

CHAPTER 2

Reviews of Theories, Concepts and Related Studies

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the main theories, concepts and studies related to the present enquiry into bride price practices. I will start by discussing how the meaning of bride price practice has changed in the context of Chin. I will then review the impact of modernization on the role of women and its impact on the bride price. Also, I will address the notion of bride price as a sphere of gender power negotiations by focusing on property relations. Finally, I will briefly review bride price studies that may be relevant to this study.

2.2 Multiple Meanings of the Bride Price in the Historical Context of Chin

Bride price and dowry are different types of marriage payments uniquely practiced by each sub group of Chin. Their understanding and interpretation is unique according to different schools of thoughts such as by anthropologists or missionaries. Trends around this practice have fluctuated over time so the process of meaning making can be said as it is unfixed, fluid, and ever changing. As the meanings and functions have been changed, the way the bride price is practiced is changing. Although some elements and meanings have been left out, some new functions and meaning appeared. To understand these changes, it is important to reinvestigate studies on the Chin from different schools of thought but centering on the bride price subject.

Western anthropologists are believed to have started studying the Chin later than their counterpart missionaries¹ (Rogers 2012: 105). N. E. Parry's (1976) ethnography represents a deeply colonially oriented approach, but it useful in exploring the cultural practices and customs among the Lakher or also known as Mara Chin, including bride price payment, which contributed to existing understandings of these, particularly placing them within structures of colonial administration. Parry noted that "the great aim of every Lakher (Mara Chin) is to raise his status in society by marrying a girl from

¹ Benedict Rogers noted the first contact of British with the Chin was in 1790.

a higher clan than his own, as thereby he gains the protection of his wife's more powerful and influential relations" so that the "competition for high-born brides that has led to the very high marriage prices in vogue" (Parry 1976: 233). A similar account is provided in Sakhong's work "In Search of Chin Identity" emphasizing how important it is to marry a daughter of noble for socio-political status adjustment (Sakhong 2008).

The notion of "cycle-in-principle" was debated by Leach (1969) and Lehman (1970) with regards to the Chin's underlying rules on marriage regulations. In general, both of them agree that the Chin have no ideology of circulating women for structural and functional aspects. Lehman (1970) argues that the Chin primarily chose who to marry for political alliances, following what he termed, "unconscious underlying rules" rather than preferring cross-cousin marriage although this is often prescribed in custom. According to his terms "a prescriptive rule" was much practiced among the Chin although Leach had not been aware of this.

Ritually and symbolically, Lehman's "feast of merit" is relevant to Sakhong's classification of the Chin social strata where he describes man and his clan members wish to marry a daughter of noble men. According to this custom no feast or festival should be organized by anyone in the community because there is a normative perception that this would be akin to violating the societal members (ZTC 2010). Contravening this is thought to bring about a curse from spirits. Also, this feast of merit is a fundamental measure of social status ranking system. Only members of noble groups are seen as those are allowed to conduct feasts and festivals.

Membership to a noble group could be acquired in two ways - either through inheritance or through a person's own achievement. In practice, becoming a noble member was almost impossible for an ordinary person as this would necessitate enormous economic capital to conduct sacrificial feasts and ceremonies. In other words, this prescription could be embraced by existing noble groups whilst there was little chance for ordinary people to partake as three generations worth of effort would be needed to marry daughters of noble men, consistently, before any chance of change. The most likely way for the ordinary was sharing the fame and the nobility of noble members by relating through what is known in Hakha terms as *nau zing dangh* festivity. This entails inviting the wife of a noble man to give a name to an ordinary new born

baby girl, and that the bride price will be offered to the name giver (in this case a wife of noble man) when that baby girl would get married.

Butler's work touches on notions of the "functionalistic purpose" and "ritualistic purpose" of practices, and points to Levi-Strauss' contention of "a universal structure of regulating exchange that characterizes all systems of kinship, by exchanging women" (Butler 1999: 49). Following her assertion, it can be argued that the symbol and the value of the bride, the items put in bride price, as well as the ritualistic procedures of the Chin, all contribute to an exchange of class status and wealth as well as "consolidating the internal bonds, the collective identity, of each clan differentiated through the act" (Butler 1999:50). In the case of Chin, the bride price is a means to exchange or shared the fame or nobility by ordinary members.

