

## WHEN OLD MEETS NEW: AN ANALYSIS OF KOREAN TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE IN THE CONTEMPORARY REALITY TV SHOW *INFINITE CHALLENGE*

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In an attempt to explore how local traditional narrative manifests in a globalized media format, we analyzed five aesthetic elements of Korean traditional performances in *Infinite Challenge* (*Muban tojŏn*) in terms of the *sinmyŏng* narrative. In the *Infinite Challenge* show, the personae release pent-up energy through endless challenges, sustain positive attitudes towards life by wiping away tears through laughter, have fun with playful deception games or word play, act like childish fools (*pabo*) and pranksters (*kŏndal*) who indulge their unbound desires, and interact with participatory audiences in an open structure. Coupled with previous research confirming that traditional communication styles shape modes of expression in contemporary media content, we believe this study can provide empirical evidence to substantiate the creative potential of local traditional narrative in indigenizing global media programs.

Keywords: media narrative, reality TV show, global-local nexus, *sinmyŏng*, Korean traditional performances

*Infinite Challenge* (*Muban tojŏn*) is a popular reality TV show that has aired every Saturday evening in South Korea since 2005. Its archetypal format was that Yu Chae-sŏk, the host-in-chief of the show, and the other four-to-six cast members struggled to carry out reckless or unfeasible tasks often under unusual circumstances. The show has developed various formats (e.g., challenging tasks, scavenger hunts, sports competitions, travel, situation comedy, musicals, and events) and produced derivative content (e.g., music festivals, design exhibitions,

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public campaigns, merchandise, and emoticons) based on its active and loyal fans. Therefore, some scholars refer to the show as a platform with strong brand power rather than a program (Yang 2014). Eleven times consecutively Gallup Korea's monthly research poll ranked it as Koreans' favorite TV program.<sup>1</sup>

The popularity and influences of the show have also attracted academic attention such as Cho (2017), Kim (2014), and Yi and Cho (2010). Most studies investigate its characteristics as an entertainment TV show by focusing on its humor techniques, use of subtitles, characterized shows, and narrative strategies (Cho 2017, 465–469). Only recently, researchers have begun to illuminate the relationship between the show and Korean cultural traditions. For example, a recent study argues that Korean traditional theatrical performances are similar to real variety shows including *Infinite Challenge*, because both “set up a stage around the living space, attract audiences to willingly approach the stage and participate in the theatre, and let them enjoy their participation” (Kim 2014, 95).

Similarly, we claim that reasons for the show's success include that it followed the reality TV show format, a globalized media format since the 2000s (DeVolld 2011), and adopted Korean traditional aesthetics. Here, Korean traditional aesthetics refers to an aesthetic principle of narrative structure embedded in Korean traditional folk performances such as *p'ansori* (dramatic narrative song), *t'alnori* (mask dance-drama), *kkoktugaksi norim* (traditional puppet play), and *p'ungmul* (drumming and dancing ensemble). These performances may relieve *han* (恨, lingering sorrow with resentment) and bring out *sinmyŏng* (an ecstatic experience) in an audience.<sup>2</sup> Although *han* was once considered to relate to virtually all Korean traditional arts, we prefer to refer to this aesthetic as the *sinmyŏng* narrative, which is conceived as storytelling whereby dramatis personae feel *sinmyŏng* because they release their pent-up emotion and thereby manifest potential vitality.

Based on the assertion by Kim (2014, 104–106) that real variety TV shows

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<sup>1</sup> An Yesul. “Mudo 11 kaewŏl yŏnsok sŏnhodo 1-wi” (*Infinite Challenge* has ranked first 11 times consecutively), *Star News*, January 27 (2014), accessed May 14, 2016, <http://news.joins.com/article/13749430>.

<sup>2</sup> Essentially, *sinmyŏng* is related to the relief of *han*, in that people experience *sinmyŏng* when they release pent-up negative emotions (traditionally, *han*). The original meaning of *sinmyŏng* was a mystical religious experience, but this was later conceptualized as an aesthetic experience or aesthetic principle embedded in artistic texts. It is now widely used as meaning ecstatic pleasure that we can experience in everyday life. The slogan “workplace of *sinmyŏng*” (*sinmyŏng nanin ilt'ŏ*) is a typical example. From the perspective of positive psychology, Han (2009, 84–86) regarded *sinmyŏng* as the Korean concept of happy experiences encompassing various attributes such as pleasure, excitement, enthusiasm, sympathy, immersion, self-affirmation, satisfaction, and other positive emotions.

share similarities with Korean traditional performances in terms of openness and expandability, we attempt to empirically examine which traditional aesthetic principles work in contemporary media content. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyze how the *sinmyŏng* narrative as a Korean traditional aesthetic manifests in *Infinite Challenge*, a contemporary reality TV show. We believe that this analysis can contribute to our understanding of how local traditional narrative meets and interplays with global contemporary media formats.

## **SINMYŎNG NARRATIVE AS KOREAN TRADITIONAL AESTHETICS**

### **Cultural Differences in Media Narratives**

A narrative is a cognitive framework by which humans make sense of the world and their time in it through stories (Escalas 1998, 267–289). A narrative has universality, because some archetypal stories are similar across the world. For example, the great floods narrative is found in different cultures (Lule 2003). However, cultural factors impact narrative styles, so some narrative styles are peculiar to cultural content.

Classic Hollywood cinema, conceptualized as American film that evolved between the 1910s and 1960s, typifies the classic Hollywood cinema narrative style (Bordwell and Thompson 1993). Characteristics of Hollywood narrative style include championing everyman heroes (e.g., cowboys, private detectives, or news reporters), clearly defining conflict, intensifying complications to a rising climax, and emphasizing formal closure through resolution (Atkin 2003). The telenovela, for example, a Latin American soap opera, also has its own narrative style. Some elements forming the basis of the telenovela include the standard ingredients of a love interest, complicated family relationships, unreal dialogue, and the poor striving to be rich (Pearson 2005).

The Chinese martial arts film genre is culturally sharable media content within East Asia. Its narrative style focuses on the juxtaposition of good and evil, and the hero is often a Confucian man with the virtues of chivalry, forbearance, and loyalty. The protagonist's actions are based on three motives: avenging a wrong, struggling for supremacy, or searching for treasure (Wang 2008). The Hindi narrative style in Indian films has an operatic/musical structure, in which the songs serve as para-narrative elements, because the story lines are used as pegs on which to hang songs, dances, fights, and other emotional ingredients (Inden 2013).

