

CHAPTER 3

Vanzang Village: The Migration village

In this chapter, by way of introducing my research site, Vanzang village I will give its brief historical background, geographical location, resources, ruling system, basic infrastructure, livelihoods activities and the different tribes living in the village. I also talk briefly about their religion, their transition to Christianity and the four churches currently existing in the village. Finally, I discuss the migratory background of the Vanzang people and the factors that facilitated their migration.

3.1 Brief Historical Background of Vanzang Village

Vanzang village is located 4858 ft. above sea level 24 miles from Thantlang town in Chin State. Its neighboring villages are Sopum in the South, Farrawn in the North, Thangzang in the West and Mualkai in the East. It has already celebrated its 200 years jubilee of the village settlement on 27 April 2002. It has a long history of its development; however, I present a short preview of the history of the village here in this thesis.

Originally, the people called “Mar” settled in this village for a period of time, before the Lai took over from them (Lian 2002). Inter-village tribal war between the Lai and Mar broke out often in the region. The Lai collaborated with Mya San who had an army of 200 persons and 20 guns, they won the war with the Mar (Lian 2002). The original settlers, the Mar left the region around AD 1750 and later the Lai people came to occupy the region. Pu Tai Kar, who was a Lai from Thantlang founded Vanzang village in AD 1800. Currently the “Lai” people are the inhabitants of the village. In the present time, the Mar’s are not found in this region any more. It is believed that Vanzang village was settled in 1802 (Lian 2002). Vanzang was the first settled village on the Vanzang village tract. Later on, the people of Vanzang established Farrawn village and Tlangpi village respectively which are now part of the Vanzang village tract. Before the British came, there was not demarcation of land in the region. The tribal

people could freely make new settlements. However, when the British ruled started in 1896, land demarcation started. Each village had their own land and their boundary was marked. In the case of Vanzang, in 1907, R.W. Head, the officer in Hakha came to Vanzang village tract and marked the boundary of each villages land (Lian 2002). Lian refers to the marking of R.W. Head for Vanzang village's boundary as following;

“North-East = Daivar rising Vanyang hill and flowing into the Lahvar.
North-West = Uiphungvar rising in Vayang hill and flowing into the Thingvar
South-East =Kwengsuivar rising in Vanyang hill and flowing to Lavar
South-West = Bailwe raising in Vanyang hill and Flowing into the Thingvar
East = Lavar
West =Thingva” (Lian, 2002:22)

This boundary has been used as the Vanzang village's territory even after independence and continues to the present day. Compared to other villages, Vanzang territory is large and arable.

