

Chapter 2

Mon: The State and its People

2.1 General View of Mon State

2.1.1 Topography

Mon state (မွန်ပြည်နယ်) is situated between latitudes 14°52' north and 17°32' north and longitudes 96° 51 ` east and 98° 13' east. It is located in the Southern part of Myanmar, bordering Bago Division in the North, Kayin State in the East, Taninthayi Division in the South and Thailand (Kanchanaburi Province) in the Southeast. On its West, there is Andaman Sea and Gulf of Mottama, formerly known as Gulf of Martaban where Thanlwin and Sittaung rivers empty into it. The Daw-na range forms a natural border between Mon and Kayin states. The total area is 4,747.8 square-miles (12,155 square kilometer) with ten townships and 450 wards and villages-tracts in Mawlamyine and Thaton Districts.(Modins,2002)

Its capital Mawlamyine is the third largest city in Myanmar. The population of Mon state is over 2.8 million (as of February 2005) and almost 70 percent of village population is said to be outside of the State. The majority are Mons however, there is a large number of ethnic Bamar, as well as members of the Kayin and Pa-O ethnic groups and a small, dwindling Anglo-Burmese community. There is a Thai Community in Kyaikkami (a resort town located in South of Mawlamyine). Although Mons share a lot of similarities to Bamar people, many do not speak the Myanmar language and their main language is Mon where analogous dialects are spoken in villages. (Modins, 2002)

Islands such as Belu-kyun¹, Kalagok-Kyun, Hinthakyun, Green Island and Onion Island fringe the coast. Mon State has a tropical climate and has temperate weather as it is located in the low latitude zone and near the sea. Unlike many states and divisions in Myanmar that has major difference in temperature during hot and cold seasons², the average temperature of Mawlamyine in January (cold season) is 78°F (25.6°C) and in April(hot season) is 85°F (29.4°C). Rain is especially heavy in July and August where annual rainfall in Mawlamyine is 190 inches (4.8 m) and in Thaton is 217 inches (5.5 m). (Modins,2002)

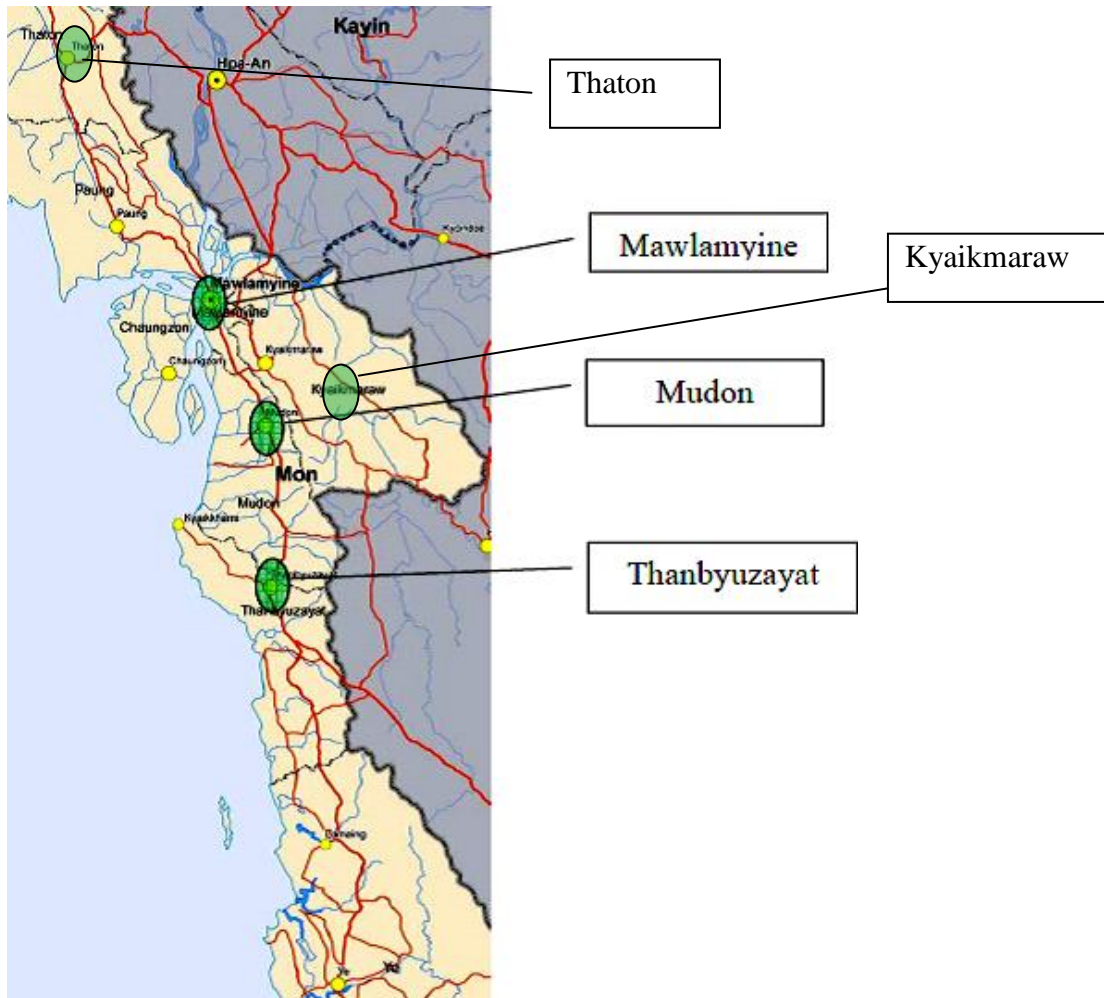
Mon State is rich with natural resources and has a cultivated area of nearly 4.5 million acres (18,000 km²), mostly under rice. The major secondary crop is rubber and rubber plantations are found in the mountainous areas along with orchid plantations. Coastal fishing and related industries such as production of dried fish, fish sauce and agar-agar are popular in the southern part, Ye district. Mon is also known for their mass production of Betel nut which is an important supply for many betel-chewing lovers in Myanmar. Paper, sugar and cashew nuts production are also part of the State's major economy.

Evergreen forests are symbol of the State where forests cover approximately half of the area and Thaton has a major factory of rubber products run by Ministry of Industry (1). Timber production is one of the major contributors to the economy of Mon state. Abundance of minerals including salt, antimony and granite forest products, and natural gas reserves are also significant economies of the state. (Modins, 2002)

¹ 'Kyun' means island in Myanmar language

² Myanmar has three seasons namely Hot (March~ May), Rainy (June~ October), Cold (November~ February).

Figure 2.1 Map of Mon State



Source: Myanmar Management Information Unit (MIMU)

Mon state has transportation advantages as its capital and other important townships can be easily reached by trains, bus, sea and airlines. The roads connecting villages and townships have been reconstructed recently that allow people to commute faster and easier. The newly opened Mawlamyine Bridge also provide quick access from southern Ye to North Bago and Yangon by a day journey. Phayar Thone Su town (also known as Three Pagoda Pass) is an alternative route which communicates Mon state with the neighboring Kanchanaburi province of Thailand.

Importantly, Mon State is also home to two “National Development Projects,” natural gas pipelines originating in Kanbauk, in northern Taninthayi Division, just below the southern tip of Mon State. One, built in 1998, runs east, straight across Taninthayi and into Thailand, while the other, built in 2000, traverses nearly the entire length of Mon State before feeding into a large government owned cement factory in Myaingkalay, Karen State. The government considered the pipelines to be highly vulnerable and therefore the pipelines have been guarded by the army at some points as there have been fifteen explosive accidents since the first pipeline was built in 1998. Of these explosions, seven were substantial, and six have been attributed to rebel activity. The KNU is widely understood to have been responsible for two, though it has never officially claimed responsibility, while the origins of the others are unknown (Mon Forum,2008).

2.1.2 Characteristics of the Region

Mon state falls under South-Eastern region of Myanmar. There are two states and one division that are in this region; Kayin and Mon States, and Taninthayi Division. The area covers 86,025 square kilometer (Myanmar Facts and Figures Yearbook ,2002) and the population of approximately 6.5 million. This region is crucial for socio-economy and politics of Myanmar and Thai-Myanmar relationship. It is under administrative authority of Southeast Command and Coastal Command (Aung Kyaw Than, 2010).Throughout history, the gulf of Mottama plays an important role for trade, immigration and naval security.

There are two major and important border trade routes passing through this region; Yangon-Myawaddy-Maesot route connecting Mae Sot (Thailand), and Yangon-Mawlamyine- Ye-Dawei-Myeik-Kawthaung, the route that connects major economic cities in Myanmar all the way to Ranong (Thailand). The first route Yangon-Myawaddy-Maesot is the shortest and most

cost-effective route to reach the border crossing point. It takes a maximum 12 hours by land transport from Yangon to Myawaddy. Due to the narrow passage over the Dawna range, the road between Kawkareik and Myawaddy allows only a one-way drive per day.³

Table 2.1 Townships and Village tracts in Mon State

No.	Township	Village tracts
1	Mawlamyine	19
2	Kyaikmaraw	43
3	Mudon	38
4	Thanbyuzayat	26
5	Ye	28
6	Chaungzon	42
7	Thaton	46
8	Kyaikhto	35
9	Bilin	50
10	Paung	48

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation Service (MOAI)

Myawaddy is a major border trade station that is crowded with cargo flows from and to Thailand. It has a population of approximately 60,000 however, and it is always busy with immigrants and migrant workers, traders and laborers. The ‘goodwill friendship bridge’ is the only main official gate for exit from and entry to Myanmar and Thailand in Myawaddy. Yet,

³ Various Sources: The New Light of Myanmar, national newspaper, Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV-national broadcasting station), interviews with the locals

there are many unofficial gates along the small shallow Moei river and Thaung Yin river. During the dry season, people can actually cross the river by walking and they cross with motor car tyre tubes when the water level is high.⁴

The second route, Yangon-Mawlamyine-Ye-Dawei-Myeik-Kawthaung, is a very long and time-consuming route. It is costly to utilize as well. It connects the southern-most outpost of Myanmar, Kawthaung and Ranong in Thailand. Kawthaung was known as Victoria Point during the British rule (1824-1948). It is geographically and demographically significant. It is located at the mouth of Kyan river on the Malay Peninsula and borders with Thailand. It is a sister city of Phuket, Thailand. The majority of Kawthaung's population is made up of Bamar, Thai and other ethnic minorities such as the Shan, Kayin, and Mon. Some Thai Muslims, alongside the Salone Sea Gypsies and Malays can also be found in Kawthaung. Burmese-Chinese and Burmese-Indians, who migrated to Kawthaung during colonial rule for tin mining and other industries also inhabit Kawthaung. Peranakan or Straits Chinese, called Pashu by the Bamars, can also be found in Kawthaung (Aung Kyaw Than,2010:23).

There is official border trading across the narrow straight between Kawthaung and Ranong. Most of the irregular migrants use this border station to enter Southern Thailand and to Malaysia and Singapore via Thai Southern provinces. The potential irregular migrants from this area use this route to migrate to Thailand and work in various sectors. However, the road to Kawthaung is not preferable by land transport. Many take air travel from Yangon or ship/boats from Dawei and Myeik. There is also a train service between Yangon and Dawei and then one must transfer to either boat service or plane.

