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Young Migrant Vietnamese in the Czech Republic Reflect Diasporic Contexts in Their Identification of Cultural Proximity with Korean Media

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ABSTRACT

Based on in-depth interviews with Vietnamese young adults in the Czech Republic who consume Korean media products on a regular basis, this study investigates how their diasporic contexts are reflected in the consumption of Korean media products. While participants quickly spotted cultural proximity as the reason for their preferences, the in-depth analysis further revealed that cultural proximity was particularly identified (a) when they devised a concept of the Asian family from the dialectic relationship among their family experiences, the represented family culture in Korean media, and the observed Czech family culture; (b) when they found their diasporic identity in the image of hardworking immigrants; and (c) when they highlighted their cultural tastes and valued their human capital in contrast to those of Czech people and other kinds of Vietnamese migrants.

KEYWORDS

Vietnamese migrants; Czech Republic; cultural proximity; Korean media; transnational media consumption; diasporic contexts

In 2012 when I started teaching at a university in the Czech Republic (hereafter, CR), I came across an interesting news story about a K-pop (Korean pop music) World Festival held in Korea. A Czech girl band won the grand prize with its performance, which copied a famous K-pop girl band, Girl's Generation. It was the picture of the girl band that caught my attention, though, because five members out of eight looked not Czech but Asian. The news story made me aware that Vietnamese performers account for a large segment of Korean popular culture fandom in the CR. And a simple question, why?, popped up, which was followed by a few common-sense questions: Is the popularity of Korean media in the CR because of the popularity of Korean media in their home country, Vietnam? Is it because they find commonalities with Korean media? or Is it because globally mobile people are naturally more into transnational media products? I learned in casual conversations with Vietnamese people that the answer to these questions is mostly yes Korean media has been popular for years in Vietnam. The cultural distance between Vietnam and Korea is much smaller than that between Vietnam and the CR. Transnational people like the Vietnamese in the CR and me tend to be more exposed to various cultures. Thus, the answer must be yes. However, the questions and answer were firmly grounded in so-called methodological nationalism that does not

account for various cultural variations and individual contexts. Thus, my questions led me to plan a research project focusing more on the transnational dynamics of migrants' lives, cultural flows, media representations, and so on.

This study focuses specifically on young Vietnamese migrants who routinely consume Korean media products by posing a broad question: How are their diasporic contexts reflected in the consumption of Korean media products? In order to fully understand their life experiences and cultural orientations, this study delves specifically into how the young migrants place themselves in diasporic contexts in the CR and how their life experiences directly and indirectly shape their preferences for Korean media products. Cultural proximity is a possible theoretical concept that may explain their daily consumption of Korean media. However, this study looks further into where and how the proximity between the young migrants and Korean media texts is identified.

Literature Review

Vietnamese in the CR

According to the Czech Statistical Office, the official number of Vietnamese in the CR reached 58,025 in 2016 (Czech Statistical Office 2017). After a short period post-1989, during which the number of Vietnamese dropped, the size of the Vietnamese community has dramatically expanded from 3,500 in 1992 (Drbohlav et al. 2009). Vietnamese are currently the third largest group of foreigners with long-term residence permits in the CR (Kušniráková 2014).

Since Vietnamese are generally classified as economic migrants like other non-EU migrants from former Soviet states and Mongolia, there have been many studies focusing specifically on economic motives and labor relations (e.g. Hüwelmeier 2015). In addition, since most studies have been reported in the Czech language, Vietnamese in the CR are a relatively less known population of international migration. Recently, Vietnamese have been one of the main immigrant populations examined by multiple studies aiming to evaluate multiculturalism and integration policy in the CR as a country facing a transition from an emigration country to a country of immigration (e.g. Drbohlav and Džúrová 2007). However, the migrants' everyday experiences have been less represented in academia compared to multiple criminological studies on this population (e.g. Nožina and Kraus 2016),

