Fast Food, Street Food: Western Fast Food’s Influence on Fast Service Food in China

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenal success of Western fast food brands in China has fascinated researchers and business people alike since its dawn in the late 1980’s. The two largest Western fast food brands in China, McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), have been heavily researched to understand origins of their success. However, a current gap in the research is the impact of these Western brand’s influences on Chinese quick service food culture. In this thesis, I will explore the conditions that allowed the brands to be so successful in China, the brands themselves and the perception that their Chinese clientele have of these brands, but then go on to use that information, in conjunction with existing research about native Chinese quick service dining venues, to propose how these brands may have influenced Chinese quick service dining culture.

Before I can even begin to explore these brands’ presence in China, I must first establish their origins and brand identity in the United States. In the introduction of my thesis, I first contrast the developments of McDonald’s and KFC. McDonald’s was the first American fast-service restaurant and their menu centered on the hamburger, a dish that first gained national fame at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904. McDonald’s pioneered the American model of quick-service by placing greater emphasis on take-away food, best eaten quickly, and ready to be eaten on the go, rather than fitting the existing dining model of a sit-down restaurant. While McDonald’s was more modern, KFC built its brand on home-style, Southern cooking, made

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available to weary drivers as a quick rest-stop meal. Fried chicken originated in Southern kitchens as a result of the Western African cooking traditions brought by African slaves in the antebellum period before the Civil War. While McDonald’s sold primarily the hamburger and KFC sold primarily fried chicken, both restaurants’ business models relied on quick, standard, reliable, and convenient service for success, and maintaining those standards consistently across all their restaurant branches. This stands in stark contrast to fast service dining in China. Although China has a long history of fast service food, the first street food market is estimated to have operated during the Song Dynasty in the early 13th century, these street food operations lacked the standardization and commercialization of Western fast food chains. However, while the definition of fast service that China associated with street food did not directly align with the Western fast food model, it may have primed a Chinese market to readily accept a new type of fast service cuisine.

In addition to its existing fast-service food culture, a confluence of other major changes in China created the ideal milieu for these fast food companies to flourish. First, shortly following Mao’s death, his vice premier, Deng Xiaoping rose to power and enacted major economic reforms including opening China economically to the West. This meant that Western businesses were finally able to operate in China beginning in 1978, and by 1987 those businesses included KFC, which opened its first store in Tiananmen Square that year. The second effect of these economic policy changes was the rise of the Chinese middle class, which stemmed from the ability of young Chinese people to be entrepreneurial. This new middle class

suddenly had an influx of money to spend and an uncertain place in society, and so used their new money to help establish their new, higher social status. Dining at Western fast food restaurants was one way that the new middle class could be “seen;” if their coworkers, friends, or family members saw them dining out at relatively expensive Western fast food venues, it made their wealth apparent. The Western fast food chains remained a universal status-symbol in China, however that status as a luxury was entirely contingent on their perception as a clean, high-quality, and service-oriented venue. Chinese customers had interest in the Western goods KFC and McDonald’s sold, but only because they represented Western culture, not necessarily because they enjoyed the taste of the food. To keep customers coming back, the restaurants adapted in ways reminiscent of their origins: McDonald’s created new foods by hybridizing Western and Eastern flavors, while KFC adopted some of China’s traditional street foods as sold them in their restaurants for a higher cost. The restaurants also adopted restaurant floor plans that better suited their Chinese customers’ dining preferences and service styles that met new needs such a social events or family-style meals. It was the restaurants’ decisions to adapt to the Chinese palette and dining needs that lead to their continued success.

The influence that Chinese dining and food culture have had on the Western fast food chains entering China is well-documented, there is little formal research on the reciprocity of that exchange; have these Western fast food chains been able to influence Chinese food culture? In the second chapter, I will begin to examine this question by first trying to understand what the words “fast” and “service” mean in a traditionally Chinese context, and how those meanings may have shifted or fit a Western fast food model. Once the two words are defined and their relation to Western fast food are established, I will look at one case study
of Lanzhou Lamian, a traditionally Chinese restaurant franchise. While there are other native Chinese fast food companies that have begun since the entrance of Western fast food companies, I chose to look at Lanzhou lamian because it had differed from Western fast food’s model in all aspects but one until 2010. Lanzhou lamian was a dish created in the 1800’s by a Hui Muslim chef that had become the identifying food of the city of Lanzhou and highly acclaimed across the country. In 2010, the city of Lanzhou created an official brand for “Lanzhou Beef Lamian” and licensed it to a company named Eastern Palace, which caused great uproar from the Hui community who continued to operate the stores that their ancestors first opened, but had their stores’ statuses suddenly delegitimized. While branding in food is not a foreign concept to Western businesses, restaurant brands had not really existed before the entrance of Western fast food brands. There has not been enough research in this area to prove that branding the dish and related store of “Lanzhou Lamian,” stems from a pressure to create an official brand caused by an earlier introduction of the concept branding restaurants that originated with the Western fast food brands, but the Western brands’ potential to have that kind of influence cannot be ignored either.

This particular case helps create boundaries for how Western fast food made have inserted itself into the definition of quick service restaurants in China: it could have had as little influence as simply encouraging the creation of a brand, or gone so far as to reinvent service styles and architectural ideas. It exemplifies the impact that an outside influence can have on a tradition that is thousands-of-years old. Other influences may have similarly been introduced then integrated into Chinese food culture and created the complex existing Chinese food culture. By recognizing that the introduction of fast food to China is an opportunity to show
how a definition, such as “quick service,” can expand, it provides an opportunity to better understand cultural development and acceptance of novel introductions. In the conclusion of my thesis, I will be looking forward to the next potential frontier for an expansion of our current understandings of food culture through the introduction of technology. In China, because of the continuing rise of the middle class and their increasing ability to spend money dining out, companies and restaurants are developing technologies to make it easier to serve an ever-growing customer-base. Those technologies include phone applications to order a seated meal at a restaurant even before arriving, online delivery services, and online customer review sites, all of which move most of a customer’s interaction with a restaurant, besides the actual dining, online.
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INTRODUCTION

Food: it is one of the few universal needs of all humans that links us together. From sitting around a fire 15,000 years ago to around a dining table in 2018, the convivial act of group dining has been essential to the development of human culture. Before I examine the influences cuisines have had on one another or the evolution of food culture, I must first explore the development of food culture itself. Cooking food is what differentiated humans from their ape ancestors. According to the collected research by NPR blogger Christopher Joyce, before the advent of the discovery of fire, humans’ ancestors’ diets consisted mostly of raw tubers and vegetable matter, occasionally raw meat but that was more difficult to come by given their limited hunting faculties before the invention of tools, all of which meant limited calories that could be dedicated to supporting a high-functioning, large brain.¹ When approximately 15,000 years ago fire was first used to cook foods, it sparked a change in not only human diets but their physical appearances as well. Fire meant that humans could cook their foods before consuming them, making their digestion easier and less energy intensive, and allows more calories to be released to the body, which meant less time needed to be spent grazing for food.²

During the era of Homo sapiens, groups of humans were somewhere between 50 and 150 members large, and so information about danger, food, water, and shelter had to be

² Ibid.
communicated over larger territories and to more individuals, and thus, language was created. Researchers believed food was a contributing factor to why language was developed; groups needed ways to communicate when they found food sources, how many individuals those resources could feed, and where they were, but language also helped diffuse the tension associated with sharing food. Once humans conquered their natural protective instincts surrounding dining, fire became Man’s first dining room table, the first place where they came together and shared stories, food, and experiences, and all of which are still shared during meals all across the world. Along with the discovery of fire came the discovery of tools that allowed humans to be better hunters and to develop new methods for cooking food. Roasting was the first and most primitive cooking method, and at first it looked much more like burning food that achieving a nice golden-brown color, followed soon after by boiling once Man created an early vessel to hold water that could survive a fire.

Once the foundational methods of cooking were created and Homo sapiens began to traverse the globe, establishing different tribes and eventually countries, each group began to establish different uses and traditions for these cooking styles. These cuisines developed out of locality; the traditional foods of any region largely depended on the types of food and food acquisition methods available in that region. Even though food and the culture that developed around food are two of the most vital tenants of culture to human survival, they have both

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
been very malleable and adaptable as conditions and influences change. Before the dawn of agriculture, as tribes of humans gained access to new resources, technologies (meaning fishing, food storage methods, cooking methods, etc.), and new means of communicating information, their omnivorous palettes allowed them to adapt to the new foodstuffs available to them.⁷

Foods also quickly became imbued with status, often depending on their availability or nutritional value. Status could primarily be established using food through two means: quantity of food or through the specific food items acquired. In the Middle Ages, for example, feasts were associated with the aristocratic class, while hunger was often endemic of the lower classes who either had to pay fealty to their lords by giving them a portion of their crops or were simply relegated to lower quality lands due to their lower social status.⁸ Different cooking styles could also serve as markers of social prestige. Boiling, for example, could represent a more evolved preparation method because of its use of tools, compared to roasting which simply requires fire. However, boiled foods are more frequently associated with intimate, home meals, predominantly made by women, whereas roasted foods are often served during festivities and prepared by men, in which case roasting actually represents the higher status preparation method.⁹ This is due to the subordinate role that home-cooking by women, because of its understanding as commonplace rather than an event in most cultures, plays to cooking done by men.¹⁰ As cultures developed, so did complex food traditions and relationships

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⁷ Whalqvist, p. 2.
⁹ Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition, p.8.
with food, often rooted in the intimate, daily interactions humans had with the food they would consume.

As countries industrialized and developed economically, and as more individuals moved to cities and away from farms, food became less central to an individual’s life. While it was still necessary for survival, it was no longer necessarily an individual’s livelihood, nor did they need to produce food for subsistence anymore, they could afford outsource food preparation to a third party. At first, this outsourcing would take place still within the home through the employment of domestic servants or slaves. It became surprisingly common in the 19th century for households, including middle income households, to have a domestic servant, not a housewife, cooking for the family. In modern day, outsourcing more often happens when individuals dine out at restaurants or on prepared foods than by having their servants cook for them. In the mid-to-late 19th century, in response to the movement of many middle class individuals to suburbs around major city centers, lunchrooms and plate houses emerged to provided mid-day meals for middle class men who worked in cities, but did not have the time to commute home for lunch. As more people, both lower and middle class, began to commute from suburban homes or distant homes within a city, the need grew for dining spaces that could cater to their needs for lunch, and so other vendors began to offer quick meals as well.

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12 Kwik, Jessica Christine. Traditional Food Knowledge: Renewing Culture and Restoring Health, University of Waterloo, p. 44.
13 Kwik, p. 45.
Coffee shops, luncheonettes and lunch counters in drugstores, and cafeterias offered a variety of dining options at a wide range of prices. According to an article from the Consumerist, one of the earliest quick service restaurants was White Castle, which opened in 1920. It looked more like a diner than a traditional fast service restaurant, but White Castle’s proprietors Walt A. Anderson and Billy Ingram pioneered the hamburger bun and offered a deal for diners who took their sliders to go, both of which laid the foundation for modern fast food restaurants.

