

Negotiating Belonging Across Borders: Burmese Migrant Enclaves in South Korea and Taiwan

Tobiasz Targosz

Abstract

This presentation provides a comparative analysis of two Burmese diasporic enclaves in East Asia: Bupyeong in Incheon, South Korea, and Huaxin Street in New Taipei City, Taiwan. Using the concept of diasporic borderlands, it explores how these urban spaces function as sites of cultural negotiation, adaptation, and resilience within distinct migration regimes. The study is based on qualitative fieldwork conducted between 2023 and 2026, which includes participant observation and informal interviews with Burmese migrants.

Rather than strictly adhering to traditional notions of borderlands, the research emphasizes the everyday practices through which borders are enacted and redefined in urban contexts. Both enclaves serve as hubs for social support, cultural continuity, and transnational connectivity, yet their specific characteristics reflect differing legal frameworks, labor markets, and integration policies in South Korea and Taiwan. These structural conditions influence a range of adaptation strategies, from temporary labor settlements to long-term community formation and political engagement.

A central focus of the study is the impact of Myanmar's 2021 military coup on migration trends, community organization, and diasporic practices. By comparing the dynamics before and after the coup, the research highlights changes in legal precarity, transnational engagement, and concepts of belonging. Despite sharing cultural origins, Burmese migrants navigate distinct diasporic borderlands, leading to diverse forms of hybridity, agency, and constraint.

By juxtaposing Bupyeong and Huaxin Street, this study contributes to the discussions on non-territorial borderlands, diaspora formation, and migrant adaptation in East Asian cities. It underscores how political, social, and institutional contexts shape the experiences of Burmese communities abroad.