

**THE MAKING OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN CHINA: BOUNDARIES,
STANDARDS, AND CONTROVERSIES**

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ABSTRACT

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The controversy over whether there is authentic organic food in China has emerged as a response to the rising concerns over health, environmental deterioration, and food safety. This study examines how organic agriculture is defined, debated, and contested among various state and non-state actors, based on ten months of fieldwork in Beijing. Specifically, the chapters investigate the following questions: What actors and institutions are involved in developing discourses of organic agriculture? What knowledge (scientific, traditional, or local etc.) is referred to in defining the “authenticity” of organic agriculture? What discourse(s) is (are) used in discussing boundaries between organic agriculture and conventional agriculture?

This study uses a number of conceptual frameworks to address the questions raised above, such as “boundary object”, “boundary work,” “boundary and arena analysis” and “boundary organization.” It analyzes organic agriculture food governance through the boundary literature to show how social actors mobilize knowledge to govern. Based on fieldwork materials that I’ve gathered in ten months, the study shows that, at the current stage, Chinese organic agriculture is a boundary object in terms that it allows interpretive flexibility of social actors; thus different groups are able to work together without consensus. While it is intertwined with the interpretive flexibility of social actors, the authenticity of Chinese organic agriculture will always remain

problematic as the result of a lack of concrete formal and informal standards that define authenticity.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Is there “Authentic” Organic Agriculture in China?

Alongside the fast development of organic agriculture in China, the question “Is there real ‘organic’ agriculture in China?” has become a subject of dispute. Many global retail outlets remain doubtful of Chinese organic product quality and cut back on organic agrifood sourcing from China (USDA 2010). For instance, the question “Can organic food from China truly be organic?” has been floating around on the Whole Foods Store Blog since 2008, and then Whole Foods stopped sourcing all organic agrifood from China except for frozen edamame, which caused a further rumor that there were no real organic agrifoods in China¹. Meanwhile, there have been scandals of fraudulent organic agrifood in the Chinese domestic market: For example, all thirteen Wal-Mart stores in Chongqing were ordered to shut down by the city government for selling “organic pork,” which did not meet the organic standards in 2011 (Bradsher 2011).

A simplistic view is the adoption-diffusion model that “organic” agriculture started from the developed world and moved to the developing world, spreading and transforming to match the “local” environment. Due to local social and economic conditions, such as the mix of the Chinese political system and the market economy, fraudulent organic agrifood operations are conducted by various dishonest public and private actors to earn a profit. For example, in its report on Chinese organic agrifood, the USDA attributed fraudulent organic agrifood in both

¹ <http://blog.wholefoodsmarket.com/2008/06/is-organic-from-china-possible/>

domestic and global markets to “unethical practices of retailers, who are known to intentionally mislabel their products in order to gain a higher profit margin” (USDA 2010).

However, upon closer examination, there is more complexity than what can be explained through a dichotomy of authentic and fraudulent organic agrifood. On one end of civil society, radical organic agriculture activists emphasize that organic agriculture needs to be liberated from agricultural standardization; thus it should not only be allowed to be named “organic” solely on the condition of meeting the national standards enforced by the state. Less radical growers argue that at least there should be alternative standards of organic agriculture, such as voluntary standards of organic agriculture that could be implemented. For instance, the founder of the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm claims that the Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) model suits the Chinese context better than the third-party certification model in the case of organic agriculture, because it both lowers the cost of certification to small farmers and reduces the mistrust of consumers toward certification bodies by building up face-to-face relations between organic agriculture growers and consumers (Shi 2012).

Conceptualization of “Organic”

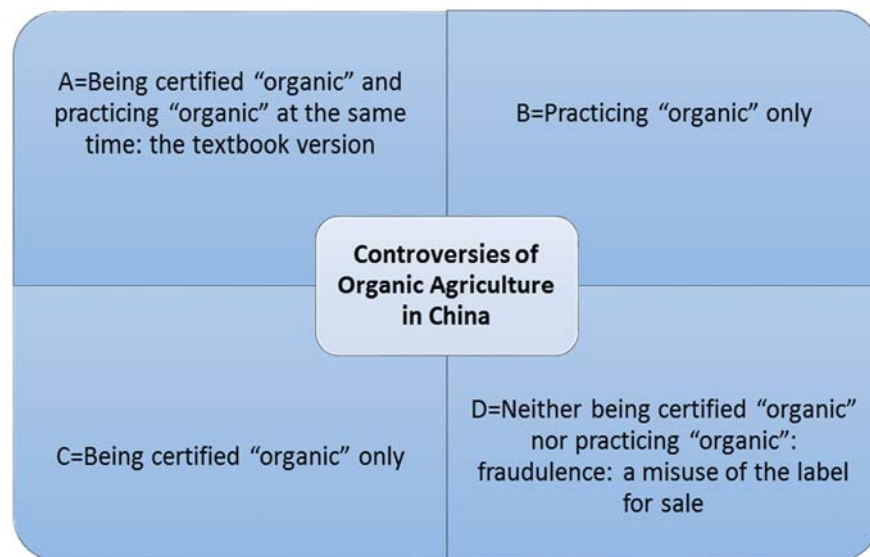
The concept “non-certified organic” has not been introduced by the Chinese mass media discourse nor is it recognized by the state, so strictly speaking, the non-certified organic food is “illegal organic” or “fraudulent organic.” Globally, however, the concept of organic is slippery and contested, as what composes the real organic is not an agreed upon conclusion (Lockie 2006).

The divide between practice and certification of organic agriculture can be seen as an alternative version of the gap between actuality and name, which has long been recognized in Chinese philosophy. Based on preferences of actuality or name, among many other differences, Chinese philosophy has been divided into two schools: The “other-worldly philosophy” that emphasizes actualities and the “this-worldly philosophy” that focuses on names. Taoism, which is one main school of the “other-worldly philosophy”, for example, advocates abandoning the names and being closer to the actuality-Tao. The founder of Taoism, Lao Tzu (500 BCE) remarked, “The Tao that can be comprised in words is not the eternal Tao; the name that can be named is not the abiding name” (Lao Tzu quoted in Fung and Bodde 1997, p.94). In other words, it suggests people quit labeling things, and instead gain “real knowledge” through firsthand experience of being and doing. On the other hand, this-worldly Chinese philosophers such as Confucius emphasized the importance of names. For instance, Confucius indicated, “The one thing needed first (to rule a state) is the rectification of names” (Analects XIII quoted in Fung and Bodde 1997, p.41), thus things in actual fact should be made to accord with the implications

attached to them by names. The name-actuality division has always been unsolved in Chinese philosophy. As a result, this-worldly and other-worldly philosophers remain separate.

Due to the tension between the actuality and name models, a divide between authentic (A) and fraudulent organics (D), as shown in Figure 1, is not able to totally depict controversies of practice and certification. Instead, I applied the term “organic” in general in this study: It is “organic” in terms of how people label it. Besides A and D, there could be organic food B, in which the producers practice “organic” procedures but do not get certified by the any agency, or there could be organic food C, which has been certified as “organic” but has not incorporated any ideas or practices of organic farming.

Figure 1 The Divide Between Practice and Certification of Organic Agriculture



For instance, “organic” certified by PGS can be seen as to be in domain A or B, depending on the groups one interviewed. Rather than asking the question “Is there authentic organic food in China?” I ask where organic food, or at least the food labeled by social groups as “organic,”

can be found. Through following “organic” food at different sites, I have learned empirically how organic food in China is produced by various social dynamics of multiple social actors. As there are multiple places where one can find organic food, there are multiple organics. The following subsections will elaborate the conceptual framework applied and specifically describe the methods used in this study.

Understanding the Organic Agricultural Controversies in China: Theoretical Foundations

In order to understand the organic agricultural controversies and reveal how power is “naturalized” in the case of organic agriculture in China, I have drawn literature from power and knowledge and boundary literature. In studies of alternative food systems, too little attention has been given to the role of knowledge production as a social and political part of alternative practices, thus examining the micropolitics of collaboration to create new objects and practices has been a current important focus (Goodman and DuPuis 2002; Tsing 2005; DuPuis and Gillon 2009).

Power and Knowledge

Power is one of the most commonly used but also one of the most ambiguous concepts in the social sciences. While power is an ambiguous concept in the social sciences, this study will embrace an approach indebted to literature within Scientific and Technology Studies (STS) to study power. In the discussion on power within STS, there is a disjunction between a “semiotic power” and a “micropolitics of power” (Bijker 1995, p.263). The first perspective of power is provided by social constructivism. It emphasizes an order of taken-for-granted categories, such as class and culture, and usually maintains a macro narrative of the social, without mentioning material artifacts. To the contrary, heterogeneous constructivism focuses on a “micropolitics of power” by engaging both human and nonhuman actors, and it tends not to apply social categories. Power, here, is a relational concept which contains a complex system of contingencies and exchanges. Knowledge, social realities, and power are produced together at the same time.

The “semiotic power” is a Marxian version of power. The main problem of the “semiotic power” concept lies in its presumption of power as the cause of social action without explaining power itself. For instance, a response from this position to what defines organic agrifood would be: The singular truth of organic agriculture would have been revealed through scientific research if there were no unnecessary interruptions from power conflicts. In such a view, nature is the ultimate reference that decides when these controversies over organic agriculture are closed. In other words, once the social actors involved in the controversies of organic agriculture find all the truth and stay away from factors such as class, interests, and so on, there then would not be any disagreement among them, since the existence of nature determines what they finally will agree upon. This position takes an essentialist approach to science, while it begs many questions on the nature of power itself. Science is present as an item for discussion, but absent as an object of investigation. Consequently, science becomes significant only insofar as it is deemed to be distorted by factors external to science, be they class interests, or interactive power struggles.

Unlike “semiotic power”, the “micropolitics of power” shares certain similarities with Foucault’s discussion of power/knowledge: Power is depicted not merely as a property owned only by a set of powerful actors who dominate others but a governing force. To depict this nature of power, Foucault invented the concept “governmentality” or “the conduct of conduct” (Foucault 1991). Governmentality is used to analyze the links between “governing the self” and “governing others” (p.147). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) argued that in modern

times there was also an increasing control in subtle forms of power while there was a decrease in the sense of subordination and domination. Differing from pre-modern times, where the individual was a fleshy object under a brutal sovereign power, modernity brought a new discourse that constructs subjects into a “mindful bodies” and governs them by surveillance.

In a general sense, this division can be seen as a disagreement between a perspective of power emphasizing power of social actors and another perspective focusing on power in dynamics. In the case of studying organic agriculture, a semiotic power approach would investigate “who defines organic agriculture?” while a micropolitics power approach would ask “how is certain agriculture is defined as ‘organic’?” By asking “Who are currently involved in developing discourses of organic agriculture? What concern (market, industrial, inspirational etc.) is referred to as their individual rationales to define organic agriculture?” this study is able to capture the two types of power by recognizing both an actor’s “rationale” and social rationalities. After all, what social actors know is always part of collective cognition (Lave and Wenger 1991 quoted in Busch 2011). In other words, the semiotic power approach and the micropolitics power approach complete each other by showing different aspects of power: The former recognizes the different influences of the social actors in defining “organic” and the latter recognizes acts of actors, given their social positions.

Boundary Literature

This study has applied three major concepts such as “boundary object,” “boundary organization” and “boundary work” (e.g. Star and Griesemer 1989; Boltanski and Thevenot 1999;

Bowker and Star 1999; Gieryn 1999) from scholarship on boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002).

Boundary objects are defined as “...those scientific objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds...and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them. Boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites.” (Star and Griesemer 1989 p.393). It is a concept first developed to explain heterogeneity and cooperation among participants of different social worlds engaging in intersection work. It facilitates understanding of how cooperation without consensus within different worlds is possible (Clarke and Star 2008, p.121).

A case applying the boundary object concept which is related to this study is Gieryn’s (1999) organic compost case. He argued that a compost pile is a “boundary object” which combines both modern scientific and traditional Eastern knowledge. Similarly, someone might argue that organic agriculture could be seen as a boundary object that perhaps redefines both traditional and scientific knowledge. Take the definition of organic agriculture given by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) for an example, “...Utilizing both traditional and scientific knowledge, organic agricultural systems rely on practices that promote and enhance²...,” it recognizes a combination of the traditional and scientific bases, as a global

² see <http://www.ifoam.org>

multicultural knowledge adopting a “strong objectivity” as Harding (1998) proposed. However, the danger of “strong objectivity” is its “mapping of difference onto an underlying hegemony” (Cohen 1994, p.345). In response to this difficulty, this dissertation takes a pragmatic approach by not assuming that organic agriculture should and will be a boundary object automatically defined by traditional and scientific knowledge, as how IFOAM proposes in the definition of organic agriculture. Instead, it will focus on whether a consensus may be achieved among different knowledge systems by understanding questions such as “What knowledge (scientific, traditional, or local etc.) is referred to as a framework to define organic agriculture?”

Boundary organizations “perform tasks that are useful to both sides, and involve people from both communities in their work, but play a distinctive role that would be difficult or impossible for organizations in either community to play (p.403). Boundary organizations are most applied to study the cooperation between scientists and non-scientists and examine how scientific knowledge and social order co-produce each other through generating boundary objects and standardized packages, but in this study, boundary organization is not applied to solely study scientific knowledge, but knowledge in general.

Unlike scholarship on “boundary objects” and “boundary organization,” which stresses how crossing the boundary is facilitating communication and cooperation by asking “given their differences, how are separated social worlds interacting and communicating?”, studies of “boundary work” asked “how is the boundary of certain separated social worlds created?” The boundary work literature identifies the divide between science and non-science through constant

negotiation of participating social actors. Boundary in that aspect emphasizes its role of separating and excluding of professional (e.g., Gieryn 1983 1995 1999; Fisher 1990; Gaziano 1996; Kinchy and Kleinman 2003; Mellor 2003). Gieryn (1983) first applied the “boundary work” concept to explain why and how the demarcation of science from non-science is not just an analytic problem for academic inquires, but a practical problem for scientists to construct ideologies suited to protect and advance their professional authority. In other words, intellectual authority of science is obtained by continuing processes of boundary-work efforts of scientists rather than being internal properties of science itself. The question of authenticity of organic agriculture thus can be seen as a translation problem, as retaining a cohesive identity of “organic” across sites is difficult, as there is too much flexibility of what is considered as “organic” agriculture in each social world.

Research Questions

Based on the literature review, I have developed the following research questions. Also, the preliminary on-site research experience gave me an idea of the messiness of organic agriculture controversies in China; thus these questions remain open-ended.

RQ 1: Who are currently involved in developing discourses of organic agriculture? What concern (market, industrial, inspirational etc.) is referred to as their individual rationales to define organic agriculture?

RQ 2: What knowledge (scientific, traditional, or local etc.) is referred to in defining the “authenticity” of organic agriculture? What are the acts of organic agrifood governance in China?

RQ 3: What discourse(s) is (are) used in discussing boundaries between organic agriculture and conventional agriculture? Is it a hegemonic discourse? If not, what are these discourses?

These questions harken back to the conceptual issues raised earlier, in the framework section: What knowledge is referred to by various social actors to gain legitimacy for “organic”? Most importantly, these questions are all related to the general question that this dissertation is trying to answer: What and how is knowledge has been mobilized in organic agrifood governance in China?

