



South Korea lifts ban on Japanese films, music and games

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SEOUL In a gesture of reconciliation with its former colonial ruler, South Korea said Tuesday that it would remove the last import barrier for Japanese movies, pop songs and video games beginning next year.

South Korea began lifting its half-century-old ban on imports of Japanese popular culture after Tokyo apologized in 1998 for the "great suffering" it inflicted on Koreans during its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945.

In the latest phase of easing restrictions, which will take effect on Jan. 1, South Korea will open its market for pop songs in Japanese lyrics, all video games, and, by South Korean standards, movies that cannot be shown to people of age 18 or younger.

South Korea had earlier allowed other types of movies, TV news, documentary and sports news from Japan. Japanese music cassette tapes and CD's are allowed if the songs are recorded in a language other than Japanese. Many Japanese video games are already popular in South Korea.

Currently, Japanese films take up 3.2 percent in the South Korean film industry, an increase from a 0.4 percent stake in 1998, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism said.

South Korea continues to bar Japanese animated films that have not won any awards in international film competitions, and on TV comedy shows and dramas. Only eight Japanese animation films have been shown in South Korean cinemas since 2000.

Japan and South Korea normalized relations in 1965 and have become close economic partners.

But recurrent bad feelings have often disrupted efforts to increase exchanges of pop culture. South Korea canceled plans to open its market wider in 2001 when Japan approved history textbooks that critics said whitewashed Japan's wartime atrocities. Tokyo does not impose any restriction on South Korean pop culture.

"We decided to further open our market because the trust between the two countries has gradually recovered with the co-hosting of 2002 World Cup soccer," the ministry said in a news release.

During Japanese colonial rule, Korean culture was virtually stamped out. Koreans were prohibited from using their Korean names and language in school.