In the Chin missionary school of thought, the practice of bride price is seen as a "primitive" tradition that disturbs Chin development and hinders their path to civilization and modernization, pointing to a need to "liberate" Chin women in traditional understandings of this term. This concern was articulated by Tha Sung (1995) where it is explained that the position and the status of Chin women in society was inferior and was even somewhat lacking in personhood compared with their male counterparts due to the unintended consequences of their bride price payment. The bride could be beaten and treated as a slave, and there is a Chin saying which explains "*nupi velh phung, darkhuang cumh phung*" ("it is customary to beat a wife and it is customary to beat a gong"). The status of Chin women in the family was at the bottom as they were subordinated in decision making because "*nupi bia in bia thlu hlah, siapi ki in lam thlo hlah*" (as one cannot pave the way with a mithun horn, one should not take a wife opinion to make decision. Tha Sung thus pointed out that Chin women were not allowed to marry who they liked following their independent choice and in fact often the bride was forced to marry and to an extent sold to the groom.

In her work, Tha Sung (1995) has also addressed the Chin customary law of inheritance transaction schemes, which oppresses Chin women on multiple levels. She discussed the Chin customary law that barred women from receiving any inheritance from their parents, and explained that this is due to there being a perception that risks could arise with regards to the property potentially bringing conflict over resources among two kinships in cases where the responsibility for such resources or property

could not be clearly defined. She also praised missionary workers for liberating and rescuing Chin women from “primitive” cultural treatment. This is because traditionally Chin women’s life was primarily focused on working hard on the farm, and staying at home bearing children to increase kin members to generate wealth and then be able to climb the social ladder. However she pointed to how with the advent of missionaries Chin women started having opportunities to attain modern education not only in theology but also in the secular sphere.

In the narrative text of the “History of Christ for Chin in One Century”, also known as CCOC (Christ for Chin in One Century), its authors problematize bride price practice among the Chin, and challenge in the politics of conversion as part of the missionary agenda. The western missionary Cope once also commented on bride price problems in the Siyin area of Tidim saying that these could not be solved immediately but needed a longer time to its deep rooted cultural ties (ZTC 1999: 31). The CCOC report thus maintains that helping Chin to abandon some “troublesome” cultural practice like bride price belongs on Western missionaries’ long-term agenda. This includes facilitating people’s change of clothes worn, hygiene practices and vice versa. Bride price is particularly seen as deeply rooted in a backward society. Thus, Sum (2012) and Suantak (2007) agree that abandon-bride-price-work could be much effective when missionary work is carried out by Chin themselves. This type of missionary is called by Pau (1988) the “Indigenous Missionary” and explained as a case where the Chin will missionize the Chin.

In his evaluation of CCOC work, Pau recommended that missionary mandates should be bound to three key aspects of faith, the socio-economic development agenda, and the political sphere (Pau 1988: 290-291). He strategized CCOC aims into two components – internal and external growth. Internal growth is a model adapted from the New Testament that enlarges the Church “through fellowship groups, theological education, informal theological education for lay persons, Christian Education, home visitation, care and counseling and small groups” (Pau 1988; 290). External growth is based on setting up indigenous churches in mission fields with a strong social engagement. Some of the social engagements include advocacy efforts towards abandoning or abolishing some ritual practices such as bride price practices. Such efforts underline the threat of sustainability of conversions in a long-term framework,

and in the short-term point to solving economic hardships by not needing to pay costly bride price.

However in the Chin missionary record book called Chin Church History (ZTC 2012), a more insightful inquiry is raised on what has reduced harmony within relationships between Chin men and women today and made cases of divorce widespread although the bride price was no longer exercised. The authors assertion is worth quoting at length: “[D]uring the period when we had dowry or bride price, marriage was stable and families were well-established” but “[We] are unable to utilize ‘freedom’ and ‘liberation’ in regards of equality among men and women” (ZTC 2012: 343). In fact, the Chin nowadays invest more on artifacts such as costly wedding rings than the bride price and aiming to conduct a holy matrimony but several young members from economically disadvantaged groups tend to elope more and thus avoid the bride price. The bride price originally was meant for the Chin to symbolize love and enclose within it the acceptance and recognition of both parties on the bride and the groom’s side.