Intercultural studies have recently focused on the sociocultural experiences of Vietnamese in the CR. One study investigated the history of the racialization of Vietnamese and cultural adaptation in comparison with other minority groups (Alamgir 2013). A sociological study highlighted distinctive kinship relations in Vietnamese families who have hired Czech nannies; the nannies supplement the role of parents who are absent due to extensive economic activity (Souralová 2014). Also, multiple studies have been conducted on the language practices of the study population (e.g. Sherman and Homoláč 2017)

Vietnamese are also known for a higher number of children (30%) and women (43%) compared to other groups of migrants in the CR (Drbohlav et al. 2009). The number of children and youth (up to 26 years of age) in the Vietnamese immigrant population has increased and accounts for 40% of the Vietnamese population in the CR (Kušniráková

2014). Despite the large number of children and young adults, detailed demographic information such as birthplace and educational level is very limited. A recent study that focuses specifically on the identity construction of young Vietnamese migrants illustrates the fluid nature of identity construction; identity hovers between one that reflects their family traditions and another that reflects the majority community in the CR (Svobodová and Janská 2016). Also, a comparative study highlights the ambivalent identity of Vietnamese in the CR (Cheng and Hu 2015). In response to the increasing interest in the diasporic identity of Vietnamese in the CR, this study pays a close attention to their transnational life and cultural experiences.

Migrants' Transnational Media Practices

Migrants' transnational communication practices have been increasingly studied as advanced communication technologies have been widely adopted in everyday life and global mobility has increased sharply in recent decades. Previous studies from a variety of disciplines, including migrant studies and intercultural communication, have demonstrated how new media from satellites to the Internet have changed the life experiences of international migrants; aided by various communication technologies, migrants (re)build human and social networks across borders by keeping ties with people like family members and peers in their countries of origin (e.g. Chib et al. 2014). Transnational communication is also an important means of engaging in domestic politics in their home countries (Aricat 2015). While some studies highlight the importance of transnational media consumption in maintaining native identity (e.g. Kama and Malka 2013), others demonstrate how migrants' transnational practices reciprocally shape members of the receiving society and their identity (e.g. Ehrkamp 2005). Transnational media communication is also an important means for migrants to cope with daily stress in their new home by entertaining themselves (e. g., Kim 2016).

The above-mentioned studies focus on transnational practices between migrants' country of origin and their new home. As the distribution of cultural products widens along with rapid technological advancements, however, migrants have often crossed multiple borders to find culturally relevant media products. Using data across different European countries, Christiansen (2004) demonstrates that migrants tend to seek more news than does the majority population by accessing not only news media of their country of origin but also international news media in English, such as BBC World, which is available on satellite television. An earlier study presents the cultural negotiation of Vietnamese youths in Australia, who consume media products from Hong Kong by using earlier forms of electronic media like video recorders (Cunningham and Nguyen 2001). Similarly, Korean American youths access Japanese as well as Korean television series not only because they prefer media products with which they are familiar but also because they want to compensate themselves for limited cultural representation in U.S. television products (Park 2004). Kartosen and Tan (2013) investigate a broader population of young Asian migrants in the Netherlands who extensively consume nonhomeland Asian media products, and they discuss the construction of Asian ethnic-cultural identity through the consumption of media products mainly from China, Japan, and Korea.

Global Korean Media

Since the late 1990s when a couple of Korean television dramas (K-dramas) gained popularity with Chinese audiences, the increasing popularity of Korean media products in Asia has been noted by both academia and the public (Shim 2006). The cultural phenomenon came to be called the ‘Korean Wave,’ with a series of successful Korean television dramas gaining popularity in China starting in the mid-1990s. Since then, multiple Korean blockbuster films and systematically commodified pop singers (K-pop) have successfully penetrated Asian cultural markets (Shim 2006). In particular, the continuous success of television dramas such as *Winter Sonata* in various countries, including Japan and Vietnam, in the early 2000s stimulated developments in related industries such as tourism and consumer-goods markets in Asia (Ryoo 2009). The popularity of Korean media products, followed by the increasing market share of Korean businesses in the Asian market, has led to the formation of a brand-like image of the country (e.g. Sung 2015). Originally coined by Chinese news media in the late 1990s, the term ‘Korean Wave’ has been widely used to describe the international success of Korean media (Kim 2013).

