

THEY'RE LOVIN' IT: HOW CHINA AND JAPAN TURNED AMERICAN FAST-FOOD INTO GLOBAL PHENOMENA

ZACHARY ZELLER

B.A. Candidate in History

Adelphi University, Class of 2024

Kentucky Fried Chicken arrived in Japan in the 1970s. McDonald's launched in China in the late 1980s. Both arrived during periods of massive social upheaval, sending shockwaves through the countries and corporations, creating an international and cultural legacy. Through analyzing the tactics and stories of Kentucky Fried Chicken in Japan and McDonald's in China, a pattern emerges. Both companies rode on the coattails of burgeoning Americana in the mid-late 20th century. However, once their success waned, both companies decided to shed some of their Americana to allow their product to match the East Asian markets. Thus, by using localization tactics to reposition their American brands, Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonalds were able to become global corporations.

Introduction: 'Twas the Night Before Christmas...

Christmas Eve is a day of traditions in America. Families gather, swapping gifts and celebrating the religious aspects of the holiday. Christmas songs are played and sung, laughs are had, Santa is tracked online, and crucially, for many families, a home cooked meal is devoured. A litany of food, including a massive Christmas ham or turkey and a medley of side dishes like yams, mashed potatoes, stuffing, and cranberry sauce, often accompanied by eggnog and alcohol, is laid out at the dinner table. Things are a little different in Japan. "Christmas isn't a national holiday in Japan...yet a bucket of 'Christmas Chicken' (the next best thing to turkey—a meat you can't find anywhere in Japan) is the go-to meal on the big day."¹ Every Christmas Eve in Japan, millions of people "trek with their families to feast at...the popular American fast-food chain KFC."² On the surface, this tradition is one of the embodiments of Western influence on Asian culture after World War II, representing the spread of American commercialism into East Asia. However, studying the trajectories of KFC and McDonald's in Asian markets reveals that these companies aren't merely American transplants.

¹ Annabelle Smith, "Why Japan Is Obsessed with Kentucky Fried Chicken on Christmas," *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 14, 2012.

² Ibid.

At the end of World War II, Japan was at the mercy of American occupation and restructuring, thrown from an expanding fascist regime to a recoiling occupied territory following the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. China was rebuilding from its lowest point, torn apart by civil war and recently besieged by Japan for the first time in its vast history. Japan and China took different approaches to modernization, turning towards capitalism and communism respectively. Though both countries worked towards American modernity, KFC and McDonald's could not be integrated into these cultures without modification. By shedding some of the Americana that made them initially exciting by localizing their marketing and sales tactics around East Asian cultural movements and family values, Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's created a unique formula that integrated the companies into Japanese and Chinese culture, allowing for the construction of globalized empires still sustained by massive profits today.

Prelude: The Suppressed Tradition of Japanese Fast-food

After the chaotic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, Japan was occupied by America, tearing down their autocratic government and embracing capitalism amid a republican restructuring. Meanwhile in China, years of brutal defeat and humiliation at the hands of both the West and the Japanese left the fledgling government in search of a new direction in the world, eventually turning them towards a disastrous couple of decades under communism. While Japan and China rebuilt and reimagined their societies, both eventually pushed towards westernization because of war and economic disaster, a new market was rising in America: the fast-food franchise. Beginning to dominate the American cultural and economic landscapes in the late '40s and early '50s, fast-food companies like Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's thought themselves as trendsetters, blending quality food service and cheap production, creating massive sales. This is mostly true—at least, for the American market. Historians are conflicted on the actual historical origins of fast-food in Asia, divided along geographical lines: though China was certainly introduced to fast-food by foreign companies after their era of collectivization, Japan already had forms of fast-food woven into its culture by the time Kentucky Fried Chicken made its dramatic entrance in 1970.

The article “Fast-food and Intergenerational Commensality in Japan: New Styles and Old Patterns” by John Traphagan and Keith Brown from *Ethnology* posits that Americana was not at the foundation of American fast-food's popularity in East Asia; rather, it was the timing of global expansion that prompted the Japanese to embrace McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, which laid the groundwork for its introduction to the rest of the East Asian region. They argue that “Whether better or not, fast-food and its various expressions for most Japanese no longer can be used to

experience, relate to, imagine, or construct the other. McDonald's is the largest chain restaurant in Japan, and Japan has the second largest number of McDonald's stores in any country."³ While America may have provided the fast-food companies that evolved into global juggernauts through their introduction to the East Asian market, fast-food itself was already present in everyday Japanese culture.

Stand-up buckwheat and wheat noodle shops at train stations, various street vendors selling steamed sweet potatoes slices of chicken served on a skewer, roasted sweet corn on the cob, and the boxed lunches bought at trains or from vendors walking through the aisles of trains...have long provided quick meals and snack for the Japanese. Indeed, one of the oldest fast-food chains, Yoshinoya, has been in business since 1899.⁴

They also reference the phenomena of conveyor-belt sushi shops, called "the ultimate in quick food in Japan, combining traditional and modern characteristics of fast-food delivery."⁵ The existence of these shops is a massive counter to the narrative of westernization being the reason for American fast-food's success in the area. The idea that Japanese culture was completely alien to fast-food culture is a narrative that works well for the corporate storyline, but the truth is that though the terminology for it was retroactively added to the Japanese lexicon, fast-food was already a part of Japanese history.

The English term "fast-food" (*fuasuto fudo*) has been adopted into Japanese. The food to which it refers, however, or the shops where the Japanese version of fast-food can be bought and consumed, are varied. Notably, they are not necessarily considered to be of American or other foreign origin...McDonald's, for example, is considered by many young and middle-aged Japanese alike to be a Japanese company.⁶

Another historical example of Japanese fast-food is the practice of *ekibentō*, or *ekiben* for short, as covered by Paul H. Noguchi in his own *Ethnology* article, "Savor Slowly: *Ekiben*: The Fast-food of High-Speed Japan." The term directly translates to station box lunch, and is heavily tied to the rise of trains. However, Noguchi is quick to

³ John W. Traphagan and L. Keith Brown, "Fast-food and Intergenerational Commensality in Japan: New Styles and Old Patterns," *Ethnology* 41, no. 2 (2002), 132.

⁴ *Ibid*, 120.

⁵ *Ibid*, 121.

⁶ *Ibid*, 121.

point out that portable food has its roots far deeper in Japanese culture than one might imagine.

