"Bonjour Bakery" Could’ve Been Delightful

But charging rural octogenarians Seoul prices is obscene

JAE-HA KIM

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From left: Kim Seon-ho, Kim Hee-ae, Cha Seung-won, Lee Ki-taek (Photo courtesy: Coupang Play)

By Jae-Ha Kim

☆☆ (out of ☆☆☆☆)

Starring Kim Hee-ae, Kim Seon-ho, Cha Seung-won, Lee Ki-taek

↑*Note: Korean names denote the surname followed by the given name.*

Although I used to love the MTV reality series "The Real World," I am not a huge fan of the genre today — especially when it comes to dating shows. Pick whoever. I literally don't care, because it's clear that none of the contestants really want to end up with each other. The shows seem to be a way for them to soft-launch their careers as brand ambassadors or as a conduit to becoming Insta-famous or something of that ilk. ("The Bachelor" and "The Bachelorette" are particularly cringe-inducing to me.)

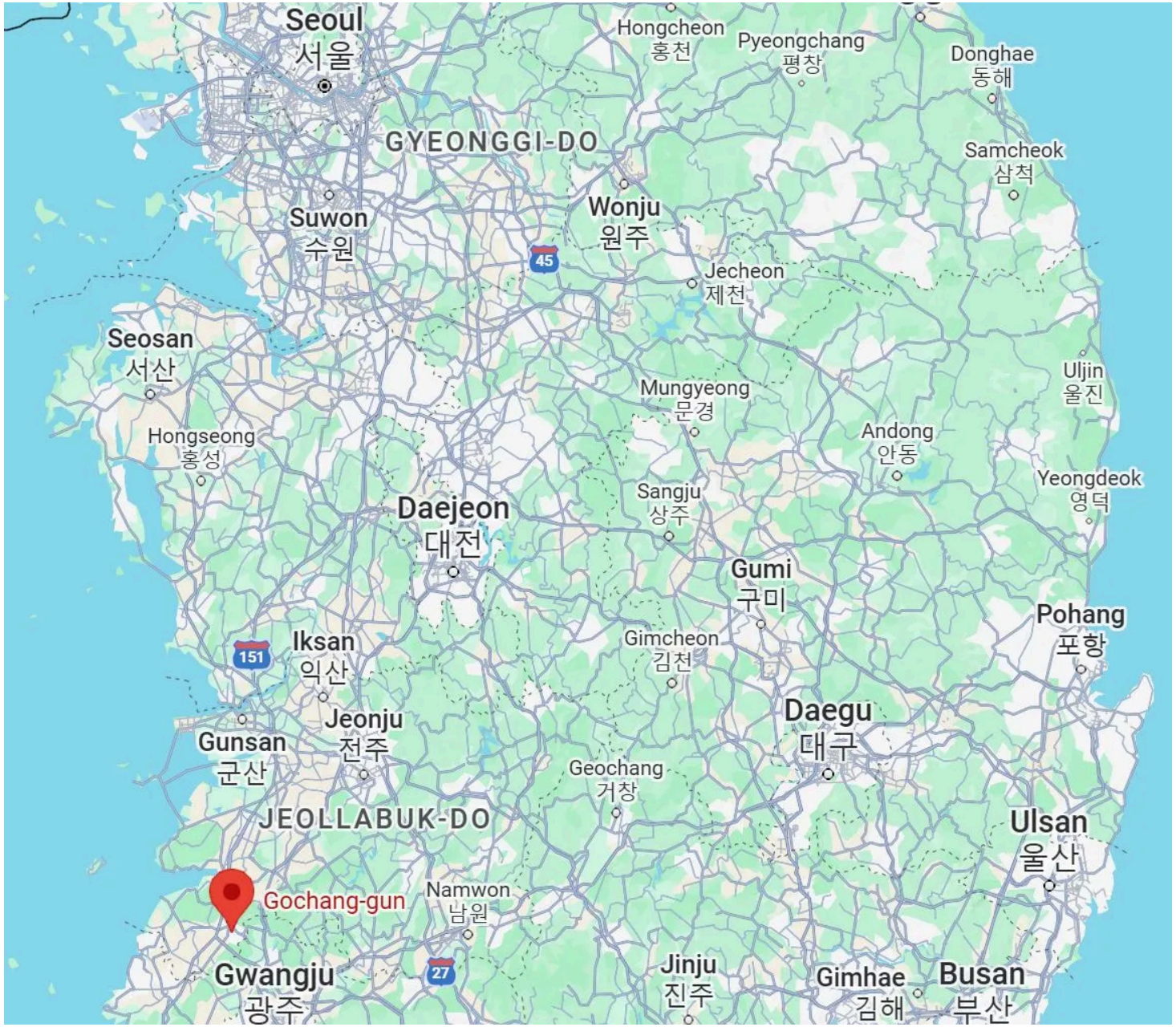
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But create a Korean show centered on food and I'm in, whether it's a K-drama (*hellooooo* "Bon Appétit, Your Majesty") or a quasi reality series like Rain's "The Hungry and the Hairy" or the "Jinny's Kitchen" franchise. In both seasons of the latter,

each episode was essentially the same as the previous one, but I was still hooked. And then there's "Culinary Class War" — which I still refer to as "Culinary 100" as a cut-throat nod to "Physical 100 ." It's a step up in production value, but like the other shows I've mentioned, the cooking competition relied on repetitive themes that still managed to suck viewers in.

