

Fast Food for Thought: Finding Global History in a Beijing McDonald's

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Few places are more familiar than McDonald's. Finding themselves in strange surroundings—overseas, on a long drive, or stuck at an airport—even people who normally disdain fast food will often take comfort in the sight of the golden arches.

I've been there, figuratively and literally. Way back in the early 1990s, I visited Beijing on a break from my job teaching English in a small Chinese city and made the pilgrimage to the city's one and only McDonald's. Located in the shadow of the Forbidden City, right at the corner of the upscale Wangfujing shopping street, the otherwise unremarkable-looking outlet had a line out the door. I ordered an ice cream and coffee, both rare treats at the time, and couldn't resist grabbing a picture with a statue of Ronald McDonald, known locally as Uncle McDonald.

I wouldn't have known it at the time, but it's possible that UCLA anthropologist Yunxiang Yan was also there. Since the early 1990s, Yan had been observing the entry of the restaurant into the quickly opening country—how McDonald's was changing China, and how China was changing McDonald's. His chapter "Of Hamburger and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing" in James Watson's 1997 book *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia* became an instant classic.¹

Yan's article brought home the complexity of how Chinese customers perceived the restaurant. Consumers were drawn to McDonald's for a variety of reasons. They came for the clean, bright surroundings, for a chance to escape the social obligations of dining with workmates or family, as a novelty, or as a treat for their children. For many, the supposed American-ness of the restaurant and even the food itself were incidental to the dining experience.

Twenty-five years later, I assigned Yan's article to a class of Chinese folklore students at Beijing Normal University. For this generation, the restaurant meant something very different. With over 2,500 outlets across China (and plans for many more), McDonald's is

now anything but novel. Most of my students still see the restaurant as a daily luxury, an association they carried from a time when their parents would take them for a hamburger as a reward for doing well on a test, or as a small comfort after a difficult day. Like students in much of the world, they see McDonald's as a place to hang out and study, either with friends or alone.

The fact that McDonald's in China is no longer the site of jarring cultural clash makes it more, not less interesting as a place to observe the many different processes that we lump together as "globalization." Everything about McDonald's is designed to be predictable, from its corporate culture to the cleanliness of the bathrooms. And, of course, one can go to a McDonald's anywhere in the world and order the same item. *The Economist's* semi-serious "Big Mac Index" evaluates dozens of currencies against the local price of a Big Mac, based on the assumption that the sandwich is a globally standard commodity.² The very idea that a freshly prepared product with seven separate ingredients—you know the ones—can be treated with the same criteria as crude oil or bulk soybeans is itself a testament to the scale and sophistication of the restaurant's sourcing and logistics operations.

McDonald's isn't just global—it's globally *visible*. Anyone can go online and immediately access a vast trove of information about how McDonald's operates in 118 countries across the world (the Antarctica McDonald's is an urban legend). A simple Google search will reveal local menus and advertising campaigns, as well as press reports about business dealings, protests, labor complaints and safety issues, and all manner of blogs, documentaries, and personal accounts involving the restaurant. By narrowing their search using Google's own tools, or by taking their search to country-specific sites—yandex.ru in Russia, naver.com in Korea, or baidu.com in China—students can easily find a wealth of information about what McDonald's serves, how it shapes daily life, and how it operates as a business anywhere in the world.

The World on a Bun

So what can McDonald's teach us?

As a research focus, McDonald's is a living laboratory for two major themes of global history: cultural exchange and material networks.

As far as culture is concerned, let's start with the McElephant in the room: Is McDonald's an agent of cultural imperialism? The image of large corporations as pathways of cultural transformation is generally not a positive one. "Coca-colonization" signifies the power of multinational corporations to drown local cultures in sugar water. A "Disneyfied" culture is one that's been appropriated, watered down, and crassly commercialized. Add the pejorative "Mc-" before a word and you unmistakably connote a kitschy, mass-market imitation of an authentic item. Big, ugly houses fronted with plaster columns are thus "McMansions," while a low-level service position is a "McJob." (As we will discuss,

George Ritzer’s idea of “McDonaldization” is a management style, rather than a cultural critique.)

