

Globalized Childhood? Kentucky Fried Chicken in Beijing

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The social ramifications of transnationalism—the flows of ideas, products, people, capital, and technologies across national boundaries—have become the staple of recent anthropological literature. This interest is based largely on the high visibility of cultural artifacts from transnational corporations, which have left people in very different parts of the world, as one scholar puts it, “increasingly wearing the same kinds of clothes, eating the same kinds of food, reading the same kinds of newspapers, watching the same kinds of television programs, and so on” (Haviland 1994:675). The growing power of such corporations is sometimes considered a major cause of cultural disruption in developing countries, mutating local traditions beyond recognition. In this chapter, I argue that although there are now many visible markers of homogenization because of a more integrated global system of production and consumption, there has also been a dramatic expansion in particularism, as competing claims for cultural identity and authenticity have become more strident. This particularism can be seen in the ways some of the most crucial decisions affecting transnational corporations are made and then modified within the confines of local societies, through the participation of local people and in adjustment to local social changes.

To elaborate on this argument, I will examine how the US-based Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) catered to Beijing children in the 1990s. This focus is mainly warranted by two considerations. First, fast-food restaurants like KFC have been especially successful among children in large Chinese urban centers. Children are often the decision-makers in determining whether an urban family will patronize a KFC restaurant. Moreover, what children eat is a fundamental part of their socialization, and changes in children's dietary patterns are indicative of changes in their larger social environment (Beardsworth and Keil 1997). In addition, children's consumption of both material and cultural goods is becoming a fiercely contested

domain in many parts of the world and among various social groups seeking to implement their particular visions of the future by shaping childhood experiences (Stephens 1995). As an organizational actor, KFC is a part of the social life of Beijing children and influences Chinese experiences of childhood by becoming part of local Beijing life. Before I set up the ethnographic context of KFC in Beijing for analysis, let me make a few remarks about this chapter's theoretical framework.

Transnational Organizations and Chinese Children

Transnational organizations, which provide institutional support for the movement of people, goods, and ideas across national boundaries, have existed as long as there have been nations (Wolf 1982; Hannerz 1992; Huntington 1973). However, in the past such organizations were less influential than other social organizations, for example, the nation-state itself, in shaping the social practices of local communities (Nye and Keohane 1972). Today, local communities are more fully integrated by global communication networks, world trade and market networks, and labor migrations into a global system of interdependence (Sassen 1996; Appadurai 1996; Featherstone 1990). As a result, understanding the social fabric of everyday life now more than ever requires an understanding of how transnational organizations connect local communities with global forces of economic development and social change (Moore 1994, 1987; Strathern, ed., 1995).

In social analyses of transnationalism, scholars have emphasized one of two perspectives. Some studies have focused on what the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern calls the "concrete models of globalization" (Strathern, ed., 1995:159), that is, the structural implications arising from the "world capitalist system" (see, e.g., Wallerstein 1974; Frank 1969; Vallier 1973; Hanson 1980). Studies based on this type of organizational analysis are often problematic because they assume a high level of cultural homogeneity in the organizations being studied and a high degree of passivity in the adaptation by the host cultures. Also, these studies do not fully account for the influences of informal networks within institutional frameworks. A second group of studies has focused on the cultural implications of transnational processes, in such areas as development, public culture, and diaspora identity (see, e.g., Morley and Robins 1995; Gupta 1992; Escobar 1995). However, these studies tend to underestimate the political asymmetries between nation-states and their ability to define and shape transnational issues. They also tend to homogenize the various transnational institutions such as world religious organizations and international business companies.

In this chapter, I will try to avoid the aforementioned problems by combining the strengths of both perspectives and by focusing concretely on a single transnational organization. My basic approach is identifying Kentucky Fried Chicken in Beijing as an entry point of transnationalism into a specific city and, I might add, literally into the gastronomy of the local people. This approach requires an examination of KFC restaurants in Beijing as socially constructed localities of consumption,² the commercial success of which depends on understanding how the local society operates. Since the opening of the first Beijing branch in 1987, KFC operations in China have been gradually "domesticated," in the sense that a formerly exotic, imported food

has been transformed into a local process by catering to innovation and to a growing market. Localization also means that once-foreign KFC is now a part of local life.

Whether or not we talk about it from a local perspective does not mean that it is not a local phenomenon, but it does result in a new measure of "dislocalization." Children have placed less-than-enthusiastic, bearded, elderly parents in favor of "Chickadee" developed for the further discussion of Chinese migration and KFC in Beijing.

The first KFC restaurant and highly visited Zedong Mausoleum in the world's largest KFC drew between 100 and 200 KFC restaurants in Beijing, located in cities throughout the world. KFC is a source of profit for PepsiCo, Inc. in East Asia (KFC, 1995). It was investing in the number of KFC restaurants.

My study of KFC during the following Saturday afternoon popular shopping two children create their preference for the green.

