

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

Rakhine State (formerly known as Arakan) is situated in the Bay of Bengal's coastal region in the western part of Myanmar between Bangladesh and the Rakhine Roma mountain ranges. The capital city of Rakhine is Sittwe. The word "Rakhine" comes from the pali word "Rakhasa" which means "The one who keeps his own race and morality" (Shwe Rakhine, 2007). The State is home to a number of indigenous ethnic groups such as Rakhine, Thet, Daing-Net, Mro, Khamwee, Kaman and Mramargyi people. The Rakhine ethnic group is the major population group in the State. The major religion of the Rakhine people is based on Theravada Buddhism, and all ethnic Rakhine are Buddhists. There are also 968,218 Muslim Bengali's (their other name "Rohingya") living in Rakhine State for a long time (Inquiry Commission, 2013: p.6). Location of Rakhine can be see in figure (1.1).



**Figure 1.1** Map of Rakhine State

Source: [www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/solve-10102012164304.html](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/solve-10102012164304.html)

Rakhine is one of the natural resource rich States in Myanmar with vast fertile lands and plenty of water sources. The main economy of the State is focused around aquaculture and agricultural. Along with the Irrawaddy Delta, Rakhine State is one of Myanmar's two main rice producing regions. However, the rice production has declined since 1962 when the military gained power. Since then land grabbing has increased and dams were built along the Rakhine rivers by the army (McCartan, 2013). This land confiscation and dam building have negatively impacted farmers. With regard to the aquaculture sector, the Western countries and the United States of America imposed economic sanctions including on the aquaculture sector on Myanmar in 2007. As a consequences of these sanctions, aquaculture products were unable to reach international markets and many businesses collapsed (All Arakan Students' Congress, 2014).

Moreover, as Rakhine State is close to the Bay of Bengal, it suffers from natural disaster almost every year. In May of 2008, the Nargis cyclone hit Rakhine State affecting many people. The Giri cyclone also hit Rakhine State in October of 2010. Around 260,000 people were affected and 100,000 were left homeless (Burma Rivers Network, 2014). Significantly in 2012 the biggest conflict in Rakhine State history occurred between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Bengali. According to the Inquiry Commission report (2013), the conflicts left 192 people dead, 265 injured, 8614 houses destroyed and more than 100,000 people internally displaced because of this conflict. After the conflict there has been no economic transactions between these two communities due to increased security concerns and mistrust. This loss of traditional markets threatens those who are already poor and rely on day to day income.

These problems have resulted in less development in the agriculture and aquaculture sectors, leading to less job opportunities and extreme insecurity in the region. The negative environmental and economic impacts are causing increased poverty making Rakhine State's population look for somewhere better to live. Therefore, migration has become an important factor and livelihood strategy for ethnic Rakhine. In Rakhine State only children and the old people are left. The young people have already migrated (Marshall, 2014).

There has always been a level of migration in Rakhine State. In the Dhanyawadi era around AD 327, the Rakhine kingdom was powerful, wide and developed. Ancient irrigation channels and water storage tanks for agriculture can still be seen in Rakhine. There was trading with neighboring kingdoms at that time. It is also believed that there was migration in and out of the kingdom. There was also significantly large migration during the colonial period (1826-1948) because of fighting at that time (Aye Chan, 2005). Currently Rakhine State has a net loss of people due to internal migration with most people migrating internally to Yangon. There has also been an increase in migration from Rakhine to Yangon after the building of the Rakhine – Yangon road via Pyay city (Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2013; p. 23-29).

People who want to migrate try to make contact with their friends or kin members in their chosen destination to get information about the host community, migration, job opportunities, and accommodation so that they can be well prepared before they migrate to a new place. These friends and kin members are part of their social network and can support them to get financial support for travel costs, accommodation and job information prior to their migration. No matter how difficult the economy is or the livelihood challenges they face in their every day life, they can not migrate without the support of their social network. They need their social network to ensure they have a safe transition to their new city by reducing the risks they face (Dekker and Engbersen, 2012). Ethnic people who live in borders area usually migrate to their neighboring countries (International Organization for Migration, 2013). For example, Shan, Karen and Mon, migrate to Thailand, Kachin migrate to China and Chin migrate to India. For Rakhine, they very rarely migrate to their neighboring country, Bangladeshi whose economy is not attractive and has 151 million people (Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh, 2010).

That is why Rakhine have to travel long distances and need to take an airplane flight via Yangon if they wish to migrate abroad. Some of Rakhine's population in rural areas do not have any official documents or a national identity card which is needed to apply for a passport. Conflict and internal displacement in the region is a key factor in a lack of official documents. This is one of many challenges for Rakhine's to migrate to

another country (Marshall, 2014). Those who do not have the financial and social capacity to migrate to an overseas country migrate to urban centers like Yangon where there are more job opportunities. Yangon is a commercial city and receives the most internal migrants in Myanmar (Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2013; p 56).

