

# Development Logic From Regional Cuisine to Global Fast Food — A Case Study of Lanzhou Beef Noodles

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*Lanzhou Beef Noodles is a distinctive regional food in and around Lanzhou, China. With the development of the society, Lanzhou Beef Noodles has become a shared culinary cultural element among people across many parts of China and even expanding globally. The phenomenon of “Lanzhou Beef Noodles” evolving into “Lanzhou Ramen” and spreading throughout the streets worldwide highlights the combined significance of this food and its business. This combination has led to the dual expansion of the economic significance of cuisine and the social significance of business. Using ethnographic research methods based on anthropology and incorporating anthropological theories of business, this paper argues that adhering to traditional culinary standards constitutes a core competitiveness and value advantage of Lanzhou Beef Noodles. A rational operation of capital plays a crucial social role in the process of business inheritance and transformation. The joint efforts of the government and the private sector, along with an adaptive business model, have transformed Lanzhou Beef Noodles from a culinary cultural resource into a cultural capital. This transition is the developmental logic behind the widespread success of Lanzhou Beef Noodles, making it a culinary delight locally, nationally and globally.*

*Keywords: culinary culture, Lanzhou beef noodles, cultural capital, business anthropology*

## INTRODUCTION

Food carries specific social meanings. Throughout the evolution of the human society, the connection between food and the collective identity of the entire social group has been intertwined. The pioneers in the modern anthropological study of food were John Bennett from the United Kingdom and Claude Lévi-Strauss from France. As early as in the 1950s, they began their research into the social significance of food and eating (Pang & Xiao 2011:48). With the development of society, the integration of food and business has led to a dual expansion of the economic significance of food and the social significance of business. Business anthropology focuses on the social aspects of individuals within enterprises, emphasizing an inseparable connection between economic success and culture (Wang 2022:22). Lanzhou Beef Noodles has been a distinctive regional food in Lanzhou. As a symbol of the regional culture, it has become a cultural icon by assimilating various cultural elements. In the process of commercialization, it has innovatively developed into a popular delicacy, making it a noteworthy case in business anthropology. Behind it lies a dual development reflecting both enterprise and culinary culture within the context of its era.

This article aims to clarify the development and representation of the culinary culture of Lanzhou Beef Noodles based on field investigations conducted in Lanzhou from 2012 to 2022. Using the theory of business anthropology and introducing the concepts of “honeycomb society” and “umbrella society” to analyze the commercial expansion of Lanzhou Beef Noodles, the paper explores how the formation and interaction of cultural and business capital attributes have transformed Lanzhou Beef Noodles from a cultural resource into cultural capital. The term “umbrella society” refers to a society primarily led by official entities, with the government as a representative. On the other hand, “honeycomb society” refers to a society spontaneously formed by the public, and it can be categorized into different types based on different civilian entities. This conceptual pair effectively explains China’s current economic and social structure (Zhang 2017:157-158). Combining theory with reality, this paper aims at revealing why Lanzhou Beef Noodles, as a regional culinary cultural resource, has become a globally renowned snack while other regional specialties have not achieved a similar success. Additionally, the paper attempts to explore the inherent value and social significance of culinary cultural capital.

## **THE TALE OF A BOWL OF NOODLES — THE BIRTH OF BEEF NOODLES AND A GRAND INTERETHNIC INTERACTION BACKGROUND**

Lanzhou is situated at the convergence of the three major plateaus: Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Inner Mongolia Plateau and Loess Plateau, serving as a vital junction connecting agricultural and pastoral regions. Nourished by both agrarian and nomadic civilizations, the areas surrounding Lanzhou are abundant in agricultural and pastoral products. The historical east-west and north-south connections have helped establish a tradition of commercial trade. As a key town on the Silk Road in history, Lanzhou have integrated various practical and customary activities, resulting in a significant population mobility. The coexistence of different ethnic groups has made it a multicultural gathering place, hosting major ethnicities such as Han, Hui, Tibetan, Dongxiang, Yugur and Salar, totaling 38 ethnic groups to date. The diverse cultures have interweaved here, fostering an inclusivity and making Lanzhou’s culture distinctively diverse. Lanzhou stands as a witness to the dynamic interaction of various cultures (Zhang 2006:4). The regional culture, particularly the culture of Lanzhou Beef Noodles, possesses features that simultaneously reflect the way of ethnic interaction and integration.

