

Golden Arches East

McDonald's in East Asia

Second Edition

Edited by

James L. Watson

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Preface to the First Edition

It seems appropriate to begin with a biography of this project. Why fast food? How did five anthropologists find themselves doing ethnographic studies of McDonald's in East Asia? This is not the sort of study most people think of as the proper subject of anthropology.

I must confess that I was drawn into this project by circumstances not of my own devising. In 1988 Ruble Watson and I made our annual visit to a village in Hong Kong's New Territories, just south of the old Anglo-Chinese border. We have been doing fieldwork in the New Territories since the late 1960s, concentrating on topics that excite anthropologists (if not always the general reader): lineage organization, inheritance patterns, ancestor worship, geomancy, popular religion. Each year we look forward to treating our host family, including two godsons, to dim sam (tea snacks) in Yuen Long, a market town that has evolved into a booming city. Soon after our arrival in early January 1989, our friends proposed: "Let's go to the new place. That's where the kids want to eat."

Later, as we emerged from our taxi-van, I looked up and there, looming in front of me, was a gigantic, three-story, sparkling new McDonald's restaurant. My first reaction can best be described as sensory disorientation: Where was I? I remember muttering to Ruble, "I didn't fly all the way from Boston to eat at McDonald's!" But of course I did, and have continued to do so on every subsequent visit to the New Territories. In the lives of my godsons and their age mates, McDonald's is a central institution. They are transfixed by the place and conspire in ever more creative ways to eat there.

Finally, after numerous visits to the Yuen Long McDonald's, it dawned on me that something had to be done about this phenomenon: it was clearly too important to ignore. I talked four colleagues into joining me in comparative studies of five East Asian settings. Each of us report similar flashes of astonishment when we discovered how deeply fast food chains had affected the lives of people we thought we knew well.

[The Golden Arches have become, as readers well know, an icon of international business and popular culture, recognized nearly everywhere on the planet. Ninety-six percent of American children are familiar with Ronald McDonald;](#) the figures are probably equally high in Hong Kong and Tokyo while Beijing is catching up fast.

Not surprisingly, many people have strong views about McDonald's and assume that all right-thinking individuals share similar attitudes. To some environmentalists and political activists, for instance, McDonald's is an unambiguous symbol of evil. American intellectuals tend to denigrate McDonald's as an expression and instrument of cultural homogenization. Several academics of my acquaintance deny that they have ever crossed the threshold of a McDonald's restaurant; those who do admit to having entered the forbidden territory claim that they were coerced by their children and are always careful to add that [they hate the food!](#) Other Americans, notably working-class people who survive at or near the minimum wage, treat McDonald's as a godsend—a home away from home where an entire family can eat for under ten dollars. In some countries McDonald's stands for the United States and is treated as a symbol of Yankee imperialism: "About 40 masked men ransacked McDonald's restaurant in Mexico City today to protest [California proposition 187]. 'Yankee Go Home' [was] among the messages scrawled on the restaurant's window" (New York Times, Nov. 9, 1994).

In this book we take the stance that McDonald's is a subject worthy of research in its own right, which means that we do not begin with the assumption that everything about the corporation is necessarily bad. In doing so we risk offending the guardians of anthropological correctness. When we presented preliminary reports of our findings at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, a senior scholar queried our motives ("Aren't you just legitimizing corporate hype?"), and another asked pointedly about the source of our research funds. Let me therefore set the record straight: Not one dime, yen, yuan, or won of research support derived from McDonald's Corporation or its East Asian franchise holders. We did not solicit funds from the corporation, nor would we have accepted such money had it been proffered. None of us has served as a paid consultant to McDonald's or any other fast food company. Our funding came from the usual (poverty-stricken) academic sources that support anthropological fieldwork in East Asia. Details can be found in the endnotes to each article.

To dismiss enterprises like McDonald's as somehow unworthy of serious inquiry is not only elitist, it is also suicidal for our discipline. Anthropologists have long prided themselves on tackling the basic issues of cultural transformation throughout the world. My graduate students will perhaps forgive me for repeating a mantra they have often heard: "In fieldwork you live where people live, you do what people do, and you go where people go." Increasingly, all over the world, people are going to McDonald's; they are also going to shopping malls, supermarkets, and video stores. If anthropologists do not start going with them, we will soon lose our *raison d'être*.

