

Strategic Dynamics and Growth Opportunities in the Ready-to-Eat Food Industry: A Comprehensive Analysis of “Wei Zhi Xiang”

Bicong He*

Department of Economics, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Mansfield, CT, United States

* Corresponding Author Email: Bicong.he@uconn.edu

Abstract. The comprehensive study on the ready-to-eat (RTE) food industry elucidates the strategic dynamics and growth avenues, focusing on the Chinese brand "Wei Zhi Xiang." It scrutinizes the industry's evolution, driven by cultural and social shifts towards convenience and nutrition-conscious consumption. The analysis navigates through the intricacies of market trends, consumer behaviors, and technological advancements that have catalyzed the proliferation of RTE foods. A particular emphasis is placed on the escalating demand for products that blend convenience with nutritional value, highlighting the industry's response to the modern consumer's fast-paced lifestyle. Through a detailed market analysis, the report dissects the competitive landscape, identifying key players and their strategic maneuvers within the industry. The future outlook section anticipates continued growth, propelled by urbanization and the burgeoning single-person household trend. A SWOT analysis of "Wei Zhi Xiang" reveals strengths in product diversity and distribution, while also pinpointing areas for improvement, particularly in health perception and environmental sustainability of packaging. Strategic recommendations for "Wei Zhi Xiang" suggest a focus on product innovation tailored to health trends, eco-friendly packaging, and market expansion into emerging economies. The report concludes that leveraging technological advancements and consumer engagement can fortify "Wei Zhi Xiang's" market position and drive the RTE food sector towards a sustainable and health-conscious future.

Keywords: Ready-to-Eat (RTE) Food Industry, Consumer Preferences, Technological Innovations, "Wei Zhi Xiang", SWOT Analysis.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

RTC/RTE food has replaced regular food due to the major change in our culture and social life. Modelization and Globalization introduced various RTC/RTE food brands and stimulated their success in the domestic market while on their way to exploiting the global market. In this paper, we are going to overview the essential technology of the RTC/RTE industry while introducing a few successful companies and analyzing the global market trending of the RTC/RTE industry in recent years. Lastly, gathering the information needed to predict the future development of the RTC/RTE industry. Ready-to-eat food products encompass a variety of packaged items designed for immediate consumption without any cooking, while ready-to-cook options require minimal preparation such as heating or boiling before consumption. These products have gained traction among consumers, particularly in the snack sector, due to their convenience, attractiveness, reasonable pricing, and palatability. Technological advancements have played a crucial role in the production of ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook snacks, with a focus on easy operation methods and appealing packaging. These products span various categories such as sweet, salted, fried, canned, fast food, baked, dried, or preserved food.

Traditional cereal consumption has evolved to include bakery items, extruded food, instant snacks, breakfast cereals, biscuits, and bars, which are lightweight, nutritionally enhanced, shelf-stable, and easy to shop, and store. Ready-to-eat/serve and ready-to-cook products have become popular alternatives to traditional cooking options, especially among young consumers, due to their convenience, texture, and palatable taste throughout their shelf life. Overall, the increasing demand

for ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook food products reflects a global trend toward convenience foods made from cereals, pulses, and millets, including puffed and flake millets, pasta, noodles, baked goods, extruded products, and fermented foods.

Great change has been caused in the food habits and the methods of cooking over the years owing to urbanization, cultural shifts, and social modifications. In this respect, today's great hustle and bustle of modern life inclines people much toward the easy and time-saving methods of cooking and quick-cooked products. This trend is reflected in the market for ready-to-eat/cooked food products, which has experienced substantial growth. According to the statistics, the market of China's ready-to-eat/cook food products is forecasted to rise to nearly 4,000 billion yuan by 2026, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of more than 20%. The trends above the table are changing, and they might change at any point. This is majorly brought about due to the changing lifestyles and changing preferences among the modern consumer group. With the change in the fast food offered in the market, people of the modern day are attracted to food products that are easy to prepare and fresh.

