

# The innovation of Chinese variety show under the impact of Korean variety show—taking Chinese variety show “*Kitchen in the Wild*” as an example

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**Abstract.** In recent year, China copying Korean’s original variety show has become a prevailing practice. The number of original works in China accounts for a small part in comparison with copied works. As an original variety show, *Kitchen in the Wild* is questioned to be a copy of *Back to Field*. Hence, *Kitchen in the Wild* will be the object of this study in order to find out if it is original and innovative, and its merits and demerits. These results will reflect the problems facing the whole Chinese variety show, followed by solutions. Firstly, the content of *Kitchen in the Wild* and *Back to Field Season One* will be compared for proving that the former is not copied from the other. Then, analyze the feature of reference and innovation. Next, text comments of the program on Douban.com will be divided into two parts, the reasons of its popularity and its problems, which would be analyzed with specific examples. At last, give recommendations to the program and Chinese variety show, combined with policies and current situation of variety show in China.

## 1. Introduction

South Korea experienced a long time copying original TV programs in Europe, America and Japan before the appearance of their own original programs. They finally created various popular original shows with their own cultural features with the financial and political support of Korean government in culture industry (Shuyue Hui, 2017)<sup>14</sup>. For example, variety shows like *X-Man*, *Lover Letter*, *Two Days One Night*, *Three Meals a Day*, *Dad Where Are We Going?*, *I Am a Singer* and *Running Man* are not only popular in the origin Korea, also prevalent among Chinese after imported to China. Due to their innovative program format, professional team, advanced filming technology, policy in both countries, cultural origin, geographical location, etc. Korean variety show has deeply influenced Chinese people’s lives in many ways, including clothing, cosmetics, food, entertainment, etc. Shuyue Hui (2017)<sup>14</sup> indicates that Korean variety show is so influential that it can be called cultural hegemony, which has undoubtedly constituted a threat to the security of Chinese national culture.

To curb the momentum of Korean wave, State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) has launched a series of policies to limit the development of Korean wave and encourage independence and innovation of Chinese program. A policy has taken into effect in October 2013, the number of program each television station importing from abroad must not be more than one, which is the enhanced version of cutback on TV entertainment. From then on, China has emerged a large number of copied variety shows originated from South Korea, *Back to Field* made by Hunan Satellite TV is one of them. This is a copy of the original *Three Meals a Day*. The obvious feature of both is three celebrities settle at a village home and cook. Recently, one of celebrities called Lei Huang in *Back to Field* directed a new program named *Kitchen in the Wild*, in which three actors have self-driving tour and cook in different places in the wild, which is an innovation, despite that both are the same type of show.

However, some internet users doubt that *Kitchen in the Wild* is another copy of *Back to Field*. Is *Kitchen in the Wild* really a copy or innovative while absorbing the merits of Korean program? What are strengths and weaknesses of *Kitchen in the Wild*? How to improve *Kitchen in the Wild*? How to improve Chinese variety show? In this study, I will discuss about these questions. I will compare *Kitchen in the Wild* to *Back to Field* in terms of format and Channel of distribution, then analyze audience's evaluation of *Kitchen in the Wild* on Douban.com in order to find out its merits and demerits. In the end, I will make suggestions on both *Kitchen in the Wild* and the development of Chinese variety show.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The development history and current situation of Korean variety show

Qian Li (2015)<sup>13</sup> sketched the social history of television and entertainment program industry. Next, referring to major events and transitions, she divided the growing history of Korean entertainment program into five stages since 1956 and expanded on each stage, they are trial period of TV industry, toddler period of TV industry, growth period of TV industry, monopoly period of public broadcasting and competitive period of multimedia. Then, she divided Korean variety show into eight categories according to the theme and described the development process and characteristics of each one. At last, the writer put forward some suggestions for reference in China. Similarly, Qiran Qi (2013)<sup>12</sup> also mentioned the development process of Korean variety show from start-up stage to ascent stage resulting from new industry planning. Before the year of 2006, the development characteristics of both Korean and Chinese variety show in each stage are pretty similar. After that, Korea made new planning to greatly improve their types of variety show, innovation, airtime, etc., its reactions are very positive in Korea and abroad. Based on timeline again, Xia Wu (2012)<sup>15</sup> divided the development into four phases, they are active phase of local variety show from 1960s to 1990s, importing phase of European and American reality show from 1990s to the end of 20th century, transforming phase of Korean reality show from the end of 20th century to the early 21st century, and formative phase of Korean reality show from 2005 till now.

From the angle of structural semiology, Shuyue Hui (2017)<sup>14</sup> showed the significance of dissemination of Korean variety show and described its development history in local: imitational exploration stage before 2003, indoor variety show stage from 2003, transforming stage from 2006, and flourishing stage since 2010. He also described its development in China: importing and remaking program for broadcasting since 2005, purchasing copyright and localizing remaking since 2012, then joint producing and cooperation. He thinks Korean variety show has deep and unconscious impact on Chinese, which can be seen as cultural hegemony and a threat to the safety of Chinese national culture in terms of daily life, values, consumption view, sense of cultural identity, cultural resources, etc.