Spiro (1975) has paid close attention to the concept of Burman marriage and its dower² practice. This has different meaning and function from the Chin’s bride price but is hypothetically relevant in any understanding looking beyond mainstream Burmanization. It is possible to contest the nature of political interests behind both the Chin’s bride price and the Burman’s dower by reviewing Spiro’s ethnographic work. The notion of bride price is crucial for the rite of marriage ceremony for the Chin. Dower on the other hand, as Spiro (1975) defined, is the property provided and brought to the marriage by the family of, and brought to the marriage by the groom, and is similarly essential for Burman who attach to traditional type of marriage. Dowry was also exercised by Burman but mostly among urban elite members, but dower stand as an essential element in the marriage market.

Following his in-depth inquiry into 16 marriages in Yeigyi in the central part of Myanmar, Spiro (1975) explained that dower in Burman society presented the economic and social prestige of a bride and her family in the society. If dower was offered in

² Some notes on Spiro’s (1975) specific terminology. Dowry is the property provided by the family of, and brought to the marriage by the bride. Dower is the property provided by the family of, and brought to the marriage by, the groom; bride wealth/bride price refers to property offered by the family of the groom to the family of the bride, and groom wealth to property offered by the family of the bride to the family of the groom (page 92).

minimal amount or unpaid this was seen as conferring no social value to the bride (“*tanbou mashibu*”) and equated to a public declaration which is meant to be that the bride was not virgin and less worthy. According to Spiro (1975), the Burman marriage theory “confers upon the husband exclusive rights to his wife’s sexuality, and since her sexuality has important social value, it is for these rights that the wife (according to these villagers) can command something of value – the dowry – in return” (Spiro 1975: 101). Also, in another measure, dowry payment reflects the status of the bride’s parents or family. He gave three reasons: “first, her ascribed status is derived from the achieved status of her parents. Second, since her parents raised and trained her, they must also take credit or blame for her achieved qualities. Third, it is her parents and brothers who, by their surveillance, are responsible for her sexual probity” (ibid). Therefore, under offered or unoffered dowry, it “would constitute a serious threat to their (the bride family) social worth”.

In this way the Chin bride price has unique symbolical value in its specific context, time and among the agents involved. It can be noted that the value of the Chin’s bride price practice is conflicting with that of the Burman dowry although it initially served as solidarity, kin networking and class stratification. The bride price is thus no longer sufficient to fix and homogenize the meaning of the Chin practice.

2.3 Family Change as Negotiating the Role of Women in Interfamily Relationships

Broadly speaking, the family is regarded as a major social institution and the center of a person's social activity. The function of family is described by Gamble as to produce and reproduce persons, biologically and/or socially through sharing material substances, giving and receiving of care and nurture, moral obligation and sentimental ties. In a classical understanding of the making of family, the role of women is essentially put as to reproduce new offspring and taking care of its members’ affair in a domestic sphere. It is similar to “the Victorian notion of family and domesticity as the keystone of society with the women as wife, mother, nurturer and ‘Angel in the House’ predominated” (Gamble 2000: 228).

However, contemporary studies on the family and the role of women in the family have shifted into a more critical direction. Feminists have challenged the notion of family as “the very locus of women’s oppression and of all meaningful personal life,

as well as the source of male power and means of socializing children” (ibid). Nam (2004) also defines a family as a social unit created by blood, marriage, or adoption, which can be described as nuclear (parents and children) or extended (encompassing other relatives) but also recognizing couples cohabitation and their children.

According to Nam’s (2004) analysis of family, which is based on a standard demographic approach and the genealogical approach, the single dimension of family identification tends to be outdated because it explicitly excluded common law partnerships, same sex partnership, single parents and adoption. This strongly challenges the normative truths and common sense as well as reminds us, as Tam (2008) puts it, that “theoretical constructs as being primarily patriarchal and universalist assumptions that ignore the particular experiences of females ... whereby the female is subsumed under what have been mostly male norms” (Tam 2008: 27).

