Community Networking and Remittances as Social Capital for Rural Community Development

in Chin State, Myanmar

Cung Liang Hu Chin

Consortium of Development Studies in Southeast Asia (CDSSEA)

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The Consortium of Development Studies in Southeast Asia has drawn on primary postgraduate research undertaken for theses from the master's programs of Asian Institute of Technology's Master of Science in Gender and Development Studies (MGDS), Chiang Mai University's Master of Arts in Social Science (Development Studies) (MASS); and the Chulalongkorn University Master of Arts in International Development Studies (MAIDS). Scholarships for the students of CDSSEA has been generously provided by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. With a diversity of academic approaches (gender studies, political science, social sciences), the individual works of this collection have in common a focus on the increasing interconnection and regionalization of the five mainland Southeast Asian countries (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam), and examine these exchanges and encounters within the context of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).

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Community Networking and Remittances as Social Capital for Rural Community Development, Chin State, Myanmar

Cung Lian Hu

RCSD
The Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development
Chiang Mai University

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Series Foreword

The Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University has extended its publication program to include Master's dissertations from The Consortium of Development Studies in Southeast Asia (CDSSEA). The CDSSEA series covers mainland Southeast Asia: Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, and regionalization, development encounters and exchanges within the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).

The CDSSEA program brings together resources and expertise from three of Thailand's leading institutions offering Master's degrees in development studies: Chiang Mai University's Master of Arts in Social Science (Development Studies) (MASS); Chulalongkorn University's Master of Arts in International Development Studies (MAIDS); and the Asian Institute of Technology's Master of Science in Gender and Development Studies (MGDS). Although the Consortium's program focuses on the relationship between development studies and social sciences, each of the programs has a different emphasis. The Chiang Mai degree focuses on social sciences and anthropological perspectives, with research interests in environmental and resource management, food security and local livelihoods, labour migration and trans-border issues, ethnicity and development, health, tourism, and agrarian transitions. Chulalongkorn's program concentrates on the political dimension of development, including democratization, human rights, conflict resolution, international and civil society development organizations, community development and globalization. The Asian Institute of Technology focuses on the relationships between gender and development—including women's rights, civil society, and gender dimensions of urbanization and industrialization.

The CDSSEA program has a practical dimension, building leadership capacity in mainland Southeast Asia's regional development, bringing together postgraduate students, encouraging debate, and promoting the rethinking of development alternatives in such areas as social equality, justice and participation, environmental and economic sustainability, and community development. In this regard, a major objective is to develop the knowledge and skills of development practitioners and to enhance the quality and effectiveness of policy-making and its implementation in the region.

The publications in this series—selected from the CDSSEA Master's program—are designed to express this diverse range of interests in development studies and regionalization, and to emphasize the relationships between empirical and theoretical research, policy-making and practice.

Victor T. King, Senior Editorial Adviser,
Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration Series

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Abbreviations

CHRO	Chin Human Rights Organization
CNA	Chin National Army
CNF	Chin National Front
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GVDG	Global Vanzang Development Group
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HTAs	Hometown Associations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VGM	Vanzang Group Mail

Glossary of Terms

Arthin Tuh	Chin ceremony for children to honor parents, traditionally by giving them a chicken heart
Hundi	A negotiable instrument, bill of exchange, or promissory note of India used especially in the internal finance of trade.
Kyat	Burmese currency (1,000,000 kyat = USD740, GBP575)
Migrant family/ household	A family resident in Vanzang village one or more of whose members has emigrated.
Mithun	A large semi-domesticated Himalayan bovine
Mizo	Inhabitants of Mizoram State, India, culturally and linguistically close to the Chin.
Non-migrant family/household	A family resident in Vanzang village none of whose members has emigrated.

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Cung Lian Hu

Burma/Myanmar

Prior to 1989, the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia was exclusively known internationally as "Burma"— the name that British colonizers used after they consolidated the central plains and previously autonomous mountainous regions in the mid-1800s in reference to the country's largest ethnic group, the Burman. The international use of "Myanmar" to refer to the country dates only to 1989, when the country's unelected military rulers of the time announced the change of the nation's name to "Myanmar Naing-Ngan." In addition, the official names of many ethnic groups, regions, cities, and villages were also changed, including that of the former capital from "Rangoon" to "Yangon."

The name changes were purportedly an effort on the part of the military regime to remake Burma into a more inclusive, multi-ethnic country, and to cast off vestiges of the colonial era. However, many critics have pointed out that these changes fail to address the root causes of problematic Burman/ethnic minority relations, and historians have shown that both "Burma" and "Myanmar" were used prior to British administration. In addition, the use of "Myanmar" in English presents a grammatical challenge, as there is no conventional adjective form.

While international organizations such as the United Nations and Amnesty International have adopted the use of "Myanmar," journalistic, activist, and academic convention in much of the world continues to favor the use of "Burma," although usage patterns continue to evolve. For this series, the decision of whether to use pre- or post-1989 "official" names has been left entirely to the author of each work, and in most instances the names are used interchangeably with no intended political implications.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Historical Background of Chin Migration

Decades of civil war and the isolation of the Burmese socialist regime between 1962 and 1988 have left Myanmar as one of the world's least developed countries, while neighboring countries like Thailand, China and Malaysia have experienced dramatic economic growth. The growing demand for labor in these economic boom countries is a pull factor encouraging Burmese emigration, added to the push factors of social, economic and political repression. Economic instability and extreme poverty exist throughout the country but are particularly acute in areas of forced displacement and in underdeveloped rural border regions (Belak 2002) such as Chin State.

Chin State, known as the "Chin Hills" due to its mountainous geography with an average elevation of 5000-8000 feet, is located in the southern part of northwestern Myanmar, bordered by Bangladesh and India to the west, Rakhine State to the south, and Magwe and Sagaing Divisions to the east. The State is home to an estimated 500,000 Chin who are of Sino-Tibetan origin, related to the Mizos, Kuki, and others. They inhabit a mountain chain extending from Chin State in western Burma through to Mizoram in northeast India and parts of Bangladesh. Although the Chin are referred to as one of the many ethnic groups in Myanmar, they are ethnically and linguistically diverse, comprising a number of ethnic groups such as the Asho, Cho, Khumi, Kuki, Laimi, Lushai, and Zomi, each with its own Tibeto-Burman language (Lian H. Sakhong 2003).

In this study, I use the term Chin people or the Chins interchangeably as a common name although my research target group is considered Laimi by other groups in Chin State. Chin people are mostly Protestant Christians. The church is an integral part of Chin society. Historian Lian H. Sakhong (2003) argued that Christianity is a unifying force for the otherwise divided tribal groups, helping to form a cohesive Chin nationality.

British rule between 1872 and 1889 divided Chin territory into separate administrative zones: a southwestern territory governed by the British Governor of Bengal; a northwestern territory controlled by the British Governor of Assam; and an eastern portion governed by British-controlled Burma (Lian H. Sakhong, 2003). Under the 1886 Chin Hills Regulation Act the British governed the Chins separately from the rest of Burma, which allowed for traditional Chin chiefs to remain in power with indirect British rule (Human Rights Watch 2009). After Indian independence, international boundaries were established incorporating the western part of Chin territory into India, and the eastern part into Burma.

The Chins along with the ethnic Kachin and Shan minorities participated in the Panglong Conference organized by General Aung San, and were signatories to the Panglong Agreement on February 12, 1947. However, after the assassination of Aung San, and the failure to establish a federal union and autonomy for the ethnic states as promised in the Agreement, civil conflict broke out (Lian H. Sakhong 2003). The Chin people have experienced severe political oppression and economic hardship as a result of the conflict between the military and the Chin which started in 1962. From the 1990s onwards, oppressive rule, meager economic investment, and lack of development in agriculture and infrastructure, including communications and transport, have pushed much of the Chin population below the poverty line. A household survey in 2005 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) found that one-third of the population of Burma lives below the poverty line. However, in Chin State it is about 70 percent, and 40 percent are without adequate food sources (Human Rights Watch 2009). Characterized by steep mountains and gorges, Chin State lacks natural resources. The Chin people depended solely on agriculture or shifting cultivation before remittances began to flow. The military did not invest substantially in infrastructure - roads, electricity and other public services - and Chin State was considered the least developed of

the administrative regions of Myanmar. It is isolated, and has no major link with other cities in Myanmar or in neighboring countries.

Poverty in Chin State, due to the lack of infrastructure, natural resources and economic opportunities, was exacerbated by the oppressive policies and pervasive human rights violations of the military government, which included forced labor (Human Rights Watch 2009). Rapid militarization in Chin State since 1988 combined with widespread ethnic and religious discrimination have resulted in a litany of human rights violations perpetrated by the Myanmar army. More than 150,000 Chin people are currently seeking refuge in India and Malaysia, while hundreds of thousands more are estimated to have moved to other areas in Myanmar (Chin Human Rights Organization 2010). Worsening socio-economic conditions have resulted in large-scale migration of Chin people. Migration and remittances have become their alternative livelihoods. Several thousand Chin migrants are scattered throughout Europe, Australia and New Zealand; most do not return to Chin State. However, people from Chin State in India's neighboring Mizoram state can go back and forth and thus can be categorized as temporary migrants.

Chin migration is caused by a mixture of social, economic and political conditions. Many economic migrants migrate to work in India, Thailand, and Malaysia. Some of these migrants have returned home with their accumulated capital; the majority have not. They go to third countries as refugees and do not return home. Refugee status provides Chin people with a way out of the deteriorating socio-political and economic conditions at home.

Several factors keep Chin migration unabated: transnational networks which connect the migrants and home; and the socio-economic impacts of remittances on recipient households. Improvements in education and health services and in household economy, enabled by remittances, can be seen in many rural Chin villages whose economy is otherwise largely dependent on subsistence farming - some 85 percent of people in Chin State rely on shifting cultivation for their livelihoods (Human Rights Watch 2009). The steep mountains and deep gorges of the Chin Hills hinder substantive agricultural development. Soil erosion and exhaustion are common as a result of the lack of viable farm land and of farming on sloping hillsides. These environmental factors limit crop production and increase food insecurity. Increasingly, since

the 1990s, the majority of the population is dependent on remittance flows from its people living abroad.

As over the years more and more Chin people migrate overseas, with a concomitant rise in remittances, there are grounds for a systematic inquiry into the factors involved in the organization of migration, in the calling for and management of remittances especially for community development, and into the potential impacts of remittances on social relations, cultural practices and social problems.

Statement of the research problem and justification

Migration and remittances have increasingly become the source of survival for many Chin households enduring hardship and a lack of infrastructure - water systems, telephones, electricity and roads - under military rule. Most of the villages have no electricity and the water systems are very primitive. The common use of mobile phones started only around 2012. Roads connecting villages and towns are not suitable for cars. There is no effective economic connectivity within Chin State or between it and neighboring countries. Successive governments have failed to construct basic infrastructure and apart from jobs in government there are no local job opportunities.

The prevailing social and economic conditions have resulted in large-scale migration of Chin people to North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and some Asian countries. In developed countries they have become permanent migrants. Migrating to Malaysia and Thailand takes only a few hundred thousand kyats. Migrants come from the better-off families - others do not have money to migrate. Households without migrants are poor, while many families with migrants have been able to improve their living standards and social influence.

Migrants are rational economic beings (Chimhowu et al. 2005) with altruism and self-interest among the main reasons to migrate and remit (Ballard 2001). Remittances are a risk sharing resource or a risk diversification strategy (Stark and Lucas 1988). They are perceived as livelihood security for households facing risk from market and natural disasters; a mutual benefit contract between those who remit and those who receive.

Sending remittances is a fulfillment of family obligations (Agarwal and Horowitz 2002). Remittances are reported to have multiple effects in sustaining rural livelihoods, establishing businesses, improving living conditions, bringing people out of poverty, and providing capital for social and economic development. Debates continue, however, between optimists who see remittances as livelihood security, a risk diversification strategy, and a contribution to community development, and pessimists who have pointed out the tendency of a culture of dependency, of social inequality, and adverse impacts on social relations.

Some studies of remittances from Myanmar migrants have found them to be a source of capital and livelihood survival (Turnell et al. 2003; Min Za Ni Lin 2009; Tun Min Sandar 2011; Rual Lian Thang 2012). Assessing the impact of remittances in Myanmar is difficult due to the country's political and economic instability. A study by Turnell et al. (2003) highlights the informal nature of Myanmar migrants' remittances made through the informal device of Hundi which transfers value rather than the currency. Focusing on the Chin migrants, Rual Lian Thang's (2012) study showed remittances to be a stable source of income for rural Chin households as well as an engine for community development. His study found that some 80 percent of villagers received remittances from relatives working overseas. Remittances were mainly used for daily basic needs, housing expenses, education, and health. In addition, remittances were also redistributed within the community for social welfare, construction of roads, schools, and mini-hydroelectric power plants.

While these studies provide an understanding about remittance determinants and how remittances help sustain household survival and contribute to community development, there has not yet been any study focusing on remittance organization and management and the wide range of networks involved. This is of particular relevance in the case of Chin society. Chin people use the social capital embedded in their kinship network in calling for remittances. In addition, Chin society is a devout Christian society in which religious institutions as well as community leaders get involved in meeting community needs. Thus, religious and community networks are an integral part of Chin social and cultural life. These networks can play an important role in migration and remittances and their role need further study. It is also important to explore the relationships between and among these networks - kinship, religious, and community - and their relationship to Chin migration

and remittances. My study will examine how these networks are appropriated as a mechanism for the redistribution of remittances within the community for services and development. The impact of migrants' remittances has not been adequately studied: in many villages receiving remittances, such as Vanzang village where I conducted my study, new forms of social and cultural practices have arisen and gaps have widened between migrant and non-migrant households. As some social issues - dependency, social inequality, and increased drug use - have become more observable in many Chin villages in the aftermath of migration and remittance sending, these phenomena require further inquiry and analysis. Chin migration patterns and characteristics as well as the social and cultural impacts of remittances in the society remain unexplored topics.

This research was therefore undertaken to fill the knowledge gap in remittance research in Myanmar by exploring the roles of kinship, religious, and community networks in the management of remittances for community services and development. This pioneer study has also examined how remittances contribute to shifting social relations and cultural practices in the rural community, as well as investigating the social costs of migration and remittances for society in general and the impacts of remittances on rural Chin community development in particular. I hope my findings will be helpful to the large academic community interested in migration and the impact of remittances at national, community, and household levels.

Research Questions

1. What are the roles of kinship, religious, and community networks in community development in a rural Chin village?
2. In what ways have these networks been mobilized for the redistribution of remittances for community development?
3. How have remittances brought about changes in cultural practices, social relations and increased social problems in a rural Chin village?

Research Objectives

1. To understand the roles of kinship, religion, and community networks in the management of remittances for community development in a rural Chin village.

2. To comprehend the impacts of remittances on cultural practices, social relations, and increases in social problems in a rural Chin community.

Research methodology

Research Site

Figure 1.1: Vanzang Village
(from Vanzang Overseas webpage with permission)

I did my research in Vanzang village in the northern part of Chin State, 24 miles from Thantlang town and close to the Indian border. It has 106 households of which 38 are non-migrant. Migration of Vanzang people to Malaysia started early in the 1990s due to increased military oppression. The village has suffered severely from atrocities committed by the military in its attempt to suppress the political movement of Chin students known as the Chin National Front (CNF) and its army wing, the Chin National Army (CNA). The CNA operated across the India-Burma border in the aftermath of the

students uprising in Myanmar in 1988. The fighting was severe from 1994 onwards. The atrocities caused many villagers located close to India to run to Mizoram state for safety. In the case of Vanzang village, the emigrants mostly went to Malaysia, where there were already some village people working. There was a villager working as a broker arranging for Chin people to go to Malaysia. Faced with the oppressive Burmese Army and the pervasive recruitment of the CNF, plus extreme poverty, Vanzang people started to migrate there. The migrants can be divided into two groups: those who have migrated for economic purposes; and those who go to seek a UNHCR refugee card to benefit from its program for resettling refugees in developed countries. Eligibility for refugee status is a major incentive. Most Vanzang migrants reaching developed countries go via Malaysia and the UNHCR resettlement program. Today, there are around 100 village people working and applying for UNHCR refugee status. Over 200 people have been resettled in developed countries such as the USA, Australia and European countries.

Unit and Level of Analysis

In this research, the households and the community are the units of my analysis. A qualitative research approach is used. I analyze the household perception towards the mobilization of remittances by the community networks for the purposes of community development. I also analyze how remittances can be pooled for community development. At the community level, I analyze the different roles of kinship, religious, and community networks and the many stakeholders involved in the management and use of remittances for community development.

This research focuses on a rural Chin village where remittances have been flowing for about a decade and where their impact has been noticeable. The impacts of remittances are implicitly far-reaching, having both bad and good results. The analysis is confined within the roles of networks in the redistribution of remittances for community development and the exploration of remittances' effects on cultural practices, social relations, and some social problems in the community.

Data Collection Methods

In order to understand the roles of community networks in the redistribution of remittances for community development, I interviewed 8 key informants representing the four churches and 3 key informants for the community network, as well as community leaders. For information regarding the effect of remittances on cultural practices, social relations, and social issues, I conducted in-depth interviews with key informants, who were knowledgeable about the village social and cultural context before and after migration. In addition, I used a household survey to interview 15 households to collect data on the impact of remittances on receiving households. Before conducting any interviews or collecting any data, I told the interviewees what I was about to ask and what I would use the data for, and got their prior consent. As a researcher, I made clear to my informants that any information gathered would be used for academic purposes only. To protect the privacy of the key informants, I use pseudonyms.

I spent one month in Vanzang village. I stayed in the house of one of my key informants with whom I could share information and ask different questions to gain his perspectives on migration and remittances. I had already lived in this village for a year in 1995 while my father was posted there, and many of the older people still recognized me and were happy to talk and discuss matters with me. By introducing myself and my family, the villagers considered me as part of their village. I quickly built up a rapport with different people in the village, though the younger generation did not know me personally. I explained that I was working on a research project for my thesis, investigating the impacts of remittances on migrant households and how the Vanzang people made use of different networks to mobilize remittances for community development. I interviewed them in the Chin language, called "Lai", that all the people in the village speak. At first, they tended to ask questions to as to why I was investigating and collecting data. They were afraid of interrogation by the military and of talking about how they spend their remittances. Villagers feel insecure when a set of comprehensive questions is asked as they have experienced Burmese Army atrocities which often occur after interrogations; they are suspicious of any questioning including for academic purposes. Many of the people I interviewed felt uneasy about discussing their financial situation. I was also concerned about a possible lack of hard data. Some people had no records whereas others kept detailed records of receipts and expenditure. But as I

explained the purpose of the research and how the information would be used, they opened up and I could have conversations and get household remittance expenditure data. My main research methods were in-depth interviews, group discussions, household surveys and observation of various projects implemented with remittance funds.

(1) Key Informants Interview

At first, I did a preliminary inquiry to select key informants. My key informants were suggested to me by many of the villagers as knowledgeable and active participants in village development. I chose key informants from those persons who were involved in different community projects and as key communicators for mobilizing remittances from overseas migrants. In other words, the key players for various community and religious projects, otherwise known as the Global Vanzang Development Group (GVDG).

(2) Household Survey

During my field work, I spent most of my time with the key informants or undertaking the household survey which was done either in the morning or in the evening. I held discussions and interviews depending on informants' availability. For some of the interviews, I arranged appointments depending on their free time. Sometimes, we had discussions and interviews at night as they preferred this, while at other times I would interview them in the morning before they went to work. When I interviewed a head of household about expenditure of remittances, he would usually turn to his wife as the person in charge of family finances, so that women became important informants for the survey. It was not harvest time and the main job of the housewives was gathering wood, either in the morning or in the evening. Sometimes I interviewed them when they were available at home. At other times I made an appointment.

(3) In-depth Interview

For in depth interviews, I selected 8 key informants: three for cultural and social transformation and 5 for community and religious networks and development. I visited all the project sites funded by remittances with key informants who were able to brief me on how the project started, the implementation process, and the mobilization of funds. I usually interviewed the key informants before the site visit and gathered additional information

during the visit. Sometimes, the key informants had more to say when we were at the sites, where they would recall more of the project's history. Group discussion provided me with more information and the different views of different people. Although I could get detailed information on the various projects that are fully or partially funded by remittances, it was quite difficult to get full information on the management of the funds, especially for the community projects, as my key informants were not responsive to that line of questioning. However, the religious leaders that I interviewed were very open and informative, and provided complete information and details about projects funded by remittances for their churches.

(4) Secondary Source

I also used a village magazine that helped me to understand the historical, social and economic situation of the village before and after migration. It was especially useful as a source of background information on community projects which although now funded by remittances had been started before remittances began to flow. To understand Chin migration as a whole and the social and cultural transformation which occurred after migration and remittances, I also made use of some relevant Chin magazines. These secondary sources helped me to get a better understanding of the issues of Chin migration and its impacts on Chin society, explained in their own language.

(5) Group Discussion

I held group discussions with the 4 key informants selected for community projects. They were all male, as women did not get actively involved in the implementation and mobilization of these projects. When I did group interviews with church leaders about religious networking and development, however, two out of 4 persons were female. I also did group interviews with the women's Friday Prayer group leaders who were also key informants for households, as they were from migrant families.

I wrote down details of the information in Lai language. I had a local guide who helped me in taking notes; all of the information gathered was put in a note book. I also used a camera to take pictures of various sites and of some letters that village leaders provided, which often had names of key sponsors and responsible leaders. I had intended to use video or audio

records, but stopped doing so as it made the interviewees nervous. I took pictures of the key informants, the project sites and the housewives I interviewed.

Topic	Women	Men	Total
Community projects	0	3	3
Religious projects	3	5	8
Households	15	0	15
Social problems and Cultural change	0	3	3
Totals	18	11	29

Table 1.1: Profiles of Key Informants

Selection of Key Informants

Vanzang village has added greatly to community infrastructure with the assistance of overseas migrants. Some of the projects are fully supported by remittances while others are only partially supported. Before the Global Vanzang Development Group (GVDG) was started, projects were carried out in an uncoordinated way without a strong managing committee. There would be one key person that the migrants would connect with, and this man would act as intermediary between the migrants and the villagers, navigating the communication and implementation process of the project. He would discuss with the villagers and the projects would be implemented under the leadership of the Village Council. My key informant was the key contact person or leader for relations with the migrants and the main leader for all remittance funded projects. This kind of informal, loose networking had practical outcomes for village development, but in 2008 the overseas migrants formed the Global Vanzang Development Group to work for village development in an organized and systematic way. At the same time a working committee was formed in the village, as part of the GVDG. They have a strong networking role with the GVDG, exchanging views and consulting, mobilizing the people, raising funds and implementing coordinated projects for village development.

When I started inquiring about who were the key persons coordinating and leading community projects among the villagers, I was informed that it was those people who had been involved in the implementation of community

projects from the very beginning when migrants started to fund them. I selected those active participants as my key informants as they were knowledgeable and best placed to provide information about migrant-sponsored projects. They had been working voluntarily for the social development of Vanzang people since remittances started. I began with intensive interviews with these persons individually, and then had a group discussion with the village GVDC sub-committee.

Concerning remittances for religious projects, I selected key leaders from different churches. After the formation of the GVDG, remittances were mobilized for building churches as part of community development, taking no account of denomination. Only one church was built under the leadership of the GVDG. I interviewed the church pastor and chairman, and other members of the GVDG subcommittee who helped in raising the issue with the GVDG. Without the contributions of the GVDG leadership, the church would not have been built. I interviewed each of the other church chairmen for a better understanding of how their church initiated networking with migrants who were former church members. They mobilized the migrants utilizing the social capital in the membership. Sometimes, the migrants themselves reconnected with their former church and felt called upon to contribute to it. This can be described as part of transnational religious connectivity.

Since my study focused on the village, I did not have any interviews with any of the migrants. The interviewees were local church leaders and/or key communicators with the migrants, and were often the implementers of the projects. I interviewed a pastor from one church who had not contacted any overseas migrants for funding for his church building; however, some local members had a family member living overseas from whom they received remittances and they gave one tenth of these remittances to the church, so remittances did benefit this church indirectly. There were also cases where members of this church had contacted their overseas relatives, informing them of a need, and where remittances were mobilized by the individual members independently. I could not interview these people individually as they were not in the village while the research was undertaken.