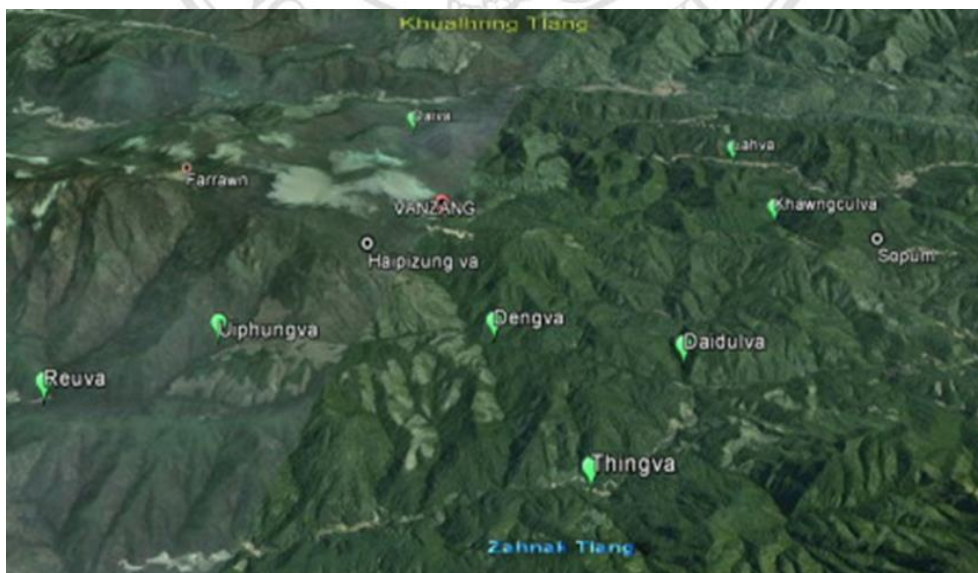


Figure 3.1 Aerial View of Vanzang Village

Source: Google Map

3.1.1 The Ruling System

Before British rule, the village was ruled by the founder of the village, Pu Tai Kar and his descendants (Lian, 2002). But when the British rule started in Chin State, the village chief was appointed by the British ruler. In some cases, the descendants of the British appointed chief became the village's headman. After independence, the village headman is selected by the villagers. The village head man is responsible not only for government services, but also for communal peace in the village and governs the village's community resources which include land, forest and water. Although the villagers give tax for land use to the government, the headman is responsible in the distribution of forest land for agriculture. The village council which consists of the headman and other members is the representative of the government at village level.

3.1.2 Tribes in the Village

Vanzang villagers share a reciprocal relationship which is based on kin relations. Reciprocity governs their social relations. It is a tribal agricultural society. There are 34 clans in the village. As of 2002, there are *Za,hngo, Zahnak, Hlawning, Cia Khar, Kingbawl, Tiohlei, Bawmchuak, Lungum, Niching, Siakhel, Lungfa, Famcun, Bawitung, Khilteng, Thlaceu, Tinhlawng, Conhlun, Hrahsel, Tihlum, Tlanglian, Vankhawng, Tualzi, Phutin, Ramlawt, Biakzual, Zathang, Hlawnceu Keiraw, Hlawnceu Calngau, Mangcin, La-u, Thitthiap, Muahlun and Kawmpa* (Hme Iap 2002). Clan relations is very intense and strong. Inter-clan marriages characterized their society. Pek Thang, in describing the social life of the people said that if someone killed a wild animal, the meat would be distributed to every household (Thang 2002). In time of famine, the villagers would share their agricultural products. The bond that has them as one clan and ones kin and as same the village is very strong. In time of death, they mourn as a community and take care of the grieving family. If a person gets seriously sick, he/she would be carried to the city by other members. The less fortunate families such as widows in the village are usually helped by other community members. When a person is sick, not able to work his or her farm, the community members help. These dynamics of community life forge a strong cohesion in their social relations and sustain community solidarity. Kinship relationship who includes family members, relatives and clans knotted the people as one family and one village. It is a tribal society bounded by kin relations and shared community life.



Figure 3.2 Communal Supper



Figure 3.3 Community Life

3.1.3 Livelihoods of Vanzang Village

The main livelihood of the people of Vanzang village is shift cultivation, cultivating the hills. The external economic source of Vanzang people is selling their agricultural products or animals to other villages or towns in Chin State or they also sell them into Mizoram State, India which borders with Myanmar. A few families in the village raise animals such as pigs or mithun in the forest and sell them in either Chin State or India. Although there are some families who have wetlands to cultivate rice near the bank of the Lava River, the majority of the villagers clear the forest and cultivate rice for their subsistence. They cultivate rice as their staple food and also other secondary supplementary crops. Presently, their main marketable crop is chili which they export to India.

Vanzang village is one of those villages that have been receiving remittance for over two decades. As stated Vanzang village is in Chin State and located only 20 miles from the Indian border. Being close to India, the people have been trading with Mizoram State, India for a long time. Recently, after migration and remittance flows in the village, some migrant families have moved to towns inside Myanmar. Remittance has played an important role in sustaining livelihoods of the migrant households. Since the villagers' livelihood generally depends on this shift cultivation, the additional remittance money they receive is used for daily expenses and survival or in a few cases reinvested in agriculture. Where families have benefited from a regular remittance flow they have been able to reduce their cultivation field size.



