

The U.S. Adaptation of Korea's Unscripted Format in the New Korean Wave Era: A Case Study of *Grandpas Over Flowers*

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Abstract

The Korean unscripted format has recently reshaped media flows and practices on a global scale. This article, based upon a comparative analysis of *Grandpas Over Flowers* (tvN) and *Better Late Than Never* (NBC), explores how the Korean broadcasting industry has attracted Western broadcasting providers with its travel-based reality format, and how an American television network has produced its own version, negotiating the local specificity that the original series contained. Certainly, cultural differences in media production between the two societies are largely embedded in the localizing process. While *Grandpas Over Flowers* was dependent upon the long-standing friendship between veteran actors and their public images as fathers and grandfathers within society, *Better Late Than Never* employs veteran entertainers' professional successes as the driving force for adventuring into exotic cultures in East Asia. This article claims that the *Grandpas Over Flowers* case evokes a new phase of the Korean Wave phenomenon, revealing a non-Western media player's attempt at challenging the domination of United States and United Kingdom television formats in the global media industries.

Keywords: television format, localizing process, the Korean Wave, *Grandpas Over Flowers*, *Better Late Than Never*

Introduction

In the early 21st century, the Korean broadcasting industry has increasingly exported television programs to foreign countries. In the early stage of the *Hallyu* [Korean Wave] phenomenon, television dramas mainly led exports, engendering the transnational popularity of other cultural products, such as films and pop music. It was during the late 2000s when Korea's leading broadcasting companies focused more on developing

unscripted television formats, including reality entertainment shows and audience competition shows.¹ Since then, the country's major networks—Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), and Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS)—and leading subscription-based television channels—Total Variety Network (tvN) and JoongAng TongyAng Broadcasting Company (JTBC)—have produced a number of unique television formats. Representative examples include *The Golden Bell Challenge* (KBS1 2000 to present),² *We Got Married* (MBC 2008 to 2017),³ *Running Man* (SBS 2010 to present),⁴ *Grandpas Over Flowers* (tvN 2013 to 2018),⁵ and *I Can Hear Your Voice* (SBS 2013).⁶ Since around 2008, several countries, including the United States, Japan, China, and Indonesia, have localized these unscripted Korean formats; the exportation of television formats thus embodies one of the primary features of the New Korean Wave.⁷

Korea's unscripted formats have somewhat, if not entirely, deconstructed the long-standing domination of Western countries in the global format business. This study posits *Grandpas Over Flowers* as an excellent context to discuss that Korea has slowly tackled the one-way flow of unscripted formats from Western countries to non-Western ones.⁸ The tvN travel-based reality series was initially remade by media companies in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Then, NBC premiered its new reality-travel show *Better Late Than Never*—the U.S. adaptation of *Grandpas Over Flowers*—in August 2016.⁹ As a number of remakes in various countries have shown, *Grandpas Over Flowers* has become one of the most important television programs in the New Korean Wave. Unlike the television dramas, including *Winter Sonata* (KBS2 2002)¹⁰ and *Jewel In the Palace* (MBC 2003 to 2004) in the early 2000s, the reality-travel show has increased its global penetration through both format export and social media platforms.¹¹ By employing the concept of television format as a theoretical framework, this article conducts a textual analysis of *Grandpas Over Flowers* and compares it with the American adaptation titled *Better Late Than Never*. This article, first, attempts to analyze not only socio-cultural meanings encoded in the program but also nationally-formulated conventions in reality television production. Second, we discuss the role of television formats in the New Korean Wave phenomenon. We map out the possibility of television formats as the emerging alternatives to dramas in television *Hallyu*. Finally, by comparing the Korean and American television programs, we investigate the major reasons for the adaptation of Korean television formats in the

United States as well as the primary differences, especially cultural differences between the two broadcasting systems, in order to address the potential of the expansion of the Korean Wave through television format in the broadcasting sector.

Television Format in the Korean Broadcasting Industry

The Korean broadcasting industry has developed television formats as one of the leading program genres. Until the early stage of the Korean Wave, television dramas as canned or finished programs were the major cultural genre for the broadcasting industry; however, since the mid-2000s, both local networks and cable channels have started to focus on the creation of new television formats, including reality shows. Through this change, reality shows have become a new television genre that Korean television channels must develop for both national and global audiences. In the global broadcasting industry, other than a few Western countries, culturally peripheral countries, including Mexico, Argentina, and Korea had no know-how, no essential equipment, and no capital to produce their own television programs, and they had no choice but to receive Western-made television programs; however, Korean broadcasting companies have finally been equipped with necessary techniques, manpower, and capital in the midst of the growth of *Hallyu* and have begun to create television formats to become a new regional powerhouse in the global media industry.

Television format was mainly developed in the early 1990s. Albert Moran first defined television format as a “set of invariable elements in a program out of which the variable elements of an individual episode are produced.”¹² The elements of a television program format include a written description of the show, the format bible, production consultancy services, blueprints, computer software, scripts, and footage.¹³¹⁴ Jean Chalaby later stated, “a format can be defined as ‘a show that can generate a distinctive narrative and is licensed outside its country of origin in order to be adapted to local audiences.’”¹⁵ However, television format production and international trade have substantially expanded in the early 21st century. The reasons why formats have exploded on global television channels are directly related to wider global television and cultural industry trends that have precipitated the rise of reality television.¹⁶

