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Cosmopolitan Empowerments and Biographical Trajectories among Young French Fans of Hallyu

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Abstract

This article explores the passion of young French people for the Hallyu, within the framework of an analysis of the contribution of the “consumption of difference” (Schroeder 2015) to the formation of the self through the figure of the 'cosmopolitan amateur' (Cicchelli and Octobre 2018a). We will first look at the reasons for the success of Hallyu in France then discuss the different forms of empowerment stemmed from the consumption of Korean products, among young people (74 in depth-interviews with young fans aged 18-31) with no previous link with Korea, which nurture their biographical trajectories.

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Introduction: A Global Breaking Wave

What happens in terms of reception when new players become global cultural leaders within a few years, as in South Korea? While research has attempted to provide answers to this question using both quantitative and qualitative investigations on the reception of Hallyu in Asia (China, Japan, and Taiwan: Yang 2012; Malaysia: Cho 2010; Indonesia: Jung and Shim 2013; Singapore: Yin and Liew 2005), Middle East (Israel: Lyan and Levbowitz 2015; Egypt: Noh 2011) or Americas (Canada: Jin and Yoon 2014; United States: Jung 2018; Argentina Iadevito, 2019; Chile: Min et al. 2018), Sweden: Hübinette 2018), there are still very little research and publications in France on the topic.

This article aims to break ground the passion of young French people for the Hallyu (Cicchelli and Octobre 2019), within the broader framework of an analysis of the contribution of the “consumption of difference” (Schroeder 2015) — i.e., the consumption of products of global cultural industries — to the formation of the self through the new figure of the “cosmopolitan amateur” (Cicchelli and Octobre 2018a). Therefore, we will first look — with the help of 74 in-depth interviews with young people from the Île-de-France region (France) aged between 18 and 31 — at the cosmopolitan skills acquired through the consumption of Korean products, distant from the culture of the interviewees, and the empowerment they

nurture. Then, we will look at the uses of this empowerment to construct a biographical trajectory. We will focus on K-pop and K dramas, which are the most consumed Korean products in France and constitute Hallyu's original core (Choi 2015).

However, this alternative cultural globalization, which takes the form of a real challenge to the large Western cultural industry, particularly in the United States (Yoon, 2018), constitutes a material of choice for understanding: a) the cosmopolitan apprenticeships linked to the consumption of cultural goods, produced in a country with rare historical links and no cultural proximity with France audiences (this amateurship produces skills related to the consumption of *Hallyu* products, such as a knowledge of the landscapes, history, mores and urbanity, and language); b) and how young people use these cosmopolitan resources to build their biographical trajectories (the empowerment through *Hallyu*).

The Cosmopolitan amateur in the global pop-cultural flows

Aesthetico-Cosmopolitanism as a Toolkit

We will use the cosmopolitan amateur concept to analyze the process, through which the consumption of cultural products coming from a foreign area takes place in one's cultural agenda, nurtures skills, and changes life path (Cicchelli and Octobre 2018a). Some authors (Regev 2013; Papastergiadis 2012) establish a link between the increasing circulation of cultural goods coming from various parts of the world, on the one hand, and the emergence of aesthetic and cultural cosmopolitanism thanks to the growing internationalization of consumption. Aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism presupposes familiarity with aesthetic norms and cultural codes outside the immediate circle of belonging acquired through the consumption of globalized cultural products and contents. In this vein, the acts of consumption constitute mediated encounters with the alterity, which are powerful in cosmopolitan socialization (Cicchelli 2018). These mediated encounters are more relevant and spread among the younger generations, which are mobile and bathed in increasingly multipolar cultural flows, so that their cosmopolitan amateurism may be considered a new generational "good taste" norm (Cicchelli and Octobre 2018b).

Once analyzed through the consumption of arts, museum attendance, or reading habits, this cosmopolitanism is now mostly tied to pop culture's global pervasiveness. Indeed, global pop culture — as a mix of transnational, hybrid and glocalised cultural artifacts, icons, and imaginaries (such as Hit Music, TV series, etc.) (Ryoo 2009; Jang and Lee 2016) — is omnipresent in everyday life of young people around the globe, offering them a vast panoply of choices as well as an important (and often interlinked) inventory of cultural touchstones to reference (Kidd 2014). As a powerful creator and vector of myriads of images of the world, which spread through capillary action at unprecedented speed thanks to digital and audiovisual technologies (Octobre 2021), this pop culture produces the global

commons, which is fostered through the imagination of desirable “elsewhere” (Appadurai 1996) and affiliation with imagined transnational communities. A plethora of highly seductive images of modern life is conveyed by pop culture, which contributes to the constitution of shared imaginaries of alterity and cultural identity for young people (Cicchelli and Octobre 2018a). On top of acting as a trans-national generational integrative tool, global pop culture may be considered to be a driver of cosmopolitan ways of being among young people.

Research has thus shown that urban youth tend to be more cosmopolitan than rural youth and students more than workers (Katz-Gerro 2017). Young people tend to be more cosmopolitan because they are placed amid dynamic cultural flows, are highly skilled in multicultural interactions, and develop cultural awareness, openness, and knowledge (Cicchelli et al. 2018). The internationalization of ordinary cultural consumption has enormously contributed to the reshaping of tastes and the constitution of common, shared cultural and artistic imaginaries of alterity and cultural identity, which young people use to structure their world: that is, to explain it, as well as orient and situate themselves within it.

