

3-2017

Localization as negotiation: Producing a Korean format in contemporary China

Wenna Zeng
Hong Kong Baptist University

Colin Sparks
Hong Kong Baptist University, sparksc@hkbu.edu.hk

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/hkbu_staff_publication



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

This document is the authors' final version of the published article.

Link to published article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jdtv.8.1.81_1

APA Citation

Zeng, W., & Sparks, C. (2017). Localization as negotiation: Producing a Korean format in contemporary China. *International Journal of Digital Television*, 8 (1), 81-98. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdtv.8.1.81_1

This Journal Article is brought to you for free and open access by HKBU Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in HKBU Staff Publication by an authorized administrator of HKBU Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact repository@hkbu.edu.hk.

Zeng, W., & Sparks, C. (2017). Localization as negotiation: Producing a Korean format in contemporary China. *International Journal of Digital Television*, 8(1), 81-98.

Localization as negotiation: Producing a Korean format in contemporary China

Wenna Zeng, Hong Kong Baptist University

Colin Sparks, Hong Kong Baptist University

Abstract

This article analyses the localization, as *Hurry Up, Brother*, of the Korean celebrity reality game show format *Running Man* by the Chinese broadcaster Zhejiang Satellite TV. Based upon field work involving participant observation and interviews with Chinese and Korean production personnel, the article explores the complex forces involved in realizing the final, highly successful, project. It is argued that localization involves the interplay of complex forces, the outcome of which is a process of negotiation. In particular, the article analyses in detail two major players in this production, Korean format consultants and the Chinese production team. It details the distinctively Korean practice of licensing a format without recourse to a formal specification of production details, and Chinese television professionals' response to these practices. It is shown that the more informal methods employed result in a transfer of decision-making power from the Korean company to the Chinese company in the course of the production. As a television format show produced in China, the production of *Hurry Up, Brother* necessarily involved interaction with political forces as well as cultural differences between China and Korea. The article concludes with considering the findings for our concepts of globalization, localization and hybridization.

Keywords: China-Korea, localization, negotiation, cultural difference, ideological control, decision-making, television format

Introduction

This article examines the processes by which a Korean reality show format, *Running Man* (2010–present), was transformed into *Hurry Up, Brother*, currently one of the most successful programmes on Chinese television. The show led the audience ratings for a Friday entertainment show in China during its broadcast period, with an audience rating of 5.002% for the ninth episode of Season II (*Sassy Girl*, 2015, China: Zhejiang Satellite TV), establishing a new marker for celebrity reality shows (Ma 2015, Wu 2016).

We analysed in detail the relationship between the Chinese broadcasting company, Zhejiang Satellite TV, and its Korean partner, Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), which influenced the nature of the final programme. Our interest is in the mechanisms by which a programme originating in one culture is successfully ‘localized’ into another. The interplay of ‘global’ and ‘local’ has, for more than two decades now, been a commonplace both of general social theory and of broadcasting studies (Elasmr 2014; Oren and Shahaf 2012; Chalaby 2012; Esser 2010; McMillin 2007; Straubhaar 2007; Moran 1998). There have, however, been relatively few detailed examinations of what is involved in localization, and it is upon these processes that this article focuses. It has recently been argued that format adaptation should be understood as ‘a site of cultural negotiation’ (Keinonen 2016). It is here demonstrated that the show as finally broadcast can best be understood as the result of negotiation between different actors rather than being a simple modification of the original format to suit ‘local tastes’. The emphasis throughout is on ‘localization’ as an active process

rather than what we may term a simple textural translation or character transplant from Korean to Chinese cultures (Shim 2006; Berry 2003).

We begin with a brief account of the issues involved in understanding the cultural relations between China and Korea which formed the background to this production. We then deal with the relationship between the Korean format vendors, SBS and their Chinese clients. We discuss in detail the cultural factors within which the production was framed and the ways in which the constraints shaped the final product. The materials used in these sections are based upon six months of participant observation in the production team of *Hurry Up, Brother* by the lead author of this article. The data gathered by this method were supplemented and cross-checked through a series of interviews with key individuals in both the Chinese and Korean production teams. We interviewed 24 television workers, Korean and Chinese, in 2015 and 2016. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. All the interviewees have been anonymized through assigning them numbers, with C (for Chinese) or K (for Korean) as a prefix, in order to protect their privacy, since some of the interviews involved business secrets and personal matters. Finally, we consider the overall implications of the findings for our understanding of the process of localization and the international format trade more generally.

Culture proximities

The international trade in formats is a well-researched aspect of contemporary television (Chalaby 2016; Rivero 2012; Gottlieb 2010; Moran and Keane 2006; Keane 2002; Turner 2009). Broadcasters in both the developed and the developing world have become enthusiastic purchasers of the rights to successful formats and, as is detailed elsewhere in this issue of the *International Journal of Digital Television*, Chinese companies have participated enthusiastically in the trade (Lu and Li 2014; Sun and Zhao 2009; Keane and Liu 2009).

Many of the programmes produced in this way in China have come from western, ‘global’ sources of formats, in the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. *Running Man*, however, is a Korean programme that enjoyed enormous success in that country and forms part of the ‘Korean Wave’ (or *Hallyu*) of popular culture that has been so successful throughout East Asia (Leung 2008; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Kim 2013; Kuwahara 2014; Lee and Nornes 2015; Ryoo 2009; Kwon and Kim 2014).

Given the historical links between Korea and China, this particular case of localization also allows an examination of the extent to which cultural proximity influences the processes of adaptation (Straubhaar 2003). As a very successful Korean reality show, *Running Man* was already the result of a process of negotiation, or hybridization, between the Western and Japanese influences on culture and production technology and Korean factors (Kim 2009; Lee 2007; Lee 2013; Ryoo 2009). The success of the Korean Wave in Asia, and to some extent more broadly, has been exhaustively researched (Iwabuchi 2013; Shim 2006). As regards its undoubted success in China, across a range of cultural phenomena, most notably television, it has been noted that, as part of the second wave of Asian modernization, Korea has been subjected both to influences from its colonial relationship with Japan and, more recently, to its client relationship with the United States (Jin 2013; Park 2005; Shin 2009a, Iwabuchi 2002; Shin 2009b).

