



**THE REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES OF RETURNEE MIGRANT  
WORKERS IN MYANMAR: A CASE STUDY OF TAUNGGYI,  
SHAN STATE**

**NAW PAW PAW WAH**

**MASTER OF ARTS  
IN  
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**THIS THESIS IS A PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
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**Thesis Title:** The Reintegration Challenges of Returnee Migrant Workers in Myanmar:  
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**Author:** Naw Paw Paw Wah


**Examination Committee:**

Assistant Professor Wanwalee Inpin, Ph. D.	Chairperson
Yuki Miyake, Ph. D.	Member
Associate Professor Wasan Panyagaew, Ph. D.	Member

**Advisors:**

  
.....Advisor  
(Yuki Miyake, Ph. D.)

**Dean:**

  
.....  
(Thanikun Chantra, Ph. D.)

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Naw Paw Paw Wah

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<b>Author</b>	Naw Paw Paw Wah
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### **ABSTRACT**

This study is based on research that investigates the reintegration challenges and barriers encountered by the returned migrant workers from Thailand to Myanmar as they endeavor to reintegrate into the job market in Shan State, Republic of the Union of Myanmar. It explores the process of the reintegration of return migrant workers while they adapt to the communities. People in Shan State migrated to neighboring countries to earn a better livelihood and in search of safety. In all three fundamental stages of overseas migration - pre-departure, post-arrival, and reintegration - they suffer difficulties. In contrast to many other studies that concentrate on the post-arrival migration challenges of the migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand, this paper focuses on the challenges associated with return migrants' reintegration into Shan State in Myanmar. The qualitative research approach forms the basis of this research methodology. The primary data is gathered from return migrants through in-depth interviews specifically key informant interviews, and the pertinent secondary data is collected from reliable online sources, books, journals, and publications. The findings benefit the community in Shan State from the recommendations for the future reintegration process. This study will facilitate the development of plans and programs that effectively utilize the abilities and experiences of returnees, making a valuable contribution to the economic progress of Myanmar.

**Keywords:** International Migration, Return migrants, Social and Economic Reintegration, Myanmar

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Human mobility has become a big topic for academics, and literature on the subject is numerous and developing on a daily basis. The increase in international migration, both in scale and diversity, has prompted a surge in academic interest, reflecting a near-universal engagement with the topic. As noted by Skeldon (1997), migration contributes significantly to the process of globalization and is intricately connected to critical global issues, including development, poverty alleviation, and human rights (O'reilly, 2017). The various manifestations of international migration encompass labor migrants, skilled professionals, students, retirees, refugees, asylum seekers, as well as instances of forced and return migration.

For many years, Myanmar, a Southeast Asian country with a rich cultural legacy, has struggled with complex political, social, and economic issues. Among these issues, international migration is particularly important and is impacted by internal as well as external factors. Myanmar's historical background is characterized by colonial control, internal strife, and political upheavals. Following its independence, ethnic conflicts, and political repressions in Myanmar caused internal conflict that resulted in waves of internal and cross-border migration and displacement (Egreteau & Jagan, 2013). Myanmar's political landscape has seen considerable changes, notably after the shift from military administration to a quasi-civilian government in 2011. However, the democratization process has been hampered by continued ethnic conflicts and human rights violations, resulting in increased displacement and migration (Smith, 2019).

Under the political situation, socioeconomic inequality, poverty, and a lack of opportunity significantly contribute to migration trends in Myanmar. In recent decades, rural-urban migration has been prevalent as people seek better opportunities in urban areas (Sudo, 2017). Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure and development in conflict-

affected rural areas exacerbates migrant flows, as individuals escape insecurity in search of safety and economic stability (Hill, 2015).

In the 21st century, international migration became popular in Myanmar. In the 2014 Population Census, 9.39 million of the population in Myanmar were classified as internal migrants. According to the census, an estimated 4.25 million Myanmar citizens migrate abroad within the ASEAN regions: 70.2 percent in Thailand (57.3% male, 42.7% female), 15 percent in Malaysia (80.8% male, 19.2% female), 4.6 percent in China (57.6% male, 42.4% female) and 3.9 percent in Singapore (49% male, 51% female). Other destination countries are the Republic of Korea, Japan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (ILO, 2016). The key Myanmar source regions where migrants are heading to Thailand are scattered throughout the country (Griffiths & Ito, 2016). According to the report, 27.2% of people who migrate to Thailand originate from Mon State. Kayin (21.5%), Tanintharyi (13.2%), Shan (12.6%), and Bago (9%), are the next states/regions of origin. Migrant outflows from Myanmar are irregular and concentrated in low-skilled sectors such as agriculture, fishing, and manufacturing (Department of Population, 2015).

While there were push factors including a lack of opportunities in the countryside of Myanmar, the pull factor of Thailand for migrant workers from Myanmar was notably higher wages. The minimum wage in Thailand was roughly three times higher than in the country of origin (Chantavanich et al., 2007). As a result, migration in search of jobs or better job opportunities has become a livelihood strategy for poor rural and urban communities with limited employment opportunities or to avoid physically demanding work that does not always pay well.

A significant proportion of Myanmar workers' intra-regional, irregular, and low-skilled international labor movement still exists. The following are the top industries for employment that are worked by migrant workers from Myanmar to Thailand, listed by gender: Construction, other manufacturing, agriculture and husbandry, garment production and sales, and fishing-related activities are all performed by males. Domestic work, garment production and sales, and other manufacturing are all performed by women (IOM & ARCM, 2013).

There are several challenges faced by migrant workers after they arrive in the host country of Thailand. These are accessing skills, and training throughout the

migration cycle including the geographical distance of training sites, the timing of classes, the cost of training, language barriers, gender or ethnic discrimination, or concerns about the risk of migration status. In returning stage to the home country, there is no recognition system to prove that they have some skills acquired in the host country. As the promotion of recognition of semi-skilled workers is the necessary mechanism, the Myanmar government emphasized the importance of skills in its 2020 response to the Voluntary Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) review. It also stated that one of its top priorities in implementing the GCM was to invest in skill development and mutual recognition of skills, qualifications, and competencies. According to this, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and International Labour Organization (ILO), and a few government organizations have helped to facilitate skill development training in their project areas.

Migration expands the labour market and increases the availability of a variety of skills, resulting in better job matching and higher productivity. Skills shortages, on the other hand, limit economic growth. The majority of Myanmar migrant workers work in low-skilled jobs abroad, and the majority of them migrate through irregular channels, ending up in precarious jobs. Migrants may struggle to fit in the gaps of labour market, or advance to higher-skilled positions.

Before ending the background of the study section, the chosen research site will be briefly introduced Taunggyi, Shan State, which is in eastern Myanmar, has a long history of migration caused by social, political, and economic reasons (Taylor, 2009). Shan State is one of the constituent states of Myanmar following its independence in 1948, but violence and instability have persisted there ever since, mostly because of tensions between the central government and other ethnic groups, including the Shan (South, 2008). Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State in Myanmar, plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of international migration within the region. Its strategic location functions as an essential hub for migrants travelling to and from neighbouring countries such as Thailand and China, thereby facilitating the movement of individuals (CHIME Study, 2018). Economic prospects in China and Thailand, as well as political unrest and conflict inside Shan State, have motivated people to migrate from Shan State (Taylor, 2009). Migration out of the area has also been influenced by environmental concerns, such as land deterioration and deforestation (Steinberg, 2013). Migration has

had a huge impact; Shan State has lost human capital as a result of the exodus of many young, talented people (South, 2008). Social implications have also resulted from this since migration frequently separates apart families. Remittances from migrants who work overseas, however, support the local economy, therefore migration has also had positive economic effects (Taylor, 2009). As a result, migration, which is influenced by many different circumstances, has been a notable phenomenon in Shan State.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

There are few studies on the challenges of the reintegration process of returned migrant workers in Myanmar. Despite the considerable scholarly attention garnered by the topic of migration in recent years, as evidenced by the contributions of Gou et al. (2020) and Porat and Benguigui (2016, 2021), there remains a paucity of academic inquiry focused on the process of reintegration among return migrants (Cordell, 2020; Setrana & Tonah, 2014). Furthermore, an extensive body of literature exists regarding Myanmar migrants residing within their host country. This literature encompasses various aspects, such as the economic implications of their presence in the Thai economy, as explored by Martin (2007). Additionally, Chantavanich, Vungsiriphisal, and Laodumrongchai (2007) have examined the working conditions experienced by these migrants. The health status of Myanmar migrants has been investigated by Aung et al. (2009) as well as Wiwanitkit (2002). So, conducting thorough research on the difficulties and impacts encountered during the reintegration process holds significant importance. Moreover, the survey by IOM and ARCM (2013) stated that around 79.9% of migrants were willing to return to Myanmar in the future, while 20.1% of surveyed migrants who had longer periods of living wished to remain in Thailand and had no desire to return home. Evidence was discovered in a 2012 policy review to substantiate migrants' worries about job availability upon return (Griffiths & Ito, 2016).

In contrast to the response mechanisms employed by other countries, the Myanmar Government lacks a comprehensive and integrated migration policy as well as an efficient migration management institution. Previously, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) was the designated department overseeing the regular deployment of

Myanmar migrants. The government of Myanmar began to implement a migration policy and collaborated with the Thai government to make sure its migrant workers received standard rights protection when Thai government was criticized for lacking an effective policy later in 2018. Due to this policy gap on migration-related issues and ethnic armed conflicts in Myanmar, workers had irregularly travelled to other countries in search of work to support their families (Hall, 2012, p. 4). Over the decades, Myanmar had the lack of policies to support migrant workers. While Myanmar has two national migration legislations and policies, it lacks a system for the return and reintegration of return migrant workers. The LROE outlined the institutional framework necessary for its execution and established protocols for registering individuals seeking overseas employment as well as employment agencies. It mandates that overseas employment agencies are responsible for fully securing the rights and privileges of workers (ILO, 2018).

In short, there is no concrete mechanism or policy of return and reintegration for returned migrant workers not only in Myanmar but also in almost all developing countries. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct this kind of research in Myanmar to support the development of return migration and reintegration policies and make a valuable contribution to the progress of Myanmar's economic development.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1.3.1 How do the return migrants from Thailand reintegrate into communities in the home country of Myanmar, especially economically and socially, based on the return and reintegration theory?

1.3.2 What are the challenges faced by the return migrants when they return and during the reintegration process into the community?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1.4.1 To analyze the level of acceptance of the skills and experiences of return migrants concerning the process of reintegration into the job market;

1.4.2 To examine the challenges and barriers encountered by return migrants in Myanmar as they endeavor to reintegrate into the job market;

1.4.3 To explore the process of reintegration of the return migrants while adapting to the communities in their home country and the challenges of them during the process of reintegration.

## **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This study aims to examine the reintegration challenges of Myanmar migrant workers when they try to reintegrate into the job market and the communities in their home country, Myanmar. The return migrants will be chosen based on a two or three-year reference period (those who returned within 2 to 3 years). It also refers to migrants who spend at least two years outside of Myanmar. The location will cover some areas of the Shan State of Myanmar where most migrants migrated and returned. The phone interview or online interview will be the option to conduct my research interview due to the political situation in Myanmar. Data for this research will be obtained by reviewing relevant research literature and interviewing returning migrants.

## **1.6 Significance of the Research**

It is imperative for governments, both in Myanmar and in destination countries, to comprehend the difficulties encountered by return migrant workers during the process of reintegration. The findings of this research can serve as a basis for the development of migration and reintegration policies not only in Myanmar but also in other developing countries. This study has the potential to contribute to the development of policies that are more effective in supporting individuals who have returned, promoting sustainable reintegration, and safeguarding their rights.