It was a busy day for children and had

has been transformed into a familiar and even intimate type of cuisine. This domestication process bears the accumulative effects of "localization," which in this chapter refers to innovations and modifications made by KFC in reaction to local competition and to a growing understanding of the special place of children in urban China. Localization also refers to the transformed attitudes of KFC patrons, whereby the once-foreign KFC product is incorporated into everyday social life.³

Whether or not they have actually eaten at KFC, Chinese boys and girls know about it from various sources, including television and classmates. This awareness does not mean that an opportunity to eat at KFC is equally available to all children, but it does result in KFC's becoming a desired taste, a lifestyle aspiration, and even a measure of "distinction" (Bourdieu 1984:6).⁴ In addition, catering to Chinese children has placed special demands upon KFC, one of which originates in the children's less-than-enthusiastic response to KFC's most recognizable symbol – the white-bearded, elderly-looking Colonel Sanders. Chinese children rejected this figure in favor of "Chicky," a youngish, fun-loving, and child-specific KFC icon specifically developed for the Chinese market and introduced there in 1995. Chicky will be further discussed below in analyzing the roles of children, parents, schools, and Chinese mass media in the localization of a transnational implant such as KFC in Beijing.

Chicky or Colonel Sanders?

The first KFC restaurant in China opened in November 1987 at a heavily trafficked and highly visible location at the Qianmen area of Beijing, just south of the Mao Zedong Mausoleum and Tiananmen Square. At that time, this Qianmen KFC was the world's largest fast-food restaurant, seating 500. In its first year, the Qianmen KFC drew between 2,000 and 3,000 customers a day, and subsequently set numerous KFC records. In 1988, for example, it fried 2,200 chickens daily and topped all KFC restaurants in turnover at 14 million yuan. By 1994, KFC had seven restaurants in Beijing, located in high-volume tourist and shopping areas, and 21 other restaurants in cities throughout the country. The KFC restaurants in China became a major source of profit for the international restaurant division of KFC's parent company, PepsiCo, Inc. Based on its success in China, as well as on its overall achievements in East Asia (KFC Asia-Pacific in 1993 provided more than 22 percent of all KFC sales, including those in the domestic United States market), KFC announced in 1994 that it was investing an additional \$200 million over the next four years to expand the number of KFC restaurants in China to 200.

My study of KFC in Beijing began in 1994 and continued with visits to Beijing during the following four years while I conducted research in southern China. On a Saturday afternoon in the summer of 1995, I visited a KFC restaurant in Dongsì, a popular shopping and dining area in downtown Beijing. Inside the restaurant's foyer, two children crowded around a KFC-uniformed "children's hostess," trying to tell her their preferences in "flying sticks" – a toy children can spin to make fly. "I don't want the green one, I want the red one," one boy shouted.

It was a busy afternoon for the hostess, as she stood by the door, greeting all the children and handing out flying sticks to each child. She had been standing for

several hours, but her easily recognized KFC uniform, the trademark red-and-white shirt with black pants, looked crisp and clean, as if she had just put it on. She hesitated in exchanging the boy's toy. His companion also wanted a red one too, in place of the yellow one. Not wanting to disappoint the children, she reached into her bag and brought out two red ones and gave them to the children. They scampered happily back to their tables, and the hostess, having satisfied two more children, turned to look for others in need of a toy or a smile.

KFC, like other fast-food restaurants, has discovered that children love eating at its restaurants and are its regular customers.⁵ Adult customers at its Dongsi branch, who most often came with their families, told me that they visit KFC mainly because their children like it.⁶ Parents, when asked what they thought about the food in comparison with other fast-food choices, said that they themselves did not really care which fast-food restaurant they patronized, but that their children chose to come to KFC. Their impression of KFC as a place primarily for children was in line with the company's own promotion of itself among children in China as a "fun and exciting place to eat." This is why the company added special hostesses for children.

The most salient symbol of this focus on children is Chicky, known in Chinese as *Qiqi*, a cartoon character that KFC hopes Chinese children will associate with KFC. Chicky is a white-feathered chicken dressed in big red sneakers, red-and-white striped pants, a red vest marked with the initials KFC, and a blue bow-tie. His blue baseball cap (also with KFC logo) is worn pulled to one side, as is the rage in hip-hop pop culture of the United States; Beijing children see such images in music videos regularly aired on local television. Chicky embodies what KFC hopes is the dining experience of its younger clientele. He is obviously fun-loving, as he winks and dances around, with his baseball cap askew. Chicky is exciting, as he waves from his plane in one restaurant mural. But he also works hard in school. On a back-to-school pencil case given to customers ordering the KFC children's meal in August 1995, Chicky exhorts the young customers to "study hard, play hard" (*renzhen xuexi, kaixin youxi*).

The Chicky character provided a strong contrast to Colonel Sanders, the dominant symbol of KFC on its arrival in China in 1987 – whose statues stood like guardians at the entrance of the first Beijing restaurant. It gradually became clear to local managers that Beijing children had problems relating to the Colonel. They identified him as an elderly and dour grandfather, with his white suit, white hair, and goatee. One general manager reported that children would come into KFC restaurants saying "Grandfather sent us." Managers at KFC's regional headquarters in Hong Kong decided to develop Chicky to set a more playful tone for the place.⁷

The physical layouts of KFC restaurants in Beijing also have been designed with children in mind. Many KFC restaurants are built with a play area for their young customers (though not the Dongsi restaurant, due to space limitations). Furniture is built with children's small scale in mind; the sink for hand-washing is low enough that most six-year-olds can use it without assistance. Also, a space is set aside for a childhood ritual only recently introduced to China, the birthday party. The Dongsi KFC had a raised seating area on the second floor, separated from the other tables by a wooden railing. On one wall, a mural depicted Chicky singing "Happy Birthday" and kicking up his heels. The area could seat about 56 customers, and for birthday parties it was decorated with balloons.

