

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this thesis, my conceptual framework is developed from three main theoretical ideas; namely, (1) gambling as social practice, (2) practice in everyday life, and (3) women and modernity in regionalizing Myanmar. These three main concepts will be elaborated on in the following.

#### 2.2 Gambling as Social Practice

The study of gambling or gambling studies is not new in social science. In fact there are different approaches to these social phenomena (see Cosgrave 2006). Here I will try to review those significant works, particularly such scholar's works that might be termed as the ethnography of gambling.

In his work "*Gambling as work*" (1963) Herman studied commercialized horse racing in the United States. In Herman's study, horse racing in America was a social phenomenon that different status groups participated in for different reasons. He pointed out that the structure of this gambling and the ways of playing among different groups who came from different classes and backgrounds, were related to a way of participation and how these gamblers created their own space or a specific membership or society at the horse race track. By analyzing how the horse race gamblers used their money to win in betting, Herman proposed that the gamblers might not be taking a risk with their bet; on the contrary, they used the gambling to "beat *the system*". According to him, horse race gambling occasionally allows the bettors to beat the system through rational means and thus permits them to demonstrate a form of identity for themselves and their associates. This led to another interpretation of the gambling that focused on the gambler's self-esteem and social gratification, through consuming activities, playing

horse race as such. Similar to Hna Lone Htee played in Myanmar today; although the odds of winning the prize in this lottery gambling are quite low in comparison to other gambling, the gamblers, who are mostly housewives, find enjoyment in this underground lottery.

Another ethnographic study of gambling was done by Rebecca Casidy in her article “Gambling as exchange: horserace betting in London”. In this study, Casidy used the concept of *Gambler as individuals* to interpret the horse race gambling. Here the practice or the social activity of gambling is at the centre of male-dominated worlds. The working class men, who had a limited time for recreation or holiday, were the focus in this study. Casidy described in her work that within a specific social structure among the male gamblers, they created and maintained their social relationship, common practices, and ideology after a long-tough working day. She concluded that there were different meanings people give to gambling, especially between women and men. Also, she showed how male gamblers watching a horse racing TV program and gambling on this race is an important way for them to create their community, simultaneously reproducing their male dominant ideology in their daily life.

In “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”, a famous work done by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, he argued that the practice of cockfighting among the Balinese villagers had deeper meanings. It involved more than just winning money. Along with this, it was viewed as a social activity, ritual, and self-presentation in that locality. Cockfight playing in Bali was relevant to kinship, self-identity, and Balinese masculinity. Through this gambling, the village gamblers, almost all who were men, established close relationships with each other, a social unity as a group and at the same time a sense of individual self-identity. In this sense, Geertz shows us that gambling is not just simply an economic activity, but a social act that reflects people’s networks and the way they make sense of the world. Thus, gambling is a type of cultural activity in which we can investigate the deeper meanings of that particular society.

The essence of the gambling phenomenon is *decision making*. The act of making a decision consists of selecting one course of action or strategy from among the set of admissible strategies (Epsten, Richard A. 2009). Gambling offers people more

than a means of recreation. In fact, betting may produce neither recreation nor monetary gain; this does not necessarily mean that it is sterile, non-productive, or a dysfunctional activity. Generally, people are aware of some specific goals within their society, which they are either unwilling or incapable of achieving by the use of ordinary methods. So, gambling may be a way of harnessing or channelling peoples' otherwise destructive frustrations (Zola, Irving Kenneth, 1963). In fact, gambling is a kind of recreation which provides people a chance to consume leisure time and excitement in their life. At the same time, the gambling arena as social space allows the gamblers to exchange their wishes and dreams for their choices in gambling. The best example of this kind of gambling can be seen in the underground lottery, in Thai and Myanmar societies in particular here, in which the players, mostly are women, choose a specific number and hope to win the prize by the number they have chosen. Even in terms of investment, playing the lottery is not a large expenditure, but the players still dream of the big prize from betting.

Another aspect of gambling is *belief in luck*. A chief factor of the gambling habit is the belief in luck; and is apparently traceable, at least in its elements, to a stage in human evolution antedating the predatory culture (Veblen, Thomas. 1899). And it probably owes the specific form under which it occurs in modern culture to the predatory discipline. That is why some people interpret their dream into specific numbers and bet those numbers in the underground lottery. And some people believe the predictions, especially one made by a famous religious or spiritual person and so on. In this sense, gambling is more than luck. It is based on faith, both in personal and spiritual/religious norms.

