

Social Capital and Burmese Migrant Domestic Workers in Thailand

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and understand the significant of social networks for Burmese domestic migrant workers who live in Thailand. In order to achieve that, the thesis employs the concept of social capital to scrutinize different social networks in the migrants' lives. The analysis in the thesis has been done both in larger level focusing on the role and important of social capital to the migration process and lives; as well as, in micro level, examining different social capital from the perspectives of the migrants.

The data has been collected in Thailand by using semi-structure interviews and observations. The thesis concludes that social capital is crucial to both the process of migration and lives as migrant workers in Thailand. On the micro level, the specific socio-cultural context of migrants' and the migrants' own agency are also shaping the way the migrants build and use their social capital. The thesis has also found that, despite its importance, social capital has negative sides. In addition, the migrants' choices and access to various social capitals in Thailand are limited.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Due to the change in the structure of the Thai labor market and the regional disparity, migrants from Burma¹ have become the largest group of foreign workers in Thailand (Huguet and Chamrathirong, 2011: 1 - 2).

Since I was a teenager at the end of the 1990s in Bangkok, I have experienced that the domestic workers in my neighborhood have been dominated by women from Burma. One by one, my relatives started to employ migrant domestic workers from Burma. Apart from their unique Thai accents, how my relatives praise them as much better workers than Thais, and how I was told to tell no stranger that we employed Burmese migrants, for me they are no different than Thai maids.

It was not until I had a chance to be a migrant myself, as an exchange student in the United States, that I realized how difficult their migration must have been. I also realized that I knew nothing about the domestic workers from Burma at all. My feelings of anxiety, fear, alienation and helplessness as a migrant exchange student initiated many questions about the transnational domestic workers in Thailand. My migration process has been largely influenced and assisted by a social network whose responsibilities ranged from recommending studies agency to being a network of support that help me get through all the difficulties. Therefore, it seems that social capital mobilized from the network is crucial even in my middle class regular² migration experience (Putnam, 1995: 67).

Comparing my migration experience to those migrant workers from Burma that I have encountered, they seem to live in a context that needs even more assistance than me. Many of the domestic migrants that I have encountered came to work in Thailand irregularly, without proper language skills, were not aware of the formal channels of help and were not accustomed to communication technology. Thereof, it seems that the migrants' social networks and personal relationship could play important roles in their migrant worker lives. Thus, I started to wonder how do their social networks contribute to and shape their migration

¹ Regarding the usage of Burma/Myanmar, I have decided that I will use the term Burma to refer to the country as this is the name all of my informants use. In order to avoid confusion, I will use the word "ethnic Burmese" to describe people that identify themselves with this ethnic group. The word "Burmese" will be used to refer to nationality.

² The thesis will use the term '**regular**' instead of '**legal**' and '**irregular**' instead of '**illegal**' as I believe in the same stance as United Nation agencies that the term illegal "carries a criminal connotation" (International Organization for Migration - IOM, 2014)

experiences. This thesis, employing the concept of social capital, attempts to address this problem.

Aims of the thesis

This thesis aims to investigate the meaning of social capital in the life of female migrants from Burma who work as domestic workers in Thailand from their own subjective experience and perspective. This study also provides account of the migrants on their experience living in Thailand. In addition, to a lesser extent, the migrants' relationship with their social network will be analyzed on an individual level. The thesis is a qualitative case studies using semi – structured qualitative interviews as the main method of information collection; some aspects of life story interview technique will be used as well.

Research question:

The main research question: what is the significant of social capital in the life of Burmese female domestic migrant workers in Thailand?

Sub –Questions

How do social networks facilitate the migration process?

How do social networks influence the life as female domestic migrant workers?

How do gender, ethnicity and class shape and influence social capital usage?

How is the domestic workers' agency articulated?

Limitations and Demarcation

The thesis uses a qualitative approach with limited and specific samples. All of the informants in this thesis live in the Bangkok Metropolitan area, are female and are able to speak Thai. The sample cannot be claimed to represent all the experience of migrant domestic workers in Thailand. Also, the argument and information in this thesis is based on informants' subjective narrative and experience. The presentation of information is also concentrated only on information that is related to the concept of social network/ social

capital. This means several interesting points from the migrants' account of their life that are less related to the thesis' main theoretical framework are not included even though they are interesting and display complex dimensions of the migrants' life.

The thesis mainly focuses on exploring the role of migrants' social networks using the concept of social capital. Therefore, other aspects of Thai – Burma female labor migration such as the influence of structural levels will not be addressed. Also, within the concept of social capital itself, this thesis doesn't emphasis much on trust building process within the networks or how social capital encourages democratic norms as emphasized in Putnam (1995, 2002). All the analytical topics presented in the research are mostly based on the theme identified through interviews, some points might be emphasized more or emphasized less than other migration literatures.

Disposition

The thesis comprises of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the aim, research questions and the importance of the research topics. Chapter 2 discusses the selection of research methods and the theoretical framework for the thesis. Chapter 3 reviews the current literatures and debates on female migration, as well as providing the contextual information on female migration from Burma to Thailand. Chapter 4 presents the experience of the informants as transnational domestic migrants workers in Thailand and analyzes the experience according to the chosen theories. Chapter 5 offers a concluding remark.

Chapter 2 : Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Research Method

Research Stance and strategy

This study employs qualitative methods with a social constructivist approach which holds that there are multi – dimensional aspect of reality and that reality is socially constructed (Moses and Knutsen, 2007: 194). It means that the thesis also acknowledges the inter-subjectivities of involved agents on the research production especially the role of myself as the thesis writer and the migrants from Burma as the subjects of the studies both in the data gathering and data creation process, as well as in the interpretation of data (Mahoney,2007 :574). Therefore, addressing reflexivity and being aware of bias and my involvement in the research process is important and a reflexive writing technique will be employed in this thesis (Bryman, 2004: 500).

This research employs a strategy of case studies. As put by Yin (2003:1,7), this strategy is suitable for investigating the complex phenomenon that research cannot manipulate the research setting. Thus, this is a proper strategy for the research topic. Case studies can be criticized for “providing little basis for scientific generalization” (Yin, 2003:10).

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the aims of the research is not to find samples that represent scientific generalization of population / variables, but to analyze the interviews as samples for theoretical case studies of the lives of migrant domestic workers in Thailand (Moses and Knutsen:2007, 140).

Method for Collecting Information

- *Interview*

The qualitative semi-structural interview with topic specific questions focusing on the role of social networks and their capital according to each migrant’s experience will be the main research method (Bryman, 2008: 438 -439). The advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that, while they allow me to obtain the information according to the focus of the

thesis, they also give some space for the migrants' own voices and points of view (Bryman, 2008 :464).

Some perspectives from life story research, which emphasizes on how events shape individual's lives by letting subject speaks of their experience, are used in this thesis (Bryman, 2004: 321). Due to time limits and the research topic, however, this thesis will not conduct a proper life story "narrative interview" (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 59), which enables interviewees to speak flexibly about their past on the aspects that they consider to be important without specific focus. The thesis instead will employ the life story research framework to shape the way interviews are conducted, as well as to shape interview questions. Life story research can provide an insight to how individuals understand and interpret the world (Bryman, 2008:440). Applying life story methods will allow me to explore migrants' perspectives and opinions on their social network and how they perceive the network's social capital in accordance to their own experience. Moreover, it will also mean that the data received from interviews will be treated as subjective truth and understanding of informants rather than as a source of pure objective truth (Behar ,1990: 226 - 227). This element seems to be appropriate to the aims of the research which attempts to understand the meaning of social capital according to the migrants' subjective experience.

- *Participants Observation*

Although interviews are the main data-collecting method in this research, I have also taken the role of "Non-Participating Observer with Interaction" (Bryman, 2012:444). This means that I have observed and interacted with the informants but not truly participated in their activities. Most of the interactions are through interviews and small talk not through participation in their daily works. Through my experience living in a household where domestic workers are employed and visiting a home with domestic workers from Burma several times, I am familiar with the context and attitude of Thai employers, their relationships with the domestic workers and the work/routines of domestic migrants themselves. I have also observed how the informants interact with me, someone who represents a different class, gender and ethnicity from them as I am a Thai male who comes from the same social circle as their employers. Apart from this, I have also attended two religious activities that were recommended by the informants and also observed the interaction of migrants who attend vocational Sunday school (Section on sample selection

below provides additional details on the research site). I have observed the process of activities that migrants participate in and the interaction during the activities. The data from participant observation in this research is used to provide contextual information on the life of domestic migrant workers in Thailand.

Sample Selection and limitation

I have interviewed eleven domestic workers from Burma. Although I did not intend to be specific regarding the gender of the interviewees, all of domestic workers I have interviewed are female. The age of the interviewees varies from nineteen to approximately forty years old. All of them currently work as domestic workers and most often this has been their only employment. The length of the interviews was approximately one to two hours. All of the informants currently live in the Bangkok Metropolitan area. Most of the interviews have been recorded.

I have also attended three other activities (once at each activity). The first was Yiguandao Movement (In Thai: ลัทธิอนุตตรธรรม), which one of my interviewees was attending and had great faith on. Another one was the activity at a Buddhist temple where ethnic Karen migrants from a certain region in Burma come together to perform a religious ceremony together. The ceremony also involves a fund raising project for sending Karen monks to be educated abroad. At the ceremony, I had a chance to talk to the domestic workers who participated in the activities there, as well as, a chance to interview the monk who helps coordinate these activities. The final activity was the Sunday vocational school for migrants set up by the Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB) which teaches language and computer skills to migrants from Burma in Thailand.

Snowball sampling method (Bryman, 2012: 202) has been used to identify both the informants and the religion activities. I met most informants through my own contacts in Thailand. The criteria for selection are that the interviewee must be able to communicate in Thai, partly due to my limited language skills. Nevertheless, the ability to speak Thai also indicates that the migrant has already slightly adapted to Thai society and is able to have some interaction with Thais. Thus, it could be assumed that Thai context is more embedded to their life than in the lives of migrants who can't speak Thai and mainly interact with their own ethnic group. These migrants are therefore expected to have more types of social capital.

Another criteria is they must not currently work in the border town such as Mae Sot as the context of migrants' live there should be clearly different than the rest of the countries.

Selecting samples through snowball method, though, can be criticized as non scientific (Bryman, 2008: 184 – 185). However, as pointed out in the discussion on case studies, the research does not claim that the interviewees could represent the whole population of domestic workers from Burma in Thailand, but instead aims to use the information as an example for theoretical analysis.

Data Analysis and Presentation

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and summarized. After that the contents were analyzed through “thematic analysis” methods where the information were grouped, analyzed and presented according to the patterns found in the data (Vaismoradi, 2013: 400).

The analysis will also employ the multi- voices style as indicated in Mahoney (2007: 574) in which all voices involved in the researching topic, including the voice of myself as the researcher and those of the interviewees, are acknowledged. In the thesis, I will attempt to be transparent in my subjectivity role in producing the content. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that my voice will still be the authoritative voice in the research since I am the one who chooses what text and which part of the interviews will be presented and the data is also put into the sequence I have designed and analyzed by the theoretical concept I have chosen (Mahoney, 2007: 583).

Ethical Consideration

The research follows the ethical consideration section in “Guidelines for the Master’s Thesis”, published by the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University (2013). In order to avoid potential “harm to participants”, the following measures were taken. All of the informants in this thesis are “informed consent” (Bryman, 2004: 511). This means that the purpose of the studies and the interviews along with, the potential readers and potential areas where the study may be disseminated, have been clearly explained before any interview attempt. The names of the informants are kept anonymous to keep their privacy and safety (Bryman, 2004: 513). To prevent “invasion of privacy”, the interviewees are

informed that they can choose to terminate the interview or their involvement in this project whenever they wish (Bryman, 2012:142).