The return of migrants frequently constitutes a useful asset for the advancement of the economy of their original countries. This research examines the economic reintegration difficulties pertaining to unemployment and underemployment. By doing so, it facilitates the development of plans and programs that effectively utilize the

abilities and experiences of returnees, making a valuable contribution to the economic progress of Myanmar.





## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As the research mainly focuses on the challenges of the reintegration journey of the returned migrant workers in Myanmar, the theory of return migration is a major theory with two sub-concepts of economic aspects of reintegration and reintegration into the community. In this section, there are three parts of the literature review. The first part reviews international migration. The second part provides the theory of return migration, which is fitter into the study, such as the neoclassical economics approach, new economics of labor migration (NELM) approach, and structural approach. It highlights the importance of having an economic reintegration process for return migrant workers with examples from different countries for being able to support this study, and it briefly describes reintegration into the community which should not be ignored because the migrants have to re-socialize into the community of origin. The last part illustrates information on Myanmar immigration to Thailand.

#### 2.1 International Migration

International migration, defined as the movement of individuals across international borders, has garnered significant attention and debate across disciplines. The movement of people across the borders of foreign countries for multiple purposes, such as economic opportunities, family reunification, asylum seeking, and more, is contained in international migration. International migration studies include a variety of concepts and theories that help us understand the underlying dynamics, causes, and repercussions of migration. This literature review, which draws on interdisciplinary views, provides an overview of fundamental concepts and theories on the topic of international migration.

The major categories of migration in the literature are “forced migration” and “voluntary migration” in relation to push and pull factors (Hugo, 2008; Koppenberg, 2012; Zetter, 2015; Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016). Although this research

mainly presents voluntary migration, it also explains the brief about forced migration in this literature review. First of all, forced migration is defined as the involuntary and frequently coercive removal of people from their homes or places of habitual residency as a result of conflict, persecution, natural catastrophes, or other risks to their safety and well-being (Zolberg et al., 1989). Lee (1966) posits that the choices surrounding migration are shaped by both "plus" and "minus" factors related to the areas of origin and destination, as well as intervening obstacles such as distance, physical barriers, and immigration policies. Additionally, personal considerations play a significant role. These frameworks for analysis are commonly referred to as "push-pull" models (Passfaris, 1989). Therefore, the forced migration can be strongly linked to the push factors. The forced migrants are usually referred to as refugees. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are around 9 million refugees worldwide.

Moreover, voluntary migration refers to the movement of people who choose to relocate for reasons such as employment, education, or personal desire (Zolberg et al., 1989). The voluntary migration situation might be linked to both push and pull factors. Push factors, that encourage migration, encompass population expansion and high density, inadequate economic opportunities, and political oppression. In contrast, pull factors are characterized by the demand for labour, availability of land, economic prospects, and political freedoms (Passfaris, 1989).

Although there are various reasons for the voluntary movement of people, this study will specifically illustrate economic migrants as voluntary migrants. Economic migrants are frequently subdivided into low-skilled and high-skilled workers, and most of them are low-skilled (Martin & Taylor, 2017). Migrants frequently fill labor-market gaps in countries of destination where native-born people are not willing or able to work in low-skilled work. According to the dual labour market theory, labour markets in host nations can be classified into two separate sectors, namely the primary and the secondary segments. The aforementioned theory, initially posited by Piore (1979) and elaborated on by subsequent scholars, presents a conceptual framework for comprehending the tendency of international migrants to experience segregation within the labour market. Specifically, these migrants frequently encounter low-wage, precarious, and unstable employment conditions, while native workers predominantly

occupy more secure positions with higher remuneration within the primary labour market. Piore (1979) argues that international migration is induced by a constant demand for immigrant labour that is inherent in the economic structures of developed countries. According to Piore, immigration is generated by pull factors in receiving countries (a chronic and inevitable demand for foreign workers) rather than push factors in sending countries (low wages or excessive unemployment).

Due to the significance of economic migration, the oldest and most well-known theory of international migration, neoclassical economics theory, was established to explain labour movement during the process of economic development (Lewis, 1954; Raniz & Fei, 1961; Harris & Todaro, 1970; Todaro, 1976). This highlights the variations in salary and working conditions across countries, alongside the costs linked to migration. Generally, it perceives migration as an individual decision made with the goal of optimizing earnings (Harris & Todaro, 1970). Migrant individuals are anticipated to relocate to regions where they can maximize their productivity and secure the most lucrative remuneration. Within this particular framework, Borjas (1989, 1990) formulated the concept of an international immigration market, wherein prospective migrants decide on their destination by conducting individual assessments of costs and benefits.

It is important to acknowledge that the migratory process might create new conditions that can serve as independent causes. These conditions include the spread of migrant networks, the establishment of institutions that support transnational movements, and the adjustment of the social significance of work in receiving societies (Messey et al., 1998). Migrant networks are social networks that connect migrants, former migrants, and those who remain in origin and destination places through familial ties, friendships, and shared community origin. The study of the impact of social networks and relationships on migration decisions is network theory (Messey et al., 1990). Migration networks raise the probability of international migration by lowering the costs and dangers of migration and increasing the projected net returns from migration.

In conclusion, international migration is a complex and dynamic topic shaped by numerous thoughts and theories. This section has given an overview of essential ideas, including push and pull factors, forced and voluntary migration, as well as

theories like neoclassical economics and network theory. These concepts and theories provide useful frameworks for comprehending the complexities of international migration, but they frequently intersect and interact in complex ways. While numerous hypotheses exist to explain the initiation of international migration, there is not enough academic research focused on the reintegration difficulties faced by return migrants from Myanmar.

## **2.2 Theory of Return Migration**

### **2.2.1 Introduction to the Theory of Return Migration**

The return migration remains a largely unwritten chapter in migration (IOM, 2012). The processes involved in return migration present a multi-layered issue that is still complex and not fully understood. Return is a part of an exceedingly intricate migration narrative, and it does not always signify the end of the process. Migration and return have primarily been theorized through the neoclassical approach as well as the new economics of labor migration (NELM) approach. While some theories interpret return migration positively, others view the act of returning to one's home country as indicative of failure in the migration process.

According to neoclassical theory, return migration is regarded as an unfulfilled migration endeavor, indicating that migrants return to their country of origin due to the failure to accomplish their anticipated objectives in the destination country (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969; Constant & Massey, 2002). This theory articulates several interrelated factors, namely that migrants depart from their home country primarily to enhance their income and benefit from the opportunities presented by migration. Their foremost aspiration is to attain permanent residency in the host nation. When their economic goals remain unmet, the viable alternative is to return to their homeland.

The theory known as the new economics of labor migration is regarded as a positive outcome of migrants' overseas experiences (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999; Constant & Massey, 2002). In contrast to the neoclassical approach, the return migration of migrant workers results from the successful experiences gained in the host country (Cassarino, 2004; Castles & Wise, 2007). The significance of remittances as a

livelihood strategy was highlighted in the new economics of labor migration (De Haas, 2007a) and is especially valuable for understanding migration trends between developing countries. As a positive outcome of their journey, migrants are thought to seek maximum earnings and family reunification according to the neoclassical approach (Cassarino, 2004; Kveder, 2013).

Regardless of the value of both theories, Cassarino (2004) noted that neither theory fully addresses the issues related to skill utilization in home countries and the structural and other socioeconomic constraints. The structural approach provides a counterbalance to certain limitations of the new economics of labor migration by incorporating social and institutional factors present in the countries of origin of returnees (Hautaniemi et al., 2013). This perspective underscores the challenges of return migration and speculates on the likelihood of re-emigration when reintegration is not successful. Additionally, it highlights the importance of institutional factors, along with a business-friendly and innovation-driven environment, as crucial components in the theoretical framework of return migration (Cassarino, 2004; Hagen-Zanker, 2008).

In the end, the two theories discussed above indicate that it is crucial in migration and return migration among several return migration theories. The contrasting perspectives of the neoclassical theory and the new economics of labor migration (NELM) illustrate the multifaceted nature of return experiences, where successful and unsuccessful outcomes significantly influence reintegration processes. These two theories are mostly related to the economic aspect of return migration. Furthermore, the structural approach underscores the importance of contextual factors that impact the reintegration of returnees. Given the identified gaps in academic literature regarding the processes of return and reintegration, particularly in the context of Myanmar, further research is essential. Such inquiries will enhance our understanding of the implications of return migration and the potential for re-emigration, ultimately contributing to the support systems for returnees.

### **2.2.2 Economic Aspects of Reintegration**

A prevalent assumption regarding return migration is that migrant workers aim for permanent residence in the host country, seeking high wages, and view returning home as a sign of failure to achieve these aspirations. However, research indicates that

many migrant workers plan to remain in the host country temporarily, often devising their return migration strategies in advance, which include their intended duration of stay and savings goals within a specified period (Cassarino, 2004). Additionally, return migrants foresee contributing to the development of their home country, utilizing their acquired skills and financial capital effectively (Cassarino, 2004).

The government should introduce a well-defined intervention strategy for economic reintegration. Reintegration is defined as the re-inclusion or reincorporation of migrants into their country of origin and community by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Dako-Gyeke & Kodom, 2017). This includes the process of migrants returning to their home country, readopting their home country's values, reinserting themselves into social structures, and reactivating their social networks in order to engage in economic activities. Athukorala (1986) expressed that pre-return or on-arrival orientation to prepare for changes and difficulties to be encountered; provision of financial and investment advice for those hoping to start a business or acquire property; and provision of information about qualification and skill recognition for labour market entry should be included in intervention strategies. Furthermore, Chobanyan (2013) identified that one of the major challenges confronting returnee migrants is a lack of information, which becomes an obstacle to return and reintegration. Raising awareness should be incorporated into legislative frameworks, employment opportunities, and private business opportunities.

The issue of reintegration of return migrants has gained prominence. According to the case of India by Rajan and Saxena (2019), many return migrants were unemployed and had difficulty finding jobs in India's domestic labour market. They received no government assistance or other government-sponsored programs. Additionally, Kuschminder (2014) also stated the range of effective reintegration is influenced by the migratory experience, the average time spent abroad, the factors that sparked the decision to return, and the position in the country of origin.

According to the existing literature, return migrant reintegration issues, especially economic reintegration, have received little attention in most countries. The case of India serves as a prime example of the significance of the reintegration problem, highlighting the obstacles encountered by returning migrants, such as lack of employment and limited access to governmental assistance. Reintegration policies for

return migrants have rarely been legislated in many developing countries and they are not created with development goals (Global Forum on Migration and Development [GFMD], 2009, p. 3). Therefore, the reintegration of returning migrants is becoming an important and exciting area.

### **2.2.3 Reintegration to the Community**

The incorporation of a migrant into the social structures of his or her country of origin is referred to as reintegration to community or social reintegration. This involves the formation of a personal network (friends, relatives, and neighbors), as well as the formation of civil society structures (associations, self-help groups, and other organizations) (IOM, 2011, p. 82). Apart from the employment issue discussed in the former section, some studies illustrated that migrants who have been absent from the origin of their country for an extended period face several other challenges.

According to the studies of Armenia return migrants (Chobanyan, 2013), a lack of knowledge of Armenia's various facets of public life is one of the main problems faced by returned migrants, which constitutes a significant barrier to their ability to resettle in their home country. Returnees, particularly those who have been gone from their origin country for a long time and have no ties to their homeland, frequently have a gloomy and, on occasion, a positive, but unreal, impression of their home country. Chobanyan (2013) also demonstrates that prolonged periods of absence frequently result in difficulties arising from a limited understanding of many facets of public life in their home country.

