

Localization of a Korean Music Reality Television Format in Vietnam from an Intercultural Communication Perspective: A Case Study of *Sea of Hope*

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the localization of the Korean music reality television format *Sea of Hope* in Vietnam from an intercultural communication perspective through a qualitative case study of *Biển của Hy Vọng*. While previous studies have primarily explained television format localization from industrial or cultural adaptation perspectives, relatively little research has explored localization as an intercultural communicative process. To address this gap, the study proposes an Integrated Analytical Framework that combines television format studies, localization theory, and intercultural communication across four dimensions: intercultural context and actors, interaction and negotiation, format adaptation, and cultural outcomes. The analysis draws upon the complete Korean and Vietnamese versions of the program, together with official production documents and publicly available secondary materials. The findings indicate that the Vietnamese adaptation successfully preserves the core identity and healing philosophy of the original format while selectively modifying its structure, narrative organization, musical repertoire, production practices, and cultural representations to suit the Vietnamese cultural and media environment. These adaptations emerge through continuous interaction and negotiation among institutional stakeholders, production teams, participating artists, and the local sociocultural context, resulting in new hybrid cultural meanings. The study argues that television format localization should be understood not merely as an industrial adaptation strategy but as a dynamic process of intercultural communication. By integrating three major strands of scholarship into a unified analytical framework, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of television format localization and provides practical implications for future transnational television production and cultural cooperation between South Korea and Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: Television format localization; intercultural communication; Korean Wave (Hallyu); music reality television; Sea of Hope; Vietnam

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the international transfer of television formats has become one of the major driving forces behind the global circulation of cultural products. Rather than exporting completed television programs, media companies have increasingly adopted format licensing, allowing local broadcasters to produce their own versions that accommodate the cultural characteristics and market demands of receiving countries while preserving the core structure and identity of the original program (Moran, 1998; Chalaby, 2016). In this sense, television formats have evolved beyond media commodities to become important vehicles for the transnational circulation and exchange of cultural values.

Against this backdrop, alongside the global spread of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), South Korea has emerged as one of the world's leading exporters of television formats, particularly within Asia. In addition to television dramas and popular music, numerous Korean reality television formats have been successfully licensed and produced in various countries, including Vietnam. In the field of music reality television, representative examples include *I Can See Your Voice* (*Giọng ai giọng ai*), *The Masked Singer* (*Cá sĩ mặt nạ*), and *Sea of Hope* (*Biển của Hy vọng*). The introduction and production of these formats have not only diversified Vietnam's television landscape but also reflected the growing cultural industry cooperation between South Korea and Vietnam.

Importantly, the Vietnamese adaptations are not simple reproductions of their Korean originals. Instead, each format undergoes a localization process to accommodate Vietnam's cultural context and media environment. Such adaptations are evident in multiple aspects, including filming locations, celebrity participation, language use, program organization, cultural symbols, and modes of audience engagement. In other words, format transfer simultaneously involves a process of localization, whereby

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selected elements of the original format are adapted and reconstructed to create a version that is culturally appropriate for the receiving context.

Among the Korean television formats introduced into Vietnam, *Sea of Hope* represents a particularly illustrative case. Unlike many music reality programs that focus primarily on musical performances, *Sea of Hope* integrates music, cuisine, natural landscapes, and environmental awareness within a distinctive "healing" atmosphere, thereby forming the unique identity of the original Korean format. While the Vietnamese adaptation retains the program's core concept, it introduces substantial modifications to its content, presentation, and modes of communicating cultural values in order to accommodate local production conditions and Vietnam's sociocultural context. Consequently, *Sea of Hope* provides an appropriate case for examining television format localization from the perspective of intercultural communication within the broader context of Korea–Vietnam cultural exchange.

Accordingly, this study adopts *Sea of Hope* as a case study to investigate the localization of a Korean music reality television format in Vietnam from an intercultural communication perspective. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how Korean and Vietnamese cultural elements interact, negotiate, and adapt throughout the format localization process, thereby explaining how a transnational television format is reconstructed within a new cultural context.

To achieve this objective, the study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) Which elements of the original format are retained, and which are modified in the Vietnamese adaptation of *Sea of Hope*?
- (2) How are interaction, negotiation, and adaptation between Korean and Vietnamese cultural elements manifested throughout the television format localization process?
- (3) How can an intercultural communication perspective contribute to explaining the localization of Korean music reality television formats in Vietnam?

