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BESSH-2017

**International Conference on  
“Business Economic, Social Science & Humanities”  
(BESSH-2017), Bangkok, Thailand**

# **Book of Full Paper Proceedings**

**International Conference on  
“BUSINESS ECONOMIC, SOCIAL SCIENCE & HUMANITIES”  
(BESSH-2017)  
Bangkok, Thailand**

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**Dr. Malika Ait Nasser**

International Conference on “Academic Fora International Conference (AFIC)” serves as platform that aims to help the scholarly community across nations to explore the critical role of multidisciplinary innovations for sustainability and growth of human societies. This conference provides opportunity to the academicians, practitioners, scientists, and scholars from across various disciplines to discuss avenues for interdisciplinary innovations and identify effective ways to address the challenges faced by our societies globally. The research ideas and studies that we received for this conference are very promising, unique, and impactful. I believe these studies have the potential to address key challenges in various sub-domains of social sciences and applied sciences.

I am really thankful to our honorable scientific and review committee for spending much of their time in reviewing the papers for this event. I am also thankful to all the participants for being here with us to create an environment of knowledge sharing and learning. We the scholars of this world belong to the elite educated class of this society and we owe a lot to return back to this society. Let's break all the discriminating barriers and get free from all minor affiliations. Let's contribute even a little or single step for betterment of society and welfare of humanity to bring prosperity, peace and harmony in this world. Stay blessed.

Thank you.

**Malika Ait Nasser**

Conference Chair

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**AFIC-17****The Role of Migrants and Social Remittance in Traditional Festivals' Practices  
in Za Yet Pyin Village, Rakhine State, Myanmar**

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**Abstract**

Loss of human resources as a consequence of migration has intensively impacted on any affairs of the sending community. In many rural societies, young people move outwardly to urban regions. These massive flows of young migration have resulted in the socio-economic changes in the home community. While many studies have revealed both positive and severe consequences associated with migration and economic remittances, only a few studies have investigated the impact of migration and social remittance particularly in relation to the changes in the cultural aspect. This study focuses on the roles of migrants, and non-migrants in terms of their ideas/suggestions and contributions on the changes in the practices of two traditional festivals, the Water Festival and the Light Festival in Za Yet Pyin village, Ramree Island, Rakhine State of Myanmar. The study aims to provide answers through an investigation of the relationship between the roles of actors (migrants/villagers), and the networks founded by migrants. Through the comparison between the pre-migration past and the current migration era, any significant changes of traditional festivals' practices are presented and analyzed which will bring new findings and insight into the area of migration study in relation to the practice of traditional festivals.

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*Keywords*— Migrants, Social Remittance, Traditional Festivals, Rakhine, Actors, Networks

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**Introduction**

Migration is the crucial phenomenon which is happening in everywhere of human world. It becomes an interesting issue to be discussed and argued in academic field. Crucially, migration has more meanings rather than it is defined by “people mobilization” because it is related with other issues such as political, socio-economic and cultural of the society.

Myanmar, one of the Southeast Asian countries is the largest migration source country in the Greater Mekong sub-region, estimated 10% of Myanmar population moving out of the country (IOM, 2015). The international community still recognize Myanmar as the least developed country owning the status of prosperity-lower middle income level.

In Myanmar, majority of Burmese and other official ethnic groups such as Kachin Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan are living with other minority groups of people. Ethnic Rakhine is one the major ethnic groups of Myanmar; their region “Rakhine state” is situated in eastern side of Bay of Bengal, and shared with international border with Bangladesh, internal boundaries with Chin State, as well as Magway, Bago and Ayeyarwaddy regions. Rakhine was spotlighted in international news about Rohingya issue. However, this introduction will say about poor socio-economic condition and massive flow of migration of Rakhine state.

Today, the status of Rakhine is noted as one of poorest regions in Myanmar. Regarding to World Bank Group's report (2014), Rakhine State is marked with its poverty rate of 78 percent compared to 37.5% percent nationally. Lack of infrastructure is root cause to happen the region to be a poor ethnic region. Local people from the region are experiencing difficulties in their daily life, struggle to have some income covering basic needs. According to World Bank Group's report (2014) stated that below 10 percent of electricity were accessed by Rakhine region. How rigid situation is that local Rakhine people can not access electricity fully yet though they are living in the place enriching natural gas. In accordance with World Bank Group report “Livelihoods and Social Change in Rural Myanmar” (2016) presented that improvements in agricultural-based livelihoods were accelerated significantly in Shan, Chin and Ayeyarwaddy regions, but less increasingly growths in Magway and Rakhine regions were remarked. According this report, it can be analyzed that Rakhine people relying on their traditional economies such as agriculture and

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aquiculture could not have higher incomes for strengthening their socio-economic situation. In the region, it has the lowest percentage of households with access to improved sanitation in the country (48% compared to a national average of 84%), as well as the lowest primary school enrollment rate (71.4% compared to a national average of 87.7%) (IOM, 2015). Therefore, it can be thought that development situation of Rakhine people are low level in accordance with their socio-economic status and life skills.

To overcome economic stress or to access higher education, moving out of their place becomes one of their coping mechanisms. Pushed by limited livelihoods, poor socio-economic conditions, local people from Rakhine highly migrated out of the region, specifically, 80% of young people from that region moved out of Mrauk-U Township for their financial security and so on (IOM, 2016). Almost three-quarters of young men in some townships of Rakhine State move out to find works, especially internal regions; Kachin State or Yangon and foreign countries such as Thailand or Malaysia (Su Phyo Wai, 2016). When analyzing people mobility from the region, there is both rural-urban migration and transnational migration. The huge problem in transnational migration is that irregular migration was figured out in Rakhine state although people from other regions went out of the country with documented status. IOM's report "Labour Mobility" (2016) mentioned that most of them migrated to neighboring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and China as "undocumented labours" and some were victims of human trafficking. 10% out of thousands of Myanmar nationals trafficked to fishing boats in Indonesia were ethnic Rakhine (IOM, 2015).

It can be regarded that almost every parts of Rakhine have been experiencing migration. In academic field, previous studies such as migration effect on socio-cultural economic of the migrant sending community (Saw Yu May, 2015) and social capital and Rakhine migrant workers in host community (Aung Myo Min, 2015) revealed significant outflow and internal young migration from Rakhine state. Although there are a few studies related about migration in Rakhine, a gap of knowledge about migration effect in sending community is needed to be contributed in migration field of study. Therefore, this study was purposed for getting to know how migration effect on traditional practices on home community. In accordance with the aim of this study, Za Yet Pyin village situated in Ramree Island, Rakhine state was chosen because it has been experiencing massive flow of young and young adults' migration for over two decades. Therefore, it could be realized that this study has relevance with the previous studies since strong concern on young mobility from Rakhine State. Among a lot of traditional practices of Za Yet Pyin village, the traditional festivals such as Water and Light festivals were intentionally selected. This become what is studied in this paper.

In local Rakhine version, it is important to note that Water festival is known as *Thungran* festival. Plus, Light festival is called as *War Kywat-See mee lights* festival in local Rakhine people. The ethnic Rakhine celebrate *Thungran* festival in the month of April. Rakhine people have the perception that they feel dirtiness can be washed from old year by sprinkling water each other during the period of *Thungran* festival days (Maung Tha Hla, 2004). The purpose of celebrating *War Kywat-See mee lights* festival is related with Buddhists' traditional perception. Almost all people of Za Yet Pyin village devotion in Buddhism have same perception with Burmese Buddhists in relation with the reason of offering lights. This practice-offering lights was emerged from welcoming Lord Gautama Buddha preaching his mother in Abode of celestial beings for three Lenten months and returning to the abode of male on the full-moon day of *Thadingyut* (which is known as the month of October in Christian calendar). The King of Celestials created gold, silver, ruby stairways for him. Buddha took the middle ruby one radiating six hues of aura. The nats came along by the right gold stairways and the Brahmas by the left silvery stairways. On account of that, Myanmar Buddhists celebrate the full-moon day with multi-colored illuminations (Khin Myo Chit, 2014). However, Za Yet Pyin village could organize this festival in the month of November because of heavy rain in October.

The main interest of the study is how migration impact; role of actors (migrants and non-migrants) and their remittances effect on traditional festivals of Za Yet Pyin village. It could be revealed by proposing the following questions: how role of actors, especially collaboration of migrants and non-migrants and remittances transmitted through networks effect on *Thungran* festival (Water festival)? How only support by non-migrants War-Kywat See mee lights festival (Light festival)?

### Methodology

This research conducts qualitative approach and case studies of *Thungran Festival* (Rakhine Water festival) and *War Kywat-See mee lights Festival* (Rakhine Light festival). According to Creswell (2007), the qualitative method is much useful when studying the interaction among people of the community and getting to know the real situation of the community in depth.

#### Research Site and Researcher Role

In the nature of qualitative method, I, the researcher conducted data collections in research site. The research is conducted through two times of visits to Za Yet Pyin village, Lay Taung Region which is located on Ramree Island in Rakhine State. As this research study on seasonal festivals, it was concerning fact that I should have to get there in

the particular period in which the traditional festivals are going to be held. Therefore, I was there to observe these traditional festivals in April and November.

There are two main researchers' roles in doing researches - emic and etic, that explains how and from which perspectives the researchers will be conducting research while collecting data and doing interviews and observations throughout the research processes (Creswell, 2007). Throughout this research, the researcher took both of roles – emic and etic because I am Rakhine and understand their culture and dialect. On the other side, I was not a member of the community that means I was not born and grown up there.

#### *Unit and Level of Analysis*

For this research, my purposive samples are the community people who are now living in the village as well as temporary returnees coming back for a short visit and some responsible of migrants' networks. So, the unit of analysis was distinguished into non-migrants (current residents) and migrants (temporary returnees for Water Festival). When recruitment participants, I had total of 22 people (10 Female and 12 Male). For my gatekeeper, one of the village leaders was approached. The person helped me for the research, especially facilitating opportunities to get entry to the population and engaging to meet the informants. He was helpful when selecting the participant, approaching the informants and asking the information of the local context throughout the research.

In the level of analysis of this research, individual and community level are mainly divided. At the individual level, participants; categorizing of migrant and non-migrants were conducted for understanding of their social memories and experience as well as their particular roles for the festivals. At the community level, the researcher did observation on the communal activities; these two festivals during the particular moment.

#### *Data Collection*

In the research, the data collection process such as key informant interviews, and participant observation were applied. For the main priority, participant observation had been focused. According to Punch (2014), participant observation is the central data collection technique in ethnography which is helpful to study the assembly of people, their behaviors and relation (Punch, 2014). Therefore, observations on the two festivals in April and November were seriously applied. After trying to get experience from observation first, in-depth interview with key-informants were conducted. According to Punch (2014), it is a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings and definitions.

#### *Findings*

According to different nature of the two festivals, findings are presented by separating the category of *Thungran festival* (Water Festival) and *War Kywat-See mee* lights festival (Lights Festival).

##### *In Thungran Festival (Water Festival),*

Changes in traditional festivals' practices by cooperation of migrants and non-migrants

In this part, how to support by role of actors especially migrants, non-migrants and remittances brought by migrants are presented for this thesis intention which is to make analysis relations of role of actors, and how to effect on the village's *Thungran* festival. Then, what significant changes in *Thungran* festival's traditional practices are explained by course of migration effect in the current migration era.

#### *Role of migrants and non-migrants in Thungran Festival*

In the village's *Thungran* festival hold in April of 2016, people from Yangon returned back to the village for enjoying this cultural practice. When coming in the village, they joined to the particular social group, such as single group (a group which is composed by single people) and married group which is composed by married people) according to their current marital status and carried out responsibilities of community works together.

According to this situation, Mr. Pyae Phyto, the leader of Youth Literacy and Volunteering Network shared me like this:

Although we are away from the village, our membership status are still alive. Our family members gave the annual membership fees to the village committee. When we returned back to the village, we just joined to the particular groups. If we got married already, we would work with married group members. I'm still single. When I returned back to the village for *Thungran* festival, I was a member of single group again.. and, worked together with my other friends, and juniors.. I mean juniors are current young members of single group. We knew *Thungran* festival could be happened if even we, returnees involved for organizing activities.. I can say only village community could not organize the whole festival because it has a lot of activities (Field note, November 2016).

Instead of carrying out communal works separately by themselves, they did reintegrate to the village community by cooperation with non-migrants. By collaboration between migrants and non-migrants, they could manage all kinds of activities included in the festival and support the continuity of the village's *Thungran* festival.

Moreover, the role of migrants was recognized as key player for managing the whole procedure of the festival because they supported the festival by sharing financial costs, and ideas; suggestions. When supporting the village's festival by migrants, it should be seen as migrants network's contribution rather than individuals of migrants. There are three networks namely; Social Service Network; Youth Literacy and Volunteering Network; Youth Network composed of local Rakhine people from Za Yet Pyin village, and they are hosted in Yangon. The leaders of these networks connected with some focal people from the village, and discussed how to plan the festival. Since the earlier time before starting the festival, there had pre-discussions, and planning how to organize, and arrange the activities of the festival.

In accordance with how to support financially from these three networks for this festival, Mr. Pyae Phyoo explained me like this: We made discussions when gathering our group members. Our leaders of each group met and discussed about it how we support and help for organizing the village's festival. You know, our networks' funds gave the costs for making all uniforms for young women for contesting of playing water, and moreover, we contributed any cost for arranging the ceremony of paying homage to elders, and then arranged buying the gifts for elders by using our networks' funds. And then, we shared some costs for arranging the whole process of *Thungran* festival of the village (Field note, November 2016).

Furthermore, migrants' networks shared their ideas /suggestions along with financial assistance to non-migrants when arranging the activities of the festival. Mr. Kyaw Kyaw, a leader of Social Service Network shared me how they shared his ideas/ suggestions some adults from the village:

Before leaving Yangon, we proposed our ideas/ suggestion to village leaders, and some adults in advance. We let them know our plan about bringing new uniform dresses made by cottons, and asked them their opinion. We asked them to start collecting some natural products for building tent without waiting we coming in the village. ..we seriously discussed them about the special regulation for not allowing alcohol beverages, and other regulations ....We discussed other permissions, and other regulations with the village leaders... Then, I just shared some new updates to the networks' members in Yangon,, and requested them to behave responsively and obediently to the elders, and friendly to the younger generation.... (Field note, April 2016).

In accordance with these information, they had well-planning by connecting with non-migrants before leaving Yangon. Therefore, it can be regarded that importance of role of migrants was obvious for organizing the festival by the support of financial input, and sharing ideas, suggestions.

Reintegration of migrants, non-migrants and supporting by migrants/ migrants networks were very helpful for organizing the festival successfully. Importantly, some changes in local traditional practices were related with effort, and involvement of role of actors.

#### *Changes in traditional practices of Thungran festival*

In the village's *Thungran* festival, core essences such as dual contesting between two sexes of playing water and placing *loun* (which is a wooden rowboat) as a water container in contesting of playing water were still practiced. The ways of procedures of the village's festival could be different from other parts of Rakhine region because it can be said that some activities of the festival are localized based on the village's geographical location.

Through observation, and interview from the village's *Thungran* festival in April of 2016, some of traditional practices were starting to be changed by course of migration impact; roles of temporary returnees and remittances. Among changes in local traditional practices, some were newly things added without removing old norms and practices. However, a few local practices were totally weakened when they were not counted as the essential things in the current condition.

From the research during the period of *Thungran* festival days, the following significant changes in local traditional practices were shared.

#### *Declination of the local practice of carrying loun from sea side into the village*

In dual contesting of playing water, placing a *loun* as a water container could be seen as core essence of Rakhine *Thungran* festival. This village still preserves this symbol whenever organizing the village's *Thungran* festival. There was another local custom which was practiced by this local community since the past time till 2014. It was a traditional practice -carrying *loun* (which is a wooden rowboat) from sea side into the village by manpower. This traditional local practice was included in preparation process as an important activity before starting dual contesting of playing water. Significantly, this local traditional practice could not be seen in other different parts of

Rakhine, and it was only practiced by this village community. According to this local traditional practice, Mr. Pyae Phyoe, 28 years shared his past experience when participating this kind of community work in 2014;

When returning back to village in 2014, I involved this group of carrying boat. I was really excited. Manpower is really needed to carry it from sea side into the village. Without harmony, we can not carry it into the village because it is so heavy. We negotiated with the fisherman with some cash and borrowed it from him. When carrying it into the village, the villagers welcomed us and applauded by shouting and laughing a lot... (Field note, October 2016).

In this sense, this traditional local practice showed solidarity and cohesiveness of this community. The practice of carrying *lounge* (wooden rowboat) from sea side into the village can be recognized as local cultural identity as well as social harmony of community people, especially young men from the village.

However, this lovely local traditional practice was starting to be declined, and it could not be sustained in the village's festival in 2016. Instead of carrying used wooden rowboat from sea sided into the village, the new wooden boat were bought and installed as the water container in the contesting ground. This was one of the significant changes of traditional practices in the migration era.

The role of migrants was a key player for organizing the activities of the village's *Thungran* festival. Although they tried to sustain some local practices, they could not engage people participating this community work- carrying *lounge* from sea side into the village when they reconsidered time cost and availability of people for this practice. As an alternative way which can sustain the core essence of Rakhine *Thungran* festival, they suggested their idea – buying for a new wooden rowboat. Concerning with this, the chairman of Za Yet Pyin Social Service Network explained me like this:

We gave suggestion and asked the village community to buy new boat and set up there. We thought it is much better. We don't need to ask volunteers to carry it. It is matter there is a boat when playing water. (Field note, October 2016).

Community people gave more priority the core essence of placing boat in the temporary tent. On the other side, they did not think the importance of local practice- carrying *lounge* from sea side into the village's temporary tent by manpower. By adopting the new way, they do not need to think for the arrangement of carrying *lounge* from sea side into the village for future and asking volunteers for this communal work.

Today, this traditional local practice could not be seen again in this village. This practice was declined absolutely after adopting the new way for resolving their difficulties. As a key player for arranging the activities of the festival, temporary returnees could be said the original developer who initiated this idea, and engaged the villagers to adopt this new thing for considering time and availability of people.

#### *Declination of the local of practice of making Traditional Thungran food: Mhote Phat Htoke*

In the past, there was an old traditional local practice – making *Mhote Phat Htoke* during a period of *Thungran* festival days. Home-cooked *Mhote Phat Htoke* is a simple dessert which is wrapped by coconut-leaf and inside the small pyramid shape package is a small amount of jam made up palm-sugar and coconut meat. Before starting the welcome day of *Thungran* festival, the village girls of single group were assigned for making *Mhote Phat Htoke* for purposing contribution of food to people attending and encouraging dual contesting of playing water. This was their local traditional practice – contribution of *Mhote Phat Htoke* to people who came to watch and participate in this contesting of playing water and it was particularly practiced during a period of *Thungran* days. However, this traditional local practice could not be sustained in the migration era. Instead of contribution of *Mhote Phat Htoke*, other ready-made liquids were replaced for refreshment.

In accordance with declination of making *Mhote Phat Htoke*, the elder woman Mrs. Mya Mya, 65 years criticized like this:

I heard that they were not interested on it anymore. Girls are more interested how to show up beautifully in festival instead of making home-cooked dessert. I don't want to interfere in every affairs when I am now very old (Field note, October 2016).

Additionally, Mrs. Cho Cho, 32 years expressed her thought on declination of home-cooked *Thungran* food like this:

I knew this kind of dessert could not be made in this April. Returnees cannot organize at all. The current members from the single group are different, not like us. They are more interested in their study and other enjoyable activities. Although they have some of free time in *Thungran* period, they wanted to spend watching movie, or using internet through their phones (Field note, October 2016).

In accordance with opinion from these two women from married group, it is thought that value on this traditional practice was changed when young generation was not passionate on it. Also, some young adults especially the returnees even did not think that it is not kind of important procedure. When adopting the easiest way of contribution liquids, not only old local practice but also sense of “togetherness” for achieving the communal work were challenged in the current migration era.

*New practice of Uniform dressing by young girls when playing water*

During the middle days of the village's *Thungran* festival, the activity of dual contesting of playing water between two sexes was organized near to the village's library. This was another significant finding which was figured out in the activity of dual contesting of playing water. It was that the village girls and young women from Za Yet Pyin village played water by wearing uniform dressings which is made by cotton. In my observation, they were very unique among other young women from other villages.

This practice – wearing uniform dresses in dual contesting of playing water was not originally from the village, and it was brought by migrants returning back to the village for this festival. The chairman of migrant network who advocated the young members of the village to follow the new practice explained me about this:

We heard elders' complain on the young's fashion. I understood elders can not follow modernized designs with time. We group discussed about it seriously before coming to the village. We had idea to request these teenagers to wear neat and tidy, to wear traditionally. Also, our village is acted as host for competition of playing water; we wanted to show something different among other villages. I had idea how about to borrow this practice of wearing uniform. I noticed Burmese group traditional dance by wearing uniform in Water Festival in Yangon. We all liked this idea.... Some migrant women supported our idea/planning by making uniform dressing for young females in the village. .... When gathering migrants in Yangon before entering to the village, we encouraged young women to wear uniform dressing. We will also carry some dressing for village girls (teenagers). No matter what trend the girls follow, but we also wanted them to follow this regulation during this short time (Field note, October 2016).

This practice was purposed for showing decent and gentle characters of Za Yet Pyin village's girls. Also, it was intended for showing distinct and uniform of Za Yet Pyin village's *Thungran* festival. This practice was developed with the idea and suggestions from the returnees, especially some leaders from migrant networks.

However, another different opinion which is against this new practice was found out from group discussion with young girls. They had feeling of unsatisfying on dressing cotton uniforms although they showed themselves in uniform dress in the contesting activity. In fact, they had inconvenient conditions when they got wet because of playing water. One of the girls from group discussion with current single group member stressed the strength of jean pants and weakness of cotton uniform dressing like this; *I feel more confident and comfortable when I got splashing water. I don't really like this uniform because its skin is very thin and not suitable for competition of playing water.*

Therefore, the two different opinions on this new practice were figured out. The ethnic community giving priority to seniority, influence of senior or elder people were noted from these differences. However, this kind of new practice by course of temporary returnees showed uniqueness and creation of Za Yet Pyin village among other neighboring villages. Also, it can be seen as the newly developed practice without affecting on the old cultural practices negatively.

*New practice of using vehicle for going to neighboring village's pandals*

According to the festival's procedures, young people from single group went around the other villages for participating in the competition of playing water in the past. They walked around other neighboring villages with the musical group, and enjoyed in other villages' *Thungran* festival. However, this kind of attending together by walking for getting splashing water was declined when they chose the vehicle instead of walking. In the festival of 2016, this scene was figured out that a group of people taking a light truck and going around the other villages' pandals to enjoy the completion of playing water. And, this kind of new practice- visiting around the pandals by vehicle could be found out easily in the festival of urban regions. In accordance with adoption of urban practice in this village's festival, Mr. Pyae Phyoe explained me like this:

We did visit to other villages' pandal on walking with musical group under the sun. Destination is too far between one village and another. Sometimes, we were very tired and sick next day after walking for many hours under the sunlight in the summer. We just considered for female because they are not sure to be comfortable with walking when after staying in the cities so long. These children (teenagers/ younger generation of single group) prefer to go there by truck instead of walking there. We just discussed in our network to do like that we did visit to pandal by car in Yangon in *Thungran* period. We just adopted this pattern and ask the village's some married group members to hire a big truck. We supported it from our network and a few from the villagers (Field note, October 2016)

According to the information, local people adopted this kind of urban practice through time by consideration of cost of time and energy. Also, this kind of new practice was brought by temporary returnees' and applied in the village. In current migration era, the traditional local practice was declined when adopting new practice introduced by temporary returnees.

In *War Kywat-See mee lights Festival* (Light Festival),

Diffusion of traditional village management system in *War Kywat-See mee lights Festival*

#### *Role of Non-Migrants in War Kywat-See mee lights Festival*

In Za Yet Pyin village's *War Kywat-See mee lights festival*, people from Yangon could not return back to the village. Without the involvement of migrants, the whole procedure of the festival was arranged by non-migrants from the village. In fact, this festival took about a-two day, so there are no many activities included.

In real, the village has experiencing loss of human resources; especially young active leaders by course of rural dislocation. When this festival was recognized as the important ritual practice by Bhddhist society, the village community tried to involve for continuity of this ritual practices. Throughout the festival, role of adults member were more apparent than role of young members when they have the critical situation – less of young people. When migrants did not return back to the village during the period of the moths of October and November, *War Kywat-see mee lights festival's* most activities were arranged with adult members of married group people.

#### *Diffusion of responsibility between Single and Married Groups*

*War Kywat-See mee lights festival* was taken about two days without preparation day for general cleaning. On the first full moon night of the festival's days, community people from all villages assembled together in the religions space which is in the middle of Lay Taung Region. In that religious space, all people including elder and young people offered candle lights, and prayed there together. After that, Za Yet Pyin villagers organized this kind of ritual practice on the second night. At the ritual performance organized by Za Yet Pyin village, they arranged to make worship, and offer candle lights at their village's monastery compound.

Before starting Za Yet Pyin village's *War Kywat-see mee lights festival*, the village communal work such as general cleaning around the monastery's compound as well as the village's streets. This communal work could be said the very important preparation process. Since the past time, this communal work- general cleaning had been carried out by single group members. Therefore, it could be regarded as traditional communal work during the period of *War Kywat-see mee lights festival*.

According to the village's traditional social system, there were division of responsibilities in communal works accounting on social groups such as single group and married group. In the past, single group members took much responsibilities as volunteers in the village's social affairs. However, the functions of single group were weakened obviously after happening a lot of massive flow of young people migration. This kind of situation could be found out in general cleaning process in preparation period. According to the village's tradition, this communal work- general cleaning was traditionally assigned for the particular single group particularly in the past. Differently, it was found out that general cleaning was volunteered by married group people behalf of single group member in 2016. The reason why adults' members of married group carried out for the communal work on the behalf of young members was figured out form this interview with Mr. Khin Hla, a member of Married group:

Sometime, the community works interrupt their concentration on study, I believe. We want to see our children as educated people, to get higher education. I don't want them satisfying their lives by living in the island. ...Thus, I came to volunteer for general cleaning instead of my daughter. My child was not feeling happy because she was worried that she could be misunderstood by others when staying away from the community work. I reminded her to focus only her study. But, I allowed her go to offer the lights on the main day of the festival.. She went to offer some lights to the temple with her friends on the full moon night. (Field note, November, 2016).

By contrast to her opinion, Mr. Khin Maung, current married group member who had been a leader of single group shared his feeling on this kind of situation like this:

I feel that young are not matured enough. The community, even their parents, and elders acted them as children. They don't think themselves like a matured young people. When we were young, we acted differently. We went to school regularly, and tried to create personal time for chatting with our peers, gathering at the village' library with other single group members and involving some of community works. We did know well how to manage time. Thus, we were strong when studying in Yangon because we understood how to manage myself with self-regulation (Field note, October 2016).

By comparison between two different views, it was thought that there are arguments on diffusion of social structure and social groups in their responsibilities of community works. There can be particular people like Mrs.



Khin Hla who concern their children can lose their concentration on their studies when they take part in community works. Therefore, they involved themselves in this kind of communal work by taking the responsibility of single group members. Differently, some people like Mr. Khin Maung thought by recalling their experience that young should be active in their studies as well as other community activities if they are recognized as members of the community. And, they wanted to claim that it is kind of a way to practice themselves how to enhance their social skill, and their maturity.

Whatever, change in clear division of social structure of the village's traditional management system was figured out. Also, it can be analyzed that it was resulted when there were no enough young members in single group in that period. In other words, it is more apparent that less young members, especially young leaders as a consequence of outflow migration is challenging to the social structure of the village system. This negative effect could be found out when there was no involvement of migrants in *War Kywat-see mee lights* festival.

### Analytical Discussion and Conclusion

As this study focusing on the two traditional festivals, analytical discussion is presented by referring some findings from these two festivals, linking with the literature review.

In *Thungran* festival (Water festival), cooperation of migrants and non-migrants could manage all important activities of the festival, and maintain core essence of Rakhine *Thungran* festival, by arranging dual contesting between two sexes, and placing *loun* (wooden rowboat) as a water container. The significant thing is that some practices were declined by adopting new ways after leaving the old ways. It could be figured out in these two things such as “declination of the local practice of carrying *loun* from sea side into the village” and “declination of the local practice of making traditional *Thungran* food: *Mote Phat Htoke*”. Another things is that some practices were introduced in this village community by bringing urban practices and applying them in the local context. It could be found out in these two things such as “new practice of uniform dressing by young girls, and new practice of vehicle for going to neighboring villages’ pandals.

When analyzing these changes, role of migrants, and non-migrants networks are main players for happening these kinds of. According to the role of organizer, they just shared financial costs for arranging activities. It could be thought that this festival was relied on financial support from migrants (individuals) and networks (collective). Therefore, some amount of financial contribution; economic remittance is migrants sending back to money, goods into their home community (Adams, 2009) from migrants could be seen as tool for generating these activities of the festival. Moreover, migrants supported not only financial elements but also their ideas, suggestions for arranging the festival. Through the leaders of migrants’ networks, they just sent social remittances (individual, collective) which is defined that transmission of ideas, behaviors (normative structures), making actions (practice) through social capitals between host and destination (Levitt, 1998). According to definition on social capital by Levitt (1998), it can be recognized as agents which has itself the quality of social remittances.

In analysis on what changes, and how changes on traditional local practices in relation with migration, and its consequences, it could be argued that quality of social remittances (individual, collective) can make to change, or maintain traditional practices. According to Levitt and Lamba (2010), social remittances have both qualities such as modification and reintegration between receiving and sending communities. Thus, it would be argued that the village’s *Thungran* festival was continued with the role of economic, and social remittances from migrants/ network. More importantly, some core essences, and values could be maintained by course of quality of social remittances. Also, due to quality of social remittances, some practices become changed by adopting new things, and giving up the old things. From *Thungran* festival of Za Yet Pyin village, this argument is issued that role of social remittances is not tangible, however its effects are severe and huge.

In *War Kywat-See mee lights* festival of the village, role of non-migrants became the main key player for arranging the whole procedure of the ritual practice when it is noted that migrants returned back to the village during that period. More importantly, the village community coping with the real situation after massive flow of migration could be figured out in this festival. In *War Kywat- See mee lights* festival, there was diffusion of responsibilities between single group and married group when carrying out general cleaning during preparation period. It was happened when married group members volunteered this work behalf of single group members although this work was traditionally taken by single group members. As there are less number of young active leaders, the village community encounters not enough active and energetic people whenever organizing the communal activities. It could be seen as negative effect of migration to the sending community. According to King and Vullnetari (2006), this argument was addressed that young / young adults’ migration can disrupt social and kinship system of the community. From *War Kywat- See mee lights* festival of Za Yet Pyin village, this argument is launched that diffusion of social structure was due to less young members in single group. In other view, it is one of the threat challenging to traditional village management system.

In an academic field, migration is acknowledged as an important issue as clearly shown by a large number of migration studies (see for example Hare, 1999; Junge et al., 2015; Malik, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2015; Fan and Stark, 2008; Wouterse and Taylor, 2008; CungLian Hu, 2015; AungMyo Min, 2015; Saw Yu May, 2015). However, there are no many studies presenting relation between traditional practices and migration. In academic field, it is very rare to study this kind of dimension.

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**Ethnic Identity and Language: Can Languages be “Culture-Bearing Units” for Ethnic Identification? Through the Study of the Northern Thailand’s Hmong Case**

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**Abstract**

Since the mid-1960s, the issue of "ethnic identification" had been debated among scholars, in particular between Raul Naroll (1964) and Micheal Moerman (1965), that "culture-bearing units," such as language and cultural practice, are not appropriated for identifying the distinction between ethnic groups. "Is language such a critical element of demarcation for ethnic identification?" "Why does language is so important for identifying and maintaining the Hmong ethnic identity in your field sites?" Language is one of the most significant markers of ethnicity, rather than being an inevitable 'culture-bearing-unit' for ethnic identification. In other words, language alone cannot be the demarcating unit for ethnic identification, not even with some of the other factors which Naroll (1964) introduces. The ideal way to demarcate ethnic identification and delimit ethnic boundaries is with those crucial culture-bearing-units and the ethnic people themselves, but the demarcation of ethnic units (or ethnic identification) is complex and nowadays it is quite political. I will discuss this point of view further and will introduce Hansen's comparative analysis (1999) on the ethnic groups of the Naxi and Tai cases in the southwest China as pieces of evidence for this discussion. This case is especially applicable because one of the compared ethnic groups is of the Tai tribe. Thai Lue originated from the examined region of southwest China, and the tribe is a focus of the debate between Naroll and Moerman about the 'culture-bearing-unit,' whether language and six other culture-bearing-units can be demarcating units for ethnic identification or not. Especially, a mother tongue for an ethnic group is the most influential principle and element for ethnic identification because it entails shared histories and as cultural repository containing emotions, not just phonological or other linguistic traits. One of the most important roles of language is delivering information from a person to a person, and generation to generation. But mother tongue has another important function that is transmitting ethnic identity to the next generations. In this sense, mother tongue is the core element of delimitation of ethnic identification even though it is not the only and absolute element for the process. Through this study, we will find that while culture-bearing-units are crucial ethnic demarcating units, the ideal type of the ethnic demarcation is by the ethnic people themselves rather than by scholars and outsiders. As we scrutinize the dynamics and process of ethnic identification and demarcation, we will find how complex and political the process is. And based on this discussion, we will practically study language and ethnic identity related issues in the Hmong villages in Chiang Rai, Thailand. And furthermore, we will address script-related issues and power relations between the state policy and the community, as well as the Hmong villages' negotiations on language and education while they cope with hidden oppression and conflict on mother tongue-based multilingual education.

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*Keywords*— Ethnicity (Ethnic Identity), Language (Mother Tongue)

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**Introduction**

The range of ethnic identification is quite extensive, and even its analysis can be seen as a political act because of its sensitivity and lack of agreement among the stakeholders about the ethnic demarcating process (Moerman, 1965). Thus, it requires a thoughtful and prudent approach. Raoul Naroll states that the six criteria for demarcating ethnic entities are "trait distributions, territorial contiguity, political organization, language, ecological adjustment, and local community structure" (1964: 284, 296; Moerman, 1965: 1215). For these delimiting criteria, Moerman raises issues about three main shortcomings of "culture-bearing units." First, "criteria such as language, political organization, and culture do not correlate completely; the units delimited by one criterion do not coincide with the units delimited by another" (1965: 1215). Second, if 'culture' is defined as "a pattern, a set of plans, a blueprint for living (Naroll, 1964: 288), then units delimited by combinations of these criteria, including the combination which Naroll suggests, are only occasionally and accidentally culture-bearing units" (Ibid.). Third, "it is difficult to discern discontinuities of language, culture, polity, society, or economy with sufficient clarity to draw boundaries" (Ibid.). In this reasoning, Moerman challenges that "the delimitation of ethnic entities is problematic, especially, where continuously inhabited but not divided into either sharp ecological zones or strong and durable states" (Ibid.).

Moerman introduces Garvin's statement to propose that language and cultural practice are not appropriate for demarcating ethnic identification. "It becomes quite difficult to use objective characteristics of language and cultural

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practice for determining where one entity stops and another, its neighbor, begins" (Garvin, 1958: 125 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1216). On the difficulty of using political organizations to delimit an entity, Nadal's opinion is that the demarcation of ethnic identification by culture-bearing units (Naroll, 1964) ignores the common phenomenon of "intermediate zones" (1974: 158 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1216), even though, in modern society, its physical boundaries may not be essential. In addition to cultural dissimilarities, especially for dialects and cultural traits, Moerman gives (1965: 1216) the following discussion list: Ember (1963: 235-6), Capell (1952: 111), Fortes (1945: 14), Goody (1962: 3), Hogbin & Wedgwood (1953: 242), Nadel (1947:4), Read (1954: 7), and Tajfel that 'social identity' is based on group (ethnic) membership (1974, 1981).

