RURAL TO URBAN TRANSITION IN A FORMER PERIPHERY

State-led Development, Land Use Change and Livelihood Transformation in Kyaw, Gangaw Township, Myanmar

Nyunt Nyunt Win

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Chiang Mai University

IDRC | CRDI
International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

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Canada

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The Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD),
Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University
239 Huay Kaew Road, Tambon Suthep, Amphur Muang,
Chiang Mai 50200 Thailand

Telephone: 66 (0) 5394 3595/6
Fascimile: 66 (0) 5389 3279
Email: rcsd@cmu.ac.th
Website: rcsd.soc.cmu.ac.th

Foreword

The Understanding Myanmar's Development (UMD) Fellowship program, supported by the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, is designed to the enhance knowledge of Myanmar's development processes, strengthen the capacity of Burmese researchers, and encourage them to actively engage the study of development policy and practice. The fellowship seeks to promote sustainable academic exchange and dialogue among researchers from Myanmar, Thailand, and other GMS countries. Under this program, 30 fellowships have been awarded to midcareer researchers in their respective areas of social and economic transformation, agricultural, environment and climate change, health and health care systems, and social media and innovations.

Dr. Nyunt Nyunt Win examines in this research how land use change has affected rural livelihoods, spurred in large part by state-led development and transnational market integration, starting in the late 1980s. Through an ethnographic approach, she examines how farming households in the rural community of Kyaw have responded to the squeeze on their land and natural resources by adapting and diversifying their livelihoods to match the new economic opportunities brought by development, demographic change and increased mobility. Only recently changed from rural village tract to semi-urbanized town, Kyaw is a case study in how the peri-urban frontier has emerged even in Myanmar's countryside, far removed from major cities. In Kyaw, livelihoods have diversified as people increasingly turn to non-farm activities and young people's aspirations shift towards non-agricultural pursuits. The households

of Kyaw now transcend static definitions of “rural” and “urban” sectors and spaces.

Kyaw in many ways stands as a representative of perhaps thousands of other rural communities throughout Myanmar, previously considered "peripheral" areas, that now struggle to deal with the changes wrought by an increased state presence and the entry of transnational forces of markets and capital. Opportunity and risk confront these communities on economic, demographic, social, and cultural fronts. How people's livelihood adaptations under the banner of "development" will effect Myanmar as a nation and society in the long run remains to be seen.

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, PhD
Director, RCSD

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I owe thanks to my brother, Police Lieutenant Colonel Tint Aung of the police force in Gangaw District – Daw Phyu Phyu Win was the first to introduce me to Gangaw and helped direct my academic interests towards the subject matter of this work. Last but not least, I would like to thank and acknowledge the members of the village administrative Office and all the villagers who generously gave their time to answer my questions and provided the information and insights for this work.

Abstract

The township of Gangaw in the northernmost periphery of Magway Region is administratively, politically and ethnically part of central Myanmar; yet, its upland-like agro-ecology sets it apart. In this mountainous and forested region wedged between the Pantaung Ponnya-taung mountain range and the Chin Hills, lowland paddy is scarce and the ethnic Bamar (Yaw) population traditionally also relied on shifting cultivation (*taungya*), livestock and forest products for their livelihoods. Due in part to its geographical isolation and because the area was a stronghold for communist insurgents in the years following independence, Gangaw Township and the broader Yaw Detha area was territorialized later than other part of Myanmar's central lowlands. While the forest department was quick to resume its efforts to control shifting cultivation following the defeat of communist insurgents in the mid-1970s, it was not until after 1988 that Myanmar state-building projects moved forward substantially allowing the state to assert more power in this peripheral region.

Identifying it as a strategic site for economic development, the military government initiated an accelerated program of infrastructure development to transform this previously peripheral area into a hub of connectivity for cross-border commerce with India, while also increasing state military presence, particularly in the border area with Chin State. The once remote rural landscape of villages, fields, and forests was thus rapidly transformed into a hub of trade and economic activity, attracting thousands of Bamar migrants to work on roads and railway construction, urban and industrial development, and timber and oil exploitation projects.

This research examines changes in land use and rural livelihood dynamics brought about by state-led development and (trans) national market integration, focusing on the period since the 1988. It employs an ethnographic approach to examine how farm households have responded to the squeeze placed on agricultural land and natural resources by diversifying their livelihood portfolios in the face of new economic opportunities brought by development, demographic change and increased mobility of the population.

Focusing on Kyaw's recent transition from village tract to urbanized town, the research highlights how the peri-urban frontier has emerged as a new context for examining transformations in the countryside. In Kyaw, livelihoods are diversifying away from agriculture as people increasingly turn to non-farm activities, young people's aspirations are shifting towards non-agricultural pursuits, and households increasingly transcend "rural" and "urban" sectors and spaces.

The research shows that the transformation of Kyaw Town from rural backwater to economic hub and trade corridor has brought significant income generating opportunities and prosperity for local people, including women. However, development has been an uneven process, with opportunities and benefits unequally distributed among the population. New forms of capital accumulation and social differentiation has given rise to growing inequality, not only in terms of wealth and employment opportunities but also in accessing urban services such as health and education – creating a more pronounced hierarchy of social classes and leading to new forms of vulnerability and exclusion.

Keywords: rural-urban transition, livelihood transformation, land acquisition, state building projects, peri-urban frontier, migrant labor, Myanmar

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in the village tract called Kyaw (now officially a 'town'), in Magway Region's northernmost Township of Gangaw, first developed when I read *Journey to Pontaung Ponnya* by Myanmar author Tin Myint (1992). He describes the difficult social and economic conditions of a remote mountainous and forested region inhabited by the Yaw people, considered to be part of Myanmar's ethnic Bamar majority, in the 1950s and 60s. Road access was available only in the dry season, and the only year-round access to the area was either by bullock carts that could cross the Myitthar River on rafts, or via flights to Gangaw Town that began operating in 1952. Traders from the Chin Hills bordering to the west frequently descended the mountains to sell bush meat, bamboo shoots, mushrooms and other forest products. In 1968, a road was completed connecting Kyaw to Gangaw and Pale, allowing salt and palm sugar to be sold year-round.

Due to limited paddy land, villagers historically relied on upland swidden land (*taungya*) to cultivate rice, pulses and vegetables, graze livestock and collect forest products. However, following the Burmese army's defeat of communist insurgents that were active in the area until the mid-1970s, villagers lost access to much of their upland swidden fields after the Forestry Department claimed these areas as state reserved land, and initiated a campaign to sedentarize shifting cultivators. As there were few local opportunities to earn alternative incomes, some household members (mostly men) travelled to other parts of the country after the harvest season was over to work as laborers in mines and other development projects, returning home for the new planting season the following year.

Even after communist insurgents were defeated and security improved in the area, Kyaw Village Tract and much of Gangaw Township remained geographically and economically isolated. However, the situation changed rapidly in the period after 1988, when the military government identified Gangaw Township and broader Yaw Detha area (which includes neighboring Htlin and Saw townships) as a strategic site for national economic development and state security, paving the way for resource extraction projects, transportation infrastructure and urban-industrial development. The once remote rural landscape of villages, fields, and forests was rapidly transformed into an urbanized hub for trade and economic activity.

The transformation of Kyaw Village Tract and Yaw Detha more broadly started with the exploitation of timber and oil resources by state-military companies as well as smaller-scale business entrepreneurs. While a bulk of the timber and oil was destined for Mandalay and Yangon, much of it was exported to China as well as across the border to India. To facilitate trade between Myanmar's central lowlands, Chin State and the Indian border – but also to increase state military presence in the region – Kyaw was targeted for large-scale infrastructure development. By the mid-1990s, Kyaw found itself in the midst of a resource and construction boom, attracting thousands of migrant workers. In 2008, Kyaw gained additional significance as a site of national security with the construction of a military-industrial manufacturing complex commonly known by its Myanmar acronym, *Ka-pa-sa*.[1] To make way for these developments, the military-state and private companies confiscated local people's farmland and residential land, often with little or no compensation paid, echoing what Elizabeth Rhoades describes in parts of Yangon as the state's use of forced eviction as a form of urban planning and development (2018). In March 2015, Kyaw Village Tract officially changed its status to become a 'town', and villages were reorganized into wards with corresponding administrative structures.

1. While it is known that the complex is linked to heavy defense industry, what exactly is manufactured or what take place there is undisclosed.

This research examines changes in land use and dynamics of rural livelihoods brought about by successive waves of state-led development and (trans)national market integration into this previously peripheral area, focusing on the period since the 1990s. It employs an ethnographic approach to understand how farm households have responded to the opportunities and challenges brought by development, demographic change and increased mobility of the population. The squeeze on agricultural land and the widening availability of non-farm opportunities means that farm households are spending less time on their land and deriving fewer income from agriculture. Instead, household members are increasingly becoming wage laborers, entrepreneurs, and commodity retail traders in an increasingly urbanized economy. Migrant workers have constituted an important source of income for locals from the sale of goods and services.

The research shows that the transformation of Kyaw from rural backwater to commercial corridor and economic hub has brought significant income generating opportunities and prosperity for local people, including women. However, development has been highly uneven, with opportunities and benefits unequally distributed. The interpenetration of rural and urban has produced economic, social and cultural changes and created new forms of social differentiation. Increased inequality, not only in terms of access to income and employment opportunities but also to urban services such as health and education – has created a more pronounced hierarchy of social classes and led to new forms of vulnerability and exclusion.

Some households were able to capitalize on new economic opportunities and became wealthy business owners, often drawing on links to military-government officials to secure lucrative construction contracts or obtain better paid positions within companies or in government institutions. Others, however, have become landless or land-poor, and now rely on low wage or irregular casual labor. While many households still practice agriculture, field plots are generally too small to depend on agricultural alone, and household members increasingly turn to a range of non-farm activities. The new generation no longer aspires to continue farming and instead see their future in construction, transportation, retail and services. At the same time, as infrastructure projects move to

other "underdeveloped" parts of the country, such as Chin State, employment opportunities for wage labor in Kyaw town have declined, resulting in a reversal of patterns of labor movement towards out-migration.

Research aim and questions

This research examines the intersection of state-led development, land use and environmental change, and socio-economic transformation in a peri-urban frontier. The main aim of the research is to examine changing dynamics of rural livelihoods and processes of social differentiation in the context of rapid land and resource commodification, demographic change and rural-urban transition.

This area makes for an interesting case study of state internal territorialization in Myanmar's lowland-upland borderlands and how these "in-between spaces" (Fold & Hirsch 2009) have been strategically targeted for economic development and national security. State approaches to rural development and the spatial transformations that have occurred in Kyaw, Gangaw Township and Yaw Detha, reflects broader processes of state building in Myanmar, where resource extraction, infrastructure development and urbanization are a territorilizing mechanism through which the state extends its power and authority, bringing previously peripheral rural areas closer to centralized control.

The research also complicates depictions of "rural" and "urban" by examining the peri-urban frontier as a zone of transition where livelihoods are a hybrid mix of rural subsistence ethics and semi-urban lifestyles. The research also shows how certain dispossessions and adaptations lead to differentiation and specialization.

My key research questions are as follows:

- How has the Myanmar state approached rural development in Kyaw Town and Yaw Detha more broadly since the 1990s, and what does this say about broader state building processes?
- What impacts have state-led development projects and (trans) national market integration had on land and resource use patterns, population movement, and dynamics of livelihoods and social differentiation?