This study is expected to broaden existing approaches to television format localization by employing intercultural communication as an analytical framework for explaining the mechanisms underlying format transfer. Furthermore, through the case of *Sea of Hope*, it provides empirical evidence of cultural interaction and adaptation during the localization of Korean television formats in Vietnam, thereby contributing to broader discussions on intercultural exchange and cultural industries in the context of globalization.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the localization of transnational television formats requires drawing upon multiple strands of scholarship rather than relying on a single theoretical perspective. Existing literature relevant to this study can be broadly categorized into three major strands. The first strand comprises television format studies, which examine the nature of television formats and their global circulation. The second strand consists of localization studies, which explore how global cultural products are adapted to local cultural contexts. The third strand encompasses intercultural communication research, which investigates how people from different cultural backgrounds interact, negotiate meanings, and adapt to one another during intercultural encounters. Although these three strands have developed within different academic traditions and address different research objects, they all provide important theoretical foundations for examining television format localization from the perspective of intercultural communication.

Television format studies have primarily focused on conceptualizing the nature of television formats and explaining their role within the global television industry. Moran (1998) was among the first scholars to define television formats as production models rather than finished television programs. According to Moran, a television format provides a transferable production framework that enables local broadcasters to reproduce a program while adapting it to the cultural and industrial conditions of different countries. Expanding this perspective, Moran and Malbon (2006) defined a television format as "the total body of knowledge systematically and consciously assembled to facilitate the future adaptation under licence of the programme". Their definition emphasizes that a format consists not only of the program concept but also of production know-how, technical guidelines, branding strategies, and accumulated production experience transferred through licensing agreements. From an industrial perspective, Chalaby (2012) argued that the rapid expansion of television format trade has transformed format licensing into one of the most dynamic sectors of the global television industry. Rather than exporting completed television programs, production companies increasingly export adaptable production models capable of being reconstructed in diverse cultural markets. Collectively, these studies explain why television formats have become globally mobile cultural products. However, they primarily focus on the industrial characteristics and circulation of formats, paying comparatively less attention to the intercultural processes through which formats are adapted in local cultural settings.

Another important strand of literature examines the localization of global cultural products. Robertson (1995) introduced the concept of *glocalization* to describe the simultaneous interaction between global and local forces in the process of globalization. Rather than viewing globalization as cultural homogenization, Robertson argued that global cultural forms are continuously reinterpreted and reconstructed within local contexts. From the perspective of international media studies, Straubhaar (2007)

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proposed the concept of *cultural proximity*, suggesting that audiences tend to prefer media content that reflects familiar languages, values, historical experiences, and cultural traditions. His argument helps explain why globally circulated media products often require adaptation before they can be successfully accepted in local markets. Together, these studies emphasize that localization is not merely a technical modification of media products but a process through which global cultural elements are selectively interpreted and reconstructed in response to local cultural contexts. Nevertheless, most localization studies primarily explain why localization occurs and what kinds of changes emerge after adaptation, while paying less attention to the communicative mechanisms through which those changes are negotiated.

A third strand of the literature concerns intercultural communication and cultural negotiation. Hall (1959) is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of intercultural communication studies, emphasizing that culture and communication are fundamentally intertwined. Building upon his earlier work, Hall (1976) further developed the concepts of high-context and low-context cultures, arguing that communication is shaped not only by explicit verbal messages but also by contextual information, shared cultural knowledge, and implicit meanings. His work provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding how cultural differences influence communication and interpretation across societies. Subsequent studies have further expanded intercultural communication research by examining how mutual understanding is achieved through communication across cultural boundaries. Gudykunst (2005) argued that effective intercultural communication depends on participants' ability to reduce uncertainty and develop shared understanding through continuous interaction. From this perspective, communication is understood as an ongoing process of interpretation, adjustment, and negotiation rather than the simple transmission of information. Kim (2001) conceptualized intercultural adaptation as a dynamic and continuous process in which individuals experience stress, adjustment, and growth while interacting with unfamiliar cultural environments. Rather than viewing adaptation as a one-way process, Kim emphasized continuous interaction and mutual adjustment between individuals and their social environments. Although developed within postcolonial cultural theory rather than intercultural communication, Bhabha's (1994) concepts of *Third Space* and *hybridity* offer an important perspective for understanding how new cultural meanings emerge through encounters between different cultures. Bhabha argued that cultural interaction does not simply reproduce one culture or another but creates hybrid cultural forms through negotiation and reinterpretation. Taken together, these studies provide valuable conceptual resources for understanding intercultural encounters as dynamic processes of interaction, negotiation, adaptation, and meaning-making.

