

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Migration, Miseries and Myanmar

The international community has its eyes on Myanmar and the country's migration problems for many decades. The current state of migration from Myanmar has been largely affected by the country's volatile political background. In this thesis, incorporating the notion of human security to the movement of people demanded not just the understanding of individuals' decisions behind their mobility and states' responsibilities, but also required the comprehension of the spectrum of migration theories and history across disciplines. Human security is beyond the notion of *freedom from want* and *freedom from fear*. For some, human security may mean not having to face or be part of conflicts and violence at home and in the neighborhood and for many, it may mean having the privileges of being able to enjoy all of their rights. For Mon irregular migrant workers, human security means not losing their identity in both Myanmar and Thailand.

While in the process of nation-building, the country only witnessed the leadership of Bamar leaders¹, who are the majority in a country that has more than one hundred ethnic minorities. Many ethnic minorities have claimed that they have lost their own identities to be

¹ From 4th January 1948 to the current day, with the exception of the first president of the then Union of Burma Sao Shwe Thaik (preceded by King George VI), whose ethnicity was Shan, the other seven presidents including the incumbent were/is Bamar ethnicity.

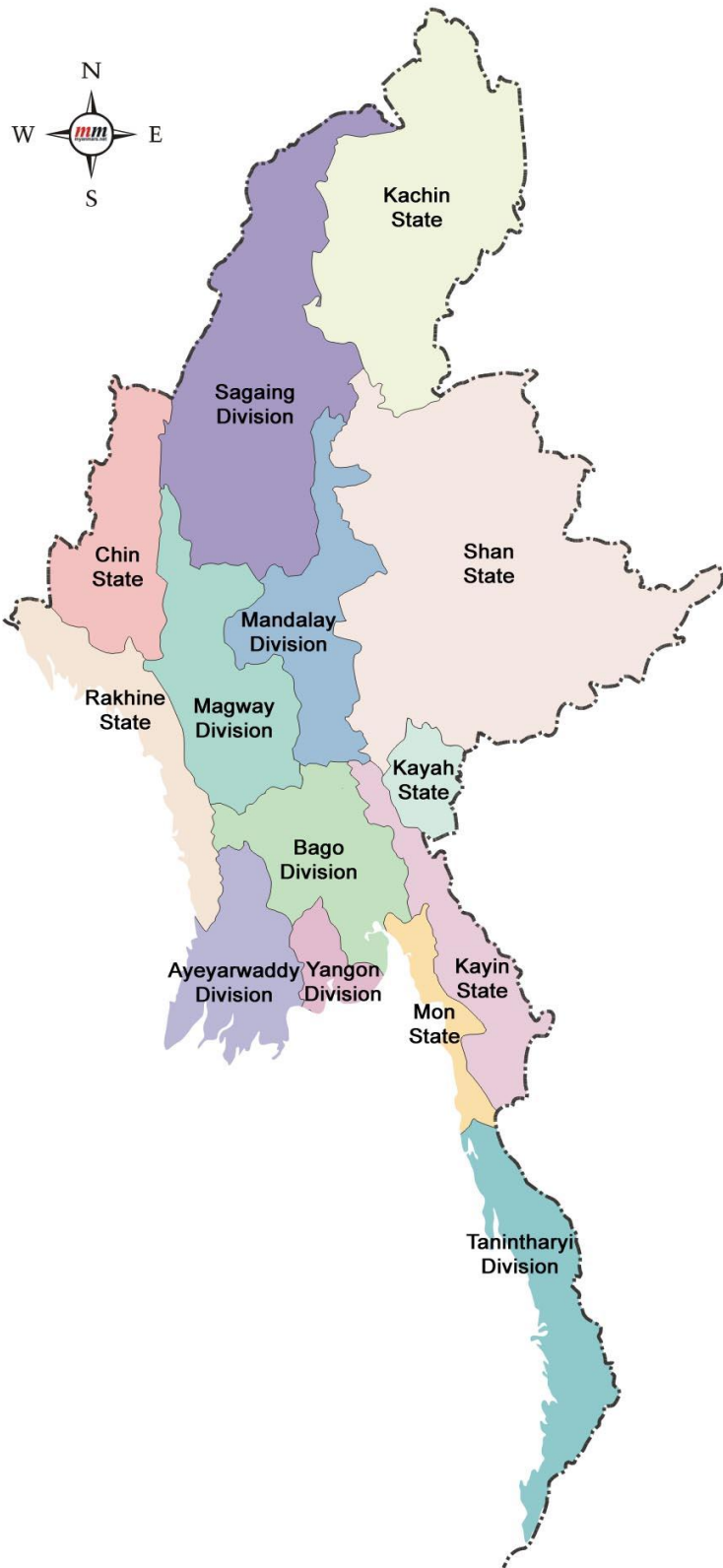
considered as a citizen of Myanmar.² As Professor Cheryl Saunders argued, “a nation-state made by a nation through the nation-building process cannot accommodate other cultures, religions and ethnic groups...it can tolerate non-integrated minorities as guests, but not as equal citizens. The status of fully recognized citizen can be attained only by integration. Those who want to become citizens must change their cultural identity” (Saunders, 2003).³

The history of how Myanmar came to exist as a multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-religious country has always been the focal point of politics in a country that consists of more than one hundred ethnicities. According to one of the most outspoken researchers on Myanmar history and affairs of ethnic minorities, Sai Kham Mong, there was discrimination against the minorities, even though the first constitution of then Burma in 1947 had a federal concept that envisaged autonomous states for most ethnic groups, even before the abolition of this arrangement in 1962. The first democratic government under Prime Minister U Nu advanced a nation-building project also aiming at the “Bamarization” and “Buddhization” of the entire country (Sai Kham Mong, 2007). This cultural centralization policy, discriminating against the “ethnic minorities” with their divergent languages and religions and living on the geographic periphery, was continued by the post-1962 autocratic governments and is still valid under the military regime (Steinberg, 2007).

² When the country gained Independence from British in 1948, it was officially named “Union of Buma” and changed to “Republic of the Union of Myanmar” in 2011 by the current government. The word for “Union” is “*Pyi-daung-su*,” which means “the coming together of different ‘nations’ and ‘national states.’ As the term indicates, the *Pyi-daung-su* allows the peaceful co-existing of different ethnic groups with different cultural and religious backgrounds, i.e. different nations, within an administrative and legal unit of political union.

³ Nation-building excludes from its process other ethnic groups, cultures, religions and everything related to multiculturalism and diversity. Thus, by accepting only one homogeneous set of cultural and religious values as its political values, the very notion of nation-building can produce only a nation-state made by a homogeneous people or nation that claims “pre-state unity based on culture, history or religion. Cf. Saunders in Blindenbacher and Koller (2003), p. 199

Figure 1.1 Map of the Republic of Union of Myanmar



Source: Myanmars.net

U Nu opted for cultural and religious assimilation into Buddhism, or *Buda-bata Myanmar-lumyo*, as a means of integration. However, General Ne Win, who came to power through military coup in 1962, removed the rights of the country's religious and cultural minorities including all civil and basic human rights, as a means of creating a homogeneous unitary state. Moreover, General Ne Win imposed his national language policy by declaring *Myanmar-sa* as the only official language in the entire Union of Burma, which therefore was required to be used at all levels of government and public functions, and also to be the only medium of instruction at all levels of schools in the country—from primary to university levels. He not only imposed the *Myanmar-sa* as the official language, but also suppressed the right to learn the other ethnic national languages of the Union. (Sakhong, 2008)

The 1974 constitution drafted by General Ne Win demarcated seven ethnic minority states - the Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah (formerly Karenni), Mon, Rakhine (or Arakan) and Shan and seven divisions, which are largely inhabited by the majority Bamar population. The demarcation of states and divisions remained unchanged until today (See Figure 1.1). According to Martin Smith, such a map is a political simplification. Over 100 different dialects and languages have been identified in Myanmar, and many unique ethnic cultures have survived late into the 20th century (Smith, 1991). The government's objectives of combining unity and diversity were turned into forced assimilation, evicting some non-Buddhist ethnic minorities from inhabitation in Myanmar. This has been the most striking reason for migration out of Myanmar, both internal and cross-border, and irregular migration can be said as a byproduct of forced displacements by government in improving the country's infrastructure.⁴

⁴ Refugee and IDP numbers rose considerably at the end of the 1980s, in the aftermath of the demonstrations of 1988, and with the loss of territory by the ethnic armies and the country's growing economic emergency. Cf. Brees in Forced Migration Issue No.30 (2008), p. 4.