- What are the key factors shaping farmers' strategies to diversify their livelihoods?
- Who has benefited from development activities and associated rural-urban transition in Kyaw Town and surrounding areas?

Location and description of the research site

Kyaw Town is located in Gangaw Township in the northernmost tip of Magway Region (see Figure 1). Gangaw Town is the capital of Gangaw District, which consists of Gangaw, Htlin[2] and Saw townships. The area encompassing Gangaw District is inhabited by the Yaw (ethnic Bamar) people, and commonly referred to as Yaw Detha. As seen in Figure 1, Gangaw Township borders Sagaing Region to the north and east, and Chin State to the west.

2. Also spelled "Tilin".

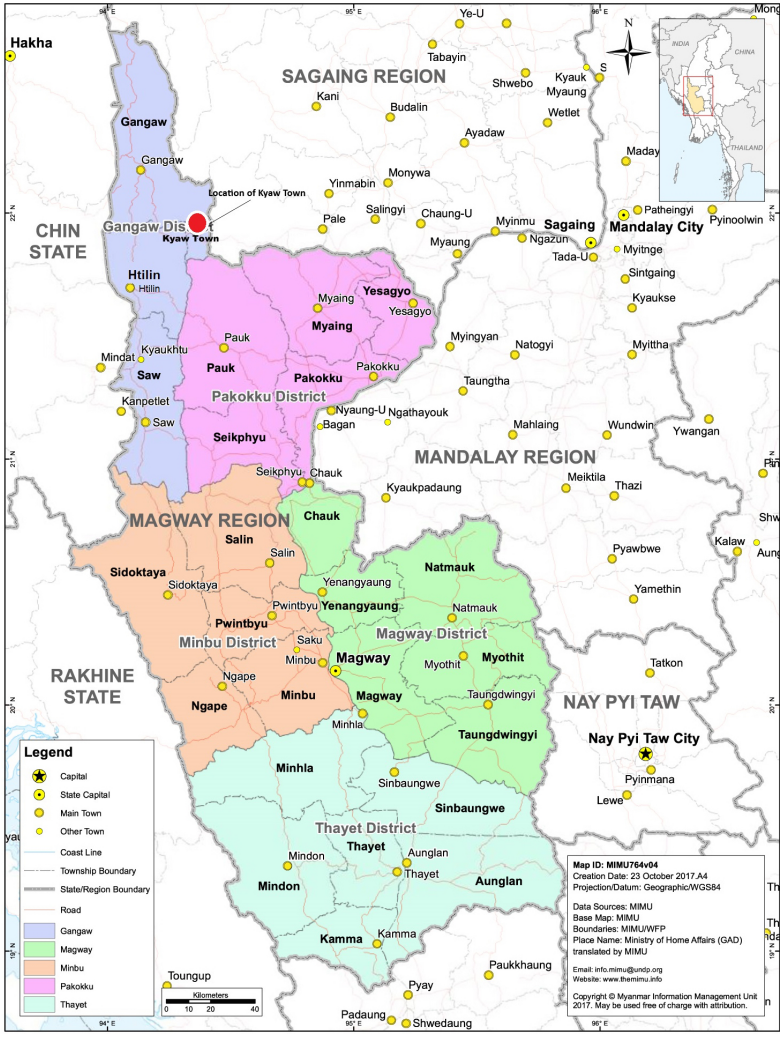

Figure 1: Map showing the location of Kyaw Town, Gangaw Township and Gangaw District in northern Magway Region
Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2017

Kyaw Town (formerly Kyaw Village Tract) is situated approximately 65 km southeast from Gangaw Town and 260 km west of Madalay (see Figure 2).

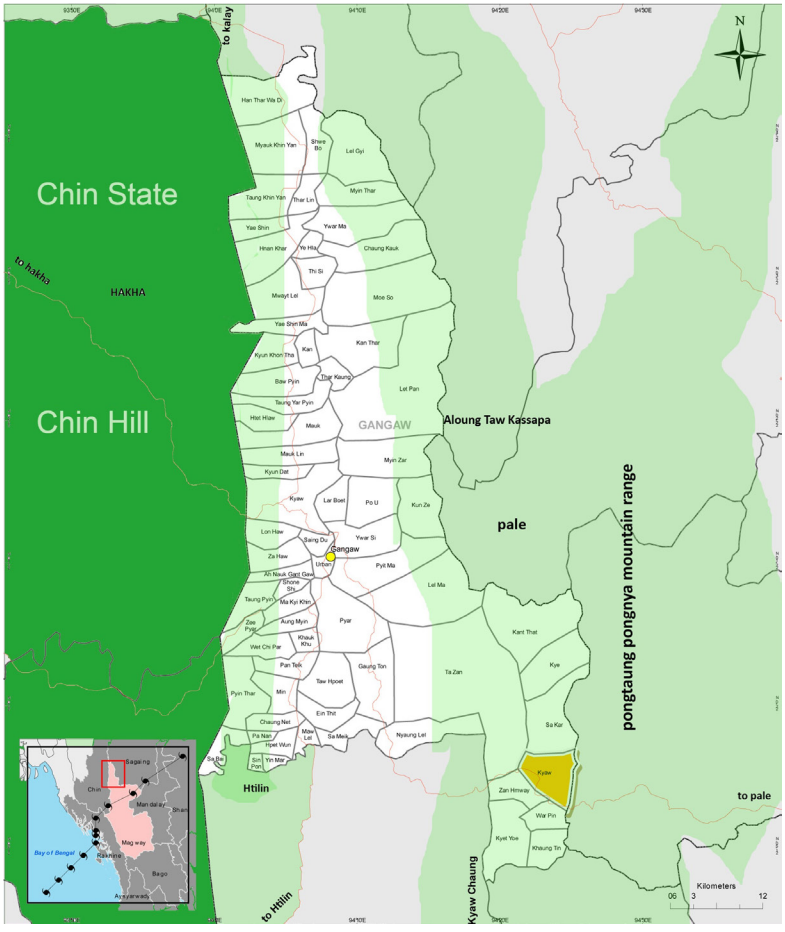

Figure 2: Village Tracts of Gangaw Township, Magway Region (Kyaw Village Tract is now classified a town)
Source: Adapted from Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2010

Most of the people living in the Kyaw Town and surrounding area are ethnic Bamar (Yaw) and to a lesser extent, Chin. With only small differences in accent, the Yaw self-identify as Bamar and there is no differentiation between the two groups in the national census. While Gangaw Township and broader Yaw Detha has historically maintained close ethnic, political and administrative ties to the Bamar-dominant lowlands of central Myanmar, its peripheral location – straddled between Pontaung and Ponnya-taung mountain ranges to the east and the Chin Hills to the west – means that it has

a also remained geographically at a distance from the main centers of political and economic power in lowland Magway, Sagaing and Mandalay. Historically, the region harbored rebellions during the reign of Bagan Kings, and in post-independence period was a stronghold for Burmese communist insurgency. Gangaw's agro-ecology more closely resembles those of upland areas. Unlike most other parts of Magway Region, which is considered part of the Myanmar's central dry zone where rice and pulses are cultivated, Gangaw Township is a wet, mountainous and forested region with limited lowland paddy land. Of the total land area of Gangaw District, 43% is covered with forests, and only 8.5% of the land area is considered arable (Gangaw District Gazetteer, 2003). This is particularly the case for the area surrounding Kyaw Town, where farmers have historically practiced shifting cultivation (*taungya*), due to the very limited paddy and lowland agricultural area available for rice production. The fact that ethnic Bamar (Yaw) in this region traditionally practiced shifting cultivation, shows that this form of agriculture is not only confined to upland ethnic groups, and adds to the ambiguous and frontier nature of this region and its people.

I argue that it is Gangaw Township/Yaw Detha's peripheral location on the lowland-upland borderlands that characterized the area as an "in-between" space occupied by people "people in-between" (Fold & Hirsch 2009: 95). Gangaw Township and Yaw Detha more broadly thus became a target for state development and securitization, a site to be territorialized, controlled and "civilized" through extensive resource and infrastructure development, defense-based industrialization and population settlement. Another key driver behind the state's territorial expansion into Gangaw Township/Yaw Detha is its location as a strategic trade route for timber, oil and consumer goods between Myanmar's central lowlands, Chin State and India. Today, Kyaw Town is located at the juncture of highways and a railway linking Mandalay, Pakokku, Gangaw Town, Kalay, Chin State, and the Indian border. It is also part of current plans to build cross-border railway connectivity networks within the frameworks of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) and ASEAN integration (Ministry of Transport and Communications of Myanmar, 2018).

Before Kyaw was officially declared a town in 2015, Kyaw Village Tract was composed of six villages: Kyaw (previously called Kyawywa, the largest of the villages), Shwebin, Pemasar, Ywangai, Kywengaing, and Sakhar villages. On 30 March 2015, the Ministry of Home Affairs changed the administrative status of Kyaw into a town and reorganized the six villages into three wards. Ward 1 comprises Kyaw village; Ward 2 comprises Shwebin, Pemasar and Ywangai villages; and Ward 3 comprises Kywegaing and Sakhar villages (see Figure 3).

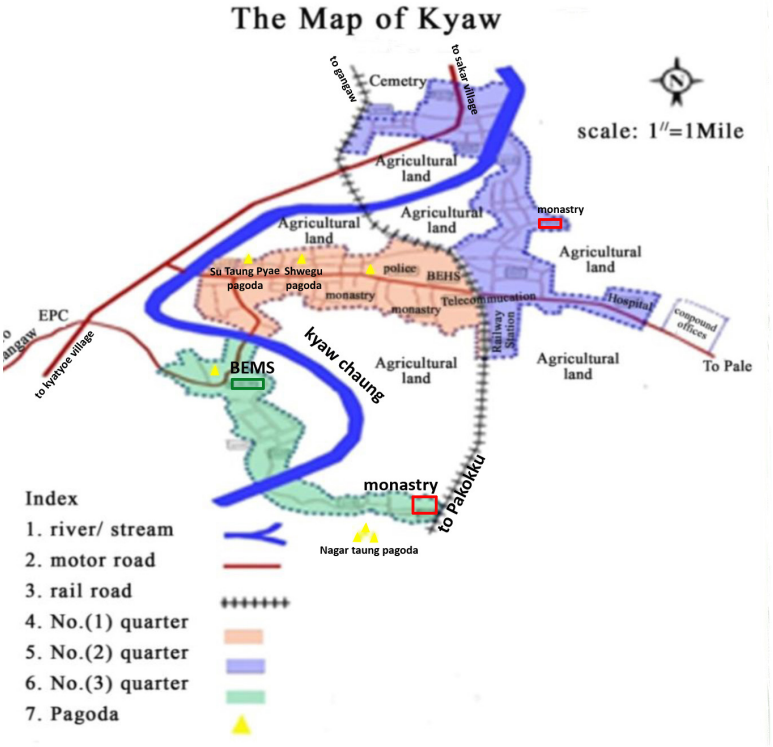

Figure 3: Map of Kyaw Town
Source: Gangaw Township Land Records Department, 2017

Previously Kyaw Village Tract was headed by a Chairman selected from Kyaw Village, and each of the six sub-villages also appointed a Chairman. Now, Kyaw Town lies under the authority of the Township Administrator and each of the three wards has an administrator. In addition, a number of government departmental

offices were established in Kyaw Town under the new administration (Township General Administration Department, 2017).

