

Gender and Remittances: A Case Study of Myanmar Female Migrant Workers at a Garment Factory in Yangon, Myanmar

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Abstract

The industrialization boom in Myanmar in recent decades has encouraged upcountry women to migrate more independently into urban settings with fewer restrictions on socio-cultural norms. An increasing number practices feminized migration with an aim to support their families back home. This research looks at the relationship between gender and remittance within the nuances and dynamics of contemporary Myanmar society. It examines how female migrants manage to send remittances amidst varied family constraints under a hierarchical structure dominated by patriarchal ideology. This qualitative research project consisted of a series of focus group discussions with 27 women employed by a garment factory in Yangon, seven of whom were selected for in-depth interviews. Research findings illustrate that their remitting practices are shaped by different gender statuses under Myanmar's transformative patriarchal society. Although their economic contribution significantly empowers them to gain greater negotiation in a gender-stratified society, patriarchal norms exist which female migrant workers need to compromise and struggle.

Keywords: female migrant workers, feminized migration, gender, remittances, Myanmar

Introduction

There are diverse causes underlying global migration. Both men and women migrate because of political unrest, insufficient income, and the desire to seek better living opportunities (Verick, 2018). Migration, meanwhile, has become gendered, as has been shown by scholars researching with various objectives and geographical settings to compare the two genders in making their moves, both internally and internationally. For instance, a study by He and Gober (2003) found that in China men migrated primarily for economic incentives, while women did so for social reasons, such as following their husbands or for marriage opportunities. To reach specific goals, women in rural-urban migration elsewhere hope their income will ease household expenditures, and the costs of education and health care for their families. Meanwhile, gender equalization in the household can also be shifted through remittances (Duflo and Udry, 2004; Ping and Shaohua, 2005; Phouxay and Tollefsen, 2011). Choudhury (2017) revealed that Bangladeshi internal migrant women were more independent, able to take care of their children, and increasingly self-confident. The China case mentioned above exemplifies gender relations in rural-urban migration, while the Bangladeshi case reflects women's mobility under the dominance of conservative Muslim society. More nuances of women's empowerment can be seen in feminized migration in the Mekong region, where Cambodian, Lao, and Myanmar women who have internally migrated and crossed to work in Thailand contributed greatly to better their families' lifestyles (Jampaklay et al., 2007; Jampaklay and Kittisuksathi, 2009; Phouxay and Tollefsen, 2011; Barney, 2012; Manivong et al., 2014; Sakulsri et al., 2020).

Under Myanmar's recent industrialization boom driven by the market-oriented economy initiated in the 1980s (Kudo and Mieno, 2007), women have gradually migrated independently to cities where they experience fewer cultural and social restrictions. The emergence of internal mobility to urban settings has yet to be explored by scholars. By contrast, cross-border patterns of women as victims of political

suppression from the post-1962 coup to the 1988 uprising leading to physical and sexual violence have been examined to a greater extent (Laungaramsri, 2006; Kamler, 2015; Hedström et al., 2021). International migration to neighboring Thailand, China, and Malaysia has become one of the strategies to simultaneously flee the conflicts and financial struggles following the destruction of economic livelihoods. Internal migration in the meantime has occurred in areas affected by armed insurgency along the borders (Chaw, 2003; South, 2007). Female migrants were then witnessed in both Myanmar's border towns and in more economically stable countries (Kusakabe and Oo, 2007; Chang, 2014; Kusakabe and Pearson, 2015). Myanmar has subsequently grown to be the largest seasonal and international migration source country in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (IOM, 2015), with over two million people migrating overseas (Department of Population, 2014).

During the military-ruled regime, the government, to recover from the effects of economic isolation since the 1960s, welcomed foreign investments and stabilized the nation through ceasefire agreements with ethnic armed organizations (Skidmore and Wilson, 2008). In 2001, it established 18 industrial zones in Yangon, prioritizing the garment industry (Kudo, 2010). A decade later, the Thein Sein government further created economic development stimulants by attracting foreign investments, promoting local businesses, and increasing the number of industrial zones. In early 2010, Yangon played a vital role as the center of the country's garment industry, with 14 industrial zones and 4,300 factories that employed 150,000 workers (Industrial Zone Supervision Committee, 2010). The urbanized Yangon region and its established industrial zones became attractive to young women seeking better job opportunities and longing to explore modern life (Zaw and Kudo, 2011). Before 2014, seven percent of the population had internally migrated, while in 2014 the Myanmar Housing and Population Census counted 9,391,126 migrants (19.6 percent of the total population of Myanmar), of whom were 4,453,017 males and 4,938,109 females (Department of Population, 2016).

