

JS2233: Idols and Celebrities in Japan and Korea
FASStrack 2025

Schedule: PM Session (2pm-6pm, Singapore Time)

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday

Course Description

Idols and celebrities are an integral, highly visible and pervasive part of contemporary Japanese and Korean culture. As the most prominent characteristic of Japanese and Korean media and cultural industries, idols have also come to saturate the everyday lives of people outside of Japan and Korea, especially in the wake of the Japan mania, Cool Japan campaigns, and the Korean waves. Through an interdisciplinary approach—combining Japanese and Korean studies, cultural studies, media studies, and celebrity studies—this course examines the idol phenomenon in Japan and Korea. Students will be introduced to key concepts in the study of idols and celebrities, and address the production, representation, circulation and consumption of idols and celebrities in contemporary Japan and Korea (and beyond) within their historical, social, political and economic contexts. By the end of the course, students will not only gain a deeper understanding of Japanese and Korean society, they will also gain conceptual and analytical tools for understanding today's global media landscape.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, student will be able to:

- Understand the production, representation, circulation and consumption of idols and celebrities in contemporary Japan and Korea within their historical, social, political and economic contexts
- Develop critical and analytical skills in interpreting idols, their star image, and their media texts via the lens of gender, sexuality, race, and the nation
- Apply relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks in analyzing issues around the production, circulation and consumption of idols in today's global media landscape
- Critically reflect on their own consumption of idols/popular culture, and understand how their consumption/fandom are part of, and are influenced by larger global cultural, economic and political processes
- Work effectively individually and in a group

Preclusion/ Prerequisite

Nil

Lecturer

Dr. YUEN Shu Min

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Course Assessment

Assessments		Assessment deadlines
Class participation	20%	Throughout weeks 1-3
Idol Training Camp: Group Class Facilitation	20%	Throughout weeks 2-3
Individual Essay	30%	20 Jul, 2359
Produce 2233: Idol Production Group Project	30%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video (1min) + Presentation: 18 Jul (in class)• Written component (media release + afterword): 23 Jul, 2359
Total for CA:	100%	

Class participation (20%)

You are expected to do your readings, prepare answers to the class discussion questions, and actively participate in small-group and general discussions in all classes. You will be graded based on the quality of your participation in class; merely attending the class without any active participation will not gain you any participation points.

Idol Training Camp: Group Class Facilitation (20%)

In a group of 4-5 (depending on enrolment), you will take on the role of trainers in an idol training camp. Your task is to research a pre-assigned topic related to the day's theme and present your findings to the class, who will act as idol trainees. As trainers, you will share valuable insights, and highlight key issues in the industry, equipping your classmates with the knowledge they need to succeed. Additionally, your group will create 2-3 discussion questions to guide in-class small-group discussions.

Grading will be split into individual performance (15%) and group effort (5%), assessed on the quality of research and analysis, ability to synthesize ideas, critical reading skills, time management, presentation skills, and teamwork.

The idol training camp will take place in the sessions on 8-10 Jul and 15-17 Jul. Each training camp will last 45-60 minutes.

Individual Essay (30%)

You will write a 1200-word paper on a Japanese or Korean pop idol or celebrity (you may also write about an idol group or an individual idol from an idol group). You will first analyze the star image of your selected idol/celebrity, providing an in-depth analysis of how the idol/celebrity is being produced and promoted locally and/or internationally. You will then present an original and informed argument about the social significance of the idol/celebrity.

In your discussion of how this idol/idol group is being produced/marketed, you should draw on the idol/group's performances (such as concerts, live shows, TV shows, dramas, etc), photos, interviews, social media posts, advertisements, news or magazine reports on them, etc, and show clearly and

convincingly how the specific images/personalities of the idol/group are being constructed/produced/self-produced. You may include images/photos in your paper, but make sure to provide the proper captions and citations. If you wish to use photos that you took, please cite as "photo by author".

