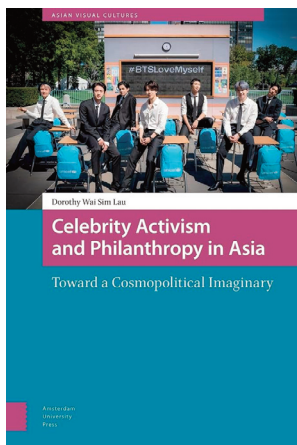


Book Review / Compte-rendu

Muh Ikbal, Aldi Alqadry, & Muhammad Anas



Celebrity Activism and Philanthropy in Asia: Toward a Cosmopolitical Imaginary (Asian Visual Cultures). By Dorothy Wai Sim Lau. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024, 160 pp. ISBN 946372009X.

Celebrity Activism and Philanthropy in Asia by Dorothy Wai Sim Lau navigates the complicated interrelationship between celebrity culture, activism, and philanthropy within the Asian context. Serving as a testament to the fact that Asian celebrities have indeed contributed to shaping humanitarian narratives and influencing public awareness, these have challenged the dominant European-centred frames of thought with regard to global activism. The book looks at a number of case studies, ranging from the K-pop phenomenon BTS to Bollywood star Aamir Khan, in order to show how these figures deploy their celebrity in speaking to social issues and mobilizing fan communities for political ends. In so doing, the book analyses a cosmopolitical consciousness that cuts across national borders and means by which celebrities function within global problematics.

Lau's work sits within the broader trend of an "Asian spin" in studies, which attempts to reframe understandings of humanitarianism and activism from an Asian perspective. Thus, it critiques historical and cultural narratives that often marginalize the voices of Asians in global discourse, proposing instead a framework that would take into consideration the diversities and complexities of Asian identities and experiences. The book also becomes particularly apposite for readers concerned with cultural studies, media studies, and at the juncture where celebrity culture meets social activism, as it further contextualizes how Asian celebrities contribute to redefining humanitarian efforts in a globalized world.

The book adds several new directions to the literature on celebrity culture and activism, especially through its particular emphasis on the distinctive role of Asian celebrities within the framework of global humanitarianism. The important contribution here is the idea of "multiversal consciousness," which, for the first time, opens up a significant challenge to the dominant Western-centred narrative of cosmopolitanism. This perspective underlines the diversity of the identities and temporary attachments that Asian celebrities possess and thus can offer an in-depth approach to how celebrity activism can reflect and engage with diverse cultural contexts. It is particularly important for community development researchers and practitioners to note, as it suggests considerations about local cultural dynamics and identities in the design and implementation of humanitarian initiatives.

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By surpassing this kind of simplistic dichotomy, Lau's analysis enables a more complex understanding of how celebrity activism works in today's intermedial and multimediated landscape in Asia. That is an important insight, particularly for community development practitioners, as the fact that strategies should incorporate the interplay between commercial interests and altruistic motives is underscored. Truly understanding such complexity may result in better collaborations with celebrities and influencers that will enhance the impact of community development initiatives within the region.

There are a few definite points in *Celebrity Activism and Philanthropy in Asia* that are unique contributions and hence peculiarly interesting. First is the concept of "multiversal consciousness," which is an important contribution in itself, given that it challenges the single and universal category of identity. This idea underlines the importance of the acknowledgment of diverse identities and transient attachments that Asian celebrities possess and it therefore yields a more inclusive understanding of how individuals navigate their identities in a globalized world. The second insight provided by Lau is the challenge to binary oppositions such as profit versus politics, nationalism versus globalization, and thus calls for nuance regarding celebrity motivations for activism. It is important to note for the community development practitioners that the suggestions here try to indicate a multifaceted approach that might arise between the commercial interests, the cultural context in which the celebrity rises, and altruistic motives of community engagement. Further, the investigation into the intermedial dynamics of celebrity activism is of special interest in that Lau researches how different media platforms and cultural contexts influence the perception and implementation of celebrity activism. It is relevant in the present world, which is increasingly becoming interconnected, where understanding these dynamics will help community development researchers and practitioners to effectively make use of media to magnify their messages. This latter point, placing Asian celebrities within a global humanitarian framework, contributes to something akin to an "Asian turn" in academic studies important in the history of marginalized Asian voices in global discourse, while simultaneously affording them greater equity in the representation of diversity in perspectives in activism. These are important points because they enrich not only the academic discourse related to celebrity activism but also provide more practical insights about community development. Therefore, both researchers and practitioners can devise more effective and culturally relevant strategies suiting the specific needs of the local communities.

Reading *Celebrity Activism and Philanthropy in Asia* will go a long way in influencing our work and practice, particularly in the line of community development and social engagement. The knowledge we get from this book will surely influence us toward more effective and culturally responsive approaches in working with diverse communities. Understanding multiversal consciousness beckons us to understand and value diversity in the identities and experiences that exist in those communities, thus allowing interventions to be more responsive and effective.

The critique of binary oppositions will inspire us to exceed mere categorization in the analysis of issues. This will enable us to understand fully the various diversities involved in activism and philanthropy and hence devise ways in which such an interplay of different motivations and contexts must go into account. It follows that once we take into account intermedial dynamics pointed out in this book, we will also be more aware of how different media platforms can shape public perception and engagement—an important consideration in today's digital landscape.

This will likely be a permanent adjustment in our practice. The emphasis on a cosmopolitical perspective will push us to constantly reflect on the cultural and ideological context of our work and assist us in instituting a dedication to lifelong learning and evolution. If the lessons of postmodernism are intertwined into our approach, then the efforts we do make will likely bear more fruit, thereby contributing toward a just and more equitable society. Generally, the insight derived from this work will play a foundational role in shaping our future practice, keeping it relevant and responsive to the needs of the communities we will serve.

We highly recommend Lau's book. It gives a fresh and critical look at the role of celebrities regarding social activism and philanthropy, with a particular touch on the Asian perspective. This is often an area that is under-explored within academic discourse; hence, Lau brings in lessons worthy of mention to enhance our understanding of the particular complexities involved in celebrity-led initiatives. This may relate to the concept of "multiversal consciousness" developed in the book, which has implications for those working in community development and social engagement who are working toward a more inclusive approach that truly respects cultural diversity.

In this respect, Lau's critical examinations of binary oppositions and the intermedial dynamics of activism will prove essential reading for anyone interested in the intersection of media, culture, and social change. Such insights can inform our practice and help us navigate the challenges of modern activism in this day and age. In general, we consider this a milestone in celebrity studies, cultural studies, and social activism, and we encourage our colleagues to take note and go through this book for consideration in practice.

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