The opening of McDonalds and KFC in China in the wake of Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms in the late 1980s drew a lot attention on Chinese socialist market economy and on the attraction of Western capitalist modernity for Chinese urbanites. Contrary to Bourdieu’s theories, consumption of Western food seemed more aspirational than an actual marker of social positioning. Going to fast food outlets was largely not about the taste, but rather a unique way of experiencing exoticism and whiteness, of feeling and being modern and thereby of asserting one’s cosmopolitanism (Gillette 2000; Hsu 2005; Kho 2014). Drawing Farrer’s concept of culinary Occidentalism (2010), I argue that consumption of Western food acts as one of the main drivers of the everyday Occidentalist discourses in contemporary China. Ethnographic observations were undertaken during a three-month internship at the Food & Beverage Unit of the French Consulate in Shanghai. Besides, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten young Chinese professionals living and with experts of the food and wine industry. Food posts on the social media WeChat were also examined in a cyber-ethnography. Informants, born in the 1980-1990s, who studied and/or worked temporarily in the West, have been immersed since their birth in this Western modernity. As a result, this new generation has been renewing strategies of social distinction associated to the consumption of Western food, which a search for healthy, non-mainstream foodways, for authenticity, as well as with the display of a knowledge capital and a highly reflexive relationship to WeChat postings.

Themes:

Check (highlight) the most applicable theme according to the abstract.

| Innovation and Technology | Health and Wellness | Culture and Society | Sustainability and Conservation |

Comments: