

## Korean Webtoonist Yoon Tae Ho: History, Webtoon Industry, and Transmedia Storytelling

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At the Asian Transmedia Storytelling in the Age of Digital Media Conference held in Vancouver, Canada, June 8–9, 2018, webtoonist Yoon Tae Ho as a keynote speaker shared several interesting and important inside stories people would not otherwise hear easily. He also provided his experience with, ideas about, and vision for transmedia storytelling during in-depth interviews with me, the organizer of the conference. I divide this article into two major sections—Yoon’s keynote speech in the first part and the interview in the second part—to give readers engaging and interesting perspectives on webtoons and transmedia storytelling. I organized his talk into several major subcategories based on key dimensions. I expect that this kind of unusual documentation of this famous webtoonist will shed light on our discussions about Korean webtoons and their transmedia storytelling prospects.

*Keywords: webtoon, manhwa, Yoon Tae Ho, transmedia, history*

### Introduction

Korean webtoons have come to make up one of the most significant youth cultures as well as snack cultures: Audiences consume popular culture like webtoons and Web dramas within 10 minutes on their notebook computers or smartphones (Jin, 2019; Miller, 2007). The Korean webtoon industry has grown rapidly, and many talented webtoonists, including Ju Ho-min, Kang Full, and Yoon Tae Ho, are now among the most famous and successful webtoonists since the mid-2000s. Their webtoons—in particular, Yoon Tae Ho’s, including *Moss (Ikki, 2008–2009)*, *Misaeng (2012–2013)*, and *Inside Men (2010–in progress)*—have gained huge popularity, and all were successfully transformed into films, television dramas, and digital games.

What is unique about Yoon is that he experienced the disciple system in the manhwa industry before independently working as a webtoonist. Unlike other webtoonists, he also established a webtoon platform JusToon in 2017 and founded his own webtoon company, Nulook Media. Meanwhile, he has been serving as the president of the Korean Cartoonist Association since early 2018. Yoon is currently attempting to use blockchain as a new system to find investors in order to develop a new financial resource system. As

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<sup>1</sup> This article consists of content from both Yoon Tae Ho’s keynote speech at the June 2018 conference and Dal Yong Jin’s interview with Yoon. The article was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies Grant (AKS-2018-C01).

such, Yoon Tae Ho has been a successful webtoonist, businessman, administrator, and visionist. Some of his attempts were not successful, of course. For example, Yoon's webtoon platform JusToon was not profitable because of other major webtoon platforms, such as Naver and Daum. However, his unsuccessful effort has been valuable for other webtoonists and webtoon platforms because they learned from this unique trial and error.

We invited him to be a keynote speaker at the Asian Transmedia Storytelling in the Age of Digital Media conference held June 8–9, 2018, in Vancouver, Canada. As expected, he discussed several interesting and important inside stories that people would not otherwise easily hear about. He also shared his experience, ideas, and vision in transmedia storytelling during in-depth interviews with me before and after his keynote speech. Yoon Tae Ho (Figure 1) delivered his keynote speech, "Korean Webtoons: History and Future Directions," during a two-hour time slot that included questions and answers.

I divide this article into two major sections—Yoon's keynote speech, and then my interview with Yoon—to give readers engaging and interesting perspectives on webtoons and transmedia storytelling. I organized his talk into several major subcategories based on key dimensions to allow readers to clearly comprehend some important features he described. We expect that this kind of unusual documentation of this famous webtoonist will shed light on our discussions about Korean webtoons and their transmedia storytelling prospects.



**Figure 1. Yoon Tae Ho Draws Misaeng. Source: Nulook Media.**

### **Part 1: Yoon Tae Ho's Keynote Speech Transcript**

#### ***Becoming Cartoonists in the Pre-Webtoon Era: Tedious, Harsh, and Long Training Processes***

Until the early 2000s, print manhwa as a book form was based on manhwa magazines—referring to manhwass published in various magazines. Cartoonists and manhwa publishers needed to attract manhwa readers who would want to buy manhwa books after reading manhwa magazines. Once people read parts of manhwa in magazines, they bought manhwa books, including those containing all episodes. During this period, it was critical to become an individual disciple of a manhwa guru. Back then, to become a cartoonist, one had to be accepted into and pass a very strict training program under this kind of teacher-disciple system.