Since Independence, the military government seemed to have only interests for expanding the size of the military in the name of “protecting the citizens,” the people of Myanmar strived to bring government’s attention to look for durable solutions for massive migration of Myanmar citizens into neighboring countries seeking protection.⁵ By the end of the 20th century, more than a million people have crossed the border to make a living outside of Myanmar. In Thailand alone, there is an estimated two million Myanmar living both legally and illegally, some of whom are seeking ways to be locally integrated while others apply for asylum, hoping for the resettlement in a third country (eg; United States, Australia, Canada, or Japan).⁶

The miseries currently facing the people of Myanmar cannot be wiped away with a few efforts and brief devotion. The country needs policies that lean towards sustainable development and that can revive the entire system effecting the population. The remedy for the miseries of migration out of Myanmar can be found among no other than the migrants themselves. And one of the remedies could be the proper application of social networks built by migrant workers and labor brokers that are significant in irregular migration of Mon migrant workers, discovered in this thesis.

1.1.2 Social Networks: The Most Effective Stimulus for Migration

This thesis follows the hidden footsteps of Mon migrant workers and discovers their traits of migration, especially their long-existing unique relationship with migrant brokers known as Pwe-sars, with whom they are connected through social networks. According to Maritsa V.

⁵ The Myanmar Army has a troop strength around 492,000, maintains the second largest active force in Southeast Asia after Vietnam's Vietnam People's Army.

⁶ If they are fleeing armed conflict or political persecution, they can receive protection and assistance in refugee camps in Thailand. However, due to the moratorium on refugee registration, those who fled after November 2005 are ineligible for protection. Some of them re-enter Myanmar while most of them have no choice but to stay outside the camps, where they are considered illegal migrants, subject to arrest and deportation.

Poros from City University of New York, a migrant's ability to move to a particular destination, find a job and housing, open up a business, participate in the development of their home country, and access health care can all be directly impacted by or even dependent upon the migrant's social network. In the case of Mon migrant workers, these networks help mitigate fear by providing them with access to new resources, introducing them to new locations, and resetting their goals for the future. These social networks allow migrants to expand their knowledge and experience while acting as shields if migrants require protection.

Migrant networks also determine whether and to what extent immigrants integrate into their host countries while also maintaining a connection to their home countries, a process known as transnationalism (Poros,2011). According to historians and renowned writers about Myanmar, such as Arthur Phayre (1883) and J.A Stewart (1937), the Mon have been living in the current area for the last 1,200 years, and therefore commuting between Myanmar and Thailand has been regarded as their "daily activity." Many Mon working in Thailand appear to be untroubled by the concept of transnationalism as Thailand has adopted many cultural, social and religious features of the Mon, most importantly the Buddhist religion which they first adopted from Ceylon in the 5th century (Thailand's World,2012).

Some of these networks are supported by the State while some exist informally. In the Southeastern part of Myanmar, there are social networks built by generations of ethnic nationalities in that region. Mon people adapt better to social and cultural changes that result from leaving from one context and entering another than other migrant workers of different ethnicities from Myanmar because of their strong social networks that exist in both countries. They have emphasized that social relations are central to understanding the processes of migration and immigrant incorporation. Through savings and investments, they have become

agents of change in their home communities. In some cases, these social networks project migration as a better option for many Mons who traditionally preferred to live as farmers and fishermen.

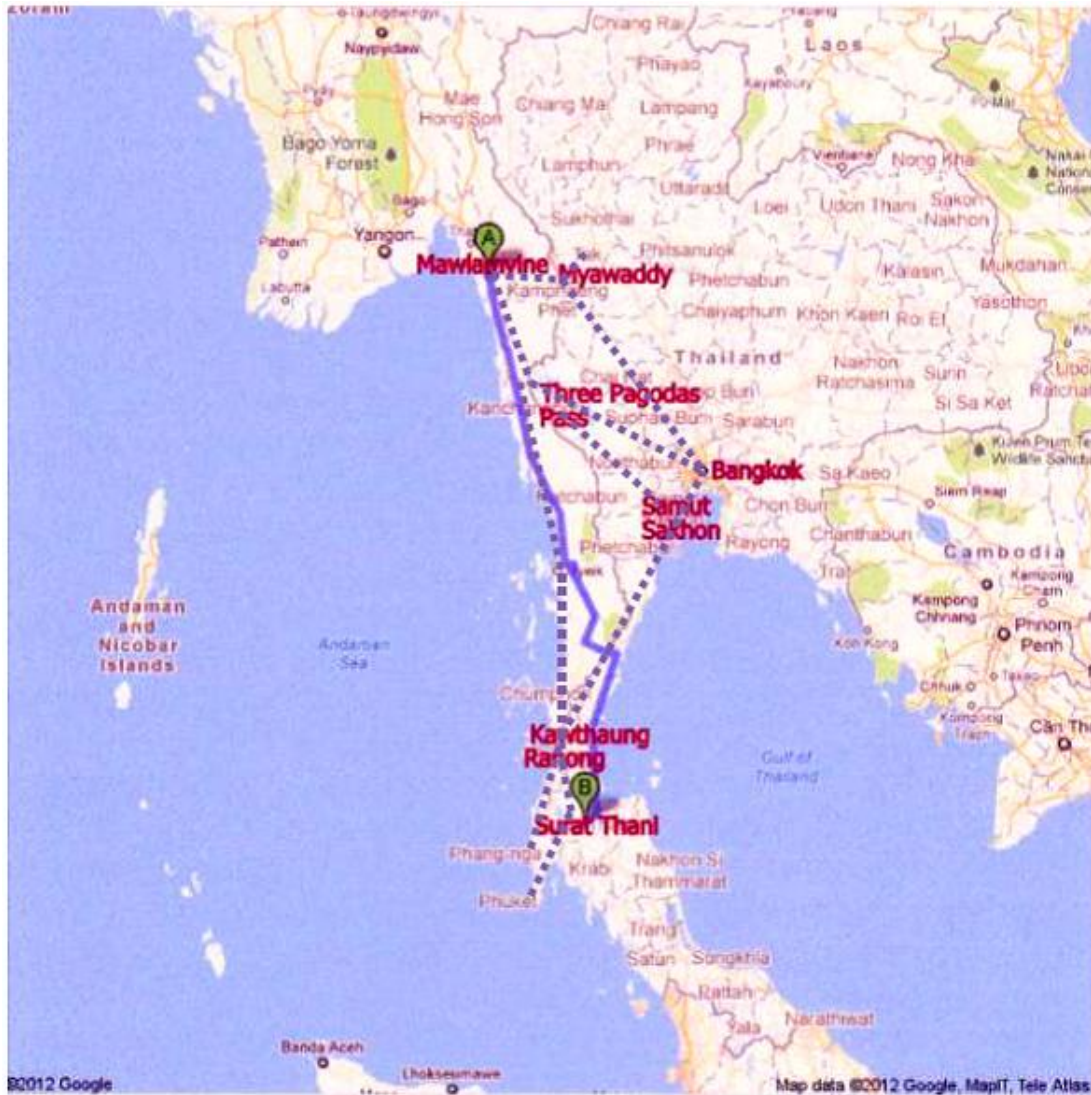
1.1.3 Pwe-sars or Agents of Social Networks

The home to many Mon people is Mon state, which is the South East region of Myanmar, which is geopolitically a very important region for Myanmar throughout history. It falls under two military commands, South East Command and Coastal Command, administratively one Division and two States: Tanintharyi Division and Mon and Karen States. This region has more than a thousand miles bordering with Thailand in the East and with a long coastal line in the West (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). People in this region have comparative advantage to emigrate than people from other parts of Myanmar as they have strong social networks and allocation of information with their Thai neighbors. This region is also known to be a receiving region of thousands of internal migrants. It has rich natural resources varying from rubber to fishery, looming and cotton production, and paddy and beans production to name a few.

