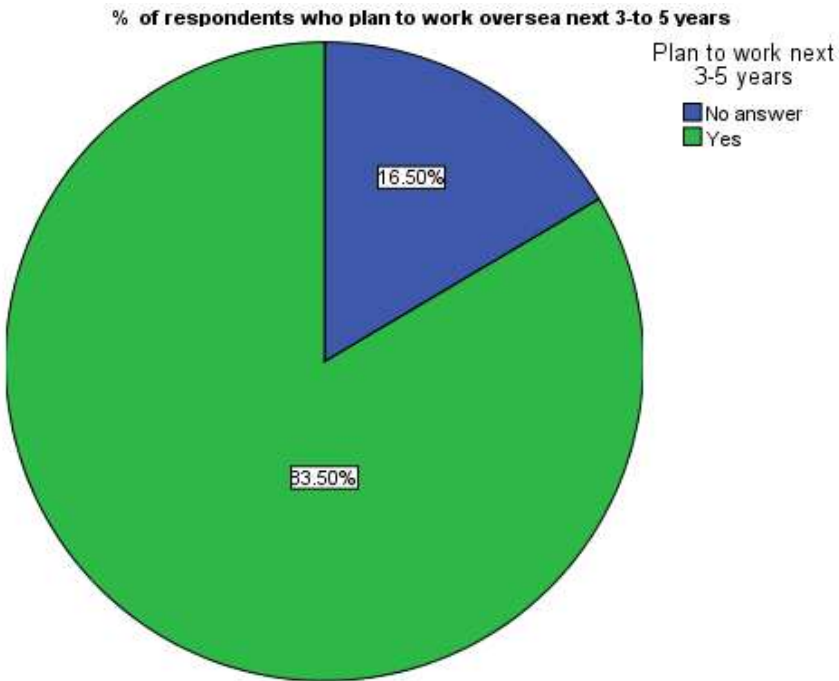
Figure 4.14 Percentage of Migrant Workers Using Pwe-sars, Other Job Brokers and Overseas Employment Companies



Source: Author

Many Mon migrant workers and their families in Thailand are optimistic about the changes that are happening in Myanmar. Not only do they view the current state of economy in Myanmar as the most encouraging and inviting since the Socialist regime, but also they are enthused that the new economy allows them to return and participate in this remarkable change. However, as ethnic nationalities who are minority compared to the majority Bamars, many are still hesitant to return to their native and start the business all over again. Figure 4.15 shows that those who participated in the interview are still leaning towards migration as they projected themselves and others working overseas in the next three to five years.

Figure 4.15 Percentage of Interview Respondents that plans to work in Overseas in the future



Source: Author

It can be analyzed that for migrant workers who are currently working in Thailand to decide to return to work in Myanmar and withdraw their children from schools and bring their elderly parents back to their villages would require more encouragement and a substantial amount of trust in the government and the system. Informal telephone interviews with those who are settled and working in Mahachai and Chiang Mai for at least 12 years proved that point as some were reluctant to even visit for a while to witness the change. They believe that irregular migration will continue if the government does not revisit the problems relating to it and if Pwe-sars remain illegal.

4.3 Surveyed Actors in Five Selected Townships

Most of the surveys focus on economic factors such as sellers, consumers, workers and investors. In this study, not only traders, small business owners, and laborers but also teachers and those who are engaged in arts and crafts are considered important as they play crucial roles in making migration decisions. Of the surveyed actors, 33.6% are from agriculture and rubber industry, 22.6% are running small businesses, 15% from the fishery industry, 14.9% are general and agricultural laborers, 10.9% of them make their living as artists, craftsmen, blacksmith, and three percent are either teachers at local (village) primary schools or working as private tutors or ‘guides’⁹.

⁹ A ‘guide’ is a person hired by parents to coach their children who are in Primary/Middle/High School after school hours. Guides are either university graduates or passed matriculation with excellent grades.