Likewise, at the age of 25, I started my career as a disciple of Hur Young Man—one of the most famous cartoonists at the time. Although I had not written any manhwass in magazines, Hur generously admitted me as his disciple because he believed in my potential. Of course, I visited his office a few times to become his disciple, which was not easy given that many young cartoonists were also competing for the position.

Entering the disciple system did not guarantee the trainees success; they had to complete a long, harsh, and tedious training processes. Once young cartoonists earned the disciple position under manhwa gurus, they had to train for at least seven years before drawing manhwa characters' faces. In more detail, the trainees were able to paint only hairs of the main character for a year. During the next one-year period, they only drew nonhuman subjects, like trees and flowers. Then, they had to spend five years drawing a character's body or some background materials. In other words, for a year, they painted white lines only, or black hairs, and then painted backgrounds of grass, cars, and buildings for many more years. Again, during this period, these trainees were able to draw bodies excluding people's faces. Because characters (people's faces, of course) make up 70% of manhwa, disciples needed this long training process to be able to draw very delicate facial expressions—laughing, crying, and yelling. People who strongly wished to become cartoonists sought to become disciples of famous cartoonists in order to watch their teacher's drawing and see how their teacher constructs storylines and characters. However, I left Hur's office instead of waiting for 7–10 years because I could not learn the ways in which he drew manhwass. This means that some disciples could not learn their teacher's works even after a 10-year training process, which put the disciples in a dire situation.

Compared with the manhwa system, webtoonists are not required to have this kind of established, tedious training process. Because some webtoonists attained their fame with no training process, people who wanted to become cartoonists immediately changed their minds and decided to become webtoonists. Instead of participating in a 10-year program, some readers of others' webtoons a day earlier would become webtoonists in a day or two, as long as they had some talent and skill. Of course, this new way of becoming a webtoonist has some negative aspects. For example, webtoonists who do not have training experience cannot deal with the most challenging situations, whereas disciples would understand the process and could overcome some difficulties relatively well.

### ***How to Become a Webtoonist in the 21st Century***

In the early 2000s, cartoonists who neither created print manhwas nor reached the disciple position began to post their drawings on personal webpages. Some, including Kim Poong, became popular this way early in their career. In the print manhwa era, cartoonists needed skills; therefore, again, people who were trained by big names like Hur Young Man were selected to draw manhwas for magazines. However, with the growth of the Internet, some cartoonists who did not become disciples themselves, including Kim Poong, Kang Full, and Lee Mal-ryeon, earned popularity. Consequently, cartoonist hopefuls began to pay attention to webtoons.

Of course, only a few webtoonists could achieve fame and earn significant money. I started to draw and post *Moss (Ikki, Figure 2)*, which made me the lead webtoonist on Mankick, one of the oldest webtoon sites, in January 2007. Some early-career webtoonists also post their webtoons on Mankick. Of course, it is not a fairytale story. When I started to publish *Ikki*, nobody read it. Only three or four readers commented on each episode, and when I got 19 comments—the highest thus far—they were mainly from my wife and acquaintances I had known for a while. Back then, there were already several famous webtoonists. For example, Kang Full got about 1,500 comments on average per episode. I was depressed and thought of many issues. When Mankick was closed for financial reasons, I restarted *Ikki* by posting it on Daum, which became a turning point in my webtoon career. Many people finally began enjoying it, and 18 movie companies approached me during the first three months of posting *Ikki* on Daum. This certainly indicates that webtoons started getting people's attention when webtoonists posted their work on a few major portals, including Daum and Naver.



