CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the global level, the issue of migrant domestic workers has been studied in a variety of settings and from a variety of perspectives. With the current transnational flows of capital and labor taking place in a globalized economy, migrant domestic workers' lives often reflect the intensive, dominant lines of social differentiation and power that exist in many societies. Many aspects of inequality appear within the migrant domestic work sector based on class, race, ethnicity, age, gender and migration status (Anderson, 2000). While many studies have reflected on the exploited and vulnerable lives of migrant domestic workers, their migrations continue.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

This research aims to investigate the life trajectory of the Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers in Chang Klan, a Muslim community in the city of Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. Chang Klan area sits alongside one street in the Night Bazaar area, a busy business district in the heart of Chiang Mai city, where Muslim migrants from Pakistan and South Asian Muslims have settled since 1870 (Suthep, 1977). Over the past few decades; however, this area has seen the arrival of Burmese Muslim migrants, who come to work and live in this community. Among these new migrants there are a number of female migrants who tend to seek work as domestic help in the area, generally working in private households for both Muslim and non-Muslim employers.

A number of studies have addressed the issues and problems faced by domestic workers in Thailand (Awasaya et al., 2004 and Sureeporn, 2007). Generally, the Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers face many difficulties in their daily lives in the host society, as they have to work in private households in which they are vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of their employers. Most of them have to work hard, yet get receive low salaries and receive little protection from state

policies. However, the case of the Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers to be found in the Chang Klan area is more complex than normal, for they are Muslim, women, migrants and domestic workers all at the same time, and all these identities would seem to be disadvantaged and marginalized to a greater or lesser degree. It is; therefore, important to understand how these women cope with their marginalized identities.

Being a Muslim woman generally means that traveling or working outside the home is not encouraged, and so from a social perspective, traveling from their home village in Burma to work in Thailand means that they have to cross, not only a physical nation-state border, but also an ideological one in terms of being a good female Muslim, a good daughter, a good wife and a good mother. However, economic opportunity allows those women to negotiate their status, meaning they can earn money by themselves and send remittances back home to support their families. Working and living in a Muslim community like Chang Klan, on the one hand provides them with some benefits in the form of shared religious beliefs (for example, Muslim employers prefer to hire Muslim employees), but on the other hand means they are exploited as a lower class form of labor. Moreover, as female migrants from Burma, these women have to work as low-status laborers - as domestic workers. Employers prefer to hire Burmese workers because they seem to work hard and are cheaper than Thai women; another factor is that many Thai women are no longer willing to work as domestic workers, for they have a better level of education and thus better job opportunities.

Over the past few decades, Thailand has experienced a large scale immigration of illegal migrants coming from neighboring countries such as Burma, Cambodia and Laos. The total number of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand today is estimated to be between 1.5 and 1.6 million, with over 100,000 women from Burma employed as domestic workers. Because of the availability of cheap labor from neighboring countries, more and more families in Thailand are paying for household services where previously they had relied upon unpaid family labor. Migration has thus been proposed as a solution to the employment gap that exists (Awatsaya et al., 2004). In Thailand, there have been very few studies carried out into this issue. In her research

into Burmese domestic workers in Thailand, Sureeporn (2007) argues that the degree of labor exploitation among domestic workers has increased in recent times and has become more complex. Due to the private and confined workspace, domestic workers tend to live and work in poor living conditions, and receive low or sometimes no payment at all. Similarly, Awatsaya et al., (2004), in a study of Burmese domestic workers in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot (Tak Province), found that these migrant domestic workers are vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of their employers.

This research attempts to examine how migrant domestic workers, despite being exploited and living in poor conditions, use every means at their disposal to negotiate for a better life during their everyday lives. I have chosen the case of a Burmese migrant community in the Chang Klan Muslim community of Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, in order to investigate the negotiation tactics they use. Chang Klan Muslim community is interesting for the fact that it comprises a large number of female Burmese Muslim migrants engaged in domestic work. The fact that these women are not only Burmese, but also female, migrant and Muslim, raises the question as to how all of these 'marginalized' identities obstruct or help them to survive while living and working in Thailand. Many scholars have pointed out that race, class, gender, religion and migration status often intersect and become the root-causes of discrimination and exploitation among migrant workers. My study; however, attempts to show how these women use their marginalized identities, as Burmese (race), Muslim (religion), female (gender), domestic workers (class) and migrants (migration status), as the basis of their negotiation tactics and in order to help them achieve their life goals.

1.2 Contextual Background

1.2.1 Who Are The Burmese Muslim Female Migrant Domestic Workers?

I use the term 'Burmese Muslim female migrants' in this study to refer to the women who come from Burma to live and work in Chang Klan Muslim community as migrant workers. Chang Klan area has become a Burmese Muslim migrant community in the sense that now there are several thousand Burmese migrants living and working there. The several thousand Burmese migrants in the area outnumber the

local Thais (around 1,000 people), and out of these, more than 100 women are employed as domestic workers in the community.