4.3.1 Agriculture and Rubber Farmers (67 Households)

Farming is considered more a family business than commercial industry for most farmers. The study found that in some interviewed households, the entire family works without hiring other laborers. Most of them farm paddy, rubber, oil palm, and cotton, betel nut, cashew nut, orchid plantations are also favored by many farmers in expanding their crop variety. In recent years, there is a noticeable increase in the government-funded kyet-su-pin (*Jatropha*) plantation to support production of biodiesel project.

Depending on the number of farms (acres) owned and productivity, the income varies among the farmers. Some are running their farms through tenants, especially for farms that are located in hilly areas. Total number of farms owned by each village was unknown as there was land ownership dispute among authorities and farmers during the time of survey. It is expected that there were approximately 1,675 acres in Village A, 1,130 acres in Village B, 800-870 acres in Village C, 560-620 acres in Village D and E respectively. The average landholding in villages A, B, C, D and E were 8 to 15 acres and this greatly corresponds to the village average where it was 7.7 and 14.6 respectively. Some farmer-traders held farm lands between 45-70 acres and they trade their own products while importing other crops from nearby towns and villages.

The average productivity of all five villages in the sample produce 90 to 110 baskets per acre (paddy 1 basket=20.9 kg). The price of summer paddy was \$40 per basket in 2011. Meanwhile. An average farmer produced one to five tons of rubber a year. Rubber price at China-Myanmar border was \$4,500¹⁰ per ton in 2011 where the lower quality rubber was \$400 per ton inside Myanmar. Currently, major trade companies are trying to buy as many rubber farms as possible from the farmers. Many farmers were forced to sell their rubber farms under

¹⁰ During the time of survey, \$1 was equivalent to 880 kyats in the black market. Some figures can only be interpreted in Myanmar Kyats due to rate fluctuation and to avoid confusion.

difficult circumstances created by corrupted authorities and voracious companies. Most farms are family inheritance and many farmers inherit land on their marriage. Some succeeded from their deceased household head. There are cases where some farmers almost sold every farm out they have in order invest in migration.

Most agricultural laborers were migrated from Dry Zone and Ayeyarwaddy Delta as many Mon farm workers have migrated to Thailand. Some landowners provided shelter while others rent their apartments out and deduct the cost from the workers' salary. Average agricultural worker makes about 60,000 kyats per month. The study had the impression that farmers in Mon are quite wealthy with high productivity and quality rice production. However, they claimed that after deducting all the costs including tenant fees, hiring laborers, purchasing fertilizers, seeds, tax payment, etc., the net income is hardly sufficient for the rest of the family to spend equally.

4.3.2 Small Business Owners (45 households)

In Mon state, one can find teashop and betel shop (*kun-yar*) at every corner of the street. These are the two very popular small businesses run by locals in Mon state. They are mostly managed and owned by extended families of traditional farmers and companies located in big cities like Yangon and Mawlamyine. From the survey, it is learned that most returned migrants started their business by opening teashops. They created a common space where people come to purchase not only food and service but share their opinions and build networks.

Among 45 households, 22 were teashop and small restaurant (*hta-min-sine*)¹¹ owners,

¹¹ "*hta-min-sine*" means "a place for rice"; represents a small local restaurant that serves ethnic(local) dishes, popular daily Myanmar dishes with rice and considerably cheaper than other Chinese or European style restaurants. About 15 to 20 meat and vegetable dishes are prepared and shown on the table or in glass cabinet where customers order their choice by pointing at the dishes. Most *hta-min-sine* offer a large variety of fresh vegetables and

10 were local product sellers (such as woven clothes, blankets, tableware, wooden kitchen ware, etc), seven were running betel and tobacco shops, four were grocery shop owners, while two were running video and book (novel, cartoons, magazines) rentals. At the time of the survey, the author witnessed a few teashops and grocery stores preparing to launch internet cafes in the village. This is a groundbreaking move as most villages still do not have electricity 24 hours a day. Locals analyzed this as the impact of businessmen traveling from Yangon and other cities for dam and government-funded development projects inside Mon villages.