*Fundamental questions for demarcating and asserting ethnic identity- Inconvenient facts of ethnic identification*

- Problem: 1. Cultures change over time, which means that ethnicity can be changed. In other words, ethnicity is impermanent in that individuals, communities, and areas change the ways they are identified. Then, how can they be identified, and what are the criteria to measure and identify the items which are 'culture-bearing units' forming the ethnic identity? Is it worth identifying them if ethnicity changes?

- Problem 2. Even though ethnicity changes as cultures change, there is an endless attempt to identify themselves among various local ethnic groups in multiethnic societies. For ethnographers, ethnologists, and governments, this is an important issue.

- Problem 3. If the demarcation and labeling of ethnic groups are sensitive and political, how can it be dealt with objectively? For example, "the original Thai tribes are political" (Nadel: 1942; Schapera, 1955 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1222).

- Problem 4. Who are the researchers? Whose perspective do they use - that of the ethnic group people themselves, or of outside scholars, or of freelancer government census employers? (emic and etic views)

- Problem 5. The changes occur as a process over a long time, so how can they be observed? Sometimes the process of cultural and ethnic identity change takes several generations. And there are probably intermediate zones and people in the midst of that process, which results in in-between people. According to Cole, (1945) and Eggan (1941), it is hard to trace changes in culture and society. Historically, "within Thailand itself all such change is toward the language, culture, and identification of the politically dominant people which, for the last 50 to 100 years, has been the Siamese" (Archer 1888: 13; Kingshill, 1960: 218-220; Moerman 1964b: 43-47 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1222). The Lue have not been exempt from this transition, including other Lue groups of people (Chinese originated Tai tribes) whose backgrounds were same as the Lue in Northern Thailand but lived in the central or southern region of Thailand (Damrong 1918/19: 2 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1222).

- Problem 6. If the change of ethnic identification is conscious or its emblems intelligible, we need to explore the principles which underlie how persons go about choosing and influencing others to choose an ethnic identity. And when they label themselves, and for others, the labels of ethnic classification are not the same as distinctive features (Moerman: 1223). So, the following question arises: "To what extent may the criteria claimed by members differ from the diagnostics by which outsiders recognize them?" (Ibid.). They have ways of folk nomenclatures, and we must know those ways.

- Problem 7. In Thailand, ethnic identification goes along with labeling. Notably, it uses the names of states and ethnic entities. However, "sociopolitical integration are given the same term: myang, a term also used for the capitals of such units" (Archer, 1888: 10; Leach 1954: 122 cited in Moerman, 1965). That's why classification of the original tribes of Thailand is political.

**The Case of the Lue in Thailand (The Example Group in Tthe Debate)**

The Lue originated in China, and their migration to Southeast Asia first started during the 8th and 10th centuries according to Thai historians. The 'Lue' people are descendants of the Tai tribe of China. There are many people in Thailand with Chinese ancestry. One describes himself in the paper as 'Chinese mixed with Lao (Jek pon Lao).' In the present-day, Thai are Chinese mixed with Lao (Chaloemtiarana, 2014; Barker & Phongpaichit, 2009). This statement seems quite radical as it "insinuates that the Thai are no longer a well-defined race but an ethnicity composed of many races and cultures" (Chaloemtiarana, 2007). The biggest and most influential group are Chinese Thais. Thai Lue originates from the same ancestors - the Chinese Tai. The majority of the Chinese Tai came to the Thai region between the 8th and 10th centuries, though there have been many recent immigrants from China within the past 200 years. However, as with the other Chinese Tai, the recent immigrants also mixed with the Lao people in Thailand. They were willing to give up their ethnic history and cultural heritage to assimilate into the mainstream, and they did it. The latest Tai Chinese came around 100 years ago to avoid oppression from the communists. But they have not mixed much and have kept their ethnic identity, not as Tai Chinese but as Lue (Thai Lue in Thailand; Shan in Myanmar, etc.) and they have remained a distinctive ethnic minority group. In this context, for the mainstream Thai

people and the Thai government, demarcating ethnic units and entities probably does not mean much. It is seen in the context of social, educational assimilation policy and its implementation.

There are many other Chinese-background ethnic groups in Thailand, such as the Aka and Lisu. Hmong is another one of these groups. Those that have remained as ethnic minority groups in Thailand are often following their own will and choices. For them, preserving their ethnicity has been a crucial and valuable decision. The descendants of Chinese who came earlier and assimilated into the mainstream are now at the center of the mainstream society in Thailand.

#### Views of 'Ethnic Identity' in Different Theoretical Frameworks

Naroll introduces a common thread which runs through the preceding statements, viewing the 'tribe' or 'culture' or 'society' as a basic culture-bearing unit (1964: 283-291). For example, Reichard (1938: 413) refers to the 'tribe' as the basic culture-bearing unit, which is understood as "an economically independent group of people speaking the same language and uniting to defend themselves against outsiders," and also as "a closed society, with laws and morals applying only to its members." Radcliffe-Brown (1940a: xiii-xiv) refers to Australian aboriginals as "divided into some hundreds of separate tribes; each with its own language, organization, customs, and beliefs." He also proposes that a tribe can exist in "any convenient locality of suitable size" and that it is "the structural system as it appears in and from that region, for instance, the network of relations connecting the inhabitants amongst themselves and with the peoples of other regions" (1940b: 4-5). Leach (1954) also favors the 'region,' and Driver's "regional study" is also related to territorial groups (1956: 15). Fortes (1940: 239) opines that the term 'tribe' is "a well-defined political or cultural entity differentiated from like units." Fortes especially mentions that 'the difficulty of using such a concept in discussing the precise boundary-territorial, linguistic, cultural or political' (cited in Naroll, 1964: 284). Evans-Prichard (1940: 23) as well as Fortes mention 'the concept of society' as the culture-bearing unit. Murdock (1953: 478-479; Naroll, 1964: 284) suggests defining a culture as "including all local cultural variants exhibited by communities within a particular geographical area which speak mutually intelligible languages and have essentially similar forms of economic adjustment." Ember takes "a continuously distributed population whose members speak a common language or lingua franca which is different from the dominant languages of any neighboring societies" as his sampling of a culture-bearing unit (1963; *Ibid.*). Whiting (1954: 526) recommends 'the local community' as the basic unit of comparative study. And Nadel (1951: 187) suggests the "political group," and Schapera (1956: 8-10) mentions "the political unit."

According to Naroll (1964), ethnic unit classifications can be figured through detecting similarities among societies that depended on their relative geographic contiguity and overall cultural connections, and political organization. In his criterion, language is considered the essential culture bearing-unit. However, none of the above-mentioned scholars think that language or the speech community alone can be relied on to define the basic culture-bearing unit. Furthermore, they don't agree on what else needs to be considered. Naroll considers and applies language as the threshold criterion for ethnic identification. Regarding difficulties with the 'culture-bearing unit,' he concludes that 'there are serious practical difficulties. First, defining and measuring intelligibility of dialects, and second, marking boundaries along linguistic continuums, and third, classifying multilingual speakers.' Above, Naroll mentioned that scholars also equally conceive of language as the basic culture-bearing unit. (Naroll, 1964: 291). As a new alternate or complementary concept of the culture-bearing unit, Naroll proposes the 'cultunit' for use in cross-cultural surveys. Here, the "cultunit" is defined as a group of territorially contiguous people who not only are domestic speakers of mutually intelligible dialects but also belong to the same state or contact group" (*Ibid.*).

#### Context of the Hmong case in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand

Although "Thai was declared "the national language of Thailand in State Convention number 9, promulgated 24 June 1940 during the regime of Field Marshal Plaek Pibunsongkhram, most language decisions in modern Thailand are based on unwritten assumptions" (Udom 2009: 90). "Language is not mentioned in the current Thai constitution, and most Thai policymakers feel that the most important languages for the country are Thai and English" (*Ibid.*).

According to the Ethnologue (<https://www.ethnologue.com/>) there are 72 languages in Thailand, including 3 sign languages. Among them, there are 51 indigenous languages, and 21 languages are nonindigenous languages. However, the right to mother tongue education is not recognized in Thailand.

'The 1999 Education Act guarantees the right of all children, without discrimination, to a quality education. A cabinet declaration in 2005 reaffirmed the right of all children, including non-Thai children living in Thailand, to receive an education. Furthermore, the government announced the extension of a mandatory free education from 12 years to 15 years in 2009' ([www.unicef.org/thailand/education.html](http://www.unicef.org/thailand/education.html)).

The majority of the Hmong population in Thailand came from Laos when the Laos civil war happened. The elder generation of those over 60 years participated in the Vietnam War too. They stood on the American side and fought

against the communists. When the Americans left the area, they were left behind. Many of them could immigrate to America, Canada, Australia and even to France. However, many others waited to go to those countries but were not able to, so they left Laos and came to Thailand as refugees. In a Hmong refugee camp, some people came to the area near the mountain Phu Chi Fa, including villages such as Huai Han and Huai Khu, but some of them still hoped to go abroad to those countries. For this reason, in the Huai Khu village, some people never got Thai citizenship. Some of the residents of Huai Khu fought against the Thai government as members of the communist resurgent. Due to this historical background, the majority of the Huai Khu school parents are against the local school's education policies and strategies related to mother-tongue-based bilingual education.

In contrast to Huai Khu, Huai Han villagers came from a refugee camp and settled there with the arrangement of the Thai government. That is why Huai Han Hmong people accepted the government assimilation policy and Thai script for the Hmong orthography easily. Huai Khu villagers' opposition is mostly about the script that Foundation of Applied Linguistics (FAL) and the school chose for the instructional language, and for the mixture of their language with Thai. FAL chose the Thai script for the mother tongue orthography instead of the Roman script. In the area, much of the population is Christian, and the church uses the Hmong language with the Roman script. Using the Hmong language with a Romanized script is a symbol of connection to the diaspora of Hmong people all over the world. For that reason, people prefer to use the Roman script. FAL and the schools' strategy for bilingual education is assimilation so that the Hmong people become an integrated part of the country, Thailand, while maintaining their own cultural heritage.

As we see in the case of the Hmong, the choice of orthography is very political and, therefore, ethnic demarcation is also impacted by political power (selection), not only by the ethnic people themselves. The following cases of Chinese ethnic groups also show the impact of politics on the demarcation of ethnic identification.

#### Literature Reviews and Discussion for Demarcation of Ethnic Identity

In my opinion, even though language entails many aspects of ethnic groups' traits including ethnic identity, history, and culture, it cannot be the only commonly recognized culture-bearing unit. However, I would like to further examine language as a particularly significant ethnic marker.

For further discussion, we need to define 'ethnic identity.' There is a common definition that "ethnic identity is an affiliative construct, where an individual is viewed by themselves and by others as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group" (Trimble & Dickson, 2005). According to Phinney, "ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one's identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group" (2003: 63). Based on these definitions, we will discuss the issue of demarcating ethnic identification.

Starting from 1922, the philosopher and sociologist Max Weber stated that 'ethnic groups' especially emphasized a subjective element in the definition that was previously unseen. He "differentiated between racial and ethnic identity by proposing that a blood relationship was necessary for racial identification but not for ethnic identification. He defined ethnic groups as, ...those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation; furthermore it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists" (Trimble & Dickson, 2005).

People are aware of their ethnic identity both consciously and unconsciously. Likewise, they behave and practice it consciously and unconsciously. Therefore, the psychological aspect is an essential element in defining ethnic identity (Foucault). It is closely related to language because when people think, their thoughts are formed with language, and are also expressed and understood with language.

How do the Hmong people think about their own ethnic identity? I asked them, "What is Hmong-likeness? Is it important to be aware of being Hmong, and why so?"

As a part of a survey done among the Hmong of northern Thailand in 2016, the Hmong people answered the question "what is Hmong-likeness?". Most of the Hmong people pointed out that speaking and understanding of their mother tongue is the most important element in indicating 'Hmong-likeness.' The next most common answer was engagement in Hmong cultural practices and rituals, which are performed in the mother tongue. In their opinion, a person who loses their language loses their Hmong identity. When applied to the whole ethnic group, loss of the mother tongue (language death) does not only mean a loss of ethnic identity, but also the extinction of the life of a culture. However, in the survey, most of the people were sure that language death wouldn't occur. In Huai Khu village, a leader mentioned: "it would never happen, but if it did, we would no longer be Hmong." Indeed, languages, particularly those that are ethnic minorities, are closely related to ethnic identity.