Furthermore, people with very limited education and job relevant skills have to work in the general unskilled labor market. Life for unskilled laborers is in the informal occupation sectors that have very challenging and dangerous working conditions. There are also a limited numbers of these types of causal jobs that leads to irregular incomes and the inability to meet their daily needs. That is why internal migrants prefer to work in a factory in an industrial zone because factory jobs are formal, provide a regular monthly income, have no education requirements and accessibility to job information is easier than for informal jobs.

## **1.2 Myanmar Industrial Development**

This study briefly explains the industrial development of Myanmar to help understand the situation rural migrants face when searching for employment in the industrial sector and enterprises of Myanmar. The industrial sector in Myanmar includes construction, manufacturing and processing, energy, electric power and mining. Myanmar had few industrial enterprises before the colonial period. There was export of some consumer goods such as earthen pots, textiles and materials for construction to some neighboring countries. The country was famous for building and repairing wooden ships. This was quite a significant activity and can be described as "the beginnings of Myanmar industrialization" (Khin Maung Kyi et al., 2000).

In the 1990's industrial zones were set up around the major cities to create a designated area for manufacturing facilities and a base of operations for investors in Myanmar. There are 18 industrial zones in Myanmar. Among the 18 industrial zones, four industrial zones are located in four districts of Yangon as it has the largest industrial production facilities in Myanmar. In addition it has the largest port which is handling about 90% of Myanmar's overseas trade. Yangon's industrial zones are the

center for most of the industries including textiles, consumer goods and food production.

Industrial zones were set up based on locations where available land existed, not based on strategic business considerations. For example, the motorcycle manufacturing factories near Pakokku township was asked to move to the Pakokku industrial zone. As a result the raw materials needed to be transported long distances along with the finished goods to the market place, making it too costly to transport goods and operate the factories. As a result the product can not compete in the market. In 2011 the industrial zones only had 50% of the land with constructed factories on them and only 30% of those businesses were operating. The rest are just vacant plots (Aung Min and Kudo, 2012). The land price in industrial zones is very high for investors adding to the cost of running a business.

Although the country is selling electricity to neighboring countries, electricity supply is not sufficient in the industrial zones. Generally, 70 percent of Myanmar's population still does not have access to power (Bangkok post, 24/11/2014). Aside from the issues of power supply another factor for businesses is the cost of transport as port clearance and transportation charges are also very high for enterprises. While the freight charges from Malaysia to Yangon Port for a 20-foot container costs 100 USD, the carriage inward charges from Yangon Port to the industrial zones (a distance of about 20 km) will cost 120-180 USD (Aung Min and Kudo, 2012: p.65). Furthermore, Myanmar businesses were operating under United States and Western economic sanctions from May 20<sup>th</sup> 2007 to May 20<sup>th</sup> 2012 (Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2014).

As a result of these difficulties Myanmar's industrial sector is not well develop when measuring it against neighboring countries. It has just small and medium industries dependent on cheap labor while focusing on export-oriented productions. As a result the industrial enterprises are running with a number of difficulties and have very thin profit margins. Therefore, factory owners provide their laborers with modest wages to meet their needs.

The Government uses the term “Cheap Labor” to invite foreign companies into the industrial zones as an industrial incentive. That is why the Government of Myanmar does not intervene and impose any policies to protect workers from low wages (Kudo, 2001). Additionally, social protection and security for workers is weak. The Social Security Law (2012) came into force on 31<sup>th</sup> August, 2012. This law mentions benefits and compensation for workers. Compensation and benefits are calculated based on workers average basic salary. For example, if a worker dies during implementing an assigned task, he will get compensation 33 times their average four months salary with installments or a lump sum according to workers family choice. Factory workers basic salaries are very low so they get low compensation and benefits. That is why, migrant factory workers face poor living and working conditions in industrial zones.

### **1.3 Statement of research problem and justification**

Basic salary for factory workers in industrial zones is approximately 35,000 – 40,000 Kyats (35 – 40 USD) per month. Cost of living is too high in Yangon so they can not rely on their basic salary, so workers work overtime. Their survival is much more dependent on overtime and bonuses. There are several kinds of bonuses such as the no absent day bonus, skills bonus, bonus for not missing any over time and meal allowances. If workers are seriously ill in bed and take a sick day, they will lose their “no absent” bonus which amounts to one third of their salary.

One of the common rules in major factories is that if someone is absent for more than three days without proper advance notification they are automatically fired. On the other hand, three months maternity leaves is provided but is only calculated on their basic salary, excluding bonus payments. If a woman does take maternity leave for more than 90 days or 3 months, she has to reapply for her job as a new employee. The most common working condition issue in the workplace is discrimination. If a worker is not clever, does not study and has poor social skills in dealing with supervisors and colleagues, they will be discriminated in their workplace.

In industrial zones, most of the internal migrants are from middle Myanmar, Ayeyarwady region and Rakhine State (Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2013).