The television format refers to “a recipe or guide to the remaking of a program[me] adaptation in another territory.”¹⁷ The television format program is devised, developed and broadcast in one television market. Once this occurs, there is an opportunity to license a re-broadcast of the

program in other parts of the world. What is put to air is a new program produced in another territory using the format of the original as a kind of template that helps to direct the remaking of the adaptation.¹⁸ Therefore, the format is generally conceived in opposition to the transnational model of (finished) program import/export trade. Unlike a finished or canned television program, the format is easily replicated and the adaptable framework licensed through the international television market for local adaptation.¹⁹ Television formats are increasing because broadcasting companies can save cost, while avoiding the risk involved in creating original programs. Both networks and cable channels also need to secure formats in order to save time that would otherwise be incurred by developing a new format.²⁰

Broadcasters in many countries prefer television formats to canned programs. In most cases, national audiences in Asia and Latin America love to watch programs that look and sound like some of their own.²¹ The idea of the television format has evolved with this situation in mind. Licensing the re-broadcast of a finished or canned program allows for very little cultural adaptation in a particular market. However, with a television format, what the trade seeks to export is the successful commercial knowledge and know-how bound up in a program that will help ensure its adaptation and remaking in another territory.²²

While television formats have been a major business norm in several Western countries in the past few decades, Korea has recently developed its own television formats and exported them to other countries.²³ As a result, American networks have increasingly shown their interest in remaking Korean scripted and unscripted formats in recent years. In 2017, ABC picked up the American remake of the Korean medical drama series, *The Good Doctor* (KBS2 2013) and renewed its second season.²⁴ In the midst of the New Korean Wave, characterizing new forms of popular culture including reality shows instead of television dramas only, as well as K-pop starting around 2008,²⁵ the Korean broadcasting industry has become active in formatting some television programs. In other words, “the phenomenon of television program adaptation illustrated by the global growth of popular formats” in reality shows, quiz shows, and dramas has received increasing attention in the Korean broadcasting industry.²⁶ As television format production and global trade have expanded significantly over the past two decades,²⁷ Korea has certainly become part of the global trend of formatting.

What is interesting is to determine whether Korea, once small and peripheral in the global television sector, is able to play an important role, not only in canned television dramas shown in the early Korean Wave, but also in television formats, “producing texts that travel in ways previously unimagined,” and so that “once-powerful television nations, including the U.S.” import television formats from culturally small countries.²⁸²⁹ The major advantage of format export is that once the format program is successfully adapted in other countries, the production company is able to continue to export the same format to the same countries and its neighboring nations.³⁰ Of course, television formats do not guarantee a healthy and ideal broadcasting environment as several countries have copied them with no payment, which worsens cultural politics between the creators and the copiers. The current debates on the television format in the Korean broadcasting industry in conjunction with the Korean Wave, therefore, will provide clarity not only on the current status of television formats but also on their directions in the future.

The U.S. Adaptation of Korea’s Unscripted Format

The main narrative of *Grandpas Over Flowers* involves four veteran actors in their seventies, including Yi Sun-jae, Shin Gu, Bak Geun-hyeong, and Baik Il-seop, who go on a backpacking tour around Europe and Asia, along with Yi Seo-jin, an actor in his forties (Picture 1). When the 14 episodes of its first season were broadcast on the cable television channel tvN from July 5 to October 4, 2013, *Grandpas Over Flowers* caught immediate attention from domestic audiences, receiving high ratings for a Korean cable television show. The first episode of the show recorded a viewership of 4.15 percent,³¹ with 5.39 percent being the highest viewing rate per minute during the airtime.³² The fifth season of the Korean reality show completed in August 2018³³ and its spin-offs, including *Sisters Over Flowers* (tvN 2013 to 2014)³⁴ and *Youth Over Flowers* (tvN 2014) also became huge sensations in Korean society.³⁵

Picture 1: *Grandpas Over Flowers* in Paris



Source: *Huffpost* (2018).³⁶

The popularity of *Grandpas Over Flowers* has expanded to an international scale. The show was first exported to TVB in Hong Kong and EBC in Taiwan, prompting CJ E&M to identify the potential of the format trade.³⁷ Male celebrities, such as Lei Kesheng and Niu Ben from

Mainland China, Chin Han from Taiwan, and Kenneth Tsang from Hong Kong, appeared in the Chinese remake of *Grandpas Over Flowers*.³⁸ The Chinese version also contained the journey of senior celebrities to Europe. More recently, NBC acquired the rights to remake this Korean reality show format. Universal Television Alternative Studio—the television production subsidiary of the NBC—modified its title as *Better Late Than Never*.³⁹ The first season of the U.S. version invited four senior celebrities, including Henry Winkler, William Shatner, Terry Bradshaw, and George Foreman, and one rising entertainer, Jeff Dye (Picture 2). While traveling to Asian countries, including Japan, China, South Korea, and Thailand, these show hosts exposed themselves to numerous local cultures and traditions, interacting with residents. This remake show has been added to the list of the network’s hits, averaging a 1.8 rating among adults in the age group 18 to 49 and 8.1 million viewers.⁴⁰

Picture 2: Better Late Than Never



Source: *Variety* (2016)⁴¹

The U.S. adaptation of the Korean reality show format did not happen by chance. Reality television has become a global phenomenon, generating cross-cultural productions and attracting multiple media markets.⁴² Of course, the major players in television format have been a few Western countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands; many Asian and Latin American countries used to buy Western formats to remake them in their countries. Since the early

2010s, however, a few leading Korean media groups have recognized the rise of the unscripted format business and have attempted to create mega formats based on their past successes in the East Asian media market. Given that Korea was a major importer of American, European, and Japanese television formats by the end of the 2000s, it is notable that, during such a short period, the nation has changed its role as an exporter in the global television format trade.