Some people may play gambling for fun, some for a certain purpose, and some may play for a better future or financial reasons. The possibility of earning "real money" by normal work is greatly restricted, if not sometimes impossible. On the other hand, there are people who make fortunes quickly through gambling. Many people gamble because they have needs that cannot be met through their earned income. They barely make ends meet, and gambling is their "opportunity" to acquire material comforts. A relative view is that gambling represents a "*safety valve*". Instead of turning

against the original source of their deprivations and unfulfilled aspirations, bettors are relieved through gambling of some of their frustrations (as Herman's work shows, mentioned above). Even though the chance to win is not much, people still think that they can win and gambling can fulfil their wishes. That drives the *motivation* for people to continue playing (Berger, Edmund, 1957). Several interpretations of gambling have appeared in the sociological literatures which consider gambling to be a form of deviancy or a cultural aberration reactive to a context of deprivation. Sociologically speaking, gambling is thought to provide an "escape from the routine and boredom of modern industrial life in which the sense of creation and the instinct of workmanship has been lost". That is why a number of observers interpret gambling as an "*escape hatch*".

Another interesting interpretation is that gambling occasionally allows bettors to "beat the system" through rational means and thus permits them to demonstrate to themselves and their associates that "they can exercise control and that for a brief moment they can control their fate" (Zola, Irving Kenneth, 1963). Maybe this is also one of the factors why people with low incomes rather than the high income earners gamble in specific kinds of gambling like the government lottery and the underground lottery. On the other hand, groups of middle class and upper class gamble (horse racing) for social reasons. This kind of gambling can be called "*social gambling*" or gambling as a social practice.

### **2.3 Practice in Everyday Life**

Everyday life sociologists try to examine the individual and their ideas within the contexts of the surrounding society in order to help to understand the whole process of society and the individual's activities. In everyday life sociology there are three main concepts which different branches of this school of thought create, contextualize and use to conduct their research: contextuality, model of the actor and the social structure. To everyday life sociologists like Norman Denzin (1970), in understanding people's experiences and their social life, they conduct their work in a natural setting. This idea of contextuality is the basic emphasis of everyday life sociology. In attempting to understand the interactions in a natural context or the setting, which already exists with

the interactions of the people, this group of sociologists see the actor as a person who has his/her feelings, intentions, and consciousness. Relationships between the society and the individual are therefore reflexive.

In a social structure, people try to negotiate the power relations of each actor and create the interactions within the society (Garfinkel 1967). The ethnomethodologist, a subgroup of everyday sociologist, focuses on how people negotiate and apply rules which embody the social structure on an everyday level (Heritage 1984). For existential sociologists people have a strong element of emotionality and irrationality and they act according to their feelings. At the same time, existential sociologists view society as complex and pluralist, divided by power struggles between different groups (Douglas 1971).

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau proposed a way to understand ordinary practice in a consumer society by conceptualizing a concept in practice into two aspects; strategy and tactic. According to de Certeau, strategy is a practice that is operated by the powerful, the state, social institutions and those who own or command scientific discourse as such. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serves as generating relations with an exterior distinct from it. In opposition, tactic is the practice; an everyday practice that is operated by the powerless or marginal people or just ordinary people who live and struggle in the system; in this case, a consumer society. Tactic is not proper, and it depends on time and the circumstances and opportunities. In other words, these powerless groups do not have specific rules and they are created within their own society.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice in *Habitus, Field and Capitals* is more systematic and complicated when we look at ordinary practice in a modern society. For him, a fundamental view is that people or the actors are constructed by a society. According to this, people's practices are located in space and significantly in time. So, social phenomenon cannot be understood outside of time and space. Habitus, for Bourdieu, is the unconscious character of practical logic and the existence of dispositions as beyond consciousness (Jenkins, 2002). And "the surface of appearance of decision making is (a) a shadow or a reflection of what the habitus is doing anyway,

either beforehand or simultaneously, (b) an option which under certain circumstances, is part of the repertoire of the habitus, not, in any sense, an autonomous or chosen process, or (c) an illusion, insofar as the principles of its operation are constrained by and derived from the habitus” (Jenkins, 2002). A field is a structured system of social positions occupied either by the individual or institutions. It is; in other words, a power relation. And, according to Bourdieu, it has four categories: economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital. So, field itself is a power and which is dominant in the society as self and also as dominant power.