Thompson and Walker’s (1995) study on the family is also relevant to help rethinking the understanding and methodologies behind the subject of family. By developing Osmond and Thorne’s model, they paid a particular attention to studying family and suggested five themes to reconsider: family as social construction of gender, paying attention to socio-historical context in the analysis of gender, commitment to gender equality and social change, the centrality of women’s experiences and questions regarding unitary notions of “family”. By centering the role of women in the family they agreed with Mederer’s research finding that much of household categorization is based on the social construction of gender but it also indicates gender identity, alerting conflict among family members and revealing gender inequality in society. For women, “Breadwinning is not just an activity, but contested, negotiated, and renegotiated meaning systems that define the boundaries of gender” (Thompson and Walker 1995: 851). According to my literature review, less attention is paid to the dimension of power in family studies looking at gender division of labor as well as in economic theory (Thompson and Walker 1995 et al Blumberg, 1988; Chafetz, 1988; Coleman, 1988; Huber, 1988; Wolf, 1988).

According to the report of OECD in 2010, the processes of industrialization, modernization, capitalist development and globalization have brought about change to family structures and increased the power of women. These changes in families are directly related to changes in women’s work, and the educational attainments which

shifted the status and power of women in the family. The higher educational attainments were obtained by women, the better economical capital they possessed, but divorce and single parenthood followed at times as consequences. At the same time, people generally started to get married later also due to increasingly opting to establish themselves in the labor market before founding a family. At the same time, more women chose to have fewer children or to delay child bearing or to remain childlessness.

Contrary to women in OECD countries, women in developing countries are in need of distancing themselves from a grand western feminist narrative. Kurian (2000) has challenged the role, the marginality and power struggle of Indian women as so-called third world women and shown that their experiences are in a sense stereotyped under the “dominance of patriarchal attitudes and the complexity of caste, class and religious identities” (Kurian 2000: 77). In her work she has shed light on the impact of dowry practices impact working class Indian women to social security vulnerability and even documented cases of suicide. Although such dowry practices were initially exercised among upper caste people, they were later “adopted by other castes and religious communities”. In the Indian context, she argues, women are treated as commodities of culture, and act as enablers of wealth and status transaction between two families. Thus, albeit this practice was not originally about economic exchange it has now been transformed into a political issue, which situates, signifies and reflects power between men and women in a broadly vertical understanding of such relations within society.

Another interesting study was done on family and the changing roles of women in the Laos context by Bounluntay (2012). It provides a useful understanding of the ways in which developing world women in urban contexts are benefiting from changing economic settings and, at the same time, are challenged in domestic and public spheres. The government of Laos’ adoption of New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986 represents according to the author the country’s entry into a modern world or globalization, done largely in order to welcome other countries’ trade and investment. Following the review of Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2011, Bounluntay (2012) noted that after the new model was put in place in Laos the numbers of working women significantly increased. This was largely due to acquiring “more decision-making on

their lives and, be able to support themselves” and their families, whilst in parallel “many of them have more access to proper education and more opportunities to improve skill and gain knowledge through a variety of vocational training and courses” (Bounluntay 2012). She demonstrated that the role of Laos women, especially the single women she studied, was not limited only to the domestic sphere, but more engaged in the public sphere. The author also pointed out that whilst the roles of women are changing as affected by modernization and globalization a much stronger institutional support is needed to support women, especially in her opinion single mothers.

It should be noted that this study was conducted in Vientiane, thus in an urban context which may have different characteristics from a rural area. It is, on the other hand, controversial to agree with her interpretation, which sees the new Laos context as “a reflection of the better condition of women’s livelihoods and improved gender equality”. I shall review gender relations more in the next section.

2.4 Bride Price as a Sphere of Gender Power Relations

Anthropologists have often studied gender as social difference, and looked at inequality and power imbalance between persons in societies by examining the relationship of maleness and femaleness rather than trying to answer ‘what is gender really?’ (Eriksen 2010). In this anthropological dogmatic notion, Eriksen posits two different ways to look at gender difference. The first level, and a customary way, is to look at “biological difference between men and women”. The other level is focusing on how a certain human society has “conceptualized”, “conceived”, “distinguished” and practiced gender socially and culturally. The bride price practice is in this sense a significant practice which entails a gender sphere that a particular society has constructed, with crucial variation among each person, kin and family members in the society.

