

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion

The main purpose of doing this thesis research on Hna Lone Htee gambling was to understand how people practice and were so addicted to this form of gambling, even though it surely does not financially and socially support them in beneficial ways. Furthermore, there are specific events and evidence that Hna Lone Htee gambling can cause trouble for some people. And what does it really mean for people participating in this digits gambling via a satellite television program? Before I went to Thailand to study, many people I met and most of the people from the central area of Myanmar, were talking with serious attitudes about digits gambling day and night. It has become a common phenomenon in Myanmar. But so far, there was no specific study on this type of gambling. Thus, it was really challenging to choose this topic as my research.

During my research, a lot of people asked me why I was working on this topic, some with strange faces and some with doubting eyes speculating whether I was from the police or local authorities. On one hand, while I was conducting the interviews and talking with the females, they gave two kinds of responses; one group said they will participate in my research helping me by answering the questions no matter what the query without leaving out any facts they were aware of. However, the other group was really afraid to answer any questions, by saying that they dare not take any risks concerning this activity. And the process of this research was also based on the real situation of dealers, and the local authorities taking actions upon Hna Lone Htee gambling. Some days, I could not do any research because the entire digit selling and playing system had stopped because of the news that authorities may be investigating these activities. Through all these experiences, I began to comprehend some of the social practices regarding Hna Lone Htee gambling; the mixing of traditional ways of life and the local people's ways of conducting a modern form of gambling within the context of traditional practices, ideas, and beliefs.

In this conclusion chapter which shows the findings of this research. I will deliver it through three main research questions which are being answered in this thesis.

1. How is Hna Lone Htee gambling operated and played by a group of housewives in urban Pyay? And how is this modern gambling related to the use of media in the context of regionalizing Myanmar?
2. In what ways do the housewives, experience, interpret, and practice this modern gambling, seen as a kind of risk taking, within the context of urbanizing Pyay?
3. What is the social meaning of *Hna Lone Htee gambling* in the daily life of the housewives in Pyay, in the context of regionalizing Myanmar?

Regarding the first question, as I have described in Chapter 3, the operation of Hna Lone Htee gambling has a very strong and large network of actors in hidden form including, big dealers, small dealers, second hand dealers, and the digit players. Normally, the main proprietors of these businesses do not show themselves in gambling settings and only the digit selling staff and the small dealers directly work with Hna Lone Htee gamblers. And the way the digit selling staff works at this business is very cautious and secretive. During my research, the digits sellers immediately destroyed all of the evidence, papers, ink packs, and vouchers they used in their work. As soon as they heard that local authorities were taking actions upon this gambling somewhere else, they immediately stopped selling digits. The digits selling staff knew that this kind of job was insecure for them. But the payment was worth it for them, a job without any physical effort. On the one hand, they were trying to negotiate with the local authorities by paying bribes, weekly, monthly and according to requests though at times they were not so willing to pay. On the other hand, in dealing with the digits players, the dealers said they needed to be tough and strong, because people wanted to bet on their favourite numbers and receive the reward if they had won. But if they lost and were in debt to the dealers, some digit players were hesitant to pay what they owed and this was hard to handle, because they could not ask any local authorities to help, this being an illegal business. So, this digit gambling is based on a “**Trust**” relationship. Even though there were some cases of digit dwellers being arrested, they were ready to work again if the

chances were available. According to the dealers; in this business it was easier to earn money this way than working normal jobs. And the actions of the court could be reduced if they could pay off the local authorities with bribes, although it was costly.

The Hna Lone Htee players had choices of where to bet their favourite numbers, but generally they chose a “*trusted one*” and vice versa. If a digit seller stopped the digit selling for some reason, they could change to another one immediately. But mostly, they enjoyed being regular customers at a specific establishment. Both for the digit dwellers and the digits players, there were some moral contradictions from religious and social perspectives, but the reality of life, in which there are a lot of demands that cannot fulfilled, became one of the guiding principle elements that drove them to continue participating in Hna Lone Htee gambling.

