



**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
HIGHER LEVEL
PAPER 1**

Friday 4 November 2005 (afternoon)

1 hour

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage carefully and then answer all the questions.

Texts in this examination paper have been edited: word additions or explanations are shown in square brackets []; substantive deletions of text are indicated by ellipses in square brackets [...]; minor changes are not indicated.

Extract from Yunxiang Yan, “McDonald’s in Beijing: the Localization of Americana”, J L Watson (editor) Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia Stanford: Stanford University Press, (1997) (pp. 39-76).

[In] 1992, the largest McDonald’s restaurant in the world opened in Beijing [becoming] a place where ordinary people could taste American culture. [...] Beijing McDonald’s [should] be understood in the context of Chinese society’s recent changes and new tendency to absorb and transform foreign cultural influences. [...] McDonald’s [works] to fit into the Chinese market [and] Beijing consumers
5 have appropriated McDonald’s for their own use.

[For] Beijing residents, McDonald’s represents American [modernity and] equality. This may sound odd to Westerners, but it makes sense in the context of Chinese culinary culture [where] banquets in restaurants are competitive [and] people try to outdo one another by offering the most expensive dishes. [...] Such competition does not exist at McDonald’s, where menus are limited, [and] food is
10 standardized.

[...] Although people have reservations about the [taste of the] food at McDonald’s, they are keen on going there. Why? Most like the atmosphere of the restaurant and the experience of being there. The attraction of McDonald’s is not filling food, but a fulfilling experience.

[...] Is the Beijing McDonald’s genuinely American? In America, McDonald’s [is equated] with low cost and fast service. [...] From a cultural [perspective], McDonald’s, a product of modernization, is treated by Americans as a necessity of modern life. In Beijing, [however], McDonald’s became a place where people could gain status by eating there. [Studying] social interactions in Beijing’s McDonald’s reveals that what appears to be the same institution represents radically different things in the two societies. The “American style” of the Beijing restaurant has been transformed [into] a
15 localized, Chinese version of Americana.
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First, Beijing McDonald’s consciously presents itself as a Chinese company; 95% of the food used is locally produced, and staff members [are] ethnic Chinese. Here localization was the goal of McDonald’s management in Beijing while McDonald’s remains essentially American in terms of menu, services and management.

25 The second feature of the localization process is that McDonald’s has become a place to ‘hang out’ [chatting and reading] – functions that contradict its original, American purpose. Couples are particularly fond of McDonald’s because they consider the environment romantic.

The emphasis on creating a Chinese-style family atmosphere constitutes the third feature of the localization process. Restaurants [display] posters emphasizing family values. It [is] common for
30 families to have their Sunday lunch at McDonald’s. Eating out is an important family event [and] such a meal embodies the harmony of an extended family – the ideal of private life in Chinese culture. What makes McDonald’s a family restaurant in American society is its ordinariness, its predictability, and, its low prices. Americans frequent McDonald’s for a casual lunch rather than a formal dinner. In Beijing, [however], it is precisely the experience of eating foreign food that draws
35 people to McDonald’s [which] represents the unfamiliar, extraordinary, nonroutine and unhomelike. Thus people frequent McDonald’s not for a casual lunch but for a formal meal.

The fourth feature of the localization of McDonald's in Beijing is that, in contrast to American practice, the Beijing McDonald's relies heavily on personal interactions with customers. [...] Each restaurant assigns receptionists to take care of children and talk with parents. One task of these receptionists is to establish friendships with children [visiting their] families and [and sending them letters on] their birthdays.

Localization strategies centre on children as primary customers. McDonald's appeal to children is due to its association with Americana and modernity. [Many] adults were brought into McDonald's by their children and continue to go there even though they dislike foreign food. Why?

[One mother who] takes her daughter to McDonald's [said] "I want my daughter to learn about American culture. She is taking an English typing class." Eating a Big Mac, like learning typing, is part of the mother's plans to expose her daughter to the skills needed in modern society, so she will [become] successful [and] enjoy a modern way of life. [...]

Beijing McDonald's is a classic case of the 'localization' of transnational systems. Efficiency and economic value – two important features of McDonald's in the USA – [are] less significant in Beijing. When Chinese workers [take their] families to McDonald's, spending one sixth of their monthly income in the process, efficiency and economy are [not] their concern. When customers linger in McDonald's chatting, they are taking the 'fast' out of fast food. McDonald's in Beijing has been transformed into a middle-class establishment, where people can experience a Chinese version of American culture.

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1. What are some of the social and cultural differences associated with the experience of eating at McDonald's in America and in Beijing? [6 marks]

 2. Discuss how the Chinese McDonald's has developed strategies to cater for local needs and expectations while retaining the global identity which is the source of its transnational appeal. [6 marks]

 3. Globalization and localization are two aspects of the same phenomenon. Show how this works in a society you have studied in detail and compare this with the McDonald's case study in the passage above. [8 marks]
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