



GLOBAL SUMMER PROGRAMME 2027

ASIAN BRANDS, POP CULTURE AND THE JOY ECONOMY

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why are Asian brands, popular culture and consumer experiences increasingly capturing global attention? From K-pop, Korean dramas and anime to character collectibles, beauty, food, fashion, gaming and experiential retail, Asian cultural and commercial products are increasingly shaping consumer preferences, identities and experiences across international markets.

This course examines how Asian brands and cultural businesses create, communicate and scale value across borders. Drawing on research in consumer behaviour, branding, strategic communication, international marketing, media and cultural industries, students will explore how consumer experiences, cultural meanings, narratives, communities and digital platforms contribute to the international success of Asian brands and popular culture.

Particular attention will be given to the emerging “**joy economy**”: consumer experiences centred on pleasure, play, emotion, identity, collectability and belonging. Students will examine how businesses transform these experiences into brand value, consumer communities and new commercial opportunities, while considering why some cultural products and brands travel successfully across markets while others encounter cultural, reputational or market barriers.

Through contemporary Asian cases, academic research, student-led case discussions and practitioner perspectives, the course will examine the relationships among cultural meaning, consumer behaviour and international business. Students will critically evaluate issues including authenticity, localisation, fandom, platformisation, cultural branding and country-of-origin associations, as well as when commercial and cultural success may generate broader forms of cultural influence and soft power.

By bringing together established academic frameworks and emerging consumer and media trends, the course equips students to analyse how Asian businesses and cultural industries create distinctive sources of value and influence in the global marketplace.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explain key concepts and theories relating to consumer behaviour, branding, consumer culture, strategic communication and the internationalisation of cultural products and brands.
2. Analyse how cultural meanings, consumer experiences, narratives, identity and communities contribute to the creation of brand and consumer value.
3. Evaluate how Asian brands and cultural businesses use media, platforms, communities and market strategies to reach and engage consumers across different markets.
4. Assess how cultural, institutional and market differences influence the internationalisation, localisation and reception of Asian brands and popular culture.
5. Critically evaluate the relationship between commercial success, cultural popularity, country-of-origin associations and broader forms of cultural influence.
6. Apply relevant academic frameworks to contemporary Asian brands, cultural products and consumer phenomena and develop evidence-based managerial insights.

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

None

ASSESSMENT METHODS

(a) Class participation & activities	20%
(b) Student research / discussion leading	20%
(c) Quizzes	30%
(d) Term research project	30%

Note: Students will be graded according to the curve after aggregating all the components.

Class Participation & Activities – 20%

Students are expected to contribute actively and constructively throughout the course. Participation may take the form of contributing to class discussions, responding to questions, sharing relevant examples, participating in in-class research and group activities, and offering thoughtful comments on the ideas and cases presented by classmates. Some sessions may include guest speakers from industry, media, cultural or related professional fields. Students are expected to engage with guest speakers by asking informed questions, responding to their observations, and connecting practitioner insights to relevant concepts introduced in the course. Quality of participation, rather than frequency alone, will be taken into account.

Student Research / Discussion Leading – 20%

Beginning from Session 3, student teams will take turns leading selected case discussions related to the topic of the respective session. Teams will be expected to identify or analyse a contemporary real-world case, conduct appropriate background research, connect the case to relevant academic concepts or readings, and facilitate a short class discussion. The objective is not simply to present information, but to encourage the class to critically examine how theories of soft power, strategic communication, consumer culture, media, branding and related concepts help explain contemporary Asian cultural and commercial phenomena. Students should be prepared to respond to questions and encourage participation from their classmates. Each student will participate in discussion leading at least once during the course.

Quizzes – 30%

There will be three announced quizzes during the course. Each quiz will assess students' understanding of key concepts, theories, readings, cases and discussions covered in preceding sessions. The quizzes will consist primarily of multiple-choice and/or short-answer questions and are intended to encourage students to keep pace with the course material and consolidate their understanding progressively.

Term Research Project – 30%

The Term Research Project is a group assignment designed to give students the opportunity to apply the concepts and theories introduced in the course to a contemporary Asian brand, cultural product, consumer phenomenon, cultural industry or platform-enabled business with relevance beyond its home market.

Students will be assigned to groups by the instructor, which may include random allocation to encourage collaboration across different disciplinary, national and cultural backgrounds. The project will be formally briefed during Session 4.

Each group will identify a relevant case and develop a theoretically informed analysis of how it creates, communicates and sustains value across markets. Projects may examine issues such as consumer experience, cultural meaning, branding, narratives, fandom, authenticity, legitimacy, platform distribution, localisation, country-of-origin associations, internationalisation, or the relationship between commercial success and broader cultural influence.

Groups will be expected to formulate a clear research question or analytical problem, synthesise relevant academic literature, conduct appropriate secondary research, and develop an evidence-based argument. The project should demonstrate both academic rigour and the ability to apply theory to contemporary business and cultural developments in Asia.

Sessions 11 and 12 will be reserved primarily for group presentations of the Term Research Projects. Each group will present its findings to the class and respond to questions from the instructor and fellow students. Assessment will consider the quality of research and analysis, appropriate use of academic concepts and evidence, originality and relevance of insights, clarity of argument, and the effectiveness of the group presentation.

Outstanding projects may, where appropriate, be further developed for student research showcases, academic conferences or publication opportunities under the guidance of the instructor.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND EXPECTATIONS

The course combines academic instruction with case-based learning, student-led discussion, collaborative research and applied analysis. Each session will generally include a combination of short lectures, contemporary case discussions, in-class research activities, student presentations and facilitated discussion. Selected sessions may also feature guest speakers who will provide practitioner perspectives on Asian media, brands, consumer markets, cultural industries or related areas of soft power.