The majority of the people from middle Myanmar and Ayeyarwady region are Burmese so they use the same Burmese language and have a similar culture. They migrate short distances and can go back to their place of origin easily. But for the Rakhine migrants, they are a minority ethnic group in Yangon, they have a different language and culture than the host community, have migrated a longer distance, come from the second poorest region and are unable to go back to their place of origin easily. That is why, Rakhine migrant factory workers are more vulnerable than other migrants in Yangon.

However, it is believed that the Rakhine migrant factory workers do not give up easily, being strong minded people with strong ethnic nationalism. When their income is meager and the situation they face is insecure, they cooperate and respond together. In cooperating, they utilize their friendships and relationships (social network), because a dynamic social network can help them. Migrants make friends and support each other while they are in a new environment and away from their place of origin. Migrants also connect and link Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) including the Labor Union to get support.

There are many Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Myanmar which undertake a variety of activities. CSOs can provide not only capacity building programs but also provide space for migrant workers to entertain and perform their traditional cultural events. Additionally, migrants can not always rely on their social network members support or CSO's so they actively learn (formal, informal and non-formal education) for their daily survival and to promote their lives.

Although there are many industrial zones in Yangon, the focus in this study is on the Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone. The zone was established in 1995, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February. It provides employment opportunities for 120,098 laborers and has 918 enterprises running a business there (Hlaing Tharyar Labor office, 2014). Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone is the biggest in terms of number of employees and enterprises. The zone is located in Hlaing Tharyar Township, two hours drive from the downtown area. The township is the most populated township in Yangon with 686,827 people and 148,695 households according to Myanmar Census 2014 (Ministry of Immigration and

Population, 2014). The township can be called a lower income workers township as many factory workers and general workers live in that township (The Irrawaddy, 5/7/2008).

This study will be conducted at “Myanmar Sunny” a shoe making factory in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone. The factory is run totally with foreign direct investment and is one of the biggest factories in Hlaing Tharyar. Around 1260 people are working at this factory. The majority are Burmese (about 790 people), with approximately one-fourth (320) of the workers are people from Rakhine and several other ethnic groups, (see table below).

Table 1.1 Ethnic groups in the factory

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Burmese	790	62.7%
Rakhine	320	25.4%
Mon	50	3.9%
Karean	20	1.5%
Shan	25	1.9%
Chin	10	0.7%
Ah Kha	17	1.3%
Lahu	23	1.8%
Lisu	5	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1260</b>	<b>100%</b>

Factory workers from this factory have gone on strike five times during 2012 to 2013 while other factories in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone have experienced far fewer strikes (one or nil). Overall, the Rakhine migrant factory workers face poor living and working conditions at Yangon. Therefore, this study will explore how Rakhine migrant factory workers utilize their social network, knowledge and learning processes to overcome their challenges and promote their life.

## **1.4 Research questions**

- 1.4.1 In what ways do Rakhine migrant factory workers in Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone utilize and create their social networks in the midst of poor living and working conditions ?
- 1.4.2 How do Rakhine migrant factory workers get support from their social networks to overcome challenges and develop their life ?

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

- 1.5.1 To explore social networks of the Rakhine migrant factory workers in Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone.
- 1.5.2 To investigate how social networks support the Rakhine migrant factory workers

## **1.6 Literature Reviews**

### **1.6.1 Social Network as a strategy to improve life**

Human beings are social animals. They not only associate with kin but also associate with non-kin to share information, help and support each other while many other animals are solitary. The more solitary animals have disappeared from the world though they are powerful and strong while mankind still exists and increases its population. As people's level of sociability increases their ability to overcome challenges and handle difficult situations also increases (Smith, 1986, cited in Bruggeman, 2008). Someone might think people are individualistic, in fact people connect and interact with others and groups such as families, friends and organizations. These connections and interactions affect the perception and action of people.

Emile Durkheim (1893, cited in Bruggeman, 2008), an early scholar in sociology, uses the term "social cohesion" which means social relationships are based on sharing ideas, norms, values and information within families, friends

and colleagues to hold themselves together. In economic anthropology, social networks are viewed as a community's property that promote wealth and well being of the community (Porte, 1993 cited in Bruggeman, 2008). On the other hand, Knoke and Kuklinksi (1982) argue social networks are the structure of relationships among actors and influenced by the location of individual actors. Mitchell (1969) reveals social networks are a link that connects people. The characteristics of social networks depend on the relationship and social behavior of the person who is involved. Social networks do not have a closed or clear boundaries.

In recent studies, many scholars have described the effectiveness of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to connect people. The internet is not merely a tool for military purposes, it has become essential for every individual in their daily life. The internet, telecommunication, has developed as a social network tool which allows millions of people to communicate with each other. Sharing information and communication is crucial in a social network (Coser, 1971).

Kyaw Kyaw Min Htut, (2012) reveals that Shan migrant workers in Chiang Mai learn basic computer skills. Learning to use a computer is not only to operate Information and Communication Technology (ICI) but it also acts to connect and make friends with new people through social media like Facebook, Line and Twitter. Moreover, migrants can connect with their friends and family members from their place of origin via telecommunications in order to maintain their social relationship, get psychological support from their kin members and gain information as well.

