

CHIN DIASPORA AND THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THAILAND:IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN MYANMAR



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts in International Development Studies

Common Course

FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Chulalongkorn University

Academic Year 2018

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คนพลัดถิ่นชาวจีนและเครือข่ายสังคมในประเทศไทย: นัยยะต่อการพัฒนาในเมียนมา



วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาการพัฒนาระหว่างประเทศ ไม่สังกัดภาควิชา/เทียบเท่า

คณะรัฐศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

ปีการศึกษา 2561

ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Thesis Title CHIN DIASPORA AND THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THAILAND:IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN MYANMAR

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Field of Study International Development Studies

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Accepted by the FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, Chulalongkorn University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Master of Arts

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เปา เชียน เลียน : คนพลัดถิ่นชาวจีนและเครือข่ายสังคมในประเทศไทย:นัยยะต่อการพัฒนาในเมียนมา.  
(CHIN DIASPORA AND THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THAILAND:IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPME  
NT IN MYANMAR) อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก : ศ. ดร.สุภางศ์ จันทวานิช

เนื่อ ง ด้วย เหตุ ผล ทาง ด้าน เศรษฐกิจ สังคม และการเมือง กลุ่มคนชาติพันธุ์จีนจากภาคตะวันตกของประเทศเมียนมาได้ย้ายถิ่นเข้ามาในบริเวณพื้นที่วงในของประเทศเมียนมาและใน  
ที่ ภา ง ป ร ะ เ ท ศ  
การเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจและความต้องการแรงงานด้วยฝีมือในประเทศไทยกลายเป็นปัจจัยที่ดึงดูดผู้ย้ายถิ่นด้วยฝีมือจากป  
ร เ ท ศ เ พื่ อ น บ ำ น ร ว ม ไป ถึง ป ร ะ เ ท ศ เ มื ย น มา ด้วย  
วัตถุประสงค์ของงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้อยู่ที่การสำรวจเครือข่ายทางสังคมของคนพลัดถิ่นชาวจีนในประเทศไทย  
และนัยยะต่อการพัฒนาทางเศรษฐกิจและการเมืองของชุมชนบ้านเกิดของคนพลัดถิ่นในประเทศเมียนมา

เพื่อ ในการ นี้ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้จึงใช้แนวคิดคนพลัดถิ่นของซาฟราน (1991)  
และแนวคิดเครือข่ายทางสังคมผู้ย้ายถิ่นของเวเบอร์ (2014) ด้วยการใช้วิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพและเชิงปริมาณ  
งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ค้นพบว่าคนพลัดถิ่นชาวจีนในประเทศไทย ซึ่งมาจากชาติพันธุ์หลากหลายกลุ่มย่อยในส่วนต่าง ๆ  
ของประเทศเมียนมา มีลักษณะการพลัดถิ่นเหมือนกัน ยกเว้นเพียงแต่มาอาศัยที่คนกลุ่มนี้มีต่อรากกำเนิดของตน  
งาน วิ จ ย ช ี น นี้ ค ้น พ บ ต ุ ว ย ว่า ค น พ ล ด ถ ี น ส ำ ร ำ ง พ ัน ธ ม ิ ต ร ต ำ ง ๆ ช ี น มา  
โดยปกติแล้วเกี่ยวข้องกับโบสถ์คริสต์ซึ่งเป็นตัวประสานเครือข่ายทางสังคมในประเทศไทย สมาคมกลุ่มย่อยต่าง ๆ  
โดยปกติแล้ว ประกอบขึ้นจากกลุ่มย่อยทางชาติพันธุ์และลักษณะร่วมอื่น ๆ เช่นเดียวกัน  
งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ค้นพบว่าคนพลัดถิ่นชาวจีนในประเทศไทยนั้นมีพันธะในการส่งเงินช่วยเหลือกลับไปยังชุมชนบ้านเกิด  
แต่ไม่มีความกระตือรือร้นในการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองในชุมชนบ้านเกิดมากนัก  
ยกเว้นแต่อาจสนใจบ้างด้วยปัจจัยบางประการ

เช่นนี้แล้ว วิทยานิพนธ์ชิ้นนี้จึงสรุปว่าชาวจีนในประเทศไทยมีลักษณะ 6 ประการตามที่ซาฟรานเสนอ  
สายสัมพันธ์ภายในเครือข่ายชาติพันธุ์กลุ่มย่อยจะเหนียวแน่นเข้มแข็งมากกว่าเครือข่ายกลุ่มใหญ่  
คนพลัดถิ่นในประเทศไทยมีอุปการะต่อการพัฒนาทางเศรษฐกิจของชุมชนบ้านเกิดในระดับปานกลาง  
แต่ มี น ัย ย ะ ท ำ ง ก ำ ร เ มื อ ง ใน ร ะ ด ำ บ นี้ อ ย  
งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้พินิจพิเคราะห์ความใฝ่ฝันในอนาคตและคาดการณ์ว่าคนเหล่านี้คงยังไม่กลับบ้านเกิดในเร็ววัน

ภาควิชา ไม่สังกัดภาควิชา/เทียบเท่า  
สาขาวิชา การพัฒนาระหว่างประเทศ  
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ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....  
ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก .....

# # 6081228824 : MASTER OF ARTS

Myanmar, Development, Diaspora, Chin, Social Network, Chin Diaspora in Thailand

Pau Sian Lian :  
CHIN DIASPORA AND THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THAILAND:IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPE  
NT IN MYANMAR. ADVISOR: Prof. SUPANG CHANTAVANICH, Ph.D.

Due to socioeconomic and political reasons, Chin ethnic people from the western part of Myanmar have been migrating to inner part of the country and abroad. Economic growth and requirement of low skill labor in Thailand since the 1980s have been the pull factors for low skill migrants from its neighbors, including Myanmar. Chin people came to Thailand not only for economic opportunities but also for onward migration. The purpose of this research is to explore the social networks of Chin diaspora in Thailand and their implication to the economic and political development of their home community in Myanmar. With that, diaspora concept of Safran (1991) and migrant social networks concept of Weber (2014) were applied in this research.

By using both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, the research finds out that the Chin diaspora in Thailand, comprised on different sub-ethnic origins who were from different parts of Myanmar, have similar diasporic characteristics, except in the case of their myth of origin. It is found out that they form fellowships usually related to the Christian churches which facilitates their social networking in Thailand. Sub-fellowships are formed usually based on sub-ethnicity and homophilic tendency exists in transnational networks as well. The research finds out that Chin diaspora in Thailand are committed to sending remittance but they are not keen in political participation for their home community but for some factors.

As such, the thesis concludes that Chin diaspora in Thailand meets the six features of the Safran (1991). The strength of ties is stronger within the sub-ethnic networks than their networks as a whole. The Chin diaspora in Thailand moderately contributes to the economic development of their home community and their political implication is weak. The research assesses their future aspiration and predicts that their return is less likely to happen in the near future.

Department: Common Course Student's Signature .....

Field of Study: International Development Studies Advisor's Signature .....

Academic Year: 2018

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I praise God for the abundance of blessings throughout my life and his faithfulness to me, especially during my time as a Master's student in Thailand.

I would like to thank the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) for granting me the scholarship. I wish the agency a more successful cooperation with developing countries and may they uplift the lives of people. I would like to mention my gratitude to H.E. Mr. Pisanu Suvanajata, former Royal Thai Ambassador to Myanmar, and Madam Toon for endorsing me to achieve the TICA scholarship. I am also grateful to officers, especially Khun Dao, Khun Chat, Khun Ann and Khun Yajai to name a few, who have been kind and nurtured me at the Royal Thai Embassy in Yangon between 2014 and 2017.

I am very grateful to my thesis supervisor Emeritus Professor Dr. Supang Chantavanich for her patience and clear guidance in every step of the production of this thesis. Likewise, the thesis committee members, Dr. Carl Middleton as chairman and Mr. Jerrold W. Huguet as an external examiner, have given me sage advices – for that I hereby regards my appreciations. This thesis will not have been produced without the participation of the Chin diasporan in Thailand. I am deeply thankful Salai Ceu Bik Thawng and Taang Khai Tawng for introducing me to the Chin community in Thailand. I would like to say “Lungdam mah mah ing!” to all the leaders and every person who welcome me and participated voluntarily during my data collection in Bang Pa-In, Mahachai, and in Sukhumvit areas of Bangkok. I wish a more united and co-operations among the Chin diaspora in Thailand and beyond.

I extend my gratitude to my family members who have been supportive to me until this period. I acknowledge the endurance of my parents and brothers while I was away focusing on my study. I would like to conclude by acknowledging my sincere regards and thankfulness to the teachers and friends whom I met at the MAIDS Program at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. The time I had the opportunity to share with them may have been tiny compared to the knowledge and moral support I learnt from and through them. I feel more confident to have acquainted with them. I am thankful to Orm for the supports and assistances.

Pau Sian Lian

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## Acronyms

BCUS	-	Bangkok Chin University Students
CBT	-	Community-based tourism
CND	-	Chin National Day
CCB	-	Chin Community Bangkok
CCFB	-	Chin Christian Fellowship – Bangkok
CI	-	Certificate of Identity
CNF	-	Chin National Front
CPB	-	Communist Party of Burma
CSO	-	Civil Society Organization
DANIDA	-	Danish International Development Agency
EAO	-	Ethnic Armed Organization
GAD	-	General Administration Department
GMS	-	Greater Mekong Sub-region
INGO	-	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	-	International Organization for Migration
LFPR	-	Labor Force Participation Rate
LNGO	-	Local Non-Governmental Organization
LORC	-	Local Law and Order Restoration Council
MCA	-	Myanmar Christian Assembly
MoU	-	Memorandum of Organization
MIID	-	Myanmar Institute of Integrated Development



NCA	-	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NLD	-	National League for Democracy
NV	-	National Verification
OSSC	-	One Stop Service Center
SME	-	Small and Medium Enterprise
SLORC	-	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	-	State Peace and Development Council
TBP	-	Temporary Border Pass
UEC	-	Union Election Commission
UNESCO	-	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	-	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	-	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ZCF	-	Zomi Christian Fellowship

# Chapter I

## Introduction

### 1.1. Who are the “Chin” people?

There are 135 officially recognized<sup>1</sup> ethnic groups in Myanmar which are categorized under eight major national ethnic races such as Kachin, Kayah, Kayin (Karen), Chin, Bamar (Burmese), Mon, Rakhine and Shan. Under the Chin, there are 53 sub-ethnic groups according to official record of Myanmar, dates back to the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) era in the 1989. I use the word '**Chin**' in this paper to refer different sub-ethnic groups under the umbrella of Chin as a whole since 'Chin' is the officially recognized name in Myanmar. I refer in this paper the illustration of Sakhong (2003: 19), the diagram of Chin people, in presenting the background of the study. However, I acknowledge the contested usage of the word 'Chin' among the different groups of people who are classified under that name, especially at this present time.

Suantak, V. S. (2008) argues that despite the manifestation of Sakhong (2003) that 'Chin' as the original name for all sub-ethnic groups, there are many different groups who prefer to call themselves differently such as Asho, Laimi, Masho (Khumi), Mizo, Sho (Cho), Zomi, and so on. He referred many colonial literary works to proof that 'Chin' is not the original name, yet just a given name. Swift (2013) also admits that it is a contested issue to clarify which sub-ethnic groups are under the 'Chin' identity. While recognizing there are some groups who wish to call themselves differently, he argues that those groups using the word 'Chin' even use that name only when they speak in Burmese or English language. He states “... *for example, in the Hakha or 'Lai' language (spoken by a Chin sub-group in Hakha and Thantlang townships known as the 'Lai'), people use 'Lai' to refer to all Chin people as well as the Lai people ...*”. He

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<sup>1</sup> The list was introduced by Senior General Saw Maung on 5 July 1989. It was published in 26 September 1990. It is very controversial in terms of the categorization, groupings and division of the ethnic groups. (see further: <http://www.rvisiontv.com/really-controversial-term/>)

states, however, that the name Chin is being used more increasingly when the Chin language is spoken (Swift, 2013: 27)

## 1.2. Chin State of Myanmar

Chin State, located in the western part of Myanmar, is bordered internationally with Mizoram State of India in the northwest, Chittagong hill tract of Bangladesh in its southwest and its internal borders are Rakhine State in the south, Sagaing Region in the east and northeast, and Magwe Region in the east and southeast. The population of Chin State is 478,801 as of 2014 of which 85.4% are Christian, 13.0% Buddhists and the rest are other religion (Union Report: Religion, 2014). Chin State is generally a mountainous region and population density in Chin State is 13.3 persons per square kilometer – population distribution is 21% in urban and 79% in rural areas (MIID, 2014). Due to the geographic location and dispersed population distribution, Chin State becomes one of the most ethnic diverse states and regions in Myanmar, with 53 officially recognized sub-ethnic groups in Myanmar. Hakha is the capital city of Chin State. The administrative structure of Chin State is divided into three districts, namely, 1) Falam, 2) Hakha, and 3) Mindat District (Win, 2017).



Figure 1. Map of Chin State retrieved from Radio Free Asia (RFA)

### 1.3. Situational Background

Due to the 'push' factors such as economic instability, political limitation, conflicts, environmental depletions, and many other social constraints under the authoritarian government, Myanmar people have been migrating to neighboring countries and further countries since the 1980s, becoming the largest migrant country in Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). According to 2014 Myanmar Census, 2,021,910 people from households in Myanmar are living outside the country. Economic growth and requirement of low skill labor in Thailand have been the pull factors for Myanmar migrants who are seeking better economic opportunities. Thailand hosts almost 70% of Myanmar's total international migrants, followed by Malaysia at 15%, China at 4.6%, Singapore at 3.9%, the United States at 2% and India at 1% according to the census data. In fact, the census does not include those who migrated household wide or by the entire families. Thus, the number of Myanmar nationals living abroad is unofficially estimated to be around 4.25 million by the Ministry of Immigration and Population (Gupta, 2016: 14). Unlike the fluctuation of the rate of migration to other countries, migration of Myanmar people to Thailand has been increasing since 1990s. According to the Ministry of Labor of Thailand, there were 1.4 million documented Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand as of May 2016 (IOM, 2016). 56% of Myanmar migrants in Thailand are mainly residing in Chiang Mai, Tak, Kanchanaburi, Ranong, Bangkok, Samut Sakhon, and Surat Thai provinces (Gupta, 2016).

Chin people have been facing human rights abuses, suppression and discriminations during the consecutive military regimes in Myanmar mostly from armed organizations, mainly the military (Tatmadaw). Therefore, not only internal migration to plain and urban areas in Myanmar, many Chin people have been migrating abroad. Despite geographical distance, many Chin people from Myanmar came to Thailand not only due to economic and political reasons but also due to other factors such as assistance from friends. Their main purpose is to seek opportunities in Thailand and some aim for onward migration towards the third countries, bypassing Thailand. According to a comprehensive survey of 100,000 Myanmar migrants in Thailand by the IOM in 2013, 0.2% of the respondents or 200 people out of 100,000 respondents are from Chin State

(Gupta, 2016: 18). The total number of Chin people in Thailand was estimated to be around 2,000 as of 2010 (Tiam, 2010).

As Myanmar transformed itself into democracy in 2010, the union government agreed to sign Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and the NCA was signed with Chin National Front (CNF) in 2012, the Chin EAO which held clash against the military after the 1988 nationwide uprising. Unlike the previous times of "central planning" system, the "bottom-up" approach was introduced by the President Thein Sein Administration and states and regions are allowed to participate and take responsibility of planning and budgeting for themselves. The proposed budget plans from each states and regions are combined into the "National Comprehensive Development Plan". The then-Chin State government also developed Comprehensive Development Plan 2016-2021 in cooperation with a local firm Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development (MIID) with financial support from DANIDA and UNICEF (MIID 2014). Taking office in April 2016, the current National League for Democracy (NLD)-led Chin State Government has adopted the development endeavor of its predecessor and has addressed many agendas to promote the socioeconomic status of the state, including human resource development and job creation, poverty reduction, promotion of agricultural sector, environmental conservation and infrastructure development in cooperation with many INGOs, LNGOs and CSOs (Thant, 2017). According to the current Myanmar Investment Law, tax exemption is allowed for investment in Chin State in addition to many other incentives (Win, 2017) and this is expected to create many job opportunities within the state in the near future. Thus, a question arises how Chins diasporas abroad have been contributing to the development of Chin State, whether out migration from Chin State will continue to grow in the light of these development initiatives within the state and the country as a whole or whether Chin people who have migrated to other places and abroad will go back to their place of origin is worth considering.

#### 1.4. Problem Statement

Since the political transition of Myanmar into democratic system in 2010 and the taking office in 2011, the quasi-civilian government of Myanmar has been initiating several programs to recover its lagging behind socioeconomic conditions. Along with several reforms, the governments have been navigating reintegration of the country into the global economic system, inviting foreign direct investments, facilitation of financial system and so on. At this point, the government has acknowledged the contribution of its people abroad to the local economy, unlike the negligence in the previous regimes. Financial reform such as liberalization of foreign exchange rate, banking and remittance reforms, and the Microfinance Law in 2011 are some of the civilian government's facilitation to its oversea migrants. Myanmar Union Minister for Labor, Immigration and Population assures that workers will be sent to other countries via memorandum of understanding (MoU).

The impact of political and economic reforms of Myanmar and its facilitations for the nationals who have been dispersing abroad due to economic and political reasons in the past is needed to be analyzed. It is to understand how nationals abroad contribute to the social, economic and political development of their home country. There has been a gap in the studies and literature about the impact on Chin diaspora in Thailand which was estimated to be around 2,000 populations in 2010 prior to the political reforms in Myanmar. By analyzing the characteristics of Chin diaspora in Thailand, this thesis explores their social network, migration experiences and their livelihoods in Thailand. And finally, it investigates how they imply the economic and political development of their home community in Myanmar, and assesses their future aspirations.

#### 1.5. Research Question

The main question of the thesis is "**What are the characteristics of the Chin diaspora in Thailand and their social networks in relation to their home community Myanmar?**" To answer the main question, the following sub-questions are prepared.

- a) Does the Chin diaspora in Bangkok, Thailand meet the six features of Safran (1991)?
- b) What are their social network, their migration experiences and livelihood in Bangkok, Thailand?
- c) How does Chin diaspora in Thailand contribute to the economic and political development of their home community in Myanmar and what are their future aspirations?

### **1.6. Objectives of Study**

The main objectives of the thesis are as follows:

- a) To explore the Chin diaspora in Thailand.
- b) To analyze the social networks of Chin diaspora in Thailand.
- c) To investigate how Chin diaspora in Thailand, and their social networks contribute to economic and political development in Myanmar and their future aspirations.

### **1.7. Research Methodology**

The research of this thesis is conducted by both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to gain the insightful and thorough understanding of the Chin diaspora in Thailand. The researcher preliminarily observes some of the networks the Chin community in Bangkok, review the documents from government and non-governmental organizations related to Chin diaspora within and beyond Thailand, and the current situations of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand, in order to understand the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand and the relationship with their home community. To strengthen the analysis of the paper, the researcher also reviewed several academic papers and applied the theoretical concepts of diaspora and migrant social networks to develop the framework of this research.

Based on the applied concepts of the paper, in-depth and Likert-type scale questionnaires were developed. In doing so, the questionnaires for both qualitative and

quantitative purposes, which are developed into understandable words but in accordance with the conceptual framework of the thesis, are translated into Burmese language. In-depth questionnaires are interrogated to the informants and some members at the focus areas of the research by randomly picking up. Burmese language is mainly used as the medium in the interviews and conversations but Zomi sub-ethnic Chin language is also used in research areas where the sampling population speak, especially in Bang Pa-In. The researcher delivers and explains the content and methods of answering the Likert-type scale questionnaires which are translated into Burmese language at the research sites. As such,

- By doing the field work at the three selected areas in and near Bangkok, the opinion surveys are collected and in-depth interviews with senior members are conducted proportionally.
- The researcher also does participatory observations by visiting the residents of some members in each research sites, integrating and conversing with them in order to gain in-depth understanding of their livelihoods, social networks and activities.
- Focus group discussions are conducted to analyze the future aspiration of Chin diaspora in Thailand. The discussants are grouped by homogeneity, mainly by the type of work, with the intention to analyze opinions by respondents of shared experiences.

#### **(i) Criteria of the Case Study Selection**

The selection and exclusion of the members of Chin diaspora in Thailand is classified as follows:

##### Study areas selection

Due to the efforts of Christian missionaries in Myanmar in the past centuries, a vast majority of predominantly animist Chins have turned into Christianity. As of 2014, more than 85% of the total population of Chin State are Christian and 13% Buddhists (Union Report: Religion, 2014). According to preliminary interviews with senior members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand, it was observed that most of the Chin people



are residing or working within and near Bangkok are Christian. Therefore, the focus areas of the field research of Chin diaspora in Thailand are mainly the Christian churches and chapels in 1) Ayutthaya Province, 2) Samut Sakhon Province and Sukhumvit area in Bangkok as follows:

1. Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, Ayutthaya Province
2. Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship in Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province
3. Bangkok Matu Fellowship, Jaisamarn Full Gospel Church, Bangkok
4. Calvary Baptist Church, Bangkok
5. Chin Christian Fellowship – Bangkok, Myanmar Christian Assembly, Bangkok

#### Criteria of the Informants for In-depth Interviews

- Informants who are senior and active members of the activities of Chin diaspora in Thailand. (The term “senior” hereby refers to someone who has been residing or working in Thailand more than five consecutive years, as of the data collection date)
- Informants who are senior and used to be active members of the activities of Chin diaspora in Thailand

#### Criteria of the Respondents for Opinion Survey

- Those who are covered in the survey
  - Members of the Chin diaspora who came to the Church on the day of data collection at on site.
  - Members of the Chin diaspora who did not come to the church on the day of data collection on site but who are reachable easily from the residents of those presented at the church. In other words, for those who did not come to the church, the questionnaires are delivered through some members of Chin diaspora presented at church or chapels who could share some of their time for the researcher and the survey data are collected later. As such, not only Christian members but also some non-

Christian members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand are included in this research.

- Those who are not covered in the survey
- The survey of this research could not cover opinions of members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand who lives beyond the survey areas and those who have different working hours from the majorities.

#### Criteria of the Focus Group Discussion

- Members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand who engage in ‘blue-color-works’ such as furniture, restaurants, and industry.
- Members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand who are university students and those who engage in ‘white-color-works’ or intellectual works.

#### **(ii) Informants Interview**

In terms of the nature of the subject of this research, persons or institute that has ‘key information’ about the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand cannot be found. Therefore, the researcher selected some informants by their participatory knowledge within the Chin diaspora in Thailand as follows:

##### **a. Senior Pastor of Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, Ayutthaya Province**

He is from northern part of Chin State and is a Zomi sub-ethnic Chin person. The senior pastor arrived Thailand in 1995. Prior to becoming the church pastor, he began his life in Thailand as migrant worker for 15 years. But when he finished studying theology at a Thai Christian institute in 2011, he established and minister the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In. The church has more than 200 believers not only Chin ethnics but also other ethnics of Myanmar, who are working in Thailand. Through his long and consecutive years in Thailand, the senior pastor has seen and been participating in the cultural and social activities of the Chin diaspora in Thailand. As a church pastor, he is also a well-known preacher not only to the Chins but also to non-Chin Christians, especially in Bang Pa-In area. He has a wide network with Thai Christian preachers as well.

**b. Chairman of Thailand Mizo Run (“Run” means “House” in Mizo sub-ethnic language)**

He is from Falam, Chin State and is a Laimi sub-ethnic Chin. He came to Thailand in May 1992 and has been working in the construction sector in Thailand. He has been the Chairman of Thailand Mizo Run, formed in 2014, and is also a de-facto church pastor of “Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship”. Being a senior and a well-known member of Chin diaspora in Thailand, he has a wide range of knowledge on the social networks and affairs of the community. Based in Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province, he is doing sub-contract from Thai construction companies.

**c. Reverend Pastor at Burmese Ministry of the Calvary International Baptist Church in Bangkok, Thailand**

He is from Htantlang, Chin State and is a Laimi sub-ethnic Chin. He studied at the Mandalay University during 1970-1974. Then he studied theology at Myanmar Institute of Theology as one of the first batch students in 1979. He served for the Baptist churches in Falam, Chin State (from 1980-1985) and Mandalay (1986-1996). By the will of God, he was invited and served as the church pastor at the Calvary International Baptist Church in Bangkok. After leading the Burmese Ministry at the church for four years, he established the New Burmese Ministry and has been ministering since 2001.

The Reverend Pastor is a well-known person among the Chin diaspora in Thailand and beyond. He was also one of the founding members Chin Christian Fellowship - Bangkok (CCFB) and Chin Community - Bangkok (CCB). He has a wide range and insightful knowledge of the community.

**d. A current leading member of Chin Christian Fellowship - Bangkok (CCFB)**

He is from Falam, Chin State and a Laimi sub-ethnic Chin. He came to Thailand in 2010 as a Master’s student for Information Technology at the Shinnawatra University, Rangsit, Thailand. He was the Secretary of CCFFB in 2011 and has been taking a leading role in the CCFFB since 2013. He was the champion in organizing the

Chin National Day in Bangkok in 2017 and 2018. By actively participating not only in cultural and social activities but also as an executive of the church activities, he has in-depth knowledge of the Chin diaspora in Thailand. As a profession, he is currently an Executive Recruitment Consultant at MONROE Consulting Group, based in Bangkok, Thailand.

**e. A former executive member of the Chin Christian Fellowship - Bangkok (CCFB)**

She is a Falam sub-ethnic Chin who came into Thailand in 2006. She was one of the founding members of the CCFB in 2007. She was involved actively in the religious, cultural and social activities of the CCFB until 2011. She has the first-hand knowledge and insightful experiences of the functions of CCFB and the Chin diaspora in Thailand. She is currently teaching Myanmar children at a voluntary school in Bangkok.

**f. Field Officer, Raks Thai Foundation, Samutsakhon Office**

*She is one of the founding members of Chin Christian Fellowship - Bangkok (CCFB)*

She is from Hakha and Laimi sub-ethnic Chin. She used to work 2 years in Falam, Chin State, and for 15 years as a nurse at the Yangon General Hospital in Myanmar before she came into Thailand in June 1997. Lost her job for three months due to the Tom Yam Kung Financial Crisis in Thailand, she later worked at an NGO in November 1999. Being one of the key founders of the CCFB and as an NGO staff, now as a Field Officer at Raks Thai Foundation, she has a vast knowledge and experiences of the Chin diaspora in Thailand.

**g. A senior member of Chin diaspora in Thailand, founding member of Matu Fellowship - Bangkok**

She is from Matupi, Chin State, who arrived Thailand in 2004. Working as a domestic worker in different houses in and around Bangkok over the years, she has

insightful knowledge about the Chin diaspora in Thailand, especially about the Matupi Fellowship Bangkok through her experience.

### **(iii) Conducting the Survey**

#### Accessing the Potential Respondents

Chin diaspora members in three areas in Thailand such as Ayutthaya Province, Samut Sakhon Province and Sukhumvit area in Bangkok are surveyed. In order to get the target number of the respondents from each study area, the researcher contacts the key persons of those places and explains about the aims of the research, brief of the questionnaires and the target group of respondents. As such, location, number and time availability of the potential respondents are ensured. Since most of the survey takes place in the churches and chapels in selected areas, the researcher explains, delivers and collects the questionnaires from respondents only after the worship programs to ensure the voluntary participation of the respondents and allows them to take time answering the questionnaires. Moreover, stationary such as the questionnaire sheet and pen are provided to each respondent in order to avoid peer pressure and allows them to answer the questionnaires freely.

In order to cover a wider and inclusive sample for the research, the researcher also delivers the questionnaires through some members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand who presented on the date of survey to those were not presented. As such, opinions of members of the Chin diaspora who do not attend the church, either due to the limited free time or not being Christians, are covered.

#### Time Frame

Field data collection were mainly done in May and June 2018. Since most of the research sites are at the churches and chapels, the researcher mostly goes to the research site for collecting opinion surveys on Sundays. However, interviewing informants are done in the week days as well. Even though most of the data collection were completed within the two months, interviews with some informants, especially with the informant from Samut Sakhon Province, continued up to August 2018. This is

mainly due to the tight schedule of informants and the follow-up questions in the triangulation process of the thesis writings.