It is critical to have information on the current situation in the home country, jobs, and business prospects. Social networks, i.e., relatives and friends who function as information support nets, frequently fill that gap (Chobanyan, 2013). They assist migrants by offering information about the origin of the country both before and after they return, as well as throughout the reintegration process. Also, problems like “jealousy and suspicion of family, friends, etc.” and “high family expectations” were more common, but only at the initial stage of their return. Returnees' relatives, friends, and neighbors, who compose their social capital, act as information, psychological, and even financial support sources for them. Returnees frequently suffer mentally as a result of social instability as well as a loss of connection with people in their former host nation (Johansson, 2008, p. 20).

In closing, the reintegration process for migrants involves the complex task of integrating into the communities of their home country. The absence of knowledge poses a significant obstacle to achieving a successful relocation experience. It is also crucial to prioritize the consideration of the psychological impact resulting from social exclusion and the severed relationships experienced by return migrants in their previous host country since this is essential for supporting a productive and sustainable process of reintegration.

## **2.3 Myanmar Immigration to Thailand**

### **2.3.1 Complexity of Myanmar Immigration to Thailand**

The phenomenon of Myanmar residents migrating to Thailand holds historical, economic, political, and social significance (Chintayananda et al., 1997). Throughout the course of numerous centuries, there has been a consistent occurrence of humans traversing the border that separates Myanmar and Thailand. During the initial phases of Thailand's progression towards industrialization, the demand for labour was primarily restricted to those hailing from rural regions inside the country. The robust economic growth experienced in the Middle East and East Asia regions prompted Thai workers to actively pursue enhanced economic opportunities in the Gulf region.

Thailand's economic growth and manpower shortages have been the pull factors and opportunities for workers from neighboring countries since local supply has not met industrial expansion and workforce demand. Furthermore, economic and political challenges in Myanmar drive workers to leave the nation in pursuit of better job opportunities. Thailand lacked an established mechanism to regulate immigration from adjacent countries at the outset. Because of the political circumstances and inadequate economic growth, the exodus of Myanmar migrants grew quickly after 1988.

In 1992, Thailand opened its labour market to unskilled migrants from neighboring countries. At the time, the Thai government launched a labour market merely for migrant workers from Myanmar in four border provinces, which was eventually expanded to nine provinces. The Ministry of Interior issued "purple cards" to 101,845 unauthorized migrants, allowing them to work in border garment



manufacturers (Jinsong, 2007). Due to the hefty registration fees (5000 THB in 1992), inadequate registration knowledge among businesses and employees, as well as a delayed registration procedure, only 704 migrants were initially registered (Chintayananda et al., 1997; Jinsong, 2007). Since 1996, the registration fees were reduced to 1000 Baht. Although the fees decreased, more than 80 percent of registered workers were from Myanmar, who had previously visited Thailand and worked without proper documentation. Despite being registered, the official status of Myanmar migrants from different regions of Myanmar was "illegal migrants awaiting deportation but permitted to work temporarily." The registration, which aimed to allow migrants to work in Thailand only temporarily, was done on an annual basis (Chantavanich et al., 2007).

The inadequate worker protection, short duration of registration, and expensive cost made registration unappealing, resulting in low registration in subsequent years (Chintayananda et al., 1997; Jinsong, 2007). Due to the 1997 financial crisis, Thailand deported around 300,000 migrant workers in order to provide greater availability in the labour market for Thai workers. However, there were just a few local workers available to fill the positions. The Thai government issued another registration decision, this time with a limited quota for hiring migrant labour.

The Thai government successfully signed a memorandum of understanding in 2001 that focused on the formal recruitment of unskilled migrants, with three countries such as Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia in 2002-2003 in search of collaborating in solving the employment problem (Vungsiriphal et al., 2010). Migrants who entered the country without legal documentation, which means they violated immigration law, were deported, although the Thai government allowed them to stay and work temporarily in designated regions (Krittiya & Pantip, 2005, quoted in Chantavanich et al., 2007). Then, in 2003, the registration policy was updated, and a new registration system was implemented, which included three strategies: (1) register migrants and their family members, (2) verify migrants' nationalities, and (3) recruit formal migrants.

Because the National Verification method took time, many Myanmar migrants were unable to finish the process by 2011. The closing date was extended twice, once in June 2012 and again in December 2012, but only for migrants who had previously applied for the NV process. Temporary work permits were not issued to migrants who

didn't submit an application for NV or who were newly arrived (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012).

In conclusion, the migration of people from Myanmar to Thailand has been a historically noteworthy and complex occurrence, influenced by various economic, political, and social factors. The labour demand in Thailand has been influenced by economic growth and a scarcity of workforce, resulting in an attraction for workers from neighbouring countries such as Myanmar. Several obstacles, including costly registration fees, insufficient worker protections, the limited period of registration, inflexibility of the registration system, and lack of solid law enforcement, have impeded the efficacy of immigration regulations. The policy lacks a long-term policy. The problem in short-term programs is the lack of consistency in migration policy. The complex historical background and ongoing intricacies of the migration of people from Myanmar to Thailand underscore the importance of the efficient reintegration and protection of migrant workers.

### **2.3.2 Academic Literature on Myanmar Immigration to Thailand**

The migration of individuals from Myanmar to Thailand has attracted significant interest among scholars and policymakers. Fujita et al. (2010) showed that Thailand was recognized as a prominent recipient of cross-border migration from its neighbouring countries. This is due in part to two factors. The first one is the neighbouring countries' transition to market economies, which started at the end of the 1980s. For example, the case of Myanmar illustrates the fall of the Burmese socialist regime in 1988. The primary cause of this collapse may be related to the failure of economic management within the framework of the 'Burmese Way to Socialism'. This economic change from socialism to market-oriented economies resulted in widespread poverty among the people in Myanmar. That is why people from Myanmar migrate to Thailand. The second factor is the growing economic difference between Thailand and these countries. Myanmar migrants occupy a significant proportion of the overall migration from the three neighbouring countries of Thailand, namely Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (Pholphirul & Rukumnuaykit, 2010; Fujita et al., 2010). The migration from Myanmar to Thailand on an enormous scale can be attributed not only to the growing economic gap but also to the presence of political push forces within Myanmar (Kulkolkarn & Potipiti, 2007; Fujita et al., 2010; Filipski et al., 2017; Waters & South,

2021). In this instance, migrants have arrived in Ranong by means of personal networks, including connections with relatives or acquaintances (Fujita et al., 2010). Ranong emerges as a prominent destination for migrant workers from Myanmar, particularly individuals originating from the Tanintharyi Region, owing to disparities in salary rates between Myanmar and Thailand. After all, the existing literature on migrant workers in Thailand (Kusakabe & Pearson 2010; Fujita et al., 2010) has painted a comprehensive picture of the exploitative working conditions prevalent among migrants, particularly in the manufacturing, fishery, construction, and agricultural industries.

According to occasional Cabinet resolutions of Thailand, unskilled migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos were registered and given work permits in Thailand, even though immigration law and the Alien Working Act of Thailand prohibit them (Bryant & Rukumnuaykit, 2007; Fujita et al., 2010). This was done under the assumption that employment for migrant workers was temporary. As a consequence, the changes in cabinet resolutions occurred on a yearly basis. For instance, the validity period for work permits could be one year or six months, or registration may be restricted either to existing workers or to new migrants depending on the law. As a result, their legal statuses continue to be unstable. In relation to the national verification system, Fujita et al. (2010) showed a significant proportion of the migrants noticed its existence. However, it was observed that these individual migrants lacked comprehensive knowledge regarding the specific intricacies of the national verification system and the requisite procedures associated with it. The knowledge regarding the system that they acquired was predominantly through the sharing of information among workers (for example: their colleagues) or within their respective communities.

Several research findings indicate that Myanmar migrants encounter a range of significant challenges (Kusakabe & Pearson, 2010; Fujita et al., 2010; Waters & South, 2021). These include adverse working conditions and limited income, financial burdens resulting from insufficient earnings, and unanticipated expenses (such as fees associated with work permits and legal status issues). Fujita et al. (2010) also mentioned human trafficking and mistreatment by law enforcement and military personnel (particularly affecting individuals engaged in sex work), heightened vulnerability to

illnesses like malaria and HIV/AIDS, difficulties in accessing affordable healthcare facilities, and inadequate educational landscape for their children.

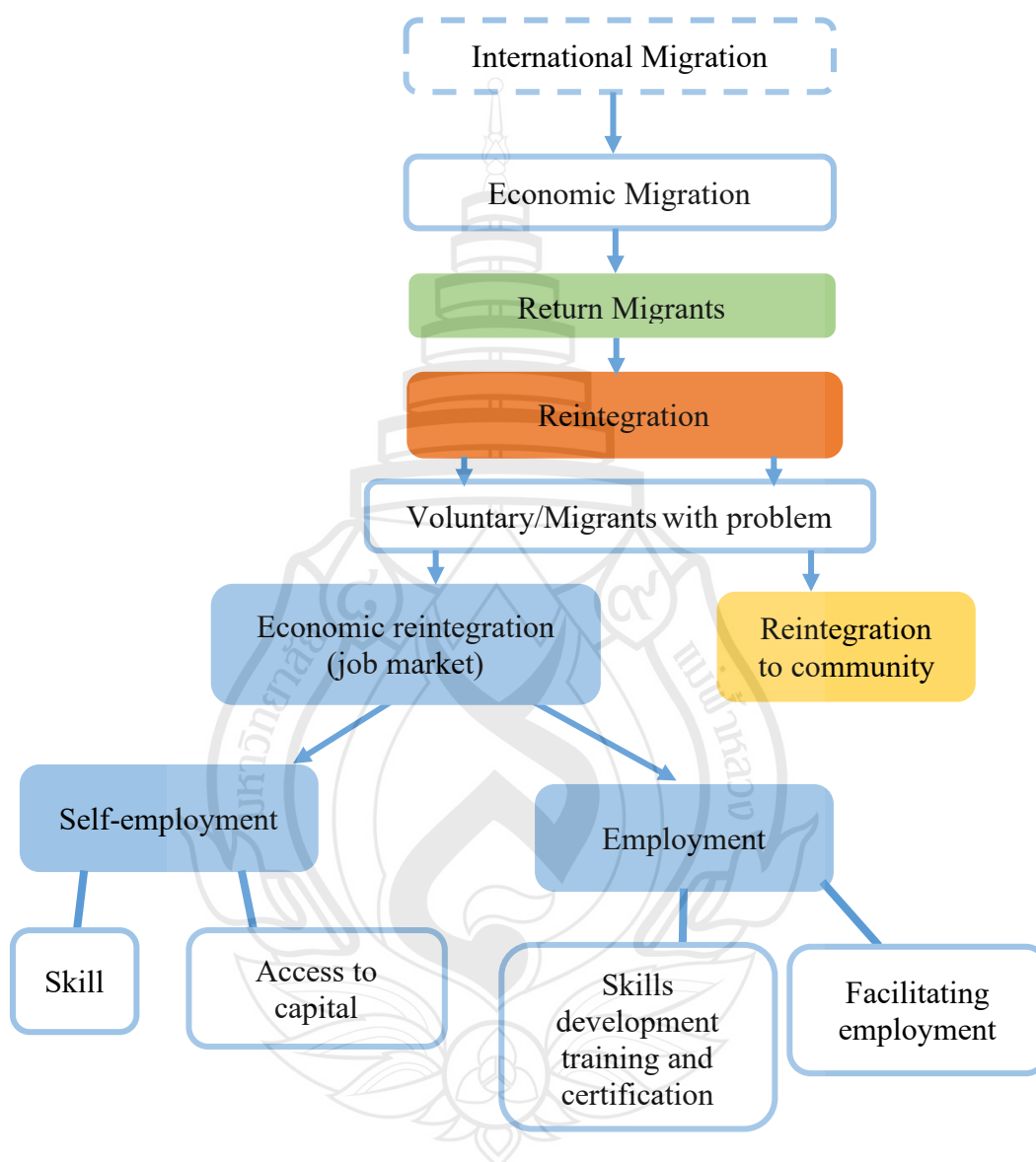
In summary, exploitative working conditions are documented in numerous industries in the existing literature despite periodic Cabinet resolutions permitting work permits for migrants. A frequent revision of the regulation on work permits in Thailand affects the stability of the legal statuses of migrants. Although migrants know the national verification system, they do not comprehensively understand it. The system of safeguarding the labour rights of migrants was not entirely effective. Conversely, the system exacerbated the exploitation of labour. While numerous researchers have conducted studies on a wide range of challenges faced by migrants in the host country, the concerns related to return and reintegration into the country of origin remain relatively underexplored in academic circles.