According to Granovetter (1973) strength of a social network depends on the emotional intensity, time spent, reciprocity and trust. The relationship will be stronger if people deal with each other with trust, emotionally, reciprocity and spend time together. But Vertovec (2004) argues that the strength of a social network depends on individual people. For example A considers B as a close

friend while B considers A just as a friend. The social network is very important and supportive to its members in many different ways. Additionally, social networks tend to promote the living and working condition of migrants when they share their resources and perform a task as a team (Zahniser, 1999). Migrant workers use social networks as a survival strategy to overcome obstacles. Networks can be categorized in a variety of ways but this study would like to focus on two different ways of social networking; the interpersonal network and the civil society organizational network.

### **1.6.2 Interpersonal network of migrant workers.**

In sociology, interpersonal networks are defined as relationships of individuals that carry information among people. Interpersonal networks are viewed in terms of nodes and ties. Nodes are described as the individual actors while ties are the links between the actors. There can be many kinds of ties between the nodes (Granovetter, 2004: p33).

Interpersonal ties are categorized into three types: *strong tie*, *weak tie*, or *absent tie*. A strong tie usually means a small groups like a family or close friends who interact closely. A weak tie means the social interactions are less likely to involve and connect strongly with each other than a strong tie (close friends). Weak ties constitute interacting with acquaintances and a friend of friends. Absent ties refers to relationships between people who are living in the same street, who know each other but not by their name and may not meet each other for a very long time. Not all social ties are equally helpful. Different kinds of ties can support different information and resources. Social ties are more effective if its members have opportunities to access useful resources and knowledge (Granovetter, 1973).

Migrants keep in touch with relatives and family members in the place of origin. Their relatives and family members give psycho-social support to reduce their loneliness. Migrant workers use the telephone to keep in touch with their families and relatives in the place of origin. Sometime they go back to their place

of origin and give a present to their kin members. When they come back they bring traditional food from their home (Amporn, 2007). Family and their relatives are very strong ties and operate as a supportive network. However, in the case of Rakhine migrant workers networks, it might be quite difficult to rely on their kinship members network because they live away from them.

So migrants rely more on their colleagues and friends who are working and living near them (Berkman, 2000). For migrant workers the nearest is the dearest and important resource. Friends and fellow migrants who came from the same place of origin assist new migrants in the way of financial, accommodation, job information before and after their migration. Later on migrants get a job and can settle down in the city with the help of their social network members (Khamphouvong, 2013). Migrant workers in Hlaing Tharyar usually live in a share house not only to support each other but also to share the living cost. If there is no over time, they have to borrow money from their colleagues (Labor Activists, 2013).

If migrant workers live and work in the same area with fellow migrants who come from the same village, they are more likely to support and look out for each other as they have a mutual understanding, they use the same language, have the same characteristics and face the same situation. This can be called a peer network. Peer networks are vitally important for factory workers because they can learn specific professional skills that cannot be taught in training institutions and survival techniques in their host destination (O'Donnell and King, 2014). Besides, migrants maintain their good behavior when they live with their fellow migrants because they dare not to miss-behave as they worry that this information will spread to their place of origin via their fellows migrants (Thuy, 2005).

However, interpersonal networks can also have a negative impact on migrants. After migrant workers finish their duty they can spend their spare time together with their fellow migrants. This may include drinking, smoking, gambling and having sex with prostitutes due to peer pressure from their social

group. Migrants find it hard to resist and do risky behavior (Huy, 2010). Migrants learn not only good things but also learn bad things from their fellow migrants by living and working together. Social networks tend to form mainly with the people who are the same class and share similar outlooks. Factory workers have to work many hours without being absent and have very limited resources. Consequently, sometimes their fellow migrants are unable to help them when they need it (Cattle, 2001, cited in Bruggeman, 2008).

Moreover, in their interpersonal networks, relationships vary and fluctuate. Today's relationship might be very good but a disagreement on the next day can cause the relationship to be broken. The interpersonal network can not always support its members equally. Members sometime can be excluded and discriminated against because of their inability to contribute within the network. Interpersonal networks have positive and negative effects on migrant factory workers. How the Rakhine migrant factory workers create, utilize and maintain their interpersonal social network to promote their living and working conditions will be explored in this study.

### **1.6.3 Civil Society Organizational networks creating social security for migrant workers**

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines Civil Society Organization as social groups which constitute formal and informal organizations such as mass-based membership organizations, indigenous peoples' organizations, faith-based organizations, as well as communities. Any organization whether formal or informal that is not part of the apparatus of government, that does not distribute profits to their directors or operators, that are self-governing, and participation is a matter of free choice is considered to be a Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Migrant workers use not only interpersonal networks but also use Civil Society Organizational networks as a strategy to face challenges and promote their living and working conditions. CSOs are broad and inclusive of all

foundations, charity groups, national and international non profit associations from civil society (Radcliffe, 1931). Clark (2003), on the other hand argues that CSOs are closed and homogeneous groups as CSOs are founded based on their members interest, values, norms, geographical factors or ethnicity. For example in the computer professional association, non computer professionals are automatically excluded from participating.