According to the 2017 census, Kyaw town has a total population of 4,565 people of which 15 households are identified as Chin (Kyaw Town General Administrative Department, 2017). However, this figure significantly underestimates the size of the population as it does not include the large number of (mostly ethnic Bamar) migrant households living in and around Kyaw Town, including those working in the oil fields, the Kapasa Industrial compound, and the oil refinery owned by Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise. Moreover, hundreds of Chin households have moved to the area to grow teak or engage in other economic activities. Most migrant workers rent houses and are not included in the Kyaw town household list or census.

Research methodology

This study draws on prior research undertaken in Gangaw Township from 2007 to 2012 as part of my PhD dissertation at the Department of Anthropology, Yangon University. Additional fieldwork for this research was conducted in Kyaw Town (Ward I, 2 and 3) in May, June and September 2017, with the help of my research assistant, Nilar Kyaw. Kyaw Town was selected as the main focus of this research because of the extensive transformations in land use, livelihoods and socioeconomic conditions that have taken place since the 1990s. The aim was to document how development projects have impacted land use change in the area over the past 30 years, and understand how local people have adapted their livelihoods in the context of new economic opportunities, rural-to-urban transition and demographic change.

Initial access to my research site was facilitated through familial connections. At the time of conducting my PhD research, my cousin was the Gangaw District chairman and he introduced me to village authorities and construction company directors. My recent fieldwork in Gangaw Township was facilitated by the fact that I already knew people from prior fieldwork. However, I also made new contacts.

I employed an ethnographic approach to collecting information, namely focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and

participant observation. First I conducted a social mapping exercise will villager authorities to help identify the main social actors in Kyaw Town I needed to interview (see Figure 4). I then invited people to a meeting to introduce my research, and arranged times for interviews with groups and key informants. I interviewed a range of actors including current and former village administrators in the three wards, local government authorities at different levels, company directors and managers, farmers, traders and non-farm wage laborers (see Table 1). Informants were selected to capture the diversity of employment and livelihoods across rural and urban sectors and spaces, different social classes, age groups and gender. Interviews usually lasted between one and three hours, and often involved multiple sittings. All interviews were recorded on MP3 player, transcribed, and then interpreted using narrative analysis. In this research, livelihood dynamics are examined via the life stories of a diverse range of subjects and their lived experiences of state development projects and market integration.

Table 1: Summary of interviews

Category	**No. of interviewees**
Farmers	18
Laborers	10
Traders	12
Local authorities	7
Migrant workers – Burmese	5
Migrant workers – Chin	6
Company Directors	2
Total	**57**

Aside from conducting interviews, I learnt about the daily lives and activities of farmers, wage laborers, traders, and middle-class residents in Kyaw town through participant observation. For example, I frequented the monastery in the mornings where I met a group of women who became my informants. I participated in livelihood activities such as stone crushing to get access to casual laborers, and I joined villagers working in their vegetable garden

where I observed the condition of farmland areas near Kyaw stream and learnt about the production and marketing of vegetables and cash crops.

I also visited key infrastructure projects such as the Ponnya-Taung Railway Tunnel and the Kapasa factory, as well as areas where there has been urban expansion in the form of residential houses, government offices, schools and hospitals. I visited areas where land (farms and residential) had been confiscated by the government to make way for various developments and discussed the process of land acquisition and compensation. I visited resettlement sites and learnt how people displaced by infrastructure development had dealt with losing their land and their strategies for adapting their livelihoods. I also visited quarries where sand and gravel mining takes place, and an active oil well near Kyaw now run by Chinese company Sinopec.

In addition, statistical information was obtained from Gangaw district and township government offices. Population census data was only available for the years 2010-2014 and 2017, and the data excludes the large migrant population, as noted above. Data on household landholdings (size and type) in all three wards in Kyaw Town was collected from the Land Records Department and then verified using a survey conducted with the assistance of five local school graduates. In addition, participatory mapping was used during interviews to identify the location of people's residential and agricultural land and to discuss the extent of land confiscation and land conversion.

Figure 4: Social mapping exercise in Ward 2 (left) and interview with the current Chairperson of Ward 1, Kyaw Town (right).
Photo credit: Nilar Kyaw

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LITERATURE REVIEW: FRONTIER DYNAMICS AND TERRITORIALIZATION IN MYANMAR

My research is situated within and contributes to wider discussions in the literature on frontier dynamics and state internal territorialization. Scholars in Southeast Asia and elsewhere have examined territory as a key aspect of state control and source of state power in the expansion and consolidation of national territorial sovereignty (Vandergeest & Peluso 1995; Scott 2009; Kelly & Peluso 2015; Rasmussen & Lund 2017). Territorialization has been highlighted as a strategy used by states to secure land and resources and control populations within their borders by governing access, policing boundaries and (re)defining space (Vandergeest & Peluso 1995). Common instruments and practices of land control include the enclosure of community lands, legislation claiming land as property of the state, land acquisition and relocation enabling states and private companies to gain access to valuable land, land registration and titling (with contingent accessibility), and the use (or threat of use) of force and violence.

In Myanmar, consecutive regimes dating back to the colonial period have used land control policies, mechanisms and practices as a central means to expand their power, exert territorial sovereignty and extract wealth. The British colonial government used territorialization to create legible spaces for revenue collection. In the lowlands, private land ownership was introduced

as part of a broader effort to modernize customary systems of land use and incentivize investment in agricultural productivity via credit uptake and land markets. Land ownership recognition was not, however, granted in the ethnic upland regions where collectively managed shifting cultivation was deemed "inefficient" and categorized as "wastelands" to be turn over for more "productive" uses (Ferguson 2014). Many of the land governance arrangements forged during the colonial era, including the differential treatment of lowland and upland areas, continue to the present day and is key to understanding patterns of land control, concession granting and dispossession.

Following independence in 1948, the Burmese state used territorialization and force in its ongoing counterinsurgency campaigns (Ferguson 2014). However, it was not until after 1988, when the military entrenched its power at the same time that it opened up the economy to foreign investment, that Myanmar state-building projects moved forward substantially allowing the state to assert more power in the peripheral regions (O'Connor 2011). This period saw the conclusion of various ceasefire agreements between the military junta and a number of ethnic armed groups, enabling the Myanmar state to gain administrative and military control over a larger portion of its territory. These regions are not only rich in land and natural resources; they also are situated close to the country's borders with China, Thailand and India.

In the current period of political and economic reform, land control remains key in regulating the economic, political and social spheres of the Myanmar state and mostly takes the form and language of development projects and foreign investment. New tools of territorialization in the form of legislation introduced by the U Thein Sein government, including the 2012 Farmland Law and 2012 Virgin, Fallow and Virgin Land Management Law (amended in 2018), are aimed primarily at attracting business investment in agriculture and other land-demanding activities (Obendorf 2012; Saw Alex Htoo & Scott 2018).

Scholars have long examined how dynamics of frontiers and capitalist expansion are strongly bound up in state territorial strategies to control people and their relations to land and

resources. Rasmussen and Lund (2018: 388) argue that frontiers and territorialization are co-constitutive: "frontier dynamics dissolve existing social orders – property systems, political jurisdictions, rights, and social contracts" – whereas "territorialization is shorthand for all the dynamics that establish them and re-order space anew." The replacement of existing regimes of resource use and control with new forms of resource extraction and regimes of regulation marks frontiers as transitional, "in-between", spaces where land and territory is contested (Fold & Hirsch 2009: 95; Peluso & Lund 2011; ibid).

The literature also points to the discursive and material production of frontiers as "sparsely populated" or "vacant", "resource-abundant", "wild" and "ungoverned" spaces that make way for acts of territorialization (Hardy 2003; Barney 2009; Eilenberg 2014; Kelly & Peluso 2015). Throughout Southeast Asia, upland borderland areas have been characterized as ethnically and culturally distinct frontiers "incompletely inscribed by civilization… and the power of governing regimes" (Li 2001: 42). These upland areas have historically been targeted for development programs and state sponsored settlement schemes driven by political agendas from the center (Hardy 2003; Eilenberg 2014). In particular, upland areas have been marked by the attempts of centralized states to regularize or eradicate shifting cultivation, increase the legibility and permanence of settlement, foster national identity among marginal populations and consolidate the nation, including by improving security (Bryant 1997; De Koninck 2000; Scott 2009; Dwyer 2014). In this sense, the frontier has been conceptualized as a (neo)colonial project aimed at "pushing back the frontier of civilization" as well as "a metaphor for national development in its material and ideological senses" (Fold & Hirsch 2009: 95).

Much of the literature exploring dynamics of frontiers and territorialization in Myanmar has thus focused mainly on the upland ethnic regions, where state projection of power in, and militarization of, previously hostile areas has accompanied the intensification of (principally cross-border) investments in land-based activities, resource extraction and commercial development (see for example, KDNG 2007; Fink 2008; AASYC, PYO & MYPO 2009; Buchanan, Kramer & Woods 2013; Woods 2011, 2019;

Sekine 2016; Einzenberger 2018). This research instead draws attention to a less explored area where state frontier expansion and territorialization catalyzed significant socio-economic and environmental transformation: the lowland-upland borderlands in central Myanmar.

The Township of Gangaw in the northernmost periphery of Magway region is administratively, ethnically and politically part of central Myanmar; yet, its upland-like agro-ecology sets it apart. In this mountainous and forested region bordering the Chin Hills and Sagaing Region, lowland paddy land is scarce and the ethnic Bamar (Yaw) population traditionally relied on shifting cultivation (taungya), livestock and forest products for their livelihoods. This area thus exhibited a certain ambiguity, continuity and dynamism not often captured in efforts to define "Valley people" and "Hill people" as representing different forms of social organization (Boutry 2011).

Due in part to its geographical isolation and because the area was a stronghold for communist insurgents in the years following independence, Gangaw District was territorialized later than other part of Myanmar's central lowlands. Following the defeat of communist insurgents in the mid-1970s, the forest department resumed a campaign to reform shifting cultivation practices by persuading cultivators to shift to permanent crops and undertake commercial plantation work. Areas designated as state reserved forest were expanded to include active fallows, grazing land and village forests, thus erasing local land claims, usage rights and customary practices in those areas. In the 1990s, logging and oil extraction concessions were issued to Burmese companies and traders, and private extraction, milling and export activities expanded rapidly. Moreover, the construction of physical infrastructure was accelerated in an effort to transform this previously inaccessible periphery into prosperous hub of connectivity for the ever-increasing cross-border commerce with India.

The resulting scramble by various assemblages of state and capital for access to land and resources squeezed or undermined the traditional livelihoods of rural communities. At the same time, new dynamics of social differentiation were implanted where

farmers responded to opportunities for livelihood diversification created by development projects and commercialization processes. In this case, improved infrastructure, increased mobility (including a mass influx of migrant workers) and the expansion of border trade with India created new income earning opportunities for household members, thus propelling 'capital' back into this peripheral area.

State-directed development and market-driven relations of production have transformed Gangaw Township to the extent that it no longer resembles other peripheral or frontier spaces. Highways and railways linking Mandalay, Chin State and the Indian border traverse through even the more "remote" parts of the township. Former rural villages such as Kyaw have become increasingly urbanized, industrialized, and incorporated into national and global processes. With less and less available land, and greater opportunities to earn cash income from non-farm activities, the peri-urban frontier has emerged as a new context shaping livelihood transitions.