The process of hiring Burmese migrants in the past (about three decades ago) started with a local person called a *nai nar* (agent) or a *nai thun* (financial broker) who had some contacts in Burma. These brokers would make contact with each other and bring the Burmese migrants across the border though Mae Sot to Chiang Mai. Brokers or agents would consult with employers about how many people they needed to hire, how many women and men they needed, plus any additional information. When the migrants arrived in Chiang Mai, the brokers or agents would send them to the houses of employers in Chang Klan area and around the outskirts of the city.

It is estimated that there are now around 2,000 Burmese Muslim migrants in Chang Klan, and these can be divided into three sub-groups. The first group migrated from Burma through Mae Sot[1] in Tak Province and then on to Chiang Mai, while the second group migrated from Shan State in Burma to Mae Sai[2] in Chiang Rai Province and then on to Chiang Mai. The final group migrated from Mae Sam Laep[3] in Mae Hong Son province directly to Chiang Mai (see figure 1.1). In Chang Klan community, these migrants work as wage laborers, domestic workers or beggars. Among the thousands of Burmese workers in the city, it is estimated that more than 100 women work as domestic workers, and these women will be the main focus of my study.

[1] Mae Sot is a town in western Thailand that shares a border with Burma to the west. It is notable as a trade hub and for its substantial population of Burmese migrants and refugees. The town is in Tak Province and is the main land gateway between Thailand and Burma.

[2] Mae Sai is the northernmost district (amphur) in Chiang Rai Province, northern Thailand. It is a major border crossing point between Thailand and Burma. In Mae Sai, Asian Highway Network AH2 (Thailand Route 1 or Phahonyothin Road) crosses the Mae Sai River into the town of Tachileik in Burma.

[3] Mae Sam Laep is a village and tambon (sub-district) within Sop Moei District in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand. In 2005 it had a total population of 9,802 people. The tambon has ten villages, and Mae Sam Leap lies near the Burmese border, on the Salween River.

Figure 1.1: Migration Routes

The largest group of women working as domestic workers in the Chang Klan area is the Burmese Muslims from Mae Sam Laep in Mae Hong Son Province. The second largest group is the Burmese Muslims from Mae Sot in Tak province, and the third, smaller group is the Burmese Muslims from Mae Sai in Chiang Rai. Most of the women who came to work and live in Chang Klan have networks in the area, meaning they know someone who already works and lives in the community. The first group of Burmese Muslim female migrant workers came to live in Chang Klan more than twenty years ago, and at that time they arrived with the help of brokers. Since then, these migrants have maintained a steady flow of people from their home villages to Chang Klan community. Some of the early migrants still live and work in Chang Klan, while others have already returned home. Others still move back and forth between their home villages and Chang Klan community, while others still have moved on to Bangkok or other places in Thailand.

The Burmese Muslim women who live in Chang Klan area are not a homogenous group, but in fact are different in terms of the amount of time spent in Chiang Mai, their place of origin, their dialects, ages, marriage and migrant statuses. In terms of the amount of time they have spent in Chang Klan community, the longest has stayed almost 30 years, while the newcomers have been in the area only a few months. Those women who have stayed in the community for some time can speak Thai well, but the newcomers cannot communicate in Thai. In term of age, the oldest is in her late fifties, while the youngest are in their teens, around twelve to fifteen years old. In terms of their place of origin, migrants come to Chang Klan from three different sources: Shan State, Yangon and Myawaddy in Burma, while in terms of marriage status, some are married but stay apart from their husbands and families in Burma, while others are single, some are divorced and others have children. In terms of their official status in Thailand, some have work permits, while others do not have any legal documents. Many of them have a long-distance relationship with their

husbands and families - who still live at home, but others have brought their husbands and children with them and live as a family in Chang Klan community.

1.2.2 The Setting of Chang Klan Community

This study enters the world of migrant domestic workers by focusing on the experiences of the Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers in Chang Klan Muslim community in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. I focus my study on Chang Klan community because in terms of the geographical context, Chiang Mai is a 'dream destination' for migrant workers from Burma as it is close to the border of Burma and can be reached from at least three main border crossings (in Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son and Tak provinces). Second, in terms of the economic context, Chiang Mai is the second largest area in terms of economic growth in Thailand after Bangkok, where there are a lot of job opportunities for migrants from Burma. Third, in terms of the cultural context, as Chang Klan is a Muslim community, Islamic beliefs link Burmese Muslims from the place of origin to the place of resettlement. Migration systems theory argues that migration streams are not randomly selected but instead emerge from prior links established through colonialism or pre-existing cultural and economic ties (Castles and Millers, 1998 cited in Parreñas, 2001: 2). In the case of Chang Klan, Burmese migrants selected this community due to geographical, economic and cultural factors.

The population of Chang Klan Muslim community is around 1,000, covering 270 households. In total, 70% of the population is Muslim, and the rest is Buddhist. Chang Klan is a multi-ethnic community and has the biggest Muslim population in Chiang Mai city. In the Chang Klan area there are Pakistani Muslims who migrated from eastern India around 1870s, and Yunnanese Muslims who have migrated from Yunnan Province in southwestern China since the nineteenth century. Later, around three decades ago, Burmese Muslims also came to work as wage laborers, construction workers and domestic servants in the area. Nowadays, the Pakistanis and Yunnanese Muslims are Thai citizens like the northern Thais, so only the Burmese Muslims, who are relative newcomers, are considered as 'alien' by the modern Thai nation state, or as undocumented migrants and low-skilled workers.