More specifically, CJ E&M—the leading Korean content and media company as part of the CJ Group in Korea—alongside other broadcasters recognized the potential of reality television in the global media market and concentrated on the creation of globally appealing formats in the early 2010s. Hwang Jin-u, the company’s head of Formats and Global Content Development, said during a media interview that the division focused on producing “extraordinary characters and stories from ordinary lives and ideas from Asian perspectives, but possess universality and scalability for international tastes.”⁴³ He further explained that the company had established an inner competition system to expand its vision; the reality formats that the company has distributed in the global television market are selectively chosen from numerous unscripted formats that the company has created for its 16 television channels in the domestic industry.⁴⁴ The company also renewed its structures to support the creation of diverse, and fresh unscripted formats meeting global standards.⁴⁵ As a result, CJ E&M has made multi-national contracts on two reality formats: *I Can See Your Voice* (Mnet, tvN 2015 to 2018) with China, Bulgaria, Malaysia, and the Philippines; and *Grandpas Over Flowers* with six countries, including China and the United States.^{46,47}

The success of *Grandpas Over Flowers* helps to advance an alternative view about global media culture, rethinking Chalaby’s description of television format as “an Anglo-American invention.”⁴⁸ The examples mentioned throughout this study address that the Korean reality show format arguably develops globally appealing themes while sustaining inherently local sentiments and containing regionally constructed cultural elements. More fundamentally, instead of viewing the U.S. remake of Korean reality television as a one-time interaction of these two industries, we propose the *Better Late Than Never* case as an initial wave that amplifies the presence of Korean media culture and practice on U.S. television. In fact, several Korean television programs, including *The Good Doctor* (ABC 2017 to present)⁴⁹ and *Somewhere Between* (ABC 2017)⁵⁰ based on *God’s Gift: 14 Days* (SBS 2014) along with *Better Late*

Than Never have been formatted in the U.S. Taking the role of television formats in the evolution of the Korean Wave seriously, we argue that the Korean broadcasting industry, at a certain level, complicates the transnational transaction of media culture and practice.⁵¹

Grandpas Over Flowers: Oldies but Goodies

During the past decade, young celebrities have occupied the major spots in Korean reality television; primetime entertainment programs, either reality-variety television series—*Running Man* (SBS 2010 to present)⁵² and *Infinite Challenge* (MBC 2006 to 2018)⁵³—or travel reality shows—*1 Night and 2 Days* (KBS2 2013 to 2018), have invited top entertainers in their 30s and 40s.⁵⁴ Due to this orientation in the Korean broadcasting industry, a travel-reality show about veteran actors in their seventies and now eighties was a quite unfamiliar concept among Korean viewers. This new reality show franchise was produced by nationally-renowned television director Na Yeong-seok, who had made the legendary travel-reality show, *1 Night and 2 Days* in the late-2000s. Notably, *Grandpas Over Flowers* was the first reality program that he created after moving to CJ E&M from KBS. It can be said that, since the reality show franchise was planned to be broadcast on a cable television channel, he took different strategies in the development of plots and characters in comparison to the reality shows that he had made for network television.

The first promotional video clearly displayed the central theme of *Grandpas Over Flowers*. In the teaser of the reality show franchise, posted to tvN's YouTube channel on July 4, 2013, the four senior actors were sitting together in the park. After having lunch together, Bak Geun-hyeong ordered Baik Il-seop to make coffee for the other older guests.⁵⁵ The subtitle, “[I am] 70 but am the youngest” was inserted in the scene.⁵⁶ That scene confirms that age is one of the most important factors that determine the relationship between the veteran actors as elsewhere in Korea and, at the same time, helps the audience assume that the symbolic hierarchy between them would cause numerous unexpected events during the process of their overseas travels. The next scene was filmed during the pre-production meeting of show directors, writers, and the actors. During the meeting, director Na Yeong-seok showed the celebrities a picture of paragliding, doubtfully asking “This is something that you cannot do, right?” and the oldest guest jokingly replied to the director: “That is [possible] if you bring two or three coffins.”⁵⁷ That dialogue reflects the main narrative of the show about challenges that the senior actors have

never tried in their lives. In the last scene, while having dinner, Baik Il-seop, who was giving his daughter a video call, handed his mobile over to another actor, Yi Sun-jae.⁵⁸ He then talked about his memory of Baik's daughter, reminding that the four actors' friendship had lasted for more than two decades.⁵⁹ A series of trailers explained the reason why the show director chose these four senior actors for this once-in-a-life travel to Europe; put differently, their long-standing friendship is the foundation for developing the audience's sense of reality while following their journey in the show.

Importantly, *Grandpas Over Flowers* aimed to spotlight old generations through the embodiment of celebrity. By having consistently and actively appeared on television dramas, films, and plays, the four senior actors have constructed their images as representative father and/or grandfather figures in the Korean context. While watching this reality show, many Korean audiences see that, despite their successful careers, these senior actors have not thoroughly enjoyed their younger days.⁶⁰ They reflected on their lives in front of the camera, and their recollections reminded viewers that the majority of older generations had sacrificed their lives in the process of industrialization and modernization since the post-Korean War period.⁶¹

In Korean society, a backpacking trip to Europe obtained its symbolic indication of liberalizing overseas travel in the early 1990s and sooner or later became a favorite rite of passage that younger generations should undergo in their 20s. In *Grandpas Over Flowers*, as can be seen in Picture 1, these four senior actors were wearing their backpacks as the subtitle of the first season itself indicates its goal as a backpack trip project by many travel agencies. From this socio-cultural context, *Grandpas Over Flowers* not only promotes an adventure that the old should do before death but also causes the national public to rethink what older generations could not enjoy while the country was rapidly modernizing in the past 50 years.