Although ethical guidelines advise that my research process should not affect the “subjects’ relationship with their environment” (Bryman, 2012: 136), I have faced the dilemma of how much I should inform my informants or shape their understanding especially when I have found that their labor rights are violated. Regarding this point, I have decided to provide them with information in accordance to their rights but left the informants to decide on their own how to respond to the information.

Concept and Theoretical Framework

The concept of Social capital by Putnam (1993, 1995, 2002) and Faist (2000) is used to examine the significant of social network in the life of domestic migrants’ workers in Thailand. This thesis also employs the concept of transnationalism to examine social capital in the context of transnational migration.

While social capital could explain the facilitators that enable migrants to move to and live in a different context, it doesn’t explain how their network and the social capital they have shape their migration experience from their perspective. Therefore, the concept of subjective experience (Brittle, 2000: 111) and domestic workers as an active agent (Nurchayati, 2011:480; Ueno, 2013: 37 – 38; Johnson, 2011: 462) will be used in order to comprehend their experience and their relationship with social networks/capital in a more subtle way.

Theorizing social capital in transnational context

- Social Capital

According to Putnam (1995: 67) the definition of social capital is “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”. Basically, social capital is a network, norm or association both that could be used to provide supports to individual such as family, peer group or ethnic based organization (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 3; Putnam, 2002:10). The belief that social capital could be used to enhance the individual comes from the notion that every social network has value and this value can be used for benefit (Putnam, 2002: 6). For example, farmers in the same village could initiate labor exchange in cultivating and harvesting which could save time and cost for both parties (Putnam, 1993: 163).

The benefits of social capital have not been clearly defined yet. In the text by Putnam (2002:6), he mentions that there is some attempt to calculate the benefit of social capital into “cash value” but at the same time there are also many literatures that focus on the effect of social capital on things that aren’t numerical measurable such as mental condition or even democracy.

Thus, it is useful to employ the concept of social capital proposed by migration sociologist, Thomas Faist (2000), in order to frame the benefit of social capital. First, it should be informed that Faist identifies features of social capital in addition to Putnam. He reveals that social capital is created based on ties (Faist: 2000, 101 -102). The ties could be either a “social tie” or a symbolic tie. A social tie involves people with whom one associates and has an interpersonal relation. It can have various sizes, forms and closeness and it could be a relationship with family, an association, or an authority. On another hand, symbolic ties are the ties that are fostered by shared identity which could connect people together even without actual interaction such as belonging to the same ethnic community or religion.

Based on this notion, Faist (2000: 102) combines the concept of social capital between those of Bourdieu which concentrates on social capital as a capital for individuals and Putnam who emphasizes on the network and norm dimensions of social capital. He proposes that there are two features of social capital’s benefit. The first feature is social capital as a resource that an individual or group can use to achieved their specific goal. This means that the benefit of social capital varies depending on how it aims to be used (Faist, 2000: 102). The second feature is social capital as a mechanism for collaboration as it can link different social actors together; thus being beneficial by providing a platform for collaboration as well as advancing the group’s benefit (Faist, 2000: 103). The benefit of social capital can be both at the individual and public level (Putnam, 2002:7). The benefit in each level is mutually enhancing. While an individual can mobilize resources from the network, being a part of and having a social tie to the network and its norms also strengthens the common norm/ practices that can be translated into public benefit and vice versa (Putnam, 2002: 7). For example, neighborhood watch programs that attempt to reduce crime rates in communities can positively affect individuals who live in that community by increasing the general safety of the community. Moreover, this also means that if social capital provides public benefits, the benefits can be transferred to someone who has not directly “invested” in and assisted the group or network but still belongs to the network in some ways through a “social tie” or

“symbolic tie” such as those in the neighbourhood who have not participated in crime reduction cooperation but still receive the benefits from the practice (Putnam, 2002: 7; Faist, 2000, 101 -102).

The public benefit can play a tremendous role in shaping the whole society. For example, if social trust, social engagement, norms and collective action between different networks are developed on a wider level, they could provide a platform for democratic institutions to emerge (Putnam, 1993: 182).

However, there is a unique feature of social capital’s benefit that needs to be pointed out. As Faist (2000: 103, 118) mentioned, even though social capital can be invested and its benefits can be expected, social capital and its benefits are more a “by-product of transaction” with the function of facilitating rather than the actual result of investment. This resonates with the way Putnam frames the element of social capital. According to his article, social capital can be used, accumulated and mobilized through everyday interactions such as sharing information, debating, helping each other, talking or even casting votes (Putnam, 1995: 67 - 68).

Putnam (1993:103) illustrates that networks and social capital are strengthened and beneficial if only members of networks keep their obligations and follow the expected behaviors. To achieve that, it means the network should be held by and embedded with strong norms that make the individual acknowledge the reciprocal practice within their social capital circle (Putnam,1993:168). Thereof, trust within networks is increased. Once there is more social trust, individuals are more willing to contribute to others as they feel sure that they will receive the same treatment in return (Putnam, 1993: 168). Therefore, collective action and platforms for collective action are enhanced. Apart from norms and obligations mentions by Putnam (1993), Faist also adds that solidarity within ties, such as a feeling of nationalism, are also a mechanism that supports the cooperation of social capital (Faist, 2000: 109).

With the “norms of generalized reciprocity”, it means that having social capital not only brings benefits, sometimes individuals must also offer something in order to keep social capital. For example, one is expected to help their peer when their request for help; Woolcock and Narayan (2000: 3) conceptualize this process as “cost” of social capital.

It should also be noted that social capital isn't always used for positive benefit, especially when it is framed as resources that could support a different goal (Faist, 2000: 103). Social capital, thus, could have an exclusionary nature and be used to enhance conflicts and discrimination such as in organizations like Klu Klux Klan (Putnam, 2002:9).

Putnam (2002: 11 -13) points out that social capital could be divided into several different typologies depending on which features of social capital are viewed as follows:

1. The first type is “formal” and “informal” (Putnam, 2002: 10), such as association (formal) versus family (informal).
2. “Thick” and “thin” / “strong tie” and “weak tie” (Putnam, 2002: 10) Thick/ Strong ties basically means a network that one have more associates and closeness with such as co-workers and the one that there is less chance to associate with such as people that one walk pass in the apartment.
3. “Inward” looking and outward “looking” (Putnam, 2002: 11). Inward looking means the social capital whose only concern is for people within the network while outward looking is the capital that attempt to provide public good. It should be noted that this doesn't means outward looking social capital will actually provide more public benefit as the characteristic and goal of each social capital should also be evaluated additionally.
4. “Bridging” and “bonding” (Putnam, 2002: 11). Bonding social capital means social capital that is created by interaction between people who are alike and share some similar aspects such as race, class or gender. While bridging social capital is created by an interaction of people who are considered to be different. Putnam seems to stress the importance of differences between these two capitals as it is expected that having bridging capital will provide more “positive externality effect” than bonding capital (Putnam, 2002: 11). Too much concentration on bonding capital, for example, could lead to intergroup conflict such as ethnic conflict (Putnam, 2002: 12). Nevertheless, same social capital often consist of both bridging and bonding elements such as the union where people share economic status but not ethnicity or religion (Putnam, 2002: 12).

In addition to all the foregoing, it should be reminded that while social capital theorists often focus on the positive effects or negative external effects of social capital and network, I agree

with points mentioned in the thesis of Panthaloet (2012: 16) that there is not so much investigation of the negative internal effects of social capital and network and how it might, as well, constrain ones agency.

- Social Capital and Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a perspective that challenges the previous notion that migrants are “uprooted” (Brettell, 2000: 104), according to the perspective, migrants actually maintain their tie with both their native and their receiving countries both in terms of movement and in terms of economic, social and cultural context, migrant also could be the linkage of change both for the sending and receiving society.

As observed by Faist (2000: 122), migrants often still have both “social ties” and “symbolic ties” to their home community. The form of transnational ties are various, they could be on a micro level such as family to business partners or Diasporas communities (Faist, 2000: 202 - 208). The ties bridge two spaces in different borders and provide a platform for the flow of “multiple transactions of ideas, monetary resources, goods, symbols, and cultural practices” that transcend the national border (Faist, 2000:196). This notion is similar to what Levitt (1998) conceptualized as “social remittance” where she finds out that “norms, practices, identities and social capital (and cultural)” is exchanged between host and origin communities (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2002: 3). As for social capital, for example, Levitt (1998: 935 -936) points out social capital found abroad could be used to enhance status at home and migrants also often have fulfilled the expectation of their ties in order to keep the transnational social capital.

In contrast to the concept of “uprooted” where the ties to origin communities are abridged, migrants according to transnationalism can migrate, emigrate, and re-migrate between national boundaries when the condition is permitted and mobilization is suited to their goal (Faist, 2000: 200).

Many transnational network theorists, have used the notion of transnational social networks/ social capital in order to fulfill the gap that previous theories on migration that either focus on cost-benefit analysis of individual or larger social economic context could not answer; for

example, why two communities situated in similar contexts have a totally different rate of migration (Faist, 2000: 94; Panthaloet, 2012: 14; Brettell: 2000, 104).

According to Faist (2000), to answer the question above, social capital also serves an important function that shapes the migration process.

The role of social capital can influence and assist individuals' decisions on whether to migrate (Faist, 2000: 122-123; 144 -145; 201), provide a platform for chain migration or even the create a culture of migration for people who have ties with the pioneer migrant, consolidate transnational linkages that surpass first generations of migrant and change the chain migration into transnational social space where linkages are kept in the succeed generation, and lastly, help migrants adapt and cope with the new context in their destination.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the concept of "social remittance" (Levitt, 1998) as well as how potential migrants are influenced by social ties who are migrants themselves shows that the influence between migrants and their social ties are mutual (Faist, 2000: 122). They both are influenced by their own social capital and they also influence their social capital. However, in my observation, it seems that the transnational perspective often focuses on how migrants' change and the transformation of context influences their origin communities rather than how their communities continues to shape them after their mobility.

Theorizing migrant's perspective

- Subjective Experience

The recent trend of research on women experience has emphasized on the subjective and individuality view point of their experience (Brittle, 2000: 111). The perspective is developed to challenge the theoretical uniformity of how one experiences oppressions; for example, arguing that women's oppression according to main stream feminism cannot represent the experience of all women (Brittle, 2000: 111; Herr, 2014: 2).

The principle of this concept is that subjectivity is created through the intersection of multi-dimension social categories such as gender, class and ethnicity (Nash, 2008:2). Through examining the intersection of these labels, the complex and context-specific experience of

each subject can be seen. This notion, according to Herr, means the viewpoint of every female should be respected even if it is not adhered to in mainstream theory such as feminism's beliefs (2014: 6). Females should also be viewed as active agents who have a capacity to control their life rather than being total victims (Charrad, 2010: 519).

In her studies on female Dominican migrants in Boston, Pessar (1995) provides a good example of why understanding the experience of female migrant in a specific context is important. She finds out that some Dominican female migrants decided that cooperation with unions to improve their working condition was not worthwhile as it could cost them a job and limit their space to home where their life fill with boredom because they would have nothing to do and have no other relationship/interaction except with their family (Pessar, 1995: 45).

Nevertheless, this perspective is not left without critics. There are numerous debates regarding whether focusing on subjective experience in relation to contexts means that the political struggles to change structural inequality are ignored (Coleman, 2009: 7).

- Agency

According to Charrad (2010: 519) agency refers to the "capacity to initiate change or to commit oneself to a transformative or challenging course of action". She also points out that agency should be examined in relation with the contextual information surrounding each individual (Charrad, 2010: 519). Under the concept of agency, although the structure might provide a suppressive context that constrains individuals, there is always room for individuals to act and find ways to resist, - even in the most oppressive context (Johnson, 2011: 460). While the concept of agency often has a connotation with an action to challenge existing hierarchies and enhance independence and self determination, sometimes it is also possible that one would makes a choice that creates even more limited space for one own agency (Charrad, 2010: 519). Thus, agency should be examined in relation to specific hierarchies in different contexts.