It is true that the consumption of cultural products, especially during certain periods of life where tremendous transformation occurs (such as adolescence or middle age), may have a therapeutic function: those products help overcome the turmoil of the passing of age or life stages. In this regard, the consumption of Hallyu can play a role to overcome certain situations of melancholia as Oh (2011) pointed out in analyzing the manners in which Japanese women liked K-dramas and activated a strong feeling of nostalgia derived from their sense of lost identity as Asian women. We also gathered data on the impact of Hallyu in terms of well-being, in so far as every fan we interviewed discovered *Hallyu* in his or her teens: borrowing their own terms, Hallyu “help them to grow.” This paper wishes to highlight cosmopolitan empowerment, i.e., the uses of exotic products for self-development, reaffiliation, and their reinvestment into valued biographical trajectories.

Hallyu in France

The French context has certain specificities that must be taken into account to understand the reception of Hallyu. The Korean Wave came only recently to France, compared to the Asian success of the K-Wave, and became recognized as a cultural phenomenon during the last decade, when both K-pop and K-drama became popular (Saint-Exupéry, 2015; Joinau, 2018) with a rising recognition in the public and media sphere. For instance, the BTS group has its fan clubs filled the Bercy-Arena stadium in 2018 (one of the major music theater in Paris), with tickets being sold out almost without any promotion, a feat which was repeated twice in June 2019 at the Stade de France (a place dedicated to football games and huge musical events, hosting 80,000 spectators each evening). K-dramas are available on many VoD platforms, with French subtitles, indicating that France has become a significant market for those products. French fan communities multiply on the internet and organize an increasing

number of events (flash mobs, covers, etc.). More and more French press articles are looking at the Hallyu phenomenon, as a sociological novelty, as an economic success, or as a political rebranding.

Having reached the French shores recently, Hallyu is more popular among young people, for three reasons.

First, young people in France have developed a generational good taste characterized by an exotic openness (Cicchelli and Octobre 2018b) in the context of the French cultural universalism (Lombard 2003). This openness towards exotic products is part of a French tradition of cultural openness (Chaubet and Martin 2011), specially developed in the field of legitimate products (such as publishing, see Sapiro 2016). But this openness varies depending on the origin of the products and the consumers. On top of the strong Anglo-American cultural flows (which had the favor of their parents, and that still constitutes part of their cultural repertoires), young people are willing to display interest in other cultural centers, such as Latin America, India, and Asia. It is important to note that, in the case of France, this openness is tied with the search for alternative models of globalization but develops without previous links with the cultural background and countries from which the product stemmed. Indeed, France has no specific historical or cultural links with South Korea (Cadeau 2016). In addition to a poor common history to date, the Korean community in France is very small (INSEE 2020) and French tourism represents a tiny share of tourism to South Korea (the latter attracted just over 100,000 French people among the more than 15 million tourists welcomed in 2018, i.e. barely 0.6% (Veille Info Tourisme 2019)): in other words, French people's contacts with South Korea are loose and Korean culture is therefore not part of the cultural references shared by them. Moreover, Korean courses are sporadic (only a few and very selective courses in some specialized universities). Nevertheless, France has become a country where young people have developed a passion for *Hallyu*. Conversely, even though France has a strong connection with North Africa, due to a colonial past, and due to continuous flows of migration, the cultural products coming from this area does not have a large appeal, even in the diasporas who tend to avoid transmitting their cultural background to their descendants, be it in terms of language proficiency or regarding cultural tastes (Beauchemin, Hamel and Simon 2015). This openness underlines the predominance of the logic of "cultural shareability" over the logic of "cultural proximity" (La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005).

Secondly, this openness is also tied to the digitalization of society and culture. In France, K-dramas are not broadcasted on TV, and K-pop bands do not appear on TV either; those products are only diffused on the internet, from YouTube to Netflix and Rakuten TV and many more, and a lot of Korean contents circulate through P2P exchanges, on social networks. Thus, the internet plays a crucial role in the rise of France's fan base community (and more generally in Europe). The high rates of network coverage, connection, and equipment facilitate access to products and the creation of vivid amateur communities,

especially among young people who are more the most connected part of the population: in 2019, 98% of 15-29-year-old had Internet access at home, and almost 93% have broadband, and 95% of 15-29-year-old surf the internet outside the home (Rolland 2020).

Thirdly, *Hallyu* appeal to the young generation in France where a new balance in the population is occurring (INSEE 2020), with rising multiculturalism, transforming the French imagined community. Young people account for 17% of the population, 25% of them have a migration background (either from second or third generation) (Tribalat 2013). The young generation is facing increasing inequalities (job markets, access to social rights) in which access to education remains the key mechanism (Van Zanten 2009; Dubet 2016), leading to strong intergenerational divides (Chauvel 2010). The unemployment rate of the young generation (18%) is three-time higher than the older generation's even though the level of education has been rising (80% or more reaching baccalaureate and 60% going to university), nurturing an increasing distrust of the educational system in its ability to prepare youth for the job market and a strong feeling of social downgrading (Maurin 2009). This is even more evident among young people with migration background from North Africa (they represent the majority of immigrants) who suffer from many discriminations (Beauchemin et al. 2015), face increasing racism (Fourquet 2019), and are also characterized by a rise in radicalized forms of protests (Galland and Muxel 2020) that questions the French Republicanism and its integration model as well as the ability of France to face the rising challenges of globalization.