Ready-to-eat food products are packed items that can be consumed directly without any kind of cooking, whereas ready-to-cook food products need some basic preparation, mainly heating or boiling, before their ultimate consumption. In other words, it helps in catering to those consumers' diversified needs and requirements who do not find any convenience without losing their taste and nutritional value. Thus, the pre-made dishes from China penetrated not only inside the country but also obtained reasonable acceptance from across the world, which is an indicator that the business holds prospects for foreign expansion. From traditional Chinese cuisines to more contemporary fusion foods, these dishes have been adapted propped for variances in the consumers' palate across the globe. It also implies that the business has been put early and successfully into international markets and forms the basis for its further robust global penetration. The international appeal of Chinese ready-to-eat dishes comprises the rich flavor and diversity, as well as convenience toward which the world today is moving when it comes to ethnic and exotic food. So, while the consumers try to seek new exposure and explore the world through their palate, growing openness to experiment with new cuisines is providing a very strong and lucrative avenue for Chinese RTE to expand its products into other geographies. The benchmark of international success truly lies in understanding local tastes and preferences, hand in hand with maintaining authenticity and quality.

On the other, the changing tastes and increasing popularity of Asian food in developed countries, together with convenience eating gathering pace like never before, both add to a valid case of Chinese RTE products consolidating their existence in these markets. Opening these markets and establishing the brand in this geography could be to a large extent enabled by strategic partnerships through local distributor partnerships, customized marketing approaches, and leveraging e-commerce platforms. To capitalize on this opportunity, Chinese RTE manufacturers, including "Wei Zhi Xiang," should focus on market research to understand the culinary preferences and dietary requirements of different regions. Developing products that cater to local tastes, while also highlighting the uniqueness of Chinese cuisine, can create a differentiated position in the international market. Additionally, addressing concerns related to food safety, packaging, and sustainability can further enhance the appeal of these products to a global audience.

In conclusion, the acceptance of Chinese pre-made dishes in international markets signifies a promising avenue for growth. By leveraging their strengths in product variety and flavor authenticity, Chinese RTE companies can expand their global market share. This expansion requires a strategic approach, including market research, local partnerships, effective marketing, and adherence to international quality standards. With these strategies, "Wei Zhi Xiang" and similar companies can navigate the complexities of the global market and successfully promote Chinese culinary heritage on the world stage.

2. Market Analysis

2.1. Market Analysis of the Ready-to-Eat Food Industry

The ready-to-eat (RTE) food industry has been growing in exponential folds for the last couple of years due to the changing behavior of consumers and technological innovations. Ready-to-eat (RTE) foods are attractive to consumers due to their convenience in obtaining a quick, timely source of daily nutrition against the backdrop of increasingly busy lifestyles and time becoming a rare commodity. That trend is expected to continue, with the global market for RTE foods posting strong growth by the end of the decade.

2.2. Current Market Trends

The market in RTE extends to a very wide gamut of products right from meals, to snacks, and desserts that address the taste preferences and dietary requirements of the market. Its food processing and packaging technological innovation have played key extensions to the product's shelf life without losing its nutritional value and taste. The two key factors to these new consumer preferences, where increasing demands for RTE foods are convenience and health benefits, may have an answer not only in easy preparation but also in the nutritious benefits entailed in them.

2.3. Consumer Preferences

Convenience, taste, and health are the only factors considered by modern consumers, particularly millennials and Gen Z. The new ingredient is RTE foods; may it be organic, plant-based, or have some natural essence in it. The demand for ethnic, gourmet, and region-specific cuisines is also increasing, representing a broad cultural shift to more diverse and adventurous habits in eating.

2.4. Competitive Landscape

Key players in the RTE food market range from big multinationals to small and medium-sized enterprises. Companies are, therefore, concentrating on innovating their product offerings, solutions in packaging, and strategies in marketing to tap a greater market share and fulfill the needs of changing consumer tastes. These were indeed strategic partnership moves that translated into visible mergers and acquisitions by firms that wanted to expand their product portfolio and geographic coverage.