Before the emergence of feminist anthropology in the early 1970s (Eriksen 2010), gender was reportedly neglected, including by famous anthropologist Malinowski who has been praised among other things for his detailed ethnography in Trobriand society. According to the critique Malinowski was lacking in awareness on women’s institutions and their function in *kula* ring exchange, and instead “exaggerated

the contribution of men” to the reproduction, the structural and functionalism of that Trobriand society.

Overall in the study of bride price, together with that of dowry since 1970s, classical anthropologists paid much attention to its structural and functional perspective. Bride price and at times dowry are sometimes viewed as a means to adjust one’s social status and exchange wealth. However the detail of such practices varies in different societies and cultures. For instance, the practice of hypergamy³ in India is intended to gain spiritual benefit by marrying a Brahman groom (see Kressel 1977). The Kachin in Myanmar exercise the bride price as a way for the groom to form an alliance with the bride’s father’s to increase his political ranking status. The case of Burmese dower and dowry (similar in function also to Thai bride price or wealth) is used to negotiate the bride family’s wealth and the groom’s status (Anderson 2007). Thus, it appears as a symbol of class regulation and a mechanism of status negotiation (Spiro 1975; Kressel 1977; Anderson 2007).

In his bride price study in two Israeli towns and Arab Eastern Muslim society, Kressel remarks on “the social setting of bride price and the key to its existence is social differentiation” (Kressel 1977:449). He argues that a symbolic dimension of the marriage payment – bride price and dowry in particular – has been ignored by Western researchers due to scholars’ assumptions of social orders within the framework of culture. He claimed that the pattern of bride price payment was ambiguous due to economic trends, and rightly argued also that the meaning of bride price was not solely for marriage “stability”. Yet, the literature he presented identified bride price as a mechanism that ensured maintenance of the social order, especially in a patriarchal society. He provided a hypothetical explanation saying that as “the bride price testifies, by its sizes, to the effort invested in preventing a divorce”. Also, in case of divorce in patriarchal and patrilineal regime, “the children are left motherless, and since, when they are small, the dependence of their mother is a hardship” (Kressel 1977:442). In contrast to matrilineal or matriarchal systems, children remain with their mother and her kin group, thus “the stability of the family is presented as a social function” and not a required material arrangement. However it is also seen as a necessary material exchange

³ The term ‘Hypergamy’ is used to indicate a marriage to an equal or a higher social prestige group or caste, commonly found in India.

due to the fragile nature of social organization. Kressel (1977) had cautiously noted that the discovery of bride price was commonly found in matrilineal societies but he commented that this does not give “any theoretical revision, but only to a refinement of the explanation”.

On the other hand, in economics literature the bride price practice is interpreted as a wealth transaction or property transaction at a time of marriage. Papps (1983) has illustrated this through a model of magnitude showing how the amount paid for bride price depends on “the women’s fecundity” in a pyramid shape where at the top is found the virgin, in the middle the widow and the horizon is reserved for divorced women. Women’s education is also considered as an influential factor to bride price magnitude with the expectation of the outcome or quality of the marriage. In her demonstration with an “economic supply and demand” curve, women on the top are the most attractive for the groom and his family and will lead to a higher bride price. However, she acknowledges that these models are uncertain and simply provide a starting point for predictions, remaining ambiguous for empirical purposes.

Anderson (2007) also proposes to conduct empirical testing for his discussion of the bride price payment. In his work, the social arrangement of gender plays a crucial role and influences the magnitude, pattern and trends within economic theory. His focus on bride price is thus largely focused on the property aspect. He explains that some ancient civilizations the like Babylonians, Egyptians and Hebrews originally practiced bride price but shifted into dowry practice due to demographic shift of urbanization, industrialization and modernization. Thus, social stratification has been increased and even changed. Anderson talks about “the marriage squeeze” phenomenon, where population growth brings about a rise in dowry amounts for women. Women and their families thus compete for a higher price with a high earning or high status potential husband. That adversely affects the bride price in the marriage equilibrium and dowry thus becomes inflated. At this point, the groom’s status is much more important than his economic earning potential. With the increasing diversification of the labor market due to modernization and industrialization, the property scheme was shifted from hierarchal inheritance property to private property.