Another fascination with this reality show is the ways in which these old men revealed their interpersonal disagreements in arranging the schedule for the trip and then managed uncomfortable situations effectively. Baik Il-Seop, who was suffering from knee pain partially due to his overweight body condition, did not want to walk around the city.⁶² Unlike him, Yi Sun-jae, the oldest actor (84 as of December 2018), was very diligent and inquisitive and, thus, tried to experience the places as much as possible.⁶³ The personality difference between the two actors was revealed when they visited the Louvre Museum in Paris; Yi Sun-jae was

fascinated with the works on display while Il-seop Baik was sitting on the bench inside the museum.⁶⁴ Shin Gu and Bak Geun-hyeong actively created a more peaceful atmosphere when the oldest and the youngest produced tension during the trip. They tried either to walk in step with Baik Il-seop or to tease Yi Sun-jae about his curiosity.⁶⁵ The show director then inserted some interviews to help the audience understand their relationships: at pre-production interviews, Bak Geun-hyeong said that they were extremely excited about going on the trip with these members.⁶⁶ Shin Gu also thought that the trip would be a great source of memories in their late lives.⁶⁷

During the trip, the four old men met a group of young Korean travelers who greatly impressed them. This encounter became another focal point to be emphasized in the show. In the second episode of the first season, while having breakfast at a guesthouse, for example, the senior actors had chances to converse with a young Korean female student who was traveling to foreign countries by herself. The actors verbally expressed their surprise, respect, and admiration about the fact that she had been traveling through multiple countries in Europe. Shin Gu confessed that he could not even identify cardinal points, north, south, east, and west if he were left alone there.⁶⁸ In order to dramatize his feelings about a young student, the show director added subtitles, “Gu Shin in his 78-year-old years showed his respect for a 23-year-old student” to the scene.⁶⁹

The polarization between the old and the young in the perception of the political mind, cultural values, and individual rights has become an issue in contemporary Korean society. The show, therefore, has provided the audience with the space and time for listening to the actors and the young travelers. Specifically, while following the actors’ faces at the Triumphal Arch in Paris, the director added a statement – “They are our past, present, and future.”⁷⁰ The director’s views on these old generations are fully reflected in the episodes of the first season, and the way in which the production staff dealt with these old hosts indeed contains the objective and nature of the reality show production. The centralization of the veteran actors, considering the fact that the main audience of cable television channels are young generations, ultimately, offers the viewers the chance to put themselves in their fathers’ place.

Better Late Than Never: The Domestication of Exoticism

As one of the first television formats based on a Korean television program, *Better Late Than Never* has greatly developed its original format

in order to reflect American culture and specificity. During the entire season, the consistent emphasis was given to the actors' exposures to exotic cultures and practices, and their various reactions in eating local food, learning traditional cultures, and visiting historical sites are employed as a source of humor during the entire series.⁷¹ At the beginning of its first episode, Asia was described as the place for experiencing "exotic beauty."⁷² Then, the next scenes briefly reported a process for setting up the travel. The show's executive producer, Henry Winkler, called other celebrities—William Shatner, Terry Bradshaw, and George Foreman—to suggest some fun activities in Asia.⁷³ Then, Winkler gave a monologue about the necessity of a person who can help the senior guests to carry bags and then contacted Jeff Dye. Unlike its Korean counterpart, which emphasizes the old guests' friendship over the decades and the director's adoption of a polite attitude in communicating with them, *Better Late Than Never* primarily portrays gaiety and excitement that the guests have going into the land of strangers in Asia.⁷⁴

The insertion of subtitles is meant to provide information about the sites where the celebrities were visiting. For example, when they were in the crossing of Shibuya district in Tokyo, the white, bold, large-size subtitles, "world's busiest intersection" and "every hour 100,000 people cross" occupied the entire scene.⁷⁵ Then, five guests' post-production interviews were added to personalize the meaning of visiting the place. Bradshaw revealed his surprise about the hustle and bustle of the street of Shibuya, in comparison to his visits to New York City, Oklahoma, and Tulsa in the United States.⁷⁶ In a capsule hotel, Winkler and Shatner talked about their feelings, mentioning that they had never been in Tokyo and would embrace their experiences in the strange but wonderful city.⁷⁷

Having local dishes is another major theme in the show. In Japan, the celebrities tried to have various local cuisines. This is one of the major contrasts to the Korean counterpart. *Grandpas Over Flowers* also highlights local dishes; however, the actors had limited money and sometimes they made their own dishes with foods brought from Korea, including kimchi, at various hotels.⁷⁸ While emphasizing the old boys' trips in unknown areas, the show still attempted to present their activities as those of normal middle-class Koreans who try to save money during an overseas trip. The unfamiliarity of ethnic cuisine in *Better Late Than Never* generated mixed reactions from the hosts. For instance, when roasted pork virginals were served at a bar, Terry Bradshaw asked a local person to have French fries.⁷⁹ William Shatner then called him "an ugly

American,” encouraging him to embrace the exotic experiences.⁸⁰ In the second episode, Terry Bradshaw was again frustrated with his appetizer, which contained the head part of fish. While George Foreman and William Shatner were having eyeballs of fish, a look of surprise crossed the faces of Terry Bradshaw and Jeff Dye.