Since the olden days, an internal migrant labor force was necessary to fill in the vacant jobs when the locals left for work in Thailand and this trend remains to this day. The region also holds two major border trade routes with Thailand: Myawaddy-Mae Sot and Kawthaung-Ranong trading routes (See Figure 1.2). Studies on socio-economic impacts of migration in Mon state shows that migration has been gaining momentum in different forms and different types. Long before human trafficking in the region became a focal study of the international community, there were people who traffic and migrant brokers who have been involved in brokerage businesses as a form of “family business.” A broker is called “Pwe-sar” in Myanmar language,

someone who is well known by the applicant, in both geographical and social terms. They mediate from unskilled labor migration to highly skilled migration, and are regarded as entrepreneurs of brokerage business.

Figure1.2 Concentration of Mon migrant workers and their main migration routes



Source: Map-Google; Data-Author's survey

Quite often, these Pwe-sars are viewed as human traffickers. This is because of their illegal migration routes and illegal transfer of labor from Myanmar to Thailand. The literal meaning of trafficking stands for “*transportation of goods or passengers*” according to the Oxford Dictionary. This thesis argues that not everyone who does trafficking in Mon state can be labeled as a “human trafficker,” because there are people who traffic passengers upon request of those passengers. Some of them are trafficking for what they believe as “liberating Mon people,” not for money or exchange of commodities. Pwe-sars in this thesis are also known as traffickers among their users. However, their status and nature of conducting business are different from “human traffickers” who are known for their illegal trade of human beings for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor.⁷

The earliest records from the 1960s household surveys show that Mons, who are known as excellent cooks and loyal housekeepers, have always been sought after as domestic workers in Myanmar. Rich and military families are not the only families that employ them, but also average-income families from the service sectors in the major cities like Yangon, Mandalay and Bago, have hired Mons as housekeepers, babysitters and cooks. It has always been a big business for brokers in Mon villages to recruit Mon women who are interested in living cities. In most cases, the husbands and fathers of these women either belong to New Mon State Party (NMSP)⁸ or are working overseas.

⁷ An excerpt from interviews with Pwe-sars and their user migrant workers.

⁸ New Mon State Party New Mon State Party (NMSP) was formed in July 1958 under the leadership of Nai Shwe Kyin (alias) Nai Ba Lwin just after a big surrender under the leadership of the Mon People’s Front (MPF) which took up armed resistance since 1948. There was dissension amongst the Mons on the promise given by U Nu who was Premier of the then Burmese government. U Nu promised that his government would help create an autonomous Mon State if Mons surrender and accept legality. With the lurking political intrigues by the military, few leaders of the MPF who were not convinced of the surrender parted ways with MPF and formed up the New Mon State Party to continue carrying on armed resistance.

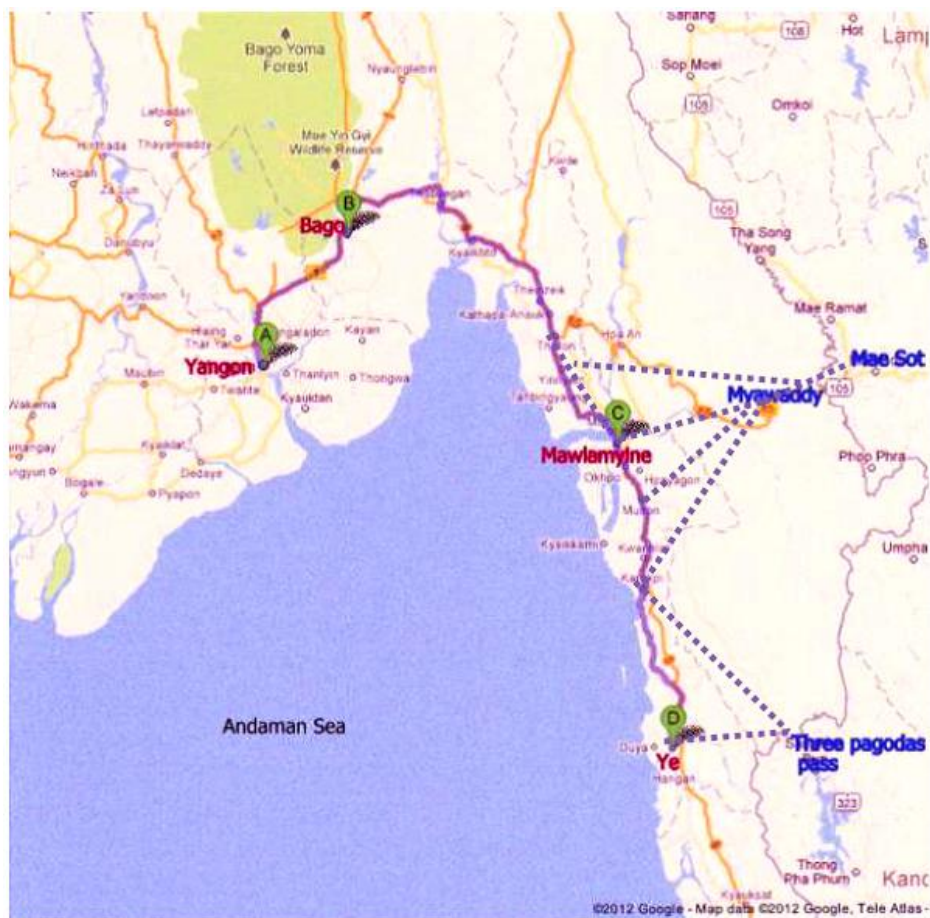
These local brokers' networks have expanded over the years. The members who are running these networks may be international brokers, corrupted police and immigration officers, returning migrants and, in some cases, former trafficked victims. There is a vague and convoluted involvement of a series of actors in labor brokerage that requires a lot of research and study on these Pwe-sars. In most cases, their role is not just brokering of labor and it is intriguing to find out that the significant positions that these Pwe-sars hold in the local communities. For instance, one of the interviewees turned out to be the daughter of a village Head. Her status in the community secured her business and she started working as Pwe-sar for domestic laborers in the late 1980s. She said that over the past two decades she has sent more than four to six thousand people, a business so busy that she obviously lost count.

Mon communities in both Myanmar and Thailand have established social networks through close-knit ties that connect their destinations with their place of origin. These ties influence the volume and direction of migration flows, the ability of migrants to learn the ropes at their destination, the making of immigrant niches, the educational performance of immigrant children, and so on (Higuchi,2010). Mon people may set out for different destinations but their first sources of contact have been Pwe-sars. Some interviewees considered Pwe-sars to be their comrades. In this thesis, Chapter Three discusses the role of these Pwe-sars and their positive and negative impacts on local people.