1.3 Research Questions

1) How and under what circumstances do these women use their marginalized identities as Burmese, Muslim, female, migrants and domestic workers to survive in Chiang Mai, Thailand?
2) How does being a member of the Muslim community in Chang Klan help facilitate the lives of these domestic workers?
3) Outside their workspace, how do these women construct their social lives and how has their intersectionality become part of their social capital?

1.4 Research Objectives

1) To understand how these women use their different identities with different actors and in different situations.
2) To understand the importance of the Muslim community in terms of supporting them as Muslim women.
3) To understand the ways in which these women have turned their intersectional identities into social capital, as well as the ways in which they have constructed a social life within a Muslim community in Chiang Mai.

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) is the first feminist scholar who introduced intersectionality as a methodology of studying the relationships among multiple dimensions (e.g. race and sex). Intersectional theory is often used to explain how the intersection of various biological, social and cultural categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class and ability, and other axes of identity interrelate, coexist and contribute to systematic social inequality. Scholars who have applied intersectionality in their works (Crenshaw, 1989; Knudsen, 2006) suggest that the classical conceptualizations of oppression within society, such as sexism, racism, homophobia and religion-based bigotry, do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression, interact on multiple, simultaneous levels, creating a system of oppression that reflects

the "intersection" of various forms of discrimination. Crenshaw (1991), who uses intersectionality to study the violence against colored women, reflects that the experiences of colored women cover the intersecting patterns of sexism and racism.

Intersectionality may be defined as a theory used to analyse how social and cultural categories intertwine. Knudsen (2006) uses intersectionality in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class and nationality. The word intersection itself means where one line cuts through another, and so is often applied to streets crossing each other. At the beginning, intersectionality was introduced as an intersection in the US sense of the word, in order to understand the ways in which people of different races cross genders, because American researchers had criticized the gender-based research for producing diversity in terms of gender, but a homogenized view of race. In early feminist studies, women were analysed as different and heterogeneous across and within the female and male categories; however, when it came to the question of race, the race-based critics argued that women and men were all white and of the same Western race. In the American concept of intersectionality, the focus is thus on race and gender. Since the early studies concentrated on the poor and marginalized colored population, the class dimension was often implied in the theoretical reflections and analysis. Later on, disability and sexuality were also integrated into the theory of intersectionality.

Leslie (2005) proposes three approaches to the study of intersectionality: a) anti-categorical complexity, b) inter-categorical complexity, and c) intra-categorical complexity. These three approaches represent the current methodologies used to better understand and apply intersectionality theory.

Anti-categorical complexity is based on the deconstruction of the categorical divisions, and argues that the social categories used are the construction of history and language. This approach states that "inequalities are rooted in relationships that are defined by race, class, sexuality, and gender", so this approach proposes that the only way to eliminate oppression in society is to eliminate the categories used to section people into differing groups. Furthermore, this approach makes a claim that society is too complex to be reduced into finite categories, and instead recognizes the need for a holistic approach to understanding intersectionality.

Inter-categorical complexity; meanwhile, is based on the fact that inequality exists within society, focusing on the complexity of relationships that exists among multiple social groups both within and across analytical categories, and not on the complexities to be found within single social groups, single categories or both. The subject matter is thus multi-group and the method is systematically comparative.

Intra-categorical complexity can be placed between the two other complexity approaches. Unlike the anti-categorical complexity approach, this approach recognizes the existence of social categories and questions their boundaries of distinction. Rather than reject the importance of the social categories; however, this approach recognizes the relevance of social categories to understand the modern social experience. This approach focuses on people who cross the boundaries of constructed categories, in order to understand the complexity and intersectionality of human experiences.

Scholars who have studied domestic work frequently mention discrimination and stereotyping of the work and the people who do it. According to Browne and Misra (2003), domestic work is heavily associated with class, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality hierarchies. Domestic work has long been associated with one gender, women, with the gendered norms of childcare and housework being seen as 'natural' for them. At the same time, norms have devalued domestic work and the workers. In a country like the USA, domestic work has for a long time been performed by ethnic minorities, and so ethnicity, nationality and citizenship-status have constructed an idea of domestic workers as being "others", those who deserve lower pay and worse working conditions.

Class, gender, race/ethnicity and nationality are all embedded in the relationships between domestic workers and employers. Employers are clearly advantaged by class relative to the workers, who witness on a daily basis differences in opportunities and experiences and in particular face class dislocations. Gender subordination also colors the relationship between domestic workers, and even though employers are generally women, female employers remain responsible for the domestic work being done by employing other women to do it for them. Race and ethnicity, as well as nationality and citizenship, have also shaped the experiences of

domestic workers and employers. Employers justify exploitatively low wages by arguing that immigrants are better-off in the host country earning low pay than in their home countries. It is this intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship status and other factors that help explain the extent of the exploitation the workers face. The intersectionality approach thus highlights the higher living standards the 'white' middle-class women have, based upon the lower living standards and exploitation endured by the racial/ethnic minorities and immigrant women (Browne and Misra, 2003)

1.5.2 Social Capital

My study will link the concepts of intersectionality and 'social capital', and explain how Burmese Muslim female domestic workers use their intersectional identities based on religion, gender, and race/ethnicity/nationality as social capital. First, I will review the concept of social capital as developed by the three founders of the concept: Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam, after which I will discuss how social capital is used by individuals to serve individual needs and at the same time to maintain collective benefits.