In my view, recent theoretical fads have led anthropologists to become increasingly detached from the interests and preoccupations of ordinary people. This book is part of a broader movement to redefine anthropology as the study of everyday life; we focus here on the most basic of human

preoccupations-food. But, as we hope to convince our readers, food is only part of the picture. The study of McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Nestle's, Kellogg's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Heinz (to name only a few of the most obvious examples) leads the anthropologist into terra incognita, a world of research dominated by business schools, securities firms, and international consultancies. Is it possible for anthropologists to deal with corporate culture in a manner that is consistent with scholarly agendas and yet relevant to the interests of a general readership? Both goals can be accomplished by concentrating on the mundane concerns of ordinary people who are themselves the consumers of Big Macs, Cokes, and cornflakes. Focusing on the mundane is a strategy that allows anthropologists to relate their micro-level investigations-which are grounded in specific communities or groups of people-to the concerns of economists, sociologists, and political scientists who deal with cultural issues at the macro or global level. By its very nature, research on global issues has a seductive quality that encourages analysts to skip across the surface of cultural phenomena, not stopping to dig deep into the lives of those who are most directly affected by corporations such as McDonald's. This book represents a conscious effort to situate the global in the local. Simply stated, our aim is to determine how McDonald's worldwide system has been adapted to suit local circumstances in five distinct societies.

Previous studies of fast food companies have focused on production, emphasizing either management or labor. The resulting publications read much like debates between conservatives and liberals: one side celebrates McDonald's as a creator of jobs and opportunity, the other condemns the company for exploiting workers and wasting resources. The authors of this book made a point of interviewing managers as well as workers whenever possible; we also read widely in the business literature devoted to fast foods. But we are primarily concerned with another dimension of the fast food system, namely consumption. What do consumers have to say about McDonald's? How is fast food perceived by those who pay to eat it? How do the preferences, biases, and cultural predispositions of customers affect the system of production? This approach may seem rather obvious to readers; certainly it was to us when we first discussed the project. Nevertheless, the consumer's perspective is largely ignored by most scholars who have written about the fast food industry. Literary critics, popular culture specialists, and media analysts tend to concentrate on their own reactions to fast food chains; they prefer to "interrogate" themselves rather than talk to people who actually eat at McDonald's. Other scholars, namely those who focus on business, have explored the managerial and entrepreneurial dimension of McDonald's, paying almost exclusive attention to the concerns of high-level executives. Ordinary customers remain in the background, if indeed they are mentioned at all.

Two of the best books about McDonald's are *Fast Food, Fast Talk* by Robin Leidner and *McDonald's: Behind the Arches* by John Love. Our approach builds on these and other studies, but we differ in one critical respect: we rely, first and foremost, on personal interviews and informal conversations with consumers. As anthropologists we are conditioned to pay close attention to the linguistic forms people use to express themselves, in their own language. We also observe the body language employed by customers and patterns of public etiquette that govern restaurant interaction. Research in other social settings has taught us that actions often speak more directly than words.

designing our joint project we had to reinvent certain features of classic ethnographic methodology. Rather than acting like lone wolves who work in isolation (the usual anthropological scenario), we agreed in advance to address a similar set of questions, and we maintained regular communication via fax and email. Insights from Korea fed our investigations in Hong Kong and Taiwan; the appearance of "Aunt McDonald" in Beijing forced the rest of us to take a closer look at the use of kinship terminology in the corporate context. The five primary contributors all had previous field experience in the society involved (over 25 years in three cases).

As editor of this book, I would like to thank the following people for help, encouragement, and research assistance: Melissa Caldwell, Bernadine Chee, Sidney Cheung, Kenneth George, Marjorie Gillette, Jack Glazier, Jing Jun, Liu Tik-sang, Eriberto (Fuji) Lozada, Holly Lynch, Pan Tiansheng, Thomas Rawski, Mary Steedly, Anna Watson, Patty Jo Watson, Richard Watson, and Ruble Watson. Pam Summa did a heroic job as text editor and helped at all stages of the research; everyone associated with this book owes her a great debt. Muriel Bell's expert advice and attention to detail were instrumental in making this a better, more readable book. Special thanks go to my godsons, Teng Chin-pang and Teng Chin-hong, without whose inspiration this project would never have gotten off the ground. None of these people, of course, bears any responsibility for the opinions, views, or conclusions presented in this book. That responsibility belongs to the authors.

New Harbor, Maine

J.L.W

Contents

[Contributors](#) xv

[Introduction: Transnationalism, Localization, and Fast Foods in East Asia](#) 1

James L. Watson

[1. McDonald's in Beijing: The Localization of Americana](#) 39

Yunxiang Yan

[2. McDonald's in Hong Kong: Consumerism, Dietary Change, and the Rise of a Children's Culture](#) 77

James L. Watson

[3. McDonald's in Taipei: Hamburgers, Betel Nuts, and National Identity](#) 110

David Y H. Wu

[4. McDonald's in Seoul: Food Choices, Identity, and Nationalism](#) 136

Sangmee Bak

[5. McDonald's in Japan: Changing Manners and Etiquette](#) 161

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney

[Update: McDonald's as Political Target: Globalization and Anti-globalization in the Twenty-First Century](#) 183