2.5. Future Outlook

The RTE food market has very lucrative prospects in the future since there is a huge scope for further developments in both developed and emerging markets. Further, the continuing trend of urbanization and growing numbers of single-person households are foretold to foster the demand for RTE foods. But within that same industry, it's threatened by risks like increasing raw material prices, really tight food safety regulations, and environmental issues on packaging waste.

In this competitive environment and to gain potential from the market, RTE food companies should remain focused on product innovation, sustainability, and the health-conscious consumer. Brand opportunities will exist only for the ones maintaining the balance between convenience and health with sustainability credentials.

2.6. Real-World Example

According to a report by Grand View Research, the global RTE food market size was valued at USD 159.15 billion in 2019 and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.1% from 2020 to 2027. This growth is attributed to the increasing working population and the rising demand for convenience foods worldwide [1].

3. SWOT Analysis

3.1. Strength

The company under consideration thus reflects several strengths forming its place favorably within the ready-to-eat (RTE) food industry. The same is observed in its brand diversity and spread of product ranges, along with distribution networks.

3.1.1 Diverse brand portfolio

A major strength lies in the strategic approach of the company towards catering to different consumer segments through its core brands of "Wei Zhi Xiang" and "Cuiyu." "Wei Zhi Xiang" is meant for C-end consumers, mainly distributors and franchisees, whereas "Cuiyu" serves B-end consumers like hotels, restaurants, canteen businesses, etc., with its wholesale of frozen food. This will allow the company to be able to penetrate the different market segments. For example, a report by Frost & Sullivan said that, in their diversification of the brand, it is the strategy to succeed and reach various consumer preferences to penetrate the markets [2].

3.1.2 Product diversification and innovation

If the company remains strongly focused on its main products of meat and poultry, it is also constantly improving the structure of its products, which appears even more the intention of diversification and innovation of its products. With high-end hot pot ingredients and local specialties, it highlights the company's power to diversify its product lineup. Euromonitor International's investigation has shown that for the fast pace at which the RTE industry is growing, innovation in products holds the key to their competitiveness [3].

3.1.3 Robust distribution channels

The company is yet to realize the development of a multi-channel distribution network. This includes direct sales, e-commerce, and distribution, particularly focusing on C-end retail. This means the perfection of the multi-channel strategy with comprehensive market coverage. On one hand, this multi-channel strategy will broaden consumers from different bases, while on the other, it will enhance market reach and revenues. According to Deloitte, effective distribution will form one of the key success factors for the company to establish sustainable growth and market standing [4].

3.2. Weakness

despite this mounting pressure and huge opportunity in the ready-to-eat food industry, there are some serious weaknesses to be dealt with to strengthen and improve their market position, one perception of the healthiness of the product, and other environmental impacts of packaging.

3.2.1 Perception of Product Healthiness

Another huge challenge in the RTE food industry is perceived unhealthiness. RTE foods are, in most cases, thought to have processed ingredients, preservatives, and high sodium composition, scaring away health-sensitive customers. However, while companies are already offering organic and healthier options, the mindset of the majority is still one of the roadblocks to widening market acceptance. Research shows some RTE processed food offerings as a source of health problems if eaten frequently[5].

3.2.2 Environmental impact of packaging

Another weakness is on the environmental front, especially in the packaging of RTE foods. There has been an overreliance on single-use plastics and packaging materials due to the convenience that is key in the sector, hence rising waste and cases of environmental degradation. While the trend is increasing more toward sustainable packaging options, the shift takes place slowly and often is realized through higher costs. The environmental footprint left through packaging directly influences corporate sustainability goals, and to a much larger degree, it has an impact on consumer purchasing behavior, particularly from certain environmentally conscious demographics.

3.2.3 Mitigating weaknesses

At the same time, such weaknesses can be mitigated by RTE food companies when they invest in product research and development for innovation on product formulations with the effect of reducing the usage of preservatives and unhealthy additives. Consumer education using transparent labeling and marketing campaigns can also change this perception with time. Besides, promoting the adoption of eco-friendly packaging solutions would minimize the environmental impact and offer a big incentive to the growing chunk of consumers subscribing to the path of sustainability.