The role of advanced communication technologies should not be underestimated in the later phase of Korean media’s success. While the early phase of Korean media’s success in Asia was initiated through more traditional practices of media marketing, such as the export of media products, the diffusion of Korean media products beyond Asia in recent years has been propelled by integrating media products into consumers’ activities on Web 2.0, which is called ‘Korean Wave 2.0’ (e.g. Jin 2012). The huge success of certain media products on social media such as YouTube has attracted giant media corporations to invest their resources in social media (Hess and Waller 2011). The worldwide success of Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’ demonstrates how Korean media corporations elaborately adopt social media in promoting their products overseas (Edwards 2012). The strategic new media promotion has been backed by the voluntary distribution of Korean media products by audiences, widening the scope of consumption and distribution of Korean media products in the world (Jung and Shim 2013). Audiences for Korean media have become more active in sharing their opinions and feelings about Korean media with their peers via social media (Jin 2018).

Propelled by extended dissemination, Korean media products have gradually gained popularity with non-Asian audiences (e.g. Jin 2018; Lee 2018; Marinescu and Balica 2013; Meza and Park 2015). Once established through an increased market share in the Asian-culture industry, Korean media corporations aggressively promoted their products to reach beyond Asia. Studies on the non-Asian reception of Korean media products have also focused on Asian diasporic audiences in the West, which consume Korean media and form transnational fan communities. Asian immigrant audiences in Austria, who are marginalized in Western society, have constructed an East Asian imagined community by consuming culturally familiar media products from Korea (Sung 2013). In the United States, young Asian migrants nurture a pan ethnic identity while constructing a coeval territory of East Asia across borders (Ju and Lee 2015). Asian Canadians, who are mainly networked via social media, consume advanced and stylish Western tastes and/or their own ethnic traditions from Korean media texts (Yoon and Jin 2016). As diasporic Asians, Korean pop-music fans in Canada embrace cultural products by reflexively interpreting

the meaning of cultural products as a means of exercising their diasporic identity (Yoon 2017).

The extended transnationalization of Korean media in an advanced technological context, the Western reception of Korean media, and the transnational imagined communities of Asian migrants consuming Korean media may define the current study population, Vietnamese young adults in the CR who extensively consume Korean media products. Guided by these previous studies, the current study focuses mainly on how the migrant audiences reflect their diasporic contexts in their transnational media consumption.

Transnational Media Consumption: Reflexively Identifying Cultural Proximity

The success of Korean media in the globalized media market has become additional evidence for the emergence of new transnational media flow decentralizing the global media market (e.g. Thussu 2007). The emergence of regional or counter media flow refutes the dominant discourse of cultural imperialism that has highlighted a global media market monopolized by U.S. media (Thussu 2000). Especially in Asia, rapid economic growth, the transnationalization of the media industry, the large size of the regional market based on its high density of population, and advanced communication technologies have been important contextual bases of the emergence of intra-regional flow (Iwabuchi 2002). Media industries in East Asia have successfully localized their media products in the course of transnationalization in their regional markets (Iwabuchi 2008).

The cultural proximity thesis has been usefully employed to explain decentralized media flow. Exemplifying the regional media flow in Latin America, the thesis posits that media consumers tend to prefer media products from culturally adjacent regions (Straubhaar 1991). With the rapid transnationalization of media industries, the notion has been useful in explaining migrants' consumption of media products from their countries of origin. La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) further developed the notion of cultural proximity by presenting the existence of multilayered proximity; first, cultural proximity varies across locals within a country, and second, people often identify their cultural proximity with certain genres dominated by advanced media industries, such as U.S. cartoons. In studies on the transnational dissemination of Korean media products, cultural proximity has been widely applied to explain their popularity not only in East and South East Asia (e.g. Yoo et al. 2014) but also in distant countries like Turkey (Oh and Chae 2013). These studies center on international audiences' shared cultural values and traditions, such as family values reflected through Korean cultural products. Similarly, social proximity is a common variable explaining the popularity of Korean media products in different East Asian countries (Yang 2012).