### 2.2 Variety show formats

A Moran. (1998)<sup>8</sup> analyzed what a "format" is and described its origin in printing industry and its 13 different synonyms. A format is means of organizing individual episodes. From the age of radio to television, it has always been an important basis. There are two kinds of formats of television program, one is related to "reality", such as news, talk show and variety show; the other is related to drama, such as situation comedy. Moran analyzed elements of each type of program. For example, game show consists of game's text description, rules, a list of catch-phases, information about how prizes are assembled, copies of artwork and décor designs and blueprints, and software for computer graphics. This study is comparatively early and useful for scholars doing the same type of research. Xiaojing Li (2015)<sup>16</sup> and Xia Wu (2012)<sup>15</sup> found out reasons of Korean variety show being so prevalent in China by analyzing its content, including its innovative theme and game, program participant, advanced shooting technology, professional and humorous post-production, real experience and expression, culture of food and tourism, etc. Then, they found problems of Chinese

version of Korean variety show, ways to get rid of imitating and copying and produce Chinese original show with features of Chinese culture. Unlike their study, Mengke Shen (2018)<sup>9</sup> analyzed reasons from a wider perspective, including cultural approachability, cooperation of business and industries and increase of foreign affairs between China and Korea, as well as Korean government's great support to their cultural industry politically and financially. Mengke also described means of avoiding cultural discount in order to spread culture better, then made recommendations to exporting of Chinese culture. Similarly, Yanan Deng (2016)<sup>18</sup> also discussed from the view of country. Yanan analyzed specific Korean variety shows and showed how their content shapes a good country image. By exporting culture, their country image has been greatly improved in terms of geography, economy, culture, society, government image, etc., which is undoubtedly competitive in international communication and development. It means that the function of exporting good variety show is important and it cannot be overlooked.

Unlike the above, Na Peng (2010)<sup>11</sup> chose the angle of narration. Na discussed about historical development and cultural context of a series of Korean variety shows with high rating, and she described their types and features of narration. By referring to this, she also described development process of variety show in mainland China. Then, she made comparisons of the use of narrative elements and their combinations on both countries' successful and unsuccessful variety shows. She found out that narrative elements such as groundwork, character image, suspense, conflict and affection and their ways of combinations are the main cause of variety show being successful, because they make a simple and insipid performance an attractive and suspensive narration, and they grasp the audience's psychology successfully.

### **2.3 Copy and Innovation of Variety Show**

A Moran. (1998)<sup>8</sup> discovered the development process from monopoly of radio and black-and-white television to rapid growth of TV industry in globalization. He found that the process of remaking or copying of TV program format between countries worldwide is pretty complicated. Although the number of remade copied TV program is increasing, it is still hard to legally define it. He took some European and American TV programs that have been remade for examples, An American show *Wheel of Fortune* had been remade by over 25 countries. After that, Moran discussed about this topic with some scholars. A Moran, Keane & Michael (2004)<sup>10</sup> described current situation of TV program's format trade between countries worldwide in the era of globalization, then discovered the trade volume and flow direction in Asia, and analyzed the format trade in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong in detail. He found out the trade is very important for a country's economic and cultural development. Factors like new technology, deregulation, privatization and economic recession lead to intense competition between broadcasters in various countries, they also lead to the situation of rising number of remaking at the same time.

A Moran. (2009)<sup>1</sup> again studies this topic of format. At this time, he chose the angle of localization. First, he described the historical development of international trade of TV program format between different countries worldwide and illustrated with some specific TV programs. Moran discovered how TV stations worldwide import TV programs from abroad and also localize them, because different country has different history, culture, custom, religion, social system, etc. Importing and fully copy a foreign TV program is very difficult and controversial. In Arab areas, for example, importing reality show from abroad sparked controversy in the beginning. They need to creatively adapt a foreign program in order to meet traditional culture and political situation in local. They choose to adapt a foreign one instead of creating a completely new one, because this can reduce their commercial risks.

Unlike the above studies, M. Andrejevic (2004)<sup>2</sup> chose the view of personal privacy to analyze the development and innovation of reality show. After the success of reality show at the early stage, people realized audience's strong demand for 'real', that is other people's real life and privacy, which is a great business opportunity for reality show producers. They started to continuously innovate and produce reality show with looser genre and more real to meet audience's demand. The hi-tech

shooting makes people's privacy expose to the public more easily, such as hidden camera and whole-day surveillance.

Jiawei Hu (2015)<sup>6</sup> indicated three main problems of editing facing Chinese variety show. One is that the backwardness of editing skills, such as sense of reality and layering, negatively influence program effect. The second is that unitary editing skills intensify program homogenization. The third is distorted and excessive editing destroys program effect and content authenticity. Unlike Hu, Chan Du (2017)<sup>4</sup> chose a certain type of program, she analyzed features of Chinese cultural reality show in different stages combined with example. This type of program before was negatively impacted by various factors like new media, importing of overseas copyright, marketization of television, etc. Therefore, some cultural reality shows started to learn to keep pace with the times, combine Chinese traditional culture and formats of foreign reality show, and make adjustments to broadcasting forms and formats. Finally, these changes have been accepted by audience. Xiaohui Wang (2007)<sup>17</sup> analyzed not only cultural reality show, also all types of variety show in China, in terms of difficulties and solutions, current situation and problems, including overflowing variety shows, disorder and empty content, tendency of copying, lack of innovation, etc. He pointed out that only innovation can lead variety show to a road of healthy development. At the end, the writer analyzed a variety show called Quiz Show consisting of localized elements of same types of program from a dozen of media-developed countries, which makes it more fun and less preaching, that is learning while laughing.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1 Text Analysis

There are not many studies relating to Chinese audience's evaluation on Korean variety show. Although Xiaojing Li (2015)<sup>16</sup> is about college students' evaluation on *Running Man*, its audience limited to college students. In this study, I will gather and analyze all of audience's evaluation about a Chinese variety show--*Kitchen in the Wild* on Douban.com. This App has received many awards, it contains the most objective film reviews. I will use it to discover the merits and demerits of *Kitchen in the Wild*, building a foundation the last part about suggestions.