#### Participatory observation areas

The study of Chin diaspora and their social network in Thailand is not limited by on-paper research, interviewing the informants and conducting field research at churches and chapels. Not only by participating at in the network and church activities of each focus areas, the researcher converses with the members face-to-face, observes and visits in person to the residents of some members of the Chin diaspora in 1) Bang Pa-In, Ayutthaya Province, 2) Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province, and 3) residents of some members in Bangkok. The visited residents are either self-rent apartments or houses as well as those provided by the works. This method allows the researcher to ease the tensions of respondents to answer the questions, see their body language and expressions, observe the insightful and first-handed knowledge of the livelihood and social network of the Chin diaspora in Thailand – it is very helpful in the writing and analyzing processes.

#### **1.8. Secondary Documents**

Documents from the CSOs, NGOs, government agencies and academic papers related to the history of the Chin people, Chin diaspora in Thailand and beyond are reviewed in order to assess the Chin diaspora in Thailand and the policy, legal issues of the host country affecting them.

#### **1.9. Data Analysis**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, triangulation method is applied into the analyzing process of survey data. Research findings, by applying both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, from each focus area including the statistics and facts are compared and cross-checked each other as well as

with the earlier findings from academic papers and reports from government agencies and non-government institutes.

### **1.10. Scope of the Research**

Due to the time limitation, the scope of research covers only main areas in Thailand where most Chins resides. Data collection was made in Bangkok and its vicinity which is broadly categorized into three main areas: 1) at the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, Ayutthaya Province, 2) Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship/Thailand Mizo Run in Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province, and 3) Myanmar Christian Assembly (MCA), the Calvary International Baptist Church and a chapel of the Matu Fellowship Bangkok which are in the Sukhumvit area of Bangkok, Thailand. Aiming to obtain diverse yet inclusive information, opinion survey collection also covered Buddhist Chin diaspora members.

### **1.11. Limitation of the Research**

Due to the limitation of institute and organization in documenting the information of Chin people in Thailand, as well as due to the nature of movement of migrants, the statistics of the Chin diaspora in Thailand is based on the estimated numbers. Therefore, selection of the study areas is decided by the documents and on the information acquired within the reach of senior members of the Chin diaspora who are mainly resided in Bangkok, Thailand.

Nevertheless, due to the limited period of timeframe, approximately two months for data collection, field research could be done specifically only within and near Bangkok, mostly at the Christian churches and chapels. Since most of the members of Chin diaspora in Thailand are working in the low-skill and medium-skill type of work, they have very limited free time. The research was able to be conducted to those who came to the church on their holiday and to those reachable by those who presented at church. Moreover, some members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand repatriated in late

2017, due to the change of law in Thailand when the Royal Decree on Managing the Work of Aliens B.E. 2560 (2017) effective in 23 June 2017.

### **1.12. Significance of the Research**

By exploring empirical knowledge gap of characteristics of Chin diaspora, their experiences, situations and difficulties, the thesis will contribute as the academic literature with regard to Chin diaspora in, and beyond, Thailand and may support further researches. This will be a great contribution to Chin community, civil society organizations (CSOs) and Chin State Government in Myanmar.

### **1.13. Ethical Issues**

In interviewing the Chin migrant workers for this thesis, it is highly cautious that their personal information will be kept confidential. The researcher will use 'consent forms' in the case of documentation of their personal information are to be publicized in the paper. Knowing that many of them will have migration experience that may not be through the legal procedures, as many others, the researcher will take only the content in that issue. Likewise, information regarding remittance and livelihood will be mentioned as anonymous to protect their personal data.



## Chapter II

### Theoretical Concepts and Research Background

#### 2.1. Theoretical Concepts

##### 2.1.1. Diaspora

Diaspora was the term used for dispersion of a particular community of people, Jews, around the Mediterranean basin until recently. However, the Greek word, 'diaspora' which is comprised of a prefix 'dia' meaning 'through' and 'sperein' meaning 'to scatter', is used by many scholars and journals to refer movement of people in different ways and in different situation. The term 'diaspora' is defined in different ways from different scholars and researchers. For instance, Kim Butler (2001) has coined the 'checklist' approach for understanding diaspora which include, 1) that that diaspora must have collective memory or narrative of their homeland, 2) they must maintain their identity notwithstanding the situation in their new destination, and 3) they must have strong network of ties with their homeland (Edwards, 2014). The checklist is broadened and being developed by other scholars and researchers in the study of diaspora. In fact, some transnational community members or diaspora who never lived in their homeland can even have a great senses ownership and willingness to support their homeland, as equal or even more than ones who used to live (Patterson, 2006). Whatsoever is coined, many scholars use the term 'diaspora' to mention the Cubans and Mexicans who reside in the US, Turks in Germany, Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and so on (Safran, 1991).

Migration and diaspora are closely related. However, many diaspora theorists argue that migration must be a 'forced' one in order to qualify an immigrant group as a diaspora. Diaspora can be defined by two ways either by 1) the fact that a large population movement from a place due to some factors leading them to settle in outside their homeland – traditional paradigm or 2) by the fact that a group of people expressing hybrid consciousness and identity – post-modern way of interpretation (Hickman, 2005). By expanding Walker Connor's definition of diaspora that states 'that segment of a people living outside the homeland', Safran (1991) proposed six features to see diaspora in traditional way, namely, 1) dispersal, 2) collective memory, 3) alienation

by the host country, 4) their respect and longingness for their homeland, 5) belief in restoration and 6) self-definition of homeland. With this notion of diaspora, expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents at a certain place, immigrant and ethnic minorities were counted in the definition (Hickman, 2005: 119).

Safran (1991) states that his concept of diaspora may imply to the expatriate minority groups (or 'communities') who share many of his six characteristics. He states that Jewish diaspora is the 'ideal type' according to his definition and it also fits in the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek and Chinese diaspora. By 'dispersal', he refers that a certain group of people and their ancestors must have been dispersed from their origin which he termed 'center' to two or more regions – 'peripheral' or foreign. 2) He states that those group of people must have a 'collective memory, vision, or myth' with regard to their homeland about its physical location, history and the achievements in the past. 3) Another characteristic of diaspora that he proposed is that, those group of people dispersed to the new region feel that they are not or cannot be accept fully by host society and they 'feel alienated and insulated from it'. 4) Those group of people believe that their ancestral homeland is their genuine or true place that they belong. Thus, they believe that they and their descendants should return their homeland when the time is right. 5) Moreover, these group of dispersed people believe that they have to be committed collectively to look after and maintain their original homeland for its prosperity and to protect from any harm. 6) Lastly, he states that those group of dispersed population maintains their relationship with their original homeland 'one way or another' and 'their ethno communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such relationship'. (Safran 1991: 83-84)

This study will explore the conformity of the characteristics of Chin diaspora in Thailand to the six features proposed by Safran (1991). Most of the Chin people in Thailand mainly reside in Bangkok and near-by areas such as Bang Pa-In area in Ayutthaya province and Mahachai area in Samut Sakhon province. Based on the scholarly estimations [estimated to be 2000 by Tiam (2010)], in-depth interviews with informants among the senior members of Chin diaspora in Thailand and field observation, I estimate that the population of Chin diaspora in the whole Thailand to be around 1200 in total.

### **2.1.2. Diaspora Contribution to Economic and Political Development**

Diaspora politics especially in the international relations and ethnic conflict resolution aspects has gained attention from the academics in the past few decades. Diaspora politics can be classified into political behavior of the diaspora, the relationship of diaspora with their home country and host country, and the tendency to which their home country facilitates political relation with the diaspora (Herner-Kovács, 2014).

Diasporas are emigrants and their descendants who are living in a third country either permanently or temporary. These diasporas maintains strong ties with their home country or ancestry and those ties enable development (Agunias Newland, 2012). Patterson (2006) studied diaspora and development in three schemes such as 1) development in the diaspora, 2) development through the diaspora, and 3) development by diaspora. Development in diaspora means the diaspora working hard in the third country in order to gain financial resources, intellectual capital and political space in order to ensure their security. The government of their country may support its diaspora in a third country for the good of its people and for its own good, i.e., the financially and politically equipped diaspora may contribute to the security and development of their home country. For instance, studies found out that South Korea has increased trade with the countries where South Korean diaspora exist. Moreover, South Korean diaspora have contributed to the development of their home country, South Korea, by transferring the knowledge and skills which they gained at the third country. 'Development through diaspora' is the positive results gained form same ethnic diaspora networks within the same country and from different parts of the world. In this scheme, Patterson (2006) gave the example of Chinese diaspora networks between mainland Chinese and oversea Chinese which constitutes an immense proportion of trading globally as well as knowledge transfer of oversea Chinese in Silicon Valley of the United States to fellow Chinese in Taiwan and Peoples' Republic of China (PRC). Lastly, for the scheme of development by diaspora, Patterson (2006) gave example of investment of the oversea Chinese to the PRC when Deng Xiaoping opened the country in 1978. Knowing the impact of 'development by its diaspora', China invested a lot on strengthening diaspora-homeland collaboration. (Patterson 2006). The first notion of 'development in diaspora' is expected to be seen in the Chin diaspora in Thailand given

the social network and ties with relatives and friends in their home country. The second notion of 'development through' diaspora is also expected to be seen mainly in, but not limited to, church related cases due to the fact that Chin people are mostly Christians and church plays an immense role in development of Chin State during the past decades when the country was under military regime. It was common that many church leaders from Chin State give fund raising tour to countries where Chin diaspora exist. The last notion is 'development by diaspora' is a choice of policy making that this thesis intends to light the Chin State government and Myanmar government broadly, to make good use of its resources.

Moreover, diaspora can be a lobbying force for politics of their country of origin which may have positive effect in political reform or for change as well as negative effect to prolong the conflict occurring in their country of origin (Wickramasekara, 2018). The diaspora living in liberal society in the third countries or in democratic countries usually try to impose the values into their country of origin. Moreover, most migrant are distributors and promoters of the universal values and they promote peace. Diasporas in Europe has become one of factors of democratization of their countries of origin over the past two decades – they usually take the role of civil society and return their home countries to take leadership in the politics. In terms of political participations, some scholars advocate for the right to vote of diaspora for their countries of origins as 1) they closely and actively taking part in the livelihood of their relatives living in the countries of origin and 2) this is a way of treating citizens equally between those living in the country and abroad as well as between citizens living abroad, i.e. equally rights for rich citizens outside and poor ones (Rigoni 2013: 6, 7).

### **2.1.3. Social Network of Migrants**

Labor migration may have many motives rather than economic factor though it plays a very vital role. Having a community of migrant in a destination will reduce the risks for new comers and new migrants will find it easier to get a job, find a place to live, facilitation in papers and so on. A settled migrant community in one destination may attract subsequent migration from their place of origin to that certain destination (Appleyard 1992). This is called the network migration or network theory as well as chain migration. The network connection is a form of social capital that attracts people

to get employment in the abroad and it is an obvious cause of migration (Haas, 2008). In terms of the Chin diaspora in Thailand and other countries, network is expected to play a big role in their migration process, given their nature of living in a closed society whereby each member in the village or community know and help each other.

Literatures on the study of 'social network' in migration have been developing over time. Saying that there is not uniform use of the concept of 'social networks' in the study of migration, Weber (2014) has synthesized the evolution of the concept 'social network' from many researchers. He pointed out the difference 'social networks' from other forms of social connections, by referring earlier studies, is that social networks have the strategic nature. Therefore, he states that the two features of social networks that it includes interpersonal and organizational ties, and that the networks can be seen as adaptive strategies towards a certain extent. He explains that migrants' ties to organization can be seen when professionals are recruited by the firms or organizations even though the professionals do not have personal ties with the people in the host country. He also elaborates the strategic nature of migrant networks when migrants expand their social ties in order to cope the new surroundings they are in. Social ties can be distinguished into two types: 1) single-dimensioned and 2) multiplex ties. Here, he explains that single-dimensioned ties are when someone interact with another in on situation where as multiplex ties mean when two people's relation is into different aspects and the two probably interact each other in different context as in the case of when two cousins became business partners that they have personal and professional interaction at the same time.

Another feature of social network is the '**homophily**'. 'Homophily' means the tendency of people to interact with another who share similar personal, social, cultural, political or economic characteristics as they are. Weber (2014) further reviews the existing literature about 'homophily' that it covers every type of social ties that may go from friendship and marriage up to work, support and exchange of networks. He says that the 'homophily' allows migrants (and people) the feeling of comfort, trust and belongings which are key elements of social networks or human interactions. Homophilic ties are generally more stable than heterogeneous ties. He also highlighted that lack of commonalities may hinder the social contacts of migrants and that if

homophily among migrants is so high, the possibility to interact with host community or ‘nonimmigrants’ is unlikely. In terms of the similarity, ethnicity can be the most important dimension, but some scholars highlight that sub-ethnicity or regional belonging can also be the decisive factors of individuals to interact with the others. Weber (2014) pointed out, citing a literature on migrant networks, that ‘homophily in race and ethnicity creates the strongest divides’ which in turn is pointed out by scholars that since the social units are not given to ethnic groups, dimension of similarity or dissimilarity hinders their social interactions. Other factors causing association or division of migrants (or people) may include education, occupation, social class, religion, attitudes and aspirations, age and gender, legal status and category immigration, and the generation of being a migrant in a host country (Weber 2014: 6).

Individual networks comprise of many other sub-networks and that sub-networks of migrants, though it may probably be overlapping, constitutes the individual’s whole network. Since migrant networks have the sub-networks, there is a difference between core and extension of each migrant’s whole network. Here, the core network means the ties which occur based on similarities of people such as being family and friendships based on biology and fictive kinship or kinship that is not based on blood nor by marriage. As stated earlier, core networks are supposed to be the most trusted, supportive and committed networks among migrants (and all human) that brings with it a powerful social capital. On the other hand, extension of network means networks beyond that of the core. This may happen in people who share similar ethnicity, school, works, neighbor, and so on. Unlike the 19<sup>th</sup> century, dimension of ties in of this kind are regarded as important aspects of the social networks. Difference between the core and extension of networks are classified by the ‘strength of ties’ which is measure by the time that individuals spend together, ‘emotional intensity’, mutual confidence or trust and assistance being served among them (Weber 2014: 6,7).

Migrant networks cover the networks of the existing migrant and their transnational networks which means their network with the ex-migrants and their family, potential migrant and the non-migrants in their place of origin as well as with people in their host societies. Weber (2014) also reviews further literatures and points out that migrant networks can be formal, saying that it can be the legal associations which are the most

substantial method of social networks. On the other hand, migrant social networks can be and usually are informal ties that may be ties among family and beyond such as among friends. Informal networks are not regulated with formal rules but they are run by the so-called informal regulatory mechanism, comprised with trust and respects or reputation of individual person among the migrants. While informal networks are more popular than the formal ones among migrants in their host countries, formal networks serve as the contact point for new comers that will lead them to their interaction with the informal networks. (Weber 2014: 8)

This thesis applies the concept of migrant's social network of Weber (2014) in order to exploring the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand. Weber (2014) has summarized that 'social network' as follows:

*"formal and informal, local and transnational, by tendency homophilic and often multiplex ties between individual migrants who share one or more dimensions of similarity; migrant networks are to a certain degree strategic but are typically regulated by informal principles rather than formal rules, consist of different sub-networks and are made up of a core and an extension, encompassing strong and weak ties."*

Weber (2014) further illustrates the role of technology into expansion and strengthening of the migrant social networks. Cell phone and computer with the combination of internet have enabled the migrants to be connected among themselves and their transnational networks. He argues that technology-mediated communications have gained much attention to the migrants, given their nature of being away from their place of origin and willingness to connect with people from their original areas, yet the literature has given less attention to the technology-mediated communication of migrants. While digital divides exist between the global 'South' and the 'North', accessibility and usage of communication technology among migrants varies due to many aspects. The determinants of dissimilarities of communication technology can be classified by socio-economic and human capital of the migrants per se, gender, age, legal status and ethnicity, according to the literature reviews of Weber (2014). Technology not only allows the migrants with communication to their relatives and friends in different places, it also provides them with other opportunities such as

information, politics of host country or country of origin by accessing chances to express their opinion on the contemporary issues and so on. While there are many bright side of technology to the migrant networks, it comes with a certain extent of personal, social and financial costs. While the financial burden is quite understood, the author gives examples that a person may overwhelm when family members can easily access to him and as for money despite his struggling in the new country. He also gives example that one may be overwhelmed by the surveillance checks to his activities or control from another country with the advantage of new communication technology.

#### **2.1.4. Conceptual Framework**

The thesis will use the concept of 'diaspora' through the lens of the tradition paradigm using the six features of Safran (1991) in order to asses and understand to what extent the Chin diaspora in Thailand, mainly from the three selected focus areas such as 1) Bang Pa-In, Ayutthaya Province, 2) Mahachai area in Samut Sakhon Province and 3) Sukhumvit area in Bangkok, meet the six features to term diaspora proposed by Safran (1991). Moreover, the concept of "migrant social networks" elaborated by Weber (2014) will be applied in this thesis to understand the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand. As such, by understanding the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand, the thesis will examine their contribution to the economic and political development of Chin State and Myanmar by using the concepts of (Wickramasekara 2018) and (Patterson 2006) respectively. Finally, the future aspirations of Chin diaspora in Thailand will be assesed in relation to the political reforms taken place in Myanmar. As such, the conceptual framework can be seen as follows:



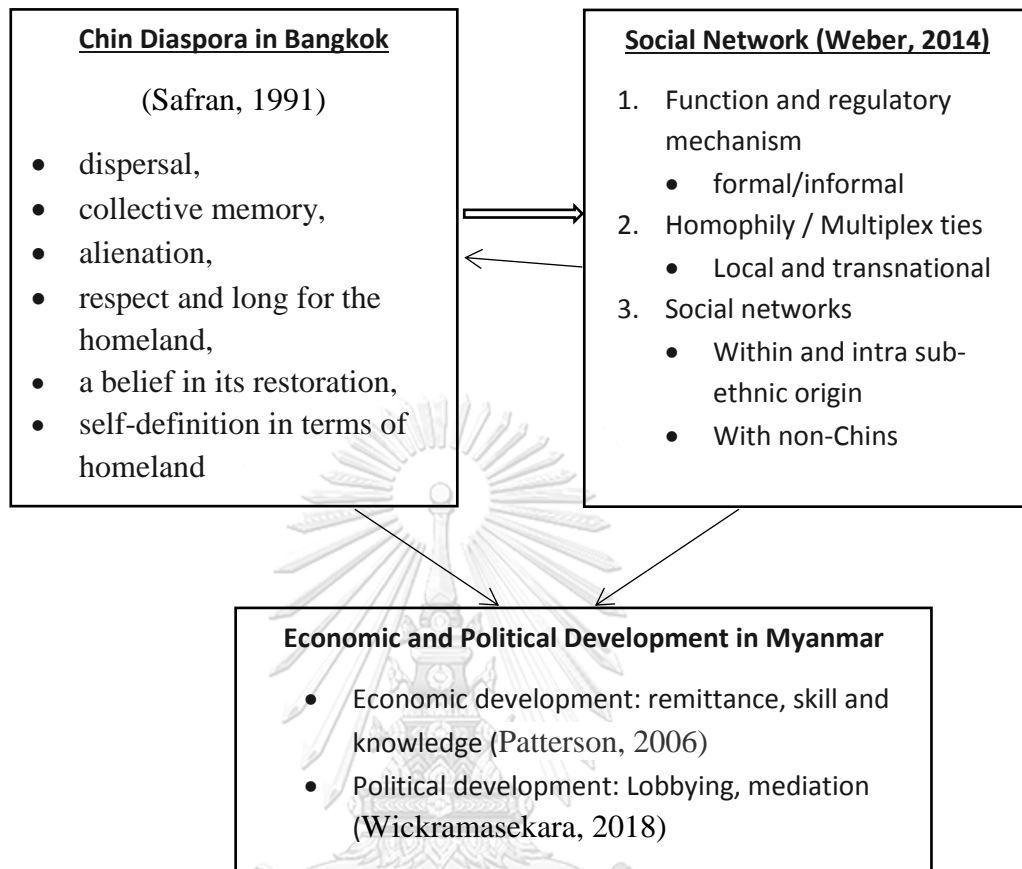


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1.5. Hypothesis

The thesis is based on the assumption that (1) Chin people migrate into Thailand not only by the economic, political or environmental motives but also they are migrated into Bangkok or its vicinity, despite geographically distant location, as there have been their relatives, friends, or people of same sub-ethnic groups were established in advance. It is expected that their social network plays a crucial role before and after their migration experiences. (2) Myanmar has transformed from authoritarian military regime to democratic system since 2010 and it has been within the second term of democratic government, having achieved relative political, social and economic advancement to some, it is estimated that they will respond going back and integrate into Chin society in Myanmar and contribute their skills and labors to the development

of Chin State. It is hypothesis that respondents with different background in terms of age and education will express prominent differences in their future aspirations. Given this will happen to other ethnic migrant communities of Myanmar and other countries in Southeast Asia to other countries, the thesis aims to bring implications for other Myanmar migrant ethnic communities from Southeast Asia so that the concerned authorities may adjust or develop policies relevant to the situation.

## **2.2. Background of the Research**

### **2.2.1. Brief History of the Chin People**

Migration is not a new phenomenon. The modernization of economic activities, technological advancement and the expansion of capitalist industry has resulted rural-to-urban migration in Europe in 18<sup>th</sup> Century as well as massive migration to the America and colonial countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. Long distant migration from developing countries has started in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century gained momentum since in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

According to migration pattern theories as cited by Professor Than Tun and Professor Gordon Luce, primitive Chin people were believed to have been migrated from western China and eastern Tibet and dwelled along the Chindwin River of Myanmar. In the views of anthropologists, earlier Chin people were originally migrated from the southwestern part of China before they migrated to their current location (Sakhong, 2003: 8, 9). Chin people were recorded in the history with different names such as 'Khyan' or 'Khiang' or 'Chiang' or 'Kuki' since 11<sup>th</sup> Century (Sakhong, 2003: 3). In fact, Chin people were immigrant from somewhere and thus Chin people today residing in the Chin State of modern Myanmar are not originally from there – thus their migration may continue as long as to seek for better life from hardship at their place of residence (Mang, 2015).

The Chins used to live peacefully in the Kale-Kabaw Valley between 1296 to 1395 without being disturbed by political event nor natural disasters during those periods. By then, the Chins located Khampat as their capital. During those times, the Chins were believed to have lived under a strong chieftain, sharing same culture and speaking same

language. But when the Shan established Kalemyo 'with double walls' at the bottom of what is now called Chin Hills or Chin State in 1395 and that resulted peaceful life of the Chins to end (Sakhong, 2003: 15) yet they have dispersed along western mountain ranges of current Myanmar territory. However, not all the Chins left Kale Valley after the conquest of the Shan but they lived together for a period of time. However, due to hardships, including forced labors by the dominant Shans, the Chins had escaped to the now-Chin Hills (Sakhong, 2003: 16). The earlier Chin people kept moving up to the land of Mizoram (now a State of India) – currently with sub-ethnic name with Mizo, Mar and Miram or Mara - which is now in the territory of India. Late comers settled to the southern part of today Chin State – their sub-ethnic names are Zotung, Zophei, Lautu, Matu and so on. Other groups scattered to northern and western part of today-Rakhine State of Myanmar – their sub-ethnic names are Khumi, Khami, Mro and so on. Many sub-ethnic groups of the Chins also spread over to the places such as contemporary Magwe Region and Bago Region of Myanmar. Most of those tribes are called Sho (Chins), comprised of Asho, Kounsho, Chinpong (Uppu), Laitu (Doaitu), Lauktu (Ekkai) and Sumtu (Sunghtu) (Mang, 2015). As such Chin people have become very much diverse in fact, the diverse ethnicity within the Chins is categorized by clanship – each clan has its own dialects. For instance, the word 'God' is called 'Pasian' in Tedim dialect, 'Pathian' in Mizo dialect, 'Pathen' in Thado dialect, 'Khanpu-ghi' in Mindat and Kanpetlet areas (Suantak, 2008). Sakhong (2003) has compiled in his book "In Search of Chin Identity", the diagram of sub-ethnic groups within the Chins as follows:

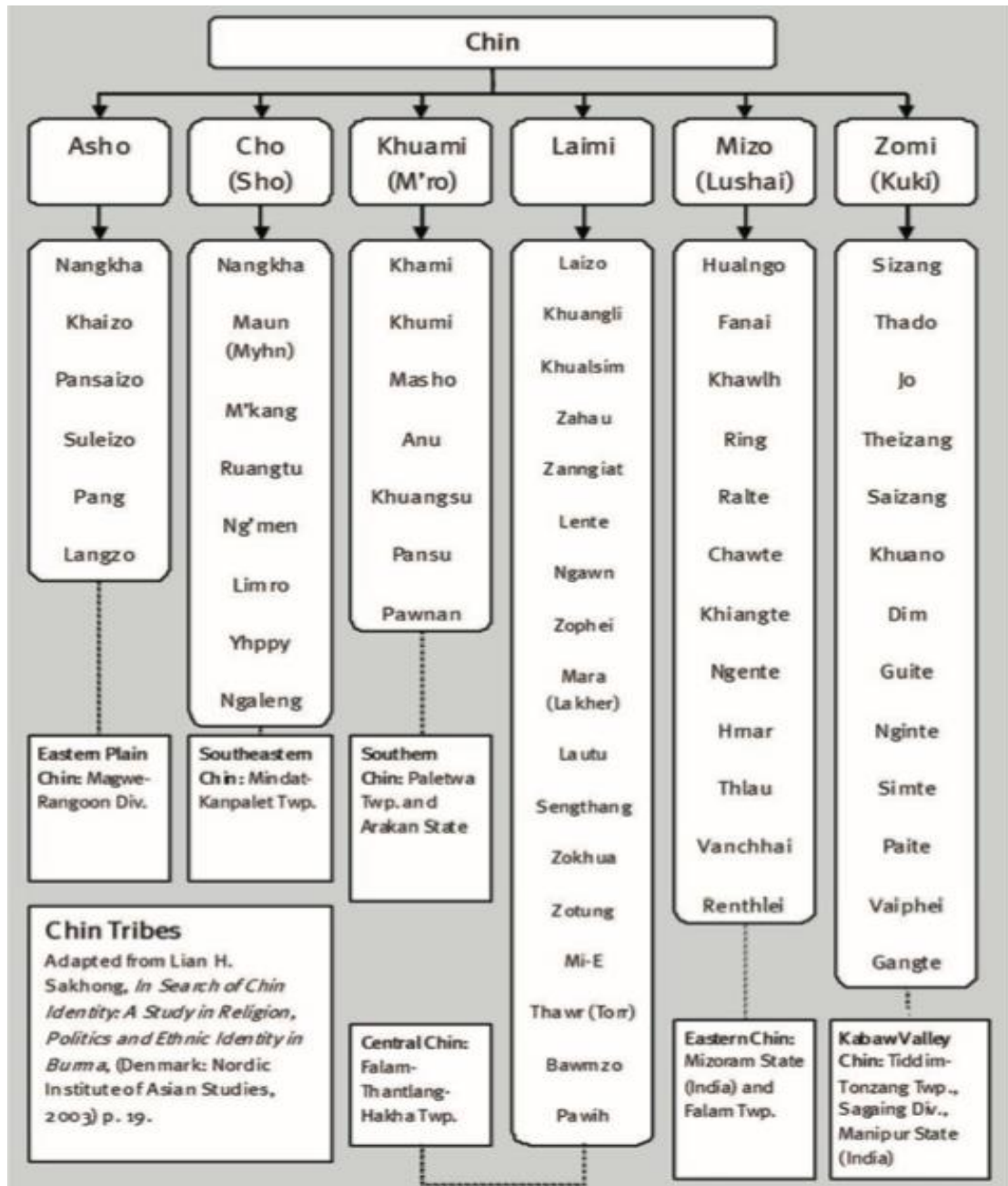


Figure 3. Sub-ethnic groups among Chins as illustrated by Sakhong (2003:19)

Sakhong (2003) explains that sub-ethnic group, in the context of Chin, refers to the 'social group comprising numerous families, clans or generations together with slaves, dependents or (the) adopted strangers'. Therefore, sub-ethnic group hereby does not necessary mean the ties from common ancestors or family, but it rather refers that social group of the same ethnic group who stay or settle in the same place. He further explains about the groupings of six sub-ethnic groups that each of them has

geographical meaning in it: ‘Asho’ refers to plain dwellers, ‘Cho’ refers to those from the southern (Chin State), ‘Khuami’ as the ‘native people’, ‘Laimi’ refers to the people from the central part, ‘Zomi’ and ‘Mizo’ are from the northern part. (Sakhong, 2003: 17-18).