My thesis analysis is influenced by Barth's notion of the persistence of ethnic groups in complex situations such as a nation-wide movement of assimilation via boundary maintenance and issues of individual and political power (1969). Barth especially emphasizes ethnic boundaries in defining ethnic groups, as they contain units of shared history that the members of the ethnic group have as a common past. Barth (1984, 1989) uses the term of 'social organization' as another idea in the importance of boundaries of ethnic groups. Despite fluid memberships and different geographical locations and citizenships, they know who are Hmong because they use the same language or dialect, and have many shared cultural traits. For example, the Hmong funeral ritual is a unique cultural ritual in which they sing their regrets about life, unrealistic and emotional wishes, ancestral philosophies and worldviews, and so on. For the Hmong, cultural practices such as the new year festival are also necessary in forming Hmong-likeness. This fits the view of cultural ecology that, as Barth recognizes, ecology can change over time, changing the group's culture without destroying the integrity of the group. As Stephen Cornell states (1988), the cultural elements of ethnic expression are also closely related to the clarification of ethnic boundaries and formation of ethnic identity. They are a historically shared manner of expression. Among the Hmong, for example, 'Hmoob' identifies the Hmong people themselves, 'Suav' identifies the mainstream Chinese, and 'Map' is used for other ethnic people in China (at the Hmong Conference 2017). Cornell mentions that "identity is both a prism and tool through which people interpret and conceptually construct the world" (1996: 267). In other words, ethnic identity is used to analyze and interpret the data and phenomena of neighboring groups making boundaries, which is essential to the maintenance of their ethnic identity among other ethnic groups (1998).

An important phenomenon is that these rituals and gatherings are all connected to the use of the mother tongue. When I checked whether the funeral ritual could be performed in another language or not, all of the Hmong people said that it would not be possible because indescribable emotions permeate their mother tongue. (However, according to Dr. Prasit at Chiang Mai University, shamans' incantations of the Hmong traditional funeral rituals are performed in ancient Chinese or mixed with Hmong words but not in pure Hmong. The Hmong traditional religion is "an assemblage of many belief systems, based mostly on ancestor worship, Confucianism and animism. Paying respect to ancestors and honoring them on important occasions are traditions that are likely borrowed from the Chinese, while beliefs in the existence of nature spirits are local influences that exist among rural inhabitants of China and Southeast Asia". (<https://wenku.baidu.com/view/461c8c19227916888486d7c3.html?re=view>)) In this sense, without the mother tongue, defining and forming an ethnic identity is impossible.

As for ethnic boundaries, Barth (1969: 9) defines ethnic units as "aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture, and interconnected differences that distinguish each such discrete culture from all others." However, Barth's critical focus, his approach to ethnicity, is on "the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Ibid.:15). It implies that these ethnic boundaries are neither concrete nor absolute, yet people persist. And people, ideas, and customs flow between groups that are able to maintain separate identities (Wagner: 13). Barth's concept of 'ethnic boundaries' is useful for demonstrating how ethnic identity works in a globalized post-modern society. For Barth, 'the culture within the group is irrelevant to the status of ethnicity as an entity': "the sharing of a common culture is generally given central importance.... culture in the definition of an ethnic group requires all members of one such group to exhibit the definitional culture traits, which is usually not the case (1969: 11-13). Barth (1969) views cultural institutions as being ecologically based. "Ecology" here includes all of the external circumstances with which group members must contend. "This means the boundary itself, by defining who is in the group and who is not, is part of the ecology... and he sees the boundary as primary to the group and the only option for group definition. Language is recognized as a means of ethnic identification, or boundary maintenance." (Ibid.: 14).

Barth (1969: 10-11) defines ethnic groups as "categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves..." and gives four identifying features of an ethnic group: biologically self-perpetuating, sharing fundamental values, comprising a field of communication, and having a self-identifying membership recognized by others as distinguishable from similar groups. In the case of the Hmong, the transnational location of groups fit these criteria well, and Barth's definition allows for the characteristic membership flexibility of the Hmong diasporas (Wagner: 15).

In this sense, learning and speaking Hmong is being used as an ethnic boundary marker in transnational locations. Thus, in Hmong mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), students perceive that the language and the process of learning it are a part of their valuable heritage in one way or another in their region of Chiang Rai province or wherever else they may be. For a more distinct definition, Barth focuses on the concept of shared history as an ethnic boundary unit. According to this idea, members need to have a common past. This is especially important for the boundaries of ethnic groups as units of social or political organizations. This fits in with Barth's original concept of culture as a response to ecology, recognizing that ecology can change over time, changing a group's culture without destroying the integrity of the group (1984, 1989). Based on these criteria, people in transnational living locations, despite having fluid membership, still share many cultural traits and are quite sure they know who has what ethnic identity.



As for Cornell's definition of identity, he states that 'identity is both a prism and tool through which people interpret and conceptually construct the world' (1996: 267). This explains how cultural elements of ethnic groups are part and parcel of ethnic maintenance and express ethnic boundaries. He also emphasizes 'putative kinship' (shared descent) or common provenance as an important part of membership in an ethnic group (Cornell 1966: 268-269). "This element of the definition is especially applicable to the Hmong with the constant tracing of blood and renegotiation of blood quantum" (Wagner: 22).

*The Evidential Case of the Chinese Tai (The Lue's Ethnic Root Group in China)*

Hansen (1999) in 'Lessons in Being Chinese' discusses the Chinese government's state education policy which they have applied to all minority groups and regions for their aim for education: 'assimilation.' They have intended to apply it uniformly to let the minority people assimilate into the mainstream. Just as the Thai government only acknowledges 62 out of over 75 ethnic groups, the Chinese government recognizes only 55 out of 275 indigenous ethnic (language) groups (Ethnologue (<https://www.ethnologue.com/country/CN>)). Likewise, in current global situations, ethnic identification is controlled by government and policy rather than by the ethnic people and the groups themselves. The culture-bearing-units such as language, cultural traits, etc. are not as influential as Naroll suggests (1964) either.

According to Hansen's research, assimilation policy is much more successful in some cases than in others. For example, in Lijiang area of Yunnan province, elite members of the 'Naxi' ethnic group have a centuries-old relationship with the Chinese state educational systems as a way to social mobility and have continued this tradition through Confucius education and under the Communist rule in the modern era. They even enthusiastically participate in the present system, using education to gain official and professional positions. In contrast to the Naxi's case, the Tai ethnic group in the Sipsong Panna area of the same province have made different choices in many ways as a separate kingdom until 1950. For example, the Tai have preserved their own script for their ethnic language and have instituted a separate educational system which is run by Theravada Buddhist monasteries. This schooling system is still the preferred school system for many of the Tai people. Here, what I see in a comparison of Thailand and PRC's education policy for ethnic minorities, is that standardized and homogenized state education aims to produce loyalty to the state and the central government, and national cultural integration through a "one language and one country" policy.

The state government's belief is that education in itself is capable of instilling identification with the state in students. However, in the case of China, the ethnic minority education policy, which aims at assimilation, ironically often stimulates ethnic minority people's interest in strengthening their ethnic identity. In these cases, the government's political process and decisions are the primary demarcating sources.

According to Hansen's study, the case of Chinese minorities is more explicit than the cases seen in Thailand, though the issues of education policy are sensitive matters in both situations. This was seen in the case of the Chinese Tai in the southwest autonomous prefecture bordered by Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar and Laos. So, there is an obvious conflict between the government and minority groups relating to the development of minority languages and education, especially bilingual education.

There are different views on the purpose of education, for example, 'in the three counties in Sipsong Panna, teachers, school administrators, and members of the Bureau of Education were roughly divided between a majority who saw the teaching of Tai as a temporary necessity and a minority who wanted expansion and improvement of Tai-language instruction in primary schools, in examinations, and in secondary education' (Hansen, 1999: 129).

Because of the Chinese's government's policy on ethnic minority groups, the Naxi assimilated into the mainstream cultural system and adopted the Confucian education that the government provided. In contrast, the communist Chinese government accepted and cooperated with the Tai group's strategy, thereby avoiding large-scale revolts against the final abolition of royal titles and the traditional Tai government and political system in Sipsong Panna. The Tai name of the kingdom was adopted by the Chinese government as the name of the new autonomous prefecture in 1953, showing that the government sought to avoid major conflicts with the Tai in the early stages of the PRC. On the other hand, the Tai's adoption of standard Chinese and the bilingual school system through bilingual education aided their chances of furthering their education, getting jobs, and receiving economic benefits. For the Tai, keeping their orthography and mother tongue by using bilingual education was a successful negotiation strategy.

The main argument here realizes that the Han and the government of China have ideals about minority groups found within the framework of the Chinese state and constitution, notably that all minzu (minority people) have equal rights to develop their language, maintain their cultural traditions, and believe in their own religions. This is the foundation of communist ideology and hegemony. However, in reality, the Chinese education fosters in many students a perception of themselves as members of a "backward" people simply because it denies the usefulness of the minorities' own languages, histories, religions, forms of education, customs, marriage practices, values, ethics, and so forth. (Hansen, 1999: 106)



*Identity and Multilinguality as A Distinct of Negotiation with the Government*

While discrimination and stereotyping exists for minorities in China, some of the minorities in the northeastern China still produce better academic performance and enrollment rates into universities. This is because of effective multilingual education. For example, Korean Chinese minority students learn through Korean, Chinese and English instruction, and their academic status is much higher than other groups including the majority Han students.

In Thailand, there are also bilingual education cases using two languages such as Thai and English. However, this is a case of using two prestigious languages among middle or higher-class Thai, similar to the previously mentioned Chinese and Korean, and Chinese and English bilingual schooling in private sectors. This cannot serve as a good model of bilingual education for ethnic minority people because a minority language has no prestige for practice and few practical benefits to its preservation in comparison with prestigious languages. Rather, these situations and comparisons reinforce the minorities' feelings and social positions of inferiority and 'backwardness'. In this context, the Thai language means 'superior' and 'unifying,' though the government does allow one level of adaptation by permitting the Hmong and some other minority language groups to use their mother tongue as an instructional language in the process of assimilation.

*Why is language so important for maintaining ethnic identity?*

Berger and Luckmann describe the function of language in a social construction in the following way: "Language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations. To take the most important item of socialization, language appears to the child as inherent in the nature of things... Language also typifies experiences, allowing me to subsume them under broad categories in terms of which they have meaning not only to myself but also to my fellowmen" (1967: 35-39)

As Berber and Luckmann state above, language has a key role in maintaining and identifying ethnic identity. In the case of the Hmong in Chiang Rai Province, one of the critical causes of their ethnic identity crisis is the government's policy of assimilation. The Hmong language has been forbidden in educational institutions. The following questions give answers to the question "Why is language so important for identifying and maintaining Hmong ethnic identity in your field sites?"

"Why does the government still hesitate to give ethnic minority groups the right to use their mother tongue as an instructional language at school?" "Why does the government let them remain in a backward state?" "How do the Hmong, as an ethnic minority language group, cope with the government's education and language policy?" "What are the main issues to consider in this matter?" And "How do they negotiate this matter with the government?"

As a subdominant ethnic minority group, the Hmong have tried to preserve and practice their unique cultural rituals with external differences from the mainstream culture in the language used and clothing worn. This is a kind of underground or hidden form of increasing negotiation power against the mainstream and the government's oppression. If participating in those cultural practices and rituals becomes an effective learning process, it also becomes a process of making 'cultural power' which is an influential type of underground resistance in the power relations. Participating in cultural practices and rituals can also have an influence on children or learners through the effect of the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). Thus, resistance occurs not only by maintaining the ethnic identity and mother tongue, but also by preserving and participating in cultural practices and rituals. These social and cultural activities and social and individual interactions occur using the mother tongue. Therefore, the language (mother tongue) is essential; it is the key tool of resistance and negotiation in preserving the ethnic identity. In the history of the Hmong, since leaving China they have been through various instances of war and immigration. But they have kept most of their cultural knowledge and language intact. This means that they have fought and struggled with many internal and external factors that have attempted to change their ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

*Conclusion*

Ethnic identity refers to a collectively possessed ethnic consciousness. It is constructed in relationships among people of the same ethnicity who claim that they have shared histories, culture, and a common background language, even if they cannot speak it. A substantial foundation for ethnic identity is that of individual identity. Individual identity is implicitly both psychological and political in nature because people construct their identity according to their preference. They choose where they want to belong and how they want to be recognized. Due to this intention, their ethnic identity can be constructed, and languages can be selected. In this way, the process of ethnic identification or demarcation is complex.