The three theorists mentioned above seem to agree that social capital is a resource. Coleman (1988) explains that social capital is the resources used by individuals and families in order to achieve social mobility. Putnam (1995) describes social capital as an endowment for civil society, and as important for economic growth and for establishing democratic institutions. Bourdieu (1986) sees social capital as a question of how power and inequalities are reproduced in social networks (Dwyer et al., 2006). However, my study examines social capital in relation to religion, gender, and race/ethnicity/nationality, and asks how these intersectional identities can be converted to social capital.

Among the three social capital concepts, Bourdieu's is often seen as the originator, and in his book 'The Forms of Capital', Bourdieu (1986) splits capital into three: economic, cultural and social capital, and sees capital as providing the means through which the dominant class can reproduce itself. Bourdieu is interested in understanding how subordinate groups might seek to raise their socio-economic status

by deploying or investing in different kinds of capital beyond the economic ones. These different capitals may include social capital - such as the operation of social networks or group membership, cultural capital, as well as economic capital.

Bourdieu's work raises the possibility that people who lack economic capital may be able to use other forms of capital to achieve their needs. Based on this, it will be important to look at how the Burmese female migrants here have used their gender, ethnicity, and religious identities as capital to achieve their own goals, for in this way it will be possible to see how gender, ethnicity, and religion have become forms of social networking or a set of shared norms and values (Dwyer et al., 2006). Bourdieu's work is significant, for he attempts to understand how the dominant class reproduces its domination, while my study explores how a subordinate group like the Burmese domestic workers has negotiated to achieve upward mobility in the host society. However, given that these migrant workers, unlike Bourdieu's economic class, have little economic capital to turn into other forms of social capital, the question I seek to explore is: How can they acquire the social capital needed to move their lives upwards?

Recently, the work of Dwyer et al., (2006) has attempted to combine the concept of social capital with ethnicity, by viewing the successes achieved by young British Pakistanis. This work explores the relationship between gender, ethnicity, social capital and educational attainment, drawing on empirical work carried out in Bradford and Slough in England. The authors argue that the concept of social capital and ethnicity has not been fully developed, plus seek to add gender aspects to the social capital concept. They pay attention to the differences between the educational attainment level and attitudes of young Pakistani men and women, seeking to explore gender influences and how forms of social capital are developed and accumulated, and how gender ideologies intersect with the construction of shared norms and values. Their initial findings suggest that there are some interesting ways in which norms, values and networks develop within different ethnic minority communities, and that these might be conceptualised as social capital. Moreover, their research highlights the complex ways in which ethnic community norms, values and networks need to be theorized - taking into account of power relations, structural constraints and

possibilities, and the ways in which class, gender and generation, among other factors, interact.

Understanding the concept of social capital based on the perspectives of Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu, provides some background to the concept, but reviewing the work of Dwyer et al., (2006) provides a greater level of understanding on the ways in which the concept of social capital should be applied to my research. The work is interesting in that they try to look at ethnicity as social capital, and more importantly look at other aspects such as class and gender in a way that assesses how these factors relate to the success or otherwise of young male and female British Pakistanis. Like the work of Dwyer et al., (2006) my work asks: How and in what ways has a subordinated group like the Burmese Muslim female domestic workers used gender, ethnicity and religious identities as forms of social capital, in order to help sustain their lives within a foreign host society?

1.5.3 Tactics of Negotiation

The concept of 'tactics of negotiation' will be applied in this study in order to see how the women negotiate within their everyday lives. The work of Michel de Certeau entitled 'The Practice of Everyday Lives' is worthy of mention here, as in it he makes a clear distinction between strategies and tactics. He sees strategy as the calculus of a force-relationship which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, enterprise, city or scientific institution) can be isolated from an environment. A strategy to him assumes that a place can be circumscribed as proper and serve as the basis for generating relations with a distinct exterior (such as competitors, targets or objects of research). Political, economic and scientific rationality is then constructed based upon this strategic model (de Certeau, 1984).

In contrast, tactics can be seen as a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" existing spatial or institutional localization, nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of an individual tactic belongs to the other - insinuating itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety and without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base on which it can capitalize upon its advantages, prepare its explanations and secure independence in respective circumstances.

While strategy can be seen a weapon of the ‘strong’, tactics can be seen as weapons of the ‘weak’. However, de Certeau (1984) claims that power can be shifted, and that it does not always lay with the strong. According to him, the “proper” is a victory of space over time, whereas, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time and is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized “on the wing”. Whatever it wins, it does not keep, so it must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into “opportunities”. The weak must continually turn to their own ends – to forces alien to them, and this can only be achieved during propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogeneous elements; thus, in the supermarket a housewife confronts heterogeneous and mobile data - what she has in the refrigerator, the tastes, appetites and moods of her guests, the best buys and their possible combinations with what she already has on hand at home. The intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form; however, not of discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and manner in which an opportunity is “seized”.