In this context, the Korean nation branding (Lee 2009; Lee 2010) – South Korea appears as a modern, dynamic, creative country offering new perspectives, be they aesthetics, cultural, social or political – but with no explicit hegemonic ambition, is really attractive for this young generation, as well as for others segments of the global population (Cho 2005; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Courmont and Kim 2013; Hong 2014; Kim and Nye 2013; Leveau 2002).

Data and Methodology

To investigate the resources that young fans build-up and the uses they make of these resources, we adopted an approach based on individual narratives of interviewees about their *Hallyu* fandomism.

The interview protocol aimed at identifying patterns of consumption of *Hallyu*, the vocabularies of motive associated with these patterns, and the consequences of this cosmopolitan passion in everyday life. The interviews covered five main themes: a) Preference for *Hallyu* products (K-drama, K-pop) and criteria for appreciation (e.g., preferences regarding ethno-national origins or for language, types of acting, role models, etc.); b) Narratives about the history of their fandomism (discovery of *Hallyu* Product, the first attachment, how it developed, who were the initiators, whom the passion was shared with, etc.); c) Narratives about the countries depicted in/by the cultural products and

imaginaries about these countries stemming from their cultural products; d) Interest in visiting or living in South Korea; e) Cultural capital and cultural resources (e.g., language skills, geographic mobility); f) Socio-demographic data concerning the interviewee, their family, and friends (especially in terms of mobility and cultural tastes).

Table 1 Presentation of the Sample of Interviews

Number of Interviews	74
Gender balance	8 boys and 65 girls
Social background	38 middle-class, 18 lower-class, 18 upper-class
Migration background	20 with migration backgrounds (mostly from North Africa) (6 from the working class and 9 from the middle class) 4 from the overseas French territories ¹ (2 from the working class and two from the middle class).
Occupation	33 at work or unemployed, 40 students (some with part-time jobs)
Education	Per university demographics and the changes in youth cultures, our sample also includes a majority of higher education graduates.
History of fandomism	They are confirmed amateurs (they have been fans for 2 to 15 years)
Preexisting cultural proximity with South Korea	None of the interviewed has family links with South Korea
Developing link with South Korea	As a consequence of their passion for Hallyu, 19 have traveled to South Korea, and 6 are following a course in the Korean language.

Seventy-four young people, between 18 and 31 years old, were in-depth interviewed (the interviews last between one hour and 30 minutes to 3 hours). These young people were recruited on forums or communities and at the exit of specialized stores (especially in Paris),

and through a snowball effect. They were all real fans, either for a couple of years or for more than a decade: for them, *Hallyu* is not just a passing fancy.

Cosmopolitan Empowerments

Our theoretical framework stems from the intellectual breeding ground of cosmopolitanism, understood as an opening to cultural otherness mobilized by individuals in a globalized society. Indeed, if the contemporary era is founded on a dialogical imaginary of the internalized other (Beck 2004: 79), in a context where “the global other is among us” (Beck and Grande 2010: 417), global pop culture undoubtedly plays a significant role in providing individuals with resources to feel moved, construct representations of themselves, and finally empower them.

The Virtue of Openness

In the cosmopolitan literature, which often and implicitly takes the individual in mobility as a reference figure, competencies refer to a series of abilities to move between aesthetic and cultural codes (Cicchelli 2012). The cosmopolitan approach insists on the individual’s ability to make his way through cultures (Hannerz 1990). It presupposes among social actors a set of abilities or skills to master codes produced in different contexts. In this perspective, the main “cosmopolitan virtue” (Turner 2001) associated with cultural consumption is open-mindedness (and its corollaries of respect, empathy/sympathy, tolerance/suspension of judgment). This virtue compels us to see the world as a common good. Cultivating the cosmopolitan virtue of open-mindedness through the consumption of Hallyu products is a matter of self-training. This forms an ordinary *Bildung* because cultural products are assigned to the “vulgar” part of leisure, which educational institutions do not take care of, and to which they most often deny the slightest interest and credit. Informal cosmopolitan apprenticeships are made possible by the advent of a techno-cultural regime of abundance (Octobre 2021), in which individuals combine cultural snatches glimpses of what they consume (Barrère 2011): this powerful cultural poaching, especially among young people immersed in cultural industries (Pasquier 1999), has continued to grow to the point where the consumer has become a pro-am (Flichy 2010; Jenkins 2006). Therefore, we consider our fans as “transnational consumers and learners of popular culture for inter-ethnic cultural understanding” based on their active consumption and participation in the Korean Wave (Oh 2009: 426).

In the interviews, we linger on the empowerment resulting from the reception of cultural goods and the knowledge they convey. For young French people, accustomed to Anglo-American and European products, Hallyu provides an opening to other possible worlds, references, narratives, and imaginaries, based on certain knowledge about South

Korea (may that knowledge be accurate or not). Thus, it offers powerful resources for empowerment, giving it a cosmopolitan dimension to which all young fans are sensitive and attached.