During the quasi-civilian government between 2011 and 2016, Myanmar was explicitly geared towards the global economy by participating in the booming economic regional integration. Trade liberalization was also emphasized, boosting foreign investment, while promoting labor-intensive industries for export, especially low-value garment manufacturing that led to greater human recruitment (Ford et al., 2021: 108-111). Market liberalization was also applied to rice farming production in the global trade, which simultaneously caused a decline in the existing agriculture-based economy. Migration to urban areas was seen as another prime factor that encouraged people to desert their farms, subsequently causing labor shortages and higher-wage labor amidst the state's attempt to improve agricultural infrastructure for increased export. When Cyclone Nargis struck in 2008, a huge number of farmers became landless or suffered severe damage to their farms (Boughton et al., 2021: 139-141). The worsened rural economy caused by low-profit margins for agricultural products, unemployment, and insufficient income motivated women to seek work in urban industries. Between 2009 and 2014, 3.6 million migrated internally, representing seven percent of the population, 53 percent of whom were female and 47 percent male (Department of Population, 2014). According to a 2016 study by the Livelihoods and Security Fund (LIFT), in the dry zone, 66 percent of migrants from Ayeyarwady and 60 percent from Magway were men.

The present study portrays the feminized migration of rural Myanmar women under the socio-cultural transition that encouraged them to seek more controllable economic livelihoods. Remittances are the most vital driver to empower women to negotiate under the patriarchal norms that are rooted in Myanmar culture. Despite the lingering influences of the patriarchal structure, the significant economic benefits that women migrants have contributed can subtly change gender equality in society. Research findings in the meantime reflect individuals' varied gender statuses of wife, daughter, mother, as well as having a filial position in the family that has shaped their remitting practices. Hence, this research tries not to position them as a pure agency that has

become totally liberal, while nor does it portray them as victims (Gaetano and Yeoh, 2010). This study argues that even though female migrants in Myanmar are more socio-culturally respected, the shifting gender status under their families' changing circumstances has unceasingly given rise to the momentum of gender prejudice that awaits being challenged.

Research Objectives and Methods

This research project has three main objectives. First, it explains how feminized migration in Myanmar occurred amidst the industrialization of Myanmar initiated in the 1980s, and persisted until the coup of February 1, 2021. Second, it illustrates the causes and reasons that individual migrants head to work in factories in the Yangon region. Third, it describes female migrants' remitting practices under Myanmar's transforming patriarchal society, which are subject to diverse criteria, such as marital status, filial position, and family background.

A gender-oriented approach was applied to study the experiences of 27 female migrants hired by a garment factory in the Hlaing Thar Yar industrial zone, Yangon. Garment factories typically favor young and single women because they are presumed to have certain feminine traits appropriate to the job descriptions (Kofman, 2004), or work in the light goods manufacturing industries (He and Gober, 2003). These ideal traits were also confirmed by a garment factory manager in this study, who elaborated that women had good eyesight, made fewer complaints, and were able to concentrate and complete the target requirements. Data collection methods included focus-group discussions, followed by in-depth interviews occurring between November and December 2019. Each session of five focus groups took almost three hours with purposively selected participants based on their marital status, birth order, and economic background, as described below.

Age: The age range of workers in this factory is between 20 and 45; however, the majority are 20 to 30 years old. Twenty key informants (74 percent) in this research were in this age range. There were three

women aged between 30 and 35, and three between 35 and 40. The oldest one was 42, and has been working as a helper for five years.

Ethnicity and geographical background: Most key informants were Burman from three different regions, consisting of ten workers from Ayeyarwaddy, two from Bago, and four from Magway. Eight ethnic Kayin lived in the Ayeyarwaddy region, whereas the other three were Rakhine.