While this kind of shorthand language is catchy, it doesn’t actually tell us much about what happens when global culture hits local society. For that, we have two working images: cultural imperialism and cultural hybridization. In the former, products are essentially forced down the throats of markets that are unable to respond. Thinking solely of food, the charge is that an insidious combination of saturation marketing, below-market pricing, and sheer blandness allows products like Coca-Cola to erode local culinary traditions. In cities all over China, the rise of Western chains has visibly coincided with the disappearance of street food. In busy market streets outside railway stations or university gates, where dozens of hawkers once sold steamed buns, tea eggs, and fried noodles, you will now find a McDonald’s, a Kentucky Fried Chicken, or one of their many imitators.

But did fast food *cause* this? As Yan points out, the food itself is hardly new in China. Every culinary tradition has its own dish that combines speed and portability—the two key attributes of fast food. One would be hard-pressed to find a place without some variation of “meat wrapped in bread” (or more broadly, “thing wrapped in another thing”). Long sold as street food, and sometimes billed as “Chinese hamburgers,” variations like *xianbing* (fried flatbread with a pork filling) or *jiamao* (steamed bread that’s sliced and filled with cooked meat) are now mass-produced, and sold in supermarkets and subway stations across China. Yet even when these native traditions, often practiced with a heaping dollop of nationalism, are mobilized by competitors or imitators, they tend to lose out against the global fast-food chains. This includes emerging franchises that specialize in Chinese dishes. During the “chicken wars” of the 1990s, Shanghai-based chain Ronghua (a name that means



Image 1: Food stall in the Lanzhou night market. Author’s photograph used with permission.

“glorious China”) Chicken proudly announced its plan to dominate the Chinese market by adapting fried chicken to local tastes and by opening a new branch next to every KFC. Yet for all that bravado, the chain is now almost nowhere to be seen.

What this comes down to is power. The charge behind ideas like Coca-colonization is that global consumer culture is *not* the result of free choice and that global food conglomerates use more than just catchy advertising to dominate consumer preference. This might be a function of having the resources to run better or more extensive advertising, sign on cultural icons as spokespersons, or something more insidious, like buying up local competitors or bribing officials to secure a better retail location.³ And it’s this ability to steamroll over indigenous culture, according to critics, that puts the “empire” in cultural imperialism.

As a point of historical comparison, this process of cultural displacement is hardly new. When change is backed by force or overwhelming advantage, or comes bundled with material benefit, local elites invested in the old system will see reason to cry foul.

A surprisingly useful parallel may be found in the history of religious mission. The juxtaposition of religious conversion and burger preference (diehard devotion of In-N-Out fans notwithstanding) may seem odd, but each one comes down to the question of *how external forces impact individual cultural choices*. At one extreme, we have the image of a completely free marketplace of ideas, one in which conversion to a new faith is a simple and unadorned matter of conscience. At the other, we have numerous examples of coerced participation, violent destruction of competing traditions, conversion as a stepping stone into a political, social, or commercial elitist sphere, or selective association of certain religious traditions with progress, or modernity. The story of Christian missions in Asia includes all of these phenomena—everything from the cultural pull of mission-run schools and hospitals, the association of Christianity with Western civilization writ large, and the practice of giving material aid to converts. Some missionaries were willing to avail themselves of these advantages, but others looked askance at tactics that cast a cloud over conversion as a free and heartfelt choice.

Back to burgers. Do Chinese diners actually *have* a choice when it comes to the kind of burger they can eat? If the traditional street hawkers have all been replaced with gleaming fast-food outlets, it seems that they don’t. But the gradual disappearance of food streets from Chinese cities is a product of urban planning. It’s a process that McDonald’s itself has little power to influence, and one that other chains can also take advantage of.

What about cultural associations? McDonald’s swept in with a wave of novelty, but China is no stranger to Western food. Eighteenth-century Cantonese merchants kept Western chefs on staff, 1930s Shanghai was crazy for ice cream, and party cadres in revolutionary Beijing raised their glasses at the city’s iconic Moscow restaurant.⁴ But the “culinary encounter” isn’t just about the food. It also encompasses the larger cultural experience of setting, music, utensils, and a sense of sitting at the border of “east” and “west.”