#### 3.2 Case Study

This study is based on Chinese variety show--*Kitchen in the Wild* as a case study. In recent years, there are a great many of copied variety shows that origin from Korea, but there are still some innovative shows. Current literature mainly focuses on the dominant position of Korean variety show and its effects on China, instead of innovation of Chinese variety show. In this study, I will discover if there is any innovation in this case by analyzing its format, channel of distribution, and audience's evaluation.

### 4. Research Question

A Korean variety show *Three Meals a Day* that was first aired on October 17th 2014 is away from mainstream variety show. Its idea is to make participants keep away from the city, close to nature, prepare various ingredients in order to just cook a meal at village home and feel the true value of a meal and normal life. A same type of show in China called *Back to Field*, which first aired on Hunan television on January 15th, 2017, is undoubtedly a copied version of *Three Meals a Day*. This topic has caused considerable controversy. Recently, Hunan television has made a food-discovering program named *Kitchen in the Wild*, which first aired on October 27th, 2018. This program is questioned by some people that it copied *Back to Field*. Therefore, I will discover and discuss the following three questions:

Is Kitchen in the Wild really a copy or innovative while absorbing the merits of Korean program?

What are strengths and weaknesses of Kitchen in the Wild?

How to improve Kitchen in the Wild?

How to improve Chinese variety show?

## 5. Format discovering of *Kitchen in the Wild*

*Back to Field* is similar to *Three Meals a Day* in many ways, including the program value, the design of the house where participants lived in, domestic animals, roles of participants, the way of guests showing up, the way of obtaining ingredients, the design of poster, etc. Although Hunan television denied copying due to different content, it cannot convince the audience as the planning is obviously a copy. Recently, *Kitchen in the Wild* aired on this TV station are accused of copying *Back to Field*, but the television denied and some internet users see it as an original program. To explore the truth, six aspects including program value, main content, filming location, participants, the way of guests showing up and the way of obtaining ingredients of *Back to Field Season One* and *Kitchen in the Wild* will be compared and discussed in this section.

### 5.1 Program value and main content

*Back to Field Season One*'s intention origins from fast-paced life in cities. The program is intended to arouse city dwellers' consciousness of living a slow-paced life. However, *Kitchen in the Wild*'s intention origins from the life of ordering take-out food, which is different from *Back to Field Season One*. Nowadays many people are very busy at working and studying, hence ordering take-out has been one of their ways of living and they are yearning for going out to have a self-driving tour and a picnic.

In *Back to Field Season One*, three hosts lived in a so-called mushroom house in a suburb of Beijing and prepared *Three Meals a Day* by themselves. The program team planted over thirty kinds of crops around the house for participants to pick. If they needed any other ingredient for cooking, they had to ask a director and exchange maize or sunflower seeds for it. For example, maize and sunflower seeds could be exchanged for meat and beer respectively. In each edition, different guest(s) came to visit after they called hosts and ordered a meal and hosts had to do their best to satisfy and entertain them. The program producers invited participants to live a normal life, aiming at encouraging people to do manual work for a better life and telling some simple and unadorned truths such as cherishing a meal and Chinese's way of hospitality.

*Back to Field Season One* encourages a life style of settling down in a fixed village house, while *Kitchen in the Wild* encourages people to 'going out'. In *Kitchen in the Wild*, three hosts drove by themselves to the original place of a different ingredient in each edition, and different hitcher(s) joined them on the way. Afterwards, the number of hosts turned four. They were asked to obtain first-hand ingredients and used original cooking methods to cook one meal a day with local features, aiming to arouse urbanites' inner wildness, encourage them to return to nature, feel their own hearts and experience a different life.

### 5.2 Filming location and participants

The filming location of *Back to Field Season One* was in a fixed house near a so-called Dadianzi Village in Miyun County of Beijing. Participants could pick any crop in farmland, buy anything they needed from nearby shops, or exchange with a director for anything such as meat, then they used those collected ingredients to cook in the house or in the yard. However, the location of *Kitchen in the Wild* was different in every edition such as Chongqing, Amur, Hainan, Yunnan, etc. Participants could obtain ingredients from the program team for free, from places such as seaside, farmland and forest by themselves. They could also buy some ingredients from local shops, borrow or exchange something from local people for cooking in the wild. Before the eighth edition, they could choose to chop food in their motor kitchen, but the team cancelled the kitchen after that. In the event of bad weather, they could ask local people for a safer place to cook.

Hosts of *Back to Field Season One* are Lei Huang, Jiong He and Xianhua Liu, who are all male celebrities and the team set roles for them, which were father/chef, mother and son severally, based on their own characteristics and abilities. Guest or group of guests appeared in each edition are also celebrities. The team prepared goats, hens, ducks and a dog near the house for them to raise, but not

for eating. Sometimes they went to local shops to buy goods, so that some local residents appeared in the show. In comparison, these two shows have something in common, that is hosts and hitchers in *Kitchen in the Wild* are also celebrities. In the beginning of this program, hosts were Han Wang, Dan Li and Yanjun Lin, but Yan Jiang joined the team as one of hosts from the sixth edition, Dan Li left and Di Ou joined as a host from the eighth edition. Among them, Han Wang's role was father and the chef in editions where Yan Jiang were not there, Yan Jiang was mother, and the rest of hosts were all children. Although Yan Jiang was new, her excellent cooking skills made her the chef. The role of hitchers appeared in each edition is like guests in the former show. Differing from *Back to Field Season One*, *Kitchen in the Wild* has field guide. Wherever hosts and hitchers went, one or several field guides played by local residents were ready to introduce them to local delicacies, guide and help them obtain ingredients for cooking. In the process, they often went across locals.

