

# Talking Hospitality and Televising Ethno-national Boundaries in Contemporary Korea: Considering Korean TV Shows Featuring Foreigners

Television &amp; New Media

2018, Vol. 19(1) 59–74

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DOI: 10.1177/1527476417697196

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## Abstract

This essay examines Korean television shows that feature foreigners encountering Korean society. A recent example, *Non Summit*, presents a series of formal “summits,” borrowing the format of an international strategic meeting. The show enables Koreans to consider issues involving cultural differences, racial discrimination, and national hospitality, particularly related to immigrants. Indeed, Korean TV shows that focus on foreigners living in Korea are increasingly popular, which surely reflects changes in the Korean racial imagination along with the increased number of immigrants entering Korea in recent years. Nevertheless, despite their stated purpose of encouraging Korea to be a more harmonious multicultural society, programs like *Non Summit* seem to reproduce racialized colonialism in the context of contemporary global capitalism, particularly through their selections of participants and their efforts to paper over revealed cultural tensions.

## Keywords

talk show, multiculturalism, hospitality, reality TV, Korean TV, *Non Summit*

“Welcome to our show! Today’s guest is the well-known Korean celebrity, X. Hugely popular with young Koreans, she visits the foreign land of *Non Summit* today.” Thus opens the South Korean television talk show, *Non Summit* (Bijeongsang Hoidam in

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Korean, sometimes called *Abnormal Summit*<sup>1</sup>; JTBC, 2014–). The show stars three would-be Korean “dignitaries”—that is, hosts—who preside over a panel typically consisting of twelve foreign participants all of whom are young (in their twenties or early thirties) and have lived in Korea for several years. During each week’s program, in a format borrowed from international conferences but without real diplomats—hence the “*Non*” in the title—the foreign panelists introduce favored sites and events from their home countries: for instance, an Italian participant describes Vatican City—explaining the symbolic global religious status of the small state. When he remarks that the official Vatican language is Latin and that there are ATMs (Automated Teller Machines) offering the option of completing transactions in Latin, his fellow panelists seem amused. A Japanese panelist talks about an artificial intelligence robot, called *Todai Robot*, which has just passed a college entrance exam; he also notes that Japanese researchers recently developed an AI (Artificial Intelligence) technology that simulates human emotions such as passion, love, and friendship. Then, a Canadian participant relates a story about a Canadian magician who floated on air while sitting in a café, enchanting the program’s other participants and, presumably, Korean viewers.

Into this studio, fully immersed in exotic stories and foreign expressions, Korean guests/celebrities are invited, addressing each week’s discussion topic, which often touches on concerns that are likely to involve young Koreans: the unpromising future, hypercompetitive job markets, difficult personal relationships with colleagues or families, and prospects for marriage. Foreign participants are expected to discuss these issues—or perhaps more accurately simply to listen, commiserate, or offer comfort. In one episode, the Korean guest laments, “I am unhappy although I achieved my life goal in my profession. Am I abnormal?” The French panelist replies that “Success equals happiness.” The Japanese panelist says, however, that “life is a series of processes. If you feel unhappy, find another goal.” Then the Belgian panelist encourages the Korean guest with a touching remark: “Hey, it is only one step in your life. If you have the courage to climb up each step in your life, you will *succeed happily*.” In this discussion, the panelists draw on their personal experiences and cultural knowledge, which of course may vary from country to country. Nevertheless, their sentiments converge on warm support for the Korean guests (and viewers who share their concerns), thereby transforming the studio—once filled with strange exoticism—into a warm and hospitable space.

Having launched in 2014, *Non Summit* has achieved considerable popularity among young Korean viewers.<sup>2</sup> This program in effect derives from a recent cultural preference for casting foreigners who have lived in Korea on television shows. Examples include *Love in Asia* (KBS, Korean Broadcasting System, 2006–2014), *Global Talk Show* (a.k.a. *Misuda*, KBS, 2006–2010), *World Boys* (Comedy TV, 2008), *Nice to Meet You, Parents of My Son/Daughter-in-Law* (SBS, Seoul Broadcasting System, 2007–2008), *Where Is My Friend’s Home* (JTBC, 2014–the present), and *Hello! Stranger* (MBC, Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation, 2014–2015). Early shows of this sort featured foreign spouses and workers, focusing on cultural assimilation in Korean society (*Love in Asia* in particular). Recent shows have preferred foreign college students and young professionals who describe how they experience living in

Korea, thereby cultivating tolerance for other cultures (e.g., *Global Talk Show, Nice to Meet You*). Other shows feature young Koreans leaving for adventurous journeys to foreign countries, where they learn not only to appreciate exotic scenery and foreign cultures but also to enjoy the warm hospitality of the people they meet (e.g., *Where Is My Friend's Home?*).