Against the dualism of the Cold War, it was easy to see McDonald's as nothing less than a proxy for America itself. There's something to this idea, as brands are said to have distinct "personas," portraying themselves as young or old, fashionable or dowdy, forward-thinking, or stuck in the past.⁵ (Think for example of the "I'm a Mac, I'm a PC" commercials from a few years back.) At least for a time, McDonald's was identifiably and uniquely "American." This was especially pronounced in the waning years of the Soviet Union, when brands like McDonald's, as well as Coca-Cola and Levi's, materially represented a longing and status that few were otherwise able to put to voice.⁶ It was also by design, a decades-old policy of promoting branded American leisure culture as a spiritual counter to communism.

But simply equating the appeal of McDonald's in China (or anywhere, for that matter) with an unstoppable wave of Americanization presents two problems. The first is that *all* brands create cultural meaning. Food comes wrapped in a package of cultural associations, such as heritage, status, or ethical production. And these associations are often tied to a place, which is why a mediocre French wine has an inbuilt prestige factor that's denied even to an excellent wine from a place like Kentucky.⁷ From this perspective, the supposed American appeal of McDonald's is anything but unique.

The second problem is that cultural associations are ultimately beyond the ability of the producer to control, in the sense that consumers can interpret the meaning of a product in any way they see fit. Even the largest multinational brands have endured their share of failure from campaigns and products that the public simply didn't want. Starbucks dramatically botched its entry to Australia, precisely because it made incorrect assumptions about how its cultural cues would be perceived overseas. Starbucks decorated its stores to connote luxury, but Australians saw bland uniformity. It thought the custom of addressing customers by first name was intimate, but Australians found it intrusive. Most significantly, consumers rejected the appeal of Starbucks's branded products, saying that the sugary iced drinks were for children and that the chain's signature coffee, with its distinct heavily roasted taste, simply wasn't very good.⁸

This brings us to the idea of cultural hybridization. Once a system of practice and meaning takes root, it's no longer "foreign." Just like religious missionaries once faced the problem of converts mixing local beliefs and deities into their new faith, as soon as McDonald's came to China, it became Chinese. This conscious or unconscious process of integrating global and local cultures has gotten the attention of fields such as marketing.⁹ Sociologists sometimes refer to it as "glocalization."¹⁰

Much of what makes McDonald's successful, less its cultural appeal than its operational model, is easily copied. Even if they don't directly challenge McDonald's in the fast-food space, China's franchise restaurants, which sell everything from dumplings to bubble tea, have proliferated exponentially. Culturally, this new wave of franchise restaurants can portray themselves any way they like, but regardless of whether their facades are marked



Image 2: Exterior of a McDonald's in Taiyuan. Photograph by Kang Linyue used with permission.



Image 3: Highly standardized restaurant decor includes the use of English language slogans as wall decoration. Photograph by Lu Yue used with permission.



Image 4: KFC exterior in Taiyuan. Outlet decor will occasionally adopt traditional motifs, sometimes at the instruction of the local tourism industry. The black sign painted in the style of a traditional shopboard contains the Chinese name of the restaurant, minus the logo. Photograph by Kang Linyue used with permission.

by the shiny plastic and bright colors we associate with global fast-food restaurants, or the traditional decor of a Chinese inn, the inside is still a business model based on replicability, instant service, and quick reheating of products that are mostly preprepared offsite. This hyper-efficient approach to production is the real heart of McDonaldization—no clowns or burgers needed.¹¹

And although McDonald's has largely avoided making major mistakes in taking its brand to China, even they cannot control how consumers will perceive their experience within the establishment. Decades after global culture began flooding into China, any half-joking status that the restaurant may have enjoyed as a de facto emissary of American culture has all but disappeared. Whatever meaning the advertisers attempted to attach to the brand, Yan explained, Chinese consumers in the 1990s came to McDonald's for their own reasons. Some came for the food, but others in spite of it. They all used the restaurant in their own way—as a private space or a public one, a place to be seen or a place to be invisible. The meanings of McDonald's were as numerous as the customers.