James L. Watson

[Notes](#) 201

[Select Bibliography](#) 239

[Index](#) 247

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Golden Arches East

In 1989, immediately after the Berlin Wall fell, two young East Germans crossed the border and happened upon a McDonald's restaurant. Here, in a letter to his cousin, one of them describes the experience: [Katje] stormed in and I stood outside just opening my eyes as wide as I could. I was shaking so. It was all so modern, white and [made] out of glass, the windows were so amazing, the roof was constructed in a way that's only familiar to us through western newspapers. Katje pulled me inside. I felt like a lost convict who'd just spent 25 years in prison. Katje had some money that we used to buy a Big Mac. I'm sure we behaved in such a way that everyone could see where we came from. Above all, I was in such a state of shock that I was stumbling over everything.

Daphne Berdahl, *Where The World Ended*

In October, 1996, McDonald's opened its first restaurant in New Delhi. The event drew protests from Hindu leaders, who criticized the company for serving beef in other parts of the world (though not, of course, in India). A young woman was interviewed while she was waiting for a vegetable burger: It doesn't matter to me that McDonald's serves beef in its restaurants overseas. I'm here for the experience.

John Zubrzycki, *Christian Science Monitor*

INTRODUCTION

Transnationalism, Localization, and Fast Foods in East Asia

James L. Watson

On November 22, 1994, the Wall Street Journal announced that the world's busiest McDonald's restaurant, located in the heart of Beijing, would have to move to make room for a new commercial development. Within hours the story was picked up by wire services and splashed across the pages of newspapers and magazines around the world.² McDonald's managers had situated their first Beijing outlet within a stone's throw of Tiananmen Square, one of China's primary tourist spots and a public arena for the celebration and contestation of Chinese national identity.¹ News of the move came as a shock to company officials who were operating on the assumption that they had a 20-year lease on the premises. The message of the surprise relocation far outweighed its immediate commercial impact: this could happen to McDonald's, potential investors reasoned, no one was safe.

Under ordinary circumstances, news of a restaurant relocation is unlikely to attract much attention. But this, of course, was no ordinary restaurant: it was McDonald's. The very name, its "Mc" prefix, and the ubiquitous Golden Arches are recognized and imitated throughout the world. McDonald's has become a saturated symbol, so laden with contradictory associations and meanings that the company stands for something greater than the sum of its corporate parts.

As the essays in this book demonstrate, McDonald's sells more than food. In Beijing, for instance, a new class of yuppies has embraced the company as a means of connecting to the world outside China. Many of the people Yunxiang Yan interviewed said they did not like the food, but assumed that something more profound was at issue when eating at McDonald's. In Korea, by contrast, hamburgers and similar meat products have long been a feature of the national diet, so the actual taste of McDonald's standard fare is not considered new. But, as Sangmee Bak demonstrates in Chapter 4, many Koreans equate eating a Big Mac with cultural and economic treason. Similarly in Taiwan, eating has become a political act and one's choice of restaurant—mainlander-owned or Taiwanese-made—can be taken as a reflection of attitudes toward independence or reunification with China. In Chapter 5, David Wu shows how McDonald's and other fast food chains have boomed on this precarious terrain, assisted perhaps by the common perception that "foreign" foods are politically neutral. Meanwhile, in Japan McDonald's has made the transition from exotic to ordinary and, as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney argues in Chapter 5, the restaurants have blended into the local scene. Much the same can be said of Hong Kong. Since the early 1970s, an entire generation of Japanese and Hong Kong children has grown up with McDonald's; to these people the Big Mac, fries, and Coke do not represent something foreign. McDonald's is, quite simply, "local" cuisine.

Today over 30 million customers will be served at approximately 20,000 McDonald's restaurants in over 100 countries (see Table 1). In 1995 the system-wide sales of McDonald's Corporation totaled US\$30 billion, \$14 billion of which derived from restaurants outside the United States. A new McDonald's opens somewhere in the world every three hours.'

TABLE 1
McDonald's Restaurants by Country, 1990-1995

	1990	1995
Systemwide	11,803	18,380
United States	8,576	11,368
<i>Japan</i>	776	1,482
Canada	626	902
Germany	349	649
England	356	577
Australia	269	530
France	150	429
Brazil	63	243
Mexico	21	132
<i>Taiwan</i>	43	111
Sweden	49	106
<i>Hong Kong</i>	51	98
New Zealand	46	98
Philippines	32	83
Singapore	34	78
<i>China</i>	1 ^a	62
Malaysia	22	58
<i>South Korea</i>	4	48
Thailand	6	39
Indonesia	0	38

SOURCE: 1995 Annual Report, McDonald's Corp., McD6-3030, p. ii. 'Shenzhen Special Economic Zone.