Dining out for lunch became increasingly popular in the first three decades of the 20th century, until in 1929 the Depression hit, causing many of the newly opened restaurants to shutter their doors as Americans tightened their purse strings. After World War II, during the 1950’s, economic growth picked up and Americans began dining out with renewed gusto and began to include dining out for dinner in addition to dining out for lunch. During the war, women had entered the workforce as well, limiting the time they could commit to preparing meals at home and creating an opening in the market for convenience foods. Surplus canned food provisions from World War II were sold to supermarkets by manufacturers trying not to waste their products, and were marketed to middle class civilians as a convenient foodstuff that would suit their new, busy lifestyles. In 1953, Swanson & Sons introduced the “TV-dinner,” a pre-roasted turkey that simply needed to be heated from frozen to be eaten, and came in

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15 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
packaging that facilitated dining in front of the television. While the story behind the TV-dinner was that Swanson & Sons wanted to increase turkey sales due to a surplus of turkey meat in their stock, this secondary-level issue lead to a new dining style that revolutionized American family dining. The introduction of the TV-dinner coincided with the invention of fast food restaurants the likes of McDonald’s and KFC, all of which created greater distance between consumers and the raw food products that went into the meals they consumed.

Ever since Man first domesticated fire, he has continually searched for ways to improve his ability to find and prepare food. In Paleolithic era, that meant innovating fishing or cooking utensils, while in modern day, that means developing new intersections of cuisines, complex cooking methods, and ever-better methods of storage and service. Humans are constantly innovating and food culture is constantly expanding, but it is difficult to understand why certain traditions are carried through the millennia and others are left in the past. By looking specifically at the entrance of fast food into China, I have a unique opportunity to examine the entrance of a relatively new cuisine to an ancient food culture and learn more about what leads to cultural expansion rather than cultural rejection.

**Street Food: Quick Service in China**

One of the oldest cultural histories of food exists in China, where formalized dining first was first recorded in the Zhou Dynasty between the 1046 BC and 256 BC. Formalized dining

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21 Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition, p. 19.
22 Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition, p. 19.
was mostly restricted to imperial banquets when the Emperor would host princes, lords, and dukes, and was not yet common among the Chinese masses, as a component of politics in China. At this point in China’s history, casual group dining was still uncommon; it was not until the economic and agricultural successes of the Song Dynasty that common people in China could afford to have three meals a day, some of which were even eaten outside the home at restaurants.

The most famous dining establishment to come from the Song Dynasty was noodle night markets. People traditionally prepared the three principle meals were prepared and eaten in the home, however light snacks became increasingly popular during this Dynasty, and these snacks were purchased at shops and markets. Based on records of laws in Beijing, despite a curfew imposed during the Song era, the street Bianling, where the Night Market was located, was allowed to remain open from 11PM to 1AM. As a result, the Night Market became the hub of Chinese nightlife during this era; at any given Night Market you might find fortune-tellers, street performers, games of gambling, arts and crafts, clothing, and Buddhist icons for sale, and of course 小吃 (xiaochi, meaning snacks). At their stands in the Night Markets, merchants and local elites could be more innovative with the foods they sold than imperial chefs could be when cooking for the emperor. The night market, in addition to trade,

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25 Anderson, p. 69.
27 Ibid.
exchanges, and influences from other countries, contributed significantly to the development of elaborate, regional specialties in China.²⁸

Chinese cuisine was subdivided into “Four Major Cuisines,” 川 (chuan), 鲁 (lu), 粤 (yue), and 淮扬 (huaiyang), which represent West, North, South, and East China.²⁹ Northern cuisine developed from some of the least fertile land in China, with low precipitation and a short growing season, conditions which could not support rice patties, but could support other grains such as wheat, millet, and maize. Mongolian, Muslim, and Buddhist cuisines all heavily influenced Northern cuisine, so much so that Northern cuisine is considered not to be a true regional cuisine, but a more globalized one.³⁰ Eastern cuisine is the cuisine of five provinces, Jiangsu, Anhui, Shanxi, Zhejiang, and Fujian, relies heavily on aquatic agriculture and fishing, and rice is its staple grain. The cuisine is known for its delicate flavors, mild sauces, and balance of sugar and salt to accentuate the natural flavors of the dish.³¹ Western cuisine is best known for Sichuan cuisine, which is notoriously spicy. In Western China, the food is not the only thing that is hot, the temperature is similarly sweltering and humid – Sichuan cuisine’s signature spice is suggested to cover the smell of food that spoiled in the heat, as are the preserved foods that are central to the cuisine.³² Finally, Southern cuisine is known for its fresh and saltwater fish dishes flavored with fermented black beans, garlic, seafood sauces, and pastes and notably, fruits like oranges and mangoes. The most well-known Southern cuisine is Cantonese cuisine,

²⁸ Anderson, p.69.
³⁰ Simoons, p. 45.
³¹ Simoons, p. 48.
³² Simoons, p. 53.
specifically Cantonese snack foods including their noodle dishes, wonton soups, and dim sum.\textsuperscript{33} Although China became unified into one single country during the Qing dynasty, the regions remained fiercely loyal to their regional traditions and cuisines, which is what protected the cuisines’ integrity through the ages.

China’s food culture continued to grow as cooking methods became more refined and as foreign ingredients and cultural influences came to China along with merchant ships.\textsuperscript{34} The rise of China’s food culture was not without setbacks; as agriculture became increasingly common in China, it led to mass deforestation and therefore greater flooding and other natural disasters.\textsuperscript{35} In recent memory, one of the most devastating examples of these natural disasters occurred in the late 1950’s, when China was struck by severe famine due to flooding, insect infestations, and drought. Although farmers had only a little food to subsist off of, the Communist government still set quotas for crop production that ignored these natural disasters.\textsuperscript{36} If farmers failed to meet these quotas, they were accused of hoarding, profiteering, and counter-revolutionary activities. Social interactions were tense everywhere, people were starving, but the common people of China could not criticize the government for their strict rules on food production for fear of being denounced as counter-revolutionaries themselves. Despite the difficulty Chinese people faced in daily life under Mao’s regime and the lack of

\textsuperscript{33} Simoons, p. 54-57.
\textsuperscript{34} Anderson, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{35} Anderson, p. 78-79.
traditional food available, villages in rural China came together to innovate recipes out of whatever they had available, some of which still persist to this day.37

The rations, collectivized farms, and collectivized dining enforced by the Communist Party were components of multiple economic and social campaigns meant to catapult China from its imperial history into the modern era, but had the opposite effect and further stifled China’s development. With the launch of campaigns like the Hundred Flowers Campaign38 and the Anti-Rightist Campaign39, the Communist Party silenced intellectuals and “rightists” who criticized the party, often by sending them to forced labor camps or killing them. It simultaneously instilled fear in the remaining Chinese population, who simply went along with the Party’s decrees going forward in an effort to preserve themselves, while also removing those with the experience and knowledge that would have helped move the country forward. As a results, the enormous investments China made in grain and steel production during the Great Leap Forward resulted in little to no measurable economic or industrial improvements because running their operations had little to no experience or education. China did not leap forward, instead, China became isolated from the rest of the world. Its lack of innovators and ability to adapt left China and it was almost as if China were suspended in time at the start of the Great Leap Forward, which ultimately left it worse off than it began.

38 A period in 1956 during the People’s Republic of China when the Communist Party invited its citizens to openly criticize the party.
39 A movement that was caused by the Hundred Flowers Campaign which resulted in the persecution of intellectuals, officials, students, artists, and dissidents who were labeled by the Party as “rightists,” acting against the betterment of the People’s Republic of China.
The All-American Burger: McDonald’s

In the early 1920’s, as China began to transform politically, America began to experience a major cultural and economic shift that would transform its food culture. The process began with White Castle and restaurants on the East Coast of America who started to develop a curbside food service system to meet the growing demand for prepared food. In a curbside system, waiters would run sandwiches and their accompanying drinks out to the restaurant’s customers, who parked just outside the restaurant along the curbside, then drove off once they received their meals. In Southern California, entrepreneurs built restaurants with only-parking lot service areas where hungry customers could drive up to be served by one of the carhops without even leaving their cars; this was called a “drive-in.” The restaurant style proliferated across the state and California quickly became the land of the drive-in, the predecessor to the modern fast food chain.

As far as drive-in owners were concerned, the name of the game at the was speed of service. The faster the restaurants could serve their customers, the higher the turnover, and the more each drive-in would profit. These drive-ins put their carhops in roller skates, innovated the early forms of the drive through ordering device, and began to tailor the foods for on-the-go dining. One of these Californian drive-ins was McDonald’s. This McDonald’s was not the today’s multinational corporation of the same name; the McDonald brothers opened the first McDonald’s just outside of Pasadena in 1937 and served up hot dogs, not burgers, both drive-in style and to customers seated in their small seating area. In 1940, the McDonald brothers

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41 Love, p. 11-12.
relocated to San Bernardino and opened the restaurant that would later garner the attention of the infamous Ray Kroc.42

By the mid 1940s, McDonald’s sales were topping $200,000 annually, served twenty-five menu items, had at least 125 covers each evening, and became the go-to teen hangout spot. This system caught the eye of other potential restauranteurs, who naturally entered the market to get their share of the profits.43 By 1948, drive-ins were everywhere in California, which put pressure on the McDonalds’ operation because this resulted in high turnover rates for carhops and stiff competition for customers.44 Times of stress often lead to innovation, and this was one of those turning points. In reaction to the economic stress sustaining a rather large menu created for the restaurant, the McDonald brothers trimmed their menu down to only their most popular products, burgers, soft drinks, and French fries, and sold them for only a dime or two.45 The brothers shocked everybody when they slashed the price of their burger from 30 cents to 15 cents; to mitigate their customers’ worries that the reduction in price would translate to a reduction in quality, the McDonalds designed the restaurant so customers could easily see the pristine, modern, stainless steel kitchen inside.46 “The McDonald brothers had clearly developed a vastly different system, tailor-made for a postwar America that was faster paced, more mobile, and more oriented to conveniences and instant gratification,” (Love, 19). While making their menu more efficient, the McDonald brothers also streamlined their method of service by eliminating carhops, rearranging the kitchen to facilitate speed, and by replacing

42 Love, p.12.
43 Ibid.
46 Love, p.15.
dishware with disposable paper bags, cups, and wrappers. Thus, the “Speedy Service System” was born.47

The McDonald brothers may have been the original genius behind this new restaurant concept, but it was Ray Kroc and his desire to franchise the brand nationwide, and later worldwide, that made McDonald’s the megacorporation it is today. McDonald’s was not America’s first franchised business, but it differed from the others because of the type of franchisee it recruited. Kroc gave opportunities to only the most ambitious, most tenacious prospective franchisees, those who reminded him of himself, and who he felt could maintain a standard, high level of quality and preserve the McDonald’s brand.48 By empowering ambitious entrepreneurs to build their own fortunes through the McDonald’s brand, McDonald’s contributed to the development of many young American’s “American Dream.”