There are also changes in cultural practices, and emerging social problems, caused by migration and remittances. To investigate these I selected three older people who were knowledgeable about the cultural and social aspects

of the village prior to and after large-scale migration. As a result of remittance flows, some people become wealthier, and their rate of consumption is increased. In social relations, the gap between the rich and the poor has become wider and wider. Migration can be socially costly, causing divorce, drug use and grievances in some migrant families. Remittances have shifted the meaning of some cultural practices in the village community. Regarding the impact of remittances on household income and expenditure, I interviewed 15 migrant households. Mainly I selected those whose family members lived in developed countries such as USA, Australia, and Europe (the amounts of money sent home by migrants in Malaysia are minimal and have smaller impact). Since Vanzang people started migrating overseas in the early 2000s, remittance flows have increased markedly and have changed household expenditure on clothes, health, education, food, property and social events. I used the household survey for information on these indicators. There are big variations in expenditure among the migrant households as the flow of remittances can vary considerably depending on how long the migrant has lived in the developed country, and their success or failure in economic terms. I asked questions in the areas of financial dependency on remittances, the productive investment of the money, and the assistance extended to family members. I also investigated the role of networking in mobilizing remittances for kin and in raising funds for religious and community projects.

Conceptual Framework

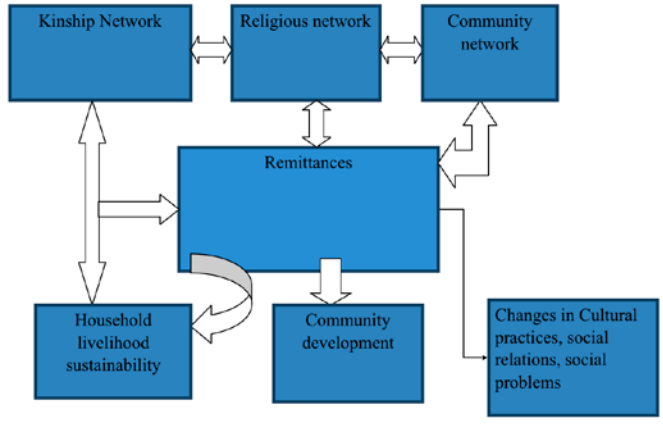

Figure 1.2 the Roles of Networks in Community Development

In most Chin societies, three kinds of network - kinship, religious, and community - are integral to social and cultural life, and play important roles in migration and remittances. Kinship networks play an instrumental role in family migration and Chin people use the social capital embedded in this kind of network in calling for remittances. Their impact reaches even to extended families. The role of the Chin kinship network in migration and remittances needs further study. Furthermore, whenever Chin people find themselves in foreign countries, they tend to form their own community, building a community network with their place of origin. For example, if five families live abroad, these families tend to care for their community needs back in Chin State and a network is formed transnationally. In this network, an exchange of ideas, information and resources takes place and provides a sense of belonging to the community. Chin society is devoutly Christian and Christianity influences all spheres of their lives - social, economic, and political. In Chin society both the religious institutions and the community leaders get involved in meeting community needs, and the church has a binding effect on people's lives and acts to heighten Chin social cohesion. As a consequence, there are many cases of remittances being used for the benefit of religious institutions and for community development projects initiated by the churches.

These networks can provide an analytical tool for studying the means of access to different resources for different groups, and the ways in which those resources are used for livelihoods and community development. My study explores the relationships between and among these networks - kinship, community, and religious - and their relationship to migration and remittances. It examines how these networks have been appropriated as a mechanism in the redistribution of remittances within the community for community services and development.

The Structure of the Book

This book is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter 1, I discuss the background of Chin migration in general and the people of Vanzang in particular. It presents the focal points of the study, the research questions, sites, research methodology and fieldwork. Chapter 2 presents a literature review on remittances and their impact on receiving communities, followed by reviews of the concepts of community networks and capital which are used to analyze

the networking between overseas Vanzang people and the villagers on the kinship, community and religious levels. It ends with a review of related studies specific to Myanmar. Chapter 3 provides background information on Vanzang village and its people. Chapter 4 looks at the kinship network and its role in migration and in calling for remittances and the impact of remittances on receiving households through indicators such as basic needs, health, education, economic investment and social and religious events. Chapter 5 discusses the networking between overseas Vanzang people and the villagers, the mobilization of overseas migrants, and the implementation of different community projects. It also discusses the religious networking between the local churches and their overseas migrants, and looks at how the local churches and their members mobilize overseas migrants for the development of their churches. It further details each religious development, especially church building funded by overseas remittances, and the women's prayer groups and their role in the development of community religious life. Chapter 6 discusses the social and cultural transformations that have taken place following large-scale migration and remittance flows. Chapter 7 presents some concluding discussion, observations and findings.

Chapter 2

Literature Review on Theories, Concepts and Related Studies

In this chapter, I review the literature on the relationships of migration, development and remittances. The first section deals with theoretical assumptions on migration and remittances, and their potential for developing the remittance-receiving community. In addition, I review the literature on social networks and social capital, showing its relevance to my study on the kinship, religious and community networks that I explore in the following chapters. In the last section I look at research literature related specifically to Myanmar migration and remittances, and the state of knowledge on remittance research in Myanmar.

Migration and Remittances as Agents of Development

International migration has been conceived as benefiting the migrants' home countries as it involves the transfer of investment capital and industrialization from the developed to the developing areas. Migrants are thus perceived as agents of change, with the flow of remittances, skills and knowledge contributing to the developing countries' economic take-off (Castles et al 2007). The economic downturn in 1973 challenged these optimistic views. Increasingly scholars started to question the benefits of migration. They have pointed out some of the problems: the loss of human capital; the breakdown of traditional, stable village communities; the "brain drain" (Adams 1969), and the "brawn

drain" (Penninx 1982). These are problems of massive departure of young men and women from rural areas (Lewis 1986). Migration and remittances were also linked to increased inequality in communities of origin because it is generally not the poorest who migrate the most (Lipton 1980). A new economics of migration theory emerged in the 1980s which shifted the unit of analysis from the individual to the household (Stark 1991; Taylor 1999). This new approach emphasizes the role of households in migration decisions. Migration is considered as risk sharing behavior, with remittances serving as income insurance (Stark and Lucas 1988). According to Ratha (2005), remittances have been increasingly recognized as an important external source of national income, exceeding US$ 126 billion in 2004 (World Bank 2004).

Remittances can be money and goods (Adams 2009), skills (Meyer et al. 1997) and ideas or practices (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). Why remit? Altruism and pure interest are mostly cited. The care of a migrant for those left behind is the most obvious motive, argued Stark (1978: 902 cited in Grieco 2003). Some studies (Stark and Lucas 1988; Glytsos 1997) suggest that migrants remit most soon after their arrival and that remittances then decline, but sometimes increase in response to the needs of their household back home. The amount of remittances will change again if the migrants expect to return permanently (self-interest). Brown's (1998) study of remittances from Tongans and Western Samoans in Australia found remittances to be driven by both demand-side variables affecting the need for family support, and supply-side factors particularly the migrants' income levels and motivation to transfer their savings and invest in their countries of origin. Kapur (2005) called remittances "the new development mantra." Studies on remittance recipients found the main beneficiaries to be lower or middle-income countries, which receive nearly half of all remittances worldwide (Kapur 2005). Adelman and Taylor's (1990) study found that for every dollar sent or brought into Mexico by migrants working abroad, Mexico's gross national product (GDP) increased by somewhere between US$ 2.69 - 3.17. For many poor countries, remittances, which are considered to be much more stable than private capital flows, act as insurance, a liquidity for small enterprises, and a social insurance which has significant impact on both poverty and equity.

Ratha (2005) indicates that remittance flows rank behind only foreign direct investment (FDI) as a source of external funding for developing countries.

At the community level, remittances invested in community development benefit members of the community as a whole.

Some scholars consider that remittances help to increase household savings and asset accumulation and serve as collateral for loans and liquidity in time of crisis (Lucas and Stark 1985); that they provide access to health services and better nutrition which have the potential for improved productivity (Yang 2003), and access to longer education thus reducing child labor (Mansuri 2007).

Remittances increase social capital, ie the ability to participate in social groups and activities, and help provide access to information (Adams 1991; Ballard 2005). Boyd (1989) noted that remittances are an indication of transnational social networks, helping to maintain migration as a household strategy, and sending messages about comparative opportunity and standards of living which stimulate further migration flows (Boyd 1989: 651).

In summary, remittance impacts are diverse depending on the relationships and mutual interests of the migrants and their households, and their respective economic conditions. Remittances help secure livelihoods when vulnerability to internal and external shocks is high. For Chin people, remittances are the way out of the livelihood insecurity imposed by hard political and economic conditions.

Community Networking as Social Capital

Social capital has been conceptualized by many scholars with different emphases. Two names stand out: Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam. Bourdieu defined social capital as the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). Putnam (1993: 167), in his emphasis on the role of social capital in civic engagement, defined social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."

Accessing social capital involves issues of ties and trust. Trust earned from social relationships is the underlying requirement for accessing social capital. Those who have close ties within the network can call upon those

resources, but others are excluded, ie there is inequality of access to the social resource. Putnam (1993) gives paramount importance to facilitating a common shared objective rather than that of kinship. Portes (1998) referred to this as "bounded solidarity," a sense of community solidarity which results from collective shared experiences. I found this concept of "bounded solidarity" relevant in analyzing the community network of migrants and local villagers for mobilizing migrants' community contributions.

The role of social networks, especially kinship and friendship networks, has been recognized in migration studies as a facilitating and encouraging factor in migratory movement (Haug 2008; Heering et al. 2004). According to Massey et al. (1993), a migration network can be defined as a composite of interpersonal relations in which migrants interact with their family or friends. Migrant networks are defined as sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origin (Massey et al. 1993: 448). These interpersonal relationships are influencing factors to support migration, after migration becomes a foundational source for information regarding accommodation, jobs and emotional support in the destination countries (Boyd 1989). Migrant networks depend on underlying factors such as the resources and perceived needs of members (Gurak and Caces 1992: 152). As social networks provide a foundation for the dissemination of information as well as patronage or assistance (Haug, 2008), they are social capital (Lin, 1999). Understanding social capital in terms of being rooted in social networks and relations, Lin (1999: 40) defined social capital as "resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions".

This study employs the meaning of social capital as both the collective assets as explained by Bourdieu (1992) and as norms, trust, and shared objectives as espoused by Putnam (1993). I will also make use of Coleman's (1994) emphasis on the functions of social capital especially in facilitating certain actions of individuals within the social structure. I found the definitions and explanations of social capital by these three scholars to be relevant and useful for my analysis. In Chin migrant networks, kinship, friendship, shared beliefs, shared community and shared ethnicity play important roles as sources of capital, information, protection and emotional support. The way the Chin people help each other and share resources is mainly on the basis of reciprocal relationships embedded in kinship, community and religious networks. This

study will focus on these kinds of social networks. Kinship networks are composed of relations of parentage which include individuals, marriage, nuclear family, descent lines and cohesive groups (Harary and White 2001). Kinship helps an individual to link with different people in a kinship network which is characterized by the interplay of three fundamental principles: filiation, marriage, and gender.

The Chin migrants involved in a kinship network feel obligated to support their relatives back home, including helping them to migrate and work abroad. The Chin migrants living abroad are concerned not only with their own family circles, but also extend their knowledge and financial resources to the larger community to help those who can be described only as acquaintances. Recipients of remittances are the migrants' kin and relatives, friends and community. But the migrant households are not the only beneficiaries; the receiving community also benefits as remittances encourage the establishment of community services, infrastructure and commodity markets. Most Chin migrants in developed countries arrive as refugees under UNHCR resettlement programs. The programs allow them to include spouses, siblings and other relatives, so refugee status is the channel for Chin migrants to bring their families to developed countries. It is also the channel for transnational marriages.

There are many cases where Chin migrants help members of their community to migrate and to send remittances. Helping others is also investing in social capital. Reciprocity is embedded in Chin society social norms and beliefs. Remittances play an important role in community development in the Chin community.

Shared norms and beliefs are also a source of social capital. Belonging to the same community generates social solidarity. Most of the Chin are Christians who feel obligated to contribute to the communal life of their society. Portes (1998) refers to this as "bounded solidarity", a sense of community solidarity which results from shared experiences of community. "Identification with one's own group, sect, or community can be a powerful motivational force" (Portes 1998: 8).

Migration for the Chin is risky as most often it is illegal, involving long journeys and crossing borders without legal documents. The risk continues after arrival as legal protection is often rare. In the midst of the uncertainty of life as migrants in foreign countries, the church plays an important role, offering

moral and emotional support for the success of migration and of job applications. In a transnational network, prayer requests are exchanged in which individual persons pray for each other. The church can be described as a power house for moral and emotional support. Being a member of a shared faith links different people from different places to a kind of social solidarity not only in the host countries but also in the process of migration and in requests for remittances for religious purposes. Many migrants sponsor religious conferences and the building of churches. Inter-church relations spanning the globe have created a coalition of various religious organizations. Chin communities in Australia, USA and Europe have invited many clergy to visit. These religious leaders, having the trust of community members from both sides of the transnational network, are key persons linking individuals and institutions across borders.

In summary, the literature reviewed above provides a general understanding of the socio-economic impacts of remittances and the relationships between social networks as social capital for migration. However, what remains under-researched is the role of kinship, religious and community networks in the organization and management of remittances for the purpose of community development. This is of great relevance to the Chin community, who lack almost all aspects of state-supported development activities and infrastructure.

Related Studies on Myanmar Migrants' Remittances

Although Myanmar has a huge number of migrants overseas, there are few studies on their remittances. These studies focus on the amounts of remittances (Turnell et al. 2003), determinants of remittances (Tun Min Sandar 2011; Min Za Ni Lin 2009), and remittances and community development (Rual Lian Thang 2012).

The informal nature of the remittances and political and economic instability make it difficult to assess the impacts in Myanmar. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), official remittances to Burma totaled US $81.3 million in 2004, from which must be deducted the remittances of foreign workers in Burma of US $42.5 million, delivering a net remittance surplus of US$ 56.8 million dollars. But this excludes remittances sent by the two million migrant workers abroad via informal payment mechanisms (Turnell et al. 2003).

The study by Turnell et al. (2003) found that the main motivating factors to remit among Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand were for the survival of their families back home, for buying land, for establishing a business, for meeting education expenses, for debt repayment, hiring workers, and purchasing consumer goods. Remittances became a source of capital in the dire Myanmar economy. They also found that remittances to Burma were overwhelmingly made via various informal mechanisms. This is for a number of reasons including government controls of migration and foreign currency flows which make the use of formal mechanisms disadvantageous for recipients. Remittances via formal financial institutions have the potential to produce dynamic economic effects – a potential which is thus lost in Myanmar's case.

Another study by Tun Min Sandar (2011) about factors influencing remittances from Myanmar migrants, mostly Mon in Samut Sakhon, Thailand, found that the main determining factor was the migrants' income. She found that 80 percent of migrants in Samut Sakhon sent remittances home, especially during the first five years, showing that temporary migrants make larger remittance payments than the permanently settled. She also found that the longer a migrant resides in a host country, the lower the remittance. According to this study, reasons for remitting include family member's emergency health problems, wedding expenses, children's education, and other basic necessities. Both studies - Turnell et al. (2003) and Tun Min Sandar (2011) - found that migrants used informal channels to remit because they did not trust bank services in Burma.

A study by Min Za Ni Lin (2009) of the characteristics of Mon migrants in Malaysia, and the impacts of remittances they sent to the Mon community in Myanmar, found altruistic feelings attached to their family and the need to provide them with insurance to be the leading reasons to remit. The study also found that the Mon migration was temporary rather than permanent. Their remittances resulted in a reduction in poverty and an improvement in the living standards of the receiving community. The remittances also had multiplier effects on the home economy in the short term (Min Za Ni Lin 2009).

The only study so far to focus on Chin migrants was conducted by Rual Lian Thang (2012). His study found that 80 percent of villagers in rural Chin households in Aibur village and Hakha village, Chin State, received remittances from relatives overseas. The remittances served as a stable source of income

for the households as well as an engine for community development. Apart from remittances being used for daily basic needs, housing expenses, education, and health, they were also redistributed within the community for social welfare and the construction of roads, schools, and mini-hydroelectric power plants, among other things. Rual Lian Thang concluded that remittances contribute to human capital development, improved livelihoods, and infrastructure development. Human capital development aside, he argued against the role of remittances as promoting economic development: the amounts of money were insufficient, and opportunities for productive investment too limited.

These case studies are mostly confined to the impacts of remittances on the receiving households, and demonstrate that remittances were their main source of income. Chin migration patterns, however, differ in certain respects from the Mon migration in that the Chin migrants in most cases have settled permanently in developed countries. The pattern of remittances sent also differs; the Chin people in Malaysia sent meager remittances, yet, when they settled in developed countries, they sent larger amounts. This contradicts Gammetoft's (2002) study in that the Chin migrants tend to send more money, rather than less, as they stay longer in developed countries. Chin migration is also characterized by refugee and family migration. If one member of the family gets refugee status, other family members can be included. The kinship network among Chin migrants and non-migrant households plays an instrumental role in family migration and might influence the use of remittances. Chin people use their social capital embedded in this kind of network in calling for remittances, and their impact reaches into extended families. The role of the Chin kinship network in migration and remittances thus needs further study. While providing general understanding about the use of remittances among Chin households, Rual Lian Thang's research (2012) did not examine the role of the networks instrumental in most Chin societies in the management of remittances for community development. This needs further study given the potential role that these networks might play as the sole agents of community development in rural communities in Chin State, given their exclusion over several decades from the government's development agenda.

Chapter 3

Vanzang Village: The Migration Village

In this chapter, by way of introducing my research site, Vanzang village, I will give brief background on its history, geographical location, resources, ruling system, basic infrastructure, livelihood activities and demography. I will also talk briefly about the villagers' religion, their transition to Christianity and the village's four churches. Finally, I discuss the migratory background of the Vanzang people and the factors that explain their migration.

Brief Historical Background of Vanzang Village

Vanzang village is located 4858 ft. above sea level 24 miles from Thantlang town in Chin State. Its neighboring villages are Sopum in the South, Farrawn in the North, Thangzang in the West and Mualkai in the East. It celebrated its 200 years jubilee on 27 April 2002.

The current inhabitants of the village are "Lai" people, who defeated the original "Mar" inhabitants in an inter-village tribal war. The Mar left the region around AD 1750. Pu Tai Kar, a Lai from Thantlang, founded Vanzang village in AD 1800. Vanzang was the first settled village on the Vanzang village tract. Later on, the people of Vanzang established Farrawn village and Tlangpi village respectively which are now part of the Vanzang village tract. Before the British came, there was no demarcation of land in the region. People could make new settlements wherever they wanted. However, when British rule began in 1896, land demarcation was introduced. Each village had its own land with a marked

boundary. In the case of Vanzang, the boundaries were marked in 1907, and remain in place today.

Compared to other villages, Vanzang territory is large and arable.

Figure 3.1: Aerial View of Vanzang Village
Source: Google Map

The Ruling System

Before British rule, the village was ruled by the founder of the village, Pu Tai Kar, and his descendants (Lian, 2002). Under British rule the village chief was appointed by the British ruler. In some cases, descendants of the British appointed chief became village headmen. Since independence the village headman has been elected by the villagers. The village headman is responsible not only for government services, but also for keeping the peace and governing the village's community resources which include land, forest and water. Although the villagers pay tax for land use to the government, the headman is responsible for the distribution of forest land for agriculture. The village council, which consists of the headman and other members, is the representative of the government at village level.

Tribes in the Village

Vanzang villagers share a reciprocal relationship which is based on kin relations. Reciprocity governs their social relations. It is a tribal agricultural society. There are 34 clans in the village. Clan relations are very intense and strong. Inter-clan marriages characterize the society. Pek Thang, in describing the social life of the people, said that if someone killed a wild animal, the meat would be distributed to every household (Thang 2002). In time of famine, the villagers would share their agricultural products. The bond that has them as one community is very strong. When someone dies they mourn as a community and take care of the grieving family. If a person gets seriously sick, he/she would be carried to the city by other villagers. The less fortunate families such as widows are usually helped by other community members. When a person is sick, and not able to work his or her farm, community members help. These dynamics of community life forge a strong cohesion in social relations and sustain community solidarity. Kinship relationships which include family members, relatives and clans have knitted the people together as one family and one village. It is a tribal society bounded by kin relations and shared community life.

Figure 3.2: Communal Supper / Community Life

Livelihoods of Vanzang Village

The main livelihood is shifting cultivation on the hills. Their external economic resource is from selling agricultural products or animals to other villages or towns in Chin State or into Mizoram State across the border in India. A few families in the village raise animals such as pigs or mithun (see figure 3.4) in the forest and sell them in either Chin State or India. Although there are some families who have wetlands to cultivate rice near the banks of the Lahva River, the majority of the villagers clear the forest to cultivate rice for

their subsistence. They cultivate rice as their staple food along with secondary supplementary crops. Their main marketable crop at present is chili which they export to India.

Vanzang village has been receiving remittances for over two decades. Remittances have played an important role in sustaining the livelihoods of migrant households. Since the villagers' livelihoods generally depend on shifting cultivation, the additional remittance money they receive is used for daily expenses and survival or in a few cases is reinvested in agriculture. Where families have benefited from a regular remittance flow they have been able to reduce their cultivation area.

Figure 3.3: Mithun (Sia) and Hill Cultivation

Geographical Facts

The village has large arable areas of land that can be rotated each year for shifting cultivation. There are generally 13 cultivation areas (locally called "lopil") which they rotate each year. Compared with many neighboring villages, Vanzang has large areas of forest and mountain ranges. The people practice customary law and the village council is the main managing body for the distribution of land for agricultural use. Near the river Lahva, which is 3 km East of the village, 15 families have wetlands for wet rice cultivation. There are around 20 small rivers and streams in the village's territory. The Lahva river in the East and Thingva river in the South are the main rivers used for fishing. There is a mini-hydro power plant on the Haipizung River. Vanzang has 6 steep mountains and tropical forest rich in fauna and flora. Lungtlaitlan Mountain located at the top of the village has a scenic view and the youth often go there to forage for flowers and fruits.

Basic Infrastructure

Vanzang village has a government primary school inaugurated on April 5, 1966 (That Ceu and Kam Cem, 2002). The elders of the village attach great importance to children's education. They considered that primary education was not sufficient and started a private middle school, locally funded. The middle school was for grade 6 and started in 1972 (That Ceu and Kam Cem 2002). The school lasted for only one year but was started again for grade 6 and 7 in 1987-88. It was expanded in 1992 for 8th grade and in 1993 it was expanded again for 9th grade.

Figure 3.4: Vanzang Football Ground & Vanzang Primary School

Vanzang village has a small football ground. Football is popular in Chin State. For the youth, there is no other sports facility in the village. They usually play on Sunday which is the day of rest for most of the villagers.

Vanzang village tract road links to Thantlang town through Sopum village and goes towards the Indian border through Farrawn, Tlangpi and Tlanglo villages. This is the main road Vanzang people use for transport and communication. A jeep can use this road although it is rocky, muddy and narrow.

There is no clinic in the village. If anyone has a serious sickness, he/she has to go to Thantlang town.

Recently, the villagers have established a preschool, public phone, electricity, public furniture (tables, chairs, plates etc.) and a good water tank, all funded by the overseas migrants.

Christianity in the Village

Christianity came to the village around AD 1918 (Ceu 2002). Before Christianity, the villagers were animists and worshiped "spirits", especially spirits of the forest. Animals were sacrificed to please the spirits in the hope of a bountiful harvest. It is believed that the villagers practiced animism for around 100 years before the arrival of Christianity (Ceu 2002). During this period the village population was never more than 30 households. According to Ceu (2002), it was after the arrival of Christianity through missionaries, Saya Mawng Cia from Thantlang and Pu Lianngailoa, from Farrawn, that the population gradually increased. The villagers gradually adapted to Christianity and left animism behind. Christianity has influenced the social and cultural customs of the people, and they are socially bound together by Christian teachings. There are currently four denominations in the village.

Figure 3.7: 100 Years Jubilee Monument

The Baptist church is the first and oldest of the churches, founded in 1924 (Ceu 2002). Originally, not all the Vanzang people were Christians, but gradually more people were converted and a few decades after the arrival of Christianity, all the villagers were Christians. The villagers adopted the Baptist

Church as many missionaries were Baptist. The first proper church was built in 1937 with wood and bamboo walls. The second was built with wood roofing in 1952 and the third was built with wood and tin roofing in 1961. The fourth was built in 1977 and the fifth in 1984. They were all built with local resources and by local people. The last one was built with reinforced concrete in 2007 with the help of the children of the founder, the Rev. Huat Kam, who were mostly overseas migrants. Its current membership is 40 households.