More than 70% of surveyed households used tea shops on daily basis and that contribute a significant amount of income to the owners. Since early 2,000, franchise market has started to boom nationwide and tea shop chains can be found everywhere in the country. In Mon state, it is found that the locals are more in favor of tea shops opened by their own people even though the number of popular tea shop chains is increasing inside Mon villages as well. Teashop culture is a well-known culture in Myanmar as many people like to start their day slowly beginning with a breakfast at local teashops.

Many teashops, even the small unnoticeable ones, have televisions installed to attract more customers. During the international and national football seasons, teashops around the villages are packed with customers that come to watch the game with their friends and families. Football (soccer) is a very popular sports in Myanmar and Mon, like any other states and divisions in Myanmar, have huge fans of football. The most popular games are English Premier League, Champion League and World cup, that get a great deal of attention from all walks of life. Normally, a small teashop earns net income of 550,000-1,200,000 kyats. The net profit becomes double, sometimes triple during these peak hours.

traditional dipping (*nga-pi-yay* or spicy salted fish broth) set, tea, soup, rice refill for free. Depending on the type of meat, each dishes may cost between 450~800 kyats (app 70 cent ~ \$1.5) and the portions are fairly big enough for a grown man.

Some teashops have a corner for weekly journals and they are usually sold by young boys around 13 years of age. Most of the waiters are also young boys, who are either school drop outs or have never attended schools. They live with other waiters at the teashop. Some of them received salary only once a year when they get a 10 or 20-day leave from work to visit their families. Depending on their proficiency and efficiency, they made between 18,000~25,000 kyats per month. Because of this extremely low income and the unreasonable working hours, many human rights activists have pointed out the severe conditions that these waiters have to face.

However, during the survey, no such strains or inhumane treatment to these waiters were found. At one teashop in village A, there were 12 waiters whose ages were 13-16 years of age. When asked if they are content with what they are paid, many responded that they are grateful and happy to have a job, a place to live and three meals a day in a cheerful manner. Author observed their responses to be courteous and truthful. All teashop owners in the sample said that they take care of these waiters' health and other social problems.

From the study, it is learned that many young waiters and cooks at these teashops would eventually risk migrating after a few years of working for their owners. It is believed that they attain information and contacts from their customers. And also for the owners, they are becoming more reliant upon government-aided projects that would bring in people from other places. With mass migration from their villages, they lose many customers over the years and the increasing prices of consumer goods make it difficult for owners to maintain a good business reputation in the market.

4.3.3 Fishery workers (30 households)

Coastal fishing has always played as important enterprise for the people of Mon. According to the locals, there are at least 500 to 3000 fishermen from Mawlamyine, Belu-kyun Island and Chaung zone township that go to the sea every day. 17 of the surveyed households worked at sea-fish, dried fish and salt production factories. Most of them worked in villages in Belu-kyun island, Thanbyuzayat , Ye and Kyaikkami townships where sea salt and dried fish are produced. They earned between \$20 to \$50 per month. Sea products from Mon state have achieved high demand from both domestic and international markets. In addition, *Nga Pi* or compressed fish¹² production is also a major fishery product of Mon state. One fishery worker said the factory in Mawlamyine where he worked is known of expertly mixing sea and rive fish with prawns for unique *Nga Pi* taste.

Ten of the other surveyed households were in inland fishing, trawling, and offshore trawling. The wives of fishery workers, who were sometimes brought to the see by fishermen, complained that their husbands had to go fishing for about 30-40 days in the sea until they can come back. Their incomes also fluctuate depending on the amount of fish they catch. If they catch high-value fish, then they can receive higher pay but according to them, the amount was much less than fishery workers working for Thai fishing companies. Their salary was between 50,000 to 80,000 kyats per month and in case the boat owner took care of the meals, these fishery workers got to save all their salary.