At least 50% of your paper should be spent on discussing the social significance of the idol. This section will build upon what you have previously discussed, and examines the kinds of impacts that the idol/group (including the images that they present and the messages that they convey through their images/performances) may have (or already have) on society and/or their audiences/fans. You are expected to refer to academic sources to support your claims. For example, if you are writing about Japanese boy bands and how they pose a challenge to the prevailing gender norms in contemporary Japan, then you should be citing the academic literature on masculinities in Japan, gender theories, or research on gender and popular culture broadly. Because this is a short paper, I would suggest that you only focus on one point/idea, and try to argue it well. You may like to refer to Oh's article on Girls' Generation (Lecture 4) for ideas and inspirations.

Deadline: 20 Jul, 2359

Produce 2233: Idol Production Group Project (30%)

You will work in a group of 4-5 to produce a Japanese or Korean pop idol/idol group. This assessment requires you to incorporate the key ideas and concepts in the course relating to the production, representation, circulation and consumption of pop idols in the creation of a new idol/idol group. There are two components to the group project:

(i) Media release kit (additional guidelines will be provided)

The media release kit comprises of a 500-word press release document and a max. 1-minute promotional video. In the press release document, you will speak from the perspective of the talent management company, and provide details on the new idol/idol group, its appeal or selling point, and the short and long-term marketing and promotion plans, keeping in mind the global media landscape, and consumption practices of local/international fans.

In the video, you will take the position of the debuting idol/idol group and perform a song and/or dance, or interview-style Q&A session. The video may also take the form of a music video, or a behind-the-scene making-of. The contents of the video should correspond to and illustrate the details in the press release document. All students in the group must participate in the video as cast and/or crew—indicate your roles in the rolling credits at the end of the video.

(ii) Afterword

You will append to the media release kit a 1000-word afterword that is written from the perspective of scholars explaining the social and cultural significance of the idol/idol group (e.g. how the idol/idol group may reinforce and/or challenge the current social order). To do so, you need to first understand the socio-cultural, economic or political context in which the idol/group is produced and/or consumed. Then ask yourself, what roles does this idol/group play within such a society besides providing entertainment? What role(s) do you want this idol/group to play? For example, if you are producing an AKB48-like girl group, then perhaps you want to look into issues like gender norms, gender ideology and femininity in (post-bubble) Japan.

Alternatively, you may also discuss how the new idol/idol group builds on, extends and changes the prevailing methods of idol production (and/or consumption) in Japan/Korea.

Keep in mind that the afterword should be written in tone appropriate for academic papers. You are required to cite (read: critically engage) at least three academic sources (i.e. academic books and journal articles) in the afterword. You should also make full use of the contents of the media release kit as examples to illustrate the points that you are making here.

Students will be assessed as a team on the basis of creativity, ability to synthesize ideas and apply the conceptual and analytical tools taught in the module to create/design something new, academic quality (afterword section), team work, and overall effectiveness (see detailed grading criteria below). The different tasks in the project cannot easily be individually broken down, as is the case with idol production in real life. To be successful, students have to work as a team—one of the intended learning outcomes of this module.

Deadlines and grades breakdown:

18 Jul (in class):

- 1-min Video & Presentation of project: 10%

23 Jul, 2359:

- Media release document: 5%
- Afterword: 15%

Course Topics

Week	Day	Topic	Session Activities <i>*subject to change</i>
1	4 Jul (Fri)	Idols, Celebrities, Society and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to course • Lecture 1 • Class facilitation and project group formation
2	8 Jul (Tue)	The Idol Industry in Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 2 • Class Discussion • Group Class Facilitation 1
	9 Jul (Wed)	Idol Factories and the Cultural Industry in Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 3 • Class Discussion • Group Class Facilitation 2
	10 Jul (Thurs)	Gender and Race: Boy Bands & Girl Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 4 • Class Discussion • Group Class Facilitation 3
	11 Jul (Fri)	Project Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with project groups
3	15 Jul (Tue)	Asia's <i>Hari</i> (Japan mania) Boom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 5 • Class Discussion • Group Class Facilitation 4
	16 Jul (Wed)	<i>Hallyu</i> 1.0 to 3.0: Transnational Cultural Consumption of Korean Popular Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 6 • Class Discussion • Group Class Facilitation 5