The Country-Style Chicken: KFC

When Kentucky Fried Chicken first started, it was itself a humbler operation; Harland Sanders began KFC as roadside café to accompany Sanders’ Service Station, his family’s gas station. As he was operating his service station, Sanders often was asked by drivers passing through if there were anything in the area to eat, which sparked in him the idea to expand his service station to Sanders’ Service Station and Café.49 At the Café guests were welcomed in like they were family to the Sanders’ family meal. At 11AM, they prepared foods like ham, biscuits,

47 Love, p. 15.
48 Love, p. 56.
fried chicken, and other family favorites for guests to enjoy around 12 PM.\textsuperscript{50} The Café became the primary source of income and continued to increase in popularity once it was featured in Duncan Hines’ “Adventures in Good Eating,” a dining guide for American travelers.\textsuperscript{51} By 1937, the original Café was such a raucous success it expanded from six seats to 142 seats and Sanders opened two more, one in Asheville, NC, and one in Richmond, Kentucky.\textsuperscript{52}

Beginning in 1950, Sanders began truly developing his personal brand and creating a character on which Kentucky Fried Chicken would later base its company brand. The modern image of Sanders is one of him wearing a white suit, a moustache and goatee, and sporting the title “the Colonel,” but he was not always this way. Harland Sanders began introducing himself, jokingly at first, as “Colonel Harland Sanders,” despite never being commissioned, to his associates in 1950 and the name stuck.\textsuperscript{53} Harland ran with it and he even bleached his beard because he was not yet old enough to have a naturally white beard all to help build his brand as a paternal, Southern gentleman.\textsuperscript{54} There were two requirements for KFC to become the fast food giant it is today, 1), to construct a method for the mass production of a food with such a particular cooking method as fried chicken, and 2) to franchise by licensing the Colonel’s secret recipe for fried chicken, that way, the Colonel could be everywhere at once. By utilizing a pressure cooker to cook chicken faster and more standardly than one could in a cast-iron pan,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{50} Ozerzky, p. 21. \\
\textsuperscript{51} Ozersky, p. 24. \\
\textsuperscript{52} Ozersky, p. 26. \\
\textsuperscript{53} Ozersky, p. 32. \\
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
the Colonel successfully took one of America’s homeliest dishes and created a fast food empire.55

While McDonald’s was built on burgers, an innovation thought to have been introduced at the Chicago World’s Fair, KFC sold something rooted in American history – fried chicken. When people were brought over from West Africa during the American slave trade and sold as slaves, they brought along with them a cooking tradition of seasoning chicken with spices then frying it in lard.56 Even when not every American could afford to raise hogs or cattle, even the poorest people in America could afford to raise a chicken or two.57 Fried chicken was first cooked by house slaves, who knew the recipe themselves, but soon became a tradition that spread among the American rural poor as a hearty but humble, and inexpensive, meal.58 In many families, fried chicken became a traditional Sunday meal, something that signified a special occasion worth sacrificing a yard bird for, not simply the snack food it has since become.

**Global Expansion in the End of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century**

In the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, fast food restaurants such as McDonald’s and KFC first opened their doors and would go on to transform modern food culture. This new style of food service developed its own cultural narrative, establishing itself as a distinctly American cuisine. As the restaurants lowered their prices to fit the budgets of all American customers, not just the upper class, they had to find some way to cut costs so food quality diminished for the sake of

55 Ozersky, p. 36.
56 Ozersky, p. 22.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
trimming margins and centralizing supply chains. As these brands grew into massive economies of scale, they were able to grow both their empires and their portion-sizes until they became unrecognizable from their original state. Under the leadership of business people like Ray Kroc and Harland Sanders these fast food chains became ubiquitous in the United States, and soon after began looking for ways to expand globally.

**Deng Xiaoping and China’s Economic Reform**

“The basic point is: we must acknowledge that we are backward, that many of our ways of doing things are inappropriate, and that we need to change.”

Before the mid 1970’s, when Chairman Mao Zedong was the leader of the People’s Republic of China, business, travel, and the flow of information in and out of China were highly restricted by the government, which minimized the flow of intercultural exchange. However, after Mao’s death in 1976, his vice premier, Deng Xiaoping, ushered in a new and conflicting era of economic and social development with the Four Modernizations. The essential idea of the Four Modernizations plan was to modernize China through four major industries: agriculture, business and industry, science and technology, and the military. While China had tried to institute significant economic reforms during the Maoist era through programs such as the Great Leap Forward, Deng Xiaoping proposed instituting a “socialist market economy” – a

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59 Love, 352.
careful balance between a market economy and a socialized, planned economy so that for China, “Socialism [did] not mean shared poverty.”  

During his time as leader of China, Deng Xiaoping set three goals and lived to realize two of them: first, to double the 1980 gross national product (GNP), which China achieved in the late eighties, second, to quadruple the 1980 GNP by the end of the millennia, which China did by 1995, and finally, to increase the per capita GNP to match that of medium-developed countries by 2050, which he believed would mean China would have achieved modernization and relative prosperity. As Mao’s rule ended, China once again opened up diplomatic relations with the United States after more than two decades of being closed to the outside world. In 1977, after Mao Zedong’s death, President Jimmy Carter visited China in an attempt to begin discussions of normalizing Chinese-American relations. The two sides were at an impasse over one topic in particular, and that was the United States’ diplomatic relationship with Taiwan, a country that separated from Mainland China at the beginning of the Communist Revolution. Mainland China wanted the United States to cease trade, especially trade of military weapons, with Taiwan to incentivize Taiwan to rejoin with Mainland China and form one, single “China.”

The United States did not dispute that the claim for one China, however there was significant push back from the American public and the Taiwanese lobby in Washington D.C.

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against ending diplomatic relations. Ultimately, the United States agreed to end almost all official ties with Taiwan, with the exception of the ability to trade a limited number of military weapons, in favor of establishing diplomatic relations with Mainland China. While the Chinese would have preferred to have all ties between the United States and Taiwan cut before accepting the diplomatic terms, pressure from the impending threat of a Soviet invasion from the South meant that the Chinese felt obligated to be more flexible. When he was quoted saying, “It is in both of our great interests in dealing with the Soviet Union if we can normalize relations,” Deng Xiaoping recognized the need for US and Chinese cooperation for protection against Soviet forces. On December 16th, 1978, China agreed to commence formal diplomatic relations with the United States beginning on January 1st, 1979, and thus China was opened to American business. One of Deng Xiaoping’s most impactful decisions for the Western world was his decision to open China’s economy to foreign trade, a decision which still reverberates through the West as companies continue working to establish and grow their footholds in China.

A Colonel and A Clown Arrive in China

When KFC and McDonald’s first entered China in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s respectively, they represented everything that Deng Xiaoping’s newly passed reforms allowed China access to. They were Western, they were modern, they were novel, they represented capitalism, consumerism, and luxury in a way that China had not had access to for almost thirty

65 Vogel, p.268-271.
years. Was it their novelty and lack of competition that allowed these companies to achieve such phenomenal success in China? During a conversation I had with a marketing team member of the Burger King Asia and the Pacific marketing team, we discussed the topic of brand positioning and perception. I asked the question how is marketing Burger King in Asia, specifically China, different from how it is marketed in the West? He said to me that it was important to maintain an air of luxury and quality around the brand because the prices, for many people in the region, were premium prices. He continued on that Burger King’s most significant competition in the East was not McDonalds, Wendy’s, KFC, or any of the other fast food restaurants conventionally considered its competition, Burger King’s greatest competition in China is street food. Street food could significantly undercut any price that Burger King could set due to the lack of overhead costs, cheap, local sourcing, limited, if any, labor costs, and lack of corporate oversight.

As an intern, I heard Burger King referred to as a “Quick Service Restaurant” chain around the office, but it was this conversation that inspired me to begin to think about the definition of “fast food” versus “quick service.” I realized that both “street food” and “fast food” could fit within the definition of a “quick service restaurant.” Effectively, they both provide a limited menu, are meant as quick, convenient, cheap dining options, often for people on the go, (anything else that could be a comparison). The reason street food is such a fierce competitor against the massive fast food corporations is because it already occupied the space Western fast food only just recently entered in the late 1980’s. I chose to more closely examine KFC and McDonald’s in this thesis, rather than Burger King, because of the existing database of research available on those two companies’ presences in both American and China, and the
limited available information on Burger King in China. This study adds to the current literature base by examining the impact on food culture that an entering cultural influence has using fast food as an example to better understand how food culture evolves. One of the questions I will be addressing in this thesis is the place Western fast food has in context of the larger definition of “quick-service” in China? Furthermore, how will it continue to effect Chinese food culture, food ways, and food preferences into the future or will rising food safety concerns and loss of novelty in an increasingly globalized world mean the meteoric rise of fast food in China will draw to a halt?
CHAPTER ONE

Western Fast Food in China

The Rise of the Chinese Middle Class

With the opening of China to the West came a myriad of cultural exchanges. In 1979 the first Chinese international students arrived in the United States, policies were put in place to improve the exchange of scientific findings, and Deng Xiaoping made his first trip to the United States after agreeing to the formal diplomatic relationship between the United States and China. Each day, the Chinese news gave updates of Deng’s visit, and at the end of the trip the government complied a documentary movie that gave the Chinese public insight into American life. Deng Xiaoping supported the production of these films because he hoped that it would show the Chinese people how backwards China had been during the Mao’s regime and would make China more accepting of Deng’s economic and political reforms.\(^1\) The videos positively portrayed the image of American industry and American cities, but it also gave the Chinese public insight into American lifestyles and American fashion.\(^2\) The release of these videos coincided with the

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\(^1\) Vogel, p. 275.
\(^2\) Vogel, p. 272-274.
emergence of a middle class, resulting from Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms, and American lifestyles and goods became aspirational for the new middle class.\(^3\) Once the videos aired, all things “American” almost immediately became all the rage, despite the fact that China had yet to undergo the political or economic changes required to support an American lifestyle.\(^4\) Before China could progress forward and achieve the economic development of the United States, it first had to overcome the economic challenges created during Communist China.

On October 1\(^{st}\), 1949, Mao Zedong officially established the People’s Republic of China (PRC), as a “democratic dictatorship.” The idea behind the establishment of the PCR was to unite all Chinese people in an effort to rebuild China under new Communist leadership, by first collectivizing agriculture, property, and factories to benefit the state rather than to enrich any single individual.\(^5\) Before 1949 there were a few groups of middle class individuals, namely private entrepreneurs and intellectuals, who owned around 4 million private firms or small businesses, but after the start of the Communist revolution they quickly disappeared.\(^6\) During the Communist era, when China became the People’s Republic of China (PRC), “class” became an incredibly sensitive topic and one that could mean life or death. According to Maoist ideology, there were only three social strata in Communist China: workers, peasants, and intellectuals (in the Marxist notion of “intermediate stratum”) that does not align with the


\(^4\) Vogel, p. 282.