**Figure 2. Yoon Tae Ho's Ikki.**

Meanwhile, when I published *Misaeng*, many television directors and game developers approached me through diverse means. Some of them attempted to attract me by naming potential actors and actresses for a possible television version. Even television producer (PD) at Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS)—one of major television networks—came with a writer. However, I decided to work with Kim Won Suk—a PD at tvN—a cable channel. He and I talked a lot about major characters, and I believed that he and I shared some common ideas for the transmedia storytelling process. For example, unlike with other directors and producers, we did not mention anything about love lines between major male and female characters. This is the way in which I transformed *Misaeng* into a television program (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Misaeng: Television drama vs. webtoon.**

Going back to the question of becoming a webtoonist in the 2010s under the new media environment, the process is still not easy. The barriers to becoming a webtoonist are getting greater than before. Because many people want to be webtoonists, the incumbent webtoonists raise the bar themselves. In Korea, for example, there are about 20 manhwa departments in various universities, and each department produces 40–50 undergraduate students every year. Before their graduation, they come to Hongick University in Seoul to put a graduation exhibition together. During this exhibition period, people from several webtoon platforms, including Naver and Daum, come and recruit talented future webtoonists. Many webtoonists who are college students want to work at Naver, Kakao, and Lezhin; however, they know

they may not be able to work there because of very stiff competition. Many who cannot attain a position with these major platforms therefore start to create adult webtoons to make money.

### ***Transmedia Storytelling: Is It All About Money?***

What I now want to emphasize is that a webtoon is not free at all. On the contrary, it has never been free because of transmedia storytelling, although webtoonists did not receive fees from webtoon portals. During the print manhwa era, if a manhwa was not popular, manhwa companies scrapped them to save space and paper. Manhwa companies used to discard all remaining manhwas two weeks after their initial sale; however, webtoons continue to get clicks as days go by, and therefore, some of them eventually draw the attention of big-screen producers.

More specifically, in the early 21st century, many webtoonists published their webtoons with no monetary reward. However, free is not free at all, because some of them brought money to webtoonists. For example, once people publish their webtoons on Daum, these webtoons remain there forever, which means that they are alive. Readers continue to click and write comments, one after another, following the webtoons' publication. Under this circumstance, big-screen producers, such as film directors and television producers, also read these webtoons and begin to think about the possibility of transmedia work. Game developers and musical directors are also major fans and creators who can transform webtoons into other cultural forms. Webtoons also become good candidates for producing characters and/or emoticons.

The nature of the contract also has substantially changed. When I started to publish my webtoons on Daum, there was one simple contract on the specific webtoon; however, webtoonists in the late 2010s have a few more contracts, including a royalty contract. Webtoon platforms also try to secure intellectual property, sometimes for themselves and other times for the creators as well.

Previously, manhwa writers made money through the sale of manhwa books; in contrast, the commercialization of webtoons has been much different. Unlike print manhwas, the webtoon's longevity on platforms—with its major features, such as unique storylines, vivid visual images, and diverse genres—may provide more opportunities than print manhwa (see Jin, 2019). Luckily, Lezhin began paying fees to webtoonists, unlike during the early stage of Daum and Naver, which became a new business model in the manhwa industry. As Lezhin began paying fees of up to KRW 200 million per month to a webtoonist, Daum and Naver also began to pay fees, although they were not sufficient. Because of a few successful platforms, including Daum, Naver, and Lezhin, about 40 platforms were working as of June 2018. I also began to receive fees for webtoon manuscripts that I created for a few platforms, including Daum. For *Misaeng*, I used to receive US\$100,000 per week during some peak periods.

There are several negatives, although they certainly play a key role in expanding the webtoon market. The main one is that many of these webtoon platforms focus on adult/porno webtoons to attract more readers than other platforms. In other words, because of competition among these platforms, porno or semiporno webtoons are rampant. This hurts several webtoon companies and, eventually, webtoonists. The dream of these platforms is to list on the stock market; however, the stock market does not allow the

listing of platforms that focus on porno-type webtoons. This means that some platforms have difficulty securing external investment.

### ***Full Blossom of Transmedia Storytelling in the Digital Era***

Transmedia storytelling based on webtoons has been thriving. Webtoon-based storytelling did not produce profits in the early stage of this new form of adaptation. Webtoonist Kang Full's early webtoons that were turned into movies were good indicators. As several of Kang Full's works, such as *Love Story* (2003), *Ba:bo* (2004), and *Apt* (2004), proved, many audio-visual creators started to pay attention to webtoons; however, because these movies did not become commercial successes, audio-visual creators were cautious about the role of webtoons as new resources for their movies and dramas.