Shelegel and Eloul (1988) also discuss how the property inheritance scheme was directly related to colonization, industrialization and modernization. They prove this hypothesis with data coded from societies in the Standard Sample of 189 preindustrial societies. In their work they claim that bride price practice was commonly exercised in a society with a common property system, while dowry is found in a private property society. The hypothesis derives from an economic perspective that sees marriage payment or wealth transaction accounts as one type of property relation. The authors note that common property systems often changed into ones of private property once the society engaged into a modern world or system, and the division of property also changed, bringing about complex and fluid change to life in such societies.

The development school of thought has paid attention to bride price culture as one of the root causes of poverty as it symbolizes as an economic form of gender oppression, marginalizing girls and women socially and can be used as a means of male power which negatively discriminates women as well as working class males (Hague and Thiara 2009 et al Matembe 2004; Ndira 2004; Oguli Oumo 2004).

Hague and Thiara's (2009) successfully argue that the bride price practice was commercialized despite maintaining its traditional value, although women interviewed in their research appear to have been largely homogenized. In the Ugandan context this practice seems akin to "buying and selling" brides. This took different forms in rural and urban contexts. In the former case cattle could for example be used as bride price, while in the latter houses and cars could be used. Due to the lack of wealth, many working class men opted to migrate to other countries in order to pay the bride price. Hague and Thiara document how some wealthy men explored extra-marital affairs, which contributed to domestic violence and to the spread HIV to their wives and children. In some extreme case, some women who faced domestic violence could not go back to their birth families since they were unable to repay her bride price to the husband (Hague and Thiara 2009 et al Matembe 2004 and Ndira 2004). In a way then such women ended up in hidden places within their societies. Since widows have no rights to inherit property from their deceased husband, economic problems and social stigmatization appeared and landed them on the bottom layers in society. Overall, the cases that these scholars have brought to light have invited us to ask why there is no, or

little, social institution that supports women in this context in Uganda. But it is also possible that Hague and Thiara simply do not provide enough information.

Moore (1990), a feminist anthropologist, has understood women's role in bride price practices as having "very little say in these transactions, and also appear to profit very little by them as individuals" (Moore 1990: 70). Radcliffe-Brown (1950) (cited in Moore 1990) noted that, "*in personnam* (rights in the wife's labor and domestic duties) and *in rem* (rights of sexual access)" were included in the characteristic of the rights and obligation of the marriage payments. She has given Burman's (1984) (cited in Moore 1990) example of South Africa's *lobola* suggesting that women's ability to gain custody and maintenance was influenced by this bride price system because of a "legislated disruption of African family" which formed a part of the apartheid system (ibid). In summary, Moore is suggesting that it is critical to study bride price practices from women's point of view.

2.5 Related Studies

There were no existing studies looking specifically at bride price studies in the Chin context at the time of writing this thesis except theologians. Many bride price studies are from other contexts around the world and mostly studied by anthropologists and economists. In the interest of this study I will look at both general and Chin-specific work.

Among the overall bride price studies, the research done in Uganda by Hague and Thiara (2009) is the most relevant with regards to the impact of bride price on women. They highlight how this can lead not only to poverty but also to the spread of HIV. They argue that this is because this practice also significantly impacts working class men. When they are unable to afford bride price this can be a push factor for migration to urban areas or other industrial countries. On the other hand, wealthy men also have manipulating bride price by engaging polygamy or having extramarital affair and spreading HIV to his family members. Despite the primary concept of the bride price is positive, modernization has resulted in the practice being subverted and destructive. Statistically, 61% of Thiara and Hague's interviewees agreed that the bride price practice has more negative impacts on their society than positive impacts so agree to abolish it.

In line with an economical explanation, Papps' (1983) work is helpful to understand the economics of bride price and how the social characteristics play crucial to determine the volume and magnitude of bride price. She explains the push and pull factors of bride price with the supply and demand curve. Among the factors she put, women's sexuality and education are highlighted as important to count the magnitude of the bride price. This is because the more women are educated the higher bride price is. She maintains that bride price is not a slave price by drawing on theoretical explorations, which she puts forward as needing testing on the ground.

Anderson's (2009) work is extremely useful to understand a variety of issues surrounding the prevalence of bride price and dowry and has widely informed my research. This includes the magnitude of marriage payments, social characteristic that determines the magnitude of bride price, the relation of property and marriage payment, the rise and decline of marriage payments due to the demand of women's labor in agricultural work, and the bride price impacts to social welfare of women. He explains that bride price shifts into dowry systems as society becomes more urbanized and industrialized. Anderson also reminds us that economists have not yet studied bride price and dowry as a structural transformation.