During my visits to restaurants, including parties, and staff were often asked to help celebrate, especially "little friends" who were becoming a new trend in Chinese cities where firms were finding new consumer markets.

Eating K

The KFC restaurant had 250 people. The restaurant had a wide variety of people waiting, people in polo shirts, people in collared polo shirts, people in mob caps that crowd the restaurant had a less-steel counter, a takeout window, an environment, which was comparable to a restaurant with a coleslaw, sodas – regular two-chicken went for around many people gathered, crowd clustered, signs pointed out. Upstairs was a large room, pointing to another area, employees were in the walking area, restaurant. On the second floor, at least one elevator, restaurant was built.

Across the street from the restaurant, *Ronghuaji* in China. There was a hostess who opened the restaurant, but the menu did not have a chicken cheaper (8.80 yuan for some vegetables) wrapped chicken.

During my visits to Beijing between 1994 and 1997, I found that fast-food restaurants, including KFC, were becoming desirable places for children's birthday parties, and staff members and areas within the restaurants were specially designated to help celebrate these events. Partygoers included parents, relatives, and especially "little friends," as children are often called in China. That KFC restaurants were becoming an integral part of conspicuous consumption in the celebration of children's birthdays is one of many indications that youngsters in Beijing and other Chinese cities were acting as consumers in their own right. Chinese and Western firms were finding more commodities specifically designed for and targeted at this new consumer market.

Eating Kentucky Fried Chicken Versus Glorious China Chicken

The KFC restaurant in Dongsì was a two-story establishment, seating around 250 people. The neighborhood has long been an active market area and is home to a wide variety of retail outlets. On a summer Saturday in 1994,⁸ I saw a line of people waiting patiently to be admitted by a restaurant employee wearing a pink-collared polo shirt with the KFC logo. This orderly scene starkly contrasted with the mobs that crowded around nearby bus stops, pushing and shoving to board. The restaurant had large windows allowing passersby to see into the kitchen; the stainless-steel counters and tiled floors reflected high standards of cleanliness. There was a takeout window, for those on the move in Beijing's new fast-paced entrepreneurial environment, with a full menu and pictures of selected items. The menu was comparable to American KFC restaurants, with fried chicken, potatoes and gravy, coleslaw, sodas – including Pepsi Cola, of course, as KFC is a PepsiCo subsidiary. A regular two-chicken-piece meal cost 17.10 yuan (\$2.14), while a children's meal went for around 8.80 yuan (\$1.10). Inside the airconditioned, brightly lit restaurant, many people gathered around the counters to place their orders, while another crowd clustered around the two sinks toward the back of the restaurant, where signs pointed out the sanitary facilities where customers could wash their hands. Upstairs was a larger seating area, with windows overlooking the street and signs pointing to another set of sinks where patrons could wash up. Uniformed KFC employees were constantly wiping counters, emptying garbage cans, and mopping the walking areas – no easy task given the stream of people walking through the restaurant. On this day, the place was crowded with families – nearly every table had at least one elementary schoolaged child. Managers said in interviews that the restaurant was busy serving an army of children almost every weekend.

Across the street from the Dongsì KFC was "Glorious China Chicken," or *Ronghuaji* in Chinese. Here, too, there was also a line, but it was much shorter. There was a hostess, too, but unlike the one at KFC, she looked bored as she smiled and opened the door for customers. The *Ronghuaji* restaurant was also air-conditioned, but its decor was more reminiscent of a night club. Although the menu did not have as much variety as KFC's, a standard meal was considerably cheaper (8.80 yuan, or \$1.10) and the customers got more food (fried rice, soup, and some vegetables). There were also alternatives to fried chicken, such as baked paper-wrapped chicken. Draft beer, a popular item in Beijing restaurants this summer, was

also available here. Both the food and the service seemed more "Chinese"; one patron complained in a letter to the editor of a local newspaper about the absence of bathrooms to wash hands after eating greasy chicken, bad service with rushed "hostessing,"⁹ and the manager's unpleasant attitude when the customer complained. Nonetheless, Ronghuaji staff (like those at KFC) emphasized cleanliness, or at least the appearance of cleanliness; Ronghuaji staff members were constantly mopping the floor and wiping counters. On that same Saturday afternoon, there were fewer families with children and more groups of young adults eating at the Ronghuaji than at the KFC.

Chicken Frying and Transnational Politicking

The differences between these two restaurants extend beyond such aspects as the age of their customers. Ronghuaji, a Chinese corporation set up in 1989, had strained to emulate the American KFC,¹⁰ whereas in fact KFC in China, as in many other countries, had been introducing changes to adapt to local consumer demands. Although corporate standards of quality, cleanliness, and management have been applied internationally by KFC, there is, in fact, no standardized way of selling chicken. In China, KFC has had to respond to the demands of different local actors (including many levels of Chinese government)¹¹ within a shifting political economy. Local managers are given a great deal of operational autonomy by Louisville, Kentucky (KFC headquarters), and Purchase, New York (PepsiCo headquarters), to determine the relationship between KFC restaurants and the Chinese government, as long as they achieve "results with integrity" – standards that are spelled out in the KFC Code of Conduct. This localization of authority, providing the means to respond quickly to consumer demand, may be the key to KFC's (and PepsiCo's) international success. PepsiCo has more than 25,000 units and annual sales exceeding \$25 billion (KFC accounts for more than 9,000 of those units outside the United States), and oversees the world's largest restaurant system. With the reopening of the Chinese market to foreign investment in the early 1980s, KFC became the first Western restaurant company to enter the People's Republic with the February 1987 establishment of the joint venture Beijing Kentucky Co., Ltd.¹²

