

From Coup to Transnational Mobility: Differentiated Mobility Regimes among Burmese Migrants in Taiwan

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Abstract

This paper examines the groups that relocated to Taiwan before and after the 2021 Myanmar coup, drawing on a cross-disciplinary perspective that bridges political anthropology and migration studies. It argues that the coup was not merely a reconfiguration of state power, but a force that reshaped human mobility, legal classification, and everyday governance practices across multiple scales. While existing research tends to treat the coup as a singular political rupture, or to understand migrants as economically motivated movers, this paper illuminates how political violence permeates everyday life through institutional arrangements and uncertainty, shaping migrants' decision-making and survival strategies.

The methodology combines in-depth interviews, questionnaire surveys, and policy document analysis, while incorporating the researcher's own reflexive experience as a post-1988 migrant to Taiwan, enabling a cross-generational comparison. The research focuses on students in industry-academia cooperation international programs under the "New Southbound Policy" framework, analyzing how individuals from different regions of Myanmar, with diverse ethnic backgrounds, chose to come to Taiwan in response to the post-coup situation.

Using "survival migration under constraint," "legal precarity," and "diaspora" as core concepts, the paper examines how the coup—through the intersection of institutional and violent environments—produces stratified and unstable identity positions. Findings reveal that, compared to post-1988 migrants, those arriving through educational channels such as New Southbound industry-academia programs after 2021 are far more diverse in composition; their migration pathways embody a persistent tension between "educational opportunity" and "survival flight." The paper concludes by proposing the concept of "differentiated mobility regime," arguing that cross-border movement is not a singular form of forced migration, but rather a continuously negotiated process between policy channels and survival needs—thereby highlighting the complex interplay among Myanmar's regional differences, legal status, and governance practices.