At the same time, Korea has had a long and very close, if at times rather problematic, relationship with China. This has meant that important elements of Korea’s cultural formation, in particular the influence of Confucian thought over concepts of the family, have rendered it particularly close to the structure of feeling present in contemporary China (Maliangkay 2006; Kim 2007; Zhu 2008; Glynn 2014). Korea can thus be said to occupy a special and distinct position in East Asia in general, and with China in particular.

We may term Korean cultural production as the articulation of a second wave of Asian modernization: heavily influenced by US models but at the same time retaining distinctive Asian characteristics that make it particularly attractive as an instance of contemporary experiences to other East Asian societies, of which China is clearly one, which are embarked upon the same processes of urbanization, industrialization and modernization, albeit with a time-lag of a couple of decades behind South Korea and the other ‘Asian Tigers’ (Kinnia 2011).

Running Man and Hurry Up, Brother

Running Man was originally a very successful production from the South Korean broadcaster SBS, launched in 2010. It was Korea’s first live-action, urban-setting variety show, placing seven regular cast members together with a changing selection of guests, in a survival competition involving various missions and games (SBS, 2015: 34). Popular celebrities, including star athletes and foreign actors, have become a familiar sight on the show, helping to broaden its fan base in Korea, as well as China and other Asian countries. The iconic element of this show is a game called ‘name-tag ripping’, involving participants hiding, running and even tussling with each other in order to remove each other’s name tags. The show, which presents the spirit of endeavour and the humour of those celebrities, gains huge attention both in Korea and China.

In October, 2014, the copyright to a Chinese version of *Running Man* was bought by Zhejiang Satellite TV and turned into a national version, *Hurry Up, Brother*, through a joint production with SBS. *Hurry Up, Brother* has enjoyed enormous popularity with both the Chinese public and the government. In the SBS’ brochure, the vendor reflects on the reasons for the success of this local version:

This was possible because of extensive prior preparation and the dispatch of the (Korean) *Running Man* production team to China to share their know-how with

their Chinese counterparts and participate in the production there. (SBS, 2015: 53)

Despite this positive account, the cooperation on *Running Man* between SBS and Chinese broadcasters was not very smooth at the beginning, since some similar projects had encountered problems. As a Korean producer said, SBS was ‘not very sure about how to promise good audience ratings in another country. We had big concerns about exporting this show’ (personal communication with K1, Korean producer, 1 July 2015). SBS was worried because there had been several failed Korean-Chinese-made television programmes in preceding years. A Korean producer explained how one example, the Korea–China joint production, *Ding Ge Long Dong Qiang*, airing on CCTV-3, failed to reach the expected audience ratings in its first season since ‘it was entirely edited by the Korean producers, who did not take China’s cultural differences into consideration. The Korean producers tended to be too confident in themselves’ (Interview with K2, 19 May 2015). However, after complex business negotiations with several potential Chinese buyers, over the spring and summer of 2014, SBS finally decided to export *Running Man* to Zhejiang Satellite TV and to work with them as a production partner instead of just acting as an exporter.

Zhejiang Satellite TV is part of the Zhejiang Radio and Television Group, a provincial level broadcasting group headquartered in Hangzhou, the very prosperous capital of the very prosperous East Coast province of Zhejiang. The Group is responsible to the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT). This body sets general policy guidelines for broadcasting, attempting to maintain what they see as appropriate cultural standards as well as ensuring political conformity (Li 2016; Xu 2013; Feng et al. 2009). The satellite channel is distributed all over China, not just in Zhejiang Province, and is the major mechanism through which the Group establishes a nation-wide audience.

The Chinese version of *Running Man* began broadcasting in October, 2014, and soon became the most popular entertainment show in Chinese television history, exceeding the previous record of *The Voice of China*. The cooperation between SBS and Zhejiang Satellite TV can be understood as a regional co-exploitation of intellectual property based on a necessary localization of *Running Man* in China. Both Korean and Chinese producers believe that the success of this show in China is based on ‘cultural and ideological localization’. The success of its programmes *The Voice of China*, *Chinese Dream Show* and *Hurry Up, Brother* have allowed Zhejiang Satellite TV to establish a strong position in the Chinese entertainment market. In 2015, Zhejiang Satellite TV was second in the Chinese provincial satellite TV market according to audience ratings¹. It was just behind Hunan Satellite TV, which has dominated the entertainment show market for a decade.

While control of commissioning and broadcasting remain with the channels, they no longer produce the bulk of their own programming, other than news and current affairs. Instead, they have a range of relationships with production companies to which they outsource part of their programme-making (Keane 2007; Xu 2013; Lu 2005). The result of this outsourcing is that, while Zhejiang Satellite TV retains a core of creative personnel, whose expertise is crucial to the realization of a show, much of the production is carried out by employees who have a more or less transitory relationship with the broadcaster and who have their own professional norms and goals.

Almost all TV entertainment production in China is financed through advertising and sponsorship, and that is certainly the case with this programme. Zhejiang Satellite TV was interested in maximizing the revenues from its investment in the programme, and that brought into the decision-making processes a number of other actors – notably advertisers and sponsors – who had their own opinions on the general shape and atmosphere of the show, and very definite views as to the size and composition of the audiences they wanted it to

deliver. All the components of the actual production are thus subject to a range of different pressures which impinge upon creative decisions (Li 2013; Linnett 2000; Olson and Thjomoe 2012; Meyers 2014).

Overall, we may say that the contemporary terrain of Chinese TV production is much more complex than is commonly imagined. Various different pressures impinged upon the Chinese production team and the Korean consultants who were working on the filming and editing. Certainly, the Communist Party, with its propaganda and cultural goals, is a central element in the production of television. Certainly, also the demands of the advertising and sponsorship markets are of central importance in the shape of a programme. The professional allegiances and the specific expertise of different groups of production personnel, however, are also significant in the kinds of decisions taken. In the case of a TV show that depends for a major part of its appeal on the presence of celebrities, they too contribute to shaping the final programme.