Interviewees point out that South Korean products' passion has made them more open-minded and contributed to their personal transformation. Stéphanie, a 28-year-old young woman, working as a hospital orderly, from a middle-class family, puts it this way: "It allowed me to bounce back on new things. Thanks to this, I now think about opening myself up to the world and people much more." According to Abby (a 22-year-old, young woman, working as a cashier's host, from a middle-class family, of Comorian origin), this open-mindedness has taught her the virtue of caring:

I think it has allowed me to be more open-minded, especially when you're interested in a new culture, it's an opening to the world. I think that's what it's all about ... it's another point of view on things. As there's a lot of drama that's turned to the life lesson side of things, it shows you things, like the good side of things. Always being caring, that's the kind of thing that impacted my way of being.

This openness has multiple virtues because it extends to all aspects of young people's lives. Julie (an 18-year-old young woman, first-year childcare student, from a middle-class family), thus, gives a global vision of the effects of Hallyu on the various dimensions of her personal and social existence:

Frankly, it changed a lot of things, because I wouldn't be the person I am now if I hadn't had K-pop if I hadn't had the dramas if I hadn't had friends who followed it too. Oh yeah, it would have been different, I wouldn't have grown up the same way, I wouldn't have learned the same things. This country (South Korea) saw me grow up, I grew up with it, I got interested in things I wouldn't have been interested in if I hadn't been interested in this country. I've already looked at schools where I could learn Korean, for example, I used to go to Google Street View, for example, to find out what it was like, what the cities were like... it's in my heart, I love it too much.

The themes of personal transformation, coming of age, peer group and elective interpersonal affinities, and finally openness towards the elsewhere are significant in the taste for Hallyu products.

Empowerment through Reaffiliation

Hallyu's taste among young French people may correspond to an imagined reaffiliation, especially for young people with less capital and or immigrant backgrounds. The South Korean detour thus allows Carla (a 20-year-old student, from an upper-class family of Algerian origin, grown up in France), who declares several times in the interview that she has been a victim of racism and that she cannot find her place (even though she follows a very selective curriculum and has already overcome many obstacles in the French school

system) — to reverse the stigma of being of foreign origin with dark skin by leaning on South Korean culture. For Carla, falling in love with a distant and valued culture, and letting go of the one in which she grew up, enables her to regain power over herself and win her fight against the social and racial relegation of which she claims to be a victim. Other young people adopt the same stance as Carla, among those who have difficulty integrating through employment, such as Abby (already mentioned) and Aby (a 20-year-old saleswoman, from a middle-class family of Senegalese origin), or those who claim to be victims of discrimination based on their skin colors, such as Aïcha (a 19-year-old law student, from a working-class family with Comorian origin) and Carla (already mentioned), who was mentioned before. Faced with the difficulties they may encounter in French society and the limited prospects for social advancement that they evoke in interviews, Hallyu appears to be for them a way of countering class and race assignments in a society which, because of its republican model of integration, devalues their cultures of origin and tends instead towards cultural assimilation.

Young fans from immigrant backgrounds, often second-generation, combine the South Korean products to which they electively affiliate themselves with the French culture in which they grew up (including its Americanized sides), but minor the cultural products linked to their migratory origins. Thus, many young girls of North African origin insist that they do not or no longer consume cultural products related to their countries of origin, notably Turkish TV series that are very successful in the Maghreb (Cicchelli et al. 2019), but also popular Arab music. In France, the postcolonial context plays an important role, migrations from North African countries have been low-skilled labor immigration, the Arabic language has been devalued because of its association with forms of social segregation (Wakim 2020). By refusing to consume those products, they distinguish themselves mainly from their parents but also from some of their friends. Very few of them consider speaking Arabic as an asset, except when they consider that their multilanguage skills facilitate their learning of Korean, a language that many of them attempt to learn, either by themselves with the help of Internet materials or by following specialized courses.

This reaffiliation is also observed among young middle-class fans without immigrant backgrounds, who also encounter difficulties in social integration. They talk about their shortened or failed school careers, they report obstacles integrating into the job market, they admit their disappointment and adjust their horizons of expectations because the future seems “impeded” in France, all grievances that nourish the attraction of elsewhere. This fantasized construction of an elsewhere full of promise, sustained by their consumption of K-pop lyrics and video-clips, and K-drama narratives, allows some young people to dream of a better future, which can sometimes be unrelated to the resources that can objectively be mobilized to achieve it. This is Anne’s case, who dreams of living and working in South Korea, even though she does not speak the language and has never visited it until now.

Autodaxis in the Case of a Scarce Resource

Hallyu's passion is accompanied by the acquisition of rare cultural and linguistic skills among French fans, most often on the fringe of school or university curricula. Most of this learning is achieved by impregnation, through the accumulation of consumption of series, films, and video clips or soundtracks. Aya (a 29-year-old childcare assistant, from a middle-class family), member of the fan bases Army, MOA, and Blackrose (respective fan clubs of the groups BTS, TXT, and The Rose), declares as follows:

I wanted to start (learning Korean) this summer. I could introduce myself there, but it would be very small. Afterward, I can recognize symbols in Korean, for example, this one (she draws a symbol on a piece of paper) means "haha" they put it on all the time. Then when I watch a drama or a series, I can recognize words or sounds. And even when I'm in the subway, and I hear Koreans talking, I'm always fascinated to see that I understand words.