### **2.2.2. Timeline of the Political Changes in Myanmar**

Myanmar is strategically located between India and China and it is a bridge between ASEAN and these former two giant countries. Rich with the culture, history and natural resources, the country was colonized by the British Empire in the twentieth century, between 1889-1948. Myanmar gained its independence in 1948. The country had undergone parliament democracy for ten years by using the 1947 Constitution. However, due to the instability of the country, the military coup happened very soon.

In 1962, the state power of the country was seized by the military coup led by General Ne Win. Later in 1972, Myanmar was navigated to the so-called “Burmese Way to Socialism”. As such, the hill region governments of Kachin, Shan, Karen, Kayah and the Chin were ceased and the then ongoing formation of the Mon and Arakan (Rakhine) states were ignored. On the other hand, the government in power appointed military personnel to take the security and administrative councils around the country which resulted, as aimed, to the removal of non-Burmese people or ethnic people such as Chin, Kachin, Shan, and so on from the political and administration. Therefore, many ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) arose and many of them established themselves in the country's border areas despite the several attempts unsuccessful peace talks. (Jolliffe, 2015: 15).

The 1974 Constitution intensified the marginalization of ethnic minorities or the seven non-Burmese states of the ethnic people with the creation of ‘ethnic-neutral’ divisions which are mostly dwelled by Burmese majority. By increasing the centric control at every level of the administration of the country, ethnic minorities have less and less political space in the country. Due to mismanagement and misconducts, the country's economy and education quality were degrading, and Myanmar ranked as a Least Developed Country (LDC) in 1987 by the United Nations (UN).

Given the down-turning situations and oppressions by the ruling government, a nationwide riot occurred in Myanmar in 1988. This has led to another military coup in

Myanmar under the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Brutal handling of pro-democracy in the 1988 riot was followed by several international sanctions. Debatable transformation of the official name of the country to "Myanmar" from former name of "Burma" was also taken place in 1989. The powerful armed group of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) which many EAOs allied was eliminated in 1989 and ceasefire agreement with many of its allies EAOs were signed in the following years, giving them special administration areas allowing them self-autonomy. On the other hand, the creation General Administration Department (GAD) and local Law and Order Restoration Council (LORC) in each state and division were part of the military coup expansion of so-called 'Burmanization' through opening (Burmese language teaching) schools, hospitals, roads and other infrastructure to ethnic areas. SLORC transformed itself into SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) in 1997. Not only international pressure, the military government under SLORC faced contestations within the country due to economic hardship and call for democracy the following years.

Debates were strong between the ethnic groups and military regarding the National Convention process which neglected demands from the ethnic political groups. However, despite pressure from pro-federal ethnic groups and pro-democracy political parties, the National Convention was done, and the 2008 Constitution was adopted. The 2008 Constitution was effective in 2011 with Myanmar's democratic transition with the taking office of the quasi-civilian led government of Myanmar led by President U Thein Sein. It is succeeded by the taking office of the National League for Democracy (NLD) government led by Nobel Peace laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi since 2016, with their nationwide landslide victory of the November 2015 General Election. The current civilian government's term will end in 2020.

### **2.2.3. The Chins during the British Period (1889-1948)**

Prior to the colonial period, power and rituals of the Chin society was within the hands of chiefs and the nobility (Khai, 2008: 15). British occupied the whole Chin Hill 1889, after forceful resistance from the northern Chin Hill since 1888 (Sakhong, 2003: 94, 95 & Mang, 2015). It brings with it the Christian missionaries which later turns majority of the Chin society into Christianity. With the colonization, many young

Chins joined the British Police Force and Army. This resulted some misunderstanding between the Burmese and the Chin, since the Christian Chin and Karen soldiers were deployed for the dealing the Burmese nationalist rebellion against the British colony power in the 1930-31. (Sakhong, 2003: 188-190). Also, serving into the civil service transformed a great deal to the livelihood of mere peasants into salary earning life that can feed the whole family without farming. Access to education and government staffs were opportunities of the next generations and more educated new generations of the Chins with fair occupations mostly in government works portrayed the easier better life of Chins during the colonial period. Yet the nature of transfer of civil servants including the military personnel and police have resulted migration of the Chins to many parts of lowland Burma (Mang, 2015).

The chiefs of different parts of the Chin hill joined the signing of Panglong Agreement on 12 February 1947, together with other leaders of the hill regions in Myanmar such as Kachin and Shan, with the guidance of General Aung San, that have led the Independence of Myanmar (then Burma) from the British colony. The Panglong Agreement pledged to the formation of federal union in Myanmar and the sovereignty of ethnic states.

#### **2.2.4. The Chins in the Post-Colonial Context (1948-1962)**

During the parliamentary system in Myanmar between 1948-1962, many Chin civil servants as well as soldiers and police continued their career in their places of assignments. However, many of the retired Chin government staffs, though relatively small number in contrast to the total population, do not return to the Chin Hills but they settled mostly in Kalembo, Tamu and some in big cities as in Yangon and Mandalay. The reasons are mainly due to food insecurity and poor infrastructure such as education for children and healthcare services in the native Chin Hills. Many Chins also came to low lands either to integrate with their retired civil servant relatives or by voluntary to seek better lives. (Mang, 2015). According to the 2014 Census, internal life-time migration flows between Chin State and Sagaing Region is more than 56,500 persons, 13,566 with Yangon Region, 6,485 with Magway Region, 3,588 with Mandalay Region and so on (Census Atlas Myanmar, 2014: 68).

### **2.2.5. The Chins during the military regime (1962 – 2010)**

Myanmar was under military regime for the first time in 1962. With that, missionary schools and private enterprises were nationalized, leading to the first decline of the country's education and economy. It was followed by Burmese-way to socialism in 1972 which worsened not only the economic decline of the country as a whole but also the tightening political space for non-Burmese people including the creation of states and regions, worsening the population into hardship economically and politically. Chin State also suffered a great deal of the system as in government's forceful direction for cultivation items such as from shifting cultivation to terrace cultivation (Mang, 2015). Chin State and the Chin people who were mostly Christians suffered a great deal of human rights abuses such as 'persecution on the basis of their ethnicity, cultural identity and religion' (Khai, 2009: 16). Therefore, food insecurity and job opportunity which is limited to the government offices – including hard situation for promotions within the government offices, many of the ethnic populations from Myanmar including Chins migrate internally and abroad (Mang, 2015).

Khai (2009) argues that the military regime of Myanmar has unwritten policy called '3B policy' - Burman (Race), Burmese (Language), Buddhism (Religion) which hinders the teaching of Chin (and other ethnic) language in public schools, treating unfairly to the Christianity of Chin people with regard to their religion activities and religious premises. He argues that this unwritten policy was aimed at assimilating the Chin ethnic people into the Burmese culture by cutting their religion, literature, culture and tradition (Khai, 2009). Due to hardships of different kinds in different parts of the country, nationwide uprising occurred in the 8 August 1988 – it is also renowned as 8888 uprising in Myanmar. Again, the military took the country again, keeping many activists including students into behind bars but this has resulted many of the population, including students and activists leaving the country and sought for refuge in other countries including Thailand. In fact, demonstrations occurred in many parts of Chin State and the control of the military has resulted the emergence of Chin National Front (CNF), a new insurgence group. The military outposts were established in many parts of Chin State. Hardships during those times include forced labor imposed by the military to carry their weapons and food, timber cutting of the military, grabbing of the livestock and food such as rice, chili, beans and so on from the Chins – many of the



peasants losing their resources and time. A few studies found that both the armed organizations are putting pressure on the villagers in many part of Chin State by charging taxes. Over the years, high commodity prices accompanied by inflation rate which entails corruption at different levels of government offices has resulted many poor Chin peasants to migrate from their place of origin (Mang, 2015).

#### **2.2.6. Chin State in the Context of Political Transition in Myanmar (2010 Onwards)**

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), after preparing necessary elements democratic government such as infrastructure for the parliaments, laws and regulations though it has weakness and faced criticism, has handed over the power to Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) on 30 March 2011 according to the, much criticized, 2008 Constitution (Thane, 2017: 17). The new democratic government of Myanmar led by President U Thein Sein promulgated peace offering on 18 August 2011 and initiated the peace process with different ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). With that, the union government agreed to sign NCA in 2012 with Chin National Front (CNF). Unlike the previous times of "central planning" system, the "bottom-up" approach, as proposed by the President Thein Sein Administration, states and regions are allowed to participate and take responsibility of planning and budgeting for themselves. The proposed budget plans from each states and regions are combined into the "National Comprehensive Development Plan". The then-Chin State government also has developed Comprehensive Development Plan 2016-2021 in cooperation with a local firm Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development (MIID) with financial support from DANIDA and UNICEF (MIID, 2014).

Along with the nation-wide landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party in the November 2015 General Election, the civilian government of Chin State took office in 2016. Taking office in April 2016, the current NLD-led Chin State Government has adopted the development endeavor of its predecessor and has addressed many agendas to promote the socioeconomic status of the state, including human resource development and job creation, poverty reduction, promotion of agricultural sector, environmental conservation and infrastructure development in cooperation with many INGOs, LNGOs and CSOs (Thant, 2017).

### 2.2.7. Chin Diasporas Across the World

Due to pushing factors within Myanmar and many pulling factors from outside, Chin people left their place of origin. Dispersion of the Chin people continues not only concentrating in nearby areas such as India, Malaysia and Thailand but also in other countries of the world. By resettlement programs of the UNHCR and social networks of the Chin people themselves, dispersion of the Chin people overtime has resulted the existence of Chin diasporas in the United States, Canada, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Sweden, Australia, United Kingdom, Denmark, Switzerland, New Zealand, Netherlands, Singapore, India, Thailand and Finland (Tiam, 2010). Based on the in-depth interview with prominent Chin persons in the third countries, Tiam (2010) estimated the populations of Chin diaspora across the world as follows:

Table 1. Estimated number of Chin diaspora across the world

No	Country	Estimate Number of Chin Population as of 2010
1	Mizoram State, India	80,000 to 100,000
2	Delhi, India	8,000
<b>3</b>	<b>Thailand</b>	<b>2,000</b>
4	Malaysia	45,000 to 50,000
5	Singapore	800
6	Philippines	200
7	South Korea	80
8	Japan	120
9	Australia	3,000
10	Switzerland	20
11	Germany	200
12	England	20
13	Sweden	200
14	Norway	1,000
15	Denmark	1,000
16	The United States (US)	16,000
17	Canada	1,200

As a matter of fact, the statistics on the Chin diaspora has been compiled weakly, almost to none of the official documentation to date, despite estimation from different Chin politicians, religious leaders and few academics. Due to the transnational social networks of Chin people, there may have been fluctuations in the number of estimated populations in the earlier section. For instance, there were reportedly more than 3,000 Zomi sub-ethnic group of Chin people living in Tulsa city alone in Oklahoma States, the U.S. (Sherman, 2013).

Most of the members of first generation Chin diasporas are low and semi-skilled, with relatively low education and trainings in advance and thus the majority of them are taking low or medium types occupations with low-paid wages or salaries and low standard of living in the host countries – yet that is even are better than the conditions in Chin State and Myanmar broadly. Also, people in Chin State recognize or acknowledge their relatives or friends who resides or working in other countries as heroes and frontiers as they are their source of income to fulfill their daily needs and beyond – this is due scarcity of job in for those remaining in Chin State and the fact that exchange value of income is higher for those working outside Myanmar. Being the majority are Christians, Chin diaspora in third countries usually have local church to worship and engage fellowship among themselves. As of 2010, 20 churches belonging to Chin diaspora in Malaysia were recorded, 11 in Singapore and more than 20 churches in the United States of America. (Tiam, 2010: 212)

Chin diasporas in third countries usually form organizations of different names, based on sub-ethnic groups, churches (Tiam, 2010: 213), clan name, names of their village or town in Chin State, residence in their host countries, and so on. These organizations usually serve as the main sources where members of Chin diaspora can relate, protect and help each other in times of joy and sadness. In addition to organizations to relate physically, there are many online fellowship channels through the websites, social media such as Facebook, Messenger, Line, Viber, and so on. Also, through these organizations or individually, members of Chin diaspora help their community and relatives in Myanmar. Most of the remittances of diasporic organizations are utilized mainly for infrastructure developments of their community in Chin State such as bridge, roads and private hospitals. However, individual

remittances are mainly to support relatives and family remaining in Chin State and other parts of Myanmar (Tiam, 2010: 213)

#### **2.2.7.1. Migration of the Chins to neighboring countries of Myanmar**

Many Chin people fled to its border Mizoram State of India - which is adjacent to Chin State of Myanmar. The other group fled to Malaysia and some are in Thailand. Khai (2009) states that the main factors of migration of Chin people into Thailand, Mizoram State of India and into Malaysia can be categorized broadly into economic, political and social pressures. He argues that the ineffective economic facilitation inside Myanmar, political pressure and human rights abuses by the military junta in the past have pushed Chin people to leave their country (Khai, 2009).

##### **a) Migration to Mizoram State of India and Malaysia**

Chin State shares borders with Mizoram State which received statehood from the India in 20 February 1987. Not only sharing the borders the people of the two states from Myanmar and India have a long-standing history of cultural practices and ancestries. Therefore, many Chin people have migrated to Mizoram State overtime. It was more about economic migration to Mizoram State in the 1970s but later the purpose of migration includes to seek refuge after the 1988 riots in Myanmar that caused many politically activist people at all walks of life, including many of Chin people. Due to the physical closeness and similarities in terms of culture, it happens that Chin migrants in Mizoram State of India is quite unlikely to be determined accurately (Khai, 2009). The estimated number of 60,000 to 80,000 Chin people resided in Mizoram State of India, as of 2008, and some of them go further to New Delhi to seek refugee status of the UNHCR. It was observed that 1,000 Chin people were granted refugee status from New Delhi and resettlements to third countries were made in mid-2006 (Alexander, 2008).

Another major destination for Chin people to move, despite geographical distance is Malaysia. As in India, many members of Chin diaspora in Malaysia sought refugee status in Malaysia – with hope to resettlement in advanced and liberal third countries (Alexander, 2008). Khai (2009) states that many Chin people migrated to Malaysia due

to the social, economic and political situations in Chin State. He argues that Chin people were called for force labor, levied heavy taxation, suffered food insecurity and being repressed due to their religion - Christianity. He also says that the agreement between the Myanmar and Malaysia authorities were also the reasons that Chin people have been migrating to Malaysia since the 1990s. Not only the rapid economic growth but also their social network as well as the hope of resettlement to third countries by the UNHCR stands are one of the main reasons that Chin people are flocking into Malaysia overtime. As such, Malaysia was home to more than 69,700 refugees from Myanmar, of which 25,000 Chin people in 2008, according to the World Refugee Survey (2008) (Khai, 2009: 30 - 24).

The Chin refugees in Malaysia and India are in a limbo at the moment as the UNCHR announced that they no longer need international protection. The Chin civil society organizations (CSOs), Chin sub-ethnic refugee fellowships in Malaysia and India, Chin student associations and political parties in Myanmar and abroad are advocating and sending petition to the UNHCR to reconsider its statement that the Chin State now is 'stable and secure' despite the 'fluid and unstable' situation in Myanmar. The UNHCR announced on 13 June 2018 that the refugee status of Chin refugees from Myanmar will expire in 31 December 2019, meaning the protection offered by the UNHCR to the Chin refugees will be terminated at end of 2019. It is estimated that there are more than 40,000 Chin refugees in India and Malaysia. (Lian & Thang, 2018)

#### b) Migration into Thailand

- Brief review on Thailand's management of labor immigration from Myanmar

Reviewing migrant worker management in Thailand, one can see that Thailand did not welcome unskilled workers until 1992. Thailand used to have two acts, the Immigration Act 1979 and the Foreign Employment Act 1978, to lay its immigration policies. The act mentioned that person come into Thailand without visa is illegal and he/she can be deported but it also states the Ministry of Interior have mandate to avoid deportation if the illegal workers register. Also, there are some prohibition for migrant workers ('aliens') for works that migrant workers usually do such as construction and farming (Chantavanich, Vungsiriphisal, & Laodumrongchai, 2007).

Due to labor shortage in Thailand in 1992, the business groups requested to their government to relax its restriction on unskilled migrant workers. Therefore, temporary registration of Myanmar (then Burmese) workers in four border provinces, which later extended into nine provinces, was allowed. In 1996, a more extended and two-year valid registration which also cover Cambodian and Laotian migrant worker 43 provinces was announced again. The scope of work includes fisheries and fishing related works, agriculture, husbandry, mining, construction, domestic work and so on. Due to the 1997 economic crisis that resulted unemployment rate hikes in Thailand, a lot of migrant workers were deported but since the gap of labor was not fulfilled by the Thai nationals, another registration for migrant workers who will take 'labor work' was opened again in 1998. Labor works refers to the 3Ds works (dirty, difficult and dangerous works) of which domestic work and manufacturing works were excluded (Chantavanich, et al., 2007)

Between 1999 and 2000, Thai government registered illegal migrant workers from its neighbor countries with quota-based system, with the recommendations by the academics in order to maintain the number of registered migrant workers in the certain sectors. Thirdly, the Thai government allowed registration of illegal migrant workers who work under the employers or who are self-employed in any occupation in 2001 and in 2002. As such, Thailand and Myanmar government signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the legalization of migrant workers in June 2003 (Chantavanich, et al., 2007). However, implementation of the MoU took time – it was implemented in 2009. In 2004, Thailand allows the registration of the migrant workers and their dependents to register as well as their employers and 13-dig ID numbers were granted to migrant workers and their dependents (Chantavanich, et al., 2007).

Thai government opened new registration system for its migrant workers in July 2009, that allow unregistered migrant workers to get a temporary stay registration (Tor Ror 38/1) and a one-year work permit. Migrants who get the work permit can apply for the national verification (NV) which allow them to work and live in Thailand up to four years (Paitoonpong, 2011). NV process has 13 steps and it requires the medical check-up and work permit application as well. The NV process which began 2009 was supposed to end in February 2012 but was extended up to August 2013 (Huguet, 2014:

15). In 2014, One Stop Service Center (OSSC) that allows the registration of all migrant workers and their dependents from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar to register their residence and workplace were open – they were granted 2-year valid ‘pink cards’. And in 23 June 2017, the Royal Decree on Managing the Work of Aliens B.E. 2560 (2017) was announced and all migrant workers who hold pink cards and the illegal migrant workers were entitled to get the CI (Certificate of Identity) and work permit from the Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor by the end of June 2018. The punishment of illegal migrant worker is very harsh either for the migrant worker and for the employer. The worker will be fined between 5,000 and 50,000 Baht and be deported after fine is settled and re-entry will be banned for two years. The employer who employ illegal migrant worker can be fined between 10,000 and 100,000 Baht for each worker.

- Types of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand

There are generally four types of migrant workers in Thailand: 1) registered migrants, 2) unregistered migrants, 3) national verification (NV) migrants and 4) MoU migrants or migrant workers who came into Thailand via MoU scheme. However, when the Royal Decree on Managing the Work of Aliens B.E. 2560 (2017) became active, pink card holders have to apply for the certificates of identity (CI) together with the visa, work permit and health care insurance so as to ensure their legality to work and live in Thailand. The CI application was originally aimed to finish by November 2017 but the government extended the up to end of March 2018 which finally was extended again to the end of June 2018 (Htwe, 2018). Deportation of illegal migrant workers in Thailand began from July 2018 (Noon, 2018) – it is observed that the situation was not as clumsy as it was in late June 2017 when the new law was accidentally put in place for the first time.

- Chin diaspora in Thailand

Some scholars categorize flow of Myanmar people into Thailand into three major phases: 1) the first group of are the ethnic minorities between Thailand and Myanmar border who fled their mother country due to the fight of ethnic armed organizations and the central government of Myanmar between 1948 and 1983, 2) the

second groups are those who fled to Thailand due to the fight between Mon and Karen against the Myanmar government between 1983 and 1987, and 3) the last group are those who came into Thailand after 1988 (Paitoonpong, 2011: 174). In those period Myanmar was under the military regime and ‘the Myanmar government’ refers to the military or ‘Tatmadaw’.

Chantavanich, S. and Vungsiriphisal, P. (2012) find out that Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand are from different parts of Myanmar, majority are from Mon State, Yangon Region, Karen (Kayin) State, Tanintharyi Region, Ayeyarwady Region and some from Mandalay Region, Kachin State, Chin State and Rakhine State. If flow of Myanmar people into Thailand be categorized into three phases, Chin people can be included into the third phase. Despite the geographical distance, people from Chin State of Myanmar also migrate to Thailand over the time. The ‘push and pull’ factors of migration of Myanmar people to Thailand implies the same effect onto Chin people. However, according to the available sources the two main categories of Chin people’s migration into Thailand are to seek economic opportunities and some, in the past, have intention to apply for the UNHCR refugee status in Thailand <sup>2</sup>or from Malaysia by going there through Thailand (Khai, 2009). At the same time, due to the better job opportunities than Myanmar, proximity and convenience to travel from Myanmar and their extensive networks, Chin population has been increasing in Thailand, estimated to be around 2,000 as of 2010 (Tiam, 2010). It is noticeable yet relatively low compared to other Myanmar ethnic minorities population in Thailand.

- Pattern of migration into Thailand

There are two types entry method of Chin people into Thailand: 1) border checkpoints and 2) via flights. 1) Those who enter via border checkpoints are usually accompanied by brokers and most of them are illegal at the entry but later they apply proper documents. In terms of the migration route, majority of Chin people cross the

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<sup>2</sup> Thailand does not ratify 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Refugee Convention) and its 1967 Protocol. It has no law that specifically define or categorize the urban refugees. Therefore, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) conducted refugee status determination (RSD) process in Thailand until 2004 when the Thai government sent all Myanmar refugee to camps in Myanmar-Thai border. More than 76,000 Myanmar refugees were sent to third countries such as the Australia, Canada, the US and many other countries from 2005 to 2011. (see further information at : <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/09/12/ad-hoc-and-inadequate/thailands-treatment-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>)



border from Tachileik-Mae Sai and Myawaddy – Mae Sot border checkpoints. Most people from northern Chin State go down to Kalemmyo, Sagaing Region by car or by motor cycle which is around 92 kilometers far. Then some go directly from Kalemmyo to Yangon (1560 kilometers) by car or via flights while some by-pass Mandalay (450 kilometers) with cars and then proceed to Yangon (1,110 kilometer). Most people from central and northern Chin State go to Mandalay directly by car and then proceed to Yangon either by car or by flights. The distance between Yangon and Mae Sot is around 443 kilometers and Yangon to Tachileik is around 564 kilometers. There are flights between Yangon and Tachileik as well.

There are very few Chin people who enter into Thailand via flight in earlier times. Flight is for those who come in with legal document – passport. Some of them come in with ‘work permit’ while some enter with ‘tourist visa’, get a job and overstay, and they later apply for relevant documents in Thailand. It is observed, by in-depth interviewing the members of diaspora, that majority of the Chin people in Thailand cross border at their entry, i.e., came in undocumented with brokers or by assistance of friends and relatives who have experience in such things. They apply available documents depending on their arrival time – they do registration, TR 38/ pink card and work permit with other requirements, some of them come in with passport and work permit and a few via the MoU scheme. However, when the new policy was laid with the enactment of Royal Decree in 2017, Chin diaspora in Thailand can be categorized by those who have 1) CI with two-year valid visa, health insurance and work permit with their employer’s name, 2) passport with relevant documents including work permit with employer’s name, 3) MoU passport with related documents and 4) those who were applying for the CI or undocumented ones at the time of field data collection in May 2018 – CI application was until 30 June 2018.

### **2.3. Knowledge Gap**

There have been a few studies of Myanmar people who have dispersed across different countries of the world into the diaspora literature and it is fewer when it comes to the Chin ethnic people from Myanmar. Most of the earlier studies of Chin people outside Myanmar emphasize on the factors that cause them to move out of their home country and the factors that attract them in the host countries that they pursue to stay.

Many of those studies look into the struggles and livelihoods of Chin people in the other countries, mostly in Malaysia and India either as refugees or as migrant workers, usually focusing on rights-based approach or emphasizing on the obligation entitled or failed towards the Chin people by the authorities of the host countries or by their home country. Therefore, this thesis situates the Chin ethnic people from Myanmar who disperse across the world into the diaspora literature, by studying those who arrived into Thailand.

Even though Thailand has been a transit route for many Chin people who have been seeking the opportunities to go to the third countries in earlier times and as a destination country lately, proper study of the Chin ethnic people from Myanmar in Thailand has not been found by far. Majority of the earlier studies on the Chin ethnic people in other countries, as well as in many cases of other ethnic people from Myanmar including the Burmese in general, usually approach through singular concept or explore a particular aspect. However, this thesis approaches by using the concepts of the diaspora and migrant social networks in assessing the livelihood and how the Chin diaspora in Thailand implies to the development of their home community in Myanmar. This thesis explores and fills the empirical knowledge gap of the characteristics of Chin diaspora in Thailand and it presents their social networks.

One of the benefits for general public in Myanmar by the economic liberalization that came along with the transition of the political change in Myanmar in Myanmar is in the telecommunication sector. The quasi-civilian government under the President Thein Sein administration permitted in 2013 the foreign telecommunication operators. Telenor from Norway and Ooredoo from Qatar began their mobile network operations since 2014 in level with the existing Myanmar Post and Telecommunication (MPT)<sup>3</sup>. With three mobile operators in the country until granting the fourth operator in 2017, there has been a significant change in the mobile network coverage in Myanmar, benefitting the public to extend their connection within and outside the country. From one of the least connected country in the world in 2013, Myanmar had more than 90% of its population connected to 3G mobile coverage and 51 million people have mobile connection. With the competition of four mobile network operators,

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<sup>3</sup> MPT joint venture of MPT with Japanese firms in July 2014

majority of the people in Myanmar from rural and urban areas are able to use data (Htun, et al., 2017: 43-43). As such, the mobile operators are introducing competitive packages to customers across Myanmar and for instance 4G service was introduced in Chin State in early 2018 (Tun, 2018). A survey in 2017 reveals that social media such as Facebook and Viber are the most popular channel of communication for majority of Myanmar people for internet audio and video calling, sending messages and extending or maintaining social networking (Htun, et al., 2017: 43-43). However, there have been few studies on how and to what extent improvement of the telecommunication sector as well as the openness Myanmar facilitates the transnational behavior and practices of the Myanmar people. This thesis presents how the openness of the country and technology improvement facilitates the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand with their relatives in home country.

Most of the earlier studies about Myanmar people in other countries usually explore the economic contribution – the remittances. There have been several researches of remittance of Myanmar migrants in Thailand and their future aspiration, but few has been done after the transition of Myanmar in 2010 (table 5.2). Moreover, the political implication of Myanmar people in Thailand, the highest number of Myanmar people abroad, towards their home country after since it was transformed into democratic elective government system has not been studied by far. This thesis fills the knowledge gap of how the Chin diaspora in Thailand imply their home community in Myanmar economically and politically and explore their future aspirations. As such, the remittance behavior and amount as well as the political implication towards their home country by Myanmar people in Thailand and their future aspiration in the second term of the civilian elected government in Myanmar can be related by exploring the case of Chin diaspora in Thailand.

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## **Chapter III**

### **Chin Diaspora in Thailand**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the profile and characteristics of the Chin diaspora in Thailand in relation to the six features diaspora Safran (1991). In the first section this chapter presents the demographic data, place of origin and living locations in Thailand, religious affiliation, sub-ethnic origins, years of arrival, occupation and salaries of the sampling population of the Chin diaspora in Thailand.