Similarly, Korea has its own traditional narrative style, namely the *sinmyǒng* narrative.

### Why *Sinmyǒng* Narrative?

The hero narrative is storytelling about a hero, the rags-to-riches narrative is about rising from being poor to being rich, the competition narrative is about competition, and the love narrative (i.e., romance) is about the emotion of love. Likewise, the *sinmyǒng* narrative is storytelling about the *sinmyǒng* emotion. The *sinmyǒng* narrative is a story in which dramatis personae feel *sinmyǒng*, because they release pent-up emotion, manifest potential vitality, and enhance self-value.

Upon viewing the *sinmyǒng* narrative, audiences may or may not experience *sinmyǒng* emotion. Contrary to the traditional view that the *sinmyǒng* narrative is storytelling that evokes the *sinmyǒng* emotion among audiences, whether audiences actually feel *sinmyǒng* is not a critical factor but a secondary consideration in determining what the *sinmyǒng* narrative is. This is similar to the love narrative (e.g., romantic comedy), in that the story of people's love affairs does not necessarily evoke the emotion of love among audience members. Contemporary theories of emotion expression firmly support this view (e.g., Battin, et al. 1992; Kelly 1998).

Even though the *sinmyǒng* narrative can be found in the folklore of Korean and other cultures, it has been more salient in Korean traditional performances since the late Chosŏn dynasty. Koreans usually refer to these performances as “plays of *sinmyǒng*” (*sinmyǒng p'uri*). As an aesthetic principle of textual structure in Korean traditional performances, the *sinmyǒng* narrative tells us how *sinmyǒng* emotion is evoked in stories while events are developed, characters interact, and time and places are positioned.

Some scholars refer to the Korean traditional narrative style as the “aesthetics of *han*.” *Han* was once regarded as a key aesthetic concept for Korean traditional arts and culture. However, recent criticism centers on the overestimation of *han* aesthetics during the colonial and military dictatorship period (Cho 2006). *Sinmyǒng* surfaced alternatively as a core aesthetic concept that captured the essence of folk theatrical performances. *Sinmyǒng* is a more appropriate concept for describing the traditional narrative than *han* is. Although using “*sinmyǒng* code” or “*sinmyǒng* aesthetics” rather than “*sinmyǒng* narrative” would be possible, we believe *sinmyǒng* narrative is more accurate. As a set of conventions or rules, code has broader meanings applicable to social or genetic codes. As such, *sinmyǒng* code can be applied to media content and other social contexts. For instance, *sinmyǒng* code can be used as a set of behavioral conventions or systems to evoke *sinmyǒng* among employees in a company. Furthermore, *sinmyǒng* aesthetics is mainly used

for works of art and focuses on beauty and the enjoyment thereof. Compared to *sinmyŏng* code or *sinmyŏng* aesthetics, *sinmyŏng* narrative emphasizes the development of events, characteristics of personae in the plot, the storyteller's viewpoint, the dynamics between producers and audiences, and the core theme of the program. Given that the terminology of narrative and storytelling is more frequently used to explain media culture than are code and aesthetics, and considering that recent reality TV shows strengthen narrativity, *sinmyŏng* narrative is more effective than *sinmyŏng* code or aesthetics in analyzing *Infinite Challenge*.

### Five Elements of the *Sinmyŏng* Narrative

Many scholars have attempted to investigate the nature of *sinmyŏng* aesthetics in various traditional performing arts including *t'alnori* (Cho 2006), *p'ansori* (Heo 2001), *kkoktugaksi norim* (Kim Hyŏngchŏl 2010), and *kut* (Kim 2009). For example, based on a comparison with Aristotelian catharsis and Indian rasa, Cho (2006, 297–361) illustrated characteristics of *sinmyŏng* aesthetics in *t'alnori*, namely amicable reconciliation between antagonists, an unfinished open structure, suggestive and playful words, active participation of awakened spectators, and the unity of God and human beings. Hŏ (2001, 151–196) proposed principles of *sinmyŏng* aesthetics in *p'ansori*, namely orientation towards *taedong* (great unity), strategies to make people both laugh and cry, the structure of play form, contrast between the narratives in the first and second halves, and the relative autonomy of parts.

Based on a review of previous literature regarding the characteristics of *sinmyŏng* aesthetics, Yun (2010) identified five elements of *sinmyŏng* narrative that can be applied to media content.<sup>3</sup> The following are particularly applicable to this analysis of *Infinite Challenge*. Yun's first element is the liberation of suppressed vitality, the release of pent-up emotions, and the manifestation of innate vigor (神氣發現). When people read a story in which personae feel *sinmyŏng* in trying to manifest their own vitality regardless of success, they refer to it as “a story of *sinmyŏng*.” One of the corollaries emerging from this characteristic is the relative autonomy of parts, in that the release of pent-up emotions in the whole structure is repeated in each part of the story. This is similar to the way the hexagonal shape of a honeycomb comprises numerous smaller hexagons, leading to a fractal structure.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed explanation, refer to Yun (2010).

<sup>4</sup> A fractal is a structure in which a pattern that is repeated within the whole figure is the same as the whole figure. A typical example is the hexagonal shape of a honeycomb, which consists of numerous smaller hexagons. In discussing *bŭng* (興), a Korean salient affection similar to *sinmyŏng*,

The second aesthetic element of the *sinmyŏng* narrative is that personae wipe away tears through laughter. This is related to the tragicomic situation. In many cultures, an elaborate narrative portrays situational irony in the sense that although the situation on the surface seems funny, the reality of the situation is tragic on a deeper level. In Korean *sinmyŏng* narratives, tragicomedy plays a key role. In his book entitled *Usŏm ūro nunmul takki* (Wiping away tears through laughter), Kim asserted that “wiping away tears through laughter” was a characteristic of Korean language culture and presented various cases in everyday language, folklore, *keut*, *p’ansori*, and old novels (Kim 2005, 29–89).

The third element is playfulness comprising the deception motif, which is popular in the trickster<sup>5</sup> genre. Somewhat different from trickster stories in other cultures, traditional Korean deception stories portray neither real evildoers nor arrant rogues, resulting in reconciliation between the deceiver and the deceived (Cho 2006, 297–323). The weak tend to deceive the strong, making the trickster story popular with audiences with its hilarious playfulness. Word play (e.g., puns, homonyms, heteronyms, and funny nicknames) and intertextuality (e.g., parodies of other episodes or programs, use of subtitles and other features) also serve to intensify this playfulness.