There are certainly culture-bearing-units such as language, cultural practice, etc., but the ultimate decision makers are the people themselves. The process of forming ethnicity or ethnic identity normally takes generations; however, currently, governments intervene in ethnic delimiting processes with political motivations as we previously

discussed as a micro level's evidence, such as Naxi and Tai tribes in Yunnan Province, China. And as macro level's evidence, the government of China and Thailand control ethnic delimitation directly and indirectly, for instance, according to the Ethnologue (<https://www.ethnologue.com/>), there are 72 languages in Thailand. Among them, there are 51 indigenous languages, and 21 languages that are nonindigenous languages. However, the right to mother tongue education is not recognized in Thailand. They have intended to apply it uniformly to let the minority people assimilate into the mainstream; have only acknowledged 62 out of over 75 ethnic groups. In the case of China, the government recognizes only 55 out of 275 indigenous ethnic (language) groups (Ethnologue(<https://www.ethnologue.com/country/CN>)).

Typically, governments intervene in the process of the ethnic delimitation with the aim of political integration, for example, with the assimilation policy of 'one country and one language.' In other words, the governments' hidden, invisible policy and agenda influence the process. Another issue is that assimilation-one language, one country-attempts to construct another identity and force it on ethnically powerless groups. Then, the powerless ethnic groups become 'in-between people' who become new type of people neither like the previous group nor like the mainstream people. Here we can find power relations and negotiation related to language and education policy on ethnic minority groups between the government and the ethnic minority groups.

According to Gramsci's view, this is hegemony reflecting the particular values and ideologies of their exponents (cf. Woolard, 1998 (Woolard points out, "in liberal democratic societies, the misrecognition, or revalorization of the indexical character of language may make discrimination on linguistic grounds publicly acceptable where the corresponding ethnic or racial discrimination is not" (1998).); Blommaert, 1999). It is simply a matter of ideology. Through this ideology, dominant ethnic groups reinforce the hegemony of the languages they speak within modern nation-states (May, 2001: preface). However, as May mentions, 'ideology is not the sole preserve of minority language proponents, although it is often painted as such' (Ibid.)

As for the relations between language and ethnic identity, Bourdieu introduces 'pedagogic authority' which ultimately needs to be seen as a form of 'symbolic violence.' This is especially true when it is expressed through the language of the classroom, which imposes a certain way of viewing the world. This is contained in the instructional language; it inculcates a person or culture's "arbitrary instruments of knowledge and expression of society" (1982/1991b: 168). Hmong ethnic and local knowledge exists mostly in the form of the vernacular; for example, ethnic rituals, practices, and festivals are all performed in Hmong. Therefore, validating the mother tongue is the way of elevating their ethnic identity and a way of preserving their ethnic knowledge. In contrast, making them feel inferior because of their language is the most effective way of discouraging ethnic pride. However, just being allowed to use the mother tongue and preserve cultural knowledge and ethnic identity without a struggle does not result in the production of power. Strong ethnic identity is produced through the friction that occurs when there is a struggle against oppression (Foucault, 1980: 92). Furthermore, as a part of the revitalization process, Hmong mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) is a means of exercising power and marking ethnic identity. This is the main purpose of doing MTB-MLE, rather than the good national exam scores that are used to prove the program's effectiveness. In another sense, MTB-MLE fosters ethnic identity through preserving and using mother tongue as the context of cooperation among the stakeholders, and relations among different ethnic factional and social backgrounds among the Hmong.

Fong and Chuang (2004) state in "Communicating Ethnic and Cultural Identity" that ethnic identity is "created in daily interactions and rituals that demonstrate common understanding and shared experiences." The language, use of time, and communication styles may be unique to each community, but the reflection and maintenance of ethnic identity through communication is an important process for all ethnic groups. That's why Naroll puts an emphasis on language.

Language should not be analyzed and sorted out alone as the only culture-bearing-unit or with a purely sociolinguistic approach that looks at dialect divisions, varieties, and mutual intelligibility tests with neighboring tribal groups (Moerman, 1965). Phonological analysis, in an applied linguistics approach, is also not enough to classify the ethnicity and ethnologic demarcation. Language, with the previously mentioned peculiarities, entails shared experiences and histories as well, such as cultural stories, rituals, and proverbs shared by the group. This means that language is not just a communicative tool, or a tool for designating sound and meaning, but also a culture-bearing repository. Moreover, it entails cultural traits, for instance, rituals, traditional practices, and festivals which are performed with the vernacular. For the Lue and the Hmong, these languages and cultures have been passed on without written forms or records. This means that the languages entail their morality and even emotions. In this reasoning, language is a significant ethnic marker rather than the most important culture-bearing unit.

Here, what I propose is that language is a significant and influential ethnic marker for ethnic people themselves in discerning their ethnic identity, but it cannot be the only delimiting and demarcating unit for ethnic identification and its boundaries. This paper is intended not just for the minorities and their language situations but also for the states and governments involved. However, without the government's help, minorities and their mother tongues are

vulnerable. Even though language policies reflect complex social identities and political situations, minorities must seek to foster governmental arrangements that are equally varied and fair, both for the minorities and for the government or states involved.

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**Social Suffering and Coping Strategies of the Widows at Mawchi Mine in Myanmar**

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**Abstract**

No one knows the complete history of the Mawchi mine situation in Myanmar. It is more than a century old since the British occupation of Burma (Myanmar) in 1830. The high quality tin and tungsten from the Mawchi mines has been exported to the world market since colonial times. Presently, Mawchi shows scars all over the hillsides from tailings where the mining operations have dumped debris over the nearby environment and has negatively affected the local people. Through reviewing of selected social science literature on mining and its impact on the communities, especially on women, this paper explores specifically the “widows’ issue”. The social exclusion and extreme deprivation faced by widows at Mawchi mine indicates wherever widows are suffering as they live in a very long term period of armed conflict, unrest political situation as well as the mining zone, they have never been visible to the public and to the policy makers or the state. Unspoken structural violence affects people differently based on various forms of social structures and it is very closely linked to social injustice (Farmer 2004; 2009). It indicates the material, cultural and gender relations that are related into gender hierarchy and the domination of patriarchal systems, through working powers in institutions as frozen factors of structural violence that are affecting widows experience of suffering and their coping strategies. Significantly, this paper challenges the stakeholders or policy initiatives both national and global that the development agenda should be addressed the painful absence of “widows’ issues” as one of the significant important issues to include women’s economic self-sufficiency, gender equality and wellbeing.

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*Keywords*— Social Suffering, Mining, Structural Violence, Gender Relations, Coping Strategy, Mawchi

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**Introduction**

Myanmar (Burma) had been under direct and indirect strategies of military control about half a century. Presently, it is at the process of changing from military government to democratic government starting in 2015 and up until now there are so many challenges inside the country. The new government itself has not yet established an official mechanism to enable a comprehensive and balanced investigation into what actually happened in all corners of the country. Despite these current existing limitations, this paper will attempt to carry out the understanding of the relationship between the Mawchi mine and the widows of Mawchi mine: widows’ sufferings and their effort/strategy to cope with the existing problems throughout their life journey at Mawchi mine in Kayah (Karenni) state, Myanmar.

My working experience and interrelations with this particular group for the years 1997-2003, the observation, oral communication, and written testimony appeared by the widows during my preliminary fieldwork in October 2015 and May – July 2016 and data collection during October – December and April – June, 2017, brought me to answer the Mawchi Widows’ situation with why and how did numbers of women become widows? What kinds of suffering do they experience and how these suffering occur? And, how do they cope with their life situation?

The first approach is specifically designed to assemble factual information from the historical evidence and testimonies about what widows experienced and from which the violent period of human history (Mueggler 2001), and the experience of suffering itself stand as to reveal the actual situation existed (Kleinman 1992; Das 1998; Bourdieu 1999; Wilkinson 2005). The second approach places more emphasis on social structure and agency that needs to be taken into consideration as to summon how working power institutions stand as a frozen key actor of structural violence that framed the social sufferings that impact on the lives of widows. Through which relationship between object social structures such as institutions power, discourses, different fields, ideologies and everyday life coping strategies are constructed (Bourdieu 1999). Third, cultural and gender relations issue will be taken as to reveal that the “experience” of suffering from the impacts of mining operations are not gender neutral (Oxfam Australia, 2009: 7) that implies women (widows) can experience suffering the consequences of mining operations than men. Then, coping strategy will be expressed as to bring women empowerment agency in everyday life activities. It is to recognize that the incidence and severity of suffering reveals a call for the development of an analytical practice in

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which all related cultures and societies take shape in response to the uprooting of life that suffering visit upon people (Dikotter 2001). It also exposed the need to clarify the where and how these various kinds of suffering emerged from where social forces could also have structural risk for most forms of extreme suffering (Farmer 2009).

Using observation as the key technique that is to reveal the truth by giving full attention to widows' everyday life words and deeds such as; listening to their whisperings, their gossiping among each others, their murmuring, their interrelation with themselves and with others, their daily activities and practices, and testimonies as a basis for promoting understanding about what actually occurred from which several spoken statements, both experience near and far observation bear witness that no one can refuse that reality existed. Through the individual and collective voices and activities of the widows it is believed that it can speak out for changing unjust forms of power structures, ending socio-political and economic violence, and breaking the chain of systematic planning towards social sufferings. And, as its belief this process will pave the way towards an acknowledgement of the existence of widows' issues as well as a full admission about their experiences as citizens of the nation to restore the social order that was torn apart as a result of the long suffering since the mine started in 1830.

#### Mawchi Mine: Historical evidence of the Violent Period of Human History

Mawchi mine has been around from the time of the British occupation of Burma in 1830 and it primarily extracts tin and tungsten. It is a more than century old mine. It is said that the high quality tin and tungsten from Mawchi mines were found before the British occupation of Mawchi. Before 1830 villagers (Karen people) were excavating private soft metal and sales at Taungoo. They were using a barter system that exchanged these products for rice, salt and fermented fish for a living. This barter system reached Taungoo Town in Bago Region. Life in those days for Karen indigenous peoples were filled with joy and peacefulness (Htoo 2012).

When the British Government discovered it, they sent an Exploration Mission to the Mawchi Region. In early 1830, the British Delegation came to discuss with Karenni, Kywe Pho Gyi, a Shan Chief, namely Kay Pho Du and the first consent was made by him for Mawchi Mine production. In the years 1830-1942, the British Government monopolized the Maw Chi Mine in the British Colony; most of the mine workers were from Yunnan Province of China, and Nepal (Crozier 1994). The Mawchi tin and tungsten mines in Kayah state were the main source of tungsten in the world before World War II. Again, in 1943-1945, during the Second World War, Mawchi Mine was monopolized by Fascist Japanese. After the Japanese lost the war, the British Government again monopolized Mawchi Mine in 1945-1947. Started by 1948-1950, the Karenni state was led by Prime Minister U Nu government and run the Mawchi Mine, and from there Mawchi mine was totally under the control of the Burman military government. In 1951-1952, due to a strike of Myanmar against the English in Mawchi Mine, the British Government retreated from Myanmar. In 1952-2016, till today, the government Military is controlling the business in Mawchi Mine. In 1970-1973, one of the companies of Russia was running the business, but retreated from it due to attacks between Myanmar Government Forces and Karenni Revolutionary Forces. After then, over the years it has increased with both Burmese and Chinese companies coming into this area to mine ore.

At present, local residents and officials said the tin mines – which are monopolized by military heavyweight Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEHL) and joint cooperation with Kayah State Mining Product Company (KMPC) and Ministry of Mining no. (2) Mining. U Ye Tun Tin, manager of KMPC, was formerly a Burma Army officer, posted in the mining area under successive formal government, who then became a militia leader. He is one of the members of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party. The other groups are the cease-fire Karenni National Solidarity Organization ("Kyae' Phyu") owns a company called Kayah Ngwe Kyae and Kayan National People Party (KNPP); which are also doing mining with the permission of UMEHL. Although people selected a new government, the National League for Democracy (NLD) start taking place in 2015, there is no sign of improvement due to the history of oppression by patriarchal institutions and due to current instability of political situation such as civil war heavily in the country.