The second section explores the conformity of the characteristics of Chin diaspora in Thailand in relation to the six features of diaspora according to Safran (1991). By saying the Jews as the ideal type, Safran (1991) says that in order to qualify a group of people as diaspora, they, fully or partly, need to have 1) dispersal from the place of origin of a group of people, 2) a collective memory of their homeland, 3) being alienated by the host society in their new destination, 4) respect and sense of belongingness to their homeland from a far, 5) believe in the restoration to their original place and 6) they have their own definition of their homeland. Although some diaspora theorists argue that a group of migrants should have migrated by force from their place of origin, Hickman (2005) argues that diaspora members can be the expatriates, expellees, political refugees, aliens residing at a certain place, immigrants and ethnic minorities according to the six features of diaspora proposed Safran (1991) (Hickman, 2005: 119).

#### **3.1. Profile of the Chin Diaspora in Thailand**

##### **3.1.1. Age Group, Gender, Marital Status and Education Background**

By surveying 108 members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand, it is observed that the gender composition of respondents is 55.5% male and 44.5% female. By categorizing the age in range, it is found out that youthful population is majority among the Chin diaspora in Thailand as 42% is between 18-25 years, 45% is between 26-35

years and the age group between 36-50 years comprises only 13% of the total sampling population (table 3.1).

According to the education system in Myanmar, Grade 1 to Grade 5 is 'primary level', Grade 6 to Grade 9 is 'elementary level', and Grade 10 to Grade 11 is 'high school level'. Once the students finished their Grade 11, they continue to undergraduate study which varies from three years to four years, depending on the institute. Master level education can be pursued if the students finished their bachelor's degree with honors. It is also found out that majority of the sampling population attended school at the high school level but did not finish. 68% of the sampling population attended and dropped school at 'high school', 20% at 'elementary level', 12% at undergraduate level, 3% at primary level and only one person of the sampling population finished master's level education which is in (Christian) Theology. (table 3.1)

Table 2 (Table 3.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents)

Age Range	Gender		Marital Status		Education Attended				
	Male	Female	Single	Married	Primary	Elementary	High School	Under-graduate	Master Level
18 - 25	31	14	34	11	2	11	25	7	-
26 - 35	23	26	22	27	1	10	33	5	1
36 - 50	6	8	6	8	1	1	11	1	-

### 3.1.2. Place of Origin in Myanmar and Living Location in Thailand

#### Place of Origin in Myanmar

The respondents came from different parts of Myanmar. Almost half of the sampling population of the Chin diaspora in Thailand 44 persons (41%) came from different towns of Chin State such as Falam, Hakha, Htantlang, Lumbang, Kanpetlet, Matupi, Paletwa, Tedim and Valung. Consequently, 42 persons (39%) among the 108 respondents came from Kalemryo, Khampat and Tamu towns of Sagaing Region, 17 persons (15%) came from Magwe Region and the remaining 5% came from Ayeyarwaddy Region, Bago Region, Mon State and Rakhine State (table 3.2).

Table 3 (Table 3.2. Places of Origin in Myanmar)

State/Region	Town	Number	Percentage
Ayeyarwaddy Region	Pyi	2	1.90
Bago Region	Bago	1	0.90
Chin State	Falam	3	2.80
	Hakha	3	2.80
	Htantlang	1	0.90
	Lumbang	1	0.90
	Kanpetlet	5	4.60
	Matupi	26	24.10
	Paletwa	2	1.90
	Tedim	2	1.90
	Valung	1	0.90
Magwe Region	Aunglan	3	2.80
	Magwe	2	1.90
	Mindone	10	9.30
	Minhla	2	1.90
Mon State	Mawlamyine	1	0.90
Rakhine State	Ann	1	0.90
Sagaing Region	Kalemyo	36	33
	Khampat	5	4.60
	Tamu	1	0.90
<b>Total</b>		<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>

### Living Location in Thailand

It is observed that only 13 out of 108 respondents (12%) are Buddhists. Despite being different in terms of religion, they have networks with the majority Christian Chin people in Thailand. The majority of the respondents (88%) are Christians. They usually have affiliation with five churches in Thailand: 1) Calvary International Baptist Church (4%), 2) Grace Church in Bang Pa-In (19%), 3) Matu Fellowship Bangkok at the Jaisamarn Full Gospel Church (19%), 4) Myanmar Christian Assembly (MCA) Thailand church (36%) and 5) Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship chapel in Mahachai (9%). It is observed that the respondents live at the nearest areas of the church they

affiliated with. Therefore, it can generally be classified that Zomi sub-ethnic group of Chin people are living near the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, Mizo sub-ethnic group of Chin people lives mostly in Mahachai and the other sub-ethnic groups such as Falam, Hakha, Matupi, Lautu, Paletwa and the Asho Chin are mostly living in Bangkok, concentrated, but not limited to, in the Sukhumvit area especially along Pridi Road in Bangkok. In terms of the living pattern, it is observed that either the Christian Chins or Buddhist Chins have similarity. The majority of Chin diaspora in Thailand, 61% (66 out of 108 respondents) rent rooms with a Chin person, 16% rent a single room, 13% lives at the accommodation given by their work or stay at their workplace and only 7% share or rent rooms with non-Chin persons. (table 3.3)

Table 4 (Table 3.3. Religious Affiliation and Pattern of Living in Thailand)

Religious/Church Affiliation in Thailand	Living Pattern				Total
	Rent A Single Room	Share with a Chin Friend	Share with a non-Chin Friend	Live at Workplace	
Buddhist	0	9	4	0	13
Calvary International Baptist Church	1	1	2	0	4
Grace Church in Bang Pa-In	3	11	0	7	21
Matu Fellowship	2	17	1	1	21
MCA Thailand	6	25	1	7	39
Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship	6	4	0	0	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>108</b>



Figure 4 (Fig 3.1. Satellite map showing MCA Church and highlighting along Soi Sukhumvit 71 in Bangkok where majority of Chin diaspora in Thailand are concentrated)



Figure 5 (Figure 3.2. Satellite map showing the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In and showing in circle where Chin people live near-by, majority are Zomi sub-ethnic groups)

### 3.1.3. Sub-ethnic Origins

The sampling survey of Chin diaspora in Thailand comprises six major sub-ethnic groups which is consistent with the Chin sub-ethnic diagram illustrated by



Sakhong (2003: 19). The majority population in this sampling population is the Matupi sub-ethnic groups (*'Matu' according to Sakhong 2003*) which total 28 out of 108 respondents (26%). The second largest population is the Khumi sub-ethnic groups whose place origin are from of Paletwa, Chin State, and its nearby villages - they contribute 22% of the total population. The Zomi and Laimi sub-ethnic groups have equal number of population, 23 persons each (21% each). Mizo group comprises 8% and the survey could include one person from the Asho sub-ethnic (table 3.4).

Table 5 (Table 3.4. Sub-ethnic origin of the sampling population)

Sub-ethnic Origin	Number	Percentage
Asho	1	0.90
Laimi <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Falam – 14 persons,</li> <li>• Hakha – 8 persons,</li> <li>• Lautu – 1 persons</li> </ul>	23	21.30
Cho (Sho) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matu (Matupi)</li> </ul>	28	25.90
Mizo	9	8.30
Khumi (from Paletwa, Chin State)	24	22.20
Zomi	23	21.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 3.1.4. Employment and Salary of Respondents who arrived before and after 2014

Arrival of Chin people into Thailand can be traced back to 1980s or even before – for instance, a Zomi sub-ethnic officer from northern Chin State, Captain Mang Tung Nung, was included in a Myanmar (then Burma) goodwill mission to Thailand in 1948. However, this research finds out that the earliest arrival of its respondents was in 1995. It is found out that the arrival of Chin people into Thailand has been increasing at a very slow pace. It is observed that only 44% of the total respondents arrived into Thailand from 1995 to 2013 and 66 % of the respondents came into Thailand after 2014. In other words, the arrival of Chin people into Thailand within the last four years, during 2014

- May 2018, is 125% higher than that of the total number within 18 years between 1995 and 2013 (table 3.5). However, it may not be fair to interpret there have been a surge in Chin people's arrival into Thailand after 2014. In-depth interviews in later section of the paper will show that there were many Chin people in Thailand, especially in Bangkok, prior to 2014. The findings on the arrival in this paper may have been due to the return or onward migration of earlier Chin people in Thailand.

The type of occupation that Chin diaspora members in Thailand are engaged into can be generally classified into six types such as industry, domestic work, restaurant, office, religious works in the Christian churches, and other works such as ice delivery, vendor, etc. For those who arrived before 2014, domestic work is the most employed sector for Chin people in Thailand (38 %), followed by industry sector (35%), restaurant (18%), office works (6%) and the remaining population are engaged into church works and other works. For those who arrived Thailand after 2014, the majority (57%) are employed in the industry sector, follows by domestic work (15%), restaurant and church works (10 % each), and a few are in the office and in other sectors. (table 3.5)

In terms of the salary, the highest paid occupations are domestic work and restaurants. These two sectors can pay more than 15,000 Baht per month. However, it is observed that 87% of the those who earn more than 15,000 Baht per months in the domestic work and restaurants are those who arrived into Thailand before 2014. In other words, salary rate is dependent on the period of working which results to competency of the respondents at their respective works. The second highest pay rate is between 10,000 – 15,000 Bhat. The respondent who are employed in the industry (51%), domestic work (21%) and restaurant (19%) are mostly paid monthly within this range. In fact, more than a half of the respondents (57%) are paid less than 10,000 Baht per month. The majority of them are employed in the industry sector (51%), follows by domestic work (19%), restaurant (11%), religious works at Christian churches (11%), and so on. (table 3.5)

Table 6 (Table. 3.5. Employment and Salary in Thai Baht for Arrival Before and After 2014)

Type of work	Pre – 2014 (1995 – 2013)			Post - 2014 (2014 – 2018)		
	Less than 10,000 Baht	Less than 15,000 Baht	Above 15,000 Baht	Less than 10,000 Baht	Less than 15,000 Baht	Above 15,000 Baht
Industry	3	14	-	26	8	-
Domestic Worker	6	6	6	5	3	1
Restaurant	2	6	1	4	2	-
Office	2	1	-		2	-
Christian Church	1	-	-	5	1	-
Other	-	-	-	3	-	-

### 3.2. Characteristics of the Chin Diaspora in Thailand

#### 3.2.1. Dispersal from their origin to other places

“Dispersal” means a group of people dispersed from ‘center’ to two or more ‘peripheral’ which can be region or other countries (Safran, 1991). Due to the remoteness, seasonal landslides and unblessed with natural resources which all resulted to poor basic infrastructure such as transportation, communication, healthcare and education, many Chin people have been dispersing internally and externally over time. Internal migration of Chin people within Myanmar is evident in the 2014 Census Report: the highest population is in Sagaing Region, followed by Yangon, Magway and Mandalay Regions accordingly (Census Atlas Myanmar, 2014: 68). This is in part reflected in the demographic data of the Chin diaspora in Thailand’s place of origin as presented in earlier section of this chapter.

Almost the whole sampling population of the Chin diaspora in Thailand (98%) agree (65.7% strongly) to the dispersion of Chin people from Chin State to many parts of Myanmar, Thailand and beyond. This conforms to the fact that Chin people are

residing, refuging and working in different countries of the world. By asking if they have relatives and Chin friends either from their place of origin or from another places in parts of Myanmar who have migrated and have been staying in the Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, India, European countries and the United States, more than 96% agreed (53.7 % strongly) that they do have so (table 3.6).

Table 7 (Table 3.6. Percentage of Responses on Dispersal of Chin people)

Dispersal	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Many Chin people including my relatives are now living in many parts of the country other than Myanmar and Thailand	65.7	32.4	1.9	-	-
2. I agree that Chin people mostly go to the United States, Mizoram State of India, Malaysia, Thailand, Australia and many European countries.	53.7	42.6	3.7	-	-

One of the informants shares his knowledge of the dispersion of Chin people in relation Thailand as follows:

*“Most Chin people come to Thailand as a transit for going further to the third countries. According to my knowledge, that pattern of migration to third countries via Thailand began from 1997. From Bangkok, Thailand, they went further to Japan, the United States, Australia, Canada and some other European countries. However, Japan and Mexico were closed for receiving the refugee by the time I arrived into Thailand in 1997, and our people were still received by Canada. I have many (Chin) friends and relatives in countries like Australia, Japan, Norway, and the United States (US). Even my children studied in the US and are now permanently staying in the US”. - (Informant from Calvary International Baptist Church, 23 May 2018)*

One of the informants who is a founding member of the Chin Christian Fellowship, Bangkok (CCFB) also said as follows:

*“Back in 2010, a few years after we have the Chin Christian Fellowship in Bangkok (CCFB) in 2007, there was a case that five Chin children who were going to their parents in Malaysia via Thailand were in trouble in Thailand. The kids were invited from Myanmar by their parents as they got refugee card in Malaysia from the UNHCR to go to third countries. The children were captured at Surat Thani Province in Southern Thailand, at the border of Thailand and Malaysia. I was informed by a leader of Chin community in Malaysia about the case. Since they request, I helped them in my capacity as an NGO staff and a leading member of the CCFB - I could assist them. By coordination with the ICRC for three kids whose parents got refugee status to Norway and the Embassy of the United States in Thailand for two children whose parents were given refugee status to the United States, I could help them. Now they are residing in their respective countries”. - (Informant from Raks Thai Foundation, Samutsakhon Office, 13 August 2018)*

Another informer contributes his knowledge about the dispersion of Chin people as follows:

*“Around 20 years ago, like 1998, and in those periods, the UN Refugee status can be applied from Thailand and if accepted they can go to the third countries. Therefore, most of the Zomi sub-ethnic groups of Chin people come to Thailand to apply that refugee status and work in Thailand while waiting for the acceptance, most of them undocumented as others. Around 2000, Zomi sub-ethnic group of Chin people who apply for the UN refugee status were concentrated in Sukhumvit and Prakhonong areas in Bangkok, meeting each other on holidays. Around 2004, the refugee status application was moved to the border areas between Thailand and Myanmar and the Zomi sub-ethnic groups of Chin people went to the camps in the border areas and most of them moved to Malaysia the following years”. He also said, “My parents-in-law went to Malaysia via Thailand in 2007, went to the United States by refugee status and now they have become the US citizens. Also, my elder sisters and my nephews are in the United States as well”. - (Informant from the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, 16 May 2018)*

Another informant who was also a founding member of the Matu Fellowship – Bangkok says as follows:

*“My brother used to stay in Thailand with us around ten years ago. Then he moved to Malaysia and later got a chance to go to the third country. He is now a US citizen. Not only him but also many relatives and friends from our town in Chin State have dispersed to big countries such as Norway, Denmark, Australia and, of course, the US. Some of them stayed in Thailand for a period of time like my brother”.* – (Informant from Matu Fellowship Bangkok, 22 May 2018)

Nevertheless, dispersion of Chin people can even be seen among the Chin diaspora in Thailand. Being the minority group and majority of whose religion is Christianity, the Chin people in Thailand live are dispersed around the churches that they participate. It is observed that they live in cluster mostly, but not definitely, by their sub-ethnic groups. For instance, the Zomi sub-ethnic group are concentrated around the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In while other sub-tribal groups of Chin people can be seen along the Soi Sukhumvit 71. (see Figures 3.1, 3.2)

### **3.2.2. Collective memory of homeland**

‘Collective memory’ hereby refers the memory, vision, myth that relate to the location, history and past achievements of their homeland, according to Safran (1991). In terms of the collective memory of their homeland, more than 90% of the respondents (53.7% strongly) agreed that their homeland, Chin State, is a cold, pleasant and hilly region in the western part of Myanmar which is filled with fresh air and wild animals including birds and that the Rhododendron or “Taung Za Latt Pann” (in Myanmar Language) flower blossoms in the winter season (table 3.7).



Figure 6 (Figure 3.3. Rhododendron or “Taung Za Latt” flower blossom in Chin hill – photo retrieved from social media)

One informant testifies as follows:

*“Since my father was a military officer and we have been living in other towns rather than Chin State such as Putao (town) in Kachin State. In 1969, father retired from his service and we settled in Hakha, Chin State, and it was the first time in my life that I stayed in Chin State, Myanmar’, he continued, “Back then, Chin State was a very tranquil and pleasant place. There was no diversification in terms of the churches and the environment was so green. I mostly enjoyed going for fishing, enjoying the cold breeze and the views of (Rhododendron) “Taung Za Latt” flower blossoms. The nature and beauty of Chin hill was so marvelous. However, I later moved to Mandalay, Yangon and now have been residing in Thailand for more than 20 years”. – (Informant from Calvary International Baptist Church, 23 May 2018)*

Another informant expresses her memory as follows:

*“I agree that Chin State is a hilly pleasant region in the western part of Myanmar. The most memorable thing about Chin State for me is the moments I*

*go to the church with friends in the cold wind and practice hymn songs the evening”, she continued, “Another memory is when we walk to carry water to the streams which is very far from our town. It was very difficult back then - we had to walked that long because water is very scarce in the hilly Chin State, especially in the winter”. – (Informant form Matu Fellowship - Bangkok, 22 May 2018)*

Moreover, more than 91% of the respondents agreed (56.5% strongly) that Chin people have been recognized for their loyalty and honesty (table 3.7). This legacy derives from the characteristic of the hornbill or “*Out-Chin-Nyet*” which is the national symbol of Chin people. Members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand believe that this legacy of the honesty and loyalty of Chin people have resulted good things to their work and life in Thailand.



Figure 7.(Figure 3.4. Flag of Chin State)

One informant testifies as follows:

*“I came into Thailand as a general worker in the beginning but later I was chosen by the Holy Grace of God to be a preacher who will look after His children. According to my experience as the general worker, I worked very hard and very loyal to my boss, as we Chin people are always being recognized, in Bang Pa-In, Ayutthaya Province, that I began as ice delivery person and later became the informal driver of him. I have still good relationship until now and*



*he still helps me whenever I needed help. This is because of my honesty and loyalty to him”*. - (Informant from the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, 16 May 2018)

However, only slightly more than one-third of the respondents agreed to ‘the myth of origin’ that original Chin people emerged into the world from a cave called ‘Chinlung’ – it is spelled differently by many different scholars (Sakhong, 2003, 1-5). While more than one third of the 108 respondents ‘disagree’ (26.5% strongly) to ‘the myth of origin’, around 16% of the members of the Chin diaspora in Bangkok responded that they do not know about this. This may probably because they were not told by the seniors in their society, including their parents, due to many other reasons.

Table 8 (Table 3.7. Percentage of Responses on Collective Memory)

Collective memory	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Chin State is a cold, pleasant and hilly region in the western part of Myanmar with wild animals where Rhododendron flowers blossoms.	53.7	37	3.7	3.7	1.9
2. Chin people have been praised for their ‘loyalty’ and ‘honesty’.	56.5	35.2	6.5	-	1.9
3. Primitive Chin people are believed to emerge from a cave called ‘Rung’.	26.9	17.6	16.1	12	26.5

### 3.2.3. Feeling of being alienated by the host society

Safran (1991) elaborates the term ‘alienation’ that the feeling of being alienated by a group of people in another region which is insulated by their feeling that they are not or fully accepted by their host society.

As seen in many cases of other Myanmar people who migrated to Thailand with different purposes, ‘feeling of being alienation’ can be found among the Chin diaspora

in Thailand. The members of Chin diaspora strongly agreed that they are being alienated by the host society.

During the field research in May 2018, one of the Chin family in Sukhumvit area in Bangkok, who requested to be anonymous, said as follows:

*“We have been staying in this small apartment for a year by now. All of our neighbors are Thai people and they are not pleased that we stay here with them. Myanmar people are not usually welcome around this area by the local (Thai) people. Myanmar migrant workers are usually supposed to live in collectively in certain places but for us we prefer to live here because it is cleaner, and facilities are much better even though it is relatively expensive. By the Grace of God, we can give the monthly salary regularly and since the house owner of our current apartment raised no objections, we have the chance to stay here and we quite enjoy it even though we do not talk with our neighbors”.* – (interview a member of Chin diaspora in Sukhumvit area, 22 May 2018)

Likewise, two-third of the respondents or more than 66% of the respondents expressed that they do not feel freedom and happiness even though they are gaining better standard of living and salary by working in Thailand. Moreover, 84% frankly agreed (51.9% strongly) they perceive themselves as strangers or guests in Thailand even though they have been working and settling for many years – some even more than a decade or two. About two-thirds of respondents (69 %) agreed that treatment of the migrants (‘aliens’) is different by the host country is different and that they are treated unfairly due to their being as people Myanmar, unlike those from the advanced countries (table 3.8).

Table 9 (Table 3.8. Percentage of Responses on Feeling of Alienation)

Alienation	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I do not feel comfortable – freedom -staying in Thailand even though I earn money and have access to the advanced infrastructures that I cannot get in my homeland.	38	28.7	16.7	14.8	1.9
2. Despite staying in Thailand for many years by now, I always regard myself that I am just a ‘stranger’ or ‘guest’ in this country	51.9	32.4	10.2	2.8	2.8
3. Unlike the other foreigners from the West, we especially from Myanmar are treated unfairly in Thailand	36.1	33.3	23.1	7.4	-

One of the informants shares the feeling of alienation as follows:

*“No matter which ethnic you belong, if you are from Myanmar, most of the Thai people think that people from Myanmar are all the same. So, given the historic background between Myanmar and Thailand, the host society have a certain kind of impression towards us. And we also have a feeling that we do not really belong to this land and know that we are not welcome warmly. Due to that feelings, I observed that Chin people from this area (Bang Pa-In) live quite closely among themselves in order to be able to help each other when it is needed, and they also enjoy the accompany of each other as they can understand language. They can laugh onto the same jokes and discuss their matters which they do not want to expose to other people. When I say ‘each other’ I refer at among the Chins and at least with people from Myanmar. Another issue is that, we are Christians and majority of the Thai people are Buddhists and it sometimes hinder our relationship with them – and it even cause us to be isolated from them. Language barrier is very crucial to our feeling of being alienated the host society – we do not understand, and they do not understand, and it is a problem. According to my experience, things get better when you can understand and be able to speak in Thai language. However, no matter how*

*good in the language, the feeling of being alienated remains as it has always been*". - (Informant from the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, 16 May 2018)

#### **3.2.4. Respect and sense of belongingness to their homeland**

Safran (1991) elaborates that the group of people who dispersed and settled in another region or country always regard their ancestral homeland as their genuine or true place that they themselves and their descendants have to return at the right time (Safran, 1991: 83). This kind of characteristic is seen among the Chin diaspora in Thailand as well. Despite earning higher income and using the much better infrastructures of Thailand over the years, almost every respondent (92%) expressed (63.9% strongly) that they have always been longing and thinking of their place of origin. They say that they have their family, relatives and friends in Chin State and other parts of Myanmar (table 3.9).

A Chin person from Bangkok expresses as follows:

*"I came here (Thailand) to work and earn money so that I can have exposure and be able to send money to my mother and siblings. As such I have been in this country for almost ten years. I can fulfill my main purpose, but I always miss my homeland (Chin State) in times of hardship and in the times when seasonal festivals celebrated such as Christmas and traditional festivals. I also miss the Chin food that we eat there, and I always ask for my family to send me the ingredients when there is someone to send through. I cook Chin food here and reminisce the good times there by myself"*. – (Interview a Chin person from MCA Church, 23 May 2018)

A Chin person from Bang Pa-In testifies as follows:

*"As of now we have two children. Our daughter is now attending at Thai school and she can speak and read Thai very well. We are happy about that. But I always insist my children (together with my wife) to use our Chin language*

*inside our house. I always let them talk with their aunties and grandparents in Myanmar via Messenger video calls (electronic communication technology that enables talking and seeing pictures of the person that you talk to) so that they will acquaint themselves each other and not feel awkward when they really meet in person on our return someday”.* – (interview a Chin person from Bang Pa-In, 31 May 2018)

Nevertheless, despite facing discrimination inside their home country and facing difficulties abroad, most of the respondents (more than 98%) expressed confidently (84.3 % strongly) that they are proud of their being as a ‘Chin’ person and they love Chin State in Myanmar (table 3.9). This feeling is testified by a person as follows:

*“I am proud that I was born as a Chin person and I can see a lot of my friends feel the same way too. I believe that we the Chin people are blessed to believe in (Christian) God and our land is blessed. I personally express my love of our (Chin) land by wearing our (Chin) traditional dress in events and when I go to the church – not only in Chin program but also in the Burmese programs”.* – (interview a Chin woman at MCA Church (*she is domestic worker at an expat’s house*), 22 May 2018)

Also, characteristic of respect and sense of belongingness is seen by observing that most of the respondents (92%) agreed (45.4% strongly with no response of disagreement) that they wish to and have been inviting many of their non-Chin friends to visit to their homeland – Chin State, aiming to show them the beauty and nature of their motherland (table 3. 9).

Table 10 (Table 3.9. Percentage of Responses on Respect and Sense of Belongingness to Homeland)

Respect and sense of belongingness to homeland	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I always long for my homeland where my parents, family, relatives and friends are waiting for me.	63.9	28.7	7.4	-	-
2. I am proud of being a Chin person and I highly appreciate Chin State.	84.3	13.9	1.9	-	-
3. I always invite my non-Chin friends to take a visit to our homeland, I will show them the beauty of Chin State.	45.4	47.2	7.4	-	-

### 3.2.5. Belief in restoration to their place of origin

This characteristic refers to the behavior that the dispersed group of people commit themselves collectively to look after their homeland from any harm and maintain its prosperity (Safran, 1991). With their respect and longingness of their place of origin as seen in other diaspora across the world, most of the members of Chin diaspora in Thailand expressed their keenness on restoration of Chin State.

One of the informants says as follows:

*“I left Chin State in the 1980s and visited a couple years ago. Things were so different now. In old times, Chin State was so pure and green – forest was healthy with fresh air. The atmosphere was good as there were only Chin people – you know each other and there were few diversities among you. But nowadays, houses and roads have become modern. Due to the changes of administration and probably as time goes by, there are people from outside in the Chin hill. I think my town (Hakha) is now a normal modern Myanmar (Burmese) town that*

*a lot of our people no long use Chin language but in ‘Burmese’ – with mixture of external people and the intrusion of new ideologies and thinking, I am worried our (Chin) youths may lost their identity of ‘honesty and loyalty’. Another issue is that the green and fresh forest in Chin State that I knew were gone missing. I insist whenever I meet with those in the position to take care of these two particular issues and warn them that if neglected our identity and uniqueness might be gone forever – the history might blame us”. - (Informant from Calvary International Baptist Church, 23 May 2018)*

At the same time, more than 90% of them believe that there are many people back in Chin State and in Myanmar broadly either in the government agencies or as the civil society organization and independent activists who are hardly working for restoration of Chin State as well as creating job opportunities and infrastructure developments so as to improve the lives of those remaining in Chin State and to accommodate the return of their people outside the country. Not only that they understand that restoration of their homeland is taken care of internally, the majority of respondents (more than 90%) expressed that Chin diaspora across the world, including them, put their efforts for the restoration of Chin State – particularly by their ‘remittance’ (table 3.10).

Table 11 (Table 3.10. Percentage of Responses on Belief in Restoration)

Restoration	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. There are currently many politicians and activists in Myanmar and abroad who are putting their effort to restore Chin State.	40.7	39.8	12	7.4	-

### 3.2.6. Self-definition in terms of homeland

The last characteristic, ‘self-definition in terms of homeland’, means that the dispersed population in other places maintain their relationship with homeland in any way and those relationships define their ‘ethno communal consciousness and solidarity’ (Safran, 1991: 84). Most of the members Chin diaspora in Thailand are the first

generation and they have their family members and relatives in their homeland (see table 3.4). They maintain their connection with homeland, either sending remittances or communicating them by phone or by internet, mostly on social media such as LINE, the Messenger, Viber, etc.