In many cases, Pwe-sars are represented as agents of these social networks. For instance, when a 22-year-old farm laborer Min Myo Oo from Kadar village (Mon State) left his village to work at a shrimp factory in Mahachai (Thailand) in 2003, he contacted a female broker who was one of Mon community organizers in Mahachai. This broker happened to be a friend of Min Myo Oo's aunt who was also working at the shrimp factory. The broker had a prominent social

status in both Mon state and Mahachai, and thus, Min Myo Oo and 13 other laborers from his village trusted the broker with all their available documents to take them to Thailand. Each of them was charged about \$200 for the service and Min Myo Oo was given \$450 by the broker for bringing other laborers along with him. Since then, he has been commuting between Mahachai and his village to recruit farm laborers to work for factories in Thailand. During the time of interview in 2011, he was a leader of more than 300 farm laborers from Kadar as well as two other villages nearby.

Figure 1.3 Major Internal Networks used by Pwe-sars (based on Mon Pwe-sars)



Source: Map-Google; Data- Author's Survey

1.1.4 Legal vs. Illegal Social Networks

Migrant workers are not the only group to have social networks because Pwe-sars also have their own networks. According to Mon state authorities, the government acknowledged the existence of informal migrant workers' networks in Mon villages, although they may not be registered. Some of the Mon migrant networks in Thailand were registered as cultural associations⁹. In the case of Pwe-sars, though existing in the society for many years, their job description has never been formalized as a legal job in Myanmar. Therefore, in the simplest term, Pwe-sars are illegal migrant brokers. Their networks are also regarded as illegal and the government, on the surface, has put a lot of effort in destroying their networks.

Before describing the irregular nature of Pwe-sars, it is important to know how this irregularity is defined and by whom. For the Mons, the border was never conceptualized as a demarcation of territories. It was simply a barrier between their families and friends. This means that Mons still consider part of Thailand and Myanmar as their land and many of them did not consider crossing the border with the help of Pwe-sars as an illegal activity. They believe that the border has separated Mon people in Thailand and Myanmar to freely practice their language, culture and exchange lifestyles.

Most of those whom are now labeled "illegal migrant workers," often recall their experience of having no identification cards, passports, labor cards or a requirement for a permission to cross borders. Their irregular migration inevitably focuses on their preservation of Mon civilization in both countries. Today's migration of Mons may be slightly confounded than their original movement. It is simply because the world today is more elaborated with rules and regulations, the political fashion of globalization. Every day, there is a movement of people and

⁹ Independent Mon News Agency (December, 2009)

the clandestine or irregular movements of Mon people have increased tremendously in the past two decades. They move within boundaries and beyond borders. And ever since globalization of the world economy has demanded acceleration of markets, goods and services, more people are encouraged or forced to cross borders.

Tracing the hidden footsteps in cross border migration is the most challenging and enthralling subject in the study of migration as recent trends requires a lot of consciousness. This is true particularly in Southeast Asia where emerging industrial countries like Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, became trade hubs quickly in the late 1990s and attracted millions from around the world. These countries pitch a high demand for labor and expertise, creating a neoliberal strategy that is comprised of institutional and comprehensive practices through which neighboring countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam mobilize their citizens and send them to these countries.

Since the early 1990s, there has been an unprecedented number of Myanmar migrants migrating to the neighboring Thailand, in conjunction with full employment and demand for labor there. According to the Thai Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor in 2009, the number of foreign laborers in Thailand was estimated to be about two million, out of which 1.3 million were from CLM¹⁰ countries, and Myanmar migrants accounted for 82% of them. The government, on the other hand, took certain important steps and measures in order to facilitate regular migration to promote safe migration.

In 1990, the government established the Overseas Employment Service as a branch of Employment and Training Section under the Ministry of Labor. Later in July 1999, the overseas employment Law was enacted, followed by the Memorandum of Understanding between

¹⁰ Abbreviation of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar

Myanmar and Thailand in 2003 to cooperate in the employment of workers. There were other efforts made by the government to prevent Myanmar migrant workers from leaving the country and working in Thailand as irregular migrants. However, some acts are done without having proper inspections.

For example, in 2008, it was reported that the Myanmar government detained several potential migrant workers based on an assumption that they were leaving the country without valid documentation, using the Myanmar Immigration Act (Emergency Provision) of 1947 and Anti-Trafficking in Person Law of 2005. Irregular migration poses very real dilemmas for states, as well as exposing migrants themselves to insecurity and vulnerability. Most states have, nevertheless, failed to manage or control irregular migration effectively or efficiently. Therefore, new, more effective and coherent approaches are required to address the issue of irregular migration, that recognizes both the concerns of states in this respect and the need to protect the rights of irregular migrants (Koser,2005).

Migrants without legal documentation that are either returned or deported from Thailand are held in the detention centers in Myawaddy and Kawthaung. Recently, many check points have been established along the routes to the border towns Myawaddy and Kawthaung to control the movement of people and smuggling of commodities. These checkpoints are tasked with law enforcement personnel: immigration officers, custom officers, military personnel and anti-trafficking task force officers. They can interrogate passengers as they like and can detain anyone suspicious for border-crossing.¹¹

It is important to be realistic about expectations. Irregular migration will continue for the foreseeable future, although it may be possible to reduce its scale. One reason is that the forces

¹¹ Interview with senior official from Ministry of Immigration and Population, Myanmar

that determine the scale of international migration are powerful, like the growing disparities in the level of prosperity and human security experienced by different societies, and the ability to modify them is very limited (Crisp and Dessalegne,2002). In addition, even if there is momentum towards a degree of liberalization in certain parts of the world, built up by issues such as addressing the so-called demographic deficit, regular migration channels will not be opened on a scale sufficient to satisfy the total demand to move.

Whether the networks are legal or illegal, Mon migrants' social networks along with Pwe-sars' networks exist interdependently in both Myanmar and Thailand. These networks have been and will be the main reason why Mon people from Mon state and other parts of Myanmar endeavor migration in all forms. These networks can be utilized by governments and NGOs to safeguard the movement of people and improve the conditions of families, especially in the areas of children's education and welfare of women. Since September 2011, several local authorities started a conference where they invite small community leaders to discuss the challenges in their villages and the difficulties that lead to choosing irregular migration. Such positive initiatives are likely to encourage these informal networks to become formal and actively participating in community development and the building of social capital in the region.

1.2 Purpose

The purposes of this study stem from the main research questions: (1) do the benefits added to the Mon migrants' standards of living sufficiently justify all the risks associated with their irregular migrations, and (2) does issuing permits for Pwe-sar offer an alternative to help mitigate some of these risks. It is necessary to study the pattern of migration chosen by Mon

migrant workers and to identify Pwe-sars' network ties and their functions in order to answer these questions.

In Myanmar, the formation and functions of social networks operated by migrants and Pwe-sars and their impact on irregular migration flows are yet to be explored. Analyzing Pwe-sar and the impact they have over migrant workers leads to one of the main purposes of this thesis. The thesis aims to focus on legalization of migrant networks that determine the scale and direction of migration flows from Myanmar, using the data of Mon migrant workers and their families. It also seeks to reveal that migration from Myanmar, including irregular, occurred through migrants' and Pwe-sars' social networks. It intends to find out alternatives to extinguishing the long-existed Pwe-sar networks in Myanmar.