This study frames agency in the context of migrant domestic workers who have to deal with employers, family and the hierarchical structure of the state where migrants, with limited rights compared to citizens and the nature of their work, are often put to the bottom of this

hierarchy. The studies of Nurchayati (2011: 480) and Johnson (2011) show that in order to achieve their goal, migrant domestic workers try to adjust the situation, manage trouble, find methods to deal with abuses and constantly attempt to bargain with anyone that has authority over them (such as their employers) in intelligent and complex ways.

Chapter 3: Background and Contextual Information / Literature Review

Internationalization of care economy and feminization of migration

The social- economic gap and hierarchy between countries and regions has been a condition for the globalization of the care economy. The globalization of care economy or “global care chain” means the increasing demand for migrant workers from relatively poorer countries in the global south to work in relatively richer countries on the work sector that Lutz’s book “The new maid: transnational and care economy” (2011: 4, 26) called “the three Cs: cooking, caring and cleaning” or what Parrenas’s article (2001: 364) called “emotional labor”. These sectors of work that traditionally are often considered to be female’s unpaid duties to provide in the private sphere. It is assumed that this growing demand reflects the change of social-economic conditions and gender relations in the richer destination country itself, as population in those countries, especially female, has been deeper integrated into the labor market outside the home and the need for foreign workers to replace their duties in the house has increased (Lutz, 2011: 24; Resurreccion, 2010: 38). Brooke (2009: 4) pointed out female jobs outside home require full commitment from labor force, but does not provide enough support to compensate for the loss of workers who perform domestic works at home.

This practice, thus, partly stimulates the recent trend of ‘feminization of migration’ where the number of female migrant workers is rapidly increasing to match or even outnumber male migrants (Castles and Miller, 2009:). For example, as mentioned in Brooke’s article (2009: 4), at least 65% of migrant workers from the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka are female. According to Parrenas’s articles (2001: 362 -363) this migration trend seems to be a reversal from the traditional trend where males are the ones who usually migrate to work abroad in order to fulfill their ‘bread winner’ role. This shift of gender migration also changes the perspective on the role of females in migration from females as ‘the followers’ of male migrant to females who take initiative of their own life/migration experience instead (Panthaloet, 2012:1; Kusakabe and Pearson, 2010).

In her article on the social impact of female migration, Piper (2008: 12) argues that the focus on gender aspects of migration is important as generally the migration experience of male and female migrant workers could be different. She points out that labor migration in Asia is often shaped by clear gender based division of labor where most of female migrants work in “social reproduction” jobs such as care work or jobs that required delicacy, while most men often have jobs in pure labor sectors such as construction (Piper, 2008: 1292). Therefore, it could be said that some aspects of migrant experience are gender specific.

It is shown that in many cases, the life and living conditions of those who work in female jobs such as migrant domestic workers are prone to risky situations. In their article on transnational domestic workers in Singapore, Rahman, Yeoh and Huang (2005) indicate that working and living in the inferior position under the private space that is controlled by the employer seems to be the nature of domestic workers’ job. This means it is likely that they must comply with working conditions and rules that are in accordance to their employers’ need. For example, they can be prone to abuses such as long working hours to suit their employers’ life style without payment substitution. In some case, the migrants even have to sacrifice their own cultural practices in order to comply with the demand of employers. For example, some Muslim girls are not allowed to practice their daily prayers (Rahman, Yeoh and Huang, 2005). In addition, according to, Brooke (2009:4) and Lutz (2011: 19) as domestic works are conducted in the private sphere, there is not so much chance for migrant to contact any other people beside their employer, thus making it more difficult for domestic migrant workers to ask for help. There are also cases of sexual abuse towards domestic migrant workers by their employers (Nurchayati, 2011; Johnson, 2011).

The article by Rahman, Yeoh and Huang (2005:245) and the article by Chin (2005) on transnational domestic migrants in Malaysia both point out that domestic workers can also be made in public sphere as the others who have tendency to threaten the security and order of the host country; thus they often have the policies where migrant are welcomed to stay only as the ‘supply’ for employers’ demand but are not welcome as part of the community. In Malaysia, for example, the otherness of migrant workers has been solidified by a law preventing transnational domestic workers from being married to Malaysian citizens (Chin, 2005: 272). The notion of dangerous other has lead to more control of employers toward migrants’ private affairs. For instance, some employers in Singapore think that allowing migrants to be out of the home and associate with people from the migrant’s community without their close supervision would be prone to what they consider as “unethical” activity

such as having sexual activities. For this reason, many migrants do not have a day-off (Rahman, Yeoh and Huang, 2005: 245). Furthermore, labor laws in many countries often exclude domestic workers or other informal female jobs such as sex workers from formal legal protection and recognition, thus, increasing the risk of them being exploited (Brooke, 2009:4; Lutz, 2011:19, Chin, 2005: 272, Briget, 2010: 64 – 65; Ally, 2005).

Not to mentioned that domestic migrant workers often have to leave their family behind only to work for the benefit of others' family in richer countries as the law often doesn't permit the family of the workers to migrate and live with them in the destination country or workers' may not have enough resources to afford moving the entire family (Lutz, 2011: 24). This can sometimes cause migrants emotional distress with the loneliness and guilt of not being able to take care of the family and perform the expected duties of mother/ daughter (Brooke, 2009: 8).

Piper's (2008: 1296) article on the development aspect of feminization migration also reveals that the trend of migrant labor diversification in terms of country of origin can also cause negative effects for female migrant workers' status as the employer may prefer workers from a country where workers are not well-aware of workers' rights and are more obedient toward the employers. For example, there is less demand for maids from Philippine in richer countries in East Asia as the Philippine state is more active in protecting the rights of their migrant workers.

However, it also should be mentioned as in line with the arguments pointed out in the article examining transnational care work in the context of Asia by Huang, Thang and Toyota (2012). The article (Huang, Thang and Toyota, 2012: 130 - 132) argues that the characteristic of transnational care work should not be viewed as universal and based on economy alone as cultural context is equally important in order to understand the process and complexity of care work in different settings. Thus the fact that care works can be conceptualized differently should always be in consideration.

- The context of labor migration from Burma in Thailand

The general information of migrant workers in Thailand seems to be conformed to the migration trends mentioned above. According to Myat's article (2010: 2-3) overviewing Burma – Thai migration, Thailand's low-skilled labor shortage, economic gap, and relatively better living quality compared to its neighbor countries are factors that draw many

transnational migrant workers to work in Thailand. On the other hand, Burma's long border with Thailand, its relatively large population, as well as, political and economic instability are push factors driving people from Burma to seek jobs in Thailand (Myat, 2010: 2-3). While there is no exact number of migrant workers from Burma in Thailand, it could be assumed that they are Thailand's biggest group of foreigners and mostly, at first, come to work in Thailand irregularly (Myat, 2010: 1). This can be seen through the statistic of unskilled migrant workers from Burma who have come to Thailand irregularly and are in the process of regularizing their status³. According to IOM (2013), as of 25 July 2013, the number of migrant workers from Burma who entered Thailand irregularly and are still in or have completed the regularization process is around 1.2 million; in comparison, the number of unskilled migrant workers who come to work in Thailand through official state-run programs is only 36,650 (IOM, 2013). Moreover, it needs to be mentioned that there may be a substantial amount of migrants from Burma who are working irregularly in Thailand and are not included into this statistic.

As pointed out in IOM's migration report, Thai state policies and attitude toward transnational migrants has been shifting back and forth between acknowledging the need for a cheap labor force to sustain its labor intensive export oriented economy (Hall, 2011: 24) and the concern for national security (Archavanitkul and Hall, 2011: 67). Thus as pointed out in the article by Toyota (2005: 293) on domestic workers from Burma in Thailand, this often results in reluctant migration policies that accept low skilled migrants to work in Thailand but enforce strict laws to control any 'potential problems' which often jeopardize migrant workers' basic rights and provide an opportunity for authorities to extort from the labor smuggling industry between Thailand and Burma.

It is not surprising that the system of migrant management and registration in Thailand is complicated and the details of procedures are constantly changing. The main idea of Thai migration policy is to regularize the irregular migrants who are already working in Thailand while trying to develop channels for importing migrants from Burma to work in Thailand regularly. At the same time there are no policies or plans for this group of migrants to be long-term residents in Thailand as migrant only should be in Thailand because of the demand from Thai employers. The last round of regularization was taking place in 2013 which will give workers from Burma a passport that is valid for six years and rights to work in Thailand

³ This is the only statistic dealing with the number of low skilled migrant workers in Thailand

for four years, as well as a work permit. To complete the process workers must also pay for health insurance and medical check-ups as well. The workers who have completed the regularization process will receive the same basic labor rights as Thai laborers (IOM, 2013). According to my interview with a colleague from the development organization (February, 2014) I used to work with, the latest problem in the regularization process is Thailand's political situation. The political unrest and having an acting government disables Thailand's ability to extend the working period of migrant workers who entered the regularization process in 2009 and many of who's permission to work in Thailand is going to be expired in April or May 2014. It is expected that around 700,000 migrants will be affected by this problem⁴.

According to Toyota (2005:289), employing female domestic workers has always been a practice in Thai society; however, domestic work is viewed negatively by Thai society because of its connotation with a low social position and because of the view that it is a job that no people who have a better choice would choose to do. It is not surprising that with the expansion of the Thai economy there is a shortage of domestic workers supply and Thai households have started to hire migrant workers instead (Toyota, 2005: 290).

Even with a constant attempt to regularize domestic migrant workers, to a certain extent it seems that the lives of migrant workers in Thailand who work in the domestic sphere are relatively more vulnerable than other migrants; similar to the overall trend, domestic workers in Thailand receive less protection from labor laws and the nature of work leaves them in a vulnerable position. It should be noted that the law to guarantee the basic labor rights of domestic workers in Thailand was just authorized in 2012; however, even within this law domestic workers is still receive less protection than other types of laborers (Matichon, 2012). The comprehensive survey studies on domestic migrant workers from Burma in Thailand by Panam, Zaw, Caouette, and Punpuing , (2004: xii - xiv) also point out that as most domestic migrant workers in Thailand live-in with their employers without so much chance to interact with their own peers, they live in conditions that could easily lead to being exploited for instance having to work in long hours without proper compensation.

Toyota (2005: 297) argues that the exploitation of transnational domestic workers in Thailand is not only caused by economic motives but also shaped by cultural practices as housemaids who live just for food, clothes and accommodation without pay has always been a tradition of

⁴ Kanokporn, 22/02/2014

Thailand. And the nature of the relationship between domestic workers and their employers is not often based on economic but reciprocity systems where the domestic workers are not considered as economic laborers who have rights but as someone who found assistance from people with higher status. The result of my interviews which will be presented later seems to confirm that this kind of practice is still embedded in the mind set of some employers.

Victim or agent?

There have been numerous debates on whether low-skilled female migrants such transnational domestic workers should be viewed as victims or active agents. With the example of the vulnerable conditions mentioned above, it is quite reasonable that domestic migrants are viewed as victims. As pointed out in the articles of Nurchayati (2011:480), Ueno (2013: 37 - 38) and Johnson (2011 :462) much of the literature on migrant domestic workers and reports published by human rights organizations often depict migrant domestic workers as victim who are exploited by multi - actors in multi-level and dimensions including the current world political economic structure. According to Ueno (2013: 37)'s article, even the literature on migrant domestic workers' relationships often depicts the "love drain" aspect of migrant life where a mother or wife has traumatic experience as her care/love is drained away from her own family to the destination countries' family instead.