However, the notion of cultural proximity has also been criticized mainly because it sees culture as a static unit that can be observable and predictable (Kraidy 2002). Viewing culture as a static unit in which the essence of a culture is unchangeable hinders understanding of the variation during reception (Kim 2009). On the other hand, the notion of reflexive (critical) proximity particularly focuses on migrants' media consumption, highlighting reflexive diasporic identities positioned between their past experiences in home cultures and migrant experiences across the border (Georgiou 2012). As Arab women in the United Kingdom consume soap operas on Arabic television, they reflect

multiple identities as Arabs, Arab women, Muslims, immigrants, Londoners, and more. While the migrant women appropriate Arabic soap operas as a means to connect them with their region of origin, some of them reflect their gender identity as Arab women in London in the course of distancing themselves from the cultural logic underlying the television shows (Georgiou 2012). Similarly, cultural proximity does not lie in national or ethnic origin but is presented through an individual's reflexive contexts. Audiences tend to individually identify proximity in certain media texts (Yamato 2014). Iwabuchi (2001: 58) claims that cultural proximity could only be 'subjectively identified and experienced by the audience' in his study on the dissemination of Japanese pop culture in Taiwan. Taiwanese audiences do not find an intrinsically similar culture in Japanese cultural products but identify cultural proximity by recognizing the same temporality in Japanese contemporary culture.

Studies on the reception of Korean media products in Asian societies have also found cultural proximity between the audiences' contexts reflected in their consumption and the Korean context placed in the products. Positing the recent popularity of Korean cultural products in East Asia as a descendent of previous Asian pop culture once led by Hong Kong and Japanese media industries, Cho (2011) suggests Asian audiences find a coeval relationship with the represented Korean sociocultural context in Korean media products. Asian fans of Korean media products feel the contemporariness of the modern and urban styles of Korean media products, which project their shared capitalist-consumerist orientations. Also, Ainslie (2016) shows that Thai fans of Korean television programs use foreign cultural products as a means to assess and critique their own positions in diverse Thai sociocultural contexts. The study demonstrates how urban audiences and rural-ethnic audiences find cultural proximity differently in Korean media texts. In an earlier study on the Taiwanese consumption of Korean media, Kim (2005) describes a coeval relationship between the characteristics of contemporary Korean society represented in Korean media products and everyday experiences and identities in contemporary Taiwanese society. Recently, Yoon (2017) elaborates cultural proximity by introducing a new concept called 'cultural affinity.' In his study, Asian K-pop fans in Canada exercise their identity as Asian migrants by appropriating the represented images of youthful and successful individuals in Korean media products. Along with previous studies on young migrant audiences consuming Korean media products, an understanding of reflexive cultural proximity guides the current study to focus particularly on the contextual reflection of Korean media consumption by diasporic Vietnamese young migrants in the CR.

Methodology

As part of a larger research project on transnational media practices in the Vietnamese diasporic community of the CR, the current study focused particularly on young adults who actively consumed Korean media products by taking advantage of their language skills and technological literacies. Before starting the study, the investigator learned that young adult Vietnamese in the CR were the first group of people who explicated their cultural preference for Korean media products. They shared some aspects of demographical background with the investigator; they were mostly born in Vietnam and moved to the CR in their early years; they were relatively well educated; many of them could speak multiple languages, including Vietnamese, Czech, and English. Investigating the contextual

connection between participants' life experiences and their media practices, the current study focused narrowly on this relatively homogenous population in the Vietnamese diasporic community of the CR.

