



**Romancing Human Rights: Gender, Intimacy, and  
Power between Burma and the West  
(Intersections: Asian and Pacific American  
Transcultural Studies)**

*Tamara Ho*

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# Romancing Human Rights: Gender, Intimacy, and Power between Burma and the West (Intersections: Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies)

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## **Romancing Human Rights: Gender, Intimacy, and Power between Burma and the West (Intersections: Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies) Tamara Ho**

When the world thinks of Burma, it is often in relation to Nobel laureate and icon Aung San Suu Kyi. But beyond her is another world, one that complicates the overdetermination of Burma as a pariah state and myths about the “high status” of Southeast Asian women. Highlighting and critiquing this fraught terrain, Tamara C. Ho’s *Romancing Human Rights* maps “Burmese women” as real and imagined figures across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. More than a recitation of “on the ground” facts, Ho’s groundbreaking scholarship—the first monograph to examine Anglophone literature and dynamics of gender and race in relation to Burma—brings a critical lens to contemporary literature, film, and politics through the use of an innovative feminist/queer methodology. She crosses intellectual boundaries to illustrate how literary and gender analysis can contribute to discourses surrounding and informing human rights—and in the process offers a new voice in the debates about representation, racialization, migration, and spirituality.

*Romancing Human Rights* demonstrates how Burmese women break out of prisons, both real and discursive, by writing themselves into being. Ho assembles an eclectic archive that includes George Orwell, Aung San Suu Kyi, critically acclaimed authors Ma Ma Lay and Wendy Law-Yone, and activist Zoya Phan. Her close readings of literature and politicized performances by women in Burma, the Burmese diaspora, and the United States illuminate their contributions as authors, cultural mediators, and practitioner-citizens. Using flexible, polyglot rhetorical tactics and embodied performances, these authors creatively articulate alter/native epistemologies—regionally situated knowledges and decolonizing viewpoints that interrogate and destabilize competing transnational hegemonies, such as U.S. moral imperialism and Asian militarized dictatorship.

Weaving together the fictional and non-fictional, Ho’s gendered analysis makes *Romancing Human Rights* a unique cultural studies project that bridges postcolonial studies, area studies, and critical race/ethnic studies—a must-read for those with an interest in fields of literature, Asian and Asian American studies, history, politics, religion, and women’s and gender studies.

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