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December 6, 2005

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Interviews: Infinity Studios and Manhwa

Posted on Wednesday, June 16 @ 15:25:21 2004 by [Staff](#)

[bckat](#) writes *"My mother's watching Korean dramas, and my sister's reading Korean comics, or manhwa. Time to dust off the Berlitz Korean language book! At FanimeCon 2004, I spoke with Jay Chung of Infinity Studios to learn more about manhwa and I.S.'s publishing activities.*

Young Joong Kim, editor-in-chief, of several Korean girls' comic magazines, wrote about Korean comics or "manhwa," "The quality of illustration and creativity can compete on the same level in the international arena. Readers' tendencies and tastes also are losing national boundaries and are becoming similar." The increase in licensed publications indicates a growing fan base outside of South Korea for its comics.

In years past, translated Korean comics have been available from Tokyopop, ComicsOne, and Curtis Comic. Mina Hwang's *Redmoon*, released partially by ComicsOne, was the first manhwa published for U.S. readers. CPM Manhwa and ADV Manga started releasing manhwa this year. Online distributor Overseas Comics reports *Demon Diary*, *King of Hell*, and *Priest* are its best selling manhwa.

Infinity Studios, the newest player to join

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the game, has licensed hot comic artist Sung Woo Park's *Peigenz*, story line by Gwong Hyun Suh. The comic has been described as an Asian version of Marvel's X-Men. The release date for *Peigenz* is July 12. At Fanime Con, I had an opportunity to speak with Jay Chung from Infinity Studios about this new series.

KA: Kat Avila, **IS:** Jay Chung for Infinity Studios

KA: Who's the target audience for *Peigenz*?

IS: The primary genre of *Peigenz* is action/drama. However, the artist is especially adept at giving even the most serious of stories comic relief without making the comic relief or tension feel out of place. Sung Woo Park accomplishes this by having a few "not-so-serious" characters in addition to tension breaking scenes. [Ed note: This is a very old trick as established by Osamu Tezuka.]

Peigenz is for a general audience without any one group of people in mind. At first glance, *Peigenz* may overwhelmingly seem like a series for guys, teenage and up. However, it contains all the key ingredients for a good comic - comedy, romance, drama, action, and good cliffhangers at the end of each volume. If I had to liken its target audience to some other title, it would have to be the anime version of *Cowboy Bebop*.

KA: Why have I seen two spellings of the title – *Pagans* and *Peigenz*?

IS: The English dictionary spelling is "pagans." The official name, as released in Korea, is *Peigenz*. There are various reasons for this. One is a cultural reason in that, like the Japanese, Koreans like European cultures, especially the Germans and French. As I know it, "peigenz" is a

anime. [Read the review!](#)

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European spelling of the word.

Pagans is actually mentioned in the series a couple of times but to refer to a precursor organization to Peigenz. In my opinion, the reason the story writer made it this way was quite possibly an attempt to cover his mistake of misspelling the word or flip-flopping between the two spellings.

The support I provide for this hypothesis is, for the first three volumes whenever some of the character's names were written in English, the spellings were different. One example would be the heroine's name. Her name was spelled in all of the following different variations: Jay Berell, Jey Berell, Jay Barell, Jay Barrel, and if I'm not mistaken, there were two other variants.

KA: Are you the translator for *Peigenz*?

IS: Technically, my official position is overall project manager for the series. This basically means I'm in charge of anything to do with the production of the English version of *Peigenz*. I am translating part of the series. However, the primary translator is Je Wa Jeong.

KA: What is Infinity Studios' production schedule for this title?

IS: *Peigenz* will be released on a monthly basis. While publishers generally don't release titles that quickly, Infinity Studios will be trying the idea. Depending on how well sales go, other titles released by Infinity Studios will also be released monthly, vs. every other month or every third month.

KA: When was Infinity Studios established?

IS: The idea to create a new publishing company, Infinity Studios, has been around for a couple of years now. Officially though, the company actively started doing business in January 2004.