Fourth, the two major character types in the *sinmyŏng* narrative are the *pabo* (fool) and *kŏndal* (prankster), who make up the beloved iconic personae in Korean cultural history. The *pabo* is a typical character in the *sinmyŏng* narrative, because even though he or she is not wise to the world, they try to maintain their own life force, naivety, and artlessness in tragic situations by wiping away tears through laughter. The *kŏndal* (prankster) is a good-for-nothing idler who liberates his or her own suppressed life force. People like these characters, because they make fun of the powerful or ruling classes.

The last aesthetic element is the intervention of the narrator and audience, in that the narrator appears in the foreground of the story, and the audience often actively engages in the story. The narrator interplays with the audience like a

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Sim (2005) asserted that a characteristic of Korean culture is “fractal *hŭng*,” wherein the whole structure is repeated in each part of the whole.

<sup>5</sup> The trickster is an archetypal character in folklore or religious stories, who uses special knowledge and skills to play tricks. Lewis Hyde (1998) regarded tricksters as ‘boundary-crossers’ because they break natural and social orders and playfully disrupt conventional rules. Narratives worldwide tell stories of how tricksters perpetrate deceit, magic, and violence. Trickster stories often take the form of picaresque adventures. Examples of tricksters include the coyote and raven in North American Indian folklore, the fox as an evil agent in Buddhist stories, and the Japanese trickster fox Kitsune. Some scholars regard Odysseus as a cunning and resourceful trickster hero. *Kumibo* (九尾狐), *pong’i kimsŏndal*, *malttugi*, and *ch’wibari* can also be regarded as tricksters (or picaros) in Korean traditional narratives.

clown (*kwangdae*) onstage who talks to spectators in their seats. Diegesis (telling) rather than mimesis (showing) is more salient, and viewpoints alternate between homodiegesis (the viewpoint of the actor in the story) and heterodiegesis (the viewpoint of a person outside the story) in the *sinmyōng* narrative. The audience actively engages in the narrative at various levels.

## *INFINITE CHALLENGE AS A CONTEMPORARY TV SHOW*

### **The Reality TV Show and Its Variations in Korea**

Reality TV shows are defined as “unscripted shows with non-professional actors observed by cameras in a preconfigured environment” (Kavka 2012, 5). Although reality TV shows focus on unscripted real-life situations, other characteristics include a low production value, high emotions, cheap antics, and sometimes questionable ethics.

The Netherlands’ *Number 28* and *Big Brother*, as well as *Survivor* are commonly regarded as the genesis of the reality TV show genre; however, its roots go back to *Candid Camera* by Alan Funt in 1948 (DeVolld 2011, 34). In the late 1990s, reality TV shows such as *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race* appeared, launching the golden era of reality TV worldwide. Since then, reality TV shows have developed into various sub-genres and spread globally. DeVolld (2011, 27–31) classifies reality TV shows into seven categories: Documentary/docu-series (recording real activities such as police investigation), reality-competition/elimination (survival game), makeover/renovation (transforming faces or houses), dating (romantic meeting between couples), hidden camera/surveillance amateur content (capturing natural reactions from unwitting participants), supernatural (searching for paranormal phenomena), and travel/aspiration (unusual travel experiences).

Since the mid-1990s, Korea has attempted all seven categories of reality TV shows. In Korea, the earliest type was that of the hidden camera, which mostly focused on the everyday lives of celebrities, rather than on ordinary people. These shows, which observed celebrities’ reactions to simple pranks, were popular for a long time. Ch’a and Pak (2012, 525–529) claim that Korea began to be influenced by global reality TV shows in the mid-2000s. Since then, many imported foreign-format programs, modified to suit Korean tastes, have comprised the mainstream of Korean broadcasting programs.

Western formats of reality TV shows adapted in Korea portray several characteristics. Lee (2004) argues that adapted foreign formats emphasize public interests and regulate exposure to sex and violence. Quiz programs exemplify this

emphasis on public interests: winners do not take the prize money for personal profit, but donate it to unfortunate neighbors or their alma mater. Kim and Pak (2006) noted that Korean reality TV shows imply a strong self-consciousness of public interests and social contribution, while those of Western countries have a strong economic and commercial logic. They also point out that Korean reality TV shows utilize the mechanism of voyeurism with identification and sympathy. In other words, Korean audiences like to identify and feel familiarity with celebrities by peeking into their everyday lives. For example, male audiences express sympathy towards celebrities who tentatively enter the military as new conscripts and experience military training in a reality show (Han, Lee, and Park 2017).

According to Pak and Yu (2009), who analyzed *1 vs. 100* in Korea, Italy, and the USA, the Korean version of the show (*Il tae paeŋ*) focused more on celebrated contestants' private lives, weakening the intrinsic characteristics of the quiz program such as the knowledge competition, tension, and profit from prize money. They also summarize the characteristics of Korean reality TV shows into three main points: emphasis on public interests, reduction of sex and violence, and the maximization of entertainment through celebrity-focused production conventions. *Infinite Challenge* not only possesses all three characteristics, but also comprises the aesthetic characteristics of Korean traditional narratives through adaptation to Korean tastes.

### **The Study Case: *Infinite Challenge***

The case for this study is *Infinite Challenge*, declared Korea's first "real variety show" in the mid-2000s when the reality TV show format began to spread worldwide. As a representative reality TV show in Korea, *Infinite Challenge* shares similarities with other reality TV shows in general. Consistent with the reality TV show concept, *Infinite Challenge* highlights the unscripted performances of cast members observed by cameras in a preconfigured environment. Although *Infinite Challenge* freely borrows and transforms various genres, its prototype is the struggles of below-average Koreans, whose physical and intellectual abilities seem to be below those of the average Korean, to carry out reckless or unfeasible tasks, often under unusual circumstances. After an "absurd" mission is given to the below-average cast members (i.e., comedians whose abilities seem inferior to those of average men), their improvised efforts to carry out the task in real situations are observed by camera. *Infinite Challenge* produces reality by positioning professional celebrities in an unprofessional, atypical format without any script, and having them conduct tasks within this preconditioned but unscripted setting.



In this way, cast members' unscripted responses construct the reality show.