Taken together, this constellation of circumstances ensures that no production of a format show in China is likely to be a simple and unproblematic matter. On the contrary, given the participation of a range of organizations and individuals with different interests and expertise, there are, at the very least, bound to be differences of emphasis that influence the final shape of the realized production. We cannot, in one article, do justice to all of the different forces that contribute to the shape of the final texts. Here we have selected the most distinctive one, which we believe is well illustrated by this case: the special and changing relationship between the Korean vendors of the format and their Chinese clients. The negotiations between these two groups were central to the production of the show, although of course several factors, such as political controls, also played important roles. We will address these other factors in subsequent publications.

The Korean connection: From ‘Production Bible’ to ‘Human Bible’

In one very important respect, the standard Korean practice with the sale of formats departs rather far from that of most western companies. As is well known, what is usually traded in the sale of a format is a very detailed description of the production decisions embodied in a programme, codified in an elaborate text, usually termed the ‘production bible’, which contains very precise details about every element of the original production (Chalaby 2016; Moran and Malbon 2006; Esser et al. 2016). This documentation is augmented, and in some cases policed, by one or more experienced production experts from the vendor, who play the role of travelling consultant. These elements are enshrined in a legal contract that binds the purchaser to follow the strictures of the ‘bible’ and the advice of the consultant. This common practice constitutes a definite limitation on the degree of freedom of the purchasing company with regard to changes to the format, which they undertook in order to produce a programme that they consider suitable for ‘local’ tastes. These restrictions are defended by the larger vendors as important elements in the integrity of their brand and frequently perceived as serious impediments to success by the purchasers. The conflicts arising from these different perspectives have been the subject of considerable discussion (Moran 2009).

The degree of intervention varies according to the power of a particular format company. Sometimes, conflicts over the extent of changes have been protracted and led to big disputes (Bowrey and Handler 2014). But sometimes, big format vendors, like the BBC, do not care so much about their smaller formats and allow local changes, since they are less likely to damage their brand. Smaller format vendors, or vendors who are not sure about the nature of the local market, tend to place more trust in the local team’s judgement and accept changes. For example, in the reality show, *Don’t Tell the Bride*, originally from the BBC, the Chinese team was allowed to turn the genuine weddings of ‘ordinary single people’ into

performances by ‘celebrities’ who were already married, but who repeated the ceremony again in the show. As a British producer who was giving a format training course in August 2015 in China put it:

Even though the core of this show is ordinary people in the production bible, it was eventually changed because many Western format owners still do not know what kind of television programmes are suitable for the Chinese market due to cultural and political differences. This format is a small format; hence, the owner did not pay much attention to whether the local team changed it. Hence, they allowed the local team to change the format. (personal communication with a British producer, August 2015)

Generally, more powerful vendors have more power to regulate the local team and minimize any changes, and this power tends to increase when format vendors want to maintain or strengthen their brand. Smaller vendors allow local buyers to make big changes. In some cases, vendors are happy with the change. There is some evidence that this kind of relationship is problematic in the Chinese case, since the exigencies of the local market can often demand changes of a scope that the original vendor is somewhat reluctant to concede.

The Korean approach, which is less resistant to changes, is better suited to the Chinese market. They do not rely upon the formal sale of a detailed production bible and a limited provision of personnel. On the contrary, the Chinese version is marketed as a ‘co-production by Zhejiang Satellite TV and Korean SBS’. The credits at the end of the show read, in Chinese Lian He Zhi Zuo (in the first season, 2014) and Lian He Chu Pin (in the second and third season, 2015 and 2016), both of which can be translated as ‘co-production’. The formal transaction in such cases is often limited to videos of the completed Korean show, a very sketchy production bible, and the provision of co-production services.

The Korean production bible sometimes made me laugh...it was almost discussing the basic principles of television production, such as that the rocker arm should be lower than the ceiling if you are producing an indoor show. The production bible is not the focus of their exports. That is quite different from a Western format show. (interview with C2, Chinese scriptwriter, 22 July 2015)

There are two main reasons why Korean format shows, at least in the two reality shows that the author observed in Zhejiang Satellite TV, do not have a detailed production bible. First, Korean reality shows cannot be summarized into a general format of rules as is standard for Western shows. Korean reality shows are drama-based and the scriptwriter plays a decisive role. The latter is usually responsible for the overall design of the show. It is hard to formalize this tacit knowledge into a production bible, as a package, since ‘every episode needs its own production bible’ (interview with C5, Chinese director, 6 August 2015). Secondly, the consultant-orientated model gives the format owner a better commercial return than a simple copyright trade. According to the producer of *Hurry Up, Brother*, the copyright fee for a formatted show is not very attractive. However, if SBS works with a local broadcaster in a co-operation model, similar to the classic co-production model (Chalaby 2012), the commercial rewards are much greater. As one administrator told us:

Without a detailed production bible, the Koreans can send their professionals to every country once those countries buy format shows, and get money from it. If you have a detailed production bible, then it is quite likely you can share this bible with other channels, and then the Koreans may lose the chance to make money from the other channel in the future. If you don't have a production bible, then you have to ask them to help you next time. (interview with C3, administrative staff member, 10 August 2015)

On the other hand, the Korean consultants are much more interventionist than is common with Western co-productions. Indeed, it is hard to call them ‘consultants’ because their role is much more extensive than that of the travelling consultant as defined by most Western format shows that go to local markets where the big format producers where the big format producers like Endemol and Freemantle media either do not have their own production subsidiaries or have only very recently established them. Most of the travelling consultants from Western shows visit local teams for around one or two days before filming and stay in the field around five days, although some do indeed stay considerably longer.