What do these statistics mean? The answer, of course, depends upon one's point of view. Some readers no doubt welcome McDonald's ascendancy as evidence that free market values prevail everywhere, irrespective of geography or cultural differences ("All the World's a McStage").⁵ This viewpoint is reflected in the news media that track McDonald's and report on its every triumph ("B

Mac Goes to Mecca").' In preparing for this project I read thousands of newspaper, magazine, and trade journal articles about the worldwide fast food industry (see endnotes beginning on p. 203 for sampling). There can be little doubt that McDonald's enjoys a special, perhaps even privileged relationship with U.S. media—a tribute to the company's virtuosity in public relations. Positive articles far outweigh negative or even neutral ones. The reverse appears to be true in Britain, owing largely to McDonald's disastrous decision to sue local environmentalists ("Big Mac Makes a Meal of It As Lib Trial Drags On").' With the possible exception of Korea, media reports in East Asia tend to be positive. The Chinese media could barely restrain their enthusiasm for McDonald's during the restaurants' first three years of operation in the People's Republic; the company was celebrated as a model of modernization, sanitation, and responsible management.

More recently, however, Chinese political leaders have expressed alarm at the growing influence of McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Pizza Hut, and other foreign food firms. As Chinese state policy has begun to encourage an indigenous fast food industry, local media coverage has shifted accordingly! Chinese leaders appear to be aligning themselves with European and American intellectuals who have long equated McDonald's and its rivals in the fast food industry as agents of cultural imperialism—a new form of exploitation that results from the export of popular culture from the United States, Japan, and Europe to other parts of the world.' "Culture" in this context is defined as popular music, television, film, video, pulp fiction, comics, advertising, fashion, home design, and mass-produced food. Corporations that are capable of manipulating personal "tastes" will thrive if state authorities lose control over the distribution and consumption of goods and services. Popular culture, in this view, generates a vision, a fantasy, of the good life, and if the Big Mac, Coke, and Disney cartoons are perceived as an integral part of that life, American companies cannot lose.¹⁰

Theorists who write about cultural imperialism argue that it is the domination of popular culture rather than outright military or political control—that matters most in the postmodern, postsocialist, postindustrial world." One of the clearest expressions of this view appeared recently on the Op-Ed page of the New York Times. The voice is Ronald Steel's: "It was never the Soviet Union, but the United States itself that is the true revolutionary power... We purvey a culture based on mass entertainment and mass gratification... The cultural message we transmit through Hollywood and McDonald's goes out across the world to capture, and also to undermine, other societies. . . . Unlike more traditional conquerors, we are not content merely to subdue others: We insist that they be like us."²

McDonald 's as a Corrosive Force?

Does the spread of fast food undermine the integrity of indigenous cuisines? Are food chains helping to create a homogeneous, global culture better suited to the needs of a capitalist world order?

This book is specifically designed to address such questions. The authors of the following case studies have different perspectives on the cultural imperialism debate, reflecting circumstances in the societies studied. We do not celebrate McDonald's as a paragon of capitalist virtue, nor do we condemn the corporation as an evil empire. Our goal is to produce ethnographic accounts of McDonald's social, political, and economic impact on five local cultures. These are not small-scale cultures under imminent threat of extinction; we are dealing with economically resilient, technologically advanced societies noted for their haute cuisines. If McDonald's can make inroads into these societies, one might be tempted to conclude, it may indeed be an irresistible force for worldly culinary change. But isn't another scenario possible? Have people in East Asia conspired to change McDonald's, modifying this seemingly monolithic institution to fit local conditions?

The essays in this book demonstrate that the interaction process works both ways. McDonald's has effected small but influential changes in East Asian dietary patterns. Until the introduction of McDonald's, for example, Japanese consumers rarely, if ever, ate with their hands; as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney shows in Chapter 5, this is now an acceptable mode of dining. In Hong Kong, McDonald's has replaced traditional teahouses and street stalls as the most popular breakfast venue. And among Taiwanese youth, french fries have become a dietary staple, owing almost entirely to the influence of McDonald's.

At the same time, however, East Asian consumers have quietly, and in some cases stubbornly, transformed their neighborhood McDonald's into local institutions. In the United States fast food may indeed imply fast consumption, but this is certainly not the case everywhere. In Beijing, Seoul, and Taipei, for instance, McDonald's restaurants are treated as leisure centers, where people can retreat from the stresses of urban life. In Hong Kong, middle school students often sit in McDonald's for hours—studying, gossiping, and picking over snacks; for them, the restaurants are the equivalent of youth clubs. More will be said about the localization process in the following chapters. Suffice it to note here that McDonald's does not always call the shots.