Thus, it is important to point out that many literatures also explore how working abroad has provided various opportunities and experience that are not available for the migrants at home, which in the end could strengthen their agency. Their new role as 'bread winner', for example, could challenge the patriarchal gender relation at home (Lutz, 2011: 21, 25). Furthermore, working in the domestic sphere doesn't always mean that domestic workers will take a passive role in the relationship with the employers and solely rely on them, as indicated in Lutz (2011: 186). There are also cases where migrant domestic workers and employers mutually rely on each other such as when employers also establish trust with migrants and do want them to stay at the job. The articles of Nurchayati (2011) and Johnson (2011) also depict that migrants do not passively accept their challenging circumstances and try to resist as well as negotiate to change their situation and gain more power. Ueno's article (2013:38) also challenges the "love/care drain" concept by indicating that numerous migrants attempt to have romantic relationships in the destination country (Singapore in her case) due

to the benefit for their migration experience or for their social mobility both in term of legal and social status. Paul's article (2009) also mentions how their experience being domestic migrant workers have provided some migrants knowledge and skills that enable them to change their circumstances to the context where they can be treated better as workers, such as moving from being maids in Saudi Arabia to working in western countries.

Therefore, as Lutz (2011: 185) points out, the boundary between 'active agent' and 'victim' is not clearly distinguished and migrant workers can be viewed in both positions. These two positions, in reality, are inseparable and should be analyzed together in order to fully comprehend the situation of each migrant worker (Lutz, 2011: 185)

- The cases of migrants from Burma in Thailand

Being 'victims' seems to be the representation that dominates the literature on Migrants from Burma in Thailand especially in those which are written by development agencies. According to Wai (2004 in Bhumiprabhas and Kerdmongkol, ed.), Koetsawang (2001) and Human Rights Watch (2010), the abuses that migrant workers face in Burma such as forced labor or violence from war have left them no other choice but to come to work in Thailand. For their migration experience in Thailand, the three literatures (Wai, Bhumiprabhas and Kerdmongkol, 2004 ; Koetsawang , 2001 ; Human Rights Watch, 2010) indicate that they have received various forms of abuses from various stakeholders including their employers, labor agents, brokers, trafficking rings, and Thai authorities, as well as, inadequate access proper criminal justice processes in all migration processes.

In the studies of Panam, Zaw, Caouette, and Punpuing (2004) which focus specifically on migrant domestic workers from Burma, the position of migrants as a 'victims' is also depicted. They (Panam, Zaw, Caouette, and Punpuing ,2004), point out various problems that domestic workers face in their migration experience from the struggling life in Burma to countless exploitation from diverse sectors in Thailand. They also highlight awareness raising, right protection and empowerment as policy recommendations to authorities.

However, although it seems not to be the initial intention of this research (Panam, Zaw, Caouette, and Punpuing ,2004), it is one of a few studies on migrants from Burma published by a Thai organization that not only presents the migrant as victims but also as 'active agents'. For example, there is a discussion that even if some of the female migrants face a lot of obstacles in Thailand, they still prefer to stay in Thailand rather than going back to Burma

as they want to escape pressure from family to conform to the role of a good daughter. There is also a discussion on the intention of these migrant to improve and advance themselves with their migration experience.

Panthaloet's (2012) thesis on Lao female migrants who works in Karaoke bars in Thailand also points out the unclear boundary and complexity between being a victim or being an agent. For example, some Laos women she interviewed have been tricked into working at karaoke bars, but at a certain time, adapted to the working conditions there and became willing to be exploited on some level rather than go home in order to secure the benefit of being workers (Panthaloet, 2012: 172 - 173).

In addition, it should also be pointed out that migrants' agency is not only exercised in the work-related sphere but also in general everyday life, as indicated in Kerdmongkol's thesis (2011). Although migrants from Burma are strictly controlled by Thai authority's migrant workers management system, they are still able to find space to exercise their resistance. For example, through regular activities such as shopping, migrants workers create a normal life space that is not conformed to the controlled space created by Thai state.

Labour movement and social capital in the context of transnational workers

What is the relationship between transnational labor migration and social capital, how do migrants accumulate and acquire their social capital, and how does social capital shape the migration experience in various aspects seems to be the main question in the existing research on migration and social capital.

Multiple publications (Hopkins, 2011; Chamlee-Wright and Storr, 2011) , have stressed the importance of collective identity, such as sharing place of origin or shared grievance/traumatic experiences, as the base for migrants to build social capital; s. For instance, as illustrated in Cambell (2012), the multi –ethnic migrants from Burma in Thailand have achieved cohesion between people with different ethnic and religious background because of the shared frustrated migration experience. In addition to that, working in the same place and being in the same situation can also be a platform for mobilization of social capital. One example is given by Anderson (2010: 62 -63) through his depiction of the domestic migrant workers' movement in United Kingdom (UK) which started as an anti-Marcos regime movement by Pilipino migrants, but turned into an organization advocating for domestic

workers regardless of nationality through the contact that Pilipino maids had with migrants of other nationalities who worked with them.

However, it is not necessary for migrants to build social capital or prefer bonding social capita (people who are similar to them) over bridging capital (people who are different). Sometime migrants will choose to enhance their status in one network even if it means that they will need to sacrifice their role in another social network; even if the network is bonding social capital that share a certain degree of similarity with migrants themselves. For example, some migrant domestic workers from the Philippines refusing to help their countrymen to find jobs as it might ruin their reputation with employers (Paul, 2013). Or in some cases, it seems that shared identity is not a vital part in social capital building for migrants. As indicated in the field studies of Kim (2013: 357), one of the most important factors for migrants in determining who to create networks with is the social position of that person rather than shared identity.

Nevertheless, based on their field reports, Nurchayati (2011), Johnson (2011) and Ueno's (2013) s articles still indicate that fellow workers from the same countries of origin (and villages) seem to be the main social networks/capital that domestic migrant workers have abroad. These fellow workers seem to be the sources of information and mental support such as exchanging experience on harassment they have received, and being a social safety net that could give them assistance in emergency situations (Nurchayati ,2011; Johnson, 2011).

Ueno (2013) demonstrated that having lovers or boyfriends, regardless of nationality, can be useful social capital for migrants both physically and psychologically; interestingly, the content of her article also reveals a more complicated account on relationships among migrant workers where there is constant competition to be better and gain higher society status among fellow migrants as well such as having Caucasian boyfriends who assert their identity more than fellow workers.

In terms of formal institutional social capital, the articles of Ally (2005: 187 -188) and Ford (2004: 101 -102) state that, generally, it is quite difficult for domestic migrant workers to have institutionalized collective action, such as having active labor unions, due to their nature of work, more private relationships with employers and how they are viewed as not being "real workers" which create structural and legal barriers for collective action. Ally (2005) also mentions that, even within unions, domestic workers have always been treated with lower status and are given less priority because the union often thinks that domestic workers

cannot be mobilized, thus domestic workers often have to rely on other types of organizations such as NGOs which according to her sometime view workers as their “client victim” (189).

Nevertheless, Ally (2005: 200 -201) asserts that the notion that domestic workers unions cannot be organized is a myth and there are some examples of successful domestic worker-based organizations due to a shift of strategy from servicing labor to advancing political goals and labor rights; as well as, conducting the activities on public space rather than the workplace.

In spite of that, Ford (2004) offers another perspective on domestic workers and unions. Although there is no formal labor union of domestic workers, the boundary between different kinds of organizations working with migrant workers such as unions and NGOs is more flexible than given credit for in the literature. For example, there are numeral domestic worker’s networks and organization that are created through the support from NGOs (Ford, 2004,111-112).

Anyhow, as illustrated in Anderson’s (2010) article on the migrant domestic workers’ movement in the UK, successfully mobilizing may not be enough to make a significant change ; the strategy for using the mobilized power and the level of activeness is quite important as well. As shown by the example of domestic workers’ organization movement in the UK such as ‘Waling Waling’ which had took the strategy to develop migrant to be active citizen who fighting for rights and recognition (Anderson, 2010: 61-63). With this strategy, the organization seems to have had some success as the UK has started a policy to regularize migrant domestic workers. However, Anderson (2010, 69) also reveals that since the shift of the state’s policy the organization and the members are less active and are more concerned about their case or about bringing their family members to UK than with conducting a politically motivated movement.

- Social Capital and Social Network of Migrant Workers in Thailand

There are few studies on social capital in the context of transnational migrant workers in Thailand and most of the studies seem to emphasize more on the concept of social networks among migrant themselves or ethnic communities rather than on social capital. Nevertheless, some of them have provided background information and interesting observation on low - skilled transnational migrant’s network in Thailand.

In the studies of Kerdmongkol (2011) on Pa –O migrants (from Burma) in Thailand, he concludes that the transnational communities of Pa – O migrants are created in order to give the support needed for survival and adaptation to life in Thailand. The communities are tied together in three characteristics which are kinship and peer based community, ethnic based community and a community that is tied by shared experience of being transnational migrants.

However, the role of social capital in the migration experience does not only limit the social capital in the destination country; on another hand, social capital in country of origin is also essential for migration experience. According to a survey by Pearson and Kusakabe (2012 :167), 50% of their sampled migrants from Burma have their extended family helping them to raise children, as many cannot effort the cost or commitment of raising children by themselves in Thailand. Nonetheless, in this case, migrants also have to contribute to these network, such as sending back remittance, in order to keep ties (Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012 : 167).

Anyhow, as pointed out in the theoretical section, social capital or networks do not only provide benefits but they can also be the source of conflicts and exclusion as well. As Panthaloet's thesis on Laos migrants in Thailand (2012: 173) argues that the nature of migrant's social network is quite dynamic rather than static. For example, as the case in her studies suggests, the characteristic of relationships within the network of Laos' migrants is often shifting between supportive and conflicting. This can sometimes entirely diminish the ties to the social network for some migrants themselves. For example, a Laos migrant who was found by her peer to be a spy for police received tremendous social sanctions that caused her to leave her job at a Karaoke shop (Planthaloet, 2012: 174).

Also, it should be noted that how and what kind of social capital is built does not depend on individual agency alone, but is also shaped by other factors such as gender expectations. Thus, for instance, the reasons for migrants to remit money home might not only be for mutual economic benefit, but also to fulfill the duties as good daughters as well.

Chapter 4: Migrants' experience and the meaning of social capital

Me (Ganon): Why don't you move to the US. since you have a right to do as a refugee?

*Mom (my informant): In Thailand if I have no works I can contact someone, there I have no one.*⁵

This chapter presents the experience of the informants as transnational domestic workers. It also presents an analysis of their experiences according to the selected theoretical concepts. The analysis displays the role of social capital in the context of the lives of female transnational migrant domestic workers. It also attempts to show the migrants' perspective on their relationship with social networks.

The Informants (See Appendix 1 for background information on the informants)

- All interviewees from this section are female
- All of them work as domestic workers at present
- All of them work in Bangkok Metropolitan Area
- Except for Aye (not sure less than 5 years) and Nam (around 8 years), all interviewees have been working in Thailand for more than ten years.
- All of them have not completed high school

Wan – 40 years old. She is the only interviewee who knew me personally prior to the interviews. She now lives with her second husband and their daughter in a room provided by her employers. She has another older daughter who lives in Burma with her previous husband. Wan was more open to me than any other informant. She was a migrant worker in Burma before she came to Thailand.

Ngam – 38 years old. Ngam's job is to take care of her employer's factory but she doesn't have to do regular cleaning work. She only has to clean her employer's home twice a week.

⁵ Mom, 09/03/2014

Her husband is a high ranked worker in the factory and they live separated from her employers' house. Ngam has quite a good reputation in the eyes of a Thai person who recommend her to me; she told me that Ngam has proper manners and is very articulate when talking. She comes from the same village as Wan and was an internal migrant worker in Burma before coming to Thailand. She has two children. She is extremely interested in religion.

Aye – 19 years old. Aye is a young maid who is now working for my relative. She, unlike my other interviewees, was born and grew up in a refugee camp. She doesn't have much working experience. She is single and has no boyfriend. In my opinion she is the most naïve of all of the interviewees.

Nid – 38 years old. Nid is the only ethnic Burmese informant. She doesn't live in her employer house but lives with her husband in their own rented room. Her husband works as a construction worker at the temple near her work place.