According to Department of Fisheries, the tax rates for offshore fisherman are 300 kyats per year for boat, from 600 kyats to 3000 kyats for motorboat, from 500 kyats to 12,000 kyats or fishing equipment, for one ton of wet fish is from 300 kyats to 3000 kyats. A motorboat will cost

¹² *Nga pi* has pungent smell and is made from fermentation of salted ground fish or shrimp, sun-dried and can be added to all types of cooking in Myanmar dishes. It is particularly used in soups, salads and raw *Nga Pi* can be consumed directly.

only from 3500 kyats to 11,000 kyats. Marine workers are systematically registered and being charged 500 kyats for registration fee but the offshore marine workers are not charged. Taxes are found to be very low for marine workers in comparison with current price of a viss (1.65 kg) of fish. No fisherman has so far made complaints about the taxes imposed by the Department of Fisheries.

However, fishery workers complained that due to corrupted officials that control fish market and monopoly by some companies, fishermen have to pay a lump sum money in the form of tax and this impacted the salary of fishery workers in different ways. The Department of Fishery responded to such problems by tightening regulations and severe punishment for bribery. Ministry of Livestock and Fishery issued a press release on March 23, 2011 with details of progress in the fishery sector and on collection of tax. According to the statement, in 2008-2009, there were 155 trawlers, 1,568 offshore trawlers, tax of K 31.306 million, 201,370 tons of sea-water fish production, average consumption of 62.86-kilogram fish per head, and 6263 marine workers, and in 2009-2010, they increased to 148 trawlers, 1,606 offshore trawlers, tax of K 32.078 million, 26,3350 tons of sea-water fish production, average consumption of 80.83-kilogram fish per head and 6,505 marine workers, comparing the figures to that of 1988's.

4.3.4 Laborers (29 Households)

In this category, there are workers who are called '*a-lote-tha-marr*' and general laborers '*kya-pan-lote-thar*.' The first type consists of constructions workers, factory workers, porters, and cleaning staff. The second category consists of waste-material and garbage collectors, manual labor (coolie), and '*a-lote-kyan-tha-mar*' or laborers that work at sites that require a lot of physical strength and energy (similar to coolie). Out of 29 interviewers, 15 of the laborers were

female. Eight of the laborers worked as cooks and helpers part-time for wealthy families in Mawlamyine. Among 14 male interviewees, six were under 25 and married while the rest were between the age of 35-49. Most of them were not happy with their income and were contacting immigration brokers to get a job in Thailand.

Five male workers in the interview worked as porters on a carrying vessel that transports brick, stones, sand, cement and iron for natural gas construction sites. They have to work in two shifts, from 8:30 to 11:30 and from 13:00 to 18:30 and make 3,000 kyats per day. They work from Monday to Friday and sometimes during the weekend on authorizes' demand. On days that require them to work over-time, they make about 5,000 kyats. They have to buy their own lunch and their daily expense (food, water, chewing betel and tea) was between 800 kyats to 1,300 kyats. It is learned that their wives were also working at '*hta-min-sine*' and made 20,000 kyats per month.

Construction workers earned 1,400 kyats per day and depending on the season, their income fluctuates. Factory workers and cleaning workers earn between 25,000 kyats to 30,000 kyats per month. They worked from 9:00-15:00 and depending on the type of factory, they had to work over-time. For example, one female interviewee worked at fish and shrimp factory that required workers to work at night and very early morning as some fishing boats only come back at night. According to her, the workers were forced to work late without getting over-time fees paid. If they refused to go to work at requested hours, they lose their jobs.

Workers that collect waste materials from factories and construction sites (eg; glass, plastic, bottles, wires, woods, tins, etc.), old newspapers, magazines, journals and books from offices and homes, are sometimes exposed to danger and discrimination on top of making irregular income for living. Most buyers of the collected waste materials are local Indians.

Workers in this category made between 20,000-60,000 kyats per month. For that, they had to start collecting since five the morning until three or four in the afternoon. Depending on the collection, the pay is made and one worker said that there were months where he was hardly making 10,000 kyats per month.

