

ANGLO-CHINESE JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2008

GENERAL PAPER

8806/02

Paper 2

1 hour 30 minutes

INSERT

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

This document consists of **3** printed pages.

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Anglo-Chinese Junior College
General Paper Department

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Passage 1: In this article Daniel W. Drezner writes about **Celebrity Activism**.

- 1 Increasingly, celebrities are taking an active interest in world politics. One reason for the new-found global agendas of celebrities is simply that today's stars have more autonomy than previous generations, and many of them recognise the benefits of being a popular saint. Stars may have always cared about politics, but they have not always been able to act on these impulses. Entertainers likely feared speaking out in the past, but the entertainment industry is not as authoritarian as it once was. The studio systems of yesteryear exerted much greater control over their movie stars. In the decades since, celebrities have acquired more leverage in Hollywood. In some cases, such as in the case of Oprah Winfrey, they have become moguls themselves. This gives them the autonomy to adopt pet causes and policy initiatives. 5
- 2 This leads to another somewhat more selfish reason for celebrities to embrace policy activism: it distinguishes them from their tawdrier brethren. We now live in a world where the path to fame can be as fast as a 15-second YouTube clip. In such a world, marquee celebrities need to take steps to differentiate themselves from the lesser stars of stage and screen - or distance themselves from past scandals. 10
- 3 The final reason more celebrities are interested in making the world a better place is that it is simply easier for anyone to become a policy activist today. An effective policy entrepreneur requires a few simple commodities: expertise, money and the ability to command the media's attention. Celebrities already have the latter two; the Internet has enabled them to catch up on information-gathering. Several celebrities even have "philanthropic advisors" to facilitate their activism. This does not mean that celebrities will become authentic experts on a country or issue. They can, however, acquire enough knowledge to pen an op-ed¹ or sound competent on a talk show. And when they look sexy doing it, all bets are off. 15 20
- 4 In the current media environment, a symbiotic relationship between celebrities and cause célèbres² has developed. Celebrities have a comparative advantage over policy experts because they have access to a wider array of media outlets, which translates into a wider audience of citizens. Superstars can go on soft-news programmes like *The Today Show* or *The Late Show* to plug their latest movie and their latest global cause. Because of their celebrity cachet, even hard-news programmes will cover them - stories about celebrities can raise ratings. With a few exceptions, most politicians cannot make the reverse leap to soft-news outlets. Non-celebrity policy activists are virtually guaranteed to be shut out of these programmes. 25 30
- 5 The growth of soft news gives celebrity activists enormous leverage. The famous and the fabulous are the bread and butter of entertainment programmes. Covering celebrity do-gooders provides content that balances out, say, tabloid coverage of Nicole Richie's personal and legal troubles. MTV will cover Amy Winehouse's on-stage meltdowns, but they will also follow Angelina Jolie in her trips to Africa. They covered *Live Earth* for both the music and the message. 35
- 6 The power of soft news is not limited to television. *Vanity Fair* let Bono guest-edit a special issue about Africa. Without intending to, those perusing the pages might form opinions about sending aid to sub-Saharan Africa in the process. Similarly, celebrity blogs can garner higher amounts of traffic. We may only speculate why Internet users flock to Pamela Anderson's website - but we know that while they are there, they can learn about Anderson's stance against animal testing. 40

¹ An op-ed is abbreviated from opposite editorial due to the tradition of newspapers placing such material on the page opposite the editorial page. It is similar in form and content to an editorial, but represents the opinion of an individual writer.

² A cause célèbre is an issue, generally political, that attracts great public attention.

Passage 2: In this article Darrell M. West writes about **American Politics in the Age of Celebrity**.

- 1 Politicians love to draw on athletes, musicians, and actors because they come from outside the political world. In many cases, celebrities are seen as white knights, not tainted by past partisan scandals or political dealings, who can clean up the political establishment and bring new ideas to public policy-making. Plus, they are seen as too rich to be bought. Their fame attracts press coverage and campaign contributors. Even though they lack detailed knowledge on issues of foreign and domestic policy, they have a platform that allows them to participate in civic discourse. 5
- 2 Politicians form alliances with celebrities and use them to raise money, attract media attention, and persuade recalcitrant voters, but celebrities also need politicians. In today's rapidly changing world, celebrities feel pressure to keep their names in the news, and it is a long time between movies or concert tours. Having a charitable or political cause is one way to keep one's name before the public and gets one a spot on talk and entertainment shows. While celebrities generally prefer non-controversial causes such as more money for children living in poverty or breast cancer research, increasingly entertainment figures are taking stances on controversial subjects, such as the Iraq War and election campaigns. 15
- 3 But a system based on celebrityhood raises a host of problems. Our fascination with celebrities raises the risk that there will be more superficiality and less substance in our political process. Celebrities have contributed to the circus atmosphere that has arisen in American politics; increasingly, politics has become a matter of public performance. Politicians get judged more by their ability to deliver crisp sound bytes than by their substantive knowledge. With journalists interested in celebrity quotes and good copy, experts with detailed knowledge about public policy are more likely to become marginalised. It is easier to go to the famous and get their opinion than to seek out voices of less prominent people who may actually know more. 20
- 4 Both democracy and culture depend on deliberation, participation, and engagement. But what we have now is a system where star power is weighted more heavily than traditional political skills, such as bargaining, compromise, and experience. Conventional politicians are being replaced by famous, media-savvy fund-raisers. The quality of civic deliberation is becoming trivialised. The gossip quotient has increased, and politics has become a 24-hour entertainment spectacle. With attention spans for important stories dropping precipitously, the system rewards celebrity politicians with famous names. Unless these individuals provide citizens with proper information, it short-circuits our system of governance. Without quality information, voters cannot make informed choices about their futures. 30
- 5 American politics has never placed a strong emphasis on substance. Compared to other Western democracies, fewer people vote at election time, and many appear not to be very informed about their decisions. As celebrity politics takes root, there is the long-term danger that citizens will become even less knowledgeable about policy choices, and they may become content to watch and be entertained. But elections are a key device by which representative democracy takes place. Citizens must feel engaged in the process, must be able to think about their options, and must feel they have a stake in the important decisions that get made. Without serious deliberation and discourse, politics becomes mere entertainment. Without experience and knowledge, society may lose its ability to confront pressing problems and resolve social conflict. 40