Moei – 24 years old. I met Meoi at the migrant Sunday vocational school which I found through my NGO contact. The director of the school introduced Moei to me. As a 24 year old, she is the second youngest of my interviewees, but her life and work experience in Thailand could be compared to the interviewees in their thirties since she has lived in Thailand for more than ten years and has strong agency. When I interviewed her, she told me her own narrative rather than waiting for me to ask questions. She is very aware about her rights as a worker in Thailand and dreams of social mobility. She is single and doesn't want to be in a romantic relationship.

Cherry – 35 years old. I met her at the vocational school as well and she was also introduced to me by the director of the school. She already has completed courses there but still comes to school to do volunteer work. Among my interviewees she is well aware and knowledgeable about her rights as a migrant worker in Thailand. She treats her job professionally and is much empowered. She is working with Western employers. She is single and has no boyfriend.

Nam – 40 years old. Her current employer is the only employer she has had in Thailand. Compared to other informants of her age, she is less knowledgeable about Thailand and has less fluent language skills. She is a widow.

Bear – 29 years old. Bear works as a baby sitter. I met Bear twice, but the first time was just to give a brief introduction regarding my thesis and the interview. The second meeting was for full interview. Compared to many interviewees, Bear is quite confident as she seems not to be anxious about my presence at all (she always came late to our appointments and told me her needs directly). She has a son whom she brought back to Burma while she and her husband are still working in Thailand.

Apple – 29 years old. I had a short interview with her as she was not finished with her daily work and seemed to want to return to work. She is single.

Mom – 30 – 40 years old. She is Aye's mother. She was born in Burma but also grew up in refugee camp. She has two daughters; one of them is still living in the refugee camp. She, her husband and her daughters now live separately and can only meet on Sunday when they have a day off from work. She has been working as a maid since she was teenager. Her husband is working in a furniture factory.

Baitong – 44 years old. She comes from the same village as Wan and Ngam. At the time of the interview, she was looking for jobs and staying with Wan temporarily. She said she is one of the poorer people in her village. She has two children; her daughter has now come to work in Thailand while her son is ordained.

Apart from the domestic migrants, I also interviewed two employers, Ranee and Luxika; a development worker, Kanokporn and a monk who operates the merit making activities. Ranee is my relative. Luxika is the mother of my friend from high school.

Social Capital and Migration Process

According to the interviews, my informants are part of chain migration (Castles and Miller, 2009: 29). They are not the pioneer migrants in their communities as their movement was facilitated by the “strong and informal” social capital such as friends and relatives in the same village who have been working in Thailand before (Putnam, 2002: 10 -11). Most of them are the first generation in their family that move to Thailand.

The main reason that motivates my interviewees to come to Thailand is economic opportunities. They felt that they were poor and wanted a better life for themselves and their

family. The economic activities in their home town are working in the field, doing some small daily wage work, and selling their product. These activities only enable them to survive on a daily basis and provide them no capital surplus. Moreover, even skilled workers in Burma are paid less than domestic workers in Thailand.

“ There was no work in Burma, most of the work was daily wage work that I had to do to buy rice day by day, I had no savings as there are so many people in my family”⁶

The migration processes though is possible because of social capital they have. Similar to the roles of social capital in assisting or influencing the migration process as described by Faist (2000: 145), for my informants, social capital is a source of information regarding the economic opportunities in Thailand. They, for example, receive information on employment, expected salary, how to move to Thailand and encouragement to migrate. Many times the networks are the one who arrange everything for potential migrants to come to Thailand.

“My relative said the salary is low here [Mae Sot – Thai border town], so she told me and my boyfriend to come to Bangkok...then my relative found me and my boyfriend a job”⁷

Some migrants used their social capital as a safety net guaranteeing that helped them decide to migrate. Having trusted social networks, they were ensured that they would have some support in Thailand especially when they had to move to a place with a completely strange context.

“My mother told me that since I did not have the number of pi⁸ Moo [alias – her relative], ... there would be no one to help me if I had troubles in Thailand, but this time since p’Moo recommended (the agent) for me, I decided to come...[o]nce I arrived, she found me a job”⁹

During the irregular movement process, migrants’ destiny totally depends on brokers which mostly are informal and irregular one. In this case, having a social network personally recommending a place to work or migration agencies means migrants will face less risk. Their friends or relatives would know who will be responsible if migrants faced abuses

⁶ Wan, 13/02/14

⁷ Wan, 20/02/2014

⁸ It is a Thai word to refer to someone who is older, usually imply close tie.

⁹ Ngam, 16/02/2014

during the migration process. Otherwise, migrants may face problems and are not able to seek help as described by Nid.

“There were five workers [coming together with her to Bangkok], and there was one who was forced to sleep with the broker when we rested at the hotel, but what could I do?, It was totally dependent on luck at that point.”¹⁰

Moreover, in the case that the trust between migrants and their ties is high such as being members of the same family, networks are also sometimes responsible for the cost of migration.

Similar to the point makes by Fasit’ (2000: 140), the migration process of new comers is made possible by the reciprocal norm among the villagers that helps sustain a transnational network of support. Although, this norm is not explicitly mentioned, it could be easily assumed from the interviews that to follow this norm is vital for the villagers. It is common that villagers might receive some form of social sanction such as being a target for gossip if they refuse to help their fellow villagers. For example, when I interviewed Wan, she mentioned that people from the same villages often ask for her assistance to find employers in Thailand, but she is often reluctant to help. She chooses to give excuses to them such as lying that there are no jobs available. The reason she doesn’t want to get involved, in helping others from her village, as in the quote below, explicitly shows the degree of reciprocal expectation she was subjected to by her community.

“It feels like duties and responsibility (to help new comers until they are able to adapt) [---](what will happen if she doesn’t keep being responsible for the new comer who she finds a job for?) their families might be angry and mistreat me such as gossip about me”¹¹.

It should also be noted that since Wan has worked in Thailand for a long time and has worked with her employers for almost ten years, she is already quite well adapted to Thailand. Therefore, she no longer needs as much assistance from her village’s networks. Once her position in the village’s network has turned from help-receiver to help-provider, she considered that it is not worthwhile anymore to continue to reinforce these norm/practices.

¹⁰ Nid, 22/02/2014

¹¹ Wan, 13/02/2014

While the theory mentioned how social capital facilitates migration, it doesn't explore how relations with social capital stimulate these females to migrate. Considering the cultural context in the village, according to the interview, the norm of obligation toward parents well-being is strongly observed by villagers. Taking good care of their parent materially and mentally is an expected duty for individuals that should be strictly observed both as an admirable duty in the eye of the community and as a moral obligation. Thus to gain money in order to improve their parents and family living standard is main stimulation of all my informants to migrate. Morally, the concept of karma has been cited in some interviews as a reason to conserve the norm. If this norm is not observed then these females could encounter gossiping both for what the villagers perceive as their malpractices and for their potential unfortunate faith deal to their bad karma. For some informants, to follow this norm means an investment as they expect that their good deeds will be beneficial for them in the next life.

“I remit money both to my parents and my husband's parents ... as my in-laws cannot work anymore so I should be responsible for them as well ... I'm afraid of karma if I don't do that.”¹²

How relationship with social network stimulate migration could also come from seeing the different between oneself and those in the same social circle. Almost all of my informants especially those who were aged around 30 -40 have emphasized that the financial success of other villagers who were working in Thailand was their main inspiration to migrate. The success is displayed through improvement of economic status such as building new big houses for families which often simulate desire of their fellow villagers to do the same.

Social Capital and working life in Thailand

- Fellow Villagers

Similar to the process of migration, my informants also mainly rely on the strong informal tie of people from their village who work in Thailand when they live in Thailand as a domestic workers. Their social network could provide the newcomers some important skills for working in Thailand such as basic Thai words and how to clean employers' houses properly

¹² Baitong, 18/03/2014

according to their employers' taste. Most of them mentioned that there are big differences in the perception of cleanliness and details of cleaning between their employers' space in Thailand and their home in Burma.

“Thai people’s house are sooo clean that I felt I should not step on it, I have never lived like this before....ironing cloth too, when I had to do it I almost wanted to cry. Here is not like at home where ironing cloth is such a simple matter”¹³

Social capital also provides an economic and social support when migrants need it. Almost all my informants except Aye said that there are a lot of people who ask them to help financially. The support can also come in the form of providing shelter and a place to stay when migrants are unemployed.

“I lived in my relatives’ house for two months when I tried to find work”¹⁴

Borrowing money from friends is one of the main economic supports and sources of credit among migrants. However, Bear¹⁵ is the only informant that has participated in self setting rotating credit groups. She and around 15 close friends from the same village set up a saving group where they put their money together as an emergency fund for people in her own group. This group provides them financial assets when needed and helps them to rely less on borrowing money from other people which always has high interest rates. Nevertheless, this practice requires a high level of social trust. All members of the group are people who know each other well and are expected to share the same norm/obligation.

“I trusted them and there is no one who has cheated yet, if some of them cheat then no one in the village will talk to them again”¹⁶

The networks also continue to be the most important source of information that shapes migrant’s awareness and perspective, through words of mouth and informal conversations. The information that is discussed and shared could be an inquiry on the well-being of their own family, discussion on behavior and news of other migrants, consulting and encouraging

¹³ Nid, 22/02/2014

¹⁴ Nid, 22/02/2014

¹⁵ Bear, 12/03/2014

¹⁶ Bear, 12/03/2014

friends who have problems, giving information on places to seek social service or updating on their working experience and work related information.

Sharing information on work experience could form an expectation and raise awareness on their job condition such as the rate of salary that longtime employees should receive.

“I met a person from my village in the van back home, she told me that since I had been working here for a long time I should get paid a lot”¹⁷

Almost all informants rely on their fellow villagers when they want to find jobs or change jobs. Additionally, the person who recommends a new job themselves also found that information through their own social network or their employer’s social networks. While it is easy to find a job via the “informal ties” (Putnam, 2002: 10 -11), this method of job searching often doesn’t provide the negotiation power on working conditions as much as finding a job via a formal recruitment agents does. One of the reasons is that migrants often acquire jobs for their friends through the network of their employers. However, as they themselves already have an unequal relationship with the employers; it is more difficult to negotiate for proper working conditions for other migrants. Not to mention that migrants themselves are often not aware of labor rights and laws. Therefore, migrants have to take a risk on their employment condition.

The choices for employment might also be more varied with the agency service. For instance, Cherry found her current job with a foreign employer via an agent service and has a formal working contact. However, migrants must have enough life skills and be familiar with the context of Thailand enough to rely on other networks that are not their strong tie social capital. Cherry, for example, is able to speak Thai and has a lot of knowledge; thus she found an access to recruitment agents.

Migrants finding work through the assistance of an informal social network actually seems to be more beneficial to employers because they take on a lower level of risk than when they hire a stranger. For example, they find it to be easier to find a surety (the worker recommender) in cases where the workers have committed a behavior that they do considered as improper such as running away. Therefore, the migrants who recommend new workers

¹⁷ Nid, 22/02/2014

must find some ways to deal with the expected responsibilities from employers when they decide to help finding jobs for their social networks.

Their isolate nature of work means that these contacts with their fellow villagers have been kept very actively through mobile phones which according to the employer “are ringing all the time”¹⁸. Unlike what Putnam (2002: 16 -17) points out on the irony of technology that could increase the chance for communication but decrease actual interaction within the network; in the context of migrant domestic workers, mobile phones have enormously increased the chance of contact. The interaction within networks as mobile phones can be used to make an appointment when they have free time and to inform the network on social events such as merit making events.

Ties with their villagers also play an important role in helping migrants facing a crisis situation. For example when they want to leave abusive employers but don’t know how to do so. Sometimes, in a case like this, the assistance from other people who are not migrants is vital in dealing with things that migrants from Burma aren’t able to do. The example below shows that although the fellow migrants is the one who are requested for help and operate the escape plan, a “very thin” capital such as people whom they meet regularly without actual contact could also be resources in a crisis situation (Putnam, 2002: 10 -11).