All of this leads me to "Bonjour Bakery," a reality show that was filmed in Gochang-gun, located about 175 miles west of Busan. This particular pâtisserie has a unique concept. Specially created to cater to senior citizens, patrons must be 65 years old or older to be admitted to the cafe. There are exceptions. Anyone dining with an elder that age may enter, which leaves room for children, grandchildren, and caregivers to give the eatery a try.


Seoul
서울
Hongcheon
홍천
Pyeongchang
평창
Donghae
동해
GYEONGGI-DO
Samcheok
삼척
Suwon
수원
Wonju
원주
45
Jecheon
제천
Seosan
서산
Uljin
울진
Mungyeong
문경
Hongseong
홍성
Andong
안동
Yeongdeok
영덕
Sangju
상주
Daejeon
대전
Gumi
구미
Pohang
포항
Iksan
익산
151
Gimcheon
김천
Jeonju
전주
Daegu
대구
Gunsan
군산
Geochang
거창
JEOLLABUK-DO
Ulsan
울산
Gochang-gun
Namwon
남원
Gwangju
광주
27
Jinju
진주
Gimhae
김해
Busan
부산

Kim Hee-ae ("Queenmaker") tackles the managerial role, Cha Seung-won ("One Ordinary Day") is the head pastry chef, and Kim Seon-ho ("Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha") — he of the adorable dimples — is the barista. One problem I had with this series, though, is that for all their talent as actors, this trio lacked the kind of genuine warmth and charm that makes it fun to watch these goofy, but feel-good shows. Kim Hee-ae comes across as cold. Cha borderline bullies his assistant Lee Ki-taek (who, by the way, is wonderful in the show). And as for Kim Seon-ho, his dimples are left to do the heavy lifting for him. It's not improbable that they were told to act this way, since reality TV is often incredibly scripted. [1] But it made a lot of their interactions *awkward*.

What made the show watchable were Lee, the cafe's guest employees (Seventeen's Dino, Ong Seong-wu, Lee Joo-bin), and the elderly rural residents who frequented the pâtisserie.



Lee Ki-taek (left) and Cha Seung-won making pastries. (Photo courtesy: Coupang Play)

Their general lack of charm aside, the main issue I had was the show's overall conceit. The cast members were literally begging the villagers to come and eat at the Bonjour Cafe. And sure, they occassionally did throw in a freebie [2] here and there with a purchased order, but the overall price point for everything was ridiculous. Keep in

mind that a good chunk of the patrons were octogenarians and nonagenarians. Some didn't have any teeth. Many used walkers. There were a few women who walked at a 45-degree angle because they could no longer stand up straight. Few had jobs, and most weren't living with their adult children. So in other words, their disposable income was minimal. [3]

"Bonjour Bakery" was set up *specifically* for this TV show and none of the A-list actors appeared on the series for free. But the showrunners had the nerve to set the price point at **₩10,000** (**Korean won**) for some of the treats (that honestly looked dry as fuq and not delicious at all *to me* [4]). That's $7.21 in USD or 6.29€ (in Euros).

Those. Are. Higher. Prices. Than. Some. Shops. In. Seoul! [5] That's how much you'd expect to pay in Manhattan. I paid $6 in Chicago for a pain au chocolat recently and that's still too much in my book. Why did this show price gouge the elderly in a rural part [6] of South Korea? That was so gross, especially since from what I understand, none of the diners were paid to appear on the TV show. [7]

Since I'm already on a hate-roll, let me add that Cha was in charge of making the staff's meals in the same kitchen he made the pastries. And he did make some delicious-looking jiggaes etc. But all I could think about was that the pungent smell of his savory meals would permeate through not only the kitchen, but the dining room where the customers were digging into their sweets. And I thought that if the customers were like me, they'd have preferred to eat the jiggaes than the pastries. [8]

There was one gentleman who sat down at the cafe and repeatedly asked the server how much the items cost. The server laughed uncomfortably, which honestly made *me* feel uncomfortable. He finally gave her ₩10,000 and asked her to give him as many madeleines as that would cover. She brings him three cookie-sized French sponge cakes and ₩1000 back in change. He was visibly disppointed in the quantity. When asked if they were delicious, he said, "It doesn't matter if they're good, just that they're edible." So take that as you will. [9]

This was a very different scenario than the grandparents [10] who came with their adult children, who treated them for their outing.