Figure 3.4 Mithun (*Sia*)



Figure 3.5 Hills Cultivation

3.1.4 Geographical Facts

The village has large arable areas of land that they can rotate each year for their shifting cultivation. There are generally 13 cultivation areas (locally called “lopil”) which they rotate each year. Compared with many neighboring villages, Vanzang has large areas of forest and mountain ranges. The people practice customary law and the village council is the main managing body for distribution of land for agricultural use. On the river land of Lahva, which is 3 km East of the village 15 families have wetlands for rice cultivation. There are around 20 small rivers and stream in the Vanzang’s territory. The Lahva river in the East and Thingva river in the South are the main rivers used for fishing. A mini-hydro power plant is set up at the Haipizung River. Vanzang has 6 beautiful steep mountains and tropical forest, which are rich in fauna and flora. Lungtlaitlan Mountain located on the top of the village has a scenic view and the youth often go there for retreats or foraging for flowers and fruits.

3.1.5 Basic Infrastructures

Vanzang village has a long history of a government primary school started on April 5, 1966 (That Ceu and Kam Cem, 2002). The elders of the village place up most importance on the education for the growth of the children in the village. As it was considered that primary school was not enough for the children in the village, they started a private middle school, locally funded. The private middle school was for grade 6 and started in 1972 (That Ceu and Kam Cem 2002). The school lasted for one year and later on it was started again for grade 6 and 7 in 1987-88. It was expanded in 1992

for 8th grade and in 1993 it was expanded again for 9th grade. This has meant that Vanzang village has a privately funded senior school for 6th-9th grade.



Figure 3.5 Vanzang Football Ground



Figure 3.6 Vanzang Primary School

Vanzang village has a very small football ground. The people love to play football. Football is commonly played in Chin State. For the youth, there is no other sports facility for their recreation in the village. They can generally play football in their leisure time. Usually, it is played on Sunday which is the day most of the villagers rest. The village is also passed by Vanzang village tract road which links to Thantlang town through Sopum village and goes towards the Indian border through Farrawn village, Tlangpi village and Tlanglo village. This is the main road Vanzang people use for transportation and communication. A jeep car can go on this road though it is rocky, muddy and narrow. There is no clinic in the village. If anyone has a serious sickness, he/she has to go to Thantlang town for a medical checkup. Recently, they have established a preschool, public phone, electricity, public furniture (tables, chairs, plates etc.) and a good water tank funded by the oversea migrants.

3.2 Christianity in the Village

Christianity came in the village around AD 1918 (Ceun 2002). However the village also celebrated Chin Evangelist centenary in 1899- 1999. Before Christianity came, the villagers were animists, they would worship “spirits”, especially spirits of the forest. The objective of sacrificing animals is to please the spirits for a bountiful harvest. It is believed that the villagers practiced animism around 100 years before the

arrival of Christianity in the village (Ceu 2002). During this period the village population never increased above 30 households. According to Ceu (2002), it was after the arrival of Christianity through missionaries, Saya Mawng Cia from Thantlang and Pu Liangailoa, from Farrawn village, that the village's population increased gradually. The villagers gradually adapt to Christianity and leave completely the practices of animism. Christianity has influenced the social and cultural customs of the people. Christian teachings have binding effects on their social interaction. By religion, they are also socially bounded together. There are currently four churches in the village.



Figure 3.7 100 Years Jubilee Monument

The Baptist church is the first and oldest church in the village. It was started in 1924 (Ceu 2002). As Christianity started spreading in the village, the people would gather at the church from 1920. At this time, not all the Vanzang people were Christians. Gradually, the people became Christians and a few decades after the arrival of Christianity, all the villagers became Christians. The villagers adopted the Baptist Church as many missionaries were Baptist. The first proper church built was built in 1937 with wood and bamboo walling. The second was built with wood roofing in 1952 and the third was built with wood and tin roofing in 1961. The fourth was built in 1977 and the fifth was in 1984. All these buildings were built with local resource and by the local people. The last one was built with reinforce concrete in 2007 with the help of

foreign migrants, the children of Rev. Huat Kam. It has currently 40 household memberships.