Regarding the use of media for Hna Lone Htee gambling, the main purpose of the Thai Stock Exchange Index is to support the economics of Thailand. However, once the Myanmar government officially changed the system with “Aung Bar Lay Htee” to prevent people from playing Hna Lone Htee gambling, digits businessmen used the Thai stock digits as the winning numbers. Similar to three digits gambling or “Chae”, which uses the Thai official lottery numbers, the same kind of method was appropriated. In addition, the development of media in Myanmar encouraged the spread of Hna Lone Htee gambling. With the gradual changes in the media landscape, people could frequently and conveniently gain access to the media, through both local and international channels, especially for the broadcasting media sector. Another factor in this leap into modernity was the inexpensive prices for advanced technologies and media consumption.

Even with the entrenched hardships of political and social constraints, the fact that people made an effort to organize and practice illegal digit gambling as a daily activity, is a very unique example exhibiting the well-constructed social structure on the ground level of society for Myanmar people. The media also influenced people’s mind set in different ways, but in this case, it did not shape people but rather people redefined media as a tool to create a chance that their hopes and dreams might come true.

Technology was disguisedly used to manifest the inner desires of people's daily practices.

The answer to the second question is my thesis's argument; Hna Lone Htee gambling in Myanmar is a representation of a mixed space of risk taking, economic hardships, traditional beliefs, modernity and state regulation in modern Myanmar within the context of regionalization. For the housewives in Myanmar, the responsibilities they have to undertake is not simply household activities, but also supporting family incomes in some way as much as they can and try to balance family income and expenses, which is very hard in reality. According to the Asian Development Bank's statistics, 70% of family income is used for food only. And Myanmar is one of the countries which gets social welfare and has very high unemployment rates. With these uncertainties, trying to balance family life is not an easy game. The economic conditions of the country directly affects the role of the housewife. All of the key informants in my research were taking on family responsibilities, and at the same time providing family income support in some way. So, Hna Lone Htee gambling in their daily social setting was another kind of risk taking. But most of them assumed with optimistic attitudes that they had a chance to grab "**Good Luck**". As they tried to catch up to the modernization process in daily life without any effort of resistance, they also attempted to procure the winning numbers by various methods, as best as they could, both in modern and traditional ways. The use of digit charts, mathematical calculations, and information from monks and mediums, were all instances of social practices demonstrating their effort to resist the fate of bad situations they came across in reality. And simultaneously create their own identity where they were able to choose their own way, maybe for a moment, an experience they rarely felt in everyday life. All of the social and economic hardships they had to face were difficult to avoid, so Hna Lone Htee gambling momentarily gave them a small space in which to escape.

Rozenberg stated that the traditional practices of worshipping in "**Nats**" and trying to get the winning numbers from super power persons and from monks was "**cheating**". Whereas in real Myanmar society most of the people do not think of it as a practice of cheating, rather a traditional belief they need to perform for their good deeds. The moral contradiction involving Hna Lone Htee gambling is also the same situation

gambling is in general, not a good thing, but in practice, situations make it hard for gamblers to escape from them because of certain incentives. During my research, I had a chance to talk with a Christian pastor from Pyay, and he said that if you want to interview Christian Hna Lone Htee gamblers, just give them a cup of drink, tea or alcohol, and they would surely answer all you want to know. This shows that whether Buddhist or Christian or other religions, Hna Lone Htee gambling has an influence upon people as a social phenomenon in Myanmar society. The female gamblers in my research were taking risks by playing Hna Lone Htee gambling, but viewed it as a chance of obtaining “good luck”, trying to grab their good fate, and shape their dreams via Hna Lone Htee gambling.

The social meaning of playing Hna Lone Htee gambling for female gamblers in Pyay is thus to create their ‘own space’ by choosing with their own free will the future moment and their fortune. They could express who they are, at least for a moment while they were playing. Most of their time was spent in the house without much recognition and honour to develop their identity in the public. So, in a way this digit gambling created an escape for them from the role of housewife. Moreover, this gambling could fulfil their income needs in some way and it was a mere hope of their daily survival.

As a final part, let me discuss the government policy on this gambling. According to the enacted laws I have described in Chapter 3, gambling is strongly prohibited in Myanmar. But in reality, enforcement of the law is not working as it should. Firstly, these rules and regulations do not match the real situation. For example, the punishment for taking part in any kind of gambling is imprisonment or a fine of 50 kyat (US \$0.7) which is a very low fine, compared to the current situation. And there being a strong relationship between digit dwellers and local authorities weakens the efforts of enforcement and actually, encourages the widespread use of Hna Lone Htee gambling. Here again, the average income of government staff is quite low, especially for police officers. The monthly salary of a normal police officer is only 30,000 kyats (US \$38) per month, which cannot sufficiently provide for their survival, for sure. So, accepting bribes from the digit dwellers is a no choice situation, and tends to help their economic survival in some way.