The word Pwe-sar is very familiar to every Myanmar and yet very alien when it comes to the context. Because of their unique continuation and the relationship they have with migrant workers, this thesis went through the historical background of Pwe-sars and their roles in the community in different eras. Their most current and embryonic role as labor brokers of irregular migrant workers has brought the attention of international community and the governments involved, and yet it has brought the most attention of potential migrant workers who are not necessarily irregular migrants. Among all the discoveries in this thesis, the most intriguing one is migrant workers' choice of irregular migration with Pwe-sars when they have other options.

In the meantime, the reality facing irregular migrant workers is quite discouraging for potential migrant workers from Myanmar. In Thailand, migrants from Myanmar who are detained for irregular entry are generally not prosecuted by the Thai authorities and are usually released from the Thai Immigration Center if they volunteer to be deported (Huguet and Punpung,2005). Many of these returns are mainly informal and not arranged by governments of

both countries. In Myawaddy, the governments arrange the official return of undocumented migrant workers once a month. The deportees are taken to the unofficial border crossings and permitted to walk across the border back to Myanmar. Eventually, these people try to enter Thailand again, unquestionably, through illegal routes with Pwe-sars.

Since the cost of migration is relatively lower for the people in this region, it is rare to find a household that has not experienced cross-border migration in Mon state. Moreover, the network and communication with those who already left for Thailand (in recent years, Malaysia) are well established within the communities. According to the survey in Balu-kyun¹², at least one family member is either currently working abroad or returned (either permanently or temporarily) and has a family member who is planning to migrate. This phenomenon under international migration is considered as chain migration and could be exposed to the risk of human trafficking. The findings in this thesis intends to corroborate that Pwe-sars becoming legitimate agents, who are still sought after by migrant workers, their families and potential migrants, may be the most feasible solution to safeguard the migration from Myanmar.

1.3 Analytical Hypotheses

In order to address those issues, this study will present the following hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that more than 90 percent of Mon migrant workers chose Pwe-sar over other migration agents, knowingly that they could get into trouble. All operations carried out by Pwe-sars in migration are highly risky and very often result in migrant workers getting detained, imprisoned and sometimes killed during movement. Yet, migrant workers chose Pwe-sars to

¹² Balu-kyun, Hintha-kyun and Kalagok-kyun are the three most important islands of Mon state.

accommodate their irregular movement due to the low cost and minimum amount of processing time. This has a huge impact on potential migrant workers as well. Hence, it can be analyzed as “high risk-high return” for migrant workers as they rely on Pwe-sars and believe that Pwe-sars can help them reach their destinations even though they were exposed to many risks.

The second hypothesis is that Mon migrants workers believed that by operating their migration clandestinely through Pwe-sars, Mon migrant workers achieved a certain degree of independence in their movement where they avoided direct control of central government. However, their irregular status leaves them vulnerable to exploitations, torture or inhumane treatments especially at their work place. This suggests that control policies have unintended consequences. Control policies have probably been to fuel the growth in migrant smuggling (Koser,2005). Mon migrants choose irregular migration knowingly that there is a high possibility of being smuggled. Even where smugglers are not involved, control policies have often pushed migrants to more dangerous and complicated ways of crossing borders and remaining illegally (MPI 2004a).

The third hypothesis is that Mon migrant workers have utilized social networks to protect their interests and achieve their goals. The resilient Mon communities in both Myanmar and Thailand are connected by continued movement of Mons between the two countries. As the migrant systems theory suggests, places of origin and destination are connected by chain migration, establishing mother-and-daughter communities across borders (Massey et al. 1987). Mon people established migration long before the borders were set up. The momentum can be very hard to stop (Koser,2005). In part, this is a result of social networks and chain migration (Boyd, 1989; Gurak and Caces 1992, Koser 1997).

Social networks are crucial for Mon migration. They rely on networks built by family members, friends, colleagues, other migrant workers and state-supported migrant networks. Pwe-sars are major facilitators of migration, particularly irregular migration, of Mon people. In the study, migrants identified two types of migrant brokers: (1) the insider or migrant brokers in their inner-circle (family, friends and relatives); (2) the outsider or migrant brokers that operate in different locations or outer-circles and are not known to the migrants directly¹³.

According to sociologist Mark Granovetter, social networks can be divided into those with strong ties and those with weak ties, each serving different purposes (Granovetter, 1973). They provide three resources necessary to startup businesses: experience, information and guarantee, and finance (Bailey & Waldinger, 1991; Min, 1988). Following Granovetter (1973), functions of these ties can be hypothesized as either weak or strong. In this thesis, based on migrant workers' corroboration, strong ties are defined as ties between migrant workers and Pwe-sars who are their family members, friends or relatives, that have a high level of trust and are evaluated positively by migrant workers. Weak ties are defined as ties between migrant workers and brokers from outer circles, for example state-supported Overseas Employment Companies or overseas job brokers. Migrant workers and their families are inclined to distrust the outer-circle brokers and evaluate their service negatively compared to Pwe-sars.

The fourth hypothesis is that Pwe-sars who are family, friends or relatives of migrant workers establish strong ties with migrant workers that are usually stable and difficult to dissolve. Migrants and Pwe-sars of such ties coexist in the same network and these networks are the primary source of financial contributions to investment. However, they have limited efficiency as these networks usually cannot perform other important chores such as the source of

¹³ To avoid confusion, the word Pwe-sar be used only for migrant brokers in the inner circle The outsider migrant brokers include licensed overseas employment companies (OECs) and informal overseas job brokers (OJBs)

information and guarantee (Granovetter,1973). Although these Pwe-sars' networks have a high level of trust by migrant workers, they are informal and are operated illegally and therefore expose migrant workers to a series of risks. And because of their homogeneity, their networks are limited to only a number of people that usually do not carry a range of options and information crucial to the survival of migrant workers. However, as these networks are stable, the operations are going strong, regardless of the risks associated with them.

On the other hand, networks of licensed overseas employment companies (OECs) or overseas job brokers (OJBs) and migrant workers compose weak ties. It is shown in the survey results that migrant workers were not keen to keep their associations with these networks as they were not important for financial assistance and their migration services were costly and time-consuming. However, the multifaceted nature of these networks tends to facilitate migrant workers in gaining the necessary experience and information. Overseas employment companies are usually much bigger networks than OJBs who exist informally like Pwe-sars. These companies can be sources of information and a guarantee to Mon migrant workers (eg; for their room rent, work contracts, residency, etc) due to their legal status. These companies officially recruit migrant workers for G2G (government-to-government) agreements.

The fifth and last hypothesis in this study is that operating migration through legal routes not only provided safety and assistance to the migrants, but also protects migrants' rights. Migrant workers who used legal migration services have proven results that their legal rights were protected and that they did not have to live in fear of being captured by the police. Hitherto, it is contradictory that Overseas Employment companies are not favored and trusted by Mon migrant workers even though they are useful in providing resources that are not available within Mon communities. Both formal and informal social networks are important for migrant workers

and their families. It is not only important in migration but also in other social and financial aspects. The merits of utilizing and becoming a part of formal social networks are rather unknown to the migrant communities in Mon state. Most of the households are used to traditional social networks where one of their family members is Pwe-sar. They did not support the idea of their migrant and Pwe-sar networks becoming formal as they assumed legalization of migration would bring direct involvement of State in their daily migration affairs.

Compared to illegal Pwe-sars and Overseas job brokers, the licensed Overseas Employment Companies offer much better security and advantages. Although the misconducts of some companies made it even more difficult for Mon migrant workers to believe in legalization, Mon communities have been working closely with officials to improve the migrant workers' conditions. As of 2011, there are 137 registered overseas employment companies in Myanmar¹⁴. According to provisions of Foreign Employment Law (99) Section 25, Sub-section (d), these licensed agencies have to take responsibilities of the workers to enjoy the rights fully, when they are deprived of rights in foreign countries. However, it is discovered that many of these companies have not assumed responsibility properly and were overlooked once the migrants began settling in their work places. Although the government responded by taking necessary action on licensed employment agencies and brokers who do not obey existing laws, exploitation still exists in many different forms. In brief, licensed labor brokerage agencies' misconduct discourages people from utilizing legal services and thereby indirectly supports migrant workers to choose illegal Pwe-sars' networks for overseas jobs.