In Kyaw town and surrounding areas, livelihoods are diversifying away from agriculture as people increasingly turn to non-farm activities; aspirations, particularly among the young, are shifting towards non-agricultural pursuits, and households increasingly move across "rural" and "urban" sectors and spaces. These processes of rural transformation and increased "rural-urban interpenetration" in Kyaw reflect what Rigg and others have described as the de-agrarianization of Southeast Asia taking place in the context of a "mobility revolution" (Rigg & Nattapoolwat 2001; Rigg 1998, 2013). As argued by Rigg (2013), evolving mobilities in the region have engendered a series of boundary crossings that challenge conceptual categories we normally use like "the village", "the rural" and "the urban". Even households "have become multi-sited and stretched over space, and occupations are increasingly non-farm and ex situ" (p. 9).

In Myanmar, research on urbanization, agrarian change and mobility has so far mainly focused on rural-urban migration and/or been confined to the fringes of the main urban centers in Yangon and Mandalay (e.g. Rhoads 2018; Aung & Tin Tin Mar

2019; Matelski & Sabrié 2019). This research seeks to extend the analysis of rural-urban transitions and relations to peripheral rural towns and the multi-faceted responses of people to these changes, including the production of a new type of "urbanized" peasantry in the countryside.

3

A HISTORY OF KYAW TOWN AND GANGAW TOWNSHIP

Historical records indicate that Gangaw Township was incorporated into a broad geographical area known as 'Yaw' region during the reign of Myanmar Kings. Yaw region itself is said to have derived its name from Yawnaka, a country founded and later enlarged by King Zalamika from Magada Country, defeating the Shan, Kadueingel, Patein, Pade, Padaung, and Pantale to gain territory. Gangaw village was established in 1248 CE (Myanmar Era 608), by soldiers and other military personnel sent by King Narathihapatae to settle the "four jungles" areas in present day west Gangaw. Legend says that the village was named after a big gangaw tree that marked the place where the village was founded (District Information Collecting Committee, 2007). During the reign of Konbaung Dynasty (1752-1885), the original name 'Kankaw' was changed to 'Gangaw'. The word 'Gangaw' has been found on the seals of timber logs during the reign of King Mindon.

Kyaw village was established on the north side of Kyaw stream in 863 CE (Myanmar Era 224), much earlier than Gangaw village. The village was originally named Kyaw Wa Ywa after its founder, but the name was gradually shortened to Kyaw. In 1130 ME (1769 CE), Kyaw village was destroyed by a flood and subsequently rebuilt. In the past, Kyaw village was composed of 16 small sub-

villages or hamlets.[3] A village elder explained that this scattering of settlements occurred because people did not want to build houses on the very limited paddy land available so they established houses far away from existing settlements. As the population grew, these became separate villages. During the British colonial government, theses were consolidated into six villages under Kyaw Village Tract, with Kyaw village the largest of the six villages.

During the colonial era, Gangaw Township office was inaugurated in 1887 under inspector U Kyar Sint. A forest department, hospital, post-office, and telegraphic office were also established in Gangaw. In 1930, the township inspector of Pakokku added 19 villages, including Gangaw Township, into Htilin Township. Under British rule, Gangaw District was included as part of Pakokku District. Gangaw was recognized as a sub-division with the division inspector's office located in Gangaw with Htilin under its administration. In Gangaw and Htilin Townships, offices were established at village level and village heads were appointed. Thus, out of the towns in Yaw Detha, Gangaw stands out as an important administrative center where government offices were established at the time of the British rule.

The British colonial government introduced new territorial arrangements to create legible spaces for revenue extraction. In the lowlands, land ownership records were introduced for taxation purposes. However, recognition of land ownership did not extend to upland fallows. In 1889, the British colonial government enacted the "Upper Myanmar Land and Akhwin Law" which categorized "vacant" land and forest as state land. Under the Land Acquisition Act (1894) so-called "waste lands" – areas used by villagers for shifting cultivation, livestock grazing and non-timber forest products – could be appropriated by the State for "public purpose". During this period, much land used under shifting cultivation systems were appropriated for plantation crops or colonial forestry purposes. For example, British teak companies established forest

3. Including Kyaw, Kywe-gaing, Sakha, Zan-mwe, Phone-soe-kyae, Kya-yo, War-pin, Khaing-tin, Le-da-ma, Ywa-ngai, Pe-ma-sar, Shwe-bin, Sakha, Kje,Don-gyi, Kan-that-ywa.

reserve areas in order to export Myanmar teak to the global market (Tin Aung Bamaw, 1964).

After gaining independence from Britain in 1948, Myanmar broke out into a civil war between different political and ethnic factions. In October 1949, Burma's "Red Flag" Communist Party, a splinter group of the "White Flag" Communist Party of Burma, occupied Htlin Township for a month, setting on fire the police headquarter, the township inspector's office and several houses. In the 1950s, the mountainous areas of Yaw Detha (i.e. Htlin, Gangaw and Saw townships) became strongholds for both Red Flag and White Flag communist insurgents, where they sought to influence the peasant movement in rural areas. While they enjoyed popular support, it was not universal. In 1956, the government launched a major operation, code-named Aung Marga ("Victory Path") to dispose of the communist insurgents in Yaw Detha and other regions of the country. The Burmese central government adopted a specific territorial strategy in its counterinsurgency operations that sought to eliminate insurgent's sources of food, funds and recruits by destroying the ability of civilians to support them. Food confiscation, crop destruction and the relocation of villages away from insurgent control areas was key part of the strategy, as described by Ferguson (2014: 303):

"[T]erritory was mapped into three zones: white areas controlled by the government armies; brown areas which were contested spaces; and black areas, controlled by insurgents. Black areas would be cordoned off…and were the targets of concentrated military operation. Any villagers in fields around them would forcibly be moved to… strategic villages, in the more direct purview of the Tatmadaw. The idea was that the key insurgent areas, the black areas, would be isolated from necessary logistical support from surrounding villages, the brown areas."

In 1958, the White Flag Communist Party of Burma surrendered, but the Red Flag insurgents remained active in the area. Continued fighting between the central Burmese military and Red Flag Communists resulted in various village atrocities, including the well known massacre at Sin Swe village, Htlin Township, about 32 km from Kyaw Town. In April 1960, Communist Party fighters

stormed the village and slaughtered dozens of village residents in retribution for passing information to the Tadmadaw about the presence of a Red Flag officers stationed in the village (Hein Ko Soe, 2016). The Red Flag Communists began to lose influence and were militarily defeated after their leader, Thakin Soe, was captured by government forces in Pakokku in 1970.

After The Burma Socialist Programme Party seized power in 1962, road construction projects began to take place in Yaw Detha. State control over land deepened under the Burma Socialist Programme Party, replacing private land rights with a system in which the state formally owned, and could exert claims over, the country's land (Scurrah, Hirsch & Woods, 2015). In lowland areas where the state extended its reach enough to enforce policies related to compulsory procurement of crops, farmers were forced to sell rice and other main crops they produced to government buying centers at fixed prices. Farmers in Kyaw area suffered significant hardships during this period, as they did not even produce enough rice for their own family's subsistence.

Shifting cultivation continued to be practiced in Kyaw and other parts of Yaw Detha during the height of communist insurgency. Following their defeat and with improvements in security, the Forestry Department was better able to implement its policy to expand the area designated as state reserved forest, which included active fallows, grazing land and village forests. This was accompanied by a campaign to reform shifting cultivation practices in areas outside designated reserved forests where farmers were persuaded to shift to permanent crops and undertake commercial plantation work, particularly teak.

After the failure of Ne Win's socialist-inspired model for economic development, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (later renamed the State Peace and Development Council) started to liberalize the economy to encourage foreign investment. As examined in the following section, the period after 1988 saw an intensification of infrastructure works in Yaw Detha resulting in widespread dispossession of farmers from their land. Timber and oil concessions were also granted to Burmese companies and traders.

4

STATE-LED DEVELOPMENT IN KYAW AND YAW DETHA

The growth of private economic activity beginning in the 1990s saw the emergence of influential economic actors with close links to the military which procured lucrative contracts for oil and timber exploitation, roads and other infrastructure projects. The key companies that engaged in development projects in Yaw Detha and Kyaw Village Tract more specifically, were: Naing Min Company; Asia-Myanmar Cott (AMC) – a subsidiary of a Kokant Chinese Company; U San Ni Company and Sinopec Oil company, along with more than forty company branches with which a number of village heads coordinated as subcontractors. Investments in infrastructure and resource development projects by these "crony" companies led to the confiscation of houses and farmland, often without adequate payment of compensation. It also facilitated the expansion of state-military power in the region, particularly in the areas bordering Chin state. Following the national elections in 2010, the military-backed government headed by President U Thein Sein initiated a number of reforms that further opened the doors to foreign investment. New laws were passed to enable the state to appropriate land and hand it to domestic and foreign companies for "development". This section examines key state building projects that took place in Yaw Detha and Kyaw area more specifically since the 1990s and the profound social, economic and environmental transformations that ensued.

Timber trade and teak plantations

The government was active in extracting teak and hard wood timber in Gangaw Township since the early 1960s. However, the timber industry expanded significantly in the 1990s and 2000s with the establishment of an auctioning system that allowed private companies to obtain permits for logging in particular areas. In 1990-91, the Gangaw Township People's Council called for tenders through an auction system that allocated forest concessions to successful bidders. Business people, mostly coming from other towns, obtained permits to fell timber in Pontaung-Ponnyataung, Kyaw, Htilin and Hakha.

The auction system and private extraction was accompanied by extensive illegal logging as firms ignored cutting restrictions laid down by the Forestry Department. Once there was no timber left in one's allocated area, firms simply moved to another location.

Most of the benefits of timber trading went to company owners and business entrepreneurs from out of town. Village administrators and local authorities that worked together with the companies also managed to increase their wealth. Many local people participated in this early period of timber trading, mainly working as casual laborers for companies and businessmen felling or milling logs for low wages. During the timber-felling season, workers relied on harvesting forest products such as resin, bamboo shoots, mushroom, honey, firewood, etc. for food and medicine.

Severe deforestation led the New League for Democracy (NLD) government to issue a countrywide ban on private logging extraction in 2016. However, forests near Kyaw town have continued to be illegally logged by local timber traders presumably through arrangements with local government officials, to the point where few forests are now left (see Figure 5).

In 2017, state authorities started encouraging farmers to grow commercial teak plantations on "degraded" forest reserve land and upland fallow land previously used for shifting cultivation. Two people interviewed are now engaged in this. The first, a former head of Kyaw village, is using hired labor from Chin families to plant teak trees on 300 acres of upland forest reserved area by

renting the fallow land from the government for a period of 30 years. There second is a local farmer who is planting teak trees on 20 acres of lowland fallow land outside forest-reserved area. He is also in the process of formalizing his land claim by applying for a Land Use Certificate (Form 7) at a yearly cost of 5,000 kyat[4] per acre. Thus, land formally used for shifting cultivation is now being planted with commercial teak, and in the process the land is being privately claimed (see Figure 6).