The reason why both shows chose celebrities was because they have high degree of public attention and people who like them would pay attention to the shows even before they watched. As both are reality shows, audiences wanted to watch the transformation from shiny image on screen to real-life image in life of celebrities to meet their snooping psychology. M. Andrejevic (2004)<sup>2</sup> found that people have great interest in snooping other people's real life and privacy, which is the reason of the appearance of a large number of reality shows. Baichuan Wang (2017)<sup>3</sup> analyzed from a larger perspective, he found that reality show can meet the audience's needs of mood transformation, interpersonal communication, self-identity and environmental monitoring. Besides, the combination of hosts that is permanent participants and guests or hitchers that is temporary participants could increase the number of topics of the show. Permanent participants could bring a fixed number of audiences for the show and temporary participants could bring a variable number of audiences, because temporary participants were different in each edition and they could constantly bring new topics and attract more audiences.

### 5.3 The way of guests showing up and the way of obtaining ingredients

The way of guests and that of hitchers showing up are different in these two shows. Guests should call hosts and order a meal, then went to the house and joined the team, while hitchers joined the team by getting a ride. Making stoves on their own is what both have in common. In terms of the way of obtaining ingredients, they only have a small part in common. In the former, participants gained ingredients by picking in the farmland, or they worked very hard and used crops to exchange goods or earn limited money. With the money, they could go shops to purchase ingredients or other supplies. In the latter, participants went to different original places to look for and collect ingredients, to buy some with enough money provided by the team, to borrow or exchange with local people. In terms of cooking utensils, they were all prepared for participants in *Back to Field Season One* and in the first seven editions in *Kitchen in the Wild*. Participants could use these utensils in the motor kitchen and borrow one or two from local people occasionally in *Kitchen in the Wild*. Since the eighth edition, the motor kitchen with all of utensils were cancelled and participants had to use materials from nature to make some by themselves, such as chopsticks and bowls, but the team still provided most of utensils for them when they were ready to cook.

### 5.4 Conclusion

In comparison, there are obvious differences between *Back to Field Season One* and *Kitchen in the Wild* in terms of program value, main content, filming location, participants, the way of guests showing up and the way of obtaining ingredients. Their permanent and temporary participants are all celebrities and temporary participants' roles are the same, but their ways of appearing are different, and their composition of participants are not the same because of field guide in *Kitchen in the Wild*. Both shows have some in common in terms of making stoves and obtaining ingredients, but the level of difficulty of obtaining ingredients in *Back to Field Season One* is apparently much higher than the other as participants in the former had to work really hard to get limited ingredients and money. In the first edition, for example, participants had to work bare-handed to collect 300 maize in the farmland

and carry them back to the house in exchange for only a piece of steak. To get the money for buying goods from shops, they also had to work hard in farmland. In *Kitchen in the Wild*, however, not only materials participants collected from nature were free, but the team gives them enough money for purchasing enough ingredients for free. In the sixth edition, for instance, they bought a large amount of seafoods using hundreds of RMB, such amount of money was almost impossible to get in one day in the other program. Therefore, over 80% of content planning between two programs is different and it is unconvincing to judge that *Kitchen in the Wild* is a copy program of *Back to Field Season One*.

To answer the question of ‘Is *Kitchen in the Wild* innovative with features of Korean program?’, features of both Chinese and Korean program will be compared and analyzed with examples in this part. Xia Wu (2012)<sup>15</sup> divided the features of Korean variety show into three main parts, real experience and game, combination of celebrities and ordinary people, omnibearing filming and varied methods of art processing. As a reality show, *Kitchen in the Wild* has the feature of real experience for sure. This show is about participants leaving the original living environment and driving by themselves to different places in the wild for finding ingredients and cooking. In the process, it’s real of their different reactions when they saw new things such as animals and plants that they had never seen or heard about and when they were in difficulties and solving process while crossing river, making tools and cooking, so that audiences can empathize with them and want to have the same experience like them. However, there is no game in this show, which make it more like a food documentary.

*Kitchen in the Wild* also has the feature of combination of celebrities and ordinary people in Korean variety show, and the team gave hosts roles as father, mother and children according to their characteristics and abilities, in order to enhance the effectiveness of narrativity, dramatization and interestingness. As celebrities and experiencers, hosts and hitchers presented the program flexibly, they needed to combine ‘speaking’ and ‘performing’ and deliver the content naturally and effectively to the audience. In the beginning of the first edition, for example, hosts expressed their ideas in cars, including their original expectations about the show, possible difficulties, their cooking skills, etc. Sometimes, the team shot and interviewed these hosts about their feelings and thoughts after the experience, then put videos in the edition. Other people who appeared on the show included field guides the team arranged in advance and other local residents. These ordinary people increased unpredictability and attraction of the show, they could also help the audience fully know about local cuisine and dining traditions, customs and culture.

The appearance of staff who work behind the scene on screen is common in Korean variety show such as *Running Man* and *Two Days One Night*, but *Kitchen in the Wild* does not have this feature. Although a staff who worked behind the scene said a few words and appeared for a few seconds in the last edition, the only content of staff showing on screen in *Kitchen in the Wild*, it only accounts for no more than ten seconds and the percentage of it is too small to admit that the program has this sub-feature. Besides, *Kitchen in the Wild* has the third feature of omnibearing filming in Korean variety show, because the team installed fixed cameras in different positions in their car and arranged cameramen for each participant, in order to catch every expression and action all the time. In terms of varied methods of art processing, the team adopted multiple editing skills for enlarging effectiveness and sophisticated skills such as sound effect, background music and captions for strengthening effectiveness of the program.

