

Who are the Dawei?

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Place of fieldwork: Myanmar

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- Research background

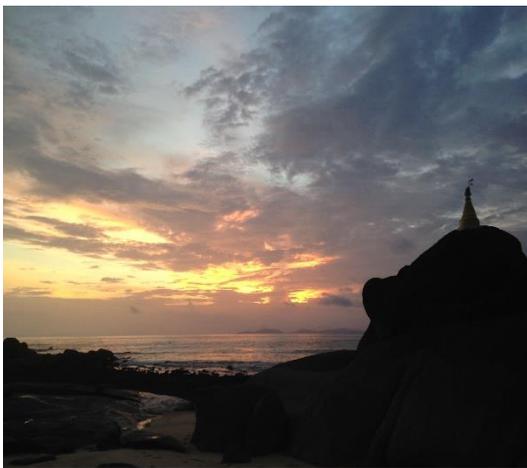
In Myanmar, there are 135 ethnic groups, and these are divided into eight large groups: Burma, Karen, Kachin, Chin, Yakhain, Shan, Kaya, and Mon. All of these groups (excepting the Mon) include sub-ethnic groups that derive from their place of residence.

- Research purpose and aim

The major tribe in Myanmar is the Burma, and of course, they have sub groups: The Dawei, Myeik, Salon, etc. These minorities in most major ethnic groups are ignored. For example, the Dawei cannot use their group designation, “Dawei,” in administrative statements (e.g., their National cards), and they must use “Burma.” Although other sub-groups under non-Burmese groups can use their own names, some of the sub-groups of Burma cannot. We recognize that Burma is the central tribe of Myanmar, but what constitutes “the Burma”? This is my research question.

- Results and achievements of fieldwork

I traveled to Dawei, and Myeik in Myanmar. Dawei and Myei are the name of a tribe



The beautiful Dawei's port

and the name of a city in the South part of Myanmar, Tanintharyi district, respectively. There are seven districts and seven states in Myanmar. Burmese groups live in the districts, and other groups live in the states. Dawei is the main city in the Tanintharyi district, but it is small and quiet. In contrast, Myeik is a large, lively city.



Kids in Dawei

In Dawei, I met many local people. Some people recognize themselves as “Burma,” not “Dawai.” However, other people recognize themselves as “Dawei,” not “Burma.” The latter people are conducting the Dawei’s nationalism campaign and also running in the election as the “Dawei Nationalities Party;” however, the party lost the election this fall. These movements started in 2013, when Myanmar decided to conduct a census after 30 years of absence. In the census, they did not have the right to write their ethnicity as “Dawei,” so they began conducting the campaign. Many people agreed with them and wrote “Dawei” on the census. However, they

do not have their own culture and history, so some people deny that Dawei can be their ethnicity.

I also conducted the same research in Myeik, but I found no people there who recognize themselves as “Myeik;” they are all “Burma.”

- Implications for and effects on future research

From this fieldwork, I discovered the diversity of identity in Dawei as well as the differences between Dawei and Myeik. In my next endeavor, I would like to research more about why and when these differences came to be.



In Myeik with my informants