Western concept of “middle class,” which defines class based mostly by level of economic security.\(^7\)

In Maoist China, the lower classes and peasants were praised for their humble way of life and their tireless work ethic, while the upper classes were persecuted, demonized, and even sent to forced labor camps. In the eyes of the Communist Party, these two groups were classified as the “exploiting class” (the upper class) and the “exploited class” (the lower class).\(^8\) In order to topple the former power regime, the Communist Party engaged in “class struggle,” which meant first designating each individual’s political status according to their land, capital, property, income, and other conditions. Once class statuses were established, the Party began exploiting these classes to identify “counter-revolutionaries,” also known as those who would oppose a Communist Revolution in China.\(^9\) The landlord, rich peasant, and bourgeois classes were identified and thrown into the “Black File,” meaning that their property was confiscated and they were forced to the lowest level of society as punishment for their “counter-revolutionary actions,” and some were even killed or sent to Laogai (prison camps).\(^10\) In 1949 about 10-15 million Chinese citizens were assigned the landlord or rich peasant class, and by the end of the 1970s, only 10-15% of those individuals still survived.\(^11\) It was not until the 1970s, when Deng Xiaoping became leader of China, that the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary

\(^7\) Li, Cheng, p.7.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid.
theories that inspired class struggle were disregarded, and a new era of capitalism and privatization entered China, and meant that it was once again safe to be middle class.\textsuperscript{12}

When Deng Xiaoping opened China to the West, only then did the term “middle class” begin to enter Chinese academic writings, but still other terms such as “middle stratum,” “middle-income stratum,” and “middle-income group,” were preferred to the term “middle class.” Part of the scholarly aversion to the term “middle class” was because Chinese scholars felt that it was inappropriate term to describe the rural industrialists and urban entrepreneurs who were traditionally of the underprivileged or uneducated social strata.\textsuperscript{13} This linguistic conflict could in part be due to the vague nature of the term “middle class,” which has a variety potential basis for definition, including ability to possess Western-style goods, the individual’s self-identification, income classification, and profession.\textsuperscript{14} Despite not fitting the previously understood definitions of middle class they were not initially privileged or highly educated, rural industrialists and urban entrepreneurs developed the industries that lay the groundwork for the rise of the middle class in China. Their entrepreneurial spirit, in addition to the development of stock markets, housing reforms, urbanization, expansion of higher education, and increasing globalization lead to the rapid development of the middle class.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to the multiple economic or social situations that could be used to characterize the middle class, there were a plethora of social factors that could predispose a Chinese individual to entering the middle class including higher education, private or state

\textsuperscript{12} Wu, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{14} Li, He, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{15} Li, Cheng, p. 7.
employment, whether they worked in a monopoly or non-monopoly industry, age, gender, and access to a more developed city.\textsuperscript{16} A study conducted by Zhang Haidong and Yao Yelin of Shanghai University suggested that according to their statistical analyses, younger people were more likely to access the middle class than older people, specifically due to the reforms made in the 1990s that made the market environment more favorable for young people. One of the reasons for this was the difference in their education levels; younger people in general had access to greater educational opportunities than those of previous generations.\textsuperscript{17} Likewise, those who were employed after Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms were more likely to have access to the middle class than those who were employed before the economic reforms.\textsuperscript{18}

Peoples’ education levels, careers, and degree of wealth were more empirical ways to define the middle class, but the consumers who achieve these empirical degrees of status, that is to say those who were educated and wealthy, looked to external, socially relevant ways to reaffirm their class status.

To many Chinese individuals, one way to demonstrate their status as a member of the middle class was to possess Western-style goods such as cars, or to dine publicly at Western fast food restaurants.\textsuperscript{19} This tendency was described by economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen as “conspicuous consumption,” defined as a way of spending money in order to display their wealth to other members of society, and often in an effort to emulate the more respected

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Li, He, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Watson, p. 49.
\end{flushright}
members of their community. This idea of conspicuous consumption is particularly relevant when considering those individuals who wanted to define themselves as middle class after Deng Xiaoping’s economic reformation. Since all kinds of “upper class” status were avoided during the time of the People’s Republic of China, there was limited potential for individuals to inherit middle or upper class status from their parents. As a result, they had to establish their status for themselves once the regime changed and one way of doing so was through their public consumption of goods, for example brand-name commodities. Middle class consumers in China believed that their peers judged them based on their consumption, and often they confused consumerist activities like shopping or dining with cultural or social activities. Rather than truly studying or understanding Western culture, they invested in Western commodities that gave them the appearance of being familiar with foreign cultures, and to distinguish themselves from the lower classes. The middle class often defined “being cultured” as owning Western goods because the West represented having modern and high-quality taste. The Chinese middle class call the lifestyle they pursue the “小资 (xiaozi) lifestyle, meaning the “chasing modern taste, living standards, and the arts,” which is defined by the consumption of Western goods, attending Western classical music concerts, Broadway shows, watching foreign films, drinking coffee, and the like.

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Those who comprise the middle class used these social signifiers to reaffirm their class status because although they met the empirical requirements for middle class, the term “middle class” is flexible. “Middle class” status could be established through occupation, income, or a variety of cultural identifiers, none of which are standardized. As a result, individuals felt insecure in their middle class status even when they may qualify as have a great enough income to qualify as middle income, but may not be cultured enough to be truly “middle class.” In many ways, being “middle class” is a Western concept to many Chinese people, who believe that being middle class requires the economic signifiers, such as having a nice home, high income, or a nice car, as well as being mannered and living a tasteful lifestyle. Western goods, because of their higher cost, perceived higher quality, and because they were from the West, were universally recognized as “bourgeoisie,” and therefore the class-conscious middle class believed these goods affirmed ones status through their consumption.

Although China still needed to develop certain social and economic infrastructures to make life in China more similar to that of life in the West, American companies prepared to enter the market as soon as China politically and economically opened. In 1978, Boeing and Coca-Cola were two of the first companies to begin planning to sell goods in China; Coca-Cola even made plans to establish their own production plant within China to simplify their supply chain. In 1987, a truly American institution opened its doors in China: a fast-food restaurant. The first Western fast food restaurant to open in China was KFC, soon followed by McDonald’s,

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24 Wang, Helen H, p. xv.
then the floodgates opened wide and a bevy of Western fast-food restaurants entered the market. These stores represented everything that the Chinese had seen in the videos from Deng Xiaoping’s trip to America. The restaurants were clean and stylized in a way unlike traditional Chinese restaurants. When these fast food restaurants first entered China, they represented the American lifestyle that the Chinese had become so infatuated with, and a way for the Chinese to access a piece of the American lifestyle within their own country.

Entrance of Western Fast Food in China

Kentucky Fried Chicken

![Kentucky Fried Chicken](image)

*Figure 2: 1987 Grand Opening of KFC Beijing, Source: Thatsmag.com*

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27 Watson, p.44.
In 1987, KFC opened a three-story, 12,000 square foot, 500 seat restaurant and began serving fried chicken to the Chinese masses. This, however, was not KFC’s first entrance into the East Asian market – they first began, and failed, in Hong Kong. In 1973, fourteen years before first entering China, KFC opened its first eleven stores in Hong Kong and they brought with them their complete, traditionally Western menu. However, they misjudged the needs of the market. After two years, the stores failed to be profitable so KFC closed the locations and retreated from Hong Kong to rethink their strategy for East Asia. According to KFC’s analysis of the failure, they had not considered the local market when creating a menu and therefore failed to develop a suitable business strategy. When KFC re-entered Asia, opening in China almost 15 years later, they found local partners to direct KFC China’s development. Together with their partners, KFC developed two primary strategies that revolutionized their business in China: to build KFC as a local brand in China, and to localize their menu.

KFC was the first American fast food chain to enter China, and being first gave them a bevy of benefits such as free publicity from organic media coverage and the freedom to pick the best locations without competition. They leveraged that power and for their first location they chose Tiananmen Square, the political heart of China’s capital city, Beijing, a choice which brought immediate attention to their brand. After they first opened in Beijing, KFC continued to grow their brand and their market share by purchasing property in secondary cities with more inexpensive land so they could expand quickly. As KFC opened more restaurants, their brand

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30 Liu, p. 20.
grew organically and gained popularity across the nation. Soon, they found themselves positioned to be an ideal business partner for many mall developers, further increasing their ubiquity. Once KFC established clustered networks of restaurants around China, they were able to begin building an economy of scale from the ground up.\textsuperscript{31} KFC chose their production partners, suppliers, and built their own storage and transportation network, which then allowed them to carry out a complex, large, and regionally specific menu.\textsuperscript{32} By seeding KFC restaurants across the smaller cities, partnering with malls and local entrepreneurs, and developing supply networks within China, KFC built itself like a new, native Chinese company rather than an entering American mega-corporation simply capitalizing on a new market.

Their second strategy, to localize their menu, aided KFC in developing itself as a local brand because it made their menu more familiar to their Chinese clientele. KFC kept some of the traditional American dishes, like their signature fried chicken, but they also incorporated the local dishes that would be more familiar to their customer base. They took traditional, home-style dishes, like congee (粥, zhou in Chinese),\textsuperscript{33} and common street foods, like 油条 (youtiao),\textsuperscript{34} and created a sense of home for their customers, but in a new, modern restaurant. This strategy of taking home-cooked foods and making them fast foods was very similar to how the Colonel first introduced fried chicken as a fast food item in America. By adapting to a

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} A rice porridge dish traditionally eaten for breakfast.
\textsuperscript{34} A fried dough stick eaten as a breakfast or snack food.
Chinese palate rather than trying to impose a Western one, within the context of their modern, Western restaurant, KFC was able to integrate naturally into Chinese culture.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{McDonald’s}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{McDonalds_in_China.jpg}
\caption{1990, McDonald’s Opens in Shenzhen, China. Source: http://abcnews.go.com/Business/photos/photo-photo-shows-mcdonalds-opened-in-shenzhen-26889162}
\end{figure}

McDonald’s success in China was never about its burgers or fries, or even about its mascot Mr. Ronald McDonald, rather their success has always been dependent on how well they could sell the McDonald’s brand to the people of China. Before China even opened itself to Western businesses to directly enter, they began export agreements with some Western firms, McDonald’s being one of them. In 1983, McDonald’s began to cultivate their relationship with China by using apples from China to supply the production of all the apple pies sold in Japan and in 1986 they began working collaboratively with China to centralize potato processing to

\textsuperscript{35} Drewery, Hayden. “West Meets East: KFC and Its Success in China.”
supply fry production the Pacific region. In this way, McDonald’s lay the groundwork for trade. McDonald’s waited for the two barriers to trade, China’s closure to Western business and lack of a robust middle class, to resolve before they entered the market. McDonald’s had previous experience with international markets and learned the best way to grow was to work alongside an innovative, local partner, who they gave almost free-reign to run the business. This benefitted McDonald’s in two ways, 1) the local business partners better understood the local culture, so could craft appropriate advertising campaigns and better understand local needs, and 2) it prevented McDonald’s from appearing as a huge, American, multinational corporation attempting to conquer the global market. In 1990, with the help of a local partner, McDonald’s opened its first store in Shenzhen, China.