Figure 5: Timber logged from forests in Kyaw area
Figure 6: Teak trees planted on fallow fields

Traditionally, shifting cultivation involves planting for one or more years, and leaving the land fallow for a number of years to allow the forest and soil to regenerate, before returning to the same plot of land to cultivate. In the uplands of Kyaw, fallow land that is left uncultivated for several years is now used mainly as grazing land. This makes these upland plots vulnerable to appropriation by state authorities, who have long since classified these lands as either "empty" or "unproductive wastelands" to be reallocated for more "productive" uses. With the government policy encouraging commercial teak plantations, wealthier households who are able to invest in planting teak can claim the fallow lands. As explained by 50 year of woman from Kyaw Town: "My upland field has not been cultivated for six or seven years; it is now regenerated forest vegetation and I have no time to go there and clear the weeds. It can't be helped if someone uses my field without asking for permission."

4. 1 USD = about 1,500 kyat

The government has instructed people to grow 150 teak seedlings per acre on upland areas. Some villagers from ward 2 and 3 have started to plant teak. However, most villagers are reluctant to plant teak in their upland swidden fields because they fear the land will be confiscated and they will lose their investment. As explained by a 53 year old villager from Pemasar village (Ward 2):

> I planted 150 teak seedlings the day before yesterday in my farm plot, which is close to my paddy field. The seedlings were nursed in the Shwebin monastery compound. However, mostly villagers have grown teak in the monastery compound and along the streets in Sakha village. Villagers are reluctant to grow teak in their upland fields as they their land tenure is not secure and they worry it may be confiscated by the government after they invest in planting the teak. Due to their previous experiences with land confiscation, they are afraid of their land being confiscated again.

Oil extraction

Although some enterprises have been established more recently (see Figure 7), oil extraction in Kyaw peaked between 1995 and 2000, attracting businessmen and oil field laborers from surrounding towns. At first, some farmers themselves began extracting oil using shallow hand-dug wells on their lowland farmland and in Nat-hteik, the place at the top of Pontaung Mountain seven miles away from Kyaw town. However, the introduction of a permit system allowed private companies to gain a monopoly over the oil wells – including the land on which they were located – thus excluding farmers from gaining benefits. As explained by one villager:

> At first, some farmers invested their land, labor and oil drilling equipment and were able to gain 10% net profit from oil production. The oil was transported to Kalay, Hakha and also sold locally. Some local people

> were able to earn good money. After that, a number of companies from Monywa (e.g. Shwe Oak Su, Dhana Aung, Pada-Myar, Khaing-Mar) acquired permits from the regional government, and started confiscating land plots for oil extraction. This led to conflicts between companies and landowners. There was one case where farm landowners set fire to oil barrels, resulting in the imprisonment of the whole family.

After companies acquired permits, local people who wanted to dig for oil on their own land needed to submit an application to the company. Many villagers worked as laborers for companies, but some village entrepreneurs sold their farmland, livestock and other possessions to set up an oil well on their land (see figures 8 & 9). Production costs, including labor, had to be covered by the landowner and all the oil had to be sold to the company that held the permit at fixed price. Some local people tried to secretly sell their oil to others to fetch a better price, entering into an agreement with company guards. Over time, as the oil resources depleted, wells had to be dug deeper and deeper, requiring greater expenditures. While some local people were able to benefit economically, around one-third eventually lost their businesses, and ended up losing their land and facing misery.

Figure 7: Oil extraction facility near Kyaw town owned by Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). Sinopec Company first established it in 2007. Photo credit: Nilar Kyaw.

Figure 8: Local oil well near Kyaw Town
Figure 9: Hand-dug oil well

Roads, railways and other infrastructure development

Starting in the mid 1960s but intensifying in the 1990s, the state initiated a number of road, railway and urban infrastructure development projects (see Table 2). Significant land confiscation took place as part of this endeavor, with many people having to give up their houses and farmland receiving little or no compensation.

Table 2: Land confiscated for infrastructure projects in Kyaw and surrounding areas

Year started	Project	Land Grabbed (Acres)	Land Grabbed (Miles)	Remark
Circa 1958	Police Station	3.5		
1965-66	Gangaw-Aikar Road	NA		Constructed by Military engineer Corps.
1966	Monywa-Pale-Gangaw-Hakha Road		199	
1966-67	Kyaw-Yaymyeni Road		14	
1968	Forest Department	0.75		Some unused land was returned
1973	Mandalay-Sagaing-Monywa-Gangaw-Hakah Road		NA	No. 901 military engineering corps transferred the road to the Construction Corporation.

1976-77	Pakokku-Pauk-Htilin-Gangaw Road			Maintenance work
1980-82	Pakokku-Pauk-Htilin-Gangaw road			Embankment work and upgrade
1987-90	State High School	11		30,000 kyat per acre paid as compensation from the sale of village football field.
1995	Kalay-Gangaw Railroad		72	
1995	Kalay Railway Station	26		Some unused land returned.
1996	Hospital			Plot of land purchased from four landowners
1996	Telephone Exchange Office	0.48		Village land where school was located was confiscated
2008	Kapasa Factory compound and Kapasa Road	1,200		96 acres was residential land requiring resettlement to new homes, and 1,104 acres was paddy and farmland. Around 3,100 feet of land was acquired for the road.
2012	Electricity power plant	5.5		Land confiscated between Kyaw and Shwebin. Those who wanted power had to pay for meter boxes. Land compensation paid from the money obtained from the sale of meter boxes.
2014	Government office	NA		
2015	Administration office	NA		Land purchased at market price
2016	Fire station	1.5		

Source: Author Field Survey, 2017

Military engineering companies undertook much of the earlier road construction and upgrades projects, which were part of the central Burmese government's efforts combat communist insurgency in the area. Increasingly, road infrastructure projects were awarded to private domestic and foreign companies with links to military/government officials.

Local people took part in some of the construction activities, including through forced labor. For example, in the early 1980s, 20 village tracts were forced to contribute labor to clear land for feeder roads as part of the Gangaw-Saingdo-Hakah road project. The road required significant relocation of people, as recalled by a 70 year old man from Kyaw village:

> The Monyaw-Pale-Gangaw-Hakha Road was started in 1966 and almost all the houses along Kyaw-Yaymyeni Road had to be resettled. In those days, people had never seen cars and they accepted moving their homes as they dreamt of riding in motorcars and hoped it would bring development. They got no compensation for their homesteads in this case.

While families had to give up their land and contribute labor, people welcomed road infrastructure and the connectivity that it brought to a previously isolated area. As remarked by one teacher in Kyaw town:

> People used to have to hitchhike on logging trucks to go in and out of Kyaw. Another teacher and I once hitched a lift on a logging truck and it broke down. We spent the whole night in the car and eventually we had to walk all the way home. Later, people travelled in vehicles that transported goods. Only in 2004 did passenger buses start to operate.

Vehicles travelling from Madalay had to pass through Pale and cross Pon-taung mountain range before reaching Kyaw. There, they would rest before resuming travel across Ponnya-taung mountain range to reach Gangaw and then on to Hakha in Chin State. Kyaw thus became a transit stop for all types of vehicles transporting goods, passengers, timber and construction materials between different parts of Myanmar's central plains areas to the Chin Hills and also to the Indian border. As explained by a resident of Kyaw:

> Because this is a hilly region, the roads used to be extremely difficult and accidents occurred often, especially trucks heading towards Chin State which

were always overloaded with goods and passengers. Sometimes, local villagers buried drivers who died in road accidents, as they could not contact their relatives. When drivers passed over Pon-taung and Ponny-taung mountain ranges they paid respect to *ahmayyeyin Natnan* (spirit shrine) to ensure safe journey. Today nobody pays respect to the *natnan* spirits anymore as the roads are more convenient. Roads transformed Kyaw and surrounding areas with increased trade and commerce, urban development, and migrants coming in from different areas.

Furthermore, between 1995 and 2006 a railway line was constructed which stopped in Kyaw station on its way to Gangaw and Kalay. The project included digging a tunnel through Ponnya-taung mountain ranges, cutting the travel time significantly (see Figure 3). The railway project attracted thousands of workers from places such as Pauk, Htilin, Myaing, Pakokku, Pale, and Seikphyu in Magway and Saigaing regions.

Figure 10: Ahmayyeyin Natnan spirit shrine

Figure 11: The Ponnya-taung Railway Tunnel
Source: facebook.com/Moemakhamoezin

To construct the railway, government authorities confiscated 26 acres of land from local farmers in Kyaw without paying compensation. As noted by a former school teacher:

> Three houses were confiscated in the Ward 2 of Kyaw town. The company did not pay compensation, so the three households submitted a petition. They were allocated plots, but villagers had to pay 13,000 kyat each for them. One household didn't have enough money to pay for the plot, so they sold the land and bought another cheaper plot for their house.

An elderly villager from Kyaw village recounted her experience:

> My paddy land and farmland were confiscated by authorities for over ten years to accommodate migrant workers who took part in the construction of the railway. I got no compensation. The authorities and the company used their power to take the land from local farmers and we had no choice but to let them use the land free of charge. After the completion of railway

> and tunnel, I was able to regain my plots. In those days, local farmers encountered many difficulties ensuring the survival of their family members."

All nearby villages had to supply quotas of laborers to work in the construction of railway project. Villagers had to cease their agricultural and other livelihood activities and supply workers for the railway project. Even some children could not attend school because they had to work on the railroad. Workers faced dismal conditions, as recounted by a former schoolteacher:

> The worksite was 10-12 miles away from Kyaw village and people had to travel by foot. Workers lacked sufficient water and food and often had to stay days in the forest without proper shelter. This led to significant health problems, including malaria and cholera. People died on a daily basis. Moreover, villagers had to provide soldiers with food and liquor. If they didn't, they would be forced to work even harder. At the time there were few cars in Kyaw and food rations were sent by bullock cart up to the work site. When the bullocks were unable to work anymore, people themselves had to carry the goods up to the site! …. Villagers had to buy hoes, spades, and baskets to carry soil at their own expense as part of their labor contribution. No machines were used to excavate the mountain; people had to use their bare hands. Rivets were used till the tops of them were just like mushrooms. It was very difficult time for villagers indeed!

Wealthier households sold their cattle to hire laborers as their representatives, but poorer households were forced to labor themselves. The situation was relieved after the government finally paid to hire excavators.

Despite the hardships, the railway project also brought some long-term benefits to villagers. The influx of migrant workers meant that local people could increase their income by selling them rice, salt, meat, fish, vegetables, construction tools and other consumer goods. Many local people opened up home shops. The large

demand for food, tools and other goods from migrants allowed people to diversify their livelihoods and engage in retail and other businesses on the side. Men and women both benefitted from the new income earning opportunities generated by migrant workers and infrastructure development. As explained by one informant:

> At the time of the railway construction, I was a teacher. On weekends, I sold rice, edible oil, salt and other dry goods at the construction site, hiring a bullock cart to carry goods. The money I earned selling goods in two days was similar to my monthly salary. With this money, I was able to buy a lorry truck and started working with companies on construction.

After the railway project was completed, people could travel to Kalay by train conveniently, and trade in consumer goods from Chin State and India boomed. Soon, every house along the Kyaw's main road became a shop, and the price of land gradually increased (Win 2012; see also Figure 16). Improvements in transportation infrastructure, increased connectivity and proximity to markets brought economic opportunities for villagers to earn cash income. However, those who benefited most from infrastructure development projects were the owners of companies, including local authorities who obtained construction contracts.

Heavy defense industry (Kapasa Factory)

In the late 2000s, Kyaw and surrounding area was selected as a strategic site for the development of an industrial military manufacturing complex. Construction of the Kapasa Road began in 2008 and the whole complex was completed in 2013. The military government expropriated more than 8,000 acres (3,232 ha) of farmland, paddy and residential land to build the Kapasa industrial complex, of which 1,200 acres (including 41 homesteads) was confiscated from within Kyaw village territory.