Manual labors (coolies) also have to work from dawn till night. Some coolies work only between 4am to 11 am in the market for 3,000 kyats, helping shop owners carry products and display them. Coolies have to carry rice bags as heavy as 50 kg and work restlessly during the working hours. For coolies working at the port, they make 40,000 kyats per month. One manual laborer said he worked as a coolie in the morning and went fishing with his friends every evening for his family. Sometimes he worked for homes that need moving or cleaning with the garden.

4.3.5 Arts and Craftsmen (22 households)

Mons have always been known as keen craftsmen and blacksmiths. Eight of 22 households in the interview inherited family business. They made Buddha statues, and other statues as ordered by their customers. They have 6 to 15 workers helping them curve the wood, make the clay and help with details. All 8 of them worked at their own crafts shop as craftsmen. Five of them have shops opened next to their workshops and earn 200,000 kyats to 1,000,000 kyats on months with good business. Some customers ordered quite expensive Buddha statues made from specific wood and one owner said he had a customer from Yangon that ordered 36 different Buddha statues for 8 million kyats. However, he also said that during raining season, sales dropped to 30-40%.

The remaining 14 interviewees were either blacksmiths or craftsmen working for a craft

shop. Their products include traditional pickled-tea boxes, baskets, wooden tables, fruit holder, bowls, cups and jars, bamboo chopsticks and ornamental accessories, silverware, gem-studded paintings, lacquer ware, cotton and silk woven fabrics, bags and pouches, payer beads made from birthstones or birth-wood , wooden pens, pen cases, name card holders and jewelry boxes . They were not paid for each product, they make and earn approximately 35,000 kyats per month. They worked on weekdays from 9 am till 4 pm. Many of them sell flowers and some small crafts at pagodas and temples on weekends and during festivals.

4.3.6 Teachers (6 households)

All interviewees worked for public schools. They worked as state-hired teachers from 9 am to 3 pm (school hours) and private tutors during after-school hours (4-6pm /7-9pm). For primary teachers, they earned 35,000 kyats per month from January 31, 2010. Until then, they were making roughly 15,000 kyats. After-school tutoring for private study groups, bordering schools and individual students earned them additional 30,000 to 60,000 kyats per month.¹³

4.4 Testimonies of Migrant Workers, Pwe-sars and Overseas Employment Companies

The following is the details of the interviews with some Pwe-sars, migrant workers and companies who have significant backgrounds from the rest. Results of survey questionnaire of 200 household and interviews with Pwe-sars and migrant workers that have similar or same

¹³ On 14th March 2012, Ministry of Finance and Revenue announced that civil servants and armed forces will receive additional allowance of 30,000 kyats (app: \$37) besides their current salaries starting from 1st April 2012. According to the State-owned MRTV, The increase will mean the lowest bracket of civil servants will receive 65,000 kkyat per month, up from 35,000. The highest tier, known as gazetted officers, will earn 130,000 kkyat, compared to 100,000 previously, while workers paid on a daily basis will receive 2,100 kkyat, up from the current 1,100.

answers are omitted. Some interviewees granted permission to use real bio data including name, age, work and location.

- 1) **Ko Myo Oo, Twenty-seven years old (Male, Pwe-sar, Yangon).** Originally from Mandalay, he moved to Yangon Division with his father (57 years old) and mother (62 years old) when he was three. His father retired as a senior clerk from Inndine military Headquarters (11th Light Infantry Division). He and his sister (21 years old) both went to school for children of military personnel near their father's work. They both finished high school but only his sister went on to pursue college degree through University of Distance Education. He started running errands for a garage manager of a factory nearby at the age of seventeen and made 15,000 kyat per month. Then he worked as an accountant who kept ledgers for a small company that rent trucks for construction sites for four years. He had to travel along with the trucks and that allowed him to meet with people from all over the country. He began working as a Pwe-sar at the age of 25 by introducing young men who were looking for jobs to construction sites, government plantations, and truck rental companies. At first, he would receive small amount of cash as an expression of thanks from these men and some companies/ owners would give him commission fees. Later on, he was asked by several companies to recruit high-school graduates to work for their firms. He quit his job and started working as a Pwe-sar for domestic jobs in downtown Yangon. His monthly income was between 100-300 thousand kyat and sent 100 thousand kyat to his parents every month. He was only recruiting male high-school graduates who were looking for a job. At the time of interview (September 2009), he was thinking of expanding his