McDonald’s first expanded to Europe and Japan, and learned from those experiences that McDonald’s stores were most successful when it was true to its “American-ness,” that is when it retained its original menu and store designs. Therefore, to become the powerful cultural and economic force it has become, McDonald’s employed a development strategy almost completely different from KFC’s. Relative to KCF’s model of adopting Chinese cuisines and their own and trying to become a “native” brand, McDonald’s entered the market as an unapologetically American restaurant. No matter where McDonald’s opens on the globe, they retain their core Western menu of burgers and fries, and they include Western items,

37 Love, p. 437.
influenced by local cuisine, rather than traditionally Chinese food items. The menu adaptations range from rather minor adjustments in sauce, for example in Greece, the Big Mac is topped with Tzatziki sauce and wrapped in a pita, to the complete re-imagination of an item, for example the “kao fan burger” in Hong Kong, which is a fried chicken patty on a bun made of rice.38 However, no matter how much McDonald’s adapted their menu, they made sure to retain their original menu items as well because McDonald’s executives believed that by filling their menu with local items, McDonald’s would lose its brand identity.39 Without a local appearance or menu, McDonald’s had to rely heavily on their local partners’ guidance to create an image of a restaurant that looks American, sells American food, and has an American service style, and yet is considered a local brand, not an American one.40

In China, McDonald’s is a restaurant like any other, customers sit and enjoy an extended meal with friends or family, the “fast” aspect of fast food is in the meal’s initial service to customers.41 This drastic departure from the Western service style, lead McDonald’s to rethink their staffing needs and restaurant designs to better meet their Chinese customers’ needs. The dining and service styles may differ between the two nations, but McDonald’s carries the same family-oriented reputation globally. When Chinese patrons dine at McDonald’s it is often with,

40 Ibid, p. 433.
41 Watson, p. 41.
if not because of, their child.\textsuperscript{42} McDonald’s works to welcome these families by hiring female
“receptionists” who help take care of the children and talk with the parents to help relieve any
stress of caring for children whilst dining. McDonald’s even tried to institute their signature
“service-with-a-smile,” which is so central to their American brand, ultimately failed in China
because it was such a departure from conventional Chinese service. While American consumers
expect smiling service, consumers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, and Korea found smiling
disconcerting because they expected an expression of “seriousness,” to convey detail-oriented
work and determination, while smiling gave the consumer the sense they were being cheated.\textsuperscript{43}
Ultimately, the counterworkers in Chinese McDonald’s stores did away with excessive smiling
and instead focused on projecting qualities respected by their communities: competence,
directness, and level-headedness.\textsuperscript{44} This, in addition to their additional staffing measures and
service styles, helped McDonald’s build the image that the restaurant is a place for families to
come and feel welcome, and where restaurant staff themselves are meant to feel like members
of the family.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{Perception’s Significance in Acceptance}

Even before these restaurants arrived in China, Chinese entrepreneurs who had
witnessed the success of Western fast food restaurants in the West, and translated that to their
regions of China by creating copy-cat restaurants, at a lower price point, that were founded on

\textsuperscript{42} Watson, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{43} Watson, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{44} Watson, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{45} Crawford, p. 15.
the same ideals of introducing the East to the West. With each authentic McDonald’s or KFC that opened, a cluster of satellite restaurants opened up in the surrounding area with nearly the same names that advertised similar products but at a lower cost. McDonald’s Chinese name is 麦当劳 (mai dang lao) while the fraudulent McDonald’s store calls itself 麦当乐 (mai dang le).

These copycat restaurants have benefits and drawbacks. On one hand, the primed the Chinese population for the authentic American brands when they entered the market in the following years and helped to create brand awareness, however on the other hand, because they were not managed by the companies or regulated, they could have any kind of service or product that they wanted, and could have damage the brand’s image before they even had a chance to establish themselves. It turned out to be beneficial to the original restaurants because despite the proliferation of counterfeit fast food eateries, they were all discretely owned by a variety of small business owners and lacked the organization necessary to grow into megacorporation like the restaurants, who were simply expanding their reach overseas rather than establishing a completely new business venture.
Counterfeiting goods, known as “Shanzhai,” (山寨), is one of China’s most famous, or rather infamous, markets where goods are often that produced in the factory facilities and by the subcontracted workers that produce the authentic products. “Shanzhai” refers to the home of bandits in the mountains, and the bandits, rather than being vilified, were seen as a Robin Hood character who steal from the rich and powerful. The narratives of Shanzhai’s roots are often set in ancient China where peasants rose up against despotic rules and become their own kings in the mountains. By using Shanzhai to characterize counterfeit goods, it suggests counterfeiting items is forgivable because they steal money from wealthy, multinational companies, to provide similar goods to the low income Chinese masses. Counterfeiting culture has an unexpected benefit for the companies they knock-off. Despite their inauthenticity, Shanzhai items assist in the dissemination of the authentic good’s brand and the Shanzhai brand into the local culture.

However, for people to recognize the counterfeit products, they must already be aware of the authentic products. To be identified, counterfeits must reflect some symbols that potentially infringe on the intellectual property rights (IPR) of the original products, because the IPR legitimize what is “real” and gives the goods their value. Since the Shanzhai products shirk legal doctrines, globalized IPR laws, state regulations, and tax codes, they can be sold at a lower

47 Ibid.
48 Yang, p. 70.
50 Yang, p. 70.
51 Yang, p. 10.
price than the original good, however the lower price tag and lessened production oversight can lead have consequences.\textsuperscript{52} Although counterfeits help reinforce brand awareness, they can also damage the brand image in two ways: 1) if they are of inferior quality, and they are the customer’s first introduction to the brand, they can lower the brand’s perceived quality, or 2) if they are of a similar quality, they can devalue the original product and steal away potential profits from the original company.\textsuperscript{53,54} If the goods are of an inferior quality, they could cause potential damage to the consumer. In food, counterfeits of original products could be produced through the use of cheaper, inferior meats. One example of this was in 2013, a criminal ring supplied hot-pot restaurants in Shandong and Wuxi with rat, fox, and mink meat which they retailed as mutton since 2009.\textsuperscript{55} This scandal and 11 other meat-related scandals involving pigs and chickens were reported on by China’s Public Security Ministry.\textsuperscript{56} Counterfeit fast food restaurants, because they are not regulated by the major organization’s administration and because they do not have a highly regulated supply chain, are even more vulnerable to these kinds of food safety scandals than their authentic counterpart.

One of the most critical factors in fast food retailing in China is the public perception of the food retailer’s brand. Much like other luxury brands, both McDonald’s and KFC are considered luxury dining experiences, and are considered expensive by the average Chinese citizen. KFC and McDonald’s status primarily came from their cleanliness, standardization of

\textsuperscript{52} Yang, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{56} “China media: Fake food scandals.” BBC News China, 6 May 2013, Web.
quality, and service, all of which were a departure from the less regulated Chinese quick service restaurants and seen as valuable. Despite the lack of government oversight on food service prior to 2015, as franchises, these restaurants faced stringent regulation by their overseeing company, which set forth quality standards that exceeded those required by the government.\textsuperscript{57,58} This higher quality standard made KFC and McDonald’s worth the higher price per meal and granted these brands their “luxury” status, but with these restaurant brands came counterfeits, which threatened to damage their spotless reputations.

While fast food restaurants are not a direct substitute for traditional Chinese street foods, they expand the understanding of “quick service,” by establishing themselves as similar but different from street food. Because fast food does not share in China’s long food history, it lacks the same foundation in culture and tradition, and is much more reliant on brand perception for its success. There are four critical factors to the perception of fast food: that fast food is expensive, modern, clean, and novel. By working to develop this brand, while still serving food quickly, fast food companies were able to build a new niche within China’s quick service food culture unlike any preexisting Chinese food tradition.

\textsuperscript{57} Approved by Clever, Jennifer. “China’s Food Safety Law (2015).” Standing Committee of the 11\textsuperscript{th} National People’s Congress, 2009, amended by Standing Committee of the 12\textsuperscript{th} National People’s Congress at the 14\textsuperscript{th} session, 2015.\textsuperscript{58} Zhu, Lin, et al. “Social media and culture in crisis communication: McDonald’s and KFC crises management in China.” Public Relations Review, 2015, p. 488.
A Fad or a Fixture

Dining at these chains is unlike dining at either their American fast food counterparts, or any dining scenario that previously existed in China: people would come to the restaurant, pay a moderately expensive price, be served their meal quickly, and then, rather than leaving the restaurant promptly like an American would at a fast food restaurant, Chinese patrons will sit and enjoy their quick service meal, slowly.\(^5^9\) At about an average of 30 块 (kuai, the Chinese character for money) per meal, \(1/6^{th}\) of a working class family’s monthly income, fast food meals were a luxury that not all Chinese people could afford, and became an event for special occasions.\(^6^0\)

While the cost is prohibitive to some, some young people choose to dine at McDonald’s specifically because of its predictable cost, compared to luxury Chinese restaurants where the prices are unpredictable and could lead to an embarrassing incident when the bill arrives.\(^6^1\) For most individuals in the Chinese middle class, spending 30 块 per meal is expensive, but spending 30 块 per meal at McDonald’s is fairly standard; it would be about as difficult to order something more expensive as it would be to order something less expensive.\(^6^2\) If a somebody were afraid of appearing cheap to the person they were dining with, then McDonald’s might be an ideal venue at which to dine because it places an upward cap on the bill without the host having to refuse to purchase an extravagant specialty dish. As a result, fast food restaurants became popular for dining events such as dates or business meetings because of their

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\(^{5^9}\) Watson, p. 29.

\(^{6^0}\) Watson, p. 30.

\(^{6^1}\) Ibid.

\(^{6^2}\) Ibid.
standardization in cost; they offer the same feeling of being a special event but with a natural limit on how extravagant that special event could be.\(^{63}\)

Beyond just their innate novelty that originated from their being American brands, these fast food restaurants placed enormous emphasis on developing their servers’ customer service skills, which then contributed to the luxury feel of the restaurants. Before the introduction of fast food, it was uncommon for restaurant workers to receive extensive training in not just their basic service skills, but in their manner of service. Both KFC and McDonald’s had training programs, McDonald’s had Hamburger University\(^ {64}\) and KFC had a training institute, that taught their servers to be friendly to their customers, offer smiles and pleasantries such as “Thank you,” along with the meals they served, and teamwork skills that would allow the service team to work more effectively together. Perhaps the most important aspect of staff training at these establishments was their extensive hygiene training.\(^ {65}\)

High-quality service was not restricted to hygiene and greetings at these restaurants, to accommodate their Chinese clientele’s needs, the companies changed their hiring processes and restaurant offerings as well. For example, children in China were foundational to the development of Western fast food brands because they loved the restaurants’ appearances and offerings, while their parents used the opportunity of dining at these restaurants to introduce their children to Western culture.\(^ {66}\) McDonald’s, became a place to celebrate birthday parties, anniversaries, weddings, and other special events.\(^ {67}\) In addition to their global mascot, Ronald

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\(^{63}\) Watson, p. 42.

\(^{64}\) Watson, p. 31.


\(^{66}\) Watson, p. 63.

\(^{67}\) Ibid.
McDonald, McDonald’s in China developed a female mascot, Aunt McDonald, who job was to attend birthday parties and entertain the children. McDonald’s also hired female receptionists who helped parents by watching their children while they dined at the restaurant. This was only one of many new developments in customer service in China that help create the welcoming and high-class atmosphere that was later attributed to these Western brands.

If the fast food companies had failed to establish such defined brands, had not been considered to be so quintessentially American, or if China were not primed by a long cultural history of street food to accept quick service restaurants, the fast food restaurants may not have had such sustained growth. In recent years, it has become apparent how fragile these brands are. KFC in particular has suffered from multiple occurrences of food safety concerns and outbreaks of illness stemming from issues in both their supply chain and the hygiene of those serving food at their restaurants. In 2012, scandal broke when local Chinese media outlets uncovered that the suppliers for KFC and McDonald’s chicken were injecting the animals with excessive amounts of antibiotics. Only two years later, another supplier, Shanghai Husi Food Co, was found out by a television report to be supplying the restaurants with contaminated meat, either fresh meat that had been contaminated by expired meat or meat that had fallen on the ground and not been cleaned. The 2014 scandal severely damaged the

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
brands’ formerly pristine reputations; these luxury restaurants were no longer seemingly impervious to failures or flaws.