The Presbyterian Church, which was started in 1973, has 16 families. They were originally Methodists, but since the Methodists could not provide them with a church they became Presbyterians. Their first church was built in 1976 with wood and thatch roofing. Later on, under the leadership of Rev. Rual Cung, funds were raised in Mizoram State to rebuild the church with tin roofing in 1978. The last renovation was in 2008 with the mobilization of migrant contributions.

The Church of Jesus Christ was started around 1972 (Ceu 2002). It was a revivalist church; the congregation favor dance, praise and worship. In 1975, it was called the Church of Jesus Christ. Later it divided into two: the majority left and started the Believer Church, with only a few remaining in the Church of Jesus Christ. Of all the churches in the village, this one has the least good building. It was built with wood and tin roofing by local resources and people, with indirect support from remittances through the tithing of the church members. There were also some donations from overseas migrants. This church has 24 households as members. The Believer church, built in 2010, is the latest one to be partially funded by remittances.

Vanzang Migratory Background

Internal migration occurred after the Second World War. At that time the villagers did not migrate outside the country, although being close to the Indian border, they could do seasonal work in Mizoram State and also trade there. But in the 1990s fighting intensified between the Burmese army and the CNA and this was the main cause of large scale external migration.

Internal Migration

The people of Vanzang migrated to different parts of Myanmar, especially Kalay valley and towns in Chin State. Most of the internal migrants moved to Tahan-Kalaymyo and Khampat as their main destinations while some families moved to Hakha and Thangtlang. As of 2002, there are 122 households who have migrated internally to different parts of Chin State and the Kalay valley in Sagaing division of Myanmar, as shown in Table 3.1.

Destination Village	Number of Emigrant Households
Khampat	45
Tahan	44
Falam	2
Hakha	16
Thantlang	11
Tahtlang	4

Table 3.1: Internal Migration *(Source: Year 2000 Jubilee Magazine)*

Seasonal Migration to India

The Indian border is around 20 miles from Vanzang village. The people of Vanzang can easily go to work in Mizoram State and return home after a few months, and there has long been cross-border trading between the rural villages and the Mizos. Mizoram State is more developed than Chin State, and offers more work. Indian currency is also stronger than Myanmar currency. The Mizo language is not difficult for the Chin to understand; language and cultural similarity between the Chin and the Mizo makes it easy to cross the border for seasonal work

Migration to Malaysia

There are two groups that migrated to Malaysia. The first fled the country for economic gain and to escape military oppression. In rural Chin State, especially in the 1990s, there were severe military atrocities in areas where there were insurgents. Additionally most of the young people including the educated did not want to work in Myanmar because of low pay; many left to work in foreign countries where pay was better. Pu Sang Hup, who was the headman from 1992-1996, recalled the brutal atrocities of the army;

> The army was trying to wipe out the CNA; they interrogated us about the whereabouts of the CNA and their movements. If we did not know they would beat us. Also, they forced us to carry their rations; usually the youth were the ones targeted for forced labor as porters. The CNA were also operating around our village, and we were caught in fear of both the Army and the CNA. Many of our villagers did not dare to work in the fields. Everyone in our village was trying to find ways to escape, and those who had money migrated to Malaysia. This is the main reason for Vazang people's migration. It was during my tenure as headman (Personal Interview on 18 February 2015).

Vanzang migration was the result of fear of the army and the CNA, and the extreme poverty the people faced after decades of military rule. Living in a village was a hopeless situation for the young generation. Faced with the recruitment of the CNF and the army's inhumane behavior, they escaped to Malaysia. This was at the time General Khin Nyunt and the Myanmar Intelligence Group's power was at its zenith. Pu Sang Hup said that this situation lasted for over 5 years and forced many to migrate.

Villagers mainly migrated to Malaysia. Although India shares a long border with Myanmar those migrating overseas did not migrate through India. Before the military started confronting and fighting the CNA, some Vanzang people had already gone to Malaysia for work in 1993. As mentioned in the introduction, Malaysia was the main destination of Myanmar overseas migrants at that time. There was a broker from Vanzang living in Yangon who worked as a travel agent and who facilitated many Vanzang people to work in Malaysia. Mang, an old educated man who is quite knowledgeable about the history of Vanzang migration, elaborates:

> The reason most of the Vanzang people went to Malaysia was that we had some people there already with jobs. They had gone to work and earn money. They went through the broker, who was one of our villagers working in Yangon. We already had a connection with these people. I believe this is why many of our villagers follow the previous migrants (Personal Interview, 16 February 2015).

This first overseas migrant group, though few in number, was followed by Vanzang villagers escaping from oppressive military rule. A few persons also went to Guam for work through the travel agent. These were economic migrants who wanted to earn money and support their families back home. They did not go to apply for refugee status, as this was not open to Myanmar citizens at that time. Later on, when the UNHCR began to grant refugee status to Myanmar citizens and send them to developed countries under its resettlement program, Vanzang people increasingly migrated to Malaysia not only to work but also to see if they could gain refugee status.

Some migrants hoping for refugee status go at the invitation of family members already in Malaysia. Those who came first applied for and got refugee status, and later invited their family members to join them, the family members also being eligible for inclusion in the case file. This migration can be described as family refugee migration. There are many who came to Malaysia mainly to seek UNHCR status.

Vanzang village has almost 300 overseas migrants, two thirds of whom live in developed countries, mainly the USA, Europe and Australia through UNHCR refugee resettlement programs.

Migration Road

Most Vanzang oversea migrants go illegally to Malaysia. All the travel is arranged by a broker in Myanmar. In Yangon, there are a number of Chin brokers who help Chin people migrate to Malaysia. This has become good business for the brokers, who can offer the choice of either legal or illegal arrangements. People who want to go quickly, or who cannot afford the money to go through the legal system, take the illegal option, the broker smuggling them into Malaysia in collaboration with other brokers working in and around Myanmar, Thailand and the Malaysia border. Most of the Chin migrants take this path. It takes two or three days to reach Malaysia. Since it is illegal, it involves a lot of risks - arrest by the police in Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia; sexual harassment by the brokers; human trafficking; frequent sometimes fatal accidents; and arrests.

In the early 90s the broker fee was around 80,000-100,000 kyats to go to Malaysia. It increased to 600,000-800,000 kyats in the late 90s and early 2000s. Going to Malaysia overland was cheap and fast, but risky. In some cases

people would go without paying money on the personal trust they had built up with the broker, and later on, after working in Malaysia, they would repay their loan. Since the overland method to reach Malaysia is quick and cheap compared to flying, most chose this option. On the other hand, there are people who go with legal documents. The brokers can facilitate traveling with legal documents and visas, but this process takes longer. It takes a month to get a passport, and then they have to obtain tourist visas which also require having sufficient money to enter Malaysia. Those who enter Malaysia legally eventually become illegal immigrants by staying on to work after their visas have expired. The Malaysian authorities may deport people whom they suspect to be illegal migrants. Vanzang villagers have people working in Malaysia, there are job opportunities there and easily available brokers in Yangon; with the added attraction of the opportunity for refugee status it is not surprising that there is large scale migration.

Oversea Migrant Population

The village comprises 68 migrant households and 38 non-migrant households. Many of the migrant families have sons or daughters or other relatives living in developed countries. A good number of Vanzang people are still in Malaysia working and awaiting resettlement. While in Malaysia, the migrants send money from time to time albeit in small amounts compared with remittances from developed countries. The majority of the households in the village have overseas migrants and remittances are their main or sometimes a secondary income source. Migrants living in the USA and Australia make up the largest number of Vanzang overseas migrants, followed by those in Malaysia, including those waiting to settle in developed countries. As the number of Vanzang people settling in developed countries increases, so do the remittances they send to their families. In recent years, the villagers have implemented several community and religious projects by mobilizing support from overseas migrants. Remittances have played an important role in developing the village.

Country	Number of Migrants
Australia	99
Malaysia	95
USA	81
Norway	15
Sweden	5
Denmark	1
Canada	2
Total	298

Table 3.2: Population of Overseas Vanzang Migrants

For a decade now remittances from overseas migrants have been flowing into the village, similarly perhaps to many other villages across Chin State. There have been noticeable activities as a result of remittance flows and the distribution of remittances for community development, as well as certain social and cultural changes.

Chapter 4

Kinship Network as Social Capital and Remittance Impact on the Migrant Household

Remittances have been mobilized by Vanzang villagers through different networks for their family's survival, for community projects and for religious development. Networking plays an important role in the mobilization of overseas migrants to provide remittances for various purposes. Villagers can capitalize on kinship or family networks to get money to migrate, for example. I will also discuss the impacts of remittances on receiving households through indicators of basic needs, health, education, economic investment, and social and religious events.

Kinship Network, its Role in Migration and in Calling for Remittance

The kinship network stands out as important. People build their trust on kinship. Chin society is a reciprocal tribal society and kinship relationships are very strong. In Vanzang village, the people share reciprocal relationships based on kin line, and help each other very much based on kinship. In the migration process, people use kinship as their social capital, capitalizing on it to earn the capital needed for migration. By kinship network, I mean the networking of people based on kin line, which broadly includes the relationship

of family members, relatives and clan as active members of the network. Radcliffe-Brown (1931) considers this as a concrete network of individuals typified by interlocking interpersonal roles. This network has been recognized as a facilitating factor in migration movements (Haug, 2008). The actors in this network are both the migrants and those remaining in the community of origin, linked by ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origin (Massey et al. 1993). In the context of Chin migration, overseas migrants generally give first priority for migration opportunities and remittances to family members, including extended family members or clan. Chin migration to developed countries is characterized by family migration through UNHCR resettlement programs. Kinship or family network plays other important roles in the transnational connectivity of migrants and their family, for example in exchanging information and resources, in calling for remittances and in transnational marriage.

Kinship as Social Capital for Migration

As described earlier, the reasons for migration can all be linked to the fear of CNF recruitment and army oppression. In the 1990s, it cost around 100,000 kyats to go to Malaysia. This was quite expensive for the majority of households in the village. Mang who is over 65 years old recalled that

> At that time, we had a lot of young people in our village. When the army started fighting with the CNF, our young people were conscripted for carrying heavy loads of food for the army. At the same time, the CNF came to our village from time to time, and we were very afraid of their recruitment of our youths. At that time, one of our villagers who lived in Yangon was working as a broker for sending workers to Malaysia. Most of the young people who went to Malaysia took loans without interest from their relatives. They helped each other on the basis of trust and kin relationships. Many migrants repaid their loans but there were also a lot of cases where loans were not repaid. At the beginning of migration, it was not because we did not have food to eat or money to spend; most of us would never have thought of emigrating were it not for

> our fear of the Burmese Army and CNF recruitment. (Personal Interview, 14 February 2015)

Going to Malaysia was the escape route from the failing economy and the brutal rule of the army. For most of the young people, going to Malaysia was beyond their economic ability. Some were asked to leave by their parents since staying at home was not secure for their future. In some cases, it was the young people who asked their parents to send them abroad. In the rural Chin context, migration is expensive for most people. Most of the migrants take loans from their relatives. Taking a loan from someone who may be part of the family requires trust. Trust becomes the main component of social capital that one gains through kinship and social interaction with other members of the community. For people seen as not trustworthy, loans are not easy to come by. Even rich families would not risk giving money to sons or relatives who were considered untrustworthy. Since not everyone possesses trust, access to this social capital is unequal. Trust can also be abused: there are cases of migrants taking a loan and not repaying it, which deters prospective lenders from making more loans based on kinship.

The first group of Vanzang people to emigrate to Malaysia did not call for their family members or relatives to follow them as the migrant situation in Malaysia was not secure. In the early 1990s, the refugee option was not available for Myanmar citizens, and the first migrations were purely economic. They included educated people: the Myanmar government did not provide jobs so they started leaving the country. Mang remembered:

> It was the coincidence of the fighting between the army and the CNF and the opportunity to work in Malaysia being well known in our village that led many of our young people and adults to leave. We could barely harvest enough food for a year. Our people mostly go to Malaysia through connections with those who have gone before. (Personal Interview, 10 February 2015).

The parents worried about their children in Malaysia as they were aware of their vulnerable situation. Those in Malaysia and their relatives could contact each other by telephone, but in the early 1990s communications were not good and not as fast as today, and to make a phone call the villagers had to go to

Thantlang town, a one day journey from Vanzang village. The communication system in Chin state was not conducive to close migrant-home relationships. Migrants were often arrested for being illegal workers and many of them ended up in prison. In spite of the communication barriers, the migrants found ways to communicate with their families through telephone and e-mail. The kinship network was not only used for seeking funds for migration; migrants called family members to come to Malaysia through this network, which involves sharing of information, resources and linkages.

The early migrants were social capital for the later ones who could use inter-personal relationships to get information, arrange accommodation and jobs, and get emotional support (Boyd, 1989). But many people migrated via the broker without having any family network abroad, taking all the risks involved in illegal migration and illegal working in a foreign country. Most illegal migrants use the services of people smugglers. Those who hold passports stay on after their visas have expired and continue to work as illegal immigrants. The role of the broker is very significant as he facilitates migration (Burt 1997). If he or she is a member of the kinship network, trust is already built in.

Kinship Networking as an Important Facilitator for Family Migration

Thlia, a mother who has two sons abroad explains:

> My eldest son called his younger brother to work in Malaysia and at the same time was applying for refugee status. He told me that he already had the refugee card and included all my family members in the case file. After talking with my eldest son, I took a loan from our relatives and sent my younger son to Malaysia. (Personal Interview 19 February 2015).

When Chin people could go to developed countries through the UNHCR resettlement program, migration increased. As the Malaysian government is not a signatory to the UN convention refugee status gave no legal protection or security in Malaysia, so the working conditions of Chin migrants remained unchanged. Having experienced the atrocities of the Burmese army in their home community, many Vanzang people arriving in Malaysia got a chance to apply for refugee status and could include their siblings or other family members in their application case file. There was a sudden rise in the population of Chin

in Malaysia. For many families, this became the path to developed countries. There are many Chin who go to Malaysia to apply for refugee status; working and earning for economic gain is not their primary aim, but rather to move on to a developed country.

Vanzang migrants include people who went to work, and later applied to UNHCR and after getting refugee status invited their spouse or siblings to join them in Malaysia; and people who went solely in order to apply for refugee status. In certain cases, it was the overseas migrants who urged their relatives to come to Malaysia as the relatives had no jobs back home. Not all the Vanzang people arriving in Malaysia got UNHCR refugee status, and not all refugee status holders got to developed countries through the resettlement program.

In many families, the head of the household and the young people go to work in Malaysia. It was difficult for many families to get enough food from their harvest, and they migrated to secure their livelihoods. Economically, the prospect of working in Malaysia is brighter for many families than working in the fields at home.

Uk, who is the only one in his family who lives in Vanzang village while all his siblings and parents live the USA, explains:

> In 1996, my father went to Malaysia to work for our family. At that time we were poor, we barely had food to eat. We had very few clothes to wear. After staying a couple of years in Malaysia, he got refugee status and included all our family members. My father asked our family to go to Malaysia and for us all to apply for refugee status. At that time, I got married here and I did not want to go. All my brothers and sisters went to Malaysia and now they are in the USA, through the UNHCR resettlement program. (Personal Interview 13 February 2015).

In another case, the migrant was the one who invited his siblings to migrate as Cer, the mother of two sons, informs:

> My son called his brother and told him that if he stayed here in the village without working his life would be ruined, so he should come to Malaysia and work with him as he has a good job there. He told his brother that if both of them work

> together, they can earn more and can support the family better. (Personal Interview, 18 February 2015).

Social capital is at work. The opportunities available are shared exclusively within the circles of the immediate and extended families. As Woolcock (2001) points out, the family or friends and associates who can access this social capital become important assets for non-migrants to mobilize. However, not all have equal access. When jobs are available or the prospect of going to developed countries is bright, the migrants call those of their family who do not have jobs or a good future. When their social capital is rising, which can be in the form of friends or in the ability to find jobs and trust from their boss, the migrants make use of this capital to help their kin who are in a less fortunate position. This social capital includes information about migration, resources and accommodation and is exchanged through the kinship network.

Capitalization of Kinship Network in Calling for Remittance

Kinship networks rest on the reciprocal relations of the members, and based on this, exchanges of material or non-material resources are accessed or claimed. Scott (2010) suggests that these interpersonal relationships can be analyzed through the concept of reciprocity, intensity and durability. Members in this kinship network can access what they have invested in the lives of their relatives, friends and family members after communication between the migrant and the home village has been established. While the people were in Malaysia, it was difficult to contact them to ask for money because the telephone was available only in the towns. But when they settled in developed countries, the villagers could easily contact them through the internet which makes their relationship closer. The continuing relationship opens the door for accessing social capital when people want to migrate but do not have the money for it. Usually they can mobilize what they have invested in reciprocal relationships. It is also observable that needy persons in the village seek remittances from the migrants based on whatever social investment they have in the migrants' lives. Sometimes a migrant will send an unsolicited remittance to a person or family whom they felt had contributed to their lives and their achievements.

Mang's case characterizes this situation:

> When I was in a hospital, I got remittances sent from the USA and Australia. Some of those who sent the money were not my kin, but they say they remembered that when they were in the village I used to help them with food. Now they are a bit better off they are willing to help. I am happy that they remembered my good deeds. (Personal Interview 10, 2, 15).

I also interviewed Ham, who does not have any immediate family member living abroad:

> My children have not gone to Malaysia. I have four children. In some years we are struggling to live as I do not have capital to start any business or farming. From hill cultivation, sometimes, we do not get enough harvest. But my nephews who are living in the USA support us to pay the rice miller so that we can earn money for our family. This is really now becoming our source of livelihood. (Personal Interview 14 February 2015).

There are cases where migrants collect money and send it to a relative whom they cannot help on a regular basis. It can be quite a lot of money. Sometimes the remittance is for building or health care. The compelling urge to send money can be related to the flourishing relationships of which the migrants are part. It is usually given when the migrants think the receiving family needs it most. Even though this kind of remittance is not regular, it can be of great benefit, reflecting the reciprocal human relationships in the community.

Kinship Networking as a Source of Religious Remittance

Hi, the chairman of the Baptist Church explains:

> In our village, when the Christmas season comes, one of our church members or a member of another church would inform the community that their family would sponsor this year's Christmas event. It would not be their money - they ask their children in other countries to sponsor. It can be stated that as one sponsors, others follow. This is a result of kin networking

> with oversea migrants. There are four denominations in our village. Before, we used to celebrate Christmas at our own church, but now, especially after migration in these past few years, we have been celebrating together with other churches as this is what the sponsoring migrants want us to do. Thus the remittance that comes for religious ceremonies unites and combines the village for religious affinity. (Personal Interview 10 February 2015).

Christmas celebrations, which are very important for Christians, are often sponsored by overseas migrants. When the Christmas season comes, one family in the village would ask their sons or daughters to sponsor the Christmas event for that particular year. Contributing to this kind of religious event signifies good deeds or merit and increases the migrant's status in the religious institution. It is interesting to see the role of the kinship network in raising remittance money for religious practices. Migrant households would ask their children abroad to sponsor a religious event as acknowledging the goodness of God and the prayers of the church and their success. The church is not the main fund raiser but rather the members of the church networking with their kin.

One church mobilized the children of its founder, the Rev. Huat Kam, to to fund their building project. To get access to all the members of the family, the church contacted family members in Hakha who were in regular touch with their overseas family through the network .

Capitalizing resources through the social network does not happen in a vacuum. It involves two way traffic. Non-migrant families also have access to remittances through being an extended part of a kinship network. They can make use of their kin as capital to ask for remittances through networking with a migrant family, or the migrant family can help them connect with the overseas migrants.

Kinship as a Source in Seeking Remittances for Extended Families

Migrant families also use remittances as social capital to help extended families. Through these remittance flows, non-migrant families can indirectly benefit. Migrant families act as agents networking with overseas migrants and

mobilizing their relatives or friends to help needy families who have no direct access to remittances but who are in critical need of food or shelter or medical assistance. Thlia explains:

> My son not only sends money for our family, I also ask money to be sent for my relatives who are poor and struggling to live. This family did not ask me to ask for money from my son. But I consider them as part of my family, so I would share their difficulties, especially the things that they cannot do by themselves. Sometimes, I would share from our portion to such needy families. We helped one of our relatives to build a house. (Personal Interview 12 February 2015).

The kinship network provides the means for migrant households to help relatives who are poor and who do not themselves have any family members abroad. Although some non-migrant families are economically viable, the majority are among the poorest of the poor in the village. Living in a village, no household is without kin. Kinship is the source of help for the poorer members of the community, who can benefit from the kinship network even though they may not have any person living abroad. In addition, remittances can provide some insurance in time of emergency, for example when the harvest does not produce enough for the family or when there is a serious health issue. Villagers can ask for a loan from a neighbor with migrant relatives abroad. Having overseas migrants is like insurance or a guarantee for loan pay back. The case of Fung, a lady who has experienced the benefits of having family abroad indicates this:

> When my kids are sick, I am really worried for their lives. Here we do not have easy access to a medical expert. We need to go to Thantlang town for treatment and it takes a lot of money. Sometimes, we do not have any money put by for medical expenses, and I have to ask for a loan from relatives or friends. In our village, the only people who can give us a loan are the ones with sons and daughters or other relatives abroad. Having overseas migrants is our precious capital. (Personal Interview on 15 February 2015).

The fifteen families that I interviewed testified that their family members went to work in Malaysia because of poverty, but they do not want them to work as slaves in other countries. Most of the interviewees noted changes brought about by remittances - new houses, new food consumption patterns, modern facilities such as TV sets, cars and motorbikes. The social impact of remittances puts increased pressure on young people to emigrate, thus fueling further migration.

Transnational Arrangement of Marriage through Kinship Network

Aye who sent her daughter to get married abroad explains:

> My daughter was asked for in marriage by our relative for his overseas migrant friend working in the USA. We have never seen this man before and do not even know him. However, when our relative came and asked on someone's behalf, we trusted him and gave him our daughter. (Personal Interview, 10 February 2015).

Marriages are arranged through the kinship network. Although arrangement is not usual in Chin state, after migration some people have been away from the village for many years and barely have connections with friends back home. When they want to get married, they order a bride. In many cases, the parents at home decide on the selection. The parents tend to choose their relatives, as it is an opportunity for the bride to go abroad and work. Iang Iang who searched for a bride for her son reveals:

> It was difficult for me to choose a bride for my son. I was thinking who would be good for our family. There are many cases I know when people send a bride abroad and the marriage ends in divorce. When my son said he would accept whoever I thought best I chose from our tribe. We knew the parents very well and the girl herself is good. We also gave them time to talk and get to know each other. When they agreed, we arranged the marriage. (Personal Interview 09/02/15).

In a transnational marriage arrangement, it is not the groom who picks the bride in most cases; it is more a family affair. In some circumstances, it is about protecting income sources and increased livelihood security. When migrants search for a bride, they inquire through their family members or friends. Either way, it goes through the kinship network, as the search entails a lot of personal trust and integrity.

In summary, the kinship network plays a crucial role in calling for remittances as members of the network use it as their social capital. It facilitates the flow of remittances as the relationship of the migrant family and the overseas migrants is anchored in the kinship network. It is not a closed network, but is open for extended family members or friends, who are clearly seen as part of the network. It is also the means by which overseas migrants are mobilized for sending remittances for various purposes in the home community. It is utilized by the church for mobilizing overseas migrants to help with its activities. It facilitates transnational marriages and fuels migration.

Remittance Flow Pattern and Usage for Household Sustainability

There are two patterns of remittance flows into migrant households depending on the age of the recipients, although it must be noted that the pattern of remittances differs from one family to another according to their different family characteristics. In migrant families where the parents are young, there are substantial remittance flows and the remittances are invested in productive business or agriculture. While in migrant families with parents that are old, the volume of remittances is not substantial but regular in its flow. This is because the migrants often insist that their parents do not work in the fields. Through group discussion with village informants, many migrant families said that they were not allowed by their children abroad to work as they used to in the past. It is also the case in migrant families that most of the young people leave the village while the parents stay behind. In this sort of family, remittance flows tend to be minimal, just enough to help the family to survive. Families with children living in developed countries, with more secure work, do better than those whose migrants live in Malaysia and who have less work security and income. Dependency dramatically increases after the migrants resettle in developed countries. The migrants send a regular minimum amount to their families for their survival. Although the migrants may be able to remit more

money, the amounts depend on migrant family conditions - if they cannot reinvest in productive business, a small but regular remittance is the norm.