⁴ Various Sources: The New Light of Myanmar, national newspaper, Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV-national broadcasting station), interviews with the locals

The children of migrant workers in Thailand come to attend schools in Myanmar every day and return to Thailand in the evening through this route⁵. It is also the case for many local patients who cross the border to get medical treatments from medical NGOs based in Thailand. There is a strong socio-economic connection between the two communities in both countries. Because of long ethnic conflicts in the region, many areas are left behind in terms of development. The infrastructure of the region as a whole, until the year 2000, was particularly appalling. Some successful cease-fire agreements between the government and ethnic armed groups led to the rebuilding and reshaping of infrastructure. New bridges and roads in the area are among the few developments.

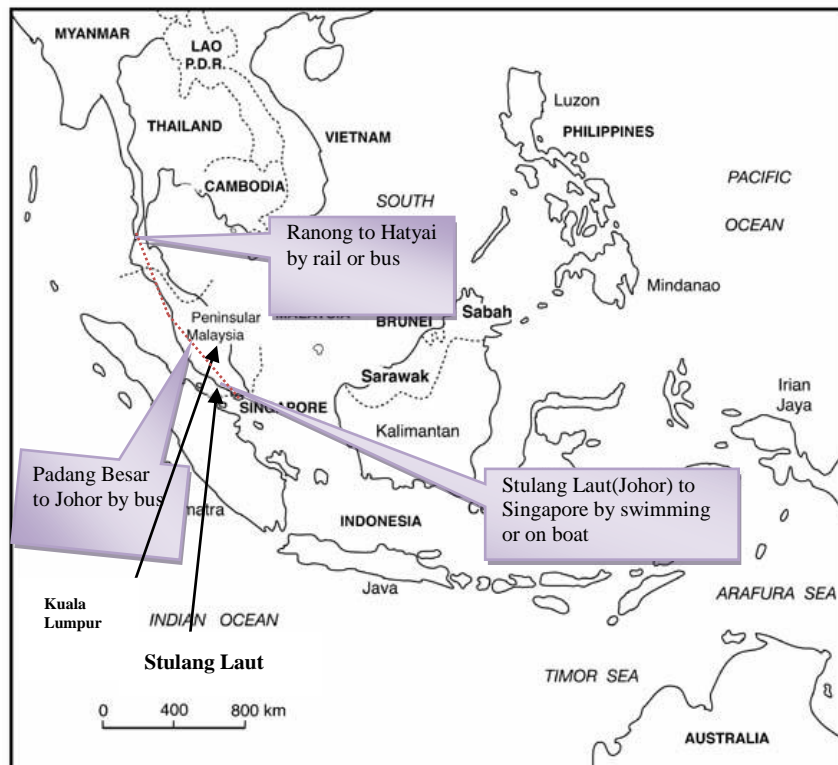
The improved infrastructure facilitates the movement of people and the region became the destination for both internal migrants and a source and transit for cross-border international migrants. Since both border outposts Myawaddy and Kawthaung are official crossing points along Myanmar-Thailand border, they are rather heavily guarded by border police, military and immigration officers that is assigned together with anti-trafficking task force. However, this never halts migrants and their families from crossing the border illegally. Corruption is involved in many cases and the current border control is closely monitoring the movement of people in that area.

However, those who want to enter Malaysia and Singapore via Thailand mostly use Kawthaung-Ranong route. An article in Asia News in 2008 revealed details of how these migrants get into Malaysia and Singapore through this route. According to the article, migrants who cross Thai-Myanmar border either by walking through the uplands or by boats from Kawthaung to Ranong, then proceeded to Phuket and from there by boat to Malaysia or Thai-Malaysia border directly. Some cross over from Johor Baru in Southern Malaysia to Singapore

⁵ Interview with migrant workers' families in Mawlamyine and Samut Sakhon in (June~ October 2011)

by boat or by swimming across the strait that separate the two countries. This detail was confirmed by many migrants who left the country illegally during the interviews but later returned. Figure 2.2 shows the route that these migrants took to enter Malaysia and Singapore.

Figure 2.2 Migration route from Myanmar via Thailand to Malaysia and Singapore



Source: Author (Map: Asia News 2008:11 / Information based on the interview with returned migrants in 2011)

2.1.3 The Present-day Migration and Mon State

Mon State is one of the most significant migrant-sending areas in Myanmar. Of the Mon that migrated to work abroad, the majority went to Thailand and Malaysia. Lin (2009) states that 90 percent of households at the village level in the Southern Mon State have at least one household member working overseas. Mon women who migrate prefer Thailand because it is

easier for them to return to their villages, although the wages in Thailand are lower than those paid in Malaysia.

In recent years, a large number of workers from Myanmar's Central Dry Zone area and Delta area⁶ have been migrating to Thailand through Mon State and the Taninthayi Region⁷. These laborers first arrived in these areas as imported workers for paddy fields, rubber and palm oil plantations to replace native labor that has already migrated abroad.⁸ After three to five years of work, these laborers also end up crossing the border to become long-term migrant workers in Thailand (Soe Nandar Linn,2011). It also highlights an important factor in Mon economy that the rich natural resources in Mon have attracted many internal migrants to move to Mon state.

Currently, Thailand is home to an estimated 1.2 million migrant workers from Myanmar, though the percentage of this number made up of ethnic Mon has never been surveyed. If Mahachai (Samut Sakhon) in southern Thailand is any indicator, the number should be quite large, for the city is home to 400,000 Mon workers. The migration of workers from Mon state is not a constant stream, and is affected by a variety of factors. Travel difficulties, as well as agricultural opportunities, associated with heavy rainfall mean that migration typically lulls during the rainy season, and rises through the cold and hot seasons until peaking during the 45 day period following mid-April's Songkran festival.

Much of Thai-Myanmar border near Mon state is mountainous, making overland crossing

⁶People in the Central Dry Zone rely on crop cultivation as a major economic activity whereas the Delta Region has been known as "rice bowl" of Myanmar. Most of the migrants coming from these areas are farmers who have abandoned their agricultural activities in their home communities and are seeking labor work at industries in Thailand to get a regular income.

⁷ Taninthayi Region is located on the Southernmost coastline of Myanmar, and borders Thailand. The government of Myanmar has signed the Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with Thailand's Government to construct the deep-sea-port at the city of Dawei (formerly known as Tavoy), in Taninthayi region, which will be the economic gateway and a shorter transportation corridor (then Singapore) to connect countries from the east and west of Myanmar and Thailand. According to the Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce of Thailand, it will be completed in 2015.

⁸ Local businessmen and investors need to import laborers from other areas to replace the local labor force that immigrated to Thailand.

into Thailand difficult, and doubly so during the rainy season. Few migrant workers, then, choose the overland path into Thailand. Most workers opt to use the Zemi River, which flows from central Mon State, through the southern end of Karen State and into Thailand near Three Pagoda Pass. During 2006 and 2007, the rainy period from June until the start of October saw an average of thirty to fifty people crossing via the Zemi River. Border-gate control reported that one hundred and fifty to two hundred people have been crossing daily since June 2008. This marks a drastic increase in migrant worker flows to Thailand.

Human rights related reports have highlighted many reasons for this increase, such as the faults of military government on travel restrictions, extortions, heavy taxation and forced labor. Poverty does represent a core reason behind contemporary migration of Mons. Local economists estimate that an average family of five requires a monthly income of 80,000 kyat, about \$65 US dollars, assuming \$1 equals 1,200 kyat (in 2008). A typical professional worker, teacher, university professor or government official used to make less than 10,000 kyat a month until 2010.⁹

A laborer on a paddy farm in Mon State can expect to earn about 3,000 kyat a day while tri-shaw driver or laborer for a boat, car or other transport stations can earn a maximum of 4,000 kyat for a full twelve-hour workday. Though this was considered as a rather higher daily income than white-collar workers like government officials until 2010, the income of most residents still falls well short because few people can find consistent daily work. Women employed outside the home face similar problems, but due to discrimination can expect to earn just 2,000 kyat a day. With low daily incomes, many poor and unemployed families cannot afford to buy even basic

⁹ In early January 2010, the government State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) announced a nationwide salary increase for all government employees. Under the announcement No. 104/2010, from the SPDC Department of Finance and Customs in Nay Pyi Daw, the pay hike raised the salary of all active members in the government workforce a flat 20,000 kyat per month, regardless of position or rank.

foods such as rice, fish-paste, salt, chili, cooking oil, meats and vegetables. Although the new government is trying to fix the economic situation that has deteriorated in recent years, the problem of inflation is still difficult to resolve. The government could somehow manage to bring the value of Myanmar currency 'kyat' up compared to how it was in 2008.¹⁰ This is also because of the slump of global economy that created drop in dollar value. However, commodity prices are still high across Myanmar. A basket of mid-range quality rice, which cost 8,000 kyat in 2007-2008, costs between 13,000 and 15,000 in Mon State in 2011. It is expected that the migration will continue to occur until the economy reaches the level where people at grass-root level can earn a stable living condition.

2.2 The Economy and Livelihood of Mon State

Agriculture is the base of Mon's economy. With plenty of fertile land and favorable climate, Mon state is one of the backbones of rice production in Myanmar. Most farmers in Mon state follow Mi-Yo-Pa-Lar farming, which means the traditional agricultural practice that has been handed over from one generation to another. According to this practice, Mon farmers grow both paddy and rubber in their lands and invest equally in paddy rice cultivation as they do in rubber cultivation, which is also one of the main exports. In Mon State, as of October 2011, there was a total of 1,352,946 acres of rainy-season paddy rice, comprised in two districts, 461,473 acres in Mawlamyine District and 430,000 in Thaton District. However, due to limited resources and labor, only roughly 800,000 acres were cultivated. Usually, the rice produced in Mon State is distributed to all parts of Lower Myanmar, including Kayin State, and Taninthayi Division (MOAI, 2012).

¹⁰ As of September 9th, 2011, \$1 is equal to 780 kyats where it was 1200 kyats per dollar in 2008. (Market rate)

Mon state is well known for its strong agricultural output and its value as an agricultural region, Mon state is home to 7 dams. The government since the 2000s, reclaimed more land and cultivation of more crops in Mon state. Ardent implementations of irrigation projects to introduce year-round cultivation has added nearly 450,000 more acres¹¹ in the state, which in the past had only about 150,000 irrigated acres. The outcome resulted in the emergence of 200,000 acres of double-cropping farms (Thiha Aung, 2005). Within the country, the leading role of rice as a food product and commercial cash crop has persisted. The government imposed paddy maximization policy¹² that introduced the summer-paddy program in 1992. Under the program, a number of small to medium scale dams were constructed in some areas, private investment in small scale diesel pumps was promoted in others, depending on the topology with respect to water availability during the dry season, and the additional output from summer paddy¹³ was exempted from the procurement.

