

# Review of South Korea's Acceptance of Japanese Animation

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## Korea's Pop Culture Policy & Japanese Animation

The inflow and acceptance of Japanese culture in South Korea were under institutional control for a long time. The South Korean government kept a policy of prohibiting the inflow of Japanese culture for over 60 years. The ban originated from “an unhappy history” between South Korea and Japan in the early part of the 20th century. Directly after liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, Lee Seung Man, the first president of South Korea, prohibited the inflow and acceptance of Japanese culture. At that time, the prohibition policy was based on “dominative anti-Japan sentiment” among most Korean people, but it did not have any distinct legal ground.

The ban on Japanese culture remained effective even after South Korea and Japan normalized diplomatic relations in 1965. For example, in the middle of the 1960s, the Korea Broadcasting Ethics Commission prohibited Japanese-style ballads such as “*Mademoiselle Camellia*” from being aired.

Meanwhile, broadcasting of Japanese TV animation (known as *anime*) programs was approved conditionally in the 1960s. At the time, it was explained as a reason for this approval that *anime* broadcasting can avoid any infringement on the prohibition policy by not openly declaring the country of origin and authorship and that typical Japanese scenes can be substituted with localized ones. Since *anime* had been blessed with overwhelming popularity in South Korea, Japanese comics and *anime* videos, which were still prohibited, began to flow in by illegal and informal routes such as smuggling and tourist traffic.

It was in the 1980s that the matter of opening Japanese culture came up for discussion first in Korean society. The matter then became a hot political issue, but whenever discussed, public opinion was divided between opening and keeping the ban.

Meanwhile, the prohibition policy was made stronger in the 1990s by adding the theory of protecting domestic cultural industries to the conventional reasoning of fending off “Japanese-style” content since the 1960s and of keeping “cultural sovereignty” from being affected by the spillover of Japanese satellite broadcasting since the 1980s.

But Kim Dae Jung's sweep into political power in the latter half of the 1990s caused the ban on Japanese culture to face great change.

Kim, elected president in 1997, declared first that Japanese pop culture be allowed gradually. In a departure from the prohibition pol-

icy, the South Korean government has announced additional opening policy initiatives four times since the first opening action in 1998.

*Anime* films for theater showings were allowed in June 2000 as the third step. The scope of *anime* films allowed was limited to those that won international movie awards, but *anime* has become totally available in any form since Jan. 1, 2006.

The South Korean government's gradual opening was meant to allow sufficient time for a complete lifting of the ban and political judgment to mitigate any negative influence stemming from anti-Japan sentiment and forestall any adverse consequence to domestic cultural industries.

## Acceptance of Japanese Animation: Track Record

### Broadcasting

According to 2007 import and export statistics on broadcast programs reported by the Korea Communications Commission (KCC), imports from Japan reached \$9.47 million, a slight decrease from \$9.52 million in 2006. *Anime* programs accounted for the bulk, \$7.76 million, or 81.9%, of the total.

And we can find high popularity and reputation of *anime* through TV program scheduling. According to the results of a survey by the Korea Culture and Content Agency (KOCCA) in 2008, *anime* is absolute and very popular content for South Korea's animation-specialized channels (“Anyone,” “Champ” and “Tooniverse”) broadcast by cable TV and satellite. (Table 1)

TABLE 1  
Programming ratio of Korean animation channels by nation of origin in minutes (%)

Country/Channel	Anyone	Champ	Tooniverse
South Korea	154,530 (34.5)	110,860 (24.6)	166,475 (32.0)
Japan	249,540 (55.7)	323,190 (71.9)	324,125 (62.3)
United States	29,070 (6.5)	7,470 (1.7)	22,225 (4.3)
Britain	5,990 (1.3)	—	3,245 (0.6)
France	2,340 (0.5)	—	—
Canada	4,200 (0.9)	4,560 (1.0)	4,210 (0.8)
Italy	2,190 (0.5)	3,465 (0.8)	—
TOTAL	447,860 (100.0)	449,545 (100.0)	520,280 (100.0)

Source: 2008 Animation Industry White Paper, MCST/KOCCA

And viewer ratings of animation programs remain high. Cable TV-viewing figures among households nationwide show animation programs accounting for 15 of the top 50 ranks. The 15 works, all

Japanese *anime*, include famous ones like “Crayon Shin-chan,” “Doraemon,” “Detective Conan” and “Pocket Monster.” For your reference, “Crayon Shin-chan Dance! Amigo” placed sixth with a 2.6% audience rating and “Doraemon: New Nobita’s Great Adventure into the Underworld” 10th with 2.3%.