*Infinite Challenge* has undergone many changes in content and format over the past decade. While the show was initially based on short, reckless, and absurd challenges, it later changed, and long-term challenges became the more common format. The versatility of its format includes the soap opera parody, conte (short drama), situation comedy, musical, scavenger hunt, challenge show, competition, and festival. Like other Korean reality TV shows, which maximize entertainment through celebrity-focused production conventions, *Infinite Challenge* is a characterized show wherein familiar celebrities create their own characters, and specific acts are emphasized. In this character-led show, narrativity plays an important role in providing a structural basis. As a reality TV show led by characterized cast members, *Infinite Challenge* has a larger narrative in which cast members improvise their role-plays. The larger narrative provides a basis for the show, and the cast members' improvised performances create a sense of reality (Ryu 2011).

Given that *Infinite Challenge* has survived for the past decade as a favorite and influential entertainment show in the competitive Korean mediascape, an underlying narrative aesthetic in the show may appeal to Korean cultural taste. Moving beyond a cursory examination of similarities between contemporary TV shows and traditional performances, we attempt to analyze how traditional narrative manifests in *Infinite Challenge* at a deeper level. In analyzing the *sinmyŏng* narrative embedded in *Infinite Challenge*, we implemented theoretical sampling to maintain the strength of this qualitative research method. Altheide and Schneider (2012) noted that theoretical sampling, which selects research subjects based on theories and concepts related to the research question, is an important method in qualitative research. Since the purpose of qualitative research sampling is not generalization, it is possible to extract potentially meaningful samples based on this notion. We tried to select episodes that contain the aforementioned elements of the *sinmyŏng* narrative and to include various types of sub-genres that have developed over the years. Of course, it is not our assertion that the *sinmyŏng* narrative approach can explain all episodes of the show. Rather, we suggest that the *sinmyŏng* narrative can capture important aspects of the show, which are closely related to cultural phenomena at the global and local levels. Based on theoretical sampling, we selected the episodes in Table 1 for analysis.

Table 1: Episodes Analyzed

Episode #	Air Date	Episode contents
1*	April 23, 2005	“Hwangso tae in’gan chuldalligi” (Tug-of-war challenge with a bull)
2*	April 30, 2005	“Chöñch’öl tae in’gan talligi” (Running a race against a train)
4*	May 14, 2005	”Chayönbaesu mulppaegi” (Scooping out of a bathtub)
3**	November 12, 2005	“Sobangch’a tae in’gan pulkkügi” (dousing a fire with water)
59–60	June 23 & 30, 2007	“Muindo t’ükchip” (A desert island special)
105	May 17, 2008	“Muhan ch’angjak tongyojae” (Infinite children’s song festival)
110–111	June 21 & 28, 2008	“Ton’gabang ül kakko tt’wuiöra” (Take money and run away)
138–140	January 24 & 31 / February 7, 2009	“Pobslaei tojön” (Bobsledding challenge)
147	March 28, 2009	“P’urojaekt’ü rönöoei” (Project runaway)
154	May 16, 2009	“Kisüpkonggyök” (Surprise economic attack)
187–188	January 9 & 16, 2010	“Üisanghan hyöngjae” (Broken brotherhood)
205–215	July 3 & September 17, 2010	“Resülling t’ükchip”(WM7 Wrestling special)
240–242	March 12, 19 & 26, 2011	“Minamisineyo” (Handsome guy contest)
253–256	June 11/ July 2, 2011	“Söhaean Kosoktoro kayojae” (West coast expressway music festival)
275–276	November 12 & 19, 2011	“T’ibi chönjaeng” (TV war special)
304–306	November 17–December 1, 2012	“Mot Ch’in So” (Festival for my ugly buddy)
308	December 15, 2012	“Muhan t’aekpae” (Infinite express)
332–333	June 1 & 8, 2013	“Myujik’öl muhan sangsa” (Infinite company: The musical)
343–345	August 17, 24 & 31, 2013	“Mudo rül putakhae” (Please look after Infinite Challenge)
360–362	December 14, 21 & 28, 2013	“Ssül Ch’in So” (My lonely buddy festival)
366	January 25, 2014	“Mudo üngwöndan” (Infinite Challenge cheering squad)
369–370	February 22 & March 1, 2014	“Hyöng, ödiga?” (Where are you going, bro?)
409–411	December 20, 2014–January 3, 2015	“T’o T’o Ka” (Saturday, Saturday: I’m a singer)
441–445	August 15–September 12, 2015	“Paedal üi mudo” (Infinite Challenge of delivery)
448–451	October 3–31, 2015	“Pabo chönjaeng” (War of Dummies)
459–461	December 9, 2015–January 2, 2016	“Mudo konggae subae” (Infinite Challenge wanted)
472	March 19, 2016	“Hipap üi sin” (God of hip-hop)

\* Season 1 episodes, \*\*Season 2 episodes, remaining episodes are in Season 3

## ANALYSIS OF THE *SINMYŎNG* NARRATIVE IN *INFINITE CHALLENGE*

### Release of Pent-up Energy

The storyline of *Infinite Challenge* involves the liberation of suppressed vitality by releasing pent-up energy. Although the show focuses on the endless challenge, it is not important whether the challenge is successfully accomplished; rather, the challenge itself is significant, because cast members can manifest their innate vigor and thereby affirm their self-value in the process of conducting the challenging mission they are given. Similar to art for art's sake, the challenge itself is the destination, and cast members are predestined to undertake endless missions in every episode. Three corollaries emerge from the release of pent-up emotions. First, through the release of pent-up emotions, personae manifest their innate vigor at the corporeal level. Second, these pent-up emotions can be better released at the societal level. The last is harsh criticism of the socio-political reality that inhibits the liberation of the life force, leading to political satire and parody.

The early episodes of the show portrayed unreasonable challenges such as tug-of-war with a bull (Episode 1), running a race against a train (Episode 2), scooping water out of a bathtub (Episode 4), and dousing a fire with water (Episode 3). Some challenges are long-term projects in which members need several weeks to learn skills such as bobsledding (Episodes 138–140), participating in a professional wrestling match (Episodes 205–215), walking the runway at a fashion show (Episode 147), and competing against young rappers in a rap battle (Episode 472).

