

Political Activism in Exiles: Homeland Activism of Exile Myanmar Youth Activists

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Abstract

With the protracted armed conflicts and political repression in Burma/Myanmar, a large number of Burmese activists have been operating in its neighboring countries like Thailand and India since the 1980s. The violent crackdowns after the 2021 military coup d'état further forced the people to seek refuge abroad. Later in 2023, they were joined by the youths who fled the country for fear of the enforcement of the military conscription law. In Thailand, many democracy/human rights groups and individual activists from Myanmar, including representatives of the National Union Government, continue to work towards changes in their homeland despite the challenges they face in everyday lives.

This paper examines the lives of the young political activists living in exile in Thailand. The study uses qualitative case study including document analysis and semi-structured interviews with the exiled youth Burmese activists living and operating near the Thai border areas. Through documentation of the lived experiences of these young exiled political activists from Myanmar, this paper demonstrates how they use limited resources and space to strengthen not only their homeland activism but also transnational activism for political change in their home country. The paper highlights the hope and aspirations for political changes as key mechanisms that encourage the youths to overcome challenges from their legal status and economic conditions during exile. The paper contributes to the effort to reconceptualise exile. It changes the narratives about life in exile - from those in need of help to those of active change agents.