Then they leave because the production bible has already listed almost everything that the local team needs to know (interview with C4, Chinese director, 3 July 2015). However, since the Korean production bible does not contain the same amount of details, Korean consultants work with the local team in a way better described as a partnership. After the first season's work, almost all of the interviewees rely on the Korean travelling producers rather than the very limited written production bible. They started to distinguish Korean format shows from the traditional Western format shows. One senior director described Korean producers as a 'human bible':

The function of Korean producers is to replace the production bible. The most admirable thing about Korean producers is that their practical experience is so rich. They gave us suggestions in the field during the first five episodes. For example, in the first episodes of Season 1 (*Legend of the White Snake*, 2014, China: Zhejiang Satellite TV), we had a guest celebrity, Kim Jong Kook, from Korea. He was hunting the other celebrities in a game. So the Korean producers informed the entire camera team where and when Kim would be present. In order to emphasize the feeling of mystery and nervousness, the Korean producers also required another cameraman to record the other celebrities' responses. If we did this by ourselves, we probably would not have done this because we were not very experienced in reality show filming. (interview with C5, Chinese director, 6 August 2015)

These arrangements do not eliminate possible friction, but they do mean that the character of the relationship is changed. In place of disputes over the extent to which local productions can depart from the textual record of the original production, working with Korean vendors has, for the Chinese team, much more of the character of a co-production.

It was, however, a co-production in which there was, at the start, an inequality of knowledge, and thus of power, between the two constituents. The Korean company SBS had authorized Zhejiang Satellite TV to use the format rights of *Running Man* in China in return for a share of the proceeds, which included the advertisement revenue, overseas sales of the Chinese version, and proceeds from the sale of any related products. They were therefore much more like a partner than simply the vendor of a format. Since *Hurry Up, Brother* is a

joint production but not just an imported show, the Korean format owners' prime interest was in the success of the programme in order to maintain a strong brand in overseas markets and make money from successful local productions. Accordingly, they were not too concerned with recreating the same cultural patterns as had been successful in Korea since they recognized that they may not work in another country. Their attitude was that they had 'sent their best men to China to work with the Chinese team to ensure a good show in order to get good audience ratings' (interview with K2, Korean producer, 19 May 2015).

The Korean producers' role in the production changed over time from the highly directive to a much more relaxed and hands-off attitude as the Chinese team gained experience. In the first five episodes of Season I, SBS provided the ideas for filming and filmed the local show themselves. Chinese producers accompanied them, but really in the role of students learning from the Korean professionals. Korean producers, scriptwriters, cameramen, and sound recorders, together with all of the equipment, such as cameras, were flown in from Korea and stayed in China throughout the filming. After filming, all the materials were edited by a Chinese independent production company, but they were supervised by both Korean and Chinese producers. As one Chinese director put it:

They were 'teachers' and we were 'students' at that time. We observed and sometimes asked questions, but not that much. There were around fifty Korean people here to produce the first five episodes. One Korean director was observed by one Chinese director. But the communication process is very complicated since everything had to be translated by interpreters who sometimes did not translate word for word. (interview with C6, Chinese senior director, 14 September 2015)

Both the Korean team and their Chinese 'students' accepted this tutelage without serious conflicts. The Koreans did not employ the power of intervention and veto over Chinese ideas. They tended to use their experience and professional competence to 'teach' their Chinese colleagues. For example, in Season I, the main Korean director taught the Chinese general director about how to work with celebrities, suggesting that it was good

policy ‘not to let them know your intention, you should play tricks with them’. The Chinese director accepted this advice since it clearly came from a more experienced expert:

Even though we have many cultural differences, I agree that the Korean producer is more experienced with regard to the design of games and how to manipulate celebrities. So most of the time, regarding technology or the structure of the games, we followed their advice. (interview with C5, Chinese director, 6 August 2015)

In the early stages, there was a sense on the part of the Chinese participants that, in some respects, the Koreans were controlling what kinds of expertise could be transferred. For example, the Chinese were not allowed access to the Korean scriptwriters, who tended to work with a degree of isolation from the rest of the production team and were responsible for developing the overall shape of each episode. At least initially, the general feeling amongst the Chinese team was that the Koreans were not telling them the reasons for something but simply issuing operational instructions. The Koreans appeared to have made a conscious decision to try to keep important production knowledge from their Chinese collaborators, at least at the start of the collaboration. One Chinese director gained an insight into this through the indiscretion of a translator:

My general feeling about this is that when we asked questions about why they do so and so, they did not explain very much. Instead, they told the translator: do not tell them too much because the Chinese are very good at learning and imitating. (personal communication with C6, Chinese senior director, 14 September 2015)

While the Koreans attempted to sustain this arcane knowledge, for example sometimes conducting crucial editing tasks themselves rather than trusting their Chinese colleagues, maintaining this professional secrecy was difficult in practice. Both Korean and Chinese production cultures operate primarily by ‘learning through doing’ rather than the formulation of explicit rules, as in the western-style production bible, and the long-term collaboration inevitably meant that there was knowledge transfer. In particular, there were two very valuable lessons for the Chinese television professionals. The first was to identify all of the

job-types involved in a reality show and fully to understand their duties within it. The second was the need for thorough preparation. Before filming, all the directors played all of the games, tried out all the props and did everything celebrities would do before the real filming, in order to predict what playing these games would look like and the accuracy of the props. A senior manager from an independent company who worked with *Hurry Up, Brother* wrote an article about the procedures of editing a show like *Hurry Up, Brother* in July, 2015. The article spread very fast in Chinese social media since it was the first time that Chinese television professionals started to make their creative workflow more ‘scientific’ in the sense of providing systematic guidelines as to running a successful production. As a senior director put it:

The first season of *Hurry Up, Brother* for us was experimental. We finally figured out every position in a reality show and their duties. We have more than 200 people in our entire team. There is a very detailed division of labour in this production: who is director, who is scriptwriter, who is undertaking the business work, and so on. Every job is very detailed; everyone takes responsibility for their work. (interview with C6, Chinese senior director, 14 September 2015)