networks to overseas-job searches and planning to work between Yangon and Myawaddy (border town).

2) **Ko Thet Naing, Twenty-nine years old (Male, Pwe-sar, Yangon).** Born and raised in Yangon with relatives, he attained his Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Distance Education in English major. His aunt was working as a Pwe-sar that recruited women from villages in Mon and Karen state to work as housekeepers, cooks, and nannies. Since finishing high school, he was working at a café co-owned by his aunt as a clerk and became friends with Pwe-sars who were doing overseas job search for young men. Until the time of interview (September 2009), he had arranged four men to leave Myanmar with legal passports and contacted them to a shrimp and shoes factories in Thailand. His net income was between 200-500 thousand kyat per month. His job descriptions included applying for a passport and handling the passport to the migrant in a shorter period of time, contacting them to specific factories in Thailand that give him money to look for labor from Myanmar. Along the process, he had to bribe some officials as necessary and depending on the fluidity of the process, migrants may be charged differently.

3) **Ko Win Aung Tun, Thirty-three years old (Male, Pwe-sar, Yangon).** He was working at a record company in downtown Yangon while operating his Pwe-sar networks in Pha-an (Karen State), Mudon (Mon State), Kaw Thaug (Taninthayi Division). His brothers were also Pwe-sars and together they have arranged more than eighty departures for migrant workers from Yangon and in those regions. Their net income was 1-2 million kyat. They had several other junior Pwe-sars working for them in each region and known immigration

officers and border guards as well. Every month, they would send 15-20 migrant workers to Thailand from Myawaddy-Maesot route. Each time, they would ask migrant workers to come to specific meeting point and arrange a mini-bus to pick them up to drive them into Thailand. Then Pwe-sars working in Thailand would arrange transportation for these migrant workers to reach their destinations inside Thailand. He and his brothers helped migrant workers get legal passports and work permits. Migrant workers had to pay any additional fees if occurred during the process.

- 4) **Daw San Yee, Forty-five years old (Female, Pwe-sar, Yangon).** She was a Mon from Balu-kyun Island in Mon state, living with her grandmother in Yangon from the age of fifteen. She finished only third standard in primary school in her village. She got married at the age of twenty three to a fellow Mon working at a garment factory in the suburb of Yangon. After one year of marriage, her husband left for Thailand to work at a garment factory there. He left with a help of a relative Pwe-sar, without a passport and work permit. It cost only a few thousand kyat. After four years, she joined him in Thailand while leaving their young children with the grandmother and other family members. She stayed in Mahachai, worked as a tailor at a knitting and garment factory from 8am till 9 pm, made 69 baht per day (approximately \$2.00). There was no holiday and after tolerating the hardship for two years, she came back to Yangon. Her husband was still working in Thailand at the time of interview (September 2009). She opened a local tailoring shop at her house and was making 80-150 thousand per month from making clothes. She was not working openly as a Pwe-sar and worked only for her family members in Mon state and a few of those who were introduced by her relatives. Her brokerage fees were 20-30 thousand kyat per person to

introduce migrant workers to her connections in the region that would help migrants cross the border and find a job inside Thailand. She did not specify details about the route and what these connections did. Her husband was sending \$300 per month starting from 2010.