### **Historical Origins of Lanzhou Beef Noodles**

Beef noodle culture holds an indispensable position in Lanzhou’s culinary culture. Regarding the history of Lanzhou Beef Noodles, it is widely acknowledged that Ma Baozi was the inventor of this food. However, historical evidence suggests that the precursor of beef noodles can be traced back to the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty. An article in the People’s Daily in 2006 stated: In the year 1799 (the fourth year of the Jiaqing reign), Ma Liuqi, of the Dongxiang ethnic from Gansu, learned the craft of making small cart beef noodles with an old soup from Chen Weijing in Huaiqing Prefecture, Henan (Zeng 2006). He brought this craft to Lanzhou and created Lanzhou Beef Noodles. Then Ma Liuzi, who came from a humble background, opened the first beef noodles restaurant in Lanzhou at the entrance of Gongyuan Lane, which was named “Ma Jia Daye Beef Noodles” and exclusively sold clear soup beef noodles. The fragrant aroma of the beef noodles and the rich flavor of the chili sauce made it a delicacy in Jincheng (an old name for Lanzhou). Lanzhou Beef Noodles inherited the method of making small cart beef noodles with old soup from the Chen family in Huaiqing Prefecture. The soup is considered the essence of the dish, with a particular emphasis on the preparation of a clear soup (Zeng 2006). During the Qing Dynasty, the official Wang Danwang wrote a poem titled “Ode to Lanzhou Beef Noodles,” saying that “Lanzhou pulled noodles are renowned throughout the world, and the crafting method originates from Huaiqing Prefecture. The soup is like a sweet dew, and the noodles resemble gold, and a single bite rivals’ a divine delicacy.” The mention of “the crafting method originates from Huaiqing Prefecture”, which is now in Henei County of Henan Province, adds credibility to the historical connection of Lanzhou pulled noodles being a reasonable transmission from Henan. Additionally, during the Qing Dynasty, the poet Zhang Shu praised Lanzhou Beef Noodles in his poem “After the Rain at Jincheng Pass”, stating that “After the rain at the Jincheng Pass, a

white horse gallops back amid thunder and burning incense, I sigh and only wish for beef noodles.” These poetic praises indicate that the Beef Noodles was already a delicious snack in Lanzhou during the Qing Dynasty. Subsequently, individuals like Chen Hesheng and Ma Baozi standardized Lanzhou Beef Noodles with the formula “first clear (soup), second white (radish), third red (chili), fourth green (cilantro and garlic sprouts) and fifth yellow (bright yellow noodles) (Lv & Fan 2011:233). Ma Baozi was persistent in his management approach, continually exploring techniques and emphasizing innovation in cooking. With a relentless pursuit of quality, his business flourished, and the reputation of beef noodles spread throughout Lanzhou, earning him the title of the “First Person of Lanzhou Clear Soup Beef Noodles”. Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that Ma Baozi, through improvements and developments on an existing foundation, refined the concept into what is now known as “Lanzhou Clear Soup Beef Noodles”.

### **Inter-Ethnic Interactions and Exchanges Between Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Facilitated the Birth of Lanzhou Beef Noodles.**

Beef noodles serve as an important carrier of Lanzhou’s historical and cultural inheritance and development. Tracing its birth, we find that Lanzhou Beef Noodles, which developed during the Qing Jiaqing era, went through the filtering of time and continuous innovation by skilled artisans and eventually became a beloved local snack suitable for people of all ages, intricately connected with the city’s name, Lanzhou. Inter-ethnic interactions and exchanges between agriculture and animal husbandry are among the tangible real-life factors behind its continuous existence.

