As Yunxiang explains in the chapter “Of Hamburger and Social Space: Consuming McDonald’s in Beijing,” the introduction of western “fast food” restaurants to Chinese culture was remarkably successful, and sparked a long period of competition between local Chinese eateries. Many of these local restaurants attempted to imitate the western fast food being served, while others developed a more traditional Chinese version of fast food. (Yan 2008: 503,504) However, although local Chinese franchises were able to produce similar, or even more appealing food to the Chinese, American restaurants like McDonalds and KFC were ultimately still more successful. Their success, Yan describes, does not come from the quality or novelty of the food being served, but from the fact that the franchises come from a different culture.

Yan notes that although westernized “fast food” had just been introduced to Beijing in the late 1980’s, the concept of “fast eating,” or Kuaican, was nothing unique. For over a decade, Chinese vendors had been selling boxed meals known as hefan to commuters and tourists at train stations. (Yan 2008: 502) In addition, eating facilities known as shitang (canteens) were very common in the workplace. These “restaurants,” although impersonal, were efficient in serving food quickly to a large amount of people, just as KFC and McDonald’s were. (Yan 2008: 506).

The largest contributing factor to the success of American fast food franchises was the environment inside of the restaurants. The bright interiors, comfortable temperatures, and friendly employees of fast food facilities offered the people of Beijing a dining experience normally reserved for only the most important occasions at expensive restaurants. (Yan 2008: 509) The Western franchises also have a social ambience that was remarkably similar to actual restaurants in America – patrons clean up after themselves and overall conversations are quieter. Yan refers to the sudden change of customers behaviors as “instant emigration” – patrons are entering a restaurant so obviously American, they can’t help but pick of on social aspects that are American as well. (Yan 2008: 513) Overall, the Chinese did not go to the Western franchises for the food – they went for the “American experience,” and a taste of modernity.

The impression that I got from this article is that although people can sometimes very easily accept parts of a foreign culture, it is difficult to completely integrate those aspects into their own culture. While the consumers in Beijing, for example, easily accepted foreign franchises like McDonald’s, Beijing as a whole was unable to assimilate the characteristics of these franchises into their own culture and restaurants. I think this shows that people are more willing to accept something different if they can identify it with something outside of their own culture, and are given the choice whether or not to incorporate it into their everyday lives.