## **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

The primary objective of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various obstacles encountered by individuals who have returned to their hometowns and are in the process of reintegrating. This research is based on a conceptual framework that shows how the reintegration process is important, and the challenges of the returned migrants' reintegration into their home country. Figure 1 describes the complete conceptual framework of this research. The reintegration process will be studied by the returned migrants, i.e., voluntary returned migrants and migrants with problems who can share the challenges they already faced. Economic reintegration is one of the important factors for the individual migrants and their families, as well as the economic development of their home country. That is why this research will mainly study the economic reintegration of Myanmar. It will investigate many pathways via which return migrants can initiate their own businesses or secure employment opportunities.

Additionally, it seeks to determine whether these individuals have access to finance and whether their abilities are duly recognized. Furthermore, the study will also explore the dynamics of social reintegration among migrant workers returning to

Myanmar. This is crucial since returnees frequently depend on familial and communal networks to obtain emotional support and aid in the process of reintegration.



**Figure 2.1** Conceptual Framework on Reintegration

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section encompasses the research methodology of the study, which will be used to investigate the dynamics of return migration and the reintegration process of migrant workers returning to Myanmar. To elaborate further, this research delineates the research design, methods for gathering data, procedures for data analysis, and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The objective of this study is to gain insight into the difficulties encountered by individuals who have returned to their home communities and are undergoing the process of reintegration. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the reintegration of returning migrants, this study employed mixed methods qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. As this research used a more qualitative style, the case study technique was selected due to its suitability in effectively and sufficiently addressing the research inquiries. This study included interviews with relevant individuals and observation of events. This study examined individuals who have returned within a timeframe of two to three years, as well as those who have spent a minimum of two years residing outside of Myanmar. The research incorporated methodologies such as in-depth interviews to gather data for the study and foster active participation from the participants. The potential primary emphasis area included specific locations of Shan State in Myanmar.

#### **3.2 Research Sites**

The designated research site was in Taunggyi, Shan State. Shan State is located in the east of Myanmar, bordering China, Laos, and Thailand on the international level

as well as the states of Kachin, Sagaing, Mandalay, Naypyitaw Union Territory, Kayin, and Mon (MIMU Myanmar, 2024). Shan State, along with Mon State and Tanintharyi Region, is one of the top 3 regions from which people migrate to Thailand. The region of eastern Myanmar has the greatest responsibility for the implications of migration to Thailand, including return migration (Griffiths & Ito, 2016). The specific location of the research site is in Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State, which is situated in east-central Myanmar (Britannica internet source, 2025). As of 2014, Taunggyi, the fifth-largest city in Myanmar, had an estimated population of 380,665.

This region has seen considerable internal and external migration flows as a result of historical, political, and economic considerations. To begin, Shan State has a long history of migration, with many Shan people seeking employment in nearby Thailand and China (Taylor, 2009). This history provides a valuable backdrop for understanding the dynamics of return migration and its effects on communities and individuals.

Moreover, there are different types of ethnic groups within Shan State. From a socio-cultural perspective, the numerous ethnic groups and cultural customs offer an exclusive setting for exploring return migration. Each ethnic group has its customs and ways of life, which can impact how migrants reintegrate into their communities once they return. This socio-cultural richness sheds light on the social features of return migration (DiCarlo, 2018).

Likewise, the various means of economy in Shan State make it an appealing case study for researching the economic aspects of return migration. Agriculture, mining, and trading are among the many economic activities that take place in the state (Keenan, 2010). This diversity presents a variety of economic opportunities and problems for returning migrants. To summarize, Shan State's historical migratory patterns, various economic activities, and rich sociocultural environment make it an appropriate location for studying return migration from both economic and social viewpoints.

### 3.3 Research Participants

The study included a group of return migrants who returned from Thailand for 2 to 3 years. The list of participants was provided by a local non-governmental organization operating in Shan State, which actively works for migrant workers. The sample size for the in-depth interviews was 18, covering both urban and rural regions. The participants underwent online interviews. Considering the need for field data due to missing participatory observation, more detailed interviews of their life histories were conducted with a particular focus on their experiences in jobs and the community. The selection of various locations within the same city and township is primarily attributed to the differing ratios of return migrant workers originating from distinct countries. For instance, certain villages may exhibit a significant influx of returnees from Thailand, while others may be characterized by a higher concentration of return migrant workers from Malaysia. The provided list indicates the diverse districts, specifically noting Bago. One participant referenced his hometown, yet it is pertinent to clarify that he belongs to the Pa-O ethnic group and currently resides in Taunggyi, located in Shan State. There was no age limitation for the respondents; however, the respondents had to be over 18 years of age. The youngest return migrant in this study was 18 years old, while the oldest was 44 years old. The ratio of the participants by gender was almost equally selected (7 Males and 11 Females).

**Table 3.1** Participants List

No.	District	Township/Village	Female	Male	Number of Participants
1	Taunggyi	Hsi Hseing	8	6	14
2	Taunggyi	Ho Taung Village, Hsi Hseing	2	0	2
3	Taunggyi	Kyauktalonegyi (sub-township)	1	0	1
4	Bago	Zayetgyi, Htantapin township	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>					<b>18</b>



### **3.4 Data Collection**

To obtain qualitative data, this study employed in-depth interviews, specifically key informant interviews (KIIs), with return migrants. The quantitative data was collected through KoboToolbox. These interviews aim to gather insights into the migrants' experiences during their overseas migration, as well as their post-return experiences, particularly their reintegration process. The purpose of conducting personal interviews was to establish personal and direct interaction between interviewers and respondents, hence mitigating non-response rates. The anticipated sample size for interviews was 18 individuals residing in Myanmar. The research methodology entailed the utilization of open-ended questions, followed by further inquiries, to effectively address the research objectives and ensure the researcher's satisfaction.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Following the completion of the data-collecting phase, the qualitative data was meticulously documented. Subsequently, the acquired data underwent transcription and translation procedures, specifically from Myanmar to English. To be adequately prepared for analysis, the gathered data was subjected to a sequence of processes, which encompass sorting and coding. The precise study topics served as the basis for generating a complete compilation of codes. In the course of this study, the examination of interview transcripts and focus group data was conducted through the use of theme analysis. This study strived to identify themes and trends about problems in the process of reintegration, acceptance within the society, and the improvement of economic reintegration.

### **3.6 Ethical Consideration**

The study was committed to ethical principles to maintain the confidentiality and objectivity of all obtained data. The participants received comprehensive

information regarding the purpose, procedures, and their rights in the study. Before the collection of data, informed consent was acquired. Throughout the process of data collection, all data were documented intimately. Engagement in the research was entirely optional, and individuals were free to discontinue their involvement at any juncture without incurring any adverse repercussions. Furthermore, it could be ensured that individuals' personal information was upheld with the utmost confidentiality.

### **3.7 Research Limitation**

This study acknowledges several potential limitations. Due to the volatile circumstances in Myanmar at the time, recruiting participants presented considerable challenges. The study depended on a limited sample of returned migrant workers, which may not adequately represent the diverse experiences of this population. During the online interview, the internet connectivity from Myanmar was notably inconsistent, necessitating multiple attempts—approximately three to four times—for each interview. Furthermore, a language barrier existed between the researcher, who speaks the Burmese Language, and the participants, who mainly speak the Pa-O Language and engaged in a bit of the Burmese language. It hindered effective communication; some participants struggled to articulate their thoughts adequately. Additionally, during this period, a general loss of trust prevailed among individuals, complicating the initial establishment of rapport between the researcher and the respondents. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study confers significant insights regarding the reintegration experiences of returned migrant workers in Myanmar, establishing a basis for prospective research.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This chapter examines the study's findings to probe the challenges and barriers returning migrants encounter when they reintegrate into employment and the community. It is subdivided into four parts. First, a summary of Shan State and its general background of migration is presented. The second part illustrates the life of return migrants before and during the migration stages. After that, the third part highlights the social and economic reintegration processes of return migrants. Lastly, the findings reveal the challenges that return migrants faced during the reintegration process and upon their return to their community in Shan State, Myanmar.

#### **4.1 Shan State and its General Background of Migration**

Shan State, which makes up almost 25 percent of Myanmar's total land area, is located in the country's eastern region and boundaries with China, Laos, and Thailand. Shan South, Shan North, and Shan East are the three sub-states that comprise one of the largest States (Maharjan & Myint, 2015). There are 5.8 million people living in the state; 24 percent of the population resides in urban areas and 76 percent in rural areas (Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2014). The people living in Shan State can be categorized into ten primary ethnic groups: the Shan, Pa-O, Intha, Lahu, Lisu, Taungyo, Danu, Palang, Akha, and Kachin.

Shan State has abundant valuable stones, metals, coal, and wood resources (Maharjan & Myint, 2015). Throughout history, the state has been a prominent supplier of timber and metals (CHIME, 2018). As part of the Golden Triangle, it has played a major role in producing opium and methamphetamines. Because of its moderate climate, it serves as the growing place for farm goods such as fruits and vegetables. It is also the home of Myanmar's tea plantations. Given that all these industries require a lot of labour, migrant workers from nearby places in Myanmar are drawn to that place.

This study's site is mostly in the areas near the Taunggyi district in Southern Shan State. Taunggyi is the city of Shan State. Ranging from 96°9'46"E, 22°14'45"N to 97°30'38"E, 19°19'3"N; the district spans 24,239.10 km<sup>2</sup> (Sharma et al., 2020). The state is home to 1.7 million people, 27.3 percent of whom reside in metropolitan regions (MOLIP, 2015). Due to the unstable situation in Myanmar, participants from different districts could not be reached.

The drivers of migration in Southern Shan State vary depending on the location. Conflict was the main reason for human mobility in most communities (CHIME study, 2018). People from some communities migrated through irregular channels to evade forced recruitment by armed groups due to the conflict. However, the migration drivers for some communities not experiencing the armed conflict were getting better job opportunities and income.

Shan State also recorded a higher number of intra-state migrations. The only two States/Regions in Myanmar with meager rates of out-migration to other States are North and East Shan (Nyi, 2013). Most migration from Shan State occurs within the state or across international borders. Within the state, people migrate to urban areas or from village to village for seasonal employment. Besides, Shan State is a site of passage as well as a destination for migrants from the Dry Zone. In addition to working on sugarcane and tea plantations, migrants from the Dry Zone utilize it as a hub for their migration to China and Thailand.

The labour force of the Shan State itself is enticed to China, Thailand, and Malaysia through international migration. Migrants from South and East Shan prefer Thailand because of the close linguistic resemblance between Shan and Thai. According to the report of Helvetas Myanmar (2015), half of the young people in Pin Laung township in South Shan have moved to Thailand to work in factories, construction sites, and for the female population as domestic workers. Instead, labour from North Shan migrates in great numbers to China because of its geographical vicinity, high demand, and high earnings. An estimated 60 individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 are reported to migrate Namhsan township every day in order to work in China. Better pay rates – daily wages in agriculture ranging from 11 to 16 USD per day – are the main pull factor.