Firstly, Ma Liuzi, the creator of beef noodles, learned the craft of making small cart beef noodles with old soup from Chen Weijing in Henan before bringing it to Lanzhou and creating Lanzhou Beef Noodles. Later, Ma Baozi, who inherited and developed the craft, settled in Lanzhou as an immigrant. Ma Baozi, originally from Hainan, played a significant role in expanding and popularizing beef noodles in the modern era. Before this development, factors such as ethnic interaction, economic considerations and historical elements had already provided the necessary conditions for the birth of beef noodles. Lanzhou itself, being a city of immigrants, has a rich ethnic distribution, increasing the breadth and intensity of interactions and exchanges between different peoples. Beef noodles, created by Ma Liuzi of the Dongxiang ethnic group and later developed by Ma Baozi of the Hui ethnic group, were embraced and recognized by various ethnic groups in Lanzhou as a culinary category. This close connection between different ethnic groups in the same region is inseparable from their interactions. Lanzhou has been a major commercial center since ancient times, and the deep-rooted commercial exchanges between various ethnic groups have provided the favorable conditions for spreading the widespread fame of beef noodles in the hustle and bustle of its streets.

Lanzhou is located at the junction of agricultural and pastoral regions, constituting a distributing center of abundant agricultural and pastoral products, and also signifying differences in dietary habits, with a prominent preference for noodles in agricultural regions and a focus on beef and lamb in pastoral regions. The interaction and communication between peoples from agricultural and pastoral areas have facilitated a combination of noodles and beef and lamb. In the traditional Chinese concept of “food as the paramount necessity of life”, harmonious relationships have historically been promoted through shared meals. To achieve a such state of interaction and communication, a compromise in dietary styles that is acceptable to different groups has been necessary, thus leading to a combination of noodles and meat. With a diverse mix of ethnicities coexisting in Lanzhou, refining food offerings for different groups allows for the celebration of each group’s unique culinary preferences and creating a shared beauty in food. In summary, the emergence of Lanzhou Beef Noodles is closely related to a background of interethnic interaction, which has set the requirements and laid a foundation for the birth of beef noodles.

### **THE CULTURAL METAPHOR OF NOODLES: THE PRESENTATION OF “FIRST CLEAR, SECOND WHITE, THIRD RED, FOURTH GREEN, FIFTH YELLOW COMPONENTS” AND AN INCLUSIVE CULINARY CULTURE**

Diet carries specific social symbolic meanings and serves as a core component in regulating individual identities. With diet at its center, a nation constructs a chain of social life interactions, utilizing diet in

expressing identity (Liu 2021:43). Lanzhou has chosen beef noodles, and beef noodles, relying on Lanzhou, have become a high-quality “Lanzhou-manufactured” product. From its content presentation, the function carried by Lanzhou Beef Noodles is not only about providing sustenance but has evolved into a spiritual carrier in the hearts of various ethnic groups in Lanzhou. It serves as an expression of identity and a conveyor of the concept of a harmonious coexistence.

### **Ingredients Manifesting a Culture of Inclusivity**

In Lanzhou, there is a folk saying about beef noodles: “Gannan’s yak, Yongdeng’s noodles, Gaolan’s bran, and Gangu’s thread”, indicating that the raw materials for making beef noodles come from different regions surrounding Lanzhou. A bowl of beef noodles possesses a broad appeal, and its essence lies in the art of fusion. Initially, Ma Baozi continuously brainstormed ways to attract business. He observed that Hui people in Lanzhou enjoyed eating beef and lamb, while Han people were fond of pulled noodles. Then he conceived the idea of combining these two elements to attract residents of the both ethnic groups. He first attempted to make lamb pulled noodles but found that many people were not accustomed to the gamy taste of lamb. Moreover, lamb meat was too tender and crumbly, making it difficult to shape. After careful consideration, he decided to use beef. Initially, it was beef pulled noodles, but over time, he realized that pulling this type of noodle was very labor-intensive and could not meet the demand during the peak hours. The noodles were too monotonous, not suitable for the elderly and children in the target eaters. After experimenting with different approaches, he eventually chose to use hand-pulled noodles, greatly improving efficiency. The diverse noodle shapes also catered to the needs of different people.



