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McDonald's impact on China

During the last century is when the most dramatic changes happened in China including continuous foreign culture inflows such as the first import car, the first McDonald, the first foreign TV show and the first English song. In the twentieth century, Chinese people experienced culture interaction at an amount that outnumbers the sum of the previous thousands years of the history. Nowadays, looking back through time and seeing the path behind us, some people who hold a xenophobic view of the culture interaction, show worries and doubts about this trend and propose to reduce this “traveling of culture” to China. Obviously this way of thinking and suggestion is superficial and impracticable. Time-space travel of culture, the way in which one culture from one country or region travel through land to another place, usually carried and spread by travelers, migrants or colonists, is an essential part of globalization. As a symbol of western fast food culture, McDonald creates significant impacts on China and Chinese people receive benefits that outweigh the costs in regard to economic growth and culture diversity in long-term development.

As early as in 1975, there was McDonald in Hong Kong, China but it didn't bring any significant changes to Chinese people's life considering the small amount of population living there. In most cases, it is not the real starting point of the first McDonald in China because there was still no McDonald in Mainland China. Then, it came the real milestone-the time comes to 1990, when McDonald started its first store at Shenzhen in Mainland China and people had no idea how it would affect their lives from then on.

At first, they were just normal people who felt hungry after work and waited in a long line

to fit in one of those 500 seats in that McDonald ordering some food they had never tried before. In fact, at the very beginning, Chinese people treat McDonald as some fancy restaurant instead of fast food. In particular, white collar class, which was under great booming in the 1990s, loved to spend time and money on McDonald. They were used to get in hours of line and ordered decent amount of food, at the same time, waiting for their friends, lovers, business partners or even their blind dates to show up. We can even find this new scenario in movies: for example, in 1996, there was a classic Hong Kong movie called *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*, in which one of the scene was the “encounter at McDonald”: the leading actor meets the leading actress who was working in McDonald and then they fall in love. In spite of the love story, we can actually see a lot of social landscape in this movie and, in this case, what McDonald was like in the late 1990s China.

And soon, McDonald became a place where people spend a lot of time hanging out with friends or lovers and even a semi-private company meeting room. Ironically, what the fast food restaurant is proud of, which is the fast-speed and efficiency was being elongated and slowed down. My parents were big fans of McDonald when there came the first store in my hometown. They told me all the interesting things happened in McDonald during last century, although it might not seem funny then. For example, at that time, the most popular way to eat a hamburger was to scratch off the cheese on the meat carefully with a knife, eat the meat, then the lettuce and finally eat those two slices of bread while drinking cola. One can easily figure out how much time it would take to carefully finish a hamburger. Another example is that many people liked to order a French fries and asked for 6 packets of ketchup so that they may dip each one of the French fries into the ketchup, eat the part with ketchup and then dip it in again and again. Obviously, they tend to spend a lot of time eating, or more precisely, enjoying French fries, while chatting with friends, working on an article or maybe simply killing some time. Imagine, at dawn, a young man in suit come to McDonald from work; he opens the door, order an ice-

cream, picks a window seat, loosens his tie, turns on a laptop, and once in a while, he just looks into the air outside the window, gazing at all the dazzling neon lights on the buildings, people passing down the street and all the street scene... Actually, this picture shows what it was like in McDonald back then.

After about two decades, in the 21st century, some things change and some things don't. McDonald is far not some fancy restaurant to Chinese people who, after about two decades, now consider McDonald more and more as fast food. Nowadays, most white collars tend to walk in and have a takeout. People ranging from tottering babies to senior couples are still the main component of McDonald consumers.

Putting the development of McDonald in China into a bigger picture, it became part of the "time-space travel of culture". It is a miniature of the process in which western cultures travel to China and how they intertwine with traditional cultures, creating significant impact on people's life.