The Presbyterian Church is one of the four churches existing in Vanzang Village. There are 16 families attending this church. The church was started in 1973. Before, they were the Methodist Church. Since the Methodist church cannot build a church building for them, the members left the Methodist Church and started the Presbyterian Church. The first church was built in 1976 with wood and thatch roofing. Later on, under the leadership of Rev. Rual Cung, funds for the church building was raised in Mizoram state of India and the people were able to rebuild the church with tin roofing in 1978. The last renovation was built in 2008 with the mobilization of migrants for contribution of the church building by the church.

The Church of Jesus Christ was started around 1972 (Ceun 2002). It was considered a revival church; the people favor dance, praise and worship. In 1975, it was called the Church of Jesus Christ. Later on this church divided into two. The majority of the members left and started the Believer Church. Only a few remain in the Church of Jesus Christ. They moved to a new place and they started their own church with wood and tin roofing in 2008. The members are those who did not join the Believer Church. Among four churches in the village, this church building is not as good as the others. It is built with wood and tin roofing by local resources and the people. The indirect impact of remittance was observed through the tithing of the church members or the free donations from overseas migrants. This church has 24 households membership.

The Believer church is a fraction of the Church of Jesus Christ. They own the old church building of Church of Jesus Christ which was built with wood and tin roofing. The believer church is the latest one that is partially funded by remittance of the overseas Vanzang people built in 2010. It has 24 households membership.

3.3 Vanzang Migratory Background

According to Pek Thang (2002), before Christianity, the village population never grew above 30 families. It was after Christianity came that the village population gradually goes up and reaches over a hundred families. Vanzang village has large areas of land to cultivate and that attracted many families to live in it. However, internal migration occurred after the Second World War as the people migrated to other villages

mostly in the Kalay-valley and towns in Chin State. This was before external migration took place. It seems that internal immigration was a slow and gradual process. Although they were poor, they did not migrate externally. Being close to India border, they seasonally work in the Mizoram state of India and also trade with them. However, when the fighting between the army and the CNA intensified in the 90s this became the main cause for massive external migration of Vanzang people. However, there were many factors that facilitated their migration.

3.3.1 Internal Migration

The people of Vanzang migrated into different parts of Myanmar, especially Kalay valley and some of the towns in Chin State. Most of the internal migrants moved to Tahan-Kalaymyo and Khampat as their main destination where some families moved in Hakha and Thangtlang town. As of 2002, there are 122 households who have internally migrated to different parts of Chin State and Kalay-valley in Sagaing division of Myanmar

Table 3.1 List of Internal Migrants

No.	Village Name	Household Number
1.	Khampat	45
2.	Tahan	44
3.	Falam	2
4.	Hakha	16
5.	Thantlang	11
6.	Tahtlang	4
	Total	122

Source: 2000 Years Jubilee Magazine

3.3.2 Seasonal Migration to India

Chin State borders with India. The Indian border is around 20 miles from Vanzang village. Normally, the people of Vanzang can easily go to work to the Mizoram State of India and return back home periodically after a few months of work. There has been cross border trading between these rural villages and the Mizos. Like

other villages, Vanzang villagers also trade with the Mizos through selling their agricultural products and buying Indian products in exchange. Mizoram State is more developed than Chin State, so they have more jobs. Their currency is also more valuable than Myanmar currency. Additionally, the language of Mizo is not difficult for the Chin to understand. Language and cultural similarity between the Chin and the Mizos makes it easy to cross the border for seasonal work and this inter-relation can be described as seasonal migrants. This cross border trading and working has been practiced over centuries.