Methodology

Based on the above research questions, I have taken a qualitative approach. I have triangulated data collected from content analysis, semi-structured interviews and on-site observations. The three sets of data can complement each other to strengthen my qualitative research approach.

Content Analysis

As the first step of the study, I launched a content analysis in order to: 1) learn about the organic agriculture media discourse from available texts and 2) develop a name list of key figures and groups for future interviews.

A search for organic agrifood (youji nongye and youji shiping) was conducted in the published newspaper articles contained in the China Academic Journals Full-text Database of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI <http://www.cnki.net>). The period from 2001 to 2011 (the last full year available when the data used in this dissertation was collected) has been selected to build an electronic pool of articles. This research yielded more than five thousand articles. Thus I further limited the search on the condition that the phrase agrifood (youji nongye and youji shiping) must appear more than five times or it must appear in the newspaper article heading. With this condition, it yielded a manageable size of 2449 articles. I chose articles only from “national” newspapers, defined by CNKI to code. It resulted in 199 articles. All selected 199 articles were coded for basic information such as the following: the theme, the location, actors involved, frames, and justifications of actors.

Semi-structured interviews

Originally, I planned to interview informants on my list developed from the content analysis. However, as my field work started, I made connections quickly with informants through snowball sampling. Hence, I decided to follow the actors in the small circle of non-certified organic agrifood producers. My two initial contacts were critical in putting me into contact with other informants.

Fang Liao³ is one of the founders of the organic farm called “little donkey”, the first farm adopting the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. As a doctoral student in the Agriculture and Rural Development Center (ARDC) at Renmin University, in 2009 Fang Liao spent a semester at a local farm in Minnesota as an exchange student, where she learned about the CSA model. After returning to China, she founded “little donkey” in the west suburban area of Beijing, supported by ARDC, which is also in charge of CSA training and support. Since then, CSA models have spread quickly: there are more than 100 CSA projects across the country (Shi 2010). On the website of ARDC, the CSA model is identified as “returning the call of endeavor by earlier Chinese intellectuals in promoting rural development in China.”

Jing Yu is one of the officials who worked in the China Organic Food Certification Center (COFCC), a certification body affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture. It is accredited by the Certification and Accreditation Administration (CNCA) to provide organic food

³ The names of the informants in this study are all fictitious to maintain confidentiality.

certifications based on procedures in which “not only international common practices are adopted, but also the actual situation of China is taken into full consideration.”⁴

Both Fang Liao and Jing Yu are influential figures in their groups, which made them good candidates for the initial contacts of this study. I started to make more connections and interviewed 39 informants in China during the ten months of field work.

Field Observation

I conducted on-site observation along with interviews. From the perspective of ANT (Actor Network Theory), the locale is important in knowledge-making. Field observation of various sites has allowed me to see how nonhuman actors, such as standards, devices, and images, are engaged in producing the discourse of organic agriculture. It enables me to better understand the settings in which actors are actually negotiating knowledge and enacting realities. I also kept field notes throughout my observations. I did not take photos of these sites myself but mostly used pictures provided⁵. The notes and photos were used as memos for my later data analysis.

⁴ COFCC Official Website at http://ofcc.org.cn/Sites/ofcc/List_5515_6882.html

⁵ I realized that building trust requires more than showing my informants the confidentiality letter in my field work. Since I noticed in the very beginning that my asking for their permission to record and take photos brought a certain hesitation, I decided not to take photos myself but used photos they documented themselves.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 2 depicts the big picture in which organic agriculture in China is embedded from a media discourse perspective. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 discuss the multiple realities of organic agriculture. Chapter 5 investigates connections of these different worlds of organic agriculture. In Chapter 6, I summarize the major findings, discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions, and suggest implications of this research for further study in the future

Chapter 2 debunks a myth of organic agriculture by identifying the social actors, the frames and justifications embedded in the discourse of organic agriculture. It shows how the dominant discourse, an emphasis on development, economic growth, and technoscientific progress, can even integrate and give meaning to something which emerged as an alternative approach of agriculture development.

Chapter 3 starts with a question: What knowledge is referred to by producers to claim legitimacy for their organic agrifood? I will examine the various kinds of encounters through which boundaries of “traditional” and “modern” knowledge are produced. By applying the literature of boundaries between modernity and tradition, I will show how the ambiguity of “organic” opens up a contingent arena for negotiating boundaries between “traditional” and “scientific” knowledge and for participating in the production of “authentic” organic outside the current “certified” version of organic agrifood in China.

Chapter 4 transforms the “authentic” or “fraudulent” controversy of organic agrifood into an empirical question: Where can authentic organic food, or at least the food named by social groups as “authentic” organic be found? By applying scholarship on “social worlds,” Chapter 4 investigates how organic food in China is produced by various social dynamics of different social worlds.

Chapter 5 is devoted to answering the question: How can these multiple social worlds of organic food be connected together and gain a significant influence with domestic consumers in China, even without any legitimacy from the state? Scholarship on “boundary organizations” is introduced as a framework to understand these multiple fragmented, yet connected practices surrounding organic agrifood.

In Chapter 6, I summarize findings from each chapter, discuss both the contributions as well as limitations of the study, and finally suggest potential questions for further research that emerged from this study.

Figure 2 The Structure of the Dissertation



CHAPTER 2 MAKING SENSE OF HIGH-TECH ORGANIC AGRICULTURE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

Abstract

It may appear jaw-dropping that organic agriculture is in line with high technologies. This chapter examines how organic agrifood is framed and justified in media discourses within China. 199 articles published in various national newspapers from 2001 to 2011 were analyzed to examine actors, framing and justifications regarding organic agrifood. The research suggests local states and industries apply “organic agriculture” to gain the reputation of developing high tech agriculture with little discussion about substantive contents of organic agriculture. In addition, science, technology and state policy are seen as crucial factors for organic agriculture development, and organic agriculture is framed as a part of – rather than an alternative to – the large-scale, modern, industrialized agriculture and food system. Finally, the lack of engagement in discussions of connotation regarding organic agriculture, especially an absence of voices from actors in civil society, results in a strong emphasis on the industrial and marketing approaches to organic agriculture.

Introduction

In a major national newspaper, one article wrote, "With the development of modern science and technology, such as gene technology, the use of sludge, radiation technology and integrated control technology, organic food production processing technology will be improved and get more in-depth research" (Farmers' Daily 2009/12/23). It may appear jaw-dropping that organic agriculture is in line with high technologies. One may attribute this associating of organic agriculture with high technologies as a mistake made by this specific journalist who wrote this article, but there are more than a few articles like this one in other major national newspapers: Is it possible that the journalists who wrote these articles all went crazy together? Becker (1998) argued that "[t]he sign that conduct is crazy is that it serves no useful purpose the analyst can imagine...things look crazy or erratic... might make sense, if you knew more about them" (p. 25). In other words, meaning is highly context based. Social rationality, in which social realities such as organic agriculture are embedded, define meanings of social realities. Although there may not be a hegemonic social rationality completely determining one concrete and singular social reality, discourses still contribute to the forming of social reality through helping social actors make sense of social relationships and construct networks (Law 1993; Lockie 2006). Latour (1987) called this sociologics and argued that social actors apply this rubric in contrast to logic to define meanings. Thus production and spread of knowledge are inextricably entangled with politics and power through the process of social actors constructing networks.

This chapter studies the seemingly confused way of framing "organic agriculture" as

high-tech in the Chinese context by examining how organic agrifood is framed and justified by various social actors. In the following sections, I first give a conceptual model and explain why I apply it to develop codes based on which the content analysis is conducted. Following that, I provide an overview of methods and discussion of the study. Discussions reflecting on how the conceptual model provides a useful framework to make sense of organic agriculture seen as high-tech is followed by a concluding section which highlights three major findings of this study.

A Conceptual Model

To debunk this myth of “organic” as high-tech, I have drawn the notion from constructivism that social realities need to be studied not as finished entities but as dynamics and action of social actors. In this section, I will introduce a conceptual model to examine dynamics of social actors and their impact on defining social realities.

Social Actors

Abercrombie (1994) argued that consumers have governing power by defining the meaning of commodities through the increasing aestheticization of everyday life, which increases the symbolic meanings attached to commodities and consumers' knowledge of them. However, China's particular political economy and marketing system, and its less developed domestic organic agrifood market, limit the potential actors who may participate in negotiating meanings of organic.

Thiers (2006) studied organic certification in China by looking at state action and the market regime. By examining three frameworks: (1) the Chinese policy making process, (2) fragmented authoritarianism, and (3) local development states, Thiers concluded that “[i]n China there is both a strong assumption that state authority will be the best and only definer of the meaning of organic and guarantor that standards are met, and a struggle between bureaucracies over which state fragment will exercise that authority” (2006, p.198). However, since Thiers' conclusion was based on data collected a decade ago, the dramatic increase of domestic demand for organic

agri-food and the emerging urban farmer coalitions in China today suggests that a hegemonic discourse of organic agriculture set by the state may have been diversified over the years.

Goldberger (2008) argued that the framing of organic agriculture originating in Kenya differs from the organic agriculture movement in the Global North. In Kenya, the NGOs framed organic agriculture as being standardized, well-researched, systematic, and scientifically proven to appeal to various global donors. Scientists and scientific knowledge have been crucial actors in scientification of organic agriculture: Will that be the case in China?

Based on the above literature, I propose the following four major social actor groups:

Social actors in civil society, industries, the state, and scientists.

Framing

Social actors rely on frames as their “symbolic-interpretative constructs” or “schemata of interpretation” that enable them “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences that they experience (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998). Frames have been also relied on repetitively by individuals to relate new experiences to old ones (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998). In other words, without frames functioning as a mental regime, social actors would not be able to attach meanings to a new phenomenon. By embedding an issue in a cognitive schema, social actors accept the issue and assign a position to it. For example, organic food can be depicted as two completely different phenomena, depending on the frames applied to construct it: It can be framed as a valuable alternative form of consumption that solves all problems associated with the current food system or it can be framed as a type of conspicuous consumption of the cultural

elite. Both ways of framing contain certain aspects of organic agrifood, but the former one is much more positive than the latter.

Framing is by no means a passive process where individuals have to interpret the issue in an assigned frame; social actors can adopt different frames as analytic as well as strategic tools to perform (cf. Hilgartner, 2000). And once a certain frame is shared by a considerable number of people in order to understand an issue, the frame generates material forces to shape the world in a particular direction (Latour 1987). In this sense, knowing the world is a certain way of making the world (Heidegger 1996). Thus, frame analysis has been used to understand various events, ranging from public debate to public policy (Goffman 1974 1986; Tuchman 1978; Entman 1993; Hannigan 1995; Reese 2001). This brief review of frame analysis suggests that frames are specific schemata through which social actors interpret and negotiate an issue; thus an empirical study must be designed to learn how organic agrifood is framed.

Justification

While each individual will attempt to justify in a personal way their definition of organic agriculture, together they can be categorized into several types of collective rationales identified by Boltanski and Thévenot (1991; 1999) as: Industrial, market, opinion, civic, domestic, and inspiration. Lamont and Thévenot (2000) later added “environment” as an additional concern. The following is a list of the major principles of the concerns and examples in the case of organic agriculture.

Table 1 Seven Types of Collective Rationales Identified by Boltanski and Thévenot

(1991; 1999)

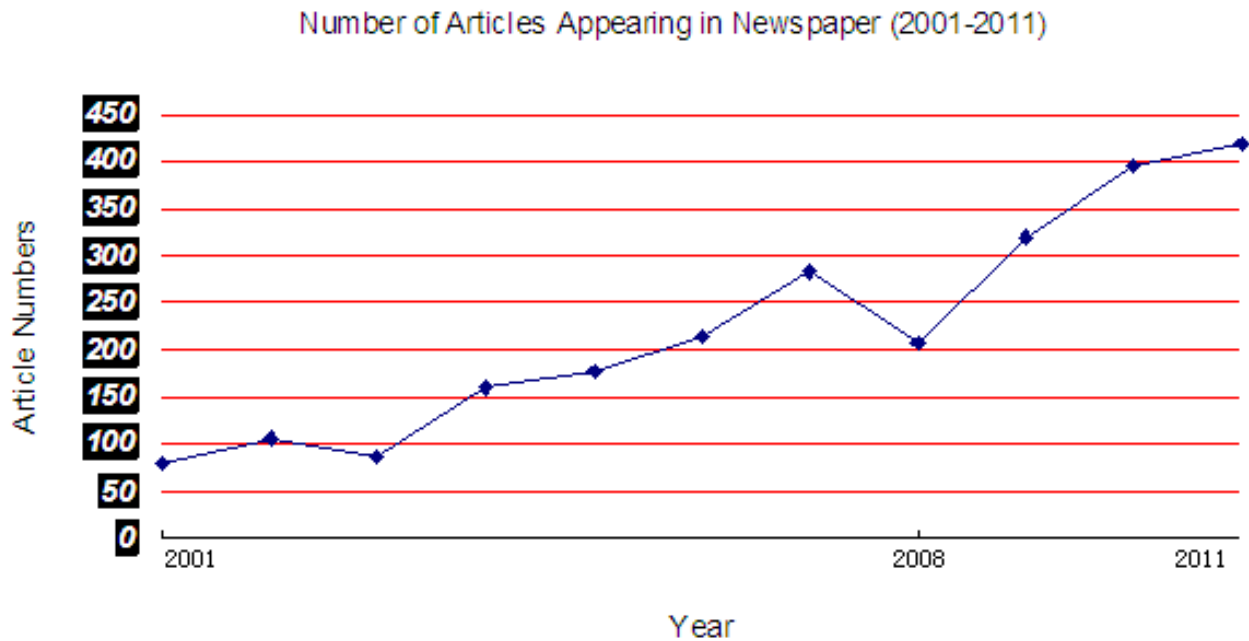
Justification	Major Principles	Examples
Industrial	Productivity, Efficiency;	“In the long run, organic agriculture will produce more food than conventional ways of farming.”
Market	Price;	“Organic tomatoes are eight times more expensive than regular tomatoes.”
Opinion	Renown, Public knowledge;	“Our efforts in promoting organic agriculture will let more people be aware of its benefits.”
Civic	Collective Interests;	“Those of us who are able to take the first step by paying more, do so to help organic farms achieve the economy of scale they need to become profitable.”
Domestic	Esteem, Reputation;	“Organic agriculture is in line with our value of rebuilding local communities.”
Inspiration	Grace, Nonconformity, Creativeness;	“Organic agriculture is a practical way to change the world”
Environment	Nature, Sustainability;	“Organic agriculture is one step to a greener future”

Justifications are the legitimating tools used by social actors to support their actions (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006). Based on this list of “regimes of justification,” this article will address the way in which newspaper articles justify organic agriculture. The above synthesis of social actors, frame, and justifications into the framework will enable me to analyze the dynamics of organic agriculture.