The official figures in the state-run newspapers elaborated that in 2011, paddy production in Mon State exceeded the local demand due to the cultivation of over 100,000 acres of summer paddy in addition to monsoon paddy. The SPDC government built Azin and Winphanon dams in Mudon Township, Wapa Dam and Zaikkaye and Kyonhtaw sluice gates in Thaton Township, Shwenattaung Dam in Mawlamyine Township, and Bilin Dam in Bilin Township, where these facilities irrigate over 60,000 acres of land. In 2004 to 2005 out of 701,600 acres of monsoon paddy, Mon State harvested 701,400 acres. The state put 49,164 acres

¹¹ 100 acres= 40.4685 hectares

¹² Paddy maximization policy can be taken as government's attempt to narrow a gap between Myanmar and Asian neighbors such as Vietnam, Myanmar's yield level was around 3 tons per acre. Summer Paddy Program was introduced since 1992/93 as part of this policy to increase productivity.

¹³ Traditionally, the main paddy season in Myanmar was the monsoon season, which brings sufficient (and frequently too much) water to paddy crops in rain fed fields.

of land under summer paddy, 61,686 acres under pulses and beans and 25,017 acres under edible oil in 2004-2005 as well.

Rubber sown acreage has also tripled over the years where in 2004 to 2005, according to the official figures, the total sown acreage was 235,000 acres, which helped create hundreds of jobs for local workers. Table 3.1 shows the agricultural development in Mon state between 1988 and 2 December 2005. Regardless of these increases, survey data from 2009 shows that the rice paddy farmers of Mon state were facing increasingly difficult conditions to continue to provide for their own livelihoods and those of their families despite these significant figures. The threat to paddy farmers could be classified into twofold issues, man-made catastrophes and natural disasters. Due to the poor design and management of the Winphanon and Kataik dams¹⁴, farms and villages throughout the area have been flooded as spillways running from the damn have failed (Mon Forum, 2009).

And because of excess rainfall, farmers in the 6 divisions of Mon State lost hundreds of acres of rice paddies due to flooding in 2009 and again in 2011. However, in addition to the destruction of their cash crops, paddy farmers face further loss of income and property from the objectionable economic management practices of the State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC) agricultural programs. Local farmers have expressed their dissatisfaction over government administrators' demand that farmers replant their crops to meet government rice quotas, despite flooding, seasonal limitations, and lack of funding. Interviews in the survey have responded that they were still expected to meet the quota or face the seizure of their land, while they are provided with little or no assistance.

¹⁴ Private investigation results show that of the 70,000 acres of rice paddies farmed in the area, 17,000 were flooded. It is assumed that the structuring of old streams and the building new runoff canals, the newly built canal and its tributaries have blocked the natural runoff flow of water that collects in the surrounding countryside. Unable to reach its natural outlets along the old streambed, water pools around villages and in paddy fields, dumping silt and flooding crops.

There were bold claims by farmers and even some local authorities that the military government was concerned only with the increase of paddy production and did not pay attention or understand the real situation facing farmers. Farmers suffered from the drop of quality and soil damage nationwide severely especially in 2007-2008. Since the late 1990s to the early 2000s, the impetus of summer paddy drive was lost due to the exhaustion of easy irrigation potentials and low paddy prices for producers (Fujita, 2003). Due to the ban on the private sector's rice export, low quality of rice in the public marketing channel, and the managerial inefficiency of the state trade agency, rice export from Myanmar did not increase as fast as the increase in output, resulting in lower market prices of paddy for farmers (Kurosaki et al, 2004).

The summer paddy program was designed to enable farmers to grow crops in the dry season. Unfortunately, the project not only failed to achieve its goal but also reduced the substantial amount of arable land in the area. The failure of the project has, in turn, highlighted the existence, and consequences, of corruption within the military regime. Fear of getting reprimanded by the central government, local officials filed reports of only the successful projects and double-dealing statistical figures instead of reporting the failure of the project. This eventually delayed many reforms and diminish the opportunities of farmers who were working hard for success. This failure can be linked directly to the migration of Mons from areas close to the dams. In addition, many villages in Belu-kyun have less availability of jobs mainly due to poor management in agriculture and fishery.

Table 2.2 Agricultural development of Mon State

Per-acre yield— basket

*1 basket= 20.9 kg

Gross production— basket (thousand)

Subject	1988	12-2-05	Progress
Land resource			
- sown acreage	969516	1102980	133464
- acres of vacant and virgin land	258804	152754	-
Irrigation			
- dam, lake, reservoir, canal	76	86	10
- river water pumping work	-	13	13
- damming creeks	-	3452	3452
- Benefited acre	149760	590713	440953
Thriving double crops	48009	196142	148133
Extended paddy cultivation			
- acres of monsoon paddy	606442	701600	95158
- per acre yield*	55.00	66.97	11.97
- acres of summer paddy	-	100500	100500
- per acre yield*	-	77.74	77.74
- gross production	33146	51830	18684
Food sufficiency	-	123%	123%
- Beans and pulses (acre)	6816	81360	74544
- Rubber (acre)	76505	235418	158913
- Oil palm (acre)	1201	1631	430
- Tea (acre)	-	72	72
- Pepper (acre)	127	14770	14643
Edible Oil crop (acre)			
- Groundnut	14705	22405	7700
- Sesame	4085	5472	1387
- Sunflower	12339	13323	984

Source: The New Light of Myanmar , Volume VIII, No. 295, Saturday 5 February 2005.P-8.

On the contrary, Mon state, surrounded with agricultural-base villages, always has a way to maintain food sufficiency through production of various crops. There are six major economic performances that help shape the economy of Mon State as a whole. They are the following:

- (1) Small-scale livestock for self-sufficiency
- (2) Small-scale livestock for commercial purpose
- (3) Integrated farming
- (4) One-village-one-product

(5) Implementation of livestock zones

(6) Development of small-scale rural manufacturing enterprises

These performances are delegated by the State and funded through township level and village-tract levels accordingly. All villages and townships are required to set their own targets that are supportive in meeting certain goal.

Table 2.3 Small-scale Manufacturing and Production of Townships in Mon State (2011)

No	Township	Village tracts	Agriculture	Livestock	No. of Products	One-village-one-product
1	Mawlamyine	19	67	28	74	4
4	Kyaikmaraw	42	230	230	165	25
3	Mudon	43	118	16	42	15
4	Thanbyuzayat	38	194	398	96	13
5	Ye	26	56	25	18	3
6	Chaungzone	28	110	500	27	12
7	Thaton	35	77	29	61	10
8	Kyaikhto	50	104	91	90	15
9	Bilin	46	315	127	63	28
10	Paung	48	70	6	13	5

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation Service (MOAI)

Agriculture-based small-scale manufacturing can be found in almost every part of Mon state. Rice grinding mills, oil crop production mills, production of export pulses and industrial crops, production of seasonal fruits, dried fruits and fruit jams, seasonal fruit juice factories, wine factories, basic rubber goods factories, bakeries are among major government-funded factories. Fruits of Mon state include durian, mangosteen and pomelo that have high demand for export. Around half of the land is covered with forests and timber production is one of the major factors contributing Mon's economy (MOAI, 2012) .

Private enterprises have also boomed in Mon state as domestic consumption has escalated over the recent years. Reserved forests, protected public forests, wildlife sanctuaries have increased through strong local participation in plantations. Myanmar, the major exporter of teak in the world, takes up 75 percent of the world market. The country is rich in forest resources with forests covering about 50 percent of its total land area. However, according to the National Commission for Environmental Affairs (NCEA), the rate of forest depletion in Myanmar from 2000 to 2005 totaled up to 466,000 hectares, standing as the fourth most forest depleting country in the world after Brazil, Indonesia and Sudan.

To counteract this alarming situation, the government opened up the forestry sector to private enterprises in 2006, a move which aimed at preventing teak depletion and enhancing development of the forestry sector. Since then, a total of 95 private companies in the country have taken part in teak and hardwood cultivation. These companies have grown over 99,000 hectares of teak and hardwood since such undertakings were granted. Myanmar designated 34 nature conservation areas, which cover 26, 603 square-kilometers or 4 percent of the total land area. In 2009, the government distributed over 17 million saplings to establish the forest plantations on 22,356 hectares' land as a public movement (The New Light of Myanmar, 2012).

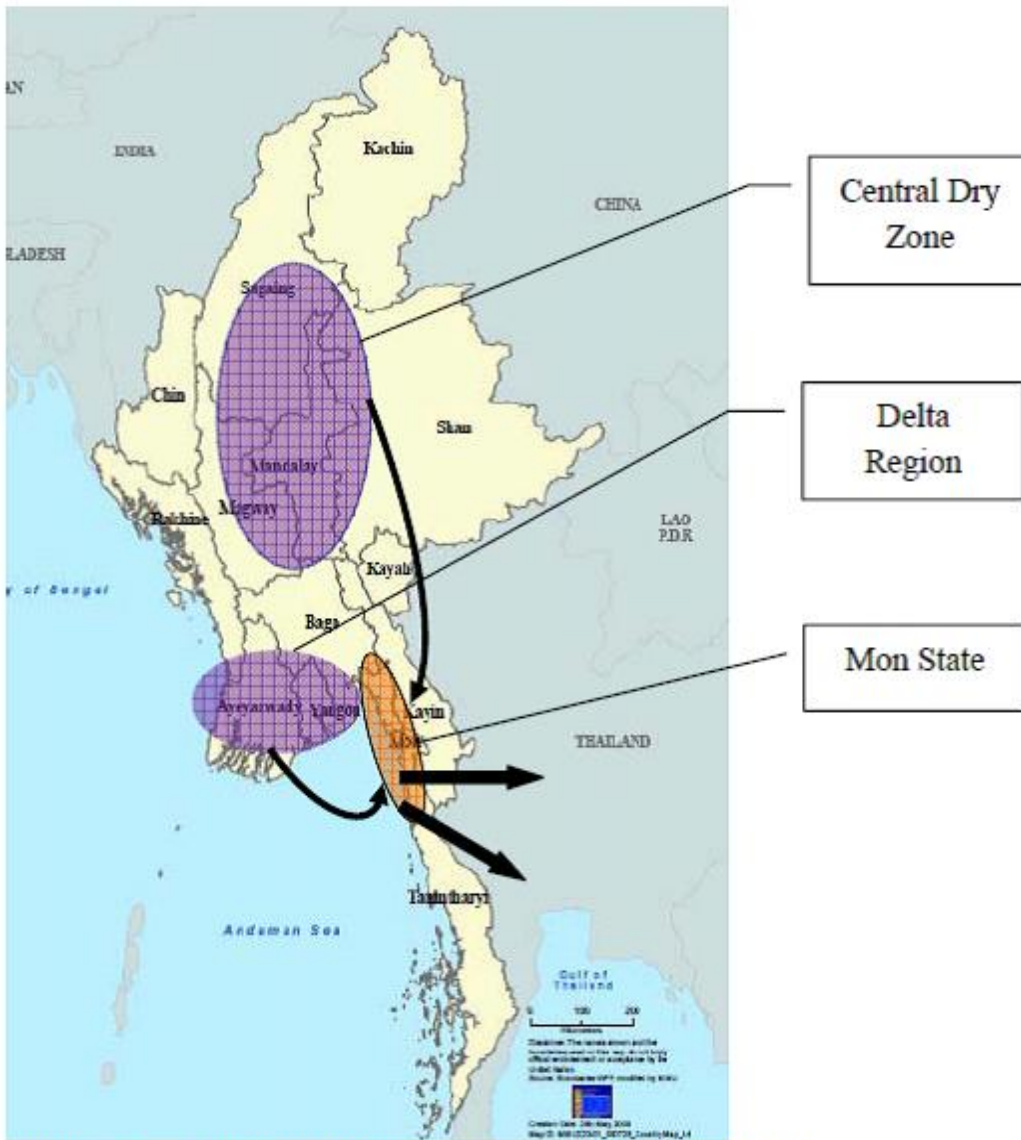
In 2011, local municipality, NGOs, and individuals have planted 689,040 trees in addition to plantation of 267,550 teak saplings in Mon state. This is under the project implemented by the Natural Environment and Wildlife Conservation Department of Ministry of Forestry that started in 2010 with the aim of preserving natural environment and wildlife nature as well as promoting ecotourism in the country. The rubber plantation and oil palm reserves have also increased in size and number. The protected rubber plantation and natural land reserve is 538,600.743 acres (217963.788 hectares). Rubber plantation in 2011 was 464,107 acre (187,817.439 hectares) and oil palm plantation is 1827 (739.960 hectares) acres respectively.