In *Tale of Genji* diners enjoy *tojiki*, portable rice balls meant to be eaten outdoors. Its *umeboshi* (sour plum) in the center helps preserve the rice, stimulates salivation, and has medicinal properties—citric acid aids digestion. Apparently, Oda Nobunaga distributed the first boxed *bentō* of rice balls and pickles during the Warring States Period (1477-1573) as did Takeda Shingen for his marching warriors (*The East* 1991:52) Richie (1985:70-71) notes the existence of *bentō* in pre-Edo painting.⁷

His direct analysis of *ekiben* itself comes largely from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when rail lines were first constructed throughout Japan. Though rail lines opened in 1872, Noguchi contends that “*ekibentō* can trace their humble beginnings to rice balls sold at Utsunomiya Station in 1885 priced at five *sen*.”⁸ Though Noguchi sees the similarities between American fast-food and *ekiben*, he notes some differences. While “a tour of an *ekiben* factory impresses visitors because of the precise movements of the production line workers and the care and dedication that each *bentō* is like every other on the conveyor belt,”⁹ giving the meals the standardization present in American fast-food, “whereas American fast-food ethos stresses uniformity of ingredients across great distances, the Japanese put value on local variations. In Japan there is a strong sense of place, so many books on *ekiben* discuss them by geographical region.”¹⁰ *Ekiben* emphasizes the importance of locality, culture, and freshness along with the speed that comes with fast-food. For decades, *ekiben* producers sought to emphasize their connection to Japanese society and culture in promotional campaigns aimed at foreigners, claiming the early forms of fast-food as a specifically Japanese phenomena. “In the old JNR days *ekiben* labels included the slogans ‘Discover Japan’ and later ‘Exotic Japan.’ ... When the railways were privatized in 1987, the *ekiben* shops affiliated with the East Japan Railway Company placed the campaign motto ‘Look East’ on their wrappers.”¹¹ *Ekiben* not only predates American fast-food, but also many aspects of modern Japanese culture. Noguchi states it best: “*Ekiben* are powerful symbols in Japan because they mediate the new age of speed in travel and the venerated past. *Ekiben* will survive in Japan as long as train travel remains a popular form of land transportation.”¹²

⁷ Paul H. Noguchi, “Savor Slowly: *Ekiben*: The Fast-food of High-Speed Japan,” *Ethnology* 33, no. 4 (1994), 319.

⁸ *Ibid*, 320.

⁹ *Ibid*, 324.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 323.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 326.

¹² *Ibid*, 328.

Historians agree that at the very least, elements of the fast-food industry already existed in Japan, with several different forms of fast-food prior to the arrival of Kentucky Fried Chicken that provided key information on Japanese culinary preferences. Boxed train lunches and standup buckwheat shops at train stations provided key context for where and when people wanted food on the go; conveyor belt sushi shops provided a model for sit down restaurant franchises; *ekiben* emphasized the importance of portability and marketing in fast-food. This history and understanding of the preferences of the Japanese audience would prove key to springboarding the success of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Part I: Kingdom Come: Arrivals and Initial Success

After World War II, Japan and China went through a period of industrialization and economic upheaval. Consequently, the relationship between Japan, China, and American fast-food companies became one of the ways of measuring the intersection of modernization and westernization. Japan and China had two different approaches to modernization. Japan modelled itself upon Western ideals of democracy, and China tried to modernize while retaining its identity as a collectivized society built upon Confucian ideals. In both countries, dozens of American fast-food restaurants began to open across the country. Before expanding internationally, this brand-new industry first had to prove itself to an American audience. As they achieved unprecedented levels of success, they grew into corporations, eventually developing loftier aims than conquering America; they wanted to conquer the world.

The Founder(s)

The first credited American fast-food restaurant, White Castle, was founded in the 1920s, but the industry really took off in the 1950s and 1960s, because of America's new highway infrastructure.¹³ During the 1950s, these restaurants helped propel the franchise system to mass popularity. Franchises allow investors to own individual restaurants, handling regular, day-to-day operations with employees, while the corporation handles overhead costs, like marketing and signing vendors, for a part of the profits. According to Chandler, this system is a massive reason for fast-food's domestic success, especially once companies began to seek franchises in urban areas. The easy replication and cheap cost of fast-food naturally leads to high profit margins, especially when compared to other common food industries.¹⁴

¹³ Anna Diamond, "A Crispy, Salty, American History of Fast-food," *Smithsonian Magazine* (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.), June 24, 2019.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Kentucky Fried Chicken opened its first franchise in 1952, when founder Harland Sanders, now known worldwide as Colonel Sanders, decided to turn KFC into a nationwide brand. He sold his original restaurant in Corbin, Kentucky, and went on a nationwide franchising spree.¹⁵ In 1954, Multimixer salesman Ray Croc visited McDonald's in San Bernardino and convinced owners Richard and Maurice McDonald, already keen on the franchise idea, to let him found McDonald's Systems Inc., promoting it to investors with the phrase "in business for yourself, but not by yourself."¹⁶

With business booming in America and the franchise system proving itself suited for further expansion, the eyes of American fast-food companies turned beyond America for further profit. Kentucky Fried Chicken expanded to Canada in 1953, opened its first establishments in the United Kingdom and Mexico in 1965. McDonald's opened its first international restaurants in Canada in 1967, and later added Costa Rica in 1970. These restaurants also expanded into then-current and former US territories. KFC's first Asian market was in the Philippines in 1967, while McDonald's had restaurants in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands by the end of 1970. American fast-food was attractive to other countries: quick and cheap to make, industry sustaining, and injecting American culture into foreign lands at the height of its popularity. If one could successfully bring an American restaurant chain into a new country, the ensuing success could be incredibly lucrative for country and corporation alike.

Japan: From Villain to Victim to Victor

Toward the end of World War II, Japan had a massive image problem: it was more than just the losing country at the end of the history's biggest war, but seen as, in part, responsible for over half a decade of terror. As Rinjiro Sodei wrote in *The Journal of American History*, "The historical fact is that Japan was an aggressor nation and perpetrated unspeakable atrocities. As a partner of Nazi Germany, the perpetrator of the Holocaust, Japan invaded first China and then Southeast Asia, causing immense misery to millions of innocent people."¹⁷ The global opinion of Japan was unabashedly negative, their authoritarian state decried and their savagery emphasized. By August 1945, it had long been clear that Japan would be unable to win the war, and that America would advance onto mainland Japan while Russia pushed into occupied Manchuria.

The detonation of two atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki almost instantly reversed this view. According to Sodei, "The strong sense of being

¹⁵ Kentucky Fried Chicken, "Our Heritage."

¹⁶ McDonald's, "Our History."