CSOs can also contribute conflict among communities. For example, a community might be in conflict because a CSOs unequal food distribution, or extreme ethnic views, religious bias or perceived unfairness in resources sharing among members or the local community. In some cases community or organizational network members do not get equal opportunities and resources. In some cases, CSOs force and encourage the community to be involved in social movements against stability (Anderson and Wallace, 2012).

There are many types of Civil Society Organizations but in general, four types of organizations are well known in Myanmar. They are Local Non-Government Organizations (LNGO), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO), UN agencies and Government founded organizations. During the military regime the Government allowed only State founded organizations. Students, teachers and government staff were forced to join and participate in State controlled Civil Society Organizations. The Government used the unlawful association law, 1908 to control and oppress CSOs including student unions, Labor unions, trade unions and advocacy groups in Myanmar (International Crisis Group, 2001).

In 2011, when the country opened up, various levels of organizations were allowed to function legally. According to available data, since 2011 there have been 127 local, 59 international non-governmental organizations and 12 donor agencies operating in Myanmar. Many of them focus on support and access to education and health care, water and sanitation, community based development projects either where the Government can not reach or when Government support is insufficient in particular areas. CSOs spend a lot of money which they receive

from local and international donors for community development projects (Local Resource Center).

CSOs have a broader role than supporting the poor, they also have potential to influence the Government regulatory agenda and business enterprises. CSOs have international and local connections. Generally they are very supportive of organizations for local people. CSOs get higher public trust than government and can especially play a vital role to check government programs. Therefore, CSOs can be viewed as an initiative in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as they interact between government and business often representing the public interest. In Myanmar, CSOs also play an important role as they seek to provide for the most vulnerable people including migrant workers.

CSOs may be part of a social movements such as the anti-global capitalism movement, political movements, the labor movement or environmental movements because they are usually initiating programs and operate as change agents for small communities. There has been 90 strikes due to low wages during May and June of 2012 in Yangon Industrial Zones. Most of the labor strikes in Hlaing Thayar industrial zone were initiatives of CSOs. Factory workers capacity and status is very low so it is difficult for them to claim their rights by themselves. Therefore, some CSOs encouraged the labor strikes and supported the workers in the social movement (Labor Activists, 2013).

Furthermore, the role of religious organizations varies across countries and regions but in Myanmar the role of religion organizations is very influential in both social and political affairs (Gil, 2008). The religious organizations including temples and churches can support not only people psychologically but also provide a space for migrants to meet a variety of people during religious ceremonies.

Moreover, there have been many ethnicity based organizations and home town organizations in Myanmar. These organizations organize festivals, religious

and culture events for their community. These events support migrant workers to maintain their cultural identity, building their ethnicity network and provide a sense of being home again in their host community. In this study, all CSOs that are closely related and support the Rakhine migrant factory workers in Hlaing Tharyar industrial Zone have been included. Rakhine Tharyar Association and Arankan National Social Organization are acknowledged in this study as these organization are ethnic based organizations and support Rakhine migrants. This study observes what sort of benefits Rakhine migrant workers receive through their cooperation and alliance with Civil Society Organizations.

## **1.7 Review of relative studies**

### **1.7.1 Shan migrant workers in Chiang Mai**

There has been a long time conflict in Shan State between the Burmese government and the Shan Independent Army. Because of this conflict, many of the houses and villages have been set on fire, people do not stay in their home with this fear leading to social and economic degradation in the region. This political tension and economic hardship causes internal displacement and transnational migration to neighboring countries including Thailand. On the other hand, the pull factor of Shan migration is important for the economic development of Thailand. Migrant workers from neighboring countries are one of the driving forces of Thailand's economy. Thailand demands cheap labor from neighboring countries and can offer a lot of job opportunities for migrant workers. Therefore, Shan people migrate to Chiang Mai the second largest developed city in Thailand for both legal and illegal job opportunities.

During and after their migration, Shan migrant workers face a lot of problems in Chiang Mai city. Under the Alien Workers Act, Shan migrant workers are treated as aliens. However, Shan always try to cope and adjust their life in a new place. There are many tactics that Shan migrant workers use as strategies to cope and promote their status. Among them, learning is one of the key survival strategies of migrant workers. Most of the Shan migrant workers

learn Thai language, culture, values and tradition. Learning Thai language allows them to communicate with their host community, business owners, coworkers and clients. They learn their cultures, values and norms from both institutional and social learning in their daily life; from media, radio, book and television channels. If they can communicate well, they can find a job more easily and also transfer to another job.