These informal learnings generate great pride. This is the case of Corentin (a 19-year-old young man, from a middle-class family), who interrupted his studies and who is proud to say that he was able to learn a few words of Korean all by himself:

by dint of listening, I learned a few words, and after that, I know how to introduce myself: Hello, my name is Corentin, ... I can say, for example, "I'm fine," a BTS music called "I'm fine" and in Korean, it's "gwaenchanha." So, it's just stuff like that. The lyrics sometimes leave a mark on me. So, I know what it means.

For many young people with little or no schooling, the Korean language's self-taught learning was a validation of their intellectual capabilities, which were doubted by their family, teachers, or co-workers. The trait is all the more notable in the case of young people with Maghreb origins, who tend to turn away from Arabic, considered a stigma: none of those we interviewed attended classes in Arabic, most spoke it poorly and could not write it, which corroborates Nabil Wakim's (2020) analyses of the triple shame of the children of immigrants from Arabic countries in France (speaking the language of the poor, speaking poorly a language that they cannot transmit to their children - Arabic being three to four times less transmitted by migrant parents to their children when living in France than Turkish or any Asian languages (Beauchemin, Hamel and Simon 2015) -, and being unable to properly communicate with their families and friends in Arabic countries).

This self-education symbolically compensates for social positions of relative downgrading, as some of these young people have difficulty acquiring economic autonomy through access to stable employment corresponding to their level of qualification. It is a real apprenticeship, whose fans value the construction in stages, from unintentional impregnation to the implementation of voluntary efforts, as Aby (already presented) points out:

I've been learning for two years now.² By dint of hearing certain phrases and words, we end up retaining them. And also, in the beginning, when I started listening to K-pop, I learned the Korean alphabet. At first, it was just to read the songs' titles to recognize them, but then I started to love the language and wanted to learn a little bit more. I started to learn grammar, and also by watching series, Korean programs, you start to remember the vocabulary.

This learning can be supported by the use of dedicated tools, especially on the Internet (song translation, language learning site, tutorials, applications, etc.), in a context where formal lessons are rare and expensive, as Léa (a 20-year-old nursing school student, from a middle-class family) explains: “(I) started to register on applications and then even to note down their alphabet because the lessons were expensive.”

Young people insist on their “satisfaction” and “pleasure” when they see all they have learned, and this is particularly pronounced among young people with the least schooling: this is the case for Alice (who has only achieved a secondary school diploma), Abby (A 20-year-old dark skin unemployed young woman, from a middle-class family, coming from La Reunion Island), Aby (already presented), Candice (a 25-year-old unemployed young woman, from a working-class family with Portuguese origin) and Marie (a 18-year-old waitress, from a working-class family) - the four of them have low qualification – Coralie (a 19-year-old unemployed young woman, from a middle-class family) and Etienne (a 22-year-old cashier's host, from a working-class family) or Corentin (already presented) - who have all interrupted their studies - or Kira (a 22-year-old unemployed young woman, from a working-class family, with Moroccan origin) and David (a 24-year-old unemployed young man, from a working-class family, from Mayotte) - young graduates who are downgraded on the job market - who all see it as a reassessment of their aptitudes. David states as follows: “in 2020, as a human race, we should be proud to be able to see a film X in language X.”

For many of these young people, the pride associated with Hallyu's “discovery” makes up for the cultural, social, economic, and family indignity they suffer. Far from the ancient elitist and bourgeois cosmopolitanism, typical of the cultured, polyglot, and traveling classes, we are witnessing the emergence of a consumerist and highly democratized cosmopolitanism: this provides young people who were once excluded from it with the foundations of an education that enables them to live in the global world.

The Trajectories of the Cosmopolitan Amateur

The passion for Hallyu offers rare resources that some fans may use to build their biographical trajectory. Some, such as Lila (a 25-year-old young woman working as a sustainability consultant at KPMG, from an upper-class family), Stéphanie and Anne (already presented), Caroline (a 20-year-old law school student, from an upper-class family),

Daphné (a 31-year-old schoolteacher, from a middle-class family), or Etienne (already presented), consider their taste for Hallyu as part of a secret garden where they find comfort and happiness to embellish their lives, and place their cosmopolitan tastes outside any other concerns and aims. Others, which will be discussed in the following pages, transfer their taste towards orientation choices, seeking to have their self-acquired skills validated by the educational system to transform them into objective forms of cultural capital. From self-taught language learning to the construction of a skill recognized by the university, there is a gap that some young people wish to fill to fully live their passion.

The Colors of a Dream

While all of them have grown up with and thanks to Hallyu, some young fans believe they are in a position to take their destiny into their own hands, relying on the strength of their passion, on the extent of the abilities they have self-acquired or are in the process of acquiring. In this respect, Hallyu can be considered as a broadening of the horizon of educational and professional opportunities in the transition to adulthood, especially for those whose social future seemed to be sealed due to modest resources.

As we have seen, language skills play a fundamental role in the recognition of newly acquired resources to imagine the future. Therefore, it is not by chance that a significant proportion of the interviewees mention their love of languages (spoken at home, learned at school, or self-acquired), their efforts to learn Korean, and the decisive role it played in their orientation. In our sample, few interviewees are pursuing highly selective curricula, and most have chosen a course of study that was not strictly dictated by their passion. Yet it would be wrong to believe that the inner world of their passion and the outer world of their academic orientation are always watertight. It is not uncommon for young people to detail the impact that Hallyu has had on their lives, emphasizing the decisive contribution of cultural consumption on their educational orientation and their conception of a possible professional future.