“Her [the migrants who asked her for help] employers also threatened me to give her money within an hour otherwise she would send the girl to the police, the girls cried and asked for help... since I do not even know how to transfer money I had to hire security guard to transfer money for me, I didn’t even know where does this girl live so I asked her to call a taxi and told the taxi direction on mobile phone, the taxi sympathize with the story so he took her to me free of charge.”¹⁹

Helping other migrants in a risky situation could also enhance one’s status in the network, such as how Wan feels that Ngam is a good person as she has helped recruit the Karen migrants who were cheated by their employers.

Although this is not explicitly said in the interview, according to my observation as someone who is similar with the context of migrant workers, the assistance of the villages’ network is

¹⁸ Rane, 18/03/2014

¹⁹ Bear, 12/03/2014

crucial because there are not many other capitals available for the migrants. For example, as they came to Thailand irregularly without much education, they most often cannot use or access to the service of governments or formal recruitment agencies in order to come to work in Thailand or in order to seek help when they are mistreated. Therefore, it is not surprising that they must rely on their own informal social network throughout their working life in Thailand.

- Employer

It is not surprising that the migrant – employer relationship is filled with conflicts and many times employers can easily take advantage of domestic workers. It could be said that the nature of the relationship between employers and workers is a power relationship in a similar way to patron-client relationship where both side receive mutual benefit from the relationship but the power (and benefit?) is unequal (King, 2009: 157). However, it doesn't mean that the unequal relationship cannot co-exist with other aspects of the relationship in the perspective of migrants. While some migrants like Cherry prefers to keep the working relationship as professional as possible and try to remain independent from employers, other have a different perspective on the working relationship. Depending on different contexts, employers actually could be one of the main social capitals for migrants.

From my informants' experience, employers play a crucial role in migrants' adaptation to Thai society; they often are the one who teach migrants Thai language, work and expected norms in Thai society. The employers also assist migrants in dealing with Thai authorities such as finding schools for their children or helping migrants when they have troubles with police. They also serve as one of the main sources of economic capital for migrants when migrants need to use money. Some employers also provide food and accommodation that is better than the average of Thai society.

Due to being different in almost every aspect except for gender in the case of female employers, they can give migrants new knowledge and perspectives. They can foster their maid to the idea of individuality and future plans by giving migrants advice not to remit all money back home. For example, Ranee²⁰ told me that she is quite skeptical toward the practices of remitting all money home. She felt that the practice left migrants without capital

²⁰ Ranee, 18/03/2014

for themselves to be able to save for the future. According to her, the money remitted home is sometime not carefully used. Thus, she tries to teach her maid to think of herself and her own future not only about her family.

Since employers are often older, combined with the power relation, the workers especially those in older generation often treat them as adult figures and treat their employers' instructions as those of older relatives. For example, when one of Ranee's²¹ workers had a problem with men, her sister informed Ranee about it and asked Ranee to help supervise the worker. Similarly, as in the experience of Bear, a welcoming and kind employer can also fulfill the role of family that the migrant doesn't have in Thailand.

“I was so lucky that I had such a kind employer who understood me, she taught me everything, taught me to work, taught me to speak Thai. She took care of me almost like her children, allowed me to eat everything, took me out to travel ... [she] took care of me like her own family member and I didn't feel that I lacked anything”²²

This kind of relationship can be developed to the point that migrants are considered as part of the employer's family and that they are genuinely concerned with each other's well-being. For example, Ngam who used to promised her current employers that she will take care of them all their life fulfilling the role of daughter that her employers don't have (before she decided that she wants to ordain).

This kind of relationship though could give migrants an emotional cost when the relationship with their employer is ended. For example, Ngam is concerned about how her employers will manage once she returns to Burma. Many times the relationship is kept even after the employment is ended and some employers still provide assistance for migrants when needed.

All in all, employers can actually be one of the most significant social capitals for migrants and it can be said that it is the only strong tie bridging capital that the migrants have. Also, many aspects of the relationship transcendence the notion of migrant as total victims under the power relation mentioned by King (2009: 157) above.

²¹ Ranee, 18/03/2014

²² Bear 12/03/2014

- Religious Institution

Another very important bridging social capital in the working life of my informants is the temple. Almost all of them except Cherry said that they like to visit the temples. They prefer to go to the temple rather than to the department store which is a famous activity for many migrants according to my informants. The temple provides them a space that offers a peaceful feeling they cannot find elsewhere. Considering their context of work where work place and home are the same place, it is quite understandable that they would find the temple to be a place to escape to. The religious institution can also have deep effects that it shifts one life goal and how one perceives the world as in the case of Ngam whom discover the teaching about nirvana and change her life goal to eliminating her passion instead of settling in Thailand.

Religious institutions and ceremony also provide a platform for building ethnic community and reproducing collective identity (Castles and Miller, 2003: 40). According to my informants, most of the religious ceremonies are ethnic-based. This gives them a chance to reinstate their ethnic identity. The religious ceremonies, including the one I attended, always involve displaying of identity. For example, cooking ethnic food together like they have done at home, wearing ethnic dress, or listening to the sermon in one's own language. These are things that they don't have a chance to do in their work environment where they have to adapt to the space and rules of employers (Rahman, Yeoh and Huang, 2005).

- Development Organization

Of all of my informants the only two who have access to and are aware of development organizations are Moei and Cherry as I met them at the vocational school for migrants. Participating in the activities of development organizations has introduced them to new knowledge and perspectives. According to Cherry and Moei, through the school, they are informed about labor rights and health rights. They have also become more aware of the channels to seek help. This knowledge enhances their individual agency and capacity such as how Cherry feels that she is not obligated to work for employers who doesn't respect her rights²³.

²³ Cherry, 23/02/2014

The activities of development organizations also provide a chance for migrants to interact with people in different occupations as well as people with different backgrounds. This can give them new awareness and information that they can use in the future. For example, after the class in Sunday vocational school I heard some volunteers talking and exchanged with each other on the political situations in Burma. They informed each other about the road construction plan that is going to be implemented and also talked about Asean communities. Cherry and Moei themselves have thought of their future in the Asean economic community. This is something that my other respondent such as Wan has no knowledge of.

Thus, when referring to the debate on the roles of NGOs toward migrants, I'm more inclined toward the position of Ford (2004 – see background information/ literature review). The case studies of my informants have shown that NGO organizations could contribute to migrants' agency in various ways.

Trust and cost of social capital in the context of being domestic migrants workers

In the previous section I have examined the role of social networks and norms in the lives of domestic migrant workers in Thailand. In this section, the role of trust in the migrants' social capital and the cost of keeping the social capital they have will be examined.

Apart of their employers in which the nature of works make the interaction unavoidable, as mentioned above, the networks that my informants have been in contact with the most in their daily lives are strong, informal and bonding social capital namely their fellow female villagers who are also working in Thailand. When I asked them who they would ask for help apart from their employers, almost every informant answered their friends from their village.

Although one might assume that the reason for keeping a few homogenous ties is because of their isolated nature of work, I have found out that it is actually the domestic workers' preference especially those who are Karen. Apart from Bear and Nid, the rest of my informants mentioned at least once in the interviews that they prefer to not to have too much contact with others apart from their close friends. One reason that they only keep contact with people from their village is lack of trust in other networks that some of them found to be insincere. Especially when there are no obligations or norms to secure that they will not be

taken advantage of, unlike in the relationship with people from their village whom they grew up with.

My informants, for instance, build trust via being familiar with each person's personality and knowing that there is a mechanism in place to foster obligation toward each other. They know that their friends will not be accepted in the village if they scam other villagers (Faist, 2000: 104).

According to the interviewees, the reasons for the lack of trust toward other networks that keep contact between networks minimal is various.

First, some of the migrants are taught not to trust strangers and to be scared of them. They are taught that having an interaction with a stranger means being in an unpredictable position that can be harmful since they do not know the stranger's background.

“I do not have any more friends than those whom I know from the village [refugee camp] but I'm not bored at all and am more comfortable as I don't know how other people would treat me, they might not like me and then bring me trouble.”²⁴

Therefore, the nature of domestic work is desirable for almost all my informants. Working in private households means they can avoid having problems with co-workers. They also feel that there are less negative influences from peer groups that would distract them from saving money.

“People who work in a factory don't have discipline and rules. When they have a day off they will travel and spend money. Domestic workers on another hand almost have no day off so the money is not wasted. If I have a friend who is bad influence they might make me want to dress beautifully which is a costly activity. While working as domestic worker I can just wear shorts and t-shirt.”²⁵

The non-trust can also cause by bad experiences of getting taken advantage of by people who are not sure would share a mutual obligation with. For example, when the migrant workers who they are not close with ask to borrow money from them; these types of person are the ones who most of my informants despise and want to avoid. Although sometimes avoiding

²⁴ Aye, 18/02/2014

²⁵ Ngam, 16/02/2014

letting other borrow money can be difficult as the norms of kindness, generosity and manners are expected. Ngam mentions that “If they ask me for the third time and I still don’t give it then it means that I have no kindness and I lie”²⁶. This shows how having wider networks doesn’t always mean benefits, if there are no collective norms, obligations and solidarity to sustain the trust.

Nonetheless, it does not mean that associating with only friends from the village will bring them fewer troubles as they would like. To associate with the people one has strong ties with also means keeping expected obligations within the network (Putnam, 1993:103). They could end up receiving negative consequences if the expected duties are not fulfilled such as Wan’s description of why she does not want to find jobs for people in her network (see “fellow villagers”).

Associating with the people from the village also means the ties with home communities are strong. They could be constantly monitored by their peers who serve as a transnational linkage transmitting information on their behavior between their home community and Thailand. Thus, the migrants still have to act in a way that conforms to the norms of their communities even if they are currently living in Thailand. It can be seen that actually transnational links provide a way for local communities to influence migrants’ lives in another country as well. Thus, sometimes choosing to alienate themselves from the social capital whom they are not truly close to has also been a choice of some workers in order to avoid the negative consequences.

Gender, Ethnicity and Class

The reasons that my informants choose to associate with an extremely bonding social capital and not really build trust with other ties are also shaped by the context of gender, ethnicity and class. The stratification also shaped their interaction with different social capitals. As the example of my informants shows, they prefer to keep contact with people of the same gender, class and ethnicity. This section will examine how gender, ethnicity and class shape how the migrants build social trust and social networks.

- Gender

²⁶ Ngam, 16/02/2014

“I was scared of Thailand at that time, many people told me that one will lose virginity in Thailand, many people I knew started their family shortly after they came to Thailand”²⁷

The quote of Wan above shows how the belief that women belong to and are safer in private space is prevailing. (King, 2008, 198).

Considering that they are taught not to trust strangers, it is not surprising that some of the workers especially those who are still single also feel uncomfortable with men and are taught by their family to distrust men. Wan, for example, told me that the benefit of having a boyfriend is to protect her from unwanted attention from other migrants especially when she was younger²⁸. Due to these reasons, some of my informants prefer to stay at their employer’s house rather than working in a factory.

Even it is obvious that several migrant’s families are concerned with their daughter’s potential sexual behavior or that they are influence by the dichotomy of “Madonna and whores” (Harrison, 1999:168). It doesn’t always mean that they would like to control their daughter’s behavior but can be that they are concerned about whether their daughter will be able to handle being in relationship and that their daughter might get exploited. “She is still naïve and young, if she has boyfriends there are potential problems... [w]ill she [her daughter] be able to handle it [the problems of relationship]...having boyfriend when she is not mature enough might be because of lust not love”²⁹.

Also for many migrants being in relationships brings them burdens. Sometime men are demanding and do not give them personal space. Some of the informants also feel that having too much attention to relationship would disorient their goal to find money. The quote below perfectly describes how many of my informants feel.