Through the concepts on ‘everyday practice, I tried to understand the Thai stock market index lottery gambling in Myanmar within the power relationship between the government and the society. In Myanmar, gambling is illegal and the state has always found a way to control this activity. Beneath the power structures and in subterfuge the gamblers negotiate, create and practice in their own way challenging the system. According to their traditional society, gamblers have their own belief about this digits gambling and interpret their daily life in accordance to this particular social context. Even though the Thai stock market itself functions as an interest for business, the Burmese gamblers redefine it in their own way as to be able to play the digits. Through the interpretation of everyday practice within this cultural context, a clearer understanding of the tactic of Thai stock market index lottery gambling can be examined.

#### **2.4 Women and Modernity in Regionalizing Myanmar**

Burma/Myanmar is a Theravada Buddhist country and like most of the other countries in mainland Southeast Asia, women’s status within the society are not as high as men’s. Traditionally, a typical model of a Burman family is an extended family and the members in this family household are composed of the parents (father and mother), children and grandparents (sometimes this may also include uncles and aunts). All of these members live together under the same roof. Structurally, the husband is the “ain-oo-nat” or the spirit head in the house. This indicates that he holds the highest spiritual place in the household system (Khaing 1984). Traditionally, women have a share in the family responsibility. This is portrayed in the traditional Myanmar saying, “*Maung Ta*

*Htan Mae Ta Ywat*” (when a husband carries a bundle on his shoulder, a wife carries a bundle on her head), meaning husband and wife have equal responsibilities in the family (Myint 2002). Sons and daughters are considered as equals. The mother or a female member is responsible for the domestic work. Since Myanmar has been modernized, the social status and roles of male and female members in the house have become recently blurred and almost equal.

If we look back to the pre-colonial period, especially in education, girls could go to a monastery which provided them basic schooling besides the Buddhist doctrines, similar to boys. Although at the age of thirteen, girls were not allowed to attend a class at the monastery because once they had come of age, it was considered not proper for them to be around monks who had strict injunctions against even raising their eyes to look at women. But there were some exceptions for women in wealthy families and high governors’ family members who had opportunities to continue studying. During the colonial period, the role for women improved with the emergence of missionary schools for girls. Since then, through the higher accessibility of education, the numbers of women who are well educated has increased and they are allowed involvement in government sectors, especially serving as teachers and in health services (Myint, 2002).

In the past decades, in Myanmar, most of the household income depended on the father or male members. However, recently due to the economic hardships, high inflation and other socio-economic factors, it is not possible to rely simply on the husband’s income. And this condition has led to a significant change in the role of the housewives and for women in general in modern Myanmar today. This is reflected in a study by Professor Yi Yi Myint, who mentions that, “[a] study of Rangoon’s four main markets, found women stall holders worked to supplement the family income and more than two-thirds of them ended up earning more than their husbands,” (Williams, 1998).

In modern Myanmar, women are expected to work and struggle for more income for their families as equally as men do. Particularly in the urban areas where their traditional roles as a housewife have not changed, but struggling with the hardships in the city’s industrial works eventually leads to new roles and status to work out for their families’ living. It is under this economic constraint that *Hna Lone Htee* or the Thai

stock market index lottery gambling has become an integral part of their daily life and social activity. Within this powerful context of urban life, to explore how these housewives make sense of this kind of gambling, and through the practice of this gambling, how they negotiate the structural condition and hardship of family life is thus worthy of analysing.