Certainly, reinvesting one's passion in the academic curricula takes forms that correspond to distinct social logics, linked in particular to the knowledge that young people and their families have about the professional returns from each type of degree. If the taste for cultural products underpins the attraction for South Korea and constitutes the basis of learning, knowledge, and skills that nourish aspirations, in some cases, the latter remain trapped in the social constraints of the milieu of origin and remains a mere aspiration. This is the case for Aby (already presented), who wants to change jobs and dream of working "in something to do with Korea" (an assertion that is not followed by any other precision) and wishes to take a Korean language and civilization course. She draws a future by combining her high school skills at learning language when she learned English and English literature ("I liked languages very much, I've always liked learning languages, English, German and even Dutch") with her penchant for Korea, stemmed from her important consumption of K-

pop, K-dramas, and webtoons: “It’s really something that interests me in the future. I’d like to go back to school but in a Korean-language program because I’m tired of working in something I don’t like. I don’t like it anymore, it’s too commonplace, whereas Korean is my passion, and I could make a career out of it.” By betting on her enrolment in a prestigious institution like INALCO³ in Paris (she insists on the quality of the courses that are given there), she is planning to go to South Korea thanks to a university exchange during her Bachelor’s degree that could eventually lead to an expatriation: “I would really like to do school exchanges in Korea like Erasmus, like a semester, I would like to discover Korea. I would love to! Not a long trip, but just to tell me that it’s like that, and then if I like it, I’ll go back.” We will never know if this young woman will one day realize her dream, which, however unrealistic it may seem at first glance, is no less coherent and firmly anchored in an active mobilization of the resources that *Hallyu* offers.

The Wager of a Social Ascent through the Possession of Exotic Skills

Some young people, especially those from the working and middle classes, want to convert their passion into a school strategy. They turn to the teaching of oriental languages and civilizations as their principal education. Some of them have tried the first year in the Korean Language before realizing that the curriculum expectations were too high for them. Others consider orientation as a vocation and desire for social ascension: this is the case of Mattéo (a 20-year-old young man, engaged in a Korean Language curriculum at INALCO, from a working-class family), who compares his passion for Hallyu to conversion and describes its discovery with expressions such as “transformation,” “shock,” “turning point. While insisting on the strength of his passion in his personal formation, he also mentions its effects on his educational choices: Mattéo wants to pursue a specialized master’s degree, then register for a Ph.D. to write a thesis on North Korea:

I plan to pursue a master’s degree in this direction by trying to focus on the North of the peninsula, in North Korea, it is essential to know Korean and the customs, all that you can’t land in North Korea as you land in South Korea. So if I need to do research in the field without the three years of Korean, I would never have been able to go to North Korea, without it’s three years, I would not have been able to tell myself that now I want to do a master’s degree on a specific theme. In fact, the professional goal would be to have a Ph.D. and become a scholar, specializing in North Korea, but if I am not caught up in my research, I really don’t know what else I will be able to do.

Kira (already presented) provides another striking example of the effect of the aspiration to master the Korean language. She learned Korean on her own during high school, and, during a discussion with one of her tutors, she discovered that her passion could be transferred to an academic goal.

Thanks to my teacher of philosophy, he was the only one who really took the time to ask us what our strengths were, what we could do, and when my turn came, I told

him that I spoke Arabic, I spoke English fluently, I spoke Korean, he didn't hesitate. As a result, I chose the degree I'm doing today. I have my degree in Korean languages and cultures, and then I added a year of a professional degree, just to professionalize my degree, and it's in the same institute because I wanted to continue my Korean courses.

By combining her polyglossia and her professional experience, Kira was able to enter the job market quickly in the luxury hotel sector. Her half-tone experience as a receptionist in a Parisian palace — she used Korean much less often than she imagined and met few South Korean clients — convinced her to take a break. Unemployed at the time of the interview, she nevertheless wants to continue betting on her linguistic assets to succeed in a job “with a link to South Korea.” Kira concludes when she talks about the impact of the Hallyu on her career path: “I think my life would have been totally different, it has contributed a lot to who I am, who I have become, the choices I have made, my projects.”

Other young people from working-class backgrounds who have not studied Korean but who already live in multilingual contexts nevertheless take advantage of their familiarity with South Korean culture and specifically their knowledge of the language. Laura (a 22-year-old young woman studying cinema, from a working-class family, with foreign Romanian and Italian origins Romanian, and the mother is Italian, who speaks fluently French, Italian, Romanian and English), also began to learn Korean on her own: “I had reached the A2 level,⁴ I think, on my own.” After an interruption of three years, she resumed her Korean studies to improve her skills before a stay in South Korea and continued to follow them during a whole year of break spent in this country. Once again, she puts her Korean language studies on hold to devote herself to obtaining her bachelor's degree and preparing for a master's degree in cinema. While her linguistic investment — motivated, she says, “by a taste for languages and by the musicality of Korean” — proceeds by “waves,” she acknowledges the socializing function of escape through language in the construction of a biographical project: I wanted to travel, I wanted to escape, so I said to myself “I'm going to learn the language” so that I can. And in fact, it was because I created a project that I continued to learn the language. If there were no projects, I wouldn't have continued. It's by insisting on this continuity that she admits to dreaming of moving to South Korea for professional opportunities. In her case, learning Korean is seen as an extension of her already well-developed language skills, but also as a turning point that sets her apart from her family, friends, and generational environment.