The reduction in the international demand for rubber has led to a plummet in the value of rubber in Mon state today. Similarly, a bumper paddy crop in Southeast Asia following 2008's international rice shortages has paddy at a fraction of its normal value. The best indicator of Mon State's economic position in relation to other parts of Myanmar is the fact that large numbers of ethnic Bamar workers have moved to the area in search of work. Geographically, Mon state enjoys more rich natural resources than many areas in central and dry zone. However, the phenomenon that many young people from Mon State have left to seek work in Thailand, Malaysia or other nearby countries required the State to replace its lost labor force with internal migrants from other areas.

Chain migration can be considered as one of the main reasons why young Mon people have left their farms and families to work overseas, especially Thailand. For centuries, Mon people have worked lived and worked in both Myanmar and Thailand and the strong existence of Mon culture and communities in Thailand allow Mon youngsters to adapt better in Thailand than other ethnic nationalities of Myanmar. In addition, due to years of closed economy in Myanmar, the Mons and many Myanmar believed that working overseas could bring in more income and

better education opportunities for their children. It can be assumed that since most internal migrants do not have the same capacity as Mons (such as networks, culture and language) to work in Thailand, they settle for working at Mon farms, replacing Mon workers who have migrated to Thailand.

Figure 2.3 The Migratory Patterns of Mon State in Myanmar



Source: Map - Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU)

Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), taken from Soe Nandar Linn (2011)

2.3 Chronicles of Mon: State and the People

2.3.1 Mons in the History of Myanmar

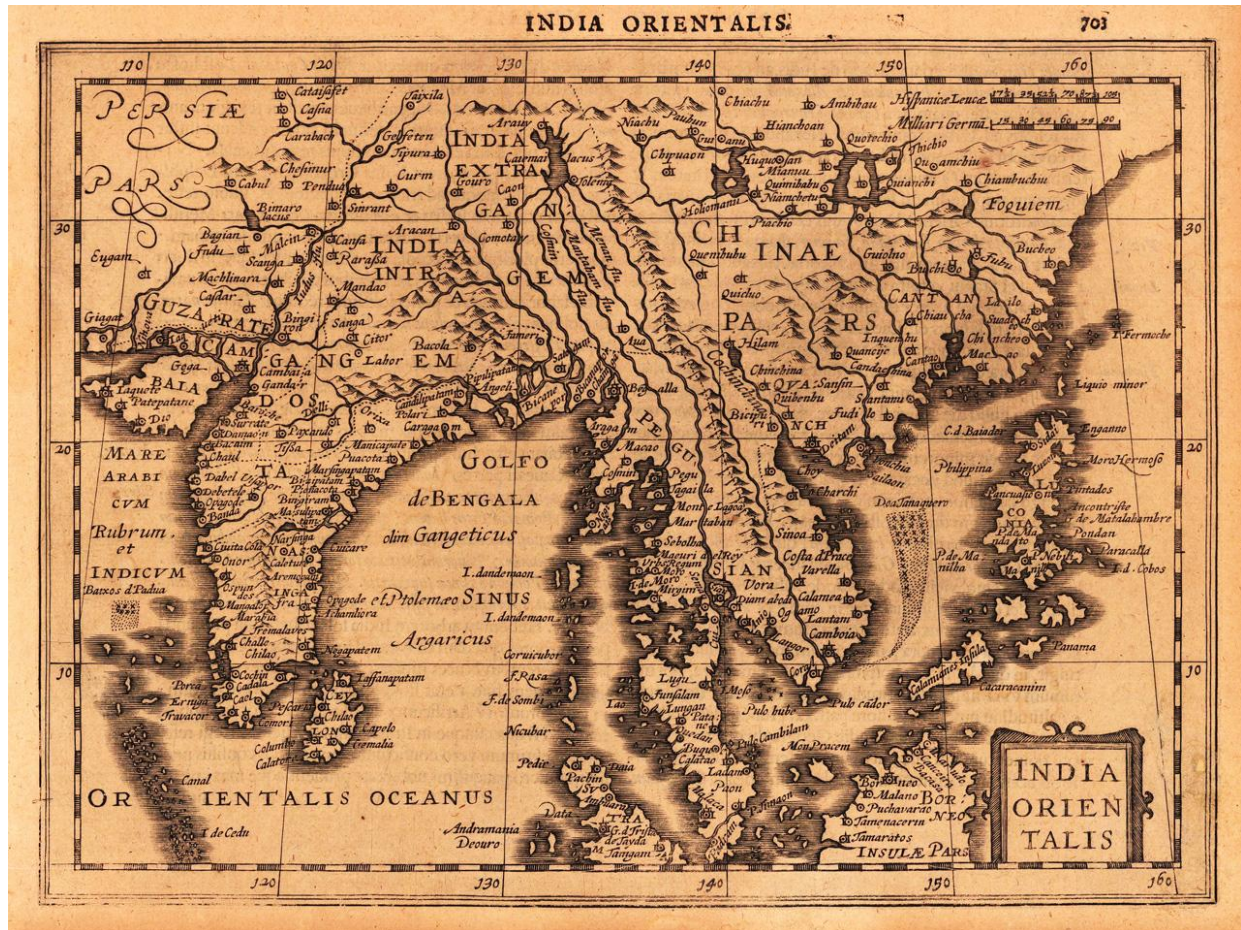
Mons¹⁵, generally speaking, are the people living in the eastern delta region of Myanmar and in west-central Thailand, numbering in the late 20th century more than 1.1 million. The Mons have lived in their present area for the last 1,200 years, and it was the Mons¹⁶ who gave Myanmar its writing (Pali) and its religion (Buddhism). The Mons are believed to have spread from western China over the river lowlands from the Ayeyarwaddy River delta south to the Chao Phraya River basin in Thailand (Guy, 1999).

The Mons hosted the earliest Southeast Asian civilizations including the Dvaravati in Central Thailand (whose culture proliferated into Isan) and the Kingdom of Thaton. They were the first receivers of Theravada missionaries from Sri Lanka, in contrast to their Hindu contemporaries like the Khmers or Chams. The Mons adopted the Pallava script and the oldest Mon script was found in a cave in modern Saraburi dating around 550 AD. Though no remains were found belonging to the Thaton kingdom but it was mentioned widely in Burmese and Lanna chronicles. The legendary Queen Jamadevi from the Chao Phraya Valley came to rule as the first queen of Haribhunjyaya (modern Lamphun) kingdom around 800 AD. (Smithies, 1986)

¹⁵ The Mon, who are believed to have originated in western China, entered the area in the 1st millennium BC, penetrating westward from the upper Mekong River. They are the first Indianized peoples in Myanmar, an honor shared with their northern neighbors, the Pyus.

¹⁶ The Mons, a people of Malayo-Indonesian stock, are related to the early inhabitants of Thailand and Cambodia who also spoke Mon-Khmer languages. The Mons who are considered to be the indigenous inhabitants of lower Myanmar, established their most significant capital at Thaton, strategically located for trade near the Gulf of Mottama and the Andaman Sea.

Figure 2.4 Map of East Indies in 1632 showing the location of Mon



Source: Courtesy of National Archives Department , Myanmar : “Gerard Mercator, *India Orientalis* Amsterdam, I.E. Cloppenburgh, 1632”

After 1000 AD onwards the Mons were under constant pressures. With the Tai migrations from the north and Khmer invasions from the east, the Mons of Dvaravati perished and gave their way to Khmer Lavo kingdom by around 1000 AD. (The surviving group of Dvaravati Mon people known as Nyah Kur still lives in Isan as a very small minority today.) The Mons were killed in wars, transported as captives, or assimilated into new cultures. The Mon as an entity virtually disappeared in Chao Phraya Valley. However, Haribhunjaya kingdom

survived as a Mon outpost in northern Thailand under repeated harass by the Tai Yuan. (Smithies, 1986)

They appear to have originally occupied a swathe of land from lower Myanmar going across the central plains of the Meklong and Chao Phraya basins, with outposts in the north and northeast, notably Lamphun, Lopburi and Si Tep, near Chaiyaphum. It is generally agreed that the two principal old centers of Mon culture were Pegu (Bago) and in the Nakorn Pathom area (where a Mon inscription dating from circa 600 has been discovered), and early art forms in central Siam, generally referred to as Dvaravati (Tharyawaddy/**om,m0wD**), were the products of Mon civilization (Smithies, 1986).¹⁷ The Mons, linguistically related to the khmers, speak a similar non-tonal language of considerable antiquity.¹⁸

Tharyawaddy was prevented by geographic barriers from establishing close political ties with other Mon states to the west in southern Myanmar and with the Mon state in northern Thailand. Tharyawaddy experienced political domination by neighboring peoples on three separate occasions: in the 10th century, when the Bamars conquered the Mon state of Thaton west of the Taninthayi Yoma; from the 11th to the 13th century, when the Khmer empire (Cambodia) arose in the east; and finally, in the late 13th century, when Tharyawaddy was absorbed by the Thai empire. Subjugation did not, however, mean extinction. The Tharyawaddy Mon retained their customs and a relative degree of racial homogeneity under their own rulers (Smithies, 1986:34).

¹⁷ According to Michael Smithies, the Mons refer to themselves as Mon; their name in classical literature was Raman or Rmen, from which the term Mon may well be derived. The Burmans (Bamars) refer to the Mon as Talaing, a term attributed with various meanings and origins, but the general consensus is that it has acquired, if it did not originally have, pejorative overtones.

