

Resistance Strategies of Local Community to Tin Mining Between Crisis and Possibility: A Case Study in Dawei, Tanintharyi Region, Myanmar

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Abstract

Myanmar's 2021 military coup has compounded longstanding crises of extractive industry governance, severely constraining the civic space in which mining-affected communities could previously organize, document harm, and seek legal redress. While literature on authoritarian environmental governance often emphasizes the total closure of civic space, this paper theorizes how grassroots agency and environmental justice counter-movements persist by mutating under conditions of extreme state violence. Drawing on 19 semi-structured interviews with affected villagers, legal practitioners, civil society representatives, and industry consultants, the study examines a two-decade trajectory of resistance to tin mining operations at the Heinda mine—Myanmar's oldest and largest tin mine, operated via a state-corporate partnership.

The study advance a three-phase conceptual framework tracing the evolution of this resistance repertoire: grassroots grievance mobilization responding to acute ecological shocks (2005–2012); institutionalized strategic mobilization utilizing formal legal channels, civil tort litigation, and transnational accountability mechanisms during the country's partial democratic opening (2012–2021); and adaptive clandestine resistance following the 2021 coup, characterized by a shift into encrypted digital networks and hyper-localized, underground organizing.

Central to the analysis is the conceptualization of the 'dual dependency trap'—a structural paradox in which mining-displaced agricultural communities become economically reliant on the very industry that destroys their ecological livelihoods. I argue that under authoritarian regimes, state-extractive capital intentionally leverages this trap as a mechanism of social fragmentation to erode community cohesion and defuse legal challenges. By analyzing how the Heinda community navigates this trap through clandestine adaptation, this paper contributes to political ecology and social movement theory by offering a localized model of adaptive resilience, redefining how civil society survives and maintains corporate accountability counter-pressures within spaces of closed governance.

Keywords: Political Ecology; Authoritarian Governance; Dual Dependency Trap; Extractive Industries; Clandestine Resistance; Myanmar