¹⁷ Rinjiro Sodei, "Hiroshima/Nagasaki as History and Politics," *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (1995), 1123.

victimized has been widely shared not only by citizens of the two cities but by the Japanese public in general. Many Japanese regard Hiroshima/Nagasaki as another Holocaust: civilian victims died horribly, and survivors are still haunted by their encounter with hell on Earth.”¹⁸ Though Sodei himself is against this narrative, pointing out that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were military cities and that “the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffered from the bombing does *not* absolve them from being a part of the aggressors.”¹⁹ America thus sought to help Japan rebuild its reputation by restructuring Japan into a close ally and global economic mecca.

Capitalism was already present in Japan, but Americans brought new ideas of republicanism in an effort to democratize the Japanese people. According to Masaru Tamamoto of *Daedalus*, American occupiers “were determined to break Japan’s militaristic and authoritarian state...Articles 1 and 4 (of the new Constitution) reduced the emperor to ‘a symbol of the state and unity of the people.’”²⁰ In short, “the occupiers destroyed the imperial state.”²¹ Japanese life had been transformed into a fusion of Japanese cultural traditions and American political and economic structure, which unpredictably coincided with a return to a kind of feudal living. Instead of emphasizing servitude to aristocratic lords, however, the focus shifted to company obligations, fighting economic wars of capitalist competition. According to Tamamoto, “in the early 1970s, the company came to be identified as the highest form of self-sufficient association. Supported by corporate lifetime employment, which became standard practice with the advent of growing prosperity, the interests of the company and the household seem to be seen as identical.”²²

This was a natural evolution of the Japanese firm. Anita D. Bhappu suggests that this culture came from the originally Japanese concept of *ie*, a collectivist, feudal idea placing the roof over the family. This combines with the principles of *dozoku*, the structure of the merchant family, to create what Bhappu posits is a traditional corporate structure for the family. For a brief period, the Meiji government instituted *zaibatsu*, Japanese industrial organizations structured around the family. However, the *zaibatsu* system was dismantled as part of the American occupation of Japan, reducing *zaibatsus* to a series of smaller interconnected companies.²³ This history of family as a business in Japan laid the perfect foundation for a corporate revolution in Japan, leaving networks in place for new businesses to start up while clearing space for them to grow into juggernauts of industry.²⁴ The traditional *zaibatsu* were demolished, but *zaibatsu* principles would be reformed under American leadership.

¹⁸ Sodei, “Hiroshima/Nagasaki,” 1123.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Masaru Tamamoto, “Reflections on Japan’s Postwar State,” *Daedalus* 124, no. 2 (1995), 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

²³ Anita D. Bhappu, “The Japanese Family: An Institutional Logic for Japanese Corporate Networks and Japanese Management,” *The Academy of Management Review* 25, no. 2 (2000), 412.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 409–15.

Konichiwa Fried Chicken

The legacy of the intermingling of family and business in Japan was perfect for the franchise system, and eventually, the newly reformed Mitsubishi Corporation saw an opportunity. According to Toru Aizawa of the corps' food sector, the company was seeking to "protect Mitsubishi's investment in grain imports by creating new markets."²⁵ Noticing the profitability of the broiler chicken industry in the US, Mitsubishi entered long negotiations with Kentucky Fried Chicken to bring the chain to Japan. According to the Mitsubishi Corporation's (now defunct) "Our Endeavors" page, "In order to secure a license to develop KFC business in Japan, an employee from MC (Mitsubishi Corporation) who was in charge of food-related business visited Colonel Sanders many times, and after four years of persistent negotiations, he finally got the nod."²⁶ After the excruciating negotiations, a test market was opened during the Osaka World Festival, which began on March 15, 1970, to ease the eleven herbs and spices onto the Japanese plate. "The store offered a 350-yen (\$2.66) combo meal, consisting of fried chicken, French fries and a roll. It was an instant success, with the store selling some 4,600 meals a day and posting average daily sales of 1.6 million yen (\$12,163.12, or \$94,308.07 when adjusted for inflation)."²⁷ With the formula proving successful, KFC Japan was officially established that July.

Even though Mitsubishi was confident in its product, KFC Japan initially struggled. The corporation was very candid about this, attributing it to a difference of opinion over where stores should be located with the American higher ups.

Based on KFC's experience in the U.S., the American headquarters proposed opening stores near suburban shopping centers. However, as the use of family cars had not yet become widespread in Japan, MC argued against that approach, saying it would be best to begin by establishing stores in downtown locations. In the end, the American headquarters was not swayed by these arguments and the suburban strategy was adopted.²⁸

The new stores adhered to American market strategies instead of adapting the brand to the Japanese market. In 1972, a new strategy was proposed: "Let's enhance the visibility of our stores by developing smaller outlets inside buildings in downtown districts and upscale residential areas. We'll give it one more shot—this time with

²⁵ Fox Butterfield, "Mitsubishi, a Giant of Japan, Branches Out," *New York Times*, June 23, 1974.

²⁶ "Our Endeavors: KFC Japan," Mitsubishi Corporation, April 30, 2013, 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 2.

locations that we believe will work.”²⁹ They opened one final test market in Kobe, which hosts a mix of Japanese and foreign residents. The store was a success and made 3.6 million yen (\$23,966.28, or \$179,844.48 adjusted for inflation) within the first month. The new strategy was employed country-wide, with stores opening in Tokyo and other major and minor cities. “In 1973, KFCJ opened its 100th store. Around this time, stores were reliably posting monthly sales of 3 million yen (\$22,805.88, or \$154,525.25 adjusted for inflation) and the company's performance stabilized.”³⁰

Part of KFC Japan's success must be attributed to their marketing efforts in the venture's first few years, including attaching it to the bluegrass movement sweeping Japan in the early 1970s. James P. Sterba, reporting from Japan for the *New York Times*, had a firsthand account of a country festival in October of 1971.

It sounded like West Virginia on a Saturday night, but it was Tokyo's Hibiya Park on a Sunday afternoon. ... It was American bluegrass music—Japanese style. For seven hours, 23 groups of fiddlers, guitar, banjo and mandolin pickers—most of them Japanese college students—entertained 1,500 fans —also mostly Japanese—in the Appalachian Hibiya Central Park Bluegrass Festival.³¹

Americans at the festival marvelled at the quality of the sound they heard, another extension of

the folk music boom in the early 1960's. Country and Western music soared in popularity here [in Japan] during the same time, and although the hardcore fans at the park did not speak much English, one could drop a name like Douglas Dillard [Tan American banjo picker] and six people would turn around.³²

The sponsor of the event? “Kentucky Fried Chicken of Japan, and the slogan for the day, printed on the programs, was, ‘Clean up air pollution, play more bluegrass.’”³³

Perhaps their most famous marketing campaign, though, began in 1974, with an aggressive and lucratively successful Christmas campaign.³⁴ K. Annabelle Smith chronicled the phenomena in an article for the *Smithsonian Magazine* in 2012. The campaign, known as “*Kurisumasu ni wa kentakkii!*” or “Kentucky for Christmas!”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Mitsubishi, “Endeavors,” 2.