The above review demonstrates that television format studies, localization studies, and intercultural communication research have largely evolved as separate bodies of scholarship. Television format research primarily explains the industrial characteristics and global circulation of television formats. Localization studies focus on how global cultural products are adapted to local contexts. Intercultural communication research, meanwhile, examines the processes through which people from different cultural backgrounds negotiate meanings and adapt to cultural differences. However, relatively little research has integrated these three strands to explain how television format localization actually takes place. To address this gap, this study conceptualizes television format localization as an intercultural communicative process rather than merely an adaptation outcome. Drawing upon the three strands of literature reviewed above, the study proposes an Integrated Analytical Framework to explain the mechanism through which television formats are localized across cultural contexts. Rather than treating localization as a static result, the framework understands it as a dynamic process involving continuous interaction, negotiation, selection, and adaptation among multiple stakeholders.

The framework consists of four interconnected analytical dimensions. The first dimension, *Intercultural Context and Actors*, identifies the cultural, industrial, and institutional contexts in which format transfer takes place, as well as the key stakeholders involved in the localization process. The second dimension, *Interaction and Negotiation*, examines how these actors communicate and negotiate cultural meanings throughout the localization process. The third dimension, *Format Adaptation*, analyzes how the negotiated outcomes are translated into concrete adaptations of the original format through the retention, modification, replacement, omission, or addition of specific program elements in response to the Vietnamese cultural and media context. Finally, *Cultural Outcomes* explores the new cultural meanings and hybrid cultural forms that emerge through the localization process as a result of intercultural interaction and negotiation. Based on this framework, the Vietnamese adaptation of *Sea of Hope* is examined as a case study to reveal the intercultural communicative mechanisms underlying the localization of Korean music reality television formats in Vietnam.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study design to investigate the localization of a Korean music reality television format in Vietnam from an intercultural communication perspective. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the purpose of the study is not to quantify localized elements but to explain the intercultural communicative processes through which television formats are reconstructed in new cultural contexts. The case study method enables an in-depth examination of television format localization as a contemporary cultural phenomenon situated within its real-life industrial and sociocultural context.

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The study selects *Sea of Hope* as the research case for three main reasons. First, unlike conventional music reality programs, *Sea of Hope* integrates music performances, cuisine, environmental awareness, and healing narratives into a single television format, making it culturally distinctive among Korean reality television programs. Second, while the Vietnamese adaptation retains the core concept of the original format, it also introduces substantial modifications in response to Vietnam's cultural and media environment. This provides an appropriate context for examining how localization is achieved through intercultural communication. Third, as one of the recent Korean television formats localized in Vietnam, the program reflects the continuing development of cultural and creative cooperation between South Korea and Vietnam.

The primary data consist of the complete broadcast versions of the Korean original *Sea of Hope* (12 episodes), originally broadcast by JTBC, and its Vietnamese adaptation, *Biển của Hy Vọng* (20 episodes), accessed via the program's official YouTube playlist (Biển của Hy Vọng Official, n.d.). Data collection and analysis were conducted during June 2026. Throughout the analysis, the Korean original was analyzed in its original Korean-language version, while the Vietnamese adaptation was analyzed in its original Vietnamese-language version.

To ensure analytical consistency, the study did not attempt to analyze every scene equally. Instead, analytical attention focused on sequences that explicitly reflected the localization process, including musical performances, interactions among cast members, restaurant operations, environmental activities, representations of local cuisine and landscapes, and other scenes involving the adaptation or negotiation of Korean and Vietnamese cultural elements. These sequences were selected because they most clearly reflected the intercultural communicative processes examined in the proposed analytical framework.

To contextualize the analysis, documentary materials, including official program descriptions, promotional materials, production information released by broadcasters and production companies, press reports, and publicly available interviews with production staff and participating artists, were also consulted where relevant. These supplementary materials were used to clarify the production context and support the interpretation of localization decisions identified in the television texts.

Data analysis is guided by the Integrated Analytical Framework proposed in the previous section. Rather than functioning as a coding scheme based solely on program content, the framework serves as an analytical lens for interpreting the localization process from an intercultural communication perspective. During analysis, empirical evidence collected from the television programs and documentary sources is interpreted through the four interconnected analytical dimensions: Intercultural Context and Actors, Interaction and Negotiation, Format Adaptation, and Cultural Outcomes. This procedure enables the study to move beyond describing localized changes and instead explain the intercultural communicative mechanisms through which these changes are produced.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the study employs data triangulation by comparing evidence from multiple data sources, including television texts, official production documents, and publicly available secondary materials. Interpretations are continuously cross-checked throughout the analytical process to ensure consistency between observed program content and documented production information. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the study aims to provide an analytically grounded explanation of television format localization through an intercultural communication perspective. Although the findings are derived from a single case, the proposed analytical framework may also provide a useful reference for future studies on the localization of transnational television formats in other cultural contexts.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Intercultural Context and Actors