Here, the key aspect is that the challenges involve cast members' bodies in vigorous activities, and as such, they enhance their value physically rather than spiritually. In an efficiency-driven mechanized society, symbolized by the conveyor-belt system and robots, the human body appears increasingly useless; therefore, the life force is emaciated and weakened. When challenges cause physical pain, particularly in the show's earlier episodes, the seemingly useless and ineffective body is transformed into a corporeal existence. It vividly represents the spectacle of pain, where pain relocates the body from life's background to its foreground. This is why reality TV survival programs force people to behave without mechanical assistance in this mechanically automated society. In the desert island episodes, cast members used only their hands and tree branches to make a fire without any of the facilities of civilization, thus mimicking a primitive situation. Herein, they affirm the utility of their bodies and revitalize their

primitive energy, which is suppressed by the facilities of civilization (Episodes 59–60).

In addition to corporeality, social bonding is also associated with the *sinmyǒng* narrative. Although people can experience *sinmyǒng* individually, it is stronger when experienced collectively. Collective social experience is a feature of *sinmyǒng*. To inspire collective *sinmyǒng*, that is, to liberate pent-up life energy at the societal level, the members of *Infinite Challenge* carry out various projects encouraging socially disadvantaged people who need social attention and care. For example, cast members enter small grocery stores without prior notice and purchase goods to cheer up disheartened retail dealers (Episode 154). They also challenged to sweep snow for elderly residents living in isolated mountainous areas after a heavy snowball (Episodes 369–370). In another episode, upon receiving a viewer's request that cast members deliver an *Infinite Challenge* calendar to a friend needing encouragement at the end of the year, members made a surprise visit to the viewer's friend (Episodes 308–309).

During these challenges to liberate people's vital energy at the societal level, *Infinite Challenge* demonstrates another component of the *sinmyǒng* narrative, namely harsh criticism of socio-political situations that prevent people from experiencing *sinmyǒng*. The show differs from other entertainment programs in its critique of social problems through parody and satire, which is also partly responsible for the strength of its fandom. Another delivery project that aired on National Liberation Day of Korea (August 15), the day on which the Korean Peninsula was liberated from Japanese colonial rule, drew social attention to the *Zainichi* (Korean residents in Japan), who endure inferior living conditions (Episodes 441–445).

The “*Minamisineyo*” (Handsome guy contest) episode can be interpreted as a parody of beauty contests, and criticizes masculine lookism, the discriminatory attitude towards physically unattractive men (Episodes 240–242). An episode of TV War is also a satire criticizing the Korean government's libertarian approach to media competition (Episodes 275–276). During the storm of protest against the government's policy allowing beef from the USA that was potentially infected with mad cow disease, the show expressed satirical criticism against the issue through subtitles mocking targeted political leaders (Episode 105). Furthermore, a long-term project in which members made a challenge to participate in a bobsledding competition to encourage professional sliders highlighted the poor facilities and Koreans' lack of attention to less popular sports (Episodes 138–140). These examples illustrate how the *sinmyǒng* narrative in *Infinite Challenge* has criticized social situations that hinder people from feeling *sinmyǒng*.

## Wiping Away Tears Through Laughter

The second aesthetic element of the *sinmyŏng* narrative is a story where personae in *Infinite Challenge* wipe away tears through laughter, resulting in the rotation of tears and laughter. The rotation of tears and laughter is closely related to the rotations of sorrow and pleasure, the tragic and comic, and tension and release, all of which are derived from the release of pent-up emotions. These rotations construct a fractal structure in the sense that the release of pent-up emotions in the whole structure is repeated in each part of the story. This fractal structure of the *sinmyŏng* narrative is similar to the way the hexagonal shape of honeycombs comprise numerous small hexagons, which leads to the relative autonomy of parts.<sup>6</sup>

The mixture of laughter and tears is a situational irony wherein people laugh off their hardships. For example, the “*Muban sangsa*” (Infinite Company) episodes are a series of situation comedies portraying the fastidious director Yu Chae-sŏk, hot-tempered manager Pak Myŏng-su, incompetent deputy manager Chŏng Chun-ha shrewd member of staff No Hong-ch’ŏl, and other minor employees (Episodes 332–333). Although these episodes depict a comic story, the story actually contains tearful situations in which incompetent Chŏng is harassed and ridiculed by the boss in an authoritarian work environment and is finally laid off. The seemingly hilarious episodes of “*Mot Ch’in Sŏ*” (Festival for my ugly buddies) (Episodes 304–306) and “*Ssŭl Ch’in Sŏ*” (Festival for my lonely buddies) (Episodes 360–362) are also based on the sorrowful situation in which friends are deemed too ugly to be invited to parties and must stay home alone during the year-end holiday season.

Some comic episodes touched the hearts of the audiences, leading to a mixture of laughter and tears. Audiences are moved by members’ attempts to complete

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<sup>6</sup> The fractal structure containing the relative autonomy of parts is frequently found in Korean traditional performances. Let’s take an example from *Ch’unhyang-ga*, a representative *p’ansori* work. Its basic theme is a love story between the heroin Ch’unhyang and her partner Yi Mongnyong, in which Ch’unhyang a *kisaeng* (a kind of prostitute) overcomes hardships and finally gets married with Yi Mongnyong a *yangban* (member of the ruling class). Thus, the whole structure of the *Ch’unhyang-ga* story is the release of pent-up emotion (i.e., *han*) that the heroine has endured as a *kisaeng* and thereby enhances her self-value and innate vigor. This structure is also repeated in each part of *Ch’unhyang-ga*. Some parts such as *sarang-ga taemok* (love song section) and *ŏsa-ch’ullu taemok* (secret royal inspector section) have relatively independent stories in which the pent-up emotions are released, resulting in a rotation of tension and release. In another traditional performing art, *t’alnori*, almost every act of the performance has a self-contained story, which is loosely associated with the main theme (e.g., people’s struggle against the oppression of the ruling class) while rotating pent-up emotions and their release (For more information, refer to Yun 2010, 319–320).

the challenges regardless of the results. When Chŏng Chun-ha participated in a pro-wrestling match against a professional wrestler, despite his weak and injured body, the expression of pain on his sweat-beaded face touched viewers (Episodes 205–215)<sup>7</sup>. Other long-term projects (e.g., bobsledding and boat racing) and earlier absurd projects (e.g., tug-of-war with a bull and running a race against a train) portrayed members doing their best, thereby producing both funny and touching scenes.