This study was based on qualitative data from 12 in-depth interviews conducted in two major Czech cities, Prague and Brno. Following the basic principle of purposive sampling, this study specifically selected participants who were suitable for the research focus. The youngest participant was 18 years old, while the oldest was 26. Since it was not difficult to find fluent English speakers in this population, all interviews were conducted in English. With the exception of two participants who attended English-based private colleges in the CR, all participants were either students at or graduates of Czech national universities. Likewise, the economic status of their families was generally homogeneous. Despite the occupational diversity of their parents, most participants identified their families as middle class. In this study, however, gender was not equally represented because it was known that Korean media fans in the Vietnamese community were predominantly female, and thus female participants could be recruited much more easily. Although two male participants joined the research initially, their interview data were excluded from this study because of the weak intensity of their Korean media consumption. Planning a larger future research project covering a wider scope of participants, the investigator ruled out other young Vietnamese migrants who either were born or arrived in the CR only recently because these two populations were far less representative of the young-adult generation of the Vietnamese diasporic community. Thus, all study participants were born in Vietnam and moved to the CR at young ages ranging from 5 to 8.

The first four participants were recruited through a Czech informant who was involved in diverse international communities in Prague, including Vietnamese and Korean communities. Snowball sampling was used to recruit the rest of the participants with the help of earlier participants. Although the researcher conducted a total of 17 interviews, five interviews were excluded from this study due to lack of relevance, such as weak intensity of Korean media consumption or multiple relocations for family reasons. The semistructured interview was composed of two broad themes, life experiences and media consumption. An interview typically lasted at least two hours because the investigator often asked many subquestions to encourage participants to share detailed experiences. The investigator transcribed interviews verbatim for data analysis and coded the data by repeatedly reading the transcription. By comparing interviews, the investigator found similarities and differences in the data, which eventually led to identifying significant common themes. During the process of data analysis, each participant was assigned a number.

Findings

Why Korean Media?

There was a common oxymoron in the interviews. Many participants said, 'I like Korean TV,' but they did not watch television. Rather, they consumed media products mostly on the Internet by using either their computer or mobile phone. Although most households of the study participants subscribed to satellite television, it was a technology for their parents, who used it for watching Vietnamese news and shows both at home and in the workplace. On the other hand, the youngsters were loyal Internet users. Like many

other Internet users, they used a variety of online services primarily for practical purposes. When it came to entertainment, however, they almost exclusively consumed Korean media products available on the Internet.

Many participants started consuming Korean television shows on a daily basis in their early years. While some of them started watching dramas with their mother or sibling, others first learned about Korean television shows from their Vietnamese friends in the CR. Participants often used abstract adjectives such as *funny*, *interesting*, and *entertaining* to explain the reason they consistently consume Korean media products. Cultural proximity was also frequently cited by participants as the reason for their cultural preference for Korean media. Asked more about cultural proximity, however, many participants initially responded that ‘Korean culture is similar to Vietnamese culture,’ which was based on the commonsensical understanding of culture as national culture. Aiming to know how to interpret the cultural proximity between the young Vietnamese migrants in the CR and Korean media texts, this study inquired further about their life experiences as diasporic children in the CR and transnational Korean media consumption. Based on the answers, this study found that cultural proximity between participants and Korean media texts was identified (a) when they devised the concept of the Asian family from the dialectic relationship among their family experiences, family practices portrayed in Korean dramas, and Czech family culture; (b) when they found their diasporic identity in the image of hardworking immigrants; and (c) when they highlighted their cultural tastes and valued their human capital in contrast to those of Czech people and other kinds of Vietnamese migrants.

Dialectically Identified Meaning of Family

When I first saw *Full House* (a drama series) more than 10 years ago, I liked the stars on the show. The two main stars were good looking ... I liked the warm-hearted story. People in the show had kind hearts like family members. (Participant 1)

Family was a frequently mentioned word when participants stressed familiarity with Korean television shows. As family is one of the most salient themes of Korean television dramas (Kang and Kim 2011), much literature on Korean drama consumption points out family values as evidence of cultural proximity between Asian (diasporic) audiences and Korean cultural texts (e.g. Leung 2008; Sung 2013). Likewise, participants of this study found cultural similarities in the structure of Korean families, family communication styles, and the decision-making process in a household, which are often depicted in Korean dramas. Particularly, some participants specifically pointed out that the authority-submission relationship between parents and children was commonly seen in many Korean dramas as well as in their own families. As immigrants, their parents often stress that conventional family values be strictly kept in their diasporic life, such as the importance of family meal time, family language practices, and discipline in child education.

