



Of 'Jiwa' (Soul) and 'Raga' (Outer persona): The Unseen Eruption Behind Super Fame - A Reflection on the Hidden Costs of Stardom

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Abstract

The lives and deaths of Danny Chan, Leslie Cheung, Michael Jackson, and Whitney Houston unveil a profound lesson: fame comes with a hidden cost, often unseen by fans and the public. This reflective article explores the imbalance between *jiwa* (Soul) and *raga* (Outer persona), arguing that the psychological and emotional toll of celebrity life mirrors disrupted ecological systems when the energy output exceeds inner replenishment, eruption becomes inevitable. Drawing metaphors from ecological balance, emotional nutrient cycles, and ancient proverbs, this article delves into the personal and collective mourning following the losses of these icons. Supported by scholarly references, it highlights the multifaceted pressures of stardom, including media scrutiny, substance abuse, racial expectations, and market exploitation. Ultimately, this piece serves both as a tribute and a cautionary reminder to cherish balance in life, both for ourselves and the stars we admire.

Keywords: Stardom; *Jiwa*; *Raga*; Emotional Imbalance

Introduction: When the Applause Echoes Too Loudly

As I sit here listening to the soul-touching song of Danny Chan Pak Keung (Waiting), my heart cannot help but drift into quiet reflection. His voice, so tender, so delicate, speaks not just to the ears, but to the depths of the *jiwa* (the very soul). And yet, beneath the beauty of his music lies an untold tragedy, namely a story that mirrors the lives and untimely deaths of others like Leslie Cheung (Silence is Golden), Michael Jackson (One Day in Your Life), and Whitney Houston (The Greatest Love of All).

I have come to believe that these four iconic souls were not merely artists. They were the victims of an invisible imbalance, namely an imbalance between '*jiwa*' (the inner world of self or soul) and '*raga*' (the outer world of fame or outer persona). In the race to shine brighter, to sing louder, to captivate millions, their outer personas, their public images, grew into towering giants. But the inner spirit, the delicate soul within, could not grow at the same speed. The *raga* raced forward; the *jiwa* was left behind.

It is this increasing imbalance between the outer and the inner, between what the world demands and what the heart can sustain, that I see as the root of their tragic ends. Just as in ecological systems, where energy must flow, where heat must dissipate, and where nutrients must cycle back to the soil; so too must the human *jiwa* (soul) find its balance between giving and replenishing, between the self and the world.

The Silent Volcano: Soul Eruption from Energy Imbalance

When the nutrient cycle of the soul is disrupted, and when too much energy is drawn out without space for renewal; the result is not unlike the silent, deadly buildup beneath the crust of a volcano. Pressure mounts. Heat accumulates. And in time, if not released or balanced, an eruption becomes inevitable. Depression is the word ending up.

For these stars, the eruption came in the form of depression, addiction, breakdown, and finally, the unbearable silence of death. Danny Chan Pak Keung fell into a coma in 1992 after consuming alcohol combined with prescription medication, suffering severe brain damage, and passed away on October 25, 1993, at the age of 35 from progressive brain failure [1]. Leslie Cheung battled clinical depression and died by suicide on April 1, 2003, by jumping from the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Hong Kong at the age of 46 [2].

OPEN ACCESS

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Received Date: 15 May 2026

Accepted Date: 26 Jun 2026

Published Date: 29 Jun 2026

Citation:

Chee Kong Yap. Of 'Jiwa' (Soul) and 'Raga' (Outer persona): The Unseen Eruption Behind Super Fame - A Reflection on the Hidden Costs of Stardom. WebLog J Environ Sci. wjets.2026.f2905. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21324588>

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Michael Jackson died on June 25, 2009, from acute propofol and benzodiazepine intoxication [3]. Whitney Houston died on February 11, 2012, from accidental drowning in a bathtub, with heart disease and cocaine use contributing to her death [4].

The Fire Beneath the Spotlight: Cultural, Emotional, and Economic Pressures

These are not merely medical facts. They are the visible outcomes of invisible suffering, namely the final eruptions of imbalances too long ignored, too heavy to bear.

