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Fast Food and Obesity in China

As Dr. DeMaria stated in his recent Editor's Page (1), the introduction of fast food in America undoubtedly contributed to the increase in obesity. He also suggested that "the introduction of fast food overseas has been accompanied by a similar increase in obesity in these countries" (1). This is certainly true for China.

China swallows fast food at an even faster rate than ever. According to the *Financial Times* (2), the success of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and McDonald's in China is the result of a transformation of China's lifestyles, which are becoming more geared to speed and convenience. There is also some sense of curiosity and faddishness on the part of Chinese youth toward Western fast-food restaurants. There are now over 800 KFCs and half as many McDonald's in China (2).

China is now fighting obesity as is the rest of the world (3). In Beijing, 27.8% of children surpass the standard weight guidelines (4). By the end of 2000, the obesity rate of male students in Beijing reached 15%, doubling that of 1990 and approaching that of developed countries (4). Obese children grow up to be obese

adults. Currently, there are tens of millions of people suffering from obesity in China; the number of diabetics is increasing by 3,000 a day; and that of hypertensive patients, who exceed 100 million, is rising at an annual rate of 2.5% (5). The latter is undoubtedly the result of the high sodium content contained in fast food.

There is a price that every developing country must pay for modernization. However, let us hope that the price the Chinese pay will not exceed the benefits derived from modernization (6). Can we achieve a utopian stage in the 21st century in which the modern Chinese retain their ancestral lean body weight while enjoying the positive aspects of a modern Western lifestyle?

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