

18 August 2010

Dr Jane Karlsson
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Dear Dr Karlsson

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Tuoli County, Xinjiang

Having spent about 25 years trying and failing to make much sense of the geographic variation in cause-specific mortality rates, I'm pretty sceptical of anything definite coming out of it all, and I wouldn't find either the presence or the absence of refined or whole wheat flour in one county particularly interesting or informative.

This is particularly so in the case of Tuoli County in China, because our diet survey team arrived there in the middle of a FEAST day!! Instead of going away and coming back some time later, the fieldworkers went ahead with a diet survey, and we didn't spot this until we were analysing the diet survey data years later for our monograph on the China study. Hence, on every pair of pages of our monograph that described any diet survey variable (ie, 48 separate times — once on every other page from pp.478-581) we stated that because of this festival Tuoli had to be excluded from the diet survey correlations.

A better guide about the low animal food content of the usual Tuoli diet is probably provided by their plasma apolipoprotein B levels, which were low (only 60 mg/dL, as against 110 mg/dL in the UK).

Please feel free to add this letter into any internet debate on this subject.

Yours sincerely



Richard Peto
Professor of Medical Statistics & Epidemiology
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PS: Although our monograph on the study dataset is now out of print, it is still freely available on www.ctsu.ox.ac.uk/~China/monograph.

cc: Colin Campbell, Chen Junshi

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