It is worth noting that *Kitchen in the Wild* also has some elements of Chinese documentary, which is innovative. First of all, in the beginning of the ninth edition, short-time emotional narration was added such as the narration of one minute and forty-five seconds narrated by a male announcer about the view and food of Yulong Snow Mountain in Yunnan and moments of the edition. This kind of narration only accounts for a tiny part of the show, but it is one of main elements in *A Bite of China*, a famous Chinese food documentary. Second of all, the program added close-up of beautiful scenery and cooking in order to visually and acoustically satisfy the audience. For example, the first edition showed the change in color, gloss and shape of sliced beef being fried from raw to cooked condition for enhancing its visual aesthetics. In order to increase the sense of reality and give the audience a

feeling of actually being there, sound processor or editor added ambient sounds. This method is always used especially when food being stewed, boiled, roasted or fried such as the sizzle of beef in the first edition. Thirdly, interviews of hosts' feelings and thoughts after the experience, which is another feature of Chinese documentary and not common in Korean variety show, could make the audience know more about these hosts and the program value. Fourthly, the program added the perspective of ordinary people, that is field guide as one of leading roles. In the eight edition, two field guides participated the whole process in the edition, they worked and communicated with other participants, which not only gives food a story and life, also helps the audience know deeply about local culture. These two guides showed their brilliant skills when they were making tools, collecting ingredients and cooking, and they told other participants about how they achieved these skills in their growing process. In addition, one of them mentioned about leaving the team earlier for the reason of going to his girl friend's family to propose, which made people know about their special marriage culture in local, also enriched the program content and improved its interestingness.

From the above, *Kitchen in the Wild* has all of features of Korean variety show, including real experience, combination of celebrities and ordinary people, omnibearing filming and varied methods of art processing, except for game and the participation of staff who work behind the scene. At the same time, the program added some elements of Chinese documentary, which is an innovative breakthrough. Normally, there is no narration in Korean variety show, but *Kitchen in the Wild* has it. About food scene, team in the same kind of Korean show just simply shoot it, while the team in *Kitchen in the Wild* shot close-up and post processed it for increasing the attraction, which is common in *A Bite of China*. In terms of the other two elements, the whole process is about celebrities' experience of the time and ordinary people are just supporting role or even background in Korean variety show, but there were celebrities' interviews after the experience and field guide played by ordinary people was one of leading roles in *Kitchen in the Wild*. In the first seven editions, the length of time field guides and other ordinary people appeared on screen accounted for half of the show on average. In the eighth edition, two field guides even participated in the whole process, they traveled with other participants together from the beginning, introduced them to local ingredients and food, guided and helped them obtain ingredients and cook, then ate with them.

## 6. Audience Evaluation on *Kitchen in the Wild*

This part is about detailed discussion on 1373 internet users' text evaluations about *Kitchen in the Wild* on Douban.com. These evaluations are divided into three advantages and three disadvantages with specific and typical examples supported. Within these evaluators, 71% rated the show as good, that is 4 or 5 stars (the full is 5 stars), 18% rated bad, that is 1 or 2 stars, the rest rated ordinary, that is 3 stars. There are 3900 net users in total rated the program but did not give text evaluation, the grand average is 6.3 points (the full is 10 points), that is 3 stars. Among them, 27.9% rated 3 stars and 32.2% rated 1 or 2 stars. Although 71% of text evaluators rated 4 or 5 stars, 60.1% of score raters rated 3 or under it, that is they think the show was ordinary or bad. If these 3900 users not only rated, also gave text evaluation, the percentages of text evaluation would change and users who think the show is ordinary or bad would account for much higher than 11% and 18%, and good evaluations would account for much lower than 71%. Compared to *Back to Field Season One*'s 7.4 points and *Three Meals a Day*'s 9.2 points, *Kitchen in the Wild* falls far behind them and its existing bad evaluations cannot be ignored.

### 6.1 Positive comments: program value

The program value is one of main reasons why some people who gave text comments love *Kitchen in the Wild*. For example, the second best of the number of people who 'like' the show among these comments is: "It is a very good slow-paced variety show. China is a big country abounding in natural wealth. Beautiful landscapes in the wild, traditional food and wonderful combination of Han Wang, Dan Li and Yanjun Lin make it a worth-expecting variety show." This comment has been given 'like'

by almost 530 people. It can be seen that the audience enjoyed watching participants leaving noisy cities and driving to other places to travel, having picnic and relieving from within in the show. China is large and rich in natural resources. Places such as Chongqing, Amur, Hainan and Yunnan and delicacies such as hot pot, Kong rice, coconut chicken and Dai's carbonado in the show were all attracting. Not only the audience could enjoy watching, they could also learn about long-standing culture and custom of different regions in China.

According to 2016 China's Food Delivery O2O Sector Report by iResearch Consulting<sup>5</sup>, China's mobile internet population has reached 6.2 hundred million and is expected to be 6.6 hundred million. The market size of China's O2O local lifestyle service is 8797 hundred million in 2015, and will be 15901.3 hundred million, in which the market share of online tourism industry is the largest, that is 48.3% in 2015 and 47.8% in 2018, and online catering industry is the second largest, that is 16.2% and 16.3%. The market share of China's food delivery O2O industry is over 2300 hundred million in 2015 and expected to be 6600 hundred million. According to data from the main food delivery companies, 42.7% users order food at work and 21.8% users have no time or do not want to cook at home. It can be seen that nowadays a huge number of people love travelling and delicacy and the corresponding market sizes are on the rise. Many people are very busy at work or study, which leads to the rapid growth of food delivery industry. In the circumstances, they are eager to leave their working region or home and go out to see the outside world to enjoy the beautiful scenery and delicious food, the relevant popular programs such as *Back to Field*, *The Chinese Restaurant* and *A Bite of China* prove it. The first two are about celebrities cooking in a fixed place in the domestic and overseas severally, the other one is about ordinary people cooking local dishes in different regions of China.

