Featured graphic. Visualizing urban gastronomy in China

"For people, food is heaven (min yi shi wei tian)."

The Book of Han circa 200BC

The culinary scene of cities often marks underlying socioeconomic changes, availability of ingredients, and cultural shifts. Food culture studies have often resorted to expensive and time-consuming surveys. Taking an alternative route, this featured graphic aims to explore gastronomical scenes in Chinese cities using a large cataloguing database.

Information about food establishments was gathered from the Chinese cataloguing website DianPing (dianping.com; a Chinese equivalent of Yelp). I manually consolidated synonymous cuisine types. The final dataset contains 844 322 restaurants in 255 Chinese cities. Each restaurant is associated with a cuisine type. I focus on nine major cuisine types, each of which (1) has presence in at least 150 cities and (2) has more than 12 000 restaurants:

- Foreign: Western (including European and North American cooking); Japanese; and Korean.
- Translocal regional: Hunan (Stinky Tofu is an example of Hunan dishes); Sichuan (eg, Kung-Pao chicken); and Cantonese (eg, Dim Sum).
- Regional: Chinese Islamic; Northeastern (eg, Pickled cabbage); and Jiangsu-Zhejiang (eg, Beggar's chicken).

Cartograms (Gastner and Newman, 2004) are used to reveal per capita restaurants of individual cuisines in different cities of the country (figure 1; Henning et al, 2010).

- Foreign restaurants in China have increased in both quantity and quality. Three major urban regions along the more developed eastern coast—Pearl River Delta (PRD) anchored by Guangzhou and Hong Kong; Yangtze River Delta (YRD) around Shanghai; and Beijing–Tianjin Corridor (BTC)—have more food establishments. The expansion of different foreign is also influenced by local social–cultural factors: 'hotspots' for Korean cuisines include Northeast China and Shandong Peninsula: the former has a large Korean ethnic minority population, while the latter hosts many Korean business expatriates.
- Translocal regional cuisines spread out of their hearths and become an integral part of culinary landscape in other parts of the country (ie, multiple 'bulges' on the cartograms). This diffusion is often driven by massive domestic migrations, enhanced socioeconomic linkages, and rapid urbanization. For example, Sichuan and Chongqing are all large labour-exporting regions within China. Migrant workers exported to the more developed coastal provinces often bring with them the preference for spicy Sichuan food.
- Regional cuisines tend to cluster in their hearths: Chinese Islamic and Northeastern-style restaurants cluster in Northern China. Jiangsu-Zhejiang restaurants remain mostly in the Yangtze River Delta.

Xingjian Liu
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, xliu36@uncc.edu

References
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Hennig B D, Pritchard J, Ramsden M, Dorling D, 2010, "Remapping the world's population: visualizing data using cartograms" *ArcUser* 2010, 66–69

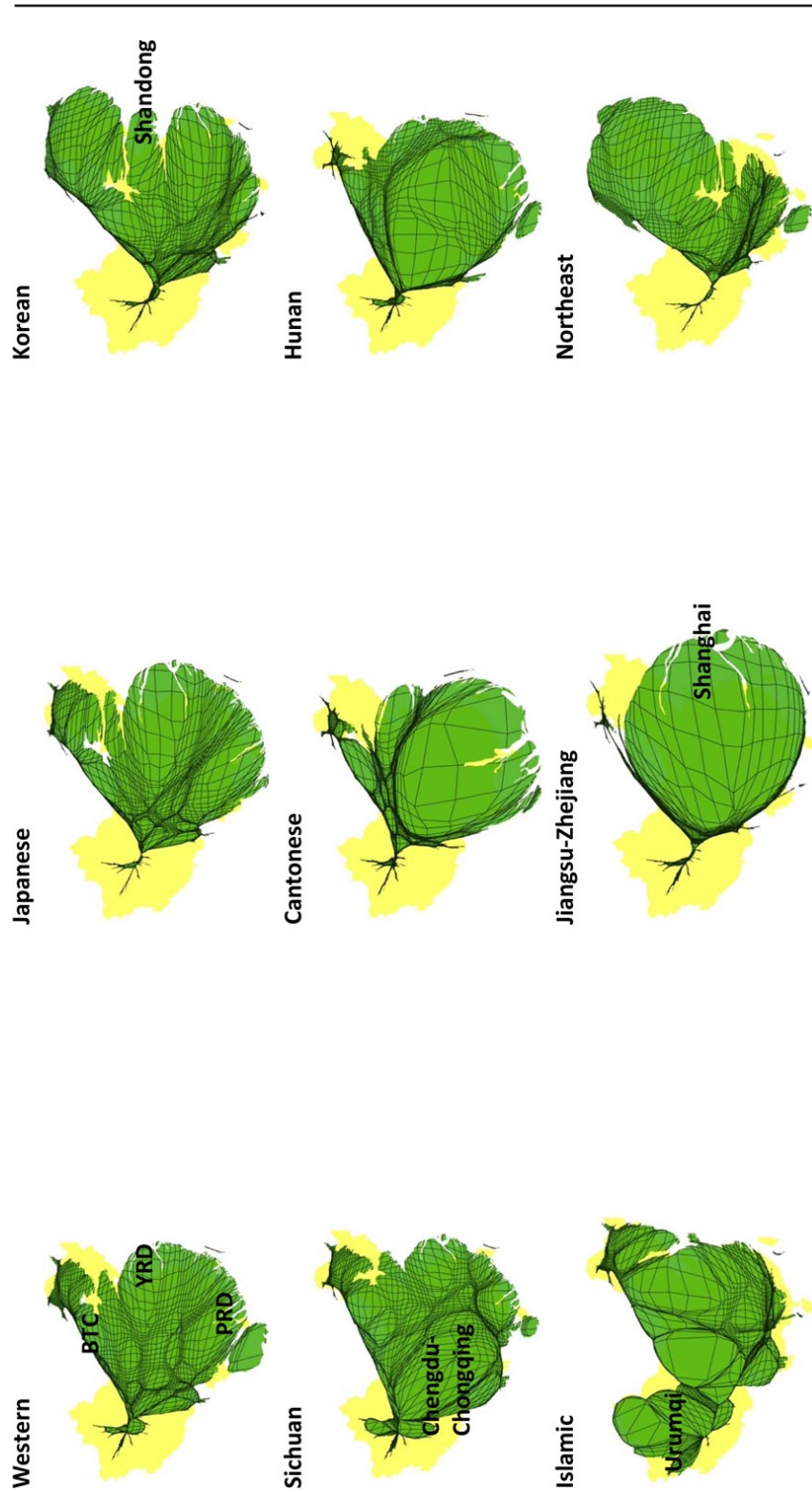**Software**: R and ScapeToad (http://scapetoad.choros.ch/index.php)

Figure 1. [In colour online.] Per capita food outlets in China.