Guillaume Rozenberg wrote in *Burma at the turn of the Twenty -First Century* that during the colonial period, the lottery was once used by the pre modern state in Burman Kingdom (by King Thibaw) to solve the country's financial crisis and bankruptcy. Subsequently, this led to negative consequences for lottery gambling in Burma as observed by Sir James G. Scott, "Neither buyers nor sellers were to be seen in the bazaar. Cultivators sold off their farming stock and implements, and launched all their money in the state lotteries. Fathers sold their daughters, and husband their wives, to have a final try for fortune, until the lottery manager issued a notice that they would give no more tickets in exchange for women" (Shway Yoe 1963:530). Rozenberg raised the question; "Can history repeat itself?" and further asked, "How precisely do lottery practices articulate with Burmese religious categories, and how should we interpret such a configuration?" To answer these questions, he explored the three digit lottery and the roles of the Buddhist monk relevant to this kind of gambling. He noted that some monks gave signs of three digits numbers to their Buddhist followers via preaching. In this case, it can be considered that, Buddhist beliefs and practice in short, are significantly relevant to people's gambling habits. In a sense, gambling on the three digit lottery can be interpreted and understood in people's phenomenological worlds, either by faith, belief or religious conception. Here the monk used his 'magical' powers to help ordinary people obtain a lucky number, and ultimately to win the lottery.

As mentioned earlier, *Hna-Lone-Htee* or the Thai stock market index lottery gambling was invented by groups of underground lottery dealers just a few years ago. The practice of this lottery gambling itself, as I have argued and will show in the following chapters, is a representation of modernity in Myanmar and can also be seen as a transnational phenomenon. It is Burmese gambling in the global age I would say. Globalisation, as Anthony Giddens states, "refers essentially to that stretching process,



in so far as the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth's surface as a whole" (Giddens 1990). In the following passage I will explore more on Giddens's concept on modernity.

Modernity is a fundamental concept to sociology as theorized by the three founders of the discipline. For Marx, what was the basis of modernity was the emergence of capitalism and the middle class, which led to an unprecedented expansion of productive forces and to the creation of the world market. Durkheim tackled modernity from a different angle by following the ideas of Saint-Simon about the industrial system. Although the starting point is the same as Marx, feudal society Durkheim emphasizes, is far less the rising of the middle class as a new revolutionary class and very seldom refers to capitalism as the new mode of production implemented by it. The fundamental impulse to modernity is rather industrialism accompanied by new scientific forces. While according to the work of Max Weber, modernity is closely associated with the processes of rationalization and disenchantment of the world (Jorge Larraín 2000, 13).

Drawing ideas from these three great thinkers, Giddens synthesized and reinvented this concept to explain social transformation in the global era. Modernity as he describes, is associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation, by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; and (3) a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy. Largely as a result of these characteristics, modernity is vastly more dynamic than any previous type of social order. It is a society—more technically, a complex of institutions—which, unlike any preceding culture, lives in the future, rather than the past (Giddens 1998, 94).

Since the 1990's, there have been significant changes in Myanmar politically, economically and socially. The country has gone through a condition of modernity. Although Myanmar has still been controlled by military regimes since 1962, a 'new political system' has recently been established. The general election in 2009 was more or less a symptom of modern politics in Myanmar. Economically, the country's market

economy has been more integrated into the outside world, particularly since Myanmar became a member of ASEAN in 1997. Since then one has seen the flow of people, capital and information streaming into Myanmar though there are still some restrictions. And the people in this country also have more opportunities to access and encounter these elements of transformation. The people's way of life in Myanmar in other words, has been more oriented towards consumerism and an information based society. And it can be assured that state censorship and control play a predominant role in this change.

As I have mentioned above, the gambling on *Hna Lone Htee* is mainly based on the numbers from the Thailand Stock Exchange Market Index, shown on a satellite television channel. Without the access to this transnational media from Thailand, it would not have been possible to operate this underground lottery system in Myanmar. The *Hna Lone Htee* is in this sense an aspect of modernity which reflects 'minor transnationalism', or modernity from below, in Myanmar. According to Giddens, to explore a facet or consequence of this modernity is well worth the time and energy. And one purpose of this study is to pursue this exploratory study which I will elaborate on below.

While we are now living in a modern world, a world that attempts to lure us with the feeling of certainty and progress, it is undeniable that we also have to take risks in our daily life. The more we experience wealth precipitated by a consumer society, the more we encounter confusion and unpredictability. Taking risks thus is another side of modernity; it is a consequence of modernity according to Giddens. We must take risks while living in the modern world. Today most people in Western countries live their lives on various kinds of trust they buy, simultaneously taking risks, either through games, gambling, consuming or buying insurance. We trust the modern technologies, the systems, and social institutions and we have to deal with trust because to establish trust, taking risk is unavoidable. (Tulloch, Lupton, 2003).