One may question why these TV shows featuring foreigners attract Korean viewers. Perhaps this cultural tendency reflects changes in Korean society, particularly related to a considerable increase in the population of migrant workers and foreign spouses in the country since the late 1990s. This change has, however, also brought on new social problems involving cultural differences and racial discrimination. TV shows featuring immigrants address these new social challenges, underscoring the necessity of cultivating tolerance of or hospitality toward this new group of “Koreans” as neighbors. South Korea, a country that has rarely adopted foreign immigrants enthusiastically, is unfamiliar with conflicts related to immigration, and now feels the need to learn about cultural differences and tolerance. Having received relatively few immigrants, Koreans have considered them a single ethnic group, “Hanminjok,” for a long time. Korean nationalism, grounded on a notion of one-blood ethnicity, solidified as Korea experienced dramatic historical events and trauma in modern times, including the Japanese occupation (1910–1945) and military dictatorships (the 1970s–1980s). The latter regimes promoted “pure-blood nationalism” to cope with these developments, hoping to consolidate Korean identity in the face of adversity. Over the course of this process, Korean society also developed negative impressions of ethnic hybridity: immigrants or the children of immigrant families were despised socially while being stereotyped as Tuigi (hybrid-blood), Ggamdunggi (blacks), and so on (Kwon 2013, 6; Shin 2006).

Under a governmental philosophy and cultural discourse based on a single ethnicity, Koreans have forgotten that they have hosted immigrants and incorporated ethnic hybridity into their society throughout history. Recent attention paid to foreigners and immigrants seems to reveal this largely concealed in-between space in the Korean racial imagination, touching on conflicts and tensions related to the ever-growing immigrant population today.<sup>3</sup> TV shows that feature immigrants or foreigners seem to stake out a certain ethical position in the context of cultural differences, promoting hospitality and kindness as new moral standards in a multicultural society.

To be sure, the new interest in hospitality has contributed to the Korean people's changing understanding of immigrants. It is also true that, through such cultural contemplation of hospitality and foreign cultures, Koreans have begun to reconsider Korea's social and cultural boundaries and the limits of Korean-ness. Nevertheless, “hospitality” here seems too naïve a term to represent the cultural mechanism needed to solve problems related to immigrants' complicated experiences in Korea (Rosello 2001). TV programs highlighting the virtues of hospitality also often treat the issue of multiculturalism within the context of tourism and commercialism, without acknowledging the latent racism or colonialism that looms over these immigrants' lives in Korea. In this way, such shows render the televised hospitality toward immigrants problematic.

With these considerations in mind, this article examines recent Korean TV shows that feature immigrants and foreigners living in Korea. I will focus on how these programs, in demonstrating the logic of hospitality, touch on social problems related to cultural newcomers. In addition, I will highlight recent changes in these programs, particularly in *Non Summit*, that treat the issue of hospitality more abstractly—while in so doing merely adopting the increasingly dominant neoliberal perspective of Korean political economy. I hope to explain how these programs reflect changes in Korean society regarding the influx of immigrants and official government policy toward multiculturalism, thereby helping to redraw Korean-ness in the national imagination.

## Televising a Multicultural Public Sphere, Changing Korean-ness

In the mid-1990s, Korean TV channels featured two foreigners, Ida Daussy and Robert Holley, who lived in (and were later naturalized as citizens of) Korea. To Korean viewers, who had rarely met foreigners—especially westerners—in their daily lives at that time, these foreign televisual presences were exotic and pleasantly amusing. Korean viewers enjoyed the unusual foreign perspectives as well as amusing happenings and misunderstandings that these westerners experienced during their stay in Korea. Once new foreign neighbors expressed their willingness to learn the Korean language and especially Korean culture, Korean viewers seemed ready to adopt them as “welcomed guests” (and later friends/family members). Since the late 1990s, however, the Korean government has adopted neoliberal globalization as a political and economic credo, increasing global population, capital, and labor flows into Korea. Since then, Koreans have witnessed growing numbers of foreigners and immigrants, with the number of immigrants reaching as many as 150 million in 2013.<sup>4</sup>

The ascendancy of neoliberalism, accompanied by the intensified influx of immigrants in the 2000s, has, however, brought a range of social conflicts and problems to Korean society. Immigrants come mostly from China (Korean Chinese or “Chosunjok” immigrants), Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Philippines; many are neither educated nor well paid. In this context, Koreans began to witness cases of mistreatment of foreign workers, increasing violence and crimes in immigrant-dwelling districts, and racial discrimination toward foreign spouses and children. (In fact, foreign spouses have had to bear up under the cold gaze of some Koreans who wonder if many of these “foreigners” have come to Korea through “purchased marriages.”) (Cho and Seo 2013). To regulate these problems and related anxieties, the Korean government issued a series of laws, including “Yeoseong Gyeolhon Iminja Gajok-ui Sahoi Tonghap Gibon Daechaek” (A Basic Policy for Social Consolidation of Female Spouses in Immigrant Families). The government also announced a proactive policy (the “official multicultural policy”<sup>5</sup>) toward immigrants. By issuing these laws, the Korean government promoted the advantages of grafting foreign cultures onto Korean society. For instance, the government argued that foreigners could help solve current social

problems such as the national low birth rate and that immigrant children would enrich the store of human capital in a globalized society, thereby cultivating the Korean public's tolerance of and hospitality toward immigrants (Lee 2008, 116–19).