Ultimately, the Shan State is the largest state in Myanmar, with diverse ethnic groups and rich natural resources. Conflict, along with the temptation of better income and job opportunities, is a main driver of migration. The intra-state migrations within Shan State and its role as a core area for migrants from different places emphasize the sophisticated nature of human migration in that state. Additionally, the labour force in Shan State is absolutely affected by international migration.

## **4.2 Example of Life Histories of Taunggyi Migrant Workers**

Pierre Bourdieu's framework of everyday practice offers a critical lens through which to examine the experiences of individuals as they navigate the balance between structural influences and personal agency. At the core of Bourdieu's sociological approach are the concepts of habitus, field, and capital, which together articulate how social conventions, individual dispositions, and resource accessibility influence daily behaviors (Bourdieu, 1977). The concept of habitus refers to the internalization of social structures that shape an individual's perceptions and reactions to their environment. Conversely, fields represent domains of power dynamics where various forms of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—are utilized to navigate the opportunities and constraints present (Bourdieu, 1984). These theoretical constructs are especially pertinent in migration contexts, as individuals' decisions and actions are shaped by the complex interplay of global economic systems, social networks, and cultural expectations.

This section investigates the migration experiences and reintegration journeys of three individuals from Myanmar, each reflecting distinct pathways shaped by their respective social backgrounds and migration experiences. The narratives of these individuals—a male mason from Hsi Hseng township, a young woman hailing from a conflict-affected village in Taunggyi, and a male factory worker from the Bago region—provide crucial insights into how their everyday practices are affected by their habitus, the fields they operate within, and the forms of capital they have at their disposal.

The influence of habitus is observable in their tendencies towards migration, which are molded by socioeconomic factors, familial responsibilities, and community norms. The transnational labor market and local village economies create particular opportunities and limitations, while access to varied types of capital—including remittances, skills, and social connections—shapes their capacity to adapt and prosper. Furthermore, the respondents' reflections on their migration experiences underscore the significance of doxa, the implicit beliefs and norms that shape their views on success, failure, and reintegration.

By framing these lived experiences through Bourdieu's theoretical lens, this analysis illuminates the fluid and context-sensitive nature of everyday practices among returning migrant workers. The narratives reveal how migration alters their habitus, affects their positioning within fields, and transforms their access to and use of capital. This perspective not only enhances our understanding of the reintegration process following migration but also highlights the wider socio-cultural and economic forces that influence individual agency.

#### **4.2.1 The Life of Male Respondent (1)**

The male respondent (1), aged 44, was born into a modest family in Ho Taung village, Hsi Hseng township, Myanmar. He has three family members: including him, his elderly mother, and his son, who is 19 years old. He completed formal education up to Grade 6; however, due to financial constraints, he was unable to pursue further studies and subsequently began his career as a mason in his hometown. At the age of 19, facing significant economic challenges, he made the decision to migrate to Thailand in search of improved opportunities to alleviate his financial difficulties.

The decision to migrate was significantly influenced by a friend who had worked in Thailand for three years and provided comprehensive guidance regarding the migration process. Initially, the respondent engaged in irregular migration; however, he subsequently secured the necessary legal documentation, including a passport, through arrangements facilitated by his employer. Ultimately, the respondent remained in Thailand for over a decade, surpassing his initial intention of a ten-year stay.

During his tenure in Thailand, he engaged in diverse professional sectors. His initial employment involved assisting a neighbor in the sale of metal components; however, due to the high population density, he transitioned to a position in painting.

Ultimately, he obtained a job at a factory in Samut Prakan, which provided consistent monthly remuneration. This factory specialized in the production of essential components for vehicles, which were subsequently exported to Japan for final assembly. This employment afforded him a sense of security and financial stability.

While working in Thailand, he sustained consistent communication with his mother residing in Myanmar, despite the costs associated with international communication. He provided remittances at intervals of three to five months, with amounts ranging from 500,000 to 600,000 Myanmar kyats. These financial contributions were primarily used for his mother's medical expenses and charitable donations. Nonetheless, the unfavorable exchange rates prevalent during that period substantially diminished the actual value of the funds remitted to his home country.

The male respondent returned to Myanmar after an eleven-year absence due to the expiration of his passport. Upon returning, he chose to reside and work in his hometown, focusing on carpentry, masonry, and occasional agricultural work. He underscored the importance of being close to his elderly mother, asserting that he does not intend to migrate again to offer her care and support.

Currently, the respondent describes his life as one of rebuilding, having encountered difficulties associated with displacement resulting from regional conflict. As a daily wage worker, he persistently contributes to his community through volunteer initiatives and mutual support within the Pa-O ethnic group. His profound sense of familial and communal connections remains pivotal to his life.

Although he acknowledges the better wages and opportunities available in Thailand, he prefers to remain in Myanmar to support his mother and embrace a more simplified lifestyle in his hometown.

#### **4.2.2 The Life of Female Respondent (2)**

The female respondent (2), 19 years old, is the middle child in a family of seven in Ho Taung village, Hsi Hseng township, Taunggyi. The family's decision to migrate was influenced by adverse conditions in her village, which had experienced destabilization due to conflict. Her family had to flee to different villages on multiple occasions. Prior to migration, her family operated a small restaurant business. However, she made the decision to migrate independently, without the input or consultation of other family members.

She selected Thailand as her migration destination primarily because of its geographical proximity and relative affordability compared to other migration alternatives. However, she faced significant financial constraints that impeded her ability to handle the associated costs of formal migration to more distant countries, including expenses for preparatory classes and other migration-related fees. As a result, the migration was conducted irregularly. Support from relatives residing in Thailand was crucial in facilitating her migration journey, as it encompassed assistance with securing employment and navigating the new environment.

Upon her arrival in Thailand, she obtained employment as a sanitation worker responsible for maintaining public spaces. This type of work was unfamiliar to her, given that she had no prior experience in similar roles in Myanmar. Despite the numerous challenges encountered, she maintained consistent communication with her family back in Myanmar, providing vital financial support in the form of remittances ranging from 400,000 to 600,000 Myanmar Kyats. These remittances were essential for her family's well-being, particularly as her parents had been displaced due to conflict and required financial assistance to fulfill their basic needs.

Numerous challenges characterized her migration experience. The most significant obstacle encountered was the language barrier, which impeded effective communication and restricted employment opportunities. This issue was particularly evident during a brief employment period at a restaurant in Thailand, where communication difficulties ultimately led to her resignation from the position. Furthermore, the irregularity of the migration process contributed to an ongoing sense of insecurity while residing in Thailand.

After spending a few months in Thailand, she returned to Myanmar, attributing this decision to difficulties in securing stable employment and the ongoing challenges related to the language barrier. It was noted that her home community primarily relies on agriculture and market trading as their main sources of livelihood. Importantly, upon returning, she reported no experiences of stigma or negative treatment from her community.

At present, she contributes to the management of the family restaurant business alongside her mother. Upon reflection of her migration journey, she characterizes the experience as unsuccessful. The interplay of language barriers, irregular migration



status, and limited opportunities abroad has discouraged her from contemplating future migration attempts.

#### **4.2.3 The Life of Male Respondent (3)**

The 23-year-old male respondent (3) was born in Bago region. He is one of three siblings who discontinued formal education after completing the ninth grade. Before migration, he was employed as a mason. Upon his decision to migrate, he resided with his aunt, who had previously settled in Thailand. The decision to migrate was significantly influenced by his aunt, friends, and other community members who had also migrated to Thailand. Furthermore, his mother played a crucial role in encouraging him to follow the trend of migration exhibited by both his aunt and the broader community.

In 2018, he departed from Myanmar. It is noteworthy that the decision to migrate to Thailand was not a premeditated one; rather, it was primarily driven by the inclination to follow the lead of others. Initially, there was no specific plan concerning migration to countries beyond Thailand. He originally intended to reside in Thailand for two years, with the intention of visiting Myanmar intermittently to partake in cultural or familial occasions.

During his time in Thailand, he worked in a factory at first and later moved to a car mechanic shop, focusing on car body repair. This job was completely new to him, as he had no prior experience in similar positions in Myanmar. He maintained regular communication with his family members throughout the migration period. While staying with his aunt, he was able to send back 300,000 Myanmar Kyats home. These remittances were mainly used to repay the debt that was incurred to finance the migration rather than significantly contributing to the family's overall socioeconomic well-being.

He noted that his absence did not create a labor gap for his family, as he was not a primary source of labor prior to migrating. He returned to Myanmar in 2022, motivated by a decision to become a fully ordained bhikkhu (monk). Although he intended to stay in the monkhood permanently, he left after a year. After that, he enrolled in a skill development training program, such as housekeeping training, which he is currently attending.

Regarding the reintegration process, he described his transition back to Myanmar as relatively smooth. His familial relationships remained stable, and the family did not provide substantial support during reintegration. Financially, he depended on a loan from one of his friends to address potential expenses associated with his return journey. Post-return, he perceived an increased sense of comfort compared to his situation before migration, even though there have been limited changes in his family's socioeconomic status.

Contemplating his migration journey, he characterized the experience as yielding mixed results, describing it as a "50-50" situation – neither a complete success nor a failure. While acknowledging that working abroad expanded his horizons, he notes that it did not produce significant economic benefits for his family. Initially, there was an intention to support his family through remittances; however, the funds that were sent were predominantly allocated for his debt repayment, while personal expenditures consumed subsequent earnings.

Looking forward, he intends to remigrate to avoid certain conflicts in Myanmar. However, he has chosen not to return to Thailand, suggesting a possible change in destination.

### **4.3 The Experience of Return Migrants before and during Migration**

#### **4.3.1 Original Life of Return Migrants in Home Country**

The life of the return migrants before migration was explored with a particular focus on their experiences in jobs and the community due to the lack of field visits in times of political instability. The age of the respondents was varied. About 17 percent of the return migrants were below 20 years old. The study showed that 39 percent of the participants were above 20 years old, whereas 44 percent were between ages 31 and 50 years old. The ethnicity of the participants was varied. 1 out of 18 participants was Kayah, while 17 were Pa-O ethnicity. According to the civil status, over half of the participants were married. Both married and single participants have 3 to 6 family members. Some women among married respondents were primarily single before migrating. They got married while they worked in Thailand and returned to Myanmar.

Besides, the data revealed that the percentage of high-school and middle-school education among the participants was the same when there was a lower number of primary and higher education. The occupational status before migrating among participants was almost similar. They mainly did their own traditional business, “Agriculture/Farming business.” “Farming” was significantly high in the category, while few numbers of people worked as masons. Mostly, they grew rice, corn, peas, and beans on their farms. The other side jobs were rice production and pig livestock farming. A male respondent (A) said,

*“Before migrating, I worked as a mason. I also painted and made silicon. ... I had a brother there, so I migrated to Thailand,”*

A male respondent (A) (personal communication, 2024, July)

In this study, voluntary migration was mainly focused, and all participants were voluntary migrants, although the significant categories of migration in the literature are “forced migration” and “voluntary migration,” concerning push and pull factors (Hugo, 2008; Koppenberg, 2012; Zetter, 2015). The participants were asked why they decided to migrate to Thailand. Table 4.1 shows that the most crucial factor was earning more money. They thought they could earn more money than in Myanmar, and it was easier to get jobs in Thailand. The other two critical factors were peer influence and the difficulty of working in Myanmar.