Exposure to different cultures as the main objective of *Better Late Than Never* is also found in their participations in the production of a Japanese reality show and a Korean pop music video. By doing so, *Better Late Than Never* has revealed the characteristics of East Asian media culture and practice from an American media’s angle. The Japanese show hosts focus more on slapstick comedies, including stocking challenges and eating spicy food.⁸¹ With guidance by some members of the K-pop idol group Girls’ Generation, the American show hosts learned a complex dance routine, which is one of the main characteristics in Korean pop music.⁸²

In the middle of each episode, the four senior celebrities had genuine conversations regarding their lives. By including such conversations, this reality show awakens the American audience to the meaning of traveling to other countries in their later ages. Henry Winkler asked the other guests if any of them had been afraid of traveling to Asian countries.⁸³ This question ends up with the shared agreement that fears often turn into motivations, which applied to the success of their careers.⁸⁴ Foreman recalled his match against Mohammad Ali and Winkler talked about how he had been dealing with the moments of fear and tension when appearing on live television shows.⁸⁵ These dialogues highlight that their successful careers were collectively rooted in their sense of challenge. Their trips to Asia have then demonstrated the importance of challenging oneself and embracing something completely different from what they were familiar with.

Cultural Negotiations in the Process of Adaptation

Navarro’s articulation of television formats as “cultural artifacts” made a shift in the discussion of the format trade from “an industry-centered promise of infinite reproduction to the culture-centered process through which the format actually circulates and establishes local identity”^{86,87} Relatedly, it matters to identify how the universal value of the Korean reality format has remained and how the locality of U.S. media culture was involved in the remaking process.⁸⁸ Based upon the comparative analysis of *Grandpas Over Flowers* and *Better Late Than*

Never, this section argues that various modifications and negotiations have been made in its remaking process. To begin with, the Korean version emphasizes friendship between the four actors, leading viewers to infer that it is special to spend some time with life-long friends in foreign countries before death takes them apart from each other. However, for *Better Late Than Never*, the four hosts were chosen from different career fields, and they are temporary companies to experience adventures in foreign countries. By doing so, the U.S. adaptation of the Korean show format takes a more individualistic angle to provide the audience with the opportunity for thinking about something to do before death.

Second, the role of the younger actor as a porter has been differently developed between the American and Korean versions of the reality show franchise. In the first episode of *Grandpas Over Flowers*, the show director deceived the young actor, Yi Seo-jin, by not telling the details of the overseas trip. Yi came to the airport in expectation of traveling to foreign countries with young girl group members. Due to that, he made a very puzzled expression when being informed that he would serve the senior actors as a porter. This event occupied a significant portion of the first episode, highlighting his participation for the entire show beforehand. Indeed, in the following stories, he played a leading role in searching for city guides, finding restaurants, buying tickets, and renting cars.⁸⁹ His instantaneous decisions produced unexpected situations, and cameras focused on the reactions of the senior celebrities and production crew.⁹⁰ The deconstruction of onstage and offstage is made based upon the close relationship between the show hosts and production staff. The numerous reality franchises that the director has produced, such as *Three Meals a Day* (tvN 2014 to present),⁹¹ *New Journey to the West* (Naver, tvN 2015 to present),⁹² and *The Dictionary of Useless Knowledge* (tvN 2017 to 2018), included unexpected events and dialogues, along with the director's appearance in the scene.⁹³ This type of storytelling was possible based upon the audience's recognition of the relationship between the show director and the actor in reality. For instance, many Korean viewers have already known that Na Yeong-seok and Yi Seo-jin had developed a close friendship after Yi's appearance on the special episodes of another reality television program, *1 Night and 2 Days*. That relationship also allowed the appearance of the show director on television when Yi wanted to negotiate with the director about travel costs.

In the U.S. version, *Better Late Than Never*, however, Jeff Dye took a limited position as a "sidekick."⁹⁴ The way in which he first appeared in

the program implies that he was not a top celebrity. When the main show producer and host, Henry Winkler invited Dye to the trip over the phone, his reaction showed that he was not a busy person these days.⁹⁵ Besides, by omitting how he prepared some travel plans in storytelling, the show minimizes Dye's presence. Instead, the show director employed him as a representative of youth among the show hosts. Accordingly, he was depicted as an inexperienced person who needed the teachings of the senior actors regarding finding a girlfriend and enjoying the nightlife.⁹⁶

Third, the U.S. adaptation of the Korean show format has been mostly modified to include the conventional codes of U.S. reality show formats: the process of flying out from the U.S. to Japan was considerably edited, and unexpected situations were mainly related to the reactions of the guests to preplanned cultural experiences. Oh pointed out that *Better Late Than Never* has only four episodes and contains "faster action and episodic humor."⁹⁷ Relatedly, whereas the Korean version has made efforts in seizing unexpected dialogues and behaviors by filming all the moments of their travels, the U.S. version has focused more on the scheduled situations in the cities they visited. Editing points additionally uncover the Korean and U.S. production teams' different approaches to the representation of the real. Korean episodes keep following the genuine relationships between the characters while U.S. episodes attempt to describe these elder men "as sympathetic but laughable figures."⁹⁸

Last but not least, there is a difference in the way that sexual discussions are involved in the process of their travels. The second episode of *Better Late Than Never* introduces geishas as a representation of Japanese culture. The show describes geisha culture as such that requires a geisha the completion of a doctoral degree in order to become "the ultimate in women, such as preparing the food, and singing"⁹⁹ In Hong Kong and Japan, they visited a place to experience some local food, and some of the members were especially introduced to items that were meant to develop their stamina as old men. By doing so, *Better Late Than Never* has celebrated "youthful, heteronormative masculinity."¹⁰⁰ Certainly, these kinds of approaches would not be welcomed in Korean television culture. Rather, the Korean senior actors have been described as romantic husbands and caring father figures: Bak Geun-hyeong often called his wife to share his experience, and Baik Il-seop talked about his granddaughter while having meals.¹⁰¹ It is necessary to mention that Confucianism is still deeply rooted in Korean society as a patriarchal ideology. Since the senior actors of *Grandpas Over Flowers* have represented the image of father and

mentor within society, the portrayal of their male sexuality is not desirable in the reality show format.