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KA: The other title Infinity Studios will be releasing is your own comic, *Tears of an Angel*?

IS: Yes, Infinity Studios is supposed to release my personal pet project, a comic called *Tears of an Angel*. The availability for it on the Infinity Studios web site is listed as TBA. Although, I've been promised the title will be published, I really don't know when.

Tears of an Angel is a fantasy romance/drama/action series based on a loose collection of dreams I've had. The primary essence of the story is a guy loses all his memories and ties to his past in an accident and he's trying to rediscover himself. Of course that is only the beginning as he quickly discovers the people he knows and trusts are not who they seem to be. In fact, he discovers even the world isn't exactly what it seems to be. As the story continues, he finds that he's "destined" to do certain things and everything that has happened to him up till that point has all been set up.

KA: This year's Grand Prize winner from open entries at the Tokyo International Anime Fair was a Korean entry *AFRICA a.F.r.I.c.A*. The largest overseas contingent at that festival was from South Korea. It's common knowledge that Japan's animation and comics industry faces its stiffest competition from Korea.

IS: South Korea isn't considered a rival manga/anime industry in Japan. You see, Korea IS part of the Japanese manga/anime industry. Japanese don't see competition from Korea as foreign competition. They simply see it as friendly competition from within their own industry. What most people don't realize is that Japanese anime isn't made exclusively in Japan. With the exception of titles that are 100% CG, most if not all anime have 50% plus of the work done in Korea, and partially in China and

India. This is another reason why I personally and professionally think of manga/manhwa and Japanese/Korean animation as one and the same.

KA: Korean comic artists have been influenced by styles and conventions used by mainstream Japanese comic artists.

IS: Korean comic artists are nearly exactly the same as Japanese comic artists. I'm referring to both style and story content. What most Americans don't know is that the stuff available here in the US is only a small fraction of what's actually available. A rough estimate in terms of numbers would be less than 2%. What is over here in the US doesn't really reflect the "average/normal" style available in Korea or Japan. When a person sees Korean manhwa, they might say, "Hey, that looks different from Japanese manga style." However, the truth is THEY don't know what manga style really is. Actually the Korean style is exactly what the Japanese style is.

Now, there is one slight difference in the Korean and Japanese industries. Although it is rather difficult to become a successful comic artist in either country, it is a bit more difficult in Korea, as the economic situation is more severe in Korea than Japan. Korean artists must show their credentials to publishers before they can get published, credentials being both education along with sample work. In Japan, it is less critical to have gone to an art or specialty college made for comic artists. Now please understand that talent in either country will get picked up. It's just for the average comic artist, it's much more difficult to start in Korea. [Ed note: It's not uncommon for new talent in Japan to be discovered through regular manga contests, much like what Tokyopop is doing with their Rising Stars of Manga.]

What does this translate to? The average Korean artist will have a better sense of

body proportions, muscle structure, etc. Mind you, I'm not by any means saying Japanese artists aren't talented. I'm merely saying the average art style in Korea might be more realistically oriented. However, speaking in terms of overall art styles, yes, they are essentially identical.

The only thing different is who the major target audience is. For example, there is generally a lot less fan-service genres in Korea. This does not mean it doesn't exist. In addition, censorship is a very big thing in Korea so you will NEVER find frontal nudity in manhwas that aren't specifically meant for adults. Anything a bit risqué such as shots of women in underwear will generally be redrawn.

KA: I probably should emphasize your web site uses a final "z" instead of "s" for "studios" because an "s" will lead to a different business.

IS: Yeah, unfortunately our company name is a fairly common company name. When we chose a domain name, we were forced to go with whatever wasn't already taken. The closest thing to Infinity Studios was www.infinitystudioz.com.

I'm not authorized to speak on behalf of the company in terms of what Infinity Studios will be licensing in the future. However, I am authorized to say Infinity Studios will be doing everything it can to bring over the best from both Japan and Korea.

KA: Thank you for your time.

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