Unlike many other American joint ventures in China, KFC launched its operations from the political power center, Beijing, instead of the economic centers of Guangzhou and Shanghai – a difference that Timothy Lane, who was KFC Asia-Pacific president at the time, called the key to KFC's success in China (Evans 1993). One result of this decision, however, was to link KFC's business in China to events in Beijing. For instance, in 1989 in Beijing, the reopening of KFC's Qianmen restaurant, adjacent to Tiananmen Square, occurred just one week after the military suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations in the square on June 3–4 sent many other foreign investors fleeing or sharply curtailing operations in China.¹³ After the crackdown, the KFC Qianmen restaurant was used by Chinese troops occupying Tiananmen Square. American popular consciousness of the failed democracy movement, stirred by its dramatic unfolding and then suppression on television, put many American businesses under domestic pressure to cease operations in China. However, KFC reopened its Qianmen restaurant, citing "contractual obligations." In this

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tense period of US-China relations, there was still an arena less constrained by state control that allowed KFC and its Beijing partners to continue doing business. According to Saskia Sassen (1996), this arena of global capitalism exists only with the complicity of states; in this case, China's commitment to modernization and economic development (and the American desire to expand the capitalist market) created the conditions for KFC to continue selling chicken. In other words, although transnational organizations have a degree of maneuverability in the arena of global capitalism, they are still greatly constrained by state involvement.¹⁴

KFC is very much decentralized in its operations. On the most local level, its restaurants are either franchises, joint-venture operations, or company-owned stores. Although the franchises and joint ventures retain greater autonomy from KFC control, even the company-owned stores have a good deal of latitude in the way they conduct their business. The devolution of the decision-making process in KFC is driven by the pressures of the fast-food business: chicken goes bad quickly, and there is little time for KFC staff to consult with superiors about decisions. Marketing plans are driven by local assessments of potential consumers and are also executed on the local level. In our discussions, KFC executives consistently recognized the heterogeneity of local markets.

KFC's flexible structure reinforces the attitude that there are many ways to sell chicken, and that for KFC to succeed in any given society it must be firmly grounded in that society. This is not to say that KFC restaurants are not supported by its transnational networks – Beijing's KFC restaurants draw heavily on PepsiCo's support services. In fact, with the 1995 restructuring of PepsiCo, KFC restaurants now share such services with other PepsiCo restaurants (including Pizza Hut and Taco Bell), with headquarters in Dallas, the home of PepsiCo's snack-food subsidiary Frito-Lay. However, local managers decide how to draw on these support services. They remain important decision-makers in day-to-day operations and in planning of local strategies.

"Cock Fight": Competing and Learning

With the success of the Beijing KFC restaurants, Chinese companies in other major cities such as Shanghai sought to form joint-venture operations with KFC; after 1988, more than 100 companies across the country wanted to open KFC restaurants (Hua 1990). With plans by a Shanghai group to open a KFC in 1989, as the story goes, two Shanghai entrepreneurs went to Beijing to see what was behind the "KFC Fever." After waiting for more than an hour in line at the Qianmen KFC, they gave up and went to the Dongsì KFC, where they were able to taste some fried chicken.¹⁵

They concluded that the reasons for KFC's success in Beijing, in addition to advanced processing, quality assurance, and management techniques, were tied to the region itself: northerners were used to eating foods similar to the standard KFC fare, such as potatoes and bread. These two entrepreneurs decided that they would emulate the social and technical practices of KFC, but for Shanghai they would offer fried chicken that was more appealing to the southern Chinese palate. In 1989, they opened the Ronghuaji restaurants in Shanghai to compete head-on with KFC. Chinese newspapers (see, e.g., Qian and Li 1991; Niu 1992; *Liberation Daily*

1990) picked up on the rivalry, labeling it a "cock fight" (*dou ji*), and praised Ronghuaaji for scoring its first victory when, in February 1990, under competitive pressure, KFC reduced its prices. This Geertzian "deep play" became a symbol of the cultural struggle between local Chinese foodways and the American fast-food invaders.

With the opening of a Ronghuaaji in Beijing in Dongsì in October 1992, the "cock fight" story changed tenor, and instead posed the problem in terms of adapting to a new lifestyle; namely, what are the social costs and benefits of a fast-food culture? Ronghuaaji's success in competing with KFC demonstrated that Chinese entrepreneurs could employ Western technology and create an industry with "Chinese characteristics." Moreover, there had been a growing recognition that the mass consumption of KFC and other non-Chinese products served as a marker of China's and, more important socially, individual consumers' success in the world market (Wen Jinhai 1992). Later articles (see, e.g., *Beijing Bulletin* 1994a, 1994b) commenting on the "cock fight" noted that KFC was changing its strategy as domestic conditions changed. For example, when the first KFC restaurant opened in China in 1987, 40 percent of the raw materials for its menu were imported. By 1991, thanks to the local development of the fast-food industry, only 3 percent of the raw materials had to be imported – namely, the Colonel's eleven secret herbs and spices.