Luckily, my own webtoon *Ikki* was made by the very famous movie director Kang woo-suk. *Moss*, a movie based on the webtoon *Ikki*, was very successful, attracting 340 million movie viewers. It was very good for the history of webtoon and webtoon-based transmedia storytelling. Later, *Secretly, Greatly* (2013) became one of the highest grossing webtoon-based movies, attracting 780 million moviegoers; this greatly changed people's conception of webtoon-based transmedia storytelling.

Consequently, many webtoonists plan to publish webtoon books while serializing their webtoons on platforms. Young people do not often buy books these days; instead, they pay money for what they read on their smartphones. However, adult readers who are accustomed to reading manhwa books still buy webtoon books. When I started working on *Misaeng*, the book version sold 11 million copies in the first three weeks. The online version was a bit late, and people could not wait until the next episode came out; that is why webtoon books that include the final episode were popular.

As a result of this business model, webtoonists develop cutting-edge techniques between each cut and each episode. Because the glimpse of the next episode is not shown on the smartphone version, readers are increasingly curious about next episodes, and they have to buy webtoon books to see all the episodes at the same time. Of course, because webtoonists are keen about their income, webtoon quality cannot always be guaranteed.

### ***Webtoon's Global Dream: Globalization***

Another main issue in the webtoon industry is globalization, given that the domestic market is small and saturated. Webtoons are gaining popularity in many parts of the world. In particular, Korean webtoons are well known in East Asia, including Japan, China, and Taiwan. For example, *Misaeng* was exported to China, Taiwan, and Japan and sold 100,000 copies in Japan.

Several webtoons have also been illegally copied in a number of Asian countries. *Alongside With the Gods: The Two Worlds* written by Ju Ho-min was illegally copied in some countries, for example. In China, several writers drew this webtoon, and they used the same story written by Ju. Therefore, unlike the Korean version, their characters were much cuter and prettier than those in the original webtoon.

However, Western countries have not yet embraced webtoons for a few reasons. Several factors are deterring the globalization of webtoons, mainly the lack of translation skills. On the one hand, translation requires a lot of time and money. Translating a webtoon requires preserving vivid and lively images; however, most translators cannot develop translation that appeals to Western readers. Naver has tried to penetrate the Western market by translating some webtoons into a few different languages, but it has lost a significant amount of money. Translation quality has been a big issue. Many webtoons use slang, which is very important; however, illegal translation does not reflect these unique words that appeal to young people. Daum spent about US\$10 million for translation, understanding the importance of quality translation. Several webtoon platforms have branches in Japan; therefore, efforts are being made to absorb Japanese webtoonists into the Korean market so that they work together from the beginning.

On the other hand, webtoonists cannot receive the benefits because of rampant piracy. When I went to a book fair in Frankfurt, Germany, a few years ago, people from Switzerland came to meet with me. I did not provide any material written in German, Italian, and French for Swiss people; however, because of illegal sites, they were already familiar with my webtoons, and they did not know whether they were pirated. The violation of copyright indeed has been problematic. When Kang Full did not know anything about the Chinese manhwa market, we received news that his webtoons were pirated in China. In Korea, four million views per day proved the popularity of the webtoon; however, in China, the clicks numbered 40 million. This suggests that one of the most significant markets for webtoonists has been ruined because of piracy. Illegal sites, both domestic and foreign, have affected the Korean webtoon industry. Lezhin experienced a net loss of US\$14 million largely because of these illegal sites. People who once to paid fees to Lezhin no longer do because they can enjoy webtoons on illegal webtoon platforms.<sup>2</sup>

## **Part 2: Interview With Yoon Tae Ho**

This part of the article is based on my personal interviews with Yoon Tae Ho before and after his keynote speech. We met at a café for two hours to talk about his experience as a lead webtoonist and his vision for transmedia storytelling. Some parts overlap with his speech at the conference. Therefore, after the keynote speech, we briefly met to double-check a few points that were raised. In this section, I attempt to avoid any duplications with his keynote speech by emphasizing other major issues.