Figure 1. Lanzhou Beef Noodles

A bowl of authentic beef noodles also emphasizes a perfect combination of color, aroma and taste. Regarding solely the “color,” the recognized standard among Lanzhou locals is “first clear, second white, third red, fourth green, fifth yellow”, which can be translated into “clear and bright broth, white radishes, vibrant red chili oil, fresh green cilantro and garlic sprouts, and bright yellow noodles”. The “aroma” is derived from the rich fragrance of the beef, meticulous ingredient selection, and the precise use of cooking tools. Both beef and lamb liver are pre-ordered from the slaughterhouse from the Yuanjutuo Street (now Xinhua Lane). The beef is carefully chosen for its tender texture and balanced fat content (Ma 2017:62). In modern times, the high nutritional value of Gannan’s yak meat, coupled with convenient transportation, has led to the habit of selecting yak meat from the Gannan Prefecture in southern Gansu. In the traditional sense,

using clay pots produced in A'gan Town, Lanzhou, to cook beef allows for the preservation of the original flavor of fresh beef to the fullest extent. The beef soup is then cooled and settled in large ceramic jars for later use. This method ensures that the soup remains fresh and unchanged in taste and color over time. When preparing beef noodles, the clear broth is then carefully concocted based on experience (Lv & Fan 2011:406). The “first clear” aspect here is achieved through the integration of clay pots from A'gan Town and yak meat from Gannan. The final presentation of “taste” is rich in the art of fusion, with various ingredients blending to showcase the completeness of “color, aroma and taste” in a blue and white porcelain bowl. The beef noodle ingredients are equally meticulous. First, there's the radish, sourced from the areas around Lanzhou and selected from fresh varieties according to seasonal changes, adhering to the principle of “second white”. The choice of chili, referred to as “Gangu's thread”, had lent prominence to Gangu County not far from Lanzhou, known for its long and slender chili peppers. Unlike the stereotypical impression of spicy peppers, this variety is aromatic but not overly spicy, making it a distinctive choice. Using these thread peppers to create chili oil results in the presentation of the “third red”. The “fourth green” is achieved by embellishing the dish with locally grown garlic sprouts and cilantro from the agricultural areas nearby. The “fifth yellow” refers to the carefully kneaded and skillfully pulled noodles that, when cooked, become smooth and translucently yellow. In areas north of Lanzhou, such as Gaolan and Yongdeng's Qinwangchuan, a strain of wheat is produced known as the “monk's head” due to its lack of awns. This wheat is drought-resistant, flood-tolerant and has a robust texture. “Yongdeng's noodles” mean using flour ground from this type of wheat to make pulled noodles.

### **The Diverse Shapes of Noodles Reflect an Inclusive Cohesion**

Beef noodles come in various shapes and lengths, including those so-called “thin”, “extra-thin”, “ultra-thin”, “super-thin”, “leek leaf”, “wide”, “thinly wide”, and “buckwheat edge”. Wide noodles are flat and resemble belts, about two fingers in width. Leek leaf noodles have a shape similar to leek leaves, with varying widths. “Two cylinders”, or extra-fine noodles, are like the thickness of rubber bands, known for their chewiness and palatable flavor. Fine noodles are as thin as strands of hair after soaking in the beef broth. Buckwheat edge noodles are particularly unique: their thickness is similar to extra-fine noodles, but when bitten by teeth, the cross-section looks triangular, requiring skilled techniques from a master noodle puller.

