

Challenging Traditional Gender Norms and Fostering Social Change: Finding a Way Forward for Queer Community in Myanmar

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Abstract

Traditional gender norms have long shaped the social fabric of Myanmar, a nation steeped in history and culture. Yet these norms have also served to marginalize and misrecognize women, queer individuals, and those who defy or fail to perform set norms and expectations. After the start of the 2021 spring revolution, traditional gender norms were not only re-imagined, but radically tested and challenged by a new generation of youths, activists, allies, and victims to transcend the boundaries.

This paper uses an integrated theoretical framework, drawing on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), Nancy Fraser's dual model of recognition and redistribution (Fraser, 2000), and the capability approach (Amartya Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011) in order to analyze how deeply embedded patriarchal, colonial, and religious ideologies interact with the structural discriminations, selective misinterpretations, and violence and thereby trying to find a pathway through. The 2021 Spring Revolution marks a critical rupture through visible LGBTQIA+ participation, women's leadership, and symbolic acts. However, visibility alone has not dismantled entrenched patterns of misrecognition, nor has it sufficiently expanded material and political capabilities.

Drawing from an array of scholarly articles, news, reports, and interviews, the paper analyzes to find out the current challenges faced by the community and argues that Myanmar's queer movement cannot rely solely on imported frameworks or short-term reforms, however well-intentioned. While the global solidarity and aid are significant, sustainable transformation requires defining our own problems through our own historical and cultural analysis. To move forward, this paper re-examines deeply rooted (mis)interpretive traditions and confronts the very institutional mechanisms that normalized contemporary norms. Only by addressing these foundational structures can the movement avoid reproducing the very exclusions it seeks to overcome.