

What makes Asian pop cultures so deeply rooted in their historical traditions, yet so irresistibly global?

History · Religion · Inter-Asia  
Exchange · Subculture ↔ Pop  
Culture Dynamic



Media · Influencers · K-pop · Film ·  
Anime · Web Novels · Labubu

# BLOCK 6 POP CULTURE IN ASIA

PA250/FM205 TAUGHT BY PROF. MERCY AN

# Topics in Asian Studies

## Topics in Film and Media Studies

### *Block 5 Pop Culture in Asia*

From K-pop and idol survival shows to animation, manga, manhwa, genre fiction, and streaming TV dramas, this course explores major forms of contemporary pop culture across Asia and their global circulation. Rather than treating pop culture as mere entertainment, we theorize it through critical lenses including consumerism, neoliberalism, affect theory, and thing theory. How do idols, collectibles, fantasy heroes, and digital avatars become commodities? How do objects acquire emotional agency? How does platform capitalism reorganize desire, participation, and cultural production?

Throughout the course, we attend to the interplay between aesthetic form and cultural meaning: how narrative structure, visual style, genre conventions, and media format shape social imagination. At the same time, we trace the lingering presence of history—war memory, colonial modernity, national trauma, and inherited cosmologies. Even the most commercial genres, from cultivation fantasy to time-travel drama, reveal how the past continues to structure the present. By situating Asian pop culture within broader debates about modernity, postmodernism, capitalism, and globalization, the course invites students to rethink what popular culture does, what it produces, and what it makes possible.

**Instructor:** Mengqi “Mercy” An, Ph.D.

**Regular class meetings:** 9:30 AM - 12:00 PM, Armstrong Hall #361

**Office hours:** Tue & Wed, 1:30 - 3:00 PM, Interdisciplinary House #201

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of major forms of contemporary Asian pop culture, including K-pop, idol survival shows, animation, manga/manhwa, genre fiction, and streaming TV dramas.
- Articulate and critically respond to key theoretical concepts such as consumerism, neoliberalism, affect theory, thing theory, and postmodernism.
- Practice close reading and close watching to interpret music, film, television, and digital media with attention to form, style, and cultural context.
- Analyze how aesthetic form shapes cultural meaning, and how history—war memory, modernity, nationalism, and cosmology—haunts contemporary pop culture.

- Write down your own learning goals for this block. What do you hope to gain from this course that will support your learning and personal growth at CC and beyond?

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## *Policy*

### Student Wellness

**Your well-being in learning is my top priority.** One of the main goals of this course is to cultivate curiosity, creativity, and scholarship—and all of these seeds need well-cared-for mental space to grow. To honor wellness practices, I have built one wellness day into our class schedule. On this day, you are not expected to do coursework and should instead focus on caring for yourself in ways that work best for you. If you would prefer to take your wellness day on a different date, please reach out to me in advance. I will assign you the tasks scheduled for the built-in wellness day so you can take your chosen day off instead—no questions asked, no documentation required.

**We often need more support than we ask for.** If you or someone you know is struggling, please make use of supportive campus and community resources at [Colorado College Mental Health Promotion](#). The [Wellness Resource Center](#) also provides support for you.

### Attendance

Attendance is essential in this course.

If a class meeting or major deadline conflicts with your predictable religious or cultural observances, please let me know by the first Wednesday so that we can make an arrangement that is both supportive and meaningful.

Unexcused absences will negatively impact your attendance grade. However, I value communication, sincerity, and your effort to learn, and I am open to negotiating meaningful accommodations for unpredictable emergent issues that support your well-being and schedule.

How to request approval for an absence: If you cannot attend class due to an unexpected illness or personal circumstance (e.g., family emergency, mental health needs), please email me before class. Your message must include supporting documentation—such as a doctor’s note, an

athletic training schedule, evidence of attempts to reschedule, or relevant correspondence related to the emergency. I trust your integrity, but I require clear evidence to ensure fairness and consistency for everyone in the class.

If your absence is approved, we will arrange make-up an assignment which is usually an additional in-class short presentation to boost your participation. Please keep in mind that missing class does not mean missing the reading/ watching materials. You are still expected to complete all assigned materials and to participate in discussion based on the readings when you return. Missing three or more class meetings may significantly affect your progress. In such cases, I encourage you to consider switching to Pass/Fail.

## Participation

I take participation seriously. You are expected to participate actively, frequently, and bravely in class. Everyone should aim to speak at least once each session. Meaningful participation involves interacting not only with me but also with your peers and contributing to the building of a class learning community. Try your best to encourage yourself and others to contribute—by paraphrasing, building on ideas, making connections, and initiating points that invite others to engage. Our goal is to make communication and collaboration part of how we think, not just what we say.