On the other hand, in terrestrial broadcasting, use of Japanese *anime* in program scheduling is much less than on the animation channels. This is because of a quota system for foreign animation programs and also because of a recent trend to place less priority on animations themselves. In 2007, terrestrial broadcasting companies shared a total of 1,780 hours for animation broadcasting. The figure breaks down to 688 hours (38.7%) for domestic animations and 1,092 hours (61.3%) for overseas animations. Broadcast time for Japanese *anime* accounted for around 5.9% of the total. Comparing program-scheduling ratios, Japanese *anime* ranked next to those of the United States, Canada, France and the EU. Before cable TV and satellite broadcasting started, Japanese *anime* was extremely popular on terrestrial TV channels, but it has become weaker more or less since then.

### Films

The number of new films screened in South Korea reached 339 in 2008 and overseas films accounted for 271. Of animation films, 19 were foreign products, with Japanese *anime* taking the largest proportion with six (32%). Most *anime* films originated from TV versions because of marketing strategies taking advantage of the high popularity of TV animation programs to produce film versions. But Japanese *anime* attracted a smaller audience than US animations (Table 2).

Meanwhile, *anime* films by Hayao Miyazaki received especially good reputation from the audience. Among *anime* films directed by or involving him, “Howl’s Moving Castle” (screened in 2004) drew three million viewers to become the most popular *anime* movie, followed by “Spirited Away” with two million and “The Cat Returns” with 530,000.

TABLE2

### Overseas animation films attracting 100,000 or more viewers

Ranking	Film	Country	Audience
1	Kung Fu Panda	United States	4,673,009
2	Wall-E	United States	1,320,830
3	Horton Hears a Who!	United States	638,598
4	Doraemon: New Nobita’s Great Adventure into The Underworld	Japan	315,859
5	Space Chimps	United States	269,947
6	Fly Me to The Moon	Belgium	184,890
7	Sergeant Keroro The Super Duper Movie 3	Japan	170,998
8	Niko & The Way To The Stars	Germany	141,394
9	Detective Conan: The Phantom of Baker Street	Japan	124,139
10	The Ugly Duckling & Me	Denmark, 4 others	109,094

Source: Korean Film Council

### Consumption Culture of Japanese Anime

As a consumer of Japanese culture, South Korea has seen negative perception for *anime* almost disappear. Considering the time span during which Japan’s pop culture prohibition policy was kept, it

is natural that we can enjoy Japanese *anime* every day.

Unlike before, TV animations clearly indicate the country of origin and the author, and frequently use the names of Japanese characters as they are and are shown even in the original language for late-night *anime* buffs.

Additionally, 60%-70% of cartoon publications in South Korea are translated comics of Japanese authorship, and Japanese companies have acquired equity interests in animation channels such as “Anyone” and “Anymax.” Comic characters such as “Pocket Monster,” “Doraemon,” “Anpanman,” “Crayon Shin-chan,” “Detective Conan” and “Digital Monster” are well-known through TV animation programs and have become popular characters loved by many Koreans. Furthermore, “Boys Over Flowers,” “Old Boy” and “Kanna’s Big Success!” made into TV dramas and films have proved a great success, and the business of remaking original Japanese cartoons into TV/movie dramas is booming in South Korea.

In addition, there are many *anime* clubs in middle and high school and university as well as many *anime*-related SNS sites and blogs set up through the Internet. There are even not a few cases of illegal downloads of *anime* via the Internet.

We can also easily find various types of pop culture related to *anime* in the South Korean community. From the mid-1990s, Japanese-style animation culture called “cosplay” (costume play) is prevalent among teenagers. In cosplay, young people enjoy wearing the costumes of characters appearing in *anime*. Furthermore, there are many “maniacs” collecting “plamodel” (plastic model) figures patterned after *anime* characters as well as numerous related community and information sites and blogs.

Any aversion against *anime* – now socially accepted and utilized – has disappeared.

The influence of *anime* will be greater than we think. In their younger days, some people started to learn the Japanese language, absorbing *anime* as well. Finally, we can see many examples of South Koreans selecting work and life relevant to Japan. *Anime* can be a crucial guide to decide the direction of our life.

*Anime* can be expected to remain stable and develop further judging from popularity in the cartoon publishing and broadcasting industries in South Korea. Especially, animation has nothing to do with nationality and can be accepted without any problem since it can be applied easily to the Korean style. In addition, demand for *anime* will remain high as the supply is already insufficient. An animation-making capacity of fewer than 50 pieces a year is not enough to meet the high demand from the TV and film industries and the needs of children and teenagers.

Moreover, *anime* is very closely connected with the cartoon publication, TV/film animation and character-goods markets. People who read cartoons with interest are inclined to watch TV/film animations and dramas remade from cartoons and to buy character goods.

In this sense, a cycling system of *anime* has been set up in South Korea, helping *anime* develop and continue influencing the country’s culture. J.S

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