
Food security and agricultural sustainability in India and China : a study of demand supply interactions of middle and upper income groups

Basudeb Chaudhuri*¹

¹Centre de Recherche en Economie et Management (CREM) – CNRS : UMR6211, Université de Rennes 1, Université de Caen Basse-Normandie – UFR Sciences Economiques et Gestion, Université de Caen, France

Abstract (in French and English)

According to some estimations, the demand of the middle classes in emerging and developing economies will be the principal motors of growth in the coming decades. In the Indian and Chinese contexts of a rapid expansion of the middle classes this adaptation to local national markets and tastes is of course an important learning process and a major opportunity for the international food industry. One major question is : What are the interactions between rural and urban populations, between different classes, their spaces of socialization and exchange? The upper and middle classes in emerging countries have the purchasing power and the access to information necessary to make discerning choices on what they consume. Preferences change as more individuals feel empowered to exercise choices. Considering India, a large part of the population is vegetarian. However, the forces of increasing incomes and globalization are affecting vegetarianism, and several contradictory trends appear which we will analyze through a combination of surveys, expert opinions and through experimental methods. Historically, among India's upper castes in the Hindu population (which is more than 700 million), vegetarianism was a strong trait. If this population becomes less vegetarian, then by an effect of dynamic cultural mimetism, other social categories might also become less vegetarian if incomes in India keep increasing. Increasing incomes, changes in the diet pattern and increase in the global food intakes have created problems such as obesity and related diseases across different income classes of the Indian population. On the other hand, health consciousness, advertising, and social media marketing are also inducing –among one part of this better off population – a reduction in their intake of animal food and a desire for healthier lifestyles, as has happened in Europe. The balance between these contradictory trends – combined with large regional cultural and social variations in the diet patterns and the equilibrium between vegetal and animal food – will shape the future demand for food, at least if relative prices are not strongly changing (and they might change if there are sharp movements or paradigm shifts in production or consumption). Also, food is gradually being transformed from being a social activity in family or community contexts that promote social and family networks and bonding, to becoming often a 'status symbol' good through professional associations, club membership or association with certain kinds of lifestyles. These evolutions are a reflection of the strategies of social mobility of individuals, professions or communities, where food and related goods (such as alcohol) become vehicles of a globalized culture. – Food- regimes rather than the food basket , might become the

*Speaker

relevant concept to analyze in the Indian context, at a much earlier stage of development as compared to the Western countries, because of the shortening of time spans over which the diffusion of trends take place.

In China, the culinary tradition is equally strong, with one major difference – the Chinese diet has a much more varied animal base. The questions to explore in the Chinese context are similar to the the Indian context – are the middle and upper classes, the urban classes driving consumer trends? China is a society that is strongly hierarchical like India, yet based on an egalitarian social ideology- does that make a difference to the place of food in its economic and social life? What is the strength of Western influences on Chinese food consumption? The philosophical traditions of each country lay considerable stress on the relationship of the mind and the body. This ‘rapport avec le corps’ is a very ancient one, which has of course been studied by anthropologists of food. Its evolution in the context of modernity and consumerism is another important accessory question in studying food behaviour.

Keywords: food security, sustainable agriculture, emerging classes, behavioral interactios