Sharing your thoughts with a group of people takes courage. Making a genuine point is always risky while saying a cliché is safe. Give yourself and others credit for speaking, no matter how much you agree or disagree. People often start by saying, thinking, or writing something imperfect or confusing. Uncertainty and confusion are part of learning. In discussion as well as in writing, focus on expressing, not impressing. Ugly is okay. Confusing is okay. Silence is not.

You will submit a self-evaluation on participation on Friday of Week 3.

## Honor Code

Using the ideas of another person—be it a professional writer, speaker, or a classmate or friend—without proper acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is a particularly significant issue in this course, because you will collect some of your data in groups, and you will be citing others' work in your research articles. All of your papers, including the group paper, must be your own. Do not take this issue lightly. You are responsible for reading, understanding, and adhering to the guidelines for acknowledging the work of others as outlined in *MLA Handbook on plagiarism and academic dishonesty*: <https://style.mla.org/plagiarism-and-academic-dishonesty/>. In addition, please see the *Pathfinder* for information on the Honor Code and CC's policies on academic theft. Even when it is unintended, plagiarism carries with it significant disciplinary action. Ignorance of the guidelines is not an acceptable excuse for violations of the Honor Code.

## Technology

Laptops are allowed in class with restrictions. Please be mindful that screens create physical obstructions which have mental affects that often discourage fully engaged communication. When actively listening in class, please fold or half-fold your laptop screen. For jotting down notes, consider using paper or a tablet so the screen isn't up all the time.

## Artificial Intelligence

Yes, AI is here to stay. As an educator, I see the ability to engage it critically as a core competence for the future workforce and society, and it is part of our collective responsibility as members of a civil society to assess and shape its use, rather than shy away from it. But in the context of higher education, you do not want to give away your own original and critical thinking, nor the hard-earned opportunity to study at Colorado College. I urge you to make your choices about AI deliberately.

This class gives you the option to choose: *to use or not to use AI, that is the question.*

If you choose to use AI, you are required to do additional intellectual work and submit a three-page reflective essay on AI use at the end of the block, due Wednesday of Week 4 at noon. You will reflect on your interactions with it, explain how it improves your efficiency and learning, and critically examine its role and presence in your life and by extension, the broader CC community. No AI may be involved in writing these reflective reports.

AI use is defined as using any part of an AI-generated response in your submitted work, including discussion board posts and oral presentations.

What does not count as AI usage: If you ask AI to summarize a reading and you only read the summary without using any of its wording, ideas, or structure in your own writing or oral presentation, this is considered consuming AI content (similar to reading an scholarly article) and does not count as AI usage.

What does count as AI usage: If you use any part of the AI's phrasing, edits, structure, organization, or bibliography in your submission, that counts as AI usage. This includes:

- Using AI-generated sentences or ideas in your writing
- Using AI-suggested edits, rewordings, or structural changes
- Using AI-generated bibliographies or citations
- Using AI to check grammar, flow, or clarity and incorporating those changes into your final submitted work

You will not be penalized for using AI and your work will be evaluated solely on its quality. But if AI plays a role beyond your control, trust me, the quality of your papers will suffer. Failure to attribute AI usage to the best of your ability and in good faith is plagiarism.

Please email me your AI choice by the end of **the first Wednesday**. Whichever option you choose, I support you and I want you to trust yourself in this learning journey and claim the chance for your own growth. You are the one who does the reading, comes to class discussions, and lives through the questions that matter to you in flesh and blood. You are taking this learning experience to your future.

## Accessibility

I am committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you anticipate or experience any disability-related barriers to learning in this course, please discuss your concerns and/or approved accommodation with me. I would like us to discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course. Additionally, if you have not already done so, please connect with Accessibility Resources, the office responsible for coordinating accommodations and services for students with disabilities: [accessibilityresources@coloradocollege.edu](mailto:accessibilityresources@coloradocollege.edu), 719-227-8285, Armstrong 219.

## *Daily Schedule*

This schedule is here to support you in managing your time and energy so that you can move steadily and confidently through the block. Pay close attention to the afternoon to-do items which are essential for preparing for the **next** class meeting. How you plan and use your afternoons and evenings matters as much as how you participate in class each morning. The schedule may change as we go. Stay attuned to updates.