De Certeau (1984) states that many everyday practices like talking, reading, moving about, shopping and cooking are tactical in character and are the “ways of operating” which can be seen as victories of the “weak” over the “strong”, whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order. Clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, the “hunters’ cunning”, maneuvers, polymorphic simulations and joyful discoveries, can also be considered as tactics.

Domestic workers, as part of the ‘weak’ sector, more often develop tactics when subverting the authority of their employers. Strategies; for example, collective bargaining, have long been elusive forms of resistance for domestic workers. However, tactics, such as ‘chicanery’ and ‘cajolery’ represent “victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong’” and are incorporated within the boundaries of the rules and order of domestic work through the clever tricks and more outlined above. Through these tactics, domestic workers are able to take advantage of opportune moments within the daily ritual of domestic work to creatively interject subversive acts into their everyday routines, so as to resist the tedium and disciplinary measures that normalize inequality between the employers and employees. James Scott’s work (cited from Parreñas

2001) also describes the ability of the 'weak' to develop a consciousness of collective struggle. His "hidden transcript" refers to the "discourse that takes place 'offstage', beyond direct observation by [the] power holders".

Living in a foreign host society, Burmese Muslim female domestic workers employ many tactics to negotiate their living and earnings throughout their everyday lives. Taking one example from an interview I held with a domestic worker, she offered to work for free for a local family in Chang Klan in exchange for them accepting her as an employee and so she could obtain a legal work permit. These female domestic workers can therefore only be seen as 'weak' if we look in isolation at their status as migrant workers from Burma. Instead of seeing these women as 'weak' or 'victims' in this way, I see them as 'agents' – those who have been able to turn their vulnerable identities into tactics of negotiation.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework shows that Burmese domestic workers have a number of intersectional identities, as Burmese, Muslims, women, migrants and domestic workers, but seem to be marginalized by the social category they are placed in. However, this study aims to show how these women have been able to turn their identities in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, religious and migration status into social capital, and use this to negotiate within their everyday lives.

Those scholars who have studied domestic workers always mention the discrimination and stereotyping that takes place towards the workers and the work. The reasons why this kind of work and the persons who perform the work are marginalized is because the work itself is deeply imbedded within hierarchies of class, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality. With regard to 'gender', domestic tasks are associated with one gender (women), and the tasks of taking care of the children, the elderly and the sick, plus housework, which is seen as "natural" for women. With regards to 'class', neo-liberalism has opened opportunities for women in developed or underdeveloped counties to participate in the labor force, but these opportunities are generally only open to women from the middle class, since they have received a good education and can work in professional occupations, and thus free themselves from

household chores and caring roles by hiring women from the lower classes (from inside or outside their country) to do this work for them. With regards to 'race', historically in the USA, domestic work has been performed by ethnic minorities and migrants, so status in terms of ethnicity, nationality and citizenship helps construct the idea of domestic workers as 'others', those who do not deserve good pay, better working condition, legal protection or any respect. It is the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship status and other factors that helps to explain the exploitation that these domestic workers face.

This study explores the possibility of theorizing social capital in relation to gender, ethnicity and religion. Here, gender can be seen as social capital in the way that the study women use their identity as women to fill the gap created by domestic work, since the household and care giving tasks are seen as 'women's work'. Race/ethnicity/nationality can also be seen as social capital in the way that the Burmese women are seen by their Thai employers as docile laborers who are willing to work for low pay. Moreover, my setting is also crucial because the research site is a Muslim community and these women are Muslims, so in this case ethno-religious factors also play an important role in the lives of both the employers and employees in this community, and this ethno-religious element can be considered social capital as well.

People negotiate every day of their lives, but the poor have to use more tactics to negotiate. The women in my study negotiate on many levels - on the household, community and national levels. Being domestic workers, these women have to negotiate with their employers in the household; being Muslims, they have to negotiate in a Muslim community - Chang Klan; and being migrants, they have to negotiate with both the Thai and Burmese states, tactics which can be seen as the 'weapon of the weak' used by the Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers.