³¹ James P. Sterba, “Bluegrass Twangs Over Tokyo ‘Mountains,’” *New York Times*, October 20, 1971.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Mitsubishi, “Endeavors,” 2.

found its origins, like the company itself, from outsiders. “When a group of foreigners couldn’t find turkey on Christmas day and opted for fried chicken instead, the company saw this as a prime commercial opportunity and launched its first Christmas meal that year: Chicken and wine for 2,920 yen (\$10)—pretty pricey for the mid-seventies.”³⁵ Despite the high prices, the intense marketing campaign, especially through TV advertising, was an instant success, and is still a major windfall for KFC nearly half a century later.

These days, KFC records its highest sales volume each year on Christmas eve. Back-office staff, presidents and execs come out to help move the lines along. Fried chicken and Christmas have become synonymous: KFC’s advertisements feature major pop cultural figures chomping on drumsticks, the company website even has a countdown until Christmas.³⁶

The Christmas campaign helped to cement Kentucky Fried Chicken’s place in Japan, in terms of both national consciousness and corporate profit. Other American fast-food chains, seeking to follow suit, either expanded their investment in the international market or began to invest abroad around the same time, though none has ever quite toppled the cultural foothold KFC has in Japan.

These ad campaigns have proved to be the backbone of KFC Japan’s lucrative success. According to *Statista*, a leading global statistics company, in 2021, Kentucky Fried Chicken generated \$2.83 billion in revenue for its parent company, Yum! Brands,³⁷ around \$662 million (or a little under 25%) of which was generated by KFC Japan.³⁸ The strategies implemented by higher ups, as suggested by the Mitsubishi Corporation, proved to be a success beyond many executives’ wildest dreams. But the success that KFC saw in Japan paled in comparison to what was yet to come in China.

McChina

After the unbelievable success of the Japanese market, other fast-food companies began expanding further into the East Asian sphere, including in South Korea and Taiwan. The proverbial white whale for these companies, though, was China. With its massive population and bustling cities, the market of China should have been able to be entered using a similar strategy as the one used in Japan, but this was not the case. The very idea of corporations existed counter to communist

³⁵ Smith, “Obsessed.”

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Unlisted, “Yum! Brands Revenue by Brand 2021,” Statista Research Department, March 29, 2023.

³⁸ Alexandru Arba, “KFC Japan: Annual Revenue 2022,” *Statista*, December 7, 2022.

principles, and even though communist strategies had tanked the Chinese economy, China was set on preserving these ideals.

This changed towards the end of the 1980s as Deng Xiaoping took power. Deng softened China's traditionally isolationist stance, especially with regards to economics. Famously going against the communist grain, Deng proclaimed "to get rich is glorious," steering China away from a collectivized economy. He allowed the arrival of international business in specially designated Special Economic Zones (SEZs), an effort which was widely praised as a progressive outlook on China's future. But something was still amiss. According to Dickinson, "By the mid-1980s, many in China, especially in academic and intellectual circles, grew frustrated at the slow pace of political change."³⁹ The next generation looked at the slow, dismal fall from grace of other communist states that fell victim to a malignant approach to reform and adaptation and recoiled in horror and fear. Tiring of their own government's party-first rhetoric, and weary of the global communist crisis, students began protesting for country-saving reforms on campuses around China, not seeking to end the communist system, but merely to reform and modernize it for the uncertain future.

In 1989, these protests came to a head with the disastrous Tiananmen Crisis of 1989. Andrew J. Nathan's "The Tiananmen Papers" in *Foreign Affairs*, a synthesis of the book with the same title, covers the crisis with insight provided by transcripts of conversations between senior party officials. Essentially, the Chinese government proceeded to teach a masterclass in unnecessarily escalating a dangerous situation to the world. They called student gatherings "a well-planned plot to confuse the people and throw the country into 'turmoil,'" stating, "Its real aim is to reject the Chinese Communist Party and the socialist system at the most fundamental level. This is a most serious political struggle that concerns the whole Party and nation."⁴⁰ These statements were intended to quell the protests and arrange people against them, but it accomplished the opposite. The protests exploded; "Many citizens felt that the editorial was too harsh...and that it was not helpful for resolving the problem," igniting "widespread sympathy and protective feelings for the students."⁴¹ Transcripts of conversations held between Chairman Deng Xiaoping and General Secretary Zhao Ziyang revealed that though government officials privately admitted that many of the protestors' demands aligned with the state's constitution, their priority was enforcing party rule.⁴² The result was devastating. As thousands of protestors gathered in Tiananmen Square, a group of party officials identified by the article as the Elders, decided to clear the area through force.⁴³ Though some, including Zhao,

³⁹ Dickson, "Introduction," 122.

⁴⁰ Andrew J. Nathan, "The Tiananmen Papers," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 1 (2001), 12.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴² *Ibid*, 13-14.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 29-34.

opposed using violence to quell protests and sympathized with some of the protestors' demands in the context of the democratization movement the party was trying to control, the order to forcefully clear the area came through on June 3rd, in a meeting with military officials. Martial law was declared. Shots were fired. Tanks rolled through the area. According to a 2017 BBC article, the estimated death toll, including civilians and soldiers, was 10,000, though the actual number is heavily disputed, especially by the Chinese government.⁴⁴

Beyond the body count, Tiananmen Square held consequences for Deng's prized economic growth. Jianying Zha notes:

China's economy just hadn't been the same since Tiananmen. Growth had cooled, foreign investment was down, and old-school Communists were making a comeback. So Deng emerged from his autocratic seclusion to resurrect an ancient Chinese custom: the *nan xun*, or 'southern tour.' Chinese emperors used the *nan xun* to assess the health of the empire at its outermost reaches, but the communist leader was going to the periphery to teach the center a lesson. Deng wanted to tout the virtues of free-market capitalism in China's restless south. It was no coincidence that he chose the coastal city of Shenzhen for his pulpit; its bustling downtown was burgeoning against the border that separated communist China from capitalist Hong Kong.⁴⁵

In turn, the government focused on reestablishing control throughout the country but was searching for ways to continue growth and win back some goodwill. At a stunning speech at Shenzhen in 1992, Deng proclaimed to government officials, "If we want socialism to triumph over capitalism... we should not hesitate to draw on the achievements of all cultures. We need to learn from other countries, including the developed capitalist countries."⁴⁶ The stage was set for the long awaited and arguably desperately needed arrival of some Western culture to prop up a state rehabilitating its image to its own people, and perhaps deliver the dagger America desperately sought to send to the heart of a longtime communist rival.