Compromises due to cultural differences and ideological controls

As a consequence of the increasing sophistication of the Chinese team, the tutoring role of Korean producers gradually faded as the series matured. From the sixth episode of Season I (*Escape from Xiushan Island*, 2014, China: Zhejiang Satellite TV), SBS had less direct input. Most of the Korean production team returned home, with only around ten Korean directors remaining in the field working with the Chinese team. From the start of Season II, the Chinese team worked even more independently, taking more control of the whole process from filming to editing. They began to take independent decisions, finding ways to negotiate with their Korean partners. As one Chinese editor, from an independent production company hired by Zhejiang TV specifically for this project, remarked:

We can use the Korean directors' professionalism to improve the design of games, but with regard to the name-tag ripping game, which is more involved with logic and storytelling, we follow the Chinese director's views. Because we are all Chinese, we have our common cultural understanding. (interview with C7, Chinese editor, 16 June 2015)

If in the first stage, the local team learned from Korean 'teachers', later on they only listened to their opinions selectively, particularly when they related to cultural issues. The value of this selective attention was apparent to the Koreans as much as to the Chinese team. During the first season, K3, one of the Korean producers, had the responsibility for summarizing all of the humorous themes that emerged in the course of video editing and producing appropriate subtitles. His account of the limits of trying to produce humour through translation is very clear:

I watched the material with my translator, who translated Chinese into Korean for me. Then I wrote subtitles in Korean, which were translated by 12 translators back into Chinese. Then they showed the Chinese version to the local team. You know, subtitling involves both linguistic and cultural elements. It was very hard for me as a foreigner to capture these interesting plot developments in words. After viewing the subtitles, the local team decided to rewrite them themselves, because my version totally failed to fit the local context. [Interviewer: What was the big difference?] Mine were just not that funny and interesting. The jokes are different. I did not argue; I knew there was a difference. From then on, the subtitles were all written by Chinese producers. (interview with K3, Korean producer, 3 July 2015)

The local production team increasingly followed the principle that 'advice from the Koreans that is accepted by our senior producer will be accepted by the video editors too. If our senior producer does not accept it, then the video editors will not accept it either' (interview with C8, Chinese editor, 1 July 2015). In complicated cases, particularly those involving culturally specific elements of the production, the Korean team's opinion was not accepted by the directors and video editors unless it made sense in the Chinese context. The relationship between the Korean and local teams thus changed over time. At the beginning, the local team followed the Korean team's advice more or less completely. Their 'teachers'

were regarded as an unchallengeable power. However, gradually, the Koreans' opinions came to act more as a point of reference. The more knowledge and expertise the local team gained, and the more their show delivered good audience ratings, the more the Chinese team felt able to trust their own judgement and the less they deferred to the power of the format owner. For most of the local team, the format owners and their representatives did not represent an authority whose instructions it was necessary to follow. Instead, they were seen as providing a service and 'their (the Korean directors') power is derived from the effect produced by successful examples, not from direct instructions' (interview with C2, Chinese scriptwriter, 28 July 2015).

For their part, the Korean experts gradually adopted a flexible attitude towards Chinese suggestions and exigencies, and started consciously to take the Chinese context into account. The relationship between the two sides thus tended to become more equal. The Korean version of *Running Man* had standard colours of blue and yellow. When Korean animation producers came to China, they found that red worked better in China: even the colour-scheme of the Zhejiang producers' office was red. Hence, the Korean producers decided to change the standard colour scheme from 'blue and yellow' to 'red and golden yellow' in order to fit the local context (interview with K4, Korean producer, 1 July 2015).

In the Chinese context, ideological control was another big factor that Korean producers had to compromise with. One case was during the shooting of the first episode of Season II (*The Battle of Goddesses: Real and Fake Athena*, 2015, China: Zhejiang Satellite TV), in Chengdu. The famous film star Fan Bing Bing was contracted to make her first appearance as a guest in a reality show. There were almost 50,000 people surrounding the chosen location at the Chengdu International Finance Square, waiting to get a glimpse of the stars. The huge number of fans caused the local government serious concern about security risks. They instructed the production team to cancel their filming in Chengdu. The Chinese team was

unable to find another suitable venue for the ‘name-tag ripping’ game, which forms the climax of each show, and proposed substituting another game called ‘eagle and chicken’. The Korean team urged the Chinese very strongly to find a way to film the original game inside their hotel, but the latter cited security concerns and refused. The Korean director involved remarked:

We negotiated with the Chinese senior producer, but the producer could not make it happen, so then we had to accept it. There was nothing we could do about the local government, and it is a great pity. Name-tag ripping is the core of *Running Man*. But we have to compromise with the local situation and respect the local team’s decision. (interview with K3, Korean producer, 3 July 2015)

In such cases, Korean professional expertise and experience were not challenged by the Chinese team. The obstacle to filming the game was the local government and the only thing the Koreans could do was to compromise to fit Chinese conditions. In another case, that a Chinese editor wanted to cut a theme that, on the basis of general television production principles, should not be deleted, but whose inclusion would raise political difficulties. The Korean editing director responded to this Chinese editor, who was insisting on this ‘unprofessional’ change, by saying that ‘I know, that is because of SARFT. You do what you think is right’ (Observation in editing room, 10 May 2015).

Localization as a process of negotiations

The localization of *Running Man* into *Hurry Up, Brother* was thus very much a process of negotiations among different players rather than a simple cultural adaptation. Certainly, production knowledge and expertise was transferred from the Koreans to the Chinese production team through the mechanisms of joint work. While it seemed to some Chinese participants that the Koreans were initially rather reluctant teachers, the Chinese were avid students. The learning process was mostly concerned with the mastery of the technical apparatus of production, where the Chinese participants realized very clearly that the

Koreans, with decades of exposure to United States and Japanese techniques, had much to teach them. On the other hand, there were significant elements in the production where the need to adapt to relevant and popular cultural dynamics was essential and where the Chinese team eventually came to determine outcomes.

