

Schedule

1. Intro and context - Monday 7th November: 2-3.50pm
2. Consumption and celebrity industry - Monday 7th November: 6-7:50pm
3. Celebrity culture and fandoms - Tuesday 8th November: 10-11:50am
4. Internet celebrity and live-streaming - Tuesday 8th November: 6-7:50pm
5. Cyber nationalism and wolf warriors - Wednesday 9th November: 10-11:50am
6. Rap music and the underground - Wednesday 9th November: 6-7:50pm
7. Football culture: Ultras and 'fake fans' - Thursday 10th November: 2-3.50pm
8. Sex, sexuality and gender - Thursday 10th November: 6-7:50pm
9. Assessment: Group presentations - Friday 11th November: 12-1:50pm
10. Wrap up - Friday 11th November: 4-5.50pm

Content

1. Intro and context

This session covers the social, political and economic context in which all other topics covered in the module take place. It will explore how the transition to market socialism and partial retreat of the state have created a freer, more individualistic and wealthier society, but also one in which the decline of socialist ideology and collectivist ways of life and previous certainties in the organization of life have affected attitudes and behaviours. The lecture will establish the socio-political parameters in which social expression and lifestyles are experienced, survey key processes such as urbanization and migration, and introduce concepts such as “liquid modernity” to help explain people’s responses. It will discuss the attitudes and behaviours of the cohorts who were born under the “one child policy” and during China’s economic take-off. It identifies the concerns, lifestyles and aspirations of the post-80s and post-90s generation and the implications for Chinese society.

2. Consumption and celebrity industry

This lecture explores consumption patterns in post-reform China, discussing how greater wealth has changed attitudes toward material well-being, spending habits and lifestyles. It situates consumption within the broader context of the transition to market

socialism, changing social attitudes and commercialization of the media and emergence of the internet. It introduces frameworks for understanding celebrity in contemporary culture and shows how different elements of the celebrity industry in China work. It demonstrates how the state controls and uses celebrity to advance its own agenda of promoting modernity, traditional values and patriotism.

3. Celebrity culture & fandoms

This lecture explores the forms that celebrity culture takes in China, how fandoms have emerged in response to the growth of the celebrity industry and the internet, and the motivations for celebrity fandoms in China. It introduces general theoretical frameworks for understanding the role of celebrity fandom in contemporary societies, and provides comparative counterpoints.

4. Internet celebrity and live-streaming

This session looks at the rise of a demotic sphere of ‘ordinary celebrity’, influencers and streamers. It discusses the economics and culture of the wanghong (网红) phenomenon, the media ecology in which it is embedded and the social effects. It then presents a case study of livestreaming local officials to show how state and Party actors are adapting to the affordances of new platforms and participatory digital cultures as part of the reinvention of political communications.

5. Cyber nationalism and wolf warriors

This session looks at the connection between popular and cybernationalism, the means of expression and political influence of this very online, very fervent cohort of mainly young people. It situates cybernationalists within the broader sweep of nationalism in China and uses a case study of “wolf warrior diplomats” to show how cybernationalism intersects with formal diplomatic communications.

6. Rap music and the underground

This session looks at the evolution of the rap scene from marginal subculture to the mainstream. It introduces concepts like cultural appropriation and glocalization to help understand whether there is such a thing as “Chinese rap”. It will look at how Chinese rappers present and understand themselves, foregrounding the idea of ‘keeping it real’

and the ‘underground’ and its expression in through the classical allusion to *Jianghu* (江湖), the lawless realm outside civilization that features in much classical literature.

7. Football culture: Ultras and ‘fake fans’

This session describes the development of football in China, the connection between football and nationalism and football and violence. It uses transnational fandom and the naturalization of foreign players as a vehicle for interrogating Chinese attitudes towards foreignness. It looks at how Chinese people engage with the global game, from ultras to those with a passing interest, and shows the means by which fans make meaning out of their consumption of football.

8. Sex, sexuality and gender

This session examines the politics and possibilities of sexuality and gender in Contemporary China. It explores how the emergence of LGBTQ identities and practices, and feminist activists negotiate state, market and transnational cultural flows in everyday life, and the various opportunities and challenges this presents. It looks at how sexual culture in China has changed since the country’s shift to a more market-based economy. Exploring how new ideas of romance, leisure, and free choice are redefining ideas of sex in China today, we will also discuss changing attitudes and public discussions of sex and pornography, and how it is governed by state and market.

9. Assessment: Group presentations

Assessment will be via a short group presentation, to which all students are expected to contribute [valid exemptions aside]. Students will be asked to choose a mini-case study related to one of the session topics and introduce it to the class. The presentation will need to describe what the case study is, what is special or representative about it, why you choose it, what it illuminates about the topic and what it says about China. Students are encouraged to use visual imagery, [very] short video, and other means to supplement their verbal presentation. Further instruction and examples will be provided during the Intro and context session. Students are encouraged to choose something that they are really passionate about and interested in – as long as it is related to the areas covered, anything is acceptable.