A member of the Chin diaspora from in Bang Pa-In testify as follows:

*“I always talk with my family in Myanmar via internet. Mainly, we update each other with ongoing matters in our daily lives and my parents usually give me moral support when I am down. To share with the recent case, I talked with my parents in Kalemyo, Sagaing Division, on ‘Mother’s Day’ day with Messenger video call. After talking our personal matters, I asked them to update me with information about my siblings, friends, relatives, and so on who are remaining there. They also share with me how they celebrate the ‘Mother’s Day’ event at the church and she showed me the present she received from my siblings. By these kind of regular communications, I feel that I am with them, like my emotion is in that place (society) even though I am physically here in Thailand. I feel motivate actually’.* – (interview a Chin young lady from Bang Pa-In, 13 May 2018)

One of the informants elaborates as follows:

*“We established ‘Thailand Mizo Run’ in 2014 (‘Run’ means ‘House’) and ‘Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship’ in 2016. We celebrate our traditional activities such as ‘Chap-Char-Kut’<sup>4</sup> usually in April, Song Kran holidays in Thailand. In the name of ‘Thailand Mizo Run’, we sent our donation equivalent to Myanmar Kyat 500,000 during the Kalemyo flood in 2015. The money was sent to a Mizo local organization in Kalemyo and later delivered to a village called Hakhalay where many Mizo people live. Since, many of our Mizo people from Thailand went back to Myanmar over the years and through the mouth-to-mouth spreading of information, this Mizo fellowship in Thailand is quite known in Myanmar, especially among our fellow people in Kalemyo. They contact me*

<sup>4</sup> ‘Chap-Char-Kut’ is a traditional festival of Mizo sub-ethnic group of Chin. (see further at: <https://www.speakingtree.in/allslides/what-is-chapchar-kut-festival>)



*when they need help – actually most of the favor they request are asking if their sons or daughters are doing well in Thailand, asking for contact information, asking for facilitation when they want to come to Thailand. But I do not work as a broker and I am just assisting my people with pure heart”. – (Informant from Thailand Mizo Run, 27 May 2018)*

An informant explains as follows:

*“The reason I was keen and have always been insisting our people in Thailand to celebrate the Chin National Day (CND) is to maintain our identity and remind our people about it even though we are staying here in Thailand. This is the core reason why we celebrate CND around the world on 20 February of each year. We wear our costumes, perform our traditional dance, read out our history and eat our food. This is how we remind and encourage ourselves”. – (Informant from Calvary International Baptist Church, 23 May 2018)*

Another informant elaborates as follows:

*“As a Zomi sub-ethnic (Chin) pastor in Thailand, I have a lot of connection with our people either in religion or in non-religion circles. For instance, since we also celebrate our National Day among our sub-ethnic group at our church this year, we invited a Reverend Pastor and a famous singer among our sub-ethnic group from Myanmar. We take care of their travel and accommodation and we enjoy the celebration of National Day with their company, hearing their encouragements and updates regarding the affairs back home”. – (Senior Pastor of the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, 16 May 2018)*

The respondents have continuous personal connection with their family members, relatives and friends in Myanmar who necessary are not living in Chin State anymore, given their being as first generation into Thailand who have close relatives in Myanmar. However, most of the respondents (more than 94%) have similar definition of their home land, Chin State, as a cold region on the blue high mountains where birds and some flowers which are not seen in other places are seen there. They also expressed that when they think of Chin State they just see the clouds, woods and the rare animals that they only see in there. Moreover, the most significant thing majority of them (more

than 95%) agreed in defining their homeland was that it so much a highland they walk above the clouds and see the Rhododendron or “Taung Za Latt” flower blossoms (table 3.11).

Table 12 (Table 3.11. Percentage of Responses on Self-definition of Homeland)

Self-definition of homeland	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Chin State, my homeland, is in the hilly region with fresh air, wild flowers and birds.	58.3	36.1	2.8	1.9	0.9
2. I define Chin State as a place where Rhododendron flowers blossoms.	51.9	43.6	0.9	2.8	0.9

## Conclusion

First, this study has filled the empirical knowledge gap of the Chin diaspora in Thailand by analyzing the sampling population who are residing and working in Bangkok and its vicinity. The paper categorizes the arrival of the respondents into two sessions – those who arrive before 2014 and those came into Thailand after 2014. Even though the earliest arrival year of the respondents dates back to 1995, it is to consider the return or onward migration of the earlier Chin people in Thailand – in depth interviews reflect the existence of Chin people in Thailand before that period. Majority of the respondents are in their youthful age and most of them acquired merely basic education in their home country. One may argue that economic hardships at their place of origin pushed the Chin people to disperse or migrate to Thailand at young age before they finished the education and it result them to engage into ordinary works in the country of destination.

As it has been observed in earlier studies and testified by the informants, majority of the Chin people uses Thailand as a transit to go to the third countries. It is seen by observing the arrival dates of the respondents that a few Chin people remain in Thailand among those who left Myanmar or arrived Thailand before 2014. Majority of the Chin people who left Myanmar during the military regime or before 2010 have left to Malaysia or been sent to the third countries by the UNHCR refugee status. In other words, it appears that Chin people came into Thailand in a faster pace after the transition of Myanmar – to seek economic opportunities. Given the age of the respondents,

occupation and arrival years in relation to the political situation, one may argue that the Chin diaspora in Thailand implies more towards new notion of labor migration diaspora as seen in the case of Turkish and Mexicans than forced dispersal as in the case of the Jews or Palestinians.

Despite the diversity in sub-ethnic origin, majority of them have same religion, with a slight mixing of Buddhists. At the same time, dispersion of the Chin people internally and abroad has raised a question of how Chin people regard their homeland among uncertainties and difficulties in the new places that they have dispersed. However, it is found out that dispersion did not result the Chin people to deviate their shared identities and knowledge of homeland. Instead, it is found out that Chin diaspora in Thailand agrees upon similar notion of respect, sense of belongingness and belief in restoration of their homeland. Due to the help of the advancements in technology, communication technology in particular, it is observed respondents maintain contact with their homeland and have their own definition of homeland. Nevertheless, the existence or feeling of alienation by the host society in Thailand towards the Chin people may enhance the maintenance cultural distinctiveness of Chin people in Thailand. In short, this section has explored a wide variety of the characteristics of Chin diaspora in Thailand and presented how they meet the six features of Safran (1991).

## Chapter IV

### Social Network of Chin Diaspora in Thailand

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the chronological background the social network of the Chin diaspora and their transnational networks. The assessment of social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand is approached through the concept of Weber (2014). Weber (2014) conceptualizes the ‘migrant social networks’ as follows:

*"formal and informal, local and transnational, by tendency homophilic and often multiplex ties between individual migrants who share one or more dimensions of similarity; migrant networks are to a certain degree strategic but are typically regulated by informal principles rather than formal rules, consist of different sub-networks and are made up of a core and an extension, encompassing strong and weak ties."*

This section identifies the function and regulatory system of the Chin diaspora in Thailand and their social connection examining homophily and heterogeneity, their local and transnational core and extension of networks, and the strength of ties in those networks.

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
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#### 4.1. Informal engagements before 2007

Before 2007, Chin people came into Thailand mainly to apply for the UNHCR refugee status or to go further to Malaysia via Thailand for the same purpose and a few intended to work. It is learnt that there were only a few Chin people who came to work and stay in Thailand. Most of them entered as undocumented migrant workers and majority of them cannot go out freely, fear of the deportation or to pay high fines to the police. For instance, registration for domestic work was not permitted to Myanmar workers in Thailand even until 2000 (Chantavanich, et al., 2007). The only moment Chin people could have meet or interact each other is at their workplace and at their residence if they are close but this interaction is within the circles of friends or in a

limited network – only a few people dares to go to the church. There was a Chin sub-ethnic fellowship a church in Thailand in 2000 but it due to the language barrier, the other sub-ethnic of Chin people cannot participate well.

In terms of the occupations in Thailand (see table 3.4), most of the Chin people were working into low-paid and restrictive unskilled or semi-skilled works such as domestic works and in restaurants. Most of them are not allowed to go out or they do not dare to go out. According to in-depth interviews, their salaries were very low in those days as they were not good at their respective works and did not understand the local language. Communication materials such as mobile phone and cable telephone were also beyond the reach of most of the Chin people in Thailand that time – late 1990s and early 2000. Telephone was only possessed by those who were working the office, church pastors and so on. And yet, only a few people in their circle know those numbers. There were few in place who will volunteer at collecting the contact information such as telephone numbers, addresses, etc. that may allow the Chin people in Thailand to know each other. As such, it is observed that communication was quite difficult and mobilizing the Chin people in Thailand was beyond their capacity. Therefore, the Chin people were living in cluster in their own sub-ethnic groups in Thailand or individually for those who do not have contact with any of their fellow Chins.

One of the informants explains as follows:

*“In my earlier times in Thailand in the 1990s, most of the Chin people came to Thailand to apply the UNHCR refugee status in Thailand or via Thailand, they proceed to Malaysia to do the same purpose – to go to the third countries. Back then, communication was quite difficult – there was no internet like this time, we were relying only on telephone. Very few of us could afford to buy mobile phones and cable phone was not so abundant either. In 1997, there was a Chin broker in Bangkok whose name is \*\*\* (now in the US). To my knowledge, he facilitated more than 1,000 Chin people to go to Malaysia via Thailand from his residence in Mochit, Bangkok. His residence was given a nickname “the Chin Centre” because it was always full of Chin people who came to Thailand*

*with different purposes. There was a cable phone in his residence it was quite known among many Chin people in Thailand back then. The Chin Centre was vanished when \*\*\* left Thailand in the year 2000. The main accommodation for the Chins in Thailand, in Bangkok to be precise, was gone. Later when Chin people come to Thailand, they just stay at their friends' apartments. It was quite inconvenient to know information among us, mobilization was very difficult and the statistics of Chin diaspora in Thailand was unknown among us. Due to documentation problems and our work nature, we hardly could meet each other". - (Informant from Calvary International Baptist Church, 23 May 2018)*

Another informant shares the experience as follows:

*"It was very difficult to communicate each other in the past. There was no internet or Facebook but only telephone. Only a few Chin people in Thailand have telephone. Since it was our early days in Thailand, we cannot communicate in the local language with Thai people and we even couldn't buy the key-pad telephones which young people nowadays do not want to use. So, when we need to contact we have to use the commercial telephone that are displayed on the street or in some shops. By the way, I remember that there was a time back then that I was in trouble with the police – the police found out that I have no legal document, they said that they will put me into jail if I cannot give them fines and I need somebody to ask for help. Since the owner of the Chin Centre had a line phone and I had to call him from the telephone shop on the street and explain the situation. After that, the police took me to the station. A few hours later, \*\*\* arrived at the police station and helped me out - I don't even know how he could manage to find me. But it was the situation back then."*

– (Interview a senior member of Chin diaspora in Mahachai, 27 May 2018)

#### **4.2. Formal Networks: Chin fellowships in Thailand, their function and the regulatory systems**

Church usually is the place where Chin people meet each other in Thailand. Therefore, most of the association that Chin diaspora in Thailand formed are religious-based fellowships. Therefore, given the majority are Christians, the Chin fellowships in Thailand are seen in the churches where they participate. Some fellowships are formed based on the sub-ethnic origin of the Chin people or by the name of their place of origin – the villages or towns where they used to live in Myanmar before entering into Thailand.

##### a) Zomi Christian Fellowship (ZCF)

The first formally organized Chin association in Thailand was that of the Zomi sub-ethnic group. The Zomi Christian Fellowship (ZCF) was formed in 1 January 2000 at the Myanmar Christian Assembly (MCA) church in Bangkok, Thailand. The aim was to organize worship program in the Chin (Zomi sub-ethnic) language, to look after each other when the members are sick, run into trouble, share necessary information among each other and to maintain Chin identity despite staying abroad. The fellowship was formed formally under the MCA, by appointing the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Accountant, Auditor, Fellowship Coordinator, Praise and Worship Leader. The fellowship has worshipping programs at the MCA church in Bangkok, between 14.00 – 16.00 hrs on the first and third week of each month in those time (Kham, 2010). According to in-depth sources, it was learnt that the fellowship gradually faded away in the late 2010s as the membership reduces – some of them return to Myanmar while majority moved to third countries, either directly from Thailand or via Malaysia, gaining the UNHCR refugee status.

An informant explains as follows:

*“There were many Zomi Chins and other Chins in Bangkok during the late 1990s and early 2000s. They were concentrated mostly in Sukhumvit area, Prakhanong areas. But when the refugees were sent to the Thailand-Myanmar border around 2004, many of the Zomi Chins went to the camp in the following*

*years, especially at Ong Pin Camp, while the majority left for Malaysia” – (Informant from the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, 16 May 2018)*

Another informant shares her knowledge about ZCF as follows:

*“I arrived Thailand in the late 1990s. Being a Hakha sub-ethnic group, I attended the church at Calvary church where a pastor from our sub-ethnic group preaches. There were very few Chin people in that church back then. However, at the Myanmar Christian Assembly (MCA), there was a Zomi sub-ethnic Chin pastor, Reverend Pastor \*\*\*, and I heard that there were many Zomi sub-ethnic Chin people there. They later have the Zomi Christian Fellowship (ZCF)” - (Informant from Raks Thai Foundation, Samutsakhon Office, 13 August 2018)*

As such, despite its functioning as a fellowship for the interaction for the Zomi sub-ethnic groups in Thailand, the ZCF did not engage the social networks for the Chin people sojourned in Thailand back then. The main reason was found to be the language barrier or not having a common dialect among them and they did not want to use Burmese language either. A senior Zomi person in Thailand says, *“The reason that we had it was to avoid worshipping in Burmese or use our language at the church and we did not want to use Burmese language again in the fellowship as long as we have enough number among us”* (interview a Chin person, 27 May 2018).

#### b) Chin Christian Fellowship - Bangkok (CCFB)

Seven years after the establishment of ZCF, another fellowship called Chin Christian Fellowship - Bangkok (CCFB) was formed at the MCA on 8 April 2007. It was organized by a variety of Chin sub-ethnic groups who were not part of the ZCF. The main objectives were to allow a more inclusive worship program for Chin-language-speaking people and to promote mutual support and coordination among the



Chin people in Thailand. One of the architects of this fellowship explains about the motives of the formation Chin Christian Fellowship - Bangkok (CCFB) as follows:

*“I went to attend church at the MCA church on a Sunday in early 2000s. I saw that there was a worship program of the ZCF. They were using the Tedim (Tiddim) or Zomi sub-ethnic Chin language. It was quite harmonious among themselves. But I also saw other sub-ethnic groups of Chin on that day – they were from Falam, Hakha, Htantlang (towns) as I recall. They do not speak Tedim dialect and thus cannot participate well in the worship service of ZCF. I suddenly had a wish to have an inclusive Chin fellowship. Later, I asked the Chin people of different sub-ethnic origin in Bangkok if they want to have a more inclusive Chin fellowship, they all agreed. The challenge that time was that most Chin people in Thailand (like other Myanmar ethnics in Thailand) were staying illegally and they cannot go out to the church or to other places freely even if they have some kind of documents in-hand. But this brought to us an objective that we can have an inclusive Chin fellowship in Thailand to help each other when necessary. Being an NGO worker in Thailand for many years by then, I also had extensive networks either within or beyond the Chin circles and I have experiences of ‘how and what’ to do in order to have a Chin fellowship in Thailand. So, I explained senior Chin people in Thailand and as they agreed, I explained the project to two Chin student who were doing their Master’s degree in Bangkok, Thailand, (both of them studied at Mahidol University) and with their assistance we call for a general meeting among Chin people in Thailand, especially in Bangkok and its near-by areas, on 8 April 2007. The meeting was attended by 84 Chin people who were mostly working in Bangkok. After a period of debates and discussion, everyone agreed to have the fellowship formed and came up with the name ‘Chin Christian Fellowship – Bangkok’. The name was inspired from that of a Chin fellowship in Malaysia by that time - they call it Chin Christian Fellowship. ‘Bangkok’ was attached in the name rather than ‘Thailand’ because most of us in Thailand usually settled in Bangkok in the first entry or come to Bangkok after staying in other towns for a period of time. Another reason is not only that Chin people are*

*concentrated in Bangkok per se but also arranging things are much more convenient in Bangkok than in other towns*". – (Informant from Raks Thai Foundation, Samutsakhon Office, 13 August 2018)

As such, CCFB was formed in order to cover a wider networks of Chin people in Thailand either to mobilize religious activities together or engage the mutual assistance among members. CCFB also allocate unpaid duty and responsibility to its members: they elect among themselves the chairman, secretary, accountant and so on. CCFB worship program at the MCA church is between 14.00 – 16.00 hrs. on the second and fourth weeks of every month. Therefore, CCFB becomes a section of the MCA church in Bangkok, Thailand, but the members separately engage their activities related to the social affairs of Chin people in Thailand. The very first worship service of CCFB was convened in June 2007 at the MCA church in Bangkok, Thailand (Cherry, 2010).



*Figure 8 (Figure 4.1. The first worship service of CCFB at MCA in Ekkamai (photo retrieved from Ms. Khin Mya Win)*

ချင်းခရစ်ယာန်မိသားစာရ

Chin Christian Fellowship Bangkok

ချင်းခရစ်ယာန်မိသားစာရသည်၊ ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံ ဘန်ကောက်မြို့ မြန်မာ ခရစ်ယာန်အသင်းတော်(အမ်စီအေ)တွင်၊ ဇွန်လိုင်လ ၈ရက်နေ့၂၀၀၇ခုနှစ် တွင်၊ စတင်ခဲ့ပါသည်။ စည်းလုံးညီညွတ်မှုနှင့်မိသားစာရဖွဲ့ခြင်းကို ရည်ရွယ်လျက်၊တစ်လ ၂ကြိမ်ဝတ်ပြုကိုးကွယ်ခဲ့ပါသည်။( ခုတိယနှင့်စတုတ္ထပတ်) ကမ္ဘာအရပ်ရပ်သို့ ရောက်ရှိနေသောချင်းလူမျိုးများ၊ဆုတောင်းပေးခြင်း၊ ဖြစ်သတိယပါဝင်ရန်၊လေးစားစွာမေတ္တာနှင့်သတင်းပို့လိုက်ပါသည်။ အယောက်တိုင်းဘုရားသခင်ကောင်းကြီးပေးပါစေ။

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Figure 9 (Figure 4.2. the pamphlet of CCFB after its formation in 2007 (retrieved from Ms. Khin Mya Win)

• Chin Community - Bangkok (CCB)

When the CCFB functions smoothly, some of the executive members of CCFB envisioned the creation of a secular or religious-free Chin community in Thailand, aiming to separate the social activities of CCFB and to emphasize its functions under the CCB, allowing the participation of Buddhist Chins who are mostly the Asho sub-ethnic origins. Therefore, Chin Community - Bangkok (CCB) was formed but most of the executive members are the same people of that of the CCFB. But due to the nature of voluntarily formation and the dual-assignments of the same executive members of either at the CCFB or CCB, the CCB just remains as an inactive group.

One of the informant explains the situation as follows:

*“I arrived in Thailand after 2011 to study, later settled in Bangkok and involved actively among the Chin community. I later was appointed to an executive role in CCFB. CCB was formed before I came into Thailand. One day, senior Chin persons in Thailand requested me with the name of CCB to lead the celebration of the Chin National Day (CND) in Bangkok, Thailand. Elders takes the counselling and advisory roles and youths like myself are to take the*

*implementation. Since the CCB was not active and I was then a leading member of the CCFB, most of the matters related to CCB, that is for the CND celebration, automatically went into the agendas of CCFB". - (A current leading member of CCFB, 3 June 2018)*

The executive members of CCFB initiated celebration of Chin National Day (CND) in Thailand for the first time on 20 February 2008. The event was attended by hundreds of all sub-ethnic groups of Chin people residing in Bangkok, Thailand, and its vicinity. The program includes reiterating the history of Chin State and Chin people, fashion show with traditional costumes of each Chin sub-ethnic groups, group singing by sub-ethnic origins and so on (Cherry, 2010). One of the architects of the celebration of CND in Thailand explains as follows:

*"Since we had quite a number of members into the CCFB and quite a big population of Chin people in Thailand by that time, I and \*\*\* had the intention to convene CND in Thailand. In collaboration with the executives of CCFB, we firstly created the Chin National Day (CND) Celebration Committee in 2007-2008 – committee members were elected among the CCFB members. Then we invited as many representatives as possible from each church where Chin people are participating in Thailand, especially in Bangkok. At first, we really had to discuss and negotiate among us about the programs of the first CND which was to be held in February 2008. We were quite a diverse group with different sub-ethnic origins among ourselves and we wanted to put our sub-ethnic affairs forward but finally we could have a good program and the first CND in Thailand was successful. We collected 100 Baht for the CND from each member and the executive members of CCFB contributed 1,000 Baht each. Since then, CND is celebrated regularly in Thailand in the following years and it becomes one of the main events that allow all Chin diaspora in Thailand to meet. At least 100 – 200 Chin people in Thailand attends the CND each year. For the record, there were 180 participants in the CND 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand". - (Informant from Calvary International Baptist Church, 23 May 2018)*



Figure 10 (Figure 4.3. Event photo of the 62<sup>nd</sup> CND celebration in Bangkok, 2010.

Photo retrieved from Ms. Khin Mya Win)

CCFB is multi-Chin-sub-ethnic fellowship and its members include all six sub-ethnic origins under the Chin ethnic umbrella as illustrated by Sakhong (2003) (see table 3.4 to see the sub-ethnic origin of members). An informant explains its challenge as follows:

*“An issue is that most current elected leaders of the CCFB are mostly the Laimi tribes, those from Falam in particular<sup>5</sup>. Since most of the frequent attendees at the CCFB worship program are from Falam or those who could speak Falam language, CCFB apply Falam dialect in most cases – like gospel songs. Some members also have the condition that they are much better in speaking Falam dialect than other dialects including Burmese. However, due to the domination of Falam language speaking groups at the moment, other sub-ethnic groups might not be happy at the CCFB worship program. Given this situation when we propose using the common language - Burmese - majority members of the*

<sup>5</sup> Falam is a town in central Chin State. Even though they are under ‘Laimi’ category, the language of each sub-ethnic groups under that category varies. For instance, those who live in Falam (town) speak different language from those in ‘Hakha’ (town).

*CCFB (those who speak Falam dialect) are reluctant and insist to use Chin language. Here, the Chin language happens to be the 'Falam dialect'. Then again, using the language of the majority group dismays the others". – (A current leading member of CCFB, 3 June 2018)*

The consequences of the challenge in applying a common dialect at the CCFB which is accompanied with certain circumstances will be presented in the later parts.

c) Involvement of the Chin University Students in CND in Thailand

The role of Chin (university) students during the formation of CCFB has been highlighted earlier. Mobilization of the Chin people in Thailand was successful with the assistance the two Chin university students in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2007. Despite frequent attendance of Chin student in different Thai universities throughout the time, there were no record of (un)official Chin student fellowships in Thailand until late 2017. Bangkok Chin University Student (BCUS) fellowship was formed in late 2017 with 34 Chin Students who are doing further their further studies in Thailand, at universities in Bangkok such as the Asia Institute of Technology, Asia Pacific International University, Assumption University, Bangkok University, Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University, Rangsit University, Siam University, Stamford University and Webster University. With their vision to detach from the influence of religion and to avoid unwanted consequences of the discourse of any ideology, they did not use the sensitive terms such as 'association' and they do not assign 'chairman or president'. (Many Chin students study in Thai universities beyond Bangkok as well.)

It is observed that BCUS members study both science subjects such as engineering, business administration, nursing, computer and networking, entrepreneurship management, tourism, nutrition and dietetics, automotive engineering and arts subject such as education curriculum and instruction, human rights and political science. The informal fellowship of Chin students, BCUS, members randomly meet in person and communicate each other on social media platform, particularly on Facebook, to share information, assist in times of needs, and so on. BCUS member students usually have social connection with the Chin diaspora in Thailand and some

of them have their personal connection as well. Those ties are mainly based on sub-ethnicity and intimacy by blood, i.e., relative or family members. It was observed that the BCUS involved as a group in the celebration of CND in Thailand in February 2018.



Figure 11 (Figure 4.4. BCUS Members at the 70<sup>th</sup> CND celebration in Bangkok, Thailand. Photo retrieved from Zohip)

#### 4.2.1. Sub-fellowships: based on sub-ethnic origin

Despite having the CCFB as the inclusive Chin fellowship in Thailand either for religious or social activities, some sub-ethnic groups of the Chin people in Thailand formed their own fellowship. They are a) Matu Fellowship – Bangkok, b) the Mizo Christian Fellowship and b) Zomi Fellowship in Thailand.

##### a) Matu Fellowship Bangkok

The history of the Matu Fellowship Bangkok can be traced back to 2004. With the unexpected death of a young Matupi sub-ethnic origin Chin person in Bangkok, Thailand in 2004, his relatives and friends faced a big trouble to manage the course of funeral procedures. They did not know how to deal with employer of the death person, demand due accountability from concerned persons, collect the belonging from his residence, and so on. An acute lesson they learnt was that it is only the people of same

sub-ethnic origin who really extend the helping hand in times of urgent needs. Motivated by that feeling, the Matupi people could easily find a common ground in their solidarity which was followed by establishing an informal network among themselves. Most of the Matupi sub-ethnic groups participated at the Calvary International Baptist Church in those days. But since they established their informal fellowship or a network, they began to have a separate worship service in their dialect on early Sunday of every two weeks at a member's apartment before they attend the Calvary International Baptist Church.

Being an informal fellowship formed among people of same sub-ethnic origin who knew each other since their younger age in their place of origin, the members did not elect the executives such as chairman in the beginning – there was an informal leadership among them. However, as the information spread to all of Matupi people in Thailand, the membership increased with more than 100 people in total. Since they cannot be accommodated within a member's small resident, they need to rent an apartment to perform activities – mainly worship program. Therefore, they all agreed on collecting membership fees (amount that member want to contribute) and monthly fees (300 Baht per person) for renting an apartment, fund for funeral of members, low-interest loan for sick members, and so on. As such, the 'Matupi Fellowship – Bangkok' became a strong fellowship which has funds and relatively big membership. When they rent an apartment, they shifted their Matupi dialect worship program to Saturday (from early morning in Sunday). The rented apartment was also utilized as guest house for visitors and new comers from Matupi, Chin State, and members in need of short-term accommodation due to loss or change of jobs. The dwellers moved out when they settled themselves at work and in city – but they had to contribute funds for the fellowship. Matupi people from other countries who cannot re-enter into Myanmar also stop by at the rented apartment. The guests from other countries came usually to get married with their fiancée, Matupi woman from Myanmar in most cases. (*They do the marriage rituals in Thailand and the wife usually follow to third countries later*).

Members of the Matu Fellowship – Bangkok lessens when Thai government moved the refugee status applicants to the Myanmar-Thailand borders in 2004. Many of its members ran to Malaysia and consequently their fellowship funding was not as



strong as it used to be. But the fellowship maintained its activities with the remaining members and they rent the apartment up to 2015, until the neighbors complained the noise of their worship programs. Afterwards, they managed to borrow a small chapel at the Thai church in Bangkok to maintain their worship program. As such, worship program in Matupi dialect is auspiciously held in the morning of every Sunday at the Jaisamarn Full Gospel Church in Bangkok, Thailand.



Figure 12 (Figure 4.5. Some members of Matu Fellowship Bangkok, posing at the chapel. Photo retrieved from Salai Tawmi)

b) Thailand Mizo Run and Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship

• Thailand Mizo Run

Thailand Mizo Run was established in 2014. "Run" in Mizo language means "House" – thus Thailand Mizo Run can be translated to "The Mizo House in Thailand". The main objective was to look after each other among Mizo sub-ethnic Chin people in Thailand in good and bad times. In terms of the organization structure, there is a chairman, secretary and accountants at each town where members live mostly – the assignments are voluntary basis and there is no remuneration. The fellowship assists its

members in when are in trouble with police, joblessness, mental problem, funeral of its members and sending back the death body to Chin State, Myanmar, etc. As a whole group, they could meet only once a year in Thailand at the Mizo traditional festival of “Chap Char Kut”<sup>6</sup> which they held during the Songkran holidays in Thailand.



Figure 13 (Figure. 4.6. Group photo of Thailand Mizo Run at Chapchar Kut 2016.