There is a local saying in Lanzhou that people of different ages prefer different types of noodles: young men prefer “extra-fine”, girls prefer “ultra-fine”, middle-aged and elderly people prefer “leek leaf” and “fine”, while intellectuals and cultured individuals prefer “ultra-fine” and “leek leaf”. On the other hand, workers, soldiers, and strong men lean towards “wide”. Different personalities and preferences contribute to the various types of noodles in beef noodles (Liang 2012:3). In other noodle categories across the country, there are rarely customized options for noodle types based on diners' preferences. The diversity in maintaining different Lanzhou noodle types not only reflects an inclusive and tolerant attitude toward dietary preferences but also creates an inclusive environment that can easily foster a sense of unity.

A bowl of authentic and delicious beef noodles, following the standard of “clear broth, white radish, red chili oil, green coriander and garlic sprouts, and yellow noodles” is, in fact, a fusion of ingredients and processing techniques from Lanzhou and its surrounding regions, as well as different ethnic groups. Therefore, the variety in noodle types represents an ultimate expression of inclusiveness and cohesion. Different ingredients and noodle types fully showcase the city's rich and inclusive cultural heritage, as well as the diverse and harmonious qualities among different groups. As a most representative culinary symbol of the local culture, Lanzhou beef noodles play a unique role in exhibiting the cultural identity and enhancing the cohesion of this city, which is home to a diverse population of multiple ethnicities.

### **THE LANZHOU BEEF NOODLE CULTURE HAS ACHIEVED A TRANSFORMATION OF COMMERCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH A PROMOTION FROM THE GRASSROOTS**

Anthropologists, represented by Salins, do not agree with the simplistic notion of equating food with meeting basic human survival needs. They attempt to avoid cultural relativism by examining food systems

in different civilizations, cultures, regions and ethnic groups (Pang & Xiao 2011:49). In other words, different food systems not only reveal their own cultural characteristics but also widely exhibit a “holistic presentation” with social functions and structural significance, as mentioned by Mauss in his *The Gift*. For the people of Lanzhou, beef noodles are not just a necessity of life but also a way of living and cultural showcasing, carrying more of a “holistic presentation” of social functions. The distribution of beef noodle restaurants in Lanzhou, known for “a shop in every ten steps,” and the tradition of having a bowl of beef noodles in the morning are timeless topics and habits. Under the impetus of reform and opening up, this beef noodle culture has directly led to an integration of food and business, which has been driven by grassroots efforts and, as popular preferences and demands have driven the localization of Lanzhou beef noodles, they have accumulated commercial capital for local beef noodle enterprises.

### **“Sharing a Bowl of Noodles” Contributes to the Formation of Local Business Capital**

When you go out early in the morning in Lanzhou, you can see several noodle restaurants of different brands full of eaters, wherever you are in the city. Upon entering one of them, you’ll notice an interesting phenomenon: the noodle-eating crowd is divided into the Hui ethnic group wearing white caps, the easily recognizable Tibetan group with dark skin and earrings, and the Han of various ages. In this normal daily scene with diverse groups, everyone is enjoying a bowl of beef noodles, and there is no discord whatever among those different ethnic groups. The natural harmony of this scene makes it difficult for people to determine to which ethnic group the beef noodles truly appeal. This scenario overlooks the fact that beef noodles have always been presented as a halal brand. People from different ethnic groups all feel that beef noodles are of their own ethnicity, leading to the appearance that beef noodles are a cultural product of various ethnicities. This situation reflects the characteristics of Lanzhou beef noodles as a regional culture that is full of ethnic integration and has a wide appeal, contributing to the formation of local business capital in the beef noodle culture.