Globalism and Local Cultures

Those who have followed academic and business trends in recent years are aware that two new "isms" are much in vogue—globalism and transnationalism. Many writers use these terms interchangeably. In my view the two -isms represent different social processes and should not be conflated. Globalism describes an essentially impossible condition that is said to prevail when people the world over share a homogenous, mutually intelligible culture. Proponents of globalism assume that electronic communications and mass media (especially television) will create a "global village."¹³ This global system is sustained, the argument proceeds, by technologically sophisticated elites who speak the same language (American English), maintain a common lifestyle, and share

similar aspirations. To quote one observer of globalism, Benjamin Barber, the "future [is] a bus portrait of onrushing economic, technological, and economic forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize peoples everywhere with fast music, fast computers, and fast food. MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's pressing nations into one homogeneous global theme park, or McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce."¹⁴

In its most recent guise, globalism has resurfaced as a logical projection of the digital revolution. According to various digitalists, notably those associated with Wired magazine, Internet enthusiasts have already begun to create a global culture that will negate or at least undermine the traditional nation-state.¹⁵ Web visionaries also predict that ideologies based on class, religion, and ethnicity will recede as the global system becomes a reality. This new utopian literature is reminiscent of early Marxist visions of a stateless, classless world devoid of ethnic and religious divisions. Underlying globalist theories is the idea that people the world over will share a common culture, but few of these modern visionaries bother to clarify what they mean by "culture"-it is simply taken for granted.

From the very beginning of anthropology as an academic discipline, debates about the meaning of culture have united and divided anthropologists." Of late, the tone of this debate has become especially strident, separating the good from the bad, the enlightened from the ignorant. In its earliest usage culture was defined by most anthropologists as a shared set of beliefs, customs, and ideas that held people together in coherent groups.¹⁷ In recent decades, however, the notion of coherence has come under attack by ethnosemanticists, who have discovered that people in supposedly close-knit groups (bands of hunters, factory workers, bureaucrats) do not share a single system of knowledge. Culture, therefore, is not something that people inherit as an undifferentiated bloc of knowledge from their ancestors. Culture is a set of ideas, reactions, and expectations that is constantly changing as people and groups themselves change.

In this book the operative term is "local culture," shorthand for the experience of everyday life lived by ordinary people in specific localities. In using it, we attempt to capture the feelings of appropriateness, comfort, and correctness that govern the construction of personal preferences, "tastes."¹⁹ Dietary patterns, attitudes toward food, and notions of what constitutes a proper meal (a concept discussed by all contributors) are central to the experience of everyday life and hence are integral to the maintenance of local cultures.

As noted above, there are serious questions attending the use of the term "culture," and the word "local" is similarly problematic. Both notions imply an inherent sameness within a given population, irrespective of class, gender, or status differences. When this style of analysis is carried to its logic

extreme the result is essentialism, which leads one to assume that "the Chinese" (for example) share an essential, irreducible core of beliefs and attributes that separates them from other categories of people, such as "the Koreans." It is obvious that all Chinese do not share the same mental framework, nor do they always agree on what constitutes appropriate or correct behavior.

Readers will note that the authors of this book have made efforts to highlight class, gender, and status differences, especially in relation to consumption practices. One surprise was the discovery that many McDonald's restaurants in East Asia have become sanctuaries for women who wish to avoid male-dominated settings. In Beijing and Seoul, new categories of yuppies treat McDonald's as an arena for conspicuous consumption. Anthropologists who work in such settings must pay close attention to rapid changes in consumer preferences. Twenty years ago McDonald's catered to the children of Hong Kong's wealthy elite; the current generation of Hong Kong hyperconsumers has long since abandoned the Golden Arches and moved upmarket to more expensive watering holes (e.g., Planet Hollywood). Meanwhile, McDonald's has become a mainstay for working-class people, who are attracted by its low cost, convenience, and predictability.

One of our conclusions in this book is that societies in East Asia are changing as fast as cuisine; there is nothing immutable or primordial about cultural systems. In Hong Kong, for instance, it would be impossible to isolate what is specifically "local" about the cuisine, given the propensity of Hong Kong people to adopt new foods. As argued in Chapter 2, Hong Kong's cuisine, and with it Hong Kong's local culture, is a moving target. Hong Kong is the quintessential postmodern environment where the boundaries of status, style, and taste dissolve almost as fast as they are formed. What is "in" today is "out" tomorrow.

Transnationalism and the Multilocal Corporation

It has become an academic cliché to argue that people are constantly reinventing themselves. Nevertheless, the speed of that reinvention process in places like Hong Kong, Taipei, and Seoul is so rapid that it defies description. In the realm of popular culture, it is no longer possible to distinguish between what is "local" and what is "foreign." Who is to say that Mickey Mouse is not Japanese, that Ronald McDonald is not Chinese? To millions of children who watch Chinese television, "Uncle McDonald" (alias Ronald) is probably more familiar than the mythical characters of Chinese folklore.