In television formats, it is crucial to develop original ideas and general feelings that many people in the world share, and *Grandpas Over Flowers* certainly advances these primary characteristics of television formats that become globally popular.¹⁰² However, as *Better Late Than Never* shows, foreign broadcasters reconfigure imported television formats to meet their own local audiences. Therefore, the flexibility of unscripted formats matters in the localizing process.¹⁰³ In the late 2010s, the Korean broadcasting industry has substantially advanced format programs while keeping in mind the global television markets. The number of adaptations of Korean television formats in both the East Asian and U.S. broadcasting markets has increased, and this new trend certainly implies a shift in the nature of broadcasting *Hallyu*.

Conclusion

This article analyzed television formats developed by the Korean broadcasting industry as alternatives to canned programs, in particular K-dramas in broadcasting *Hallyu*. Through our textual analysis of *Grandpas Over Flowers* and its comparison to the American adaptation *Better Late Than Never*, this article discussed socio-cultural forces embedded in the localizing process of the Korean unscripted formats in the United States. It also identified the future direction of the Korean Wave by looking at the contribution of reality show formats to increase the presence of local media culture in the global broadcasting sector.

Media scholars have long sustained their standpoint in examining the global television format trade through the theoretical framework of cultural imperialism, in which the U.S. and U.K. broadcasting industries create and circulate mega formats to the rest of the world.¹⁰⁴ That binary approach to the global-local and core-periphery is being fundamentally challenged by some non-Western media players who have shown their capacities in the production and distribution of global media formats with the support of digital technologies and media convergence. In particular, the arrival of Korean scripted and unscripted formats at the media industry in the U.S. and other countries, including France and Japan, confirms that such a shift calls television scholars and producers to take current media realities seriously.

The Korean broadcasting industry has constructed its image as a rising center of media products and practices in the global media market. In

adapting Korean television formats, there are some notable differences between Asian and Western countries. At the beginning of the 2010s in Asia, Chinese satellite channels and some Asian broadcasters in Indonesia and Vietnam attempted to adapt Korean unscripted formats, and their localized programs penetrated into the Chinese media market. That experience helped Korean television directors to recognize the potential of unscripted formats.

While there are several reasons for the expansion of Korean television formats in Asia, cultural intimacy certainly plays a key role. As Lin and Tong already discussed, the inter-regional popularity of Korean television dramas until the late 2000s was related to the inclusion of Confucian socio-cultural values and warm human affection.¹⁰⁵ East Asian audiences enjoy “the commonality of cultural experiences” with Korean television programs.¹⁰⁶

Such cultural intimacy helps understand the context in which Chinese television purchased the license for localizing the reality show, *Grandpas Over Flowers*. Confucian society teaches young generations to respect their elders, and Confucianism is strongly reflected in *Grandpas Over Flowers*. Therefore, such a Confucian tenet may be responsible for offering spaces for regional viewers to sympathize with the main subject of the show. In the modern cosmopolitan living conditions, older adults have become marginalized in East Asian societies to a considerable extent; however, *Grandpas Over Flowers* depicts their lives in a respectful but fun manner, which possibly appeals to Asian viewers.

The ways in which *Better Late Than Never* modifies the original storytelling and characterization should also be discussed in the cultural context so that they show the differences between East Asian and North American cultures. Recently, there is a scholarly demand for examining the reality television genre with cultural sensitivity and understanding the reality format as the global media product that indispensably generates cultural negotiations and modifications in the localizing process.¹⁰⁷ The American adaptation of *Grandpas Over Flowers* is a result of cultural negotiations between the local and the global through the program format developed in the non-Western region.

We are certain that the adaption of local television formats in both the East Asian and the Western markets will continue to rise. Korea has been a frontrunner at this particular juncture. This, however, does not mean that Korea will become a mega giant in the global television format markets as Korea’s rise is only a very recent phenomenon. Instead, what we want to

emphasize is that our comparative study provides further opportunities to develop this line of thinking, offering the necessity for exploring the Western adaptation of the non-Western reality television format. Since most of the comparative studies on reality television focused on how U.S./U.K. super formats have been locally remade, academic discussions on the possibility for internationalizing non-Western reality show formats rarely occur in global media studies. In this situation, our analysis of the U.S. adaptation of the Korean reality format, *Grandpas Over Flowers*, brings the global spread of the Korean reality show format to the fore of debates on the global media industry studies. Moreover, our study reveals the U.S. broadcasting industry's localization strategies in the process of remaking a reality show format imported from non-Western countries.

Notes:

¹ Dal Yong Jin, *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media*. Champaign, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 2016.

² Byeong-chang Yi, dir. *The Golden Bell Challenge*. Aired March 1, 2000 to the Present on KBS1.

³ Hang Heo and Sun-yeong Kim, dir. *We Got Married*. Aired March 16, 2008 to May 6, 2017 on MBC.

⁴ Hwan-jin Yi, dir. *Running Man*. Aired July 11, 2010 to the Present on SBS.

⁵ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Grandpas Over Flowers*. Season 1. Aired July 5, 2013 to August 16, 2013 on tvN.

⁶ Su-won Jo, dir. *I Can Hear Your Voice*. Aired June 5, 2013 to August 1, 2013 on SBS.