¹⁴ They are all located in Yangon and some operate field offices with a few agents.

1.4 Scope and Data Collection

This study deals with mostly intangible aspects of migration. First of all, it studies the irregular character of the movement of people, which is the most difficult to predict and comprehend. Secondly, it deals with mixed emotions of people who became either stateless or citizens of another country in their own land. Thirdly, it locates the indicators of where this irregular migration is going in the near future. It recognizes the importance of statelessness of migrants' children and the uncertainties facing the parents because of their illegality. Therefore, the planning of data collection and field survey required careful analyses of geopolitical conditions, the involvement of different actors and time frames, distances and locations.

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 backgrounds and expertise but differed in experience. Six out of 15 Pwe-sars were between 27-35 years of age, whereas the rest were in their forties. They were all of 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 township, six from Mudon township, four from Thanbyuzayat township, five from Kyaikmaraw township, and five from Thaton township. All Pwe-sars were of Mon ethnicity and

have lived inside Mon state all their lives. Only four of them have been overseas themselves, while the rest operate overseas job searches 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. 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.

Table 1.1 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

They also provided information on migration experience, number of years working overseas, their choice of migration facilitator, duration of process for migration, and the cost and 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 the migrants' community, and an Overseas Employment Company that was a legal firm working as an agent for countries that

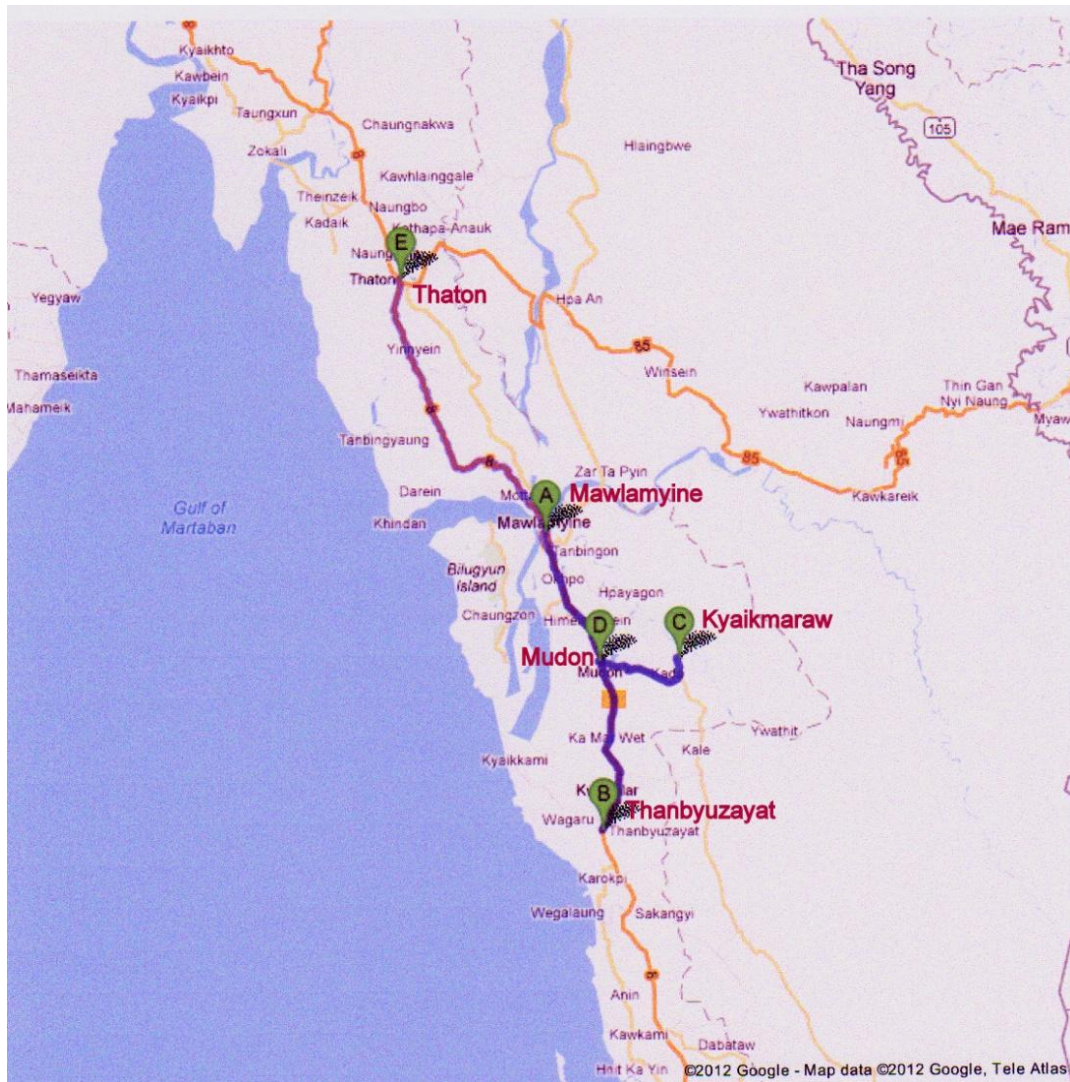
signed MOUs with Myanmar government and that were of interest to Myanmar migrant workers.

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 led by a lecturer in Yangon Institute of Economics. The interviewees provided detailed descriptions of each migration route that they took and are planning to take. 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.

Most of the surveys focused on economic factors such as sellers, consumers, workers and investors. In this study, not only traders, small business owners and laborers but also those who were engaged in arts and crafts, and teaching profession are considered important as they play crucial roles in making migration decisions. For the purpose of interviewees' confidentiality, real names of the villages and interviewees are not disclosed. In Myanmar, such data of households with migration history does not exist and so is the case for the data for potential migrants in Mon state. Therefore, the sample households were selected by referral sampling methods. Of the surveyed actors, 33.6% represented agriculture and rubber industry, 22.6% small businesses, 15% from the fishery industry, 14.9% came from general and agricultural laborers, 10.9% of them worked as artists, craftsmen, blacksmith, and 3% belonged to either teachers at local (village) primary schools or working as private tutors, or as 'guides'.¹⁵

¹⁵ 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.

Figure 1.4 Five Study Townships in Mon State



Source: Map-Google

Based on interview results, it can be analyzed that migrant workers and their families favored Pwe-sars over any other migration facilitators. The reason was not only because migration fees charged by Pwe-sars were usually cheaper and the processing time for migration was shorter, but also because of their close relationships to the migrants and their families. However, according to the migrants, the risk of being deported, detained and captured by the

local police or cheated by the other labor brokers in Thailand was the highest with Pwe-sars. Due to Pwe-sars' illegal status, the migration process they operated involves bribing several corrupted officials, using highly-risky transportation routes and dealing with smugglers. Choosing Mon state as the case study opened doors to many unrequited questions about irregular migration, such as why Mon and other ethnic minorities have the tendency of following irregular migration and why this irregular migration is ongoing even with several major developments taking place in the area.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This thesis attempts to bridge several social and economic ideologies for a considerable part of the theoretical background of Mon's migration. Although the main argument is constructed on Social network theories, it initiates linkage with other useful theories of migration and sociology. And since it requires understanding of history of Mon immigration to Thailand and the current political glitches that lead to irregular migration, the study relates theories that are applicable to ongoing problems. The oldest theory of migration is neo-classical economic theory. According to this theory, wage differences between regions are the main reason for labor migration. The current trend of Mon migration to Thailand is the perfect example because such wage differences are due to geographic differences in labor demand and labor supply, although other factors might play an important role as well, e.g. labor productivity or the degree of organization of workers.