*Infinite Challenge* appears to touch viewers, even though its basic format is that of an entertainment show. When the show conducts public campaigns to encourage people who are socially disadvantaged, the mixture of laughter and tears both entertains and moves viewers. This was evident when cast members completed their mission to clear snow for isolated elderly people (Episodes 369–370), when they held a healing party to cheer up test-taking students (Episode 366), and when they made a surprise visit and delivered gifts (i.e., the program calendar) to disappointed people (Episode 308),

While pursuing public interests, the show emphasizes the comic to avoid a moralistic tone. Following content that immerses the audience in a touching scene, they are then made to laugh, thus keeping them at a critical distance from the scene. This rotation of tension and release, tears and laughter, and immersion and apathy is similar to that found in Korean traditional arts. In the *p'ansori* performance *Hŭngbo-ga* [The song of Hŭngbo], for instance, when the poor Hŭngbo visits his rich elder brother Nolbo's house to beg for food, Nolbo's wife hits Hŭngbo in face with a rice spoon. At this tearful and discouraging situation, Hŭngbo takes some grains of rice from his face and says "I am so hungry. Please hit my face one more time with the rice spoon so that I can eat a little more rice from my face." An ancient *hyangga*, the native song of the Silla dynasty, tells a legend about how *Ch'ŏyong-ga* [The song of *Ch'ŏyong*] originated. After seeing that a demon has committed adultery with his wife, Ch'ŏyong steps back, sings, and dances instead of being enraged at him. These illustrate the rotation of tension and release by wiping away tears through laughter.

The rotation of the opposite employs a distancing effect to prevent audience members from being overwhelmed by empathetic emotions and to draw them into a critical attitude. The show enables the audience to remain distanced from the situation after immersing them in it. For example, after Chŏng Chun-ha was

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<sup>7</sup> This episode was so touching that it was rated as one of the most memorable episodes of the show for the past decade. Spot News Team "Muhan tojŏn Chŏng Chun-ha p'ŭroresŭlling ōmch'ōngnan yŏlchōng" (Chŏng Chun-ha's great enthusiasm for pro wrestling in *Infinite Challenge*). *Dailian*, November 29 (2015), accessed July 31, 2017, <http://www.dailian.co.kr/news/view/541548/?sc=naver#reple>.

fired from the Infinite Company and after failing numerous times in business, he went to the river to attempt suicide. However, overweight Chŏng Chun-ha postponed his suicide attempt, because a feeling of hunger drove him to eat before dying (Episodes 332–333). During the public mission to remove snow for isolated elderly people, Yu Chae-sŏk and other members used slapstick to avoid the tone of an altruistic documentary, thus creating a distancing effect (Episode 370).

### **Playfulness with the Deception Motif and Word Play**

The third element of the *sinmyŏng* narrative found in the show is playfulness. Essentially, the show is a carnival-like scene where clowns wearing masks play for fun. This playfulness is expressed in the deception motif. A prominent sub-genre in *Infinite Challenge* is a city chase game, in which cast members chase other members through real city streets to carry out missions such as searching for money or valuable things hidden in the city (Episodes 110–111). This sub-genre is a scavenger or treasure hunt game at the city level. While conducting the mission, some members deceive other members. Betrayal of and conspiracy against members are common; therefore, “infinite egoism” is a code of conduct for members in *Infinite Challenge*. For example, the “*Ŭisanghan hyŏngjae*” (Broken brotherhood) (Episodes 187–188) is a parody of the Korean traditional folktale “*Ŭijoŭn hyŏngjae*” (Brotherly love), in which good brothers secretly try to give their own straw rice bags to each other. In contrast, the mission in the Broken Brotherhood episode is to dump each member’s trash in another’s house. In this episode, Pak Myŏng-su and No Hong-ch’ŏl deceived Chŏng Chun-ha, who was the recipient of other members’ trash at the end of the episode. However, the episode did not focus on the serious pain of the loser (Chŏng Chun-ha), but comically showed the loser and others laughing when the trash was dumped. This illustrates the spirit of playfulness in that everyone in the episode enjoys the game.

In addition to the deception motif, playfulness is intensified through word play and festival events. The show uses puns, homonyms, and heteronyms for fun. Humorous nicknames were used to make fun of others, resulting in playfulness. Every member has numerous nicknames. Pak Myŏng-su, for example, has more than 300 nicknames. The use of nicknames is related to parody. Also, many titles of episodes are parodies of other media content, and this parody is based on intertextuality. The use of subtitles is another way to express playfulness. As such, the program producer uses subtitles for various reasons such as to explain the situation, clarify actors’ dialogue, enliven performances, and make fun of the actors on behalf of TV viewers. This playful use of subtitles makes the show

more enjoyable and pleasurable. The show opens a biennial music festival (Episodes 253–256) and special festival for musicians popular in the 1990s (Episodes 409–411). It also holds year-end parties including the “The festival for my ugly buddies” (Episodes 304–306), “The festival for my lonely buddies” (Episodes 360–362), and the “Handsome guy contest” (Episodes 240–242). These events maximize the playfulness of the show even though they are not embedded in the *sinmyŏng* narrative.

### The Fool and Prankster Characters

Fourth, two types of characters commonly depicted in the *sinmyŏng* narrative, namely the fool (*pabo*) and prankster (*kŏndal*), appear in *Infinite Challenge*. Almost all members can be regarded as fools, partly because the slogan of the show is the “infinite challenge of below-average Koreans.” According to the superiority theory of comedy, people feel superior over and laugh at others when they look down on the ridiculous actions of those they consider inferior. As such, this reality-oriented comedy show depicts these inferior characters. Among the cast members, Chŏng Chun-ha and Chŏng Hyŏng-do are the most foolish characters. Both are lazy, overweight, and gluttonous. They are easily deceived and often ridiculed by members. Chŏng Chun-ha’s nickname is “*Tongnae pabohyŏng*” (village idiot) and Chŏng Hyŏng-do’s is “*Ŏsaekban Ttungbo*” (awkward tub). They look like the characters (i.e., two unintelligent and dim-witted friends) in the 1994 American comedy film *Dumb and Dumber*. In the episodes of the “*Pabo Avengers*,” Ha-ha and Kwang-hŭi gathered celebrities often characterized as foolish but innocent, and organized them to challenge the supposed intellectuals of entertainment to a battle of wit (Episodes 448–451). Although *pabo* are naïve, childish, and artless, they preserve their own life force—that is, their *sinmyŏng*.