Myanmar is a diverse nation, consisting of about 135 ethnicities with disparate social and cultural practices. Burman is the majority ethnicity, accounting for around 68 percent of the total population, and their culture and religious beliefs are dominant over Myanmar culture. At the same time, each ethnic group values the family and respects its community's social and cultural heritage. Hence, both dominant and minority cultures rooted in their ethnicities create gender hierarchy at quite similar degrees.

Marital status: There were 18 single women, seven married, and two widows.

Education level: Out of the 27 informants, 15 had dropped out of secondary school, while nine finished primary school, two were at the tertiary level and one was a graduate in higher education.

Filial position: Collected data indicated that eleven of the informants were the eldest child in their families. Four of the others were second eldest, eight were the second youngest, and four were the youngest.

Experiences as labor migrants in Yangon: Of the 27 females, ten had three to five years of working experience, another ten had five to eight years, and seven had over eight years of working experience in Yangon.

In-depth interviews were conducted with seven women, six of whom were single, and one was a widow. The married women participated in the focus group discussion but later refused to give individual interviews because of their husbands' objections. The interviews were transcribed in the Myanmar language and later translated into English. All informants' names in this article are pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Conceptual Framework: Feminized Migration and Remittances

The conceptual framework in this study is a gender-based approach, which previously witnessed that upcountry women were less powerful than men in making decisions to migrate for work, because of being confined by the patriarchal system practiced by individual families and communities. However, higher income and significantly greater financial contributions have gradually changed migrant women's positions in their families due to the distribution of power and participation in household decision-making, even though certain societal and cultural values may still exist in Myanmar society. Thus, as women have become joint earners, they have achieved equal access to rights and responsibilities. Choudhury (2017), in a similar vein, found that women in Bangladesh made their own decisions in rural-urban migration to escape social norms, unemployment, and poverty. These findings echo the growth of internal migration in Laos, where young women go find jobs in cities, especially textile factories in the Vientiane Capital (Phouxay and Tollefsen, 2011; Manivong et al., 2014). Particularly, the ethnic Hmong who acquire more capital follow suit, and chose to migrate to bigger towns instead of crossing the border to Thailand because of their lower command of language compared with their fellow Lao people. Their reasons for migration are not limited only to labor-intensive job opportunities; others include education, additional skills, and trading channels (Rungmanee et al., 2021: 14-23).

In the case of Myanmar, the forces of market liberalization directed towards exporting manufactured goods, combined with improved road networks and advanced communication technologies contributed by China in the 2000s, have continually encouraged rural women to seek work away from their homes (Ping and Shaohua, 2005). This circumstance followed such phenomena as in China, where 99 percent of women migrants employed in a Shenzhen factory were bound by strict disciplines embedded in their society (Tam, 2000). Regarding Myanmar's traditional migration patterns, gender stratification once caused migrant women to be recognized as wives who followed their husbands (Griffiths and Ito, 2016). Until the early 2000s, unemployment,

poverty, and the economic decline in rural areas were the main reasons people migrated for income generation, year-round employment, as well as to acquire additional skills to add to their profiles. Nowadays Myanmar society allows women to travel outside their villages, as feminized migration has become a trend equaling that of their male counterparts as in the case of Bangladeshi migrants (Choudhury, 2017). Young women, who were economically dependent and lived under parental control, eventually changed their values and attitudes when adapting to urban life (Chaw, 2003). However, in some rural areas in Myanmar, the trend has resulted in unexpected changes. Karenni women were left behind to take care of household and farm chores, but were empowered through male migration and contribution from remittances (Rungmanee et al., 2021: 24-35).

The narrower theme of this research is the crosscutting of gender and remittances, under the question of how female migrants at one factory manage to send their remittances amidst varied family norms and hierarchical structures. Hence, this study endeavors to show various gendered factors determining internal female migrants' remitting methods which yet remain, as research gaps in the studies of Myanmar's rural-urban migration. Livelihoods and Security Fund (2016) reported that younger and unmarried migrants apparently sent back more remittances than those who were older and/or married. Studies investigating migrant women revealed their moral obligation to remit, demonstrating filial responsibilities that follow cultural practices (Chaw, 2003; Griffiths and Ito, 2016; Htwe, 2018). For instance, the remittances of Myanmar female migrants in Thailand succeeded in shaping gender ideology, as well as power relations within the remittance-dependent families (Kusakabe and Pearson 2015).