3.3. Opportunity

The RTE food industry is an industry with many opportunities that are ready to be exploited for growth and innovation. Main opportunities are spotted, such as trends toward consumer health consciousness, market expansion at the global level, and advanced food technology.

3.3.1 Health-conscious consumer trends

Healthy eating options such as organic ready-to-eat foods, high-protein content foods, low-calorie content foods, free-from-artificial additive foods, etc., have attracted heavy attention from the consumer end and have been growing in Trends toward healthier eating will allow RTE food manufacturers to put some creativity into their line and meet the needs for healthier choices. A report by the Food Industry Association (FMI) indicated that the change in eating habits—due to health-consciousness after the pandemic—is increasing demand for foods that are healthier and convenient [6].

3.3.2 Global Market Expansion

The RTE food industry still has a lot of meaningful growth opportunities in emerging markets. Some of the dominant factors that could influence a boost in demand for quick, convenient meal solutions are rapid urbanization, an increase in income levels, and changing busy consumer lifestyles in countries such as India, China, and Brazil. The Asia-Pacific region is expected to show the fastest growth in the RTE market, keeping in view all those reasons of factors, according to one report of Mordor Intelligence [7].

3.3.3 Advancements in food processing and packaging technology

The use of technology and automation in today's date has become indispensable for food processing and packaging, leading to better product quality, extended shelf life, and most importantly, taking care of safety. Opportunities for RTE manufacturers lie in differentiation through innovating with HPP (High-Pressure Processing), aseptic processing, and smart packaging that further add to the shelf life of the product and increase convenience. One market report stated that innovations in packaging are bringing changes to market dynamics for RTE foods, with a focus on sustainability and convenience [8].

3.4. Threats

Though this bloom in the RTE food industry, various threats remain, which shall shake the size of the market. The threats include the changing regulatory landscapes, supply chain vulnerabilities, and changes in consumers' behaviors.

3.4.1 Changing Regulatory Landscapes

Food industries, RTE included, are under strict regulations that involve food safety, labeling, and environmental impact. Regulatory shifts only put more cost pressure on compliance spending, harming profitability and functional effectiveness. Food safety and packaging regulations, for example, have been tightened, and have even reached the point of restricting what type of RTE products could be produced, packaged, and sold [9].

3.4.2 Supply chain vulnerabilities

The RTE food industry relies mostly on its cumbersome supply chain, which includes the procurement of raw materials, production, packaging, and distribution. Any such fracture in this supply chain, such as raw material shortages, transportation delays, or geopolitical tension, would amount to great operational difficulty and increase in cost. This was, for instance, the COVID-19 pandemic that showed the weaknesses of global supply chains and affected the availability and pricing of raw materials to the RTE food sector[10].

3.4.3 Shifts in consumer behavior

The fact of the matter is, that there is a constant change in consumer preferences, and a possible trend of people shifting from processed food to fresh, home-cooked food would be adverse to the RTE industry. This means the increasing focus on health and wellness, in addition to the push towards more authentic, traditional cooking experiences that impact the demand for RTE products. The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) report noted that consumer trends are increasingly moving toward fresher and minimally processed options, a fact that may pose a threat to the RTE market [11].

4. Recommendations

4.1. Product Diversification and Health Focus

Wei Zhi Xiang, the company, should continue the diversification of product offerings in line with the upward-spiraling trends of the health-conscious consumer. These would also include the widening of offerings in the organic, low-calorie, functional food segments catering to specific health needs like heart health, diabetes-friendly, and immune-boosting options. Developing products that will be a mix of traditional flavors with nutritional benefits, so that they can fulfill their preference of taste along with health.

4.2. Sustainable Practices and Eco-Friendly Packaging

End consumers are raising more and more concerns about sustainability. Wei Zhi Xiang can be an industry leader in RTE with more sustainable packaging. Changing to eco-friendly materials, decreasing plastic use, and improving recycling capabilities will not only minimize environmental impact but also have a good and lasting effect on people who are environmentally conscious consumers. Brand image and consumer trust from these efforts in communicating to the people through marketing campaigns can be developed effectively.