Recent Korean TV shows that portray foreigners favorably seem to reflect this governmental effort to promote multiculturalism. An early example of such a program, *Love in Asia*, depicts foreign spouses struggling to adjust to Korean culture. In one episode, for instance, the camera follows a young woman from the Philippines, capturing her daily life but, by highlighting her weak mastery of the Korean language and her poverty, it seems to represent her with a degree of contempt. She even finds herself abused by her own family, sometimes being prevented from parenting her own child or from opening her own bank account,<sup>6</sup> intensifying her suffering as an immigrant in Korean society. After showing scenes of immigrants being mistreated, the show employs a voice-over narration: "She can bear with this difficulty because she wants to be a good mother." In this way, the show papers over the foreign spouse's misery by praising her courageous behavior, patience, and "sacrifice" so that she can be a "good wife," a "good mother," or even a "good daughter-in-law," seeking to transform this pathetic life story into a touching narrative of assimilation. In contrast, *Non Summit* shifts the focus to broader issues of cultural difference, racial discrimination, and national hospitality. The program features twelve foreigners who are called "national (non)summit panelists." They discuss concerns they seem to share with young Korean viewers,<sup>7</sup> including racism, the economy, the nature of happiness and hatred, and ethics. The show thus offers a site for "public talk" that evokes general notions of hospitality and multiculturalism, thereby constituting a "public sphere" in which Koreans can grow into global citizens.

In *Non Summit*, these "national representatives" introduce "hot issues" in their own countries, novel rituals, and funny episodes that reflect their cultural naïveté. In direct and indirect ways, they share the political and cultural perspectives of their native countries, such as U.S. policy on gender equality, racism, and education. In addition to serving as "foreign" representatives, these panelists, having lived in Korea for a while, are quite familiar with Korean culture and customs. In episode 51, for instance, a Chinese panelist debates with an American about U.S. foreign policy in Asia. At one point, the American calls him "the Chinese diplomat" as the camera captures the Chinese participant's reluctance to be characterized this way; he says "Hey, why are you so formal? I am your *hyeong*" (a friendly way of addressing senior male colleagues in Korea), shifting a debate that had become heated back to cordial talk.<sup>8</sup> In such ways, *Non Summit* showcases participants who are versed in both foreign knowledge and Korean culture. This synthesis of exoticism and familiarity helps build solidarity between foreigners and Korean guests (as well as viewers) during sometimes vigorous debates. Furthermore, this doubled position also discloses the ambivalent relationship that is offered to foreigners in Korean society: they are, as George Simmel ([1908] 1971, 143) observes, not like a stranger "who comes today and goes tomorrow," but rather like someone "who comes today and stays tomorrow"—yet remaining strangers, without being fully absorbed by the receiving society.

Here, this stranger status is also equivalent to the term “resident alien” in its literal meaning, a “boundary figure” in the Korean community, which becomes clearer as the panelists talk about national borders in episode 22. In that episode, panelists from Turkey, Italy, and France delineated how current national borders are drawn in their home countries, often preserving historical traces of conflicts, wars, and negotiations. As their discussions deepened, the German panelist introduced a photograph that captures an East German soldier fleeing to West Germany when the Berlin border was about to close in the aftermath of World War II. The soldier is frozen in the posture of jumping across a barbed-wire fence, wearing a military uniform and carrying no luggage, thereby emblemizing his desperation for freedom. While showing this “frozen moment of crossing,” the program plays solemn music, highlighting the rigid borders separating traditional nation-states, blocking the flow of ideas, people, and goods, thereby reinforcing the harshness and fear entangled with borders in contrast to the more fluid ones structuring contemporary Korea.

The show then focuses on other aspects of borders, as the Belgian panelist shows a photograph of a neighborhood in Baarle, a Belgian city bordering the Netherlands. In the photograph, a house is located in the upper-left corner, from which a lined pebble-block decoration stretches onto the pavement. The seemingly insignificant stone here is in effect the national border, demarcating Belgium and the Netherlands; the house in the picture actually belongs to two nations—divided by the little line of pebbles—showcasing the arbitrariness of national borders. However, people can cross the border easily, as in other European countries. In this regard, a German panelist adds, “My aunt goes to Denmark for grocery shopping, and I go to the Amsterdam airport on my return trip to Korea.” As such, the various references to borders in *Non Summit* indicate that national borders are constantly being reshaped performatively, while national cultures circulate concurrently between countries. This underscores the presence of flexible borders and people in fluctuating movement (especially immigrants), questioning the teleological traditions of past and present as well as the polarized historical sensibility of the archaic and the modern,<sup>9</sup> revealing a certain flexible median zone between borders.