Another character type is the prankster. The characters of Pak Myŏng-su and No Hong-ch’ŏl are older and younger pranksters respectively. Pak is a self-centered, hot-tempered man, who abruptly yells at younger members and bluntly expresses his feelings. No usually deceives and betrays other members in the scavenger hunt game, so one of his nicknames is “*Sagikkum*” (swindler) (Episodes 110–111). Pak pretends to be “number two” and flatters Yu Chae-sŏk, the host-in-chief for the team. At the same time, he has an eye on the host-in-chief position, but cannot succeed in dethroning Yu. Although Pak and No are malicious scamps, they are not threatening evildoers, because they are easily controlled by Yu. As Pak gets older, he looks shabbier and is losing his hair and physical strength. He likes to call himself “*Kŏsŏng*” (a giant star), but others prefer “*Ch’anŭmi hyŏng*” (a worthless fellow). Although they blatantly release their pent-up



desire and aim to have power over others, they are villains who prompt sympathy from viewers. When people watch the scamps who liberate their unconscious desire, which is suppressed by morality, people experience vicarious pleasure and love the scamps in the show. When Pak, who has long played second fiddle to the host-in-chief Yu, won the Best Entertainer Award for his roles in *Infinite Challenge*, people identified with him and felt pleasure from hearing about his award.<sup>8</sup>

### Intervention of the Narrator and Audience

The last element of the *sinmyōng* narrative embedded in the show is the narrator in the foreground and the active engagement of the audience in the narrative. Following Stam, et al. (1992), the narrator of the show is conceived as a storyteller who relies on diegesis rather than mimesis. In typical TV shows, the narrator objectively portrays what is going on to the audience by concealing himself behind the narrative and maintaining a consistent viewpoint. In contrast, in *Infinite Challenge*, the authors and the program director (PD), cameramen, and other staff members frequently make their presence known in scenes of the show in various ways. For example, scenes are obscured by a shaking camera, which allows viewers to feel the cameraman's presence; cast members talk to the cameraman behind the scenes; and the camera sometimes shoots another cameraman running after actors, especially in the scavenger hunt game.

The director, Kim T'ae-ho, is well known for his humorous appearances in the show. The director usually informs the cast members of the mission using a voice-over, and the members rebel against and negotiate with him about the given mission. The director also sometimes plays a funny character in the show. For example, when Pak Myōng-su was ranked last of the seven members in the handsome guy contest, he got angry and extemporarily invited the director to the contest, where the two men competed against each other to decide who the ugliest man was (Episodes 240–242). The director is sometimes brought to the fore using subtitles in the scene, which summarize the situation, express emotions and opinions, chastise cast members, and praise their actions. As the director plays the roles of narrator and audience member, the show's viewpoint alternates between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic perspectives.

The audience is also actively engaged in *Infinite Challenge*, corresponding to the author in the foreground of the story. This active audience engagement is in line with the Korean cultural tradition differing from Western aesthetics. In Western

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<sup>8</sup> P'yo Chae-min. "Pak Myōng-su, 2010 MBC yōnye taesang '2 inja ūi pallan'" (Pak Myōng-su won 2010 MBC Best Entertainer Award, 'A Rebellion of No. 2'). OSEN, December 30 (2010), accessed July 31, 2017, <http://osen.mt.co.kr/article/G1109520731>.

proscenium theatre, the audience is a sort of voyeur who gets to peep at a play through the so-called fourth window; accordingly, he or she keeps a disinterested distance from the play and enjoys contemplative pleasure therefrom. In this context, the concept of the active audience in Western text theory (e.g., reader-oriented textual analysis) just suggests that the reader's interpretation differs from the author's intention, and the meaning of text is constructed by the reader's interpretation rather than the author's intention (Scott 1994, 461–480). The audience's active engagement in *Infinite Challenge* goes beyond this level of audience activity. They differently interpret the show, eagerly express their opinions and suggestions regarding the show, and voluntarily appear in the show as guest players. These audience engagements are similar to those in traditional *sinmyŏng* narrative. In Korean traditional performances which are typically played out in *madang* (outdoor yard), the *kwangdae* (the clown) frequently talks to and interacts with the audience, and the audience actively engages in the story by expressing *ch'uimsae* (complimentary reaction to the clowns).

There are three levels of audience engagement in *Infinite Challenge*. The lowest and simple level of engagement is the audience members' different interpretation of the show. One of the reasons for its strong fandom is that viewers sometimes interpret a specific content as political satire of current affairs. The next level of engagement is found in the comments and suggestions that viewers write on the online bulletin board. As soon as the show airs, viewers write hundreds of messages on the Internet bulletin board, where they express their opinions about the episode. Some skillful viewers edit funny scenes of an episode and upload video clips called "legend videos" of the show. While viewers suggest ideas for the show, staff and cast members regularly monitor viewers' responses and adopt their ideas in the show. Furthermore, those suggesting good ideas sometimes appear on the show to execute their contributions. The "Mudo rŭl put'ak-hae" (Please Look After the *Infinite Challenge*) episode, for example, depicted an elementary school boy and high school girls directing all staff and cast members in the real production setting to incorporate their ideas into the show (Episodes 243–245).

The highest level of engagement is participating in the show as a player. The audience in the Korean traditional performances is more likely to be invited to the playground (i.e., *madang*) and to play a role with professional actors (i.e., *kwangdae*) than the audience in a Western proscenium stage production. The audience of the show may play a role while interacting with the cast members. The audience can participate in program-derived events such as music festivals, charity functions, and design exhibitions, all of which later air on TV (Episodes 409–411). In addition, when cast members play a scavenger hunt game, people whom cast

members meet are often familiar with the format and rules of the game and so offer to hide cast members or intervene in the game, resulting in active engagement in the narrative (Episodes 110–111). The “Mudo chimyöngsubae” (Infinite Challenge Wanted) episode cast real policemen as chasers searching for cast members whose roles were that of wanted criminals (Episodes 459–461).

## DISCUSSION: COMPARISONS, INFERENCES AND IMPLICATIONS

### Diachronic and Synchronic Comparisons

In an attempt to explore the global-local nexus in media narratives, we examined how the *sinmyöng* narrative was embedded in *Infinite Challenge*. A narrative analysis identified five aesthetic elements of the *sinmyöng* narrative in *Infinite Challenge*, namely release of pent-up energy, wiping away tears through laughter, playfulness through the deception motif and intertextuality, the characters of the fool and prankster, and intervention of the narrator and audience. To better understand the *sinmyöng* narrative in *Infinite Challenge*, these characteristics should be compared and contrasted with the older *sinmyöng* and other Western narratives. A substantial comparison may need a separate research paper, although we can merely make inferences based on the previous literature.