Risk can be defined in various ways depending on the specific issue. Normally, people describe risk in a negative sense; for instance, losing life's security, facing dangers or discomfoting situations and taking risks on physical or financial conditions. In this modern world there are things that operate beyond our control, but we try to find a way to control it, particularly in an unscientific way. People can be at ease by the

convenience and effectiveness of travelling by car, but on the contrary, this is actually being in a high risk situation.

Risk taking can be read in two ways. On the one hand, it is involuntarily risk taking in which people are confronted with risks in daily life which they have no control over. This kind of risk taking is unavoidable, such as global warming, disease outbreaks and a world market financial crisis. On the other hand, when individuals choose to take “voluntarily” risks for their personal pleasure or profit, they appear to be willing to accept relatively high risk levels in return for rather modest quantifiable benefits. Even this kind of risk itself is seen as a negative thing, as some groups of people evinced the view that there were positive aspects to taking risks. This is especially among the people who think there are still some choices to be made about upcoming situations. They are risk taking voluntarily. Voluntarily risk taking is driven by a sense of conquering and controlling specific events. In other words, taking risk for the people in the modern world is dangerous but also exciting. In modern societies, most people who are individualistic usually see an exposure to risk as a normal way of living. In theory, “risk” can be defined as “a chance of losing something” in unpredictable situations, a living in uncontrollable events and so, “risk taking” is a way people engage in such dramas and conditions in their everyday practices such as gaming, gambling, and consuming material culture. It can also be a way of living, presenting self-identity itself which reflects people’s risk taking in these modern days.

Modern gambling, like *Hna Lone Htee*, is a form of risk preference which is itself an aspect of economic choices under uncertainty. How do people take risks in gambling on the horse race, soccer game betting, or playing the underground lottery? How do they handle their chance of winning in such kinds of gambling? Do people really engage with risk in their gambling practice?

## 2.5 Conceptual Framework

As discussed earlier, since the 1990’s, democracy movements and changes in political power in modern Myanmar have initially led the country to be integrated into the outside world though not completely as demonstrated in the half door open