We have entered here the realm of the transnational, a new field of study that focuses on the "deterritorialization" of popular culture. As Arjun Appadurai notes, the world economy can no longer be understood by assuming that the original producers of a commodity necessarily control it.

consumption. A good example is the spread of "Asian" martial arts to North and South America fostered by Hollywood and the Hong Kong film industry.²¹ Transnationalism describes a condition in which people, commodities, and ideas literally cross-transgress-national boundaries and are not identified with a single place of origin. One of the leading theorists of this new field argues that transnational phenomena are best perceived as the building blocks of "third cultures," which are "oriented beyond national boundaries."²²

Transnational corporations are popularly regarded as the clearest expressions of this new adaptation, given that business operations, manufacturing, and marketing are often spread around the globe, to dozens of societies.²³ The Nike Corporation, a U.S.-based firm that began operations in Japan, is an excellent case in point. One of the company's most popular products is the Air Max Penny, inspired by an American basketball player whose nickname is Penny. The shoe contains 5 separate components produced in five countries (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the United States). By the time it is finished, the Penny has passed through at least 120 pairs of hands. The final product is assembled by Chinese workers in a Taiwanese-owned factory just north of Hong Kong; design work is done by American technicians at a research center in Tennessee. Nike itself does not own any factories. Instead, the company relies on an international team of specialists who negotiate with manufacturers, monitor production, and arrange shipment.²⁴

The classic model of the transnational corporation assumes a non-national, or even antinational, mode of production controlled from a headquarters complex located somewhere in the First World. Dispersed production and centralized control would certainly appear to be the norm in the transnational food and beverage industry: Coca-Cola's far-flung empire is based in Atlanta; KFC is based in Louisville; Heinz in Pittsburgh; Kellogg's in Battle Creek, Michigan; Carr's, the biscuit maker, is based in Carlisle, England. The list could easily fill this page and the next.

At first glance, McDonald's would appear to be the quintessential transnational: It operates in more than 100 countries and maintains a sprawling headquarters complex in Oak Brook, Illinois—the home of Hamburger University. On closer inspection, however, the company does not conform to these expectations; it resembles a federation of semiautonomous enterprises.²⁶ James Cantalupo, President of McDonald's International, claims that the goal of McDonald's is to "become as much a part of the local culture as possible." He objects when "[p]eople call us a multinational. I like to call us multilocal," meaning that McDonald's goes to great lengths to find local suppliers and local partners whenever new branches are opened. To support his claims, Cantalupo notes that, in 1999, there were fewer than 20 American expatriate managers working in overseas operations.²⁷ Yunxian Yan discovered that only one American—a Chinese-speaker—worked in the Beijing headquarters of McDonald's; all of the managers encountered by Sangmee Bak in Seoul were Korean nationals; and in Japan, decisions have been in local hands since the company's opening in 1971. In fact, it was

McDonald's early experience in Japan that set the tone for future overseas operations. As John Lovvorn notes, the Japanese case "proved that the key to success in the international market was the same as [in the United States]: local control by local owner-operators."²⁸

Research in this book reveals that McDonald's International retains at least a 50 percent stake in its East Asian enterprises; the other half is owned by local operators. Soon after McDonald's opened in Korea, a major political debate erupted over the disposition of local profits. Was the goal of the company to enrich American stockholders or to help build the Korean economy? Korean managers confronted their critics by arguing that local franchisees owned half the business and that a high percentage of profits was plowed back into its Korea-based operations. Sangmee Bak notes that local managers insisted that the Korean business environment was so complicated that foreigners could not hope to survive on their own. They took great pride in their accomplishments and told Bak that their business was a Korean business. In Korea—as in China, Taiwan, and Japan—McDonald's goes out of its way to find local suppliers for its operations.²⁹ Hong Kong, as noted in Chapter 2, is the lone exception. Owing to its special geographic circumstances, raw materials are no longer produced there, and nearly everything McDonald's uses has to be imported. (Since its repatriation on July 1, 1997, however, one could argue that Hong Kong no longer relies on "imports," given that most of its supplies come from mainland China.)

McDonald's localization strategy has been so successful that two of its East Asian managers have become international celebrities: Den Fujita, Managing Director, Japan, and Daniel Ng, Managing Director, Hong Kong. These men are credited with turning what appeared to be impossible tasks ("Selling hamburgers in Tokyo or Hong Kong? You must be joking!") into dramatic success stories.³⁰ Fujita and Ng are media stars in their respective countries; like Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald's in the United States, they have become entrepreneurial legends who extol the virtues of hard work, personal discipline, and the free market.³¹ (Another such living legend is, of course, George Cohon, President of McDonald's Canada and the impresario of McDonald's Moscow; in 1991 Pravda proved he had a sense of humor by designating Cohon a "Hero of Capitalist Labor.")