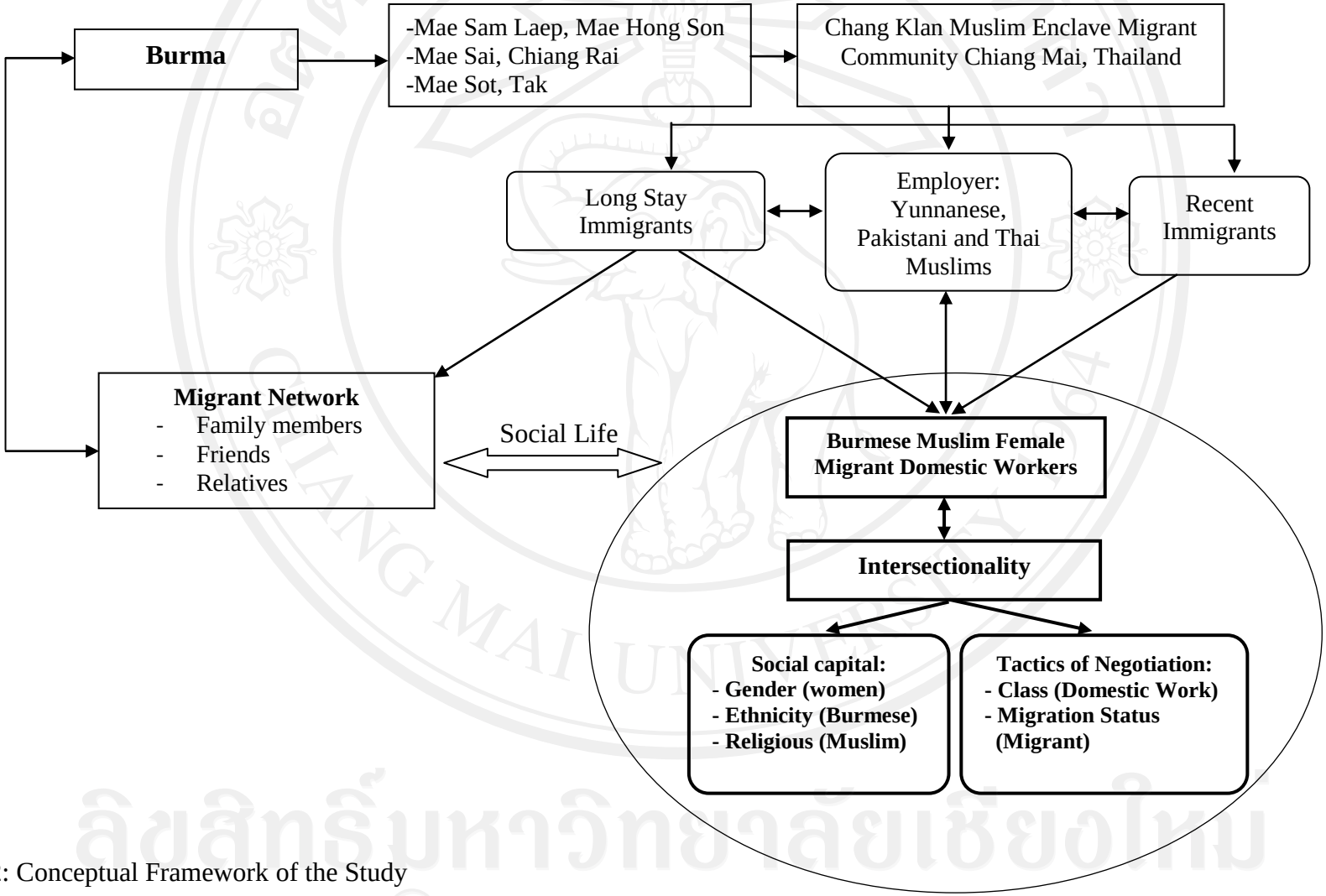

Figure 1.2: Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Research Site

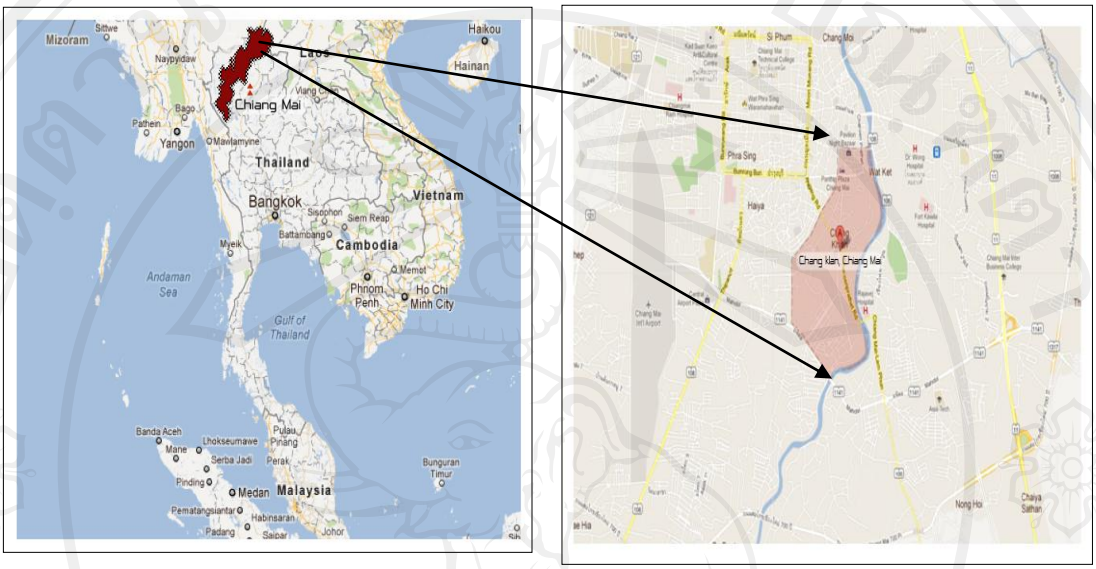

Figure 1.3: Map of Thailand and of Chang Klan Community in Chiang Mai Province

My research was conducted in Chang Klan Muslim community in the city of Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. Chang Klan is one Tambon (sub-district) within Amphur Muang (the city district) in Chiang Mai Province, and is located about two kilometers southeast of the old town wall. The population of Chang Klan's Muslim community is around 1,000 people, covering 270 households. In total, 70% of the population is Muslim and the rest is Buddhist. There are three Thai schools in the community: Montfort College, Vichai Vittaya School and Children's Garden School, and there is one Islamic school which teaches religion and how to pray and is open every day in the evening, starting at 5.30 p.m. This school is closed every Friday.