### Week 1

#### Mon 2/16

- Morning: Class orientation
- Afternoon:
  - Watch *KPop Demon Hunters* (1h 36m, Netflix)
  - Read Stephanie Choi, “K-Pop Idols: Media Commodities, Affective Laborers, and Cultural Capitalists” (15 pp)
  - Post a response on Canvas about *KPop Demon Hunters*

#### Tue 2/17

- Morning: Class meeting; *KPop Demon Hunters*, Korean Diaspora storytelling, Introduction to KPop, and Korean Shamanism
- Afternoon:
  - Read Keith Howard, "K-Pop: A Pocket History"
  - Read Cedarbough T. Saeji, "Embodying K-Pop Hits through Cover Dance Practices"
  - Read Marcus Tan, "K-Contagion: Sound, Speed, and Space in 'Gangnam Style'"
  - Watch "Gangnam Style"
  - Read Kyung Hyun Kim, "BTS, Transmedia, and Hip Hop"
  - Post two responses on Canvas (each on a different homework item)

### Wed 2/18

- Morning: Class meeting; K-Pop as a genre of cultural product; K-Pop as an ecosystem
- Afternoon:
  - Read Michelle Cho, "K-Pop and the Participatory Condition"
  - Watch KATSEYE – *The Debut: Dream Academy* (skim, 10 minutes)
  - Read "'Farewell' to Fostered Idol Reality Shows: Idol Fan Consumption and Government Regulation in China"
  - Read *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, Introduction
  - Post two responses on Canvas

### Thur 2/19

- Morning: Class meeting; K-Pop fandom, compare across fostered idol cultures in Japan and China and the U.S. reality show
- Afternoon:
  - Read Thomas Baudinette, "Idol Shipping Culture: Exploring Queer Sexuality among Fans of K-Pop"
  - Read Jungmin Kwon, "Theorizing the Korean Wave: K(Q)ueer-Pop for Another World"
  - Read Lee and Lee, "Unpacking K-Pop in America: The Subversive Potential of Male K-Pop Idols' Soft Masculinity"
  - Read Timothy Laurie, "Toward a Gendered Aesthetics of K-Pop"
  - Watch one K-Pop performance mentioned in the readings
  - Post two responses on Canvas

### Fri 2/20

- Morning: Class meeting; K-Pop and Gender in performance and shipping culture; queering K-Pop
- Afternoon:
  - Read "Pop Culture and Historical Memories of War" (11 pp)
  - Read *Barefoot Gen*, Vol. 1
  - Post a response to *Barefoot Gen*

## Week 2

### Mon 2/23

- Morning: Class meeting; Japanese Manga and *Barefoot Gen*; wartime memory and pop culture
- Afternoon:
  - Watch *Grave of the Fireflies* (1h 29 m, Netflix)
  - Post a response

### Tue 2/24

- Morning: Class meeting; Japanese Anime and *Grave of the Fireflies*
- Afternoon:
  - Read “The Collaborative Sensemaking Play of Jubensha Games: A Deconstruction, Taxonomy, and Analysis”
  - Read “The Complete History of Jubensha”
  - Read “Here’s What Makes Jubensha Different” <https://mssv.net/2025/03/26/heres-what-makes-jubensha-different>

### Wed 2/25 - Field trip day

- Morning: : Jubensha session at Rabbit Hole (return by 4 PM)
- Afternoon:
  - Post a longer response (~ 400 words) about your experience of Jubensha

### Thur 2/26

- Morning: Class meeting; Chinese pop culture form Jubensha
- Afternoon:
  - Read Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry” (15–20 pp)
  - Read David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Introduction (10 pp)
  - Read Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (15 pp)
  - Read George Ritzer, “Prosumer Capitalism” (15 pp)
  - Post a response

### Fri 2/27 - Wellness Day

- No class meeting

## Week 3

### Mon 3/2

- Morning: Class meeting; Postmodernism, prosumerism, and neoliberalism

- Afternoon:
  - Read “PopMart: Gen Z Consumerism and the Soft Power of Asian Blind Boxes”
  - Read Christine Yano, *Pink Globalization* (selected chapter, 41 pp)
  - Read Bill Brown, “Thing Theory” (22 pp)
  - Read *The Affect Theory Reader*, Introduction (25 pp)
  - Read “Cute Studies: An Emerging Field” (9 pp)
  - Post two responses

### Tue 3/3

- Morning: Class meeting; Toy Culture, Thing Theory, and Affect
- Afternoon:
  - Watch *Kamikaze Girls* (on Canvas)
  - Read “Lolitas, Mountain Watches and Sexy Gals” (10 pp)
  - Read “A Postwar Cultural History of Cuteness in Japan” (5 pp)
  - Post a response to *Kamikaze Girls*

