



Pop Pacific: Stories from Around the World

Jayson M Chun And Patrick Patterson

The “Pop Pacific” describes how Asian and American popular cultures mix together, reflecting shared histories and connections. What we call “K-pop,” “J-pop,” and “Japanese anime” are national labels for this broader transnational culture that crosses borders. This cultural space shows how Asian and American media constantly influence each other through exchange and interaction. The result is new mixed styles, fan communities, and cultural practices that blend elements from both regions and beyond. The Pop Pacific emphasizes the hybrid nature of modern popular culture that cannot be easily separated into purely Asian or American categories.

Each essay is written by someone who loves K-pop, anime, or other forms of transnational pop culture. They share their personal experiences and show us what this popular culture means to them in their own communities.

Before reading these photo essays, let us tell you our backstories of how we became interested in this topic.

Jayson Makoto Chun, Honolulu, Hawai'i
I grew up in Hawai'i, so Japanese culture was all around me. As a kid, I learned J-pop songs from Japanese TV channels, but when I reached middle school, I thought they were too “nerdy” and switched to American pop music instead. It's funny – now I love J-pop again.

I first encountered anime and manga during my childhood visits to relatives in Japan. Back in Hawai'i, I watched anime on the local Japanese TV station, and read manga with a dictionary beside me. It was fun, especially when reading about a sexy space alien in a bikini from the 1978 manga classic *Urusei Yatsura*.

Fig. 1 (above left): Manga depicting the Pop Pacific by manga artist Kazuo Maekawa. He is known for his work on *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* and has conducted manga seminars in The Netherlands, United States, and Japan. He operates Manga Dojo Tokyo (<https://experiencetokyo-mirai.com>), a studio offering manga drawing instruction for visitors. For workshops, he can be contacted at alohamanga.contact@gmail.com.

Fig. 2 (above centre): Former K-pop idol Bekah from the group After School speaking to a class at the University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu. She spent an hour taking photos with the students. (Photo courtesy of Noah Padilla)

Fig. 3 (above right): Editor Jayson Chun's office. Anime figurines and a bust of Jungkook from BTS on his bookshelf identify him as an anime and K-pop fan and help students feel comfortable entering his office.

My K-pop journey started in 1995 when I was a graduate student. During a layover in Korea, I heard Kim Gun Mo's song “Wrongful Encounter” playing from a street vendor's stall. A Korean friend bought me some tapes, and that's how my interest in Korean pop music began.

Decades later, I am a history professor who teaches East Asian popular culture. I've witnessed the worldwide spread of manga, anime, and K-pop. I watch anime every week and listen to K-pop while driving to work. I'm amazed at how much perceptions have changed.

Patrick Patterson, Portland, Oregon
I grew up and went to college in Western Oregon. Then went to visit a friend in Japan. I liked it so much I stayed for six years!

My first year friends took me to a karaoke bar in a small country town. I could only sing English songs so I was limited to Elvis, Frank Sinatra, and The Beatles! I realized that the only way to sing cool songs at karaoke was to learn Japanese. So I did. Doing so also helped me make friends, and spurred an interest in Japanese culture. I decided to combine my love of history and my interest in Japan by studying Japanese history. I decided to write my dissertation on pre-World War II popular music.

I learned how to study popular music and to look into the music business in Japan and Asia. I watched K-pop surpass J-pop in global popularity. So I put my research skills to work, and learned as much as I could about Korean history and popular music as well. Today I listen to both K-pop and J-pop. I am lucky that my profession and my passion have converged.

How This Project Started

In 2023, we gave a presentation on the Pop Pacific at the Association for Asian Studies conference. Afterwards, Paramita Paul, the editor for *The Newsletter* of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), approached us. She offered us a blog (<https://blog.iias.asia/pop-pacific>) where we could publish our work in a casual yet academic manner. Our blog posts became a way for us to write about our hobbies while also creating a free and accessible resource for teachers, students, and fans around the world. All our posts are written with non-native English speakers and general audiences in mind. We hope you enjoy this collection of photo essays.

The Stories

Abena Asomiah from Togo, West Africa, explores what it's like to watch Japanese anime when it's been translated into French. She shows us the unique challenges and joys of experiencing Japanese stories through a French-speaking lens in Francophone Africa.

Renu Deswal takes us inside the growing K-pop fan community in Delhi, India. She shares what she's seen as K-pop has become more and more popular in her city and nationwide in India.

Eshbekova Munisa Jabbor Kizi gives us a window into K-pop fandom in Uzbekistan, a majority Muslim nation. Her story shows how global pop culture finds its place in different religious and cultural contexts.

Fine Lavoni Koloamatangi, who is Tongan and lives in Aotearoa New Zealand, shows us how Pacific Islander communities there connect with K-pop. Her essay reveals the special relationship between Pacific Island culture and Korean pop music.

Mylene T. De Guzman is both a K-pop fan and a geographer. She compares what it's like to attend a K-pop concert in Seoul (where it all began) versus attending one in Manila. Her perspective shows us how the same music can feel different in different places.

Jeon Seongkee looks at the Pop Pacific from Korea itself. He visits a jazz club in Incheon struggling to keep customers as K-pop and other popular music take over. His story reminds us that in Korea, cultural influences from abroad are constantly battling for public attention.

Why These Stories Matter

These essays teach us that popular culture doesn't remain stationary. When K-pop travels from Korea to India, or when anime goes from Japan to Togo, it becomes something new in each place, shaped by local languages, religions, and fan communities.

Each writer shows us their world through their own eyes, helping us understand how global culture becomes personal and local at the same time.

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