The localization of a format show is a process in which different factors play a part, and the parties involved need to negotiate with each other in order to reconcile their different interest and reach a successful agreement. Power in these negotiations can shift from imbalance to balance. In this case, the Koreans and the Chinese were both powerful players in the process of localization. They negotiated with each other and their relative power to determine the outcome changed over time, according to the dynamic transfer of knowledge and the success of the show.

Both cultural proximity and commercial reasons played a part in why Zhejiang Satellite TV agreed to use a 'human bible'. Both sides saw the 'co-produced' model as serving their commercial interests. This model better accommodated some of the cultural similarities and difference between Korean and Chinese cultures. These two countries share an East Asian culture in which most working experiences are quite flexible and knowledge is transferred by word of mouth and practical experience, not embedded in a formal set of prescriptions like a production bible. However, in the detailed process of localization, cultural differences were the major reason why the Korean professionals did not hold power all the time. They were obliged to consider the fact that Korean and Chinese cultures are different in important respects. They finally agreed to compromise over differences like humour, language, storytelling logic, and viewing habits. Those differences were the products of a local knowledge that was exclusive to the local Chinese team and were valuable resources of the local team. On cultural questions, it quickly became apparent to all parties that the Koreans, however expert they were in Korean culture, were hindered by cultural distance and

double translation and could not insist on their interpretations in such instances. The same was true with the external factors of governmental influence and ideological control. The Korean producers obviously could not challenge political power in such cases and, accordingly, they normally agreed to accept the Chinese team's decisions regarding such issues.

Conclusions

The first conclusion to be drawn from this investigation is that the universally applied terms 'global' and 'local' maybe be very useful but they are in fact inaccurate, at least in this case. *Running Man* was not produced by a disembodied global corporation employing citizens of the world to create a show aimed at a universal audience. On the contrary, it was produced by a Korean company, employing Korean staff, to create a show aimed very precisely at a Korean audience, operating in Korean conditions and resonating with their interpretation of Korean culture. The Chinese product, *Hurry Up, Brother*, was certainly not produced by a local company employing local staff for a local audience. It was produced by a major broadcaster with a national presence, employing staff from all over China, and operating under Chinese conditions. It did not employ the local Hangzhou dialect but the national language, Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese), its locations were not restricted to the local area, and it was aimed not at a provincial audience but, at the very least, at the Han majority of the Chinese population. It attempted to resonate with a version of the dominant national Chinese culture, not local Hangzhou culture. The very condition for its existence was its acceptance by a national regulatory authority, which further constrained its actual production. In both its original version and its Chinese avatar, this was a 'national' product and the exchanges at issue are more accurately described as 'international' than 'global' and 'local'. Whatever may be the case in other forms of cultural production, or in the trajectories

of other television formats, the evidence presented here does not fit easily into the commonplace formula.

Following from this, the evidence complicates our understanding of notions of the Korean wave, cultural proximity, and hybridization. The success of *Running Man* is undoubtedly part of the international success, particularly in East Asia, of a wide range of Korean cultural products that are covered by the term *Hallyu*. There is no doubt that the cultural proximity between Korea and China had a major impact on the nature of the production process. As a senior member of the Chinese team remarked:

The reason why a Korean reality show can be popular in China is that Korean culture is also part of general eastern culture. It pays attention to emotions and positive energy. Similarly, their production experiences were not written down in a production bible, but transmitted through people, words and mutual understanding, combined with an appreciation of the local audience's taste, and therefore depending on the local teams' professionalism and perception. (interview with C1, senior staff member, 13 August 2015)

However, the evidence collected from the production of *Hurry Up, Brother* is not that of the exclusive importance of cultural proximity but rather of the continuing relevance of cultural distance. It was precisely at the points at which the nuances of culture, for example in language and humour, were most important to the success of the Chinese version that all parties recognized that Korean models would not work in this new context and in which the decision-making process was handed over comprehensively to the Chinese team.

It is a commonplace to regard these new products as examples of a hybrid culture in which elements of two distinct cultural formations are fused to form a third, distinct and new product. This analysis demonstrates, however, that such processes are extremely uneven. In the case of the techniques of production appropriate to this kind of television, both parties perceived the starting relationship to be unequal and recognized that over time there was a direct transfer of such knowledge from one party to another. The Chinese team aspired to be

as technically competent as their Korean peers and aimed to achieve the same level of production expertise as they demonstrated. At the structural level, however, important elements of the Korean original survived more or less unaltered into the Chinese version. This continuity was particularly clear in the ‘name-tag ripping’ game, which was central to the structure and success of the Korean show and, as both Koreans and Chinese clearly recognized, occupied the same position in China. To the extent that it was absent from the Chengdu-based episode (*The Battle of Goddesses: Real and Fake Athena*, 2015) due to external pressures, it was recognized by both sides as major damage to the fabric of the show. In terms of the ways in which this structure was embodied there was a further differentiation: as noted above, in this dimension it was the Chinese team’s rootedness in their tacit knowledge of Chinese culture and politics that gave the latter their unchallengeable role as arbiters of language, humour and the fine decisions on video editing. In this case, at least, the traces of both original cultures are visible without too much effort in the production of the final hybrid product.

The final, and major, lesson of this analysis is that the process of creating a successful format-based programme in another culture is one of negotiation. Both the parties – Zhejiang Satellite TV and the Korean company’s production experts – were forced to work within constraints set by each other, although power was very unevenly distributed between them at the beginning. The relationship between the Chinese and Korean producers grew more equal over time, perhaps because of the mechanism that SBS used to license its product, and there was a clear sense that the kinds of knowledge being transferred were a matter for negotiation. Over time, the result of this was a transfer in the power to control the production from SBS to Zhejiang Satellite TV, but that major shift was reported by all parties as a relatively amicable change.