As in Japan, KFC would blaze the path for other corporations to follow. Little is known about whether the Chinese government or Yum! Brands initiated the dialogue that led to the chicken company's expansion into China, but in 1987, the first KFC was opened in Beijing, proving to be a wild initial success.⁴⁷ According to David Bell and Mary L. Shelman, Yum Brands! took a similar approach to their

⁴⁴ Unlisted, "Tiananmen Square Protest Death Toll 'Was 10,000'," *BBC News*, December 23, 2017.

⁴⁵ Jianying Zha, "Learning from McDonald's," *Transition*, no. 91 (2002): 18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ "KFC in China | About Us," Yum! Brands, accessed April 18, 2023.

effective Japanese strategy, focusing on developing growth through localizing to Chinese customs rather than relying purely on Americana.⁴⁸ However, it was McDonald's that truly represented the shift of the status quo away from the government's iron grip on culture through isolationism, and toward seemingly impending globalization. Despite the fact that "most investors were shying away from China because of the bloody 1989 crackdown on democracy demonstrators,"⁴⁹ McDonald's executives plowed forward, seeing the opportunity to aid a weakened Chinese state and, more importantly, their own self-interest by launching restaurants in China.

McDonald's began its operations in China in 1990 in the SEZ city of Shenzhen.⁵⁰ It turned out to be immensely successful, setting single-day sales records for all McDonald's prior to 1990.⁵¹ In 1992, the company opened its first franchise in Beijing. James L. Watson, writing the introduction for his collection of essays *Golden Arches East*, noted that, at the time, "McDonald's enter[ed] the Chinese scene during a critical time of class formation; for the first time since the communist victory of 1949, independent entrepreneurs and business people are allowed to operate openly."⁵² According to *The China Project*, a New York based news company focused on reporting on China:

Powerful forces were roiling the capital in 1992, and the Golden Arches were at the intersection of two of them: capitalism and the forced amnesia that the PRC leadership banked on to move past the legitimacy crisis and humanitarian disaster of spring 1989. Situated at the corner of Chang'an Avenue — less than three years removed from tanks rolling down that "Avenue of Eternal Peace" — and Wangfujing, its location could not have been more central. Not only was the store a few blocks from Tiananmen Square on the country's most important thoroughfare, but Wangfujing was, along with Nanjing Road in Shanghai, the commercial showcase of China's booming economy.⁵³

⁴⁸ David Bell and Mary L. Shelman, "KFC's Radical Approach to China," *Harvard Business Review*, August 1, 2014.

⁴⁹ Steven Mufson, "Big Mac Under Attack in Beijing," *Washington Post*, November 29, 1994.

⁵⁰ "30年历程," McDonald's Global, Accessed April 2, 2023.

⁵¹ Nicholas D. Kristof, "Beijing Journal; 'Billions Served' (and That Was Without China)," *New York Times*, April 24, 1992.

⁵² James L. Watson, "Introduction: Transnationalism, Localization, and Fast-foods in East Asia," *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*, ed. James L. Watson (Stanford University Press, 2006), 18.

⁵³ James Carter, "The First McDonald's in Beijing Was a Symbol of Engagement," *The China Project*, April 21, 2021.

A *New York Times* article focusing on the opening of the Beijing market, which listed the restaurant as having 700 seats and 29 cash registers, stated:

The new McDonald's ... is the biggest McDonald's restaurant in the world—and apparently the only one with a Communist Party secretary. By the time the new restaurant closed at 11 tonight, it had registered 13,214 transactions, setting a new one-day sales record for any McDonald's restaurant in the world. Those transactions represented about 40,000 customers, executives said.⁵⁴

The location easily attracted both employees and customers, despite a relatively high price point. “It’s a bit expensive to eat here at McDonald’s,” said Miss Zhang, a 20-year-old university student. “But I guess for a high-fashion restaurant like this, the prices are O.K.”⁵⁵

This perception of McDonald’s as high fashion extended beyond the idea that McDonald’s was trendy. According to Yunxiang Yan in his essay on McDonald’s in China in *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia*, one interviewee said, “The Big Mac doesn’t taste great, but the experience of eating in this place makes me feel good. Sometimes I even imagine that I am sitting in a restaurant in New York City or Paris.”⁵⁶ This profound statement highlights just how much Chinese culture had shifted since the era of Mao Zedong. Gone were the days of nationalist fervor that helped the population endure the harsh consequences of communism. Instead of dreaming of an idealized future of communist harmony, the Chinese common man now dreamed of a departure from their domestic reality, using a cheeseburger of all things at the site of the country’s most recent and notorious disaster to fantasize of what a better life was like abroad. McDonald’s popularity was cemented by its reputation as something global, carrying the banner for foreign investment into China, but also representing a connection to the outside world that was previously unfelt in Chinese life.

This friction between the globalizing ideals of McDonald’s and the Chinese citizens and the nationalist ideals of the communist government spilled over just two years after the opening of the Tiananmen Square restaurant. The Chinese government wanted to develop a commercial complex on the land within and surrounding the downtown Beijing McDonald’s. According to the *Washington Post*, McDonald’s was just three years into a 20-year lease and refused to give up its restaurant. Soon, “the 700-seat fast-food restaurant at a corner of the busy Wangfujing shopping street...[was] nearly surrounded by the rubble of neighboring

⁵⁴ Kristof, “Billions.”