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<sup>2</sup> Because of the importance of the piracy issue, in April 2018, the Korean government announced a 'joint countermeasure for overseas websites distributing pirated content.' The government began developing technology to block illegal reproduction and distribution websites, such as The Night of the Rabbit, which distributed content, including webtoons, using servers in a foreign country. The Night of the Rabbit provided content for about 1,500 illegal copies of Korean webtoon series. Pirated content is shaking the foundation of the digital content industry (Yoon, 2018). According to the Korea Copyright Protection Agency (KCPA), the amount of damages caused by the infringement of digital content copyrights increased from KRW 1.07 trillion in 2015 to KRW 1.2 trillion in 2017. A webtoon industry official said, "Pirate websites steal new series of webtoon that were carefully crafted by creators in two hours but private companies have limits to respond to them. It is urgent to come up with technical and political measures to block pirate sites that infringe the copyrights with having servers in a foreign country and bypassing the domestic law" (Yoon, 2018, para. 7).

Jin:

You have published several interesting and popular webtoons. Other than webtoons, what is your favorite hobby? Are they related to your works?

Yoon:

I like travel because I need to get some unusual and unknown experience. Therefore, my travel is not separate from my vision and/or plan of my next webtoon works. For example, after the end of one webtoon, I used to go to some places, including Greenland, the South Pole, and Alaska. I spend all my energy when I create webtoons, and after the season, I am exhausted. I need to take some rest. However, through these trips, I also learn some new things. The places I visit provide new ideas. My hobby and my work are closely related.

Jin:

Why did you become a webtoonist?

Yoon:

Mainly because of the market milieu. I used to draw regular manhwas; however, the market has decreased. Many creators believed that it was time to become a webtoonist because of the increasing role of digital technologies. In particular, when I became a webtoonist after drawing manhwa, I was in my late 30s, and new blood had already started to jump into the webtoon market. It was the last opportunity for me to change my focus and career.

Jin:

Which kind of media environment is the most important during your transition time, from a cartoonist to a webtoonist?

Yoon:

Digital convergence between old and new media is a major issue. However, the role of the smartphone had actually started to increase around 2014. Until then, people still used PC to enjoy webtoons. Back then, there were only limited webtoon applications, which deterred the webtoon boom on smartphones. In recent years, many applications have come out to attract webtoon readers. The proportion of mobile users has rapidly increased to become the majority of readers, and about 70% of webtoon readers now use their smartphones to access Daum and Naver. Once people started to use smartphones because of convenience and convergence, they also began to enjoy webtoons on their smartphone (see Jenkins, 2006).

Jin:

Webtoonists these days consider themselves becoming part of big-screen culture through transmedia storytelling. What do you think of it?

Yoon:

It is inevitable. As transmedia transformation becomes popular, webtoonists also need to think about synergy effects, meaning we have to keep this phenomenon in mind, when we create new webtoons. This is not an issue to be judged based on either goods or bads, because it is already out there. However, what

we have to think about are the major characteristics of webtoons and movies. For movies, time flies automatically and forcefully. Once you start to see them at theaters, you must see the movies until the end. Webtoons are different because the readers have a choice: they can scroll down the page, or choose not to. They just stop reading their favorite webtoons at certain points and come back later to finish them. This means that webtoonists must fulfill webtoon-like features instead of always considering big-screen elements. If webtoonists cannot meet webtoon-like characteristics, their works cannot become big-screen productions.

Jin:

There are several webtoonists or companies that create webtoons for multiple purposes, which means that they immediately produce dramas and movies while publishing webtoons.

Yoon:

A few webtoonists conduct that kind of system. However, none of them have achieved commercial successes. Webtoons and big-screen forms are different. Once webtoons are published, television producers and film directors can adapt and develop big-screen culture. Webtoonists have great freedom and creativity to write and draw new materials; however, once they are ordered by film companies or broadcasters, their imagination could be limited and controlled. Creating cultural products with freedom and developing cultural products with limitations are much different. If webtoonists create cultural products based on contracts, their works turn into commodities and are not cultural products anymore.

Jin:

Why don't you direct movies yourself?

Yoon:

Film directors must have almighty power; however, I don't think I have that kind of director quality. Film directors have to work with music directors, stage directors, and cast and crew; and therefore, they must have ability in controlling these crews and actors. As a webtoonist, I am able to control my own work, but I cannot effectively control other components and actors. I want to create webtoons that I enjoy first, instead of big-screen production.

Jin:

There are several webtoons that have been adapted into television dramas and movies, like *Misaeng* and *Inside Men*. Although it is not your work, *Along With the Gods: The Two Worlds* also attained huge success at theaters. However, the plot and structure have been modified. What do you think about it?