¹⁸ Descriptions in Chinese and Indian texts specify their settlement area as being around the present day cities of Moulmein and Pegu in the monsoonal plains of Southeast Burma. This area was first known as Suvannabhumi ("land of gold") and later as Ramannadesa ("Land of Ramanna"); Ramanna being the word for Mon people. The area known as Suvannabhumi was often connected with the historical Buddha in the later Mon and Burmese chronicles that credit the Mons with first establishing the Buddhist religion in Burma.

The Mons, after moving westward into the Ayeyarwaddy River delta of southern Myanmar in the ensuing centuries, they acquired Theravada Buddhism, their state religion, from Ceylon and South India, and they adopted the Indian Pali script. By 825, they had firmly established themselves in southern and southeastern Myanmar and founded the cities of Bago and Thaton. Some historians argued that it is the year 825 that depicts the foundation of then Pegu (Bago) but many pointed out that it may have been 849. Pegu was first known as Hamsavarti (Hanthawaddy); the *hamsa* or goose is the mount of Brahma in Indian tradition, and the goose, sometimes resembling a swan raised on a tall pole, is often still held to be the sign that a temple in central Thailand was originally a Mon foundation. The Mons converted to Theravada Buddhism very early on and were instrumental in transmitting Buddhist teachings to both the Burmans (Bamars) and the Thais. (Tun Aung Chain, 2010:22)

A Mon village typically consists of rectangular houses with thatch roofs, granaries, and cattle sheds. Most villages have a monastery that also functions as a school, as well as pagodas, an image house where images of the Buddha are kept, and a rest house or meeting house. The family unit is nuclear rather than extended. The Mon religion of Theravada Buddhism is combined with belief in various spirits (Tun Aung Chain, 2010:7). The Mon homeland occupies a coastal strip of land bordering the Gulf of Mottama and includes the Belu-kyun and Kalagok-Kyun islands. The physiography of the area consists of lowlands terminated by the Taung-nyo Range in the East. The Sittaung River is the region's northwestern boundary, and the rivers Gyaing, Ataran, Thanlwin, and Ye drain the area westward to the Gulf of Mottama. (Tun Aung Chain, 2010:18)

Rice and teak have always been the most important agricultural products; mangoes and durians are cultivated as well. Tea, sugar, tobacco, rubber, salt, and bamboo products are

exported from Mawlamyaing since the olden days. Other cities and towns in the region include Thaton, Ye, and Mottama. Thaton, the former capital of the Mon kingdom, lost its position as a port because of silting. The kingdom of the Mon people was powerful in Myanmar from the 9th to the 11th and from the 13th to the 16th century and for a brief period in the mid-18th century. The Mon migrated southward from western China and settled in the Chao Phraya River basin (of southern Thailand) about the 6th century AD. Their early kingdoms, Tharyawaddy and Haripunjaya (*qq.v.*), had ties with the ancient Cambodian kingdom of Funan and with China and were also strongly influenced by Khmer civilization. (Ministry of Education, 1994; 2002).

About the same period as Mons' movement to the westward, southward-migrating Bamars took over lands in central Myanmar and established the kingdom of Pagan (Bagan). In 1057 Bagan defeated the Mon kingdom, capturing the Mon capital of Thaton and brought 30,000 Mon captives to Bagan. This event was to prove culturally decisive for the Bamars because the Mon captives included many Theravada Buddhist monks, who converted the Bamars to Theravada Buddhism; Pali replaced Sanskrit as the language of the sacred literature, and the Bamars adopted the Mon alphabet. (Tun Aung Chain, 2010:13-15)

After the fall of Bagan (1287) to the invading Mongols, the Mons regained their independence and captured Mottama and Bago, thus virtually controlling their previously held territory. The next 200 years witnessed incessant warfare between the Mon and the Bamars, but the Mon managed to retain their independence until 1539, when they came under the domination of Taungoo Myanmar (Luce,1985). In the mid-18th century, the Mon rose in rebellion and reestablished their kingdom of Bago, but it lasted approximately only 10 years. The Bamars triumphed permanently over the Mon when their leader Alaungpaya¹⁹ razed Bago in 1757

(Ministry of Education, 1998). Many of the Mons were killed, while others fled to Siam (now Thailand). The Mon are still centered in southeastern Myanmar, though their numbers are small compared to those of the ethnic Barmars.

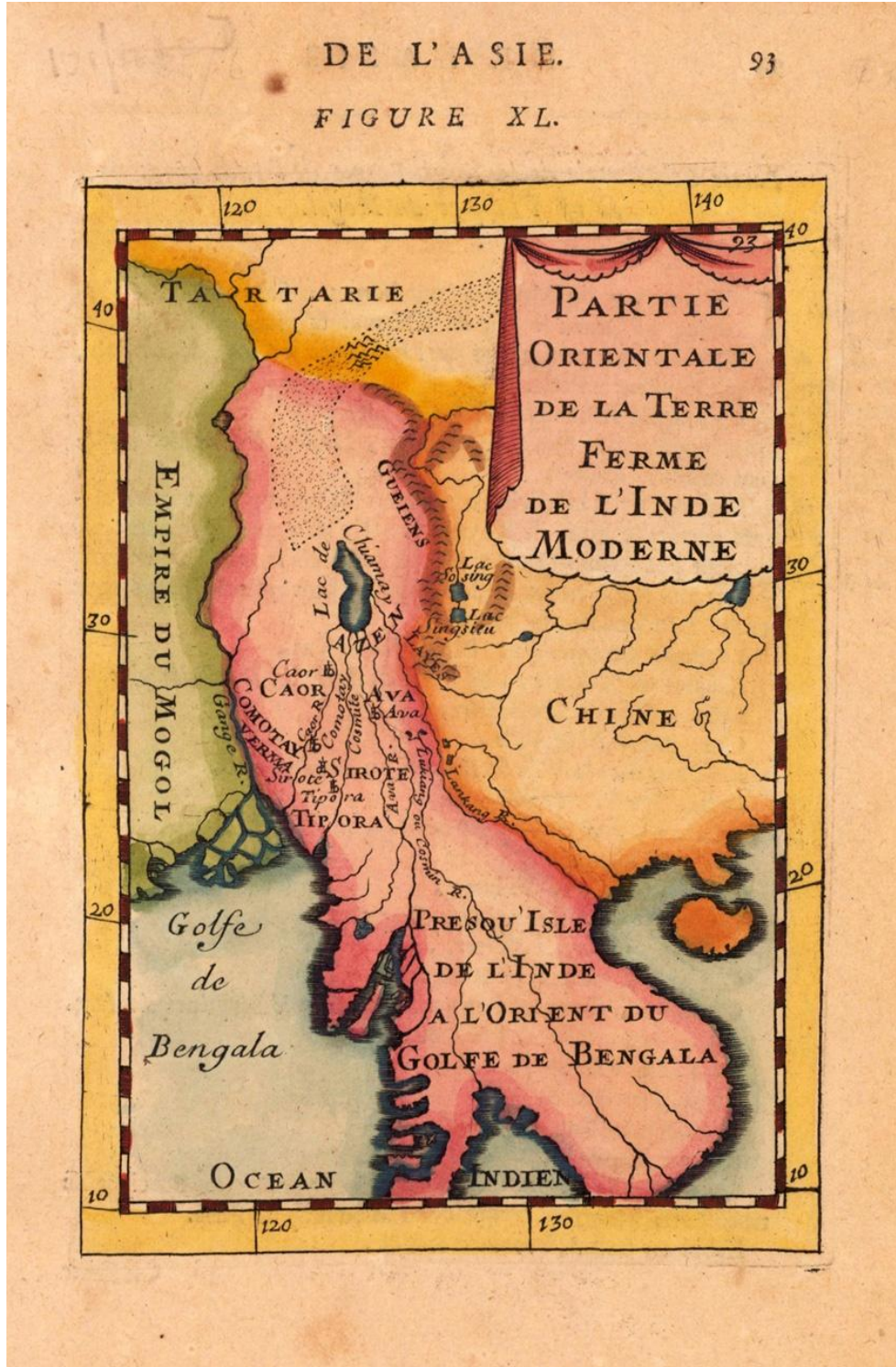
Figure 2.5 Flag of Hanthawaddy bearing the present symbol of Mon State



Source: National Museum, Yangon, Myanmar

¹⁹ Alaungpaya (meaning: Victorious) is regarded as one of the greatest kings of Myanmar who ruled the Myanmar Empire from 1752 to 1760. He founded Konbaung dynasty, which held power until the British annexed Upper (northern) Myanmar on Jan. 1, 1886. He also conquered the independent Mon kingdom of Bago (in the Ayeyarwaddy River delta). His last campaign was an invasion of Siam (Thailand). He led an army through the town of Dawei southward to Tanintharyi and then northward to Ayutthaya (Ayuthia), the Siamese capital, which he surrounded in April 1760. During the siege he was wounded, and he died while his army was in retreat to Myanmar.

Figure 2.6 Map of Innwa (Ava) Kingdom and Bay of Bengal in 1686



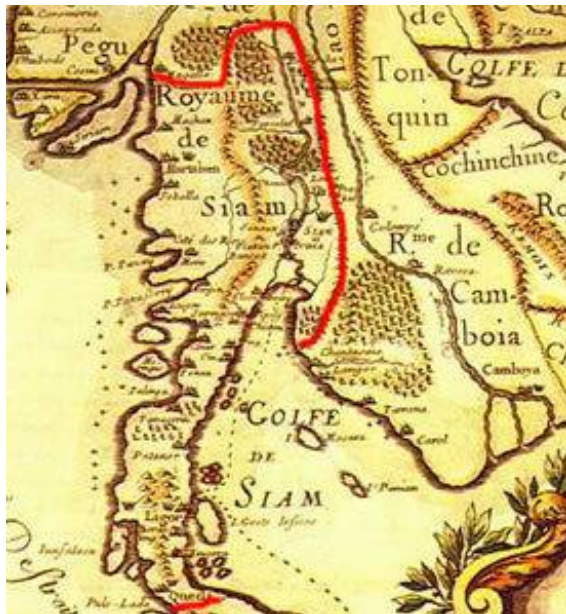
Source: Courtesy of National Archives Department , Myanmar , “Allain Manesson Mallet, *Partie Orientale De La Terre Ferme De L'Inde Moderne*. 1683”

2.3.2 Historical Background of Mons Immigration to Thailand

The immigration of Mons into Thailand then Siam, cannot be conversed in the same context as Mon settlement in the region. The immigration began at the first half of sixteenth century, the time where its kingdom Pegu (Bago) was enjoying a long time of peace under King Dhamazedi and Banyar Yan. Both Kings are well-known for their devotion in religion and efforts to make Buddhism reachable by all levels of society, including the creation of religious and public buildings. Banyar Yan's son Smin Dhaw (Thamein-Daw) was the last king of Mon race to reign in Bago (Halliday, 1913; Tun Aung Chain, 2010).

