

Caught in the Taingyintha Trap: The Naga and Myanmar's Unfinished Nation-Building

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Abstract

Most studies of Myanmar's nation-building explain the challenges of constructing a unified national identity because it's a 'wicked problem'. It's also argued that Myanmar's nation-building is a predominantly Burman-centric process, often referred to as Burmanization. It posits a profoundly contentious theoretical and conceptual argument, particularly the relationships between the state and ethnic nationalities, which requires an in-depth analysis of how it is interpreted and applied in practice. To engage in rigorous discussion, this paper examines the case of the Nagas from the borderland. The relationship between the Nagas and Myanmar is a history marked by assimilation, marginalization, and resistance. The Nagas persist that they were never an integral part of Myanmar, either through consent or conquest, but co-opted as a national race 'taingyintha' through nation-building processes. This paper presents an analysis of how the state deploys nation-building in the Naga Hills, how the Nagas respond, and how both the Myanmar and the Nagas persist along competing political trajectories in the spectrum of unfinished Myanmar's nation-building.