For young people from middle-class backgrounds who have had doubts about their academic orientation, the passion for Hallyu can also play a role of guidance. This is the case of Alix (a 24-year-old woman, from a middle-class family), who “searched long and hard” and is still feeling her way. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled in a research master's degree in Asian studies in a major Parisian institution after completing two years of psychology and one year of sociology. Alix is writing a master dissertation related to her

passion since it deals with associations promoting Korean culture in France. She justifies this choice by the intensity and pervasiveness of her cultural consumption — she even admits to having modified her clothing and diet.

It's really pervasive, I read Korea, I think Korea. And then, in any case, I focused my studies on Korea. I have classes on Korea during the week, I make dossiers on Korea, and even before I was in this master's program, last year, even the two years of my Bachelor's degree in sociology, when I had to make dossiers as soon as I could I oriented them on Korea, I would take a subject in relation to Korea.

She asserted that she did not envision any other possible future: “If I hadn't gone in that direction if it wasn't for Korea, I don't know what I would be doing today as a study.”

Hallyu, an Additional Resource

It is different for students belonging to the most educated and highbrow classes who value the formalization of the skills acquired through their passion for Hallyu, and especially in language, not as their main (or even only) training, but rather as a gateway to more selective training and above all highly profitable on the labor market. Young people from the upper classes use their Korean language skills and their knowledge about Korean culture more often as an “extra” advantage in classic courses. The profitability of the diplomas is more clearly taken into account in their curriculum choices. As an example of young people from the upper classes with knowledge of Korean, Ania (a 22-year-old young woman, from an upper-class family) has chosen to follow an English and Chinese curriculum, which promises numerous opportunities given the intensity of economic exchanges with English and Chinese-speaking areas. Ludivine (a 21-year-old business student, from an upper-class family) or Delphine (a 24-year-old following a master's degree program at SciencesPo Paris, from an upper-class family) both use their knowledge of Korean as an additional resource likely to provide them with a comparative advantage in the highly competitive environments in which they operate. Young people from immigrant backgrounds who manage the Korean language make the same estimation: Khadija (a 20-year-old wealth management student, from an upper-class family with Tunisian origin) believes that Korean will help her in her job search in the specific market of French Korean expatriation.

Camille (a 20-year-old young woman, from a middle-class family) who was accepted into a master's degree in International Business thanks to her “Korean project,” acquired skills connected with her passion: she visited South Korea, which allowed her to “better understand the country.” Talking about her adolescence, she insists on the role played by Hallyu: “it was omnipresent, I listened to k-pop, I watched videos all the time, I watched K-dramas all the time, I learned a lot of things thanks to that.” Her parents, both with higher education degrees, are part of his reinvestment strategy, which takes the form of complementary courses:

My family thought it was very good, especially in relation to my studies. I took a business school exam for my master's degree, and I was accepted. They found it more interesting to do this Korean Bachelor's degree so that it would be complementary to my master's degree. I'm going to do a master's degree in international business, and I would like it to be focused on Korea, especially since the school where I enrolled allows me to take Korean classes.

She also points out that the objective of obtaining this competitive business school diploma takes precedence over her desire to find a job related to South Korea: "afterward, if things turn out that I'm not with Korea in the end, well, too bad, but it would be nicer." Her passion for Hallyu is reinvested as a curriculum strategy that ends up taking precedence over her initial taste. She concludes her interview as follows: "Hallyu is still music for music's sake, I did my concerts it was cool, I did stuff with my friends it was cool, I went to Korea it was cool, but that was temporary, it brought me to now." Camille and other interviewees from the upper classes thus differ from Mattéo, Alix, Laura, and Kira, which all come from the working or middle-classes: the latter try to convert their resources into diplomas that they see as a cosmopolitan way of being in the world (Opening up to a culture, possibly going to live in a country), while the former transform their resources into diplomas that signal global skills, where concern for the other is not central, to display distinctive advantages in a highly competitive labor market.

Catch-up Strategies

When the failure of a scholar or professional strategy looms on the horizon, young fans implement remedial measures to try to make the most out of the resources they have acquired, even at the cost of some adjustments, sometimes painful, of their initial projects.

This is the example of Coralie (already presented) and who interrupted a journalism curriculum because she could not fit in. She has nevertheless created a blog on Asian culture and Hallyu, which she hopes will help her professionalize. She considers her passion for Hallyu as the revelation of her taste for journalism:

It's a change that affirmed me and made me what I am today, made me become a journalist in a sense. Because it is thanks to the Hallyu that I have asserted myself. This change is my life. She claims her approach of Hallyu to be both aesthetic and analytical, which allows her to take them seriously and decode their ethnological dimension: "There aren't many journalists who can decipher what's going on in the Asian world. Today I'm making a website about K-pop, etc. to show what it is. I'm examining the messages, the subtexts, I'm trying to link the clips to Korean culture. I actually use my knowledge of Asian culture to make it known."

Likewise, Julia (a 23-year-old student, from an upper-class family) dreamed as a young girl of becoming a “businesswoman” like the heroines of so many K-dramas she has seen.