Under the proposed Integrated Analytical Framework, the localization of *Sea of Hope* into *Biển của Hy Vọng* is understood not merely as the transfer of a television format across national borders but as a dynamic process of intercultural communication. Rather than occurring in isolation, this process is embedded within a specific intercultural context and shaped by multiple institutional and human actors who participate in the interpretation, negotiation, and reconstruction of cultural meanings. Accordingly, this section first examines the intercultural context in which the format transfer takes place before identifying the principal actors involved in the localization process.

From an intercultural communication perspective, the transfer of *Sea of Hope* took place between two societies that share several important cultural characteristics. According to Hall (1976), both South Korea and Vietnam can generally be understood as high-context cultures, where communication relies heavily on implicit meanings, shared cultural knowledge, interpersonal relationships, and situational cues rather than explicit verbal expression. Beyond communicative styles, the two countries also share broader cultural similarities rooted in East Asian cultural traditions, while more than two decades of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) have further increased Vietnamese audiences' familiarity with Korean popular culture and media aesthetics. Collectively, these cultural affinities contribute to what Straubhaar (2007) conceptualizes as cultural proximity, creating favorable conditions for the cross-border circulation and reception of Korean television formats in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, cultural proximity does not eliminate the need for localization. Although both countries exhibit characteristics of high-context communication, differences remain in media production practices, audience expectations, and television

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consumption habits. The original Korean version of *Sea of Hope* adopts a slow-paced and reflective narrative style that emphasizes emotional restraint, everyday interactions, natural scenery, and the atmosphere commonly associated with contemporary Korean "healing" television programs. By contrast, Vietnamese entertainment programs generally place greater emphasis on lively interactions, verbal communication, emotional expressiveness, and a faster narrative rhythm. These differences do not constitute cultural incompatibility; rather, they create an intercultural communicative space in which the original format requires adaptation to remain meaningful and engaging for Vietnamese audiences.

Within this intercultural context, the localization process is carried out through the interaction of multiple institutional and human actors. At the institutional level, JTBC, as the original broadcaster, together with its distribution partner SLL Joongang Co., Ltd., functions as the format owner responsible for preserving the program's core identity. As Moran and Malbon (2006) argue, internationally licensed television formats are normally accompanied by a "format bible" that specifies the essential production principles, structural components, and creative guidelines that should be maintained across localized versions. On the Vietnamese side, Viettel Media acquired the official adaptation rights and assumed responsibility for translating these production principles into a version suitable for the Vietnamese broadcasting environment. According to Viettel Media (2022), *Biển của Hy Vọng* premiered on December 15, 2022, on HTV7, QPVN, SCTV6 and digital platforms including YouTube and Mocha, representing one of the recent Korean television formats officially localized for Vietnamese audiences.

The localization process also involves a range of human actors whose participation extends beyond technical production. These include producers, directors, scriptwriters, production staff, participating artists, and audiences. Rather than serving as passive participants, these actors collectively interpret the original format and participate in its localization within the Vietnamese cultural context. Together, they establish the organizational and communicative setting in which intercultural interaction and negotiation take place. The interactions and negotiations among these actors throughout the localization process are examined in the following section.

B. Interaction and Negotiation

The localization of *Sea of Hope* was not a one-way transfer of production techniques from South Korea to Vietnam but an ongoing process of intercultural interaction and negotiation among the actors identified in the previous section. Rather than simply reproducing the original television program, the localization process required continuous communication through which the Korean format was interpreted, discussed, and reconstructed within the Vietnamese cultural and media environment. Television format localization, therefore, should be understood not merely as industrial cooperation but also as a process of intercultural communication in which different actors negotiate shared meanings across cultural boundaries.

From an institutional perspective, this process began with the official licensing agreement between JTBC, SLL Joongang Co., Ltd., and Viettel Media. As Moran and Malbon (2006) explain, internationally licensed television formats are typically accompanied by a "format bible" that specifies the program's core concept, production principles, structural framework, and other essential elements intended to preserve the identity of the original format across different local versions. At the same time, however, television formats are designed to allow creative flexibility so that local producers can adapt specific elements to suit their own cultural and broadcasting environments. Consequently, the localization of *Sea of Hope* required Viettel Media to balance fidelity to the original format with the practical demands of the Vietnamese television market.