⁷ The Korean Wave—the rapid growth of the cultural industries and the exports of Korean popular culture—started in the late 1990s. In the early stage of *Hallyu*, television dramas and films played a key role in penetrating the Asian region. The Korean Wave has shifted its major characteristics since around 2008 as several major elements change their directions. Compared to the early *Hallyu* period, the major regions for the exports extend to Western countries, and social media plays a key role in spreading Korean popular culture. In the realm of the broadcasting sector, television formats and reality shows instead of dramas become major genres to be exported. Dal Yong Jin, *New Korean Wave*, and Hui-kyeong Kim, “Po-maes Sin-han-lyu-lo Jin-hwa: ‘Han-deu’ Yeol-pung Mi(dd)chil-kka-tss-hwang-geum-si-gan Kkwe-chan Gus-dag-teo.” *The Korea Economic Daily*, September 22, 2017, Available online at <http://news.hankyung.com/article/2017092260441>

⁸ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Grandpas Over Flowers*. Season 1.

⁹ Troy Miller, dir. *Better Late Than Never*. Season 1. Aired August 23, 2016 to September 13, 2016 on NBC.

¹⁰ Seok-ho Yun, dir. *Winter Sonata*. January 14, 2002 to March 19, 2002 on KBS2.

¹¹ Byeong-hun Yi, dir. *Jewel in the Palace*. Aired September 15, 2003 to March 23, 2004 on MBC.

¹²Albert Moran, *Copycat TV: Globalization, Program Formats, and Cultural Identity*. Luton, UK: University of Luton Press, 1998, 13.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Heidi Keinonen, "Television Format as Cultural Technology Transfer: Importing a Production Format for Daily Drama." *Media, Culture and Society* 39, no. 7 (2016): 995-1010.

¹⁵ Jean Chalaby. "At the Origin of a Global Industry: The TV Format Trade as an Anglo-American Invention." *Media, Culture and Society* 34, No. 1 (2012), 37.

¹⁶ Christine Quail. "Producing Reality: Television Formats and Reality TV in the Canadian Context." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 40 (2015): 185-201.

¹⁷ Albert Moran, "Makeover on the Move: Global Television and Programme Formats." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 22, no. 4 (2008), 461

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dal Yong Jin, *New Korean Wave*.

²⁰ Jean Chalaby, "At the Origin of a Global Industry."

²¹ Dal Yong Jin, *New Korean Wave*.

²² Albert Moran, "Makeover on the Move," 461.

²³ Kyung-min Oh and Hong-sik Yu. "A Study on the Export Characteristics of Korean TV Format and Its Localization in the Abroad." *Broadcasting and Communication* 16, no. 4 (2015):5-47. As Oh and Yu (2015) discuss, Korea started to export its television formats when CCTV in China imported *Dojeon Golden Bell* in 2003; however, the majority of format exports only began around 2008 and onward.

²⁴ David Shore, prod. *The Good Doctor*. Aired September 25, 2017 to the present on ABC.

²⁵ Dal Yong Jin, *New Korean Wave*.

²⁶ Amos Thomas, "Regional Variations on a Global Theme: Formatting Television for the Middle East and Beyond." *Media International Australia* 132, No. 1 (2009), 105.

²⁷ Christine Quail, "Producing Reality: Television Formats and Reality TV in the Canadian Context." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 40 (2015): 185-201.

²⁸ Kai Hafez, *The Myth of Media Globalization*. (London: Polity Press. 2007).

²⁹ Ira Wagman, "Global Formats and Canadian Television: The Case of Deal or No Deal." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 38 (2013), 614.

³⁰ Jin-sik Park and Doh-yeon Kim. "Globalization and Localization of Contents through Television Formats." *Journal of Broadcasting and Telecommunications Research* 7 (2013): 9-37.

³¹As of January 2015, a view rating of 3 percent was considered as a success for cable channels, although domestic audiences have rapidly changed their television watching habits since the early 21st century. In 2018, several television programs on cable channels record over the viewer rating of 10 percent and even 15 percent; therefore, the standard of success in cable channels continues to shift. Nam-cheol Heo, "Ke-i-beul-eun Wae Si-cheong-lyul 3% Neom-eu-myeon T-dae-bag-t-il-kka." *Kyunghwang Shinmun*. January 12, 2015, Available online at http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=201501122133415.