The Kapasa military industrial complex was developed by AMC, a subsidiary of Tetphyowai Company owned by a wealthy Kokant Chinese businessman with close the ties to the government. Naing

Min, U San Ni and a number of other smaller companies also took part in the construction work. Local government authorities, including village chairmen and some wealthy well-connected families, were appointed by AMC Company and its subcontractors to assist with the land acquisition and resettlement process. In return, many of these elite families obtained lucrative construction contracts, particularly transporting materials for which they purchased large trucks and invested in new business.

Local families were inadequately compensated for their lost land and houses, nor did they receive much assistance in the relocation process. A former manager of Naing Min Company, shared his experience of the land acquisition process to make way for the Kapasa Road:

> In 2010-11, the Kapasa Road had to be paved through Shwebin village [now in Ward 2], and 41 households had to be resettled to a new site. The relocation of the first nine houses was managed by U Sanny Company, and they did not provide relocation money. Naing Min Company, together with state authorities, managed the relocation of the remaining 32 households. They paid 20,000-50,000 kyat per household depending on the size. The paddy land that was taken by the road was compensated at 4 lakh[5] per plot.

A man from Shwinbin village whose house was resettled by the Kapasa Road provided a different perspective:

> The money given by the company and state authorities to move our houses was not enough. Relatives from Ywangai, Sagar, and nearby villages came to help us move and rebuild our houses. We provided all the people that came to help us with meals everyday. We had to collect our own bamboo and other materials for the construction of roofs, matting, etc. During the

5. A lakh is a unit in the South Asia numbering system equal to one hundred thousand (1 lakh = 100,000 kyat)

> relocation process, we had to stay in temporary shelters. We had no access to water or latrines; we had only ourselves to rely on, and our relatives who gave a helping hand to those whose houses were confiscated and were in trouble. It caused us a lot of suffering.

The plots of land provided were not big enough for barns to keep livestock or store rice and other products. Some farmers were left in debt after they had to rebuild their houses. Furthermore, in 2013, six more acres of farmland was confiscated from Shwepin village for the construction of a power plant station, which supplied electricity to the factory. Once again the villagers were poorly compensated, if at all. Thus, the authorities and business people were the ones who benefited from the Kapasa development and often took advantage of poor farmers without providing adequate compensation for the land they confiscated.

Resettled families had to undergo various lifestyle and livelihood changes. At the same time, there was a lack of transparency in the land acquisition process, causing uncertainty and sometimes resentment among villagers, as it often resulted in unequal levels of compensation and support. Some villagers whose land was confiscated by the Kapasa factory received no relocation support at all; others received 50,000 kyat per acre. Some received replacement house plots far away and others were able to build houses along the Kapasa road and benefit from increases in land price. Some families whose farmland was confiscated by the government became landless and faced significant hardships. These inequalities caused dissatisfaction among the people.

Figure 12: Kapasa Road

Figure 13: Dismantling houses to be resettled to make way for Kapasa road

Figure 14: Families stayed in temporary shelters during the resettlement process

Figure 15: Resettlement site

The above changes connect rural development processes to state economic restructuring in the push to turn Kyaw into an urban and industrial area. Kyaw thus became a main economic area with an

expanding population of migrant workers, many of whom married local women and settled in the locality. Resource and infrastructure development projects produced significant land use and livelihood changes as Kyaw village tract shifted from a mainly rural landscape where agriculture and forests were the main sources of subsistence livelihoods, to an increasingly urbanized economy where retail trade, construction and services became key sectors for employment and cash income. Urbanization and the provision of services such as hospital, schools, police, water supply, and electricity led to more land conversion and attracted additional migrants. In 2015, Kyaw Village Tract was officially declared a town.

In next section, I examine changes in the agrarian structure and livelihoods of local people, and specifically how the decline in agricultural land has gone hand-in-hand with processes of livelihood diversification in the context of rural-to-urban transition.

5

AGRARIAN CHANGE AND RURAL-TO-URBAN TRANSITIONS IN KYAW

Changes in agriculture, land use and tenure

Agriculture used to be the cornerstone of local people's livelihoods. People grew rice, vegetables and legumes, and raised cattle on their lowland paddy land, farmland and upland shifting cultivation land. People also collected forest products such as bamboo, mushrooms, herbs, medicine, firewood and hunted for bush meat.

Agriculture continues to play an important role it Kyaw's local economy, and many people still depend on farming and collection of forest products to at least supplement their food security and income. However, the past three decades has seen significant changes to the agrarian structure, including a reduction in the amount of land available for cultivation, the emergence of land-poor and landless workers, and a growing diversification in – and sometimes a total shift towards – non-farm based livelihood activities, particularly among the younger generations.

There are various dimensions to agricultural land use change and broader processes of agrarian transformation in Kyaw. One key factor that catalyzed agrarian change, particularly since the mid-1970s, is that people lost access to their upland swidden fields as a result of government policies and projects aimed at eradicating

shifting cultivation. Due to the region's mountainous topography, paddy land was never enough to provide for farm household's food security and so farmers also relied on shifting cultivation (*taungya*) to secure sufficient food for their families. Even though rice yields increased as a result of farmer's investments in irrigation[6] and the introduction of new rice varieties in the 1970s, lowland paddy areas were simply not enough to meet all household's food security requirements and upland fields were thus cultivated. Each year, farmers used to collectively decide on which fallow areas to clear and cultivate for that year's season. They cleared vegetation with fire and cultivated crops for one or more years and then allowed the vegetation to naturally regenerate, thus replenishing the soil. When villages in and around Kyaw were first settled, households established land claims by being the first to clear and cultivate patches of forest. Households maintained tenure rights to their swidden land throughout the cycle, returning after the fallow period to cultivate the same patch of land they cultivated years before.

However, since colonial times, shifting cultivation has been seen as an "unproductive" form of agriculture that destroys forests (Bryant 1997). Subsequent governments have declared fallow lands, which are part of the shifting cultivation system, as "wastelands". This classification, inscribed in various laws – the latest of which is the 2012 Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Law (amended in 2018) – has served to justify the state's claims over these lands and allowed leases of "fallow" and "waste" land to business for agricultural and other development purposes (Saw Alex Htoo & Scott 2018).

In Kyaw area, large swathes of upland areas previously used by local farmers for shifting cultivation, grazing land and the collection of forest products were demarcated and classified as state forest reserve land and cultivation within these zones was

6. Local farmers have collectively built seven small dams that channel water to paddy fields from mountain streams. The largest is the Myauk-tak Dam on Zayan-Chaung stream in north Kyaw area, constructed in the 1960s by more than 90 households. It supplies water to 400 acres of paddy land. Village committees manage the dams and members pay maintenance costs and contribute labor, such as dredging the main channel twice a year.

made illegal. Moreover, policies were introduced to encourage farmers to convert the remaining upland swidden land into permanent crops for cultivation (these fields are now referred to "farmland" or "fallow land"). In Kyaw, government projects to encourage farmers to switch to permanent commercial crops failed due in part to poor soil and weather conditions. As explained by a 70-year old farmer:

> I grew sunflowers according to the instruction of the agriculture department, but birds destroyed the sunflowers and the rain damaged the crops. Pigeon pea also did not yield well as it was *kyitmyay* (muddy soil). The village chairmen only nodded when I explained. In the end, farmers themselves were left to bear the all the risks and losses and faced difficulties.

Some of farmland plots are located lower down on flatter soil close to paddy fields areas and are of better soil quality. They are used for growing rain-fed rice and vegetables such as sesame, peas, beans, corn, potato, onion, chili and Indian mustard. However, plots located further away from the village in the uplands have poor soil and lack water. They are now mainly used as grazing land (managed by village administrators) and only cultivated occasionally by local villagers (see Figure 15). As explained by one woman:

> I don't cultivate all my farmland plots because vegetation and weeds have taken over. I have to enlist the help of the relatives or neighbors to clear them. I leave my farmland areas that are not cultivated as grazing land and this helps to fertilize the land. I only grow two acres of paddy land and farmland every year. My remaining six acres of farmland have been left idle for six years.

This makes these lands particularly vulnerable to land grabbing, not only by state and company actors, who label them "abandoned", but also by other wealthier villagers who are encouraged to use these lands productively and invest in planting teak. The lack of tenure security over these lands also works as a disincentive for farmers to invest on that land (see also Section 3 on teak plantation).

Figure 16: Clearing vegetation in upland fields to cultivate crops

Years of government policies restricting *taungya*, alongside other processes of agrarian change, has resulted in farmers in Kyaw abandoning shifting cultivation altogether. They have converted some of their better quality fields mostly located close to their paddy fields into permanent crops, while the more distant upland fields are used as grazing land and only cultivated some years, as noted by the woman above. Some poorer farmers permanently cultivate their upland fields that used to be used for shifting cultivation. Their former swidden fields are located far from Kyaw Town and so they settled permanently in the areas close to their fields (locally known as living in *Poke-sin-pin-sin*). Members of those families have to live in *Poke-sin-pin-sin* areas the whole year round from planting up to the end of harvest. They only return to Kyaw Town for special occasions. Their children are generally left in Kyaw Town so they can attend school. Importantly, some farmers actually bought upland swidden land to produce food for their families after their paddy land was confiscated by the state for infrastructure projects. This highlights how land acquisition for "development" drove some farmers further into the hills to find alternative land for cultivation.

Alongside the erasure of upland shifting cultivation practices and the conversion of upland swidden fields to permanent crops,

people have lost paddy land, farmland and residential land to infrastructure projects, as described in Section 3. The extent of agricultural land confiscated for these projects is unknown. Land use records for Kyaw obtained from the Gang District Lands Records Department (1994/5 and 2015/6) do not reflect reality on the ground as they show very little change in land use categories for the 11-year period when land-intensive development projects were in their prime (see Table 3). The land use changes depicted in the Table 3 are mostly attributed to land acquired for the railway project, which includes 26 acres of fallow land, 13 acres of paddy land, two acres of farmland, and two acres of village/residential land. Land confiscated for roads, the Kapasa industrial complex and other development activities are not included in the figures. Nor is the conversion of agricultural land to urban uses accounted for, including the building of residential houses and home shops on paddy land.

Table 3: Land Use Categories in Kyaw in 1994/5 and 2015/6

Land type		**1994/5**	**2015/6**
		Acres	
1	Forest Reserve (FR-Protected)	5,682	5,682
2	The Wild (Fallow Land)	976	950
3	Paddy Land	991	978
4	Farmland	162	160
5	Garden	3	3
6	Village Land (Homestead)	87	85
7	Other	2,373	2,373
	Total	10,274	10,231

Source: Gangaw District Land Records Department, 1994-95 and 2015-16

The acquisition of paddy and farmland for state development projects has had flow on effects in terms of catalyzing further land conversions. For example, some people were forced to rebuild houses they lost on part or all of their remaining paddy/ farmland. Others, particularly those close to main roads, decided to convert their paddy/ farmland into houses for their children, home shops

or other businesses, seeing opportunities to earn more income from retail trade than from farming (see Figure 16). The conversion of paddy/farmland into residential houses, shops and other businesses increased rapidly alongside the boom in trade, construction, services and other economic activities, contributing to further urbanization. More recently, the government has sought to regulate the uncontrolled conversion of paddy land into urban/residential areas by requiring people to apply for permits at the township lands records department.