5) **Daw Ohnmar, Forty-nine years old (Female, Pwe-sar, Yangon).** She was from Pyinmana which is 320 km north of Yangon and moved to Yangon with her husband in 1992. Her husband (60) was a sergeant in the military and was working as a driver at a senior official's residence. She was working as a house helper to that official's family. They were provided a room at public housing apartments and lived with their sons who were sixteen and twenty respectively. She recruited girls from thirteen to eighteen years of age from villages near Pyinmana to work for other officials' residences. She also found domestic workers where mothers were cooks, fathers were drivers and school drop-out girls were housekeepers for these senior officials' residences. For providing female housekeepers, she was paid 50 thousand kyat per person with a guarantee that these women would work for the minimum of two years. She was also contacted from local Pwe-sars from villages near her native town and some from the delta region. She was willing to extend her brokerage business to overseas jobs search as many young men and women she knew were asking her to do so.

6) **Daw Kyu Kyu , Forty-nine years old (Female, Pwe-sar, Mawlamyine).** She was born in Ywa-lut village in Balu-kyun island and moved to Myawaddy with her aunt at the age of eight. She helped her aunt operate a grocery store while working as a waitress at the age of thirteen. At fifteen, she was sent to Thailand by her aunt to work at a garment factory near Thai-Myanmar border where she had to make 80-100 pieces of clothes in one hour. She was

provided shelter, food and some clothing but not salary. After a year of not being paid, she escaped to Bangkok with a help of an elder worker at the factory. She met her husband who was a Thai national and owner of restaurant in Bangkok. She recruited many young men and women looking for a job from her village and helped them found jobs in Bangkok. In 2002, she returned to Mawlamyine and opened a restaurant while continued operating brokerage. She was charging 30-50 thousand kyat per person and for her relatives, she sometimes offered free service. Most of the operations were illegal and involved a lot of corruption and exploitation.

- 7) **Company (A), Seikkanthar Street, Yangon.** Registered at Ministry of Labor in 2004, the company supplied Myanmar workers for those candidates with their qualification and relative experience in search of skill workers, General workers, Training workers, Technicians and other professionals to Asia-Countries (Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, Japan) and U.A.E countries. They recruited workers for the following job categories: production operators (general workers and skill workers), machine operators (technician and helpers), restaurants (waiters and general workers), engineers/technicians/designers (Bachelor of Engineering/ diploma in engineering), dockyard service (welder/ pipe-steel fitter/ electrician/ painter), garment factory (technician/ sewing operators and general workers), construction (civil engineers/ site engineer/ supervisor/ carpenter/ rebar installer/ general workers). They provided service for air-ticketing, passport applying and renewal, visa application, medical examination, education to applicants on job and language trainings, job application and well-training for interviews. They advertised on local newspapers, journals and on the internet. Not only interested migrant workers from Myanmar contacted

them, but also foreign companies and business owners (for example –restaurant owners in Malaysia and Singapore) were contacting them to look for labor. Depending on the destination, the process duration and cost varied. For a construction job in Thailand, a job seeker was required to prepare 400-600 thousand kyat by the company.

8) **Company (B), 37th Street, Yangon.** Registered in 2006, the company was recruiting mainly for entertainment business, maintenance and renovation of electrical and electronic goods. They have branch offices in Singapore, Malaysia, UAE, Japan, USA and Canada. The founder was a returned migrant who has worked in several of the countries mentioned above. The company's Yangon office had 38 staff members and 3 managers. The company was also beginning to look for general workers from agriculture, construction and technical fields in 2009. They provided a place to stay for job seekers from outside Yangon with reasonable prices during the process. The company also recruited several of local Pwe-sars as agents to do field recruitment. A recruited migrant worker had to go to Yangon to complete the process and sign the contract of a minimum of two years with the factory/company introduced by company (B). The total migration cost charged by this company was 400 thousand kyat for a job in Thailand. The follow-up study in March 2012 showed that the company raised the service fees to 15% due to the new tax policy. Many Mon migrant workers had used this company to find a job in Thailand.