The growth and expansion of beef noodle culture are inseparable from the consumer market. With the deepening development of the market economy, Lanzhou consumers, based on their love for traditional beef noodles, have continuously increased their demands for products and services. Since the reform and opening up of China in the early 1980s, two striking phenomena have occurred in urban areas during the process of market transformation: a large influx of rural migrant population into the cities and the emergence of numerous individual business operators and private enterprises. In such a context, the “honeycomb-like society” representing ordinary people seemingly has not had much power and resources, but based on their own efforts, those involved have striven to gain more market space and opportunities (Zhang 2015:78). Local beef noodle enterprises in Lanzhou seized the opportunity presented by the changing market. They conducted research and development based on the characteristics and needs of local consumers, continuously producing flavors that both meet market demands and satisfy consumers’ purchasing desires. Simultaneously, in the competitive market, local beef noodle enterprises must try to enhance their innovative capabilities to establish themselves in the market and gain a competitive advantage. Through technological, managing and business model innovation, these enterprises have achieved both a scale expansion and accumulation of business capital.



Figure 2. Business Phenomenon of Lanzhou Street Beef Noodle Restaurants

### **Business Capital Promotes the Capitalization of Brands**

In Lanzhou, distinctive beef noodle restaurants, each with its own features, form a vibrant landscape, embedded in the streets and alleys. Especially in the Chengguan District of Lanzhou, the density of these restaurants is the highest, reaching 3.06 per square kilometer (Yang 2020). The group engaged in the operation of Lanzhou beef noodles is not limited to halal brands alone. The inclusion of Han and Tibetan ethnic groups has expanded the beef noodle industry, giving rise to numerous specialty fusion of beef noodle enterprises such as intestines and beef noodles, pickled vegetable beef noodles, spicy beef noodles, and many more. According to the “Lanzhou Beef Noodle Big Data Report” released for the first time during the signing ceremony of the cooperation framework agreement between Northwest Minzu University and Gansu Yilan Big Data Technology Co., Ltd. on December 1, 2020, Lanzhou has a total of 1,691 actively operating beef noodle restaurants. And Chengguan District has the biggest number 673, accounting for 39.8% of the total (Yang 2020). The vast beef noodle market has enabled local beef noodle enterprises to gradually accumulate commercial capital.

In the process of market development, local enterprises gradually pay attention to brand building and enhancement of marketing capabilities. By shaping a unique brand image, strengthening product promotion and engaging in market advertising activities, local enterprises have established consumer trust in their products or services, leading to a high market awareness and reputation, which help them acquire more commercial capital. In the course of market development, numerous local brands have emerged in Lanzhou, including popular ones like Jinding, Ma Zilu, Ma Anjun, Bai Jianqiang, Mogouyan and Shejianjian. The commercial capitalization provides local beef noodle enterprises with resources and capabilities, enabling them to expand their scale, enhancing market competitiveness, establishing brand recognition and acceptance, creating differentiation and added value, increasing brand premium and strengthening market position. These factors mutually reinforce each other, propelling the process of brand capitalization. In the late 1990s, Lanzhou Jinding Beef Noodle Co., Ltd., a state-owned enterprise was established and started to promote chain operations nationwide.

## THE CULTURAL CAPITAL EXPANSION OF LANZHOU BEEF NOODLES FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: A DUAL PLAY BY THE GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The impression that outsiders have of Lanzhou is mostly the ubiquitous signs of “Lanzhou Ramen (or Lalian)” (Lanzhou pulled noodles) hung all over the country. Surprisingly, a bowl of noodles could have spread so widely, with signs everywhere. However, in the local context of Lanzhou, there is no such term as “Lanzhou Lamian”. As a normal type of noodle, it is rarely referred to with this name in and around Lanzhou. The fact that it has two different names and distinctly different attitudes when it spreads to other places raises questions. Why does the distinctive noodles from Lanzhou achieve such success as “Lanzhou Lamian”, and why have not other regional noodles achieved a similar recognition? The attitude of “This Lamian is not that Lamian” does not clearly reveal its cultural roots. This phenomenon, worthy of exploration, can be analyzed and studied by examining the content presentation of the beef noodles, revealing the inherent mechanism of culinary cultural resources transforming into culinary cultural capital.