A female respondent (A) answered that:

*“I had difficulties farming. I was in debt for buying fertilizer products, but I was able to pay off the debt after harvesting. So, when I worked in Thailand, I thought I could make more money.”*

A female respondent (A) (personal communication, 2024, July)

**Table 4.1** Reasons for Migration to Thailand

Reasons	Frequency*
Earning money	8
Peer influence	4
Difficult to work	4

**Table 4.1** (continued)

Reasons	Frequency*
Lower migration cost	2

**Note** \*The frequency of responses from multiple respondents exceeded the total number of respondents.

A male respondent (B) said that he did not have a migration plan, but his family told him to follow with his aunt:

*“At that time, I was at my aunt’s house. My aunt, friends, and surrounding people had gone to Thailand. As my aunty migrated to Thailand, my mother reassured me and asked me to go... I did not plan to go to this country or that country. Everyone was going to Thailand, so my mother told me to follow them. That is why I migrated to Thailand.”*

A male respondent (B) (personal communication, 2024, June)

#### **4.3.2 Life of Return Migrants in Host Country**

The remittances were sent to provide for the family's needs in the homeland, buy some agricultural products, pay for buildings, use for donations, and ensure children’s schooling and education, especially for married migrant workers. Most of the respondents could not send money monthly because their salaries were not enough to send monthly, and they had to use it for other purposes.

A female migrant (B) described that

*“My salary is just over 7,000 Baht. That’s why I can send 2 or 3 months once. When I have to go through the process of extending a passport or other documents, I cannot send money back home. The fees of extending a passport in Thailand costs over 10,000 Baht.”*

A female migrant (B) (personal communication, 2024, July)

The average month they could send was one time within 2 to 3 months. However, some migrants could not send the remittances due to the problems faced in Thailand, and some could send it once throughout their life of working in Thailand until coming back.

Sometimes, when the migrant's family has 2 or 3 migrants in their family member, they are not worried about sending the money back home. The migrants' remittances were quite crucial for some migrants' families. For some, it did not matter for them.

A male respondent (B) said that

*“When I stayed with my aunty in Thailand, I sent 300,000 MMK monthly back home to pay the debt I took for coming to Thailand. My remittances were not helpful for my parents because all the money was gone to pay back the debt.”*

A male respondent (B) (personal communication, 2024, June)

These findings shed light on the various unexpected obstacles experienced by return migrants and underscore that the need for support mechanisms to address their concerns remains. However, there is a system to protect them.

#### **4.4 Reintegration of Return Migrants**

The participants were first asked about the return status category in this section. Most respondents returned to their original place voluntarily, whereas three out of eighteen respondents mentioned they had returned with problems. The average duration in Thailand is two years among voluntary return migrants. The stay in Thailand for return migrants with problems was between five months and one year only, although they originally intended to stay in Thailand for three to five years to maximize their salary.

Secondly, the respondents in this study were asked to describe their reasons for returning to their home community. Table 4.2 shows the factors contributing to their decision to return to their home country. The total number of reasons was their health and their family's health issues:

*“My health condition was not good. I became so lean day by day. That is why I came back,”* said one female migrant (C).

A female migrant (C) (personal communication, 2024, June)

Problems at work, difficulty in finding jobs, Pregnancy, documentation issues, and religious rituals in Myanmar were the other critical factors in deciding to return home. A male respondent (C) and another male respondent (D) expressed the same reasons:

*“I have difficulties at work. I do not get a regular salary. What is the point of working? So, I decided to come back home.”*

A male respondent (C) (personal communication, 2024, July)

*“This was my second job. I worked in construction. My duty was to paint the building. I worked for 15 days. Instead of giving me a 15-day salary, the employer only gave me a 10-day one and left me a 5-day one.”*

A male respondent (D) (personal communication, 2024, July)

**Table 4.2** Reasons for Returning Home

Reason	Number
Health issue	4
Family health issue	3
Problem at work	3
Difficulty in finding job in Thailand	3
Pregnancy	3
Documentation issues	1
Religious ritual in Myanmar	1

One female returning migrant (B) said that she returned to Myanmar due to her pregnancy:

*“I got married after over a year of working in Thailand. Then I got pregnant. In Thailand, it is not easy to give birth because we need documentation, like a passport for a child and others. My husband cannot speak the Thai Language very well, so I came back to Myanmar to give birth.”*

A female returning migrant (B) (personal communication, 2024, July)

Another male respondent (E) remarked:

*“It is not easy to work in Thailand without any relatives. Although I have my brother in Thailand, I have difficulties. ... I did not have a passport, so I could not go outside here and there. Even if I went to work, I had to check the situation before traveling to work to avoid getting caught. There was no freedom of movement for me at all because I did not have a passport.”*

A male respondent (E) (personal communication, 2024, July)

#### **4.4.1 Social Reintegration**

Reintegrating into the social community occurred smoothly for the returned migrant workers because the community and the family helped the returned migrants reintegrate. Some expressed they got support from the family and the community financially or socially. The friends of the returned migrants in Thailand offered financial help to ensure they had enough money on the way home. At the same time, most participants responded that they did not get any help from their families or the community because they possessed the capacity to manage their responsibilities. Once in the home country, the community disseminated information concerning job opportunities to assist daily wage workers.

Furthermore, the returned migrants could resume their normal everyday lives as there was no pessimistic reaction or impression from the community, whether they were regular or irregular migrants. All participants kept in touch with the home community when they were in Thailand. When they returned from abroad, the neighbours welcomed them by visiting their homes for a week. Subsequently, the situation reverted to normalcy without any adverse repercussions. Some returned migrants mentioned that their relationships with the community improved because they worked abroad. Many participants described the relationship with the community as the same as before. For example, a male migrant (F) said:

*“When I returned, they visited my house continuously for a week. I also visited them. After a week, it became normal life. They went back to work and did other things as normal.”*

A male migrant (F) (personal communication, 2024, July)

All respondents described that their relationship with their families remained the same. Among women migrants, their community gave various opinions upon their return; for instance, returning home is good for them, and they better stay in the host country. A female migrant (B) also said:

*“Some said why you came back home. Some wanted me to stay here. Each of them gave a different opinion.”*

A female migrant (B) (personal communication, 2024, July)

Nevertheless, the returned migrants could participate in all events and were never left alone in the community. Although the community did not expect help from them, they participated in the community events as volunteers. The semi-skilled migrants expressed their willingness to contribute to the community. One such example is a mason who offered to construct a house free of charge under the current circumstances. A male migrant (F) described,

*“I help in the community events whether the village heads invited me. We worked and celebrated with unity. For other personal things, I help them if they need me. We visited each other house.”*

A male migrant (F) (personal communication, 2024, July)

Despite smoothly reintegrating into the community socially, they encountered a significant challenge due to the lack of security caused by political instability and civil unrest. One male migrant (B) said:

*“I can get into the everyday life. But there are difficulties because we are fleeing from the war zone.”*

A male return migrant (B) (personal communication, 2024, June)

In conclusion, the return migrants' reintegration process into the social community is comparatively smooth, with the support of their families, the community, and friends in this study. The welcoming attitude of the neighbours, the migrants' willingness to engage in community events, and the migrants' contribution reflect a



positive aspect of their reintegration. However, the challenges posed by political instability highlight their difficulties.

#### 4.4.2 Economic Reintegration

Returning migrants to Myanmar following their absence have revealed significant shifts in the country's economic landscape, which have varied according to the timing of their return. Job opportunities remain constrained due to ongoing political turmoil, complicating the situation further for returnees who must navigate a challenging employment market. Moreover, the ability to sustain livelihoods significantly differs between those who own land and those who rely on daily wage work in agriculture. This section explored the economic challenges of the return migrants.

During their absence, the returned migrants observed changes in Myanmar's economic landscape. The responses may differ slightly according to the year they returned. The persons who came back to Myanmar before the 2021 Myanmar coup d'état could indicate the improvement of the economic situation. Figure (4.2) describes that eight respondents said their socio-economic situation worsened, while four participants reported a slight improvement, and five mentioned the same as before. A female respondent (B) said:

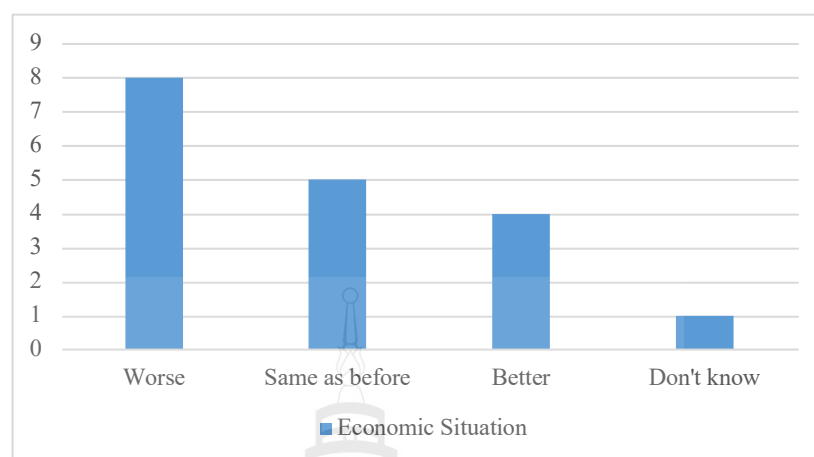
*“It changed a little bit. I can see the village's roads and transportation have improved, and the houses here have improved yearly.”*

A female respondent (B) (personal communication, 2024, July)

Another female respondent (G):

*“Before migrating, I didn't have my own house. After migrating, I can build a house and buy land.”*

A female respondent (G) (personal communication, 2024, July)



**Figure 4.2 Economic Situation**

The employment situation still remains limited, and because of this political conflict, employment opportunities have worsened in their home community. Therefore, some respondents were unsure of how to rate their employment situations during the interview. Table 4.3 illustrates the type of employment that the return migrants do once they come back to Myanmar. A high number of migrants work in agriculture while others work for daily wages, own businesses, and attend skills development training. A female return migrant (D) remarked,

*“The economic situation is declining. Even for farmers, farming is worsening because of the current political unrest.”*

A female return migrant (D) (personal communication, 2024, July)

Although some returnees got the chance to acquire skills in Thailand, other returnees, including them, reverted to their original farming occupation, and one worked in the family business, for example, running a restaurant because of the political situation.

Another male return migrant (D) reported that

*“Once I returned to my home community, I initially found work as a mason using the skills I had learned in Thailand. However, I currently need a stable job due to the conflict.”*

A male return migrant (D) (personal communication, 2024, July)

The farming economy proved unpredictable, and inconsistent deals made it difficult for the returnees to sustain themselves in the current situation. A male return migrant (F) said,

*“I can’t decide whether I should do farming or not, whether I should stay at home or run away because the situation is not good.”*

A male return migrant (F) (personal communication, 2024, July)

**Table 4.4** Types of Employment

Employment Type	Number
Agriculture	10
Daily wages	3
Own business	1
Others	3

In the agricultural sector, individuals who possess ownership of land reported a greater ability to support themselves and their families. They generate additional income through the sale of farm produce while also utilizing a portion of their yield for personal consumption.

*“Currently, the farming has been done. But the merchants who will buy our products haven’t even returned to the city yet.”* said a male return migrant (F).

A male return migrant (F) (personal communication, 2024, July)

Other individuals employed on a daily wage basis in agricultural settings face significant challenges in financial sustainability, as their earnings are limited to daily compensation and do not yield any interest or equity derived from the farm.