Methods

The concepts of organic agrifood (youji nongye and youji shiping) have been directly translated from the English terms. To obtain a basic understanding of the media discourse regarding organic agrifood, I have conducted a keyword search of organic agrifood (youji nongye and youji shiping) in the published newspaper articles contained in the China Academic Journals Full-text Database of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI <http://www.cnki.net>). A ten year time period from 2001 to 2011 was sampled. This research yielded more than five thousand articles. Thus I further limited the search on the condition that the phrase agrifood (youji nongye and youji shiping) must appear more than five times or it must appear in the newspaper article heading. With this condition, it yielded a manageable 2449 articles. As shown in Figure 1, the number of newspaper articles has risen steadily from 2001 to 2011, with an exception for the year 2008. I chose articles only from “national” newspapers, as defined by CNKI. It resulted in 199 articles.

Figure 3 Number of Articles Appearing in Newspaper (2001-2011)



My application of content analysis to collect data is based on the assumption that the media both mirrors and actively participates in everyday discourse through “the intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness” (Giddens 1991, p.27). In the Chinese setting, the relation between media and public opinion is more closely connected than in democratic societies. However, it is still too simplistic to equate media discourse with discourse in general. After all, Chinese journalists still make decisions as to what is to be included or excluded in reports, although they may follow different principles from their counterparts in the West, such as representing the voices of the state. Furthermore, certain norms of journalism may alter their writing styles in reporting the stories. The journalistic style may direct the media discourse of organic agriculture away from the daily discourse. To limit these problems, I have included a wide range of newspaper sources so as to reflect the wide range of public opinion.

Location of Organic Agriculture in China

Several newspaper articles argue that there is/should be a close connection between organic agriculture development and the Chinese Western Development Drive (a Chinese policy) as displayed in Table 2, based on an ecological reasoning narrative that the most important factor for organic agriculture is the natural resources of a region. In this narrative, Xichong, a county in the Sichuan Province, has various advantages for developing organic agriculture.

Table 2 Organic agriculture development and the Chinese Western Development Drive

Article Title	Newspaper	Date
Promising Future for Organic Agrifood in the West Region	Farmer's Daily	2001-1-8
Organic Agriculture and the Western Development Drive	Farmer's Daily	2001-2-12
Organic Agriculture and the Western Development Drive	Farmer's Daily	2001-2-19
Promising Future of Organic Agriculture in the Western Development Drive	China's Food Quality News	2001-1-13
Xi Chong County is building into Organic Agrifood Base in the West Region	China's Food Quality News	2009-9-29
Xi Chong: Organic Agrifood Base in the West Region	China's Food Quality News	2010-3-4
Xi Chong: the Endeavor to be the Organic Agrifood Base in the West Region	China Trade News	2010-7-8

The empirical data of table 3, however, shows that reporting of organic agriculture remains largely focused on developed agricultural regions. A few regions (Zibo, Shandong; Jurong, Jiangsu; Wanzai, Jiangxi) have been mentioned as examples for China's organic agriculture development. For instance, there are thirty-articles about organic agriculture development in Boshan, a district in Zibo, Shandong province. The "Boshan mode" has a demonstration significance for accelerating the development of organic agriculture in China (Science and Technology Daily 2009/12/21).

Table 3 Location of Organic Agriculture as Discussed in News Articles

Location	Frequency	Valid Percent (%)
The Globe In General	50	25.1
Shandong	38	19.1
Jiangxi	13	6.5
Beijing	12	6.0
Jiangsu	12	6.0
Total	196	100

Social Actors

The State

Local governments (19.9%) and a specific region (16.8%) are the leading actors in the media discourse. As shown in table 4, the central state (5.1%) is the authority to which the local state is constantly referenced. The newspaper articles of this type in general follow a storyline as such: “the central government policy functions as a critical ‘guideline’ – a specific region and local government follow the policy — there has been a great progress of organic agriculture development in that region— the local economy has developed while farmers’ income and welfare have been considerably improved.”

Table 4 Social Actors of Organic Agriculture

Social Actors	Frequency	Valid Percent (%)
Certification Organizations	6	3.1
NGOs	8	4.1
Central Government	10	5.1
Farmers	14	7.1
Organic Agriculture	17	8.7
Experts/Universities/Research Institutes	18	9.2
Developed/Developing countries	51	21.0
A specific local region	33	16.8
Local Government	39	19.9
Total	196	100.0

On one hand, there may be a certain ambiguity in the central government policy on organic agriculture; the local government officials thus have space to interpret the policy of the central state in terms of their own versions of organic agriculture.

Last year Document No. 1 mentioned only “to support development of green and organic agriculture,” but this year’s policy document has changed to “actively develop,” the situation of organic agriculture down the road will be better and better because of the preference policy by the central government.

On the other hand, many central state policies which have nothing to do with agriculture

have also been strategically used by local government officials as the guide under which to label organic agriculture. For example, some officials portray organic agriculture as the need to follow “the guidance of the scientific outlook on development” (China's Food Quality News 2005/06/07). Some officials say it is part of agricultural modernization. These created associations give organic agriculture legitimacy beyond agriculture.

In sum, the media discourse shows a similar conclusion to that of Thiers (2006), who argues that projects to develop organic agriculture at the local level in China are most often government led efforts to add value to agricultural production even though this strong emphasis on development is in contrast to the assumptions on which global organic standards are based. Through the process of interpreting and revising the meanings of organic agriculture, the local state is able to construct organic agriculture to have desirable attributes that fit local needs. By doing so, the sustainability agenda is replaced by a regional development agenda.

Industries

Behind local government (19.9%) and a specific region (16.8%), industry actors compose 13.8% of social actor roles in the media discourse. Articles about industries are not concerned with substantive issues such as ecological benefits of organic agriculture; they stress more how the management of the industries can be advanced so as to meet various organic agriculture standards. In other words, the core of organic agriculture is seen as an operational issue: how an organization can meet a range of standards. The international organic agriculture standard, national organic agriculture standards and private standards (e.g. San An Beyond-Organic

standard promoted by the San An Company) are drawn to indicate capacity of a certain company in producing organic agrifood. State-private partnerships are also demonstrated as the state is the dominant force in standardization activities, while companies are responsible for their efficiency, based on the established standards.

There are different tones regarding organic agriculture standards: Some articles argue that international standards by the WTO are ways by which the developed world puts up barriers to trade without China's consent; others see global standards as useful tools for companies to measure up to. Regardless of the tone, a pragmatic agreement is reached by all these articles: Standards, even if they are unequal rules set by the powerful, need to be met and certification is what makes organic agrifood "organic". Non-certified organic agrifood, as a concept, is not mentioned at all.

Noticeably, nineteen out of twenty-seven newspaper articles focusing on industries appeared since 2009. According to these articles, organic agriculture has become one of the most favorable investments for venture capital.

Multiple capitals are eyeing organic agriculture. Prior to 2005, investment in organic farms was mostly from small capital and its operation was cautious when organic farms were relatively small...now many venture capitals are starting to turn to this area and the scale of investment has expanded. Some venture capitalists have entered this field. For example, XX Co., Ltd. was initiated by venture capital...

These articles framed organic agriculture as the newest business concept and a profitable

investment opportunity created by food safety scares in recent years. Companies mentioned in these articles are ones which have the strong financial and social resources to participate in this new marketing competition such as Wanda Group (one of China's largest real estate companies); China Minsheng Banking Corporation Limited (the first bank owned mostly by private enterprises in China); Lenovo China; 360buy Jingdong Mall (the largest B2C online retailer in China).

As many companies mentioned are science and technology enterprises, real estate companies, and private equity firms, organic agriculture is framed as an upscale commodity invested in by business owners and that caters to affluent urban consumers.

....two years ago, Zhang Heng, one of the founders of the YMT Organic Farm Co. Ltd. was still a golden-collar manager who worked in a world-top-500 enterprise with an annual salary of more than a million...

...Liu Chengjun, a lawyer who had been working in the advertising industry for seven years before becoming the founder and general manager of Beijing Century Chestnut Ecological Agriculture Co., Ltd which produces organic eggs...

...Before starting Douli Organic Farm, Zhang Tonggui was the founder of the Duoli Sichuan Restaurant which had a chain of more than 30 stores in Shanghai ...

"I do not want to compete with farmers; we want our products want to be of high value-added agrifood." Zhang Tonggui said...

Organic agrifood is linked with the elite groups and their cosmopolitan lifestyle. Beck's

(1992) account of the ‘Risk Society’ is particularly applicable when looking at the articles under this category: Organic agrifood is framed as a solution for this group to avoid the risks associated with modernization, ranging from urbanization to environmental degradation.

Given its applied stringent standards, the prices of organic agrifood are much higher than conventional counterparts: Usually, the price of organic vegetables in foreign countries is 5 to 10 times more expensive. In China, its price is 4 to 5 times that of the conventional goods. Generally, consumers with higher incomes and awareness of health and food safety will purchase organic... Organic agrifood needs a new sales model so it can be brought closer to an urban lifestyle....

Scientists

Scientists and experts play an important role in Kenya’s organic agriculture development (Goldberger 2008). In the media discourse, agriculture scientists and experts also play noticeable roles in interpreting organic agriculture. Science professionals are also viewed as the key figures for changing the current situation. For example:

... In some European universities and agricultural technical schools, there are organic agricultural disciplines to train professionals in organic agriculture, animal husbandry, aquaculture industry and other technologies. In the production of organic agriculture, those professionals have played important roles. As far as I know, in China programs to train organic agricultural technology specialists still do not exist, which is bound to affect the development of organic agriculture in China. China must fill the gap as soon as possible to

strengthen and pave the way for the development of organic agriculture...

Also, scientists and experts are authorities on whose support the advocacy of organic agriculture hinges. For example,

...the development of organic agriculture is not going to embrace backwardness: organic agriculture does not use agrochemicals, but it by no means rejects science. On the contrary, it is the application of modern biology, ecology, the application of modern agricultural machinery, modern agricultural production management methods and soil and water conservation techniques, and organic waste treatment technology, biological technology...

While science itself is automatically seen to be strong enough to argue against opposing voices, values, social justice, and welfare of the civil actors are rarely mentioned in endorsing organic agriculture, since ideals such as “protecting the environment” and other values are cited by the opponents as evidence to argue that organic agriculture only fits the context of developed countries but not China. As science is identified as a panacea for the great economic, social, and political challenges faced by the nation, scientists take responsibility not only for scientific research and development, but also for social problems.

Other Actors

Developed and developing countries.

A certain proportion of the articles are focused on a specific nation and its experience in developing organic agriculture. In these articles, the categorization of “developed” and “developing” countries shows the logic of global trade opportunities provided by organic

agriculture: There are growing market demands for organic agriculture in developed countries, and developing countries which seize the opportunity greatly benefit from it.

Organic Agriculture Itself

In 8.7% of the articles, organic agriculture speaks for its own sake: the discourse is constituted as if a scientific truth reveals itself. Social actors whose interests are at stake are dismissed while power and social relations seem to be dissolved. Through the “objective” voice of organic agriculture, politics was automatically woven into the fabric of scientific practices which are structuring and restructuring the world.

The Civil Society

There is a voice promoting farmers’ governing role in promoting organic agriculture: “Let the farmers become the leading actor in organic agriculture” (Farmers’ Daily 2010/1/26 007). Farmers are only mentioned, however, in 7.1% of the articles in total, which is higher than certification organizations (3.1%) and NGOs (4.1%). These actors in the civil society altogether take up 14.3% of all social actors, which is much less than the state and industries.

Framing: Developing Organic Agriculture Scientifically

Over the past ten year period, the binary opposition frame in Western discourse, which depicts organic agrifood as being synonymous with safety, naturalness and nutrition, in contrast to the conventional agriculture as being artificial, threatening and untrustworthy, was not widely applied by the Chinese media. There are only two articles framing organic agriculture as an alternative to conventional agriculture and they both are about organic agriculture development in other countries (Japan and Italy). After all, re-thinking industrialization is a feature of post-modernity. In a country where modernization is still considered as the goal and the future, a re-thinking of “conventional” or modern agriculture would be in conflict with mainstream values.

Table 5 Framing of Organic Agriculture in Chinese Newspapers

Frame	Frequency	Valid Percent (%)
Returning to Tradition of Agriculture	6	3.1
Technological Progress of Modern Agriculture	163	83.2
Alternative to Conventional Agriculture	2	1.0
A mix of traditional and new agriculture	25	12.8
Total	196	100.0

There is not much a dispute over organic agriculture in terms of its content. Rather, it is consistently framed as the technological progress of modern agriculture. For example,

The development of modern science and technology, such as gene technology, the use of sludge, radiation technology and integrated control technology will largely improve organic agrifood in its quality and sustainability (China Inspection and Quarantine Times 2002/01/25).

The frame of reporting about other types of advanced technologies such as nanotechnology is also applied to organic agriculture. It is more or less viewed as consistent with conventional agriculture; it differs only in its technological stage. A strong developmentalist metaphor shows that organic agriculture, which may emerge as an alternative to the conventional, is still framed as part of that very conventional agenda against which it tries to rebel against. For instance, biotechnology and soilless cultivation technology are considered to bring benefits to organic agriculture. The dominant discourse frames organic agriculture as a high technology at the top of a linear path of agriculture technologies. And it is necessary for China to use the new “organic” technology to catch up with the developed nations.

Organic agriculture is a given fact: Most organic agriculture articles see organic agriculture as an advanced production technology, based on the fact that other countries in the world have already developed it and that there is a global market for organic agrifood. Others advocate organic agriculture because of the substantive benefits of organic agriculture, such as its ecological benefits.

Framing organic agriculture as being positive is quite consistent, but there was a certain concern as to whether organic agriculture fits China’s context, especially considering its potential

risk to food security.

If China fully adopts the organic agricultural production mode... there would be 290 million people starving. Therefore, organic agriculture cannot be blindly promoted across the country. Organic Agriculture Cannot be Promoted Blindly (Farmers' Daily 2003/07/16)

However, this argument had not been referred to by two articles citing the FAO documents, which suggests organic agriculture provides a solution rather than a risk to food security. Ever since the following two articles using the FAO data to back up their claims appeared, there were no more articles questioning organic agriculture and its effect on food security.

...The organic Agriculture and Food Security International Conference was just held at the FAO headquarters in Rome. The conference document emphasizes that governments should integrate organic agriculture as their agricultural development priorities...

Justifications

Justifications are mutable and unstable, so it is simplistic to view the regimes of justification summarized here in table 6 as absolute rules which do not leave further room for interpretation and negotiation by the participants. However, the application of these regimes still lends some insights.

Table 6 Justifications of Organic Agriculture in Chinese Newspapers

Justification		Frequency	Valid Percent (%)
Industrial		97	49.5
Domestic		6	3.1
Market	International Market	47	24.0
	Domestic Market	8	4.1
Civic		12	6.1
Inspiration		7	3.6
Opinion		6	3.1
Environmental		13	6.6
Total		196	100.0

Ironically, “industrial” and “market” justifications, which in the West are seen as what the organic agriculture movement is against, become the reasons for organic agriculture development in the discourse, without a sufficiently countervailing voice: the “environmental” justification which has been the backbone of the organic agriculture movement and “green”

politics (Emerich 2011) takes only 6.6%, while “civic,” “domestic,” “opinion” and “inspirational,” justifications are even lower percentages.