The other pattern of remittance flows is that sent to parents who are still young and can still work to support themselves. The remittances in these cases are more substantial but not regular as is often the case with migrant families who have elderly parents. Families with younger parents tend to invest the remittances in productive business or agribusiness. Some stores and a tea shop have sprung up in the village as a result of remittances. The main marketable crop in the village is chili. Many families in the village invest in this agribusiness to provide an income. These migrant families, though they still depend on remittances, generate their own income to reduce their dependency. These families tend to ask for substantial money to start a business. They also invest in assets such as land and buildings in Thantlang town. In the Vanzang village community, the characteristics of the workforce of the migrant family play an important role in harnessing remittances for either survival or businesses. In what follows, I discuss the role of remittances in household sustainability using indicators such as basic needs, education, health care, economic investment, etc. Migrant families spend their remittances mostly for their basic needs, accounting for 34 percent of the total, followed by health expenditure at 27 percent. The high expenditure on health is down to migrant families with elderly parents with chronic health problems.

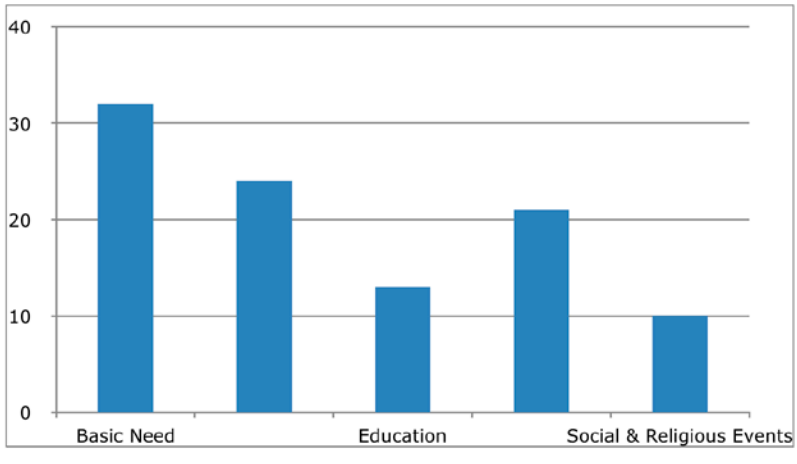

Figure 4.1: Percentage of Household Expenditure of Remittances

Basic Needs

Most of the migrant families spend the remittances they receive on basic needs - food, clothes and shelter. This was a common trend among 5 families out of the 15 interviewed, using their remittances for building their houses, daily food, home furniture, TV set and motorbike. Remittance flows into migrant families range normally from 100,000 kyats to 500,000 kyats once a month or once every three months. All the 15 families interviewed agreed that their pattern of consumption of food and clothes was changing. The five families claimed that 70 percent of their remittance income goes to this category. Compared to the social and economic condition of the family prior to migration, the food they consume is better and includes food purchased from Thantlang market. Moreover, the people as a whole wear better clothes as their accessibility to the market is increased. One of the interviewees reveals how their food consumption pattern has changed after receiving remittances from abroad:

> Three of my children live abroad, one in Australia and two in USA. They support us every month. If they do not send money monthly, they send once every three months. They do not want us to work in the fields, saying that they can support us. We have built our house. Since we do not cultivate, we buy rice and other foodstuffs from Thantlang town. Now that we can buy food we like, we eat a lot of market food that is a huge shift from our traditional way. Before migration, we could not buy foodstuffs from Thantlang town and we mainly depended on rice. Most of the time, we could not use oil in our cooking. We did not have a good water system. Now we have a vegetable garden. We can buy oil from the market and grow garden produce at home and we can have healthy food. I have observed this pattern of change in food consumption in other families too. (Par, Personal Interview on 24 February 2015).

The use of remittances for daily survival is the priority in the remittance receiving families; however, they also use the funds for rebuilding their houses and buying new furniture or modern facilities such as TV, motorbike etc. Most of the houses of remittance receiving families have been rebuilt. Remittances for housing tend to be sent as a single lump sum. Migrant families start rebuilding their houses one or two years after the migrants have settled in

developed countries. Most of the new houses in the village belong to migrant families. As soon as the migrants arrive and accumulate some capital they help to rebuild their old house. This has led to changes in types of housing structure. Za explains about his family condition and changes in the migrant households in the village:

> Our brother lives in the USA and sends us money for our house. When he was in Malaysia, he could not help us to build. As soon as he got enough money for the building he asked us to rebuild our house. Our house was in ruins and my parents wanted to rebuild. You know, many of our village houses have been rebuilt, so we felt like we were left behind. I can say that most of the new houses built in our village are funded by remittances. It is after migration that we have TV and motorbike in our home. (Personal Interview 23, 01, 2015)

As described earlier, migrant families with elderly parents tend to depend completely on remittances. The migrants also insist that their parents should not work as hard as before. The migrants take full responsibility for their livelihoods and send remittances often. This pattern is similar to the finding of Rual Lian Thang's (2012) research in Aibur village, who found that the migrants asked their parents to stop cultivation as they took financial responsibility for them as the young generation was leaving the village. Most of the migrant families interviewed have elderly parents whose main expenditure is on daily survival. The five families who participated in the group discussion all agreed that their children sent remittances just for their survival. Another characteristic of this category is that they tend to have more overseas migrants. The case of Thluai, a mother whose two children are abroad, illustrates:

> Since two of my children live abroad, they always tell me not to work anymore in the fields since they will take care of our food and monthly expenses. Both of them send us remittances from time to time and we are wholly dependent on them. If we didn't have this income, we would still be working in the fields. But as we do have another income source through our children we are not cultivating rice any more. We buy rice from Thantlang town. (Personal Interview 24 February 2015)

The expenditure varies depending on the characteristics of the families. In the case of families with older parents who need to take medicine for chronic health problems most of their remittances go on medical expenses. The amount of money provided varies according to family conditions - age, medical condition, condition of house etc. But all of the interviewees claimed that having family overseas is what makes their life secure.

Health

Remittances help secure health access for migrant families. Four households out of the 15 households surveyed and interviewed said that they spent most of their remittances - 65 percent - on health care. Since there is no clinic in the village, anyone with critical sickness has to go to Thantlang for treatment. That makes access to medical care expensive. If the migrant family has a family member with a chronic illness or elderly parents who are in need of constant medication, that forces the family to spend most of their income on health costs. Five families revealed that they spent most of their remittances for their parents' medical treatment. They buy medicine from Thantlang town. Kil Tawi, a lady who takes care of her mother, told me:

> On a monthly basis, we use most of the money we receive from my brother for my mother's medical treatment. Although sometimes he sends us money for other purposes like for building and raising animals, when he sends us the monthly money, most of the time we use it to buy medicines. We have to buy them in Thantlang and the medicines that my mother takes are expensive. Every month we spend a lot of money for her. (Personal Interview 27 February 2015)

Although not all the migrant households spend intensively on their health, it is clear from the interviews that all of them considered remittances as their medical insurance, and that they can as a last resort seek assistance by approaching their sons and daughters. It seems that for health issues, the migrants tend to send more punctually. In the absence of government medical services, the remittance becomes for most of the migrant families what can be described as their health insurance mobilized through their family members overseas. Uk describes the reliability of remittances for health:

> My father who is in the USA provides me with money to go to the clinic. Without him I do not think I could pay my medical expenses myself. Since I have a serious heart problem I need to go to Thantlang clinic from time to time. Most of the time, my dad sends me money for my check-ups. If my dad hadn't gone to the USA, my life would have been different. (Personal Interview, 14 February 2015)

With remittance income, access to health care is generally improved for migrant families. Even non-migrant families can get medical help when faced with serious sickness by mobilizing the members of the Global Vanzang Development Group (GVDG).

Education

The village has a private middle school funded by remittances. As a result household expenditure on education is not very great. In addition, for those who have high school students in Thantlang town or university students, the migrants take full responsibility for their relatives' education costs. Two families reported that they have high school or university students outside the village and in all cases they are being sponsored by family migrant members. In these cases expenditure on education is 60 percent of their total remittance income. When families have university students expenditure is very high and the migrants cannot really send remittances to the household for other purposes. Cer describes her position:

> My eldest daughter lives in the USA and her younger brother and sister live in Malaysia. In the last two years we have spent a lot of money for one of their brothers to go to high school in Thantlang. He stays in boarding school so we spent a lot of money for him. Most of the time, only my eldest daughter can send money. We spend mostly for education, though we always use some amount for our survival. Sometimes, my eldest daughter has to send money for her sibling in Malaysia. (Personal interview, 18 February 2015)

Similarly, Meng states:

> My son lives in the USA and another three of my children live in Malaysia. I have one university student attending in Kalaymyo. He spends over 200 US dollars per month, so most of our remittance goes for his education. Since we do not have other income sources, we depend on our children abroad. Most of the time, our son living in the USA can send us money more regularly than those in Malaysia.

Migrant families who have high school and university students spend a lot of money on their children, but they are a minority. Expenditure on primary and middle school students is minimal since they have a government primary school and a private middle school funded by remittances, and most of the parents do not consider what they have to pay as unaffordable.

Economic Investment

Most of the migrant families in the village have improved their living standards. It is difficult to measure economic investment as different indicators can be used. However, as mentioned in the basic needs discussion, many migrant households have rebuilt their houses, and even buy new land and houses in Thantlang town. Migrant families own 18 motorbikes out of a total of 32 owned in the village, and 23 TV sets out of a total of 38. Five migrant families have purchased land in Thantlang town and are in the process of building houses. Four migrant families out of the 15 interviewed claimed that they reinvest 60 percent of their remittance income in productive business. In addition many migrant families buy animals and raise them for making a modest profit. Tuan said:

> My son lives in the USA. He cannot send us money very often. But when he sends, he sends a lot - 2500 US dollars for example. Since we cannot work in the fields, we decided to reinvest in a tea shop and store. We order things from Thantlang town. We make enough money for our living. Even though we do not get remittances often, we can make money here due to the capital that he has provided for us. (Personal Interview 17 February 2015)

Some of the migrant families own wetlands for rice production or fish ponds. Some families invest in animal raising such as a pig farm. A lot of money is invested in this kind of undertaking. Cin said that:

> We own large fish ponds. But we could not make any profit out of them as we had no capital to invest. But as our children go abroad, they can earn money and send to us, and we invest most of our remittances in this project. Now we are making pretty good profit. If our children had not gone abroad we could not have capitalized our fishery. (Personal Interview, 17 February 2015)

Cung added:

> I told my brother in the USA that I wanted to start a pig farm and he sent me the capital to start it. I have 25 pigs now. Though my brother sends money for my parents, I do not want to depend on their remittances as I have my own family here. This business is really bringing benefit for my family. (Personal Interview, on 17 February 2015)

There are several factors involved in leveraging remittances for economic investment: the migrant's ability to send, the regularity and amounts of remittance, the characteristics of the migrant family and their ability to invest, and the economic environment for productive investment.

Many migrants have invested in land, not only in the village, but in Thantlang town where they also build houses, using wood from the village. There are also migrant extended families that are not getting remittances regularly who invest what they do get in cultivating marketable crops like chili. In Vanzang village, economic investment is much dependent on the workforce of the migrant family and their aspirations for economic growth.

Social and Religious Events

Another area where migrant families spend money is for social events and religious ceremonies. These social and religious events are increasing as the result of remittance flows. Although the money used is not very much compared to other areas of expenditure, social events such as birthday parties

or thanksgiving celebrations, and other religious events, such as Christmas or New Year, are indirectly or directly funded by remittances. The 15 migrant families interviewed claimed that around 10 percent of their remittances goes towards this category. Hi remarks:

> Since many of our villagers have arrived in developed countries, we always have overseas migrants or their families sponsoring Christmas events for all community members. Sometimes, the migrant wants to sponsor such an event but at other times, it is the migrant family who want to do it using their remittance money. (Personal Interview, 17 February 2015).

Important family events include thanksgiving, Arthin Tuh and birthday parties. Thanksgiving is related to a religious event as the migrant or the migrant family gives thanks to God for having escaped from accident or being cured of a sickness, or when they are successful. This kind of event happens from time to time in the village, especially in the migrant families and is usually sponsored by remittance funds.

> We have organized a thanksgiving service at our home, inviting all our villagers because I was healed from sickness and my son has escaped from an accident in Malaysia. After his arrival in the USA, he sent us money, and we thought that first of all we should thank God and organize a thanksgiving service. (Meng, Personal Interview on 18 February 2015)

With remittance funds, migrant families can organize frequent social and religious events. Even though the migrants live in different countries they are not forgotten: they share and connect with their home families through these social and religious events. Since the poor cannot hold such events as often as the migrant families, the social status of the migrant families is increased.

Conclusion

The kinship network plays a crucial role in migration and in calling for remittances, as members of the network use it as their social capital. The

transnational relationship between the migrant family and the overseas migrants is anchored in this kinship network. It is not a closed network, as it is open for extended family members or friends - the sharing of resources and information goes beyond mere kin line. It is also the means by which overseas migrants are mobilized for providing remittances for various purposes in the home community. In the case of Vanzang people, the kinship network also helps facilitate family migration through the UNHCR resettlement program, and transnational marriages. Migrant families have also made use of it for mobilizing overseas migrants for religious contributions. The kinship network brings remittances that impact on both the migrant and non-migrant households.

The main category of expenditure among migrant families in Vanzang village is for household basic needs which include housing, furniture, clothes, food, TV and motorbike. Remittances bring a remarkable change in meeting these basic needs. A few migrant families have high school and university students. Migrant families that have students outside the village claim that most of their remittances are directed towards their children's education. For economic investment, the migrant family's workforce is crucial for leveraging remittances for productive investment. Since there are no able-bodied members left in many migrant families, there is not much investment in agriculture-related business or farming. In the larger context, transport and communications are still a huge hurdle for effective economic growth in Chin state. Remittances have led to an increase in social and religious related events. These migrant sponsored events have symbolic meaning and have increased the social status of migrant families. In sponsoring such events the migrants identify with their home family and community and share life transnationally with their home village.

Chapter 5

Community Networking and Community Development

Community networking here means the networking of migrants and villagers for initiating various community and religious projects for the village and the welfare of the villagers. I define remittance flows for these purposes as community remittances as they are transferred for community projects mobilized by the home community and intended to benefit all members of the village. In the first section, I discuss the structural organization of Vanzang community networking, pointing out the actors, the way they function and the development from informal to formal networking. I discuss the context which enables the mobilization of resources and the different factors that make it possible, and details of community and religious projects that have been implemented in the village. The second section demonstrates the patterns of religious remittance flows and how the existing churches in Vanzang village mobilize their overseas migrant members for their church buildings. I also highlight the Women's Friday Prayer Group and their religious contributions for the community. I conclude with some findings and observations.

Structural Organization of Community networking

Hup, the key contact person for community projects in Vanzang village, noted, "Only after the formation of Group Mail and the arrival of our villagers in developed countries could we have community networking between our

overseas migrants and the villagers here" (Personal Interview, 17 February 2015).

From the early 1990s, Vanzang people migrated to Malaysia. At that time, overseas communication facilities were available only in Thantlang town; this caused a huge problem for the rural migrant families and the community. For the migrant families to make a phone call, they had to go to Thantlang; similarly, if the migrants wanted to talk to their families, they had to send messages for them to come to the town. It was difficult for the migrants to maintain relationships with their families. During this time, there was little or no community based network with the migrants. The villagers did not ask migrants working in Malaysia for community project funds as the migrants were not in a position to contribute. However, after the arrival of Vanzang people in developed countries, they were better able to keep in touch and unite for the cause of their village. Vanzang Group Mail (VGM) became the virtual social space to meet and stay in contact for all Vanzang people both overseas and in Myanmar. It was here that they could form a network as Vanzang people and work together for the development of their village.

The Actors in this Community networking

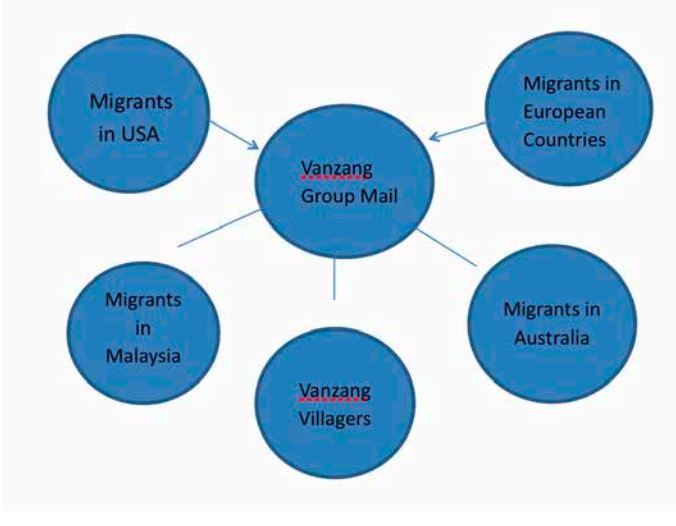

Figure 5.1 Actors in Vanzang Community Networking

Vanzang Group Mail as the Center for Networking

When asked about Vanzang community networking between the migrants and Vanzang villagers, Hup explains:

> While Vanzang people were in Malaysia, we did not have any networking with migrants at a community level, though there were some people who donated for our village. Communications were bad at that time and we hardly contacted our children in Malaysia. It was after our people arrived in developed countries that we began to have networking with overseas Vanzang people on a community level especially when the Vanzang Group Mail was created. I do not know the year exactly, but that was the time we could talk with our oversea migrants and exchange information about our village back and forth. We use VGM through the public internet café. Throughout the years, this VGM has been our center of communication. This is the channel we use most for informing overseas Vanzang people about village issues. (Personal Interview, 11 February 2015).

As the number of the Vanzang people settling in developed countries increased, they formed a village community through the VGM. Living in developed countries, they have access to the internet and on-line group mail creating an interactive space for all overseas Vanzang people. At the same time, in the early 2000s, the government gave permission to open internet cafés in Myanmar. Since this was expensive, only a few cafes were available even in towns. Most of the migrants' families connect with their oversea families through public internet cafés. The coming of public internet enables the creation of community networking and brings people from different countries into one virtual group. The VGM has become the place where Vanzang villagers from all around the globe interact and exchange information and knowledge. When asked about the role of VGM for community networking, Kep explains:

> This is where exchanges of views, needs and cooperation take place. Sometimes, community issues are debated and votes are taken for implementation decisions. The migrants also discuss how much an individual or family would contribute

> when we have collective donations. This helps us connect with Vanzang villagers living in different countries, to exchange perspectives and work for the various needs of village development. (Personal Interview, 20 February 2015)

The VGM helps develop a cohesive relationship among the migrants regardless of where they live, or how far away. Community life is shared again, strengthening Vanzang people's solidarity as belonging to one village. Community projects are discussed and mobilized through this group mail. News relating to Vanzang people is shared globally. Overseas migrants can enter virtually into village life and share their memories and stories. This reconnects them as one village and maintains their presence in the village through involvement in community projects. The VGM plays a crucial role in connecting all Vanzang people in different countries and helps organize them for community solidarity.

The Formation of Global Vanzang Development Group

In addition, as overseas people became involved in different projects for the community, coordination for remittances led to the establishment of the Global Vanzang Development Group (GVDG) in 2008. It was envisioned that the arrival of Vanzang people in developed countries would benefit not just the migrant families but all members of the village. The aim was to coordinate community efforts for leveraging remittances for social and economic development.

> To organize better community projects and mobilize the overseas people, we decided to form the GVDG. We have representatives in different countries who help mobilize the overseas people. We have a subcommittee in the village here. The representatives are just volunteers - they do not decide whether to implement a project or not. The public decides and the GVDG works out the project. We had done projects informally, but we thought we should function more formally, so overseas migrants agreed and we formed the GVDG. Now any issue goes through the GVDG. (Kep, Personal Interview, 20 February 2015).

The GVDG does not stop migrants who want to make individual contributions. There are still cases where an individual or family makes an important contribution for the community or the church. The GVDG takes responsibility for raising and sending funds. A village representative is selected to stand as the connecting agent between the migrants and the villagers, and to take responsibility for communications with the migrants. When a project is proposed or implemented, this man is responsible as a communicator. Most of the community projects discussed were implemented before inception of the GVDG. The GVDG now coordinates community projects and mobilizes overseas migrants, but the VGM is still the main channel for communication and mobilization.

The Context for Formation of Ideas for Community Projects

The Arrival of Vanzang People in Developed Countries

Community networking developed as the number of overseas migrants settling in developed countries increased, especially, as indicated above, after the formation of the VGM. Overseas migrants can easily be mobilized by the villagers for various reasons most of which are directly related to community life. Around 300 persons have settled in developed countries including the USA, Australia and European countries. Knowing many of their people are living in developed countries and have financial capital to contribute to the welfare of the village, the villagers consider them as social capital that they can mobilize to develop their community and ease their common struggles.

The Availability of Access to Oversea Migrants through the VGM

As discussed earlier, the VGM is the place for sharing information relating to all Vanzang people either from abroad or in the village and other parts of Myanmar. They use this network with overseas migrants as the channel for sharing their ideas regarding what they plan to do for community welfare. All of these ideas are central to the development of community life. Any community member, whether a villager or a migrant, can form an idea and present it to the forum. Sometimes, the village leaders or the GVDG sub-committee are the ones who form and share the ideas. There is no strict rule for coming up with ideas and sharing information with the VGM. All ideas for community projects

are presented and mobilized through the GVDG. Since most of the Vanzang people who have access to the internet are members of the group, emergency needs of individual members can be raised as well. Being part of the network, a person can benefit from information and resources from the social capital of the shared community. Every community project also goes through the VGM as it is the main channel to reach the overseas migrants. Most Vanzang people from the village or other parts of Myanmar can communicate with overseas migrants as members of this group. Internet communication results in a constant exchange of information and resources between the migrants and the villagers. In the VGM, the people do not just share ideas for community projects, they also pass on news for example about deaths and members' health. This becomes the social field where migrants can feel a part of the home village and interact virtually with other members. It is also where villagers communicate with overseas migrants and mobilize their support for various community development projects or other important issues.

Common Struggle

In mobilizing the overseas migrants, the villagers raise different issues and concerns. The issues are mostly common struggles central to the basic infrastructure development and welfare of the villagers. For example, the villagers raised the issue of livelihood insecurity as a community issue needing community action. Hill farming using the traditional slash and burn method no longer guarantees food security for many families due to climate change. The overseas migrants share concern for the livelihood security of the villagers - insecurity is a common reason for migration, as the migrants know from personal experience. By demonstrating the vulnerability of their livelihoods, the villagers formed ideas to address the problems with the overseas migrants' assistance.

The villagers also mobilize the overseas migrants to support or complete community projects. For instance, the villagers had been running a private middle school since 1992 with only local resources. They paid the salary of the teachers by selling pieces of land to farmers, selling students' labor, and with contributions from parents. With these local funds, the school was able to survive for several years. But running the school with local resources was a struggle and ultimately the school committee could not raise sufficient money for the school to survive. Similarly, in the case of an expansion of the football

ground, the villagers could provide the labor but they could not afford to hire a bulldozer, so they raised this issue with the migrants who funded the renting of a bulldozer to complete the work. This kind of project, especially if locally funded or initiated, is usually taken up by the overseas migrants. Initially the villagers had communication barriers which caused huge problems in networking with their family members abroad. Likewise at community level, the villagers could not effectively connect with their overseas migrants when projects were in mind. As mentioned before, Vanzang village is remote and early on had no communication facility. The migrants always demanded constant reporting on the progress of projects they were involved in. Faced with this challenge, the villagers set up a public phone in the village to speed up communication with migrants as well as enabling all the migrant families to talk with their overseas relatives.

Changes in Traditional Practice

The raising of funds to obtain modern facilities with the assistance of overseas migrant remittances led to changes in the traditional way of life among the villagers. Traditionally, Chin houses have thatched roofs, though some better-off families choose tin roofs. Donating for corrugated iron sheets for those who cannot afford to roof their houses is very common. In the case of Vanzang village, there were several houses roofed with thatch. After Vanzang people migrated to developed countries, many good houses have been built using modern construction materials and it is easy to see who the migrant families are and who are not by looking at their houses. Those with thatch roofs tend to be non-migrant families or widow or newly established families. In the newly transformed village, thatch roofs have become a sign of poverty. The villagers mobilized overseas migrants to help those families who had not changed their roofing. Traditional usage of local resources is considered as undeveloped or backward. Another community practice is the use of bamboo rice filters as plates at communal feasts. In the transformed village, villagers found this old-fashioned and awkward too, and identified it as one of the things that needed to be changed.