Into this space between borders—or cultures, in this context—*Non Summit* brings exotic knowledge, imagination, and humor supplied by foreign experiences. Furthermore, Korean celebrities are “invited” into this in-between cultural space to consider a theme (agenda) that is perceived to concern contemporary Korean youngsters. For instance, a Korean guest, worried about the job market, confesses, “I want to get plastic surgery to look better at a job interview,” and then asks, “Am I abnormal?” (episode 11). The American panelist, seemingly perplexed by the Korean guest’s remark, replies that he is shocked to learn that Koreans include photographs with their résumés. He and the European panelists claim that it would be illegal to officially request a photograph on a résumé because it could result in discrimination based on race, gender, nationality, or age. In a similar vein, the Italian argues that many Korean companies require qualifications unnecessary for the given job positions, such as English language competence and degrees from good universities. The foreign panelists’ impressions of the Korean job market in this way extend to comments on other

aspects of Korean cultures, including Koreans' tendency to overvalue appearance, university degrees, and family backgrounds, any of which may result in discrimination. In this sense, these foreign perspectives suggest that some Korean norms may be politically incorrect, or even potentially shameful.

*Non Summit* also treats issues that have been rarely acknowledged in the Korean public domain, such as cohabitation without marriage (episode 2), homosexuality, communism, and the fraught relationship with North Korea, thereby granting opportunities to consider unnoticed facets or alternative modes of living in Korean culture. Here, the other side of culture can be understood as the element in Korean life that has been excluded in the process of establishing cultural norms. Thus, *Non Summit* discussions reveal "the strangers within" of Korean society. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva understands strangers through their close relationship with the self. As Kristeva (1991, 103) asserts, foreignness is born when the archaic, narcissistic self deserts—and simultaneously projects itself upon—"what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself." However, such primal repression is never complete and, as one encounters foreigners, or those who do not belong to the nation in which they reside (or live under the state's jurisdiction), this moment often provokes a confrontation with one's own foreignness and doubt about one's sense of boundaries (Kristeva 1991). In this light, the presence of strangers always troubles the boundary of the same, in the sense of society, the subject, and the self. As such, the presence of foreigners, or *strangers qua strangers*, casts doubt on the certainty of Korean-ness and calls attention to the exclusions that ground the nation's commonality and ethical-political character. In this sense, as *Non Summit* addresses issues related to Korean norms and hospitality toward other cultures, the program creates a public sphere where it is possible to confront "strangers" in Korean society in all their permutations. In its effort to reexamine Korean culture through foreign lenses, the show thus discloses the artificiality of national norms, which are often demarcated by prejudice, custom, piety, or precedent.

### **"The [Korean] Is Comparison": Redrawing a New Line of Comparison**

Despite governmental efforts and cultural discourse promoting a multicultural society, immigrants continue to be perceived as threats and as sources of chaos in the Korean popular imagination. Urban districts populated by immigrants such as Chinatown Incheon have often been depicted in ominous tones in Korean newspapers and public discourse. Foreigners have been portrayed as prone to crime and violence, thereby triggering anxiety over national as well as job security. Such negative public images of immigrants resonate with the lingering racial distance the Korean people maintain from this new group of Koreans. More significantly, this racial distance shifts all too easily into a form of racism,<sup>10</sup> in which cultural discourses, such as foreigner-featuring TV shows, engage.

For its part, *Love in Asia* has continued to solicit sympathy for and promote hospitality toward foreign Others depicted as marginalized (especially, as I observe later, foreign spouses of native Koreans), while acknowledging that the cultural majority

should respect and welcome minority groups (I.-y. Kim et al. 2009). In particular, the show treats the difficulties that foreign spouses encounter living in Korea—no matter how secure their marriages are—depicting in particular how they came to Korea, how much they miss their home countries, and how they struggle to adjust to Korean customs and be good parents in immigrant families. Seeking to render their personal stories of love and suffering touching, *Love in Asia* joins the Korean government's effort to manage social problems related to immigrants. Nevertheless, the show also depicts these foreign spouses, who are typically young, poor, and uneducated, as having neither proper professions nor strong Korean language skills. Here, the presence of the women—including scenes in which they are misrepresented or even mistreated—seems to disclose cultural tension, even if inadvertently, and thus serves as a spectacle of ethnic Otherness in Korean society.