References

- Berry, Chris (2003), 'What is big about the big film?: De-westernizing the blockbuster in Korea and China', in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*, London: Routledge, pp. 217–29.
- Bowrey, Kathy and Handler, Michael (2014), 'Instituting copyright: reconciling copyright law and industry practice in the Australian film and television sector', in Kathy Bowrey and Michael Handler (eds), *Law and Creativity in the Age of the Entertainment Franchise*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 140–69.
- Chalaby, J. K. (2012), 'Producing TV content in a globalized intellectual property market: The emergence of the international production model', *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 9(3):pp. 19–39.
- ____ (2016), *The Format Age: Television's Entertainment Revolution*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Chua, Beng Huat and, Iwabuchi, Koichi (2008), *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Elasmar, M. G. (2014), *The Impact of International Television: A Paradigm Shift*, New York: Routledge.
- Escape from Xiushan Island*, 2014, China: Zhejiang Satellite TV.
- Esser, Andrea (2010), 'Television formats: Primetime staple, global market', *Popular Communication*, 8(4): pp. 273–92.
- Esser, Andrea, Smith, Iain Robert, and Bernal-Merino, Miguel (2016), *Media Across Borders: localising TV, Film and Video Games*, New York: Routledge.

- Feng, Charles G. C., Lau, T.Y., Atkin, David J. and Lin, Carolyn (2009), 'Exploring the evolution of digital television in China: An interplay between economic and political interests', *Telematics and Informatics*, 26(4):pp. 333–42.
- Glynn, Basil (2014), 'Approximating cultural proximity and accentuating cultural difference: Cross-border transformatinos in asian television drama', in Jeongmee Kim (ed.), *Reading Asian Television Drama: Crossing Borders and Breaking Boundaries*, London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, pp. 47–74.
- Gottlieb, N.-l. E. (2010), 'Free to air? Legal protection for TV program formats', The Law & Economics, Olin Working Paper Series No. 513, Chicago: the University of Chicago Coase-Sandor Institute.
- Hong, Junhao, Yanmei Lv, and William Zou (2009), 'CCTV in the reform years: A new model for china's television?', in Ying Zhu and Chris Berry (eds), *TV China*, Bloomintong: Indiana University Press, pp. 40–56.
- Iwabuchi, Koichi (2002), *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- ____ (2013), 'Korean Wave and inter-Asian referencing', in Y. Kim (ed.), *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, New York: Routledge, pp. 43–56.
- Jin, Y. (2013), 'Hybridization of Korean popular culture: Films and online gaming', in Y. Kim (ed.), *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, New York: Routledge, pp. 148–62.
- Keane, Michael (2002), 'As a hundred television formats bloom, a thousand television stations con-tend', *Journal of Comtemporary China*, 11(30):pp. 5–16.

- ____ (2007), *Created in China: The Great New Leap Forward*, Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Keane, M. and Liu, B. (2009), 'Independent television production, TV formats and media diversity in China', in A. Moran (ed.), *TV Format Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, Bristol: Intellect, pp. 240-53.
- Keinonen, Heidi (2016), 'Television format as a site of cultural negotiation: Studying the structures, agencies and practices of format adaptation', *View Journal of European Television History and Culture.*, 5:9, pp. 60-71.
- Kim, Sujeong (2009), 'Interpreting transnational cultural practices', *Cultural Studies*, 23:5-6, pp. 736–55.
- Kim, Youna (2007), 'The rising East Asian "Wave": Korean media go global', in Kishan Thussu Daya (ed.), *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow*, New York: Routledge, p. 121-135.
- ____ (2013), *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, New York: Routledge.
- Kinnia, Yau Shuk-ting (2011), *East Asian Cinema and Cultural Heritage: From China, Hong Kong, Taiwan to Japan and South Korea*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kuwahara, Y. (2014), *The Korean Wave: Korean Popular Culture in Global Context*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kwon, Seung-Ho and Kim, Joseph (2014), 'The cultural industry policies of the Korean government and the Korean Wave', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 20(4):pp. 422–39.

- Lee, Jamie Shinhee (2007), 'Language and identity: Entertainers in South Korean pop culture', in M. Mantero (ed.), *Identity and Second Language Learning*, Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, pp. 283–303.
- ____ (2013), 'Hybridizing medialect and entertaining TV: Changing Korean reality', in Rani. Rubdy and Lubna Alsagoff. (ed.), *The Global-local Interface and Hybridity: Exploring Language and Identity*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters, pp. 170–89.
- Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes, Abé Markus (2015), *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Legend of the White Snake*, 2014, China: Zhejiang Satellite TV.
- Leung, Lisa (2008), 'Mediating nationalism and modernity: The transnationalization of korean dramas on Chinese (Satellite) TV', in Beng Huat Chua and Koichi Iwabuchi (eds), *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, p. 53-69.
- Li, Huailiang (2016), 'Chinese culutre "Going out": An overview of government policies and an analysis of challenges and opportunities for international collaboration', in Keane Michael (eds), *Handbook of Cutlural And Creative Indsutries in China*, Glos: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, pp. 129–42.
- Li, Luzhou (2013), 'Chinese television between the state and the market: An analysis of the business reality show win in China', *Media, Culture & Society*, 35:7, pp. 906–17.
- Linnett, Richard (2000), 'McCann creates sponsor-friendly TV program unit', *Advertising Age*, no. 71(35), pp. 4-5, 21 August, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/208331844?accountid=11440>. Accessed 25 April 2016.

- Lu, Di (2005), *Decoding Private Television* (in Chinese character 解析中国民营电视) ,
Shanghai: Fudan University Press.
- Lu, D., and Li, X (2014), 'Development report on the broadcasting and TV industry (2011–2012)', in P. A. Walker and Y. Hardy (eds), *China Cultural and Creative Industries Reports 2013*, Springer Berlin Heidelberg, pp. 42–59.
- Ma, Qingwen (2015), 'Bengpao Ba, Taiwang Hudong' (in Chinese Character 奔跑吧, 台网互动), *Rating China 收视中国*, 9, pp. 33–34, September,
<http://www.csm.com.cn/Content/2016/11-11/1054171231.html>. Accessed 20 January 2016.
- Maliangkay, Roads (2006), 'When the Korean Wave ripples', *IIAS Newsletter*, no. 42, Autumn, p. 15, Autumn, <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/12766>. Accessed 25 January 2016.
- McMillin, D. (2007), *International Media Studies*, Malden: Blackwell.
- Meyers, Cynthia B. (2014), *A Word from Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden age of Radio*, New York: Fordham University Press.
- Moran, Ablert (1998), *Copycat TV: Globalization, Program Formats and Cultural Identity*, Luton: University of Luton Press.
- ____ (2009), 'When TV formats are translated', in Ablert Moran (ed.), *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, Bristol: Intellect, pp. 39–54.
- Moran, Albert and Keane, Michael (2006), 'Cultural power in international TV format markets', *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 20(1):pp. 71–86.