The emotional toll of stardom is amplified by public scrutiny. Documentaries like *Living with Michael Jackson* showcase the struggle of maintaining a curated public image while hiding deep private adversities, revealing the cost of being eternally observed [5]. The louder the applause, the deeper the silence within. The emotional damages experienced by fans, such as those who sued Michael Jackson's doctor, reveal how celebrity loss morphs into public grief and consumption rituals [6]. While Jackson was a global icon, his relationship with the Black community remained complex, as leaders projected onto him the tensions of identity, race, and cultural representation [7]. Despite his groundbreaking artistry and unmatched global reach, his life was also overshadowed by scandals and controversies that continue to complicate his public memory [8]. Together, these dimensions reveal Jackson as a figure who not only transformed popular culture but also provoked enduring debates on art, race, identity, and morality.

Whitney Houston's life further exposes the racial dynamics in the construction of fame. Her appeal to a wider audience and subsequent criticism for sounding "too white" highlight the conflict between commodification and authenticity, which often stripped her of agency [4]. Meanwhile, the economic industry concentrated on superstars' places immense pressure on a few while marginalizing many, creating inefficiencies and fuelling psychological stress [9, 10]. Her untimely death in 2012 did not end her presence in popular culture, as holographic performances and other posthumous projects reignited debates about authenticity, ethics, and the commercialization of artists after death [11]. Houston's legacy remains a complex blend of unmatched vocal talent, crossover stardom, public vulnerability, and continuing cultural resonance.

Proverbs of Wisdom: Warnings from Ancients

In our modern lives, we forget the truths once encapsulated in simple proverbs.

a) Chinese proverb: “水能载舟 · 亦能覆舟” (Water can carry the boat, but it can also overturn it); Fame, like water, can elevate or destroy.

b) Malay proverb: “Seperti api dalam sekam” (Like fire beneath ashes); The suffering is hidden but burns within.

c) English proverb: “Pride comes before a fall”; Excessive pride and arrogance often lead to one's downfall.

d) English proverb: “Heavy is the head that wears the crown”; Responsibility, status, and recognition often carry hidden burdens and suffering.

e) English proverb: “Not all that glitters is gold”; External success or prestige does not always reflect true worth or goodness.

f) English proverb: “The higher the tree, the stronger the wind”; The more visible or successful a person becomes, the greater the challenges and pressures they may face.

These ancient truths remain evergreen. We are all vessels of energy. Without rest, without spiritual return, the human soul burns from within. The stars we admire carry not just light but weight.

Conclusion

I am reminded of the gentle stories in the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, with stories that carry the same message: that our *jiwa* must be treated with love, patience, and time, just as we tend to the well-being of our families. In those simple stories of kindness, forgiveness, and hope, we see how even the smallest acts of care can heal the deepest wounds. The soul, like a fragile garden, must be watered, tended, and cherished, or it withers silently.

What I have learned from Danny Chan, from Leslie, from Michael, from Whitney, and from the stories that warm the heart, is this:

1. Fame is not free.
2. Glory without grounding is dangerous.
3. The louder the applause, the deeper the silence within.
4. The heat of energy, if not cycled, will consume the host.
5. The soul needs not only protection but also gentle investment: of love, of time, and of presence.

We must all learn the wisdom of balance, the ancient art of aligning our *raga* and our *jiwa*, just as ecosystems teach us: no tree grows forever without returning its leaves to the soil. No river flows without rain returning to the sky. And no heart can sustain giving without moments of stillness, reflection, and restoration.

I hope, in some way, that my humble words can serve as a message of remembrance and respect for these beautiful souls. May they rest in peace, and finally free from the imbalance that haunted them in life. And may we, the living, learn to live with enoughness, with balance, and with the wisdom to cherish both our outer journeys (*raga*) and our inner sanctuaries (*jiwa*).

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The author declares that generative artificial intelligence tools were used in a supportive capacity during the preparation of this manuscript. These tools assisted with language refinement, structural organisation, and stylistic clarity of the text. All ideas, interpretations, reflections, and conclusions presented in this paper are the author's own and are grounded in personal experience and scholarly judgment. The author retains full responsibility for the content, accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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