Remittances gradually acted as a key driver in empowering women and elevating them to a more dominant position in their households. Yet, they somehow struggle to maintain their power relations within the family or to subvert male dominance in the Myanmar hierarchical society. This situation is similar to that of Salvadoran migrants, whose remittances entrenched women's empowerment and

the balance of power in their families (Menjívar, 2000). LIFT (2016) reported on Myanmar that once married female migrants begin to support their children's education, primary health, and social activities, it is difficult for them to send money to their parents. However, residence patterns after marriage in the different cultures give contrasting findings. Barney's study (2012: 72-73) on young Lao women's out-migration to Thailand shows that married migrants who practiced matrilocality were eager to remit to their parents. This phenomenon, in general, showed the improvement of society's expectation of women's roles, compared to one presented nearly two decades ago in Curran and Saguy's work (2001), which indicated that the family responsibilities of both males and females depended on their birth order. In most cases, daughters demonstrated greater gratitude to their parents in terms of physical care and nursing than did sons. Moreover, migrant women, especially those who were single, assumed that they had the responsibility of supporting their extended families through remittances.

Research Results and Discussion

Root Causes of Internal Migration

Debt, fluctuation of agricultural product prices, natural disasters (i.e., soil erosion and flooding), and political unrest were the root causes of rural-urban migration presented by the majority of the female migrants in this study. Their reasons for migration were supported by Maharjan and Myint (2015), who suggested that rural people migrated to urban areas to supplement their income and/or to accumulate capital. The lack of farmland in rural areas and the seasonality of agriculture are the main reasons that people in the Ayeyarwaddy region migrate. An example is Mu Mu, 27, from Bogalay in this region, who decided to leave her child with her parents because of a significant drop in the agricultural yields. Apart from problems in the agricultural sector, climate change also played a role. Her village and people's farms were severely damaged by Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Faced with unexpected weather causing low yields, most small- and medium-sized farms faced

indebtedness (World Bank, 2016). Win-Win, a single female from Pyapon also in the Ayeyarwaddy region, lost her family's property in the disaster. This loss forced her to rent neighbors' land, which resulted in debt entrapment, and so she moved to Yangon. After working in the factory for some time, she finally paid off her debt. When vacancies were announced in the factory, she persuaded her sisters to join her.

Other reasons given by the 24 interviewees included seeking decent-paying jobs, furthering their education, acquiring new experiences, and exploring city life. Three participants were worry-free regarding sending remittances because of their financially stable families; therefore, their main reason to migrate was to explore the city lifestyle. One of them – Htet Htet, 32, single, was an ethnic Rakhine and the youngest child in her family. She explained,

Before I moved to Yangon, I used to help my mother with all the household chores. I was very bored and wanted to travel. One of my friends encouraged me to work with them in the factory, which allowed me to explore many new things that the city has to offer. I am very happy living in the city now because I can visit the pagodas and shopping malls (Htet Htet [Pseudonym], 2019).

The rationalization of this Rakhine woman's migration, aligned with that of Derks (2008), who found that Khmer women migrated in search of work in urban Cambodia, where they took delight in purchasing modern commodities and enjoying social activities in the capital. Kusakabe and Oo (2007) revealed likewise that migrant women in the border areas enjoyed wearing different clothing styles and watching movies that inspired them to be more self-confident when living away from home.

Cost of Living in the City and the Impacts on Remittances

The sending of remittances and labor migration are interrelated to the households' socio-economic development. As mentioned above, earnings from factory work are considerably higher than on-farm

income. In 2018, the Myanmar government set the daily minimum wage at 4,800 MMK (US\$ 3.60) or (600 MMK hourly), after factory workers launched protests demanding increased wages (Department of Labor, 2018). Most of the research participants received around 190,000 MMK (US\$ 131.30) monthly, whereas the average income was between 170,000 and 200,000 MMK (US\$ 120 to \$138) per month. Regarding management of their income, 18 single women voiced their desire to send remittances that were deducted from their income and were able to spend the rest on accommodations, food, some affordable cosmetics, and occasionally on new clothes. Two of the married women tried to regularly send remittances for their children who lived with their grandparents and needed financial support for school fees. Another married woman failed to send any money to her parents because her children lived with her. LIFT (2016) affirmed that married Myanmar female migrants were less able to send money home than those who were single. This resonates with Delpierre et al. (2017), who reported that remittances received by families in India contributed solely to the living costs and their children's schooling.