These assertions of China's successful adaptation of Western business techniques, made in different ways by entrepreneurs such as the Ronghuaaji managers, Chinese joint-venture managers, and government officials, ring like a 1990s version of Chinese reformers' calls a century earlier of "Chinese learning for the essence, Western learning for utility" (cf. Wei and Wang 1994). The point is that KFC did not obliterate China's culinary traditions; instead it stimulated a local discourse on national heritage. Since Ronghuaaji opened its first branch in Beijing, competing explanations for the origins of fast food have been offered in the media coverage of the "cock fight." Some claim that the origins of China's fast-food industry can be found thousands of years ago in such foods as stuffed buns (*baozi*) and glutinous-rice rolls (*zongzi*); others trace the origins to more recent traditional foods such as spring rolls, fried dough sticks, and other foods that once could be bought on the streets of any market town. Others argue that fast food is an idea wholly imported from the United States, and is something unique to American culture that has spread throughout the world. Another claim is that fast food in China is linked to the recent explosion of economic development and increased personal consumption.

With the reforms begun in the late 1970s, all economic sectors including agriculture have experienced tremendous growth – resulting in increasing levels of individual consumption. One of the most cited reasons for patronizing fast-food restaurants is the desire to eat Western food – to have a taste of modernity. For Chinese visitors to Beijing, eating at a fast-food restaurant is part of the experience of visiting the nation's capital; the Dongsì KFC made this explicit, by mapping out KFC restaurants and tourist sites in Beijing on a large display outside the restaurant. Out-of-town visitors are readily distinguished from native Beijingers when they pose for family pictures standing next to a life-size statue of Colonel Sanders.

Whatever the origins of fast food in China, the beginnings of a fast-food craze in Beijing were apparent in 1984, when the first Western-style fast-food restaurant opened in the city's Xidan district. The Chinese-owned and operated Yili Fast Food

restaurant, which used a new technology involving the food served in a vacuum-sealed container for 1.20 yuan for a hamburger, was a success. At the same time, Huaqing restaurant, making Chinatown a major dining station, making China's first fast-food restaurant, making China's first fast-food preparation technology. The arrival of KFC in Beijing: high prices, high quality, high food restaurant: high prices, high quality. By 1994, fast food was a major part of Beijing: McDonald's, KFC, and others. Vie de France (French restaurant). All are marked by high standards of hygiene; the uniform food, is always high quality. These fast-food restaurants are about hygiene and the "cock fight," the food restaurants have become a major part of consumers a predictable large amount of food. Government agencies to cater to that whenever he visits, give him at least one providing free delivery orders of more than

The wide variety of food provided a space for non-Chinese cuisines on a menu. Beijingers, for example, With the maturation of a wide range of goods and services, Beijingers' sense of modernity (Beardsworth and Kitchin 1991) of Beijing residents marking their entry into modern life. One writer lamented: "by a rapidly advancing life. Perhaps it is worth has a chance to enjoy the production of a vast capitalist market and Western societies: 'China in all action' (Strathern 1991) different commodities producers to consumers idea that is gradually

restaurant, which used Donald Duck as its symbol, claimed to be "the first step in solving the food service problem."¹⁶ The restaurant charged 1 yuan for a hot dog, 1.20 yuan for a hamburger, and 4 yuan for fried chicken with french fries. About the same time, Huaqing Snack Food Restaurant opened across from the Beijing railway station, making Chinese-style fast food. Both of these early ventures stood out from other Chinese restaurants that simply served food fast by using updated food-preparation technology imported from abroad – Hong Kong and the United States. The arrival of KFC in 1987 further defined the characteristics of the modern fast-food restaurant: high standards of hygiene and a standardization of food quality and menus. By 1994, fast-food restaurants, both Chinese and foreign, had multiplied in Beijing: McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Brownies (Canadian), Café de Coral (Hong Kong), Vie de France (French), Yoshinoya (Japanese), Million Land House (Chinese), and so on. All are marked by standardized, mechanized cooking and an explicit concern for hygiene; the uniformed staff member mopping the floor, no matter what the style of food, is always highly visible in Beijing fast-food restaurants. The flourishing of these fast-food restaurants coincided with a growing concern among Beijing residents about hygiene when eating out. In summer 1993, soon after the outbreak of the "cock fight," there was a food-poisoning scare in Beijing. KFC and similar fast-food restaurants had the advantage in this situation of offering anxious Chinese consumers a predictable product. Furthermore, with the ability to reliably produce a large amount of food, KFC has also been commissioned by businesses and government agencies to cater large banquets. An American economics professor recounted that whenever he visits Beijing, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is sure to give him at least one banquet with KFC products. In summer 1994, KFC began providing free delivery within central Beijing (inside the city's Third Ring Road) for orders of more than 500 yuan (\$62.50).