From the perspective of intercultural communication, this process can be interpreted as one of developing shared understanding between partners from different cultural and industrial contexts. Gudykunst (2005) argues that effective intercultural communication depends on reducing uncertainty and establishing mutual understanding through continuous interaction. In the localization of *Sea of Hope*, communication between the Korean format owners and the Vietnamese production team gradually clarified which elements constituted the essential identity of the original program and which aspects could be modified without compromising its fundamental concept. Rather than representing unilateral decision-making, localization therefore emerged through ongoing dialogue, consultation, and negotiation among the participating institutions.

Negotiation was equally evident in the creative decisions made during production. According to Viettel Media (2022), the Vietnamese production team sought to preserve the original program's healing philosophy while redesigning its presentation to better resonate with domestic audiences. Music Director Tiên Cookie explained that song selection was determined not only by musical quality but also by the emotional function of each performance within the narrative of individual episodes. Songs were carefully selected to complement the emotional development of each episode and to integrate naturally with culinary activities, environmental experiences, and interactions among the cast members. These production decisions illustrate that localization involved negotiating communicative meanings rather than simply reproducing the audiovisual content of the Korean version.

The negotiation process also extended to the participating artists themselves. Unlike conventional Vietnamese entertainment programs, where celebrities primarily perform or compete, *Biển của Hy Vọng* required its cast members to undertake multiple social roles simultaneously, including restaurant management, cooking, bartending, customer service, environmental protection activities, and live musical performances. These unfamiliar production conditions required the artists to continuously adjust their

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interactions with fellow cast members, production staff, guests, and local communities while maintaining the healing atmosphere that defined the original format. Rather than performing predetermined entertainment personas, they actively contributed to constructing a communicative environment characterized by cooperation, authenticity, empathy, and emotional connection.

Overall, the interaction among institutional stakeholders, production staff, and participating artists demonstrates that television format localization is fundamentally an intercultural process of communication and negotiation rather than a simple transfer of production techniques. Through continuous dialogue and mutual adjustment, the Korean production philosophy was reinterpreted within the Vietnamese cultural context while preserving the essential identity of the original format. The concrete outcomes of these negotiations are manifested in the structural and content adaptations discussed in the following section.

C. Format Adaptation

As discussed in the previous section, the negotiations among institutional and human actors were ultimately translated into concrete modifications of the original television format. However, format adaptation does not simply involve changing the original program. Rather, it requires balancing continuity and change by preserving the core identity of the original format while modifying selected elements to suit the local cultural and media environment. Drawing on Kim's (2001) concept of intercultural adaptation, television format localization may likewise be understood as a continuous process of adjustment in which communicative practices and production strategies are selectively retained, modified, expanded, or reorganized to achieve compatibility with a new cultural context. The analysis identifies four major dimensions through which *Biển của Hy Vọng* adapted the original *Sea of Hope*: the retention of the core format identity, structural adaptation, narrative and production adaptation, and local cultural integration.

1) *Retaining the Core Format Identity*: Before examining the modifications introduced in the Vietnamese adaptation, it is important to recognize that the localization process preserved the essential identity of the original format. As Moran and Malbon (2006) argue, successful television format localization requires balancing innovation with consistency by maintaining the indispensable elements that define the format while allowing flexibility in locally adaptable components. Rather than creating an entirely new entertainment program, *Biển của Hy Vọng* retained the fundamental concept and program philosophy of *Sea of Hope*, thereby ensuring the continuity of its format identity.

First, the Vietnamese version preserved the original "three-in-one" program concept that integrates live music performances, restaurant operation, and environmental activities. Similar to the Korean original, participating artists simultaneously assumed multiple roles as singers, restaurant staff, and environmental volunteers. Rather than functioning solely as performers, they prepared meals, served customers, interacted with local visitors, and participated in environmental protection activities such as beach clean-ups, coral planting, and marine waste collection. This multidimensional format remained the central organizing principle of the Vietnamese adaptation.

Second, the healing philosophy that distinguishes *Sea of Hope* from conventional music reality shows was consistently maintained. Both versions emphasize emotional comfort, interpersonal connection, and psychological relaxation through the combination of music, nature, and everyday experiences. Instead of relying on competition, elimination, or dramatic conflict, the program constructs a calm and intimate atmosphere in which artists and guests communicate through shared daily activities and live acoustic performances. The Vietnamese production team explicitly sought to preserve this "Heal and Chill" philosophy, positioning the program as a space for emotional restoration rather than competitive entertainment (Tra Trang, 2022).

