ByMyFrench
FMCG / Homeware Export Consulting

NO. 1 · NOVEMBER 2026



The Letter

Asia · *the market seen from the ground, for French brands*

Tableware · fine food · retail · consumer trends

IN THIS ISSUE

JAPAN

-44.5%

Japan loses half its Chinese tourists, not their spending

p. 3

SOUTH KOREA

+125%

Seoul, Asia's new shopping capital

p. 5

CHINA

¥894

More trips, fewer things bought

p. 6

SOUTHEAST ASIA

98.8%

Three platforms for all of e-commerce

p. 8

Dear reader,

Every month, I tell you what is moving in Asia, in stores, at distributors and among shoppers, with one question in mind: what does it change for a French brand? This month, Japan loses half its Chinese tourists without losing its sales, Seoul becomes the region's shop window, China keeps spending, just not on things, and several historic department stores close their doors. Enjoy the read, and write back: your questions will shape the next issues.



Maxime
de Fougeroux
Founder, ByMyFrench

THE ESSENTIALS

This month, in six lines

JAPAN	Chinese tourists have almost vanished (-44.5% in September), yet each visitor spends more than ever. Department stores are on their ninth month of growth.	p. 3
JAPAN	Since 1 November, tourists pay the tax at the till and get it back at the airport. December's figures will show whether sales suffer.	p. 4
SOUTH KOREA	Lotte and Shinsegae have more than doubled their sales to foreigners. And it is no longer just luxury.	p. 5
CHINA	826 million trips during Golden Week, but the lowest spend per trip since the pandemic. Chinese consumers pay for experiences.	p. 6
SOUTHEAST ASIA	Shopee, Lazada and TikTok Shop share 98.8% of e-commerce. That is where your choice of distributor plays out.	p. 8
STORES	Seibu and Hands leave Shibuya, Galeries Lafayette leaves Beijing, Metro closes its department stores in Singapore. Meanwhile, The Hyundai lands in Tokyo and 118 Mall opens in Kuala Lumpur.	p. 9

NUMBER OF THE MONTH

¥423,021

The average spend of a French visitor to Japan in the third quarter. No other nationality spends more, and Japanese department stores have noticed.

THE FRENCH SIDE · 2025 EXPORTS

JAPAN

€1.32bn

of food and drink (-2.7%). Chocolate grows (+5%), biscuits fall (-19%).

SOUTH KOREA

€610m

of food and drink (+1.1%). Butter jumps 26% to €83m.

CHINA

€1.8bn

of cosmetics (+1.2%). China remains France's top customer in Asia: €24bn in total.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

-10%

for French cosmetics, facing stiffer competition.

A weak yen and won make our products dearer locally. Those still growing share one thing: buyers know why they are paying for them.

Sources: French Treasury (Japan-Korea agri-food letter, Feb. 2026), FEBEA (Feb. 2026), France Diplomatie (China country sheet, Feb. 2026).



01 · JAPAN

Japan loses half its Chinese tourists, not their spending

Beijing has advised its citizens against Japan for a year. The Chinese left, others came, and they spend more.

THE FACTS

- Visitors from **mainland China fell 44.5%** in September (430,800), after nearly -60% in August.
- Japan still welcomed **3.1 million visitors** (only -5%), thanks to Koreans (+25.6%) and Taiwanese (+13%).
- **Spend per tourist hit a record** : ¥233,677 in Q3. The French lead with ¥423,021.

A year of frost between Tokyo and Beijing

It all started with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remarks on Taiwan in November 2025. Since then, Beijing has advised its citizens against Japan and flights have been more than halved: 2,641 round trips in August, against 6,127 a year earlier. The Chinese shopper who powered duty-free retail has given way to more varied travellers, coming alone or with family.

So who is buying now?

In Q3, **Taiwanese visitors spent the most** (¥381.8bn, +26.2%), ahead of the Chinese (-39.8%) and Koreans (+45.8%). Singapore, India, Mexico and the Middle East all set September records.

VISITORS, SEPT. 2026

Korea	842 k	+25.6%
Taiwan	596 k	+13.0%
China	431 k	-44.5%
USA	218 k	-3.2%

Thousands of visitors. Source: JNTO via Travel Voice.