When applying neo-classical economics to international migration, it can be said that countries with a shortage of labor relative to capital have a high equilibrium wage, whereas countries with a relatively high labor supply have a low equilibrium wage. Due to these wage

differences, labor flows take place from low-wage to high-wage countries (Borjas, 1989; Massey et al., 1993, 1998; Bauer and Zimmermann, 1995). Mon state has suffered series of armed conflicts between NMSP and Myanmar military that resulted in tardy economic and social developments in the region. One interviewee was a factory worker in the rubber industry in Thaton Township who made under \$40 per month in 2009¹⁶. His wife made double the amount of that income working in a shoe factory in Thailand the same year. Several theoretical models are proposed in this chapter to clarify the state of migration for Mons.

Anthony Giddens' "Central problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analyses" (1979) and "The Construction of Society" (1984) were cited to analyze the individual behaviors of Mons in making a decision to migrate. Survey data shows that the individual behavior of these migrants was partially influenced by availability of work, information and security in urban areas. Sometimes, cities are safer to commute than in the villages that occasionally host armed conflicts between resistant forces and military. Interviewees in Mawlamyine and Thaton appeared to be more informative and had more access to resources than those from Kyaikmaraw and other smaller townships.

The comparison of Mon migration to international migration is also significant as it allows the understanding of other patterns of migration that resemble to that of the Mons' patterns, and durable solutions can be drawn based on experiences learnt. Massey et al. 1993, 1998) and Schoorl (1995) distinguish theoretical approaches of international migration into two categories, theoretical approaches explaining the initiation of migration and theoretical approaches explaining the continuation of migration. In this theoretical overview, a similar distinction is also made. The neo-classical economic theory, the dual labor market theory, the

¹⁶ One dollar was equivalent to 1,125 kyats

new economics of labor migration, and the world systems theory try to explain the initiation of migration (Jennissen,2004).

An example of an indicator that causes an international migration flow between two countries is wage difference between these two countries. It is a mistake to assume that the initiation of international migration flows (e.g. a wage difference) only acts in a short space of time. Wage differences between countries may persist for decades. This initiation of migration may instigate international labor flows that persist as long as these wage differences continue. International migration itself may even exacerbate the initiation. Income inequality, for instance, may be the initiation of migration from a country. Subsequently, if remittances or return migration cause increased inequality in the sending society, emigration leads to more emigration.

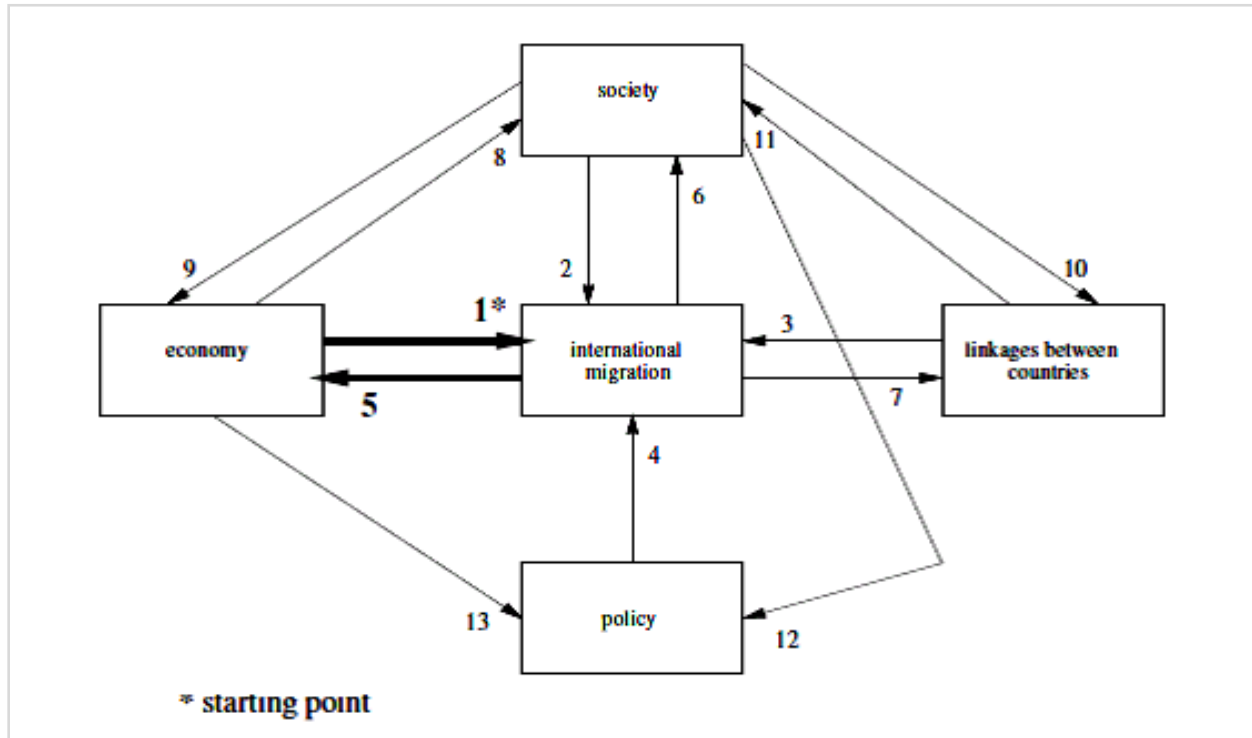
On Mon migrants' decision to migrate, the study referred to 'The New Economics of Labor Migration' (Figure 1.5). Many migrants appeared to have gone through a dilemma of whether they should stay or go. Stark and Bloom (1985) argue that the decision to become a labor migrant cannot only be explained at the level of individual workers, but also wider social entities have to be taken into account as well. One of the social entities to which they refer is the household. Households tend to be risk avoiding when the household income is involved. One way of reducing the risk of insufficient household income is labor migration of a family member. Family members abroad may send remittances. According to the new economics of labor migration, these remittances have a positive impact on the economy in poor sending countries as households with a family member abroad lose production and investment restrictions (Taylor, 1999).

On the account of Mon migrant workers migrating from Thailand to Malaysia and spreading out to build their networks in Singapore and Korea, it can be analyzed that the Mon

communities in each of these countries are not only connected by family networks but also by their similar culture, religion and other aspects. An international migration system consists of a group of receiving (core) countries that are linked to a set of sending countries by relatively large flows and counter flows of migrants (Fawcett and Arnold, 1987; Massey et al., 1993). Countries in a migration system are not only connected by people but also by other types of linkages (Fawcett, 1989). Kritz and Zlotnik (1992, p. 3, see Figure 3.1) distinguish the latter into historical, cultural, colonial and technological linkages. A migration system is situated within a particular context. Kritz and Zlotnik distinguish the social, political, demographic and economic context.