The first and the most direct benefit is economic growth. Western fast food culture like McDonalds has been altering China's economic patterns and kept prospering in China's economic markets. Loroche et al. stated that "with current growth rates of 20%, China's fast-food market offers a point of economic growth for the catering industry and attracts aggressive competition from some of the biggest global players" (p. 675). This study showed that the western fast-food culture brought drastic economic booming to China, especially the Chinese catering industry, with increasing competition which even accelerated the rate of the economic growth. Beijing, the capital of China, is quite a typical example of this economic growth brought by rapid booming of western fast food culture. It is shocking that "in the dozen years before McDonald's opened in Beijing, the city's GDP per capita had jumped from \$250 to \$1,049" (Healey, "How McDonald's Started in China").

Moreover, western culture like McDonald brought way more benefits not only

economically but also culturally. McDonald was just a starting point and a tip of iceberg. The introduction of fast food chain McDonalds to China has led a huge shift to the Chinese eating preferences at the end of the 20th century. Pan et al., researchers of Dietetics and Nutrition, stated that “most of the subjects (Asian students) residing in the United States were consuming American-style meals (e.g. pizza, hamburgers, sandwiches, French fries, and carbonated beverages), not traditional meal items” (p. 55). This revelation clearly showed that western fast food culture had reshaped Chinese young people’s eating habit and brought a new trend of diet habit. In a broader picture, since several decades ago, incoming western culture has been affecting and modifying Chinese people’s many kinds of habits including eating habits, working habits, etc. And it gradually unveiled and showed the previously covert mysterious picture of western culture to domestic people. It is undeniable that culture diversity in China is being constantly enhanced as more and more foreign culture inflows travel from thousands of miles away and finally settle down and start to grow. Enhanced culture diversity benefits people’s lives by giving people more living choices and a more broad-minded view of the colorful world. For example, before the arrival of McDonald in Beijing, local people didn’t have many choices of their breakfast and have to stick on the Beijing breakfast eatery nearest to their home or workplace. Ever since McDonald opened its first store in Beijing, people have experienced a more flexible breakfast choice and enjoyed the benefits of a more changeable recipe every day. People may easily get sick if they are asked to have the same breakfast for seven days in every week but may feel better if they can add something new to their recipe by going to McDonald occasionally.

On the other side of the coin, McDonald did introduce some disadvantages and harm to Chinese people, including some serious issues such as health problems and damage to culture preservation. “According to a report, while China’s GDP doubled between 2005 and 2009, the nation’s number of obese people grew from 18 million to 100 million. And to make the

situation worse, China, along with India and Vietnam, is a nation that has the “double burden” of dealing with a population that eats too much and is malnourished at the same time. As a result, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease have become more prominent in China” (Floracruz, “Effects of a Rapid-Growth Economy: China's Booming Fast Food Culture Takes Its Toll on Health”). These shocking statistics shows that the booming fast-food industry has led to a thorny and immediate health-problem situation that China must face. Another disadvantage is the damage to culture preservation, which means that some people choose to learn more about western culture and lead a more “westernized” life but they go too extreme and as a result, they pay less and less attention to our own indigenous traditions. A direct demonstration is the decreasing number of people who normally go to Chinese restaurants instead of western fast food restaurants. Ever since McDonald entered Chinese food industry, it has generated huge competition within the industry and occupied a significant part of the market. Let alone the profit lost by those traditional Chinese restaurants, they are losing their attraction to consumers, which is a more serious problem than money.

However, it is wise to have faith on achieving a healthy balance between foreign culture and indigenous tradition. It is true that at first McDonald did attracted lots of people who otherwise would go to traditional Chinese restaurants. They might focus more on the new foreign culture at its first appearance when it remained fresh and mystical but as time passed by, people got a more thorough and comprehensive understanding. It is great to see how people get used to the fast food nature of McDonald and learn how to utilize it. They know why fast food is called fast food because they order a fast takeout when they need to save precious time for rushing to work, spending time with families, or meeting their friends. Gradually, they get to know when and where to spend great amount of time hanging out with friends, lovers or families and when to have a quick McDonald in order to spare time for other things. Given enough time, people do have the ability to absorb the new culture travelling from away home,

integrate it with traditional culture well and finally get benefits from it.

As a symbol of western culture, McDonald has settled and grown in China for more than two decades, creating enormous impact on Chinese people's lifestyle. In general, the development of McDonald in China in a broader picture represents the time-space travel of western culture to China, which is an essential part of globalization and brings more benefits than costs to China.

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