In 1540, Bago was conquered by King of Taungoo, Tabin Shwehtee who assumed the supreme king in Bago and later invaded Siam. This King is known as a mediator, who has sought every way to conciliate Mons and is even said to have conformed to the Mon custom of cutting the hair so as to become one of them. His successor Bayinnaung is one of the most famous Kings of Myanmar, who ruled Myanmar, Siam, the Lao and Shan states. His thirty-year reign (1551-81) was the most energetic period in Myanmar history. He captured Ayutthaya easily in 1564, but not for long, because the Siamese king, Maha Chakrap'at, promptly revolted at the first opportunity. Bayinnaung returned in 1569, captured Ayutthaya a second time, and placed a pro-Burmese prince on the Siamese throne. This time Siam stayed loyal for the rest of his reign, but troubles sprang up elsewhere. (Halliday, 1913:1-15)

Figure 2.7 Map of 1686 by Lord Curzon showing locations of Pegu (Bago) and Siam (Thailand)



Source: Courtesy of National Archives Department , Myanmar , “Lord George Nathaniel Curzon (1859 - 1925) *Buffer States part IV: Thailand, 1894*”.

Cambodia attacked, seeing an opportunity to even old scores with the Thais; six Cambodian raids (1570-87) were defeated, forcing Bayinnaung to rebuild Ayutthaya's defenses, even though he knew that might be asking for trouble in the long run. In the northeast, Laos became a constant source of trouble because it never accepted the loss of Chiangmai. Bayinnaung invaded Laos twice, taking both Laotian capitals (Luang Prabang and Vientiane), but never capturing the king; every time the Bamar troops withdrew Setthathirat, King of Lanxang, returned to make more trouble. At the time of his death in 1581, Bayinnaung was preparing to conquer Arakan (Rakhine), which up to that date had escaped his attention. The campaign was canceled, and Arakanese independence lasted for two more centuries. (Halliday, 1913:1-15)

Bayinnaung left his son and successor, Nanda Bayin (1581-99), with more problems than he could handle. In 1584 his uncle revolted at Ava (Innwa), and Nanda Bayin called upon Pra Naret, the new prince of Siam, for help. Pra Naret brought an army to Bago, only to discover in the nick of time that Nanda Bayin plotted to kill him. Thereupon he rescued some prisoners that were previously brought there by Bayinnaung and returned home. (Halliday, 1913:1-15) Nanda Bayin took this as an insult and invaded Siam three times (1585, 1586, and 1592) to bring Pra Naret to kneel; each time Pra Naret crushed the invading forces. Siam's independence was assured after this. In 1590 his father died and he was crowned king of Siam, changing his name to Naresuen.

In 1593 he turned the tables on Myanmar by invading and taking Dawei and Mottama. Two years later the Myanmar governor of Chiangmai had to request Siamese aid to stop an invasion from Laos, and Naresuen gave it on condition that the governor switch his allegiance to Siam. (Phayre,1883:24) Myanmar fell apart completely while Naresuen was restoring Siam. Two brothers of Nanda Bayin revolted, called in help from Rakhine, and together they burned Bago to the ground (1599). Nanda Bayin was taken to Taungoo and executed, and Bago never completely recovered afterwards. Naresuen was also involved in the attack, but he arrived too late to share in the looting of Bago, in fact, his "allies" inflicted a nasty defeat that forced him to flee back to Siam. (Halliday, 1913:13)

Nanda Bayin's nephew, Anaukpetlun, recovered Lower Myanmar (1605-13) and Chiangmai (1615) from his enemies, bringing a measure of stability back to Myanmar. The Taungoo dynasty moved its capital to Innwa, where it lasted until 1752, but its kings were weak, and holding the country together was all they could do. In his 22-year reign between 1606 and 1628, Anaukpetlun completed the reunification efforts of the Myanmar kingdom begun by his

father King Nyaungyan. Having inherited a partial kingdom comprising mainly Upper Myanmar and Shan States from his father Nyaungyan, Anaukpetlun went on to reconquer Lanna in the east and Lower Myanmar in the south from rival Bamar factions and the Portuguese. He also conquered Upper Thaninthayi from the Siamese. The kingdom was known as Restored Toungoo Dynasty or Nyaungyan Dynasty. It was during these wars of conquest that the Mon people began to feel restive under the intolerable burden of the constant military duty imposed upon them. (Halliday, 1913:15, Phayre, 1883:104)

Figure 2.8 Map of Thailand in 1713



Source: ComingAnarchy.com “Curzon: Modern SouthEast Asia, 1713”.

2.3.3 Impact of Mons Immigration on Thai's Culture

The first immigration of Mons to Thailand was not recorded in Mon history, as the border demarcation of Myanmar and Thailand especially near Mon State was always indistinct. However, Halliday (1913) and Phayre(1883) stated that it was after Pra Naret's unsuccessful attack to Bago that many Mons, monks and laymen from Mottama followed him to Thailand, the event which the Siamese (Thai) writers took as the first real immigration of Mons in any number into Thailand. Thai historians have records of Mons' immigration in the year 1660. Phayre pointed out Mon uprising and the occasions where Siamese had many adherents in Mottama around the same time.

These events took place in the reign of Pra Narai just after the invasion of Innwa by the Chinese in 1658. It is also to be noticed that Mons voluntarily sought refuge in Siam (Thailand). The Mons are linguistically allied to the people who inhabited Lower Siam in bygone days. The old time capital stood near the site of the present Phrapatom and, according to Colonel Gerini, was the great port of Siam in that day. People who inhabited the country around the capital probably spoke a language akin to that of the Mons, and it is possible that the people who then inhabited peninsular Siam were actually Mons.

One of the dangers to the Bamar monarchs in the invasions from Siam was the fact that Mons, who were the nearest neighbors to the Siamese, were always ready to be on friendly terms with the invaders. According to Thai historians, during Thai monarch Pra Narai's reign (1656-1688), Mon troops from Ayutthaya formed a vanguard of the Siamese army and were the first to engage with the Bamar advance. There was also a great influx of Mons into Siam on the occasion of the taking of Bago by Alaungpaya in 1757.

Figure 2.9 Map of South East Asia in 1745



Source: Courtesy of National Archives Department , Myanmar ,“Cornelius Mortier and Jean Covens, *Carte des Indes et de la Chine. Dressée sur plusieurs Relations particulieres Rectifiees par quelques Observations. Par Guillaume de L'Isle de l'Academie Royale des Sciences. A. Amsterdam chez Iean Covens et Corneille Mortier, Amsterdam, 1745*”

Again in 1774, during the reign of Sinbyushin, a few years after the fall of Ayutthaya, Mons fled into Siam in a huge number when the governor of Mottama rebelled against Bamar king. In 1814, during another rebellion of Mons in Mottama, a great number of Mons sought refuge in Siam. They were looked upon as desired immigrants and the responsible parties were sent out from the capital to meet the fugitives and take them to suitable places where land was given and the necessities their immediate needs amply provided.

This is quite a remarkable history in the Mon immigration as it was of interest to Prince Pra Chom Klao, who afterwards became King as the well-known Maha Mongkut. Then a mere boy, he was appointed by the king to meet the Mons of this last immigration at Kanachanaburi, and bring them to Bangkok. The King ordered three royal war boats and lictors to accompany a guard of honor (Halliday,1913:11). This evident desire to get away from their Bamar rulers and seek shelter with a friendly nation seemed to give support to the common impression that the Bamars did all in their power to stamp out Mon nationality.²⁰

Halliday stated this importance and said that it is worthy to note that these immigrations of Mons into Siamese territory coincided with the active intercourse between the two countries. One can see Mon influence on almost all aspects of the Thai lifestyle. For instance, Thais adopted Phra Thamat or jurisprudence laws from Mons and has been following their principle of divine kingship up to now. Besides, Raman Buddhism, which observed strict monastic rules, was adopted as a solid foundation for the Thammayut sect in Thailand. Many of Thai customs are based on Mon beliefs as well.²¹

²⁰ Bamar Kings Tabin Shwehti and Aluangpaya mostly established themselves in Pegu (Bago), the old Mon capital and ruled the Mons as conquered people while Mons were always plotting against the Bamar monarchs and administration, forming a rebellion.

²¹ For example, Mon Rong Hai - (the Mon tradition of weeping and wailing at a funeral) and Pi Phat Mon - (Mon traditional orchestra) are well known among the Thais. The tradition of Kon Chuk - (Topknot Shaving) which has been practised for a long time was derived from the Mons.

Figure 2.10 Map of British-India, Burma and Siam in 1867

Border demarcation in color :Red=British-India, Blue= Burma, Green= Siam



Source: Stieler, A (1867) "Ost-Indien", J. Perthes Gotha publishing 1867

2.4 Defining Migration and Migrants through Migratory People of Mon State

Migration of Mon people in the past three decades has shaped a different structure of migration in the region. Not only do they produce chain migration, they have also reproduced new migration pattern with migrant brokers or Pwe-sars. The role of Pwe-sars plays an important role in defining migration and migrants of Mon state. More than eighty percent of the population in Mon state is linked to NMSP, the Mon army that has been fighting for autonomy for more

than six decades. They believed that if they did not pursue their migration in a clandestine character, they would not have any chance to exit the country. Using the illegal Pwe-sars' networks have allowed many to exit and enter Myanmar unnoticed by the authorities. In many cases, Pwe-sars have helped these migrants reach their destination by providing various services from obtaining travel documents to finding jobs for them. Some of the interviewees stated that they considered Pwe-sars as “benefactor” for their cooperation in migration. However, it is incongruous to assume that all Pwe-sars have trafficked these irregular migrants on their request. The contemporary Mon migration may present as Mon's struggle to maintain their culture and community in both Thailand and Myanmar. Nevertheless, their irregular migration continued to challenge the freedom and rights they possess.

2.4.1 The Impact of Internal and International Migration in Mon State

As mentioned earlier, internal migration represents a bigger image than it commonly does in this region as a major portion of international migration is initiated by these internal migrants, whereas they are later found in the cross-border, brokerage and even trafficking categories. For internal migrations, the main driving force for migration is poverty and scarcity of source of incomes and livelihoods in their origins. However, for international migrants, the motivation to improve livelihoods and capabilities and the need to overcome social economic risks is the main migration driver. Many internal migrants were forced to leave their villages and towns. The main reason behind the forced migration is thought to be political instability and the feeling of insecurity.

The origins of the internal migrants are generally Bago Division (East), Dry Zone, Ayeyarwaddy Division, Yangon Division and Rakhine State. There are also internal migrants

from the northern part of Mon state such as Bilin and Kyaikhto. The majority work as seasonal migrant workers, flexible to move from one place to another depending on the availability of the jobs. The surveys show that most migrants stayed in a maximum of one year in one place. Most internal migrants had to move from one place to another due to difficulties in earning during particular seasons. For example, workers who were working in brick kilns also moved from one place to another when the brick making season finished .i.e., when rainy season began. The rainy season arrives early in Mon state during the middle and end of May. Workers then have to start working in paddy fields as daily wagers. This is still a typical situation in Thanbyuzayet Township.

Internal migrants from closer distance such as Bago usually return to their origins during rainy season as Bago division can provide quite a variety of jobs for seasonal workers around this time of year.²² Some internal migrants who were working in large government rubber plantation and palm oil plantations implemented by big companies worked and stayed longer than one year as their accommodations were arranged or provided by the government departments that recruit them. These jobs offer more guarantee than working at the farms since these projects are long-term and because they are long-term, workers are allowed to bring some family members to live with them. Women in the families are sometimes recruited as cooks.