If anything, these meanings are even more individuated today. A short documentary covering 72 hours in the life of a Beijing McDonald's—the one located just outside my university's East Gate—shows the chain in 2018, long after it had become an extraordinarily *ordinary* part of Chinese life. When asked why they came to McDonald's, most people still gave reasons that were strikingly personal. Young adults were there because they associated the taste with their childhoods. An older man who had been eating at McDonald's twice a week since the 1990s was hard-pressed to explain why he loves the restaurant so much, he just does. Three burly brothers sharing a pile of burgers explained that they had eaten together at McDonald's just before two of them went to study overseas, and were now reuniting over the same food, and at the same table. And of course, many individuals seemed to value the fact that they could sit and study at the establishment and not get thrown out.¹²



Image 5: Assembling flat pack furniture in a new restaurant. This Beijing outlet went from empty space to service in under a week. Author's photograph used with permission.

Material Networks

The second major theme is the circulation of resources.

According to a McDonald's training manual, the chain sells 75 sandwiches every second, adding up to over two billion each year. This phenomenal feat is made possible by a sophisticated web of production, processing, and supply, not only of the foods that eventually pass over the counter, but also of items like cups, straws, and trays. Behind the scenes, the chain is also constantly moving people, knowledge, and resources across global, regional, and local networks.

The movement of commodities is central to the study of global history, especially the global history of food. More than simply moving a product, trade of certain especially valuable commodity exports—American tobacco, tea and silk from China, spices out of Southeast Asia, or cotton out of India—transformed trade itself, driving innovation in transport, navigation, and finance. (Staying in the realm of ideas, one could even say that the modern economic theory of free trade itself emerged precisely in order to cover the bitter taste of exploitation with the sugary myth of development, but that's a story for another day.¹³) For the historian, trade also presents tangible benchmarks of progress. Tracing the physical circulation of identifiable commodities like minted coins or kiln-marked porcelains¹⁴ allows us to see how far and how fast things moved, and to understand how the flow of goods gradually overcame barriers of distance, price, policy, or custom. We can also see the development of new markets and uses for the goods that flowed in return.¹⁵

Each of the commodities that would appear in a typical McDonald's meal has been studied on the world stage. Our hamburger bun is made possible through a trade in wheat that over time was sometimes more and sometimes less global.¹⁶ Our fries started with the introduction of potatoes to Europe,¹⁷ and transformed along with the changing science and the business of oilseeds—as well as the wave of health anxieties that prompted the chain to change its recipe from beef tallow to vegetable oil.¹⁸ Our fountain drink is the product of a 200-year love affair with refined sugar.¹⁹ (Depending on where you are, this might be high fructose corn syrup.²⁰)

Beef—the whole point of a burger—is a story in itself. Although beef can be produced anywhere that has cattle, some places are more naturally suited to making an industry of it. So, for centuries, the beef trade consisted of walking cattle to market, often according to annual grazing patterns, and sometimes across great distances.²¹ By the 19th century, the beef trade was becoming truly global, connecting new sources of supply in the Americas with seemingly insatiable markets in Europe, especially England. The advent of refrigerated shipping finally allowed producers to take fresh beef across the Equator, paving the way for distant places like Argentina and Australia to emerge as global suppliers. The hyper-efficient industries in these export centers both developed and dominated the industry. Even with its vast cattle herds in domestic farms and grasslands, China was relegated to

supplying regional markets, and could only compete when war and shipping shortages disrupted global supply chains.²²

Within the global flow of commodities, McDonald's is not a uniform consumer. In places like Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand, it promotes a policy of sourcing local products, especially beef. In other cases, local sourcing has produced problems. In one of China's many food safety scandals, a large McDonald's supplier near Shanghai was caught on video in 2014 processing expired meat. Despite the public outcry, McDonald's ultimately decided to stick with this supplier, in part because of the difficulty of finding another that could work on the necessary scale.