*Photo retrieved from Thailand Mizo Run Facebook Page)*

The member fee was 1,000 Baht per year per person in the early years (later reduced to 500 Baht per person). Usually, new comers contact the Mizo Run and they register their membership. The new comers are allowed to pay their membership fee within three-months. The memberships are recorded carefully, and the funds are used for the activities and to assist the members in need or when facing trouble. Those who do not contribute the membership fee are not taken care by the organization/fellowship. During its first formation period, there were about 100 Mizo people in Thailand, most of them work in, Mahachai area in Samut Sakhon, Phuket, and border towns such as Ranong and Hat Yai.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Chap-Char-Kut’ is a traditional festival of Mizo sub-ethnic group of Chin. (see further at: <https://www.speakingtree.in/allslides/what-is-chapchar-kut-festival>)

Thailand Mizo Run does not recruit people from Myanmar to Thailand, but it assists some of its people in getting jobs in Thailand. Due to the information spread through the mouths of words among Mizo people, the Mizo Run is popular among the Mizo people in Myanmar, especially among the circles in Kalemryo, Sagaing Region.

- Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship

The Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship was formed in 2016, as a follow up program of the Thailand Mizo Run. The main reason of formation is to allow the Mizo people in Thailand the opportunity to worship in their language. It was due to the fact that there were many new young Mizo sub-ethnic origins in Thailand during that period who cannot speak Thai language (yet) and they do not enjoy speaking in Burmese language either. They were in need of a right place for worshipping or church that use the language they speak. The worship program is conducted the whole day in every Sunday at a house of a senior Mizo person in Mahachai area in Samut Sakhon Province.

In order to be able to worship peacefully or to avoid any annoyance from the local police, they requested an official certificate from Nazarene Church, a Thai church, in Samut Sakhon Province – the certificate recognizes that Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship as a wing under the Thai church which is doing genuine religious activities. The certificate guarantee that the police may not enter into their worship program or into their chapel without any warrant. The worship program is conducted in Mizo language the whole day of every Sunday - morning session is between 11.00 hrs and 13.30 hrs and even session is between 15.00 hrs and 17.00 hrs. The senior members take the lead and other members rotates the stewardship in the program. During the worship program, there is a section that any member can share their experiences, testify the blessings, etc. with other attendees.

Since some members work in areas far from the worship house in Samut Sakhon province, the fellowship serve lunch for the church attendees. Member fees are collected for fund and it is combined with the donation/offertory during worship program. This fund is utilized for buying ingredients to cook Chin food for lunch on every Sunday at their worship house. During the break, every single member of the

Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship take their lunch together – this allows the social network among the members and they can converse about any topic among themselves from their daily life in Thailand to the information in their home community in Myanmar.



Figure 14 (Figure 4.7. A member testifying at Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship.

Photo taken by researcher)



Figure 15 (Figure 4.8. Sunday lunch break at Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship. Photo taken by researcher)

c) Zomi Fellowship in Thailand

Zomi Fellowship in Thailand was formed in 2013 with the Zomi sub-ethnic Chin people in Thailand who mostly live and work in Bang Pa-In, Ayutthaya Province Thailand. In general, one can assume that it has the legacy of the former ZCF that was active in the 2000s. The main purpose is to do worship programs in their dialect and look after each other in times of need. The founder of the fellowship is a church pastor who used to live in the area for more than twenty years and is also a Zomi sub-ethnic origin. Majority of the Zomi people who live in the area have similar workplace, live closely or rent the rooms together and as a significance, most of them are from the same town – Kalemyo, Sagaing Region. The fellowship is based at the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In. They have Zomi language worship program in the evening of every Wednesday of the week and majority of the them rotates stewardship at the church. They used to participate the holistic CND celebration in Bangkok over the time. But Zomi group in Bang Pa-In have been separately convening the CND at their church in Bang Pa-In since 2013, using the Zomi dialect.



Figure 16 (Figure 4.9. Worship program of Zomi Fellowship in Thailand. Photo retrieved from Grace Church in Bang Pa-In)

As a significance, their church has more function than a church for the Zomi sub-ethnic origins in Thailand. The church provides shelter for the new comers into Thailand who do not have any contact, those who have trouble in Thailand either due to loss of job or quitting job and in need of shelter. Due to the mouth-to-mouth information sharing, many of the Zomi people in Thailand and some in Myanmar know the contact information of the fellowship – mostly the chairman’s contact information. They contact him for assistance directly or through the networks, then he can pick them up or instruct their route to base of the fellowship. Also, the church is open for rehabilitation of the drug addicts or those Zomi people who face depression at work. It gives them shelter and food while helping them through the religious programs. Once, the people at the shelter became stabilized, i.e., find job for those who look for jobs and normalized for those who have mental or drug problem, they are can leave the church – some left donation for the maintenances of the church. Some people, but in limited number, are also allowed to stay at the small room under the church but they have to pay a small contribution for the monthly water and electricity costs. The church has more Zomi people, but it is not limited for the Zomi people but also for other sub-ethnic groups of Chin people as well as for non-Chin ethnics from Myanmar.



Figure 17 (Figure 4.10. The provided shelter at Grace Church in Bang Pa-In. Photo taken by researcher)

Summary

Whatever the formation Chin fellowship in Thailand and sub-fellowship, no matter how they function, it is found out that members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand value the continuity of the CND celebration in Thailand each year. They usually select the executive committee members among themselves by voting system and those elected persons take their role to make sure the smoothness and successful completion of event. When the CND celebration date is close, each member of the sub-ethnic fellowships is invited through the representatives. The sub-ethnic executive leaders are chosen from the CCFB worship program, among the frequent church attendees and those who usually attend the meetings related to Chin diaspora in Thailand. Shown below is the voting result of the chairman, vice chairman, secretary, vice secretary, accountant and assistant accountant for the 68th Chin National Day celebration in Thailand.

Candidate	Chairman	Vice Chairman	Secretary	Vice Secretary	Accountant	Assistant Accountant
John						
Ci Ci						
Sandar						
Pa Pum						
Suh Suh						
Rem Rem						
Kyaw San						
Lei Hnang Thang						
Touwui						
Aung Kyaw Thant						
Ruala						
Hman						
Dma						
Paupet						
Khai Tawng						
Daw Thang						
Cherry						

Figure 18 (Figure 4.11. Voting result of Executive Committee for convening CND in Thailand. Photo retrieved from CCFB)

CCFB has been running its activities overtime: worship program and the general affairs of its members – the Chin diaspora in Thailand. It is observed that the CCFB is keen on keeping document records for its activities such the meeting attendants, minutes of the meeting and decisions, its activities such as workshops, picnics, seeing and praying for the sick members, and so on. Based on the activeness and participation of a member into the activities or meetings, the CCFB members decide to assign some of its members the relevant tasks, i.e. whom to assign as representative of a certain sub-ethnic group, for instance. The executives of each sub-ethnic group take responsibilities such as informing, inviting for meetings and events, collecting membership fee, etc. It is the key method of communication and mobilization of the Chin diaspora in its early days. But nowadays, with the help of technology – internet communication through social media, communication and mobilization is very much more convenient than before and it is very convenient.

#### **4.3. Homophilic tendency and Multiplex ties: local and transnational**

##### a) Homophilic tendency: local and transnational

The term ‘homophily’ generally means the tendency that people interact with those who share similarities with them in characteristics such as personal, social status, culture, political ideology and so on. An individual migrant or a person may have many sub networks in his/her society. In other words, a person may have a core network which is a network based on similarities among people or homophily, and extension of networks which is a network beyond the core ones. Core networks are usually within the family and friendship based on biology, but it may also happen among friendship which does not based on blood or on marriage as well. Extension of network can happen among people who share ethnicity, go to same school, works, neighbors, etc. – not on blood. (Weber, 2014).

Homophilic tendency is seen among the Chin diaspora within Thailand and with their transnational ties. Majority of the respondents (91.6%) maintain their transnational ties via technology mediated communication system, particularly through social media



and emails or google mails (table 4.1). More than two-thirds of the respondents (88%) agreed (55.6% strongly) that they took assistance from their Chin friends and relatives before, during the entry and early days of their arrival into Thailand (table 4.1.).

Table 13. (Table 4.1. Percentage of Responses on Transnational Ties)

Transnational ties	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. To contact my friends and relatives outside Thailand, I use internets: (email, Facebook, Messenger, Line, Viber, etc.)	54.6	37	5.6	2.8	-
2. I took assistances from Chin friends and relatives who were in Thailand before, during and early days of my arrival in Thailand.	55.6	33.3	8.3	1.9	0.9

An informant explains as follows:

*“In the past and even until now, most of the contact transnationally are mainly through personal or individual network between relatives or friends, usually within the same sub-ethnic groups. A difference is that telephone was the main channel of connection for many of our people in Thailand when they contact with their friends or relatives abroad – it is so expensive. Nowadays, technology mediated communication system is very much convenient and efficient. Most of our people use social media channels such as Messenger, Viber and Line to contact outside Thailand”.* - (Informant from Calvary International Baptist Church, 23 May 2018)

The formation of CCFB and celebration of CND in Thailand are evident to the preference of Chin people in Thailand to interact among themselves and to look after each other – people of the same ethnicity who share similar cultural and social background. A more homophilic tendency is seen by observing the formation of the sub-fellowship based on the sub-ethnic origin among the Chin diaspora in Thailand in later years of the formation of CCFB and celebration of CND in the host country. It is

found out that the sub-fellowships perform as the core of networks for respective sub-ethnic origins of the Chin diaspora in Thailand. More than two-thirds of the respondents (75.9%) expressed that they usually go to church where they can meet with their fellow Chin people, usually conducted the worships in Chin dialects. It is also learnt from the sampling population that around two third of the respondents agreed that they mostly interact with Chin friends than others in Thailand (table 4.2).

An informant explains about the homophilic tendency of Chin people as follows:

*“Most of the Chin people in these areas are the Zomi sub-ethnic origins. Most of them came from same place of origin. They know each other since their childhood in Myanmar and they come together or invite each other to Thailand – most of them even work at the same place. They go work together, come to the church together, share the rooms and cook together and they spend their free times together. They enjoy the company among themselves because they talk the same dialect, laugh on the same jokes, and they feel safe to be together. As such most of the Chin people in our area, get married among themselves. Within five years, we have quite a number of Chin families in this area and it has now become like a small Chin village here. They come to the church together and cook meals after church and eat together”*. – (Informant from the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, 16 May 2018)

Churches or fellowship within the same sub-ethnic groups play at the focal point for the interaction of Chin people in person in Thailand. It is also observed that most of the members make themselves free on Sunday or choose the works that give holiday on Sunday. It is the observation that the use of their sub-ethnic dialect in the church program enrich the homophilic tendency and solidarity among a certain sub-ethnic group of the Chin diaspora in Thailand. Due to their livelihoods in Thailand, they do not have free time in the week days. Most of them only have time to meet or interact with their fellow Chin people only at the church on Sunday. They gain moral strength by worshipping in their language, seeing friends and later going out with them after the church.

Moreover, it is also found out that the strength of ties in the core networks or fellowships in the same ethnic-origins of Chin diaspora in Thailand is very strong. Since most of them (83%) go to the church at least once a week, they have the opportunity interact with their friends of same ethnic origin. Majority of the respondents (78.7%) expressed that they go out together after the church or in other holidays. Not only that they meet at church on Sunday, majority of them (65.7%) maintain contact with their friends and pastor from their church via social media channels and on phone in urgent cases (table 4.3).

*“I got out-pass opportunity (free time to go out) from 7 AM to 5 PM on every Sunday. Since I work the whole six days in a house, I wish to gain spiritual and moral strength by attending at the church and want to talk my language (my sub-ethnic dialect) with my friends after the church. So, I choose to attend at the MCA and join the CCFB worship program. I am also assigned to be an accountant for the fellowship as well. After the worship program, we usually chat in our language while having lunch and sometimes we visit the house of the worship leader and cook some traditional foods. I usually go back home – my workplace - in the late afternoon. Attending the church on Sunday and seeing my friends give me moral strength for the whole week and I do it the same every Sunday”. – (interview a Chin person in Bangkok, 17 May 2018)*

*“Most of our people live and work in industries in Mahachai area (Samut Sakhon Province). Officially their works are close on Sunday, but the employers give double price for those working ‘overtime’ work on Sunday. General workers prefer to work on Sunday to grab this incentive. However, most of our people prefer to come to the worship programs on Sunday, sacrificing their opportunity. They like seeing each other (friends of same sub-ethnic origin), worship together, share information, giving moral support to each other” – (interview Chairman of Thailand Mizo Run, 27 May 2018)*

Table 14 (Table 4.2. Percentage of Responses on Homophilic Tendency)

Homophilic tendency	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I go the church which is conducted in Chin dialect and where I meet Chin people	40.7	35.2	12	11.1	0.95
2. Most of my friends in Thailand are Chin people	23.1	34.3	31.5	8.3	2.8

Table 15 (Table 4.3. Percentage of Responses on Strength of Ties)

Strength of ties	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I meet my Chin friends in Thailand at least once a week at church	54.6	29.6	7.4	3.7	4.6
2. I hang out with my Chin friends after the church and in other holidays	42.6	36.1	15.7	1.9	3.7
3. I frequently contact with Chin friends in Thailand, including church pastor either via phone or internet	32.4	33.3	25	-	-

b) Multiplex ties: local and transnational

As it is seen in many other cases of the migrant social networks, despite there is more tendency to homophilic networks, the Chin diaspora in Thailand also have other local and transnational multiplex ties. Sub-networks or extension of networks is seen either in the individual migrants as well as through the fellowships.

- Individual level

Most of the respondents are working at low-skilled and semi-skilled types of works such as the industry, restaurants, domestic works, and so on. These types of works are the occupations that many migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR are employed in Thailand. Therefore, due to the nature of work, the respondents interact with non-Chin people either at work or at their lodging places – hostel provided by work. Majority of the respondents (89.8%) agree that they have non-

Chin friends among their networks in Thailand whom they establish intimacy as strong as their Chin friends (table 4.4).

A Chin person says as follows:

*“I used to live with my family in Thailand with my wife. As we got a new baby, my wife went back to Myanmar and I remain here in Thailand. However, in order to lower my accommodation costs and to secure myself, I rent a room together with two friends – one is Burmese and the other one is a Karen ethnic person. Both of them have good moral and characteristics – they do not drink alcohol and have disciplines. Therefore, we could stay together for more than a year as of now. We share the costs for our kitchen and eat meal together”.* – (interview a Chin person from Bang Pa-In, 13 May 2018)

Another senior person also explains as follows:

*“I had no contact with any Chin people in Thailand when I first arrived in the late 1990s. And due to the situations in Thailand back then, we were quite vulnerable as migrant workers – illegal ones actually. Therefore, we were keen to make friends among any person who came from Myanmar. We got some kind of confidence when we meet a Myanmar friend. As such, I have got some good friends from my workplace – they are not Chins. When I say friend, I mean those who are really intimate or very close. Friends to who I can go anytime when I need help. They looked after me when I was in the hospital in 2004. We establish this level of intimacy”.* – (Interview a Chin person in Mahachai, 27 May 2018)

A more strategic type of multiplex ties at individual level is also observed among the Chin diaspora in Thailand. Since, some of the Chin people are well accustomed to the location, culture, people and language in Thailand, they can facilitate the migration of other people, either to come into Thailand or bypassing Thailand. By helping their friends in the beginning, some of them unknowing become the indirect agents of smuggling. Due to the nature of their work, they have to deal with people locally in Thailand and transnationally. Therefore, they deal with Chin people and non-Chin people in Thailand, Myanmar, and to their destination country, i.e., Malaysia. One of a Chin person in Thailand who engages into this type of work explains as follows:

*“I have been in Thailand for more than ten years and I am quite good at speaking Thai language. Learning from experiences, I am quite accustomed to the route where people usually take when they want to go to Malaysia via Thailand. In fact, I began to know when I help some of our villagers in Chin State in attempt to go to Malaysia long time ago. Once I was successful helping them, other people contact me to assist them as well and I later ask them for money – most of them are from our village in Chin State. They are happy because I do not cheat them, and I treat the nice. Over time, the information that I can assist people go to Malaysia via Thailand internally among many people in our sub-ethnic group and it later expanded beyond. Therefore, I cooperate with another friend in Thailand who is also a Chin person from another sub-ethnic group. He also was doing the same thing like me. We agreed to let our people go together so to save the cost We have our partners in Myanmar and in Malaysia. Myanmar side usually arrange the route from any part of Myanmar to Bangkok and we arrange the route from Bangkok to Malaysia. We send them to Malaysia-Thai border, we usually use the land route then the water route. Our partner in Malaysia pick up the people in that side. As such, we were becoming like business partners. Later, I did not limit my scope of client and I helped people who are not Chins as well, not only Myanmar people I even once sent 8 Turkish people. But this type of business is not lucrative anymore, especially after the Rohingya case around 2015. I still have good contact with the government staffs along the route” – (interview a Chin person in Bangkok, 17 July 2018)*

Table 16 (Table 4.4. Percentage of Responses on Multiplex-ties: Individual)

<b>Multiplex-ties: individual</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neural</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. I have non-Chin friends in Thailand whom I interact closely	45.3	38.9	7.4		8.4
2. I have non-Chin friends in Thailand whom I interact as close as the Chin friends	46.3	43.5	8.3	-	1.9

- Organizational level

It is found out the CCFB and other sub-fellowship of Chin diaspora in Thailand have established many local and transnational multiplex ties. The Chin fellowships in Thailand have establish ties with the local Thai people, non-Chin ethnic from Myanmar who are sojourning in Thailand, and so on. In some cases, they are contacted for help from abroad and they also invite the pastors, singers and prominent people from Myanmar to participate at their activities in Thailand. The transnational sub-networks are usually related to religious issues in most cases but sometimes it can be related to traditional events and social events such as funeral, legal issues faced by a Chin person, and so on. These characteristics will be explained in the following case studies:

### **Case study 1**

Since the CCFB is using the premise of the MCA and it can also be seen as one of the sub section of the MCA, Bangkok. Therefore, it is observed that the chairman of CCFB is also one of the worship leaders at MCA – in other words, his network in the MCA is dual-dimension: one as the chairman of CCFB and one as part of the MCA, Bangkok, Thailand. However, this has given more capacity in managing matters related to CCFB. This can be observed in the case of CCFB Summer Camp during 13-17 April in 2017.

The CCFB invited a Chin reverend pastor and a Chin singer from Myanmar with the name of ‘CCFB under MCA church in Thailand’ in 2017. The purpose was to ask the two people to assist the first summer camp of CCFB in April 2017. Again, with the image of the MCA, Bangkok, Thailand, the summer camp was conducted at the MCA (branch) church in Pattaya, Thailand. Moreover, they were offered a space a Thai church member in the area for conducting their morning worship program in Pattaya.



Group Photo: 17<sup>th</sup> April 2017



Suh Suh: Bible Study



Morning Devotion

Figure 19 (Figure 4.12. CCFB 1<sup>st</sup> Camp Photos, retrieved from CCFB)

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### Case study 2

In 2009, CCFB assisted the medical treatment and repatriation of a mentally ill 34-year-old Chin woman who come back from Malaysia to Thailand.

A Chin lady who used to stay in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 2003-2007, went to Malaysia to search better job in October 2007. But when she got metal disorder she was accompanied by her sister from Malaysia to Thailand in November 2007. She was left with her friends in Bangkok to recover. But in Thailand she did not take medicine and her illness became worsened.



Upon the informing and request from her friend, CCFB sent her to Somdeet Chaophya Psychiatric hospital in Thon Buri, Bangkok between 3 – 20 March 2009.

*“Since the lady could not afford the cost of the hospital, CCFB negotiated with the social security and all of the hospital charges were cancelled. CCFB gave her 5,200 Baht in cash and arranged for her going back to Myanmar. There was a Chin person who came back from the U.S. who will be going back to Chin State for a visit. Therefore, repatriation of the lady via Mae Sai – Tachileik was accompanied by a CCFB member and the Chin person from US. After sending off at the border in Mae Sai, the CCFB member came back to Bangkok.”* – (Interview a senior Chin person, 27 May 2018)

### **Case Study 3**

In 2010, a car that carries 30 illegal Chin people to Malaysia was shot by the Thai police<sup>7</sup> at Cha Am, a border between Thailand and Malaysia on Thai side. The car collapsed, and it caused 7 deaths and the rest were detained in the police station. An executive member of the CCFB was requested to assist in this case by the Chin Christian Fellowship, Malaysia. The informant shares her experience as follows:

*“The Malaysian side requested the CCFB chairman (then) to assist the case. I was working at the NGO by that time. So, the CCFB chairman assigned me for it and I had to manage it. The CCFB facilitated the funeral of the diseased bodies and helped the injured persons”* - (Informant from Mahachai, 13 August 2018)

### **Case study 4**

Majority of the Zomi people are working and living in Bang Pa-In. The Grace Church is their focal point where they worship together and interact. The church is also a refuge for them when they shelter and food. It serves many other affairs of them such as marriage, rehabilitation from mental failure or addiction to drug and it generally the

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<sup>7</sup> Since the car did not stop by warnings, the police shot the wheel of the car that carries 30 Chin people illegally.

beginning of the social life of Zomi people in the area. The church is open for non-Zomi people and the participants includes Chins other than the Zomis and other ethnics from Myanmar such as Karen, Kachin, Rakhine and Mon.

For the multi-level worshipping program, the Grace Church uses Burmese language and it allows the Zomi people to interact with people of other sub-ethnic origins and other ethnic people. Sometimes, Burmese pastors from other churches are invited to preach at the church as well. Usually after the Burmese program on Sunday, they cook some food and enjoy lunch together. The church attendees who have time wait for lunch and they interact closely while enjoying Burmese food and sometimes Thai food.

*“I am working at a Thai noodle shop at a Thai school in this area. I have been working for so many years and I am quite expert in cooking Thai noodle – ‘Kwe-ta-yao’. When the church requests me, I buy the ingredients from my mates at the market and cook for the mass while they are doing the worshipping. It is fun that we could share our difficulties, joys and feelings with church members while eating together at church. For the cost, the church pastor compensates all expenses”* – (interview a Chin woman in Bang Pa-In, 13 May 2018)



Figure 20 (Figure 4.13. Church attendees eating lunch together after the worship program on Sunday at Grace Church in Bang Pa-In. Photo from the church)

The Zomi Fellowship in Thailand usually invite guest preachers and singers over time for CND celebration, since they hold it separately from 2013. According to in-depth interviews, the reason was due to the fact that CND celebration in Bangkok is quite far and since they have quite a number of people among themselves that they celebrate it separately, using their sub-ethnic dialect or Zomi dialect. As a matter of fact, they maintain their transnational ties with their people in Myanmar by inviting them at the traditional even that they hold in other country.

#### **4.4. Social networks within and intra sub-ethnic fellowships**

This section presents social connection within the sub-ethnic fellowships, intra sub-ethnic fellowships and with non-Chin ethnic groups in Thailand by assessing the strong and weak ties in the core and extension of networks.

- Social networks within each sub-ethnic fellowship

As presented in the earlier parts, the CCFB was created to be an inclusive fellowship among all sub-ethnic groups within the Chin diaspora in Thailand. Later, CCFB is mostly comprised with a certain sub-ethnic group of Chin people and it has to select the dialect of that sub-ethnic group as its main internal language. As such, due to the difficulty to practice a common language within the whole Chin people in Thailand and the homophilic tendency of members, there arises some sub-ethnic fellowships from those who have a certain number in Thailand. The sub-fellowships are 1) Matu Fellowship - Bangkok, 2) Thailand Mizo Run or Thailand Mizo Christian Fellowship and 3) Zomi Fellowship in Thailand.

There are some similarities among each sub-ethnic Chin groups in Thailand. They are formed with the intention to be able to conduct their religious worshipping services in their respective sub-ethnic dialects and to look after each other in good times and bad times. As such, at least they interact among each other once a week at the church. They usually converse, share experiences, hangout together in their holidays – mostly on Sunday after the church or worship programs. Their social interaction occurs within the weekdays via technology mediated communication channels, mainly on social media. Another similarity seen within each sub-ethnic fellowship is that they

have their transitional ties with their fellow sub-ethnic groups in their home country as well as in other countries. And they celebrate their traditional festivals in Thailand within their respective sub-ethnic groups and they sometimes invite their fellow people outside Thailand to take part.

- Social networks intra sub-ethnic fellowships

In Thailand, one of the most inclusive organization among all tribes of Chin people technically is the Chin Christian Fellowship – Bangkok (CCFB) which is practically a hybrid organization that is the combination of CCFB and CCB. The emergence of sub-fellowships does not eliminate the social networks of intra sub-ethnic fellowships. They are a small minority of Myanmar ethnic people in Thailand and they need to look after each other to survive in the host country. Therefore, they have to sort out their common ground – to celebrate the Chin National Day (CND) together once a year, in February.

Holistic celebration of CND can only happen by maintaining the connection within all the sub-ethnic fellowships of Chin people in Thailand. One of the reason that ties the bond among different sub-ethnic of Chin people in Thailand is their concern of ‘difficulty’ in the host country. At this point, ‘difficulty’ refers to bad times such as death of a member, dealing with police, loss of jobs, trouble of settlement in Thailand, and so on. More than two-thirds (89%) of the sampling population responded that Chin diaspora in Thailand assist each other ‘during difficult times’ without any divides in terms of sub-ethnic origins (table. 4.5)

*Table 17 (Table 4.5. Percentage of Responses on Perception towards each other within the Chin diaspora in Thailand)*

<b>Perception towards each other</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neural</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. Chin people in Thailand assist each other during difficult times, without any divides based on sub-ethnic origins	51.9	37	6.5	4.6	-

Some members of the diaspora share their experiences as follows:

*“I came to Thailand in the late 1990s and began working as domestic worker in a Thai house. It was very hard back then since we were mostly illegal ones and having no friends. When I change the house after a year or so, I earn 4,000 Baht per month. Since I was keen to go to church, I took unpaid holiday on each Sunday. They cut my daily wage of around 150 Baht. But at church, I met with some Chin people who arrived Thailand earlier than me. They are not my sub-ethnic groups, but they were quite supportive to me. By seeing with them, I gain a lot of moral support and I felt safe working in Thailand – they even can help me with my job opportunity. Since they arrived earlier and had wider network, they finally helped me get a job (domestic worker) at the Saudi Arabia Ambassador’s residence in Bangkok. Since then I can improve my career more and more. I could invite my daughter to Thailand and with the support of my employers, she is studying now at a Thai university.”* – (interview a Chin domestic worker, 22 May 2018)

One of the members of Chin diaspora testifies this characteristic as follows:

*“I am a Zomi sub-ethnic origin and I am originally from Kalemmyo, Sagaing Region, Myanmar. I have been in Thailand for more than five years as of now and my work in inside Bangkok. Therefore, I usually attend the church in MCA and joined the CCFB because I cannot always participate at the Zomi Fellowship – as Bang Pa-In is very far and costly for me to go every Sunday. It is quite harmonious and warm for me to be a part of the CCFB. I understand it more in the case of the death of my mother. My mother passed away in Kalemmyo a few months ago and I informed our Chin friends in the CCFB. Then the information was shared on the Messenger group (i.e. the group conversation channel on social media among Chin diaspora in Thailand) and many Chin people of different sub-ethnic origins assisted me financially and by giving me moral supports – praying for me as well.. Only with their help that I could urgently go back to Kalemmyo to my mother’s death body”* – (interview a Zomi person who works in Bangkok, 20 May 2018)

Another person from Bang Pa-In share his experience as follows:

*“I am from Hakha, Chin State, and I am working in an industry in this area (Bang Pa-In, Ayutthaya Province). Since it is very far to go to MCA in Bangkok, I usually attend at the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In on Sunday and in other days. The church pastor is a Zomi sub-ethnic origin, but he is very kind to all of us – not looking at our sub-ethnic origin. He has an extensive knowledge and strong networks with local people in this area. Therefore, I actively participate within and beyond the church activities here and I have cordial relationship with the Zomi group and the pastor. They give me support morally and physically – I just simply feel safe to be part of the fellowship” – (Interview Chin person from Bang Pa-In, 3 June 2018)*

#### **Case Study: Chin National Celebration in February 2018**

Many Chin people are Christians and they celebrate Christmas auspiciously in their own church and they enjoyed among themselves every year. In fact, the whole December is full of joy for them – they go out for carol singing since the first or second week of the month and it is followed by Christmas day whereby friends share gifts and families reunited, and the new year celebration. For the Chin diaspora members in Thailand, they are more excited when the Christmas ends. Many of them are thinking of the big event that they will celebrate in the next two months. They began to discuss within their circles, at their sub-ethnic fellowships, on how they would like to celebrate the CND 2018, what programs they will include, will they be participating the traditional dance as a group and inter sub-ethnic group football competition, will they stand for a group song as a sub-ethnic group, who is going to sing, and so on.