The course is designed to develop two complementary forms of learning: theoretical understanding and practical application. Students will first be introduced to relevant concepts and academic frameworks drawn from fields such as soft power, strategic communication, media and cultural studies, consumer culture, branding and behavioural science. They will then apply these ideas to contemporary Asian cases in order to examine how cultural and commercial influence is created, communicated, experienced and contested.

Active learning is an important component of the course. Students should not expect each three-hour session to consist solely of instructor-led lectures. Beginning from Session 3, student teams will take turns leading selected case discussions. These discussions will require students to undertake background research, apply relevant course concepts and facilitate discussion among their classmates. Other sessions will include short in-class research exercises, group activities, debates or applied analytical tasks designed to allow students to test theoretical ideas against real-world phenomena.

Where guest speakers are invited, students are expected to prepare for and participate actively in the session. This includes listening critically, asking relevant questions and considering how the speaker's professional experience relates to academic concepts discussed in class. Engagement with guest speakers will form part of class participation.

The term research project will be introduced in Session 4. Students will work in instructor-assigned groups and progressively develop their project alongside the course. Sessions 11 and 12 will be devoted primarily to group presentations, allowing students to demonstrate their ability to integrate academic literature, contemporary research and course concepts in analysing an Asian soft power phenomenon.

Students are expected to complete assigned readings before class, participate respectfully in discussions, contribute equitably to group work and approach contemporary cases critically rather than treating commercial popularity or cultural visibility as evidence of soft power by default. The course places particular emphasis on connecting academic concepts with current developments across Asia and on learning from the diverse cultural perspectives represented within the Global Summer Programme.

CONSULTATIONS

On appointment basis during office hours.

RECOMMENDED TEXT AND READINGS

SESSION 1 — Asia Goes Global: Brands, Culture and Consumer Influence

Steenkamp, J.-B. E. M. (2019). Global versus local consumer culture: Theory, measurement, and future research directions. *Journal of International Marketing*, 27(1), 1–19.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X18811289>

Nye, J. S., Jr. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>

SESSION 2 — The Joy Economy: How Culture Creates Consumer Value

Holbrook, M. B., & Hirschman, E. C. (1982). The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(2), 132–140. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208906>

Schmitt, B. (1999). Experiential marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1–3), 53–67. <https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870496>

SESSION 3 — Brands as Cultural Meaning Systems

McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(1), 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209048>

Holt, D. B. (2004). *How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding*. Harvard Business School Press. [Selected chapter]

SESSION 4 — Framing and Narratives: The Stories Brands Tell

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>

Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701–721. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701>

SESSION 5 — Authenticity and Legitimacy: Who Has the Right to Sell Culture?

Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331>

Beverland, M. B. (2005). Crafting brand authenticity: The case of luxury wines. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(5), 1003–1029. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2005.00530.x>

SESSION 6 — The Korean Wave: Building a Global Cultural Business Ecosystem

Jin, D. Y. (2024). *Understanding the Korean Wave: Transnational Korean pop culture and digital technologies*. Routledge. [Chapter 6 - [Local Cultural Industries Toward the Global Cultural Markets](#)]

Lee, S. T. (2022). Film as cultural diplomacy: South Korea's nation branding through *Parasite* (2019). *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 18(2), 93–104. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00192-1>

SESSION 7 — Fandom: When Consumers Become Communities

Muñiz, A. M., Jr., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412–432. <https://doi.org/10.1086/319618>

Schau, H. J., Muñiz, A. M., Jr., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30–51. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30>

SESSION 8 — Platforms: How Asian Culture Travels

Jin, D. Y., Yoon, K., & Han, B. (2023). Platformization of the Korean Wave: A critical perspective.

Communication Research and Practice, 9(4), 408–427.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2023.2249776>

Jin, D. Y. (2024). The rise of digital platforms as a soft power apparatus in the New Korean Wave era. *Communication and the Public*, 9(2), 161–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20570473241234204>

SESSION 9 — Crossing Borders: Globalisation, Localisation and Cultural Difference

Roth, M. S., & Romeo, J. B. (1992). Matching product category and country image perceptions: A framework for managing country-of-origin effects. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 23(3), 477–497. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490276>

Lee, F. L. F. (2006). Cultural discount and cross-culture predictability: Examining the box office performance of American movies in Hong Kong. *Journal of Media Economics*, 19(4), 259–278. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327736me1904_3

SESSION 10 — From Commercial Success to Cultural Influence

Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2026). Re-imagining CCT for crisis times: Theorizing collaborative consumer culture. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-026-01157-1>

Nye, J. S., Jr. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>

SESSION 11 — Term Research Project Presentations I

No new assigned readings.

SESSION 12 — Term Research Project Presentations II and Course Synthesis

No new assigned readings.

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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Accessibility

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LESSON PLAN	
LESSONS	TOPICS
LESSON 1	Asia Goes Global: Brands, Culture and Consumer Influence
LESSON 2	The Joy Economy: How Culture Creates Consumer Value
LESSON 3	Brands as Cultural Meaning Systems
LESSON 4	Framing and Narratives: The Stories Brands Tell
LESSON 5	Authenticity and Legitimacy: Who Has the Right to Sell Culture?
LESSON 6	The Korean Wave: Building a Global Cultural Business Ecosystem
LESSON 7	Fandom: When Consumers Become Communities
LESSON 8	Platforms: How Asian Culture Travels
LESSON 9	Crossing Borders: Globalisation, Localisation and Cultural Difference
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