At the time, Korea was going to bring me something. I was really into that, and I wasn't really thinking about studying, I was thinking, “Go ahead, I'm going to have a great career.” I saw myself as a businesswoman, I was really in my dreams, I said to myself, “Go ahead, you'll find yourself in a big chaebol.” I'll be the only foreign woman.” I was doing something for myself, and it didn't necessarily go as I would have hoped.

She had to give up her dream, having understood that such a success implied integrating selective universities. After a professional bachelor's degree in commerce and the abandonment of a bachelor's degree in Korean, she took a year's break and ended up enrolling in a bachelor's degree in economic and social administration. This young woman recounts that her academic choices related to Hallyu — she thought at one point that she had a sufficient level of understanding to study Korean — were questioned. She suffered greatly from this failure, which she experienced as clear proof of the difficulty of reinvesting the skills she thought she had acquired and the too great a distance between cultural consumption and academic knowledge. However, her new choice was not so much against her former passion as towards a different attempt to take advantage of her experience of South Korea, a country she has already visited twice on top of consuming K-pop, K-Dramas, as well as documentaries, travel sites, and blogs. As a blogger and YouTuber about K-beauty, she hopes to take advantage of her knowledge about South Korea to achieve a professional position with links to the foreign world.

Now I'm in economic and social administration, so I'm still studying everything related to the economy. I still have a focus on international trade. Still, I'm a bit more involved in everything, especially now that South Korea is more of an emerging country, at the time, it was a very emerging country. Now I think it's a country that has already proven itself, so I don't think there are exciting things to do. Now, there are too many foreigners there, there are a lot of French people who are there now, and I think it's more of an interesting country in economic terms to work there or develop something.

Less linear than that of other interviewees, these biographical trajectories follow the thread of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment for Hallyu and South Korea. These catch-up strategies enable young people to reap the sweet fruit of their labor even when the transformation from their skills into cultural capital, as objectified by a diploma, was not possible.

Conclusion

Born in the field of leisure, the taste for exotic culture for young French people with no previous proximity with South Korea (be it historical, cultural, touristic), manifests the cosmopolitan virtue of open-mindedness and nourishes cosmopolitan learnings, that transforms into skills when activated in empowerment strategies. This virtue is as much a starting point (because it takes a quantum of initial cosmopolitan openness to turn to cultural products that are far removed from the aesthetic canon and the cultural content of the individual) as it is an outcome (because it is by being deployed that this virtue authorizes learning). Thus, and without deciding on the thorny question of the threshold to be crossed for an individual to develop a cosmopolitan identity, we have selected excerpts from interviews that can be read in the light of a recognition of a self-openness to others.

As they consume Hallyu products, young French fans nourish dreams of taking control of their destiny and thus invite their passion to structuring curricula and professional choices. As they consume Hallyu products, young fans develop cosmopolitan empowerment strategies, mainly thanks to their self-acquired Korean language skills, proudness, and distinction related to the mastery of a rare resource. From immigrant backgrounds with little cultural capital and short curricula, some of them use it to build an elective cultural affiliation – while distancing oneself from the culture of origin and from French culture — to counter the prejudices and racism of which they sometimes feel victims. For some of them, the question of the recognition of their cosmopolitan skills quickly arose, and they turned to specialized courses: those less familiar with the profitability of diplomas chose a Korean path for their leading training, while the more endowed adopted strategies of accumulation of capital and use their passion for South Korea as an additional advantage.

If by claiming their identity as Hallyu fans, some young people with an immigrant background are revisiting their place in French society, it is nevertheless important to note that it is girls rather than boys who express this demand: admittedly, the fan attitude is rather feminine (Oh 2016). This “feminine universalism” in the use of Hallyu products and skills stemmed from their consumption has two characteristics in France. First, it is enrolled in the school system, given the centrality of diploma in French society as an emancipatory tool, as in many other European countries. Girls have now achieved a better academic level than boys. They reinvest their passion into their curriculum, transforming cultural resources (including that built up in cultural consumption) into educational capital (Baudelot and Establet 2017). Secondly, this “feminine universalism” is strongly tied with racial issues, especially in the case of young people from Northern African origins: young women with such immigrant background use their passion as an empowering tool (including in their curriculum), whereas their masculine counterparts do not bet on the same path, a difference well documented by French sociologists, who compare the social perceptions of the figures of young girls and young black or Arab boys (Guénif-Souilamas and Macé 2004), the first

being valued (as integrated and peaceful) and the second being more problematic (as rebel and conservative).

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Notes

1. France counts the “metropole” (on the European continent) and several Southern and Antarctic lands, such as French India (Pondicherry), New Caledonia and French Polynesia (both in the southern

Pacific Ocean), Saint Pierre and Miquelon (in the northwest Atlantic Ocean), Wallis and Futuna (in the South Pacific Ocean) and Mayotte (a Comoros archipelago situated in the Indian Ocean). Overseas France accounts for 18% of the territory and 4% of the population. The population of these territories is mixed race.

2. As she is a fan for 3 years, it means she began learning Korean just one year after discovering Hallyu.

3. INALCO is the only French University dedicated to the languages and civilizations of the world, offering courses in more than one hundred languages and civilizations. It is a very selective curriculum. <http://www.inalco.fr/en/inalco-university/reach-out-world>.

4. Level A2 corresponds to the second level on the European Union's scale of languages, the CEFR. This level, which is quite common among people who have studied a language at school (English, German, Spanish, etc.), is the minimum level required to venture to travel using the language.

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