Yoon:

Although we as webtoonists have the original rights, we cannot intervene in the big-screen production process once we sell the rights to movie companies and broadcasters. As they cannot intervene in our creation process, we do not control their process, which is important. In addition, we have to avoid any risks by avoiding unnecessary involvement in the process. The success or failure of movies and television dramas adapted from webtoons should be their sole responsibility.

Jin:

What is the most memorable work among your webtoons?

Yoon:

It would be *Misaeng*, because I worked hard to create it. I never worked at any ordinary companies, and therefore, I did not know anything about salarymen's life. It is an impossible mission from the start. In order to gather some resources, I contacted several big trading companies; however, they refused to open their door. Therefore, I had to find someone else who was working at a mid-sized trading company. They provided a lot of necessary information.

Jin:

You just finished the first part of *Misaeng II*. What is the major difference between this new webtoon and the first one?

Yoon:

The first one was about impeccable interns and salarymen; however, the new one is about the owner of small companies. As a salaryman, your life has been set by companies; as the owner of small companies, you have to decide everything. Most of all, in big companies, you are only a part of a big system, which means that your emotions and feelings are not important. In the small companies, everybody knows everybody's life and feelings. Therefore, the life in small companies is emotional. Your personal characters matter. In this particular webtoon, I plan to portray these detailed and complicated relationships between the owner and the employees.

Jin:

Do you plan to develop it in a big-screen form?

Yoon:

I will start to create Part 2 this coming winter. tvN will make it as a drama. Again, although I have the transmedia adaption of my work in mind, I try to focus on creativity.

Jin:

Your most recent transmedia storytelling case is *Inside Men*, but you did not complete it. Do you plan to complete it?

Yoon:

When I created it, I wanted to become a webtoonist who continuously studied and learned from our society. For example, whenever I had some social issues, like Gangnam leftist,<sup>3</sup> I tried to understand it well by

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<sup>3</sup> The term *Gangnam leftists* refers to people who live a rich life [in Gangnam, Seoul] but have a proletarian mind. It was originally used to make cynical remarks about the self-contradictory behavior of the 386 generation—the generation of Koreans born in the 1960s who were very active politically and instrumental in the democracy movement of the 1980s—however, "it has more widespread use these days, as it is a general term for people who have a leftist mindset but enjoy bountiful lives" (Yang, 2007, para. 1).

learning it carefully and added some fiction to dramatize it. However, when I came to the end of this particular webtoon, I was in conflict between the webtoon's characters and my own character. I felt that I was more conservative than the webtoon's characters, and therefore, I could not finish it. Regarding the completion of the work, I have no intention to do so, because it was already made as a movie. Although nonfiction parts were not completed, the movie director liked the fiction parts very much. It is politically very sensitive, however, there was no external pressure because only a limited number of people accessed this particular webtoon.

Jin:

Like in *Misaeng* and *Inside Men*, you have continued to develop some serious social issues. Do you have any reasons for that?

Yoon:

Manhwa is a kind of journal, which means that webtoons have no choice but to reflect sociocultural characteristics of the era. I personally grew up in Gwangju in the 1990s and witnessed several social movements. This experience became a basis of my own personal character to be reflected in webtoons.

Jin:

As a webtoonist, you are very vocal about the welfare of artists. What is the major reason behind this?

Yoon:

The milieu surrounding the manhwa industry has changed. Previously, manhwa artists were controlled by a few big manhwa companies and manhwa gurus. However, in the 2010s, webtoonists publish their creative works on platforms, and these platforms must treat webtoonists fairly, with transparency. Webtoonists must be respected during the contract state with these platforms. For example, they must have enough time to carefully check the contracts, and they have to use legal services of qualified lawyers.

Jin:

What do you think about the contemporary webtoon industry?

Yoon:

The webtoon industry has been growing exponentially. As of June 2018, about 4,000 webtoonists are working to create and publish their works. There are about 40 webtoon platforms for these webtoonists. During 2009–2010, there were only 200–300 webtoonists. It has greatly expanded to become one of the major cultural industries, and this will continue.

Jin:

What is the most significant agenda for the webtoon industry?