For employees with some years of experience and established contacts across the board, their employers arranged for their families to stay together in better conditions and provided other social benefits. This is a usual case for workers who have been working for rubber farms for years and have been given their own plot inside or near the owners' farms. Still, these

²² According to the interviews, Bago division has a number of army-owned lands that require many daily wagers to help meet the high productivity of monsoon paddy. The highway construction projects and dam maintenance that are usually in bad condition during rainy season also demand workforce along with projects like watermelon plantation and raising tilapia fish in paddy fields.

projects still imply uncertain working conditions. For instance, many rubber farms supply raw materials to the government factories. If the Ministry decides to cut the budget on these supplies, rubber plantation owners have no choice but to reduce the number of workers working in the plants. Due to these variable conditions, many internal migrants in the survey were found to be singles.

A big number of internal migrants can be found working in the entertainment business and service sectors such as hostesses, waiters and waitresses at teashops, restaurants and karaoke bars, especially in the Three Pagoda Pass town at the border. Almost all of them regard the current job as a transit job as they were looking for jobs overseas and once they caught better opportunities to migrate, they would leave their jobs for work in Thailand and Malaysia. These kinds of young internal migrants can be found working in Myawaddy, Kawthoung, and big cities for transport such as Mawlamyine, Dawei and Myeik (Aung Kyaw Than, 2010:27).

Most internal migrants who were in their late 40s and older have little or no education background. On the contrary, considerable numbers of younger migrants working in teashops, karaoke bars, and massage salons obtained certain level of education. Young boys (9-14 years) can be found working as waiters had obtained primary education in their native towns/villages and some young men and women even pursued a university degree or taking distance education courses to graduate. These people have higher tendency of migrating to foreign country than to remain in Myanmar even if working conditions are favorable inside the country as they are found to be excited about the experience of working a foreign country.

For international migrants, the heterogeneous nature can be found across dimensions. In particular, age, skill, education level and family background are polarized. The interviews with the family members of international migrants in Bangkok and Samusakhon indicate that most of

them were in their early twenties when first migrate. However, some of them who arrived in Thailand more than five years ago were in their late thirties and early forties (Aung Kyaw Than, 2010:28).

In terms of skills and education, although no specific skills are acquired prior to migration, most of the young international migrants studied at least a high school education. Some of them have already graduated university and spoke English well. Some of those who have migrated to metropolitan cities like Bangkok found many opportunities to practice English, especially when they work in service sectors like department stores, restaurants and cinemas, and therefore eventually become able to communicate in Thai language. Rather than moving alone, these international migrants move with their family members and even those who migrate first as singles, they are found with families within the first or second year of their migration to Thailand. However, majority are found migrating to places where their family members are already settled.

They tend to move while they are younger and a small group pursue education inside Thailand or get married with Thai nationals. Mons have a tendency to go back to their roots and settle down with someone from the same ethnic background. This is quite noticeable in returned migration where children of parents who have left Myanmar decades ago return to their parents' village to look for a partner and eventually settle down together with the extended family. At the same time, through marriage, many Mon women leave their villages to join their spouses working in Thailand and eventually settle in Thailand with other family members. Migrant families who are working near the border are inclined to send their children to attend schools inside Myanmar so that the child can speak Myanmar language. This shows their intention to come back to Myanmar in the future.

There are also some migrant couples working together in Thailand and leave their children with their parents or relatives in Myanmar. This is quite common and they send money (remittances) to support their children and extended family members. Most of the remittances are made through illegal brokers as they provide service such as bringing the money straight to the hands of person of destination. And since migrant workers fear being taxed based on how much they earn and send back, most of them never use banks. They also fear being exposed to Myanmar embassy. However, new labor recruitment system requires every migrant worker to use banks for remittances and in receiving their monthly salaries.

In the past, the Mons migrated to Thailand to escape the rule of Bamar Kings in early 17th Century and from becoming victims of tyranny during the British colonial rule in the 19th Century. The characteristics of the migrants from Mon state can generally be divided into young, ambitious and challenging. Most of them are farmers, agricultural laborers, non-farm laborers (common jobs in this category are factory workers, fishermen, and craftsman) and traders. According to the data collected from surveys, most of them belong to the age group of 15-35, and 70 percent of those who have migrated to Thailand are males. In this region, it is very common to see different types of migrants. Internal migrants from other part of the countries are coming into Mon state to fill the place of workers who migrated to other places. The presence of international migrants in the State, either crossing the border without document or migrating through proper channel, also highlight the geopolitical importance of Mon State. In addition, the majority of the forced migrants such as IDPs²³ and refugees living in the camps along Myanmar-Thai border are originally from this region.

²³ Internally displaced persons; according to Thailand Burma Border Consortium TBBC, as of 28 February 2010, there were about 5% of ethnic Mon refugees in total of 137,242 refugees living in 7 refugee camps (K1. Mae La Oon, K2. Mae Ra Ma Luang, K3.Mae La,K4.Umpiem Mai, K5. Nu Po, K6. Ban Don Yang, K7. Tham Hin) Palning-Japan IDP Village and Halockhani resettlement site.

2.4.2 Concentration of Migrants in the Region

Recent researches show that most Mon workers in Myanmar work at fishing, construction, and rubber plantations. Many of them work at Three Pagodas Pass, a small business zone where many Thai businessmen have invested in factories that employ low-wage workers from Myanmar. Although Three Pagodas Pass was famous for its border trade after 1988, in 2006 the Myanmar government decided to ban imports entering from Three Pagodas Pass as well as not to export through it. As a result, the job opportunities on the Myanmar side of the border vanished, leaving most workers to seek employment on the Thai side.²⁴

In March 2010, local border officials reported that more than three thousand migrant workers have come back and most of them are Mon migrant workers from Southern Thailand where they were working at local rubber plantations owned by Thais. According to these returnees, Mons are most concentrated in Ranong, Phang-nga, Phuket and Surathani provinces. These provinces provide jobs varying from fishery to entertainment, hotel and tourism industries. They returned mainly because of the tightened security and immigration control on Thai side where police traced down many illegal migrant workers.

Myanmar migrants in Thailand are widely spread across Thailand with the highest concentration in the Northern and Southern Provinces bordering Myanmar. About twenty four percent of the total Myanmar migrants are living in Bangkok and near Bangkok. Thirty two percent are living in Northern part of Thailand which is close to the two Myanmar border posts, Tachilek and Myawaddy. Another thirty two percent are living in Southern Thailand which is close to Myanmar border post town (Ministry of Labor, 2008).

²⁴ According to Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), many from the Myanmar side earn their living in Thai factories producing textiles, sockets, underwear, wigs, and shoes.

**Table 2.4 Registered Myanmar Migrant Workers in Thailand by location and sex
(as of December 2007)**

Region/ Provinces	Total	Male	Female
All Regions	489,282	263,572	225,710
Bangkok	80,058	37,459	42,599
Bangkok vicinities	128,073	67,070	61,003
-Samut Sakhon	73,489	36,299	37,190
-Samut Prakan	19,230	11,333	7,897
-Nakhon Pathom	15,562	8,288	7,274
-Pathum Thani	11,648	7,061	4,587
-Nonthaburi	8,144	4,089	4,055
Central	138,519	73,382	65,137
-Ayutthaya	2,248	1,437	811
Region/ Provinces	Total	Male	Female
-Others	136,271	71,945	64,326
East	25,032	15,325	9,707
-Chonburi	11,593	6,883	4,710
-Rayong	4,401	2,608	1,793
-Chacherngsao	4,713	3,172	1,541
-Others	4,325	2,662	1,663
West	31,490	18,466	13,024
-Rachaburi	12,759	7,383	5,376

-Prachubkirikhun	6,498	3,969	2,529
-Kanchanaburi	7,514	4,205	3,309
-Others	4,719	2,909	1,810
North	88,428	41,191	47,237
-Chiang Mai	41,174	20,932	20,242
-Tak	26,911	8,796	18,115
-Chiang Rai	10,131	5,457	4,674
-Mae Hong Sorn	1,296	708	588
-Others	8,916	5,298	3,618
North East	3,114	1,855	1,259
-Nakorn Rachasrima	1,565	951	614
-Kon Khen	366	209	157
-Nakorn Panom	28	14	14
Region/ Provinces	Total	Male	Female
-Others	1,155	681	474
South	122,641	75,894	46,747
-Phuket	30,997	18,186	12,811
-Suratthani	27,110	16,899	10,211
-Songkhla	13,967	8,797	5,170
Others	50,567	32,012	18,555

Source: Office of the Foreign Workers Administration, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor (2008)

The current numbers are unknown however, at the end of 2009, the number of migrants as shown in table 3.4 have increased. Top ranking provinces according to Thai Ministry of Labor, the number of “documented” Myanmar migrants are: Bangkok (195,244), Samut Sakhon (152,707), Chiang Mai (65,988), Surathani (60,787), Phuket (56,705), Samut Prakan (49,290), Ranong (48,992), Tak (45,316). However, unofficial data show that there is a large number of ‘undocumented’ Myanmar migrant labors are living in Thailand.

More than half of the 489,282 registered or documented migrants (as of December 2007) work in sectors such as fishery processing (13.4%), agriculture (18.9%), and construction (15.7%) and in domestic works (10.8%). Migrant workers are also working in sectors such as fishing boats (2.1%), rice mill (0.9%), brick factory (0.6%), ice factory (0.6%), transport (0.1%), mining (0.2%) and others²⁵ (36.3%). Many migrants have returned to Myanmar for work from mid-2011, after the country announced its intentions to revive the economy with its human resources. More than seven thousand professionals are working in Thailand and 6,267 are registered professionals working in academic, consultation, medical fields and international organizations based in Thailand. Table 3.5 shows what other types of jobs in which Myanmar migrant workers are engaged (Cambodia and Laos).

Internal migrants are concentrated in border towns and in big cities and towns in Mon state like Mawlamyine, Mudon, Thanbyuzayet and Ye. They can be found in Taninthayi, Dawei and Myeik where all major agriculture sectors are developing such as rubber plantation, palm oil plantation, salt farm, and brick kilns. In Myawaddy and Kawthaung, the border towns where many immigrants and foreigners are blended in the societies, a number of temporary internal

²⁵ Many in this sector have changed job time after time and resemble mostly to the seasonal workers. Many of them are working in different sections of entertainment businesses.

workers are found working in restaurants, karaoke bars, massage parlors and teashops.²⁶ Most of them are constantly searching for opportunities to gain access to companies in Thailand and Malaysia to be recruited. Among them are hundreds of young girls as young as 15 working at karaoke bars and massage parlors.