“There are a lot of people in factories, it could bring a hassle, I prefer to live quietly ... being a domestic worker I can do the work on my own while in a factory people could cause me

²⁷ Wan, 20/02/2014

²⁸ Wan, 20/02/2014

²⁹ Mom, 09/03/2014

troubles, I also don't want men to court me, as men in factories are often already married and I don't want to have a boyfriend right now as my goal is to make money".³⁰

Not to mention that they might get tricked monetary or used as sexual partner for men who already have a family.³¹

As mentioned before, uncontrolled sexual behavior could also cost their reputation in the village. Therefore, the context of being domestic workers living in private households is used as a space to avoid potential problems. Nevertheless, it should be noted that although my informants highlight the negativity of associating with men, it doesn't mean that they completely controlled themselves sexually in practice. Ranee told me that dealing with the love problems of her maid is one of the things that gives her the most headaches (she describes a lot of relation problems of my informants that she knows but I will not address those information due to ethical consideration). Therefore, it is possible that I am informed about proper sexual behavior because it is considered to be a good image to present rather than the actual practices that my informants follow.

Resonating with the literature on transnational mother/daughter (Ueno, 2013; Thai, 2012; Boccagni, 2013 and Parrenas,2011), according to some of my informants such as Ngam³² or Bear³³, it seems that female migrants also are more likely than males to keep the obligations towards their parents while living in Thailand. Ngam told me that "[Men] start to behave badly once they come to Thailand, women also save money for family, but men when they go back home sometimes don't even have savings...there are only five from hundreds that still behave properly". This could be another reason that kept my informants from associating with the opposite sex whose characteristics according to their gender perception could detract them from intended goal.

- Ethnicity

Ethnicity is very important to the informants as all of them identify themselves by ethnicity first rather than by nationality. Even with fellow workers from Burma there is less feeling of solidarity and trust between people from different ethnic groups, not to mention about the

³⁰ Apple, 08/03/2014

³¹ Ranee, 18/03/2014 I got this information from employers not migrants.

³² Ngam, 16/02/2014

³³ Bear, 12/03/2014

Thai whose different statuses cause the power relations in the first place. When I explained the purpose of the interview to Wan that I would like to study Burmese (as nationality) domestic workers in Thailand, she told me right away “but I’m not ethnic Burmese”³⁴.

The words as “both of us are Karen” ,for example, have often been cited as a reason for some of my Karen informants when they choose to interact with someone including when helping those in need or when they choose to associate with or start a conversation with someone.

As I have found in my field research, the consciousness on ethnic differences and less association between different ethnicities could be either because of small reasons such as the language differences or it could be a result of assumptions towards norm and characteristic of another ethnic group. Ngam told me “Most of Karen are good people, for Mon they do not know how to save money, use all their (daily) salary everyday”³⁵.

According to my observation, the sense of ethnic’s belonging transcends nationality and border. At the Karen merit making activities I have observed, the monk who takes charge of organizing the activities and fundraising is actually a Thai-Karen monk not a monk from Burma. But he is view as one of the Karen and is trusted by migrants who have attended the ceremony. The ceremony I have attended is actually a merit making ceremony for his birthday. This seems to be a contrast situation to the interview of Wan where she states that her husband who is ethnic Burmese always feels out of place in Karen companies³⁶.

It also shows that ethnicity, according to the informant, is a mechanism for building social trust as well.

“Since I speak the same language as them, they lets me be the one who organize [the activities and managing the fund]”³⁷

- Class

It seems that for my informants, class is also as important as ethnicity in defining social relationship. For example, sometimes they feel that they are in the position of being looked

³⁴ Wan, 09/02/2014

³⁵ Ngam, 16/02/2014

³⁶ Wan, 20/02/2014

³⁷ Monk, 28/03/2014

down on by other people in Burma who have better social status. “Some people who are so high educated like to look down on others”³⁸. Also, some of the informants such as Bear and Nid have developed close ties with people of different ethnicities but belong to the same class with them.

The notion of class could be embed into individual thought and controls their social action which could affect migrants’ relation to social capital. The case of Wan’s youngest daughter is a good example. According to my observation, due to her employer’s support, Wan’s daughter was raised with a Thai middle class’s life style. She told me weary that when she took her daughter to swimming pool, people think she is the care taker of her daughter instead of her mother due to her daughter’s action and characteristic. She seems to be uncomfortable with it.

How Wan feels that her daughter’s middle class life style is not proper to their status provides an example of why it might be difficult to develop a more equal relationship of between people of different class in term of norm and obligation. As the feeling class shapes and limits the possibility of one’s social action.

According to Wan, for example, having a “strong tie” between people of different class seems to be unimaginable (Putnam, 2002: 10 -11). When I asked her why she doesn’t try to marry someone who is not low skilled labor, she told me “There is no way that kind of people will be interest in us and even if they are interested I don’t think I will agree anyway because it is weird”³⁹.

The notion of class difference is deeply integrated to the working relationship in Thai society. In Thailand, it is common for domestic workers (and other occupation as well) to refer to the employer as “master”.⁴⁰ Because domestic worker is an occupation that is treated with lowest social status in Thailand, the awareness of class different and social status is even more solidified for some migrants due to the ways they are treated (Toyota, 2005: 290). Such as Meoi who felt that she was treated the lowest that she has ever been treated in her life, as a different type of human being than her employers. “I had never thought that I had to eat

³⁸ Cherry, 23/02/2014

³⁹ Wan, 18/03/2014

⁴⁰ เจ้านาย

leftover food⁴¹, if someone used to starve then I don't think they will mind, but I have never starved before”⁴².

This awareness, however, causes Meoi to think of social mobility and change her life goals from having a lot of money into having respect from others.

“I want to go back because I feel it is useless being here, if I continue working in Thailand I will be subservient for all my life”⁴³

- Solidarity and Social Capital as Public Good

Although social categorization has shaped and limited migrants' relationship with social capital, it is also the main source that fosters the feeling of solidarity. This feeling brings out the “public good” characteristics of the migrants' social capital. This section will also explore the benefit of social capital that migrants possess in the public level.

The awareness of being different both in term of class and ethnicity including by being mistreated can produce a feeling of solidarity within each “symbolic tie” (Faist, 2000: 102; 109). Faist (2000: 109) pointed out that solidarity can be built through “a willingness to transcend immediate self-interest, grounded in emotional identification with others.” Due to their experience in Thailand, some of my informants have developed the feeling of sympathy for other people who belong to the same “symbolic ties” (Faist, 2000: 102; 109). For instance, being treated badly because of her social status inspires Cherry to educate people from Burma. Education, she hopes, will provide her peers knowledge to be able to protect themselves from the same treatments she received in the past⁴⁴.

Creating the dichotomy of “us and them” though could be the cause that solidifies the connection with symbolic ties (Richardson, 2007:51). “Them” in the cases of my informants are often Thai people or Thai employers whom some such as Cherry and Meoi perceive as oppressors of well being of migrants from Burma. However, this also means, once dichotomy is created, it is more difficult to foster trust between groups within the dichotomy as well.

⁴¹ It is a practice in many employers' home that they will eat first and domestic workers will eat later the food that the employer's family doesn't finish

⁴² Meoi, 23/02/2014

⁴³ Meoi, 23/02/2014

⁴⁴ Cherry, 23/02/2014

“After that, I never want to associate with Thai people [She means Thai ethnic not Thai nationality] again, I hate Thai and always beware that Thai will not treat Burmese well. I hate so much, I felt so hurtful.” (Moei, 23/02/2014).

This quote from Moei is also very interesting as, in contrast to the finding on ethnicity above, she uses the word Burmese to address migrant workers rather than using her own ethnicity of Karen. It could be assumed that she is speaking in the context of Thailand where people from Burma are treated as one entity both by the state and employers and this also influences how migrants identify themselves as well.

Putnam states that weak ties are more important in “sustaining community cohesion and collective action” which increases a platform for public benefit (1993: 175 - 176). From my field work, this point is demonstrated through the merit making and fund raising for Monk education activities that I have attended. In this activity the participants are united through symbolic ties of being Karen from the same districts that want to contribute to their homeland rather than strong personal ties.

The vocational school which gives an education opportunity for people who are linked by very weak ties of having the same nationality is also a good example. Both of these capitals show how collective actions can contribute to the people who have not directly taken part in maintaining and accumulating capital. For example, the Karen people back in the village who receive the education from monks.

Even though the activities such as merit making or vocational school provide public benefit and brings various people together, in the end, it is still shaped and driven by social status. The activities of these two social capitals are involving specific groups of people that are tied together by pronominal attachments toward to Burma or to a certain ethnic group. Therefore still doesn't serve as a linkage of different social group between those of migrant workers and other groups in Thailand, and has not enhanced norms and trust in the wider level.

Social capital and migrant's agency

Although there are capitals available, agency is crucial in determining how the capital is used (Charrad, 2010 ;Ling and Dale, 2013: 4-5). As individuals are linked to the wider society, in order to achieve their goal, they must shape and change their social network as well (Ling and Dale, 2013: 5). From the interviews with my informants, agency is evidently displayed.

While social capital is important in facilitating migration, it requires migrants' strong will in order for migration to take place. Coming to Thailand for many of my informants meant they entered into a completely strange place that they had almost no knowledge of. As illustrated above, even if there is assistance from social networks, the fact that they cannot speak the language, don't know channels to get help and must prepare for an unpredictable risk means that the decision to migrate requires tremendous agency.

Although it could be argued that reciprocal norms and obligations towards family place burden towards migrants and cause them to accept all the risks relating to the migration process, I would say that, for my informants, contributing to family is their personal goal and investment. But the benefit from this investment might be different than how benefit is conceptualized from the perspective of capital. For example, as mentioned before, some informants conceptualize their obligations as a chance for merit making that they expect to yield them a better life in the future (or next life).

The feeling of obligation is not only derived from norms. Wan, for example, wants to make her mother live comfortably because she is appreciative of how much her mother has sacrificed for the family.

“My mother has always lived in hardship, I want to give her when I still be able to ...my mother is the most important person”⁴⁵

Not to mention that, for some of the interviewees, a personal agency of wanting to have new experiences, curiosity or even to display challenges to gender notions within their network also contributed to the migration.

“My mother doesn't love me, she only loves her sons.....when I was at home she always complained about me that my ear got numb, so I think it is better to leave and prove to her that I could do like her son”⁴⁶

The clearest example of displaying agency is how migrants deal with abusive employers. If they are treated badly or are not paid properly, most of my informants are not passive in the situation. Although none of my informants have used legal mechanisms to address their

⁴⁵ Wan, 09/02/2014

⁴⁶ Bear, 12/03/2014

abusive employers and often use the choice of running away, the decision to run away especially for irregular migrants requires a lot of capability. They must decide, calculate and plan in detail on the process of running away that will enable them to leave and reach their support network without being caught. Nevertheless, the most important factors are the boldness and readiness to face obstacles in order to make change. This feeling sometimes makes them determined to leave when even a small chance is present.

“They ordered me to buy stuff in markets, so I used that money for transportation cost to my sister’s place, I left with nothing”⁴⁷

Although they live under their employers’ rules and space, most of my informants don’t take employers’ treatment or working conditions for granted and often negotiate. For example, they can negotiate for a rise in salary. If the workers have worked for a long time and are trusted by employers then they might use a tactic of threatening to leave in order to increase their negotiation power.

As I mentioned above, the cost of having social capital such as being the target of gossip or having to follow expected behaviors can be an annoyance and burden for migrants. For example, when someone would like to borrow money from them. Therefore, various informants have used several strategies in order to avoid the obligation. The strategies could be lying that they don’t have money such as Baitong, or avoiding having too many new friends such as Wan. But Ngam has a unique practice as she uses religion to deal with the situation. “It might be because of my karma that the money is not returned ... if I can get it back that would be good, if I can’t then it is a chance to make merit”⁴⁸.