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Yunxiang Yan, “McDonald’s in Beijing: The Localization of Americana,” in *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia*, ed. James L. Watson (Stanford University Press, 2006), 258.

buildings and corrugated construction fences.”⁵⁷ In a stunning rebuke of the Chinese government, the conflict lasted nearly two years. According to the Canadian Broadcast Company in a 2019 retrospective, “It wasn’t just any company being asked to make a change to its plans: It was McDonald’s, the iconic American burger behemoth.”⁵⁸ In 1996, McDonald’s agreed to move the restaurant 150 yards north after negotiations with the Chinese government. At that point, business was booming for McDonald’s, with “26 restaurants in Beijing and plans to open 3 more by the end of the year. It has more than 100 restaurants in 15 cities in China.”⁵⁹

Part of this success is due to the high standards Chinese McDonald's held themselves to. Though McDonald’s in America today is not always associated with cleanliness, in China, the restaurant felt like stepping into a whole new world. Watson’s “Big Mac Attack” article emphasizes this as the author discusses his first hand interpretation of the appeal of the Hong Kong McDonald’s: “wherever McDonald's takes root, the core product, at least during the initial phase of operation, is not really the food but the experience of eating in a cheerful, air-conditioned, child-friendly restaurant that offers the revolutionary innovation of clean toilets.”⁶⁰ To that end, according to Watson, McDonald’s in China is seen as an innovator and standard bearer of a modern Chinese society, and cleanliness became an integral part of their brand. “The chain's preoccupation with cleanliness has raised consumer expectations and forced competitors to provide equally clean facilities.”⁶¹ By emphasizing cleanliness and modernity, at least initially (both McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken have had to weather some sanitization scandals in China in the last fifteen years), McDonald’s was able to firmly establish itself as a haven for Chinese modernity and as the model for the future of the market in Asia.

Though McDonald’s does not currently have the store count that Kentucky Fried Chicken does (though McDonald’s has promised to surpass KFC by 2027, increasing their store count to over 10,000),⁶² it is still a force to be reckoned with in China.

At present, mainland China has become the second largest market for McDonald’s in the world, the fastest growing market in the world, and the largest franchise market in the world outside the United States. As of September 2022, there are nearly 5,000 McDonald's

⁵⁷ Mufson, “Big Mac.”

⁵⁸ Unlisted, “When the World’s Biggest McDonald’s Was Told to Close in China,” *CBC News*, November 30, 2022.

⁵⁹ Reuters, “McDonald’s to Move Beijing Restaurant,” *New York Times*, December 2, 1996.

⁶⁰ Watson, “Big Mac Attack,” 122.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 128-129.

⁶² Reuters, “McDonald’s Is Investing More in China to Tap ‘Tremendous Opportunity,’” *CNN*, November 21, 2023.

restaurants in mainland China, serving more than 1 billion customers each year and employing more than 180,000 people.⁶³

In 2022, McDonald's generated over \$23 billion in revenue globally,⁶⁴ and according to Ion Analytics, "McDonald's China posted a total revenue of CNY 19bn [billion] (USD 2.7 bn) in the first nine months of 2022."⁶⁵ What's arguably more impactful, however, is the symbolism that McDonald's has left in expanding to China. Ronald and friends championed a new wave of foreign investment in China, despite the negative connotations surrounding the Chinese government, while spearheading a burst of American culture and setting new restaurant-hygiene standards to a previously-closed-off communist nation.

Part II: Thy Will Be Done: The Global Implications of Success

The arrival of American fast-food to East Asia, specifically China and Japan, had further reaching implications than just financial success for the company and a set of trendy new restaurants for the countries. Though these expansions may have started out as simple business ventures, they turned out to be political and cultural movements for the individual and the corporation. Growing success beyond their roots began to separate American fast-food from America, and these corporations went from simple business ventures to international icons, titans of industry that were subject to their own rules of influence and credibility.

During this rise, both companies learned to walk the tricky line between globalization and localization, rather than fully embracing either approach. Sangeeta Ramarapu and Narender Namarapu and John E. Timmerman examined the differences between the two concepts and referred to definitions of the two terms set by Theodore Levitt, who is widely credited with popularizing the term globalization. He believed a global corporation treats the world as one market with little variation, while a localized corporation operates under the idea that products and procedures must be changed based on the variables of each location.⁶⁶ Ultimately, the road to McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken's destinies as globalized corporations under Levitt's definition was paved by making localization compromises where necessary.

⁶³ "30年历程," McDonald's Global.

⁶⁴ "Revenue of the McDonald's Corporation Worldwide from 2005 to 2022," Statista Research Department, March 22, 2023.

⁶⁵ Yiqing Wang, Wong Ka-Chun, and Eva Ng, "McDonald's China Backer Carlyle Weighs Exit," *ION Analytics Community*, March 30, 2023.

⁶⁶ Sangeeta Ramarapu, John E. Timmerman, and Narender Ramarapu, "Choosing Between Globalization and Localization as a Strategic Thrust for Your International Marketing Effort," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 7, no. 2 (1999): 97-98

The Politics of a Cheeseburger: The Localization Effect

Food, perhaps more than anything else in the world, is synonymous with culture and heritage. To sell one's food is to sell one's culture, and thus, the impact of American fast-food overseas lives far beyond a simple economic transaction. These companies represented a direct pathway to American culture, both for those consuming the food and those in charge of selling it. However, as time wore on, the American aspect of the product diminished as leadership sought to cater to the individual market they were in; thus, the localization effect.

The essay "McDonald's in Beijing: The Localization of Americana" from *Golden Arches East* covers the transformative nature of the arrival of McDonald's from the perspective of the common Chinese person. It's not the food that is attractive to the people; according to author Yunxiang Yan, "My ethnographic inquiry reveals that whereas children are great fans of the Big Mac and french fries, most adult customers appear to be attracted to McDonald's by its American style rather than its food. Many people commented to me that the food was not really delicious and that the flavor of the cheese was too strange to taste good."⁶⁷ A survey conducted by the author among Chinese university students found general dissatisfaction with the food that McDonald's produced.⁶⁸ So why did McDonald's take off in the country? "In the eyes of Beijing residents, McDonald's represents Americana and the promise of modernization. McDonald's highly efficient service and management, its spotless dining environment, and its fresh ingredients have been featured repeatedly by the Chinese media as exemplars of modernity."⁶⁹ In the same study, Yan reported that, "Most informants said they liked the atmosphere of the restaurant, the style of eating, and the experience of being there. In other words, the attraction of McDonald's is that it offers, not filling food, but a fulfilling experience."⁷⁰

The presentation of a global restaurant chain in the heart of Chinese life, especially in a time of tumult in one of the most restricted nations in the world, offered a safe way for people to protest the Chinese Communist Party. McDonald's represented the antithesis of the government's darkest moments and longest standing policies, emphasizing the progressivism that the Chinese government sought to portray itself as having. A news story on McDonald's during National Day in China in 1993 emphasized this impact, highlighting an elderly couple eating at the restaurant in Tiananmen Square almost 45 years after a photo was taken of them clearly malnourished in the same spot.

⁶⁷ Yan, "Localization" 45.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 45-47.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 41.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 47.