Table 2.5 Internal Migrants Data in Thanbyuzayet, Mudon and Ye Townships, Mon State (2008)

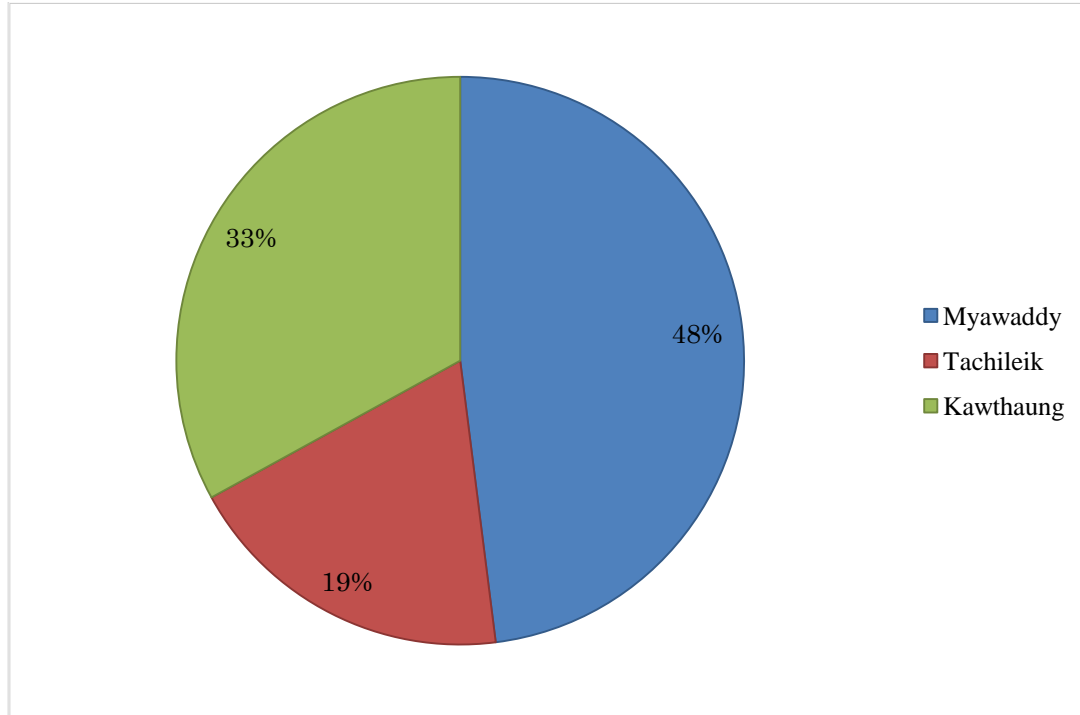
Township	% of internal migrants in each village	Average Migrants per village	Average Migrants Households per village
Thanbyuzayet	28	956	185
Mudon	9	328	62
Ye	8	311	64

Source: Field reports, Migration Health Project, IOM Myanmar

It is difficult to get accurate figures for internal migrants in the region, however, IOM data in the region shows that Thanbyuzayet township of Mon State is the most concentrated area for internal migrants. It has an average of twenty eight percent of the total population and the average internal migrants in each community are 956 with an average 185 household per village. Mudon is the second most concentrated area with nine percent of total population and average 328 migrants and 62 household per village. Ye followed with eight percent of total population and average number of migrants in each village is 311 with average 64 household in each village.

²⁶ Aung Kyaw Than (2010). P-30.

Figure 2.11 Myanmar migrants that came to border offices to do NV process



Source: Author (based on IOM Migrant Information Note issue 3, Labour Migration Programme, IOM Thailand Office)

Internal migrants are most concentrated in sectors such as agriculture, fishery, construction, and particularly in Mon state, rubber plantations. Off shore fishing and coastal fishing, crab farms, prawn farms and other jobs such as driving trishaw, selling fertilizers as sub-agents and in small-scale weaving. Some operate home-base small shops selling beetles, soft drinks, and snacks.

Myanmar migrants are particularly concentrated in industries located along border areas such as the Tak and Ranong provinces of Thailand. According to the survey conducted by IOM on Myanmar migrants who came to do National Verification (NV) process in three border offices, the majority use Myawaddy-Mae Sot route to enter Thailand to work as irregular migrants in different sectors and regions.

Table 2.6 Registered Migrant workers in Thailand from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar, by type of work, nationality and sex, December 2009

Type of work	Total three nationalities	Nationality								
		Cambodia			Lao People's Democratic Republic			Myanmar		
		Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total	1,314,382	124,761	78,945	45,816	110,854	52,980	57,874	1,078,767	591,370	487,397
Fishing	56,578	14,969	13,208	1,761	1,800	1,153	647	39,809	34,496	5,313
Seafood process.	136,973	6,020	3,044	2,976	1,180	629	551	129,773	60,477	69,296
Agriculture	221,703	24,085	15,141	8,944	18,035	11,355	6,680	179,583	110,441	69,142
Construction	220,236	32,465	21,502	10,963	12,635	8,469	4,166	175,136	112,204	62,932
Agric. process.	65,305	6,635	3,930	2,705	3,677	2,209	1,468	54,993	35,408	19,585
Meat processing	8,852	442	296	146	792	478	314	7,618	4,877	2,741
Recycling	13,172	2,215	1,365	850	1,360	906	454	9,597	6,007	3,590
Mining, quarrying	1,843	61	40	21	35	20	15	1,747	1,210	537
Metal sales	12,556	995	738	257	2,191	1,479	712	9,370	6,617	2,753
Food sales	54,225	4,483	2,262	2,221	13,074	4,833	8,241	36,668	19,378	17,290
Soil business	5,879	689	432	257	322	212	110	4,868	2,871	1,997
Const. materials	11,441	1,003	673	330	1,296	871	425	9,142	6,337	2,805
Stone processing	3,543	229	153	76	263	188	75	3,051	2,021	1,030
Garment business	49,501	1,739	673	1,066	6,121	2,738	3,383	41,641	16,993	24,648
Plastic business	16,954	1,341	782	559	2,673	1,534	1,139	12,940	8,064	4,876
Paper business	2,569	139	81	58	399	239	160	2,031	1,256	775
Electronics	2,595	152	93	59	342	198	144	2,101	1,358	743
Transport	9,596	2,502	1,726	776	601	393	208	6,493	4,431	2,062
Trade	42,814	4,778	2,895	1,883	7,565	3,994	3,571	30,471	18,604	11,867
Car repair & serv.	5,631	376	261	115	1,276	865	411	3,979	2,839	1,140
Fuel and gas	3,439	281	170	111	777	518	259	2,381	1,554	827
Education, foundations, assoc.	837	36	20	16	67	26	41	734	320	414
Household	129,790	6,578	1,422	5,156	21,267	3,227	18,040	101,945	16,977	84,968
Other	238,350	12,548	8,038	4,510	13,106	6,446	6,660	212,696	116,630	96,066

Source: Office of Foreign Workers Administration, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor, Statistics on Foreigners obtaining Work Permits in 2009 (Bangkok, Ministry of Labor, 2010)

2.5 Summary

Mons are regarded as one of the earliest civilizations in Southeast Asia and their inhabitation in the current Myanmar is said to have begun in the 9th Century. They had their own kingdom and Mon civilization has existed in the lower part of Myanmar and Southwest part of Thailand for centuries. Mon kingdom Thaton was conquered by Bamar king in 11th Century and

many intellectuals and Buddhist monks were taken to the Bamar kingdom of Pagan(Bagan). Myanmar history has highlighted the importance of Mon culture and how Mons were responsible for the spread of Buddhism in Myanmar. Mons famously fought Bamar kings and their troops for more than 200 years in history and finally founded their kingdom in Pegu (Bago) in 18th Century that lasted shortly. During those civil wars, Mons fled to the current Thailand, the land that many of their ancestors used to live.

Many historians and researchers of Mon have explained the immigration of Mons to Thailand in many different ways. In fact, Mons never considered the commute between Myanmar and Thailand as migration to another country. After the British redrew the map of southeast Asia in the 19th Century, Mons in both side of Myanmar and Thailand were separated by a border line, that eventually pushed them to bear ‘illegal migrant’ IDs. Mons have never stopped crossing Thai-Myanmar border during and after the colonial period that lasted for a hundred year. After Myanmar gained Independence from the British in 1948, Mons asked for autonomy of Mon Land and they founded autonomous Mon Land in 1974. Since the beginning of Socialist regime in Myanmar in 1962, Mons continued their liberation movement as new Mon State Party (NMSP) that signed a cease-fire with State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) government in 1995.

The current trend of Mon migration to Thailand began after the 1988 nation-wide uprising that demanded democracy from the military regime. The brutal suppression of the junta led thousands of Myanmar fled the country to take refuge in Thailand. Currently, Thailand hosts approximately 1.2 million migrant workers, of which the Mons could make up at least 700,000 of the population. The exact population of Mon in Thailand has never been surveyed however, Mahachia, the southern city of Thailand alone has 400,000 Mon workers. Mons have strong

communities in several Thai cities either work-related or family-related.

Most Mons working in Thailand and other countries are illegal. They left Myanmar with a help of migrant brokers and, smuggling and trafficking are the two major and frequent threats they have to face in this irregular migration. Although Mon state is rich with natural resources and abundance of opportunities, 70% of the population remains in poverty and this is one of the driving forces behind their migration to Thailand. Identity is another major challenge for most Mon migrants. Mons regard their identity as Mons, not as Myanmar or Thai citizen. Many of them, until recently, have no registered identification card issued by authorities of Myanmar. Their illegality has made them more vulnerable to trafficking and other migration-related problems.

The next chapter highlights the fact that Pwe-sars and overseas employment companies could provide a larger variety of options and information. The trust between migrant workers and these Pwe-sars are found to be insignificant and many Mon workers who went to Thailand with these Pwe-sars turned to their family Pwe-sars for their return to Myanmar. Another significant finding in this study is the presence of the large number of internal migrants in Mon state. There are internal migrants from other part of the countries filling the place of workers who migrated to Thailand and other countries. It is interesting to find that majority of male workers in Mon villages have migrated and worked overseas instead of working for their farms. One of the main reasons is that they are used to migration experience, the trend that is set by their ancestors. 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.

There are also international migrants either crossing the border without document or migrating through a proper channel. And the majority of the forced migrants such as IDPs²⁷ and refugees living in the camps along Myanmar-Thai border are originally from this region. Internal migration represents a bigger image than it usually does in this region as a major portion of international migration is initiated by these internal migrants whereas they are later found in the cross-border, brokerage and even trafficking categories. For internal migrations, the main driving force for migration is poverty and scarcity of source of incomes and livelihoods in their origins. However, for international migrants, the motivation to improve livelihoods and capabilities and the need to manage social economic risks is the main migration driver. The reason behind the forced migration is obviously political instability and the feeling of insecurity.

²⁷ Internally displaced persons; according to Thailand Burma Border Consortium TBBC, as of 28 February 2010, there were about 5% of ethnic Mon refugees in total of 137,242 refugees living in 7 refugee camps (K1. Mae La Oon, K2. Mae Ra Ma Luang, K3. Mae La, K4. Umpiem Mai, K5. Nu Po, K6. Ban Don Yang, K7. Tham Hin) Palning-Japan IDP Village and Halockhani resettlement site.