Behind each of these success stories lies the ability to discern, and respond to, consumer needs. Daniel Ng, for instance, established his own research unit and ran focus groups to monitor the changing attitudes of ordinary customers; he is also a keen observer of the popular culture scene in Hong Kong. The independent natures of these local managers (not to mention their sheer chutzpah) underline the obvious: McDonald's transnational success is due in large part to its multilocal mode of operation. There is, however, another critical factor in the equation—good timing.

The Family Revolution in East Asia: Children as Consumers

It is certainly no coincidence that the startup dates for McDonald's (see Table 2) correspond to the emergence of new classes of affluent consumers in the various East Asian countries.³³ Rising incomes have produced dramatic changes in lifestyles, especially among young people who live and work in metropolitan areas. Decisions regarding employment and consumption no longer require consultations with an extended network of parents, grandparents, adult siblings, and other kin. Married women are working outside the home in increasing numbers, which in turn has affected gender relations, child rearing practices, and residence patterns.³⁴ A majority of newlyweds are opting for neolocality (forming a new household separate from those of their parents) or creating new arrangements that defy convention. In Taiwan, for instance, professional women often insist on living near their own parents, rather than follow the more "traditional" pattern of patrilocal-ity (living with or near the husband's parents). The crucial factor here is the household labor-childminding, cooking, and shopping-provided by the working woman's mother, whose assistance makes her daughter's professional life possible."

In response to these changes a new family structure has emerged, one that focuses on the needs and aspirations of the conjugal unit, the married couple. Conjugal-ity brings with it an entire set of attitudes and practices that undermine older assumptions regarding the meaning of life.³⁶ Should married couples strive, regardless of personal cost, to promote the welfare of the larger kin group and support aging parents? Or should they concentrate on building a more comfortable life for themselves and their immediate offspring? Increasingly, the balance is shifting toward conjugal-ity and away from the family norms that guided earlier generations.

TABLE 2
Startup Dates for McDonald's in Various Countries

1955	Franchising begins in U.S.A.	1984	Taiwan
1967	Canada	1985	Thailand
1971	Japan	1985	Mexico
1971	Australia	1986	Turkey
1971	Germany	1988	South Korea
1972	France	1990	China (Shenzhen Special Economic Zone)
1973	Sweden	1990	Russia
1974	England	1991	Indonesia
1975	Hong Kong	1992	China (Beijing)
1976	New Zealand	1992	Poland
1979	Brazil	1993	Israel
1979	Singapore	1994	Saudia Arabia
1981	Philippines	1995	South Africa
1982	Malaysia	1996	Croatia

SOURCES: 1994 Student Information Packet, McDonald's Corporation, McD 11274, p. 38; New York

The shift also coincides with a dramatic decline in the birthrate and a rise in the amount of money and attention lavished on children. China's single-child-family policy has helped produce a generation of Little Emperors and Empresses, each commanding the affection and economic support of two parents and in many cases four grandparents.³⁷ In Chapter 1, Yunxiang Yan shows how McDonald's has capitalized on the Little Emperor/ress phenomenon, treating children as independent decision makers who command substantial resources. Similar patterns of indulgence are common in Taiwan (see Chapter 3) and in Japan, where children command impressive amounts of spending money.³⁸ In 1995, Hong Kong parents gave junior high school students an average of US\$107 per month to spend on snacks and entertainment.³⁹

McDonald's restaurants first appeared in East Asian cities during the early phases of this family revolution. When one looks closely at the historical sequence summarized below, it is obvious that entrepreneurial flair alone cannot explain the corporation's phenomenal success rate.

Tokyo, 1971

An affluent middle class has matured by the early 1970s,⁴⁰ and a new generation of consumers can afford to eat out on a regular basis. McDonald's takeoff corresponds to the emergence of the "teens," a hitherto unrecognized stage in the Japanese life course. For the first time in Japanese history, all young people are expected to stay in school until age 18.⁴¹ These leisured youths become avid consumers of American-style fast foods and popular culture."

Hong Kong, 1975

McDonald's opening date marks the beginning of a long economic boom in Hong Kong as the British colony becomes an international services center and a transshipment port for the Chinese trade. A white-collar middle class rapidly replaces Hong Kong's postwar working class." By the mid-1970s the majority of residents are living in neolocal, conjugal units and are preoccupied with their own offspring rather than a wider network of kin.⁴⁴ Children and young adults emerge as full-fledged consumers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. McDonald's becomes the "in" place to eat.