When moments like the 2014 scandal arise, it's natural to ask whether blame should be pinned on China, McDonald's, or globalization itself? There's no single answer. For the outside observer, such moments show the complexity of a fast-food supply chain that corporate sources are unlikely to reveal. For example, reporting in the wake of the 2014 scandal brought to light the fact that both McDonald's and rival chain Kentucky Fried Chicken sourced at least some of their meat from the same Chinese factory, which also supplied much of the fast-food beef and chicken served in Japan.²³ It also revealed that "local" sourcing is in some ways a notional concept since the Chinese supplier captured in the video (Shanghai Hushi Foods) was owned by an American parent company (OSI group) based in Illinois, using beef that was "aggregated" from numerous sources in order to preserve a standard taste. In China, that beef likely included imports from a constantly changing mix of exporting countries. In 2019, direct beef imports were dominated by countries from South America, but we also need to consider live cattle imports from places like Australia, and the millions of tons of animal feed that China's animal industries source from a global market in corn and soybeans.²⁴ So where is your hamburger actually *from*? In practical terms, the answer is *everywhere*.

Beyond its products, the McDonald's business model is itself a very concrete expression of globalization and its limits. While maintaining its global corporate culture, McDonald's also needs to adapt to each country in which it operates, meaning that central priorities about social responsibility or local business structure will be expressed differently in different locations. For example, the Ronald McDonald House charity is globally run as a single organization but still needs to follow the laws of each jurisdiction that it operates. Restaurant ownership also differs by market. Though many restaurants in places like China are still owned by large investors, most markets favor franchises, in which the operator puts up the investment. Beyond even this model, many of the vital details—such as the number of franchises available, and the training and capital requirements for opening a new store—will look slightly different in each country. As a business, McDonald's is global, but also very tangibly local.

And that's really the point of what McDonald's represents. Like cultural hybridity, globalization of material trade is a very complex phenomenon, and any one transaction

involves numerous trajectories of things, knowledge, and resources. A single meal represents a chance to dive deep into dozens, if not hundreds, of such transactions, the accumulation of decisions that both bring the world together and keep it at a distance. In short, the world on a bun.

Classroom Applications

The globalization of McDonald's demonstrates in microcosm the complexity of the processes that shape world history. This translates well to classroom use because these many variations on themes of cultural adaptation and material exchange are knowable.

For students, McDonald's combines the familiar and the foreign, a chance to see the same questions answered in different cultures, markets, and legal jurisdictions. At home (wherever that may be), the restaurant is often so ubiquitous as to be almost invisible. Yet as generations of study-abroad students will attest, the experience of visiting a McDonald's abroad is at once comforting and confusing. You might order, for example, a Royal with Cheese but just end up with a regular old cheeseburger on your tray. But there's no need for mystery. The restaurant is eminently knowable both through its huge web presence, and because it's one of the world's largest and best-known—both loved and hated—corporations.

McDonald's large web presence makes the restaurant an ideal subject for online ethnography. When trying to understand the nature of the restaurant's public face, the best place to begin is undoubtedly with McDonald's own website in each of the different countries that it operates. These official pages open a door to that country's unique menus, promotions, and advertising. Using them, students can quickly learn about the different ways that the global corporation localizes its public image: that McDonald's Malaysia advertises prominently its halal ingredients and supports charity drives during the Chinese New Year, that McDonald's New Zealand highlights its sustainability initiatives and use of locally sourced beef, and that the vegetarian items on offer in India (McPaneer, anyone?) do indeed look pretty tasty.²⁵

From there, it's a short trip to thinking about how the restaurant is viewed in society. Like the video shot in the Beijing outlet, there's no shortage of amateur and professional footage, travel videos, and personal blogs that show how people use the space of a fast-food restaurant. Students also have the option of directly interviewing relatives, acquaintances, and even strangers overseas, an exercise that can also serve to introduce the methodology of oral history. Finally, the question of cultural appropriation can be viewed in reverse by seeking out McDonald's copycats—strikingly similar enterprises, slogans, decor, or menu items that give insight into what competitors consider emulating or copying outright, and how unique the fast-food model is in any particular society.