### The Regional Expansion From Lanzhou Beef Noodles to Lanzhou Pulled Noodles

The thriving local market of Lanzhou beef noodles has spurred its expansion beyond the region. In 1959, the Beijing Gourmet Association invited Lanzhou Beef Clear Soup Noodles to open a restaurant in the capital, Beijing. After 1978, with the help of the winds of reform and opening up, the fragrance of Lanzhou beef noodles spread far and wide, reaching various parts of the country and even extending globally (Yan 2016:405). According to the data from “Lanzhou Beef Noodles Big Data 1.0,” there are a total of 1,990 beef noodle restaurants in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, with Beijing having the highest number of 709. However, for a long time, many of the “Lanzhou pulled noodles” establishments across the country were not actually opened by people from Lanzhou, Gansu, but rather by people from Hualong, Qinghai. In 2009, Dongfang Palace was chosen by the Lanzhou municipal government as the first demonstration enterprise for promoting Lanzhou beef pulled noodles across the province, the country, and overseas. It was authorized to use the “Chinese Lanzhou Beef Pulled Noodles” trademark. The franchise system became Dongfang Palace’s magic tool for rapid expansion. Dongfang Palace established a franchise model primarily focused on technical services and personnel training, accompanied by corresponding supervision mechanisms. It was not until 2012 that local pulled noodles from Lanzhou began to significantly expand beyond Lanzhou and march into the rest of the country (Zhang 2015:34).



Figure 3. Dongfang Palace Lanzhou Beef Noodles Business

Lanzhou Lamian has become a nationwide popular delicacy and is a successful case of transforming a cultural resource into economic resource. In fact, local people in Lanzhou do not use the term “Lanzhou Lamian”. When asking them which Lanzhou Lamian is delicious, you may receive skeptical looks from them and a serious explanation that “we don’t have Lamian in Lanzhou, only beef noodles”. The reason



behind this is that as early as the 1980s, in order to alleviate poverty and encourage people to go out in business and become prosperous, residents of Hualong Hui Autonomous County in Qinghai Province began promoting noodle restaurants nationwide as a means of livelihood. Initially called Qinghai Lamian, they later saw that Lanzhou Lamian had a greater reputation, so they decided to use the signboard of “Lanzhou Lamian” to make consumers believe that it was similar to Lanzhou Beef Noodles and, unexpectedly, this business grew larger and larger (Zhang 2015:32). Signboards of “Lanzhou Lamian” can now be seen everywhere across the country, and for a while, the phenomenon of “Lanzhou Lamian” has surpassed the breadth and depth of “Lanzhou Beef Noodles.”