External Influences

In Chin State, villagers often fund the construction of mini-hydro power plants by using remittances, as Rual Lian Thang's (2012) study shows, since the

government does not provide electricity to villages. Several other villages had already mobilized their overseas migrants to fund mini dams. Many villages have also built churches with remittances. This kind of mobilization for community projects can be observed across migrant villages in Chin State; community projects are imitated from one village to another. The resources these villages have in common are the overseas migrants and their remittances.

These different factors play an important role in the birth of community projects in Vanzang village. The overseas migrants become the community's shared capital for the villagers, who lack basic infrastructure and struggle to maintain a survivable livelihood. The VGM provides them with access to the overseas migrants to convey their concerns and struggles. The villagers make use of their common struggles, traditional practices and what other migrant villages do as important ways of mobilizing overseas migrants for the development of their community.

From Ideas to Reality: Communication and Mobilization Procedures

The VGM is the center for communication and mobilization, where ideas for community projects are shared. Though all ideas may not be implemented, all are presented in the forum. For the villagers it is the only channel where they can raise their concerns with the migrants. It is where the migrants and the villagers exchange views, communicate and consult on various issues. Although anyone can propose ideas for community projects, most of the time it is the village leaders or the subcommittee of the GVDG that does so. Before they propose, there would be some discussion and the issue would then be brought to the VGM for the overseas migrants to consider. Before the internet was available in the village, one of the village leaders had to go to Thantlang town to email a message to the overseas migrants. The key contact person or messenger between the village and the oversea migrants is the former village headman. He would bring any issues from the village into the VGM to convey to the oversea migrants. Even though someone else from the village proposes an idea, when it comes to implementation this key contact person plays the leading role in the communication and mobilization process. Ideas raised in the VGM are discussed and debated among the overseas migrants and when a decision is made it is communicated to the village and the villagers

implement the projects and usually contribute the labor. In implementing the projects, especially before the formation of the GVDG, the village council and other community leaders worked together. After the formation of the GVDG, the sub-committee of GVDG raises issues and also implements community projects.

No.	Project	Amount (Kyat)	Year Completed
1	Rice Loan	1,000,000	2005
2	Mini Hydro Power Plant	14,200,000	2007
3	Public Phone	870,000	2007
4	Teachers' monthly salary at private middle school Teachers' salary at private preschool	390,000 120,000	2009 2013
5	Communal Furniture	700,00	2013
6	Football Ground	1,350,000	2012
7	Construction of Vanzang Village Tract Road	4,000,000	2012
8	Medicare	NA	
9	Tin Roofing	2,000,000	2013
10	Funds for the Disabled	NA	

Table 5.1 List of Community Projects

As the number of Vanzang people settling in developed countries has increased, so has the money coming into the village. There is a growing increase of individual and collective remittances for different reasons which one way or another affect community life. As their capital increases they can envision bigger projects for the community. After the migrants settled in developed countries, the volume of remittances for community projects has grown. Projects cover a wide range of issues facing the local community. For community projects, there are either individual or collective donors. Community projects funded by remittances are discussed below.

Rice Loan

An important project of the oversea Vanzang villagers is rice distribution through rice loans, to address the insecure livelihoods of the villagers. The migrants' first priority is for the livelihood and security of the villagers. Most

villagers depend on cultivating the hills for their livelihoods using the slash and burn form of traditional agriculture. In Vanzang village, there are few well-to-do farmers. Those who have wetland for rice fields have secure livelihoods. But most of the people depend on rice cultivation on the hills where success is largely dependent on the weather and livelihoods are always uncertain. Hup recalls how they brought the matter into the VGM to start this project:

"We raised this issue with our overseas people. We informed them that many families in our village did not harvest sufficient food to last for a year. It was a pressing need for our community. We knew that Vanzang people in developed countries could do something to help. Many were interested. A plan was agreed after discussion and was then implemented in the village." (Personal Interview, 17 February 2015).

In an attempt to help as many people as possible, the rice loan was the first community initiative. Vanzang villagers and overseas migrants came up with the idea to start a self-sustaining project. Initial capital of 1,000,000 kyats was provided to the village. It was designed so that rice would be bought and sold with no profit so that poorer families could buy more cheaply. It was expected that the initial capital would rotate so that the fund would be available every year. The subcommittee of the GVDG manages the funds, and the distribution of rice is carried out in collaboration with the Village Council.

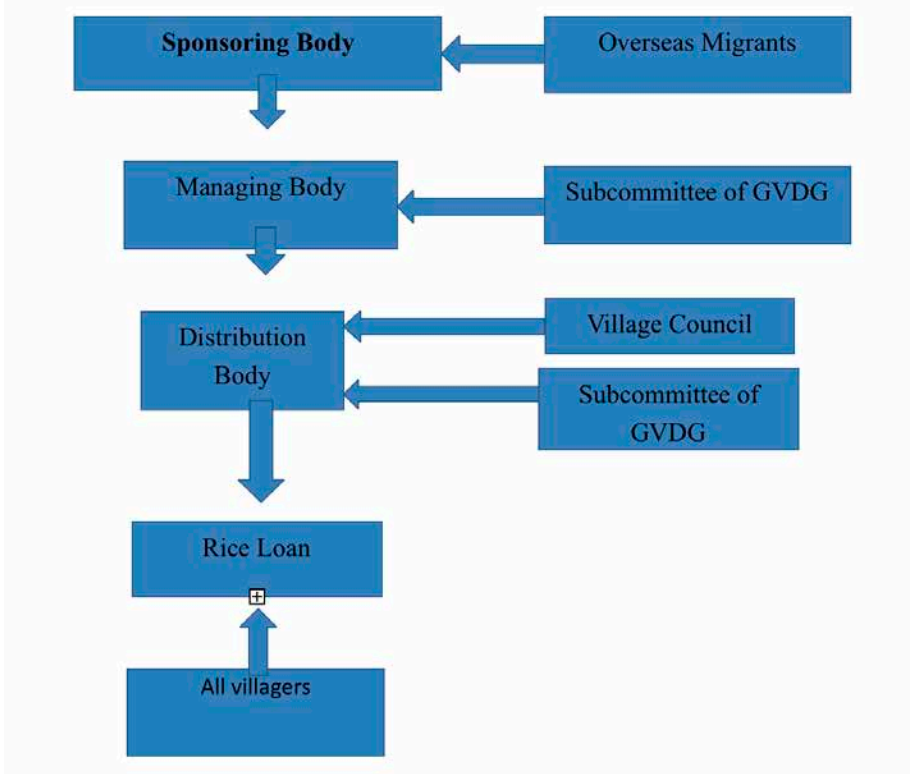

Figure 5.2: Rice Loan Management

Hup continues to explain the rice loan's vision and rice distribution:

> When we started this in 2005, our overseas migrants planned to add more funds into the project if needed, but they wanted to see first how it functioned. The project is specifically aimed at ensuring food security for our villagers. Access is open to all, but families who have harvested enough rice for the year don't use the project. Through this, we could help a lot of non-migrant families. (Personal Interview, 17 February 2015).

Non-migrant families have full access to this rice at below normal cost. An interview with Sang Kung, one of the beneficiaries, describes the benefits:

> It is quite difficult to manage when my harvest does not yield sufficient rice to sustain my family for the year. I do not have any brothers and sisters, or relatives working abroad who could send me remittances. It is quite difficult for us to buy food. I am really grateful for our villagers who have started the rice project; I can buy rice cheaper than at the shop and it helps my family survive. Having members of our community living overseas is really beneficial to us. My family also profits from migration and remittances. (Personal Interview, 11 February 2015).

Food insecurity is a common problem for local people. This project is specially designed to reduce the shock and hardship resulting from the threat to the livelihoods of many villagers if their rice crops fail. For village families, in such circumstances, they can depend on the rice loan project created through remittance funds. This is particularly important for non-migrant families. It is also important because of the farmers' increasing vulnerability to the effects of climate change.

The Construction of Mini Hydro Power Plant

Village communities do not exist in isolation. The mini hydro plant follows a pattern of community development that is seen in many villages, initiated by overseas migrants. The Chin state government does not provide electricity to villages. In the absence of government initiatives, several migrant villages have mobilized their overseas migrants to fund the construction of mini dams, as Rual Lian Thang's study (2012) shows. Chin topography is appropriate with rivers flowing down from high mountains.

Vanzang village has a stream called Haipizung. It is located 2 km from the village. Its geographical location is appropriate for building a small dam. In order to start the project, preliminary research was carried out by the villagers in 2007. They had observed other villages which had constructed dams, and gained knowledge from them. Mechanical and electrical experts were consulted about the feasibility of the project. After conducting the basic research, the matter was brought to the group mail to discuss and raise the money. Vanzang village has never had any electric light. Electricity is considered essential for

its all-around development. The initial idea of constructing a mini-hydro power plant was put to the VGM by the villagers. Hup describes the whole process:

> We shared the idea of building a mini dam with our overseas migrants. In the olden days the best our villagers could do for light at night was candles. Electric light was a pressing need for the kids, as they wanted to study at night. We could not use electrical products in the village though people could buy them. Confronted with this, we proposed to the overseas migrants the building of a small dam at Haipizung. At first, we were not confident about obtaining the funds for construction. We learnt from the experience of other villages and when the funds were raised through the GVDG we were able to build. It was a great venture between the overseas Vanzang people and the villagers. (Personal Interview, 14 February 2015).

All Vanzang oversea migrants were mobilized to get the funds necessary, and a total of 14,200,000 kyats was raised and given to the village subcommittee. The subcommittee took the lead in implementing the project and managing the funds and the construction. The building of the hydro power plant was completed in 2007. One of the villagers reveals the benefit of having electricity:

> We had never had this before. When we started using it, we were amazed to see our village full of light. We never thought this could be done. We never dreamed of any possibility to set up a hydro power plant. Now we can watch TV. Many houses have their own TV now. Our children can study at home under electric light. We have street lights. All the villagers benefit from our overseas migrants. Every household is given light. This is one of the major community development projects made possible by our people abroad. (Ham, Personal Interview, 14 February 2015).

In this case, it required a lot of resources to set up the mini hydro power plant including the mechanical knowledge, the financial capital and the cooperation of the people. The villagers used the available resources to create this infrastructure. Possibilities for developing infrastructure are often gleaned

from other social networks, and projects are realized with a combination of local and foreign input. What happened in this project was that the common knowledge about the location and the technical difficulties motivated the migrants to find solutions for the community. Transnationally developed projects come with the sharing of common knowledge and resources within each group, villagers and migrants, and the full participation of the local people.

The Setting up of the Public Telephone

Communicating and networking with their family, relatives and villagers is an important aspect of the transnational relationship of migrants and their community of origin. As I mentioned in the introduction, Vanzang village is a remote place 24 km from Thantlang town. There was no communication facility in the village. For the villagers to make a phone call, they had to go to Thantlang, a full day's journey on foot. If a migrant wanted to talk with their family they would have to ask the family to go into town. Overseas migrants wanted to have a communication system by which they could be connected easily and maintain relationships with their families. In the 1990s, the government did not normally give telephones to rural villages, but in the 2000s they started providing some rural villages with PCOs (Public Call Offices). This opened the door for rural villages to access telecommunication. As the volume of remittances and the involvement of overseas migrants in development projects increased, the need for efficient communication became crucial to the coordinating work of the GVDG. Not only did the villagers see the setting up of a telephone as part of village infrastructure development, it was vital to future community projects. According to some of the interviewees in the case of the dam construction, the villagers encountered communication barriers during the implementation period when they had to go into Thantlang town and use the internet to update progress to the GVDG. Experiencing the communication problem, the GVDG aimed at finding a solution through the installation of a telephone in Vanzang village which they hoped would make for better and easier communication. This project was proposed soon after the hydro power construction was completed. Hup comments:

> For our villagers, the construction of the hydro power plant was a great venture between our overseas migrants and the people here. During implementation, we had a big communications problem. The migrants expected reports on

> the progress of the work and accounting for the funds. The expectations of the migrants who invested in this project were very high. Sometimes, we would report to them only once a month and they were not very impressed. At that time, there was no way of speeding things up. We could not go to Thantlang town every week to write an email or make a phone call. Then we proposed to set up a phone here and the GVDG agreed to support this, stressing that communication facilities are a necessity for the village. (Personal Interview 11 February 2015)

The GVDG mobilized funds for this project and a total donation of 870,000 kyats was received from overseas migrants. The telephone was set up in 2007, since when it has been much easier for the villagers and the migrants to talk on any issue related to the community. As far as community projects are concerned, talking on the phone is not the complete solution as the migrants expect pictures and detailed information. However the phone helps immensely. Than explains:

> I was amazed to see how our people after arriving in developed countries became very strict on managing funds and requiring good financial and project management. They love details. At the same time, we understand that if we do not do our best, our overseas people will stop funding. The setting up of the phone really helps for communication but for reports on the project we still need to go to Thantlang town. (Personal interview on 15 February 2015).

The government also plays an important role in opening up public access to telecommunications. Without the government providing public access, the local people would not have been able to do it. The role of the government cannot be ignored in the implementation of community development through foreign workers' remittances. At the same time, the villagers are proactive in finding opportunities to mobilize their overseas migrants for the community. As the government started providing public access to telecommunication, the villagers were quick to mobilize their people for the common benefit of the community. Setting up the public phone makes communication between the

migrants and their home village easier. It brings them together more intimately and this increases remittance flows.

Educational Initiatives

Vanzang was given a government primary school in 1966. The villagers started a private middle school as a community initiated project in 1972. For many families, sending children to Thantlang town after graduating from primary school would have been quite beyond their ability. Paying the private middle school teachers was also too much for the parents and the school only lasted a year. It was resumed in 1987, and during the 1990s the teachers were paid from money received by the village council from selling public land to farmers, supplemented by money collected by the parents among themselves. Here it is worth noting that the school committee was led by the village headman. Since Chin people practice customary law for forest use, the village council governs village land and forests. Those who want a larger cultivation area can buy land from the council. Practice differs from one village to another. In the case of Vanzang village, the money received from selling land was used for the running of the private school. The school was run with financial constraints but sustained over the years. Sometimes, the students would do farm work to earn their tuition fees.

As time went by, there were fewer people in the village who wanted to buy land. With diminished land sales there were insufficient funds for the teachers' salaries and parents had to pay. The villagers attempted with all resources available locally to run the school, but it was not easy. In 2001, those Vanzang people who arrived in Malaysia and the USA started mobilizing themselves to raise funds for teachers' salaries. This remittance was used as a revolving fund; the school committee loaned it to business people with interest and the interest was used for the salaries. Since 2008, the middle school has been run exclusively from remittances. Three teachers are employed at salaries of 130 USD per month. One of the elders of the village, Hmung, states:

> Education is the best legacy for our children. Migration has had a big impact and as they grow up they want to go abroad and earn money to support the family. So we told our people in different countries that we should invest in the education of the younger generation to build our future. We share with

> them the need to develop human resources, as part of developing our community. We want to have educated people who can work in government offices. Nowadays we have very few. As our country changes, we hope for a more educated generation. The migrants were very supportive to the ongoing private middle school. (Personal interview 10 February 2015).

Than also explains how they mobilized the oversea migrants for this:

> We ran our private middle school with local resources for almost two decades. We consider it is the most important thing for our kids and invested a lot for this school. Before, we could sell land that would help to get funds for teachers' salaries. Nowadays people do not buy land as much as before, so it is tough to find funds for the school. Although some migrants would send money from time to time, it did not fully cover the salaries. So we raised the issue of our struggle with the overseas migrants and ask them to support our teachers. Some of our former students have reached developed countries and they also become our sponsors. (Personal Interview on 16 February 2015)

Period	**Source of Funds**
1972-1973	Parents
1974-1986	None: School not functioning
1987-1995	Parents
1995-2001	Sales of land; Government relief funds
2001 onwards	Migrant Remittances

Table 5.2 History of Private Middle School Funding
Source: Vanzang 200 Years Anniversary Magazine

As the oversea migrants started funding the salary of middle school teachers, the idea of opening up a kindergarten was proposed by the villagers. The idea recognized the benefit of a daycare center so that the mothers can work. In Chin state, kindergartens are found in towns. Almost none exist in villages, where the old people take care of the pre-school children while the parents work in the fields. Vanzang village, like most Chin villages, had never

had a kindergarten. It was started in 2013. The overseas migrants have hired two teachers annually since its inception. There are about 40 children eligible for the preschool. More parents can now work in the fields as their children are being cared for. Hup explains:

> For our villagers, over the years we have been struggling to pay for the salaries of three middle school teachers. And we cannot think of hiring preschool teachers although we have a good number of kids who can go to kindergarten. When our overseas migrants supported opening it, our villagers were very happy. Our overseas migrants hire 2 teachers for this preschool every year. This school was started in 2013. (Personal Interview 11 February 2015).

When I asked how it was started one of the advisors of the GVDG states:

> We asked our overseas people to open this preschool four years ago. They did not see it as important. Later we raised the issue again. In 2013, they agreed. We have around 40 kids in our village. Sometimes, when we raise an issue, it takes years to start. Especially as the migrants are the ones deciding as they are our sponsors. (Personal Interview on 17 February 2015).

Migrants regard educational development as an important foundation for the future of the village. Different educational services are provided to invest in human resources to develop the villagers' knowledge and education. One migrant from the USA (Bawi Cung) circulates a newspaper called Chin Land Today for the villagers, to enlarge their general knowledge. The newspaper is sent to the village every month. It is kept in the village library and everyone can read it. Chin Land Today has been circulated for two years providing an opportunity for the villagers to read and become informed about local and international news. After Myanmar changed from a military to a quasi-democratic country in 2011, the press has opened up and in Chin state a number of local newspapers have appeared. This also benefits the rural population as they can read independent news.

The Improvement of Communal Furniture

The migrants' attempt to develop their community covers all aspects of village life, including minor issues that the villagers could deal with by themselves. Modernizing what they consider as traditional and backward characterizes their approach to community development. An example of this is the assistance provided for buying community property such as tables, chairs and utensils for use in community related events. The Vanzang overseas youth raised a total of 700,000 kyats to purchase this equipment. Lack of these basic facilities created problems in feeding the villagers during communal events.

> We have always had problems when it comes to communal feasts as we do not have proper furniture. We still use bamboo rice filters as plates. We see that many villages have changed this kind of feeding system. So we decided to ask our overseas people to buy new tables, chairs and other utensils. The migrants were surprised that we were still using the old equipment. So some interested people donated money for this project Now with these new plates it is easier and cleaner. (Hup, Personal Interview, 16 February 2015).

The Renovation of Village Football Ground

In Thantlang Township, there are 6 village tracts, of which Vanzang village tract is one. Once a year, a football tournament at township level is organized for the youth. The youth selected from Vanzang village tract participate. The five other villages in the Vanzang Village Tract all have good football grounds. The youth of Vanzang wanted to expand their football ground likewise. In the 1990s, it was not possible to hire a bulldozer from India for leveling the ground. They enlarged it using manual labor,but it was still not up to the level of the football grounds in the other villages. Vanzang people brought this matter into the forum of the GVDG. Immediately, the GVDG took the matter up and mobilized funds for the remaining work to get done. A total of 1,350,000 kyats for the construction of the football ground\was raised and sent to the village subcommittee. A bulldozer was hired and the renovation of the ground was completed in 2012. In other parts of Chin state remittances have also been mobilized for the enlargement of football grounds. Not only was the football ground expanded and leveled but also the ground in front of

the primary school, for the school children to play. Za, one of the youth leaders in the village states:

> Networking with overseas Vanzang people has brought many changes in our village, especially the project like the construction of football ground. Vanzang youth living abroad have a strong interest in our young people. There is a constant relationship between migrants and village youth. The overseas migrants are interested in promoting the youth's unity and solidarity. When the community needs something, especially any work that is beyond their capability, the GVDG assists. What I see is that the GVDG is more interested in locally initiated projects. So far they have never denied any project that we have started locally. Remittances are driving many of our community projects, which benefits everyone. (Personal Interview 12 February 2015).

He continues:

> We have invested a lot of our own labor. We informed the overseas Vanzang people that if we had money we could hire a bulldozer to enlarge our football ground. We told them that if they provided this support villagers would have a large and good football ground, and the youth especially would enjoy it. We also noted that many neighboring villages' football grounds had been enlarged by remittances from overseas migrants, while we were left behind. (Personal Interview 20 February 2015).

The villagers raised this issue in the sense that the migrants' role in sponsoring the rent of the bulldozer would provide the standard recreational facility for the community.

The Construction of Vanzang Village Tract Road

Another project where the overseas Vanzang people contributed was the improvement of the Vanzang Village Tract Road. This road starts from Thantlang town and goes through So Pum village, Vanzang village, Farrawn

village, Tlangpi village and Tlanglo village, bordering with India. It is the main road the people in these villages use for transport and communication. The road was rocky, muddy and narrow. It winds along 40 miles and only jeeps can use it in the summer. Since this is the main connecting road and links with India, there was awareness among the people that its restoration was vital to the social and economic growth of the villages.

In normal conditions, the government would construct good roads for these villages especially this road which connects to a neighboring country. But in this case the people did not expect the government to invest in repairing the road; rather the government was widely viewed as an oppressive force with no interest in social and economic development. In fact, the military government considers the area as a hot spot for CNA operations. Since they took power in 1988, they have not invested substantially in the development of Chin state. The government merely exists for controlling the people and as a result the people have lost trust in it. In the absence of a good government working for its people, the local people looked to their own resources and mobilized them for the development of the road. The villagers would rather use overseas migrants as their capital to improve their own community, for which this connecting road stands as the first and most important development. I discussed the construction of this main road with Hup, who said:

> This road goes from Thantlang town to Farkhawn village of Mizoram state of India. All the people from these five villages use it. For us it is our highway. The road is narrow, and in summer is only suitable for a jeep. In the rainy season it is not accessible at all. We all have to use it in spite of its terrible condition as it is the road for our market. Whenever we want to go to India, we use this road. Whenever we want to go to inland Myanmar, we use this road. It is what connects us to the outside world. Many times we asked the government to repair the road for us, but they never did. As remittances flow into the villages the people can buy motor cars and motorbikes and the road becomes more important. The village leaders realized that we could deal with the problem with our own resources by connecting with our overseas migrants. Each village was responsible for mobilizing their people living abroad for this project. It seems that the migrants also

> considered this crucial for our development and they supported us financially, so we repaired the road by using remittances. (Personal Interview on 14 February 2015).

Hup explains how it was started:

> I attended a meeting of all the village leaders and they proposed to renovate the road by seeking remittances. Since we all have overseas migrants, we agreed. Each village leader is responsible for mobilizing his people to contribute. I was responsible for mobilizing my migrants. I sent them an e-mail about the project; many of them contributed. (Personal Interview, 17 February 2015).

Remittances are considered as common capital and an available resource to improve basic infrastructure. The GVDG also took part in this initiative and raised money from its members and participated in this collaborative five village project. A total of 4,000,000 kyats was raised and invested in the road construction. A bulldozer was hired and the road was finished in 2012. Remittances in this case united the people for a common cause which no one village could have achieved by itself. Each migrant from this coalition of five villages worked for the best impact for their communities.

Health Care

The GVDG does not control its members on issues of help. There is always space for individual contributions on particular issues. There are issues where the GVDG does not operate as a village project but receives contributions from migrants for individual benefit. When it comes to individual cases, any migrant can offer help. Issues are made known through the GVDG network or group mail. An individual case can be sickness, death or bad luck. Some migrants, though they are not related to the needy person, somehow relate through acquaintance or friendship or due to sharing the same community, and provide help. Many critical patients, regardless of their social position, can access this invaluable asset for the provision of medical care. I interviewed one patient from Vanzang village, Bawi, who underwent cancer treatment in Yangon, who was grateful to the overseas migrants:

> Mostly, my relatives send me money for my treatment. However, when overseas Vanzang people knew of my situation, I received a lot of money from different people. They are neither my family members nor relatives. We are just fellow villagers. I never expected that they would help me a lot. I got money from Australia, USA and Canada from my villagers, around 1,500 USD. This is beyond the expectations of my family. We are blessed by their generous giving. (Personal Interview 18 February 2015)

The Vanzang overseas people engage in providing remittances for health care for those who are admitted to hospital. There is no organized system that manages this, and no strict requirements for access to the funds. It all depends on the migrants. It does not obligate any one to give for a patient. It functions loosely, but is helpful for recipients. In the village there is no clinic or hospital that the patient can go to. If anyone is diagnosed with a serious disease, he or she must go to Thantlang or another city. Most of the patients who go for treatment can barely afford the expensive medical costs in cities.