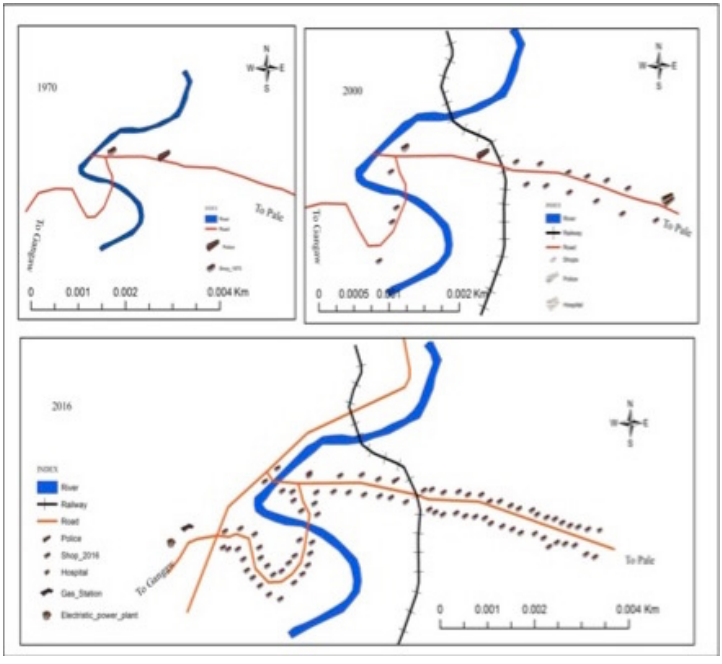

Figure 17: Urban expansion along main roads in Kyaw Town has led to increased land prices. Source: Author

Another dimension to the agrarian change process in Kyaw area is the increased atomization of paddy and farmland, whereby land parcels are becoming smaller and smaller as land is subdivided among children through each passing generation. As seen in Table 4 below, around 46% of farming households in Kyaw own less than one acre (0.4 ha) of paddy/farmland, while 50% own between one and five acres (under 2 ha). Although government records are only available for 2016-17, making it difficult to identify changes

in plot sizes over time, the survey conducted with farmers confirms that land plots are becoming smaller from subdivisions, making farming increasingly unviable, particularly for future generations. In Kyaw Town today, not all children are able to inherit land from their parents – only one or two children will inherit land for farming. This is another factor pushing household members and particularly younger generations to find alternative forms of employment and income. Nevertheless, land stays with the family and continues to contribute to household food security and income, particularly for elderly parents. While the parents are still alive, some children who engage in farming have to work on the family paddy field through the system of *a-phet-pay-chin*, contributing half of the paddy yield to their parents.

Table 4: Structure of agricultural landholdings* in Kyaw, 2016-17

			Planted area (%)				
Ward	**Total no. House-holds**	**Total no. Farming House-holds**	**Under 1 acre**	**1-5 acres**	**5-10 acres**	**Over 10 acres**	**Total**
Ward I	510	257	45.9	50.6	3.1	0.4	100%
Ward II	483	319	47.4	49.8	2.8	-	100%
Ward III	235	233	50.2	48	1.3	0.5	100%
Total	1228	809					

Source: Gangaw Land Records Department, 2016-17 and Author Survey
* Includes paddy and farmland mostly used for rice cultivation; excludes upland fields and fallow land

Farmers sometimes loan their paddy land to close relatives or neighbors who need land to meet their subsistence needs. Payment is based on the amount of rice yield rather than the size of the land. People who own shops or businesses and don't cultivate their land also lease their paddy land to others villagers, particularly the landless or those with small pieces of land, where the produce is shared equally between landowner and tenant.

The buying and selling of paddy land, farmland and homesteads is not based on formal land titles, as few people have these. Rather, village administrators and neighbors who bear witness verify land

transfers. There is an ethnic dimension to land ownership rights as well. Local people will only sell their land to ethnic Bamar, including migrant workers, but they will not sell their land to Chin people. In the past, a Chin pastor was sold land for a house and the person who sold the land was denounced. Chin families thus have to rent accommodation to live in, even if they are long time residents. Most Chin families work as laborers on other peoples land (e.g. teak plantations) and do not rent land for cultivation themselves.

Most people do not hold Land Use Certificates (LUC, Form 7) for their houses or for their paddy land, even though they are eligible to apply for one. All land transfers and mortgaging of land continues to be done semi-informally through local authorities. In 2012, a land titling initiative was introduced by the Gangaw Township Land Records Department, whereby farmers were encouraged to apply for LUCs (Form 7). Villagers were notified before the titling team arrived and asked to register by filling out Form 1 with information about the household's landholdings. However, not may people applied. As explained by the current chairman from ward 2 in Kyaw:

> The township land records team came to the village three times and told villagers to fill out Form 1, but some local farmers didn't understand the process, failing to apply for it as yet. Even my sister said that without a LUC, we would be able to carry out cultivation on our land as per usual. Two-thirds of local people don't have Form 7 yet; only one-third of them have got it.

There are a number of reasons why villagers have not applied for a LUC. Firstly, they don't see the added value of obtaining a Form 7 title. Most people feel that their homestead and paddy land, the main land categories eligible to receive a title, is already fairly secure and uncontested. They pay land tax and village administrators and neighboring all knew whose land belongs to whom. Secondly, issuing a LUC Form 7 would require the township land records department to survey and measure individual land plots. However, they lacked staff, capacity and budget to do the field surveys. Getting a title would thus incur a fee for villagers to get their land measured. Thirdly, the land plots that villagers feel is the most insecure in

terms of tenure is not eligible to receive a LUC anyway. For example, most farmland (formerly shifting cultivation land) is not eligible to receive a LUC. Only some farmland near the paddy fields can get it. These fields are not in the forest reserve area; they don't get it because many have forest vegetation (e.g. fallow land). Moreover, paddy fields and farmland areas along Kapasa Road or near the oil well operated MOGE is not eligible for titling. Thus, local people didn't bother about it.

In 2015, some local people received a LUC Form 7 after the township land records office visited houses and carried out surveys. However, most farmers still only have land revenue receipts as the main documented proof of ownership for their farmland. As explained by an elderly farmer:

> I have 3.5 acres of land, but I only got a LUC for 1.5 acres of my paddy land. My other 2 acres of farmland was not eligible for a LUC. Moreover, another 0.7 acres of shifting cultivation land which I bought 23 years ago now lies in the forest reserve area and I cannot legally claim that land.

Livelihood change and rural-urban interactions

Farming and livestock production remains an important source of food and income for many Kyaw households. Yet, most households do not have sufficient land to sustain their livelihoods based on agriculture alone, and those who continue farming (approximately 65% of households, see Table 4) increasingly do so on part time basis. While some households are now landless and rely entirely trade or wage labor, many of those impacted by land grabbing have been dispossessed of part, but not all, of their land. Many households thus find themselves in the "awkward predicament of semi-proletarianization", whereby they retain a small plot of land that is not large enough for subsistence and they are required to engage in some form of wage labor (Kenney-Lazar 2012: 1022). Table 5 below shows how rural households in Kyaw Town are increasingly dividing their time between farm and non-farm activities, and livelihoods increasingly span across "rural" and "urban" sectors and spaces.

This marks a profound shift in the trajectory of rural change in a region still often depicted as the country's rural heartland.

Table 5: Job categories of heads of households surveyed in Kyaw

	Job Categories	Ward No 1	Ward No 2	Ward No 3	Percent
1	Farmer	213	240	113	
2	Farmer + Driver		28	3	
3	Farmer + Carpenter		15		
4	Farmer + Staff	6	18		
5	Farmer + Rice mill + Oil mill		4	2	
6	Farmer + Grocers	10	2		
7	Farmer + Blacksmith		1		49.30%
8	Driver		24	4	
9	Grocer	9	13	8	
10	Carpenter	7	11		
11	Car rental	57	21	6	
12	Restaurant	2	1	5	
13	Tea shop	3	1		
14	Civil servant		13	2	
15	Hair dressing/ beauty salon	2	1	1	
16	Copy shop/photography	2			
17	Guesthouse + restaurant	1		1	
18	Student private boarding services	3			28.31%
19	Car mechanic	2	1	4	
20	Pump station		1		
21	Goldsmith	4			
22	Electrical goods	8		2	
23	Garment shop	10		4	
24	Blacksmith		2		
25	Casual labor	175	42	25	21.08%
26	Housewife		13	2	1.31%
	Total	514	452	182	100%

Source: Author Field Survey, 2017

As discussed in previous sections, early forms of land dispossession and livelihood transitions in Kyaw area were linked to efforts at controlling the use of upland forest lands for shifting cultivation and converting farmers to a sedentary livelihood system. In the 1990s, agricultural land — paddy, farmland and fallows — was acquired by the state and private companies for large infrastructure projects which opened up the region to resource exploitation, and urban and industrial development. Owing to its location, Kyaw became a principle trading area for timber, oil and consumer goods transported between the central lowlands, Chin State and the Indian border. Thousands of migrants arrived in Kyaw to work in construction projects and other economic activities.

Local residents took advantage of alternative employment and cash earning opportunities associated with these development projects. They opened up home shops or market stalls selling vegetables, forest products, construction tools and a range of consumer goods (see Figure 17). New businesses sprung up providing a range of services to the newcomers. Women and girls have actively participated in and benefitted from these opportunities, and become important income earners at the household level. Today, households exhibit a complex mix of occupations that cannot be easily classified. It is common to find a husband or wife working on the land (as landowner and/or tenant), while also engaging in various forms on non-farm wage labor. Younger generations are opting not continue with farming and instead seeking jobs as drivers, construction workers, carpenters, mechanics, etc. Those with higher education seek better-paid positions as company and government employees. Thus, rural households have embraced a diverse portfolio of activities to secure higher incomes and living standards in the face of increased land pressure and new economic opportunities. This does not mean that there is no future in agriculture, but the balance of livelihoods are not as dominated by agriculture, and there is a high degree of interpenetration of rural and urban spheres of work and life.

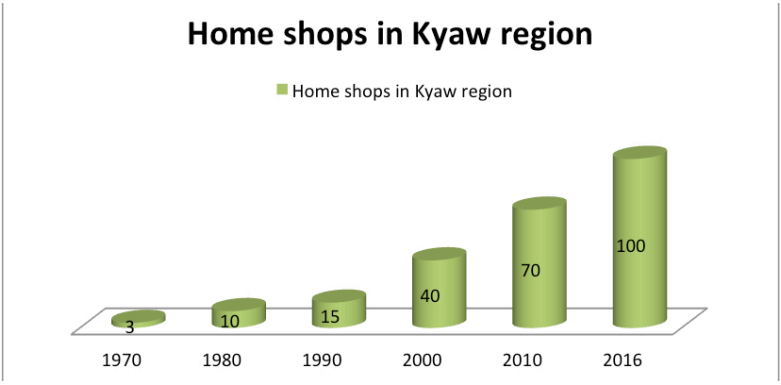

Figure 18: Growth of family-owned retail shops in Kyaw Town
Source: Village administrative office in Kyaw, 2017

The influx of migrant workers has and continues to play a key role in local livelihood transitions. Many of the local business still depend on workers who live near oil fields and the Kapasa industrial complex, as explained by a local teashop owner:

> The shop is not, in fact, for local people but for those who come from other regions. On weekends, people from Kapasa [factory] leave the compound and go shopping. Every shop is crowed with buyers. Mechanics, barbershops, grocery stores, they all mainly get their business from Kapasa workers. It is the weekends when Kyaw Town is bustling with activity. The local people hardly spend money.