*Non Summit*, however, approaches issues of multiculturalism differently, focusing on broader questions about racism, discrimination, and Korean culture and customs seen through foreigners' eyes. For instance, in episode 22, *Non Summit* deals with gender and racial discrimination in Korea. The participants comment on daily racist practices and share anecdotes related to racism in their home countries or other global regions; they also talk about how their countries have struggled to overcome racist behaviors and violence, thereby helping to identify methods for resolving a recently growing strain of racism in Korean society. Nevertheless, the program never delves into these sensitive issues fully, nor do the panelists reach consensus. Once their debates become even slightly heated, the show interrupts the discussion with comic gestures or jokes, thereby preventing the "talk" from becoming overly serious (as a Korean panelist once said, the show is "not EBS [Educational Broadcasting Service] but an entertainment show!"). In addition, the host panelists often conclude their discussions with bland, sunny platitudes: "*Non Summit* dreams of a healthy global society in which every youth can live without racism [or happily, in peace, etc.]." Such closing remarks seem to advocate solidarity with "international brothers," or perhaps a transnational, cosmopolitan citizenship, as a desirable mode supplementing citizenship in the nation-state.

Here, the philosophy of the show, reflected in its effort to suture cultural divides by cutting off actual debates with gentle humor and idealism, reflects the Korean government's pursuit of a multicultural society through nothing more than solicitation of tolerance toward other races and cultures. Nevertheless, cosmopolitan citizenship does not seem possible in reality; as Chantal Mouffe (1999) claims, all human communities are constituted by "closure," a process of demarcation through the inclusion–exclusion of potential members. People, however, often fail to acknowledge this process of closure that in effect produces a community (Mouffe 1999). In its initial emphasis on building a healthy multicultural society, the Korean government touted the benefits of having multiple races living together, particularly, as I have noted, in being able to function effectively in global society and compete in global markets. However, Korean multiculturalism commingles with complicated sensibilities of admiration, sympathy, and revulsion (I.-y. Kim et al. 2009, 71). Korean immigrant laws seem to favor foreign spouses over migrant workers and other foreigners; the Korean government grants



greater legal and financial support to multicultural families and their children, while work conditions demonstrate that migrant workers have not been fully supported, lacking full human rights and equal dignity (H. Kim 2006).

Considering that foreign spouses represented only 15.9 percent of the entire population of foreigners or immigrants living in Korea in 2012,<sup>11</sup> Jiyoung Cho and Jungmin Seo (2013) argue that the government prefers foreign spouses because they are more willing to adopt traditional Korean cultural norms while bearing and raising Korean babies. In other words, foreign spouses can be incorporated into Korean national territory with very little change in existing national political or cultural boundaries. In this light, Korean society's embrace of foreigners defers to the long-standing culture of Korean-ness based on the stubborn national image of "pure blood" (blood ties and family) according to which Korean identity precludes ethnic hybridity (Cho and Seo 2013). Also, the principle of exclusion–inclusion still works in the context of Korean policy promoting multiculturalism, helping to utilize the government's multicultural philosophy as an effective instrument with which to forge a new mode of Korean nationalism.

Moreover, as many Korean scholars have argued, this selective foreign policy, or "gendered migration policy," reflects a double bind whereby the host society grants hospitality to certain groups of foreigners while withholding respect from other groups. This is in effect to embrace a form of orientalism.<sup>12</sup> In fact, while *Love in Asia* advocates extending hospitality to female immigrants from poor countries, *Non Summit* features male participants, mostly from European countries or North America (with only a few from, say, Africa or Nepal scattered here and there). *Non Summit* panelists are all educated and successful in their careers: they include a Canadian computer gamer who won a world championship, an executive at a car dealership, an MA student at a top Korean university, a fashion model, and so on; these panelists also wear fashionable clothes and at times seem to pose like fashion models—they represent physically idealized citizens in today's consumer culture. As these panelists express multicultural values and promote public ethics, the show conveys not only the benefits of multiculturalism but also Korean society's implicit respect for the voices of western Others (as opposed to Others from the Global South; Sohn 2015). At the same time, however, many Koreans remain contemptuous of immigrants from Asian and African countries. In particular, Korean Chinese and Asian laborers have often been negatively stereotyped, making this group the primary cultural Others in contemporary Korean racial thinking, an alien class upon which Korean society dumps its cultural conflicts and anxieties.