Getting a job was possible among semi-skilled returned migrant workers when there was no such political conflict upon return. Compared to female migrants, male migrants had more chances to learn skills on the job in Thailand. The skills they learned in Thailand were from the factories, car and auto repair, and construction sectors, whereas most female migrants worked as domestic workers. If there were machines like in Thailand, they could get jobs in the factories of Myanmar. The unskilled

returnees had no option but to revert to their community's primary occupation, agriculture. A male return migrant (B) illustrated,

*“As I worked at the car repair shop in Thailand, I could continue working in that kind of place here. I worked in the automotive refinishing section.”*

A male return migrant (B) (personal communication, 2024, June)

To sum up, those findings also shed light on the mixed observation of economic changes in Myanmar upon the migrants' return, with some reporting improvements while others faced worsening socio-economic situations. Despite the unpredictability of the agricultural economy, many returnees reverted to farming. The impact of political tension on job opportunities was manifest. Additionally, male migrants had more opportunities to equip skills, particularly in technical sections, than female migrants.

#### **4.5 Challenges of Reintegration**

This section explains the reintegration challenges of the return migrant workers. According to the study's findings, there were no social reintegration challenges for the migrants once they entered the community except for facing their life security challenges due to the political instability. Many of them and their families in that region have fled to avoid the attack between the two groups. Once it stopped, they returned to their homes to do the agriculture work for their livelihood.

Meanwhile, economic reintegration poses significant challenges. The most pressing financial issue for return migrant workers in Myanmar is the difficulty of securing stable and meaningful employment. Even in typical situations, Myanmar return migrant workers struggle to find jobs; however, this current situation makes it more difficult for them to do so.

Furthermore, even when employment is available, it is often in informal sectors that do not match the skills and experience the workers gained abroad. Those who returned to the original farming work faced the issue of buying seeds or fertilizers at a high price, and the primary product prices for families also got higher compared to the previous normal situation. Female migrants (G) and (H) said the same things:

*“The economic situation is not good. In farming, the price of seeds and fertilizers increases. And the price of basic home items is also increased.”*

Female migrants (G) and (H) (personal communication, 2024, July)

Another critical challenge is the lack of support systems. Upon returning to Myanmar, migrants observed the lack of official reintegration programs and processes, which can further exacerbate the financial instability of returned migrants, especially for married returned migrants who have many children. The returned migrants reintegrated into their home country according to their own plan with the support of their family and friends. If they could receive any assistance from responsible persons or authorities, they would seek support for employment opportunities and financial aid for agriculture activities to sustain their livelihood.

Individuals possessing the skills acquired in Thailand may encounter challenges in applying these skills within their local communities during the current situation. Sometimes, these skills are not often transferable to Myanmar's regional economy, leading to a mismatch between workers' qualifications and available jobs. This skills mismatch limits the economic reintegration of return migrants and further contributes to their economic difficulties. Despite encountering employment challenges, individuals in the 30-44 age group who returned migrants expressed no intentions of further migration. Conversely, young expectant mothers are contemplating remigration when their offspring reach the age of 2. Nevertheless, it was affirmed that these individuals are unequivocally committed to returning upon achieving their targeted savings.

In conclusion, the return migrant workers faced less social but significant economic challenges. While social reintegration appears relatively smooth, significant economic obstacles hinder their transition, particularly in securing stable employment and navigating the high costs of agricultural inputs. The lack of formal support systems exacerbates these difficulties, leaving many to rely on personal networks for reintegration. Furthermore, the skills acquired abroad often do not align with local job opportunities, contributing to a mismatch in labour markets. Despite the challenges, a commitment to stable reintegration remains, with many expressing a reluctance for further migration.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Chapter 4 showed the migration patterns and drivers in Shan State, Myanmar, focusing on the Southern Shan State. The study explored the experiences of return migrants, highlighting their original life in the home country and their life in the host country. The findings also highlight the diverse economic experiences of return migrant workers in Myanmar following their reintegration, with some reporting improved financial situations while others faced exacerbated socio-economic challenges. The agricultural sector emerged as a key area of economic focus for returnees, particularly for those who owned land, enabling them to generate income through the sale of farm products. However, some respondents employed on a daily basis encountered significant financial issues due to limited earnings and the absence of interest or equity from the farm. Furthermore, the reintegration process presented substantial challenges, particularly in securing stable and meaningful employment, as well as the lack of official systems and reintegration programs. The impact of political instability further compounded these economic and reintegration challenges. The summary demonstrates an overview of the migration dynamics and the experiences of return migrants in the Shan State of Myanmar.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This chapter is organized into four distinct sections. Initially, a comprehensive summary of the research findings is provided. The second section critically analyzes the research outcomes in relation to established theories. Subsequently, the third section outlines potential policy recommendations aimed at facilitating the reintegration process based on the findings. Finally, the chapter concludes with suggestions for future research, elaborated upon at the end of Chapter 5.

#### **5.1 Summary of Research Findings**

Under the research title, “The Reintegration Challenges of Returnee Migrant Workers in Myanmar: A Case Study of Taunggyi, Shan State,” this section summarizes the study’s findings to probe the challenges and barriers returning migrants encounter when reintegrating into the community and employment. The research questions are: (1) Based on the return and reintegration theory, how do the return migrants from Thailand reintegrate into communities in Myanmar's home country, especially economically and socially? and (2) What are the challenges faced by the return migrants when they return and during the reintegration process into the community? Before starting the primary summary, the following paragraph will provide a concise overview of Shan State.

Shan State, situated in eastern Myanmar bordering China, Laos, and Thailand, constitutes nearly 25 percent of the nation’s land area. It comprises three sub-states: Shan South, Shan North, and Shan East. The state’s population includes ten major ethnic groups, such as the Shan, Pa-O, Kachin, etc. Shan State supports agricultural production owing to its mild climate, particularly noted for its tea plantations.

Drivers of migration in Taunggyi, Southern Shan State, are context-dependent, with conflict primarily motivating human movement in many communities. Some individuals have migrated irregularly to escape forced recruitment by armed groups,

while others seeking better job opportunities have moved for economic reasons. Additionally, Shan State has experienced significant intra-state migration, with meager out-migration rates to other regions, particularly in North and East Shan. Most movements of people occur within the state or across international borders, often from rural to urban areas between villages for temporary work.

The local labor force is also attracted to international destinations such as China, Thailand, and Malaysia. Migrants from Shan South and East primarily choose Thailand due to linguistic similarities, with reports indicating that half of the youth in Pin Laung township have relocated for employment in various sectors. Conversely, individuals from North Shan predominantly migrate to China, motivated by its geographical proximity and lucrative job prospects. Some young adults from Namhsan township reportedly migrate daily to work in China, drawn by higher wage rates in agriculture.

This study examined the experiences of return migrants, emphasizing their employment and community experiences before migration, particularly in light of the challenges posed by political instability that limited field visits. The respondents encompassed a diverse age range, with approximately 38 percent under 20 years old and a notable representation of different ethnicities, with precisely 12 Pa-O and 1 Kayah among the participants. Over half of the respondents were married, and both married and single individuals reported having 3 to 6 family members. Some married women were previously single before migrating to Thailand, where they married during their employment and subsequently returned to Myanmar.

Educational qualifications among participants revealed an equal number of those with high school versus middle school education, although there were fewer individuals with primary or higher education levels. Occupationally, most participants engaged in traditional agriculture, with rice, corn, peas, and beans being the primary crops. At the same time, a small number worked as masons or in side jobs involving rice production and pig farming.

The study focused on voluntary migration, distinguishing it from forced migration. It identified earning potential as the foremost motivator for migration to Thailand, alongside peer influences and challenges faced in Myanmar. Respondents reported significant financial struggles in their home country, leading to the decision to seek better opportunities for their families; only a few were able to send money



regularly due to insufficient earnings and other financial obligations. Some respondents indicated that remittances were crucial for family sustenance, while others felt their contributions were minimal as they were primarily used to settle debts incurred from their migration.

According to research question 1, “Based on the return and reintegration theory, how do the return migrants from Thailand reintegrate into communities in Myanmar's home country, especially economically and socially?” the findings discussed the return status of participants, revealing that a majority returned voluntarily to their original places. However, three out of eighteen respondents experienced challenges during their return. On average, voluntary return migrants spent two years in Thailand, while those who faced issues had shorter stays, lasting between five months and a year, despite their initial intentions to remain for three to five years to increase their earnings. Participants were also asked to articulate their motivations for returning to their home country, with Table 4.2 illustrating the key factors influencing their decisions. The primary reasons included health concerns for themselves or their families. Other significant factors included workplace difficulties, job scarcity, pregnancy, documentation issues, and cultural obligations in Myanmar.

In the reintegration section, returning migrants did not receive any assistance upon their return. The social reintegration of return migrant workers was largely facilitated by supportive community and familial networks. While some migrants received financial and social assistance from their families and communities during their return journey, many reported that they did not take any aid upon arriving back home. Nevertheless, community members played a crucial role in providing information regarding job opportunities for daily wage workers. Upon their return, the community exhibited a welcoming attitude, with neighbours visiting migrants for up to a week, allowing for a smooth transition back to daily life without negative repercussions, regardless of the migrants' legal status. Some migrants noted an improvement in their community relations, which was attributed to their overseas work. All returned migrants indicated that their familial relationships remained unchanged. However, female migrants encountered mixed opinions about their return, with some expressing a preference for them to stay in the host country. Besides, the returned migrants actively contributed to community events as volunteers. For instance, a mason

offered his services to build homes without charge. Nonetheless, these migrants faced significant challenges due to ongoing political instability and civil unrest that affected their daily lives.

Following this section, economic reintegration highlighted the substantial economic changes in Myanmar experienced by returning migrants, which differ based on their return timing. The job market remained restricted due to ongoing political instability, posing additional challenges for returnees. Those with land ownership were better positioned to sustain their livelihoods compared to daily wage earners in agriculture.

Returning migrants noted varied economic conditions upon their return. The persons who returned before the 2021 coup viewed the economic situation as somewhat improved; for instance, some reported enhanced infrastructure and personal property advancements. Despite these observations, the overall employment landscape has deteriorated, leading to uncertainties among returnees regarding their employment status.

Although some returnees acquired skills while abroad, many reverted to traditional agricultural occupations or family businesses due to adverse political conditions. Consequently, the unpredictability of the agricultural market had hindered their ability to achieve economic stability.

Landowners in the agricultural sector reported greater self-sufficiency, profiting from the sale of their produce, while daily wage workers faced significant financial challenges due to their limited earnings. Employment opportunities were more accessible for semi-skilled male returnees than for females, who primarily worked in domestic roles.

Based on research question 2, “What are the challenges faced by the return migrants when they return and during the reintegration process into the community?” the study discussed the challenges faced by return migrant workers during their reintegration in Myanmar. The findings indicated that while social reintegration was largely unobstructed, significant economic hurdles persist, mainly due to political instability and resulting in livelihood insecurity. Many migrants returned to their agricultural work after fleeing violence; however, they faced difficulties in securing stable employment, with the current economic climate exacerbating these issues.

Available jobs were often informal and did not correspond to the skill sets acquired abroad, leading to financial instability. Moreover, a lack of official reintegration programs further complicated their situation, particularly for those with families. Without adequate support, returnees relied heavily on personal networks for assistance. Additionally, a disconnection existed between the skills attained in Thailand and the demands of the local job market, limiting the effective reintegration of returnees. Despite the obstacles, individuals aged 30-44 displayed a strong commitment to remaining in Myanmar, whereas younger mothers consider migration once their children are two years old.

## **5.2 Discussion of the Research**

The return migration of workers has received less attention in studies. This phenomenon challenges established migration theories, like the neoclassical, which claims migrants go home because they did not achieve their goals abroad. However, recent research indicates that return migration can also stem from positive experiences in the host country and highlights the role of remittances in supporting livelihoods. Moreover, challenges involving economic reintegration and the effective use of skills in the home country have become essential in understanding return migration's complexities. This introduction provides an overview of contrasting viewpoints and sets the stage for further exploration of the complexities surrounding the return and reintegration of migrant workers, particularly in the context of the Shan State in Myanmar.