4.3. Market Expansion and Localization

Another great opportunity is expansion into new geographic markets, especially those from emerging economies where demand for RTE products is growing. Wei Zhi Xiang must consider local products' localization according to regional tastes and dietary preferences through proper market research in combination with local partnerships. This approach will enable the company to tap into new consumer bases and diversify its market risk.

4.4. Leverage Technological Advancements

This means that, for Wei Zhi Xiang, investing in technology for the improvement of products, optimization in supply chains, and enhanced ways of engaging consumers is essential too. In a word, advanced data analytics, machine learning, and AI can somehow assist Wei Zhi Xiang in predicting market trends, operating efficiency, and personalized marketing. It can provide brand exposure and availability through its e-commerce sales channels and digital marketing strategies, reaching the consumer in its ever-growing digital way.

4.5. Consumer Engagement and Transparency

In this context, thus, more efforts in the relationship of engagement and transparency with the customers would give Wei Zhi Xiang an edge. This may include but is not limited to, stating outright product labeling, listing the product ingredients, sourcing information, and nutritional information. There will also be active engagement with the consumers on various digital platforms, of which the most important one is social media. Offering cooking tips, recipes, and usage ideas for products can also enhance consumer experience and product value.

4.6. Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships

Forming strategic partnerships with other players in the food industry, and also with health and wellness brands or technology firms, would drive innovation and market expansion. Through collaborative efforts in product development, there can be co-branding and cross-promotion marketing activities that will flourish in new avenues of growth and diversification. Such an alliance fosters an extension of access to new market and marketing segments in a way of amplifies the presence in the market by Wei Zhi Xiang and its brand power.

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell, with the detailed analysis of "Wei Zhi Xiang" within the ready-to-eat (RTE) food industry, comprehensive insights could have been summarized by the concerned person over the analyzed market, SWOT, and strategic recommendations provided.

Now, the food industry, which is based on RTE products, is at a turning point of historical development and continues its high pace of growth under the influence of changing consumers' ways of life, scientific progress, and the global market situation. However, with a robust brand portfolio and a list of the most diverse product offerings available, Wei Zhi Xiang has managed to establish a praiseworthy stand amidst such a tough competitive landscape. Servicing consumers across varied segments through its core brands, a strong commitment to product innovation, and strong distribution has been salient for the market strength and sustenance of growth.

The abovementioned consumer health perceptions and, even more so, environmental concerns regarding packaging, and overall risk in the industry due to regulatory changes and supply chain disruptions require a proactive and strategic approach. These are provided together with recommendations on how "Wei Zhi Xiang" can address them while utilizing their strengths and market opportunities. The company would be able to move forward and achieve further success in the upcoming markets, provided it concentrates on highlighting the healthiness of the product by sustainability, reaching many market segments, being efficient and innovative through technology, and involving consumers with transparency following strategic partnership pursuits.

Going forward, the trajectory of the RTE food market is quite encouraging as developed and emerging markets have immense growth potential. Further, with an increase in urbanization, evolving consumer preference for easy-to-go, healthy, and sustainable food choices is likely to be a major factor driving the demand. So long as "Wei Zhi Xiang" is dynamic, innovative, and consumer-oriented, the company will do quite well in such opportunities.

This, therefore, epitomizes the trends of the wider sector that "Wei Zhi Xiang" experiences in the RTE food business catches and the opportunities, as well as risks, in the fast-evolving markets. Properly strategizing all these aspects, "Wei Zhi Xiang" will be at the forefront of reinforcing not just its current positioning within the market but also assisting in developing the industry in a more sustainable and health-focused manner. The future of the company will have to be built on that very ability to integrate consumer insights with operational excellence, building a brand that reflects the convenience, taste, and well-being aspirations of today's consumers. This would, in the process, perhaps make Wei Zhi Xiang continue its strong standing in the RTE space with great grit and resilience given the growing global food diversity and dynamism.

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