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- ³² Na-yeong Kim, “‘Kkoch-bo-da Hal-bae-t Si-cheong-lyul Ji-sang-pa Bang-song Wi-hyeob-ha-na?’” *MBN*. July 6, 2013, Available online at <http://http://star.mbn.co.kr/view.php?no=548392&year=2013>
- ³³ For example, Ji-u Choi, an early *Hallyu* star in Asia joined the program as a guest porter and Yong-gun Kim played a role as a guest traveler with them in the fifth season.
- ³⁴ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Sister Over Flowers*. Aired November 29, 2013 to January 17, 2014 on tvN.
- ³⁵ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Youth Over Flowers*. Aired August 1, 2014 to April 1, 2016 on tvN.
- ³⁶ *Huffpost*. “tvN Cheung T-kkoch-bo-da Hal-bae-t Won-nyeon-mem-beo Chul-yeon-whag-jeong... 6wol-2-9-il Cheos-bang.” *HUFFPOST*, May 31, 2018, Available online at https://www.huffingtonpost.kr/entry/story_kr_5b0fb09de4b0fcd6a8339e08/.
- ³⁷ Jeong-yeon Kang, “‘Grandpas Over Flowers’ to Excite Taiwan, Hong Kong Audience,” *10Asia*. September 13, 2013, Available online at <http://en.tenasia.com/archives/73081>
- ³⁸ *Global Times*. “Chinese version of *Grandpas Over Flowers* earns popularity.” *Global Times*. June 17, 2014, Available online at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/866134.shtml>.
- ³⁹ Kate Stanhope, “NBC Renews ‘Better Late Than Never’ for Second Season.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 22, 2016, Available online at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/better-late-never-renewed-second-931945/>.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*.
- ⁴¹ Sonia Saraiya. “TV Review: ‘Better Late Than Never’.” *Variety*. August 22, 2016, Available online at <https://variety.com/2016/tv/reviews/tv-review-better-late-than-never-nbc-1201841865/>
- ⁴² Amir Hetsroni, *Reality Television: Merging the Global and the Local*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publisher, 2010.
- ⁴³ Kristin Brzoznowski, “CJ E&M Focuses on What’s Fresh.” *World Screen*. August 28, 2017. para. 1, Available online at <http://worldscreen.com/tvformats/cj-em-focuses-on-whats-fresh/>
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*.
- ⁴⁵ Rebecca Hawkes, “CJ E&M Develops Korean Formats for International Audience.” *Rapid TV News*, April 26, 2018. para. 1, Available online at <https://www.rapidtvnews.com/2018042651842/cj-e-m-develops-korean-formats-for-international-audience.html#axzz5PKXyxdSG>
- ⁴⁶ Kristin Brzoznowski, “CJ E&M Focuses on What’s Fresh.”
- ⁴⁷ Na-hye Hwang and Gang-cheong Yi, dir. *I Can See Your Voice*. Aired February 26, 2015 to April 27, 2018 on Mnet.
- ⁴⁸ Jean Chalaby, *The format Age: Television’s Entertainment Revolution*. Malden, MA: Polity, 2016, 17
- ⁴⁹ David Shore, prod. *The Good Doctor*.
- ⁵⁰ Stephen Tolkin, prod. *Somewhere Between*. Aired July 24, 2017 to September 19, 2017 on ABC.
- ⁵¹ Dong-hun Yi, dir. *God’s Gifts-14 Days*. Aired March 3, 2014 to April 22, 2014 on SBS.

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- ⁵² Hwan-jin Yi, dir. *Running Man*. Aired July 11, 2010 to the Present on SBS.
- ⁵³ Tae-ho Kim, dir. *Infinite Challenge*. Aired April 23, 2005 to March 31, 2018 on MBC.
- ⁵⁴ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *1 Night & 2 Days*. Season 1. Aired August 5, 2007 to February 26, 2012, on KBS2.
- ⁵⁵ tvN. "Grandpas Over Flowers: Teaser." *tvN*, July 4, 2013. Video, 2:03. Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2lXkfFPEUE>
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Grandpas Over Flowers*. Season 1.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Ibid. Season 1. Episode 2.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ David Oh, "Elder Men's Bromance in Asian Lands: Normative Western Masculinity in *Better Late Than Never*." *Critical Media Studies in Media Communication* 35, No. 4 (2018): 350-362.
- ⁷² Troy Miller, dir. *Better Late Than Never*. Season 1.
- ⁷³ Ibid. Season 1. Episode 1.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Grandpas Over Flowers*. Season 1.
- ⁷⁹ Troy Miller, dir. *Better Late Than Never*. Season 1. Episode 1.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Ibid. Season 1. Episode 3.
- ⁸³ Ibid. Season 1. Episode 1.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Vinicius Navarro, "More Than Copycat Television: Format Adaptation as Performance." In *Global Television Format: Understanding Television across Borders*, edited by Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, 23-38. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012.
- ⁸⁷ Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf. Introduction to *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television across Borders*, edited by Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, 1-20. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012, 7.
- ⁸⁸ David C. Oh, "Elder Men's Bromance in Asian Lands," 351.
- ⁸⁹ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Grandpas Over Flowers*. Season 1.

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- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Three Meals a Day*. Aired October 17, 2014 to present, on tvN.
- ⁹² Yeong-seok Na, dir. *New Journey to the West*. Aired September 4, 2015 to present, on tvN.
- ⁹³ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *The Dictionary of Useless Knowledge*, June 2 to July 28, 2017, on tvN.
- ⁹⁴ Troy Miller, *Better Late Than Never*. Season 1. Episode 1.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid. Season 1. Episode 3.
- ⁹⁷ David Oh, "Elder Men's Bromance in Asian Lands," 351.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Troy Miller, *Better Late Than Never*. Season 1. Episode 2.
- ¹⁰⁰ David Oh, "Elder Men's Bromance in Asian Lands," 352.
- ¹⁰¹ Yeong-seok Na, dir. *Grandpas Over Flowers*. Season 1.
- ¹⁰² Su-hyeon Choi, "Mi-kuk-to Han-kuk Pang-song Il-me-i-keu-tss Beonj-han-lyu Doel-kka?" *The Chosun Ilbo*. June 13, 2017, Available online at http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/06/13/2017061300065.html
- ¹⁰³ Jin-Sik Park and Doh-yeon Kim. "Globalization and Localization of Contents through Television Formats." *Journal of Broadcasting and Telecommunications Research* 07 (2013): 9-37.
- ¹⁰⁴ Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf. *Global Television Formats*, 2.
- ¹⁰⁵ Angel Lin and Avin Tong. "Re-imagining a Cosmopolitan 'Asian Us': Korean Media Flows and Imaginaries of Asian Modern Femininities." In *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, edited by Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi, 91-126. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008, 92.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 94.
- ¹⁰⁷ Amir Hetsroni, *Reality Television*, 2.