Would I watch this again? No, because while it had some good moments, the primary trio annoyed me more than anything else. [11]

Super-size me: One of the things that I always notice when I watch Korean food-oriented shows is how the portions are more normal-people-sized rather than the garguantan super-sized orders we get in the U.S. Six people would share three desserts. And for the few customers who each got their own treats, they more often than not commented about how they would be skipping their next meal because they were already so full.

Airdates: Eight 80-minute episodes of "Bonjour Bakery" (봉주르빵집) aired from May 8 through June 26, 2026 on Coupang Play. (I watched it in the U.S. on Viki.)

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RM, j-hope, and Chris Brown

I had hoped to write about this [12], but life had other plans for me. I did have a nice discussion about this with *K-Culture with Jae-Ha Kim* subscribers at my last Zoom meet-up a couple weeks ago. We had differing opinions, but were able to dissect the issue without screaming at each other (as people are wont to do when they're anonymous and online).

But I was curious what you all thought. So if you'd like, take the poll and/or leave a comment below. (The poll is anonymous. No one, including myself, can see who anyone voted for.)

> **Appearance at Toronto show ignites debate over celebrity accountability as anti-violence organization suspends RM from role model list**



From left: J-Hope, Chris Brown and RM pose for a photo together following Brown's concert near Toronto on Aug. 12, as posted on Aug. 14. (Instagram @chrisbrownofficial)

POLL

Do you think RM & j-hope of BTS should apologize for taking a photo with Chris Brown?

Yes

No

I really don't care

An acknowledgment would've sufficed

Other

83 VOTES · 8 HOURS REMAINING · SHOW RESULTS

If this newsletter struck a chord with you, I would appreciate it very much if you shared it and/or hit that little heart button to get the algorithm working for me.
Thank you, and have a wonderful week!

K-DRAMA INDEX

JAE-HA KIM • AUG 1



These are some of my reviews and essays about K-Dramas (and also Korean films and other Korean-centric projects). You may also read more about my take on Korean pop culture in outlets such as Rolling Stone, Mashable, Victoria & Al...

Read full story →

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1 I was on the set of a cooking show, and the chef literally didn't know what to do without being told. Granted, maybe they were shooting out of sequence and they needed some guidance. Or maybe not.

2 Or *service/서비스*, as they call it in Korea.

3 I know that there are naysayers who will say, "Fuck those Boomers. They brought on their lack of income themselves." They would be wrong, because Boomers is a U.S. construct. Koreans born between the 1930s and 1950s are known at 산업화 세대 (or *industrialization generation*) that lived through horrible times and sacrificed themselves to rebuild the country.

4 Say what you will about me, but I'm a good baker and know my pastries.

5 Someone may have purchased pastries in Seoul that cost more. But you get my point, right? Gochang ≠ to Seoul.

6 And, of course, some of the elderly had money. For instance, one of the women was the landlord of the building they rented for the show.

7 Coupang Play, the distributor of the series, is worth more than $27 billion USD. Anyhow, if I have any of this incorrect, please let me know and I will correct it and give credit to whoever let me know. Thank you!

8 I am conflating my own culinary desires here.

9 I don't have this in my notes, but I do believe he bought more of these madeleines for his wife, who had recently been hospitalized.

10 Near the end of Episode 5, there are two sets of in-laws who don't see each other at first. When they do, the first grandfather goes running over to the cashier to make sure he pays

for his in-laws, who had recently moved to the area to help care for their grandchild, Jennie. This is a very Korean custom. Koreans are more likely to fight over getting to pay for the check, than to try to get out of paying.

11 This was disappointing given that the trio are among my favorite Korean actors.

12 For those who are unaware, Chris Brown has a history of alleged 😒 violence against women (the most notable being his battering of his former partner, Rihanna).



17 Likes · 1 Restack

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Comments Restacks



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K-Culture with Jae-Ha Kim reply rules



H.M. Carrijo H.M. Carrijo 2h

Liked by Jae-Ha Kim

About the dimples, as a big fan of Jinny's Kitchen and the Village Barber, I didn't feel like watching this show at all... What I love about those shows is the warmth, camaraderie and the relationship they establish with the community . As for Nam and Hobi, unfortunately I couldn't stay at the meet-up for the debate, but of course I heard all about it afterwards. I'm pretty much on the same page as our common friend. Anyway, I would say the issue is much bigger in the US than here in Brazil. It's become old news long ago around here.

LIKED (1) REPLY SHARE

1 reply by Jae-Ha Kim



Son Young Hahm, Ed.D. 6h

Liked by Jae-Ha Kim

It was hard to watch especially and a bit like fancy Seoulites trying to level-up elders in the countryside. It almost felt like the cast members begrudgingly showed up to the set. I kind of wish Dino was in the regular cast instead! Especially after "The Village Barber" with Park Bo Gum and Lee Sang Yi who built a lot of jeong with the neighbors. In that show, they charged nominal prices, offered free drinks and snacks with haircuts, and created a warm community space for children and adults. PDs take note!

LIKED (1) REPLY SHARE

1 reply by Jae-Ha Kim

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