

PANEL

Roles of Ethnic Organizations in Promoting Grassroots Peace and Community Security in Myanmar

Convener

Makiko Takeda
Aichi Gakuin University

Panel Description

Myanmar has experienced a top-down regime transition that shaped the country's political trajectory. Now, it is standing on the threshold of a new era and has already taken a step forward in carving out a path to democracy. However, contrary to the public's high expectations in the early days of the Aung San Suu Kyi-led new civilian government, Myanmar's democratic transition appears struggling to move forward. The reality has been far from fulfilling neither domestic expectations nor international standards yet. Many hurdles remain to be faced regarding ethnic and religious equality as well as much political confusion for reinstalling ethnic peace have been caused by various extreme groups/activities of nationalistic, religious and identity nature, which in many ways are serving the interest/agenda of the military and authoritarianism.

The nation's hybrid democracy, shadowed by the military's continued dominance influencing the legislative, judicial and executive branches, actually brings about neither national reconciliation nor the realization of a full democratic state. In addition, there exist numerous multiple divisions in Myanmar; these are rooted in colonial history and exacerbated by the oppression of ethnic minorities under military governments, power struggles in the current peace process, and disparity in development opportunities, all of which impede the transition from violence to peace, and threaten the human security of ethnic populations. Therefore, up to the present day, due to the weak economy, political unwillingness, and lack of rule of law, the government has failed to provide sufficient and appropriate support for all the ethnic nationalities to guarantee a minimum level of living through social security. In such a treacherous situation, ethnic organizations of many forms have been playing an important role in promoting grassroots peace and community security.

In this panel, each author focuses on a different type of ethnic organization in Myanmar and analyses the approaches and means to foster peace, security, and social transformation from the grassroots level. Four research papers by the panelists will be tabled for discussion with the following objectives: (1) identify similarities and differences among different types of ethnic organizations (2) reveal their ways and means to approach the problems, issues, and challenges in the form of community initiatives (3) list the measures and steps to empower them and intervene towards transforming negative impacts to be positives, and (4)

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summarizes useful, effective and applicable findings to be studied further for a wider application elsewhere.