Here, Koreans' attitudes toward foreigners seem to apply the lingering paradigm of global colonialism, which encourages an orientalist perspective, echoing Franz Fanon's famous assertion that "the black man is comparison." As Fanon (1967, 186–87) observes, colonized black subjects enact contempt for other colonized people, particularly by adopting a white perspective and judging other blacks through would-be white eyes. In this light, one may say that, in Korean society, where immigration has never been a contentious issue until recently, immigrants have now become the objects of a new racism in politics.<sup>13</sup> It is in keeping with this tendency in Korean politics that the ongoing rearrangement of Korean racial geography, which is occurring in the midst of a major influx of immigrants, remains conceptually implicated in the

invalidated logics of neocolonialism and the spread of global capital—with a deep vein of Korean nationalism—thereby reorienting racial conflict in line with the newly demarcated boundary of Korean nationalism. In this sense, society's movement toward multiculturalism, by soliciting hospitality toward immigrants, fails to undermine the deeper reality of racism; instead, Korean society, despite superficial efforts to advocate for multiculturalism, continues to occupy a contemporary global racial geography which, although it has been changing, remains based on exclusion–inclusion, albeit in a new form.

This proximity to neocolonialism and neoliberalism informs the logic of *Non Summit*, as the show's preference for a white, male-centered global society clearly demonstrates. In addition, while maintaining its manifest preference for tolerance and hospitality toward marginalized groups and making a public show of challenging society's prejudices, *Non Summit* often touches on issues that are rarely discussed in Korea, such as the social hierarchy (episode 30) and youth unemployment (episode 73). In these discussions, the show seems to challenge existing Korean nationalism and the state's authority. However, as Heejeong Sohn (2015) indicates, when *Non Summit* addresses the global economic system, it seems merely to reiterate the old Korean nationalism. While discussing social hierarchy and equality in the capitalist system, German and American panelists claim that society, as a natural result of competition, inevitably consists of a wealthy group and the poor. Even Russian and Chinese panelists, who came from formerly socialist countries, say that there is a social hierarchy in communism and that inequality might be more severe in such countries than under capitalist regimes. These remarks (and even testimonies relating personal experiences) imply the invalidity of communism and the superiority of capitalism. In this sense, as Sohn claims, this show, despite its public effort to advocate for multiculturalism, discloses its preference for global capitalism and neoliberalism as pervasive rubrics in contemporary Korean society. Although on the surface it promotes the lofty sentiment of multiculturalism, then, *Non Summit* (and other TV shows that feature foreigners) merely shift support from one mode of nationalism to another. Furthermore, the show's multicultural discourse can also be considered an instrument for a new form of racism in Korean society, one that fuses western norms with traditional Korean norms to demarcate foreign Others.

## **Hospitality for the Primitive Other, Traveling in Friends' Lands**

*Where Is My Friend's Home?* is a spin-off in which foreign *Non Summit* panelists take other panelists to their home countries; they bring their "friends" to their hometowns or to well-known tourist sites. In these episodes, Koreans visit the very sites that their foreign counterparts have introduced in *Non Summit*: scenic natural wonders, historical museums, and ancient palaces and cathedrals as well as popular tourist sites and restaurants—in Italy, France, Nepal, or Germany. They also invite these friends to meet their families and childhood friends, showing them cherished places and objects with special meaning. Korean viewers are invited to travel alongside these *Non Summit*

panelists, feeling like (welcomed) guests in their foreign friends' houses, enjoying the hospitality (as if viewing these programs means becoming friends through the transfer of hospitality). One might argue that the program performs Korean viewers' passion for foreign countries, particularly their attraction to the exoticism of unknown lands. Here, it is the foreign panelists who guide the travels, hosting the Korean panelists (and viewers) who once hosted them.

When they visit Italy, for instance, the Italian Alberto brings his friends to Tuscany, where they rent a farmer's house for a night's stay. As they wake up in the morning, they are amazed by the fresh air, the glint of morning dew shining in the sun, and the smell of soil in the wild vineyard that seems to stretch endlessly. The charming display of preindustrial implements and artifacts in an historical vineyard proclaims the immediacy of use value, and each object is situated as part of a peasant culture that had been thought long dead. The vivid scenery offers an escape from busy contemporary life, from the contamination of the "fallen [and secular] world" (in Walter Benjamin's sense) (Benjamin 1965, 243), revealing the Otherness of an exotic country.

As the *Non Summit* panelists stroll through renowned cathedrals and palaces or a square in Florence teeming with bicycles, they also hear of local customs, tales, and bygone traditions, thereby providing the Korean visitors with "authentic" stories and vivid images of celebrated sites of antiquity. While visiting famous tourist sites, or sipping espresso in a Venetian café, they might be impressed to see uncovered the hidden facets of a well-known site of human history in an atmosphere of antiquity—a "true glimpse" of the local culture, or the Other. In this sense, their trip constitutes an encounter with the Other—the foreign land, the unfamiliar surroundings, and the warmly welcoming hosts. More importantly, these experiences are encounters with their own expectations of iconic sites, and thus every moment has the potential to make them aware of the archaic Other within them which is, as Kristeva (1991) puts it, a discovery of the self.