The Donation of Tin Roofing Materials

The GVDG is also in association with the villagers in considering the need to help those families whose houses are roofed with thatch. During the 1990s, when Vanzang people were starting to migrate, there were several houses with thatch roofs in the village. When a storm hits, usually at the beginning of the rainy season, those roofs often blow away. Overseas migrants experienced this when they were in the village. Those who have tin roofing are safe from the strong wind. In the 1990s, only the economically better-off families could have such roofing. After Vanzang people migrated to developed countries, many good houses have been built and it is easy to see who are the migrant families and non-migrant families by the condition of their houses. Hup explains how the idea was shared with the oversea migrants:

> Since we have many houses with thatch roofing in our village, we proposed to the forum of GVDG the idea of helping these families by providing them with corrugated iron sheets. These families tend to be poor. We know that thatch is not as plentiful as before. But in any case we aspire for all our villagers to have

> tin roofing. The overseas migrants considered our proposal and raised money for us to help these families. (Personal Interview, 13 February 2013).

Those who cannot build new houses still use the thatch roofing that the Chin people have used for centuries, which is a local resource. As I argued before, some local resources are considered undeveloped or backward. Both the villagers and the migrants agree on this. And in a transforming village, thatch roofing remains a symbol of the past, particularly as many houses have been rebuilt with new construction materials. Tin roofing is seen as modern or developed in some way and it becomes important for the villagers that all houses have good roofing. In another respect, it shows remittances being shared with the less fortunate families who do not have direct access. The overseas migrants consider these families disadvantaged economically. Often, they are widowed and/or newly established. And finding thatch in the forest is not as easy as before; as weather conditions change, there are not many areas left in the forest where thatch can be harvested. And in the newly transformed village, thatch roofing denotes poverty. That sparks interest in the minds of the overseas migrants to help those families without tin roofs. The GVDG mobilized all Vanzang overseas to contribute towards this project. In 2013, a total of 12,000 corrugated iron sheets were donated to replace thatch roofing. The purchase of materials and the distribution of work was carried out by the subcommittee of the GVDG. And now all the villagers' houses have tin roofs.

Funds for the Disabled

The contributions of Vanzang migrants cover all aspects of the community. They attempt to help the less fortunate people, not only the poor but also isolated social groups such as the disabled, the blind and the mentally retarded. There are seven people who are either blind, disabled or deaf. There is awareness among migrants of the need to help them. From 2007, once a year, especially during the Christmas season, they are given presents. The migrants mobilize among themselves to find the money. This is a migrant-initiated project carried out once a year, ever since 2007. The GVDG has been raising funds among its members to help these people, who are considered part of the society to be helped not just by their relatives, but by the villagers at large who also care for them. Although it is only once a year and a small amount

compared with other projects, remittances have been flowing steadily for their welfare.

In summary, the involvement of migrants in their community is holistic. It is also further observed that ideas for village community development are brainstormed by both the migrants and the villagers. Projects are not necessarily initiated by either overseas migrants or the villagers but by a combination of the two, discussing needs and ideas. Usually, to get the whole process of a project started, there is a lot of discussion and exchanging of views from both sides. At the same time, it is important to note that the ideas for development tend to follow the same pattern among other communities in Chin state with social networks with migrants abroad. Nor should the role of government be ignored; some of the projects came about as a result of the government opening an opportunity for development. But since the government is not working for community development, there has to be dependency on remittances for community life improvement.

Religious Networking and Development

In Vanzang village, there are four churches, each of which has its own connections with overseas members. Christianity is deeply embedded in Chin society. As Lian, H. Sakhong (2003) argues, Christianity became the way of Chin people. Even though migrants may affiliate themselves to churches in their new communities, they still maintain a relationship with their homeland churches via their family members. Each church in the village mobilizes its overseas migrants to take part in their activities. Sometimes, the church committee is actively involved in this mobilization process. In other cases, the members are the active mobilizers, in which case the religious involvement of the migrants is confined to their own churches. The church utilizes its overseas migrants as religious capital and mobilizes them for the development of the religious institution, mainly for the building of their churches.

The Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Church is one of the four churches in Vanzang Village. There are 16 families attending. The church was started in 1973. Before then they were the Methodist Church, but since the Methodists could not provide a church building for them, they left the Methodists and became Presbyterians.

The first church was built in 1976 with wood and thatch roofing. Later on, under the leadership of the Rev. Rual Cung, funds for church building were raised in Mizoram State of India, and the people were able to rebuild the church with tin roofing in 1978. The last renovation was in 2008 with the mobilization of migrants for contributions, organized by the church committee.

In 2007, as the church was in a poor state of repair, the church committee proposed to construct a new building. The committee decided on a concrete building, which is not an easy task in a village like Vanzang where transport to town is not good. The people have to buy the construction materials needed from Thantlang town, as only wood is available in the village. A lot of money is required for the shipment of materials. The task was considered impossible by many villagers because of the poor transport facilities. One of the committee members, Than, recalled the situation they were facing:

> When we announced that we were going to put up a concrete building for our church, many people laughed at us and said that it was impossible. We were a handful of 16 families; many of us were very poor. But we, the committee members, were firm on our decision and we encouraged all our members to contribute whatever they could. We thought that if we could not finish by ourselves, we would ask our church members living abroad. (Personal Interview, 14, February 2015).

The people started building with whatever local resources were available. The need for more money was raised; the committee started contacting migrants who were former members of the Church. They connected with two persons initially - Za Chawn living in Malaysia and Rem Bik living in the USA. There are many church members working abroad, but these two were the only ones contacted by the committee. They were known to be successful. A church member, Than, comments:

> When we were having difficulty in finishing the building project, we contacted only two persons, Za Chawn and Rem Bik who are working overseas. Although Za Chawn stopped supporting us half way through, Rem Bik continued sending money till completion of the project. This was the only time as a church body that we raised money from overseas migrants

> when we saw that we were not able to accomplish it from our own resources. There were other people whom the committee did not approach but who donated of their own accord when they heard about the project. All of them were church members who had left our village. They were our source of capital throughout the construction period. (Personal Interview on 15 February 2015)

Donor	**Amount (Kyat)**
U Rem Bik	9,000,000
Pu Za Chawn Lian	786,000
Pu Tuan Hre	80,000
Pi Iang Cuai	70,000
Total	9,936,000

Table 5.3 List of Donors for the Presbyterian Church's Building
Source: the Church Monument

As they began building, Za Chawn wanted to participate. He is the son of the former leader of the church. Even though his family has left the village, they still have a strong affection for this church as they had put great effort into developing it while they lived in the village. The news of church construction started spreading among the church's overseas members. Despite the limited resources available, the church members pressed on. All the members contributed their labor free of cost, considering it as an act of merit. As the building construction progressed, Rem Bik whom the committee also contacted for contributions also started donating. Former strong members Pu Than Hre and Pi Iang Cuai also contributed when they heard that the church building was in progress.

Although the church did not have enough resources for the building, they considered their overseas migrant members as capital that they could mobilize when they most needed it. Even though the migrants live far way, the church still considers them as members. The migrant families have a constant relationship with them and share news about the church and its prayers. When asked about Bik's involvement in church activities before his migration, one of the church leaders comments;

> Before migration, our main donor, Rem Bik was not a devoted member; he did not attend regularly, but after he migrated he became committed to church activities. When we contacted him for help, he agreed to donate. He is a completely different person now. (Than, Personal Interview, 17 February 2015)

When the building was about to be completed, in answering a question from one of the church members about his donations, Bik was quoted as saying:

> I am not like I was before, I know God now. I want to contribute to the church building as you have all prayed for me. Now God bless me I want to get involved in God's work. Even though you are far away, I consider you as my church who have always prayed for me. (Quotation 14 February 2015)

In addition, the church committee recognizes the important role of Bik's mother in his decision to donate:

> She is a devoted member of the church. We thought that she would mobilize her son to contribute to the building as she often makes prayer requests for him in the church services. We recognize her role in encouraging her son to be part of the project. (Church Committee interview, 15 February 2015)

The pastor of the church was given responsibility for making contact with the migrants, and became the key contact person who linked directly with the individual donors. He was responsible for conveying the donor's expectations such as the good management of the funds by the building committee, as well as bringing up issues the committee wanted discussed with the donors. On behalf of the committee, he reported regularly on the building expenses throughout the construction period, right through to completion.

The home church's role can never be ignored as members of the church constantly share the message of prayers and words of encouragement with the overseas migrants, in time of sorrow, need, struggle and success. The religious institution is not confined in location; it is transnationally connected with its overseas migrants which brings forth what can be described as religious remittances, in the form of prayers, merit, and financial contributions. It is also

apparent that although the church has many members working abroad, not all are economically able to support it. The church approaches those they consider as financially able to help, or to children of devoted members. The level of remittance contribution is dependent on the success of the migrants, their interest in religious activities and level of family commitment.

The Baptist Church

The way remittances were mobilized by this church is different from the Presbyterian Church. A committee was formed to build the church in 2004. They decided to name their church as the Huat Kam Memorial Baptist Church, after their founder, and raised funds from the founder's children. The committee informed the children of Rev. Huat Kham that they were going to build the church in their father's name and requested funds for it. Some of the Rev. Huat Kam's children are still in Hakha city in Chin state and the committee brought the matter up in person with Pi Biak Zi, one of the his daughters. She undertook to contact all the family members in the USA, and to help mobilize the funds. All the construction materials were paid for by the children of the Rev. Huat Kham and delivered to Vanzang village. The members of the church contributed all the labor. Pu Lian Hi, the church chairman, described the process:

> We had a church meeting about our church building. The church committee unanimously agreed to approach the Rev. Huat Kam's children to ask for their financial help. After we went to see them at their home in Hakha city, they agreed to help us. We did not know the total cost of the building. I assumed it would be around $80,000. The children of Rev. Huat Kham took care all of the construction materials and had them delivered to the village. We did not know what all the individual contributions were. Many of the Rev. Huat Kam's children live in the USA. They took it on as a family project, as their father was the first pastor, the founding father of our Baptist Church. Pi Tha Cuai, a daughter of the Rev. Huat Kham living in Hakha, contributed 1,000,000 kyats for the bricks (Personal Interview 15 February February 2015).

After the building was completed, many people contributed. The building committee did not ask any migrants for furniture, it was the migrants who inquired about what was needed and made their own contributions under the leadership of Pu Thawng Kio, a former church youth leader. And Pu Ceu Thawng, a former member, also contributed 1,500,000 kyats for the pastor's quarters. The church building committee did not raise money for this. None of the church leadership team contacted him for such assistance. However, Pu Ceu Thawng found his own way to be part of the home church through his mother, who is a devoted Christian and church member. Often, the members are active fund-raisers, rather than the pastor or the church committee. Members who have sons and daughters living in foreign countries play an important role as mobilizers as they keep in regular contact with their children. When asked about the people who donated the furniture and other items funded by remittances, U Lian Hi, the church chairman explains:

> Pi Tha Chuai donated a generator, amplifier and sound system. Pu Bawi Er provided a keyboard. All the chairs were donated by the overseas members. They contributed over $4000 for the chairs. The mobilization of overseas members was led by Pu Thawng Kio who is now in the USA and used to be the church youth leader. We did not ask any overseas migrants for furniture, it was their own decision; when they found out about our church building they joined together for these things (Personal Interview, 15 February February 2015).

Hi further points out:

> Regarding mobilizing overseas youth, the key person is Pu Thawng Kio who was once our youth leader. As far as I know, those who were active participants in church activities while they were here are concerned with what is happening in our church now that they live abroad, and try to get involved in any way they can. While non-active participants were also contributing, greater support came from active participants. And those devoted families' children are making more contributions to the religious institution (Personal Interview 15 February 2015).

The church utilized the social capital invested in its membership. Although it did not have its own financial capital, it saw overseas members as having the resources to provide it. Having members abroad, the church used its religious position in their life and mobilized them to participate in the building project. The church took advantage of the Rev. Huat Kam's being the first pastor to mobilize his children for the church's benefit. Membership in the church can be viewed as social capital; and accessing that capital was done through mobilizing the children of the Rev. Huat Kam. As members of the church go abroad to live, the church increases its social capital as these members do not sever their connections. Religious remittances are raised through the membership and the religious indebtedness of the migrants to the home church.

The church does not have a regular relationship with its overseas members, but when the need arises the church mobilizes them to participate. In religious practice, membership does not necessarily depend on one's location, but is vested in the spiritual life of the person. Migrants take with them the spiritual teaching of their church. The church's influence on their lives is not completely lost. One of the reasons is that the migrants still have relatives living in the village, and these families become the active agents for the church. The families not only maintain contact with their overseas migrants, they share the religious elements of the local church with them which forges a kind of continued transnational religious affiliation. It is apparent that these devoted persons, consisting of the migrants and the parents who mobilize them, are active participants in transnational religious practice. Often these devoted members become active transnational messengers who carry the messages of the church to their relatives, friends and families abroad; this plays an important role in the process of mobilization.

The Believer Church

The building was started on the 3rd March, 2010. The church committee started to build with their own resources using local church funds. They aimed to erect a reinforced concrete building. All the construction materials were bought from Thantlang town. It is expensive to use materials from outside. The way this church functioned to raise money was different from the previous two churches. As they began building, the church committee brought the issue to the forum of the GVDG which was networking with all Vanzang overseas migrants and asked for help in raising funds. Lian, the pastor states:

> When we could not continue our building with our local resources, we sent a request to the VGM asking for help to complete it. As the GVDG raised funds among its global members, many Vanzang people who were not our church members contributed. It was a global response, most of our Vanzang people got involved in our construction. Many of them considered our church building as part of Vanzang village community development, and did not worry about denominational differences or affiliations. During the building period, our tithe was also increased, so church members gave more (Personal Interview 28 February February 2015).

The local church members contributed their free labor. Their members also gave more donations towards the building through their offerings and tithing. After the formation of the GVDG, the overseas Vanzang people were able to mobilize funds for this particular church as part of community infrastructure development. Community involvement became the central focus of the GVDG through participation in projects. These can be for religious institutions, community infrastructure or services. Even though the amount contributed towards the building was much smaller than in the previous two cases, the contributors represented different members of Vanzang community and from different countries. Since each church does not have equal social capital or religious capital that they can harness for their church activities, flows of remittances to the respective churches are unequal.

Country	Amount (kyat)
Australia	863,000
Norway	400,000
Denmark	100,000
USA	1,787,150
Total	**3,150,150**

Table.5.4 List of Overseas Migrant Donors

This church mobilized Vanzang overseas migrants to contribute to the church building as part of village development, which the previous churches did not. One of my key informants notes that the leaders of this church are also community leaders:

> These church leaders are the main communicators for our community projects. Also, they have a lot of overseas members. Having this advantage, they can easily mobilize overseas migrants for their church building. Other churches can only mobilize their own church members. As the leaders of this church are also the leaders of our community they can mobilize even non-members for their church building (Lal Personal Interview 18 February 2015).

Za who is one of the church leaders recognizes the role of overseas migrants in the mobilization process as he points out:

"Our members were also actively involved in mobilizing others who were not our members. They helped us to find funds in their countries. Their roles were crucial to the completion of our church building" (Za, Personal Interview 18 February 2015).

In this example, the GVDG allows for effective mobilization of Vanzang overseas people, as the transnational exchange of information and relationships not only provides remittances for projects but creates a sense of community where individuals connect and contribute to village life. Although the GVDG does not necessarily take up every community project, it helps organize the process of mobilization efficiently and makes it easier to propose community projects. As the people are grouped as one village or one community, their resources can be mobilized for action. They act cohesively for their community life despite the differences in their social, economic and religious status.

Another two interesting factors are that the Believer Church has more powerful people who are part of the village council and members of the subcommittee of the GVDG, and it also has a larger number of overseas migrant members. This church therefore has more religious capital than other churches which which makes a difference in the process of networking and mobilizing for the project.

The Church of Jesus Christ

The church was built in 2008 without raising any funds through remittance contributions either from the GVDG or from overseas members. Financially it was totally dependent on the local members of the church and

their labor. Unlike other churches, this church did not attempt to build a concrete building but rather a simple wooden building with tin roofing. Members of this church are migrant families but even so the church did not send any proposal for their church building to the GVDG or approach specifically any of its foreign members for financial support. In spite of their reliance on their own strength, there were some overseas migrants who contributed, having heard about it.

Cuai Te, an individual donor from Korea, contributed 150,000 kyats. She was not contacted by the church committee - it was her own decision. Another man, U Chum Ling, who lives in Hakha city in Chin state, also contributed to the building with a total of 150,000 kyats for the windows. Pu Bawi Lian, one of the local church members, contributed the wood needed for the chairs. The remaining financial contributors were local members of the church. When I interviewed the pastor he explained:

> For our church construction, we neither brought the matter to the consideration of the GVDG nor sent any special request to any of our overseas members. Even those people who contributed from Korea and Hakha, we did not ask them, it was their own decision. They may have heard from our church members. We completely depended on our local members who generously donated towards the building construction. If I say we do not get any remittances I may be wrong because many of our local donors have overseas family members. Therefore, indirectly, remittances are among our sources too. (Personal Interview, 15 February 2015).

Unlike other churches that use the religious capital embedded in its foreign members, this church rather depended on the local members who have access to that capital through their family relationships. In the Chin community, one of the measures for observing remittance flows is the tithing of people into their own church. In normal conditions, a family cannot give a lot of tithing, however, when they get money from their relatives overseas, they can tithe one tenth of the total amount of remittance received. This is generally seen as typical Christian family behavior in the village, and is a source of income for the Church's various activities. However, this does not mean that every family tithes all their income.

Friday Prayer Group

In Vanzang village, the Friday Prayer Group was set up in 2008 consisting of women from different churches. They come together and pray for the various needs of the village and its overseas members every Friday. Most of the attendants are from migrant families although non-migrant families also participate. Although they pray generally for the various needs of the village and the spiritual growth of the villagers, their prayers for overseas migrants are noteworthy. From time to time, this prayer group receives prayer requests from an overseas migrant. This group is transnationally linked with overseas migrants. They send messages to all the Vanzang overseas migrants that every Friday the village women are praying for them. The leader of the group, Tlem explains:

> The reason we decided to have this prayer group is that we want to pray for the spiritual growth of our village. We unite all women from different churches. Also, since most of us have sons and daughters in other countries, we want to pray for them regularly. Many of our group members are messengers to their relatives abroad. They bring prayer requests and tell us about the results of our prayers in their lives. That is how we gradually connect with overseas migrants. Those who appreciate our prayers send us money and we organize here a couple of spiritual training sessions for our villagers. (Personal Interview, 19 February February 2015).

When I ask about how this prayer group linked with overseas Vanzang peopleTlem further explains:

> Often, I get an overseas phone call asking us to pray for different things they are concerned with. Our prayers are linked with overseas life and many have informed us about the important role of our prayers in their lives. We also get some donations from time to time from overseas migrants.
>
> We do not get a lot of money from abroad. We get some money for our lunch and activities. When overseas migrants contribute larger amounts, we organize some training for our

> community. We have done a couple of training sessions for our villagers. Sometimes, we donate the money to religious speakers who come to our village. Personal Interview, 15 February 2015)

This prayer group has transnational dimensions, forging a form of global religious connectivity through Christian spirituality. The setting up of the auto phone in the village also sharpens the process of religious networking between the villagers and the migrants. Through this communication system, migrants can make prayer requests to their mothers. Even though it is a loose networking through prayers, it does bring forth remittances that enhance the religious life of the local people. Most of the members of the group are mothers who have children living overseas, and who are not necessarily linked with or through the GVDG. It is a coalition of devoted Christian women from different churches in the village working for the spirituality of the community rather than for any particular church.

Donor	Amount (kyat)
Thawng Vung	100,000
Nawl Cung	324,000
Chum Mang	60,000
Za Luai	100,000
Tha Mang	24,000
Lal Sin Eng	10,000
Total	**618,000**

Table 5.5 List of Oversea Migrant Donors for Friday Prayer Group

With the funds received from overseas, the prayer group holds religious community events to help the spiritual life of the villagers. An event sometimes involves the hiring of a religious speaker for three days or sometimes a week. It is meant for all members of the community, and all the villagers are free to attend. The group has held three religious events for the community with the remittances they have received from overseas. The group demonstrates community networking as they focus on the growth of the spirituality of the people. The exchange of prayers and remittances is a function of the community working together. There is an increasing recognition from overseas migrants that the group represents the village as members contribute spiritually not to a single church but to the whole community.

When I was there the group was planning to build a prayer house for everyone in the village, through mobilizing Vanzang overseas people. What is observed through the activities of this prayer group is that, after migration, the women from all the churches in the village have organized themselves to come together with a common concern for the spiritual life of their overseas relatives. They can function independently as a women's group and make their voices heard in the religious realm of village life. Their constant contacts with overseas migrants through prayers become added social capital that they can mobilize for religious action. Remittances can empower nonaligned groups or groups outside the traditional power structures to have an impact, in this case in the religious sphere.

Prayer is one of the mediums that intensify the transnational connectivity of the migrants and the home community. Even for the local churches, prayer is their social capital investing in the lives of its members. This is observed when members of the church raise funds for religious purposes among their relatives overseas, using prayers offered for them as the basic capital. In most Christian homes, it is usually the mother who prays. The prayers of the church and the women are cohesive elements that act to bring the migrants and the villagers together into a transnational community. There are cases where remittances are sent requesting prayers for success in migrant life. When the migrants get a new job or some good opportunity, it often results in sending money for expressing thanks to the church or the prayer group.

Conclusion

For community networking, the formation of the VGM plays a crucial role in connecting all Vanzang overseas people virtually in one place, reinforcing cohesive relationships between migrants and villagers resulting in the birth of various different projects in the home community. It is found that one key person stands out as a mobilizer for the villagers and the oversea migrants. For the villagers, their main mobilizing strategy is to pinpoint their shared struggles and experiences in community life. As has been seen, for basic infrastructure development, the community raises issues in such a way that the possibility of improvement is clearly demonstrated for the understanding of the overseas migrants. And all the issues raised are central to the welfare of the community. Most of the development issues were raised by the villagers based on the needs

of the community. The migrants are the sponsors for community development programs. In this community networking, both the committee and the members are agents and initiators of development. Though some ideas may originate from the village or from their overseas migrants, others come from networking with neighboring villages. In most cases, community networking helps share the remittances with non-receiving families – ie the poorer segment of the community shares in the benefits. The distribution of remittances through community development is effective to harness remittances for social and economic development in rural regions where the government does not meet development needs. Initially a number of projects were carried out without a formal leadership system, by a loose network without any rules or regulations but which nevertheless functioned effectively. Later on the Vanzang Global Development Group was formed to coordinate community projects and mobilize all Vanzang people from Myanmar and abroad. This was an important development in community networking. Community networking helps to exchange information and mobilize effectively for the cause of Vanzang people. The churches in the village benefit from the religious donations of the overseas migrants.

The church is a religious space where the migrants share their concerns, and their lives are embedded in the church. Being members of the church, even though they may live in different countries, still connects them with each other. This membership acts as social capital. Each church can mobilize its overseas migrant members or the wider overseas migrant community to seek assistance. This has commonly been for the building of new churches. There is also the indirect flow from tithing remittances. The sense of belonging to the community through religious participation is seen as important for both the migrants and the villagers. It brings them into contact with each other; it involves them in projects that they work on together; and it demonstrates care and concern in the offering of prayers by the villagers and remittances by the overseas migrants.

Before large-scale migration, the women could not effectively involve themselves in the religious development of the village. Now, through migration and remittances, the women, as keepers of the remittances, have more resources to contribute to village religious institutions. In establishing their prayer group they have established a new structure in the religious life of the community. The women's group can mobilize overseas migrants through prayers and raise resources for contributions to community religious development.