The migration experience of the return workers was relatively successful. They returned home not because they failed their migration journey. According to the neoclassical theory, the most longstanding and recognized migration theory, migration is a largely unsuccessful endeavor. This theory suggests that migrants often return to their home countries when they fail to achieve their anticipated objectives in the destination country (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969; Constant & Massey, 2002). This theory outlines several interrelated factors: pursuing higher income, attaining migration benefits, and establishing permanent residency in the host country. Additionally, the

theory known as the new economics of labor migration (NELM) is regarded as a favorable outcome of migrants' experiences abroad (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999; Constant & Massey, 2002). In contrast to the neoclassical perspective, the return of migrant workers is attributed to the positive experiences gained in the host country (Cassarino, 2004; Castles & Wise, 2007). This study's findings described that the majority of return migrants returned to their home country, not as a consequence of failing to achieve their objectives in the host country. Instead, the neoclassical theory appears inadequate in explaining the circumstances surrounding return migrants in Shan State. Notably, nearly all return migrants characterized their migration experiences as relatively successful despite encountering challenges such as health issues due to working in unskilled labour markets, irregular wage payments, and instances of mistreatment by employers.

The New Economic of Labour Migration (NELM) emphasized the importance of remittances as a crucial livelihood strategy, as seen by De Haas (2007) in Chapter 2.1.1. The study reveals that remittances play an important role for the majority of respondents and their families; however, one respondent said they are least important for his family, having only been sent once during his stay in Thailand. The impact of remittances appears contingent upon the number of family members engaged in migration and the economic context of the family. In instances where a family has two or three migrants, there tends to be a diminished motivation among the younger migrants to remit funds home. This phenomenon often correlates with a favorable economic situation of the migrants' parents. Some migrants allocate remittances for land acquisition and housing construction. In contrast, others utilized these funds to purchase agricultural supplies, support their children's education, and meet various other financial needs. A subset of parents with young migrants expressed greater concern regarding their children's safety and health conditions in Thailand than the potential remittances those children may provide.

Under economic reintegration, Cassarino (2004) indicated that migrant workers typically plan to reside in the host country temporarily, having made arrangements for their eventual return, which includes determining both the duration of their stay and the savings they aim to accumulate within a designated timeframe. In the context of the neoclassical approach, these migrants are viewed as pursuing maximized earnings and

the possibility of family reunification (Cassarino, 2004; Kveder, 2013). The participants in the research exhibited a strategic approach regarding the duration of their stay; however, while they did not specify a particular amount of savings accrued, they demonstrated an intention to enhance their property investments within their local community. The majority of the respondents expressed a preference for temporary residence in Thailand as a means to maximize their earning potential.

In previous migration waves, the emphasis was largely on remittances rather than on permanent returns. Numerous migrants resided abroad for long durations to financially support their families. At present, return migration is emerging as a more significant trend, influenced by the aging of migrants and the difficulties associated with maintaining a livelihood in Thailand. At the same time, the contemporary migration landscape highlights a significant transition from informal migration practices to more formalized frameworks shaped by state policies and regional influences. While these officially recognized migration routes provide certain safeguards, they also engender new vulnerabilities, including reliance on employers and constrained mobility, thereby adding layers of complexity to the migratory experience. Nevertheless, the process of reintegrating into the socio-economic landscape of Myanmar continues to be hindered by several challenges.

The acquisition of skills is fundamental to professional development. The structural approach points out the difficulties of return. The structural approach discussed here seems to address several deficiencies of the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) by considering the social and institutional factors inherent in the home countries of returnees (Hautaniemi et al., 2013). Cassarino (2004) illustrated that both Neoclassical theory and NELM theory do not adequately address the complexities surrounding skill utilization in countries of origin and various socio-economic limitations. The findings posit that effective utilization of skills plays a crucial role in the return and reintegration processes. The findings indicate that some participants acquired skills during their employment in Thailand. Raising awareness regarding the necessity of skill acquisition before migration is essential, as some return migrants have indicated difficulties in securing employment in Thailand. Upon reintegrating into the job market in Myanmar, they faced substantial barriers to applying those skills due to a lack of technological infrastructure comparable to that of Thailand. Consequently,

many participants reverted to their original occupations in agriculture because of this and political instability. Despite encountering various challenges, the majority of return migrants aged 30 and above do not have intentions to relocate again. Therefore, this structural approach is partially applicable to the case study of Shan State.

Apart from the employment issue, some studies have illustrated that migrants who have been away from their country of origin for a prolonged duration encounter various difficulties upon reintegration into their social communities. This process of reintegration requires the establishment of personal networks, including friendships, familial relationships, and connections with neighbors, as well as the development of civil society structures, such as associations, self-help groups, and other organizations (IOM, 2011, p.82). Social networks, defined as family members and friends who serve as sources of informational support, often bridge informational gaps (Chobanyan, 2013). The findings support social networks fill the gap because of the significance of social networks in Taunggyi, Shan State, where community members actively exchange information about the home country. Moreover, these networks provide both financial and social support for returning migrant workers at the initial stage of their return and after.

Also, the literature of Chobanyan (2013) said problems like “jealousy and suspicion of family, friends, etc.” and “high family expectations” were more common, but only at the beginning of their return. This particular scenario is not relevant to the community of Taunggyi, Shan State because the respondents reported that the community showed a warm welcome upon their return to their home country. As highlighted in the findings section, they engaged in visits to the houses of returning migrants over a week. Remarkably, there was a complete absence of social exclusion, loss of interpersonal connections, or severed relationships. Furthermore, they actively participated in social events and collaborated cohesively as volunteers in these initiatives. So, it can be asserted that the moral community culture prevalent in rural areas continues to endure in Shan State.

Existing literature from different countries indicates that the challenges associated with the reintegration of return migrants, particularly regarding their economic reintegration, have often been overlooked across many countries. A case study by Rajan and Saxena (2019) focusing on India revealed that numerous return

migrants faced unemployment and encountered significant obstacles in securing employment within the domestic labor market. Furthermore, these individuals did not receive support from government initiatives or programs designed to assist them. The circumstances surrounding research on return migrants from Shan State are notably parallel. These individuals have returned and reintegrated into their respective home communities based on their own strategies. They have received information regarding employment opportunities within their communities. Noteworthy, it has been reported that no official government-sponsored program exists to assist returning migrants.

Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework—specifically his notions of habitus, field, and capital—offers essential insights into individuals' migration and reintegration experiences. Analyzing the narratives of three respondents from Taunggyi, Shan State, this discussion underscores the interaction between structural dynamics and individual agency in influencing migration choices, experiences during their time abroad, and the process of reintegration upon their return. The experiences of respondents living and working in Thailand profoundly influenced their habitus, reshaping their perceptions of labor, success, and avenues for social mobility. Respondent 1 achieved financial stability through factory employment, which not only augmented his economic capital but also illuminated the constraints imposed by exchange rate fluctuations and remittance systems. In contrast, Respondent 2 faced significant challenges due to a lack of cultural and linguistic capital, ultimately leading to her early return to Myanmar. Conversely, Respondent 3's experience as a car mechanic—skills he developed while abroad—broadened his cultural capital, although a significant portion of his remittance contributions was primarily directed toward debt repayment. The doxa, or the underlying beliefs that shaped their migration experiences, also transformed during their time abroad. For instance, Respondent 2's initial optimism about migration was considerably tempered by the realities of irregular work and language barriers, prompting her to reassess the long-term viability of migration as a strategy. Similarly, Respondent 3's decision to pursue vocational training upon his return suggests a recalibration of his aspirations, influenced by the structured employment he encountered abroad.

The process of reintegration into their home communities highlights the lasting effects of habitus and the evolving dynamics within various social fields. Respondent

1's return to his hometown reveals a strong dedication to family obligations and a longing for communal belonging, even at the cost of higher earning potential abroad. His involvement in local volunteer efforts within the Pa-O ethnic group underscores how cultural capital acquired during migration can be reinvested in community development. In contrast, Respondent 2's reintegration into her family's restaurant business illustrates her resilience and adaptability despite her view of migration as a setback. Additionally, Respondent 3's engagement in skill development programs represents a proactive approach to leveraging his migratory experience for future opportunities. The roles of both economic and symbolic capital were crucial in shaping these reintegration experiences. For Respondent 1, the remittances he sent home during his time abroad, although limited by unfavorable exchange rates, cultivated a sense of financial responsibility and familial support. Similarly, Respondent 2's contributions to her family's livelihood through remittances emphasized her economic agency despite the irregularities of her migration limiting her long-term benefits. Respondent 3 provides a nuanced perspective, acknowledging the mixed outcomes of his migration while expressing optimism about future possibilities.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the limited academic research on the reintegration of return migrant workers in Taunggyi, Shan State. That is why the author did research and found many important issues. The findings challenge neoclassical theory by showing that migrant workers do not necessarily return due to unmet goals in the host country. The NELM theory points to remittances as an essential livelihood strategy, while the structural approach underlines the challenges of skill utilization and reintegration faced by returnees in their home countries. This research emphasizes the importance of considering social, institutional, and economic factors to understand the reintegration processes of return migrants. The insights gathered from the respondents emphasize the importance of implementing policies that not only address the structural obstacles to successful migration but also provide the necessary support systems for effective reintegration. By bolstering access to economic, cultural, and social capital, policymakers can empower migrants to capitalize on their experiences abroad, thereby promoting sustainable development within their home communities.



## **5.3 Policy Recommendation**

### **5.3.1 Establishing Official Reintegration Program for Return Migrants**

This study revealed a lack of an official reintegration framework or government-sponsored programs tailored for voluntary return migrants in Myanmar. It is imperative for the government to establish a comprehensive intervention strategy aimed at facilitating economic reintegration because the most critical financial challenge facing return migrant workers in Myanmar is the difficulty in obtaining stable and meaningful employment. While these workers typically encounter obstacles in securing jobs, the current circumstances exacerbate these difficulties. Addressing the development gap will play a crucial role in facilitating the reintegration of return migrants into their communities and should constitute a fundamental aspect of governmental development policy.

### **5.3.2 The Imperative Preparedness for Reintegration in Labour Market**

Athukorala (1986) emphasized the importance of incorporating pre-return or on-arrival orientation programs to address potential adjustments and challenges. He also argued for the inclusion of financial and investment guidance for individuals seeking to initiate a business or purchase property, as well as information on the recognition of qualifications and skills to facilitate entry into the labor market within these intervention strategies. In the case of Shan State, the return migrants described that if they could receive any assistance from responsible persons or authorities, they would seek support for employment opportunities and financial aid for agriculture activities. Moreover, reintegration policies for return migrants have rarely been legislated in many developing countries and are not created with development goals (Willoughby & Henderson, 2009).

### **5.3.3 Enhancing Collaboration for Future Reintegration Process**

A lack of economic opportunities may compel some individuals to revert to their pre-migration circumstances. The findings suggest that the socio-economic conditions of the home communities of return migrants significantly influence their capacity to reintegrate effectively, leveraging the resources and skills acquired in their countries of destination. Implementing measures to expand employment opportunities and other

revenue-generating avenues within these local communities is imperative. The objectives of governmental policies and initiatives must be directed toward fostering robust economic prospects in these areas. This necessitates that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other entities involved in the reintegration process consider the future economic conditions facing return migrants.

#### **5.4 Recommendation for Further Study**

Based on the findings derived from the specific context of this research, the researcher suggests that future studies should focus on the processes of return and reintegration under typical circumstances, employing quantitative methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of the associated challenges. Furthermore, additional research may examine the experiences of migrants who express a desire to re-migrate after acquiring relevant skills. This study reveals that a subset of these individuals has acknowledged the importance of skills development training and is currently participating in courses related to housekeeping and hospitality.

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