By learning, they can integrate into their local community and negotiate; reconstruct and deconstruct their identity from time to time. Sometimes, they present with a Shan identity and sometime they do not show it. Identity negotiation is important for migrant workers being a non-Thai. On the other hand, they maintain their cultural identity by organizing social and cultural events in their host society to get psychological support when they are away from their native land. Singing, dancing and playing Shan traditional music instruments brings a sense of home again (Kyaw Kyaw Min Htut, 2012)

### **1.7.2 Rural – urban migrant workers in Lao**

In the case of rural – urban migration in Lao, many sons/daughters of farmers migrate to urban areas after harvesting season. Lao up land people migrate to urban areas due to the unequal development inside the country. Rural-urban migration causes young unmarried male and females to move and participate in urban development projects. In Lao traditions, parents give farm land as their heritage equally to their children. In some families, they belong to just one acre of farm land that is unable to be shared equally with their children so some children do not received their share of any parental land. There is population pressure on agriculture resources in rural areas.

Providing to parents is good merit for Lao people. Therefore young people migrate to urban areas to search for a job to support their parents. On the other hand, some young people aged between 16 to 30 do not want to work a long day “under the sun ”, they just want to work “under shadow and the electricity”. In the city they are free from their family and old traditions. In the city they have

every convenience; running water, electricity, shop and market at every corner all day and night. After they finish their work, they can go out, no one tells them where and when they can go out, no one asks or gossip if a woman talks to a man or goes out alone to meet with a man. Their life is in a modern city. Migrating to the urban areas is not only good sons/daughters behavior of the family but also they want to achieve their desire to be modern.

In the city migrants face challenges; low income, limited benefits and job insecurity. Migrants have to seek another part time job above their full time factory work. After their duty is finished in the day time, they work another job to earn more money such as a waiter, shop keeper, providing sexual services in a bar and as a mistress for married men in order to get financial support or room rental charges. Some people study in beauty salons others study sewing. Some migrants sell clothing with credit terms inside the factory as an extra income. In spare time they go window shopping, they could not afford to buy expensive things. Migrant workers use many strategies to overcome challenges and to promote their life. (Khamphouvong, 2013)

### **1.7.3 Migrant workers Social Network at Maha Chai in Thailand**

Many of the migrant workers in Maha Chai are from Myanmar. They migrate temporary or permanently to live and search for a modest job in Maha Chai. Most of the migrant workers work in construction sites or seafood, prawn and fish-canning factories. Some of the migrant workers are working with work permits while others are working without a work permit. Their life is very insecure. They have to rely on their social network. Migrant people live far away from their family, relatives and friends and from their place of origin, they create a new social network in their host destination. Social networking starts from living and working together in a particular place, interacting with neighbors, sharing feelings and information. Friends and family are a major source of health information. Their social network affects their health related issues negatively or positively.

Most of the migrant workers can not afford to rent a room so they live in share rooms with their friends or some live with their partners. Usually their room mates are their coworkers who have also migrated from Myanmar. Their peer network is very important for them. They do social activities together; watching videos, window shopping, drinking, playing cards and visiting commercial sex workers. Migrant workers are uneducated and do not read any books so they rely heavily on their social network information. If they have some health problems they inform their close friends and ask for suggestion. If their peers also don't have the capacity to handle the issues or give the wrong message, migrants get into trouble. Even if migrants are seriously ill in bed they do not go alone to the clinic or hospital (Myint Thu and Hmwe Hmwe Kyu, 2006).

#### **1.7.4 Lahu Female street vendor's social network in Chiang Mai**

Lahu are one of the hill dwelling people in Chiang Rai's highland area. They use shifting cultivation, opium plantations in the hill regions and hunting and gathering in forests for their living. Usually, Lahu has an big family because they need Labor for agriculture works. Central Thai government forces them to cultivate dry-rice and other cash crops instead of opium plantations without providing any financial assistance and knowledge on how to cultivate dry-rice in the hilly regions. It was difficult for Lahu people to sustain their livelihood as there is an income difference between opium and rice plantations. As a result, Lahu people migrated to Chiang Mai in groups or as individuals. Among them, some of them are female. Lahu female migrants work as wage labors or street vendors in Chiang Mai markets. When Lahu married female migrants work as street vendors in Chiang Mai, their husband and children are left in Chiang Rai hilly region. Their husbands have to work in the fields and feed cattle and are unable to take care of the children so their kin members take care of their children. Young adult daughters of Lahu female migrants have also been cared for by their kin members, protecting them from sexual assaults by villagers while their parents are away. Kinship network in the place of origin is very supportive for Lahu female migrant street vendors.

Selling or trading in the market is not a Lahu traditional business so they have to learn it from their friends and friend of friends. In order to get a selling space in Chiang Mai they have to deal with authority and have to develop good relationships with them. Selling in the street is mobile. The market days in Chiang Mai are dynamic and changing such as Monday, Sunday and Friday market and so on. So market information is vital for street vendors. They can get information from their peers. Street vendors are afraid of theft. A thief can steal their products for sale while they are away for a while or seeing a doctor. Their peers, street vendors, take care of their belonging while they go away. Their interpersonal relationships are important.