Since 2017, the Chin diaspora in Thailand has a common discussion channel on social media, the Messenger. They use Burmese language as the medium of communication in that social media conversation channel. Burmese language is applied in real life conversation of intra sub-ethnic conversation of Chin people in Thailand and in Myanmar. Some members raised the abovementioned questions in the Messenger which is discussed and finally resulted to holding a meeting at the house of the chairman

of the CCFB on 28 January 2018. His house is very close to the MCA church along the Sukhumvit Soi 71. Representatives of the sub-ethnic groups including that of the BCUS attended the meeting and discussed about the program. After a long discussion with lively debates and negotiations among different sub-ethnic groups of Chin diaspora in Thailand, the meeting concluded with some decisions. The key decisions that they came up with are 1) to celebrate friendship football match among each sub-ethnic group on 17 February and 2) to celebrate the CND on 18 February 2018. They also come up with the assignments for each task and budget. A quota for each sub-ethnic group and BCUS based on the population is set in the meeting. As such each sub-ethnic group representatives are assigned to inform their people, collect funds from members for the renting the football playground and hall for the CND.

As such there was a friendship football match among Chin diaspora on 17 February 2018. The CND was harmoniously celebrated on 18 February 2018 in Bangkok. As a significance, the income and expenditure of the celebration of the CND, including that of the friendly football match was shared to the social media where every Chin diaspora in Thailand has access to (see Fig. 4.14).



Figure 21 (Figure 4.14. A prayer before friendly football match. Photo retrieved from John)





## **Conclusion**

The social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand is based on formal fellowship which derived into sub-fellowships. Their core aim is to create a community among people with different kinds of similarities in identity so that they can worship together and look after each other while they are thriving in the host country. It is found out that the differences in sub-ethnic origin and in dialect hinder the maintaining strong tie of network within the Chin diaspora in Thailand as a whole and led them to have sub-fellowships based on sub-ethnic origins. The Christian churches also play an important role in establishing and maintaining the social networks of the Chin people in Thailand. While networks among each sub-ethnic origin becomes the core of networks, they have many layers of extension of network not only within the different sub-ethnic Chin groups, but it goes up to the non-Chins in Thailand as well as to their transnational networks. As seen in many other migrant social networks, this study finds out that the Chin diaspora in Thailand, despite their favor of networks among people of same sub-ethnic groups, cannot survive on their own so they have to cooperate and coordinate with other groups including the Burmese and Thai churches and people in order to survive and maintain their Chin fellowship. In brief, this study concludes that strength of ties within the social networks of Chin diaspora in Thailand is the strongest within the sub-fellowship of same sub-ethnic origin.

It is also found out that technology plays a vital role in maintain the social networks within the Chin diaspora in Thailand and for their transnational social networks. It is found out that access to internet and their ability to use social media such as Facebook, Messenger, Viber, etc. enable the mobilization different sub-ethnic groups of Chin diaspora members in Thailand in times of difficulties and to celebrate the CND once a year who, otherwise, usually meet only within each fellowship of same sub-tribal origin. Moreover, it is found out transnational networks especially with home community is much facilitated by the mobilization in Myanmar. As the technology divide between Myanmar and Thailand is being narrowed down with now four mobile operators offering competitive services and majority of the population afford to use data in Myanmar, this study found out that the Chin diaspora in Thailand are enjoying several positive benefits, as in the case of virtual video calling with parents on the Messenger and gaining moral support for instance.

The increasing role of social networks in job search process either with or without migrants have challenged the conventional economic approach of expecting the “invisible hand of the market” to allocate workers to an appropriate job (Weber, 2014: 14). It is learnt from the study that Chin diaspora members in Thailand, especially within same sub-ethnic groups, assist each other in migration process, finding jobs and settlements in Thailand. The aims of forming the networks or sub-ethnic fellowships among the Chin diaspora include this purpose – to look after each other in times of need which also implies assisting when a member lost job or seeks (better) jobs. At this point, while there are several positive effects of social networks in job searching within migrant groups, the Chin diaspora member groups should aware that extensive homophilic nature may lead them to stagnate into a particular sector of work, currently 72% of the respondents are engaged into industry and domestic works, earning similar rate of wage for instance (see table 3.5). It is also seen that due to the homophilic tendency, the Chin diaspora in Thailand are found to live in a cluster, mostly by sub-ethnicity in Thailand. Lack of exposure and inability learn the language of host country may hinder their upward social and occupational mobility of the Chin diaspora in Thailand (Weber 2014:24).

## Chapter V

### Implication to Home Community in Myanmar

#### Introduction

Since the diasporans maintain strong ties with their relatives in home country, their interaction or ties enable development (Agunias Newland 2012). Therefore, after looking at the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand, this section explores how they imply to their home community in Myanmar. In doing so, the paper will present their 1) economic implications and 2) political implications.

#### 5.1. Economic Implications

Economic contribution of the Chin diaspora is approached by two lens such as their remittance and their skills and knowledge sharing to home community. Remittance plays as the second largest source of fund after the foreign direct investment and it is regarded as one of the most crucial factors of development financing in many developing countries – it is regarded to be more resilient than foreign aids which is volatile to the international politics. Studies of the remittance of Myanmar diaspora abroad can be classified into two parts: 1) the remittance before the transition of Myanmar and 2) remittance after the transition of the country. Earlier studies of Myanmar migrants' remittance either from Thailand and Malaysia, both before and after the transition of Myanmar in 2010, highlight that remittance is mostly sent via informal channels such as hundi system since it costs lower and is more convenient - the money is delivered to the doors of the receivers in many cases. However, some other studies after the transition of Myanmar also shows the shifting of remittance into more formal channels as well (Akee & Kapur, 2017: 5-9).

##### 5.1.1. Remittance

More than two-third of the respondents (75.9%) agreed (31.5% strongly) that the salary and wages they earn in Thailand exceed their personal consumptions. Due to their transnational ties with home country, majority of the respondents (77.8%) agreed (35.2% strongly) that they send money to their family and relatives in Myanmar regularly and only 22.2% did not respond, assuming that they do not sent remittance because they have family in Thailand and may not have surplus of income (table 5.1).

‘Regularly’ hereby refers to ‘monthly’. It is found out that the pattern of use of remittance is quite similar to earlier studies on the migrant remittances.

By reviewing many earlier studies on the remittances of Myanmar migrants in 2003, 2006 and 2007 from different researchers, Chantavanich, et al. (2012) finds out that the remittance is a crucial source of income for the relatives and families of Myanmar migrants. It is observed that the money is used for repaying the debt borrowed for their emigration and for social affairs of the families such as daily consumption and education for the younger ones. In their study, Chantavanich, et al. (2012) also found out that majority of the remittance of their sampling population of Myanmar workers in Thailand are utilized for daily consumption of the family, followed by education of the children, savings and to pay debt, etc. (Chantavanich, et al. (2012: 228).

Similar pattern is found out in this study of the sampling population of the Chin diaspora in Thailand. Earlier studies also have shown that many households in Chin State are dependent remittance of their family members abroad (Thang, 2012). Moreover, dependency of the Chin people towards the remittance is reflected by the fact that the average economically activeness of population in Chin State is lower than the average national rate. According to Census Atlas (2014), it is defined that working age is between 15 and 64 years in Myanmar and labor force participation rates (LFPRs) refers to the degree that working age population are economically active - are working or looking for work. The average LFPR rate in Chin State is 64.8%, which is lower than the national average rate of 76%. It is also learnt that the LFPR rate in Kalemyo (Kalay), where most of the Chin diaspora in Thailand come from, is 67.1% while the average rate in the whole Sagaing Region is 72.3%. In other words, out of 264,605 people in Chin State who are between the age of 15 to 64 years, only 64.8% are economically active. The average unemployment rate in Chin State is 5.4%, higher than the national rate of 4.0%. The total population in Chin State is 456,788 as of 2014 (Census Atlas, 2014: 52).

This study also finds out that approximately two-third of the remittance (67%) is applied to daily consumption, education (25%), repaying debts (5%) and only 3% is used for investment. Investment hereby refers to spending the remittance for filling up the small shops and buying some livestock such as pigs, chickens and ducks (table 5.1).

Table 18 (Table 5.1. Percentage of Responses on Remittance)

<b>Remittance</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neural</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
My salary/wages in Thailand is more than enough for self-use in Thailand	31.5	44.4	20.4	3.7	-
I send money to home in Myanmar regularly.	35.2	42.6	22.2	-	-
<b>Use of Remittance</b>	<b>Daily Consumption</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Repay debts</b>	<b>Saving</b>	<b>Investment</b>
My remittance to family and relative in Myanmar is utilized for	67	25	5	-	3

With the political transition in 2010, followed by the taking office of semi-civilian government's taking office in 2011, economic changes were put in place in 2012. With the reform, Myanmar's economy has been growing with single digits of inflation rates. In terms of exchange rate, the country adopted floating exchange rate, resulting official and market exchange rate having narrow gap (Akee et al., 2017:9). Since 2012, the domestic banks in Myanmar were allowed to give remittance services, in coordination with Western Union, 2C2P, Moneygram, etc., of Myanmar migrant workers from Thailand, Malaysia, Dubai and Singapore (Htun & Bock, 2017). Foreign banks were allowed given permission to conduct, yet limited, services in that country. The reforms should have effects on the remittance behaviors of Myanmar migrant workers abroad. Akee et al. (2017) states that the long taking distrust of ordinary people into the banking system may continue to take place sometimes. Incentives and creating means to attract flow of remittance into official banking channels is still needed. (Akee et al., 2017:9)

However, as seen in many other earlier studies on the behavior of remittance of Myanmar migrant workers from Thailand and Malaysia (Akee, et al., 2017), it is found that out majority of the Chin diaspora prefer to use the informal channel for their remittance. In fact, Chin migrant workers say that they prefer to send through the brokers whom they know in person to ensure the money they sent reach the destination.

Even though it may be higher in costs, they send through brokers than the online banking or through the banks.

An informant explains as follows:

*“Most of our Chin people in Thailand prefer to use the informal channel to send their remittance. Actually, sending money through brokers is very convenient for them. Due to long-term or long period of relationship, there is trust between the sender and the broker. So, they just sender just transfer the money to the bank account and they inform the broker. The broker confirms and then the broker contacts his/her colleague in Myanmar to transfer the certain amount to the destination. As such, transferring money to Myanmar is done within hours in week days”* - (Informant from the Grace Church in Bang Pa-In, 16 May 2018)

A Chin person share his experience as follows:

*“I send money to my parents regularly. I try to send them every month because they rely mostly on my remittance. I usually send money through my friend. I give the money to my friend and he give it again to the broker to proceed as requires. My friend came to Thailand earlier than me and he have a wide range of network. So, most of us ask his favor whenever we need to send money home, but we do not need to pay him”*. – (interview a Chin person from Bangkok, 22 May 2018)

Another person says as follows:

*“I send money to my family bypassing Tachileik. I know a broker in Tachileik whose place of origin is from Kalemyo (my town where my family lives) and we know each other in person as well – he is a Chin person. I transfer the money to him at his bank (Kasikorn Bank) account and he again transfer to my parents via a local Bank in Myanmar. In fact, our house in Kalemyo is close enough so*

*my parents prefer to get the money in person at his house. It is more expensive than sending directly via mobile banking services, but I prefer to use him because I trust him. I use him for more than six years”.* – (interview a Chin person in Bangkok, 17 May 2018)

In 2015, the World Bank (WB) estimated that Myanmar receives a total of 3.5 billion US Dollar (USD) from its people working officially in other countries which it estimated to be 3.1 million people in total. That estimated amount of remittance equals to 5.5% of the country’s GDP in 2015 (World Bank 2016 cited in Akee et al., 2017). The Myanmar government estimated on the other hand that the total remittance is 8 billion USD, 13% of the GDP. Even though there may have been gaps in estimation between official and unofficial remittances, Myanmar has become one of the world’s top ten countries to receive remittance which contributes significantly into its GDP share (Akee et al., 2017: 11).

Furthermore, the WB estimates that 1.7 billion USD, out of its total estimation of Myanmar’s remittance in 2015, came from the Myanmar people in Thailand. Remittance from Thailand tops Myanmar’s total remittance from different countries of the world. The average annual remittance amount of Myanmar people from Thailand per person varies depending on the year of the study. Akee et al. (2017) compiled the earlier knowledge on the remittance of Myanmar migrant workers from Thailand and I added a study into the table as follows:

*Table 19 (Table 5.2. Average annual remittance of Myanmar migrant workers from Thailand per person)*

No	Year of the Study	Sampling population	Average annual remittance amount per person (in Thai Baht)	Authors (researchers)
1	2002-2003	1,000 Myanmar migrants in Thailand	19,000	Turnell, Vicary and Bradford (2008)
2	2007	356 Myanmar	34,000	Jampaklay and Kittisuksati (2009)

		migrants in Thailand		
3	2011	100 Myanmar migrants in Thailand	23,686	Sandar (2011)
4	2014	154 Myanmar migrants in Thailand	52,225	Kubo (2014)
5	2010-2011	5,027 Myanmar migrants in Thailand	29,822 <sup>8</sup>	McDougall, Pattanatabud, & Vungsiriphisal, (2016)

In this research of the Chin diaspora in Thailand, it is also found out the amount of remittance that the respondents could send to their family regularly varies. The majority (35.2%) could send home the amount between 2500 and 3500 Baht, follows by 26.9% of the respondents between 3500 and 4500 Baht, 22.2% between 2000 and 2500 Baht and so on (table 5.3). As such, the average amount that respondents send to their family and relatives in Myanmar is 3,398 Baht at a time. Considering that a person can send his remittance every two months, it is six times in a year, i.e. around 20,388 Baht per person in a year. The population of Chin diaspora in Thailand estimated to be around 2,000 as of 2010 (Thiam 2010). By triangulating the scholarly estimation with the in-depth interviews with informants and observation on sites, I estimate the population of Chin diaspora in Thailand to be around 1200 in total. Based on this estimation, the annual remittance amount of the remittance of Chin diaspora in Thailand to their home community is around 19 million Baht per year. (this estimation is based on 78% of the predicted total population of 1200 in total, assuming that they send the amount of 3,398 Bhat on average every two month or six times a year)

<sup>8</sup> Calculated on USD 1 = 31 Baht (962 USD x 31 = 29,822 Baht)



Table 20 (Table 5.3. Percentage of Responses on Remittance Amount)

<b>Remittance: amount</b>	2000 – 2500 Baht	2500 – 3500 Baht	3500 – 4500 Baht	4500 – 5500 Baht	> 5500 Baht
The amount of money I send to Myanmar at a time	22.2	35.2	26.9	12.9	2.8

### 5.1.2. Skill and knowledge sharing

Chantavanich, et al. (2012) finds out that majority of migrant workers in Thailand learn the ‘work skills’ from their works in the host country. Their study has proven that those who work in the factory learn most the skills such as process of the jobs, regulation and work discipline. The sector of work that follows factory are seafood processing, humanitarian or social work, agriculture, services, clerk construction and domestic work. The skills that the Myanmar people who work in Thailand believe that they learn include their work experience in their respective type of work, their Thai language skills that may give them competitive advantage, broader job opportunities, the knowledge and techniques related to employments, and so on (Chantavanich, et al., 2012: 228-229).

It is found out that half of the respondents (47%) are employed in the industry sector which covers the factory, seafood processing sectors where migrant workers learn work related skills the most, 25% as domestic workers, 14% at restaurants, 6% at church, and so on. Therefore, it can generally be assumed that the Chin diaspora in Thailand have undergone the similar course of work and language skill learning processes as seen in the study of Chantavanich, et al., (2012: 228-229). Two-third of the respondents (74%) agreed (29.6% strongly) that they have shared their experience and work-related knowledge in Thailand with their family and friends in Myanmar via phone and via social media channels, particularly the Messenger. Moreover, 43.5% of the respondents agree that some of their friends who used to stay and work in Thailand with them have repatriated and now applying their experience and knowledge in Myanmar (table 5.4).

Table 21 (Table 5.4 Percentage of Responses on Skill and Knowledge Sharing)

Skill and knowledge sharing	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I conversed with family and friends in Myanmar about my experiences and work-related knowledge in Thailand to people from my home town in person and via internet and phone	29.6	44.4	22.2	3.7	-
2. I have Chin friends who are now applying in Myanmar their work knowledge and experience in Thailand.	23.1	20.4	32.4	18.5	5.6

## 5.2. Political Implication

Diaspora can either have some positive or negative effects to their country of origin. Lobbying of a diasporic community may have good effect to the political reform in their country of origin or it may prolong the conflict in their country of origin (Wickramasekara, 2018). On the other hand, since diasporic community interact actively with their family members or relatives in their country of origin, some scholars advocate their country of origin should open equal space for the political participation of the diasporic community, i.e., right to vote. (Rigoni 2013: 6,7). As such, his section identifies the political implication of Chin diaspora to their home community by assessing whether they engage in lobbying and if they vote during the elections in Myanmar. The findings are presented as follows:

### 5.2.1. Lobbying

Most of the respondents (almost 80%) arrived in to Thailand after the political transition in Myanmar in 2010, which was followed by the taking office of the quasi-civilian government of President U Thein Sein administration in 2011. With the political transition, one of the ethnic armed organizations, Chin National Front (CNF) signed ceasefire agreement with the central government of Myanmar and it involved into politics by forming itself a political party. Likewise, as the country enters into democratic transition there are many ethnic political parties and civil societies arose in Myanmar. Assisted by the technology boom along with the openness of the country,

social media serves as the bridge between the politicians as well as activists with the general public. Since social media, Facebook to be precise, serves as one of the mainstream media in Myanmar context, political participation of the respondents in inquired based on the behavior of their social media usage.

About two-third of the sampling population of this study (65%) responded that they do not follow Chin politicians and activists' social media while around 35% responded that they follow the social media updates of those people and share it onto their walls sometimes, adding their perceptions. Only one-third of the population (31.4%) responded that they share their political opinion, beliefs and desire, and convince their friends and family in Myanmar to vote a certain party. The remaining population responded that they do not engage in such thing, 38% neglected and 30.3% denied (9.3% strongly denied) the statement (table 5.5).

Table 22 (Table 5.5. Percentage of Responses on Lobbying)

Lobby	Strongly agree	Agree	Neural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I read social media posts of prominent Chin politicians and activists and share on my wall and write my opinions	14.8	20.4	39.8	22.2	2.8
2. I share political belief and instruct friends and family in Myanmar which party to vote	12	19.4	38	21.3	9.3

### 5.2.3. Voting

Advance voting can be done two ways in Myanmar: 1) within constituency voting which is for those who are travelling, those who are in the hospital and in detention centers on the election day. 2) out-of-constituency voting for students, trainees, military servicemen and police, citizens who are living abroad on the election day. This is according to chapter 9, section 45-47 of the 2010 House of Representatives Election Law of Myanmar. Therefore, during the General Election in 2015, the Union Election Commission (UEC) of Myanmar assigned the Myanmar embassies in 37 countries to arrange for the Myanmar nationals in those countries to cast their advance votes before the 8 November 2015. The embassies have mandates to set the date for the

advance date in their respective countries. In Thailand, the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok opened the date for advance voting on 17 October 2017. It was reported that Myanmar embassy invited for the registration for four months but only 3,000 out of the estimated 3.5 million Myanmar people registered at the embassy – there were many unqualified registers out the 3,000 people as well (Ganajnakhunde, 2015).

It was surprisingly found out that none of the selected sampling population of the Chin diaspora in Thailand responded that they voted for the advance ballot at the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok for any of the elections in Myanmar. The reasons they gave are quite logical, given their livelihoods in Thailand. The majority of the respondents say that they do not know such things as advance ballot and that they can be able to vote from Thailand. Another significant group are those who say that they are not interested to vote, saying that they need to work and that working is better to earn than going and wasting money and time. A very few group say that they knew about their rights to vote but they said the procedures at the Myanmar embassy hinders them – Myanmar migrants or expats in Thailand have to do pre-registration to vote at the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok and it is reportedly very complicated for an ordinary migrant worker who came into Thailand to work for general works.

### 5.3. Future Aspiration

While there have been a few studies about the possibility of return of Myanmar citizens abroad (Chantavanich, et al., 2012, Egretreau, 2012:137), this paper assesses the future aspiration of Chin diaspora in Thailand. The findings on the future aspiration of the respondents is found out to be contradicted in itself. In other words, the Chin diaspora in Thailand expressed that they do not plan stay in Thailand forever, but they do not have concrete timeline to return as well. More than a half of the respondents (54.6%) agreed (only 19.4% strongly) that they will go back to Myanmar within 5 years (table 5.6). But according to interviews with Chin diaspora members at each focus areas, it is learnt that the reason was because majority of them believe that they can save some money within five years. It is also observed in this paper that the majority of the respondents (74%) agree that they will definitely go back to Myanmar if they earn the wage or salary in their home country which is slightly lower than their current rate

in Thailand. As such, only 13% of the respondents agree to settle in Thailand and live for the rest of their lives while it is found out that 58.4% of the respondents denied about settling in Thailand forever and they are willing to go back to Myanmar even though they do not know when exactly it is (table 5.6). As such, in terms of future aspiration, it is to conclude in general that majority of the respondents have no certain timeline to go back to Myanmar even though they do not plan to live in Thailand for the rest of their lives.

*Table 23 (Table 5.6. Percentage of Responses on Future Aspiration)*

<b>Future Aspirations</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neural</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. I will go back to Myanmar within 5 years	19.4	35.2	40.7	2.8	1.9
2. I will go back to Myanmar if I could earn the wage slightly lower than my earnings in Thailand	36.1	38	25.9	-	-
3. I have no plan to go back to Myanmar as I am settled here already	5.6	7.4	28.7	26.9	31.5

This finding is similar to that of earlier studies. Chantavanich, et al. (2012) finds out that return plan of Myanmar migrants in Thailand is controversial in their studies of 204 Myanmar migrant workers in Bangkok, Samutsakhon and Mae Sot in 2012. The study finds out that majority of the migrant population have plans to go back to Myanmar but very few of them expressed a concrete plan of return in the short-term or within one year. The study also finds out that more than half of their sampling population who expressed desire of return shows that they will return within 1 to 2 years while around three-third of the respondents expressed plan to return within 2 to 3 years. It is also learnt that returning was for temporary purpose in the case of majority of the respondents, while the group of migrants who plan to settle down in their home country expressed that they plan to save enough money first in Thailand before

returning and they have family members with them. Since one of the key concern is for job opportunities in their home country, the study also finds out that possibility of return in short-term is unlikely due to the situations in Myanmar. It was argued that job availability which is the fruit of economic opportunity in Myanmar is the key factor of return of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand, given that more than a half of their sampling population were previously unemployed before coming into Thailand (Chantavanich, et al., 2012: 230-233).

### **5.3.1. Reviewing recent economic activities of the Chin State government in Myanmar**

Since its taking office 2016, the Chin State Minister for Development, Electricity and Industry declared that the NLD-led Chin State government focus on three areas namely, trade, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the tourism for developing the economy of Chin State (Htwe, 2016). Two years after handing over the office from USDP government in 2016, the NLD-led Chin State government has been implementing its socioeconomic development initiatives.

Poor transportation infrastructure has been one of the main problems in Chin State that hinders socioeconomic developments for the local Chin people and leverage out-migration of the young population instead. However, it is learnt that 50% of the current Chin State budget is allocated for reconstruction and reinforcement of the transportation infrastructure which is one of the main challenges in the state. The current government has built bridges and more than 200 miles of roads to facilitate the transportation and flow of goods within and beyond Chin State. The construction of World Bank funded tar road linking the capital of Chin State and Kalemyo of Sagaing Region will be ready to use in 2019. Plans are also reportedly underway for the road construction from Tedim Township from northern Chin State to Paletwa Township to the northern Chin State (Win, 2018). This road, though it may take some time, will connect to the Paletwa-Mizoram highway of the India-Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, according to the Chief Engineer of the Ministry of

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<sup>9</sup> A three-phase USD 480 million project agreed between India and Myanmar governments in April 2008. The first phase includes construction of deep sea port in Sittwe, jetty at Paletwa, Chin State, and dredging Kaladan waterway plus building six vessels. The second phase and third phases include building highways linking Paletwa, Chin State and Mizoram State of India. (see further at: <http://mdoner.gov.in/infrastructure/kaladan-multi-modal-transit-transport-project-inland> )

Construction of Myanmar, the government plans to build five airports in Hakha, Htantlang, Lielinpi, Tedim and Paletwa townships of Chin State. Currently construction of 25 billion Kyat five-year project of the first airport in Chin State in Lielinpi near Falam township of Chin State is under construction (Min, 2018).

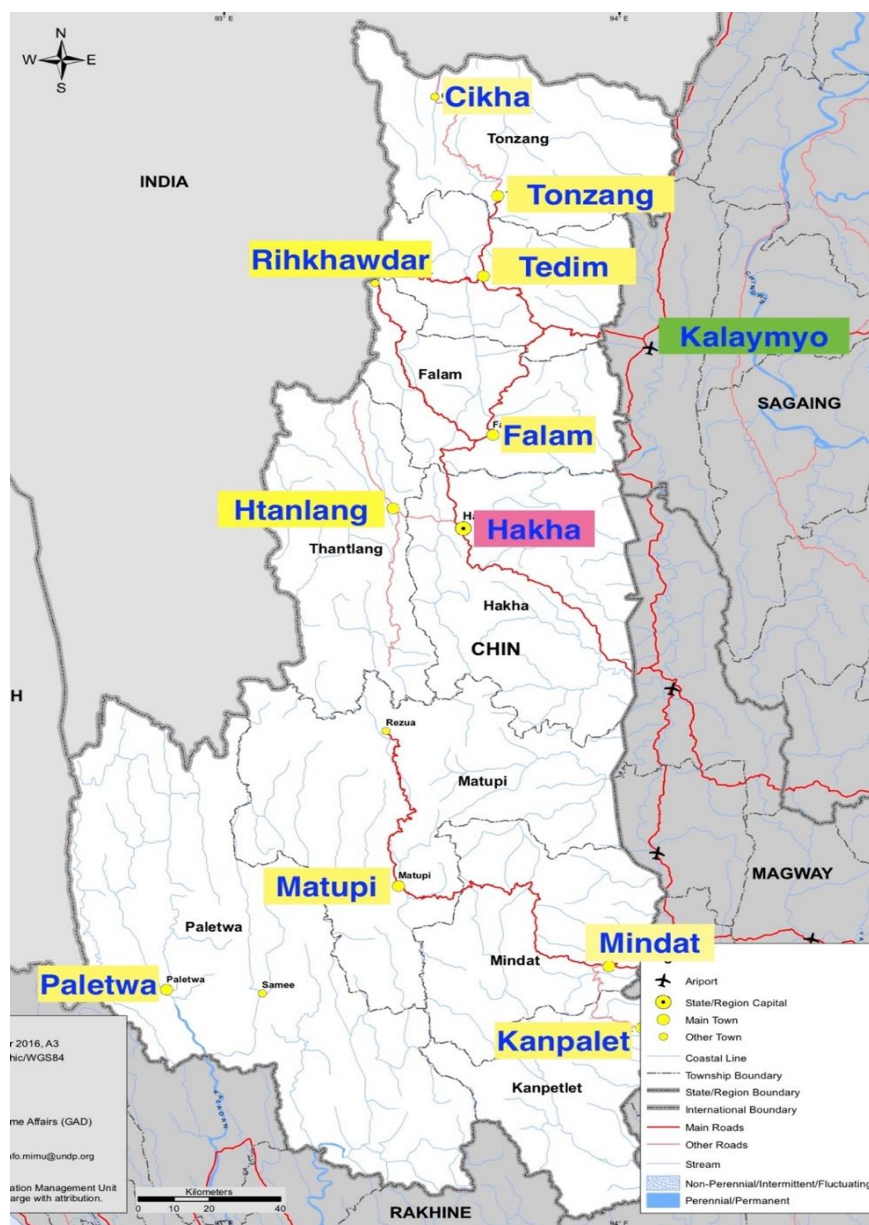


Figure 23 (Map of Chin State showing towns and road connection as of 2016. Retrieved from Myanmar Information Management Unit)

In order to promote the tourism sector in the unspoiled hilly region of Chin State, the current government has implemented community-based tourism (CBT) in three villages from Kanpetlet township, Falam township and Tedim township respectively, ranging from the southern-central-northern parts of the geography. Many (eco-)tourists are attracted to the Khonumsum, also known as Nat Ma Taung or Mount Victoria, National Park in southern Chin State which is the third highest mountain in Myanmar. The park received the ASEAN Heritage Park status and Outstanding Universal Value by the UNESCO. The government is also keen to tourism promotion via the famous heart-shape Rih Lake in Chin State. It can be reflected by the opening of border checkpoint at Rihkhawdar, 3 kilometers from Rih Lake recently, allowing legal border passing between India and Myanmar via Chin State – 17 days with “Border Pass (BP)” and 7 days with “Temporary Border Pass (TBP)”. As a result, the government sources recorded that Chin State received 11,047 local and 2,454 foreign tourists in 2017, an increase from 5,251 local and 1,761 foreign tourists in 2016 (Win, 2018).