Third, the Vietnamese adaptation also retained the experiential production style of the original format. In both versions, performances are embedded within authentic everyday situations rather than staged as conventional television concerts. Music is integrated naturally into restaurant operations and interactions with guests, while the surrounding coastal landscape functions as an essential component of the viewing experience. This emphasis on authenticity reinforces the healing atmosphere and emotional appeal of the original format.

These retained elements demonstrate that the localization of *Sea of Hope* was not intended to replace the identity of the Korean original. Instead, the Vietnamese production preserved the format's core concept, program philosophy, and experiential structure while selectively introducing modifications appropriate to the domestic cultural and media environment. The following sections examine how these localized adaptations were implemented in practice.

2) *Structural Adaptation*: Following the preservation of the core format identity, the Vietnamese production team introduced a series of structural modifications that reorganized the program while maintaining its fundamental concept. These changes did not alter the essence of *Sea of Hope* but adjusted its overall structure to better suit the production conditions and viewing habits of Vietnamese audiences.

One of the most noticeable structural adaptations concerns the overall scale of the program. Whereas the Korean original consists of twelve episodes filmed across two coastal locations (Pohang and Goseong), the Vietnamese adaptation expands the program into twenty episodes produced in three different coastal regions: Co To (Quang Ninh), Cu Lao Mai Nha (Phu Yen), and Phu Quoc (Kien Giang). These three locations respectively represent the northern, central, and southern coastal regions of

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Vietnam. Rather than merely extending the number of episodes, this expansion provides greater geographical diversity while allowing the program to present a broader representation of Vietnam's coastal landscapes.

A second structural modification involves the organization of the program into three clearly defined chapters. Unlike the Korean version, which follows a relatively continuous narrative across its two filming locations, *Biển của Hy Vọng* is divided into three thematic parts, each associated with a different destination and emotional atmosphere. The first chapter, *Toward the Sunrise*, introduces the healing journey through the peaceful scenery of Co To Island. The second chapter, *The Sea's Turbulence*, presents a more emotionally intense atmosphere in Phu Yen, while the final chapter, *After the Rain Comes the Rainbow*, concludes the journey with themes of emotional recovery and hope in Phu Quoc. This chapter-based organization provides a clearer narrative progression while preserving the program's overall healing philosophy.

The Vietnamese version also modifies the internal organization of individual episodes. In the Korean original, each episode generally follows a natural daily rhythm in which environmental activities, restaurant operations, and musical performances unfold organically without explicit thematic framing. By contrast, every episode of *Biển của Hy Vọng* is assigned an individual title and emotional theme. According to the production team, these themes guide not only the narrative development but also the selection of songs and the arrangement of activities throughout each episode (Viettel Media, 2022). This structural adjustment offers viewers a more explicit narrative orientation while remaining consistent with the original healing concept.

Another notable adaptation concerns cast organization. While both versions retain a fixed group of principal participants, the Vietnamese production adopts a more flexible arrangement by adjusting cast members and inviting different guest artists across the three chapters. This approach maintains the continuity of the program while introducing new interpersonal dynamics and musical collaborations throughout the twenty-episode season. The structural reorganization therefore enables greater variety without fundamentally changing the format's original identity.

Taken together, these structural adaptations demonstrate that localization does not necessarily require altering the essential characteristics of a television format. Instead, the Vietnamese production selectively reorganizes the scale, chapter structure, episode design, and cast arrangement to accommodate domestic production conditions and audience preferences while preserving the core framework established by the original format.

3) *Narrative, Musical, and Production Adaptation*: Following the structural adaptations discussed above, the Vietnamese production team further localized the original format by reconfiguring its narrative organization, musical design, production activities, and cast arrangement. These modifications sought to present the program in ways that would be more accessible and emotionally engaging for Vietnamese audiences. The adaptation therefore extended beyond structural changes to encompass the communicative strategies through which the program conveyed its healing philosophy.

One important adaptation concerns narrative organization. Unlike the Korean original, where emotional meanings emerge naturally from the daily experiences of the cast members and the surrounding environment, *Biển của Hy Vọng* adopts a more concept-driven storytelling approach. The twenty episodes are organized into three thematic chapters, and each episode is assigned a specific title and emotional theme. These themes guided not only the narrative progression of each episode but also the selection of songs, production activities, and interactions among participants. This approach provides viewers with a clearer emotional trajectory while preserving the reflective atmosphere of the original format. Such narrative organization also corresponds more closely to the storytelling conventions commonly found in Vietnamese television entertainment, where audiences generally expect a more explicit thematic structure.