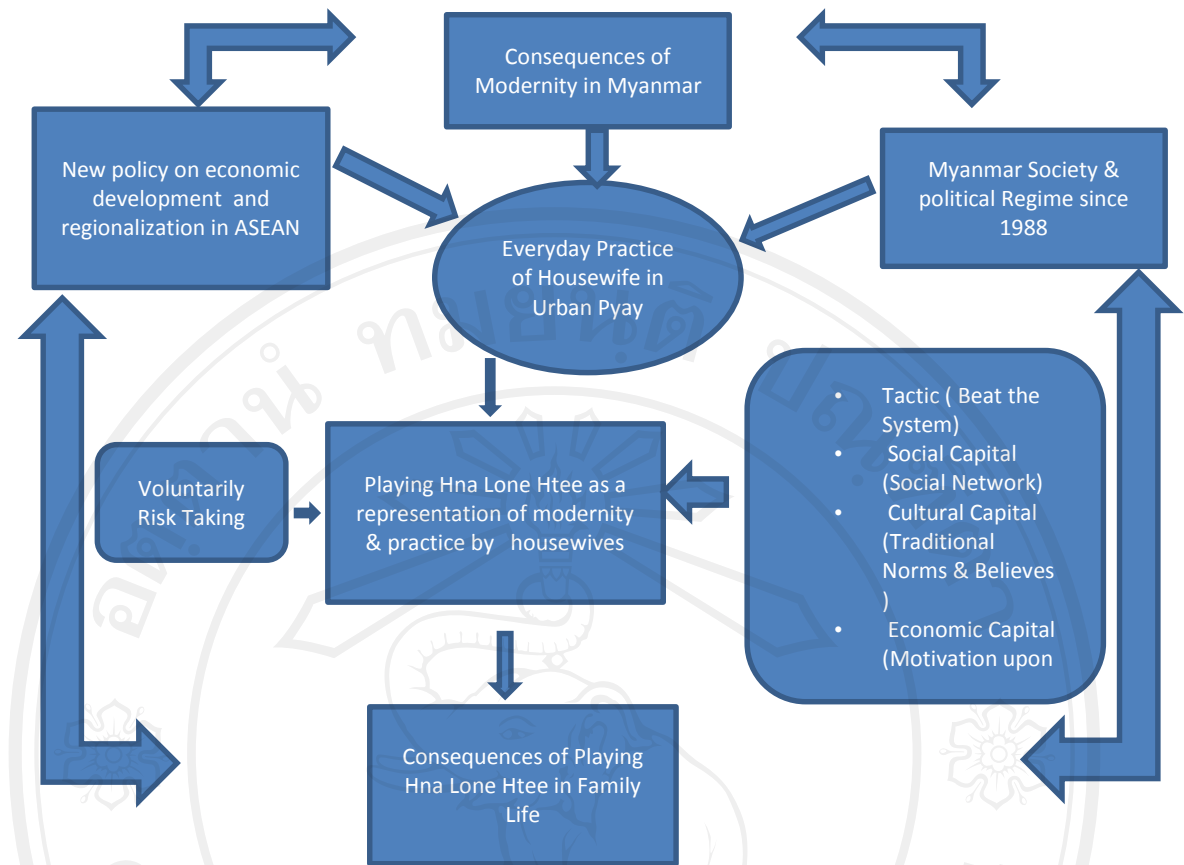
economic policy. The turning point in the new era of modern Myanmar began in 1997 when this 'new nation' was regionally accepted by other Southeast Asian nations and Myanmar became a member of the ASEAN. Since that time significant changes in economic policies and political reforms in Myanmar have gradually developed. More investments from outside the border have been brought in; in particular, those from neighbouring countries such as Thailand, China and India. The border trade is also freer than before, and a lot of development projects which are based upon the uses and exploitation of natural resources are increasingly introduced into Myanmar. Along with economic development and foreign investments, the media industry and information technology businesses have also been significantly invested in by the state and private sectors. Thus, this media landscape is now more competitive. The flows of media, news and information have been more accessible and flexible compared to the former periods. Although the people in Myanmar have now gained access to the transnational media through the satellite TV channels as such, some news and information are still restricted by the state. People in Myanmar today are thus living in a territory of contradictions. There are tensions between the suppression of information by the military regime on the one hand, and the development of investment projects and integration into the world market and global and regional economies on the other. The growth of economic development and foreign investments have eventually led to changes in the life of the people in Myanmar, which predicates the need to be more engaged in risk situations

These social changes from the turning outward to global and regional integration in Myanmar since the 1990's, I propose and argue, in this thesis, are manifested and could be observed through the emergence and the popularities of modern gambling such as soccer game betting and two digits underground lotteries, the *Hna Lone Htee*. Modern gambling, which is operated through various kinds of transnational media; in other words, the flows and uses of information or media consuming activities, has become part of people's ways of life, particularly in the main cities in Myanmar, Yangon, Pyay, Mandalay, and Nay Pyi Daw for example. Gambling from my perspective is a kind of risk taking in the urban setting in particular where people have to struggle with and compromise between political changes and economic tensions. Therefore, within the context of regionalization in Myanmar people's daily life has

become more involved with media consumption and consequently, their social life has become complicated.

In this new structural context, the role of husband and housewife in the family, in Myanmar today, is not much different in terms of work and family incomes. Women are also absorbed into public work and modern economy in various forms. However, the work in the public that most ordinary women can access is still limited to the informal sectors. Gambling on *Hna Lone Htee* is surprisingly a space that is open to them. With easier access to media and information technologies playing the two digits, which is shown on the TV screen through a Thai television channel, is not only a source of family income for some, but also a kind of entertainment and sociality among friends and neighbours. Undeniably, *Hna Lone Htee* has really become popular among ordinary housewives in urban Myanmar. Even though this modern gambling is illegal and is operated underground, the players, most of whom are women, can still find ways to play and in fact, create their own tactics to bet with on this modern gambling, to beat the system?. It seems that under the pressure of political, social, and economic changes and tensions, this modern gambling first enables these ordinary people to create their social space, and secondly creates a way for them to escape from economic hardship, social tensions, and risk. I thus argue that, *Hna Lone Htee* is a representation of modernity in regionalizing Myanmar.

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่  
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**Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework**

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่  
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