The historical and empirical evidence suggests that the most suffering felt by the villagers living in Mawchi mine was the forcible martial law especially appearing in the "four cuts" policy conducted by government army forces since the Burman military took over the power in 1948. There was a remarkable incident which happened in 1948 when Burmese military entered churches in Karen villages around Mawchi mine area and murdered more than eighty Karen Christian worshippers (Crozier 1994:25). The Karen national insurrection burst out immediately. The battles frequently broke out; murder has been going on every day. This ambush life situation made some local people move to another place, some find ways to rescue themselves and go to refugee camps; some are being internally displaced over sixty years, while some are still remaining there and working in traditional ways. Traditionally, the fighting stops for the paddy-planting with no schooling, no hospital running. Then the Mawchi mines' area situation was totally turned into complex and multifaceted problems under the overall control of the Burmese Army and then to the military government and different armed groups. Subsequently, local people totally became the scapegoats among those groups and their lives entered into severe hardship.

The latest and the most severe of crisis in Mawchi is the result of the regime's 1996 forced relocation campaign. This program led to the total collapse of agricultural production in the area and the subsequent collapse of the rest of the social structure and economy. All the villagers from the surrounding areas were forced to move into the town of Mawchi. The cessation of agricultural production brought about a massive increase in the price of food and a large increase in unemployment. Most people are more or less constantly hungry and spend their days scrounging around looking for food. All the children in the Mawchi mines are engaged in helping their parents obtain food - collecting birds, worms, frogs and insects to eat. Moreover, the collected rice was burnt occasionally by military troops. During that time, men were killed indiscriminately by both sides of the armed groups while the others died by exposure to toxic chemicals. They were affected with bloody coughing where one couldn't find any medicine, no food. Torture involved loss of eyesight; nails pulled out, and knife attacks. Where there were also torturing and killing happening every day in Mawchi we could say structural violence and direct violence are highly interdependent including racial violence, gender violence, hate crimes, state violence, terrorism, and war" (Gilligan 1997).

On the other hand, because of the mining works the ruins of Mount *Ler Bwa Koh* (rock-mountain), rivers and deforestation appear, and the natural beauty around the Mawchi town is also damaged. Local people started to encounter environmental problems. The water dried up, the creeks became narrow, deforestation and landslides occurred year by year. This situation has led not only to environmental destruction but also the climate changed and the situation has brought the local people into more severe hardships throughout their whole life. Since then, a lot of social impacts, such as health problems caused by tin mining, pollution from mining waste, drinking water problems, and health problems downstream from mines, dangerous living conditions and safety of mine workers, painful early deaths of mining workers, gender disparity, and landslides have occurred. All these are what the local people have to encounter their whole life and especially it seriously affected them and also by preventing them from meeting their basic needs (Galtung 1969, 2007).

Consequently, the mining works for years have left deep scars all over the hillsides and caused landslides every year. All nearby environment suffered from water pollution, damaged roads, health issues, lack of basic needs, security and safety needs, and, all villages surrounding there are now in critical condition. All the issues occurring in Mawchi mine are likely to have been the result of acts of political decision and social conditions that break down and destroy human life (Kleinman 1997); where there exactly social suffering could be found as the result of what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems (Kleinman, Das & Lock (eds.) 1997).

The local people, despite working there for many years, have seen no signs of development in the area. The local people are still living in poverty, and have suffered from several impacts of the mines. There has been no improvement in health, education, communication, transportation and economy. It is needs to be clarified that where and how these various kinds of suffering emerged from where social forces could also have structural risk for most form of extreme suffering (Farmer 2009).

### Social Suffering and Structural Violence

In relation to social suffering and structural violence; "structural violence" refers to systematic ways in which social structures harm or disadvantage individuals and in it people hurt and suffer. Structural violence is restrained and it's often invisible, and usually no specific person can be held responsible. Johan Galtung identified that the term "structural violence" as a form of violence which may harm people by social structure or social institution and also by preventing people from meeting their basic needs (Galtung 1969). Paul Farmer has given a clear point on structural violence, noted that: "it is the social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way. And, these kinds of arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people. In it neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault; rather, historically given and it is often economically driven processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency" (Farmer 2009).

One key aspect of structural violence is that it is often hard to see. For example, Farmer mentioned that when a baby dies of malnutrition, or from a vaccine-preventable disease, who should we blame? The accumulated effects of structural violence on an individual will necessarily mean less health and shorter life. Again, the phrase "constraint agency" used by Farmer is being a challenge to the notion that structural violence may be manifested in obvious forms, such as civilians killed by civil war or unstable political situations, bombs, landmines or infants that die from preventable diseases.

My consideration of some of the subtle effects of distributed harm visited upon the local people at Mawchi mines took place during the years 1972-1996. Empirical evidence has shown that in Mawchi mining 40% of men died prematurely it was generally due to the severer political situation, and mining works. Here, I would like to cover information that is based on my preliminary fieldwork survey that has implications for the invisibility of "structural inequality" of social arrangements that draw individuals and local people into harm. In fact, most men died

due to the mining works and lack of medicine in the hospital in that Mawchi area. This indicates to us the unequal arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization powers or state and other institutional powers; they are violent because they cause injury to people in which human rights violation is situated and social suffering is rooted. Now, let us turn to the concept of various structural harms. The structural inequality is embedded in Mawchi mines as in the political and institutional powers because during that period of times, since the colonial powers in Mawchi mines, and until 2010 not all the local people had citizens' identity cards although they were born there. Since a person did not have citizen ID (National Registration Card) according to the state martial law he or she couldn't travel to the city, above all, he or she cannot own anything, for this, one can easily lose his or her land and livelihood because he or she fell through the cracks in a state law or under dictatorships' ruling and no government services reached them. For example; politically and historically; the "four cuts" policy that was introduced for ethnic cleansing brought all communications break down into Mawchi mines and all Karen villages in the hill sides. My personal experience evidence found that it took one day in order to reach Mawchi and one had to pass by more than 20 military forces brigades inquiries or checkpoints between Loikaw and Mawchi in Kayah state. Considering the mining situation, men mining workers died earlier than average due to the lack of medicine and lack of food and women remained in the community as widows. All these situations identified the "constraint of agency" that challenges the notion in which structural violence is manifested in it as "structural inequality". These structural inequalities lead to harm toward people and make them suffer their whole life.

Consider that all Karen people in Mawchi surrounding area lived in an area of insurgency, fleeing from civil war, crying for the dead every day because of the trauma. The fact is that if they received the same social advantages that the other citizens did then they would not have to transform themselves as refugees or internally displaced people, and men at Mawchi mines would not die as early as they did and women would not have to remain as widows taking every single role to carry out their family life situation. Here, fleeing to escape from an unjust situation and especially men's early death and women remaining as widows is as violent as people can get in Mawchi mines. Another incident was that numbers of Karen villagers in Karen state and Mawchi area were illegally dispossessed of their homes, paddy fields, and all plantations burned by the government military troops anytime everywhere in Karen hillsides. Women in Mawchi villages were hard put to find food from their surrounding villages. And, consider that specifically in Mawchi mines, men had to serve and stand as frontier soldiers for the military troops, men were tortured and killed by both sides of military and non-state armed groups but mostly by military troops, while other men died from exposure to toxic chemicals, then women remained as widows and struggled with their long life journey in dire straits. Following these, could we say that is it enough to blame the military troops or non-state armed groups or is it to blame the colonials that left mining works into chaos? Of course, one can blame the military troops or any non-state armed groups or colonials but the factors that structural violence or other state powers that are committing violence against the civilians is undeniable that do harm to people.

Consider when the land is shaking from explosives while one is operating the mining that forces the local people to move and every time when a landslide occurs and crushes the houses, to whom do we have to assign blame? Could we say that is it the fault of the local people that they are stupid enough staying there even though they are alarming to move from their home land? Structural violence here is often invisible and often has no one who can be held responsible that is to hold that behavioral violence and structural violence can interlink. As Dikotter described; all these different forms of human suffering tended to bring tools of critical analysis to bear upon the potential for the moral character of society to be exposed through the incidence and severity of suffering (Dikotter, 2011).

#### Gender, Mining and Environment Issues

The concept of gender here will convey the differences between women and men within a particular context in which gender differences that caused different effects on women and men will be examined. From which the relationship between widows' suffering and gender and mining will take place as to look at mining as the main factor that causes a destruction of widows' lives in this context. While considering the conditions of men mining workers in Mawchi, men mining workers died from exposure to toxic poisons or landslides by the operation of the mine, mining appeared to be a form of exploitation where there are very bad working conditions which destroyed people's lives. And, this mining position stands as an institutional power that caused damage to family life, creates uncertain life situations leading to displacement of families and ultimately destroying nature that changed people's life cycles until people are not able to survive. The situation in which the proposed solutions to the problems generated by mining operations frequently fail to adequately address the needs of women, which are often quite different from those of men. Because through this, women especially "widows" appear as the one of the most affected who have to go through these as a heavy burden. Men would also suffer for sure as they are mining workers, while on the other hand women are the most affected as they have to take all responsibility for the kitchen, for their children and for the family income. For men, they died and they no longer need to suffer, but for women, they have to suffer and struggle to make the family survive.

The empirical evidence has shown that since the beginning, mining separated men and women; men mostly work inside the mine, while women have to take domestic works without pay. For this, the separation of labor in mining



works created complexity where widows have to suffer double workloads as they have to do domestic works and struggle for income. Such kind of situations indeed represent mining works as serious obstacles to policy makers, structural powers, and affected communities interested and the industry's negative impacts especially on women's lives around the world (Nash 1979). Through a gender lens displays how such a situation would be very hard for those women who always perform the domestic works and never have a chance to enter into mining works to have to take double workloads and carry on all work after their husbands died.

Moreover, the cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity frequently play as an important social concept where women and men learn their behavior and roles from society. These differences are mostly reflected in roles, responsibilities, access to resources, constraints, opportunities, needs, perceptions, views, etc. that are held by both women and men. For example, the patriarchal culture, political culture that marginalizes women's life in Myanmar may produce male (military, father) has the power to shape gender roles in Myanmar society. The visibility of a patriarchal culture, the fundamentalists' idea and the lack of women in it may reinforce the perception that women should take on submissive social roles. The presence of the man is evident in every level of power, and in every part of the government administration level.

The social norms, like many other phenomena, are the unplanned, unexpected result of individuals' interactions. This has been covered; and the customary rules that govern behavior in societies have been extensively overwhelming women life situation; function in different cultures (Geertz 1973) and motivate people to act. Such norms create gender stereotypes where there is usually a simplified and standardized conception or image concerning the typical social roles of male and female, both domestically and socially. These are beliefs held about characteristics, qualities, and activity-domains that are "supposed" appropriate for men and women. In Myanmar, generally and traditionally, typical characteristics for women are piety, submissiveness, and domesticity, while authority, and social behavior, are traits commonly held by men. They are influenced by the social ideologies and economic model held at a certain period of time accordingly, changing, even at times reversing, with every significant social transformation.

Undeniably facts are manifested that since the institutional behavior is informed by presumptions of appropriate and necessary behavior for men and women, their actions, their interactions, and the often catastrophic results of their policies cannot be separated from the social context that frames them. For example, stereotyping is putting a label on people or things. A stereotype is a simplified or fixed image of all members of a culture or group based on race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender or national origins. When we stereotype people, we prejudge them. We assume that all people in a group have the same trait; we label them and put them into molds. This implies that structure can be so rooted in masculinist presumptions that even were women in charge of these structures, they would retain the core characteristics that many feminists and progressive men find troubling and it constitutes an important base for understanding the asymmetries in masculinized labor markets such as mining in countries around the world (Salinas and Gianna 2014).