This awareness of the archaic Other appears in manifest form when the group follows Alberto along a path he often took on boyhood journeys. As these "friends" ride bikes wearing similar attire and display similar postures before the camera, their voyage into foreign lands extends into Alberto's personal memory. As they then travel to Germany, their journey again transforms under the panelist Daniel's guidance, with his personal memory connecting them to a broader human history. While in Germany, Daniel takes his friends to the Dachau concentration camp—now preserved as a memorial to Holocaust victims. As they arrive at the front gate, they assume sorrowful expressions. They wander about, observing traces of the camp: the railroad tracks over which the "death trains" brought victims, a wooden cart for carrying corpses, narrow and filthy barracks. As the participants arrive at the crematorium, the very place in which thousands of people were exterminated, the camera captures their shock as they struggle while confronting such an unbearable history.

Soon after, however, the camera pulls back, holding on Daniel sitting in the empty lot before the crematorium. He remains silent, contemplating empty traces of the past—the seemingly indifferent trees, pebbles, and empty tracks, all of which surely punctuate "the void" in history, or the unspeakable past. For Daniel, a member of the

second generation following the perpetrators of the Holocaust, this encounter with the abyss of history is surely charged with shame and guilt, imposing on him a certain obligation “to know.” This ethical confrontation, however, becomes profound because the traumatic past here is neither knowable nor accessible, thereby leaving him (and the viewers) feeling obligated to history (or the historical Other).

This confrontation with the historical void and obligation to unbearable knowledge resonates with what Emmanuel Levinas (1969) posits as the moment at which one cannot avoid adopting an ethical attitude toward the Other. In his discussion of knowledge and ethics, Levinas highlights the subject’s awareness of the Other. The subject, through the gesture of opening to, or offering hospitality to, a foreigner, feels obligated to know about the Other. Nevertheless, this obligation reaches its limit in the subject’s knowledge—the subject cannot recognize what he fails to know and is not aware of the limits of his own comprehensive faculty. Thus, “the presence of the other is equivalent to this calling into question of [his own] joyous possession of the world” (Levinas 1969, 75–76, author’s revision), and the calling into question itself is ethics, interrupting one’s comprehension, certainty, and image of the world.

In *Where Is My Friend’s Home?* the *Non Summit* panelists’ trip gives them the opportunity to discover foreign lands—and the painful awareness of historical debts embedded in the Others. Also, while the panelists discuss cultural differences, tolerance, and hospitality, *Non Summit* addresses the limits of national standards, of the self’s knowledge, and of any given country’s ethics (a boundary demarcated by human nature). In this light, travel and discussion about the Other, extending hospitality toward and accepting it from foreigners in these programs, are opportunities to gain this awareness of the absolute Other, an awareness that goes beyond the idea, pervasive in multiculturalist discourses, of recognizing and respecting the Other, because this accommodative gesture only defines and preserves the difference between hosts and foreigners. In fact, Levinasian hospitality is that which acknowledges that the Other cannot be interpreted or translated into the host’s structures of living; instead, it requires the host to work actively against this inclination. The host thus must be open to transformation in the unique presence of the Other. It is therefore a consideration of the strangers’ presence that obligates those offering hospitality (Korean viewers) to open themselves to alternative ways of being and seeing that are incarnated by the strangers (Levinas 1981).

In episode 41, *Non Summit* discusses ethics in various countries—the very standard that demarcates any given community and that community members must meet to be considered normal. The foreign panelists introduce their home nations’ systems of ethics, their national education systems, their laws and regulations. They are also asked to consider each other’s ethical standards, through which the program manifestly showcases the issue of hospitality and tolerance: the hosts ask questions such as “What would be the most ethical behavior if you were to witness your friend steal money in the classroom?” Panelists from European countries argue that the student should advise the friend to return the money before reporting the situation to his teacher. The Europeans explain that such behavior is considered ethical, particularly because their countries, after experiencing World War II, value human fraternity above all. The act

of stealing is wrong, but reporting the act to the teacher would disrupt and perhaps destroy the relationship with the friend. So, instead of having the disciplinary system enforce the rule, it is better to use friendly persuasion to right the wrong. The American panelist says, however, that the student should go directly to the teacher instead of attempting to resolve it by himself or herself; he adds that with so many distinct ethnic groups in the United States, most people acknowledge the existence of differing ethical standards even in a single community. In this way, the discussion discloses the differences and distance that underlie national ethical norms, thereby opening up the in-between space in which issues involving foreigners play out.