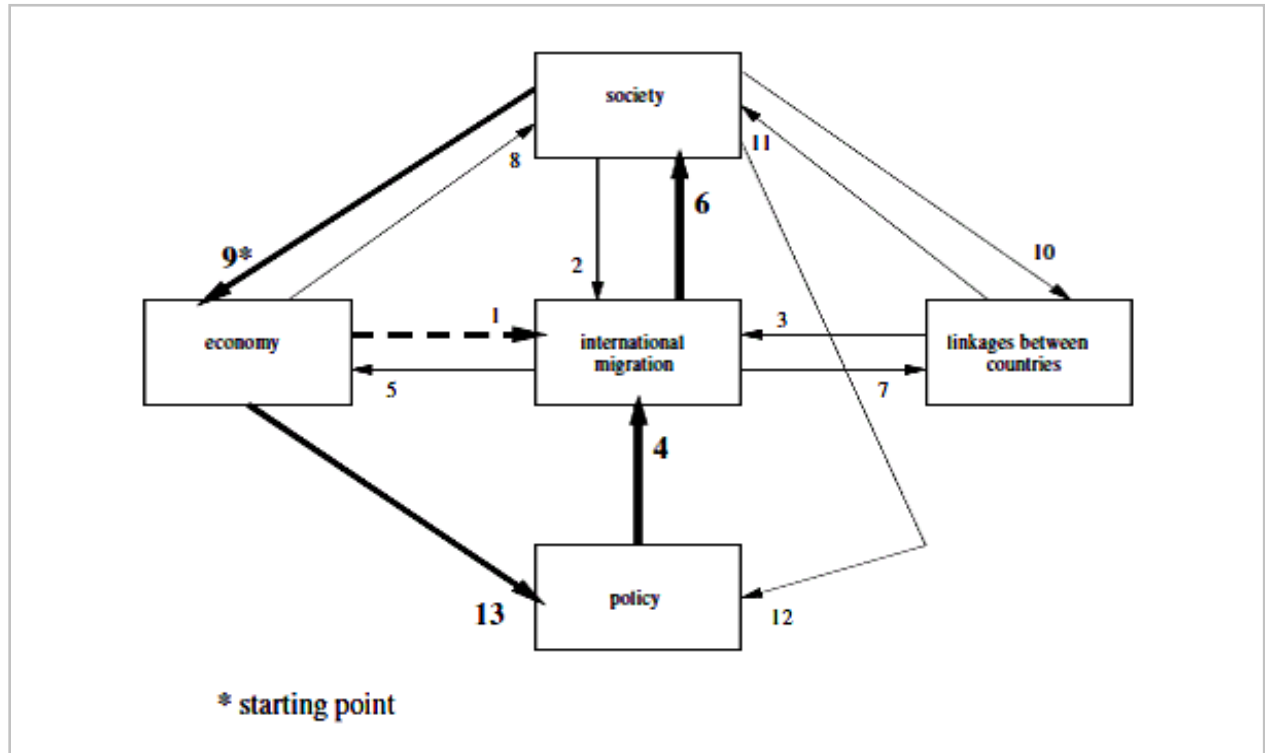
Although one can argue that Mon immigration to Thailand was based on political reasons rather than economical, according to ‘the dual labor market theory,’ such international migration is mainly caused by pull factors in the developed migrant-receiving countries. Thailand is one of the fastest growing economies in Southeast Asia. According to this theory, segments in the labor markets in these countries may be distinguished as being primary or secondary in nature. The primary segment is characterized by capital-intensive production methods and predominantly high-skilled labor, while the secondary segment is characterized by labor-intensive methods of production and predominantly low-skilled labor. The dual labor market theory assumes that international labor migration stems from labor demands in the labor-intensive segment of modern industrial societies (receiving countries) (Piore, 1979; Massey et al., 1993). As mentioned earlier, Thailand’s labor shortage in the beginning of the 21st Century opened many employment opportunities for workers from Myanmar.

Figure 1.5 The New Economics of Labor Migration



Source: Jennissen (2004) based on Stark&Bloom (1985)

Figure 1.6 The dual labor market theory



Source: Jennissen (2004) based on Piore (1972)

Piore (1979) gives three possible explanations for the demand for foreign workers in modern industrial societies, which are general labor shortages, the need to fill the bottom positions in the job hierarchy, and labor shortages in the secondary segment of a dual labor market. The last explanation is also covered by the first two explanations. General labor shortages lead to vacancies at the bottom positions in the job hierarchy. In addition to general labor shortages, there may be specific shortages at the bottom of the job hierarchy arising from motivational problems and demographic and social changes in modern industrial societies (Massey *et al.*, 1993). Motivational problems come about because jobs at the bottom of the

hierarchy are often associated with low social status and because the opportunities for upward mobility are generally low.

Network theory tries to explain why international migration is an ongoing phenomenon. International migrants change the ethnic composition in receiving countries. As a result of large inflows of international migrants, migrant networks may be formed. These networks enhance the probability of employment and a decent income. Together with lower costs of migration, the increased probability of employment and a decent income enlarge the expected net return to migration. This enlarged expected net return to migration increases the volume of international migration, thereby increasing the migrant population.

Migrant networks help potential migrants, for instance, by contributing to financing the journey, helping to find a job or appropriate accommodation, or by giving information about education possibilities or access to social security (Esveldt *et al.*, 1995). When this theory is put in the context of the microeconomic level of individual choice, networks lower the costs of migration and increase the probability of employment at the destination and decrease the probability of deportation. In other words, the presence of this form of social capital enlarges the expected net return to migration. In this thesis, this is explained by the Pwe-sars' network and their unique relationships with the migrants.

Similar to network theory, institutional theory tries to explain why international migration is ongoing. Large international migration flows strengthen material linkages between countries. If, for instance, travelling between the sending and receiving country increases, cheap and frequent flight connections will be established. In this way, moving costs of future migrants will become lower. Subsequently, such lowering costs of mobility may lower the threshold that deters potential migrants from migration. Institutions may also be working with

already settled migrants (i.e. voluntary organizations that help migrants to settle down in the host society). These institutions strengthen cultural linkages between countries. For example, they lower the (psychological) costs because of the assimilation in the receiving society (Jennissen,2004:55-56).

The synthesis of theories illustrates the important aspects of migration and network and institutional theories allow the in-depth analyses of Pwe-sars and migrants. These theories are applied to the current situation of Mon migrants where the presence of a large Mon migrant network in Thailand increase the probability of employment and lower the costs of accompanying migration. Institutions that come about because of a large inflow of migrants lower the costs of migration too. The influence of economic determinants on international migration flows are quantified by treating the variables like ethnicity, colonial past, language or the political situation collectively.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two discusses the detailed historiography of Mon people and their migration chronicles, providing the insights of how they have maintained their population in both Myanmar and Thailand. It documents various literature applied to the study of Mon civilization and the personal journeys of Mon migrant workers. It also highlights the flow of internal migration into Mon state, how the state has to fill local labor shortage in Mon state. More importantly, it documents the reason of why many Mon people gave up their farm lands and living with family to work overseas. It asserts Mon people's understanding of migration and introduces the role of Pwe-sars in Mon state. Chapter Three will elaborate the role of middlemen or Pwe-sars in Myanmar. It will argue the binary paradigm of the Pwe-sars and

focuses on their analogous nature to the human traffickers. It stresses the point that Pwe-sars and Mon migrant workers have a unique relationship, and how Mon people portray the role of Pwe-sars as shields for irregular migrant workers.

In Chapter Four, details of field study in five survey townships in Mon state and interviews with Pwe-sars are explained along with analytical hypotheses. This chapter highlights different perspectives of formal and informal migration, while reflecting on the reality of irregular migration that requires proper legal action to safeguard migration. Chapter Five questions Myanmar's perspective of legalism and human security. It reviews the current and earlier Immigration Laws of Thailand that Myanmar migrants have to deal with. It underlines the aperture among migration theories and how the subject of migration is at the center of other major studies and its relationship to human security. Finally, Chapter Six concludes the study with recommendations for the future study and policy making in Myanmar. This chapter particularly correlates the impacts of recent political transformations to the work that was not finished by the previous governments in Myanmar.