In the eyes of the people in Lanzhou, the “Lanzhou Lamian” found throughout the country on every street and alley cannot match Lanzhou Beef Noodles in terms of the complexity of its production process and the depth of flavor fusion. Participating in the national environment, whether in hardware or software, it cannot compare to the local Lanzhou Beef Noodles. “Lanzhou Lamian” as a popular fast food has only learned about half of the essence of “Lanzhou Beef Noodles”, with the remaining half mainly lying in the soup and noodles. It is the cost difference in the soup and noodles that prevents Lanzhou’s local beef noodles from going out into the whole country. As described earlier in this paper, the soup ingredients and craftsmanship of Lanzhou’s local beef noodles are quite sophisticated and cumbersome to handle, while Qinghai people make noodle soup mainly by using seasonings to quicken the process, which differs significantly in cost from Lanzhou beef noodles. Therefore, in the normal low-cost fast-food market, Qinghai noodles can make a profit, while Lanzhou beef noodles will incur losses. Although it has only learned about half of the essence of Lanzhou Beef Noodles, the taste and style of Lanzhou Lamian have quickly been accepted by the national public in the fast-food market. This is a first step in going out. In a certain sense, the changes made by the people of Qinghai to Lanzhou Beef Noodles actually transformed its “distinctiveness” by integrating it with a more “common” approach. The next step behind this is the outward development of local Lanzhou Beef Noodles, consolidating the market position of Lanzhou Beef Noodle as it goes out. For a particular industry or enterprise, government support will undoubtedly bring greater developing momentum and market competitiveness. In 2012, the Lanzhou municipal government continuously provided funds, platforms and support of other sorts in brand establishment for Lanzhou Beef Noodles. With the rapid development of the Chinese society and the growth of national economic income, its positioning is not only to provide a low-cost fast food but also to establish a reputation for Lanzhou Beef Noodles, emphasizing low prices but uncompromising in craftsmanship. Lanzhou’s local noodles began to go out on a large scale and enter the national market. The authentic taste combined with a scientific chain management model quickly achieved success, making Lanzhou Beef Noodles a stable popular food brand. The so-called chain is a form of business organization and management system conducted by a group of restaurants or branch enterprises under the unified leadership of the headquarters of the same business enterprise. It is not only a change in business form but also an innovation in business system, representing a significant adjustment in the structure of the circulation industry. With the openness of the country, government support and the accumulation of private capital, the market-oriented reforms in the food industry have undergone major changes (Yu 2007:5). The chain model of Lanzhou Beef Noodles has enabled local enterprises to step out of the country and go global. Currently, Lanzhou Beef Noodles has established outlets in multiple countries, including the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, and more.

### **The Global Development Logic of Lanzhou Beef Noodles’ Culture Capital**

Cultural capital, as a positively effective form of capital, exists in both symbolic and material forms. The convertibility of different types of capital lays the foundation for production strategies, with the aim of ensuring the reproduction of capital through capital conversion (Li 2021:10). Only when culinary culture becomes a market link with cultural added value and establishes the connection between cultural resources and economic development, can the transformation process from cultural resources to cultural capital be accomplished.

As a category on the Chinese culinary menu, beef noodles are present throughout the country. However, why is it that Lanzhou beef noodles, essentially a bowl of soup noodles, have achieved expansion from the

local to global scale? This reflects the inherent logic of the transformation from a cultural resource to cultural capital. Firstly, as a regional dish, Lanzhou beef noodles showcase a cultural metaphor of harmony and inclusiveness through the scientific combination of “noodles” and “soup,” as well as a meticulous selection of ingredients and cooking techniques. Over the course of its historical development, a bowl of Lanzhou beef noodles has evolved into a regional food suitable for people of all ages, representing a progression from a food category to culinary culture. Secondly, based on the development of beef noodles as a regional cuisine, with the momentum of China’s reform and opening-up, there was spontaneous participation from the public in the beef noodle industry due to its significant market potential. Having a market is crucial for the development of any enterprise, and the local beef noodle businesses have successfully accumulated commercial capital. Thirdly, people from other regions, attracted by the greater fame of the Lanzhou beef noodles brand, chose to replicate the beef noodles of this flavor, leading to a rapid and widespread promotion of Lanzhou beef noodle culture. During this period, local Lanzhou beef noodle brands, supported vigorously by the government, began to compete in the market based on quality. Finally, the participation of people from different regions has turned Lanzhou beef noodles into a brand in the Chinese culinary category. The business model of local enterprises, utilizing chain franchise operations and the management philosophy of local brands, have transformed these enterprises from commercial to brand capitalization. Lanzhou’s local beef noodle businesses going global have become brands within the beef noodle category. Culinary culture serves as a unique cultural symbol for a country or region, and through globalization, different countries’ culinary cultures can be exchanged and shared. People can better understand each other’s culture, values and lifestyles through tasting and learning about the cuisines of other countries, thereby promoting cultural exchange and understanding. In the current process of accelerating globalization and the complex international environment, a win-win cooperation between countries is a sustainable and healthy model in the global landscape. The global dissemination of Lanzhou beef noodles has achieved a win-win situation for both the culture and cultural capital, representing a sustainable path for regional and even national enterprises and cultural development models.

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