Table 7 Number of Articles by Justification and by Selected Years

		2001	2002	2010	2011
Justification	Industrial	2	6	11	16
	Domestic	0	1	2	0
	International Market	10	9	5	1
	Domestic Market	0	0	1	4
	Civic	0	1	2	0
	Inspiration	0	0	2	1
	Opinion	0	0	3	2
	Environmental	2	0	1	2
Total		14	17	27	26

The arguments made during the earlier years (2001-2002) are characterized by the predominant use of the international market justification. It is not until later years (2010-2011) that arguments about growing organic agrifood for the domestic market began to emerge. Thiers (2006) examined the encounter between Chinese domestic politics and global organic food standards. He indicated that the authoritarianism of the planned market and the fragmented entrepreneurial state changed the global agenda of organic agriculture from promoting sustainability to interests making and power competitions among agencies and governments at

different levels. Thiers thus argues that China's adopting organic agriculture practices is driven by the global market and profit seeking activities of various governmental bodies. Such an argument has again been verified in the justification of organic agriculture development, as the mass media largely applies the industrial convention to justify organic agriculture development. As a country of the Global South, China is developing organic agriculture targeting the global market. It is based on this pragmatic agenda that organic agrifood is a type of high value added commodity.

Organic agriculture in China started from international trade. As in the downstream side of the supply chain, the discourse also suggests a consensus that meeting demand requirements from the upstream side of the global supply chain would upgrade China's low level of agricultural production. The industrial justification which emphasizes scientific control and professionalism is closely tied with the major frame of organic agriculture development as a way to raise China's technological standing. The strong belief in science, technology, and industrialization together display a strong advocacy of modernization.

Discussion

Once having learned more about organic agriculture in the media discourse, framing “organic agriculture” as high-tech does make sense. The absence of discussions related to IFOAM values and principles is related to the general discourse, which regards science, technology and state mechanisms as crucial factors for organic agriculture development. The local states and industries apply this “organic agriculture” concept to gain a reputation for developing high technology agriculture. This result agrees with Thiers’ study (1996) on Chinese organic agriculture, as both the central and local states define what “organic” means in the Chinese context. In other words, the food governance mechanism in organic agriculture development is still predominately state-ruled.

This media discourse has broader implications for how organic agrifood may be related to the public debate. Since organic agriculture is framed as a part of, rather than an alternative to, the large-scale, modern, industrialized agriculture and food system, it does not reflect the voices of actors in civil society. In other words, based on the media content analysis, either there will be a lack of public debate of organic agriculture practices or the public debate may be so diversified that they do not even directly relate to this framing of “organic” as a high-tech agrifood. Since the content analysis is based on public media newspapers selected by the CNKI, it might also be due to the close relation between the state and the mainstream media newspapers. There may be other media, such as commercial newspapers, newsletters, and websites, which highlight different actors, apply other frames and provide other justifications.

Conclusion

This analysis of the media discourse concerning organic agriculture points to three conclusions. First, although it uses the same name of “organic agriculture” as defined by IFOAM, “organic agriculture” in the Chinese context is associated with meanings very different from those of safety, naturalness and the alternative. Local states and industries apply this “organic agriculture” concept to promote the reputation of developing high-technology agriculture, with little discussion about the substantive content of organic agriculture. Second, science, technology and state policy are seen as the crucial factors for organic agriculture development. There are no radical critics of conventional agriculture found. Quite the opposite, organic agriculture is framed as a part of, rather than as an alternative to the large-scale, modern, industrialized agriculture and food system. Third, the lack of engagement in discussion of connotations regarding organic agriculture, especially an absence of voices of actors in civil society, results in a strong emphasis on the industrial and marketing justifications for organic agriculture.

CHAPTER 3 THE AUTHENTIC ORGANIC: TRADITION, MODERN AND BOUNDARY

WORK

Abstract

This chapter examines how the authenticity of organic food is socially constructed by two groups of advocates. By drawing the boundary of “authentic” organic concept, a divide has arisen between traditional and modern approaches among organic agriculture producers. The ambiguity of the meaning of organic agriculture in the Chinese context opens up a contingent arena for participation in making “authentic” organic through negotiating boundaries between “traditional” and “scientific” knowledge outside the current “certified” version of organic agrifood in China. By incorporating the boundary work framework into the discussion between traditional and scientific knowledge from the postcolonial technoscience studies literature, this chapter shows that the boundaries between traditional and modern scientific knowledge in Chinese organic agriculture practices are not defined by the pre-existing nor internal properties of any given knowledge system. Instead, the boundaries are constantly constructed and transformed through a set of ongoing processes of situated social actors in their daily practices.

Introduction

In my fieldwork, Mr. Qing was often referred to as an example of the “authentic” organic food grower. Qing graduated from Peking University in 1979 and was hired as a faculty member in 1983 in the Peking University Law School. His wife was a faculty member in the English department. The pair was considered “successful” in the mainstream, but they both disappeared from that world beginning in the 1990s. Besides their close family members, nobody they knew where they went. It was rumored that Mr. Qing went abroad, had become a monk, had committed suicide, and so on. In 2011, Tang, a leading journalist in China, received a phone call from Mr. Qing, who had shared the same bunk bed with him in a college dormitory. Tang went to visit Mr. Qing and reported his story later, which made a piece of breaking news in 2011.

Qing and his wife had been leading their hermit lives in "paradise," which is far over a hilltop in a suburban area of Beijing. They have been renting 2,500 acres of land for 50 years at the price of less than 200,000 Yuan (approximately 3000 USD). There was no village, electricity, or road to their house: you had to walk more than 30 minutes from the main road to their home (Huaxi Dushi Bao 2011). Mr. Qing only went to the county close to the mountain once a month to purchase salt, the only commodity they bought from the market, and to run other errands. Once a year, Mr. Qing “had to” go to Beijing. Mr. Qing always brought his own food and water from the mountain. Despite this, his chest would hurt from the polluted air in Beijing for at least three days every time he visited. Over the decade, they had been living the lifestyle of Robinson Crusoe. Qing decided to “come out” and started to sell their non-polluting or “purely organic”

agricultural products. The goal was to earn enough money to continue their lifestyle in the mountains.

This story brings a mysterious glimpse of light to the “organic” agrifood Mr. Qing was later marketing. On one occasion, I was sitting over a table in an environmental NGO, joining in the conversation initiated by people who came to the NGO to buy “non-polluted” agriculture products.

A: I bet that his products are ten times more organic than those we can buy from the market.

B: Of course, considering Qing’s integrity, I certainly trust his products; how can he have abandoned it all? He could have made millions of Yuan, considering he was doing so well before his becoming a recluse on the hill. He could have “gone to sea” (Xiahai, which means to take the entrepreneurial plunge in Chinese) like many of his peers.

C: Yes, but he did not. That obviously showed his attitude toward money, so it is countable that he would not put any chemical substances in the agrifood he produces and consumes himself.

I: But where can we buy his products?

B: It is so pricey that I have heard that the millet he produced is over ten times the market price, plus he has so many friends who are waiting to buy from him. Well, I guess there would not be any left over for us.

I had never met Mr. Qing in person but I kept hearing stories about him over and over again from different informants I met at various locations. Even today, he rarely comes out from his

“paradise” and he only sells his products to limited acquaintances. Qing is but one of the many “authentic” organic celebrity producers I came to know about during fieldwork. I was able to eventually contact, meet, and interview other, worldlier organic celebrity producers, such as Xun and Ming, however in the small circle of non-certified organic food producers, Mr. Qing’s food stands out as a version of organic which follows the strictest of standards. Similar to the above quoted conversations, the narrative highlights the fact that “authentic” organic food is not merely more “pure” than the certified organic food sold in the supermarket, but also it is of higher quality than non-certified organic food, which is produced for profit as a result of the moral qualities associated with the person who produces it. Organic agrifood becomes associated with the imaginary retreat from a modern lifestyle to a place of tranquility. The hermit lifestyle, which comes from the Taoist tradition, has been the cultural symbol for the ideal lifestyle of dignity and purity in the Chinese tradition.

The “Tradition-Modern” Boundary vs. “Authentic” Organic Agrifood

I heard radically contrasting voices from my informants: On one hand, the world of non-certified organic agrifood seems to be full of legends, such as the story of Mr. Qing. The storyline of those who have abandoned fortune and fame is woven into the narrative of “organic.” Organic stands for a certain amount of purity which has not been polluted by the market economy and profit seeking motives. On the other hand, however, quite a few of my informants were telling me that it is difficult to run “organics” as a normal business, since some “psycho” gurus have ruined the reputation of “organic.” This has been done by marginalizing “organic” as a special kind of community for a closed circle of like-minded consumers who would buy into stories like Qing’s, thus at a larger scale “organic” does not sound scientific or even reliable.

The content-analysis study I conducted (Chapter 2) showed that organic agriculture is framed as a part of – rather than an alternative to – the large-scale, modern, industrialized agriculture and food system in media discourses in China. Thus, I had not expected that in my fieldwork I would encounter such contradictory positions. In the debate over what is “authentic” organic agriculture, one group claims that organic agriculture is returning to the call of traditional farming and looking for an alternative development path for China. Organic agriculture has been inherited from eastern philosophy and religious values such as those of Taoism and Buddhism, in respecting harmony between people and nature and promoting ideas such as “less is more.” This version of organic agriculture argues that it was inherited from the traditions which are assumed to be authentic, holistic, philosophical and pure, as opposed to modern, standardized,

technological and polluted agriculture. On the other hand, the other group depicted it as scientific knowledge and a management system that is cohesively incorporated into modern and advanced farming, thus needing to be separated from the traditional Chinese way of farming, which was seen as backward. As I continued to do my fieldwork, this divide appeared too obvious to ignore. From the legendary story of Mr. Qing to business-oriented organic agrifood producers, it became apparent that the traditional/modern divide plays a critical role in constructing the legitimized authenticity of organic agrifood.

This paper examines how producers deploy a range of strategies to negotiate where the boundary of authentic organic agrifood should be drawn by introducing various scenarios in which the boundaries between traditional and modern knowledge systems are produced at the same time. I will first introduce the discussion between traditional and scientific knowledge from the postcolonial technoscience studies literature, then explain how incorporating the boundary work framework into the existing literature will be beneficial. This paper shows that the boundaries between traditional and modern scientific knowledge in Chinese organic agriculture practices are not defined by the pre-existing or internal properties of any given knowledge system. Instead, the boundaries are constructed and transformed constantly through a set of working processes of situated social actors in their daily practices.

“Modernity” vs. “Tradition” and Boundary Work

The discussion of the boundaries between modernity and tradition can be traced back to Weber's (2003 [1930]) analysis of why non-Western societies failed to achieve the modernity as it developed in Western society. He concluded that Western society attained modernity through rationalization, bureaucracy, science, and secularization – exactly the elements lacking in a traditional society. There are two polarities underlying the debate about traditional/modern and scientific/indigenous knowledge. From Weber's point of view, the boundaries between science and other indigenous knowledge are determined by the internal natures of both sides: With science being rational, civilized, advanced and progressive and with traditional knowledge being irrational, primitive, backward and undeveloped (Nader 1996).

In contrast, Gusfield (1967) concluded that “the relations between modernity and tradition do not necessarily involve displacement, conflict, or exclusiveness” (p.351). However, modernization theory and world systems theory (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1982) had considerable influences for a long time before modernity as a project was finally confronted. Echoing Weber, numerous scholars (Rostow 1991 [1960]; Basalla 1967; Schott 1993) have proposed a “diffusion model” of science and depicted pictures of how Western science spread from center to periphery, and how dependent institutions of colonial science emerged. The latter would typically develop into a national science. These scholars emphasized the importance of technoscience for traditional society to “take off” and “catch up.” Under this linear model, technoscience is seen to be superior to indigenous knowledge replacing the latter as time goes by.

However, the predictions of modernization failed and the logic and theory of modernization have been challenged. Instead of one linear path to modernity, there are many forms of modernity: Alternative modernities (Appadurai 1991), new modernities (Strathern 1999), indigenous modernities (Sahlins 1999), and others (Rofel 2007), to name a few.

Problematic as it is, the epistemologically functionalist perspective of scientific development, along with modernity, has been planted in the policies as well as ideologies of many developing countries. For instance, the Chinese government has committed to building a strong nation through its National Innovation System (Liu and White 2001). Similarly, science became a sign of Indian modernity, translated and appropriated by Hindu nationalism (Prakash 1999). Postcolonial Science and Technology (PST) scholars have criticized functionalists for not taking this history of how modern technoscience spread around the globe into consideration. Instead, they argued that the boundaries between technoscience and other indigenous knowledge are constructed rather than essential. This is due to the fact that there is no pre-existing property of technoscience or a certain indigenous knowledge. Technoscience and indigenous knowledge both include varieties of heterogeneous practices. They differ from each other in the kinds of technical devices and social strategies through which certain knowledge is mobilized. The privilege of technoscience over any indigenous knowledge is historically associated with power rather than internal natures, as “European expansion and the growth of modern science require each other” (Harding 1998, p. 70).

Visvanathan (1997) experienced the relations between science, the state, and violence

through the exploration of development. He showed how development is a scientific project based on the scientific method and a belief in progress. The violence of modernity is not only from the state but also from "the violence of science seeking to impose its order on society" (p.20). Thus, science is a "vivisectional mandate" where the other is the object of violence suppressed by science in the name of rational objectivity. In the same vein, Turnbull (2000) argued "all knowledge traditions, including Western technoscience, can be compared as forms of local knowledge..." (p. 6). By studying various traditions in diverse settings, ranging from cathedral buildings and Micronesian navigation, to cartography and turbulence research, Turnbull showed the heterogeneity of various knowledge practices, which differ from the coherent imaginaries that modernist perspectives have used. He concluded that the differential power effects of technoscience and other local knowledge "can be compared but without privileging any of them epistemologically" (ibid).

Differing from the above studies which indicate a cultural relativism toward the boundaries between modern scientific knowledge and other traditional knowledge, Harding (1998) proposed a global multicultural science adopting a "strong objectivity" based on a postcolonial perspective. Harding's "strong objectivity" is similar to Latour's (1993) "relativist relativism", and both of them aim to redefine the boundaries between Western societies and others without falling into cultural relativism. According to these two concepts, strong objectivity should give up the universalist assumptions that are based in Eurocentric Judeo-Christian Culture and a masculine fantasy of potency. Thus the two concepts alternate absolutism by not placing one culture and its

knowledge above others. They also differ from absolute cultural relativism by not denying common ground between different societies (Latour 1993).

However, the danger of Harding's multicultural science studies (as well as Latour's relativist relativism) is its "mapping of difference onto an underlying hegemony (Cohen 1994 p.345). For instance, Adams (2002) showed how international pharmaceutical industries seized the intellectual property of certain Tibetan medicines by using science to negotiate indigenous practitioners away from their traditional knowledge. As a result, many Tibetan medicine practitioners developed doubts about their own practice, not because it is ineffective to cure diseases, but because their knowledge appears invalid in front of the efficacy standards built by the biomedical knowledge system. Adams' example indicates that a multicultural science cannot take place justly among groups that are in unequal power relations.