Yoon:

The most significant homework for the webtoon world is to find foreign markets. The domestic market is saturated; therefore, without exploring the global markets, the webtoon industry cannot expand its size. Korean webtoonists are not sole players. Japanese manga and Chinese comics are also targeting the global

markets; therefore, how to compete with these cultural producers on the global stage is a big issue we have to think about.

Jin:

Can you explain any particular strategies to make inroads into the global markets?

Yoon:

It is significant to develop webtoons reflecting universal ideas in order to penetrate the global markets. The success of Marvel movies, such as *The Avengers* and *Iron Man*, depends on their portrayal of universal themes, including family issues, friendship, and individual sorrow, that appeal to the general public. Although they are hero movies, people don't go to theaters without commonalities they can sympathize with. Likewise, to appeal to global audiences, Korean webtoonists must depict themes and issues that everyone feels together. In other words, webtoonists have to develop insights to attract global audiences. Although drawing ability is important, understanding our contemporary society is also very important.

Jin:

What is your advice to emerging webtoonists?

Yoon:

One of the most significant parts is sustainability. Creating webtoons involves a lot of emotional effort, and webtoonists need to control their emotions to continue their quality works. For example, many webtoonists are easily affected by people's comments on their works. Some young webtoonists are too keen about them and do not control their pace. When people cheer, these webtoonists go far beyond their capacity to please the audiences, which hurts creativity and continuity.

Jin:

What are the most important systematic supports you can develop as the president of the manhwa association?

Yoon:

There are two different parts. The government must support artists by providing necessary legal and financial measures. In particular, early-career webtoonists cannot make enough money during the intermission between the first part and the second part of the same webtoon. I hope that the government provides some insurance to them so that they are able to continue their creative works.

Jin:

What is the most significant agenda for the webtoon industry, as the owner of a webtoon firm?

Yoon:

I want to emphasize the importance of blockchain as a new business model as I focus on blockchain technologies. The Internet provided some opportunities in terms of openness and accessibility to everyone. However, only a few limited portals and mega-giants controlled the Internet-related markets through mergers and acquisitions. In the blockchain era, I believe that webtoon companies and artists share benefits

by eliminating the intermediaries. Although the market may be controlled by a few mega-giants, we have some hope for transparent and collaborative mutual benefits when the companies and the artists work together.

More specifically, I plan to use blockchain in the webtoon business in order to fundraise for the development of new webtoonists and webtoons. For this, the most important part is to write a white paper appealing to investors. In particular, creating good profiles of webtoonists will be key, because these papers show who they are, and what they can develop. I still think about details because the methods of an ICO (initial coin offering)—[a fundraising mechanism in which new projects sell their underlying crypto tokens in exchange for bitcoin and ether]—can be carefully decided. For example, I plan to write a new webtoon titled *South Pole*, and have to decide on the total amount of money I need. Because I have to visit the South Pole and stay there for a long period of time, I need to secure some investments. To do this, I explain the ways in which I write the webtoon, and divide the profits, including from movies and/or television dramas later, which are not easy to determine.

ICOs are a relatively new business model but are rapidly become a dominant venture-funding model. Because I believe that some webtoonists or companies are successfully able to use ICOs on blockchain, I am now working with lawyers. As in the case of the initial stage of the Internet, many people are very interested in this new form of investment opportunity, and I have to seriously consider it for my works and company.

### **Conclusion**

Korean webtoons have become sources for transmedia storytelling in the 2010s. With the rapid penetration of smartphones, the manhwa industry has shifted its focus from magazine manhwas and manhwa books to webtoons. Yoon Tae Ho, as one of the pioneers in the webtoon field, has created several popular webtoons reflecting sociocultural conflicts in contemporary Korean society, which eventually turned into big-screen cultures. Partially due to his contributions in advancing webtoon-based transmedia storytelling, many webtoonists and big-screen culture producers are attempting to make webtoon-based television programs and films. However, as he emphasized, several significant issues, including illegal piracy and paucity of translation, continue to hurt the transnationalization of webtoons. What the webtoon industry must keep in mind, therefore, is avoiding hyper-commodification and commercialism, while the Korean government and webtoon platforms provide reliable media milieus for the creation of quality webtoons.

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