Q3 SPENDING (¥BN)

Taiwan	382	+26.2%
China	358	-39.8%
Korea	294	+45.8%

Source: Japan Tourism Agency.

01 · JAPAN, CONTINUED

Department stores hold firm

+4.2%
Department store sales in September, ninth month of growth

¥49.6bn
Duty-free sales in September (+25.3%), 11.2% of revenue

+19.8%
Isetan Mitsukoshi sales to foreign customers in Q2

Betting everything on loyalty

Isetan Mitsukoshi will link foreign customers' passports to its app, already downloaded by 71% of them. Takashimaya uses its Singapore and Vietnam stores to bring those shoppers to Japan, and J. Front Retailing swaps customers with Thailand's Central Group.

A new tax-free system since 1 November

Tourists **pay the tax at the till** and **get it back from customs on departure**. The ¥500,000 cap on consumables and the sealed-bag rule go; the ¥5,000 minimum per store per day stays. The aim: stop the illegal resale of tax-free goods.

Some in the trade expect **a 10 to 20% drop** in tourists' high-end purchases in the short term. December's figures will tell.

TAX-FREE IN 3 STEPS

1 **Purchase**
Price paid with tax, purchase logged electronically

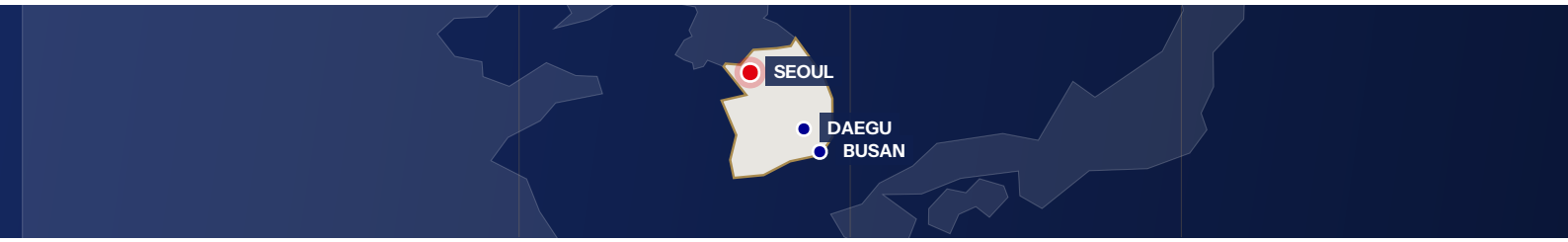
2 **Departure**
Customs check at the airport

3 **Refund**
Tax refunded on purchases up to 90 days old

> OUR TAKE
>
> *If your materials only exist in Mandarin, you are missing the people buying right now: Koreans and Taiwanese. Traditional Chinese and Korean are becoming essential. And Tokyo department stores' loyalty apps are worth negotiating for: they reach shoppers before they even board the plane.*

IF I WERE IN YOUR SHOES

1. I would get my **brand sheet and labels** translated into Korean and traditional Chinese.
2. I would ask my Japanese distributor **what share of my department store sales** comes from foreigners, and from where.
3. I would watch **November sales** closely to measure the effect of the new tax-free system.



02 · SOUTH KOREA

Seoul, Asia's new shopping capital

The won is weak, tourists are pouring in, and Seoul's department stores are having their best year.

THE FACTS

- **10.71 million foreign visitors** in the first half, a record (+21%).
- Sales to foreigners: **+125% at Lotte**, **+120% at Shinsegae**. Lotte passes 1 trillion won.
- Tourists are buying **beyond luxury** : Korean fashion, beauty and food.

A boom driven by the won

Visitors' card spending reached 1,040 billion won (+50.8%), a record since 2018. At The Hyundai Seoul, sales to foreigners jumped 134% and now make up nearly **20% of revenue**, close to 30% at Lotte's flagship.

Not just luxury

Department stores are multiplying **pop-up shops** and selections inspired by Korean culture. Lotte, Shinsegae and Hyundai each aim for over 1 trillion won in sales to foreigners this year.