Thus, there is a tension between the two positions. "By moving into comparativist mode, there is a grave danger of the subsumption of the other into the hegemony of Western rationality, but, conversely, unbridled cultural relativism can only lead to the proliferation of ghettos and dogmatic nationalism" (Ashcroft et al. 1995, p.138). In response to this difficulty, there are two main positions held by various scholars in Postcolonial Science. One position is studying how the boundary between technoscience and indigenous knowledge *should* be defined, though it might be otherwise, which I name the idealist approach. Another position is to see *how* boundaries are being drawn and re-drawn in situated processes, which can be called the pragmatic approach. According to Latour's notion of "relativist relativism", there *should* be a

consensus that exists among different knowledge systems because of the very fact that all natures-cultures engage in work and montage, practice and controversy, conquest and domination (Latour 1993 p. 16). However, Latour has not explored *how* that consensus might be achieved in action. Thus, incorporating the boundary work literature into the pragmatic approach can enable researchers to study *how* boundaries are negotiated more precisely.

Boundary work was initially applied to study how the boundaries between science and non-science are drawn through constant negotiation of participating social actors (Gieryn 1983). Boundary, in that aspect, emphasizes its role of separating and exclusion of professional (e.g., Gieryn 1983 1995 1999; Fisher 1990; Gaziano 1996; Kinchy and Kleinman 2003; Mellor 2003). Gieryn (1983) first applied the “boundary work” concept to explain why and how that the demarcation of science from non-science is not just an analytic problem for academic inquires, but a practical problem for scientists to construct ideologies suited to protect and advance their professional authority. In other words, intellectual authority of science is obtained by continuing processes of boundary-work efforts of scientists, rather than being internal properties of science itself. Adding this framework will allow us to understand relationships between the traditional or modern knowledge by asking questions such as “What can be counted as legitimate knowledge in different locales?” while avoiding the tension between the comparativist mode and cultural relativism.

Organic as Tradition

Although none of them admit that they are the leaders in the non-certified organic circle or that there is a coherent discourse about organic agriculture and traditions, the celebrity producers, such as Xun and Ming, share values with each other in this respect, supported by many others who insist on the traditional roots of organic agriculture. In their words, organic agriculture is mostly referred to as a “return to innocence.” In the views of those who establish a close connection between Chinese tradition and organic agriculture, today’s world has not progressed but regressed from the past. This is evident in the fact that even though there has been progress in material achievements, there has been regression in the cultural and spiritual arenas. The series of problems that come with modernization far outweigh its benefits as they mainly reflect on two negative aspects: The pollution of the environment and degradation of morality in the social world. Only tradition, a return to innocence, would solve these problems. “Organic” in this sense, stands for “innocence”, a kind of purity which is polluted by both the physical environment and social crises of today’s world. As Xun said,

In the ancient times, people did not have material development but they were happier and more content. People in the modern world today now have won everything by trading off the homelands and natural environment to industrial progress. Without roots in nature and land, people are not able to achieve happiness. So I just hope to recall the consciousness of people for land and environment through the food we eat every day (Xun).

Xun is a radical environmental activist from Taiwan who once led the villagers to resist

several polluting factories and the pillaging of a land developer. In 2005, she was nominated for the "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize assessment" program under the Nobel Peace award. Xun then turned from environmental protection to brewing fruit and rice vinegar, since she is Hakka (a subgroup of Han Chinese) and Hakka people have kept alive many Chinese traditional practices such as brewing and fermenting. Others, especially Nei, share Xun's views. Nei is a mother who initiated the first organic farmers' market in Beijing. She also self-organized a "mothers group" which promotes organic agri-food from field to table. According to Xun, what is worse than environmental degradation is the erosion of moral values, or "the pollution of human hearts". Many moral values are eroded by profits: people today prefer quicker benefits. This was echoed by Ming:

It was so difficult for me to find trustworthy food since I had allergies to chemicals. I was working full time for China's largest food company in its international trading department, flying from country to country. I had no time to grow my own food so I had asked my extended family members in the countryside to do it for me: but no, even they played tricks to save time and put in chemicals which I had required them not to. Finally, I quit my job and rented the land here as you see now (Ming).

In Chinese history, living as a hermit is an important tradition (Porter 2009). Noticeably, among the informants I met, nearly half of them were addressed as the San Gao group: They more or less shared Ming's experience. San Gao literally means "three highs": High education levels, as it is common for the farm owners to hold a doctoral degree, or sometimes two PhDs;

high income from previous work, previously in the golden collar class; and high standards in pursuing ideals. Their stories share a similar storyline: They had high achievement in previous work (usually in the so-called “fictitious economy” sector) but were not satisfied either with the meaning of life or with life quality; so they sought ways to improve life quality/meaning by better food or lifestyle. They started part-time in renting farms and could self-supply food for their family and friends. They eventually decided to quit their well-paid jobs and devoted themselves full-time to farming. They became business owners, running the farm while living the dream lifestyle of “their ancestors.” As Ming elaborated her story,

Organic agriculture is not a petty bourgeois lifestyle, but a way of life and attitude toward life. I put walls around the field because I started my farming experience from zero and was afraid villagers around me would think I am a lunatic. I grew up as an urban Beijing native, knowing nothing about farming. I could not learn from others either because people I talked to thought I was crazy for not wanting to apply chemicals, since at that time it was thought to be progressive. How could you go against the trend? I learned everything from zero by myself. Only later, did I realize that traditional classics had the knowledge I needed (Ming).

In this way, organic is framed as a lifestyle one can lead to follow the path of one’s ancestors. It resembles the ancient way of living in many ways: Self-provision, a family farm, and diversity in agrifood production. Thus it is not about earning a living but living a lifestyle; being close to nature and in harmony with it. In this sense, organic farming is less about farming but more about agri-‘culture’: Cultivating one’s soul and the meaning of life.

Under this value, organic farmers who have lands and resources do not exceptionally build Shuyuan. Shuyuan, or Academy of Classical Learning, is a form of traditional school that was established privately in the mountains to provide scholars a quiet environment away from worldly distractions. Programs including children's summer camps are run year long. In these programs children are taught the traditional classics, including Confucianism, Taoism, and other old traditional thoughts; and food education.

"Is there any tradition which can be more closely related to farming itself?" is a question I also asked my informants, since the discourse of organic consists not only of abstract concepts but also includes cultural heritages. If it is produced through tradition, it actually can be seen in the materials of agriculture. The informants showed me specific commodities and technologies. Among all the commodities, rice is the product most referred to as associated with tradition. Although the GMO issue is a prohibited topic which most informants did not address directly, organic rice is mentioned as "the right kind of rice" to make traditional food such as rice noodles, rice wine, and sticky rice cakes. Another of the most mentioned traditions is traditional fermenting technology. Not adding "artificial" additives is the key to the technology.

As a country with a long history, food fermenting technologies, which really say much about human-time relations, have been important parts of the food culture: rice wine, vinegar, soy sauce, etc. The right apprentice for fermenting technology is difficult to find since everybody now somehow seems to believe in the modern and "quicker" technology of fermenting vinegar by putting in additives.

Besides food and food technologies, the classics of agriculture were also shown to me by several informants as "visible" materials of traditions. In the ancient classics, answers to questions regarding proper farming are provided. Three classics are constantly referred to in the narratives of organic agriculture producers, such as Taoist philosophy; Huai Nan Zi, a 2nd-century BCE Chinese philosophical classic which includes Yin-Yang and the Five Phases theories; and Qi Min Yao Shu, the most well-kept of the ancient Chinese agricultural texts written in the third century CE. Besides these, there were no specific farming techniques. As one informant said.

Now everyone is about science, efficiency and development. Promoting tradition starts from the fact that we need to respect tradition rather than to see it as backwardness. So we start from simple things of tradition to create awareness: It is still at an early stage.

For the traditional organic group, the modern organic group stands for profit-seeking and efficiency at the cost of a series of values, including family, morality and value. In a word, what should be purified from their authentic "organic" agrifood? On the other hand, moral values and human bonds are critical in establishing the right way of producing "organic." Returning to the ancient can be seen as a means of purification. The key to this is to dismiss negative material consequences associated with modern lifestyles, such as the pollution of chemicals and human hearts. It also indicates that the organic agrifood production system needs to be separated from negative social relationships associated with quick progress, industrialization, and development by rebuilding local community, promoting trust relations among people and advocating for civil

society.

This narrative sees "organic" as an opportunity to re-turn, re-construct, re-build, and re-organize lost agricultural traditions. What stands in the center of traditional organic agriculture is the notion of morality and quality of farm owners. In other words, for dissenting people, the trustful producer-consumer relation weighs more than anything else in composing the authentic "organic."

Organic As Modern

Wen is the first college student from his village, which is under the administration of a town in Miyun County in northeastern Beijing. After he graduated from a top agricultural university in China, Wen traveled around the country for various business opportunities before finally settling in his hometown and starting his own business. Wen caught my attention the first time I talked to him. Boldly, he criticized Mr. Qing and others such as Xun and Ming mentioned above.

Some of the people in the organic circle are psycho in terms of their actions in participating in agriculture. Organic agriculture becomes a way of action art. This way of marketing organic is dangerous as it gives the impression that it is merely for a group of idealists. And they also are not trained in agriculture and know little about how important scientific knowledge of farming is both useful and necessary.

At the time I visited Wen in his farm, he detailed his disagreements with the group for he directly framed himself as a modern agricultural professional and businessman, and attributed the difference of the two groups to different profit models.

To the three highs, they had savings from their previous jobs so they have money to burn: organic agriculture is just a romantic lifestyle or an idealistic attempt for them, but to me and many other farm owners, it is our livelihood. Organic agriculture does not need to be all morally high: like any other business, it is a business opportunity for us to earn profits by providing high-quality products to the group which need them. So I'd like to discuss venture capital and management issues instead of those "values", "traditions" and "ideals."

In Wen's mind, the failure of attributing selected scientific characteristics to organic agrifood that effectively demarcate it from traditional and somewhat backward agriculture has endangered his practical interests every day. Thus, it is necessary to provide scientific rationales for the superiority of the organic agriculture in which he is engaged. To do so, Wen constantly emphasizes his professional education in agriculture as differing from the San Gao farm owner group "who, before organic became popular, had zero experience in farming" in Wen's words. Besides that, Wen also demonstrates that he has many innovations that brought technological changes into the conventional agrifood system and helped to improve what is now labeled "organic."

A well-known innovation of Wen's is the raising of chicken and vegetables together in a greenhouse. China Central Television (CCTV), the predominant state television broadcaster in China, has reported this innovation on its agricultural channel. The news has given Wen a special kind of credibility, as Wen told me that his members have trusted him more firmly after that, despite the fact that he has not received organic certification from any third party agency. Wen has successfully convinced a majority of his VIP consumers that the organic certification from the so-called third party is fishy and only meant to generate profits. When I asked Wen what gives him legitimate authority that his members can rely on, he replied,

My members come to me not for a very romantic reason such as social justice. They come to me because of food safety. I fully understand their needs and can provide them high-quality produce, guaranteed by my expertise in agriculture. There is no so-called traditional or

modern agriculture. There are ONLY right agricultural practices which are based on scientific knowledge. If you visit my farm, you will gain confidence in our products not because of the stories I told you but because of what you are seeing with your own eyes.

“In modern societies, science is near to being the source of cognitive authority: anyone who would be widely believed and trusted as an interpreter of nature needs a license from the scientific community” (Barnes and Edge 1982 p. 2). Resembling the modernization narrative which engages science as the authority, the narrative of Wen is representative in the way that it transforms organic into a question in the tone of truism: Only science knows the authentic organic. Wen's opinion is shared by informants who cite science as their authority. Despite this fact, situated actors may have slightly different interpretations of what modern science contains. For example, Shen said,

I see the difference between organic and conventional products lies in management, not technology. The technological part is straightforward: make the milk pure without external unnecessary 'pollution' during the process. The management issue is difficult: organic is all in the details of management.

Shen worked in an embassy before becoming the CEO of the RI organic milk company, one of a few companies producing organic milk in China. His company also received organic certification from one of the renowned state background third-party agencies. Unlike many others who show obvious negative attitudes toward formal organic certification, Shen argued,

In the current Chinese context, certification is the mandatory requirement for our business.

Thus, we get the organic certification: our product is good enough to meet the standard, and it gives us an opportunity to receive examination by professionals.

Shen also indicated that by following the rules, his company has received considerable financial support from the county government. The local government also complemented his work as they formulated the goal of developing a modern and sustainable agriculture system. Many other informants suggested that Shen has strong social bonds with important political figures, as his previous job gave him access to social resources that others do not have. Shen himself, however, attributed the company's success in getting funding not to his personal relations but to the strict management procedure they follow. In other words, the leverage of following the current organic certification required steps that demarcate their products from the "low-quality" products, which had no evidence besides self-proclaimed stories.

What Shen referred to as "low-quality" milk with only self-claimed stories was the "organic milk" at the farmers' market sold by another merchant, Ming, who was mentioned earlier as one of the traditional organic agrifood supporters. Ming owned fewer than 10 cows; the amount of milk she sold was quite limited. Shen did not speak against Ming directly since they both were attending the farmers' market, but Shen firmly stressed the "authenticity" of his own products.

Without systematic management procedures, one cannot produce qualified dairy products.

However, some consumers are so naïve that certain touching stories can just convince them.

Consumers should not trust what they can see either, because they are not professionals.

However, the legal certification and management procedure cannot be lies since it would

have required too many people in disparate departments to make the lies happen.

The faith in strict management can be seen as another interpretation of organic agriculture as modern agriculture. Instead of focusing on the knowledge of farming, this perspective stresses more on the executive aspect of agrifood. In this account, the critical factor of organic is the quality of a commodity which needs to be guaranteed by modern management. The quality of organic cannot be separated from the quality aspect of the commodity.

A notable argument is the way this group responds to the questioning of organic agrifood in terms of food security. For the informants I interviewed, they admitted that there is inevitably a tension between food security and organic agriculture production. That is where markets and an efficient business model need to step in, as it can match up the high-quality products with the group that values quality the most. This way of reasoning stresses quality and efficiency and indicates a neoliberal influence, which is not shared by the traditional group who apply a social justice framework to justify their values. One of the informants addresses this difference by arguing the determining factor is the social environment of China:

We are for profits, but it does not mean we have not efficiently solved the problems of food safety and environmental pollutions. The form of a firm is determined by the society in which the firm operates: we are in a market economy and the rule of the market is thirsty for profits! The competition will filter out the winners from the losers. That is why we are steadily improving the quality of our organic products.”

The traditional organic group refers to some research which suggests organic agriculture

would not be less productive. Or they argue that the current food system is not sustainable itself and even though the organic agrifood model does pose certain dangers to food security, it still stands for the right path that agriculture development needs to take, and the production problems will be resolved sometime along this path.

You would never know if the path was not taken. At the current conditions, we just need to make sure that it is the RIGHT path and take it. Rejecting organic agriculture development just for the reason that it might conflict with food security is like refusing to eat meals just because you are too afraid to be choked to death when you are eating.

Modern organic agriculture, however, is mostly defined as unqualified organic. Management systems and technology are the two critical factors. Certification, whether it is third-party certification or professional certification, is necessary for one's defining of "organic." As is typical in the discourse of modernization, technoscience and management are referred to as the privileged knowledge that guarantees "the right way of developing organic."

The Boundary Work of the Authentic Organic

Through tracing the multiple trajectories of everyday organic agrifood discourses, I show that it is actually through the trajectories of producing “traditional” in relation to “modern” knowledge that a certain version of “organic” comes to have legitimate authority without being officially certified.

