

□□□ **ACADEMIC STUDIES WITHOUT TEARS** □□□

ACADEMIC RESEARCH FINDINGS TURNED INTO INFORMATION THAT ADVOCATES CAN GRASP AND USE EFFORTLESSLY

To learn why we launch this program, read the Explanatory Note placed at the end. Feedbacks welcomed. Contact: min@tinybeamfund.org



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Is meat and dairy consumption in developing countries all about taste and affordability?



When advocates plan their food consumption campaigns in low- and middle-income countries, is it wise to assume that the overwhelming reason people in these countries eat more meat and drink more milk is because these foods are getting cheaper and they appeal to people’s taste buds more than other kinds of food?

A growing body of academic research indicates that the food choices of individuals in developing countries are *not* simply a matter of the price or taste of the food itself.

Their choices are closely tied to deep-seated meanings, values, aspirations, personal identities, and a host of important contexts each individual associates with different foods (e.g. who they eat with, where they get their food).

This research insight suggests that there are benefits to be gained if advocates take into account such meanings as well as the contexts in which people consume their food.



1. Do consumers of fresh milk in China care about how much it costs?

Price is not a priority concern, not even for economically disadvantaged households.

When purchasing fresh milk, instead of the price tag, Chinese consumers look first for the milk’s safety certification, shelf life and freshness, and consider the nutrition value of milk.

Price is in the second-tier of preferred attributes. This tier includes taste, brand, organic, fat, sterilization technique, traceability, and price. Of least concern to consumers is the purchase location, the milk’s origin and packaging.

Jin, Shaosheng, Rao Yuan, Yan Zhang, and Xin Jin. “Chinese Consumers’ Preferences for Attributes of Fresh Milk: A Best–Worst Approach.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 21 (November 5, 2019): 4286. doi: 10.3390/ijerph16214286



2. Why do Christians in India like/don't like meat?

Whether they like meat or not depends on a host of factors that shift and develop over time.

Their meat consumption patterns are shaped, for example, by their caste and religion, their gender, age, status, their desire to use meat to forge positive identities. External events and developments – from national anti-cattle slaughter campaigns to messages of food activists – also play a role.

A bit more info:

- “meat-consumption can sometimes be status-enhancing or a powerful act of defiance”
- “When Hindu nationalism dominated the political scene in the late 1990s, for example, celebrating beef as prestigious rather than ritually polluting was, for many Christians and Dalits, part of an oppositional politics of identity. This dynamic is now significantly complicated by the overlaying of other events, actors and voices, such as those of environmentalists and the meat industry.”
- “The acceptability of meat consumption for Indian Christians varies considerably across regions, denominations and socio-economic divides.”
- “Meat consumption, then, was a malleable symbol by which people distinguished themselves as particular kinds of people.”

Staples, James. “Beef and Beyond: Exploring the Meat Consumption Practices of Christians in India.” *Ethnos* 82, no. 2 (March 15, 2017): 232–251. doi: 10.1080/00141844.2015.1084017



3. In the Indian state of Gujarat, is there really a recent shift to more animal-based food?

Gujarat is an economically advanced state and a major producer of dairy, poultry and fish, while maintaining a strong vegetarian identity and cuisine.

Is more animal-based food eaten there recently? It is not a simple “Yes” or “No”. For example, some foods are acceptable at certain times and on certain occasions but not other times.

Caste and socio-economic positions influence dietary choices. So is the different norms and values attached to foods (e.g. what is considered “pure” and “impure”), and varied eating practices.

A bit more info:

- “A recent [2018] article based on national surveys clearly stated that characterising India as a vegetarian land is a misrepresentation of reality since ‘the vegetarian population of India is at best 31% and realistically less than 20%’.”
- “. . .the linear model of nutrition transition driven by a ‘natural’ ambition to eat animal proteins, favoured or limited by income, food supply and physiological needs, may appear relevant at the macro-scale of nutrient categories, but requires a nuanced culture-specific analysis to reveal the variety of animal based food preferences or avoidances.”
- “This Indian case reveals that dietary change is not unidirectional towards the Western model but each culture has a unique form of transition.”

Fourat, Estelle, Shagufa Kapadia, Urvi Shah, Vaishali Zararia, and Nicolas Bricas. “Understanding Transition in Animal Based Food Consumption: A Case Study in the City of Vadodara in Gujarat (India).” *Review of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Studies* 99, no. 2 (2018): 189–205. doi: 10.1007/s41130-018-0076-7



4. When people in a country have more money, they eat more animal-based food. Right?

Not necessarily.

Researchers analyzed FAO data of 183 countries for 1961-2011, and found that “counter-intuitively, the pattern of meat protein consumption does not always follow the pattern of rising annual per capita GDP”.

Although there has been an undeniable rise in the consumption of animal-based food in emerging economies in this period, “for similar degrees of economic development, the composition of ABPs [animal-based protein] and the position of meat within this category vary significantly among countries, suggesting that historical, geographical, cultural and religious factors may be involved.”

For example, Japan’s animal protein intake is way below the average for high-income countries.