In a diachronic comparison with the older *sinmyöng* narrative expressed in Korean traditional performances, the contemporary *sinmyöng* narrative in *Infinite Challenge* shares these five aesthetic elements with the older narrative, as the elements were extracted from traditional “plays of *sinmyöng*.” In contrast, compared to the contemporary *sinmyöng* narrative, the older one is more likely to emphasize spiritual unity and collective oneness. This is because Korean traditional performances are rooted in *kut* and most performances have preludes and epilogues in which all the performers and members of the audience sing and dance together, resulting in a sense of shared commitment and conviviality (Hö 2001). In addition, the old *sinmyöng* narrative was closely related to the relief of *han*, whereas contemporary *sinmyöng* emphasizes playfulness (Yun 2010, 318–3223).

A synchronic comparison with other Western narrative styles, specifically classical Hollywood cinema, reveals similarities to and differences from the *sinmyöng* narrative. According to Augusto Boal (1979), a Brazilian theatre director, Hollywood narrative style derives from Aristotle’s catharsis aesthetics. Catharsis aesthetics aims at the purification and purgation of negative emotions (especially pity and fear) through the plot structure, including elements such as exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. As Kim (2010) argued, the

*sinmyŏng* narrative in *Infinite Challenge* is similar to catharsis aesthetics in that both emphasize strong affective experiences and the outpouring of emotions. However, the two narrative styles also differ. According to Cho (2006), the catharsis-oriented narrative has a closed structure in which antagonistic relations collapse and audiences passively maintain a disinterested and contemplative attitude towards the story, like audiences watching a drama in a proscenium theater. In contrast, the *sinmyŏng* narrative is a fractal structure in which tension and release are infinitely repeated while reconciling antagonists. The audience is actively engaged in the story by differently interpreting the contents, expressing opinions and suggestions, and participating in the show as a guest player.

These arguments are not genuine comparisons, but exploratory conjectures based on relevant previous studies. Future research efforts should extend to conducting full-scale comparative studies of the *sinmyŏng* narrative.

### **Inferences: Reasons for Hybridization**

We can make tentative inferences about the reason why the traditional *sinmyŏng* narrative style manifests in a contemporary TV entertainment program. We may discuss the reasons from production and consumption perspectives. From a production perspective, the traditional *sinmyŏng* narrative style may influence the contemporary TV show as a result of the lowest common denominator (LCD) orientation, which is a strategy to maximize audiences (and revenues) by offering a program with maximum audience appeal (Atkin 2003). The LCD approach suggests that local media content should appeal to the cultural tastes of local audiences to maximize audiences and revenues. Considering that *sinmyŏng* code is widely found in Korean traditional performances as well as contemporary popular culture, *sinmyŏng* seems to be a cultural archetype that satisfies the cultural taste of Koreans.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, *Infinite Challenge* may adopt the *sinmyŏng* narrative to maximize audiences and boost audience ratings.

From a consumption perspective, the show may help audiences regain their life force in the face of difficulties by instilling *sinmyŏng* in them, even though the *sinmyŏng* narrative does not necessarily make audiences experience *sinmyŏng*. In this highly fragmented and industrialized society, where people suffer from a lack of meaning in their lives, it is becoming increasingly difficult to manifest one's innate vigor. Nonetheless, similar to the assertion by Park (2016) that Psy's music video

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<sup>9</sup> *Sinmyŏng* ranked second of the top twenty memes (i.e., cultural genes) distinguishing Korean culture from others, according to a survey conducted by the Advancement Center for Korean Studies (*Han'guk kukhak chinhŏngwŏn* 2012). Thus, *sinmyŏng* has been recently conceived as a Korean cultural archetype (Cho 2006; Han 2008).

*Gangnam Style* alleviates people's distress through *haebak*, Korean traditional humor, *Infinite Challenge* may evoke *sinmyŏng* emotions among members of its audience through *sinmyŏng* stories. The consumption of *Infinite Challenge* every Saturday evening may relieve the stress and strains of the audience's weekday jobs and revitalize them, even though it cannot offer an ultimate solution for their fatigued lives. Of course, this argument is beyond the scope of this paper. Future research must be conducted to empirically examine whether the *sinmyŏng* narrative in *Infinite Challenge* virtually enables audiences to experience *sinmyŏng*.

### Theoretical Implications

This study has significant implications in two contexts. In the Korean studies context, numerous studies have examined *sinmyŏng* aesthetics in Korean traditional performances, but few explored its influences on contemporary TV shows. This study, which examined the traditional narrative in contemporary media, may provide impetus for future research in the relevant fields. In addition, some Korean scholars (e.g., Cho 2006, 467–486; Han 2008, 9–10; Yun 2010, 328–332) assert that *sinmyŏng* as a Korean cultural archetype can be found in both traditional performances and contemporary Korean popular culture, such as TV dramas, K-pop (Korean pop music),<sup>10</sup> non-verbal performances, and local festivals. A recent study proposed a similarity between traditional theatrical performances and real variety shows including *Infinite Challenge* (Kim 2014). Consequently, it is no wonder that the traditional *sinmyŏng* narrative embraced *Infinite Challenge*, a contemporary product of Korean popular culture. Furthermore, given the criticism that Korean popular culture including K-pop and cinema, despite its cultural hybridity and industrial success, ignores local heritage and unequal global-local exchanges (e.g., Jin and Ryoo 2014, 128–129; Shim 2011, 223–225), *sinmyŏng* narrative may be a cultural heritage to keep “glocal” balance and to develop the third place enabling other hybridity to emerge.

In a broader and global context, our analysis is consistent with previous research reporting the nexus between local traditional communication modes and global media content (e.g., Neher 2002; Pearson 2005; Wang 2008). For instance, the meddah, a traditional storyteller playing in front of a small group of viewers, such as a coffeehouse audience, influences speech styles and group listening of

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<sup>10</sup> Although Park (2016) analyzed the Korean tradition of humor in Psy's *Gangnam Style* in terms of *haebak*, the results of the analysis seem to share many characteristics with *sinmyŏng*. For example, characteristics of *haebak* such as an optimistic attitude towards life despite difficulties, creatively transforming the negative into the positive, group enjoyment, emphasis of eccentricity (*p'agyŏk*), and passion are similar to those of *sinmyŏng*.

radio media in the Arab world (Boyd 2003). Coupled with these previous studies, which indicate that traditional communication styles shape modes of expression in contemporary media content, the results of this study provide empirical evidence to substantiate the creative potential of local traditional narratives in embracing global media programs.

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