Development in Kyaw region has provided both challenges and opportunities for local livelihoods. People do not have equal access to jobs and alternative income-generating opportunities. Adaptation has often been more challenging for those families most vulnerable to the impacts of developments – think of those farmers who have retreated further into the hills to continue cultivating on their former swidden fields and been forced to permanently settle near their fields. Yet even these poor farmers, who might be thought of as less successful in adapting to new economic contexts, are increasingly crossing boundaries through increased mobility. They circulate between their homes near their farm fields and Kyaw Town, where their children attend school

and later engage in a range of non-farm pursuits where they can earn an income and acquire an acceptable standard of living.

Household trajectories of livelihood change and how people respond to the risks and opportunities created by development are examined below through two examples (see Box). These household narratives illustrate that the adaptation experience is diverse and usually linked to a range of "capitals" (e.g. economic, social and political) on which individuals and households have different capacities to draw (Scoones 1998). Successful adaptation is more often associated with sectoral and spatial mobility, meaning that opportunities are drawn across multiple sectors and locations rather than from limited areas in and around Kyaw.

Household trajectories of livelihood change

Case 1: The entrepreneurial village head

Mr. A (72 years old) was the head of Kyaw Village Tract from 1982 to 1988. In 1990, he sold half an acre of his farmland and invested the money in setting up a sawmill. In those days, the timber felling industry in Kyaw was at its prime. He earned a lot of money selling timber (Padauk wood) to Myat Noe Thu Company. He also invested in opening up a shop to sell clothes, shoes and toys in 1994.

In 1996, Mr. A was reappointed as a village head for the second time. During his time as village head he was responsible for overseeing the construction of the railway project, various small bridges and the railway station. Through connections with the relatives of a former authority, he was able to obtain a construction contract with Myat Noe Thu Company in 1997. Myant Noe Thu was one of the companies responsible for the railway, highway and bridge projects, in addition to its involvement in the timber industry. Mr. A bought a lorry truck to transport workers and construction material and his business grew to have a 40-employee workforce.

After years of selling wood to Myat Noe Thu Company, Mr. A was able to get a broader insight of the market and he expanded his wood selling business to other areas such as Chin States, Bago, Taung-ngu, Taung-thar, Kyae-Ni and Lat-pan-taung (near Mongywa).

Mr. A's sons initially worked in the family timber business, but now they have set up separate businesses and home grocery shops. Currently, Mr. A is supervising the construction of a religious building. He has also purchased additional paddy land from other villagers.

In summary, Mr. A's position as head of the Kyaw Village allowed him to use his political capital to the gain contracts with companies and thus he was able to gain personal benefit from state development projects. He earned a lot of profit through his wood selling business, and by supplying companies with construction material and workers for large infrastructure projects. He also invested his profits in side businesses, such as shops and in purchasing additional land. He is definitely one of the more wealthy successful businesspersons in town.

Case 2: Staying with agriculture

Mr. B (53) became a village administrator for Ward 2 in 2007. He obtained only primary level education, studying up to the 3rd standard at the monastic school in Shwebin village. Going to School was a difficult task as there was no bridge to cross the creek. Since he was 14 years old, he started helping his parents with shifting cultivation, marking the trees that needed to be cleared before planting. After he got married, he built a house on his parent's homestead compound in Shwebin village.

His parents could not pass him any farmland of his own so he worked permanently on his parent's shifting cultivation fields (*taungya*). He moved his family to live permanently in the *taungya* field. They stayed there for around 10 years, only returning to Shwebin village for special occasions. His fourth child was born in the *taungya*. Their life was very hard at the beginning. It took one whole day for more than 15 workers to clear the land for farming and it only produced fifty baskets of rice per year. Like many other families in his village, they only had enough rice to eat for five months of the year. For the remaining seven months, they lived off maize, butter bean and banana. They also had eight cattle.

Later, he was able to save enough money purchase a plot of paddy land near Shwebin village and they moved back. The field was on a

steep slope and it took about five years to level it. However, it produced nearly a hundred baskets of rice per year. At present they have two acres of paddy land and five acres of farmland (formerly used for shifting cultivation but now under permanent cultivation). In total they are able to produce 120 baskets of rice per year.

Mr. B and his wife extended their residential area so that their children could build houses in the same compound when they marry. But in 2010, 150 ft. of land from their homestead was confiscated by the government to build the Kapasa Road. Two of their children work on the family farm, and built their house in the same compound. One daughter moved to her husband's house as there was not enough land for them. Another son, who is still single, works in construction for U Than Swe Company in Chin State. He earns two lakh (around $140 USD) per month, but spends almost all of his income and is unable to send money home to his parents.

Mr. B and his wife have worked very hard to overcome difficult conditions living and working on the *taungya* to being able to purchase paddy, farmland and a house close to town. His household continues to depend heavily on agriculture for food and selling vegetables to restaurants and private schools in Kyaw for income. His rise in status is reflected in his nomination to become village head in 2017. However, times have changed in Kyaw and there are no longer any large infrastructure projects planned in the area. Indeed, Kyaw has shifted from being a recipient to a source of migrant labor, with many people now moving to Chin State and other places in search for a job. Only one of his children has been able to obtain non-farm work and he has had to move to Chin State for it. In the future, Mr. B's children will inherit their land, but whether they continue to work on it remains to be seen.

While Kyaw Town has become more prosperous, and income earning opportunities have widened for the rural poor, it has also led to social differentiation and created a gap between rich and poor families. Those who profited most from state-led development projects in Kyaw town are government officials, tendered companies and a few village heads. Former village chairmen and

wealthier families with contacts in government were able to secure contracts with companies in building and construction, and now own their own transportation business. The sons and daughters of company owners and wealthier families attend the better schools in town or in Mandalay and many are studying to become doctors and engineers or work in the corporate and government sectors.

The majority of local people own small plots of land and have to work as wage laborers, at least on a part-time basis. The more entrepreneurially minded opened up shops and businesses but most have come to depend on low paid labor. Those who are landless are most vulnerable to employment losses and wage reductions in uban-based industries and services, as they do not have agricultural production to fall back on. Access to better jobs for vulnerable groups is constrained by skill shortages, informality and discrimination. For example, Chin families who migrated to Kyaw are not allowed to buy or hire paddy land or farmland from locals and mainly work as casual laborers in both farm and non-farm activities.

While in the past there were plenty of laboring jobs available, these have become scarcer as large infrastructure projects are no longer being planned in the area. Construction companies and associated industries and workers are instead moving to other regions such as Chin State to carry out projects there. As one local remarked:

> I bought my vehicle for 700 lakh so that I could transport construction material. I worked at U Sanny Company and was paid daily based on the number of trips I made. But now there are no plans for projects anymore, and so I have to go to other regions such as Chin Hills and Pale to find work there.

While Kyaw once attracted migrant workers, this trend is reversing as more and more people out-migrate in search of jobs. In and around Kyaw town, men and women are increasingly competing for low paid work such as stone crushing. As large infrastructure projects come to a halt, many are left with uncertainty about future employment.

6

CONCLUSION

The paper examined how a mountainous and forested rural area on Myanmar's lowland-upland borderlands was territorialized by the state during the 1990s by a combination of resource extraction projects, infrastructure development and urban-industrial expansion. Over a number of decades, the state applied various strategies of land and population control to dispossess people from their land and reorganize space in line with its vision of rural development. The paper examined the resulting transformation on agricultural land use and rural livelihoods in the context of broader rural-to-urban transformation, highlighting how rural change has been deeply embedded in processes of state building and restructuring.

The experience of Kyaw offers insight into the risks and opportunities associated with state-led development from the perspective of a particular locality, highlight the changing position of rural areas and people living and working in them. As agricultural land has become more scarce, rural livelihoods have become contingent on exploitation of a wide range of non-farm activities, suggesting profound changes in the trajectory of agrarian change. The research thus complicates depictions of "rural" and "urban" by examining the peri-urban frontier as a zone of transition where livelihoods are increasingly a hybrid mix of rural and urban livelihoods, lifestyles and modes of belonging, as villagers transcend sectors and their associated spatial boundaries.

Thus, even in small satellite towns such as Kyaw, which is still considered a remote place from the gaze of Myanmar's main urban centers, lives and livelihoods are becoming increasingly divorced from farming and, therefore, from the land. Patterns and associations of wealth and poverty have become more complex and diverse as non-farm opportunities have expanded and increased mobility has fragmented livelihoods across sectors and space. On the one hand, we see the emergence of new forms of wealth that are de-linked from the land. Many rural residents in Kyaw – including the poor – have benefited from a diversification of portfolios and it is precisely this diversity which has enabled them to secure incomes and an acceptable standard of living despite suffering losses in agricultural land. On the other hand, processes of social differentiation and the creation of new forms of vulnerability threaten the prospect of inclusive urbanization. This, in turn, carries policy implications for how best to achieve pro-poor development in rural areas.

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About the Author

Dr. Nyunt Nyunt Win received her PhD in Anthropology from the University of Yangon in 2012 and is currently Professor (head) at the Department of Anthropology, Dagon University, Myanmar. Prior to that she taught cultural and social anthropology at the University of Yangon, Nationalities Youth Resources Development Degree College (NYRDC) in Yangon, Yadanabon University, and University of Mandalay.

She has led a number of research projects on ethnic groups in Myanmar including the Kokant, Wa, Naga, Chin, Kayan, Padaung, Mayamagyi, Taron, Yaw and Bamar, and has published three books on the socio-economic life of Wa and Naga ethnic groups. Her research interests include social networks, social structure, livelihood strategies, ethnic identity, resource management and rural development.

RURAL TO URBAN TRANSITION IN A FORMER PERIPHERY

State-led Development, Land Use Change and Livelihood Transformation in Kyaw, Gangaw Township, Myanmar

The Township of Gangaw in the northernmost periphery of Magway Region is administratively, politically and ethnically part of central Myanmar; yet, its upland-like agro-ecology sets it apart. In this mountainous and forested region, lowland paddy land is scarce and the ethnic Bamar population has traditionally relied on shifting cultivation, livestock and forest products for their livelihoods. The military government initiated an accelerated program of infrastructure development to transform this previously peripheral area into a hub of connectivity for cross-border commerce with India, while also increasing state military presence, particularly in the border area with Chin State. The once remote rural landscape of villages, fields, and forests has rapidly transformed into a hub of trade and economic activity, attracting thousands of Bamar migrants to work on roads and railway construction, urban and industrial development, and timber and oil projects.

This research examines land use change and rural livelihood dynamics brought by state-led development and transnational market integration since 1988. It employs an ethnographic approach to examine how farming households have responded to the squeeze on land and natural resources by diversifying their livelihoods in the face of new economic opportunities brought by development, demographic change and increased mobility. Focusing on Kyaw's recent transition from village tract to urbanized town, the research highlights how the peri-urban frontier has emerged as a new context for examining transformations in the countryside. In Kyaw, livelihoods are diversifying as people increasingly turn to non-farm activities, young people's aspirations are shifting towards non-agricultural pursuits, and households increasingly transcend "rural" and "urban" sectors and spaces.

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