SALES TO FOREIGNERS, H1

Lotte	640	+125.0%
Shinsegae	580	+120.0%
Hyundai	500	

Billions of won. Hyundai: approx. Sources: Korea JoongAng Daily, KED Global.

+134%

The Hyundai Seoul, sales to foreigners

OUR TAKE

I see Seoul as a shop window for the whole region: shoppers from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan pass through and buy there. Tableware and fine food belong in the home and food floors, especially as pop-ups, with a strong story and a limited edition.

IF I WERE IN YOUR SHOES

1. I would identify **the home and food buyers** at Lotte, Shinsegae and Hyundai.
2. I would prepare a **pop-up proposal** with a limited edition designed for Korea.



03 · CHINA

More trips, fewer things bought

Golden Week set a record for trips and a reverse record for spend per trip. Both say the same thing.

THE FACTS

- Golden Week: **826 million trips**, but **¥894 per trip**, the lowest since before the pandemic.
- **Experiences boom** (upscale hotels +80%, theme parks +41.2%), shopping streets grow 4.7%.
- September: retail sales **+1.1%**. Department stores fall, online food soars.

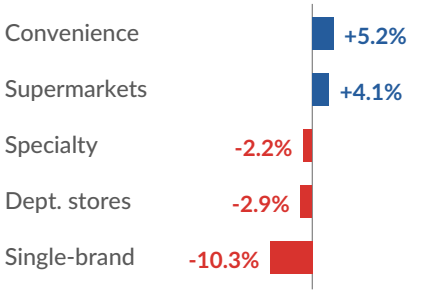
Two-speed consumption

Most households remain cautious. A wealthy minority keeps trading up, but pays for a moment rather than an object. Outbound trips rose 9.3% (4.44 million) and sports services 29.4%.

September's official figures

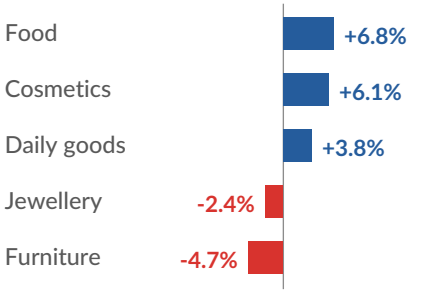
Over nine months, retail sales reached **¥37 trillion (+1.1%)**. Proximity wins (convenience stores +5.2%, supermarkets +4.1%), department stores (-2.9%) and single-brand stores (-10.3%) decline. Online, food grows 15.8%.

BY FORMAT, JAN.-SEPT.



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 20 October 2026.

BY CATEGORY, JAN.-SEPT.



03 · CHINA, DOUBLE 11

Double 11 opens up to foreign brands

1 million
brands expected by Alibaba, a record

70 million
products on offer during the festival

60,000
merchants taking part for the first time

What is different this year

Alibaba combines discounts and coupons worth up to **28% off** and sets aside tens of billions of yuan in coupons for its 64 million 88VIP members. Its **AI shopping assistant Qwen** helps customers compare products. Taobao is upgrading its international logistics (over 600 partners, direct delivery) and promises to absorb shipping cost swings. JD.com started earlier and reports double-digit growth in shoppers on day one.

The platforms no longer publish total sales. The outcome will have to be read between the lines, in brand and category announcements.

China has not stopped consuming: it is choosing. It pays for a moment, an experience, a story, far less for one more object.

> OUR TAKE
>
> *For tableware, I believe more in upscale hotels, restaurants and corporate gifting than in department stores: that is where the product becomes part of an experience. Cross-border is once again a good way to test the market without an importer. But take care of your Chinese product pages: AI shopping assistants read them, and compare them.*

IF I WERE IN YOUR SHOES

1. I would list the **upscale hotel groups** and corporate gift buyers to approach.
2. I would have **my Chinese product pages** checked by a native speaker: story, uses, care.
3. I would consider a **test on Tmall Global** before looking for an importer.



04 · SOUTHEAST ASIA

Three platforms for all of e-commerce

The region's e-commerce grew 22.8% in a year. Almost all of it goes through three apps.