Moe Moe, who moved to the city four years ago with her sculptor husband from the Magway region, and left their six-year-old son with her parents, said:

Every month we send around 100,000 kyats (US\$72) to my parents for our son's education. My husband earns an average of 8,000 MMK (US\$ 6) per day, depending on the availability of work. We cannot afford to remit more, because the cost of living in the city is high (Moe Moe [Pseudonym], 2019).

City life is expensive for migrant workers; therefore, to make ends meet, Cho Cho, a single mother from Salin, Magway region, whose husband passed away three years ago, lives with her six-year-old daughter, and has shared a single room with six other family members over the last ten years in Yangon. Her salary only sufficed to pay for food and her daughter's education, so she had to depend on other family members to help with rent and other bills. Similar stories

narrated in Htwe's work (2018), which examined migrant workers in the same area, stated that most female migrants at the research-site factory lived close to their work in order to reduce transportation costs. There, workers who lived less than thirty minutes from work are qualified to have free transport by the factory.

Gendered Determinants for Remitting Practices

Stories from research participants echoed the United Nation's statement (2009) on the connection between gender and the sending of remittances. According to the statement, monetary transmittals were dependent on marital status, age, and gender – and women generally remitted more than men did. As also shown elsewhere, female migrants in the United States were motivated to send money back home (De la Briere et al., 2002; Vanwey, 2004). Abrego's study (2009) conducted among Salvadorian migrants in the United States ascertained that migrant mothers took more parenting responsibilities than their husbands. In Asian cultures, Osaki's research (2003) on Thai women migrants demonstrated similar findings, as they explained their desire to repay gratitude to their parents as the influence of Buddhist concepts. This research has delved further by looking at apparent gendered determinants that impacted female migrants' remitting behaviors. The variables included marital status, being a son or daughter, and filial positions in the family.

Marital Status: The marital status of informants influenced their attitudes toward remitting. Single women regularly sent remittances every month, while the married did not, because of their husbands' control over family finances (see Nwe, 2009). Traditional, customary, and religious practices made women subordinate to men in social, political, economic, and religious spheres (Thein, 2015). Suksomboon's study (2008) regarding Thai migrant women married to foreigners affirmed difficulties in dealing with their partners when planning to remit.

Sandar, 27, who married a few years ago and lived with her in-laws in Yangon, had left her mother in the village with her eldest widowed sister, who had one son. Her sister worked on a farm without

other resources or regular income. Sandar used to send money home when still single, but marriage changed the situation. She explained:

When migrant women are married, it is more complicated for them to send money to their families. I could not send any to my mother because my husband controls all our expenditures. Traditional culture and customs require married women to consult and inform their husbands about everything. They are not allowed to do anything without their husband's consent (Sandar [Pseudonym], 2019).

In another case, Marlar had rented a small room in Yangon for eight years. Her husband was a carpenter, but was not regularly employed. Since her income was barely enough for their rent and living expenses, they resorted to borrowing some money to survive. When the interest accumulated, they failed to manage to pay even the monthly interest. Sometimes they quarreled over money because her husband wanted to send money to his family. This situation resonates with what Piper (2005) revealed—among married women in a patriarchal society, remittances were transferred to their own families only when their husbands consented.

These situations contrast significantly with those of single migrants. Thida from Magway region comes from a large family. She has two elder brothers and one married sister but is unable to support her mother, who lives with youngest sister, who is 12. Her siblings have their own families and struggle with limited funds. Thida said that her family needed her remittances every month because their income was not sufficient for her mother's needs to take care of the youngest sister and her grandchildren.

Marital status influences attitudes on remitting. Single women reliably sent remittances home, while married ones failed to do so because of their husbands' control. Circumstances change when they become widowed. One respondent revealed that she regained control of her life after becoming a widow and gaining the power to bring up her daughter. However, under Myanmar tradition, women continue to live

under the hierarchical household, which includes family responsibilities, whereas men remain in an elevated position. Following this practice, married migrants abide by their husband's instructions, while the unmarried shoulder the families' obligations handed over by their married siblings who face challenges and difficulties in supporting even their new families' affairs.

