

Compounding Vulnerabilities in Mon Border Communities

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Abstract

This paper explores how resettled Mon communities on the Myanmar-Thailand border experience, perceive and struggle to cope with the triple burden of violent conflict, climate change and military dictatorship. It applies the concept of 'compounding vulnerabilities' to capture how the resettled communities simultaneously face multiple drivers of risk and harm that interact in mutually reinforcing ways, shaping the environment and people's everyday (in)abilities to cope. Drawing on critical political ecological approaches to vulnerability, the paper situates current conditions of compounding vulnerabilities within longer-term historical conflict dynamics and wider political economic processes. Particularly it shows how decades of ethno-nationalist conflict and ceasefire dynamics prior to the 2021 coup, including agrarian change towards commercial rubber plantation, caused a chronic socio-economic crisis, continuous displacements, and environmental degradation that continue to shape people's vulnerability to climate change. Empirically, the article draws on fieldwork conducted in 2023 and 2024 in two villages in the Three Pagoda Pass area situated on the Thai-Myanmar border, which are predominantly inhabited by people identifying as ethnic Mon and which are the result of resettlement schemes related to the ceasefire between the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the military regime in the 1990s. Fieldwork combined ethnographic research on livelihood struggles after the coup with a household survey on people's experiences with climate-related disasters.