### Wed 3/4

- Morning: Class meeting; Subculture and pop culture, cosplay, Lolita, and Bosozoku
- Afternoon:
  - Read *Return of the Blossoming Blade*, Episodes 1–2
  - Read Zhange Ni, “Reimagining Daoist Alchemy, Decolonizing Transhumanism” (25 pp)
  - Watch “Cultivating Immortality Explained” (9 min) <https://youtu.be/4hHXLiEgMsY>
  - Post one response

### Thur 3/5

- Morning: Class meeting; Daoist motifs in Chinese and Korean *xiuxian* texts
- Afternoon:
  - Watch *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* (폭군의 셰프, Netflix), Episode 1
  - Read Jia Tan, “Platformized Seriality: Chinese Time-Travel Fantasy from Prime-Time Television to Online Streaming”
  - Read “How Chinese and Korean Dramas Invented a New Time-Travel Approach” <https://www.inverse.com/entertainment/transmigration-dramas-chinese-korean-time-travel>
  - Read “How ‘Farming Literature’ Became China’s Hottest Genre” <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1015006>
  - Post a response

### Fri 3/6

- Morning: Class meeting; Time-travel and narrative temporality in TV shows
- Afternoon:

- Submit self-reflection on participation
- Work on final project and oral presentation

## Week 4

### Mon 2/9

- Morning: Oral presentation on final project
- Afternoon:
  - Work on final paper

### Tue 2/10

- Morning: Final paper workshop
- Afternoon:
  - Revise your report

### Wed 2/11 - Final paper due at noon

- No class meeting

## Assignment #1 Reading/Watching Responses

Each response should be approximately 200 words.

If responding to a scholarly reading, structure your response using the “They Say / I Say” format:

- Briefly summarize the author’s main argument (“They say...”).
- Offer your own analysis, critique, or extension (“I say...”). Engage directly with the author’s claims rather than summarizing the entire reading.

If responding to a cultural product (film, TV episode, song, manga, performance, etc.), focus on a specific element (theme, character, scene, visual device). Explain why it stood out to you and analyze what is at stake culturally, politically, or aesthetically. You may also pose a thoughtful question to extend discussion.

Responses are due by **10:00 PM** on the assigned date.

## Assignment #2 Student-Led Discussion

You will choose two readings or viewings and lead discussion on two separate days. Although you will primarily prepare for one material each day, you should reference other course

materials when appropriate to deepen connections, especially when your chosen content is short.

Leading discussion means preparing a range of questions, beginning with more accessible questions that help the class understand the text, and moving toward more challenging, conceptual questions that invite deeper analysis. If you choose a longer film or manga, focus your discussion on a few key aspects or several important scenes rather than trying to be comprehensive.

Plan for approximately 30 minutes of discussion. You may begin with pair discussions or small-group conversations before opening to the whole class. If the conversation is going well, you may continue longer.

Please actively participate in your classmates' sessions.

## Assignment #3 Comparative Pop Culture Analysis

For your final project, you will write a 5-page analytical paper and deliver a 10-minute presentation comparing two pop culture forms, genres, media systems, or fan cultures.

Your comparison may be:

- Across different Asian contexts (Japan, Korea, China, etc.), or
- Between Asian and American pop culture, or
- Across different media forms (TV, web fiction, music, games, animation, etc.).

Oral Presentation (10 min, Tuesday 2/10 in class)

- Demonstrate additional research findings beyond the assigned course readings.
- Clearly explain your comparative argument and guide the class through your main analytical points
- Use effective visuals and examples to support your claims.

Written Report (5 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman)

- Clearly introduce the two cases and explain why they are being compared. Provide enough background so that readers understand the cultural context of each example.
- Use specific examples and analyze them in detail. Focus on interpretation rather than description.
- Move beyond surface description and explain what these similarities and differences reveal about broader cultural logics.
- Engage meaningfully with one or more course concepts, such as gender, fandom, affect, community, neoliberalism, thingness, agency, platform capitalism, or historical memory.

Possible topics:

- Japanese cute culture vs. K-pop soft masculinity
- Rebirth dramas (China/Korea) vs. American time-loop films

- KATSEYE vs. Produce 101
- AKB48 vs. K-pop idol groups
- K-pop vs. American Idol
- Fiction vs. visual culture (from text to image)
- Anime vs. manga (reflection on adaptation and mediation)

## *Evaluation*

- Attendance and Participation - 20%
- Assignment #1: Reading / Watching Responses - 20%
- Assignment #2: Student-led Discussion - 20%
- Assignment #3: Final Paper and Presentation - 40%

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C	D	F
93-100	89-92	85-88	80-84	76-79	70-75	60-69	<60