

PANEL

Between Myanmar and Taiwan: Governance, Religious Engagement, and Networks of Social Support

Convener

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Panel Description

This panel examines Myanmar–Taiwan connections through comparative perspectives on governance, networks, religious engagement, and social support. Bringing together papers on Sino-Burmese migration and Myanmar students in Taiwan, Buddhist monastic relief, and the Free Funeral Service movement in Myanmar, the panel asks how state institutions, religious actors, migrants, students, and lay or local organizations respond to political instability, social insecurity, and natural disasters across different historical and regional contexts.

The first two papers turn to Myanmar, focusing on Buddhist responses to civil conflict, natural disasters, poverty, and the breakdown of social services. One paper examines, from the perspective of an ordained monk, how Buddhist monks provide shelter, distribute food, offer informal education, and give spiritual support to communities affected by war and disaster. The other explores Myanmar’s Free Funeral Service movement as a form of socially engaged Buddhism from below, showing how lay practitioners have transformed Buddhist merit-making into organized social service and civic action.

The other two papers focus on Taiwan’s institutional channels for incorporating people from Myanmar. One examines the making of Huaxin Street, or “Myanmar Street,” through Cold War geopolitics, the Republic of China’s overseas Chinese affairs system, and global production chains. The other analyzes the transformation of the “Overseas Chinese student” regime from an ancestry-based classification system into a critical institutional channel for cross-border educational and labor mobility.

By placing Myanmar’s Buddhist relief practices and lay Buddhist social movements alongside Taiwan-based mobility regimes, this panel highlights how governance and social support operate not only through state policy but also through religious authority, moral practice, educational channels, and migrant networks. Rather than treating migration, education, religion, and welfare as separate fields, the panel asks how different actors negotiate mobility, belonging, social responsibility, and collective survival across unstable institutional conditions.