Obligations of sons and daughters: Similar to other Asian countries' cultures, Myanmar adheres strongly to a patriarchal ideology deeply rooted in family affairs. Sons are more appreciated by parents than daughters and are given greater responsibility related to parental care, like the case in Taiwan (Lin et al., 2003). In Myanmar, sons are expected to be household leaders, and their education is strongly supported by parents, while daughters have to sacrifice theirs when the families encounter financial problems (Thein, 2015). Khin Khin, 29, who was born into a farming family with one sister, aged 21, and three brothers who were 27, 25, and 13 years old, recounted:

As I am the eldest, I dropped out of school when I was in the 8th grade because my parents could not afford the education fees for all the children. My parents chose the eldest son to be educated, and he is now a teacher in our village (Khin Khin [Pseudonym], 2019).

Likewise, Yin Yin, 29, was living with her two sisters, aged 32 and 26. All of them were single and shared a room near the factory to cut their accommodation costs. She described how her two sisters prioritized sending remittances after receiving their salaries. Another migrant, Hla Hla from Bago region, told us about her sister's filial obligation to her parents.

In our culture, daughters have the greatest responsibility to take care of their parents. Although my sister is married and cannot provide funds, she looks after my parents when they are sick, while my brothers do not (Hla Hla [Pseudonym], 2019).

The majority of research participants believed that the gratitude owed their parents was indefinable. Thus, when becoming adults, they repay it by supporting their families as culturally practiced. These migrant daughters preserved their filial piety through moral and financial responsibilities to support their families. Even though sons and daughters' responsibilities may slightly differ among families, Mu Mu, the eldest married migrant woman introduced earlier, revealed that her brother was the youngest child, but still single and could support their aging parents in the village. Because of his demonstrated responsibility, even his sisters showed him respect.

Since my younger brother's grocery business is successful, he can afford to look after our parents financially. In Myanmar culture, it is typical that the eldest child inherits the family business and takes control of their siblings. My family is slightly different because my brother is the youngest and manages everything for my parents (Mu Mu [Pseudonym], 2019).

Phyu Phyu, single, dropped out in the 10th grade. She has one married older sister and one unmarried older brother who became a monk. She used to help her mother dry seafood on the shore, but due to sunburn and exhaustion, she decided to leave the job, and move to Yangon for work and has now been living there for four years.

Although I am the youngest, I send money to my parents for food and basic healthcare every month. My brother, a monk, has no money, while my sister struggles to support her own family. Therefore, I am the main earner and feel honored to take care of my parents, who consult me about almost everything they do (Phyu Phyu [Pseudonym], 2019).

Narratives of selected migrants above are consistent with the findings of Nwe (2003), showing that women's positions in the family constituted legitimate roles. Sisters, daughters, and mothers work to earn income for the family either through a formal job or unpaid work

at home, which consequently empowers women's roles, and has implicitly begun to shake Myanmar's patriarchal structure. Kusakabe and Oo (2007) found that migrant women working in one border city had become more powerful and achieved higher positions within families and communities via remittances.

Another woman, Thuzar from Ayeyarwaddy region, 28 and single, lived in a small dormitory with her 21-year-old sister who was a university student. They also had a 25-year-old brother, who worked at another factory, but lived on his own. She described her situation as follows:

Every month I send money to my family, but my brother cannot because he spends most of his money on betel nuts, clothes, and social activities. As I am the eldest, he thinks that I am responsible for taking care of him and our sister (Thuzar [Pseudonym], 2019).

Female migrants' excerpted interviews reflect the research conducted two decades ago by Curran and Saguy (2001); single women faced more pressure to remit large amounts to support their families. This data is in line with their faith and Theravada Buddhist Dhamma as practiced in Southeast Asia. Therefore, offspring aspire to repay gratitude to their parents as an obligation (Nwe, 2011). Gender also crosscuts with filial positions in families in the changing Myanmar society, where daughters are increasingly expected to be responsible for household finances as well as doing the household chores. Migrant daughters performed the breadwinner role impressively, achieving even more than their male siblings who were culturally expected to be the family's leaders.