Music likewise underwent significant adaptation during the localization process. While live acoustic performances remain the central component of both versions, the Vietnamese adaptation broadens the musical repertoire to include contemporary Vietnamese pop, ballads, chill, and lofi-inspired arrangements alongside acoustic performances. Rather than selecting songs solely on the basis of popularity or vocal difficulty, Music Director Tiên Cookie explained that musical performances were designed according to the emotional message of each episode and their contribution to the program's overall healing narrative (Tra Trang, 2022). Music therefore functions not merely as entertainment but as a communicative medium through which the emotional themes of the program are conveyed and shared with audiences.

Production activities were also expanded while maintaining the original program philosophy. Similar to *Sea of Hope*, cast members in *Biển của Hy Vọng* operate a seaside restaurant, prepare meals, perform live music, and participate in environmental protection activities. However, the Vietnamese version introduces a wider variety of interactions, including spontaneous musical exchanges with restaurant guests, opportunities for diners to participate in live performances (Episodes 4 and 10), surprise events such as marriage proposals at the restaurant (Episode 4), and various community-oriented activities. Environmental initiatives are likewise diversified through beach cleaning, underwater waste collection, coral planting, and recycling activities. These additions enrich the viewing experience without changing the fundamental identity of the original format, allowing the program to balance entertainment with its healing and environmental messages.

Another notable adaptation concerns cast organization and performance. While the Korean version maintains relatively stable guest participation across several episodes, the Vietnamese production adopts a more flexible arrangement by introducing

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different guest artists throughout the three chapters of the program. At the same time, participating artists assume multiple social roles beyond musical performance, serving as chefs, bartenders, and servers. Rather than presenting celebrities primarily as performers, the program emphasizes their everyday interactions, cooperation, and emotional authenticity. This multidimensional representation contributes to a stronger sense of intimacy between artists and audiences while reinforcing the program's healing philosophy.

Taken together, these narrative, musical, and production adaptations demonstrate that localization extends beyond preserving the structural framework of a television format. Instead, they illustrate how storytelling strategies, musical expression, production design, and participant interactions can be selectively reinterpreted to accommodate local audience expectations while maintaining the communicative philosophy of the original format. The following section examines the cultural outcomes generated through these adaptive processes.

D. Cultural Outcomes

The preceding analysis has shown that the localization of *Sea of Hope* involved a continuous process of intercultural negotiation and format adaptation. However, the significance of localization extends beyond production practices and program design. Through these adaptive processes, *Biển của Hy Vọng* generated new cultural meanings that reflected both the preservation of the original format philosophy and its reinterpretation within the Vietnamese cultural context. Rather than functioning merely as a localized television program, the Vietnamese adaptation became a cultural product that reconstructed local identity, fostered hybrid cultural expression, and extended its influence beyond television broadcasting.

One important cultural outcome is the reconstruction of Vietnamese cultural identity through the localized format. Although the fundamental concept of *Sea of Hope* was retained, the Vietnamese version embedded numerous local cultural elements that enabled audiences to recognize the program as distinctly Vietnamese. This process is evident in the representation of geographical space, cuisine, music, and traditional cultural practices. The program expanded its filming locations from two coastal regions in Korea to three destinations representing northern, central, and southern Vietnam – Co To, Cu Lao Mai Nha, and Phu Quoc – thereby transforming the original seaside restaurant into a cultural journey across Vietnam's coastal landscapes. Vietnamese cuisine likewise became an integral part of the program through the introduction of dishes such as *bún hải sản* (seafood noodle soup), *nem rán* (Vietnamese fried spring rolls), *phở cuốn* (fresh pho rolls), and *bánh tráng nướng hải sản* (grilled rice paper with seafood), while local food culture was further highlighted through activities such as visiting traditional fish sauce producers in Phú Quốc (Episode 19). In addition, the program incorporated Vietnamese cultural traditions, including wrapping *bánh chưng* (traditional square sticky rice cakes), exchanging symbolic Lunar New Year red envelopes (*lì xì*) containing handwritten messages and well wishes, and sharing Lunar New Year greetings (Episode 6). These elements demonstrate that localization did not merely reproduce the Korean format but recontextualized it within the everyday cultural life of Vietnam.