Chapter 6

Social, Economic and Cultural Impacts of Remittances

This chapter explores the social, economic and cultural impacts of remittances in Vanzang village. Remittances do not just benefit the economy of households and develop community and religious institutions, but also create new social relations and give new meanings to cultural practice. In migration studies of Chin people, these aspects have not been explored although the impacts of migration and remittances on Chin society are very plain. Remittances do not change cultural practice completely, but transform it with new meanings added over a period of time. In what follows, I discuss some of the economic and cultural transformations and social problems arising from migration and remittance flows in relation to Vanzang people. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I discuss the impact of remittances on socio-economic and cultural practices. In the second section, I deal with the social costs of migration and the impact of remittances on the social life of the village. The chapter concludes with some discussion and observations.

Remittances and Social, Economic and Cultural Transformations

Remittances have transforming elements. After remittance flows into the community, there is an increasing rise of individualistic and materialistic behavior among the local people. Remittances play an important role in empowering local people and contributing to the change from a subsistence

economy to a market oriented economy. Accessibility to markets increases. Remittances do not completely change culture but transform it with new meanings and modifications. As remittances begin to flow in greater volume, this increases the socialization of the receiving families which results in more social and cultural events, which have transnational implications as migrants are in most cases the sponsoring parties. Some of these cultural events speak symbolically about the increasing social and economic status of migrant families.

From an Egalitarian to an Individualistic and Materialistic Society

Vanzang is a small agricultural village with around 106 households. Before the 1990s, there was no migration apart from seasonal migration to India. I interviewed three persons from the village who are around 60 years old, inquiring about their perspectives on the social life of the villagers and how their society has changed over the years since remittances began. They explained that in the old days their society was generally an egalitarian and equitable one where people shared reciprocal relationships and strong kinship. Exchanges of gifts and agricultural products characterized their society. In most cases, they helped each other and shared their food with others who did not have enough. If someone did not have food to eat, he or she was "lent" food by other families without any interest. The receiver would give back the same amount of food he/she had received. Exchange of goods was the most prevailing custom. Wealth was defined by the quantity of goods one owned. For example, someone who harvested a hundred bags of rice a year was considered very rich, or if a person owned several animals like horses or cows, or sia (mithun), that person was also considered rich. A typical family would make money through selling these animals or agricultural products. Agriculture was mainly for subsistence. The staple food was rice. The livelihoods of the people were dependent on agriculture. They generally depended on cultivating the hills through a rotating slash and burn system. Za recalls:

> Our society has changed a lot with the coming of remittances. Our social relations used to be reciprocal and people were good and sharing. We respected each other. We shared what we had such as animals or food with those who did not have any. It is not that we were without stingy minded people but we were more generous in general. We shared our agricultural

> products. Now that we have money to buy things, it is strange to see that we do not share any more. We need to buy almost everything. Although there may be many other factors involved, I see that after the road and transport became better, people have money to buy, and we now consider everything with the value of money. Rather than exchanging our goods we buy from each other. Before, if we killed some wild animals, we used to share the meat among our family and friends, but now if somebody kills an animal they sell it. Everything is commercialized. In the past, we cared for the elders in the village. We respected each other. Now we often observe that those who have remittance income speak abusively, which makes it painful to listen when we have a community meeting. Now we listen to those who have money or the migrant families. We respect them because they have sons and daughters living overseas. (Personal Interview on 14 February 2015).

Before, if a person took a loan, she or he gave it back without any interest. This kind of social life of sharing of agricultural products and helping each other without taking interest characterized the community life of the village. With the flow of remittances , what was commonly considered as an egalitarian society is transforming. The people become more individualistic, measuring things by their monetary value, whether it be agricultural produce or animals. Za continues:

> There is no such thing as an exchange of goods practiced any more, rather if a person does not have rice to eat, they can take rice from somebody, and pay back with the present price. If a person wants to borrow, they now have to pay with interest. Nobody lends money without interest even if the borrower is a close relative or friend (Personal Interview on 14 February February 2015).

Hi laments these changing human relations:

> One of the signs of the transformation of our social customs in the village is that now we borrow money with high interest.

> Materialism has increased after workers' remittances. Things are defined by their monetary value. We are not helping others any more like before; we count everything now by its money value. That was not the way of our previous society. For old people like me, I am very sad that we become richer in material things but lose our reciprocal relationships. (Personal Interview, 15 February 2015).

The possession of TV sets, motorcycles and phones is increasing. Out of 32 households who possess motorcycles, 18 of them are migrant families. There are 38 households who have TV sets of which 23 are migrant households. In addition, many new houses are built, especially by the migrant families. This increase of materialism can be linked to other factors made possible by remittances like the construction of the road and mini hydro power. 15 households interviewed claim that they eat better food, dress in better clothes and use better furniture compared to the situation before migration. Consumption patterns have changed over the years. Vang reveals:

> In my village, many families have TV sets as their sons and daughters can send them money. I tell my son that we are the only ones without it and we have to go to other houses every night to watch. He says he will send money for us to buy one. I can see that there is a lot of competitiveness to possess things. If soneone has a motorbike, everyone wants one. Some of the migrant families are buying expensive motorbikes from India. Ten years ago, we hardly bought foodstuffs from town. But now every household uses food stuffs from town. People can afford it. Our clothes are better. As we have money, our ability to consume also increases. In my case, my son would ask me to buy new things. Sometimes, I want to buy things when I see other people have them. (Personal Interview 15 February 2015).

The Decrease of Rice Farming and Increase of Market Crops

Vanzang people have practiced slash and burn cultivation for years, and the village was largely dependent on this traditional cultivation as their source

of livelihood. As remittances increased, some migrant families cut down on their agricultural work. They do not cultivate as they used to by clearing large areas of forest. Many families have reduced their cultivated area over the years and are relying on remittances. This is particularly true for those migrant families with elderly parents. Out of 15 households interviewed, 6 families say they do not cultivate extensively like before. Although they have fields, they are now ploughed for other crops such as corn, beans and other vegetables. It becomes secondary and supplementary to their livelihoods. Now, in the village, rice can be bought easily through the rice project started by the migrants. For those who have money, they can buy from Thantlang town where plenty of rice is sold at the market. The construction of the Vanzang village tract road makes the villagers' transport easier and the market more accessible. Most importantly, the migrants are able to support their families, which however creates dependency on remittances. Most of the interviewees say that they are encouraged by their sons and daughters not to work hard in the fields. The villagers tend to depend on market accessibility as they have the capital to use for their food, unlike before when they had to depend on their fields. They do not completely discontinue their cultivation of the hills; there is just a reduced level of dependency on agriculture.

But dependency on remittances is high among migrant families with elderly parents. Dependency on remittances depends on the structure of the family or its number of workers. One important factor in dependency is the number of migrants from a given family. One of the migrant families interviewed had three or four persons living abroad. For these migrant families, their dependency on remittances is very high as their children can remit regular amounts. Investing in productive agri-business has not occurred on a large scale which may indicate the inability of the parents to work and do business. Remittance flows are regular but have not brought significant transformations in the family as most of the money is used for health and daily survival, and not invested in money making businesses, thus leaving the village families with a level of dependency. In migrant families, the migrants make a one-time investment to re-build the parents' house, purchase new furniture, TV set and motorbike, and after that just send remittances for their basic survival. Regarding the reduction of hill cultivation, Thluai explains:

> After my children arrived in the USA, they all told me to discontinue our agricultural work. Before they went abroad,

> we had to go every day and work in the rice fields whether it was rainy or sunny. Our children also joined us in the work. It was very difficult. Our children also experienced the hard labor we had to put in to our hill cultivation. And some years we did not get enough rice to feed ourselves. Now they can work and are able to send us money, so they said we do not have to work hard. Because of our children's remittances we can have a rice field as part of our livelihood but not as the main one. (Personal Interview, 15 February 2015).

In contrast, where the parents are still young and the migrants' siblings are still at home, there is a changed pattern of cultivation. As mentioned before, rice is the main subsistence crop of the villagers, but an increasing number of families have begun to cultivate marketable vegetables. The migrant families or extended families that are investing in local agriculture cultivate chili as their main market crop. As Vanzang is close to the Indian border, many cross the border to trade agricultural products. Within these migrant families, the young parents tend to make the most of the remittances they receive by investing in marketable crops. A village farmer, Bawi, points out:

> Now we have the money to buy the seeds and employ labor to cultivate market crops. The main crop people cultivate is chili. After drying them, we sell to traders who sell to India. Although there are market failures in some years, it is the most suitable crop for our land and soil. Therefore, many of us in the village are investing in it. Some families make 2,000,000 to 4,000,000 kyats a year, depending on the harvest and that year's prices. (Personal Interview 17 February 2015).

After remittance flows into the village, there has been a change in the pattern of cultivation from traditionally based subsistence agriculture to marketable crops. This change is related to the migrant family's condition and the overseas migrant remittances. Remittances have become the main livelihood source both for those who are wholly dependent as well as for those who can reinvest in productive agro-business.

Arthin Tuh

Arthin Tuh is a Chin cultural practice. It is an act of children to parents showing love and honor, and seeking the parents' blessings. In Chin culture, it is a general practice that when parents are in their old age, their children would kill a chicken and cook its heart and give it to the parents, an act that symbolizes love and honor from the children. In return, the children ask for blessings, which can be wealth, health and physical wholeness. Before migration and the flow of remittances in Chin State, this had been a simple act of love and honor that the Chin people typically practiced. It was not a communal kind of event, but rather a family event. However, as people have more wealth, this cultural practice has been modified and has become a communal event, a trend set by remittances. Moreover it is no longer just the heart of a chicken that people bring, but the killing of big animals like cows, buffalo, pigs and mithun, and funding a communal feast. The Arthin Tuh has become a social norm that many migrants provide for their ailing parents. It is turning into an event which is not only about the love and care of the parents but also about the whereabouts of the children who organize the event and who they are. It is a kind of advertisement for the increasing status of the migrants.

Lian comments on this modified social norm:

> In Chin culture, we have this practice called Arthin Tuh where the children would bring the heart of a chicken to feed their parents to show honor and love and ask their blessing. Nowadays, the way Chin people practice Arthin Tuh has changed, and I should say this is very much connected with migration and remittances. For example, as the migrants stay in foreign countries, they cannot come and take care of their parents. When their parents are ailing, they want to honor them and ask blessings before they die. Therefore, they send remittances for this purpose to their family members and invite all of their relatives and friends to the event. What has changed is that the focus is more on the migrants, and what they are doing, rather than on the parents' love and care. It has become a communal event. Even though it is typically an act of love, now its meaning has arguably shifted and it has become more of an advertisement for the increasing social status of the family and the overseas migrants. (Personal Interview 19 February 2015).

This practice of giving the heart of animals has turned into "Sathin Tuh" - that is the killing of big animals and feeding community members. It shows migrants' financial status and support which denotes a higher social status for the family. In the past, everyone could perform this cultural practice. It was called Arthin Tuh because mostly Chin people would do it with the heart of a chicken. But now poor families struggle to do it if at all. It has become the thing of migrant families. Za states:

> We should say it as Sathin Tuh because this practice has been characterized by killing big animals and the event becomes communal as a lot of people are invited to participate. Sometimes, I feel, the people compete in making the event larger and larger. It has become a thing of the migrant families! We need to think how we do it, organizing large parties or taking good care of the parents all the time. After migration and remittances, it has really shifted from its original meaning. (Personal Interview, 19 February 2015).

In its traditional concept, Arthin Tuh is not a symbol of social status, influence and wealth, but rather of the affection, love and honor of children towards their parents. But now, with the impact of remittances, it has become more a symbol of increased social status, economic capacity and influence. It has become a socially competitive event where people try to enlarge the practice by killing more animals and inviting more people. In Chin culture, the mithun (called "Sia" in Chin language) is a special animal that is often killed for prestigious and honorable events. For Arthin Tuh many migrant families have killed mithun in organizing a communal event to honor their parents and ask their blessings.

Transformation of Marriage Custom

I discussed earlier how migrants seek brides from the home community; I will describe briefly the marriage customs of Chin culture before Christianity. In the bride price system of Chin people, the mother and aunt of the bride would be the ones to receive the amount of money or goods. They were the ones who asked for "ti awk" (meaning the money that was asked for from the bridegroom's side when they brought home the bride). The uncle of the bride would ask for a separate bride price from the bridegroom's side, and usually

neither family could interfere with his decision. Often if he asked for more money, he contributed in return to the wedding or gave goods or animals to help the newly wedded couple. The bridegroom would give a siapi (a female mithun) to the bride's family plus sponsoring the celebration of the marriage. If he could not afford this, he would give a " dar khuang or dar bel", that is a silver cooking pot. Some meats would also be given to the aunts of the bride or relatives and the bridesmaids. In return, these people would give some utensils or other necessities.

After Christianity came, the system changed. Many parents did not want to ask for bride price considering it as selling their daughters which is against Christian teaching. People became good to each other; there were no strict demands for siapi or other things. The bride's family would say that we do not demand a bride price but love and care for our daughter. So marriage became easier for most people. There was not much difference in marriage parties between the haves and the have-nots. Now people ask for a marriage party. The bride's family expect a good, sometimes luxurious, marriage party that is very expensive for the bridegroom's family. The money spent organizing the marriage ceremony and the dinner party is much more than the price of a siapi, which was the customary bride price. Marriage is more difficult for the bridegroom and costs more than it would have done under traditional practice. Describing this changing form of marriage, Tial Kawi (2008:85) comments:

> In reality, we want our daughter and son to get married. We want our daughter to be loved and get married. In the same way, we want our son to be loved and be married. We love equally our daughter and our son. As we spend money for our son's marriage, we should also spend for our daughter. As the bridegroom's family is willing to pay, the bride's family should also do the same. Now, I should say, we should use our old custom of bride price system as our social norm. Otherwise, it is really troublesome for many families.

After migration, the pattern and form of marriage has changed dramatically. Mail order brides or what is locally called "parcel" has become the popular form of marriage in which migrants would order a bride from Chin State whom their parents or relatives and friends would choose. The people call it simply "parcel" so as to denote the way women are sent just like

a parcel. This kind of marriage involves complexity and contradictions. For example, if a single migrant wants to marry, he will ask his family or friends to help search for a life partner. Many Chin single men cannot find a life partner in the developed countries where they live. Some of the reasons cited are that most of the migrants are men; and that since both the men and the women migrants are working and earning, they do not want to marry each other. In some cases, since the single men are not fluent English speakers, they are not able to mingle within their new community; therefore it is difficult to find a life partner there. Getting married within one's tribe is also considered as helping and empowering the other family, and part of maintaining one's culture and language. It is also a way of bringing kin to the developed country. It can be described as a strategy of migrants' livelihood security as many single men see that working alone in a developed country is not much benefit as most of their earnings go to meet their living expenses. Marrying an overseas migrant is popular among Chin girls as it is an opportunity to migrate overseas.

With many Chin refugees settled in such countries as the USA, Australia and Europe, the parcel marriage has become the popular fashion. Generally, the bride is found through different networks in different villages and towns, depending on the bridegroom's social networks. This has changed the nature of the marriage ceremony. When a prospective bride is found through the social network, permission to marry is sought from the bride's family. After agreement is reached between the two families, a normal marriage ceremony involving friends and relatives or church members is held either at the bride's home or at the church, but without the presence of the bridegroom. Knowing the bridegroom is an overseas migrant, the bride's family ask for a lot of money for the bride price, along with a luxurious party. The bride's family would not ask just for the equivalent value of a siapi. Bride price is given in the form of money, and no longer in the form of goods or animals. In some cases, it includes both payment of money and luxurious party celebrations, and especially in parcel marriages the bridegroom's family takes full responsibility for the cost. The bride's family's financial involvement is very rare; but they take a high risk of uncertainty about the future life of the bride. Aye points out:

> My daughter was asked for in marriage by our relative for his overseas migrant friend working in the USA. We had never seen this man before and did not know him. However, when our relative came and asked on his friend's behalf we could

> trust him so we gave our daughter. (Personal Interview, 10 February 2015).

Since communication facilities like the internet or telephone are often not available in rural villages, marriages can be arranged without the couple knowing each other or even seeing pictures of each other. In some cases, the two sets of parents have never met. A lot of risk is involved. Often the bride's family takes the risk of giving their daughter to someone they do not know in person. For the prospective bride, getting married to someone whom she does not know or has never seen is only a matter of obedience to parents. For the parents, it can be said that it is part of their livelihood strategy as it involves the daughter going to a developed country and earning money which could be vital to the family's survival in the future. While there are many successful transnational marriages through bride order, there have also been several divorces. Some of the brides who go through this channel often run away after discovering the bad character of their prospective bridegroom. Sometimes, the brides will run away with their boyfriends. In certain cases where the bride and bridegroom do not know each other, when they meet, they do not fall in love as expected, and get divorced instead. Since the bridegroom pays for everything including bride price, marriage ceremony, and all the expenses relating to overseas travel, when divorce takes place the bridegroom will ask for his money back. That will put the bride's family into debt and create enmity between the two families. Tial Kawi (2008:86), writing on this issue further laments trend of bride orders:

> It seems that we have two marriage ceremonies, one that is celebrated in the community without the bridegroom but is often luxurious as if the bridegroom were there. And another one that is celebrated abroad after the bride has arrived. This has turned our cultural marriage system into something different. For farmers and government workers it is not easy to have a normal marriage ceremony now that remittances have penetrated our culture. Even though we have a lot of money, we should not use it to destroy our culture.

Thang Thai (2009) identifies three periods of change in marriage patterns for Chin people. The first was under British rule when Chin youngsters were

joining the army and were the ones the Chin girls would look for as life partners. The second period was that of military rule from 1961 -1988 when government employees were the most sought after. The third period from the 1990s onwards has seen Chin overseas migrants as ideal life partners by Chin girls. He called "parcel" a "New Age Way of Marriage". The traditional form of Chin marriage is re-shaped by this new practice. A characteristic of the parcel marriage is that the parcels are female. It is surprising that males are not parceled for female migrants. This may be because the male population of migrants is higher than the female counterpart, or because the females who live abroad are not keen for male villagers as partners. Thang Thai strongly argues for male parcels as he sees them as part of solidarity with Chin culture and language. He argues in support of maintaining Chin culture and language abroad:

> I see only females are going abroad. Although I encourage this for establishing Chin families in other countries rather than mixing with foreigners, I also encourage female migrants to order male parcels; that would be considered as helping each other or helping create Chin families among overseas migrants, and will later be a blessing for our country. Their children would be educated and would contribute to our country and people. We should also parcel our young men. (Thang Thai 2009:62).

It is true that 99 percent of parcels are women, and that the practice has increased the female population of Chin overseas migrants. The common reason why the migrants are able to order a bride is that when they apply to the UNHCR they claim to be already married which provides them with legal provision to bring over their spouse.

Remittances as Factors for Increasing Social Events

There is an increase in celebrations of birthdays or anniversaries sponsored by the remittances. In Chin society, like many others, there are often such celebrations, and thanksgiving services. However, remittances have increased the income of many families, and socialization has increased too. The way such events are organized has been drastically transformed. There are cases where birthday celebrations become a communal event with migrant sponsorship. Similarly, wedding anniversaries are sponsored by overseas

migrants for their parents. Living in poverty in a remote rural area, many couples could not have afforded such an event before. Before migration, celebration of birthdays was as simple as offering prayers and having a small party. In rural Chin communities, in fact, it is not a popular celebration; poor families struggling for survival would often be unable to afford it. It is the same with celebrating an anniversary.

Remittances have changed or in some ways added new meaning to these family related events. Nowadays, in Chin communities, birthday celebrations sponsored by foreign migrants are quite frequent. This is also a result of the intensifying relationships between migrants and their families, which bring forth remittances for the beloved ones to compensate for the lack of real personal care. Migrants would send money for their nephews' or nieces' birthdays and for the celebration would invite not only the family but sometimes a greater part of the community as well. In a small village, the event would include all the villagers. At these events, in addition to good wishes for the person whose birthday it is, much is also said about the sponsoring persons and their professions. Thus these social events have a deeper meaning about social and economic status. In many of the anniversary events, the migrants are the main sponsors for their parents. Although the main purpose is to show their love and care for their parents, as sponsors much of their status also comes to the fore. These events have been transformed and become part of the migrants' social contribution to the family. The migrants play a more important role at such events than the person for whom the event is organized. Than, who is in his 60s, pinpoints the change he observed as regards to cultural practices:

> I have attended many social events such as thanksgiving services, Arthin Tuh, celebrations of birthdays and anniversaries, funded by overseas migrants. If we ask the party organizer whether they intend to refer to the migrants or not, they may say "no", but in reality we can tell that all our social events have taken on new meaning. We often hear more of the migrants' story. Many of the social events that are organized for the community are more or less funded by overseas migrants. Therefore, we cannot deny the impact of remittances on these social practices. (Personal Interview, 15 February 2015)

The celebration of Mother's Day also gets migrants' attention. For them it is an important event where love gifts are sent to their mothers. Fifteen of the households I interviewed said that they get pocket money on Mother's Day every year from their sons and daughters abroad. "Ever since my daughter lives in the USA, I always get pocket money or phone calls on Mother's Day. This is something special for me." (Thlia, Personal Interview, 19 February 2015).

In the village it was not celebrated to the same extent as in other countries. It is difficult to show love when the family is very poor. However, after migrants settled abroad, making phone calls on Mother's Day was not enough - sending money has also become the norm, showing the impacts of other cultures on the receiving family. Remittances carry the practices of other cultures and the export of this foreign culture helps recognize the important position of women in the family. This pattern of honoring mother by sending pocket money is common in different villages. Rather than it being a local community event, it has come from overseas migrants and can be observed in migrant households. Sometimes, the migrants send clothes or other gifts as a token of love and appreciation. Mother's Day is transnationally celebrated and motherhood has its transnational implications as the children still share their mothers' love and care in transnational social space.

In summary, due to the flows of remittances in the village, social relations have been shifted. What was considered as an egalitarian society is changing, as a result of the large flows of remittances, into a society which has become individualistic and materialistic. Additionally, remittances have transformed the pattern of agriculture as migrant families can invest in marketable crops. A typical cultural event such as Arthin Tuh has become a transnational cultural event with its meaning modified and the celebration become communal and competitive. It is not only about parents' love and care, it shows symbolically the increasing social status of the migrant family. In Chin culture, in most cases, marriage was arranged after the prospective bride and bridegroom got to know and love each other, and then agreed along with both parents' consent. Today, however, "parcel" marriage has been made possible by many factors including the social situation of the overseas migrants and the livelihood strategies of non-migrant brides' families. It has turned the traditional custom of marriage into something more commercialized and materialistic.

Remittances and Social Problems

Migration is socially costly. Although there are many families who are economically transformed by the money they accumulate and who have improved their livelihoods, in other cases marriages have fallen apart. Deep grievances can arise in migrant families due to mismanagement of remittances by the recipients. For many migrant families, remittances have become their main source of livelihood but this creates a culture of dependency over time. As remittance flows increase, the ability to participate or organize family and communal events also increases. Some of these events are important for overseas migrants - they are the sole sponsors and they are also consumers. Remittances can bring both good and bad to the receiving community.

Divorce

Some families have benefited from remittances, helping others to migrate, and investing in assets such as land, housing and marketable crops; but for other families, migration and remittances have seen their families fall apart. The number of children of broken homes has increased. There can be many factors that can be linked to the increased divorce rate; here I suggest two main reasons. Firstly, in Vanzang village, there are cases where the combination of overseas remittances, difficulty in communication and long periods without remittances caused families that were thriving before migration to fall apart. Par who is 28 and divorced from her migrant husband explained the reasons:

> Due to communications difficulties I cannot have constant contact with my husband. It is not easy to have a close relationship with him from this village. Even in the town, making overseas calls is not easy for me. I think communication barriers play an important role; since we cannot communicate it is easy to go our separate ways. For years my husband did not send us any money. (Par, Personal Interview, 19 February 2015).

It is clear that migrant families are vulnerable when wives left at home have no regular contact with their spouse for years and when remittances fail to appear, leaving the family to face acute poverty.

Another reason generally cited for family collapse is related to the use and management of remittances. Often, in the migrant family, the manager of the remittances is the wife. There are many wives who are considered to be good managers of the funds for the betterment of the family. Some of them invest in productive business or lend the money with interest. They may also invest in assets like land, houses and other property. However, in other cases the wife spends the funds on having a good time, hanging around with her friends, spending whatever she gets and not investing in any assets. She keeps asking for money from her husband, who would not know how the money was being used. Remittances increase the ability to socialize which often becomes part of the reason why wives start intimate relations with other men. This is a principal reason for the increased divorce rate.

Hi comments;

> Some families in our village fell apart, because the husbands work in Malaysia and for years do not send remittances or make phone calls. The families feel abandoned. There are cases where the wife gets married to another man. Even for those who are receiving remittances, we have observed mismanagement of remittances causing families to fall apart (Personal Interview 17 February 15).