## 6.2 Positive comments: popular participants

The participation of celebrities is another main reason of the program receiving attention. For example, one of hosts Han Wang is a very famous, reputable and influential TV presenter, he is a wise, knowledgeable, cultured, intelligent and experienced man. Along the way of travelling, he not only cooked for others, he also taught them about varied culture and knowledge with humor. Another host, Dan Li, is famous for his outstanding talk show. Although he is extremely lazy as known, he is talented and funny. Yanjun Lin is a singer. He is diligent, frank, quiet and polite, that is why some audiences like him. Some temporary participants are also popular such as He Chen, who was humorous and impressive in the first edition.

An internet user in Douban.com commented: "*Dan Li is funny. Yanjun Lin is thoughtful. Han Wang is wise. The program value is good. Scenery is wonderful.*" This comment has been 'liked' by over 200 internet users. "*I like these hosts. Each of them is excellent, which is uncommon. I also want to cook in the wild after watching.*" This one is the best in the 'like' list, showing the degree of participants' popularity. Another user said: "*Even a woman like me wants to marry Yan Jiang!*" Many people also wanted to express like this, because this comment is the third best in the 'like' list. In the beginning, Yan Jiang joined the program as a hitcher. She is an easy-going and smile-a-lot girl, and she is proficient in cooking, so that other participants like her very much. As a result of their recommendations, she finally became one of hosts since the sixth edition and other participants were relieved about cooking, because Han Wang, the only host who can cook in the absence of Yan Jiang, is not as good as her in the respect of cooking skills.

## 6.3 Positive comments: professional production

Professional production is another main reason why people love *Kitchen in the Wild*. One of comments is that: "*I have just finished watching the first edition. The quality of picture is great, scenery shot is so wild, and food close-up is attractive!*" This one shows that the program is satisfying in aspects of shooting and post production. The close-up of food is an element of Chinese documentary, and also an innovation. Advanced shooting facilities and skills make beautiful scenes fully exposed to the audience. For example, people can use a drone to shoot some views from the air that is infeasible on the ground. An evaluator commented: "*This slow-paced show makes me feel*

comfortable. The filming spot of the first edition looked like a place where the god lives. Hunan Television's post production is always satisfying. Every moment of landscape and delicacy was as beautiful as a painting." This evaluation was 'liked' by over 200 users, which proves audience's satisfaction with the aesthetic of the program.

#### **6.4 Negative comments: uncorrelation between content and the theme**

Some audiences think *Kitchen in the Wild* is too boring as a show about field survival. "Wild" is a main feature of the program, but it is not wild enough. The team provided participants with varied kitchen wares and enough money for purchasing, so that they could obtain a variety of ingredients with negligible effort. Han Wang, as the only host who cooked in the first five editions, was not skilled enough in cooking; Dan Li was too lazy to live in the wild where manual work was needed; Yanjun Lin was obedient but not skilled in manual work. These were all their obstacles of living in the wild. A user gave a detailed expression about this problem: "After watching the first edition, I think the content is not related to the theme. I thought I could watch something 'wild', but I did not. They just bought hot pot seasoning, beef, mutton and bamboo shoot from a market, borrowed firewood, pot and garlic chives from local residents, and picked mushroom with the help of the field guide. Fishing was done by the field guide as well. Is there anything wild? Where is the kitchen? With such a small amount of ingredients obtained from others, were they enough for four strong men?" 33 users 'liked' this comment.

If it is seen as a simplified version of *Man vs. Wild*, the problem is participants did not obtain ingredients by themselves; as an entertaining version of *A Bite of China*, their cooking skills were not good enough; as a wild version of *Back to Field*, they had no tacit understanding. The team was trying to learn from other outstanding programs, but they did not do it well. Surprisingly, *Kitchen in the Wild* has been upgraded since the eighth edition. Participants started to challenge varied difficulties, which was different from boring content of the first seven editions. In the eighth, Yan Jiang nearly fell into a river while crossing it and others were surprised. With the guidance of two field guides, celebrities obtained materials from a tropical rainforest and used them to make tools such as chopsticks and spoons, they also obtained some seasoning and ingredients by themselves. However, the program still has a problem: No matter participants dared or dared not to challenge new things, they would receive enough money and ingredients from the team without any effort instead of gaining by themselves. Ingredients and money were easy-earned with no challenge, which is why the program was boring and needed improvements.

#### **6.5 Negative comments: uninteresting interaction and low degree of involvement of participants**

Although everyone of hosts is very popular with the audience, they were not familiar with each other, so that their interaction was embarrassing. They always had nothing to say and completed process for process's sake, so some audiences did not find it funny but boring. A typical comment is that: "This team tried to imitate Korean variety show but did not do it well. The communication between participants was so embarrassing, maybe it was Han Wang did not know about other participants and it was like him 'preaching' them instead of chatting with them." 14 users 'liked' this one. Hitchers of the third edition were Yan Jiang and Di Ou. Other participants like Yan Jiang very much and their interaction was harmonious. Di Ou and Han Wang have known each other for many years, and they presented a program called *Day Day Up* together for many years before, so that they were tacit and worked well with each other in *Kitchen in the Wild*. The participation of these two people was one of reasons of the show getting more attention and being more popular. Hence, the degree of familiarity and tacit understanding between participants should be taken seriously.

