



GLOBAL SUMMER PROGRAMME 2025

GA201 POPULAR CULTURE IN ASIA

Instructor Name : Dr Chris Tan
 Title : Popular Culture in Asia
 Email : silenceglaive@gmail.com



COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines popular culture in East Asian countries in light of their recent economic and political transformations. It explores the ways in which popular practices, entertainment and media messages are shaped by class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and generational relations, as well as by contending political ideologies. It considers how globalization and westernization intersect with indigenous and national traditions in the region.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course aims to cultivate in students a critical understanding popular culture in East Asia, in terms of content and audiences, as well as the social, political, economic, historical and institutional contexts in which various forms of popular culture are produced, practiced and consumed.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the formation of East Asian popular culture in contemporary;
- Understand how practices of popular culture in East Asia may reinforce divisions in gender, ethnicity and social class, and how they may constitute a form of resistance towards the established social order;
- Understand the historical, social, political and economic contexts of production, distribution and audience reception of popular culture in East Asia
- Gain a critical awareness of the multi-directional transnational flows of popular culture in East Asia, and grasp the theories and conceptual frameworks for explaining audience consumption of foreign cultural products;
- Appreciate how fan subcultures form around the consumption of Asian popular culture and how fans challenge media production with their own fan works.

PRE-REQUISITES / REQUIREMENTS / MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE COURSE(S)

Nil

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Students will be evaluated as follows:

Class participation (20%): You are encouraged to actively participate in the discussions and activities that take place in class. Good class participation involves actively listening to your instructor and other students during class, joining class discussions, asking thoughtful and helpful questions, and being a good team member during classroom group work.

Group presentations (20%): Students will be divided into 7 groups of 3-5 members each. The groups will do presentations as follows:

- Soft power (Group 1)
- Platforms (Group 2)
- Gender and sexuality (Group 3)
- Boys' Love / *Danmei* (Group 4)
- Influencers (Group 5)
- Fandoms (Group 6)
- Celebrities (Group 7)

Each group will identify a topic of their choice within their week's theme. **It is essential for the group to make an appointment to meet the instructor at least one week before the presentation.** Prior to the meeting, the group is expected to have read the prescribed reading and prepared several presentation outlines (in case the first one does not work out).

Each group will be given 30 minutes to present the topic. The group can decide on any format they want: some groups might want to be more creative and fun by making the presentation an interactive session involving the audience (like a talk show), or by doing role play (with or without costume), debate, etc. The aim is to make the learning experience interesting and relevant. You may use technology and visual aids (e.g. video, DVD, PowerPoint, etc.) in your presentation. You can also give handouts to the audience to help them follow your arguments. Assessment will be based on organization of the presentation, knowledge of the subject matter, clarity, articulation, teamwork, creativity and engagement with the audience.

Group essay (20%): Based on its chosen topic **and** in consultation with the instructor, each group will build on its research and develop it into a thoroughly researched essay of **2000 words (+/- 10%)**. The essay should be submitted by 11.59 pm three days after the presentation.

Final exam (40%): The final exam will be conducted in-class during Session 12 on the lock-down browser. Details will be provided later.

Total: 100%

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND EXPECTATIONS

There are 3 class sessions per week, each lasting 3 hours. Each session will consist of an overview lecture, a group presentation, interactive learning, and group discussions. Occasionally, guest speakers will be invited to give the lecture in class. You are expected to do *all* required readings prior to seminar, and should be prepared to discuss them.

CONSULTATIONS

By appointment only. The instructor can be contacted at silenceglave@gmail.com (faster response) or christankk@smu.edu.sg.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS

Session 1: Foundational concepts

Chua, Beng Huat. 2004. Conceptualizing an East Asian popular culture. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5(2): 200–221.

Fuchs, Christian. 2014. Social media as participatory culture. In *Social media: A critical introduction*. Pp. 52–68. London: Sage.

Session 2: Japan Wave

Kinsella, Sharon. 1995. Cuties in Japan. In *Women, media, and consumption in Japan*. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, eds. Pp. 220–254. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.

Session 3 (Sep 3): Korean Wave

GUEST SPEAKER: TBC

Venters, Laurie, and Alexander Rothenberg. 2023. Trammelled stars: The non-autonomy of female K-pop idols. *Celebrity Studies* 14(4): 455–471.

Optional (but highly recommended)

BBC World Service. 2024, 19 May. Burning Sun: Exposing the secret K-pop chat groups.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EEp1q_iMYc

Session 4: Soft power

Kim, Youna. 2022. Introduction: Popular culture and soft power in the social media age. In *The soft power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and drama*. Pp. 1–38. New York: Routledge.

Session 5: Platforms

Kumar, Anilesh, and Daya Thussu. 2023. Media, digital sovereignty and geopolitics: The case of the TikTok Ban in India. *Media, Culture & Society* 45(8): 1583–1599.

Session 6: Gender and sexuality

Elfvig-Hwang, Joanna. 2021. Media, cosmetic surgery and aspirational beauty aesthetics of the ageing body in South Korea. *Asian Studies Review* 45(2): 238–252.

Week 7: Boys' love / Danmei

Ye, Shana. 2023. *Word of Honor* and brand homonationalism with “Chinese characteristics”: The *dangai* industry, queer masculinity and the “opacity” of the state. *Feminist Media Studies* 23(4): 1593–1609.

Session 8: Influencers

Tan, Chris K. K., Jie Wang, Shengyuan Wangzhu, Jinjing Xu, and Chunxuan Zhu. 2020. The real digital

housewives of China's *Kuaishou* video-sharing and live-streaming app. *Media, Culture & Society* 42(7–8): 1243–1259.

Session 9: Fandoms

Zhang, Qian, and Keith Negus. 2020. East Asian pop music idol production and the emergence of data fandom in China. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 23(4): 493–511.

Session 10: Celebrities

Galbraith, Patrick W., and Jason G. Karlin. 2020. Chapters 6 – 9. In *AKB48*. Pp. 41–70. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Session 11: Class wrap-up

Session 12: Final exam

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

All acts of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized possession of exam questions, or tampering with the academic work of other students) are serious offences.

All work (whether oral or written) submitted for purposes of assessment must be the student's own work. Penalties for violation of the policy range from zero marks for the component assessment to expulsion, depending on the nature of the offense.

When in doubt, students should consult the instructors of the course. Details on the SMU Code of Academic Integrity may be accessed at <https://smu.sharepoint.com/sites/oasis/SitePages/DOS-WKLSWC/UCSC.aspx>.

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LESSON PLAN		
LESSONS	TOPICS	REMARKS
LESSON 1	Foundational concepts	
LESSON 2	Japan Wave	
LESSON 3	Korean Wave	Guest speaker: TBC
LESSON 4	Soft power	
LESSON 5	Platforms	
LESSON 6	Gender and sexuality	
LESSON 7	Boys' Love / <i>Danmei</i>	
LESSON 8	Influencers	
LESSON 9	Fandoms	
LESSON 10	Celebrities	
LESSON 11	Class wrap-up	
LESSON 12	Final exam	