Moran, Albert and Malbon, Justin (2006), *Understanding the Global TV Format*, Bristol: Intellect Books.

Olson, Erik L. and Thjomoe, Hans Mathias (2012), 'The relative performance of TV sponsorship versus television spot advertising', *European Journal of Marketing*, 46:11/12, pp. 1726–42.

Oren, T., and Shahaf, S. (2012), 'Introduction: Television formats- a global framework for TV studies', in S. Shahaf and T. Oren (eds), *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*, New York: Routledge, pp. 1–20.

Park, Sora (2005), 'The impact of media use and cultural exposure on the mutual perception of Koreans and Japanese', *Asian Journal of Communication*, 15:2, pp. 173–87.

Rivero, Y. M. (2012), 'Interpreting Cubanness, Americanness, and the sitcom: WPBT-PBS's *Que pasa U.S.A* (1975–1980)', in S. Shahaf and T. Oren (eds), *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*, New York: Routledge, pp. 90–108.

Ryoo, Woogjae (2009), 'Globalization, or the logic of cultural hybridization: the case of the Korean Wave', *Asian Journal of Communication*, 19(2):pp. 137–51.

SARFT (2015), '*Open Content of Administrative Approval Procedures in Broadcasting Programme*' (in Chinese character 广播影视方面行政审批事项公开目录), 28 May, http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/art/2015/5/28/art_1625_673.html. Accessed 16 April 2016.

Sassy Girl, 2015, China: Zhejiang Satellite TV.

SBS (2015), *Brilliant Vision*, Korean Seoul Broadcasting System, Seoul.

Shim, D. (2006), 'Hybridity and the rise of Korean popular culture in Asia', *Media, Culture & Society*, 28:1, pp. 25–44.

- Shin, Hyunjoon (2009a), 'Have you ever seen the rain? And who'll stop the rain?: The globalizing project of Korean pop (K-pop)', *Iner-Asia Cultural Studies*, 10(4): pp. 507–23.
- ____ (2009b), 'Reconsidering Transnational cultural flows of popular music in East Asia: Transbordering musicians in Japan and Korea searching for 'Asia'', *Korean Studies*, 33(1):pp. 101–23.
- Straubhaar, J. D. (2003), 'Choosing national TV: Cultural capital, language, and cultural proximity in Brazil', in Michael G. Elasmr (ed.), *The Impact of International Television: A Paradigm Shift*, London: Routledge, pp. 77–110.
- ____ (2007), *World Television: From Global To Local*, California and London: SAGE Publications.
- Sun, W., and Zhao, Y. (2009), 'Television culture with Chinese characteristics: The politics of compassion and education', in J. Tay and G. Turner (ed.), *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-broadcast Era*, New York: Routledge, pp. 96–104.
- The Battle of Goddesses - True and False Athena*, 2015, China: Zhejiang Satellite TV.
- Turner, G. (2009), 'Television and the nation: Does this matter any more?', in G. Turner and J. Tay (ed.), *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-broadcast Era*, New York: Routledge, pp. 54–64.
- Wu, Fan (2016), '2015 big events in China TV audience market' (in Chinese character 2015年中国电视收视市场大事件扫描), *Rating China 收视中国*, 3, pp. 5–22, March, <http://www.csm.com.cn/Content/2016/11-11/1054114042.html>. Accessed 30 May 2016.

Xu, Minghua (2013), 'Commercial reform and the political function of Chinese television',
Telematics and Informatics, 32(2):pp. 367–77.

Yu, Le (2016), 'Zhejiang Satellite TV occupies No. 1 audience rating list' (in Chinese
character 浙江卫视登顶综艺收视率榜单 《跑男》给力), 14 July,
<https://kknews.cc/entertainment/46zo5g.html>, Accessed 16 July 2015.

Zhang, Xiaoling (2011), *The Transformation of Political Communication in China: From
Propaganda to Hegemony*, Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.

Zhao, Yuezhi (2004), 'The state, the market, and media control in China', in Pradip N
Thomas and Zaharom Nain (eds), *Who Owns the Media?: Global Trends and Local
Resistance*, Penang: Southbound Sdn. Bhd, pp. 179–212.

Zhu, Ying (2008), *Television in Post-Reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership
and the Global Television Market*, New York: Routledge.

____ (2012), *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, New York: The New
Press.

Contributors details

Wenna Zeng is currently a doctoral candidate in the School of Communication at Hong Kong Baptist University. She worked as a journalist for seven years in a Chinese provincial TV channel, winning several national awards for her reporting. Her research interests include television production, format trading and production, the structure of the media industry, theories of power and globalization.

Colin Sparks is professor of media studies in the Department of Journalism at Hong Kong Baptist University. Before joining HKBU he worked for many years in School of Communication at the University of Westminster, where he directed the Communication and Media Research Institute. His research interests include media in societies experiencing rapid social, economic and political change, comparative media systems, and the impact of new media upon legacy media. He is an Editor of *Media, Culture and Society*.

Contacts:

E-mail: 13479636@life.hkbu.edu.hk

E-mail: sparksc@hkbu.edu.hk

Correspondence address:

HKBU School of Communication

CVA Building

5 Hereford Road

Kowloon Tong

Hong Kong

Note

1. In China, a good audience rating for an entertainment show is about 1%. For example, the highest average audience rating in the second season of 2016 in entertainment show is Zhejiang Satellite TV at 1.40%, while the second position is occupied by Hunan Satellite TV at 1.10%.(Yu 2016).