

PANEL

Cross-Stressing in the Periphery: Historic Migratory Populations and Practices in the Border Regions of Myanmar and Thailand (1)

Convener

Thanyarat Apiwong
Department of History, Chiang Mai University

Thomas Bruce
Thammasat University

Panel Description

The papers on this panel examine the histories of transnational communities in Myanmar and Thailand seeing their places of activity as a crossroads and as sites of cross-cultural interaction. They examine different communities who were able to negotiate different cultural enclaves and bring to the fore the aspects of their cultural repertoire to suit the occasion. Regions that later became fixed political frontiers had for long been places of plurality and fluidity, as well as conflict and exploitation. Whereas port, ocean-facing polities exhibited a relatively clear, and largely uncontested political, economic, and social hierarchy, such upland regions were far more susceptible to contestation and vulnerability. Often the states in these regions served as tributary states for raising manpower for those larger centers, more intimately connected to the seabound ports. Communities who lived in these upland areas would therefore need a mixture of flexibility and confident self-identity to successfully operate. The papers on this panel reflect this mixture of stability, plurality, and flexibility addressing key areas, namely local production, trade, and consumption, including Chinese migrant involvement, varieties of Buddhist and other religious expressions, and elite strategies for negotiating cross-cultural currents, all with significant political consequence.