



**FOSTERING RESILIENT NETWORKS
FOR A SUSTAINABLE INDO-PACIFIC:
REFLECTIONS FROM ICPP7 CHIANG
MAI**

BY KATHERINE HASNAIN

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Photo: Day 1 at the 7th International Conference on Public Policy
Credit: Katherine Hasnain

The Pacific Forum's vision of fostering resilient networks in the Indo-Pacific came to life at the 7th

International Conference on Public Policy (ICPP7) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. As a Young Leader with the Pacific Forum and a President's Graduate Fellow and PhD student at the National University of Singapore (NUS), I witnessed how gatherings like ICPP7 convene scholars and practitioners who strengthen the region through dialogue, collaboration, and shared learning. Against the backdrop of Chiang Mai, a city of Buddhist heritage, layered history, and intercultural exchange, the conference illustrated how networks of trust and ideas are essential to advancing sustainability and stability, much like the balance of flavors in a bowl of crispy khao soi noodles.

Resilient networks begin with the ability to combine rigorous methods and cultural sensitivity in research. The pre-conference courses at Chiang Mai University underscored this lesson for me, offering concrete skills to bridge theory and practice. In Governing Ecological Transition Processes, Claire Halpern (Sciences Po) explained how governance capacity, the ability of public authorities to mobilize resources and negotiate collective priorities, is essential to achieving sustainability goals incrementally. Later, Philippe Zittoun (LAET-ENTPE) demonstrated how qualitative interviews, conducted with humility and attentiveness to the question of how, can elicit the narratives and doubts that shape policy decisions. Together, Halpern's emphasis on mobilizing governance capacity and Zittoun's call for relational, attentive research show that effective policy depends on both institutional strength and the human connections that sustain it.

Strong regional networks thrive when scholarship remains relevant and responsive to real-world needs. This was the clear message of the keynote roundtable on The Future of Public Policy and Governance Research, chaired by M. Ramesh (NUS) and Ora-orn Poocharoen (Chiang Mai). The discussion challenged us to inhabit the space between theory and action, aligning academic work with the inequities, crises, and opportunities that define the Indo-Pacific today. As bells clanged from a nearby temple, I reflected on how impactful research emerges not in isolation but through collaborative communities grounded in shared values and a quiet openness to others.

The ICCP7 Conference also highlighted how governance structures in the Indo-Pacific must also respect institutional and cultural diversity. At the panel Comparative Policy and Governance for Sustainable Development in Asia, scholars examined how regional governance approaches adapt to local contexts to advance sustainable development. Hiroko Hashimoto (University of Tsukuba) discussed Japan's decentralization and local policy autonomy, while Chun-Yuan Wang (National Cheng Kung University) illustrated Taiwan's innovations in balancing growth with environmental stewardship. Chunhua Ye (NUS) shared cases from Thailand and Vietnam that underscored how policy models must be adapted rather than replicated. Together, these cases reinforced that effective policy transfer in the Indo-Pacific depends on adapting lessons to local institutions, cultures, and development needs.

Finally, opportunities to contribute to these conversations also strengthened my role within the broader Indo-Pacific policy network, especially as a Young Leader at the Pacific Forum. During the session A Climate Policy Design Lab for Asia and the Southeast, chaired by Benjamin Cashore (NUS) and Maitreyee Mukherjee (NUS), I presented my exploratory research on governance challenges in EV battery mining supply chains in Indonesia and the United States. I detailed how my early research seems to indicate that hybrid governance models combining formal and informal mechanisms, including local and tribal governance, could aid in filling enforcement gaps and institutional inertia. The feedback I received helped refine my ideas while contributing to the broader regional discourse, much like sharing a plate of fragrant *pla nin thot samunphrai* (delicious Thai fried fish with aromatic herbs) with colleagues can transform strangers into collaborators through a shared table.

The setting of Chiang Mai itself embodied the resilience and balance the conference sought to cultivate. Walking through its bustling markets, quiet courtyards, and centuries-old temples, I was reminded that sustainable policy must honor the cultural and spiritual contexts it seeks to serve. The city's layered history as a crossroads of civilizations reflected the ethos of dialogue and respect that organizations like the Pacific Forum work to sustain across the Indo-Pacific. Savoring *tam khanun*, a dish of young jackfruit salad, at a

street stall while monks passed by, I thought of how spiritual mindfulness can complement our intellectual rigor, making policy more humane and attuned to the rhythms of the communities it affects.

Much of what sustains resilient networks happens outside formal sessions. At ICCP7, coffee breaks, hallway conversations, and shared meals became spaces where ideas were exchanged and friendships forged. These informal moments revealed that trust and understanding are cultivated as much through presence and sincerity as through agreements and publications. Sitting with colleagues over *khanom chan*, a delicate rose-shaped dessert, and *pandan cream buns*, a beloved ingredient in Southeast Asian sweets—I realized how these conversations, quiet and unstructured, often carry more weight than any single panel. The gentle hospitality of these encounters reminded me of the way temples open their doors to visitors, offering a place of calm in which strangers may meet and learn.

Support from the Pacific Forum made it possible for me to join this remarkable community and contribute meaningfully to its dialogues. I left Chiang Mai appreciative of the investment the Pacific Forum, the International Public Policy Association (IPPA), and other like-minded networks have put in emerging scholars and embedding them in vibrant networks of thinkers and practitioners. These collaborative and culturally attuned gatherings enable us to meet regional and global challenges with creativity, patience, and solidarity.

Dialogue, research, and cooperation remain our most powerful tools for sustaining the networks of trust and regional resilience that underpin a thriving Indo-Pacific. ICCP7 demonstrated how networks that span countries, cultures, and disciplines allow us to face shared challenges while building trust and resilience. I am deeply grateful to the Pacific Forum, my colleagues, and the many participants who made this experience so meaningful. As I reflect on the quiet wisdom of the temples, the conversations shared over delicious Thai food, and the generosity of those who welcomed me into this community, I remain committed to carrying forward the connections and insights forged in Chiang Mai. The relationships we nourish — both scholarly and human — are what sustain peace, understanding, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.