At first glance, this news story reads like the typical propaganda skit that one still finds in official Chinese media, with its constant play on ‘recalling the bitterness of old China and thinking of the sweetness of the new society.’ However, in this case it is McDonald’s—a capitalist, transnational enterprise—that symbolizes the ‘sweetness’ of current life. What is even more interesting, the headline of the story reads: ‘Forty-Four years: From *Tu* to *Yang*.’...In common usage, *tu* means rustic, uncouth, and backward, whereas *yang* refers to anything foreign (particularly Western), fashionable, and quite often, progressive.⁷¹

In the past, the suggestion of anything Western entering Chinese life would have been shut down immediately. The fact that McDonald’s is encouraged by state media is a stunning heel turn from a country that just over fifteen years earlier was in the midst of purging non-communist thought from its community.

McDonald’s was also able to generate success by marketing itself heavily as a haven for children. “In China, as in other parts of East Asia, the startup date for McDonald’s corresponds to the emergence of a new class of consumers with money to spend on family entertainment. Rising incomes are dramatically changing lifestyles, especially among young couples in China’s major cities. ... The Communist Party’s single-child family policy has helped produce a generation of “little emperors and empresses,” each commanding the undivided affection and economic support of two parents and (if lucky) four grandparents.”⁷² With more money than previous generations and fewer children to care for, parents could suddenly afford luxuries that were unthinkable in their childhoods. One such luxury became food, and McDonald’s immediately jumped on that bandwagon. They created a marketing blitz designed to make McDonald’s a reward for good behavior and a present for the new-to-China phenomenon of the birthday party. Kids, especially those belonging to middle and upper-class families, begged for their parents to rent out the local McDonald’s for parties.⁷³ In his essay “McDonald’s in Hong Kong,” Watson delivered firsthand accounts of the power of these children at a McDonald’s. “Many Hong Kong children of my acquaintance are so fond of McDonald’s that they refuse to eat with their parents or grandparents in Chinese-style restaurants or *dim sum* teahouses. ... In 1994, a nine-year-old boy, the descendant of illustrious ancestors... talked about his concerns as we consumed Big Macs, fries, and shakes at McDonald’s: “A-bak [uncle], I like it here better than any place in the world. I want

⁷¹ Ibid, 41.

⁷² Watson, “Big Mac,” 125.

⁷³ Ibid, 125-127.

to come here every day.”⁷⁴ The influence flipped the power dynamics of Chinese children and elders in the 1990s.

“Grade school children often possess detailed knowledge of fast-foods and foreign (non-Chinese) cuisines. Grandchildren frequently assure the role of tutors, showing their elders the proper way to eat fast-food. Without guidance, older people are likely to disassemble the Big Mac, layer by layer, and eat only those parts that appeal to them. ... Partly as a consequence, Hong Kong’s youth are among the world’s most knowledgeable and adventurous eaters.”⁷⁵

All these remarkable changes are attributed to the cementing of McDonald’s as a culinary standard to children and has reaped massive profits for McDonald’s while having profound cultural consequences. In short, “In China, the fast-food industry helped start a consumer revolution led by children.”⁷⁶

It all shows the double-edged political sword that American fast-food like McDonald’s came to represent for America and China. Though the allowing of American fast-food into China doubtlessly acted as a window for American propaganda, with the iconic logo and the Big Mac symbolizing the West, it also allowed for another perspective to slowly emerge. The longer McDonald’s was in China, the more it provided an opportunity for the Chinese government to claw out a much-needed image refreshment, twisting Western consumer culture to be a Chinese political statement. China used McDonald’s as a vehicle to present its people with a new narrative: China is better now than it was before, modern, fresh, and slowly becoming more international, by the will of the people.

Yan posits that “McDonald’s has become a caricature of its intended symbolic association. It represents a localized, Chinese version of Americana,” which he lists in five aspects: the presentation of McDonald’s as a Chinese company (due partially to 50% of the company being owned by a Chinese partner), the adaptation of a climate-controlled, “hang out” environment, an emphasis on Chinese family values, especially of the extended family, a heavy reliance on personal interaction with customers, and a focus on children as primary customers, the so-called “Little Emperor” phenomenon. These adaptations led to instant and then sustained success for McDonald’s in China, though perhaps limited the luster with which the American style brought them. As time went on, the differences between a Chinese McDonald’s and an American McDonald’s became clearer and clearer. The supposed connection between the restaurant and the outside world remained, but to maintain success

⁷⁴ James L. Watson, “McDonald’s in Hong Kong,” in *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia*, ed. James L. Watson (Stanford University Press, 2006), 101.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷⁶ Watson, “Big Mac Attack,” 126-127.

beyond being a fad, fast-food chains had to lean into what makes the Chinese market unique, engaging in localization. “In other words, to build on their initial success, McDonald’s restaurants must localize their foods (and some of their cultural associations as well), converting them into something that is routine and ordinary for Beijing residents, while somehow maintaining their image as a symbol of the American way of life.”⁷⁷

This principle holds true to KFC Japan. Though the cultural gap between Japan and America wasn’t nearly as wide as the gap between China and America, there was still enough of a difference to require adaptation. Adhering to the American business model did not produce sustainable success in Japan, and it was only after American executives began listening to their Japanese counterparts that the venture finally took off. According to Lance Heiko of Bryant College, in the 1970s and 1980s, Japanese culture shifted toward faster service speeds akin to Toyota’s Just-In-Time assembly model, which restaurants had to adapt to. Heiko lists seven of Toyota’s Just-In-Time techniques which promote a quick culture focused on efficiency and meeting exact demand instead of overstocking for later. For example, “Production Lead Time Minimization: The elapsed time from the arrival of raw materials, components, or subassemblies through processing and final assembly to delivery to customers is minimized in a plant using JIT.”⁷⁸ Heiko argues that this principle is seen in Japanese culture with their emphasis on speed in everything from transportation to restaurant service. “Consistent with this cultural feature and Japan’s urbanization is the speed of service in restaurants. Noodle shops, sushi bars, yakitori (chicken or other skewered foods) restaurants, and American fast-food franchises (McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Shakey’s, Dunkin’ Donuts, etc.) are all designed for fast service.”⁷⁹

The degree to which these companies are seen as American has dwindled over time. In their overview of fast-food in Japan, Traphagan and Brown noted the degree to which Japanese people think American originating fast-food is actually Japanese.

One 50-year-old informant claims that ramen is Japanese. ... For him, writing the word ramen with the katakana syllabary does not mean that it is a foreign word. It is a Japanese word. ... McDonald’s in the past several decades has gone through the same process of Japanization. Sony and Toyota, both very Japanese from their beginnings but also very modern, use the katakana syllabary for writing and displaying their names, for many of the same reasons we

⁷⁷ Yan, “Localization,” 73.