The boundary work strategies by the traditional organic camp is different from the modern: one of their main strategies is framing organic as a solution to “the problem of pollution” caused by modern development. It emphasizes the pollution of both the environment as well as people’s hearts. The solution appears to change the current social relations by building bonds between people: the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) certification model, reconstructing community, and many other human-factor enhancing solutions. The discourse shows an “anticipatory nostalgia” in Hugh Raffles’ words, which indicates how “things which have not yet and may never exist come to pass” (Rofel 1999 quoted in Zhan 2009 p.21). The boundary work of modern organic, however, is done by emphasizing the quality of things instead of the moral quality of producers. For the modernizers, authentic “organic” needs to be demarcated from the un-qualified agriculture done by amateur farmers who have not received formal agriculture education training.

Despite the apparent differences claimed by the two groups, they share more similarities than they suggest in many aspects. Both groups have practiced organic agriculture for a fairly short amount of time. Thus what both groups emphasize as being the more important assignment

for them is solely growing the idea of organic agrifood in peoples' minds rather than growing organic agriculture on the land. They frame this point differently, as the modern organic agriculture group uses the term "marketing and giving consumers the right information." A firm even changed "community supported agriculture" (CSA) into "client supported agriculture" to stress its business model. The traditional organic agriculture group, however, addresses it as "educating citizens and rebuilding the trust relation among people by engaging growers and buyers of organic agrifood."

This sharing notion of organic agriculture is essentially about trust. However it also reflects the technological aspects. One of the modern organic agriculture firms showed me the evidence of their technological advances. This involved burying one video camera every few meters in the soil to detect whether the farmers who work on the field actually follow their instruction of not using certain pesticides, as is required. Another common "high technology" that the modern organic agriculture firms apply is reviewing the soil and air quality indicators every few days on *Wechat*. *Wechat* is a popular social network communication service widely used on mobile phones (236 million monthly active users according to its official report by August, 2013). The traditional organic agrifood group embraces the usage of *Wechat* as well.

The traditional agrifood group has used their techniques to promote trust. A common strategy is holding various events that engage people to participate in traditional food cooking techniques at 24 solar term points. In traditional Chinese culture, the 24 solar term points were used by farmers to signify timing of farming and special food was prepared for different solar

term points using seasoning ingredients. One event I attended was intended to teach people how to make the sweet green rice ball at Qingmin (or clear and bright), one of the 24 solar term points. These events were attended mostly by women members with their young children.

In these events, the organizer would emphasize the idea that “real food” has the right kind of energy only when it is prepared with the appropriate seasoning and good ingredients. In this case, the sweet green rice ball needs wormwood juice (wormwood is a seasoning grass) and high-quality organic rice. Thus, organic has been successfully framed again under “Chinese tradition.” The event was held in Beijing, which is situated far north of the Yangtze River, whereas traditionally the sweet green rice ball was only consumed to the south of the Yangtze River. I was concerned with the conflicting value it might appear to have, with one version of “organic” involving eating local. However, nobody else in that event seemed to be concerned about that question. Apparently, these events convince many people who attend that organic, after all, is just a revision of the ancient cultural values relating to food. Quite a few of the participants even bought rice from the organizers after the event.

Besides the element of marketing, there are hybrid practices of modern and traditional elements in each type of organic production. All the traditional organic agrifood farms I visited were using Baoyi seed because the specific seed to be used for organic farming (according to the national organic standard) is simply not available on the market.

It would take us many years to go back to a pure traditional practice since it is hard even to locate seeds. This is the reality of the current situation in China: nobody can find the

organic-standard seed, and even those who have organic certifications are the same. Tradition is more about the value and attitude of farming and human-nature relations, rather than any specific technology. In that sense, the traditional values we follow differentiate us from those who perceive organic only as commodities sold on the market.

When I visited the organic milk factory with Shen, I noticed that the milk cows were fed with traditional Chinese medicine based herbs. I asked Shen why and he asserted that it is a technological innovation as those herbs in the old time were only for people, but now they have been creatively used in their animal feeding. Also, traditional music was played when the milk cows are being milked, which was another technological innovation, modified based on Kobe Beef production practices in Japan. It is important to note that even modernists such as Shen himself could have framed their product easily within the “traditional” framework, if he had wanted to.

In another scenario, I met Ronger in a Chinese medicine clinic. Ronger graduated from an agricultural university and was attracted to organic agriculture because it is not only about agriculture but the “Chinese dream.” He worked as a team member for one of the most well-known organic programs officially affiliated with the Food Safety Center, the Department of Sociology at one of the most prestigious universities in China. Ronger told me that he was trying to convince the clinic to give out the leftover herbal medicine for them to use as a reliable and cheap food to feed their chickens. I asked why he had chosen this clinic and why herbal medicine, as well as where did he get the idea from. He explained,

All things are quite random. I have been a fan of Chinese traditional medicine for years. Before joining our current program, I did my internship here in this clinic because it was easier to ask them than other clinics with which I had no personal ties. The organic agrifood trend in China has just started, so all that we could attempt to do is to make our program survive. At a practical level, there are really no divides between traditional and modern "organics": all of us are altering the concept to make it feasible, depending on the path we travelled before. Sorry I cannot tell you a story which doesn't sound like a closed circle, but it is what it is (Ronger).

Ronger did not tell me a closed-circle story, but his words did demonstrate what I have been observing: The boundaries between traditional and modern knowledge are outcomes of efforts of social actors rather than explanations. They are fluid yet have material forces. Through purification, authenticity is achieved.

As Latour (1993) has argued, "[o]ne is not born traditional; one chooses to become traditional by constant innovation. The idea of an identical repetition of the past and that of a radical rupture with any past are two symmetrical results of a single conception of time" (p. 76). In that sense, we have never been modern and the boundary between traditional and modern knowledge is a false divide in the first place. According to Latour, "modern" exists only in the conjoined processes of hybridization and purification. Once people stop believing in the purification processes and start acknowledging "the hybrid," the modern as a project will collapse.

The trajectories I draw above in which 'authentic' organic is produced along traditional

knowledge and modern science follows Latour's notion of "relativist relativism". Organic, traditional, and scientific are not entities with predetermined properties but are constantly in a process of co-production and co-construction. Notably, the boundaries are drawn around organic agriculture (what would be considered as "authentic" organic) and between the tradition and modern knowledge system, while there is little direct interactive relationship between the two social groups. In most trajectories, they constantly talk about the other group, but do not talk to each other, so the boundaries mentioned in this chapter are not interactive through social engagement. Yet, boundaries for things are also boundaries for people, as the "right" boundary of the object would require the same "right" actions of social actors to go with it. Thus, the boundaries are still group boundaries, even though there is little direct negotiating between these two groups.

Conclusion

This chapter started from the following question: Why and how do many producers gain legitimacy to call their products “organic” if their products are not certified according to state regulation? I examined various kinds of trajectories in which, by drawing boundaries of “traditional” and “modern” knowledge systems, two groups also produce boundaries of the “authentic” organic agrifood and thereby gain legitimacy for their products in China. In other words, the boundaries between traditional knowledge and modern scientific knowledge in the worlds of organic agriculture are not defined by the pre-existing and internal properties of agricultural science or tradition. Nor are they simply limited as homogeneous and pre-existing given knowledge systems. Instead, the boundaries are constructed and transformed constantly through a set of working processes by situated social actors. It is through processes of negotiating boundaries that a certain notion of “organic” comes into form and stands out from others. Therefore, drawing the boundaries of the “authentic” organic agrifood is an achievement that needs constant efforts by social actors in action. The ambiguity of “organic” opens up a contingent arena for negotiating boundaries between “traditional” and “scientific” knowledge and for participating in the production of “authentic” organic outside the current “certified” version of organic agrifood in China. Yet, discourses have material power to shape our world. Although the boundaries themselves are fluid, changing constantly in various situations, they still exist in every setting and generate desired or less-desired results as the participants negotiate. Those results are or will become realities: a proliferation of certain organic agrifood producers

and the failure of others; different organic farm landscapes: large scale or small scale; and many other possibilities.

CHAPTER 4 THE MULTIPLICITY OF ORGANICS IN CHINA

Abstract

This paper transforms “Is there authentic organic food in China?” the central question of organic food discourse in China, into an empirical question: “Where can organic food, or at least the food named by social groups as ‘organic,’ be found?” The scholarship on social worlds and arena analysis are introduced as frameworks to understand these fragmented but connected multiple notions of organic agrifood. It examines how organic food is constructed in different social worlds, such as by state actors, environmental NGOs, and the rural reconstruction group. By showing how organic agriculture is heterogeneous in five different social worlds, this paper argues “organic” in action does not rely on any single and homogeneous knowledge about “organic.” Instead, it is through networks that producers have built and through daily growing and marketing practices that different organics come into various shapes to different audiences in multiple social worlds. The authenticity of organic is a hegemonic discourse which needs to be accompanied, yet has not yet been accompanied by any dominant groups.

Introduction

During the summer of 2011, I conducted initial observations and informal interviews in a franchise grocery store which sells exclusively organic agrifood. It is located within a residential community in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province. “Organic” is still a new concept to most people who walked into the store, so many of them merely chatted with the owner about what organic is without buying anything. Having predicted that it would take a while for the residents in this community to become regular customers, the store owner only sells processed organic agrifood with a longer shelf life than fresh fruits and vegetables. There are only two shelves in the store: one with certified goods such as exported USDA green label infant formula and domestic certified soy sauce, and the other shelf contains non-certified organic goods, with Phoenix Dan Cong Oolong Tea as a specialty, since this kind of organic tea only grows in the hometown area of the owner, who enjoys privileged access to the supply of the goods as a local.

When people inquired about “organic”, the owner usually explained that “organic” means “natural”, “original”, and “without chemicals and additives.” The most common question that followed is, “how do we know that it is so?” The owner would point out the organic labels on certain products, but those were not enough for many people, since comments such as “so they say – who knows – nobody sees that by their own eyes” followed. The owner then would talk at length of the organic tea which was not certified but from his own hometown: How he came to know the tea since his childhood, how the tea bush looks and what it smells like, what is special about the curling and twisting technique, etc. The picture he described was so vivid and out of

personal experience, that it appeared as if he was witnessing the tea on the shelf being “organic.” Sometimes the owner would brew the tea and serve it to whoever still had doubts.

At first, it was quite confusing to me as to how taste could help those curious ones to learn about and identify a concept as abstract as “organic.” Then I realized that once the tea is put into the physical bodies of the potential customers, their doubts about the impersonal labels provided by an unknown government body such as a third-party certification agency would be replaced by a corporeal experience of “organic.” And the tacit knowledge about the organic tea of the owner had further enforced their knowing. The experience of seeing people developing their first ideas of “organic” agrifood in the small community store led me to make sense of what “organic agriculture” means to both producers and buyers at a larger scale.

Thanks to the preliminary fieldwork, I had anticipated that places relevant to organic food would be not limited to farms, agricultural universities, and organic farmers’ markets before the formal fieldwork. Soon after my entering the field, I still found myself in unexpected places, such as in IBM’s China headquarters office, a Chinese traditional medicine clinic near the Forbidden City, and an NGO working on women’s rights issues. Along with unexpected geographic locations of “organic”, I also experienced a blurring of conceptual boundaries of “organic”: While there is a concrete textual concept of “organic” existing on paper, such as the one IFOAM has decided on its website, the different organic food practices I encountered in the fieldwork never seemed to fit well into any textual definition.

The argument by mainstream media and other scholarly studies that the state is still the main

authority in defining organic agriculture is built on the assumption that the state-defined organic agriculture is the only “authentic” organic agriculture. However, that assumption is problematic, as many Chinese local producers and consumers have developed their own opinion on what authentic organic agriculture is. No matter how vague the term “organic” may seem to my informants, and no matter how scattered the organic agriculture venues were, it did not prevent the development of organic agrifood commodities, which are quite different from their certified organic counterparts defined by the state standards. In a social setting where there is a lack of legitimacy for these versions of organic, without any agreement of its definition, consensus about standards, or even a specified location for non-certified organic food, groups who have different understandings of organic are still gathering together and sharing resources to work on non-certified organic projects somehow. So, the question remains, without any sort of legitimacy, how can this kind organic agrifood which is not defined, clear-cut, and consistent be developed?

As Clarke and Montini (1993) pointed out, “Technologies can be studied as places where people meet.” Thus authenticity of non-certified organic agriculture in China can be translated into an empirical question: “Where can organic food, or at least the food named by social groups as ‘organic,’ be found?” How they are formed, shifted, and negotiated is the theme of this paper. With this empirical question, I followed the “organic” agriculture community activities and located places and social actors involved. The scholarship on social worlds and arena analysis are introduced as frameworks to understand these fragmented but connected multiple notions of organic agrifood. It follows with a brief history of certified organic agriculture development in

China. By showing how organic agriculture is heterogeneous in four different social worlds, this paper argues “organic” in action does not rely on any single and homogeneous knowledge about “organic” defined by the state. Instead, it is through networks that producers have built and through daily growing and marketing practices that different organics come into various shapes to different audiences in multiple social worlds. The authenticity of organic is a hegemonic discourse which needs to be accompanied, yet has not been accompanied, either by the state or by any dominant social group.

The Social Worlds/Arena Framework

The Social Worlds/Arena framework has been applied in a range of studies on scientific controversies (Clarke and Montini 1993; Christensen and Casper 2000). The concept of “social worlds” came from “social wholes” (Thomas 1914) which were indicating that individuals were situated and embedded in universes of discourse (Mead 2009 [1934]). The universes of discourse emphasize shared discourses, which makes and marks boundaries of different groups. Strauss (1978 1982 1993) and Becker (1982) defined “social worlds” as “groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals and building shared ideologies about how to go about their business” (Clarke and Leigh Star 2008, p.115). If organized around certain issues of concern all these involved social worlds are analyzed as an arena.

The strength of the Social Worlds/Arena framework is in analyzing consistency, fluidity and change of the group meaning-making process as it studies collective actors, not based on units such as organizations and institutions. It stresses group activities as “maintaining perceptible boundaries between social worlds and gaining social legitimization for the world itself,” thus it is beneficial to study discursive processes of controversies. Also, the Social Worlds/Arena framework attempts to empirically identify as many active individuals and social groups of related social issues as possible (Strauss 1978 1993; Becker 1982; Clarke 1990 1991), especially revealing actors who seem to be irrelevant in less notable arenas. For instance, to understand the bicycle requires some history of transportation – via actors who were directly related to the

bicycle as well as those involved in rubber technology, railroads, cars, nature, and so on (Pinch and Bijker 1987; Clarke and Montini 1993). In other words, there are multiple perspectives on any technology, thus any simplifying these multiplicities of perspectives into two sides itself may be a hegemonic strategy (Star 1983). Studying those “implicated actors” who were usually dismissed as “irrelevant” around certain controversies is a way to deconstruct the hegemonic strategy. This framework thus emphasizes local and situated knowledge built up in a community by recognizing practices of seemingly “unrelated” implicated actors in different networks (Mills 1940; Collins 1990; Haraway 1991; Star 1991; Fujimura 1991).