In Korean drama, there are many scenes of family dinner. It’s an important scene to understand family relationship. ... It’s similar to my family. Dinner time is my mom’s nagging time (laugh). (Participant 5)

Participants also defined the conservative family culture in their close, yet subordinate, relationship with their parents. More important, conservative family values are reflected

in their diasporic context. For many participants, family was a diaspora separated from everyday Czech society. Even if they were well integrated into Czech society and culture, their parents believe family should be maintained in conventional Vietnamese ways because it was one of the most distinctive cultures accounting for their identity. When contrasted to Czech family culture, their own found common ground with Korean family culture depicted in Korean dramas. This was typically reflected in a term, ‘Asian family culture,’ used by participant 12.

I know my Czech friends also have family gathering often. Family is important for Czech people. But, it’s not like Asian family. My parents are stricter than Czech parents and they are crazy about our education. I don’t think Czech parents are like that (Participant 12).

In sum, the cultural proximity found between their families and Korean families represented in television products was formulated in the transnational dynamic of their lives: (a) their parents conservatively maintained family practices that originated across the border; (b) family culture was one important cultural element that distinguished them from Czech culture; and (c) they found a seemingly similar family culture in television dramas produced in another Asian country. The individual, diasporic Vietnamese family experience was coined as Asian family culture when it was contrasted with a Western family culture and supported by references found in Asian media products.

Hardworking People

I’ve seen many Korean dramas about people working hard. It’s a kind of cliché. Everyone in Korean dramas work hard. It’s a typical image of Korean people to me ... Vietnamese people work very hard. It is a kind of our thing. (Participant 2)

As many academic studies emphasize work ethic as a common traditional value that facilitates rapid economic development in Asia (i.e. Chan 1996), participants of this study often identified their fellow Vietnamese and themselves as hardworking migrants while stereotypically associating Korean people with the image of hardworking people in the media. Responding to the stereotype, Korean media has been keen on embedding traditional cultural values like work ethic in their products as part of their industrial strategy (Choi 2010). Some participants of this study preferred a story about people who made every effort to succeed, calling it a typical genre of Korean dramas. They sympathized with characters who overcame unfortunate situations and strived to succeed. The young migrant audiences sympathized not only with fictitious characters in media products but also with Korean celebrities who devoted themselves to excelling in their areas. Well informed about the Korean media industry, they also knew that Korean actors and singers had spent many years to train, as planned by their management companies. Participant 3, who was a loyal fan of many K-pop bands, such as Big Bang, said that she liked not only their music but also their behind-the-scenes stories portraying the long hours of practice and multiple hardships necessary to be stars. Similarly, some other participants regularly followed the stories about their K-pop stars on the Internet.

While appreciating stories about hardworking people from Korea, participants were proud of the image of Vietnamese people as hardworking migrants. Although they agreed that the work ethic originated in traditional Vietnamese cultural values, they specifically constructed the image of hardworking people from their daily context in the

diasporic community. Most participants shared a similar view of their diligent parents as the main reason for their current stable life. Their hardworking parents spent excessive hours at their work places, such as small grocery stores called *potraviný*¹ in Czech, small retail stores selling imported goods, or large Vietnamese wholesale complexes located in major Czech cities like Prague and Brno.

Vietnamese people are known as hardworking people. I agree. Our older generations like my parents have worked so hard. Vietnamese's stores always open first and close last. (Participant 3)

A strong work ethic was also practiced by the young migrants, who displayed their belief in the norm as a necessary condition for their diasporic life. Some participants summarized their school life with the image of a hard-studying student, regarding their educational achievement as a reward for their sacrificial parents. It was important to them to point out that they were willing to embrace the stereotypical image of hardworking migrants. Participant 7, who shared her experience at her school, where teachers and classmates stereotypically expected her to outperform, said the image helped her devote herself to schoolwork. For her, a strong work ethic was not only an inherited value from her family and community but also a role she played as a young migrant from a stereotyped diasporic community.