While some might assume that Ngam lets other people take advantage of her and that the religious teachings sustain this kind of practices, I would argue that Ngam does not passively let someone take advantage of her and uses the religious teaching to legitimize the passive practices. Although she believes in Karma, she still tries to get her money back in various ways. Before she lets someone borrow her money, she has already thought and calculated thoroughly on the consequences of her actions. Religious teachings have actually been used to give her peace of mind on the consequences that she cannot control. This is a way she uses

⁴⁷ Bear, 12/03/2014

⁴⁸ Ngam, 16/02/2014

to deal with the negative part of having networks. This shows her own way of exercising resistance.

Interaction with social networks in the context of Thailand could also enhance migrant agency. The awareness of their status from being treated badly and being in a disadvantage position under the social structure is an inspiration to improve themselves. Even under limited circumstances and structures that doesn't give them many opportunities, some of my informants constantly try to find ways to invest in a better future. This could be in the form of improving themselves through accumulating knowledge and skills as in the case of Moei and Cherry.

““I realized that my life has no choices because I have no education, no education means I only can work in a subordinate position”⁴⁹

“I want to find new experiences for my future, if I have more knowledge then it is easier to find a job.”⁵⁰

Sunday is often the only day off for most migrants. The fact that they choose to come to school instead of having leisure time shows how the agency is exercised to suit their goal even in limited circumstance.

Migration experience in Thailand, on the other hand, has shaped Ngam's goal and heightened her agency to achieve it. Life as a migrant has made her understand the uncertainty of life and feel the need to embrace the nirvana which she sees as the best solution for her life. Wanting to achieve this goal, she thinks of going back to Burma as soon as she can in order to become ordained. Although she has received a lot of disagreements from her social network, such as from her husband, her agency is strongly exercised to the point that her social network cannot influence her decision to pursue it. She has negotiated and attempted in various ways to alter the network's attitude. For example, she brings her husband to learn religious teachings in the hope that he will perceive the world in the same way as her.

“[M]y husband doesn't want to go back but he can't live here alone....so I reminded my husband that we have to part one day when I died anyway”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Moei, 23/02/2014

⁵⁰ Cherry, 23/02/2014

All in all, it could be assumed that migrant agency is the driving force throughout the whole migration process including in the relationship of the migrants and their social network. Without agency, the female would not decide to migrate in the first place. From this perspective, it seems that social capitals and migrant's agency mutually shape one another. Social capitals are used to accommodate the personal goal of the migrants. On the other hand, migrants' personal goal is also shaped by their social relations.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

The aim of the thesis has been to investigate the meaning of social capital in the life of domestic migrant workers from Burma in Thailand. The first and second sub-research questions attempt to see the role of social capital in migration process and their life in Thailand. The results show that social capital is involved in every stage of the migration process and the informants heavily rely on their social capital to be able to live and work in Thailand. These networks they have is tied by trust, norm and social obligation (Putnam, 1993 ; Putnam, 2002).

However, having social capital also means that the migrants have to accept what the social capital costs and that includes the importance of following norms and expected obligation. Therefore, I agree with Planthaloet (2012) that each network also could be a burden or a source of conflict that constrains migrants as individuals depends on the context and depending on the relationship with social networks. This side of social capital has not been much emphasized in the literature on migrants' social networks.

The type of social capital they have also defines how the capital is used and the effects of social capital toward the migrants' lives in Thailand.

According to my informants, the social capitals they keep and invest in are extremely bounding (Putnam, 2002: 11). Most of them only have a close association and have a chance to associate with people of the same ethnicity, class, occupation, gender, and place of birth. Also, similarly to the finding of many literatures on low-skilled transnational migrants

⁵¹ Ngam, 16/02/2014

(Nurchayati, 2011; Johnson, 2011 ; Ueno, 2013 ; Kerdmongkol,2011), the informants rely more on the transnational ties they have with the people from the same village back home rather than new networks in the host country. Apart from their employers, the only other types of social capital in their lives that could be considered as bridging capital are religious institutions and development organizations. However, the activities of these organizations are still created from pronominal attachments of belonging to a certain ethnicity or nation (Castles and Miller, 2009: 35). In relation to the point above, the thesis also found out that migrants rely mainly on informal social capital rather than formal mainly due to inaccessibility. I would say that the only formal social capital they access is development organizations.

All the factors above have limited migrants' choices, options and access to social capital and don't give them much chance to have capitals that provide a benefit that is more suitable to their goal. The reasons for this could be both because of migrant's personal choices due to distrust of others or because of context that provides them less access to other kinds of capital. This also means, in the context of the migrant domestic workers' lives, there seems to be less social trust, civil engagement and cooperation between different gender classes and ethnic groups both within the social circle of the migrants themselves and between the migrants and Thai society (Putnam, 1993). Therefore, it is not surprising that migrant communities are not included in Thailand migration policies-making process (Archavanitkul and Hall, 2011: 67).

In the context of the informants' lives, the thesis also found out that the weaker ties such as people at education institutions could also provide a platform for migrants to exchange and receive new ideas and be a better platform for developing public benefit; unlike people that have strong ties with migrants who often come from the same background. Thus, the thesis agrees with the assessment that "weak ties may also be better for knitting a society together and for building broad norms of generalized reciprocity" (Putnam,2002: 11)

There is not so much information according to the interview on inward looking and outward looking social capital. Apart from the fact that the only formal and bridging capitals migrants can access are outward looking organizations. Therefore, the thesis doesn't agree with the stand that migrants' social organization only should be built from below with purpose to advance for political rights that is mentioned in Ally (2005). The thesis' findings support the

notion that every relationship of migrant workers could provide them useful capital (Putnam, 2002: 6).

It should also be noted that even though their option and access to social capital is still limited, the context of migration in Thailand actually provides a chance for migrants from Burma to use various capitals that might not be available at home since life at their villages only offers minimal networks and social circles to interact with. The thesis also identifies that life in Thailand can provide the context that shapes migrants' goal, choices and agency.

The third and fourth research sub questions aim to investigate the migrants' relationship with their social capital on a micro level. The third question aims to understand how the migrants' relationships with their social capital are shaped by multi-dimension social label, while the fourth question focuses on how the migrants' agency is exercised in their social relations.

The findings of the thesis supports the notion that specific context is crucial when subjects are studied (Charrad, 2010 ; Brittle, 2000 ; Herr, 2014 ; Nash, 2008). As shown in the thesis, gender, ethnicity, class and religion contribute to migrants' limited options and choices of social capital. But, at the same time, they can also be the platform that shapes individual's agency and nurtures feelings of solidarity. The feelings of solidarity could contribute to widen the individual's trust and feeling of obligation toward people with weaker ties but shared symbolic identity (Faist, 2000 : 101 -102).

Considering cultural context could also highlight the possibilities of inter-subjective interpretation of the concept of social capital. For example, could the practice of using social capital as a merit making vehicle for the next life be considered as a benefit of social capital? This seems to be the case in the perspective of some migrants.

Regarding agency, the findings agree with the literature on migrants' agency that the informants are agents who can accumulate benefit from their migration experience to foster their personal goals rather than being passive victims of socio-economic structure (Nurchayati,2011 ; Ueno, 2013 ; Johnson, 2011 and Paul, 2009). It is shown in the thesis that even under limited circumstances they still attempt to manage to use social capital for their own self-advancement, and to resist constrains.

Migrants' agency and capability be could even more strongly exercised if they were provided with more chances of access to more types of social capital and social service. The thesis content reveals that personal social networks might not be the best benefits providers for migrants even if they are the resources that most migrants rely on. Actually, other institutions such as government agents or business agents might be more effective in similar roles. And, as mentioned above, the fact that they almost totally rely on personal social networks is because of a lack of access to and unawareness of other services providers. Therefore, the thesis would like to emphasize that organizations and institutions should reach out and provide migrants more chances to develop ties and build trust. The thesis hopes that this practice will not only give the benefit to migrants but could also foster social trust on a wider level. The ties should not be limited only to social service providers but formal business organizations and state as well.

I would like to emphasize on the role of the state that can effectively improve domestic migrant workers' statuses. It could be said that the migrants use their personal ties in order to compensate for lack of state involvement in providing them security and opportunities such as non-effective labor's protection mechanism. What kind of interactions between different social capitals and what kind of norms could lead to more involvement of the state in the migrant domestic workers' welfare is an interesting question that could be researched in the future.

Lastly, I would like to end my thesis with a question toward how the concept of social capital is framed. Interviewing many informants, I also start to question the notion that a person is willing to contribute or help others only because they expect long-run benefits in return. Or is it the case that one needs feelings of solidarity in order to decide to help others as illustrated in Putnam (1993, 2002) and Faist (2000). When I asked my informants for an interview, most of them agreed to it even though it was very unlikely that they would receive anything in return in the short or long distance future. Agreeing to an interview with me didn't guarantee any reciprocity between us and seemed to cost them an extra time off their work. When I told Bear that I was sorry to waste her time, she responded: "I want to help someone who has a dream to achieve that dream". Might this act of humanity, consideration and sympathy be the unexplored mechanism of social capital?

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Appendix 1 : the Informants' information.

- All interviewees from this section are female
- All of them work as domestic workers right now
- All of them work in Bangkok Metropolitan Area
- Except for Aye (not sure less than 5 years) and Nam (around 8 years), all interviewees have been working in Thailand for more than ten years.

No.	Name (alias)	Date	Ethnicity	Age	Place of Origin
1.	Wan	13/02/2014 20/02/2014 18/03/2014	Karen	40	A village near Hpa-An, Karen State
2.	Ngam	16/02/2014	Karen	38	A village near Hpa-An, Karen State
3.	Aye	18/02/2014	Karen	19	Mae La Refugee Camp
4.	Nid	22/02/2014	Burmese	38	A village near Bago
5.	Moei	23/02/2014	Karen	24	Katom, A village between Ppa-An and Mawlamyine
6.	Cherry	23/02/2014	Karen	35	A district in Hpa-An province three hours from Pa-An city
7.	Nam	28/02/2014	Karen	40	Lai Puay , Hpa-An
8.	Bear	02/03/2014 12/03.2014	Pa O	29	District in Mon state
9.	Apple	08/03/2014	Pa O	29	Patom Province, 7 hours from Myawaddy
10.	Mom	09/03/2014	Karen	30s to 40s	Mae La Refugee Camp, originally from Karen state.
11	Baitong	18/03/2014	Karen	44	A village near Hpa-An, Karen State

Other

All of them work and live in Bangkok Metropolitan Area

No.	Name (Alias)	Date	Ethnicity	Age	Occupation
O1.	Kanokporn	22/02/2014	Thai – Chinese	32	Work in development organization
O2.	Luxika	08/03/2014	Thai – Chinese	58	Housewife of business man
O3.	Ranee	18/03/2014	Thai – Chinese	58	(Retire) housewife, use to be civil servant.
O4	Monk	28/03/2014	Thai-Karen	-	Monk

Appendix 2: Sample interview questions

The questions below are the example of interview questions that are used to interview migrants.

Background information

What is your name?

How old are you?

Which ethnic group do you identify with?

What do your parents do for living?

How long have you worked as domestic workers?

How many people are in your family?

Migration Process

When did you come to Thailand?

Why did you want to come to Thailand?

How did you come to Thailand?

Who assisted you to cross the border?

How did you escape the police?

Working life in Thailand

How did you find your first employers?

How did you find your current employers?

Please describe your daily routine.

What is the characteristic of good employers and bad employers?

How many hours you have worked per day?

Do you have a free time, holiday or weekend?

What do you do when you don't have to work?

Who find school for your children?

Who do you call when you have problem?

What make you feel sad during work?

What was the worst thing that happened to you?

Have anyone asked you for help?

Please tell me about your life!

How did you meet your husband?

Why did you trust this particular person?

Why did you asked this person for help?

Future

Do you plan to go back to Burma? When?

What is your future plan?

Any particular thing you are afraid of?