Although the restaurants continued to promote their high quality food and hygienic restaurants, their messaging was undercut by customers’ and news outlets’ social media posts that contradicted their statements. In China, social media has emerged as one of the most important ways to for companies to communicate with their consumers, especially in times of crisis; it allows companies to respond to situations in real time, but it also increases the vitality of crises and makes information easier to disseminate. When KFC and McDonald’s both faced food safety crises in 2012, both companies took to social media to resolve the crises, but took two contrasting approaches. In 2012, McDonald’s was found in a hidden camera investigation by China Central Television to be selling expired food at one of their most prominent stores: the McDonald’s franchise on the Sanlinton. Only thirty minutes after the story broke, McDonald’s issued an apology through social media, stating that the offending franchisee has been suspended, and only 90 minutes later, McDonald’s official microblog issued a formal apology. These apologies were forwarded over 17,394 times and received 13,286 comments, most of which were positive and praised McDonald’s for their quick response and willingness to accept responsibility for their actions. When KFC faced similar scandal, the China Economic Net reported that one of KFC’s poultry suppliers raised chicken to maturity in only 45 days before sending them to slaughter for use in KFC cooking, they decided to deny culpability. Rather than admitting to any wrong doing, KFC tried to justify their actions as the industry standard,

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72 Zhu, p. 489.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
and it was not until over two months later, when evidence was provided that proved the allegations true, that the Chairman and CEO of Yum! China issued an apology on KFC’s official microblog. The popular response to KFC’s handling of the crisis was outrage.\textsuperscript{75} Their consumers commented responses to the apology such as, “Next time I get sick, I’m going to KFC. Get my antibiotic fix[ed] from their chickens – save me a trip to the hospital!” which demonstrated their feeling that KFC damaged its healthy and clean reputation.\textsuperscript{76} Despite any management or procedural changes KFC made to repair their relationship with their customers, their reputation has yet to recover from the scandals.\textsuperscript{77}

At their simplest, when the advertisements, fancy restaurant displays, novelty, and prestige are stripped away, McDonald’s and KFC are no more than a new style of quick service food. By looking at speed of service alone, fast food might appear similar to street foods or other quick service, traditional Chinese foods, however one cannot simply ignore the factors that separate the two. While fast food is served quickly, it is consumed slowly, which is a stark departure from the way in which street food is consumed. Both dining styles may require fast service, but the speed at which food alone is served does not define its service. At fast food restaurants, service workers undergo extensive customer service training, care for their customers’ children, and even assist in wedding ceremonies, all of which are unheard degrees of service for a traditional Chinese food vendor. So how exactly does one define the “service” of

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
quick service? Moreover, in what way has the introduction of Western fast food altered the meaning of “fast service” and the consumer expectation of “fast service” for traditional Chinese restaurants? To truly understand the impact that Western fast food has had on traditional Chinese restaurants, one must take a more nuanced approach to understanding “fast service” and the potential range of restaurant types that could be considered “fast service.”
CHAPTER TWO

Expanding “Fast-Service”

In the previous chapter, I examined the entrance of Western fast food brands in China, the circumstance that surrounded and preceded their entrance the relationship Chinese customers have with the brands, and ultimately found that these brands’ successes are inextricably linked to their brand’s perception as a high-quality, luxury good, with little brand loyalty. Even though these brands elicit limited loyalty from their customers, they have had unprecedented success in China. In 2017, KFC reported 5,138 operating locations in China and McDonald’s had approximately 2,500 restaurants with plans to double that number by 2022.¹,² Like any foreign introduction, however, these brands bring with them cultural traditions of their American homeland, most apparently their different cuisines, service styles, and standards of cleanliness. McDonald’s and KFC, despite these variances from traditional Chinese food service and culture, have still embedded themselves into Chinese food culture. Among the middle class, these restaurants became habitual dining spots, places to relax, and places to spend time with their families. They have so successfully “glocalized” that modern Chinese children when surveyed do not identify either brand as “foreign.”³ In part, their successful integration was due to their willingness to adopt more traditional Chinese flavor profiles and to accommodate different service needs specific to their Chinese customers. In this chapter, I pose the question

¹ “Yum China.” Yum Brands, Web.
² “McDonald’s bumps up estimate for stores in China by 2022.” Reuters, August 8, 2017, Web.
³ Bell, David, and Mary L. Shelman. “KFC’s Radical Approach to China.”
of whether this exchange was reciprocal? While Western brands adopted aspects of Chinese culture to become more successful, did the Western culture they introduced – service styles and dining styles – influence the development of native Chinese fast-service restaurant brands?

Around the time of McDonald’s and KFC’s introduction, restaurants like Lanzhou La Mian (Figure 2) began to formally establish themselves as brands and began to franchise, much like the early fast-food restaurants franchised in America. While these restaurants retained their more traditionally Chinese appearance and menus, other fast service restaurants began to open as well, for example Dico’s (Figure 9) and Zhen Kungfu (Figure 10), which had an appearance similar to that of a Western chain restaurant, but were completely Chinese, from menu to management. This chapter will explore what influence the introduction of Western fast food has had on Chinese food culture, specifically how it may have altered the expectation of service and of speed of service. First, I will examine how the introduction of Western brands like KFC and McDonald’s have expanded the definition of “fast service” in China beyond just fast food or canteen style dining, and created a new niche within the dining culture for their particular service style, that of a “fast food restaurant.” To do so, I will define what the expectations and definitions for “fast” and for “service” are in China and compare this to the Western expectations, thereby illustrating how Western fast food chains have expanded upon the previous understanding of a “fast service” restaurant. Then I will look at the more tangible influences through a case study; Western fast service restaurants may have impacted the customers’ expectations for these words, but how has that influence manifested in traditionally Chinese restaurants? In the previous chapter, I looked at what aspects of Chinese culture the
Western chains adopted, and in this chapter I will examine the inverse – what attributes, if any, of these Western fast food chains have been adopted by Chinese restauranteurs and why?

First, What is “Fast?”

In this chapter, I will explore the expansions of the definitions of “fast,” “service,” and “fast service,” in China after Western fast-food entered their canon of food culture. Around the time of Western fast-food brands’ entrance into China, local entrepreneurs and firms began to develop native Chinese chain restaurants that marry some of the introductions from Western fast food with more traditional Chinese practices to create a hybrid dining style. I would like to examine both the definitions of “service” and “fast” pre-entrance and post-entrance, whether or not it was effected, and if customers’ expectations for these terms changed. For example, while the Western fast-food chains have extensive service training, Chinese food service purveyors have never before enforced such practices. With the introduction of Western brands to China, has the consumers’ expectation for quality of service in food service settings changed? I would similarly like to examine the alterations made to the definition of “fast,” and “fast service,” post-entrance and if the entrance of Western brands has affected their definitions, how has it done so?

Before exploring how the definition of fast has changed with relation to food, one must first understand how speed is evaluated based on the cultural conceptualization of time. In China and in America, these definitions stand in contrast. American society, much like German, Swiss, or British society, is monochronic, meaning that Americans prefer to do one action at a
time and within a tight schedule, and see this as the most efficient way to occupy their time.\textsuperscript{4} In America, time is linear, constantly moving forward, and highly valued as a representation of an individual’s earning potential.\textsuperscript{5} The central idea of this valuation of time is that the more hours spent working, the more successful an individual will become, in part because of the greater amount of money it allows one to make. When time is spent doing something seen as having no value, Americans often view this as wasted time.

In China, individuals deeply respect the value of others’ time, and make great efforts to be prompt or even early, but also ensure that they are not rushing a meeting once they have another’s time. According to an anecdotal essay by cross-cultural researcher Richard Lewis, people in China carefully nurture the personal relationships surrounding a meeting, rather than treating the interaction as merely transactional.\textsuperscript{6} Similarly, qualitative research conducted by at Ocean University in China suggests that in modern China, there is a difference in how the older generation manages time compared to the younger generation. In the older generation, the “cult of idle life,” can still be observed in many ordinary Chinese people’s lives, especially among the older generations, but in the major cities especially, more and more young Chinese people are adopting a quicker pace of life.\textsuperscript{7} The same research examined the influence major schools of philosophy and religion have on a nation’s perception of time. The Chinese valuation

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Lewis, Richard. “How Different Cultures Understand Time.” Business Insider, June 1, 2014, Web.
\end{itemize}
of time stems from the intersection of three philosophical or religious traditions: Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. In Confucianism, time orientation is multidimensional; it is past-focused, which allows for greater consideration of China’s long philosophical and ethical history and considers the current situation in light of those passed down traditions. Moreover, in Confucianism, time is considered flexible and practitioners emphasize the “right occasion” or “right opportunity” when dealing with an affair or event, which is facilitated in part by the flexible conceptualization of time.8

Taoism advocates for relativism and the limitlessness of time, but the most important tenant of Taoism is “Tao,” the principle that establishes that there is no clear division between life and death or past and present, they are simply relative.9 An example used to illustrate this concept in Taoism is the life span of a tree compared to the life span of a human compared to the life span of a fly. While to the fly, its 24-hour life span may seem long, to a human it is only a moment, likewise while a human’s 100-year life span may seem long, to a tree that may live a thousand years, the human’s life is short – the time of each of these life spans is relative to the individual perceiving it.10

In Buddhist philosophy, time is part of our consciousness and appears during the process of knowing, and is a product of a human’s interactions with matters.11 As a result, time is subjective because it is dependent on the acknowledgement of individuals’ consciousness,

8 Li, Mengyu, p.67.
9 Ibid.
10 Li, Mengyu, p.68.
and is also therefore relative, because it relies on individuals’ perceptions. Furthermore, Buddhist philosophy suggests that time does not really exist, it is only a concept with a relative truth depending on each of the world experiences of each individual’s consciousness.\textsuperscript{12} Even though people in China deeply respect one another’s time, traditional Chinese culture conceives time as subjective, relative, and flexible, which is why even a brief exchange has space for pleasantries and the cultivation of relationships.

At restaurants like McDonald’s and KFC in China, their service style adapted to better suit this careful balance of neither taking up too much of their customers’ time or being disrespectfully blunt in their interactions with customers. While customers are served quickly, both McDonald’s and KFC provide the necessary accommodations to meet the needs of their customers, be they individuals or families, to allow them to dine without feeling rushed or delayed. Based on my research in the last chapter, a few examples of these accommodations include larger store sizes, greater numbers of seats, hostesses to help with children, and most recently, tables that better accommodate family-style dining.

China’s relative understanding of time is perfectly expressed by their patterns for dining. Whether customers make the effort to dine out at a Western fast food restaurant like KFC or McDonald’s or they dine a street food stall. In either situation they expect fast service, slow

\textsuperscript{12} Bunnag, p.5.
service is seen as a waste of time, but the time to they take to consume the food may vary depending on the company they keep, their environment, or other circumstantial effectors, without feeling like wasted time. Both meals technically fit within the singular niche of “fast” service, however they occupy very different spaces within the Chinese consumers’ idea of dining – one provides the necessary facilities for a customer to sit and savor the meal while the other is strictly for speed. The speed of service is relatively standard across these two dining formats, so it is the “service” aspect of “fast service” that more significantly distinguishes the two.