Considering this candid and forthright approach to hospitality regarding the Other, it is worth noting that *Non Summit* discussions take place in the Korean language. Indeed, Korean is the official language in most of these foreigner-casting programs. Interestingly, *Non Summit* panelists without exception speak Korean almost fluently, a rarity for foreigners. Here, as these participants talk about public issues, Korean viewers might consider it amusing that their own language has been used as the standard language for “global talk.” Viewers might also feel they can access foreign cultures easily while listening to the panelists’ stories—thanks to multiculturalism, without physical or linguistic barriers. Nevertheless, it is also true that obligating these foreign participants to speak Korean may constitute a sort of violence against them because, as Jacques Derrida (2005, 7) asserts, “it is perhaps the first violence which the foreigner undergoes: to have to claim his rights in a language he does not speak.”

In fact, the panelists’ native languages often subject them to mutual “judgment”: they can feel embarrassed when they speak with a noticeable foreign accent. For migrant workers in Korean society, this situation is worse: they often experience linguistic barriers in their daily lives, forcing them into an asymmetrical position from which to fight for their rights. When they cannot speak properly, they are at risk of being summarily dismissed, which constitutes linguistic discrimination. In this light, the official (or even culturally “desirable”) use of Korean surely functions as a form of violence against foreigners who have decided to live in Korean society.

Thus, by using Korean as its standard language, *Non Summit* contributes to reproducing this common violence against foreigners, suggesting that the reestablished national norms buttressed by the Korean language might be inhospitable to foreigners. In this sense, it may be also true that the trend in Korean society (and in recent Korean TV shows) toward cultivating global citizenship can be problematic, not only because Korean multicultural policy has been biased but also because it invites Korean viewers to indulge in watching TV spectacles in which Korean culture and language are at work as a global standard rather than learning foreign perspectives they might apply to Korean culture.

As of this writing, *Non Summit* has been on the air for two years. Most of the show’s viewers are young Koreans in their twenties through forties. They may become infatuated with the foreign cultures introduced in *Non Summit* and even identify with their favorite participants. As foreigners discuss Korean culture and national norms, Korean viewers also hear opinions formulated according to foreign standards. It is within this context of openness toward foreign cultures that young Korean viewers

learn about the artificiality of Korean national boundaries. The opportunity to contemplate issues of tolerance and hospitality thereby reveals the shared space left for the Self and the Other. In fact, viewers might reflect a cultural trend among young Koreans who fantasize about foreign lands.<sup>14</sup> As such, the discursive space that *Non Summit* grants is a fantasy space into which Korean participants (Korean hosts and viewers) are invited; in such a space, they can also consider issues that arise in their daily lives.

Yet *Non Summit* seems to follow the logic of neoliberalism. Laurie Ouellette (2004) suggests that TV talk shows, particularly programs in which participants attempt to judge other people's behaviors and customs, tend to create a certain sort of citizen by encouraging viewers to learn techniques of self-governance in a neoliberal society. Furthermore, as such encounters with foreign Others and reconsiderations of Korean national culture take place every week in Korean viewers' homes, the programs turn these viewers into "global citizens" who are eager to learn about hospitality toward foreignness. However, it is also true that this eagerness for global citizenship in effect reinforces existing normative orders in contemporary society, which are customarily male, bourgeois, and Eurocentric. In this light, viewers are continuously interpellated into the temporal flow of contemporary Korea, which *Non Summit* challenges and reasserts simultaneously.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The author received financial support from Korea University for the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

### Notes

1. The formulation "non-summit" also signifies being "abnormal" in Korean, which resonates with the show's challenge to Korean normality.
2. In 2015, *Non Summit* received a 6-percent rating on average, which was high for a cable TV show (JTBC 2015).
3. For an example, see Shin (2006).
4. See Korea Immigration Service (2013). Through this influx of migrant workers and the adoption of neoliberalism, the Korean government attempted to resolve a chronic unemployment problem, which has become increasingly serious since the late 1990s (Cho and Seo 2013).
5. The official multicultural policy is contrasted with the unofficial policy that is designed to promote multiculturalism on the personal level.
6. See, for instance, episodes 136 and 154.
7. In fact, the program invites viewers to propose discussion topics through its home page.
8. In addition, they also know that junior colleagues are supposed to set the table for senior colleagues at restaurants and behave similarly in Korean work culture.

9. In this regard, Julia Kristeva describes national borders as an intersection between two temporalities: “the process of identity constituted by historical sedimentation (the pedagogical); and the loss of identity in the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative)” (Bhabha 1990, 304).
10. For instance, images of Chosunjok have remained negative and may even have become more negative in recent years (N. Kim 2015).
11. There were 932,983 foreigners in Korea as of December 31, 2012. This figure includes 148,498 foreign spouses (Korea Immigration Service 2012).
12. Several studies indicate this point. See, for instance, Cho and Seo (2013) and H. Kim (2006).
13. In this light, Etienne Balibar (1991, 20) describes “immigration as a substitute for the notion of race and a solvent of ‘class consciousness.’”
14. Recent statistics have shown that increasing numbers of young Koreans hope to live in foreign countries (Won and Moon 2015).

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