P213 / Non-Western Innovation Policy: Direction, Value and Institutions

Topic : Other

Chair : Salah Chafik (University College London)

Second Chair : Wolfgang Drechsler (Tallinn University of Technology)

Third Chair : Yifei Yan (University of Southampton)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Across three themes, this panel examines how innovation policy unfolds in the context of non-Western (Buddhist, Confucian, Islamic, and beyond) governance traditions. The first theme is direction: from a specific industry to the larger techno-economic path, what and who determines where resources and effort are aimed, and on what grounds. The second is value: what accounts of public benefit and of human flourishing underwrite those determinations of innovation policy. The third is institutions: what organisational and legal forms have embodied those accounts and directed collective effort in practice.

Research Questions

- What (historical or contemporary) accounts of direction, value and institutional form do non-Western governance traditions supply, and how do these differ from those within mainstream (global-Western) innovation policy?

- Where such traditions influence innovation policy in practice – whether explicitly invoked, quietly operative or negotiated vis-à-vis imported models – what difference do they make to instruments, processes, and outcomes?

- Which categories of contemporary innovation policy prove parochial under this comparison, which travel – and in case of the latter, where (within the governance tradition or beyond?)

A core objective of the panel is to produce a special issue (target: *Journal of Responsible Innovation*) consolidating the scholarly findings and contributions.

Scientific relevance

After post-war R&D and national systems of innovation, transformative change has emerged as a third framing for innovation policy (Schot & Steinmueller 2018), alongside a normative turn across the field toward the values and orientations underlying innovation. For the latter, mainstream policy and scholarship have largely remained procedural, with ethical concerns diluted into checklists that often reinscribe the very structures that responsible innovation in particular set out to challenge (Pansera 2025).

Directionality, understood as making social choices over alternative pathways of development, has been one promising area of scholarship, although the focus is mostly on how direction is set as opposed to what direction is (normatively) worth setting (Stilgoe et al. 2013). Emerging work on mission-oriented approaches asks how public organisations should be structured and how risks and rewards shared (Mazzucato et al. 2020), and on dynamic capabilities asks not what states possess in terms of resources but what they must be able to do (Kattel 2022). Yet societal goals and values themselves are largely taken from existing international consensus – some of which are plausibly common to all human societies. This panel, however, seeks to investigate precisely the area(s) of difference and their provenance (Drechsler et al. 2025).

Recent comparative work makes the limit visible: a study of DARPA, China's New Energy Vehicle Plan and EU smart specialisation distinguishes challenge-based entrepreneurialism, hierarchy-based experimentalism and rule-based proceduralism (Gronchi 2026). Institutional variety is therefore already legible to the field, yet read as variation in implementation rather than in purpose. As such, treating non-Western governance traditions as sources of substantive normative content makes this panel a timely contribution to innovation policy scholarship, but also a concrete decolonisation effort by foreground these sources on equal terms with those from the global-Western in facilitating dialogues across different traditions (Yan 2026).

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel examines innovation policy through non-Western governance traditions, including Buddhist, Confucian and Islamic – which, taken together, have significantly shaped the culture and governance of societies that are home to roughly half of humanity. The panel also welcomes contributions from other non-Western traditions that are likewise largely absent from innovation policy scholarship. We invite papers addressing one or more of the following:

- How a tradition's account of the common good or of human flourishing has informed, or could inform, the direction of innovation?

- How and by whom direction gets set where such traditions are explicitly invoked, quietly operative, or negotiated against imported models?

- How organisational and legal forms carrying these traditions (endowments, guilds, monastic economies, developmental ministries) have directed innovation policy?

- Whether and how the field's own categories (e.g. missions, directionality, responsibility) travel beyond the settings that produced them?

Historical and contemporary work are equally welcome, as are single-tradition studies and comparisons across two or more. Papers that engage sacred sources from these traditions directly, whether textual (scripture, jurisprudence, commentary) or embodied in institutional practice, are especially welcome.

References

Drechsler, W., Chafik, S., & Kattel, R. (Eds.). (2025). *Islamic public value: Theory, practice, and administration of indigenous cooperative institutions*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Gronchi, I. (2026). How to craft a mission? A Theory of Action for the strategic public management of mission-oriented innovation policy. *Research Policy*, 55, 105631.

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Yan, Y. (2026). Debate: Advancing decolonization of public administration—Experiences and lessons from East Asia. *Public Money & Management*, 46(3), 254-256.