

JS2233: Idols and Celebrities in Japan and Korea

FASStrack 2026

Schedule: PM Session (2pm-5pm, 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	30%	In class, Weeks 1-3
Music/Concert Video Analysis	20%	In-class presentation, Weeks 2-3
Produce 2233: Idol Production Group Project	30%	In-class presentation, 17 July
Fieldtrip + Reflection Paper	20%	22 July, 2359
Total for CA:	100%	

Class participation (30%)

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.

Music/Concert Video Analysis (20%)

Format: In-class presentation during weeks 2-3

You will select one J-pop or K-pop music video or concert performance and present a close analysis of how this music/concert video represents, reinforces, or complicates ONE key theme from the course.

Possible themes:

- Gender
- Racial /national identity
- Affective labour
- The idol system
- Fan–idol relationships
- Transnational circulation of J- and K-pop
- Participatory culture

Produce 2233: Idol Production Group Project (30%)

Format: In-class presentation on 17 July.

You will work in small groups to conceptualise and produce a new Japanese or Korean pop idol or idol group. This project requires you to apply key ideas and concepts from the course—relating to the production, representation, circulation, and consumption of pop idols—to the creation of an original idol concept.

Part A: Management Pitch & Idol Debut Video

Your presentation will begin with a short management pitch, in which you introduce your idol or idol group from the perspective of the talent management company and explain its concept, positioning, and promotion strategy. This should include elements such as:

- Idol/group identity and concept
- Visual and performance style
- Target market(s) and fan demographics
- Promotional and circulation strategies (including transnational considerations)

You will then screen a 30–60 second debut video produced by your group. All group members must participate in the video as on-screen performers and/or off-screen production staff. The video should visually and performatively showcase the idol or idol group, and illustrate the ideas presented in your management pitch (e.g. concept, image, appeal, and market positioning).

Part B: Scholarly Analysis

Following the pitch and video, you will deliver a scholarly presentation analysing your idol or idol group using concepts and readings from the course. You should situate your idol or idol group within broader discussions of idol culture, media, and society, and examine how your concept reveals, normalises, negotiates, or contests particular ideas or practices in contemporary Japan or Korea (and/or contemporary popular culture more broadly).

Fieldtrip + Reflection Paper (20%)

Format: Reflection paper (800-1000 words), due 22 Jul, 2359

As part of this course, students will participate in a field trip to a J-pop or K-pop–related cultural event or site in Singapore. The field trip is designed to give students first-hand exposure to the production, circulation, and consumption of J-pop or K-pop beyond the classroom.

Following the field trip, students will submit an individual reflection paper that critically analyses the experience using key concepts and frameworks from the course. The paper should move beyond personal impressions to examine how the event or site relates to themes such as idol training, affective labour, industry structures, fandom, or transnational circulation.

Further details about the field trip and the reflection paper will be provided closer to the date.

Course Topics

Week	Day	Topic	Session Activities <i>*subject to change</i>
1	30 Jun (Tue)	Idols, Celebrities, Society and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to course • Lecture 1 • Project group formation
	1 Jul (Wed)	The Idol Industry in Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 2 • Class Discussion
	2 Jul (Thurs)	Idol Factories and the Cultural Industry in Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 3 • Class Discussion
	3 Jul (Fri)	Project Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with project groups

2	7 Jul (Tue)	Boy Bands, Soft Masculinity and Female Fantasy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 4 • Class Discussion • Music/Concert Video Presentation
	8 Jul (Wed)	Girl Groups, Race, Sexuality and the Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 5 • Class Discussion • Music/Concert Video Presentation
	9 Jul (Thurs)	Field Trip (Tentative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field Trip to a J-pop or K-pop event/site in Singapore
	10 Jul (Fri)	Field Trip Debrief, Project Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing workshop, project consultation
3	14 Jul (Tue)	Asia's 哈日 (Japan mania) Boom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 6 • Class Discussion • Music/Concert Video Presentation
	15 Jul (Wed)	韩流: Transnational Circulation of Korean Popular Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 7 • Class Discussion • Music/Concert Video Presentation
	16 Jul (Thurs)	Idols in the Digital Age: Fandom and Participatory culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture 8 • Class Discussion • Music/Concert Video Presentation
	17 Jul (Fri)	Project Presentation & Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce 2233 Project presentation