Some migrants enjoy living and working in other countries and forsake their family. Pu Kio Hmung, the song writer and singer composed a song - "We are learning foreign lifestyles" - characterizing the migrants' social life in Malaysia. By learning foreign lifestyles, many migrants enjoy an extravagant social life. This has led to the break up of many families. Even though they have been working for years, they do not send any money. The new social environment has ruined many families. Other migrants have been jailed for years as illegal immigrants and have lost contact with their families because of that. Others have lost their lives while working. Whereas the purpose of migrating was to work and earn capital and make a better living, for some

families, migration and remittances have brought them into a more difficult situation due to unexpected consequences.

Social Grievance

Hi further noted:

> One of the bad things that come along with migration is the deep grievance that occurs in some cases between the migrants and their families due to the mismanagement of remittances. What I personally believe is that the son and the parents' hearts will not be healed in their life time and that is what I think is the saddest thing that migration and remittances have brought. We have many cases of grievances, especially with returning migrants. (Personal Interview, 15 February 2015).

Vanzang village has a good number of migrant returnees from Malaysia. As I mentioned earlier, the first groups of migrants were economic migrants who went to earn money. Some of these migrants have returned home with their accumulated capital. They did not apply for UNHCR refugee status. They were successful migrants in Malaysia and amassed wealth with the intention of returning home. They usually sent money as soon as they got it through money brokers - few return with a lot of money on their person. So the family back home was responsible for managing the remittances. In the 1990s, there was no communication facility in the village, and phone calls were rarely made over the year. This vacuum in interpersonal relationships created a space where many migrant families had control over their remittances with no input from the migrant:

> Some migrants have worked hard to accumulate capital and saved well and sent it to the family back home. They thought that the funds would be either kept well or invested in productive business. They took it for granted that the remittances would be well taken care of so that when they returned the money could be used to start a business. Then when they return they find that the money has been mismanaged and nothing is left. They feel deeply aggrieved

> with those responsible. (Hi, Personal Interview, 15 February 2015).

The responsible persons are usually the migrants' parents or wives and this causes deep grievances between the migrant and the family, or between the children and the parents, leading to family break-up. The migrants believed that their accumulated capital would make their life better back home. When these dreams are shattered, so are family relationships. There are cases where the returning migrants would ask for repayment from those responsible, which makes things worse.

Dependency on Oversea Migrants

In the countryside, where the government does not invest in basic infrastructure, there is no opportunity for business. So a high dependency on remittances develops. In rural areas, remittances are the main source of income for many families. At the same time, since the government does not invest, the villagers use remittances to improve their community, initiating different community-based development projects ranging from health, education to livelihood security. This has created another form of dependency.

> Without remittances or the people of Vanzang overseas, we cannot do anything. In some ways, we are depending on the remittances of our migrants. Many of our community projects are migrant-initiated and remittances fund them. We participate only through our labor. We have not undertaken any community project using locally based resources only; this shows that, more or less, we depend on our overseas migrants. Even if we start a project locally, it is eventually funded by the overseas migrants. Many of our church buildings are also built with remittances. (Sang, Personal Interview, 18 February 2015).

The villagers rely on overseas migrants for community projects. Remittances have created such dependency that local resources are not utilized to the maximum. Dependency on remittances is tangible in the religious and communal spheres of Vanzang village. The 15 migrant families I interviewed all stated very clearly that remittances acted as social security which they can

access while trapped in desperate and difficult situations, as well as providing security for their livelihoods and survival. Remittances have become their main source of survival. At the most challenging times remittances are their final resource. Even though the level of dependency may differ from familiy to family, remittances are the main source for generating other types of livelihood. Migrant families with elderly parents tend to be the most dependent on their remittances. I Lal Uk states:

> Our children send us money monthly for our living expenses and emphasize that we do not have to work in the fields. We are anyway not able to work like before. We reduced our rice fields after our children moved to the USA. We are not cultivating like we did before, we do it as a secondary livelihood just cultivating some vegetables. We depend on their remittances. We can buy rice from the shop now. (Personal Interview, 14 February 2015).

For these families, the level of dependency is higher than in the case of those who can still work and do farming. Among migrant families whose parents are still young and energetic, remittances are productively reinvested either in business or agriculture. To start a business or invest in some marketable crops, these families need financial capital. Remittances are mobilized from family members living abroad. The amounts designated for such businesses are more substantial and sent infrequently. It is often thought from the migrants' side that once certain amounts of money have been remitted for profit-bearing business, their family would be earning and the obligation to send money would reduce. In the context of Vanzang village, the interviews with the 15 migrant families show that those who get substantial, though not frequent, amounts of remittance are making productive investments, more than those who receive frequent remittances. The former group depend on overseas migrants for their financial capital. Migrant families who do not get a lot of money explain that their ability to leverage remittances for productive business depends very much on its volume. Hlei who is investing in the cultivation of chili explains:

> I think that I and my wife can still work in the fields. So, I told my daughter that we need money to invest in chili farming - we cannot afford the seeds or the labor. So, she said that if

> it is going to bring profit, she would send money. And she gave us the capital, an amount of 10,000,000 kyats. And this year, we made a good profit. As a result, we do not ask for money so often. At least we can make some money here. I think it is difficult to make business here. Investing in marketable crops is risky as the market price is unstable. (Personal Interview, 14 February 2015).

Thlia adds,

> It may be wrong to say it, but we are completely dependent on our son and daughter. But we are also mindful of our children. We know that they do not get money easily. They have to work long hours in the USA. When they tell us about their working situation, we feel sorry for them. I always tell them that we are working as much as we can here to earn our living. They do not have to think of us too much. However, when we are in the most difficult times, when we do not know what to do for money, having migrants overseas is really what saves the day. They are the source of our hope and expectations. (Personal Interview, 15 February 2015).

One third of the families state that remittances have become their source of livelihood and that the migrants have their own families and work very hard. In attempting to invest in a productive business or agriculture the villagers try to be independent with the best use of remittances. Some migrants stress that the money they send should be invested in some productive businesses so as to sustain the families' livelihood. But this depends on the families' ability to undertake productive agriculture or business. Some migrants want to invest but their family cannot do the job. The flows of remittances to those families who can invest in productive businesses are greater than those to the families who cannot. There are very few families who can leverage the remittances for business and agriculture. If businesses or agricultural crops fail, remittances can still be the final accessible source for migrant families. All in all, rural livelihoods rely on remittances.

To sum up, the unexpected consequences of migration, such as divorce and grievances, are severe for migrant families. Whereas remittances have

improved many families socially and economically, for many others they have resulted in family break-down. Remittances have created a culture of dependency for the home community. Not only are the migrants' families totally dependent on remittances for their livelihoods, dependency for community development is also apparent.

Conclusion

Migration and remittances have transforming elements, changing the pattern of human relations. In Chin rural communities, what was once considered as an egalitarian and equitable society has turned into an individualistic and materialistic one as a result of remittance flows. Changes in the pattern of agriculture are observed as people begin to cultivate more marketable crops, changing from subsistence to market-oriented cultivation as they could invest remittances and have access to markets. Remittances help develop modern facilities. Similarly remittances shape local customs into new forms of meaning. Arthin Tuh, a cultural event, the simple act of showing love and honor to parents, has become a transnational communal event sponsored by migrants. It demonstrates the increasing social and economic status of the migrant family. Remittances lead to an increase in social events. Chin marriage customs have changed over the years with the ordering of brides becoming institutionalized. Marriage is commercialized as a means to migrate and has become a part of the livelihood strategy of both families. Transnational marriages increase female migration as males are rarely ordered. Marriage has become more expensive for bridegrooms and their families.

The unexpected consequences of migration are severe for some migrant families. While remittances lift up many families socially and economically, for others they destroy their family relationships. Mismanagement of remittances sometimes breeds deep grievances in interpersonal relationships in migrant families. Remittances have created a culture of dependency for the majority of the migrant families. Both the community and the migrant households depend on foreign remittances. But remittances not only sustain the households and drive community projects; they also shift the patterns of human relations and transform them for better or for worse.

Chapter 7

Discussion and Conclusion

There has been large-scale migration from Vanzang village. Just over 70% of village households have one or more family members living as migrants overseas.

Migrants provide direct support for their families in the village. Those with no migrant family members lack this support and are poorer. The wealth gap between migrant and non-migrant families is widening. Non-migrant families do, however, share the benefits of remittance-funded community development projects, and funding for services such as education and health, and a rice loan scheme. Ideas for development can come from either side, or from other villages in Chin State. Kinship, religious and community networks play an important role, and mechanisms have been established for villagers and migrants to decide jointly on what to do and how to do it. But although remittances have produced benefits for the village, there is also a down side.

Remittances as a Livelihood Source for Rural Households

Most studies of the impact of remittances on receiving households in Myanmar (Turnell et al. 2003, Tun Min Sandar 2011, Rual Lian Thang 2012) show that expenditure for basic household needs is the main use.

Most Vanzang migrants have settled permanently overseas. Migrants with little intention of returning send money for the basic survival of family members and the community, not for investment or putting by for some

potential future return. In Vanzang village, remittances are mainly to supplement their families' income or to build new houses and buy land. If the potential for future economic investment were good, the migrants might invest their resources in Chin State instead; but as things stand the economic situation of Chin State, especially in the rural areas, is not conducive to investment.

Migration is often conceived as part of a mutual risk diversification and livelihood strategy (Stark 1991), but Vanzang migration is more about escaping military oppression; it was only with the military oppression of the early 90's that large numbers of people began to leave. This implies that the normal mutual interest in creating additional wealth for the family is not as strong as in other cases. Vanzang emigres should perhaps be considered more as refugees than as economic migrants.

Some migrants remit most soon after their arrival overseas, and remittances then decline over time, but can increase to meet specific household needs (Stark and Lucas 1988, Glystos 1997). But in the case of Vanzang village, remittance flows mostly follow a regular pattern, where migrant households receive remittance income at regular intervals over the long term. In most cases the migrants consider themselves responsible for their family's survival.

In rural areas of Chin state, where economic opportunities are lacking, remittances are the main income source. Families still practice shifting cultivation but their livelihoods are increasingly secured by remittances. All households interviewed claimed that having overseas migrants provides them with what can best be described as social security. They can hope for help in desperate situations, such as crop and market failures. Remittances provide them with money to meet basic needs, to cover education and health costs, to engage in more social events, and in some cases to create businesses. The additional wealth improves the status of migrant families in the community.

Not all migrant families can invest their remittances in productive businesses. Remittance receiving families with money to spare tend to invest in assets such as land and housing rather than in intensive cultivation of marketable crops, though a few are engaged in the latter and some are investing in retail shops.

Remittances have relieved migrant families of education costs as the migrants have taken responsibility for funding.

The gap in social standing between migrant and non-migrant families has increasingly widened. Migrant families have more capital and provide most of the village decision-makers. The increasing social status of the migrant families is reinforced by their frequent organization of social or cultural events.

Remittances provide the health security that migrant families can mobilize for their health care. Migrants sometimes help members of other famiies with health costs.

Remittances as a Driving Force for Community Development

Vanzang overseas people are spread out and have not been able to form associations or institutionalize the sending of remittances through involvement of the Government or NGOs, as is the case with the Mexican Home Town Associations for example (Orozco, M. 2000). Their case is different. Community projects are often started from the village and the overseas migrants are mobilized later for their financial involvement. The money raised is used for specific purposes, such as community development or infrastructure improvement projects.

Remittances have touched all spheres of community life, and play a crucial role in the reduction of livelihood vulnerability. The provision of rice loans and roof sheeting are collective responses by the migrants to the issue of the climate change threatening local livelihoods.

Education is an important ingredient of community-initiated development. Not only have the migrants taken charge of funding the private middle school, their contributions have led to the opening of a preschool which frees women's time so they can enter the workforce more fully.

Overall, through the mobilization of overseas migrants, the villagers can address the various basic needs of the village. Almost every part of community life is affected through the mobilization of remittances, starting from the setting up of a public telephone to the expansion of the football ground and the installation of a mini hydro power plant. Migrants provide the funds but management and maintenance are wholly the responsibility of the villagers. Most of the projects were initiated by the villagers, who take ownership; ownership by the villagers is one of the main reasons why community projects are successful and sustainable.

Remittances will continue to drive community projects in rural communities, in the absence of government development programs. Most of the investment is centered on building the basic infrastructures vital to community welfare.

Remittances have also driven religious developments. The existing four churches in Vanzang village have all been directly or indirectly impacted by overseas remittances either through financial contributions for the construction of church buildings or through the giving of tithes by the migrant families from their remittance income. On an individual basis migrants' religious involvement is bigger than their involvement in community projects. This may be the result of the influence of the church on their lives. Some migrants relate their success to the prayers of the church. Religious donors may be either individuals or families. Each church has its own overseas members who can be mobilized for religious purposes.

Community Networking as a Source for Mobilization

The role of kinship networks is observed in migration (Haung 2008, Heering et tal 2004) and in the mutual support of migrants in their host countries (Boyd 1989). Similarly in Chin State, where kin relations are very strong, the role of kin networking and of sharing resources in migration and remittance mobilization is very important. In the absence of financial resources, people utilize their personal relationships along immediate and familial lines as capital to gather finance for migration.

Overseas migrants maintain their kin network primarily with their immediate family and relatives, who are the main beneficiaries of the remittances. Migrant families can mobilize the resources for extended kin or friends and for religious purposes. The kinship network is also an important facilitating factor for transnational marriages.

Community networking is based on community ties that have been formed by the social and cultural relationships of belonging to and living in the one community. These community ties are the principle links through which community members provide social support (Wellman and Wortley 1990); they help in coping with daily problems and in ensuring community solidarity and support, and create community cohesiveness in times of

uncertainty or insecurity. The networking of the Vanzang overseas migrants and the village are very much based on the social norms that govern village community life, based on the ties of shared community life prior to migration.

Solidarity from shared communal experience of livelihood vulnerability, lack of basic infrastructures and political oppression are what activate community projects.

When Vanzang migrants were in Malaysia, they could not contribute effectively to their community. But as they migrated to more developed countries with higher incomes and started accumulating resources they could contribute more.

Remittances become an important shared resource available for the welfare of the community. In the early days several projects were carried out without a formal leadership system, but in 2008 the Global Vanzang Development Group (GVDG) was formed to coordinate community projects and mobilize all Vanzang people from Myanmar and abroad. This was an important development in the networking between the migrants and the villagers. The representatives of the GVDG living in different countries play an important role, connecting groups of people to the network, providing information and services, and taking responsibility for raising and sending funds. A sub-committee of the GVDG was formed in the village to better coordinate projects and get collective donations.

Not all the projects were funded by collective donations; some were funded by a few individuals. And not all project ideas were implemented; overseas migrants were not always supportive.

Requests for funds are not all assessed equally. For example one person may get a remittance requested for medical treatment but another may not. In spite of its drawbacks, the community network helps to exchange information, resources and foster community solidarity. A question remains about where this community networking is heading in the light of the political change in Myanmar. Chin State is presently receiving substantial financial support from local and international NGOs for basic infrastructure development and the development of the livelihoods of the people. This is likely to change the landscape of remittance management whether within the household or the community, and is also expected to affect the perceptions of overseas migrants

towards their home village. Future researchers may pay attention to this structural change in the study of remittances in Chin State.

The religious network appeared more clearly after many Vanzang people settled in developed countries. This is informal and does not have a strong tie with the GVDG. It utilizes the religious affinity that exists between the migrants and the villagers, in most cases based on belonging to the same church, to raise funds for religious development. The overseas migrants send money to their churches while the local members send prayers, emotional and spiritual support in return. Overseas members are considered as religious capital for the development of church buildings and activities. Since the number of overseas members is not spread equally, the churches' access to religious capital is also unequal. The leadership structure of the church also makes a difference; church leaders who are also village leaders can mobilize overseas migrants more effectively than those who are not village leaders. Interdependence of religious and kinship networks is observed when the religious network sometimes depends on kinship networks to mobilize its overseas members.

The transnational religious network is also empowering the local women to contribute to the religious development of the community. Before migration and the flows of remittances the village women did not unite and contribute as a group. But migration, and having sons and daughters living overseas, was the stimulus that brought them together as a group to pray for their children's success. This broke denominational boundaries and united the village women who now work together for the religious development of the village. What started as the Friday Prayer Group has now become an important transnational religious network, as they have created strong ties with overseas migrants through their prayers.

Remittances as a Transforming Force for Social and Cultural Change

Remittances have transforming powers, touching different aspects of society. They change the pattern of human relations. In Chin rural communities, remittances have been a driving force for transforming an egalitarian and equitable society into an individualistic and materialistic one. When people increase their consumption with the coming of remittances, materialism simultaneously increases in the community. In a traditional agricultural society

like Chin State, life is shared as much as possible through exchanges of goods and the families' forging of egalitarian relationships in community life. With remittances increasing, commoditization of agricultural products or animals is noticeable. There may be many factors leading to this transformation, but the primary reason is the social impact of remittances. The market is more accessible as the road is developed. Changes in the pattern of agriculture are observed as people begin to cultivate more marketable crops. The people changed from subsistence to market oriented cultivation as their capital and market access increased. Having capital, the people can acquire modern facilities. In Vanzang village, the use of a TV set, motorbike, and the building of houses with modern facilities is now common. With remittances, modernity comes and the gap between migrant and non-migrant families becomes wider.

Migration has also had some unexpected and unwelcome consequences, including a good number of divorces. Remittances uplift many families socially and economically, but can also break up their relationships and cause families to the fall apart, resulting in the emergence of children of broken homes. Communication barriers inhibit close relationships between the migrants and their families. Mismanagement of remittances has also caused misunderstanding between the migrants and the families, and can breed deep grievances in interpersonal relationships. Remittances have created a culture of dependency for the majority of the migrant families. Where the migrant families have people in the workforce, leveraging remittances for productive agro-businesses is observed; however, where an elderly parent is head of the family and unable to work, dependency on remittances is high. As remittances have been mobilized for various community developments, community dependency on remittances is also found. For the rural Chin community, remittances are their social security; when their livelihoods are threatened, remittances are an accessible resource that can be mobilized for their survival.

Similarly, remittances have shifted the meaning of local customs. Even as they widen the social inequality between the haves and the have-nots, they also attach new meanings to local customs. For example, Arthin Tuh, a simple act of showing love and honor to parents which used to be performed with family and friends, has become a major social event. In its modified form it demonstrates the social and economic status of the migrant families. Remittances also transform other social events like birthdays, anniversaries

and religious events all of which have become community events which again show-case the wealth and increasing status of the migrant families.

Chin marriage practice has also been transformed with bride order having become institutionalized. Ordering a bride, through a network of family, relatives and friends characterizes this new pattern of transnational marriage. Organizing such marriages by the relatives or friends of the migrants and both parents, without the bridegroom, has altered the traditional concept of marriage, which was based on love or arranged within the village where the couple knew each other. Increasingly, marriage is commoditized as a channel for the brides to go abroad, and has become a part of the livelihood strategy of both families. Transnational marriages increase female migration as males are rarely ordered for an overseas marriage. The local bride price system has also changed as marriages are commercialized. As the migrants are considered rich, a lot of money is sought for ceremonies or bride price.

Recommendation for Further Research

Remittances play an important role in sustaining receiving households' livelihoods. In this research we found that women are usually the keepers of remittance money and/or the mobilizer plus the main contact person for overseas migrants. At the community level, the women are empowered by the remittances to contribute to the religious development of the village. Further research may give attention to the impact of remittances on gender relations.

When I returned back from my research field, I happened to meet a Chin man living in New Zealand who had been on a visit to his home village. I told him about my research project. This man happened to be one of those overseas migrants who usually contribute to village community projects. He wanted to see the good results of the community projects and the response from the local people but he did not get a satisfactory response. This is what he shared about the remittance burden:

> Whenever my villagers mobilize us for community projects, I try my best to contribute even though I do not have a lot of income. I am financially involved in every community project. I understand that my village lacks basic infrastructure and living in a wealthier country I have a responsibility to help

> make things better. I thought the villagers would be grateful for the projects and to the donors. But when I arrived in my village many years after having left, those active in mobilizing overseas migrants for community projects did not talk to me or even show me the project sites or share with me the benefits of the projects. I was very sad because I gave money for these projects. I did not give because I was rich, I have little income, but for my community I did not spare anything as I gave my best. The response of my village leaders and the villagers was not impressive. I think that they take us for granted. Earning money is very hard in a foreign country. Donating $100 US dollars is not easy for us. I believe many of us donated out of love for our community and people. But if they are not serious about having a good rapport with the overseas migrants, remittances will not be sent. As for me, I will not send money anymore unless my villagers change their attitude! (Field notes 25 March 2015)

The comment above speaks a lot about remittance burden. The perceptions of overseas migrants on their financial contributions to home village projects needs further research: what makes them contribute to their community of origin? What is the mobilization process? what are their individual perceptions on the use of community money?

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaires

Section A: Identifying Remittance Recipients

A1. Gender

[ ] Female [ ] Male

A2. Age

[ ] Less than 20 years

[ ] 21-25 [ ] 26-30 [ ] 31 -35

[ ] 36-40 [ ] 41-45 [ ] 46-50 [ ] 51-55 [ ] 56-60

A3. What is your level of education?

[ ] High school [ ] Bachelor [ ] Non formal Education

A4. What is your employment status?

(1) Unemployed

(2) Farmer

(3) Student

(4) Others

A5. In general, what is your income level?

[ ] Less than 20,000 Kyats [ ] 2000-50000 [ ] 50001-70000

[ ] 700001 -100000 [ ] 100001-120000 [ ] 120001-150000

[ ] 150001-170000 [ ] 170001-200000

A6. Do you have family abroad?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

A7. Do you receive remittances?

[ ] yes [ ] no

A8. If so, for how long?

[ ] one year [ ] two [ ] more than 2 years

A9. How frequently do you receive remittances?

[ ] monthly [ ] quarterly [ ] Sometimes [ ] Never

A10. What is your main income source?

[ ] Remittance [ ] Farming or agriculture [ ] others

A11. What percentage of your income is from remittances?

[ ] 75- 100 percent

[ ] 50- 75

[ ] 50- 25

[ ] less than 25

Section B: Pattern of expenditure

B1. Why does your family receive remittances?

(1)

(2)

(3)

B2. Who decides how to spend remittance?

[ ] Sender, [ ] Parents [ ] Others

B3. For what purposes is the remittance sent?

[ ] Education for health

[ ] Health

[ ] Basic needs

[ ] Business

[ ] Social and religious events

B4. What percentage of your remittance income do you use for basic needs, clothing, food and shelter?

[ ] Less than 25 percent

[ ] 25 to 50 percent

[ ] 50-75

[ ] 75-100

B5. What percentage of your remittance income do you use for health and education?

[ ] Less than 25 percent

[ ] 25 to 50

[ ] 50-75

[ ] 75-100

B6. What percentage of your remittance income do you use for economic investment?

[ ] Less Than 25 Percent

[ ] 25 To 50 Percent

[ ] 50-75

[ ] 75-100

[ ] Agriculture [ ] Husbandry [ ] Retail Shop [ ] Store

B7. Do you use remittance income for contributing to community projects here?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

B8. Do you use remittance income for social and religious events? If yes,

[ ] Less Than 25 Percent

[ ] 25 To 50

[ ] 50-75

[ ] 75-100

Appendix B

Vanzang Village

The Baptist Church

Interview

Haipi Zung Mini Hydro-Power Plant

Vanzang Primary and Middle School

Community Networking and Remittances as Social Capital for Rural Community Development

in Chin State, Myanmar

Cung Liang Hu Chin

60-years of military rule and economic depression in Myanmar have led to large-scale emigration; Vanzang village in northeast Chin State is no exception. Migrants from the village went first to Malaysia, and from there UNHCR resettled many of them as refugees in Australia, Europe and USA. They send money back to the village, where their remittances have played a crucial role not only in sustaining the livelihoods of their families, but also in funding education, health care, and improving village infrastructure. But there is a down side: a wealth gap has appeared between families who have migrant relatives and those who don't. Village society has become more materialistic and many customs have changed, in particular regarding marriage, where "mail order" brides for migrants has become a normal practice. Some families have fallen apart when migrants discovered that their remittances had been mismanaged. The author, who is himself Chin and lived in the village as a child, investigates the roles of kinship, religious, and community networks in mobilizing funds for community development, and explores the impacts of remittances—both good and bad—on village society.

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