9) **Min Myo Naing ,Twenty-seven years old (Male, migrant-worker, Yangon).** Min Myo Naing worked together with his father at their family's farm in Mudon Township. His father (56 years old) was a traditional farmer and a breadwinner of a family of two males and four

females. After witnessing two relatives and two friends getting fairly-good income jobs in Malaysia, Thailand and Korea, he became inspired to take the challenge of working overseas. Along with him, there were thirty other friends in his neighborhood. He was contacting an agent company in Yangon about a job in Thailand when he was approached by a local Pwe-sar. That Pwe-sar promised him to get a passport and visa within twenty days and asked for 500 thousand kyat. He paid 300 thousand kyat as the first installment and agreed to settle the rest once he receives his passport. He kept in touch with the Pwe-sar but found out that that Pwe-sar disappeared with his and 15 other friends' money.

4.5 Summary

The long and complicated fights between Mons and Myanmar army have been the main reasons for tardy development in Mon state that suffered many Mons without proper education, healthcare and basic human rights. Migration has been the only hope for survival for many Mons, who are now cross-border migrant workers. However, after the new civil government was formed in March 2011, many have hoped that societies of all-level would benefit from the transition. From holding elections that allowed the oppositions to participate freely to opening new chapters of economy (such as the establishment of special economic zones that create thousands of jobs of Myanmar citizens), millions of Myanmar migrants, including Mons currently working abroad are given great incentives to repatriate in the near future. For Mons, the question of how much liberty would the Mon Land get and the reunion of their separated civilization is still the most interesting and concerned subject.

Migrant workers have a bond with their family networks that has a strong impact on their migration decisions. These networks produce chain migrations and many migrants stated

that they were tied in this chain without having clear direction of where they were heading. This usually puts migrant workers at risk where these informal networks have brought them through illegal passages to the destination. Unexpected costs occur very often as they may need to bribe corrupted officials or deal with traffickers along the way. Job options are usually not feasible for migrant workers that went overseas through Pwe-sars networks. They had to work in the same or similar work place as Pwe-sars have limited efficiency. The most significant factors found among migrants' choice of migration facilitators are process duration, cost, and finance. They considered risks associated with their choice after their financial considerations. For instance, a migrant worker who chose a relative Pwe-sar for his migration went through the shorter process duration with a much cheaper price and may be supported financially by that Pwe-sar during migration. A migrant worker who chose to go to Thailand through government-approved overseas employment company received opposite experience. He or she had to wait for a certain period of time until all travel documents are ready. However, the risk exposed to the migrant that went with Pwe-sar was higher than the other migrant as he/she was taking illegal routes to get to the destination. And because of the irregular status, they faced more exploitation at work than the migrant worker who went to Thailand through official channel. The irregular status often prohibited them from taking legal actions against abusive treatments as their employers kept them despondent by threatening them with the police.

Although migrant workers assertively emphasize Pwe-sars as their benefactors who can help them achieve their goals, it is quite idealistic to believe that they can achieve any goal with such high risks and vulnerability linked to Pwe-sars. The role of Pwe-sars in Mon irregular migration is highly questionable and one can analyze that Mon migrant workers and their families were not willing to reveal the real identity of Pwe-sars in fear that the government might

eliminate the networks. This fear might also associate with the fact that if Pwe-sars become legal like overseas employment companies, the cost of migration would become higher than the current rate and the processing time could become lengthy.

The chapter has analyzed that the current trend of Mon migration from Myanmar to Thailand focuses on migrants and Pwe-sars' networks that determine the scale and direction of migration flows from Myanmar. It emphasized that the benefits added to the Mon migrants' standards of living do not sufficiently justify all the risks associated with their irregular migrations as they are deprived of their basic human rights for their irregular status. It analyzed that issuing work permits to Pwe-sars could offer an alternative to help mitigate some of the risks associated with irregular migration as other migration facilitators, including the state-supported overseas employment companies, cannot replace the strong ties that Pwe-sar networks have with the migrant workers.