The wide variety of fast-food restaurants with international links like KFC have provided a space for Beijing residents to exercise choice: whether sampling exotic, non-Chinese cuisines, choosing which style of fast food to eat, or selecting items from a menu. Beijingers, for the most part, no longer struggle just to obtain life's necessities. With the maturation of the economic reforms, they can now choose from a wider range of goods and services. The new phenomenon of food "neophilia" reinforces Beijingers' sense of being modern, of having progressed well beyond subsistence (Beardsworth and Keil 1997; Chapter 7, this volume by Maris Gillette). The ability of Beijing residents to choose, especially choosing to eat fast food, can be seen as marking their entry into modernity.¹⁷ At the height of the "cock fight" controversy, one writer lamented: "It is said that the pace of modern society has quickened. Pushed by a rapidly advancing way of life, people hardly have time to pant, let alone to enjoy life. Perhaps it is worth the sacrifice in quality to add to the quantity so that everyone has a chance to enjoy the fast-food culture" (Zhang Xia 1993). The accelerated production of a vast array of consumer goods and services, associated with the capitalist market and modernity, has fostered an ideology of consumer choice in Western societies: "Choice has become the privileged vantage from which to measure all action" (Strathern 1992:36). This ideology means more than having a number of different commodities to choose from; it emphasizes the shift of emphasis from producers to consumers. The former's profit depends on the latter's satisfaction – an idea that is gradually spreading in China's transition to a free-market economy.

Working with Schools and Finding Young Consumers

As mentioned earlier, KFC's most important Chinese customers have been children. To further its recognition among children, KFC has worked to develop partnerships with schools, teachers, and parents. Throughout China, KFC sponsors numerous children's sporting events, essay competitions, and other contests. These events have in turn helped KFC lure more of these young customers (and their parents) into its restaurants: KFC set a one-day sales record on June 1, 1993, International Children's Day.¹⁸ The journalist Susan Lawrence describes the welcome given in May 1994 to John Cranor, then president and chief executive officer of KFC, by 110 Shanghai schoolchildren. Dressed in white wigs, fake goatees, and string ties, they performed the "Colonel Sanders Chicken Dance" at a ceremony marking the opening of the world's nine-thousandth KFC outlet (1994:46). Schools, as KFC appreciates, have a major impact on the socialization of children and in defining ideal forms of childhood. But today's Chinese schools cannot be seen as the extension of the nation-state in shaping students into ideal citizens (in the eyes of the Chinese government) or as a homogeneous system defining cultural standards of childhood (cf. Shirk 1982). The variety of schooling options for Beijing children today reflects the increasing social disparities arising from the booming growth of the Chinese economy (Yan 1992, 1994). The emergence of private schools, catering to a new elite, suggests that Chinese children participate as subjects in these processes of social stratification but are also themselves symbolic objects for adults.¹⁹

It can be argued that KFC plays an important role in this stratification of Chinese childhood. Meals at fast-food restaurants, while an enjoyable family event from the child's perspective, are considered expensive by average consumers. In 1993, a typical meal for a family of three cost between 18 and 48 yuan, when the average monthly income of a wage-earner was about 400 to 600 yuan (Evans 1993:3). John Cranor of KFC described the company's customers as "aspirational consumers," people with enough disposable income to spend the money for a fast-food meal. However, with the enforcement of the one-child policy, Chinese parents are willing to spend more money on their "little emperors" (*xiao huangdi*) or "little suns" (*xiao taiyang*) for fast-food meals, snacks, and toys. Commentaries abound in the Chinese press on how parents and grandparents are focusing too much attention and too many resources on single children, spoiling them to the point that they grow up without discipline. The popularity of fast food, despite its expense, and changing patterns of consumption must be understood in light of these changes in children's social relationships.

KFC is only one of a number of foreign and domestic organizations competing for children's attention in China.²⁰ In summer 1994, Yoshinoya distributed prizes such as rulers with magnifying glasses to any customer who purchased at least 25 yuan worth of food. McDonald's (there is one across the street now from the Dongsì KFC) was the leader in the distribution of toys, in Happy Meals, and assorted other souvenirs; at the McDonald's on Wangfujing Street in central Beijing, there was even a separate counter for toy and souvenir purchases. Fast foods were not the only items that children were demanding; children recognize a whole range of brightly

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packaged snacks by brand name. In a *Beijing Weekly* article discussing changing food consumption patterns, one mother complained that "Every month we spend a third of our income on our child's food, and snacks maybe cover a larger percentage" (Qiu 1994:8). According to the same report, Chinese children spent (or their parents spent for them) \$1.25 billion in 1993 on snack food, a category that included KFC chicken.

Besides fast-food restaurants, there are a number of other domains where children and their parents can spend money today that are a recognized aspect of Beijing childhood. Video-game parlors (such as the Sega World in Qianmen) are scattered throughout Beijing's shopping districts, including the Dongsi area. Each game cost between one and two yuan in the mid-1990s. Just down the street from the Dongsi KFC were two "Mickey's Corner" stores, the local retailers of Walt Disney products. The Dongsi McDonald's was in the basement of a four-story department store filled with toys, computers, and other wares for children, and bookstores all along Wusi in central Beijing sold books, computer programs, and magazines to help children with their schoolwork. In a survey on children's consumption in Beijing, marketing experts James McNeal and Wu Shushan (1995:14; see also McNeal and Yeh 1997:45-59) discovered that urban children in China influence 69 percent of decisions about consumer purchases and have direct control (through allowances, gifts from parents and grandparents, etc.) of more than \$5 billion per year (25 percent of which goes toward the purchase of snacks).

Television is yet another medium that draws Beijing children's attention. Many non-Chinese children's shows (like *Captain Planet*, *G.I. Joe*, and *Inspector Gadget* from the United States and other cartoons from Japan) are part of the local experience of Beijing children. The influence of these shows is further reinforced with toys, clothing, and other products based on the show. Late-afternoon television is dominated by these children's programs, including locally produced children's game shows in which teams of children compete in various obstacle courses, athletic challenges, or information quizzes with children-only audiences screaming "Jia you" (literally "add oil," a phrase that translates into something like "Rah, rah" or "Go for it"). And many commercials airing during children's programming advertise drinks, snacks, computers, and other mostly local products targeted at young consumers.

