

# China Will Soon Rule the World (in Processed Food Consumption)

Diabetes and obesity rise in the East as China consumes more Western junk food.

September 27, 2013 | Steve Holt



A Chinese girl eats a hamburger at an American fast-food chain in Beijing, China. (Photo: Guang Niu/Getty)

China has been called “The Middle Kingdom,” and Napoleon famously referred to the country as “The Sleeping Giant.” Maybe China should be renamed “The Processed Kingdom” and its people “The Eating Giants.”

China will soon overtake the United States in a rather dubious category: It’s poised to become number one in the consumption of processed foods.

Euromonitor International estimates that in terms of volume, the Chinese market for packaged, processed foods like ready-made meals, and junk items like cookies, chips, and soda, will surpass America’s by 2015—107 million tons of packaged food in China, compared to 102 million tons in the U.S.



Did you do that math? With a population of 314 million, the United States still out-eats China’s 1.4 billion people in terms of processed foods per person by a four to one margin.

## 100 Days of Real Food: 10 Highly Processed Foods and Ingredients to Avoid

Just like America, processed food consumption is having its effects on China’s population. Twelve percent of China’s adult population—114 million people—have diabetes, causing complications such as cardiovascular and kidney disease, as well as strokes, which experts say amount to a “major epidemic.”

American presidents may talk about exporting democracy, but we’ve had far better luck getting other nations to adopt our fast-food-eating ways. In China alone, McDonald’s now has more than 1,600 restaurants, and Bloomberg reported last year that the fast-food chain generates around 22 percent of its revenue from franchises in the Asia Pacific region, the Middle East, and Africa.

The food is taking its toll. The 2012 Singapore Chinese Health Study, which surveyed more than 50,000 Chinese Singaporeans between 45 and 74 years of age, found that eating Western-style fast food—including burgers, fries, pizza, fried chicken, hot dogs, and other types of sandwiches—on a regular basis significantly increased the risk of diabetes and coronary heart disease.



In terms of packaged foods, the Chinese appear to especially love their cookies, almost all of which are imported from abroad. Last year, the Chinese cookie market was worth more than \$24 billion, according to IbisWorld, ballooning more than 21 percent in the last five years.

**100 Days of  
Real Food:  
Easy Ways  
to Cut  
Back on  
Processed  
Ingredients**

But lest we pick on the Chinese, they are by no means the only country that succumbed to the convenient lure of Western-style fast food. A study released earlier this year found that for the first time ever, sales of fast food items like pizza and hamburgers surpassed those of more traditionally French foods.

“In the land of gastronomy,” France’s *Le Point* magazine declared, “fast food has become the king.”

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