In order to leverage the SME development, the Chin State Chamber of Commerce and Industry in early 2017 was formed and DICA began its operation<sup>10</sup> in the capital of Chin State in late 2017. According to its SME development policy, the Chin State government plans to promote traditional weaving in the capital of the state – Hakha as well as in Falam and Htantlang townships and coffee plantation has been implemented in Tonzang and Tedim townships. The UK-funded DaNa Facility is also supporting the three-year project to grow coffee and geography-friendly fruits in Matupi, Mindat and Kanpetlet townships in Chin State (Win, 2017). Despite some criticisms for slow in implementation, the NLD government also plans to finish building marketplaces in nine<sup>11</sup> major towns in Chin State to leverage the economic activities (Htwe, 2017)

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<sup>10</sup> Information on the Myanmar Investment Commission: <https://www.dica.gov.mm/en/information-myanmar-investment-commission-MIC>

<sup>11</sup> Mindat, Hakha, Paletwa, Khai Kam, Tedim, Kanpetlet, Falam, Tonzang and Mindat towns in Chin State



### **5.3.2. Assessing the possibilities of repatriation of Chin diaspora in Thailand**

The sampling population of the Chin diaspora in Thailand are seen to concern about the job opportunities and income level in Myanmar when they consider about their repatriation. First, the average minimum wage in Thailand is 315.97 Baht since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018, ranging between 308 and 330 based on the province where the workers are employed in Thailand (Bangkok Post, 2018). On the other hand, the daily minimum wage rate in Myanmar is about three times lower than that of Thailand. The minimum wage rate for SMEs in all states and regions in Myanmar which was increased to 4,800 Myanmar Kyat (approximately 120 Baht) from 3,600 Myanmar Kyat is lower than that of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam (Phyo, 2018). On the other hand, despite tax exemptions up to seven years and other incentives are permitted for investment in nine townships of Chin State according to the existing Foreign Investment Law of Myanmar, Chin State received no foreign direct investment between the financial years<sup>12</sup> of 1994-95 and 2017-18, as of October 2017. Despite the ongoing efforts of the government and development agencies, the chronic needs of electricity supply and roads infrastructure in Chin State result in poor private sectors and lack of job opportunities (Win, 2017).

While calls for foreign investment in hydropower projects are underway and even if the projects are implemented, it will take time to improve the situations whereby only three towns out of the 15 townships in Chin State are covered with the government electricity supply as of 2016. The National Electricity Policy of Myanmar also aims to the full electrification of Chin State up until 2030 (Oo, 2016). On the other hand, amidst the ambition for improving the road infrastructures for trade and business opportunities, due the land confiscation and political unrests caused by random confrontation of the military (Tatmadaw) and an EAO in the southern Chin State and obviously due to the international concern of the Muslim community in the northern Rakhine State, the anticipated India-Kaladan Multimodal Transit Project that is expected to leverage the trade and business opportunities to Chin state is still long to be operational. The existing trends of the government's economic promotion as well as supports from the international organizations in Chin State are seen into the agriculture and eco-tourism sectors. According to Census Atlas (2014: 60), the majority of labor force (74%) in

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<sup>12</sup> Financial year began in first April and ended at the end of March next year in Myanmar before the financial year of 2018-2019.

Chin State is employed into the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry. Moreover, job opportunities creation through tourism industry is still insignificant in Chin State where the red tape of visiting to many of its townships by foreigners were loosened just in 2013 (Thu, 2015). As such, given the existing situations of the Chin diaspora in Thailand who are engaged into such as industry and restaurants and assessing their future aspiration with the existing situations of Chin State and in Myanmar broadly, the voluntary repatriation of Chin diaspora in Thailand is less likely to happen soon.

### **Conclusion**

It is found out that the Chin diaspora in Thailand generally have significant commitments to send money back and share knowledge to their home community. Given the type of work and salary that they are earning in Thailand which is in the margin of the minimum wage – 300 Baht per day, the average amount of remittance that Chin diaspora members send home is high. Despite the financial sector reforms since 2012 along with the transitions in Myanmar, now the second term of the civilian government, the remittance behavior remains similar to earlier studies – Chin diaspora members prefer to send money home via informal channels. While commitments to remittances is good for households in Myanmar in the short-term period, sending away all the money to home may have consequences in the long term unless the remittances are put into some kind of investments. However, this paper finds out that the Chin diaspora in Thailand are committed and moderately contributing to the economic development of their home community in Myanmar.

In checking political implication by assessing the voting behavior and lobbying activities, it is also found out in this research that the Chin diaspora in Thailand implies weakly into the politics of their home country - Myanmar. Their weak interests into lobbying or politics may relate to their livelihoods in Thailand as well as to their underlying skepticism towards the political leaders in Myanmar over time which in part have pushed them Thailand. On the other hand, the role of the Myanmar embassy in Thailand is crucial in enhancing the political participation, giving the rights to votes in particular, of the Chin people in Thailand and Myanmar citizens broadly. This study finds out that weak facilitations of the Myanmar embassy in Thailand was one of the

reasons why Chin diaspora in Thailand did not cast their advance votes during the 2015 General Election. Given the existing situations, this study finds out that the political contribution Chin diaspora in Thailand to their home community in Myanmar is weak.

According to the findings of this research and the situations in Myanmar, it is likely that the voluntary repatriation of Chin diaspora in Thailand may not take place in the near future. It is observed that the respondents do not have clear plan for returning to Myanmar even though they responded that they wish to go back within 5 years. Even though some of them responded to return Myanmar if they earn a slightly lower wage, it is unlikely to happen soon because the current minimum wage in Thailand is three times higher than that of Myanmar. And Myanmar will not be able to raise it for the time being if it aims to attract foreign direct investment amidst the ongoing economic instability and international pressure arises, but not limited, from the Muslim community issue in Rakhine State. Also, it will take some time to be able to accommodate the returnees of Chin people from Thailand who are mostly employed in industry service sectors.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion, Discussions & Recommendations

#### 6.1. Conclusion

*“What are the characteristics of the Chin diaspora in Thailand and their social network in relation to their home community in Myanmar?”*

##### 6.1.1. Characteristics of Chin diaspora in Thailand

The study shows that majority of the Chin diaspora came into Thailand at their youthful age and it is seen that gender composition is quite balance among the sampling population of Chin diaspora in Thailand. They quit the course of basic education in Myanmar in its early stage to come to Thailand. This phenomenon relates to the low level of school enrollment in their place of origin or due to struggling of their family, in other words, due to poverty resulted by unemployment at their place of origin as found out among Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand by the Chantavanich, et al. (2012, 22).

It is found out that half of the respondents are employed into the industry sector which is generally labor-intensive work with low and semi-skills requirements. The second largest group are those working as the domestic workers, follows by restaurant, church related works, vendor, delivery service and so on. This is related to the fact they left school at young age in their home country and come abroad at young age with immature skills and experience of work. It is also seen that majority of the respondents earn salary which is within the margin of minimum wage in Thailand while some of the them earns beyond that. Domestic workers have the highest rate of remuneration together with one restaurant worker. These two types of work are done by earliest comers among the sampling population. Therefore, they earn the highest range of salary due to their long experience and they may be working in expats' house – who pay higher salary rate than the local Thais.

Similar to the situations in Myanmar, Christian comprises the majority (88%) of Chin diaspora in Thailand only a few (12%) of them are Buddhists. They go different churches in Thailand and the preference of the church usually is based on their sub-ethnic origin. Setting their churches as the focal points, they live at near-by areas and most of them rent the rooms together among themselves, unless they stay at accommodations provided by their works. Coming from different towns from different states and regions from Myanmar, not only from Chin State, the Chin diaspora in Thailand comprised of variety of sub-ethnic groups of Chin people. This reflects the internal migration of Chin people from Chin hills to many plain areas within Myanmar occurs as well.

Findings of this study on the place of origin of the respondents and interviews with informants prove the dispersion of Chin people internally and across the world. Despite there has been some deviations, myth of origin for instance, due to the diverse sub-ethnic origins, it is also found out that they have the collective memory of the physical characteristics of their homeland. Religious also plays a curial role in unifying the Chin people in Thailand as well their ethnicity and they have collective memory of the homeland – the geography, atmosphere, the unique seasonal flower and their national bird in particular.

Chin people faces religious pressure in Myanmar, being a Christian state within the Buddhist country – Myanmar. They have the feeling of alienation when they go to the plain areas where by customs and religions are different from their kind. Likewise, it is found out in this study that religion stands a big difference for the Chins with their host society, follows by differences in the language and culture. Findings of this research have also proven that alienation occurs towards the Chin diaspora members in Thailand. The respondents and informants collectively have shown their regard of Chin State as their homeland which can also be related to the fact that most of them are the first generation in Thailand whose close relatives are living in their homeland. This has proven their respect and sense of belongingness to homeland and the belief in restoration of their place of origin. Their ethno communal consciousness is survived and renewed by their collective nature of working, living, and performing church activities in Thailand, mostly based on their sub-ethnic groups. Transnational

interaction with their fellow Chin people and organizing traditional events have always renewed their definition of homeland.

In brief, based on the findings of this paper, the Chin diaspora in Thailand meets each of the six features of diaspora according to Safran (1991).

### **6.1.2. Social networks of Chin diaspora in Thailand**

The social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand can generally be classified into two periods, pre-2007 and post-2007. Due to the constraints in terms of legality and types of work that most of them were engaged into, the interaction among Chin people in Thailand before 2007 was based on informal function and linear or within people with same sub-ethnicity. Even though there was a sub-ethnic fellowship at MCA it was not accessible by other sub-ethnic groups of Chin people in Thailand back then.

With the formation of CCFB in 2007, engagement of the Chin diaspora in Thailand relies more on a formal channel. With the original aim of organizing an inclusive Chin fellowship in Thailand, the CCFB organized inclusive worship program of the multiple sub-ethnic group of Chin people for some time and initiated the celebration of CND in Thailand. However, the language barriers and homophilic tendency of members resulted the formation sub-fellowships in Thailand, mainly based on sub-ethnic origins. As such social networks within the sub-ethnic fellowships become the core and intra sub-ethnic networks become one of the extension of networks in general. But the emergence of sub-ethnic fellowships did not eliminate the original aim of the having an inclusive Chin fellowship or organization in Thailand. This has been evident in the continuation of CND celebration in Thailand over the years even after the emergence of sub-fellowships. Moreover, multiplex ties among different sub-ethnic group of Chin people in Thailand is seen by the evidence that they help each other in times 'difficulties', regardless of sub-ethnicity.

However, there has been a significant difference in terms of the strength of ties within the core and extension of networks within the Chin diaspora in Thailand. In other words, the social interaction of the Chin people and intimacy among themselves within each sub-ethnic group is much stronger than that of intra sub-ethnics or with non-Chins.

While interaction of different sub-ethnic groups of Chin diaspora members in Thailand occurs only once a year in the CND celebration, social networks within fellowships of the same sub-ethnic group happens at least once a week. Not only that they meet at the church once a week, they also spend time and discuss their problems together during their holidays. They maintain their contact each other and share information locally and transnationally with their same sub-ethnic groups via the technology mediated communication channels such as social media during the working days or weekdays. Therefore, it is concluded that the strength of ties within each sub fellowships is stronger than that of the original fellowship. In other words, it is found out that members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand are more intimate towards people of the same ethnic-origin than among Chin diaspora in general.

### **6.1.3 Implications to economic and political development in Myanmar and future inspirations**

It is found out that majority of the Chin diaspora are earning the amount that is sufficient for their personal expenses in Thailand. It is also found out that they are strongly committed to sending the money back to their family and relatives in Myanmar. However, given their wages in Thailand, the amount of their regular remittance is high - yet relatively moderate when it comes to its relative amount. The utilization pattern of the remittance of the Chin diaspora in Thailand by their relatives and families is found to have similar patterns as in the earlier studies, mainly for daily consumption, education and repaying debts. In terms of the skills contribution, it is found out that the majority of Chin diaspora are employed in the sectors that can equip the employees with skills the most. According to in-depth interviews, it is also found out that there have been many former Chin diaspora members who are currently applying the skills and knowledge they learnt in Thailand at their communities in Myanmar. On the other hand, it is also observed that majority of the members of the Chin diaspora in Thailand are not engaged to the political trends in Myanmar and they did not vote for the elections in Myanmar which is partly due to the weak facilitation from the Myanmar government agencies. Therefore, this paper concludes that the Chin diaspora in Thailand is moderate in economic contribution to their home community in Myanmar and weak in terms of political participation. In terms of repatriation, it is also

found out that Chin diaspora members have no plan to settle in Thailand forever but they are not sure when to return. It is to conclude that the choice of time to return their home country depends on their economic opportunity.

## 6.2. Discussions

- Since the 1990s, researchers in migration keep attention to the transnational migrant networks to underline the reasons why the contemporary transnational connections are different from the earlier ones with the advancement of new technologies in communication and transportation sectors and changes of political and economic situations in the home and receiving counties. (Vertovec, 2001: 574). The word ‘migrant’ covers a great variety of people on the move within and between countries with different social status, ranging from traders and business people to labors and refugees. Migrants are generally classified between the ‘force’ and ‘voluntary’ migrants and policies were based upon this notion. However, despite the simplification of motivation for migration of people in the past into a forced and a voluntary migration, there are more recognition of the mixed migration or the fact that it is difficult to distinguish whether a person or group of people migrate voluntarily or by force. Studies have proven that very few migrants are qualified to be called definitely ‘forced migrants’ or ‘voluntary migrant’. Instead, most migrations occur by ‘choice’ within a ‘constraint’ and the only difference is how many options within a certain constraint one may have – some people may have many choices while others may have little or even no. People may have mixed motivation for outward migration, which may change en route, and those people may be settled in a mixed community during their migration process or at the destination country - onward migration of those people may happen in the same situation. As such, many policy makers take into account the transnationalism which comes from the characteristic or behavior and practices of mixed migration (Van Hear, 2009).

Transnationalism encompass the contemporary condition of the movement ‘people, ideas, goods travel across regions or nation states’ which is intensified by the technology advancements in the communication and transportation sectors in the twenty first century (Duong, 2015: 232-233). This thesis presents the transnational behavior and practices of Chin people by studying the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand and their implications to home community which the policy makers should take into account. It is found out that many Chin people from different place of origin from Myanmar came into



Thailand by different reasons – taking different routes overcoming different experiences along the way. While some of them did their onward migration, some seek the economic opportunities in Thailand. As time goes by and due to the facilitation of the technologies, the Chin diaspora in Thailand could establish and maintain their social networks. Not only that they have strong networks in Thailand, they form and maintain the transnational networks with their relatives in home country and in other countries. Having established quite a strong network and settled in Thailand, it is found out that Chin diaspora in Thailand are committed in sending remittance and sharing knowledge which are crucial for the livelihood of their relatives in the home community. This finding reflects how the onward migration of Chin people from Thailand, Malaysia and India in the past and the continuing flows over time have resulted the establishment of Chin diaspora across the world and their transnational networks may have similar effects as in the case of Chin diaspora in Thailand, sustaining the livelihoods and welfare of their relatives in home community in Myanmar.

- It is learnt that the sampling population of the Chin diaspora in Thailand comprised of all the six sub-ethnic groups under the Chin as illustrated by Sakhong (2003: 19). In other words, the Chin diaspora in Thailand is comprised with the variety of the sub-ethnic groups of Chin people (table 3.3). The diversity in the sub-ethnic groups among the Chin people results a significant difference when the respondents are questioned about their collective memory of their homeland, i.e., the second among the six features of diaspora proposed by Safran (1991). It is found that the respondents have similar memories collectively in recalling the physical characteristics such as the hill, fresh and cold breeze, flowers, wild animals dwelling in their place of origin and abstracts such as ‘the Chins regarded as loyal and honest by others’. But the respondents of different Chin sub-ethnic origins are found to have different knowledge on the myth of their origin.

Respondents were questioned if they agree that primitive Chin people come from the legendary cave called ‘Chinglung’ as discussed in Sakhong (2003: 2-3). After discussing the historical account of the origin of Chin people, Sakhong (2003) also discussed the traditional belief that ‘Chin’ derived from the ‘Chinlung’, a cave or rock from which it is believed that primitive Chin people emerged into this world as humans. He states that the cave is termed differently by different clans and the

location varies accordingly (Sakhong, 2003: 2-3). It is learnt from this that while one-third of the respondents agree to the myth of origin that Chin people come from the cave of 'Chinlung', the same volume of respondents expressed that they do not agree to the myth while 16.1 % remained neutral to the statement. In other words, the different sub-ethnic groups within the socially constructed conglomerate of the Chin identity (cited Nagel (1994) in Swift, 2013: 25) may have or believe in their own 'myth of origin'. Therefore, it is concluded from this finding that a dispersed population from a certain place of origin may have similarity in collective memories of homeland in the physical features, but they may adhere to their own myth based on the historical facts and teachings of their original sub-ethnic forefathers.

- The original place of the respondents covers many places in Myanmar. It is learnt that more than a half of them were living in other states and regions outside Chin State in Myanmar. Not only that they come from many different states and regions of Myanmar, their original towns in Chin State is also different. They came from more than nine different places from Chin State that covers all regions of the state which is generally classified into the north, south and the central parts (table 3.2). It is learnt from in-depth interviews, that some of them were not born in Chin State while some of them born but left their homeland, Chin State, for many decades. However, it is found out that most of the respondents harmoniously expressed similar perception about their respect and sense of belongingness to their homeland, Chin State.

One of the last characteristics of the six features of diaspora according Safran (1991) is 'self-definition in terms of homeland'. By this term, Safran (1991) refers that a certain group of dispersed population to other regions or countries maintain their relationship with homeland and those type of relationship defines their ethno communal consciousness and solidarity (Safran 1991: 84). Celebration of the Chin National Day as a whole in Bangkok, Thailand, holistically among all sub-ethnic groups of Chin people in Thailand is found to be one the key factors to maintain the 'ethno communal consciousness' of each sub-ethnic group of Chin people and their solidarity.

It is also found out in this study that the respondents maintain their contact with families and relatives in their home country, not only with those remaining in Chin State but also with those living in other parts of Myanmar. It is also observed that most of the transitional ties have homogenous tendency. In other words, they mostly contact with family, relatives and friends who share the same sub-ethnic origin as they are. It is even found out in this study that some Chin diaspora members in Thailand invite people of their same sub-ethnic group to join traditional even in Thailand. It is also found out that a fellowship of Chin sub-ethnic group sent disaster response assistance to their fellow people in Myanmar who are not necessarily staying anymore in Chin State. Despite maintaining contacts with their families, relatives and friends who left their homeland, Chin State, and are staying in other parts of Myanmar, it is found out that the sampling population of Chin diaspora members in Thailand define their homeland, Chin State, in very similar characteristics (Table 3.4). This may have been due to the fact that majority of them are the first generation whose memories are molded with characteristics of their homeland, Chin State. Also, the ethno communal consciousness of their being as a Chin person may have by-passed territorial boundaries through their homophilic transnational ties. However, the advancement of technology, for instance social media, that nourishes the users with real time virtual images in any parts of the world may maintain or survive the consciousness of Chin diaspora members about their ethnicity and homeland transcending the physical distant.

- A similarity among each sub-fellowships of the Chin diaspora in Thailand as well as their original fellowship is that the church, i.e., Christian churches, serve as the community and network creation sites. As in the case of Burmese Muslims and community mosques in Mae Sot, a border town between Thailand and Myanmar (Kōsem, 2016: 11), the churches and chapels of each sub-fellowship of Chin diaspora in Thailand function more than a place for religious worshipping. They serve as a shelter for those in need of accommodation, venue for marriage either for the diaspora members per se or for intercontinental marriages, a place for maintaining their ethno communal consciousness and identity, amongst many

others. The churches widen their network with other ethnics from Myanmar and allows them to interact with the local Thai people who shares the same belief as they are. In other words, the churches expand the social networks of Chin diaspora and their social capital in Thailand.

- In this era, the illegal immigration has been portrayed by the media and political rhetoric to the public discourse that threatens the national interests in terms of security and employment (labor replacing and technology). This discourse has led to xenophobia and the public to favor imposing stricter nation-state borders and immigration policies. The governments of destination countries see that criminal gangs and illicit business network are responsible for the smuggling of people from the sending countries. Therefore, they take actions to combat and eradicate smuggling of migrants to stop or reduce the massive illegal migration, for instance, the European Migrant Smuggling Center was launched by the Europol in 2016. Despite the governments' actions and warnings, the migrant continues to hire the smugglers (Zhang, Sanchez & Achilli, 2018: 6-15). Zhang, et. al. (2018) explore the smuggling practices in the America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Pacific and finds out that smuggling facilitators are *“the relatives or close friends, acquaintances or distant operators – all members of a social network of varying relational proximity”*. As such their studies conclude that smuggling of migrant is *“complex and layered social process where kinship, friends and associates, overseas migrant communities, personal connections, money and prior experiences coalesce to form the basis of protection, safety and decision-making along the migration route”* (Zhang, Sanchez & Achilli, 2018:9)

The study of the social network of Chin diaspora in Thailand also finds out similar scenarios. According to the in-depth interviews with informants, it is understood that Thailand is a transit country for majority of Chin people in seeking the refugee status to go further to the third countries in the past. The cases of Chin brokers who facilitate the migration of their fellow people to the third countries and the expansion of the smuggling business but causing no harm to the clients and the

facilitation of CCFB to the troubled Chin children and the group of Chin people on the accidents in Thailand on the way to Malaysia comply to the findings of Zhang, et. al. (2018) in other parts of the world. Moreover, majority of the respondents in this study admit that their homophilic transnational ties have great influence in their migration into Thailand as well.

- Egreteau (2012) states there are few evidence to prove the domestic political development influence of Myanmar overseas communities even though there is a dynamic transnational activism. This paper also finds out that there has been few evidence of the political by the Chin diaspora in Thailand to their come community in Myanmar according to the findings of their lobbying tendency and voting behavior. However, there are some reasons behind the fact that the respondents did not cast their advance votes for the General Election in Myanmar 2015 from Thailand. It is found that the responsible Myanmar government agencies were not keen enough to give awareness and facilitating the rights to vote its people in Thailand which comprise one of the largest volume of Myanmar people abroad. Some of respondents say that they were aware of the information while the other group complain about the complicated procedure and inconvenient location for the voting.

During in the General Election of Myanmar 2015, the Union Election Commission (UEC) mandated the Myanmar embassies in 37 countries to facilitate the advance voting of the Myanmar people from those countries before the election date, 8 November 2015. However, only 30,000 were turned out to be registered from those counties. It is way too low compared to the number of Myanmar nationals living abroad, for instance there were more than 2 million legal Myanmar workers in Thailand among the estimated 4 million in total, around 200,000 in Singapore and between 400,000 and 500,000 in Malaysia alone.

In Thailand, the Myanmar Embassy did not inform its people in the country about the voting day which is only one day and how to vote for the parties and candidates of preference. Despite opening the voting day only one day, on 17

October 2015, and only at the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok, the news was not publicized in advance to Myanmar people sojourning outside Bangkok. Majority of Myanmar people are working beyond Bangkok such as Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkram, Samut Prakan, Kon Kaen, Ranong, Pattani and Tak provinces (Jitcharoenkul, 2015). Similar incidents were reportedly happened in the Myanmar embassies in other countries as well. Despite the UEC covers in the state newspaper in Myanmar that this was due to the immature experience and low in human resource capacity of the Myanmar embassies abroad, it was criticized by many institutions, news agencies and scholars. The UEC reported that there were only more than 500 Myanmar nationals who casted their advance votes from Thailand – it is only 0.025% of the eligible voters from Thailand.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

#### **(i) To Chin diasporans in Thailand**

Firstly, compliment is due to the founders and those who are organizing the Chin fellowships and convene the CND in Thailand over the years. The Chin diaspora is relative small in volume compared to other Myanmar migrant communities in Thailand, yet it seems that they have a variety of sub fellowships. I would like to suggest the concerned persons to collect statistics of the Chin people in Thailand and consider if they can compromise a common ground in order to have a more unified group among each sub-fellowship. It will be of great advantage if the existing resources such as the premises and human capital, including the Chin university students, should be combined for the collective benefit of the diasporic members in Thailand and it will have positive effect to their communities in Myanmar if social ties become stronger than as it is now.

Secondly, I would like to encourage the existing Chin fellowships to extend their networks locally and transnationally. I recommend the Chin fellowships to engage with Chin diasporic associations from other countries and

share information and resources. At the same time, I encourage them to extend their networks with other Myanmar ethnic communities in Thailand as well as with the local Thai populations in their circles. Expansion of network may bring in a variety of positive social capital to them.

**(ii) To Myanmar government agencies**

Firstly, Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand constitute the highest portion of the Myanmar nationals abroad. Their economic contribution or remittance to their home communities in Myanmar have a great deal of impact to the local economy in Myanmar. However, as it is found out in this study and in earlier studies, remittance does not pass the legal channels over time. This is because of the high costs of remittances, complicated procedures at the banks when they apply the official channels. Therefore, I would like to suggest the concerned government agencies to negotiate with private sector in the financial industry and facilitate the convenience and smoothness of using legal channels for migrant's remittance from Thailand to Myanmar. Usage of official channel will have positive effect either to the country, Myanmar, as well as to the senders.

Secondly, Myanmar is in the process of democratic transition after several decades of military rules. Since the public is the key to a democratic country, so as their rights such as to vote and to be protected regardless of whether they stay inside the country or abroad. Since they contribute significantly in the economy and social welfare of the country from a far, their voice should be heard, and protection should be given in the state's capacity. Therefore, I would like to suggest the concerned authorities to consider assuring protection of its people in Thailand and, learning from last experiences, the facilitation of giving the massive eligible voters, Myanmar nationals, in Thailand their rights to vote in the future, to name the nearest one is the upcoming General Election in 2020.

**(iii) To Chin State government agencies**

Movement of Chin people from Chin State to lowlands in Myanmar or to abroad is not a new phenomenon. The cause of out-migration is not limited to political hardship such as human rights violations in the past, economic and social reasons have also been the prominent reasons that cause Chin people to leave their homeland over the course of time. On a realistic analysis, geographic remoteness and seasonal landslides due to the geologic nature of the soil in Chin State hinders economic activities and does not offer job opportunities. However, as seen in this research finds that Chin diaspora in Thailand are committed to sending remittance to their home community, yet with preference to informal channel.

Given the current situation of inactive foreign investment or local investment in job creating sectors within the region, by considering the transnationalism of the Chin people, I would like to suggest concerned authorities in Chin State to consider proper ways to attract more remittance of its people not only from Thailand but also from other countries and to reallocate them into regional development, especially into the basic social needs. The program, for instance, may include improving banking infrastructure and incentives for remittance, expanding digital connection in the region and so on. At this point, attracting more remittance than welcoming repatriation may serve better to the region. However, jobs should be created for locals at the moment by attracting and screening relevant business investment in Chin State and creating space for returnees who will transfer their oversea experiences to locals should follow. Therefore, policy makers in Chin State should make sure the best way forwards and whom to welcome back. For the time being, since out-migration is no new to many people in Chin State, the government should initiate or welcome concerned INGOs or CSOs to conduct safe migration awareness to young generations in the region.

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