In addition, I would like to look at the role media portrays in highlighting the social issues resulting from Hna Lone Htee gambling in the society. There are a number of articles, both from printed media and online media discussing this gambling. In the article written by the author Hla Tint Swe, in *Hot News Journal*<sup>1</sup>(volume-3, No-117, 22-28 Nov, 2012), he pointed out that taking legal action on gambling pertained to the small dealers and second hand dealers, but the big digit dwellers were rarely investigated because of their strong relationship with authorities and the bribes which support the police officer's income. And he uses the article title "*Chae Lae Ma Pyote, Yae Lae Ngote Tote*" (ခါးလဲမျိုဝီတု ရဲလဲငုတ္တုတု) which means that digits gambling are running as usual and authorities are staring with blind eyes. Starting from June 1, 2011, there was a project to outlaw gambling; "*Laung Kasar Pa Pyout Yae Si Man Chat*" or "Project of taking actions to stop gambling in Myanmar"<sup>2</sup> which had been carried out according to the instructions of the president. The goal was to reduce gambling activities in Myanmar society, but it was only successful for a short time. Because of the poverty and low income status of citizens and also for government staff, no matter what the projects are, they will not be effective as long as people have ends to meet which cannot be fulfilled by their normal workload.

Another printed media highlighting digits gambling and its social impact was written in the "*Popular News Journal*"<sup>3</sup> (No.3 Volume.5, January 17, 2013), describing the daily life struggle of basic people living in the outskirts of Yangon, the formal capital. The article discusses the interaction between poor people and the mortgage shop (pawn shop) where people try to exchange their basic property for money in order to survive. And it is also emphasizes the fact that people are playing digits gambling because it is their only escape from life's struggles; winning a specific amount of money. The main point of this article is about poverty and the vicious cycle in Myanmar. And the author describes the main point of this article as, "Bank for Poor

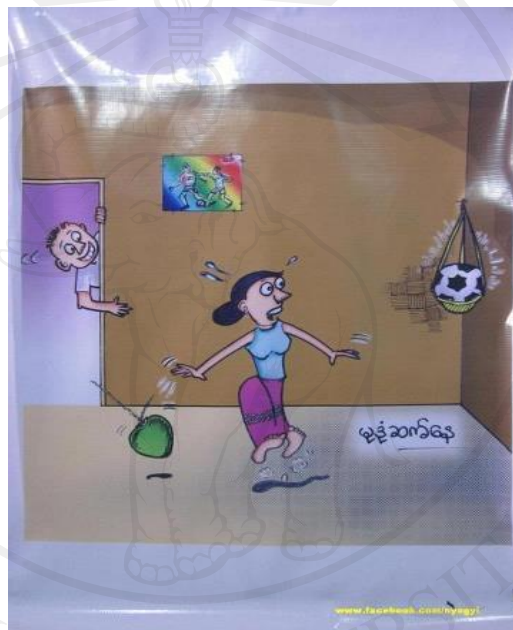
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<sup>1</sup> Hot News Journal is one of the weekly published journals in Myanmar.

<sup>2</sup> New source is from 7 Days News Journal, No.29, Volume 10, September 27, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Popular News Journal is also one of the weekly published journals in Myanmar.

People or Breath of Poor who are ready to exchange themselves as mortgage” (ဆင်းရဲသားဘဏ္ဍာကို (သို့မဟုတ်) လက်လွှဲလှူဒါန်း ဘဝကိုပင် ပစ္စည်းတရားမည့် အသက်ရှင်သံဃာ). All of the printed media articles and blogs which discussed Hna Lone Htee and the social consequences described the prevalence of the poverty, the daily struggles of Myanmar people and the horror stories of Hna Lone Htee addicts in the gambling society in various ways. Although some people are aware of the harmful social effects of this playing, the influence of Hna Lone Htee gambling is still going on in the society. And I would like to share some cartoons which reflect the current situation of Hna Lone Htee gambling in Myanmar society.



**Figure 6.1 Instead of offering Coconut to “Nat”,  
Football is being replaced (Source: Internet)**

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**Figure 6.2 A Man Asking the Police Officer where he can play Three Digits Gambling. (Source: Internet)**

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