Taipei, 1984

McDonald's is the first foreign food company allowed to operate in Taiwan's previously closed market. The start-up corresponds to the beginning of a new political era, one in which local interests challenge the authoritarian rule of the Nationalist Party. The Golden Arches arrive just as Taiwan reaches takeoff as a major player in the global electronics and computer markets. Taiwan's emerging middle class begins to have time and money to spend on leisure activities. Family patterns change rapidly to accommodate urban life and the regular employment of married

women.⁴⁵ Older forms of childhood socialization, emphasizing filiality and obedience, are gradually de-emphasized to accommodate practices that encourage consumerism.⁴⁶ Taipei's young embrace McDonald's as a symbol of their new lifestyle.

Seoul, 1988

McDonald's is the first foreign food chain permitted to operate in Korea. An indigenous middle class has emerged after decades of personal sacrifice and deferred gratification by the previous generation of workers. Salaried employees (mostly male) have little spare time for family activities, but their dependents begin to enjoy a lifestyle defined by consumerism.⁴⁷ Korean children rapidly become knowledgeable consumers, eager to eat hamburgers, pizza, and American-style chicken. The persuasive power of this new generation is impressive: Many parents who object to foreign imports find themselves arranging birthday parties for their children at McDonald's.⁴⁸

Beijing, 1992

Family patterns in urban China have been changing rapidly since the introduction of economic reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s. McDonald's enters the Chinese scene during a critical period of class formation; for the first time since the communist victory of 1949, independent entrepreneurs and business people are allowed to operate openly. Affluent families begin to distinguish themselves by engaging in conspicuous consumption and, as outlined in Chapter 4, McDonald's becomes a powerful symbol of the new lifestyle. By the mid-1990s a booming market in children's entertainment (theme parks, video parlors, computer games) has emerged. McDonald's is expanding rapidly in China to capitalize on these cultural developments; plans call for up to 600 outlets by the year 2003.⁴⁹

One conclusion is obvious: McDonald's could not have succeeded in East Asia without appealing to younger generations of consumers, children and teenagers. The corporation makes a point of cultivating this market and invests heavily in television advertising aimed specifically at children. Birthday parties have become a key element in this strategy: Prior to McDonald's entry into the local scene, festivities to mark the specific birthdates of youngsters were unknown in most parts of East Asia. In Hong Kong, for instance, calendrical dates of birth were recorded for use later in life (for matching the horoscopes of prospective marriage partners, for instance), but until the late 1970s most people paid little attention to the annual event—if indeed they remembered it at all.

McDonald's and its rivals in the fast food industry have promoted the birthday party—complete with cake and candles—in their advertising and, as the case studies in this book make clear, the celebration has become the rage among upwardly mobile youngsters throughout East Asia. McDonald's also introduced other, localized innovations that appeal directly to their youngest customers. In Beijing the company's ubiquitous male mascot, Ronald, has been paired with a female companion known

Aunt McDonald, whose job it is to entertain children and attend parties. In Taipei and Hong Kong McDonald's offers parents a special party package that includes gifts and toys for each participant plus the services of a hostess who leads the children in songs and games. Parties of this type have become an integral feature of the local culture.

More than any other factor, therefore, McDonald's success is attributable to the revolution in family values that has transformed East Asia. Furthermore, as demonstrated repeatedly in this book, the localization process depends heavily upon children: In Japan and Hong Kong, McDonald's did not make the transition from foreign import to "local" institution until the first generation of childhood consumers began to have children of their own. Generational succession is not yet complete in Taiwan, although as David Wu illustrates in Chapter 3, children are driving the localization process. It is too early to call the outcome in Korea and China, but the research by Bak and Yan (Chapters 4 and 5) demonstrates that children everywhere are powerful agents of social change.

Standardization and Taste: The McDonald's System

One characteristic of this book distinguishing it from previous studies of the fast food industry is our focus on consumption: we place primary emphasis on the role of consumers. As noted in the Preface, we have chosen not to concentrate exclusively on production. Before we proceed, however, something needs to be said about McDonald's efforts to standardize its product, given that consistency and predictability are important keys to the company's worldwide appeal. What follows is a brief summary of the fast food industry, its history and productive processes. Readers who are interested in specific aspects of production (including management, labor relations, food sourcing, and mechanization) might wish to pursue the references cited in the endnotes.

McDonald's, of course, did not invent fast food, although the corporation is largely responsible for the standardization and automation we now take for granted in the industry. Nearly every country has a candidate for the original "fast" cuisine: fish and chips in Britain, noodles in China, station buffets (ekibento) in Japan, street kebabs in Turkey, sausage and bread in Germany (which later metamorphosed into the ubiquitous American hot dog)." One key to McDonald's success is the constant push to speed up production without sacrificing consistency. Corporate goals announced in late 1995 include the filling of walk-in orders within 90 seconds and a guarantee that customers will never have to wait more than three-and-a-half minutes at drive-through windows. Company representatives monitor performance by making surprise visits to McDonald's outlets every quarter's

McDonald's has created a system that depends upon standardized procedures in everything from

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