Chang Klan is a multi-ethnic community. Historically, the first group of Muslims in Chang Klan started migrating from Pakistan in the 1850s, when one Pakistani Muslim came with his Burmese wife and her younger brother and younger sister who were Buddhist (personal interviewed with local people, 2011). Since that time, Chang Klan has developed into a larger Muslim community. The majority of Muslim people in this community are now Thai citizens of Pakistani, Yunnanese, Indian, and Bangladeshi ancestry, so it is now the Burmese Muslims who are the

newcomers, as they move back and forth between Thailand and Burma. It is estimated that the number of Burmese Muslims in Chang Klan could be as high as 2,000 people. Their status in Thailand is as temporary migrant workers, and they usually end up working in low-skilled and low paid jobs in the community, similar to other areas in Thailand. Nowadays, Chang Klan is also home to over a hundred Burmese female domestic workers.

1.7.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is based at the individual level, paying particular attention to the Burmese female domestic workers currently working and living in Chang Klan community. In Chang Klan community there are more than 100 Burmese women working as domestic help, who come from different areas and have different backgrounds. Some of them are single, while others are married, and they are aged between their early twenties and late fifties. Some of them live in Chiang Mai together with their families. My research tried to uncover the different kinds of domestic workers that live in Chiang Mai in terms of their places of origin, their backgrounds and ages, as shown in Table 1.1 below, which gives the details of the ten women who acted as my key informants.

Table 1.1: Details of Key Informants

No.	Name	Age	Place of Origin	Length of Stay (years)	Married Status	Migration Status	No. of Children
1	Arbi	56	Mae Sam Laep	20	Married	Documented	1
2	Keeta	35	Yangon	17	Married	Documented	3
3	Manoya	30	Mae Sam Laep	13	Married	Documented	1
4	Ploypailin	19	Mae Sam Laep	5	Single	Informal	n/a
5	Yamira	49	Mewadee	6	Married	Documented	2
6	Sa	31	Mewadee	5	Divorced	Documented	1
7	Sareema	30	Mae Sot	16	Married	Documented	2
8	Seeda	29	Mae Sam Laep	15	Married	Documented	2
9	Sora	29	Mae Sam Laep	15	Married	Documented	1
10	Tangmo	28	Shan State	10	Married	Documented	2

Source: Household survey 2010

1.7.3 Data Collection

Four data collection methods were applied in this study: participant observation, in-depth interviews, research ethics and narrative analysis.

Participant observation: During my research, I observed the women's activities and participated in their gatherings, including the Ramadan Festival celebrations held in Chang Klan community – signaling the start of a month in which Muslims fast - they cannot eat food or drink during the daytime but can eat at night. During this time, every evening Muslims, including men, women and children, visit mosques to pray and eat. The Muslims who come to pray and eat at Chang Klan Mosque include Thai Muslims, Pakistani Muslims, Yunnanese Muslims and Burmese Muslims. Unlike the other Muslims, the Burmese Muslims participate in this festival on a different status and level to the others, for they work as wage laborers and domestic workers, both for the Mosque and its attendees. Therefore, during Ramadan I met with many women from Burma who have been hired to work as domestic workers – helping to clean, cook and serve. Men as well as women do this kind of job. I met other women who 'work' as beggars – being the most recent arrivals (both males and females do this, but most are women who arrive with their small children), for during Ramadan Muslims donate money to the poor. This event opens up the opportunity, not only for domestic workers to find a job and receive free food, but also a space for beggars who come for Burma to share some of the benefits generated during the holy festival.

I also observed their daily lives; spent time eating in food shops, drinking in teashops and shopping at the local fresh market and for groceries in the area. There are four teashops in this community where they sell tea, coffee and roti, and my other meeting points were at the grocery stores where they sell household goods from Burma and also shops owned by the Burmese.

In-depth interviews: During my work, I met with many different people in Chang Klan community. I used in-depth interviews and open-ended questions with the female Burmese migrant domestic workers who now live and work in Chang Klan. The women do different kinds of domestic work; some work as live-in domestic workers with only one employer, some work as domestic workers with many

employers, and some work as domestic workers within a Thai company. I also interviewed their husbands, relatives, friends, children and employers.

In this community, I also used an in-depth interview (with open-ended questions) with the religious leader, and this helped me to understand the ways in which religious space has allowed these women to participate and generate benefits. I used informal interviews with other community leaders in order to understand the perspectives that they have with regard the Burmese Muslim migrant workers, and in particular the female domestic workers. In addition, I talked to local people in the community, which allowed me to see the larger picture there and helped me to understand the different contexts that exist in the area.