As a result, Yan Jiang and Di Ou became hosts since the eighth edition. Apart from hosts, the selection of hitchers and field guides is also essential. They should not only be able and dare to challenge in the wild, they should also have tacit understanding with hosts for enriching the program content and improving interestingness together. If hitchers were not familiar with hosts or did not

even know about them, the influence of the show would be negative. In the second edition, for example, ONER members as hitchers were obviously not familiar with hosts and they had nothing to chat about, which lead to embarrassment of the edition.

Besides, many participants did not dare to challenge new things. In the ninth edition, a field guide finally gained some worms from some bamboo canes, but only one participant Han Wang out of six dared to eat them raw and only two tried after them being cooked, which undoubtedly made “wild” just a word without practical action and made the program boring. An internet user commented: “*They wasted such a great program value. Producers in China are too lenient to celebrities. This program should not be called ‘wild’, because these celebrities did not do anything ‘wild’.*” 33 users ‘liked’ this one.

## 6.6 Negative comments: unprofessional editing

Good editing turns boring videos into a wonderful show, while bad editing turns wonderful videos into a boring show. A user in Douban.com said: “*I think wonderful videos were edited into an incoherent, inconsecutive and incompact program. The team failed to show the simple joy of searching for ingredients and cooking in the wild. Participants just hastily went through the process for process’s sake and then waited for a meal.*” Another comment is that: “*So boring. The editing was disordered.*” This means that the editing of *Kitchen in the Wild* is not professional, which is one of reasons why it was boring. Sometimes, participants were divided into two or three groups to go different places to do tasks, but a scene in the same place continued for too long so that the audience forgot other scenes and felt it incoherent. What’s more, the editing of the show lacks proper limits. A lot of continuous scenes containing both boring and interesting content continued for too long and the whole episode was fully presented so that the audience felt it boring, which shows that editors did not put in time and energy. For example, the time of participants driving to the destination lasted almost ten minutes and the time accounted for almost one third before they arrived at the destination in the first edition. When they chatted with each other in the car, they always had nothing to say and the scene still continued to be presented to the audience. Hence, when participants perform or chat, editors should adjust or edit the scene properly to make the plot wonderful and satisfy the audience. Besides, many plots prove that captions were not properly edited. In the whole process of the tenth edition, for instance, almost all of captions were what participants had already expressed before, so that these captions were redundant, boring and useless for enhancing the program effect.

## 7. Recommendations

### 7.1 Recommendations to *Kitchen in the Wild*

*Kitchen in the Wild* combined some features of Korean variety show and some elements of Chinese documentary, which makes it an innovative program and it deserves attention in China. Although it is a good thing to innovate, this program did not properly use these Korean features and it has some obvious problems. The team should combine opinions from all sectors and advantages & disadvantages from the same type of show, in order to enhance *Kitchen in the Wild*.

*Kitchen in the Wild* encourages people to return to nature to experience the life in the Wild, search for ingredients in original places and use these to make delicacies in traditional ways, this program value was one of main reasons of the program being attractive. However, no matter it was before or after the show being upgraded, the program value and content were not matched. The team should make sure they are matched perfectly.

First of all, the team should cancel the rule of participants getting any money and ingredient without effort, and they should obtain by themselves. If they need money or ingredient, the team should create some obstacles and increase the degree of difficulty for them to challenge rather than simply give them for free, which can not only relate the program value and content, also enrich the content and increase interestingness. For instance, participants had to work really hard in order to gain limited ingredients in *Back to Field*. Sometimes they were so tired that they outwitted or bargained

with directors, or even broke the rule to get ingredients, which made the content more interesting and substantial. The team of *Kitchen in the Wild* should also relate field activities and the obtaining of ingredients and money, so that participants are goal-oriented. If they want to gain something, they have to bravely complete varied challenges that the team sets for them. They should avoid the same type of situation in the ninth edition that most of participants just looked at worms but did not dare to eat them, making the show 'looking' instead of 'experiencing'. If they faced up to challenges, it would enhance the show for sure. Besides, although *Kitchen in the Wild* is a reality show, the team should not just let participants do as they like but offer them a wide variety of substantial scenarios like a scripwriter. Ke Zhong (2017)<sup>7</sup> indicates that screenwriters have functions of designing character, structuring narration and spreading emotion and their participation can improve the quality and competitiveness of reality show. Internet users think *Kitchen in the Wild* was boring, which is closely connected with boring content. Hence, good screenwriters should be invited to weave the content such as designing characters, depicting plots and stories, spreading emotions and emotional themes, exploring punchlines and bursting points, on the basis of keeping the program real. The team can also refer to some related shows with wildness and popularity such as *Man vs. Wild*.

Although permanent and temporary participants are humorous and popular, but their unfamiliarity and reservation were obvious, proving that the participation of celebrities with popularity is not always a good thing. Participants in *Back to Field* are not only popular and humorous, also familiar with each other. Among them, Jiong He and Lei Huang are good friends of over twenty years, and most of guests are friends of them and Lei Huang's students, this results that the audience think their interactions were tacit, warmhearted and interesting in the program. *Kitchen in the Wild* has been upgraded in terms of the combination of hosts since the eighth edition, the selection of hitchers should also be noticed and they should not only be good at showing themselves in the program, but also be familiar or have some connections with hosts. On the basis of a good combination of participants, they should learn to be active and brave to participate in the field life. If they just 'look' but not 'experience' activities, the audience would think they are not dedicated, and it would negatively influence the show.

