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How Do Korean Animators Survive in an Industry Marked by Clichés?

It is undeniable that Korean *anime* artists have borrowed many ideas, styles and techniques from their Japanese counterparts. This is perhaps not surprising considering many Koreans were employed in the past to do the labour-intensive colouring and drawing work for Japanese companies. The Korean *anime* industry, which has existed for over two decades, has since the early 1980s produced primarily cartoons for the pre-teen market, such as *Agi tongnyong tulli*/'Tulli, the Baby Dinosaur', *Kkoma chadongch'a pongbong*/'Minicar Vroom Vroom', and *Tallyõra Hani*/'Run, Hani, Run!' (1988). Despite being successful domestically, few of these and other products were sold abroad. Since the late 1990s, however, the industry has developed enormously and it now produces *anime* that in terms of technology, style and narrative can be compared with Japanese products. A new generation of Korean animators is keen to establish itself, and Japanese producers are recognising their expertise (in 2002 the first Japanese-Korean co-production, *Pata pata hikõsen no bõken*/'Adventure on a Flying Ship', was aired on Japanese TV). But Korean *anime* has yet to become a serious competitor to its Japanese counterpart. Those Koreans who strive to compete with foreign products may, however, find it difficult to do so, since the genre of *anime* is conservative and – much unlike that of comic books – distinguishes itself, rather than through style, through technology, story and narrative. How does the Korean industry market its products, and how do they distinguish themselves internationally? This paper will look into the idiosyncrasies of the Korean anime industry and look into how it positions itself vis-à-vis foreign products.