Research ethics: Some of the Burmese migrant workers living in the research area are undocumented migrants, so their status is quite insecure in Thailand. In order to protect their rights, I have not used their real names in this paper; I promised to keep all the information they gave me confidential and used the information only for my thesis writing purposes. I clearly introduced myself and my research objectives every time I met them, and made sure that they understood me fully and made sure that they were willing to let me interview them. I asked for their permission every time I wanted to take their photos or record their voices, and I proceeded only after they had given me permission and felt comfortable for me to do so.

Narrative analysis: After collecting data through participant observation and in-depth interviews, I analyzed the narratives I gathered in addition to my own observations. As this study aims to read and understand their everyday lives, to make sense of the primary information I combined and compared my data with other relevant work, theories and concepts.

Reflection from the field: What I found and learned from my field visits is that it is not easy at all to obtain information from Burmese Muslim female domestic workers due to the fact that some of them are undocumented migrants, some of them cannot speak Thai and because the place where they live and work is a Muslim space. In this Muslim community, any newcomer or stranger is watched and monitored by local Muslims, who sometimes told me they did not see the point of my study and asked how it would benefit their society.

Also, as I had already realized it would be more difficult for me to interview male migrants, I hoped that interviewing the female migrants would be easier and thus facilitate my research possible. In fact, it was still not very easy to find female migrants who really wanted to talk to me; even though some were willing, it was only a small number. Since my research site is a 'host society' for the migrants, it was not easy to find them in a public sphere; therefore, I identified several mechanisms to approach them. First of all, I made myself a name card in three languages: Thai, English and Burmese – having asked my Burmese classmate to translate my name into Burmese. This card contained my full name, my contact details (including telephone number and e-mail address) and most importantly my position as a Master's student at Chiang Mai University. Surprisingly, the name card worked well in the field and became an effective 'ice breaker' during my encounters. I also told them about myself, even though I cannot communicate in Burmese, because after they had seen the Burmese words on my name card, they started to trust me a little more.

During my interviews, I tried as much as I could to meet and talk with the women in their homes - in the private sphere, as this made them more relaxed about talking to me and made it easier for me to ask questions. However, sometimes I had to meet and talk to them on the street, in food shops or other public spaces, and here I felt we were being watched and monitored by the local and Burmese Muslim men in the area. Muslim areas like Chang Klan are places in which many ethnic groups intersect, including the many generations of Thai-Pakistani and Thai-Yunnanese Muslims, the Burmese Muslim migrants, as well as foreigners and Thais like me. It is thus a place where local people feel a certain suspicion towards newcomers, and this caused me problems during my field visits.

As well as experiencing an uncomfortable feeling when meeting these women in the public sphere, another challenge was the language barrier, since I cannot speak Burmese, and some women I spoke to could not speak Thai, especially the recent arrivals. However, this was not really such a problem, because I found that the long-stay female migrants could act as my interpreters; there were many occasions on which these migrants were able to act as emergency translators for me, allowing me to complete my interviews.

1.8 Organization of the Thesis

This paper examines the experiences of Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers through the lens of intersectionality, where class, race/ethnicity, gender, religion and migration status intersect, plus I will explore the women's social capital as well as the negotiation tactics they use within their work lives and as part of their resettlement in a Muslim migrant community. As a result, the paper is organized around the intersection of inequalities the domestic workers experienced by the workers and explains the ways in which these women have turned their religion, race/ethnicity and gender into social capital, and the ways in which they have negotiated their class and migration status in different situations and institutions; for example, in the work place, in their families, the migrant community and with the Thai state.

Providing a theoretical overview, **Chapter 1** outlines three approaches to understand the movements of the migrant domestic workers: modernization, the world economic system and the actor-based approach. This chapter also discusses three concepts applicable to the study of Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers: intersectionality, social capital and tactics of negotiation.

Chapter 2 provides general information about the domestic workers in Thailand, and is divided into four parts: (i) the definition of the term 'domestic worker, (ii) the shift that has taken place from the use of Thai domestic workers to migrant domestic workers, (iii) the limited legal protection offered and ambiguity of Thai government policy towards migrant domestic workers, and (iv) the transnational flows of Burmese female migrants from Burma into Thailand and then to Chang Klan.

Chapter 3 provides background information about the Burmese Muslims over three sections. The first provides background information on the Burmese Muslims in Burma, the second, the cross-border movements of the Burmese Muslims from Burma into Thailand, and particularly to Chiang Mai, covering the historical and contemporary contexts, and the third provides information about the research site - a Muslim migrant community called Chang Klan.

Chapter 4 discusses the concept of social capital in relation to gender, ethnicity and religion, and shows the ways in which Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers have turned their gender, ethnicity and religion into social capital by drawing upon the discussion several cases from my field work.

Chapter 5 debates the negotiation of class and migration statuses among the Burmese female migrant domestic workers, and examines the negotiation tactics used by the workers to help them to achieve their aims and promote their upward mobility.

Chapter 6 concludes by integrating all the chapters together and returning to answer the initial research questions - debating the different circumstances within which the women use their marginalized identities (as Burmese, Muslim, female migrants, as well as domestic workers) as negotiation tactics to survive in Thailand. I will also analyze the way in which the Muslim Chang Klan migrant community has helped support the workers, and examine the lives of the women outside their workspace, the ways in which they have constructed their social lives and their use of intersectionality as social capital.