Empirical evidence suggests that all the sufferings, the life coping strategies from severe hardship situations, bitterness of life situations in Mawchi indicate that women are unjustly treated by different authoritarian institutional powers, which specifically means patriarchal institutions and men domination, create harm to them. It is because throughout history, evidence suggests that the persons who hold on to this institutional power in this particular context situation are all men; that brings us clear understanding that directly or indirectly affects and impacts of mines that have brought to widows' lives. All these can be seen in the workings of power in the institutional arrangements; the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making powers across genders in mining areas, and the types of gender differences and inequalities existing in the mining sector.

#### Widows' Coping Strategy and its Relation to Social Suffering

Indeed, mourning or grieving a loved one is a deeply painful process, but it is a continuing process or process of change (Turner 1957; Donahue 1993). This is because a positive model of suffering has a redemptive role to play in human life experience when he/she tries to cope with any situation; in which the life history and experience of people illustrate that how people take issues as to overcome difficulties that enter into their lives and in doing so, people are not that good and not bad; they are in difficult and hard situations but people are still trying to find ways to cope with bad situations (Smith 1977). Indeed, the bereaved wives may experience a range of emotions such as bitterness, sadness, anxiousness, weariness, anger, shock, denial. While on the other hand, their activities through spiritual interaction, peer group gathering and encouraging gives them the energy to cope with their new life. Above all the varying degrees of emotion, the common denominator of Mawchi widows that makes them to be somewhat unusual is that they have the ability to make a positive decision in order to respond to their suffering; which is they let their emotional control be a guiding way to move on with the intentional and motivated capacity to act (Kleinman 1992).

The idea here is that ordinary people's everyday life behavior and activities could be identified as their strategy for negotiating space of power relation not through opposition mode but through their everyday political behavior. A number of researches strongly suggest that people over the world have been trying to react in negotiation activities as

power relations through different appropriate strategies from where powerless people are able to show the “space of power relation” (Chafing 2004). How could powerless people or sufferers use coping strategies of everyday life behavior as a negotiating space of power relation? Here, I present a look at the sufferers as active actors as they are using their own strategy as a contesting meaning of power relation in which it would articulate that “no matter how powerless you are, you can be a good actor”.

Firstly, the empirical evidence revealed that as long as widows have no chance to enter into mining works, Mawchi widows can empower themselves through a space by showing their contesting meaning and strategies in choosing global and local markets or black market in selling the tin and tungsten (Lead) that they are collecting from the soil-wastes that are flowing from the mining sites through the river. This is by where cultural politics or cultural strategies emerged to show that this group of widows can empower themselves through a space, which is called “space of power relation” (Chafing 2004).

Second, the historical evidence has shown that whenever the collected rice was burnt occasionally by the military troop in Mawchi mines area women/widows were the main persons who had to find daily food for the family while most men were tried to escape from the porters’ mission conducted by the military troops (porters’ mission means forced labor by the Myanmar military to carry military equipment). “We are not afraid any danger would happen to us in the jungle because we know how to deal with the jungle life... above all we just know that we have to find food for our children to survive... it took at least three days and nights walking in order to get the main food rice” said by the widows group (Preliminary fieldwork October 2015). Moreover, whenever the authoritative persons are more recently trying to take over the Mawchi mines several times and various kinds of social problems may occur any time in this mining area, this situation makes some people to move away from their own land. What the widows’ group used to do in this situation was that they gather the villagers, conducting meeting, and encouraged the villagers, then get the villagers’ signatures and they sent it to the respective persons, then they go to the river sites and work as usually as they do that reveals they protest against naturally. Such situation reveals that widows are still strong and they are considered not mere victims to these mechanisms of control, even though they are facing severe hardship in their daily life activities and program performance networks provide them with the social, material, and emotional support to survive the unstable situation elsewhere (Lee 1997).

The idea is that how people’s consciousness of suffering alters when a dominant cultural narrative of suffering is subject to significant change; it is not only how suffering is understood and managed, but also to show how do people try to deal with it as it is subjectively felt. With this concept in mind, I submit, although humans may be powerless and they may seem to be very heavily laden which let them suffer from severe hardship by dominant power of various fields, not all individuals are reacting the same way accordingly. They may find a suitable way for themselves to survive instinctively. That means “people are able to think”; their specific efforts show as the way in which people could employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events. It also indicates that widows are performing not only for money to survive but also for their dignity and integrity to be someone or something special as human beings. Preliminary fieldwork suggests that the most important strategies for the powerless persons are in showing their “power through performance” (their daily life works & activities performance), and their perception over: “this is our land: we were born here and we will die here” said by a 67 year old widow named Naw Hsardu Gaw and consistently supported by the widows group. It is clearly implied that widows could identify themselves that they are ruling in their own way. “Every person is able to give meaning to his/her suffering”.

Third, a number of research backgrounds strongly suggests that religion plays the most important role in coping and the subjective importance of religion strategy (Huguelet et al. 2009; Yurdakul and Atik 2016; Borrás et al. 2007). While some research evidence shows strong links between religion and the attitudes toward rebellious actions that indicate that religious practices and religious attendance are associated with the probabilities of participating in a protest, signing a petition as strategies against injustice or harmful regulations (Motta 2005). Preliminary surveys and observation of the Mawchi mine situation clearly show that religion is very important in providing meaning to the widows’ lives in Mawchi mining areas, especially in coping with everyday life difficulties, in giving meaning to these difficulties, in complaining what their sufferings to God, in gaining control, or in obtaining comfort. For example; an art of religion here, in “widows’ religious belief, practices and activities as coping strategies” can also serve as the interest of power; because my observation brought me that whenever they pray they complain against the power holders through whispering to God and asking God to defeat them, they ask God to speak to the power holders’ heart and mind to not discriminate against them or to consider for the poor and the needy. This could also be focused on “institutional (social and political) tendencies expressed in their religious practices that are showing correlation with problematic structural tendencies in which they are dealing. Their daily life activities and strategy implied the appropriate emotional reaction to the world in its infinite variety that provides them with schemes of perceiving the world they live. On the other hand, ways of solving suffering by worshiping God as to reduce their suffering shows that people have different rationality strategies as they are trying to find ways of solving in order to stand up (Spiro 1960). The ensured condition happening here is that powerless persons cannot engage in politics and it’s about powerless people articulating their power; a different form of power, a different form of life (Wittgenstein 1971, 1953). It is sure that people may choose a different kind of power through whispering to God through prayer and for

them to show how “prayer” functions as a rational strategy to solve suffering. The powerless people may not have any voice or any chance and they may also have no rights to fight against anything but they might probably have their own rights; own identity and dignity to hold on to and they may find ways to alleviate their suffering through worshipping God and through talking/asking and praying to God for them to reduce their suffering. All kinds of coping strategies of widows reveal as to invest one’s own conscious effort, so as to solve personal and interpersonal problems in order to overcome and to try to control, minimize or tolerate stress and conflict or suffering that they have encountered that are appeared as the strategy of powerful (De Certeau 1984, 2002).

### Discussion and Conclusion

Historically, it is revealed that “Mining”; as one of the ancient activities, has a “troubled” history, filled with numerous disruptions of the pre-existing socio-political systems (Wood 2008). It is where various objects and different institutional behavior powers are embedded in it (Seager 1993; Rocheleau; Thoman-Slayter; Wangari; 1996). It is simply indicated that the mining itself produces problems and difficulties to those people and gives harm to them. In fact, evidence from researchers and scholars provide us with information that people’s pain and miseries are caused and conditioned by different fields of society (Bourdieu 1999), shaped and expressed through material and cultural links (Seager 1993) and the multifarious life worlds where moral, emotional, social, political sides of experience intersect (Scheper-Hughes 1992; Das 1998; Kleinman 1996), and it could also shift in political economy that alters experience (Scheper-Hughes 1992).

The phenomenon of “suffering” may have a widespread meaning; it is factual, existing in different ways through individuals’ experiences in which it is rooted in different contexts (Bourdieu 1999; Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997; Scheper-Hughes 1992). By looking at the relationship between the premature death of mining workers and the widowhood experience suggested that the phenomenon of suffering that appears in widows’ daily life experiences at Mawchi mine, their stories and their daily life struggle to overcome all forms of social suffering which has not emerged by itself. Instead, it is related to the major political and social cultural narratives that stand as a driving force where structural violence appeared and existed. These kinds of suffering first shifted across historical periods, altering the experience of widows which gives harm to the widows’ lives and causes them to suffer.

First, “mining” stands as the main object that created major socio-political-economy instability, which is harmful to human rights. Through which corruption entering into people’s life cycle world prevents them from attaining their basic needs. Where there are human rights violations, corruption could be found elsewhere in every field that brings dehumanization which affects poverty and immorality. This was happening mainly through the military, different armed forces, different institutional powers which is being strongly rooted in and influenced by the corruption of the colony associated with the authoritarian persons (Crozier 1994) that is related to capitalism (Braudel 1985). The interrelationship between the mining works and unequal development process represents a demonic destruction of nature and drastic changes in human communities, and causes war and death; displacement of families and ultimately destroying nature and problematic relationship with economic development (Lahiri-Dutt 2010; Plumwood 2003, 1993). It is structure because it is embedded in “structural inequality” of social arrangements that created premature death to mining workers (men). It is structural violence because the notion of people’s experience of suffering is mediated through social structural oppression in which how these forms of violence such as social, political, and economic culture alter and define suffering; its origins, its purposes, and the social exclusion, the constraints imposed by inequitable political and economic structures (Rocheleau; Thomas-Slayter; Wangari; 1996), in which how widows in a specific area have to undergo and respond to it.

Second, in relation to mining, it is uttered that the needs and environmental knowledge of women has been ignored or still ignored and absent from major policies and daily project activities elsewhere. Research evidence has shown that large-scale mining affects women in indigenous communities more adversely than men (Bose 2004; Tauli-Corpuz 1997). In a particular context women (widows) have never been visible to the public to the policy makers or the state nor to the NGOs, INGO, CSOs. It has shown that mining presents serious obstacles to policy makers in which women and environmental knowledge are completely excluded from policy making decisions. This ignorance and absence agenda clearly indicates that lack of concern from community development project programs and activities for the widows; simply implied unequal development or uneven equality, moreover it could also appear as “unequal social arrangement” that is constraint imposed by both local and global agencies. Because we understand that this is a global environmental crisis where the material and cultural links between gender hierarchy and the domination of the natural world existed from where the personal interaction could be developed and institutional arrangement could also be transformed into non-exploitive, nonhierarchical, cooperative relationships (Seager 1993). Therefore, it is to present that the painful absence of a “widows’ issues” in Mawchi mines as a significant important issue that should be addressed and considered as one of the vital issues in which the needs and environmental knowledge of women should be considered in major policies and daily project activities in both national and global development agenda (The Global Widows Report 2015). That makes sense in order to support equality as to build up the world towards poverty reductions.

Third, the existing problems in Mawchi mines also provide us with gender and power issues which appeared in the patriarchal system of male dominance/power/control which is supported by and explained through culture, religion, superstition and other ideologies (Butler 1999). These are held in place by institutions and structures including laws, policies, and practices. This has resulted in centuries of women's subordination in gender hierarchies and the strong belief in unequal gender relations as the "natural order of things." But, not only the patriarchy is just one power structure in society, but also there are other structures of domination or power structures in society. These may include power structures based on ethnicity, sexuality, age, social status, culture, religion, etc.

Additionally, widows' ability of their own capacity building appeared through their daily life coping strategy proved that it eliminates or hides the devaluing of women's ability and to bring women empowerment agency in every level of activity, and it is to express how cultural hegemony (Gramsci 2000) works. It is expressed a culture in which women are segregated from men, from any power institutions through the practice of everyday life strategy that imply gender/women empowerment could be seen and recognized elsewhere. Because unlike an army with weapons or a political system backed up by a written constitution, the power of cultural hegemony lies in its invisibility; all culture resides within human's mind itself (within us) (Morton 2007). Widows in Mawchi mines have become the evidence that "administration and management of everyday life strategies are self-segregating, setting itself up as a barricaded insider by adaptation to the environment; which has been created by the strategies of the powerful" (De Certeau 1984, 2002).

Finally, the study of Social Suffering and Coping Strategy of Mawchi widows is calling for all women and men, alarming all INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, and it is especially challenging for the new government that must be involved at every stage of efforts to reassert the rule of law and rebuild Myanmar societies through transitional justice. The needs for Rights, Equality, Justice, and Security must be addressed and human rights must be protected.

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