Music represents another significant cultural outcome of the localization process. While *Sea of Hope* primarily featured Korean songs alongside a limited number of English-language performances, *Biển của Hy Vọng* centered its musical repertoire on Vietnamese popular music while continuing to incorporate selected English and Korean songs. More importantly, the program created new forms of musical expression through multilingual performances and mashups combining songs from different linguistic and cultural traditions. Examples include the mashups of *We Don't Talk Anymore* with *Để Em Rời Xa Anh* ("Let Me Leave You") (Episode 11), *Hoa Nở Không Màu* ("Colorless Blossoms") with *Someone Like You* (Episode 14), and *Từng Là Của Nhau* ("Once We Belonged to Each Other") with *A Thousand Years* (Episode 20). Similarly, Vietnamese singer Đức Phúc's bilingual performance of Korean singer Lee Hi's song *Only*, presented partly in Korean and partly in Vietnamese (Episode 13), illustrates how localization generated new forms of intercultural musical expression rather than simply translating the original songs. These musical adaptations transformed intercultural communication into an artistic practice through which multiple cultural traditions coexisted within a single performance.

The cultural influence of the localized format also extended beyond television broadcasting. Many performances from *Biển của Hy Vọng* were subsequently released as standalone digital content through the program's official digital platforms. Several performances accumulated millions of views on YouTube and streams on Spotify (*Biển của Hy Vọng* Official, n.d.; Spotify, n.d.). Rather than remaining components of a television program, these performances continued to circulate as standalone cultural products across multiple media platforms. Their continued availability and popularity indicate that the localized program generated sustained audience engagement beyond its original broadcast schedule and expanded its cultural presence within Vietnam's digital media environment.

Taken together, these findings suggest that television format localization involves more than the adaptation of production techniques or program structures. Instead, it generates new cultural meanings through the interaction of global television formats and local cultural practices. This process corresponds closely to Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "Third Space", in which intercultural encounters produce hybrid cultural forms that cannot be understood solely in terms of either the source or the receiving culture. In the case of *Biển của Hy Vọng*, the localized format neither simply replicated *Sea of Hope* nor replaced it with

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an entirely indigenous program. Rather, it emerged as a hybrid cultural product that combined Korean format principles with Vietnamese cultural identities, values, and communicative practices, thereby illustrating how television format localization can serve as a dynamic process of intercultural communication and cultural production.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the localization of the Korean music reality television format *Sea of Hope* in Vietnam from an intercultural communication perspective through the case of *Biển của Hy Vọng*. Rather than conceptualizing localization simply as the adaptation of a foreign television program to suit domestic audiences, the study has demonstrated that television format localization is fundamentally an intercultural communicative process involving continuous interaction, negotiation, adaptation, and the construction of new cultural meanings. By analyzing the localization process through the proposed Integrated Analytical Framework, the study provides a systematic explanation of how a transnational television format is reconstructed within a new cultural context.

The findings indicate that the Vietnamese adaptation successfully preserved the core identity of the original format while selectively modifying its structure, narrative organization, musical repertoire, production practices, and cultural representations to accommodate the Vietnamese cultural and media environment. These modifications were not implemented independently but emerged through ongoing communication and negotiation among institutional stakeholders, production teams, participating artists, and the broader sociocultural context in which the program was produced. The localization of *Sea of Hope* therefore illustrates that successful television format adaptation depends not only on industrial cooperation but also on effective intercultural communication among multiple actors throughout the production process.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to existing scholarship in three respects. First, it integrates television format studies, localization theory, and intercultural communication into a unified analytical framework capable of explaining television format localization as a dynamic communicative process rather than merely an adaptive outcome. Second, by emphasizing interaction, negotiation, adaptation, and cultural outcomes as interconnected analytical dimensions, the study extends previous television format research, which has largely concentrated on industrial circulation or textual adaptation. Third, the study provides empirical evidence demonstrating that intercultural communication offers a productive theoretical perspective for explaining how global television formats are reconstructed in local cultural contexts.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study also has practical implications for television production and cultural industries. The case of *Biển của Hy Vọng* suggests that successful format localization requires maintaining the core identity of the original program while allowing sufficient creative flexibility to incorporate local cultural characteristics, audience expectations, and production practices. Rather than weakening the original format, such intercultural adaptation enhances its cultural relevance and contributes to more sustainable forms of transnational television cooperation.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As a qualitative single-case study, the findings are derived from one Korean television format localized in Vietnam and therefore cannot be generalized to all television format adaptations. Furthermore, the analysis focuses primarily on production texts and production-related materials rather than audience reception. Future research may compare multiple Korean television formats localized in Vietnam or examine audience interpretations of localized cultural meanings through surveys, interviews, or digital audience analysis. Such comparative and audience-oriented studies would further enrich our understanding of television format localization as an ongoing process of intercultural communication and cultural production.

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