⁷⁸ Lance Heiko, “Some Relationships between Japanese Culture and Just-in-Time,” *The Academy of Management Executive* (1987-1989) 3, no. 4 (1989), 319.

⁷⁹ Heiko, “Relationships,” 319.

see for writing ‘ramen’ and McDonald’s, KFC, MOS Burger, and Mr. Donut with katakana. Many of the people we talked with did not know, and certainly did not care, what the nationality was of (sic) the fast-food chain in question.⁸⁰

The pair also note that McDonald’s, among other companies, was recognized as Japanese in Japan, rather than American.

One 45-year-old woman who works in a nationally prominent medical school in the Tokyo region assumed that McDonald’s was a Japanese company. Her 21-year-old daughter asked if there is a McDonald’s in Pittsburgh and seemed genuinely surprised with an affirmative answer. The young wife of a newly arrived junior officer in a Japanese consulate in the United States shouted with glee when her car passed a Mr. Donut shop in Pittsburgh. She had not known that Mr. Donut had stores outside of Japan.⁸¹

McDonald’s and KFC may have started out as one type of restaurant, but across their East Asian markets, they only truly found success once they were willing to adapt and shift to the cultures they were expanding into.

Corporation Over Country: The Globalization Effect

The willingness to localize created a new kind of international company across all industries. Today, we recognize McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken as global titans, corporate cornerstones that are ingrained in the cultures surrounding their restaurants. Though they are heavily localized in each country, they are still recognized by many as American-originating companies that have spread across the globe.

That idea seems to run counter to what has been presented about the knowledge of the origin of the likes of McDonald’s and KFC in Japan today, but again, Traphagan and Brown make a unique and essential note about perception of these global companies. They point to Mr. Donut, an international precursor to Dunkin’ Donuts: “We should not be surprised with such national chauvinism in corporations producing visible consumer items, since most Americans we ask are unaware that Mr. Donut was for several years British (a subsidiary of Duskin) and not an American company.”⁸² The forgetting of a company’s origin is a badge of

⁸⁰ Traphagan and Brown, “Fast-food,” 131.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

honor for the globalizing company, serving as a roundabout argument that a chain has truly gone global. This comes from changing the way companies advertise, choosing to appeal directly to the consumer rather than referencing their alien origin.

These companies remain globalized because while their advertising is heavily localized, their menu is not. Both McDonald's and KFC proudly serve the same products you would find in America. McDonald's prominently features the Big Mac, the McChicken, and milkshakes. Though the Chinese menu is more robust than the American menu, its extra contents are mostly variations on American style foods.⁸³ KFC Japan has an even closer menu to its American counterparts, exclusively emphasizing chicken bucket meals and chicken sandwiches.⁸⁴ The key portions of each menu are still intact; burgers and eleven secret herbs and spices are still at the forefront of their respective restaurants.

From an economic standpoint, this keeps American fast-food companies within Levitt's definition of the globalized company, bolstered by taking extra opportunities to boost their international recognition. From 1976-2017, McDonald's was a sponsor of the Olympic Games. Ads featuring athletes eating McDonald's ran globally for decades, increasing the global appeal of the company. In 2008, when Beijing hosted the Olympics, McDonald's announced the creation of the McDonald's Champion Kids program with the International Olympic Committee. "The programme will enable [sic] up to 300 kids from around the world to travel to the 2008 Olympic Games to share their stories and experiences with their local communities and hometown news outlets. Through this once-in-a-lifetime journey, the children will have the chance to see the Games, meet Olympic athletes, visit cultural sights and interact with kids from across the globe."⁸⁵

Inexorably, American fast-food companies, especially McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, have achieved globalization in economic terms. The menu that they serve is consistent across crucial cultural regions, and though their regional advertisements are heavily localized, the international marketing campaigns they embark on, especially with regards to McDonald's Olympic campaign, separate them from other local chains.

It's Been a Pleasure to Serve You

The three paths that began at the end of World War II intersected with one another, twisting and weaving, fusing and creating two new distinctions that redefine how we view the world. China endured blistering struggles, one after another in a

⁸³ McDonald's Global, "汉堡."

⁸⁴ "メニュー | 商品情報 | ケンタッキーフライドチキン." ケンタッキーフライドチキン, Yum! Brands Global, 2023. Accessed May 14, 2023.

⁸⁵ Unlisted, "McDonald's to Sponsor 'Champion' Children - Olympic News," *International Olympic Committee*, January 7, 2022.

brutal march through time, eventually resulting in the construction of an industrial machine. Japan, at its lowest international moment, rebounded into international prosperity during the economic miracle, and though it briefly dipped when its bubble burst, Japan is still strong today. McDonald's and KFC were greeted by China and Japan when domestic political policy or corporate negotiation allowed, seeking new customers and new opportunities. A pattern emerged over time with varying degrees of speed after the arrivals, where both companies were met with initial success (with McDonald's having a soft launch experiment in Hong Kong), but in the face of obstacles including waning public interest and government interference, they pivoted to shedding some of their American policies and practices and leaned into cooperating with each region.

Now two paths remain: that of the company, and that of the country. Both companies sought to become globalized corporations to expand their opportunities and customers, but crucially achieved it via localizing their policies and advertisements. Now, they have evolved into corporations, existing outside of one exclusive set of laws to push their product across the globe. The countries are now left with stabilized economies and generally content people but are wary of the influence they let in to get there. China especially walks an ever-thinning tightrope between the communist ideals they claim to uphold and the western values and practices that have made them both rich and glorious.

However, one wonders what will become of these closely knit alliances between corporations and countries as the world teeters towards increasing hostilities between regions, especially in an increasingly online world where social media discourse and perception often influences company success. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, McDonald's and KFC suspended and eventually closed all stores in Russia due to international backlash against Russia's campaign in an effort to preserve the company's image in its largest market; should China similarly make good on its repeated threats to invade Taiwan,⁸⁶ a US protected ally, would these companies be forced to choose between their Chinese and Japanese/American markets? Is that level of profit a sacrifice they would be willing to make for the perceived greater good, or will McDonald's and KFC fully morph away from their origins to become chains of the world? A day may come when these stories and cultural touchstones may not matter. However, for today, the influence of American fast-food on the two most powerful East Asian countries during their cultural zeitgeists is undeniable, and it is thanks to the evolution of Kentucky Fried Chicken in Japan and McDonald's in China.

⁸⁶ Emily Feng, "China repeatedly threatens to invade Taiwan. What would an invasion look like?" NPR (Washington, D.C.), October 18, 2024.

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