Moreover, Lahu female street vendors mostly do not have enough finance to run a business so they take goods with credit term from the big traders. Reciprocity and trust is crucial to get credit from the big traders. Additionally, they make friends with their customers and build trust in order to get regular customers. Therefore street vendors try to strengthen their social network in order to survive at the market place, success in their business and for their children in the place of origin (Fujii, 2010).

Overall, Kyaw Kyaw Min Htut (2012) said that Shan migrant workers in Chiang Mai learn Thai language to interact with local people and avoid misunderstanding. Khamphouvong (2013) reveals that internal migrant workers in Lao work overtime to get extra income in order to overcome their life challenges. Migrant workers from Myanmar in Maha Chai use peer networks to get health related information and medicine (Myint Thu and Hmwe Hmwe Kyu, 2006). Additionally, Lahu female street vendors use social networks to get a selling space in the market and market information (Fujii, 2010). This is similar to how Rakhine migrant workers in Yangon learn Burmese language to interact with their local community and the support Rakhine migrant factory workers in Yangon gain from their social network.

## 1.8 Conceptual Framework

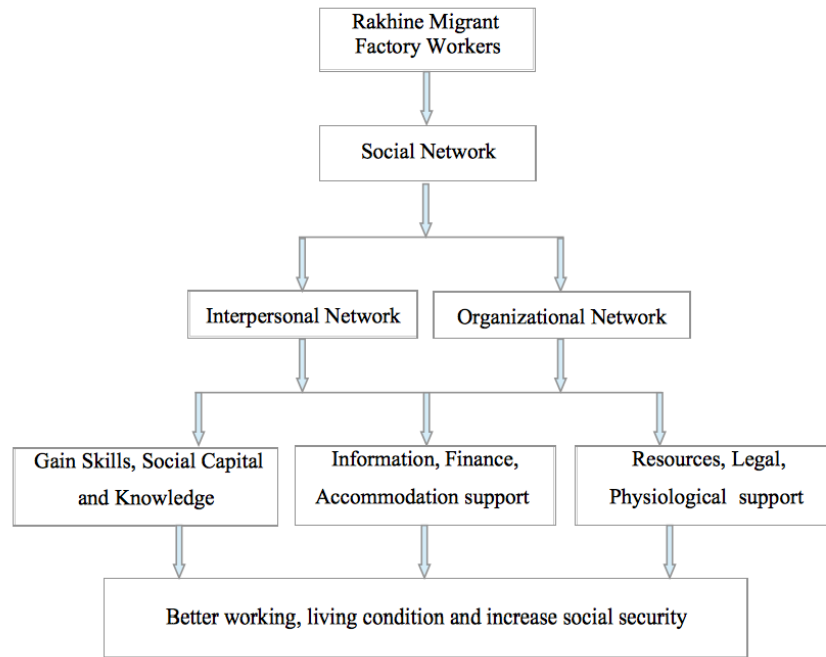
Rakhine migrant workers use social networks as a main strategy to overcome challenges and promote their living and working conditions. Social networks are in three different forms:

- 1) Interpersonal network comprised of kin members, coworkers, friends and neighbor
- 2) Civil Society Organizational network includes home town associations, Rakhine association, religious based organization and Labor Union
- 3) Learning as a network; migrants study for their survival through formal, informal and non formal education with the help of their friends.

Their interpersonal network supports financial, accommodation and information. Civil Society Organizational Network provides physiological, resources and security and learning that brings knowledge, skills and social capital. All of these can enhance living and working conditions of Rakhine migrant workers.

This study will analyze the way Rakhine migrant workers create, utilize and maintain their social networks to overcome challenges and promote their living and working conditions in Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone. Below figure shows the conceptual framework of this study.

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**Figure 1.2** Conceptual framework

## 1.9 Research methodology

### 1.9.1 Research site

There are many factories in Myanmar and most of them are located in urban areas such as Yangon, Mandalay, Meikhtila, Monywa, Mawlamyaine and Pyay. Although there are many factories throughout Myanmar, this study focuses on one particular factory in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone. This study investigated Rakhine migrant factory workers from “Myanmar Sunny” shoe making factory. This factory was chosen as the study site because the factory is classified as a large-scale enterprise according to the Private Industrial Law of Myanmar (1990). This is because it uses a labor force of more than 101 people and uses more than 50 (Horse Power) machine power. The factory provides very low basic salaries of 30,000 Kyats (30 USD) per month. Employees from that factory have been on strike five times to get more salary during 2012 to 2013 while other factories in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone had either one or no strikes. The factory only employs those who are living in a town near the factory.

The studied factory is located in Twin Thin Taik Wun U Tun Nyo street in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone (2), Yangon region. It was opened on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1995 and is fully funded by Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Japan. It produces high quality formal shoes of around 1600 pairs per day. All finished goods are formal leather shoes and exported to European and East Asia countries. Leather, raw materials and high tech machines are imported from overseas countries. The factory products (shoes) are not sold in the local market.