3.3.3 Migration to Malaysia

There are two groups that migrated to Malaysia. The first group is those who fled the country for economic gain after experiencing the military oppression. In rural Chin State, especially in the 1990s, the military's atrocities towards the Chin people living in the red areas where the insurgents were active was severe and most of the youth including the young educated ones did not consider working in the country or in the government due to the low payment; they would rather migrate to work in foreign countries. This caused many to leave the country for a better economic status. Vanzang village locates close to the Indian border experienced the extreme atrocities imposed by the army in the form of forced porter, restriction of movement and forced labor. Pu Sang Hup, who was the headman from 1992-1996 recalled the brutal atrocities of the army;

“The army was trying to wipe out the CNA; they interrogated us about whereabouts of the CNA and their movement. If we did not know they would beat us. Also, they forced us to carry their rations; usually the youth were the most targeted to be forced porters. The CNA were also operating around our village, we were caught in fear of both the Army and the CNA. Many of our villagers did not dare to work freely in the cultivation fields. Everyone in our village was trying to find ways to escape from this fear of the Army and those who had money migrated to Malaysia. This is the main reason for Vazang people migration. It was during my tenure as headman” (Personal Interview on 18, 02, 2015).

Vanzang migration is generally a result of the fear of the army and CNA, and the extreme poverty the people faced after decades of the Military regime's rule. Living in a village was a hopeless situation for the young generation. Faced with the recruitment of the CNF and the army's extreme forced porter and inhuman atrocities, they went to Malaysia as the pathway to escape this terrible and fearful condition in the village. It was the time General Khin Nyunt and the Myanmar Intelligence group's power was at its zenith. According to Pu Sang Hup who was the headman (1992-1996) in the village, he stated that this situation lasted over 5 years and forced many to migrate due to the fear of periodic fighting between the Army and the CNA and the effects of the Army's cruel and extreme atrocities on the daily life of the people.

Vanzang migration has its unique characteristics. Villagers mainly migrated to Malaysia. In Chin migration, thousands of people migrated to India which is normal as it shares a long border Myanmar. As far as the overseas population of Vanzang is concerned, they did not have people migrate to developed countries through India. Before the military started confronting and fighting the CNA, some of Vanzang people had already gone to Malaysia for work in 1993. As mentioned in the introduction, Malaysia was the main destination of Myanmar overseas migrants at that time. In the case of Vanzang people, there was a broker living in Yangon who worked as a travel agent who facilitated and sent many Vanzang people to work in Malaysia. I ask Mang, an old educated man who is quite knowledgeable about the history of Vanzang migration, he elaborates;

“The reason most of the Vanzang people went to Malaysia was we had some people already there who had jobs. These people went to work and gain money. They went through the broker, who was one of our villagers working in Yangon. We already had a connection with these people. I believe this is why many of our villagers follow the precious migrants” (Personal Interview, 16, 02, 2015).

These previous arrivals of Vanzang people which I categorize as the first overseas migrant group, though they were few in number, they were followed by Vanzang villagers escaping from the oppressive military rule. A few persons went to Guam for work through the travel agent also. This group is characterized by economic

migrants who wanted to earn money and support their families back home. This group did not go to apply UNHCR status, as it was not open for Myanmar citizens at that time. Therefore, most of this group came to work in Malaysia, escaping from the insecure social and economic condition of the village. Later on, when the UNHCR began to give refugee status to Myanmar citizens and send them to developed countries through its resettlement program, Vanzang people increasingly migrated both to work and to see if they could gain UNHCR refugee status in Malaysia

The second group of those villagers leaving the country is to seek refugee status in Malaysia. Some of these people go because of the invitations of their family members working in Malaysia. These people are included in the case file of those who have received refugee status. Those who came in the first group applied and got refugee status and later invited their siblings to join them. Their siblings are included in their case file as having refugee status. Later arrived siblings can join the previous receiver of refugee status. Therefore, this migration can be described as refugee family migration. There are many who came to Malaysia mainly to seek UNHCR status. These two groups characterize Vanzang people migration into developed countries. Totaling both these groups, this Vanzang village has almost 300 overseas migrants, two third of whom live in developed countries, mainly the USA, Europe and Australia through UNHCR refugee resettlement program.