**Second, What is Good “Service?”**

In the fast food industry, the food satisfies the customers’ hunger, but the service, more often than not determines how a customer views the experience. Good service can make amends for low-quality food or an incorrect order, but bad service will leave a sour taste in the customer’s mouth. The definition of “service,” though, changes depending on the cultural expectation of different countries. In America, “good service” is usually a term associated with friendly, attentive service, something not necessarily expected in other countries, including China.13 During Communist Era China, service workers were ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy. As a result, service workers were known for treating the general public, who regarded them as so lowly, with contempt, were difficult to work with or get the attention of,

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and often rude to their customers.\textsuperscript{14} As wages and working conditions improved in the 1980s with Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms, service began to improve some too, but still was unrecognizable by the American standard of service.\textsuperscript{15} When KFC and McDonald’s first opened in China, they had to have advocates for the company explain to customers that the service workers’ smiles were not mocking the, they represented how excited the workers were to serve their clientele because the style of their service was so different from the norm.\textsuperscript{16}

When Chinese customers of these Western fast food restaurants were polled about which aspects of customer service they considered to be most important, service quality and customer satisfaction were the two most important. In this context, service quality and customer satisfaction are defined primarily by the customer’s experience with their environment and their social interaction with the operators of the restaurant. These factors, interaction and physical environment, are prioritized even to outcome quality, meaning the quality of the food item they are served, to many Chinese consumers at restaurants.\textsuperscript{17} When customers evaluate the interaction and physical environment of a restaurant, they look at speed of customer service, ease of obtaining information and service, and the server’s experience, and knowledge about the product and service.\textsuperscript{18} As early as 1971, Western newspapers have interest in Chinese customers’ expectations of service: customers in China expected patient, thoughtful service from their service people, where the server considers the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{14} Watson, p.32.\\
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.\\
\textsuperscript{16} Watson, p. 28\\
\end{flushleft}
Consideration for the customer’s time and patronage ties back to the Chinese understanding of time because behavior that reflects this respect for the customer is part of the politeness necessary for service not to seem abrupt. Even though many restaurants in China offer fast service of food, the waiting times before service can be long. When a restaurant becomes well known in China for high-quality food, the foodies of China line up to dine there, enduring up to an hour long wait during the week and even longer wait times over the weekend. To ensure that their customers are content to wait for service, restauranteurs in China became creative with how to occupy their customers during that waiting period. While it is not necessarily a “fast service” chain restaurant, a well-known hot-pot restaurant chain across China, Hai Di Lao (海底捞), used the waiting time before service to treat customers to a complimentary hand massage to help pass the time. Other locations, and other quick service restaurants, offer free snacks, Internet, games of Chinese checkers, poker games, and even a “noodle dance” show, which looks much like a Chinese ribbon dance, but with wheat noodles stretching up to 10 meters instead of ribbons. The shows or services provided to customers while they wait add to the customers’ overall satisfaction by providing value to their customers’ overall dining experience.

Ultimately, customers expect a high degree of competency and a complete understanding of the brand or product that servers represent because, when polled, customers reported that receiving something other than what was ordered, or having to ask a service

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person multiple times for the same service made consumers the most frustrated compared to other potential failures in service.\textsuperscript{22} Because of the standardization across Western fast food chain restaurant and the extensive training that their service workers receive, restaurants like McDonald’s and KFC satisfy their Chinese clientele’s expectation for competency.\textsuperscript{23}

Despite high degrees of customer satisfaction, Western fast food restaurants do not have high degrees of customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction and perceived service quality are directly related to interactions individuals have at one restaurant, while customer loyalty is more significantly influenced by the consumer’s perception of the company as a whole.\textsuperscript{24} Modern Chinese individuals’ customer loyalty is driven by factors beyond just what is most financially accessible. Consumers prioritize companies that have open and honest communications with their customers, that respond to customer feedback by adjusting their products or service methods, and that show a commitment to corporate social responsibility.\textsuperscript{25}

Essentially, Chinese consumers are loyal to companies that act in the best interest of their communities, not just their own company. In light of these expectations, it becomes apparent why McDonald’s brand recovered more quickly than KFC’s when navigating food-safety scandals in 2014; McDonald’s was completely transparent with their customers, apologized, and even invited news crews into their kitchens, while KFC denied any wrong doing until it was proven.\textsuperscript{26} There were enough fundamental similarities between the Western fast food restaurants’ service styles and Chinese consumers’ expectations for competent service for the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{22} Chan, p. 13.
\bibitem{23} Watson, p. 21.
\bibitem{24} Chan, p. 12.
\bibitem{25} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
restaurants to satisfy their customers with only minor adjustments. However, to truly become a Chinese brand that garners customer loyalty, the Western brands must better understand consumers’ expectations for members of their community and strive to meet those expectations.

**Food Fight: Lanzhou Lamian**

With both the definitions and expectations for “fast” and “service” establish, I can now explore how these definitions manifest in traditional Chinese restaurants and more completely characterize the “fast service” niche of food service. To better understand how these definitions manifest in traditional Chinese restaurants, without simply asking broad, difficult to answer questions, I would like to use Lanzhou lamian as a case study of a local food item that has been branded, commodified, and made into a national chain restaurant. For this section of the thesis, my sources are mostly informal sources, customer and blogger testimonials online, and magazine articles because there has been limited scholarly research conducted on the effect of that Western fast food had on food culture in China.

Lanzhou lamian (兰州拉面) is a type of hand-pulled noodle from the capital of the Gansu province, Lanzhou. Noodle-making is one of the China’s oldest food traditions – archeologists have found records of noodles in books from the Eastern Han Dynasty over 2,000 years ago, and noodles found in the Lajia site on the Yellow River that date back over 4,000 years. In the early 1800’s, during the Qing Dynasty, a Hui Muslim chef created this particular recipe for noodle soup that became one of the most popular dishes in Lanzhou; locals consume
lamian for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, and sometimes all three. Lamian is a particular type of noodle dish, similar to Japanese ramen, “La” (拉) means to pull, which is how the dough is stretched into long, thin noodles, and “mian” (面) means noodle, which is the central component of the soup dish. The noodles are stretched and pulled, folded, rested, and refolded until they become thin, chewy strips, then are quickly cooked in soup. In 2010 the city government of Lanzhou created an official brand for “Lanzhou Beef Lamian” and began licensing its use to a catering company called Eastern Palace, who have since opened 400 official lamian restaurants. Eastern Palace was not the first proprietor to sell Lanzhou Lamian on a broader scale, the Hualong Hui, a Muslim ethnic minority group, operated over 10,000 restaurants when the licensing agreement came into place. Rather than creating their own brand, Hualong Lamian, the Hui protested the restaurants Eastern Palace opened and fought rabidly for their right to sell Lanzhou Lamian. What about this food stuff changed when it was branded that made the brand so valuable to the purveyors as a brand? As McDonald’s and KFC’s successes demonstrated, branding matters.

But how did the city of Lanzhou create a brand for their variety of lamian? There are variations of noodle soups all over China, there is no special service training for service workers, and yet, even just by establishing an authentic “brand,” for the lamian from Lanzhou, officials disrupted the Lanzhou lamian status quo. As established in the previous chapter, despite the

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27 Moorman. “For the Love of Lamian.”
prevalence and acceptance of Shanzhai\textsuperscript{30} culture, Chinese consumers are brand-sensitive for a number of reasons including for their health and safety, for status gained by purchasing a brand name item, and to ensure the authenticity of the item or service they purchase.\textsuperscript{31} These fears stem from China’s history of producing counterfeit goods; there is stigma borne with purchasing counterfeit items often because of their inferior quality, inauthenticity, and lower price tag. If one has the capacity to buy an authentic branded item, they would choose to do so rather than sacrifice quality and safety for a lower price tag, therefore the purchase of counterfeit items has become a symbol of the lower classes who may not have the extra capital to purchase authentic goods.\textsuperscript{32} An example of this kind of counterfeiting is the copy-cat Western fast food chains that opened around the time of these brands’ entrances and became an alternative to the authentic Western chains for people who could not afford their more-luxury pricing.\textsuperscript{33} This begs the question, if somebody is able to dine at an authentic Lanzhou restaurant, but does not pay a premium for the authentic product over the counterfeit, does it still differentiate them by degrees of status? That is to say, is somebody who dines at an Eastern Palace Lanzhou lamian

\textsuperscript{30} “Shanzhai” (山寨) is a term used to describe the culture of counterfeiting products in China, which is generally viewed as a kind of Robinhood story where counterfeiters make cheaper versions of luxury goods so that those goods are more accessible to lower income individuals.  
\textsuperscript{33} Yang, Fan, \textit{Faked in China}, p. 69.
restaurant of a higher class than somebody who dines at a Hualong Hui-operated restaurant? This is where Lanzhou lamian diverges from the entering Western fast food chains in all but a few ways. Firstly, dining at a Lanzhou lamian restaurant was never a status symbol in China. Secondly, the recipe for any Lanzhou lamian recipe is essentially the same and consists of five key components: yiqing (一清), erbai (二白), sanhong (三红), silu (四绿), and wuhuang (五黄). The yiqing, which means “one clear” is the soup’s clear broth; erbai, which means “two white,” are the white radishes in the soup; sanhong, meaning “three red,” is the dark red chili that gives the soup its signature spice; silü, meaning “four green,” represents the green garlic stems and coriander leaves; and finally, wuhuang, meaning “five yellow” is for the yellow wheat noodles.34 While both the Hui and Eastern Palace lamian noodle dishes may be authentic in terms of their ingredients and service, the Hui may fear that because their stores are no longer “official” Lanzhou lamian restaurants, that they will suffer this same stigma of being a counterfeit brand. Even though the Hui operates twenty-five times the number of Lanzhou lamian stores that Eastern Palace operates, and people in China have been dining at these restaurants for decades, they still could potentially suffer from losing their authenticity.35

Branding is a relatively recent introduction to China; before the 1970s, there were very few Chinese, brand-name companies excluding a handful of banks or automotive producers. In 1978, when China underwent economic reform and opened to foreign businesses, both Western and native Chinese brands proliferated. The first branded fast-food restaurant in China

34 Moorman. “For the Love of Lamian.”
35 Ibid.
was Mr. Lee, founded in 1988,\textsuperscript{36} one year after the entrance of KFC, followed by Dico’s\textsuperscript{37} and CNHLS (Wallace) in 1994, two years after McDonald’s opened in 1992.\textsuperscript{38} There is limited research on if Western fast food chains had an effect on Chinese food-brand development, or if developing these kinds of franchised brands are simply a product of China’s overall economic development and greater formalization of businesses.

However, future research into the pressure Western brands placed on local Chinese businesses to establish themselves as legitimate brands and capitalize on the brand-fever that swept through China could be valuable to more completely understand the impact Western fast food chains had on the food industry and Chinese food culture in a more global sense.

Other than the newly-official branding of this ancient dish, has the influence of Western fast-food brands affected the development of these restaurants, or their perception by locals, in any other way? Western fast-food became a status symbol for the emerging Chinese middle class, but have these local brands, and if not, why not? The evolution of fast service food culture is complex and multifaceted, but with regard to fast food in China, the topic has almost exclusively been studied by looking at Western fast food restaurants and the causes of their


\textsuperscript{37} “Dicos fast-food restaurant closes two outlets in Xiamen | What’s on Xiamen,” What’s On Xiamen, Jul 9, 2009. Web.

success. Although there is limited available academic research on the effect the influence Western fast food has had on Chinese food culture, I believe my research demonstrates that the topics deserves further exploration. Quick service food in China might initially appear to be dichotomous, Western fast food versus Chinese street food, but in reality, there is a spectrum of cuisines and service styles in Chinese fast service cuisine. Rather than only existing in contrast to traditional Chinese fast service restaurants, Western fast food chains contributed to the expansion of the definition of “fast service” food in China.
CONCLUSION

Fast Becomes Faster, but Where Will Service Go Next?