Raised in a hardworking family and motivated to be diligent, Vietnamese young adults were familiar with the stories about hardworking people in Korean media products. Cultural proximity was identified through the familiarity. By consuming the image of Korea and the represented image of hardworking Koreans in the media, they could confirm the willingly embraced image of hardworking migrants. Going one step further, some of them even shaped their future by consuming the images of fictitious characters. Those who liked Korean television shows dramatizing a variety of professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers, cooks, IT engineers, and financial managers yearned to live like the characters who made every effort to achieve their life goals. Another component of cultural proximity was found in the lifestyles of the fictitious, hardworking professionals.

Keeping Pace with Trends

As previous studies have explained, Asian (migrant) audiences can feel the contemporariness in the up-to-date styles of Korean media products (e.g. Yoon 2017). This study's participants were also loyal audiences of the so-called Korean trendy dramas characterized by stories about urban professionals surrounded by contemporary lifestyle amenities. They stayed informed about Korean celebrities, cultural trends in Seoul, new fashion and beauty products, and so on. Participant 2 revealed her cultural tastes by romanticizing about the image of the technologically advanced society and hypermodern urban spaces frequently represented in Korean television shows.

It's funny to see every person on Korean dramas lives in a luxurious flat. They wear expensive suits and drive expensive cars. I know it's just a drama. But, I am interested in them. I want to visit Seoul to see this kind of scenes. Especially, I want to go to Gangnam and Hongdae. I heard people are very stylish in these areas (Participant 2).

In the meantime, consuming Korean media is a cultural practice differentiating the young Vietnamese migrants not only from Czech people but also from other kinds of Vietnamese

migrants, such as their parents' generation and recent migrants. They tended to regard Czech people as slow to adopt new cultures and products and insensitive to trends. Many participants bluntly said Czech people looked outdated. They contrasted Czech society with the young Vietnamese community as old versus young people. This attitude was partly affected by their earlier experiences in small Czech towns. More than half the participants were raised in small towns because of their parents' businesses. They often compared their life in small towns with their life in Prague or Brno.

I lived in a small village near Ostrava. It's a never changing town. People are so conservative and do the same things all the time. They don't know anything about new culture. Now I am happy with my life in Prague. There are more young people and foreigners. In Prague I have many friends who are interested in Korean media. I haven't seen anyone (who is interested in Korean media) in the village. (Participant 7)

They identified themselves as people who were sensitive to cultural trends and had tastes commensurate with urban life by employing the analogy comparing young Vietnamese versus old Czech people with urban centers like Prague versus small Czech towns. Meanwhile, they regarded Korean media culture as a new, trendy one. Distinguishing themselves from the old, outdated image of the Czech village, they highlighted their cultural taste for the urban, trendy lifestyle found in Korean media products. The cultural proximity between their cultural tastes and the represented images of Korean young professionals' lifestyles kept them aloof from the stagnant Czech culture as they defined it. Moreover, the distancing strategy was also carried out in their diasporic community.

While belonging to the Vietnamese diasporic community, they were more tuned in to the upcoming trends of media, culture, and lifestyle than were other Vietnamese because the young migrants saw themselves as having higher human capital. Benefitting from stable living conditions, the 1.5 generation of Vietnamese migrants could gain multilingual skills and maintain a relaxed lifestyle, which allowed them to use a wide range of media sources. On the other hand, the older generation or recently migrated young Vietnamese were known to have very limited options in their media consumption. Those who worked all day in their small shops continued to use Vietnamese satellite television, often as background noise. Although those Vietnamese also used the Internet and mobile devices, they relied on Web services based in Vietnam and narrow compatriot networks on social media. A limited linguistic competence in Czech and other foreign languages as well as long hours of work hindered the older generation and the new migrants from diversifying their media choices.