Similarly, Schegel and Eloul (1988) studied marriage payments by balancing women's labor, property circulation and status maintenance. The explanation is given based on considering the social and economic structure of the society. In this vein, they argue the bride price "circulates property among the households, thus removing goods from family access ... dowry ... keep property within the kin group by giving it to the new conjugal couple" (Schegel and Eloul 1988: 294). Therefore, bride price and dowry as marriage payments are a function of the kind of property relations within the society. Although this work is important in this study's understanding of bride price, these scholars' analysis of this subject could benefit from deeper understanding of social norms, lineage and class systems as fuzzy and always evolving.

In regards to Chin studies, the work of Parry and Lehman is relevant to classical understandings of Chin's structure including the debate of "cycle in principle". Leman points out those different groups among the Chin such as "Tidim", "Matupi", "Hakha" Chin and so on practice on marriage payments differently and uniquely. That can be further examined through the concept of "feast of merit", kinship network, political

stand and class order. Although Parry did not particularly focus on the Khumi Chin, his ethnographic study of the Mara enriched the common understanding of functionalistic and ritualistic purposes of conducting a costly marriage ceremony and its aim for the Chin.

The work of prominent Chin scholar Sakhong 'In Search of Chin Identity' provides a study not only of class order and its relation to political mobilization but also the impact of colonialism and western missionaries to the Chin. While this work is extensive and informative for the present research, it should be noted that a theological perspective informs his accounts of Chin identity thus distancing his work from this thesis' perspective. Vumson's book is extremely useful as it provides a broader understanding of impact of colonialism to the China social fabric, economy and the changing Chin's world-view. Suantak's (2007) social science work on conversion of the Chin provide further insightful understanding on the debate of identity construction and the rationale of conversion, the impact of colonialism and western missionaries and how new identity claims are relevant in the political negotiation with the State in the post-independence era. This is relevant in the context of this thesis as it also attempts to bring forward an understanding of bride price in the context of Burmanization.

The work of Chin theologians such as Tha Sung (1995) paid attention to the role of women and raised questions in favor of the liberation of Chin women. In this perspective, bride price payment is seen as a burden for Chin women's liberation and a hindrance to a just society. She also discussed the customary law that barred women from receiving any inheritance from parents and explained that this is due to a perception that risks could arise with regards to the property potentially bringing conflict over resources among two kinships in cases where the responsibility for such resources or property could not be clearly defined.

Lastly, but not least, Spiro (1975) work is important for understanding the cultural clash between Burman and the Chin in regards of marriage payment, which is very useful for this thesis' framework. The Burman's practice of dower has different meaning and function from the Chin's bride price but is hypothetically relevant in any understanding looking beyond mainstream Burmanization. Dower on the other hand, as Spiro (1975) defined, is the property provided and brought to the marriage by the family of, and brought to the marriage by the groom, and is similarly essential for Burman who

attach to traditional type of marriage. Dowry was also exercised by Burman but mostly among urban elite members, and dower remains as an essential element in the marriage market.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The focal point of this study is to understand the bride price negotiation in the contemporary Chin context. Based on the literature I have reviewed, I will present this study's conceptual framework and explain how it will allow me to analyze the complexity of bride price negotiation.

It is first of all necessary to understand the historical context of the Chin as this plays an important role for the continuation of bride price practice in present times. By looking at the historical context, I will address two interdependent factors, which influence the Chin bride price on a broader structural level. I will call these two factors internal and external, and I will claim that they shift the meaning of bride price practice. I will review the traditional concept of bride price practice that characterized social approval of the marriage covenant, class distinction, internal bondage among families and clans or kinship network, which was characterized as internal bondage and central to Chin collective identity. This traditional characterization has somewhat changed since Chin society was exposed to Western missionaries, colonialism and Burmanization and the meaning becomes cultural resistance and assurance in a case of divorce.

