



BOOK REVIEW: KFC in China, Secret Recipe for Success

Author: Warren Liu

The American icon KFC is now a Chinese one as well. Beginning with a single store in 1987, KFC has grown to become the largest restaurant chain in the country, foreign or domestic.

With over 2,000 restaurants in China, KFC outnumbers McDonald's two to one. In a nation where American brands have trouble reeling in loyal customers, The Colonel's smiling face has become a fundamental feature of any Chinese city.

What was the secret recipe behind KFC's success in China? KFC's leading Original Recipe chicken was just a starting point. In *KFC in China: The Secret Recipe for Success*, Warren Liu provides directions and all the essential ingredients.

Born in Taiwan, Liu left for America at a young age to study and build his career in firms such as MasterCard International. In 1997, Liu joined Tricon, now YUM! Brands—the parent firm of food brands Pizza Huts, A&W, Long John Silver's, Taco Bell, and KFC—to lead the executive team that brought KFC to the Chinese mainland.

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Liu describes his team, the “Taiwan Gang”, as not just savvy executives, but also as people with an instinctive understanding of Chinese culture. This understanding, he attests, saved priceless time and effort in crafting the global KFC brand into one palatable for the Chinese consumer.

Liu holds that, “strategy is context-dependent; a strategy that works well in a stable and mature market economy would most likely not work well in China, given the diversity of its people, geography, the heritage of a rich and complex culture, and a rapidly and continuously changing business environment.”

One successful example Liu recounts is KFC's offering of Sichuan-style chicken. Such flavoring is already dear to the Chinese consumer and can be related to immediately. It quickly caught on with consumers, and is now one of KFC's core products in China.

This case and the myriad others like it brought KFC in China to exceed the simple status of American brand, and truly become a “global brand *with Chinese characteristics*”.

In *KFC in China: The Secret Recipe for Success*, Warren Liu takes the reader on a whirlwind tour through developing an American brand in China and does so with a keen social and political contextualization that is entertaining, pivotal, and hard to find. This book is a must-have for those interested in cross-cultural brand building and anyone seeking a greater understanding of the China market.

Drexel University's Global China Connection chapter has had the pleasure of interviewing Mr. Liu for *The GCC Podcast*. You can hear or download the interview on GCC's website at www.globalchinaconnection.com/podcast.



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