Tracing McDonald's networks of goods, services, and funding will be a bit more challenging, and here the company's own information might not be of much help. Instead,

students will want to turn to the business press—reports about new contracts and relationships, the opening or closing of borders to food trade, and, of course, the seedy details that are exposed to sunlight in the wake of scandal. This sort of exercise will involve more groundwork than simply looking at the public face of cultural localization, but can really drive home the myriad practical concerns and decisions that go into the operation of a global commercial entity. Having cut their teeth on a present-day example, students will be well prepared to see what’s similar or different in their historical sources.

Beyond following actual goods, students can also trace *ideas* about the sourcing of McDonald’s food, including the way that rumors and images affect perceptions of safety, nutrition, and social justice. While online sources may be limited as far as historical depth, students can find paper advertising in magazines (including digitized ones) going back decades, and with it construct a timeline of the values that the restaurant tried to tie to its supply chain. From an educational standpoint, the presence of *misinformation* isn’t a liability, since it gives students an opportunity to assess and defend the reliability of their sources.

Students can also study the economic impact and meaning of demand. Writing in 1997, Yan portrayed McDonald’s as a mark—either in fact or in aspiration—of China’s urban upper-middle class. Twenty-five years later, such exclusivity is very far from the case. The middle class still uses dining as a mark of status, but the ubiquity of outlets and a sharp drop in the cost of fast food relative to income has pushed fast food well out of the category of fancy dining.²⁶ How similar processes have played out elsewhere will be a question for students themselves to pursue. The specifics of uncovering year-on-year price changes in any given market and tracking them against urban and rural incomes will require some digging but is eminently possible as the empirical foundation for a student project.

Conclusions

A Chinese saying tells us that “a sparrow may be small, but its internal workings are complete” (麻雀虽小, 五脏俱全). That is to say, close observation reveals internal complexity, and there’s value in seeking to understand the workings of the world in microcosm. As a globe-spanning MNE, McDonald’s is hardly a sparrow, but it is *finite*, and its manifestations within individual countries—as cultural, legal, and market systems—even more so. Although the familiarity of the restaurant can be initially misleading, the combination of uniformity and adaptation produces an infinite number of possibilities for comparison across space, and especially as a historical process across time. In places like China, where “modernity” has become distinctly passé, the restaurant still carries distinct layers of social and personal meaning. With fast food of all stripes becoming increasingly ubiquitous, the unique attraction of Americanization is arguably long gone. But at the same time, it’s clear that there’s no single standard to judge definitively whether the company’s Chinese operations have become more or less “global.” A deep dive into what McDonald’s is, does, and

means will leave students with a new appreciation for just how complex these questions are, as well as a blueprint for tracing similar questions back into other historical settings.

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Notes

¹ Yunxiang Yan, "McDonald's in Beijing: The Localization of Americana," in James L. Watson, ed. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 39–76. A revised version of this essay entitled "Of Hamburger and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing" also appears in numerous edited collections.

² "The Big Mac index," *The Economist* accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/big-mac-index>.

³ Thomas L. Leatherman and Alan Goodman, "Coca-colonization of diets in the Yucatan," *Social Science & Medicine* 61 (2005): 833–846. Jason M. Nagata, Frances K. Barg, Claudia R. Voleggia & Kent D. W. Bream, "Coca-Colonization and Hybridization of Diets among the Tz'utujil Maya," *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* 50, 4 (2011): 297–318.

⁴ May-bo Ching, "Chopsticks or Cutlery? How Canton Hong Merchants Entertained Foreign Guests in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in Kendall Johnson, ed., *Narratives of Free Trade: The Commercial Cultures of Early US-China Relations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 99–115. May-bo Ching, "The Flow of Turtle Soup from the Caribbean via Europe to Canton, and Its Modern American Fate," *Gastronomica* 16, 1 (2016): 79–89.

⁵ See Thomas David DuBois, "China's Old Brands: Commercial Heritage and Creative Nostalgia," *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 18, 1 (September 2020):1–15 accessed March 14, 2021, doi:10.1017/S1479591420000455.