Figure 11: Fleet of Deliveroo drivers, Source: “How to order delivery on China’s Meituan App,” That’s Mag Shanghai.

Now, almost 30 years after KFC first entered China, Western fast food restaurants have become so widespread and glocalized that they have lost much of their novelty. These restaurants still represent luxury and Western culture to many Chinese individuals, but, especially as the middle class continues to grow and develops deeper roots to their class status through other cultural symbols, these restaurants do not command the same power through
their brands that they did in the early 1990’s.\textsuperscript{1} Even though their brands might not receive the same attention as they once did, fast food has still impacted Chinese food culture in ways not yet fully explored. With greater research into the development of native Chinese fast food brands, changes to quick service and customer expectations, and continued research on the growth of these Western companies, we can build a more complete understanding of their impact. As stated earlier in this thesis, food culture never stops developing, so while this research on Western fast food brands deserves to continue, we must continue looking for new frontiers in food culture. In my research on “fast service,” I found what I believe to be the next technology that will revolutionize that term: smartphones and the internet.

As China continues to modernize, develop, and utilize technology nationwide, it is inevitable that these technologies will incorporated in all facets of daily life including dining. One particularly notable instance of technology in dining is the rapidly growing food delivery industry. At the end of 2017, the online food delivery market reached a total value of approximately $31.9 billion (204.6 billion yuan), a 23% increase from the previous year.\textsuperscript{2} Approximately 300 million Chinese citizens use online services to order food, and according to a report by the China Daily, that only accounts for a small percentage of the total food catering market.\textsuperscript{3} Although delivery has existed for decades in China, it was not until the age of smartphones that the delivery industry flourished and since then it has become one of China’s

\textsuperscript{1} Liu, Coco. “Are the Chinese falling out of love with McDonald’s.” \textit{South China Morning Post}, Nov 2017. Web.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.
most competitive online markets.\(^4\) My question now is, will smartphone and Internet
technologies, like fast food, be the next catalyst for widespread change in food service in China?

These applications are popular for a reason; they make ordering in food convenient and
easy, and often cheap. The services operate through applications on users’ phones, which show
food providers near the customer’s location, allow them to filter their search, show them
menus, allow them to order through the app, and even allow customers to track their orders,
until the food arrives at their door, removing human contact almost completely from the
ordering process.\(^5\) The delivery drivers mostly work for one of China’s five delivery brands:
El.eme (饿了么), Deliveroo, Baidu-Waimai (百度外卖), Meituan Dianping (美团点评), or
WeChat.\(^6\) Usually, delivery drivers for any of these five companies have six orders to deliver in
an hour over a wide area, so the drivers are known for racing through the streets at high speeds
on motorbikes, only to dismount when they arrive at their destination and run up many flights
of stairs. If the deliveries arrive late, the blame is placed on the delivery drivers, who receive
ratings much like Uber drivers do that review their performance and can affect their job status.\(^7\)

The drivers’ speed is not the only factor that can affect customers’ reviews. According to a
report by the Wall Street Journal, customers often ask delivery drivers to pick-up other items,
for example cigarettes or sanitary pads, and will review them poorly if they arrive without the

\(^4\) Gao, Yuan. “China’s Hottest Internet Sector is Old-Fashioned Food Delivery.” *Bloomberg News*,
\(^5\) Tao, Li. “Dinner at your door: inside China’s US$37 billion online food delivery services
\(^6\) Lin, Liza and Wayne Ma. “Olympic Athletes Have Nothing on China’s Lunch-Delivery Guys –
Drivers gun scooters, sprint up stairs to meet brutal quotas; ‘challenging work’.” *The Wall Street
\(^7\) Lin. “Olympic Athletes Have Nothing on China’s Lunch-Delivery Guys – Drivers gun scooters,
sprint up stairs to meet brutal quotas; ‘challenging work’.”
additional items. For all intents and purposes, the delivery drivers and their companies are the food service providers to their customers, not the restaurants from which the customer ordered.8

When China’s seemingly-exponential economic growth began to slow in 2014 and 2015, the Chinese middle class began to feel the need to tighten their purse strings and be more economical about their purchases, which included their dining habits. To save money, Chinese customers turned to the online food delivery application with growing frequency because they often offered discounts when dining in at restaurants or ordering delivery, making dining out less expensive.9 These discounts attracted more and more customers to engage with restaurants online first, then choose where they would dine out based on the deal offered and the online reviews, rather than relying on just their own personal knowledge or physical advertisements, because they now had greater access to information about deals all over their city.10 One of the side effects of these restaurant aggregators is that Western fast food restaurants’ sales have suffered since their inception.11 Even though KFC and McDonald’s are popularly order for delivery in China, they face stiff competition from the thousands of other restaurants that crowd these online marketplaces. To remain competitive as technology becomes more integrated into the dining experience, Yum! China is currently in discussion to

8Lin. “Olympic Athletes Have Nothing on China’s Lunch-Delivery Guys – Drivers gun scooters, sprint up stairs to meet brutal quotas; ‘challenging work’.”
10Baertlein. “Hungry? China’s food delivery apps bite into Yum revival.”
11Ibid.
buy Daojia.com, a smaller food delivery services firm. While their long term goals are to open 20,000 KFC restaurants in China, the executives at Yum! China interest in demonstrates the perceived value of delivery services in China’s changing dining culture.

Third party delivery as the new medium for food service has the potential to change completely customers’ metrics for good or fast service by replacing traditional service interactions with features on an online application. When individuals use a food delivery service to order food directly to their homes, rather than dining out, they make so many of the prior metrics used to measure speed and service obsolete. For example, customers ordering delivery may not be influenced by the restaurant’s appearance, which had been one of the most significant influences in customer satisfaction in traditional food service settings, because they do not interact with the restaurant. Likewise, may remove the aspect of “being seen” from dining because by ordering in, one cannot be seen dining out or treating others to meals at upscale restaurants. While dining in itself may be a status symbol because it means one has the ability to purchase food rather than cook for themselves, delivery applications often make ordering in inexpensive and widely accessible, so it is unclear if ordering delivery is seen as a symbol of status. Finally, when individuals order dinner, their conceptualization of “fast service” may change because of how much further their meal must travel to arrive at their home rather than their table within a restaurant. Currently, there is little to no research on consumers’ expectations for food delivery service and speed in China, so this is largely my own

13 Tao, Li. “Dinner at your door: inside China’s US$37 billion online food delivery services market.”
speculation based on my previous research. However, I believe it is important to consider how delivery relates to the expanded definitions and expectations of “fast service” to understand how it might fit into that niche of food culture.

Technology integrating into dining is not restricted to delivery alone in China, it is has become a marketplace for discount dining vouchers, restaurant reviews and recommendations, and has even become the new way to order food in a restaurant or before even arriving at a restaurant. Since its launch in 2003, Dianping became the go-to online venue for restaurant reviews, information, reservations, and discounts. Most significantly, the application has no English option, it only operates in Mandarin Chinese, meaning it is intended for a Chinese audience and not to accommodate visiting Western tourists. Because of Dianping’s massive user base, approximately 260 million active users, the restaurants’ profiles and offerings on Dianping act as important advertisements.¹⁴ Online review sites in China have changed the landscape for marketing for local restaurants: the restaurant reviews and photos uploaded to the application by customers create a brand for the restaurant that represents them, either positively or negatively, without allowing the proprietor to curate their brand, and then broadcast that brand to a much broader audience.¹⁵ While a restaurant’s product and in-restaurant service still carry significance, they are no longer the only metrics by which customers evaluate the restaurants desirability.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid.
As technology continues to integrate into Chinese food service, it will continue to change the expectation for service, speed, and even influence food culture in ways that cannot yet be predicted. With technology comes efficiency and therefore speed of service, but what would happen to customers’ perception of a restaurants’ service when technology is integrated? As we previously established, in China, competency, speed of customer service, ease of obtaining information and service, and the server’s experience, and knowledge about the product and service are the most important considerations in determining quality of service, so could these services be substituted when a customer interfaces with technology? Some restaurants in China are exploring this territory, for example, KFC has introduced tablet ordering at some of its locations that only requires a scan of one’s face to pay, but real people deliver food to their customers. Other restaurants further integrate technology into their diners’ experiences by replacing their servers completely with phone applications or robots. Even though technology and robots may meet a Chinese clientele’s expectations for service on paper, can they make up for the lack the pleasantries and human contact of a more traditional service experience?

China has continued to be one of the countries where companies test out innovations in technology, then expand those technologies to other existing markets. The primary example is online delivery. While delivery was available outside of China for many years, it was mostly carried out by individual operators who worked for the restaurants, rather than outsourced to

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an online third party. The idea of having a fleet of delivery drivers to cater to a wide audience, or to have delivery be a primary method for dining, organized through an online or mobile platform, did not truly arrive in the West until the emergence of aggregators like UberEats, Grubhub, or Postmates.\textsuperscript{19} After seeing what success they had with aggregators in China, and after having a decline in in-store sales in the United States, McDonald’s brought delivery back with them to the US and began a partnership with UberEats in an effort to boost their sales nationwide.\textsuperscript{20} Both in the West and in China, fast food chains see efficient, widespread delivery service as the next step forward in the food service industry, either through partnerships or developing their own technology. The pressure for taking the lead in delivery services has lead companies to innovate new store types, new methods of delivery, new staffing procedure, and new ad campaigns in the West. Beyond just moving ordering food from in-store to online, companies are integrating technology into food service in a multitude of different ways. For example, Domino’s Pizza recently launched a pilot test, in conjunction with Ford Motors, of a self-driving delivery car that cooks a pizza on the way to the customer. Instead of needing to wait for a pizza to be cooked in-store, given to a delivery driver, and brought to the customer, they complied those three steps into one, leaving loading the car with raw pizza as the only human interaction with the pizza before delivery.\textsuperscript{21} Other fast service restaurants are considering opening kitchen-only restaurants that act as a hub for delivery drivers. There would

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be no customer interface at the restaurant, it would simply serve as a place to quickly produce food that delivery drivers, potentially third party drivers, would deliver directly to their awaiting customers.\(^2\)

With the removal of humans from the service side of food service, fast service again shifts in its meaning. “Fast,” no longer has the needs for human interactions that could extend the period of time customers are comfortable waiting, nor does it make space for manual, multi-step actions in food service. In a food service industry run by technology, “fast” may now assume automation and standardization. Rather than hoping one’s pizza arrives in 30 minutes or an hour, with the help of drones, self-driving cars, and mobile cooking units or satellite kitchens, delivery times could be guaranteed. “Service” may no longer be determined based on human interactions or accommodations. Instead, good service will be determined by how intuitive a company’s application is, how appealing the online images of their food items are, how quickly those items can be made and delivered to the customer, and how integrated the pay system is in the ordering process. These trends are still just now emerging, being tested, and entering new markets, so the overall effect technology has on a diner’s experience has yet to be seen. We can be relatively sure, however, the understanding of fast service will change in China and beyond, just as when Western fast food expanded the definition of what a fast service dining experience could be.

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