Shifting Power Relations in the Family

Illustrated in the previous section, gender equality in Myanmar has explicitly oscillated in recent times. Women proved their contribution to a more decent livelihood, education, participation in the economy, and leadership of the family. Remittances have certainly acted as an

impacted driver in favor of women's empowerment and upholding their decision-making in their households (Jampaklay and Kittisuksathi, 2009; Phouxay and Tollefsen, 2011; Barney, 2012; Manivong et al., 2014). These situations contrast with those of Honduras transnational female migrants in the United States, who were considered powerless in relation to income management, because of feeling guilty about abandoning their children (Petrozziello, 2011). More nuances were proposed by De Haas (2007), who asserted that remittances impacted not only beneficiaries in the post-migration process, but also the pre-process of individuals' decision-making to migrate which are driven by dependent parents and siblings.

Hlaing Hlaing from Bago moved to the city with her two younger sisters and they all worked in the same factory. She proudly presented her contribution to the decision-making process in her family:

Every month we send money to our father, who lives with our eldest brother. Since our mother passed away seven years ago, I was forced to take the role of mother and sister. After we receive our salaries, I divide them into our own monthly expenses and remittance. I have become the decision maker for my family because our father consults me about all home affairs (Hlaing Hlaing [Pseudonym], 2019).

Some women struggle with the Myanmar patriarchal transition, like Ni Ni, who every so often wanted to argue with her father, but cultural teachings on how to behave towards seniors stopped her from doing so.

Our father comes from the village to the city to collect money from us every month. Whenever he comes, he gives us advice on how to live in the city. Sometimes I feel fed up with his words and want to speak out, but I cannot because I am afraid of him. In Myanmar culture, children are not allowed to talk back to their parents. Although I am the eldest child and send money every month, my father is the only decision maker in our family, so no one argues with him (Ni Ni [Pseudonym], 2019).

Although remittances have consistently empowered female migrants in Myanmar, traces of women's social inferiority continue to be noticed in this gender-stratified society. This finding resonates with Chowdhury's argument (2009) that the material base of patriarchy in Bangladesh households was that men-controlled property and money while maintaining the powerless and dependent status of women. Thus, according to Myanmar cultural beliefs, men who have a relatively higher status than women maintain inequitable power distribution and financial resources in marriage and other familial relationships. The results of this study show that most single migrant women succeeded in shifting their positions and power relations within their families by remittances as the main driver, while the married struggled with financial constraints and their husbands' approval, before being allowed to send money to their own families. Furthermore, women – whether single or married – are faced with greater filial obligations than sons in the hierarchy of the family structure.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the Myanmar rural-urban migration pattern has changed recently, as a result of women being encouraged to migrate for a better quality of life, higher income, and varied opportunities for further education. Although cultural practices are still followed, families and communities in the villages accept the necessity of migration to help ease families' financial troubles. This research has also found that migration sparks a decline in women's dependence on men because their ability to make a living leads to growing maturity, self-confidence, and becoming reliable breadwinners for the family. The Myanmar situation echoes those in neighboring countries such as China, Bangladesh, India, and Laos (Ping and Shaohua, 2005; Kainth, 2009; Phouxay and Tollefsen, 2011; Barney, 2012; Manivong et al., 2014; Choudhury, 2017), where migrant women moved to the cities for a better livelihood as a result of their despair from working on nearly unprofitable farms. Hence, it is predictable that an increasing number

of women in Myanmar would participate in internal migration in the near future, become more independent, and gain greater equal social status.

Remittances are, in general, considered vital for improving migrants' households, and helping to alleviate poverty in rurality. This study shows the nuances and dynamics of how remittances are determined by feminized migration. Female migrants' differences in marital status, filial responsibilities, and family backgrounds have significantly affected their remitting ways within the transition of an influentially patriarchal society. This research argues that young single women compared to men of the same age are more likely to send money back home. Single migrants are more diligent in sending remittances than those who are married, because the latter are obliged to first take care of their own families. Widowhood has allowed women to regain power once they are out of their husband's control. However, although Myanmar women have followed the trend of feminized migration, they are nonetheless struggling with the transition of patriarchal norms that have long dominated society. Thus, the changes in gender equality in Myanmar still require further attention and strengthening.

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