Children also watch television shows not directly aimed at them as a group, including popular serial dramas, sporting events, musical shows, and news reports. These become part of the local experience, symbolic resources that children can draw upon for their own use.²¹ For example, in the summer of 1995, students from several Beijing senior and junior high schools, in conjunction with the China Wildlife Conservation Association, mobilized to save the Wusuli tiger from extinction.²² They set up booths throughout the city to publicize the danger of extinction and to solicit donations to support a wildlife center. After seeing the students on the news, I went to a shopping area, where I saw young people wearing "Save the Tiger" T-shirts, handing out flyers, and collecting money. When reinforced by children's television shows like *Captain Planet* that promote a similar message, and by news reports of other children's social activism around the world, this kind of campaign becomes part of the socialization of Beijing children in the 1990s.

Conclusion: Globalized Childhood?

The most telling marker of KFC's localization in Beijing is that the company eventually lost its status as a "hot topic" (*remen huati*), meaning that it was no longer a major focus of cultural wars. By 1995, "cock fight" articles had become less salient in media discussions, and Glorious China Chicken had expanded, albeit slowly, with food choices that appealed more strongly to young adults. The novelty of "having a taste of modernity" faded. KFC patrons were more likely to say they ate there because it was convenient (*fangbian*), the children liked it, and it was clean. Symbolically, the Dongsi KFC no longer enjoyed equivalency with Beijing landmarks. In August 1995, the KFC map marking KFC restaurants and Beijing's tourist sites was replaced by a new one sponsored by a Chinese non-fast-food restaurant, which omitted any mention of KFC. Eating at KFC represented a change of eating habits. One man who was accompanied by his young daughter told me, "You can't make KFC chicken at home," in a manner suggestive of Americans eating take-out Chinese dishes. It was still a treat, but not a special one. To some Chinese, particularly older people, KFC products still would "taste foreign," but for children, KFC simply tasted good.

As KFC gained more experience in China, it expanded its offerings to continue attracting customers and to distinguish itself from the growing number of fast-food alternatives. Being Western was no longer enough to ensure success, as KFC became a routine part of the local environment. For example, in 1995, Beijing KFC restaurants offered a spicy chicken sandwich that was not available in KFC restaurants in the United States. With the proliferation of international fast-food restaurants, companies begun to stress the uniqueness of their products. An outlet of the South Korea-based Lotteria chain advertised the "Koreanness" of its fast food in a placard outside the restaurant. There was also a constant bombardment of Lotteria commercials on television, in Korean, showing scenes of happy South Korean customers. The menu highlighted Korean fast-food specialties, such as the bulgogi burger (barbecued beef) and red-bean frozen dessert. Beijing customers became more selective in their consumption, more aware of the differences among fast-food offerings.

In retrospect, Chinese children have played a key role in the "localization" of KFC restaurants, influencing many of the changes in KFC business tactics. KFC has become a fixture of the local environment in the sense that it is part of the local children's experiences and embedded in local social relations. In one sense, children do draw parents into KFC restaurants, to eat fast food, taste modernity, and have fun. In the process they are drawing their elders into an intersection of local society and transnationalism. The children's special relationship with KFC restaurants is reinforced by television shows and other popular media and by their schools, as each enhances awareness of the world outside China and the relationship between their lives and global capitalism.

But this is not a passive relationship in which a transnational organization like KFC dictates lessons to be mastered by the natives. Both local residents and KFC are linked in a network of social relations that include manifestations of the nation-state (through schools, bureaucracies, and so forth), the media, and rival fast-food

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restaurants like Ronghuaji. As a result, KFC has had to adapt to the expectations and demands of its customers in ways that are not necessarily standard throughout the world KFC organization. In this case, the "periphery" talks back to the "center." With the increased consumption of goods and services for children, KFC has had to ensure that people are interested and supportive of their message. Rather than reflecting a fixed set of practices originating in its world headquarters in Louisville or its regional headquarters in Hong Kong, KFC's branches in Beijing are the sites of consumption where transnational forces are "domesticated," that is, localized with the input of local people, including local managers and young consumers. The invention of the mascot Chicky is a case in point, in that this character was invented specifically for Chinese children. Staffing requirements have also been adjusted, to introduce hostesses catering to young people. Additionally, KFC's outreach programs linked to schools and children's holidays incorporate local employees' understanding of the Chinese educational system.

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Beijing children, just as children in most parts of the world, live in a deterritorialized space that can be viewed as a sort of globalized childhood culture; Chicky pencil-boxes with a pinball game on top can appeal to first-graders, whether in Beijing or in Boston. Fast-food restaurants like KFC are favorites among children, and like school they are part of children's social experiences. Many of the same cartoon characters continue to attract young television viewers in both China and the United States. The resulting "culture" is not a single, homogenized global children's culture, because these childhood experiences with consumption exist not in a vacuum but embedded in particular networks of social relations and historical contexts. Particularism becomes possible despite seemingly worldwide practices such as eating at KFC because specificity is produced in the consumption process. At first glance, KFC restaurants in China, as part of a transnational corporation, might seem to be one of those hallmarks of globalism that the anthropologist Daniel Miller refers to as the "new massive and often distant institutions" that catalyze the politics of differentiation (1995:290). On closer inspection, however, the success of KFC restaurants in Beijing has depended on its ability to become local, to become an integral part of Beijing children's social life.