⁶ Brigita Tranavičiūtė, "Dreaming of the West: The power of the brand in Soviet Lithuania, 1960s–1980s," *Business History* 62, 1 (2020): 179–195.

⁷ Geoffrey Jones and Nicholas J. Morgan, eds., *Adding value: brands and marketing in food and drink* (London: Routledge, 1994). For an outstanding overview of scholarship on the history of branding, see Rafael Castro & Patricio Sáiz, "Cross-cultural factors in international branding," *Business History* 62, 1 (2020): 1–25.

⁸ See the CNBC report "Why Starbucks Failed In Australia," accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/20/starbucks-australia-coffee-failure.html>.

⁹ Cheryl Nakata, ed., *Beyond Hofstede: Culture frameworks for global marketing and management* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁰ David Inglis, "Globalization and food: the dialectics of globality and locality," in Bryan S. Turner, ed., *The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 492–514.

¹¹ George Ritzer, *The Mcdonaldization of Society. An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1996).

¹² "Beijing Normal University McDonald's: 'Your choice is the best plan'." Episode 13 北京北师大麦当劳-你做的选择就是最好的安排. Even without subtitles, non-Chinese speakers can still search the video for visual clues in the same way they would a personal visit to a McDonald's overseas. *Tengxun shipin* [Tencent movies], accessed December 15, 2020, <https://v.qq.com/x/cover/814qe0slfkkskwk/f0027qw2f7j.html>.

¹³ Gallagher, John and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review*, 6, 1 (1953): 1–15.

¹⁴ John N. Miksic, ed., *Southeast Asian ceramics. New light on old pottery* (Singapore: Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, 2009). Barbara Harrison, "The ceramic trade across the South China Sea," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 76, 1 (2003): 99–114.

¹⁵ For a good introduction to this expansive field, see Jonathan Curry-Machado, ed., *Global Histories, Imperial Commodities, Local Interactions* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹⁶ Gema Aparicio and Vicente Pinilla, "International trade in wheat and other cereals and the collapse of the first wave of globalization, 1900–38," *Journal of Global History* 14, 1 (2019): 44–67.

¹⁷ J. G. Hawkes and J. Francisco-Ortega, "The Potato in Spain during the Late 16th Century," *Economic Botany* 46, 1 (1992): 86–97.

¹⁸ On oilseeds see Ines Prodoehl, "Versatile and Cheap: A Global History of Soy in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Global History* 8, 3 (2013): 461–482.

¹⁹ Sidney Winfried Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

²⁰ Bartow J. Elmore, "Citizen Coke: An Environmental and Political History of the Coca-Cola Company," *Enterprise & Society* 14, 4 (2013): 717–731.

²¹ Blanchard, Ian. "The Continental European Cattle Trades, 1400–1600," *Economic History Review*, New Series, 39, 3 (1986): 427–60.

²² Thomas David DuBois, "Many Roads from Pasture to Plate: a Commodity Chain Approach to China's Beef Trade, 1732–1931," *Journal of Global History* 14, 1 (2019): 22–43.

²³ "McDonald's Faces Declining Sales In Asia After China Food Scandal," *Forbes*, Sept. 11, 2014. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2014/09/11/mcdonalds-faces-declining-sales-in-asia-after-china-food-scandal>.

²⁴ Fred Gale, *Development of China's Feed Industry and Demand for Imported Commodities*, FDS-15K-01 Economic Research Service/USDA. https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/outlooks/36929/55490_fds-15k-01.pdf.

²⁵ For a similar case, see Demi Simi and Jonathan Matusitz. "Glocalization of Subway in India: How a US Giant Has Adapted in the Asian Subcontinent," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, 5 (2017), 573–85.

²⁶ By the author's own memory, a McDonald's chicken sandwich with fries and drink in 1998 cost about 18 yuan, the same price as a sandwich alone today. In that same time, China's per capita GDP has grown roughly by a factor of ten. On dining as a marker of middle class status anxiety, see Jin Feng, *Tasting Paradise on Earth: Jiangnan Foodways* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).