The team of *Kitchen in the Wild* had varied advanced facilities and skills, providing a solid base for recording the program. However, they did not show the ability of editing materials into interesting and coherent scenarios. In terms of post-production, they absorbed the feature of varied methods of art processing of Korean variety show, but they did not get the essence. There are many materials about a program, editors should take the essence and discard the dregs, and properly and fully use varied methods such as shot's selection, sequencing, captions, visual effects and sound effects, in order to improve the rhythm and layering and avoid 'boring' scenarios. In the first edition of *Three Meals a Day* Season One, for instance, one of hosts did not say anything in the process of him driving to buy a piece of Tofu, but editor added melodious music, sound effect of laughter and subtitles such as "He is so cool in any way", "This is just a trip of buying a piece of Tofu", "He is not evading inspection" and "He is not absconding" for making fun of the host, which made this plot that was supposed to be boring very interesting. For another example, in *Running Man*, the end of competition when the winner was about to be revealed was skipped until competitors were about to show the result in awards ceremony, this kind of editing made it suspenseful, layering and attractive to the audience.

Besides, humorous post-production can make the program more interesting, so that editors should avoid doing anything for nothing, they should fully use their imagination to properly apply varied methods to express speech and mood that participants did not express and make it interesting at the same time. The team should provide editors professional training or replace these editors with excellent ones, and actively absorb advantages of the same type of program with high rating. For example, the team can refer to *Three Meals a Day* and *A Bite of China* whose editors can turn boring videos into lively and interesting programs.

Not only *Kitchen in the Wild* has these problems above, Chinese variety show also has these problems.

## 7.2 Recommendations to Chinese variety show

To improve the healthy development of the market of Chinese variety show, encourage the development of innovative and valuable programs, SARFT has launched a series of policies. For example, a policy has taken into effect in October 2013, the broadcasting time of entertainment show must not be more than 70% weekly, the number of program each television station importing from abroad must not be more than one and it must not be broadcasted in prime time the same year, and entertainment show must be put on record in advance; In February 2016, the participation of juveniles and children of celebrities in reality show must be strictly controlled; In October 2018, to further curb the phenomenon of chasing star, hyping, excessive entertainment, high remuneration, forging TV ratings, etc., the percentage of participants, the number of participants, remuneration and cost are further strictly controlled, police is also involved in fighting working mechanism of forging TV ratings and click rate.

As can be seen from the above, SARFT has been limiting on international and domestic entertainment program instead of really encouraging its development in China for curbing harmful effects of them on Chinese society. In comparison, Korean government has been really encouraging Korean TV program. For example, The Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) was established in 2001, in order to promote the development of Korean culture. The government provides TV stations subsidy of fifty million US dollars each year to improve and support the development of local program. The popularity of a variety show at home and abroad is closely related to the government support of the country.

Hence, China can follow the example of Korea in launching some policies that really help improve the development of Chinese entertainment program. For example, China can establish and fund a research institution for the purpose of conducting comprehensive and detailed studies and analysis about program format, content, channel development, the audience and production team of domestic and foreign entertainment programs, etc. Then, advantages of excellent programs should be absorbed for developing innovative entertainment programs with Chinese culture. TV stations and video websites with high production of variety shows can also organize some relevant research teams and competitions in their companies in order to encourage employees to constantly learn advanced knowledge while working. Although Hunan television has high production of variety shows, many of them are copies from other shows and the quality is uneven. The station can try to organize a team to study and improve the quality of programs, and regularly organize some competitions for showing some great and innovative programs to the audience.

Although there are some innovative variety shows in China such as *Ding Ge Long Dong Qiang*, *Grade One* and *I Am an Actor* and the copyright of the last one has been purchased by an American entertainment company, the number of innovative programs is much less than copied ones. Therefore, China should actively learn deeply about the knowledge of entertainment show rather than learn superficial knowledge. The shortage of talents is not only a problem facing *Kitchen in the Wild*, also a significant reason of limiting the development of Chinese variety show. To solve this problem, some courses about domestic and foreign variety program can be opened for students of related majors to study in universities, because it can help them be better prepared for entering related field of work. The impact of variety show on the audience is no less than that of movie and television show, the phenomenon that the image of Korea has been greatly improved by exporting their variety shows proves it, so that producers should not only absorb strengths of foreign variety shows, also study Chinese programs and adhere to policies in China for producing more innovative, excellent and localized programs. If the content of Chinese variety show is improved and its exports are expanded, the image of China will also be greatly improved in aspects of geography, economy, culture, society, government image, etc.. these will increase Chinese competitiveness in international communication and development for a certainty.

## 8. Conclusion

In terms of program value, main content, filming location, the combination of participants, the way of guests showing up and the way of obtaining ingredients, *Back to Field Season One* and *Kitchen in the Wild* are obviously different with each other, so that the latter is not copied from the former. What's more, although *Kitchen in the Wild* has features of Korean variety show in aspects of real experience, combination of celebrities and ordinary people, omnibearing filming and varied methods of art processing, it innovatively added some elements of Chinese documentary including narration, close-up, interviews of participants and the participation of ordinary people as leading roles. Some internet users on Douban.com like the program value, celebrities as participants and professional production of *Kitchen in the Wild*, but some other users do not like the show in terms of its uncorrelation between content and the theme, uninteresting interaction and low degree of involvement of participants, and unprofessional editing. The rating of *Kitchen in the Wild* is much lower than that of *Back to Field Season One* and *Three Meals a Day*, so that the team should make thorough improvements on program content, the selection of participants and editing. Producers of Chinese variety show should also make these improvements, because they have problems of copying, uneven quality and the shortage of talents. To encourage innovation and improve the quality of Chinese program, China should not just politically curb the development of programs that are not good for the country, some more important things, such as establishing research institutions and competitions and improving the quality of education of related majors, should be done to improve the country's image that is good for the development in varied aspects.

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