The Social Worlds/Arena framework is adopted in this paper because of its openness in analyzing changing boundaries of collective actors and the advantages of those implicated actors in organic agriculture in China. As I mentioned earlier, many of those social actors I met in the fieldwork by following “organic commodities” are actively involved in the actual negotiations of meanings in the arena of organic agrifood yet their opinions have not been fully recognized by the mainly public media or many researchers.

The History of Organic Agriculture in China: The State as the Authority

Due to global market demands, organic agriculture in China was initially developed for its added value. In 1990, a tea company in Zhejiang province had received Dutch SKAL organic certification, which was a milestone in China's organic agriculture development. In the same year, the China Rural Ecosystems Division, which later became the Organic Food Development Center (OFDC), had joined as the first International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) member in China. OFDC-certified organic agrifood exported to international markets rose from US \$600,000 in 1996 and US \$3-6 million in 1997 to \$15 million in 1999 and \$30 million in 2000 (Thiers 1999, Du 2001, Smith 2002).

In 1992, China established national certification bodies modeled on the baseline of rules established by IFOAM. The China Green Food Development Center (CGFDC) was founded in the same year that the green food standard was established. The CGFDC created the Green Food Standard Regulation based on the IFOAM standard. Meanwhile, OCIA (USA), Ecocert (France), BCS (Germany), IMA (Switzerland), and JONA (Japan) still carried out their certification work in China. In 2012, the national regulation of the “implementation rules on certification of organic products” was implemented. According to this regulation, “all organic products leaving the factory for sale after July 1, 2012 shall apply the national organic certification mark (including the organic transformation product certification mark), the only coding (organic code) and the certification logo name” (*Farmers’ Daily* 2012). All internationally-certified commodities needed to be re-certified according to the latest regulation.

Thiers (1996; 2006) studied Chinese organic agriculture in 1990 and argued that certified organic production was seen as a means to target the lucrative international market. Given that incentive, developing organic agrifood was the same as producing other goods: All are for fetching a premium price in the international market. Two different branches of the central government and various local and state governments fought with each other to gain the profits. Thiers (2006) further argued that politics and markets shaped Chinese organics differently from organic standards in the West, which were characterized by non-governmental, social movement politics. Instead of developing standards and procedures which met the interests and needs of local farmers and consumers in China, OFDC adopted international standards and tailored local priorities to meet requirements of the global market (Thiers 2006).

Ten years after Thiers' (1996) study, the domestic organic agrifood movement was booming, but the state still held a similar position: organic agriculture is still seen as mainly for export; thus it needs to be based on stringent standards so it will be accepted by global buyers. Organic agrifood stands for high-end products which are targeted for export and a small portion for domestic sales. From this perspective, the farms which can achieve the organic standards still need to be large farms because only they have the technological resources to support and meet the required standards.

Also, it is a mechanism for the state to retain its authority in regulating the domestic organic agrifood market. As an official from the committee who participated in writing the national standards commented,

A few years ago, many foreign companies sold whatever they named organic in our domestic market: it was a totally chaotic time. Now, order has been established, thanks to the national standard.

The officials do not see it through a social rights perspective but think that small-scale farmers who want to engage in organics are impractical idealists or unethical businessmen who simply try to take advantage of “organic” to make profits. Organic agriculture is perceived as an advanced system of modern agricultural technologies which needs agriculture professionals and strict research processes to guarantee its quality to global buyers. As for the domestic agriculture policy, food security is emphasized and the connection between food safety and organic agrifood is not recognized.

Thus, for the state, the strategies applied to demonstrate the validity of national standards of organics are not meticulous, as state authority may not be the best nor the only “definer of the meaning of organic and guarantor that standards are met” (Thiers 2007 p.198) but it remains a strong authority.

Multiple Social Worlds of Organic Agrifood

____Although the state is still retaining its authority in defining what authentic organic agriculture is, there are other social worlds in which non-certified organic agrifood is developing as well, even though non-certified organic has not been recognized by the state.

The Environmental NGOs: Environmental Protection

For radical environmental protection movements, protecting the environment through food consumption is feasible for people to adopt in everyday activity. Thus, organic agrifood is gradually being included in agendas of many NGOs. The *Nature* is one of the biggest environmental NGOs in China, and it has gradually adopted organic agrifood into its agenda. The *Nature* and the Beijing Organic Farmers' Market (BOFM) cooperated on a kitchen waste project in 2011 when the BOFM first started. Also, the organization cooperated with BOFM alongside other NGOs such as Greenpeace China and Green Beagle in various activities. Furthermore, BOFM has served food at the annual meeting of the *Nature* yearly since 2012. Eating organic, composting leftover food, and learning where food comes from are promoted as one important aspect of a low-carbon lifestyle. One informant I interviewed commented on why environmental NGOs cannot keep their members, and thus could not remain financially self-sufficient solely from the membership fee collected.

The environment folks talk too much about environmental politics and the dark side of pollution: it is too negative, not engaging, and pessimistic. Common people are already fed up with the harmful environment in China: Who did not know that we are heavily polluted?!

And it was too stressful to continue discussing it after five days of workdays on how bad the environment is. The Nature needs to learn more from BOFM to engage people in a practical and fun way of “protecting the environment” (Zhai 2013).

For the environmental NGOs in China, being as apolitical as possible is a survival strategy to get work done. Thus a discourse “for food safety” would gain much more approval from the state than a discourse such as “against the enclosure of arable land”: At least, in the mind of pragmatic environmentalists, this would be the case.

Very few NGOs, especially domestic NGOs could be as radical as international NGOs. For instance, Greenpeace China ran a project to fight against GMO agrifood. We would not be nearly as radical as it and claim we are “against” GMOs, especially since the state is positive with GMO R&D. We just say we are “for” organic agrifood and the slow food movement. (Song).

Being part of the non-certified organic community is not merely about being politically pragmatic but about keeping the organizations running when financial supports are limited from other resources. For instance, the Oasis is a domestic environmental organization which was initially established by advocates who were concerned about desertification of northwest China. However, as a domestic NGO with far less resources than international counterparts such as the Greenpeace and more influential domestic NGOs such as the Nature, the organization had been facing financial difficulties at the very beginning of its establishment in 2002, even though it was still receiving constant support from a group of active volunteers who deeply care about the

long-term problem of desertification in China. Funding for desertification projects was limited; thus Shan and two other part-time staffers in the *Oasis* had been seeking for innovative ways to keep the organization running. Their current project in 2013 was being part of the non-certified organic agrifood community: Selling eco-friendly beauty products and fruit and rice vinegar at the BOFM. The two part-time *Oasis* staffers were the ones who make eco-friendly beauty products at the *Oasis* office in Beijing while Shan, the only full-time staff member of the *Oasis*, is concerned about the long-term plan for the organization. He was thinking to shadow Xun, a radical environmental activist from Taiwan who later turned from environmental protection to brewing fruit and rice vinegar. Selling Xun's organic fruit and rice vinegar exported from Taiwan was the start of this plan, since he said that he wanted to test out how large a market there was, due to so much uncertainty involved with the non-certified organic community. Feasibility of connecting what people need and what is available is the crucial factor of Shan's plan, as he remarked in the interview that "he is not much an idea person who is concerned about 'authentic' organic. It is just a word anyway."

In sum, promoting "organic agrifood" thus is seen as a strategy to engage urbanites in environmental protection from a daily lifestyle approach and to keep the organizations running when financial supports are limited from other resources. By associating it with a "food safety issue", these NGOs create some sort of alliance with the state rather than working against it, and thus gained a wider range of support.

The Rural-Reconstruction Group: Agriculture, Farmers and Rural Development

Rural reconstruction was started in the late Qing dynasty by Chinese elites such as James Yen, Liang Shuming and Tao Xingzhi. It was one of the most known movements in China's path toward modernity. It was often criticized, as the movement attributed China's social ills to the ignorance, poverty, weakness and selfishness of farmers (Ning 2014). After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, this movement was replaced by Mao's vision of rural reconstruction. To address many problems in rural areas due to a rural-urban imbalance, Wen Tiejun, a public intellectual, coined the phrase “three rural problems” (rural people, rural society and the rural economy) and founded the James Yen Rural Reconstruction Institute in Hebei province as the new rural reconstruction group in 2003 (Ning 2014). In 2004, Wen founded the Liang Shuming Rural Reconstruction Center at Remin University in Beijing after he was appointed as the dean of the School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development in the university. In 2005, the Fifth Plenum of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China created a “new socialist countryside” aiming at solving the “three rural problems” while Wen has become involved in rural reconstruction in different governments of all levels (Ning 2014). However, given the support from the central government, the new rural reconstruction group encountered many problems: For example, the James Yen Rural Reconstruction Institute was shut down in 2006 by the local authority. However, the group is resilient, as the members still work their way under various difficulties.

For the rural reconstruction group, the current urban-rural dual structure is seen as the cause

of China's food safety problem. The so-called "food safety problem" in fact, is a pseudo-problem. Instead, the real problem is the "San Nong" issue (three problems related to rural issues): Nong Ye (agriculture), Nong Cun (rural), and Nong Min (farmers). As one informant, Ken Zhong, a leader in a well-known rural reconstruction organization, argued,

Farmers who live in Chinese rural areas are treated like second-class citizens in their own country. No wonder there was a food safety problem. Our organization grew from the rural reconstruction group, which had predicted the current food safety issue based on the seriousness of "San Nong" many years before the current "organic" trend.

To solve the problem, things need to be done in order to change urban-biased policies, so that there could be a trust relationship rebuilt between the urban consumers and rural farmers. Ken Zhong further explained,

We (our organization) do not like the concept of "organic": The organic concept was from an industrialized production version of sustainable agriculture. We prefer to call what we sell "trustworthy" food: if you want to find trustworthy vegetables, you must go and find the trustworthy people who grow the food for you.

Despite their negative attitude to the concept of "organic," the rural reconstruction group still uses the word "organic" and other popular concepts such as "Yang Shen" (literally meaning "cultivating life," which is a longstanding tradition in China to improve personal health) for pragmatic reasons: the food safety problem poses a smaller political risk than the San Nong problem, as the latter is relevant to political reform of the current system. Also, it is more

practical to approach urban consumers through food safety rather than educating them about farmers' rights, which in their mind is irrelevant to them. As the activists learned lessons from the failure of rural reconstruction projects in the past, without the participation of those who live in the urban areas, it would be difficult to solve the rural problems. As they start to approach the "San Nong" issue through its impacts on people who live in urban areas, projects are run to build a bond between urban and rural people, so there can be mutual trust through cooperation.

In this narrative, mandatory modernization and urbanization – launched to increase profits at the expense of the rural farmers – have destroyed the foundation of Chinese society. Urban Chinese live very poorly as compared to their rural counterparts – not in terms of financial poverty, but in a poverty of limited choices in terms of whether they can choose an "alternative lifestyle. The trust level in the cities is described as "having no cooperation, no sincerity, and no joy" (informant named Ken Zhong). The rural reconstruction groups argue that China has been rooted in rural communities for thousands of years and that its history and social relations can only engage via the communal relations of agriculture. China needs to find a different path to modernization from its current development path. In this logic, European and American cultures originated from hunting and then capitalist commercialization, so people can live with individualism and solve the problem of trust by a social contract among strangers. Chinese local culture could not produce such a relationship. The community-based bonds of trust have been completely disrupted, and thus the food safety problem has occurred. "Organic" is an opportunity to frame rural reconstruction so that these groups can work on rebuilding social relations and the

trust of the people more efficiently and constructively. For this reason, what is “real” organic is not the question once it is a constructive means of rural reconstruction.

In sum, rural reconstruction groups apply “organic agrifood” as a strategy to continue their community-building work in a legitimate way, fitting within the current Chinese socio-political setting: improving social justice without a political reform of the unequal urban-rural social structure. By creating alliances with both small farmers and urban consumers, these groups manage to create space for community and trust building in an innovative approach.

Urban Consumers: Food Safety, Foodies, and Health

Consumers are implicated actors who also define organic agrifood in China in a certain way within the arena of organic agrifood. One of the most well-known non-certified organic producer groups provided me lists of the common questions consumers often ask them about as follows,

- 1. How can you make us believe that your organic agrifood is produced in accordance with what you claim if it is not certified?*
- 2. Price: How much more does your organic agrifood cost, compared with conventional vegetables and fruits?*
- 3. What is happening in the U.S. and EU, in terms of organic agrifood?*
- 4. How do you deal with pests if you are not using pesticides?*
- 5. How do you ensure food freshness during delivery?*
- 6. Can we skip a weekly delivery if we buy a yearly subscription from you?*
- 7. What are the varieties of vegetables we can choose from?*

8. How do you guarantee the winter supply?

9. Do you also have poultry and egg subscriptions?

10. Since we live with contaminated water and polluted air, how much health benefits can we get from buying your food?

Based on these questions, the group invited Cun to join the team and take charge of its marketing. Cun worked for the IBM China office as a sales manager before he quit his job: His wife was pregnant and he personally needed to keep an eye on food for his wife and their future baby. Compared to other team members who are “fresh” and idealistic college graduates, Cun called himself an “old ginger” – someone who is savvy in certain areas – and his specialty is marketing. Cun told me that although the environmental and justice aspects of organic agrifood are important for his team, it was not the case for consumers. Most consumers, according to Cun, buy organic agrifood mainly for the sake of food quality and health. Cun demonstrated his point in a marketing event which was part of my participatory observation project.

The event was held at the IBM China office. IBM is an obvious choice, considering Cun had his old social ties there. The team showed up with carrots, honey, and even a live hen. The hen just could not stay in a basket in the IBM lobby in Beijing; at times team members had to run after the hen in the lobby, trying to catch it.

Besides the somewhat “earthy” looking products, however, Cun also invited Mei to join them. Mei, an anthropology doctoral student at Yale, was an old friend of the group and she had actively participated in organizing the Beijing Organic Farmers Market when she was still a

Harvard undergraduate. As an American who speaks fluent English and Chinese, Mei was instructed by Cun to speak English at the workshop the day before the team went to IBM, since it would provide more credibility, as Cun explained how IBM employees always feel products associated with the USA are better in quality than their domestic counterparts. Mei served as some sort of certification and stood as a form of credibility to approve the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model, which the group was promoting as what was happening in advanced countries. And everything went nearly as Cun had anticipated: None of the questions raised by the audience that day went beyond the ten questions listed above.

In sum, the numerous food safety scandals in recent years in China have exposed the deficiencies and contradictions within the Chinese regulatory state (Tam and Yang 2005). They have also weakened the trust of people in the governing capacity of the state and government authorities (Yan 2012). Thus, consumers have exercised their agency and tailored “organic agrifood” according to their own needs rather than taking the national “organic” standards for granted. As such, it is critical for the growers to see through the surface of “organic” to understand a range of needs behind the concept. By doing so, non-certified organic agrifood growers substitute the “organic” with other attributes which the consumers are buying through “organic” and avoid the state as the “middleman.”

Private Organic Food Companies

Multiple business owners said Youji (Organic) means You Ji Hui (having an opportunity).

And the following positive tone of market opportunity is what I often heard from this group:

China is such a huge growing market, with unlimited opportunity for unlimited potential!

Our company has XX acres of farmland in the Beijing suburban area, from which we will be able to provide high-quality fruits, vegetables, and other commodities in the Beijing region for our XX members (David Wang did not reveal the exact numbers in the interview for confidentiality purpose).