17 Jul (Thurs)	Idols in the Digital Age: Fandom and Participatory culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 7 • Class Discussion • Group Class Facilitation 6
18 Jul (Fri)	Project Presentation & Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce 2233 Project presentation: Video (1min) + group presentation

Reading List

Part I: Introduction

Lecture 1: Idols, Celebrities, Society and Culture

- Turner, Graeme. 2014. [Understanding Celebrity](#). 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd (Chapter 1: Understanding Celebrity).
- Dyer, Richard. 2007. "[Stars](#)." In *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, edited by Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, 78-84. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Lai, Jocelyn Yi-Hsuan. 2017. "[East Asian stars, public space, and star studies](#)." In *Routledge Handbook of East Asian Popular Culture*, edited by Koichi Iwabuchi, Eva Tsai, and Chris Berry, 167-177. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Part II: A Star is Born: Producing Idols in Contemporary Japan and Korea

Lecture 2: The Idol Industry in Japan

- Brator, Philip and Tasubuku Masako. 1997. "[Idol Chatter: The Evolution of J-Pop](#)". *Japan Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (Apr): 55-65.
- Marx, David. 2012. "[The Jimusho System: Understanding the Production Logic of the Japanese Entertainment Industry](#)". In *Idols and celebrity in Japanese media culture*, edited by Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, 35-55. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kiuchi, Yuya. 2017. "[Idols You Can Meet: AKB48 and a New Trend in Japan's Music Industry](#)." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 50, no. 1: 30-49.

Lecture 3: Idol Factories and the Cultural Industry in Korea

- Shim, Doobo. 2008. "[The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave](#)". In *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, edited by Chua Beng Huat and Iwabuchi Koichi, 15-31. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Shin, Solee and Lanu Kim. 2013. "[Organizing K-pop: Emergence and Market Making of Large Korean Entertainment Houses, 1980-2010](#)." *East Asia* 30: 255-272.

Lecture 4: Gender and Race: Boy Bands and Girl Groups

- Nagaike, Kazumi. 2012. "[Johnny's Idols as Icons: Female Desires to Fantasize and Consume Male Idol Images](#)." In *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, edited by Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, 97-112. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oh, Chuyun. 2014. "[The Politics of the Dancing Body: Racialized and Gendered Femininity in Korean Pop](#)". In *The Korean Wave: Korean Popular Culture in Global Context*, edited by Kuwahara Yasue, 53-81. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Part III: From *Hari* to *Hallyu*: Cultural Imperialism, Indigenization, and Media Globalization

Lecture 5: Asia's *Hari* (Japan mania) Boom

- Iwabuchi, Koichi. 2004. "[Introduction: cultural globalization and Asian media connections.](#)" In *Feeling Asian modernities: transnational consumption of Japanese TV dramas*, edited by Iwabuchi Koichi, 1-22. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Chua, Beng Huat. 2012. [Structure, Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture.](#) Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press (Chapter 1: East Asian Popular Culture).

Lecture 6: *Hallyu* 1.0 to 3.0: Transnational Cultural Consumption of Korean Popular Culture

- Ryoo, Woongjae. 2009. "[Globalization, or the Logic of Cultural Hybridization: The Case of the Korean Wave.](#)" *Asian Journal of Communication* 19, no. 2: 137-151.
- Iwabuchi, Koichi. 2008. "[When the Korean Wave Meets Resident Koreans in Japan: Intersections of the Transnational, the Postcolonial and the Multicultural.](#)" In *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, edited by Chua Beng Huat, and Koichi Iwabuchi, 243-264. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Lecture 7: Idols in the Digital Age: Fandom and Participatory culture

- Condry, Ian. 2018. "[Hatsune Miku: Virtual Idol, Media Platform, and Crowd-Sourced Celebrity.](#)" In *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture*, edited by Alisa Freedman and Toby Slade, 123-134. London: Routledge.
- Sugawa-Shimada, Akiko. 2020. "[Emerging '2.5-dimensional' Culture: Character-oriented Cultural Practices and 'Community of Preferences' as a New Fandom in Japan and Beyond.](#)" *Mechademia*12, no. 2: 124-139.