3.3.4 Migration Road

Most of Vanzang oversea migrants go illegally to Malaysia with legal documents like passport. All the travel is arranged by a broker in Myanmar. In Yangon, there are a number of Chin brokers who help Chin people migrate to Malaysia. As many people started going to Malaysia, the work of a broker became good business who both sends people through illegal and legal means. Some people want to go quickly and they choose to go through an illegal way, the broker smuggling them to reach Malaysia in collaboration with other brokers working in and around Myanmar, Thailand and the Malaysia border. These brokers are trans-nationally networked and facilitate the massive migration of Chin people. It is illegal but many work as brokers and most of the Chin migrants go through the broker agents. It takes two or three days to reach Malaysia. Since it is illegal, it involves a lot of risks, the arrest of the police from

Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia, sexual harassment from the brokers, human trafficking and frequent accidents causing deaths and arrests on the way to Malaysia.

In the beginning, the broker fee was around 80,000-100,000 kyats to go to Malaysia in the early 90s and later on it increased to 600,000-800,000 kyats in late 90s and early 2000. If the people went to Malaysia overland, it was cheaper, fast and risky. In some cases some of the people would go without paying money on the personal trust they built with the broker and later on, after working in Malaysia, they would repay their loan. This is how they negotiated with the brokerage system. Since the overland method to reach Malaysia, is quick and cheap compared to going in an airplane, most of chin people choose this approach. They also cannot afford the money to go through the legal system. The many Chin brokers in Yangon who sent people to Malaysia encourage many Chin people migrate to Malaysia, mostly through illegal processes.

On the other hand, there are people who went through with legal documents. These brokers can facilitate traveling through legal documents and visas, however, this process takes a longer time. To make a passport, it takes a month, after getting a passport; they have to obtain tourist visas which also require having sufficient money to enter into Malaysia. There are people who go through this legal way. However, as they went to work in Malaysia, after their visas expired, they continued to stay in Malaysia and worked there. Though they went by the official travel mechanism, they later became illegal migrants in Malaysia. There are cases where the Malaysia authorities would deport people whom they suspected to be illegal migrants. Vanzang people use both ways to go to Malaysia. This nature of the migration process characterizes Chin migration. In the case of Vanzang people, as mentioned before, they have people who had been working in Malaysia, plus the easy availability of brokers in Yangon, the opportunity for refugee status and job opportunities all results in massive migration to Malaysia

3.4 Oversea Migrants Population

The village consists of 68 migrants household and 38 non migrant households. Many of the migrant families have their sons or daughter and relatives living in developed countries. A good number of Vanzang people are still in Malaysia working and waiting to go abroad. While in Malaysia, the migrants often send money from time

to time though it is small amounts compared to those remittances coming from developed country. The majority of the households in the village have overseas migrants and remittance that has been coming to some families as their main income source while for others as a secondary source. The oversea migrants living in the USA and Australia comprise the largest part of the overall Vanzang overseas migrants followed by Malaysia. Those who are in Malaysia are waiting to settle in developed countries. As the number of Vanzang people settling in developed countries increases, so is the remittance they send to their families. In recent years, the villagers have implemented several community and religious projects through mobilizing overseas migrants to improve their community life. Due to the fact that they were able to raise remittances among their overseas members to solve many of the common struggles, the role remittance has played in developing this village is remarkable.

Table 3.2 Population of Oversea Vanzang Migrants

No.	Countries	Population of Overseas Migrant
1.	Australia	99
2.	Malaysia	95
3.	USA	81
4.	Norway	15
5.	Sweden	5
6.	Denmark	1
7.	Canada	2
	Total	298

By now it has been a decade that remittance has been continuing to flow into the village from overseas migrants similar to perhaps many other migrant villages across Chin State. I have chosen this village as there have been noticeable activities as a result of remittance flows through networking with overseas migrants in the redistribution of the remittances for community development as well as an increasing of certain social cultural transformations taking place in the village. In the next chapter, I discuss the

community networking between the overseas migrants and Vanzang villagers, the mobilization and implementation of different community and religious projects.



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