Sans, P., and P. Combris. “World Meat Consumption Patterns: An Overview of the Last Fifty Years (1961–2011).” *Meat Science* 109 (2015): 106–111. doi: 10.1016/j.meatsci.2015.05.012



5. Which food is considered “tasty” in South and Southeast Asia mega-cities?

One would think that it is entirely up to each individual’s own innate taste buds to determine whether a mouthful of food is “tasty” or not.

But this explanation does not tell the whole story for middle-class residents of Bangalore and Metro Manila.

Taste preferences of these persons are subject to various influences. The kinds of food they consider to be “tasty” depend on: 1) Whether the person is competent in preparing meals at home, or eats out. 2) The choice of food available at the site where the food is consumed. 3) The meaning each person has regarding what constitutes a “tasty meal”.

Sahakian, Marlyne, Czarina Saloma, and Sunayana Ganguly. “Exploring the Role of Taste in Middle-Class Household Practices: Implications for Sustainable Food Consumption in Metro Manila and Bangalore.” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 46, no. 3 (January 1, 2018): 304–329. doi: 10.1163/15685314-04603005



6. “Macro narratives” mold people’s food choices in Argentina

What are “macro narratives” or “macro tales”? These are narratives “that circulate in the common sense of people, and that guide them in the moment of making decisions”. They are the words and stories “heard in the family, the media, among friends”, the things “remembered from school”, the discussions circulating in institutions respected by society.

In Argentina, there are powerful macro narratives strongly in favor of meat consumption and disapproving of veganism.

A bit more info:

- “. . . the consumption of meat is representationally linked to wealth, abundance and health, and also to popular festivities and to get-togethers with family and friends. Not eating meat is associated with poverty, malnutrition, weakness and disease, and vegetarianism in males is often used to joke about their lack of virility.”

- "If you ask any Argentinean what food is national, he will answer "asado", "empanadas salteñas" (a pasty filled with chopped meat), etc. All of these contain meat. Cooking with meat is part of the national identity . . ."

Navarro, Alexandra. *Food and Culture in Argentina: Perceptions of Plant-Based Diets, Stigmatization of Veganism and Current Challenges of Activism to Reduce (and End) Animal Consumption*. Tiny Beam Fund, 20 Apr. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.15868/socialsector.36571>



7. What it takes to assemble "a decent meal" in Cuba

Cubans experience serious economic challenges and food shortages. It is hard for them to secure enough food for their needs. But in spite of this situation, they do not simply get hold of the cheapest food they can find when they try to put together "a decent meal".

The way they go about acquiring food and their views on the sort of food that meet their personal standards are "intricately linked to the local moral stances on what it means to be a good person, family member, community member, and ultimately, a good Cuban".

Garth, Hanna. *Food in Cuba: The Pursuit of a Decent Meal*. Stanford University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9781503604629 (hardcover); 9781503611092 (paperback); 9781503611108 (ebook)



8. Why do people in Vietnam go to McDonalds and steak houses?

After the government implemented successful economic reforms and joined the WTO in 2007 in order to lift Vietnam out of poverty, fast-food chains such as McDonalds and KFC opened their doors to customers in Vietnam for the first time. People there began to acquire a taste for this type of food.

But it is not solely the taste of "Big Macs" and fried chicken wings that draws customers to these eateries.

After decades of food insecurity, people in Vietnam regard meat as a symbol of good economic development that enhances their lives and as a mark of distinction that they have achieved.

Furthermore, "foreign-inspired food practices" such as eating at steak restaurants or celebrating children's birthdays at fast-food chains "come with significant social status attached".

A bit more info:

- "individual choice is a small part of the complex processes that determine consumption patterns"
- "My point is that not only development per se, but particular forms of development and food regimes in favour of cheap, mass-produced meat through domestic production and imports, create the necessary back-drop for rapidly increasing meat consumption."
- "An understanding of everyday life and the practices through which meat reaches people's shopping bags, plates and mouths, is needed in order to understand why and how people actually eat more meat."

Hansen, Arve. "Meat consumption and capitalist development: The meatification of food provision and practice in Vietnam." *Geoforum* 93, (July 2018): 57–68. doi: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.05.008

EXPLANATORY NOTE:

- Academic studies are notoriously hard to find, read, and put into practical use by non-academics.
- Super-busy advocates cannot afford to spend a lot of time and effort to dig up, digest, and deploy academic research even though they recognize the value of academic studies in informing and improving their advocacy work.
- *Academic Studies Without Tears* aims to help advocates faced with this dilemma.
- Its target audience are leaders and funders of non-profit advocacy organizations addressing the many negative impacts of industrial animal agriculture in low- and middle-income countries.
- It uses a communication style – reminiscent of quiz or news items – that makes everything a breeze to read.
- Each issue focuses on a particular topic and includes 8 – 10 academic studies.
- It goes without saying that the academic studies featured are *not* the final word. They have flaws and limitations. They are just a tiny selection of perspectives and findings for advocates to consider, to whet their appetite. But every relevant data point and nugget of cogent information adds to one’s store of knowledge and has the potential to spark new ideas.

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