Many parents of this study's participants also watched Korean television shows on a regular basis. However, the patterns of Korean media consumption of the two generations had deviated from each other over time. While the young audiences stayed updated on Korean media and cultural trends by surfing the information ocean, their parents were likely to be tenacious in their practice of watching seemingly old-fashioned Korean television shows that were available on Vietnamese satellite and Web services in the Vietnamese language.

Recently, I only watch Korean dramas with English subtitles. They are more available and much quicker (to obtain) than those with Vietnamese subtitles. They are supposed to be distributed by Korean Americans. ... I get information about Korean media, culture, and celebrities from many websites in English. (Participant 6)

The migrants who were competent in English could access all available media sources, which allowed them to keep pace with Korean media trends. Taking advantage of their perceived higher human capital, they took a step closer to the cultural tastes of their contemporary Korean audiences while taking a step back from other Vietnamese who had experienced different life trajectories. In other words, cultural proximity to cultural trends in Korean media was identified in the distance lying between their own and other Vietnamese's media practices, which was possibly explained by different life experiences.

In sum, the trendy Korean media consumers recognized that Korean media represented the Korean society's value of stressing the pursuit of human capital by portraying a variety of professions leading the society. The young audiences, who position themselves as educated, modernized, trendy, and urban young migrants, identified cultural proximity with a Korean media culture that represents fast-changing urban lifestyles. Czech people and other kinds of Vietnamese migrants were often employed to highlight their own closeness to Korean cultural trends.

Concluding Remarks

As part of a larger study on the transnational media practices of Vietnamese in the CR, this study focuses specifically on the 1.5 generation of Vietnamese migrants who consume Korean media products on a regular basis. Even if the youngsters are native Czech speakers and educated through the formal Czech educational system, they still strongly belong to the largest Asian immigrant community. Thus, it seemed quite obvious that they were likely to be fans of cultural products from one of the most powerful media industries in Asia. Cultural proximity seemed to be an easy thesis explaining their preference for Korean cultural products, compared to the commonsensical understanding of the cultural distance between an Asian culture and a European culture. The young Vietnamese migrants also quickly picked cultural proximity as the reason for their Korean media consumption. However, this study goes deeper to understand how cultural proximity originated in their life experiences as migrant children instead of in the cultural distance classified by cultural regions.

Cultural proximity between the young participants' life experiences and the represented Korean cultures and lifestyles in media products was identified around three interrelated values. Firstly, raised in migrant families, they often differentiate their family relations from those of Czech people while finding similarities with family values represented in Korean media products. The similarity is not simply grounded in the notion of the Asian family but also through their experiences with parents who have strived to survive in a Central European country. Secondly, the image of hard-working people links their own identification of Vietnamese people to a typical image of the Korean young professional portrayed in Korean media products. They value work ethic as a driving force of success while embracing it as a norm for migrant children who are supposed to perform well in their family, community, and school. Last, the young, educated, and globalized migrants fix their sights on the advanced lifestyle of successful professionals living in an urban center, which is one of the most common motifs of Korean media products. Differentiating themselves from other kinds of Vietnamese migrants as well as from Czech people, they define themselves by their

distinctive human capital, which is often represented and highlighted in Korean media products.

The findings of this study also reflect the limitations of this study. Participants only represent a relatively homogeneous group of Vietnamese. Their perceived higher human capital explains their distinctive living context. Thus, the findings limitedly explain cultural proximity as identified by this specific group of people rather than by the general Vietnamese population in the CR. However, this study directed me to the next steps for my research very clearly; studies on media practices of other kinds of Vietnamese, such as old people, recent migrants with limited language skills, and migrants separated from or assimilated to Czech society, would further expand the understanding of transnational media, diasporic community, cultural proximity, and human capital.

Note

1. *Potraviný* is a very important contextual cue in understanding the Vietnamese diasporic community in CR. Backed by large wholesale networks of Vietnamese, Vietnamese run small grocery stores on every corner of Czech cities. Stores carry a variety of groceries and open early and stay open late to attract local customers who casually shop for a small amount of groceries. Participants also said that Vietnamese in the CR are typically represented as people working at a *potraviný*.

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