To have a better understanding of the various dimensions of bride price practices it is necessary to examine the relationship between bride price magnitude, patterns and trends and the roles of women in interfamily relationships in the Chin context. In order to do this effectively, I have employed the idea of family change as a key concept. I characterize family change in the Chin context as seriously impacted by external forces such as Western missionaries, colonialism and Burmanization. In particular, I try to focus on the roles of women in interfamily relationships, which have been changed by and through modernization. It should be noted in this context that there are many similarities between Christianization and modernization as they relate to the Chin context. In both cases these processes are sites of contestation, negotiation and re-

negotiation of the bride price. I will study the conception of family among the Chin and then I will try to examine whether the changing roles of women affect their bride price.

Lastly, I will draw attention to the re-conceptualization of property on the basis of gender, as this also relates to the external forces that I have mentioned. The element of property is a key to understand how the women's labor in kinship that affects the bride price payment. I will focus on the aspects of bride price, which are interlinked with gendered aspects of property. To do so, I will look at the current re-conceptualization of property relations by looking at mainstream constructions of property. I will look at key property concepts from women's point of view and from different socio-economic levels. I will, in particular, attempt to break the silence around women's voices on the re-conceptualization of property relations by employing a feminist approach. This study overall then focuses on how different socio-economic factors influence the decisions of women making them choose to continue this bride price practice, and simultaneously addresses the complexities of gender discourses on property.



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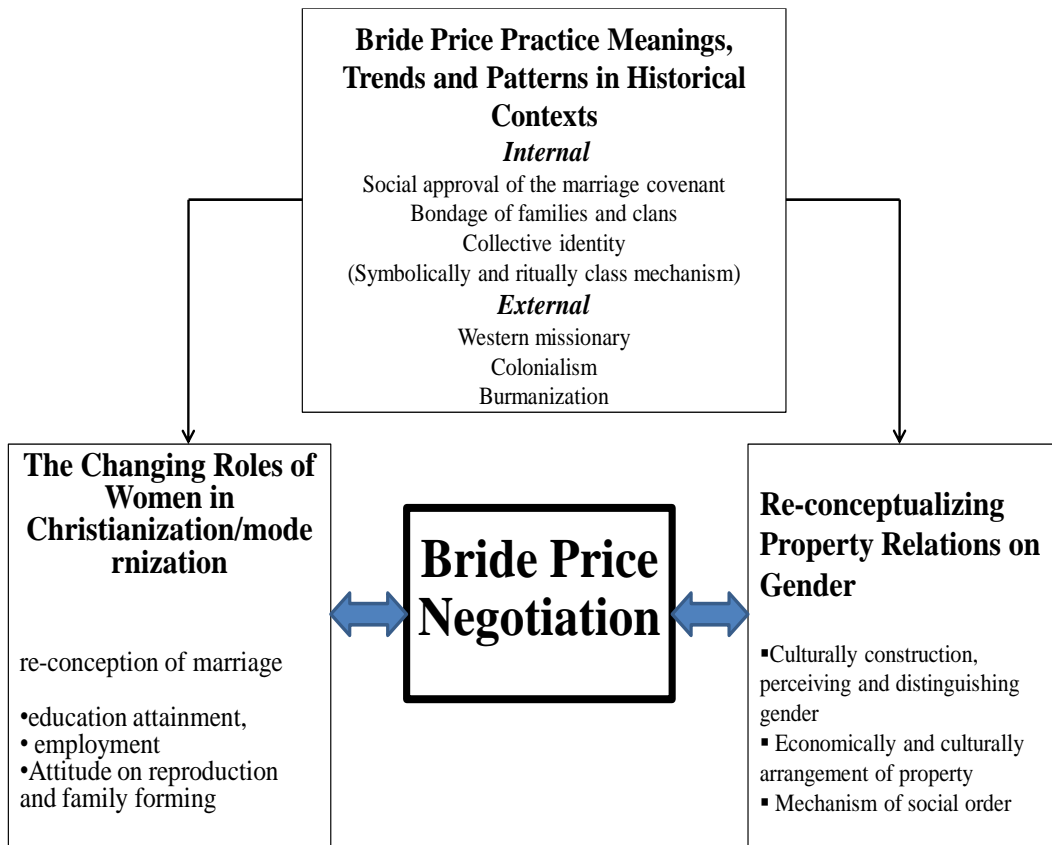


Figure 2.1 A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Bride Price Negotiation