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Modernist descriptions of transnational organizations, as discussed earlier, are clearly not reflected in KFC's own business structure. In its decentralized organizational structure, businesspeople are well aware of the organizational traits necessary to succeed in today's globalized economy and the shift of emphasis from production to consumption. Even with global linkages, international support networks, and an arsenal of both financial and symbolic capital, the ability of transnational organizations to succeed in various locations, whether in Beijing or Delhi, hinges on their ability to become intelligible to people in their local social context.

NOTES

- 1 Studies of transnational processes have also long existed in anthropology, as seen in the earlier concerns of diffusionist and acculturation theorists. Also see the work of Godfrey Wilson and others working out of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and Manchester

- University, and the analysis of earlier anthropological studies of transnationalism in Vincent (1990).
- 2 I refer to consumption as "a use of goods and services in which the object or activity becomes simultaneously a practice in the world and a form in which we construct our understandings of ourselves in the world" (Miller 1995:30).
 - 3 Following Appadurai's model (1996), localization is the result of the "work of the imagination." According to this model, social groups need to create specificity from a more universal set of abstract ideas or concrete things. In other words, localization is the translation of the social meanings of abstract ideas or concrete things from a general gloss to particular ideas, ideas that make sense in a social group's specific context.
 - 4 This is not to say that all Chinese children share a fixed standard of childhood, nor that their intentions or goals in employing such standards are universal. Instead, I am asserting that eating at fast-food restaurants has become a habitualized aspect of Chinese childhood experience.
 - 5 Raymond 1996.
 - 6 My two fieldwork visits in 1994 and 1995 both took place during the summer when school had let out, so non-weekend observations of customers with children are probably much higher than during the school year.
 - 7 Raymond 1996.
 - 8 Prior to 1994, the official Chinese work week was Monday through Saturday. In 1994, the work week was changed to six days one week, and five days the next. In 1995, the Chinese government officially changed to a five-day work week, Monday to Friday. The day that I am describing is an alternating five-day work week Saturday.
 - 9 "Hostessing" is a fast-food industry euphemism for staff encouragement of customers to eat quickly and not linger at tables. In this case, the staff member directly asked the person to leave his seat (Liang Hui 1992).
 - 10 The first franchise was sold by Colonel Sanders in 1952, and Kentucky Fried Chicken became incorporated in 1955. In 1969, Kentucky Fried Chicken went public, listing on the New York Stock Exchange. Kentucky Fried Chicken was acquired by RJR Nabisco in 1982 and then acquired by PepsiCo in 1986.
 - 11 The relevance of Ferguson's discussion of the state in this case is especially clear, where the state is seen not as a single, unified entity, but as a "relay or point of coordination and multiplication of power relations" (1990:272).
 - 12 "Colonel Sanders' Legacy." Public relations announcement, Kentucky Fried Chicken Corporation. Kentucky Fried Chicken contributed US\$630,000 of the initial \$1.04 million dollar investment (60 percent), with the Beijing Travel and Tourism Corporation contributing 28 percent and the Beijing Corporation of Animal Products Processing Industry contributing 12 percent.
 - 13 *South China Morning Post*, June 22, 1989.
 - 14 President Clinton's major critique of Bush's foreign policy was his soft line with the Chinese government after the Tiananmen Massacre. In 1993, Kentucky Fried Chicken waited until President Clinton announced his decision to extend the Most Favored Nation Treaty to China before announcing their plans to invest an additional US\$200 million in the People's Republic of China. This is an example of what Sassen describes as state complicity in the creation of a transnational arena, an arena that challenges traditional ideas of state sovereignty.
 - 15 The two entrepreneurs cited are Ronghuaqi manager Li Yucai and assistant manager Li Yaozhen (*Liberation Daily* 1990).
 - 16 *Hong Kong Standard*, April 16, 1984.
 - 17 McCracken (1988) asserts that the "great transformation" of the West involved not just an "industrial revolution," but also a "consumer revolution" that has shifted Western

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ideas about the relationship between the individual and society. McCracken's arguments are congruent with Harvey, Miller, Appadurai, and Strathern's discussion of postmodernity and the shift of emphasis from production to consumption.

- 18 Susan Lawrence, personal communication.
- 19 In addition to one-time "sponsorship fees" (costing as much as US\$3,600), annual tuition fees and room and board could be as much as \$1,550; considering that the average annual Beijing household income is between \$1,800 and \$3,600, it is obvious that these private schools are only for the well-to-do elite and upper middle class of China (Crowell and Hsieh 1995). Public schools also have large fees; for example, in Guangdong's Jiaoling county, many children could attend the top local high school only after paying a sponsorship fee of 8,000 yuan (approximately US\$964).
- 20 This competition for attention is similar to the role of "drawing attention to" in Stafford's analysis of Angang education/socialization (1995:11-12).
- 21 This argument is similar to Barth's (1987) discussion of personal uses of communal ritual symbols.
- 22 Although these are adolescents, they serve as "models" whom younger children aspire to emulate. However, further research is needed to better understand the dynamics between Beijing "youth" (*qingnian*) and "childhood" (*tongnian*).

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