

Knights in Shining Armor? The Dangers of White Saviorism

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A group of young Black children, dressed in traditional garb — a hut, desert, or something else sufficiently African serves as the background. And smack dab in the center? A beaming, white volunteer.

How often does a picture tell the whole truth? Photos of this nature are what pop up when you search “white saviorism”. This narrative is not limited to only African beneficiaries, and paints white people as the heroes — the “knights in shining armor” — of all “lesser, helpless” people of color... an extreme case of *jyouge kankei*. It refers to performative attempts at aid that are centered around the aid-giver, meant to make them look or feel good, while often having a harmful effect on the communities they’re meant to be helping, dubbed “volun-tourism”.

This may seem sudden, but did you know that eighty percent of children in orphanages are not actually orphans? This is according to *Frontiers*, a peer-reviewed journal on sustainable tourism. In low or middle income countries such as Haiti and Cambodia, children with families are trafficked into joining them. This is because orphanages have become a sort of industry — white tourists work short stints, and because this brings in funds, more and more children are sold or kidnapped to fill them. The government and UNICEF have attempted to shut this system down, but with tourists continuing to contribute to it, this has proven challenging. Even when the harm is not this drastic, short-term volun-tourism still perpetuates harmful racial stereotypes, wastes resources on flights and housing, and silences community experts by replacing the ones who know their environment best and causing dependence on uninvolved, short-term workers with a high turnover rate. By targeting effects and not the root cause, volun-tourism is only setting struggling communities back, preventing them from creating a sustainable and long-term

solution to their issues.

If a foreign teenager flew to Japan after a major earthquake, rushed in to “help” without training, took photos, got in the way, and burdened locals with extra work, we wouldn’t be happy — we would call this *zen’i no oshitsuke*, or an unwelcome favor. In one of the most infamous cases of white saviorism, American high-school graduate Renee Bach ran a “clinic” in Uganda with zero medical training, inserting IVs into malnourished children without a single qualified nurse in the vicinity. 105 children died in her care before she was sued for medical malpractice — despite this, she was praised and treated as a hero by readers of her blog back in America. If treatment had been left to local, qualified medical practitioners, perhaps these young lives could have been saved. All in all, it is just colonial logic with a fresh coat of paint.

A historical example of this attitude is the poem titled “The White Man’s Burden”, published by Rudyard Kipling in 1899. This “burden”, a self-imposed fantasy of responsibility marketed as noble and righteous, translated into real-life suffering when it excused America’s colonization of the Philippines. Kipling spread the idea that Filipinos were not as civilized as white men, and that by colonizing them and stripping them of their culture, they were actually educating and helping them. He called Filipinos “half-devil and half-child”, with his harmful rhetoric fueling Manifest Destiny — which was used as justification for the takeover of Hawaii and many other Native lands.

Although most of us here are not white, we mustn’t treat this as an issue unrelated to us — as a privileged community, we should always inform ourselves before we act, and ensure that our good intentions create an impact that reflects us and does ourselves justice too. Many of us that are applying to a college overseas or trying to get a recommendation from our schools are scrambling to volunteer and gather community service hours, and even if this does not apply to you right now, helping others is undeniably a core part of the human experience. It is vital to always keep in mind: when you extend your hand to those in need, help them as equals, human beings — not a

project of self-aggrandizement.

出典

【図 書】

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【Webページ】

ECPAT “Destination Mekong Summit — Partners unite to protect children and vulnerable communities through regulating voluntourism, and to end orphanage tourism”

〈https://ecpat.org/destination-mekong-summit-partners-unite-to-protect-children-and-vulnerable-communities-through-regulating-voluntourism-and-to-end-orphanage-tourism/?utm_source=chatgpt.com〉

(最終アクセス2025年12月5日)

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