The factory provides employment opportunities for 1260 people; 80% of the employees migrated from various part of Myanmar. Among 1260 people, the majority of the people are Burmese, approximately 320 people are from Rakhine and a few other ethnic minorities. The factory employs those who are physically strong enough to work, lives in a the town near by the factory, have attained or above at the age of 18 and has a labor registration card from Labor Exchange office. A labourer from this factory can earn approximately around 100,000 Kyats (100 USD) salary per month including bonuses.

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**Figure 1.3** Map of Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone and Township

Source: General Administration Department

### 1.9.2 Level of analysis

This study focuses on a micro level analysis and uses two types of approaches; individual and organizational level. The analysis includes how migrant factory workers create, utilize and maintain social networks with colleagues, friends and kin members. Also this study researcher analyzed how Rakhine migrant workers extend their social network with CSOs like the Labor Union and Rakhine Tharyar Associations.

### **1.9.3 Population and the selection of participants**

The factory manager (a friend of this study researcher) was the gate keeper or important person to connect with Rakhine migrant factory workers. To gain interviews with factory workers, the researcher requested the factory manager to select two Rakhine migrant who have been working for many years in the studied factory and can share information among the Rakhine factory workers. The researcher explained to the Rakhine migrant factory workers about the objectives of the study and gave contact information of the researcher in order to build trust, mutual understanding and to reduce fear on use of their personal information. The pilot interview was conducted with these two Rakhine migrant factory workers and then interview questions were modified. After this the two migrant factory workers, factory manager and researcher set up a time schedule to interview a further nine Rakhine migrant factory workers.

Inside the factory, there are small groups of people who are working in different sections so interviewees were selected from different groups and different sections of the factory. In selecting the nine migrant factory workers the following criteria was used:

- 1) education level,
- 2) work position,
- 3) working experience and
- 4) sex balance.

In Accordance with the participant selection criteria, nine Rakhine migrant factory workers, one manager, one supervisor, one representative from Rakhine Thahaya Association, Arakan Social Network Organisation and Rakhine Youth Association were interviewed. There were 14 participants in total.

#### **1.9.4 Data Collection**

This study used qualitative research methods to collect data, to understand more about how Rakhine migrant workers create and utilize their social networks to overcome their challenges and promote their lives in the midst of poor living and working conditions.

##### **- Participatory Method**

This study used participatory research methods to observe Rakhine migrant workers; the way they communicate, share resources among themselves, their group interactions with other groups and how they enjoy their life. The study researcher studied their participation at social activities inside and outside the factory such as playing football, playing guitar or sitting in a tea shop or restaurant. This included chit chat in their free time and spending their days off with them. This method was used after the introduction of the researcher to migrant workers from the factory manager and before conducting semi-structure interviews.

##### **- Semi-structure Interview**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine Rakhine migrant factory workers. There was a research assistant who supported the researcher in note taking and collecting necessary documents for the study during field works in Yangon. The researcher also noted down important key words and made recordings with the approval of the participants. Mostly, the interviews were conducted at late evenings after working hours when migrant workers had free time. The interviews were conducted at the participants home, near the studied factory or at a tea shop in Hlaing Tharyar where it was more convenient for migrant workers to be interviewed and then go back to their home. The researcher facilitated the whole interview and did not go beyond the key focus of the study. The participants shared their personal information and experience without worry at the interview. Participation of the participants was high because of the factory manager's support and their willingness to participate. A semi-structured interview method was the most applicable data collection method for this study.

## 1.10. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into six chapters. Chapter I is organized to provide a clear introduction and explanation on how this study was designed, what the initial interest of this study was, who the target population is, the focus of the study and how the study approaches its target population. Additionally, this chapter explains the connections between context and theoretical concepts. It reviews and discusses the applied social, cultural and learning theories, conceptual frameworks and research methodology that is used in data collection.

In Chapter II, the study mainly provides an overview of Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone and the studied factory where the Rakhine migrant factory workers work to provide context information. This chapter also provides insight on how the industrial zone operates and how a factory in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone manages their business including its history, rules, regulation and activities in the factory sections.

In Chapter III, the study explains the background of the Rakhine migrant factory workers including their life in their place of origin, living and working conditions at Hlaing Tharyar. In order to understand their challenges and problem not only in their host destination but also in the place of origin. In addition the chapter provides information on how migrants migrated to Yangon, how they found a job in the studied factory and what are the challenges in their life.

In Chapter IV, this chapter will examine how Rakhine migrant factory workers in Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone utilize and create their social network in the midst of poor living and working conditions. It also explores how migrant workers learn to overcome the struggles in their life and how learning functions to strengthen their social network and promote their life.

In Chapter V, this chapter explains how Rakhine migrant factory workers get support from their social network to overcome challenges and develop their life.

In Chapter VI, the conclusion chapter, mainly discusses the key findings of the thesis and its linkages with theoretical concepts. It also provides an understanding of the limitations of the study and suggestion for further study in this area.



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