THE FACTS

- Platform e-commerce: **$157.6bn** in 2025, +22.8%.
- Record growth in **Thailand (+51.8%)** and **Malaysia (+47.6%)**.
- **Shopee, Lazada and TikTok Shop** hold 98.8% of the market.

Three players, with video as the engine

The market is **locked up by three players**. Shopee still leads, but TikTok Shop and its Indonesian arm Tokopedia already weigh two thirds of its volume. Video and live selling now drive growth.

Good ground for tableware

Live demonstrations (setting a table, cooking with a utensil, opening a gift box) convert better than a product page. An advantage for brands with a story and craftsmanship to show.

2025 GROWTH

Thailand	+51.8%
Malaysia	+47.6%
Region	+22.8%

Source: Momentum Works, Ecommerce in Southeast Asia 2026.

98.8%

Share of the three platforms

OUR TAKE

In Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand or Vietnam, you do not sell "online": you sell on Shopee, Lazada or TikTok Shop, and someone has to run the store. Before signing with a distributor, I always ask the same question: who runs our brands on these three platforms, and with what results?

IF I WERE IN YOUR SHOES

1. I would ask each candidate distributor for **their numbers on Shopee, Lazada and TikTok Shop**.
2. I would shoot **three short demo videos**, reusable for live selling.

05 · STORES

What opens, what closes

Mid-size sites close, flagships and small curated formats get stronger.

OPENINGS AND DEALS

10 JULY · TOKYO

The Hyundai, Omotesando

Korea's Hyundai opens its **first department store outside Korea** : 620 m² in Tokyu Plaza Omokado, with Korean fashion, beauty and food. It targets around ten sites in East Asia by 2030.

1 NOVEMBER · KUALA LUMPUR

118 Mall

Over 300 stores at the foot of the Merdeka 118 tower, anchored by **SOGO118** and premium supermarket **Village Grocer**. Up to 22 million visitors expected in year one.

29 OCTOBER · BUSAN

Shinsegae buys Lotte Centum City

A first in Korea: Lotte sells its store to its direct rival, which plans a large retail and cultural hub. The competition authority still has to approve.

CLOSURES

30 SEPTEMBER · TOKYO

Seibu Shibuya

Closed after 58 years, with no agreement with the landowners on redeveloping the site.

15 NOVEMBER · TOKYO

Hands Shibuya

End of lease for this cult Japanese lifestyle store, opened in 1978: kitchen, home, stationery, DIY.

AS LEASES EXPIRE · SINGAPORE

Metro, Paragon and Causeway Point

Metro closes its last two department stores and is preparing **smaller formats and concept stores**.

LATE MAY · BEIJING

Galeries Lafayette

The Beijing store closes after 13 years. Shanghai and Shenzhen stay open.

OUR TAKE

The department store is not disappearing in Asia, it is shrinking to its best. Retailers close the sites that no longer pay and invest in a few flagships, or in smaller, more curated formats. For a tableware or fine food brand, these small formats are often easier to enter: they are looking for exactly the brands you cannot find everywhere.

IF I WERE IN YOUR SHOES

1. If you were sold at Hands or Seibu in Shibuya, I would ask my distributor **where those sales will move to**.
2. I would follow **Metro's new concepts** in Singapore and The Hyundai's selection in Tokyo.
3. I would visit **118 Mall and SOGO118** in the first months, while buyers are still building their range.

06 · AGENDA

What to watch in the coming weeks

11 NOV.

Double 11 in China

Signals on Chinese holiday spending, to be read in brand announcements.

15 NOV.

Hands Shibuya's last day

One less lifestyle address in Tokyo: where will its shoppers go?

DEC.

Japan: first effects of the tax-free reform

November department store figures will show whether the feared drop materialises.

END 2026

Korea: the 1 trillion won mark

Lotte, Shinsegae and Hyundai each target this level of sales to foreigners for the year.

A PROJECT IN ASIA?

Let's talk for 30 minutes

Torn between two markets, or looking for the right distributor? Book a slot, or simply write to me.

Book a slot >

maxime.defougeroux@bymyfrench.com

Scan to book

SOURCES (CLICKABLE)

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↗ France Diplomatie, China sheet

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