

# **Faith Beyond Frontiers: Exploring the Role of Religion in Southeast Asian Public Diplomacy**

## Panel Convenor:

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## Discussant:

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Against the backdrop of an increasing visibility of religion in national politics and international affairs, this panel aims to discuss newly developing configurations of religion in the public diplomacy strategies of Southeast Asian countries. While recent scholarship has vividly debated the incorporation of Islam into governmental foreign policy outlooks and soft power agendas in Indonesia and Malaysia, the international diplomatic role of other religions well-dispersed in Southeast Asia, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Confucianism, is understudied. By focusing on Southeast Asia and its grand religious diversity, this panel comparatively inquires whether we can discern similar developments and broader trends of the religion-public diplomacy nexus across nations, or whether the region is rather marked by country-specific, contrasting approaches toward the role ascribed to religion on the international parquet. The panel welcomes contributions on all religions (including Islam) and all Southeast Asian countries that engage with the questions outlined below, but is open to suggestions on related topics.

- What conditions states to either make use of religion in public diplomacy or to restrict religious agency to the national or to the private sphere?
- By what means do governments instrumentalize religion for public diplomacy, in foreign policy agendas, in crafting international alliances, in confronting foreign political players, and in promoting themselves in the international sphere?
- Can we observe differences between the individual religions and the qualitative depths and quantitative width of their involvement in public diplomacy?
- What religious-political discourses and national images are constructed by public diplomacy? How do these relate to the concept of religious soft power?
- What strategic role is religion given in international conflict resolution, peace- and dialogue work?
- Are the local religious level and the global level linked through public diplomacy? How do domestic religious affairs and international aspirations meet in public diplomacy? What role does public diplomacy play for religious and political legitimization at the domestic level?

- Besides state actors, what other actors are engaged in furthering religious aspects in public diplomacy? Concretely, what role do religious non-state actors play (religious civil society organizations, individual charismatic religious leaders, and actors from the religious economy and religious businesses)?
- Can we observe a growing involvement of transnational religious education institutes and organizations (state-funded as well as private) in official public diplomacy? What role do religious “science diplomacy” and government-initiated academic exchanges play?
- In how far is religious public diplomacy a terrain of women? (Having in mind recent diplomatic women initiatives by the “Religions for Peace” project)

**Single session**