David Wang is an example. He majored in journalism in college. Before starting his current company, he worked for a company which co-cooperated with the China Agriculture Academy. When I first interviewed him, he had just started this new company. Perhaps because of his journalism background, Mr. Wang was quite cautious when I first interviewed him and he was trying to find the best way to frame his company.

You can write of us as providing the “special supply” food for consumers, although our staff-members were against me using this word. There is the special supply of organic food for government officials which you cannot buy with money, but now we have made it possible for you to access equal quality food with them. The price is high, but for elites, this price is absolutely WORTH it.

That the quality, supply services, and logistics management remain professional is the key.

Mr. Wang even changed CSA from COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE to CLIENT

SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE to illustrate their professionalism. In this logic, the members pay the company to buy a special kind of commodity and the company provides them with first-class quality and door-to-door organic agrifood and service.

The marketing strategies Mr. Wang has adopted are developed from his understanding of the elites in China: The people who are affluent and willing to consume high-quality food but have no access to “special supply” agrifood due to a lack of political power. Also, organic agrifood decreases the anxieties triggered by the potential risk of poisoning due to the food safety problem.

“Organic agrifood” is essentially about buying a ticket out of the “food safety problem.” It is more about lowering the invisible risk rather than agrifood quality itself. In a sense, we are an insurance company. So we are doing anything we can to make our clients feel secure. For instance, besides certification, we also put surveillance cameras on our farms and broadcast all the information we have on WeChat (A popular social network communication service app widely used on mobile phones. It has 236 million monthly active users according to its official report by August, 2013) to provide all of our clients with first-hand information.

Also, offering a gift card option is another important market strategy, as a certain amount of organic agrifood purchases are for gifting purposes. Among Chinese business figures and officials, extravagant gift-giving is a common practice. “Organic” certification is equivalent to a well-known brand and the high price indicates the status of gift receivers.

In sum, from the private company side, certified-organic commodities are a gatekeeper, in strict accordance with the national organic standards. It is a pragmatic approach to not bargain over certification. After all, certification provides added values which offer companies incentives to get a commodity certified; it also keeps the small-scale farmers from sharing the cake. The matter of “real” or “fraudulent” depends on the rules established. Since these companies usually have both financial resources as well as governmental connections to get certification under the existing institutional settings, they have an incentive to work in accordance with organic standards. For them, “organic agrifood” is a booming business opportunity to cater to needs of the wealthy. By following the national organic standards, it creates alliances with government agencies and denigrates non-certified organic growers as competitors, resulting in a furtherance of their own business interests.

Conclusion

The state still retains its authority in defining what authentic organic agriculture is thus does not give any legitimacy to any form of non-certified organic agrifood. The national regulation and standards on organic agriculture in China are still based on its historical development: Mainly for exporting and global buyers. However, this paper has shown that various social actors have exercised their agency in their social worlds and tailored “organic agrifood” according to their own agendas rather than taking the national “organic” standards for granted. For the environment NGOs, promoting organic agrifood is a strategy to create an alliance with the state by protecting the environment, from an apolitical approach rather than working radically against the state. It is also a pragmatic way to engage urbanites in a daily lifestyle approach, especially when funding opportunities from other resources for environmental NGOs are limited. For the rural reconstruction group in China, being part of the non-certified organic agrifood movement is a strategy to fit their community-building work within the current Chinese socio-political setting: Improving social justice without calling for a political reform of the unequal urban-rural social structure. For private companies, they see “organic agrifood” as a booming business opportunity to cater to the demand of the wealthy. It is important for them to follow the national organic standards so they can protect their own business interests.

CHAPTER 5 CONNECTING MULTIPLE ORGANICS IN CHINA: A CASE STUDY OF THE FIRST ORGANIC FARMERS' MARKET IN CHINA

Abstract

This chapter examines why and how the social worlds of social actors with organic agrifood multiples are connected together and gain significant influence among domestic consumers in China. The Beijing Organic Farmers' Market (BOFM), the first Organic Farmers' Market in China, is investigated as a case for the study. Scholarship on "boundary organizations" is introduced as a framework to understand the role of BOFM. This chapter shows that although these social worlds are seemingly separated from each other, they are connected through the boundary organization BOFM, which actively engages actors and groups with different agendas through a range of strategies, including gaining support from the media and connecting to the global community. Although BOFM as an organization may appear in terms of its illegal status, a fair amount of agency is still articulated by BOFM in the processes by which it is mobilizing resources through connecting these different social worlds.

Introduction

Who are governing the very process of organic agriculture in the classically distinct spheres of state, market and civil society? In the global North, there has been a debate about market and civil society in the development of organic agriculture. For example, in his book *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan (2006) critiqued organic food as a mere corporate strategy to sell foods produced by industrial farming. To Pollan, the ideal of "organic" is no more than an ideology promoted by transnational corporations (TNCs) such as Whole Foods and Wal-Mart in order to deceive consumers. However, advocates of the organic agriculture movement have been actively trying to promote the idea that organic food consumption is a powerful expression of citizenship and a potential force for social change (Lockie 2009). In the global South, the dynamics are equally complex. For example, Goldberger (2008) argued that organic agriculture development in Kenya is governed by various global donors as well as several local NGOs. Thiers (2006) examined the encounter between Chinese domestic politics and global organic food standards and argued, "[i]n china there is both a strong assumption that state authority will be the best and only definer of the meaning of organic and guarantor that standards are met..."(Thiers 2006 p.198). In this case, the planned market authoritarianism and the fragmented entrepreneurial state are the leading actors in the development of organic agriculture. In other words, the notion of a free market without state authority contradicts China's organic agriculture practices, which are driven by the global market but largely distorted by the profit-seeking activities of various governmental bodies. Thus, despite differences in the specific contents of these disputes, both of

the global North and the global South share controversies regarding governing bodies in organic agriculture development.

This line of debate of organic agriculture governing bodies is relevant to a larger debate on how globalization has influenced the agrifood system. Agrifood globalization theory proposes that there is a divergence in the role of nation-states, since in Western nations the nation-state is no longer the only dominant actor: There is a power shift from the States to TNCs and global governance bodies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Bank (Buttel 2001). However, few studies actually investigate how these processes are happening: What are the techniques and practices of the power shift in the agrifood system under globalization? A governance perspective, thus, is needed to explore techniques applied by many “non-political” actors and to the changing dynamics of the agrifood system (Higgins and Lawrence 2005).

This paper is an attempt to apply a governance perspective to make sense of the processes of organic agrifood development in China. Building on literature of boundary organizations, I examine how various social actors and different versions of “organic agrifood” are arranged into networks by the Beijing Organic Farmers’ Market (BOFM). Even though there are relatively weak voices from civil society actors in the mainstream media discourse, resulting in a strong emphasis on the industrial and marketing justifications for organic agriculture, those social actors have governing power if they practice and mobilize it. This governing power, yet, may not construct any single discourse such as a “food movement” or “consumer food sovereignty” to compete with the general discourse, which regards science, technology and state mechanisms as

crucial factors for organic agriculture development in China, even though social agency is continuing to be articulated by organizations such as BOFM.

In this paper, I first give a general overview of the concept “boundary organizations” and explain why I apply this concept instead of applying classifications such as the state, market, and civil society. Following that, I examine how various social actors and different versions of “organic agrifood” are arranged into networks by the Beijing Organic Farmers’ Market (BOFM). I conclude this essay by reflecting on how literature on “boundary organizations” provides a useful framework to make sense of food governance in China in the era of globalization.

Boundary Organizations: A New Perspective for Studying Food Governance

The fact that globalization has been influencing the agrifood system is commonly studied. However, scholars disagree on how globalization is impacting it. On one hand, agrifood globalization theory places much emphasis on the nation-state, international governing bodies, and TNCs in their discussion of global food governance, since they perceive globalization as a macro-scale process. On the other hand, other scholars argue that there is emerging neoliberalism and free-market individualism: Active participants are using their food consumption choices as expressions of citizenship that speaks of self-responsibilities (Seyfang 2006; Lockie 2009). The two sides are essentially debating on the question: What is more important within food governing in confronted by globalization: agency or structure? This division is caused by the gap between macro- and micro-sociological approaches. In general, political economic perspectives frame power in a dominant/subordinate divide but many complex cases show that discussing power by identifying actors in the classically distinct spheres of state, market and civil society in a dominant/subordinate relationship is not sufficient. For example, there are many empirical cases indicating how states actively support, fund, outsource or leave space open for international nongovernmental organizations (Risse 2002; Woods 2002). And TNCs are not totally unattached to the nation-state, since most of the large corporations have their headquarters in one nation while operating semi-independently in many other countries (Hirst and Thompson 1999). Moreover, globalization is mediated and even promoted in certain countries by nation-states such as China (Ong 1999). Furthermore, governments can operate their programs “by influencing,

allying with or co-opting resources that they do not directly control” (Rose and Miller 1992, p.189).

As there is a need for a synthetic approach which unites macro- and micro-sociological approaches, scholars have applied Foucauldian “analytics of power” to integrate a microphysics of power, the “genealogy of the subject”, with the macro-perspective of power, the “genealogy of the state” (Foucault 1978 p.82). To depict the nature of government as a form of power, Foucault invented the concept “governmentality” or “the conduct of conduct” (Foucault 1991). The Foucauldian perspective of power does not focus on institutional actors, or the question “who conducts?” but the practices of conducting and the very rationalities behind these practices. It suggests power is the result of action, not its cause (Rose 1993). This notion of power enables the conceptualization of a broader range of governmental authorities beyond the limited categories of states, the market, and civil society. The conceptual tool “boundary organization” is directly derived from this notion of power, suggesting power is the outcome of actors’ interaction in stable networks (Callon and Latour 1992; Latour 1986; Law 1992).

Various organizations, ranging from technoscientific institutions to NGOs promoting organic agriculture, and government agricultural extension offices, have been studied as boundary organizations (e.g., Moore 1996; Guston 1999; Cash 2001; Kelly 2003; Miller 2001; Fogel 2002; Goldberger 2008). Moore (1996) proposed the concept of boundary organizations as bodies which “[p]rovide an object of social action and stable but flexible sets of rules for how to go about engaging with that object” (p.1598). Thus, a boundary organization is defined more by its

functions rather than by its members or levels. Guston (1999; 2000) argued that the boundary organization has three major functions: maintaining accountability among the different social worlds at the boundary; mediating among actors involved; and facilitating collaborations of ‘boundary objects’ among these distinct worlds. Applying Guston’s conceptual framework, Cash (2001) studied the US Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), and multiple levels of the organization. Expanding these studies, Miller (2001) showed that the boundary organization framework has the capacity to study a more contested and complex organization which consists of “hybrid management” (2001, p.480). Boundary organizations also play a role in hybridization, deconstruction, boundary-work, and cross-domain orchestration (Miller 2001). The boundary organization literature suggests that organizations need to be studied within networks by following the actors, rather than made of categorical judgments in advance (Irwin 2008). Rather than seeing power as properties of the powerful and the powerless, it indicates governing power is embedded within networks through social dynamics.

A Brief History of BOFM

In 2010, the Beijing Organic Farmers' Market (BOFM) was started by Zhi, who was raised in China but later moved to the UK. When she was living in Beijing and sending her two young sons to attend a local Chinese school, she was concerned about food safety problems. She decided to buy directly from farms which did not apply much fertilizer and pesticide. Soon a Japanese artist, Neko, and a Harvard anthropology undergraduate student, Mei, joined her. They shared the same concern of food safety as they stayed in China as expats. In addition, Neko and her artist friends also saw this as a symbolic gesture to show support for organic food and local environmental justice. It then expanded to other activists who were concerned about ecological agriculture and The Three Rural Issues (San Nong)⁶.

The market was voluntarily launched, aiming to build a platform for producers and consumers who were already familiar with organic agriculture to communicate and exchange experience, as well as to help consumers search for safe and reliable organic products. It was also designed to help farmers expand markets so that more farmers would be attracted to participate in organic agriculture, which reduces the environmental pollution caused by fertilizers and pesticides, increases food security, and promotes fair trade (Zhi).

Zhi recalled that she named the market the Beijing Organic Farmers' Market (BOFM) as

⁶ The Three Rural Issues are agriculture, rural areas and farmers' issues, relating to rural development in China. It has been emphasized by the top political leaders since the 2006 National People's Congress.

similar to a market she occasionally attended at home in Cambridge, UK. From its inception, BOFM showed a strong connection with the global community and consumers.

Tina, one of five current full-time staffers at BOFM, received her MA from NYU and worked for PAG, a US-based NGO which works to promote fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. She got so involved at BOFM that she later quit her job, and devoted herself full-time to BOFM.

In the beginning, we never would expect it to get such a strong response from consumers since we only hosted it once every several months. At that time, one of the most important jobs for us was to visit farms in suburban areas in Beijing and interview owners for the purpose of getting them to join us and sell their products with us (Tina).

When the first Beijing Organic Farmers' Market (BOFM) was held in September 2010, only those who knew the organizers went: it was a small group. The farmers' market was later held in different locations in the city and was known as "the floating market". When, in May 2012, I went to BOFM for the first time, there were however crowds of consumers. It was attracting large numbers of people every time I visited on subsequent occasions. Some of my informants said that they could not buy what they needed since the market was overpopulated with buyers such that many vendors sold all of their products within one or two hours after the market opened.

The number of the sellers had grown from under 10 to over 40 by November 2013, and the number of Weibo (a social network tool, equivalent to Twitter) fans grew to over eighty thousand.

There were also more than 200 sellers who applied to join BOFM. BOFM has not yet established written rules for the procedures regarding how they should select new vendors, but the organization attempts to retain a certain diversity and balance of “the global and the local, business and social justice values, modern and traditional, and so on.” These three aspects are, in another sense, where the connection efforts are made.

How to Build Bridges

The Global and the Local

From the very beginning, BOFM has been receiving support from the global community. Actually, the very choice of the name "organic" is a global endeavor of framing a solution to food challenges in the Chinese context by expats; from the very beginning, the inception and the advocacy stemmed from the global community. Thus the global community has constantly been referred to by BOFM to gain both information and funding resources. As Tina has worked full-time for PAG, an international NGO, she referred to herself as a person within the “NGO circle” in China, allowing easy networking with all sorts of NGOs.

The critical thing is that we all share the similar value of social justice. And each NGO or social entrepreneur, or even company, only takes a different format of social justice. The embedded code in us is the same and you would notice that usually we who share the similar values are similar types of persons (Tina).

Tina was correct: BOFM did speak a similar language to that of other NGOs – for example, concepts such as women’s rights, small farmers’ interests, and social equality are constantly drawn by her to demonstrate that BOFM is “with the NGOs.” The networking offers information, as well as social and financial resources to the development of BOFM. Cooperation with other NGOs improves both the positive social image and influences of BOFM. It also goes far beyond this, however. For instance, *Nv You*, a women’s rights non-governmental organization, lends its office space to BOFM for its weekly workshop free of charge. Tina built several friendships with

people who worked at *Nv You*. It would otherwise take BOFM a lot of effort to find sponsors to hold such events.

PAG is another important NGO from which BOFM receives funding and social resources. As mentioned earlier, PAG offered the scholarship for Shi, the iconic leader who started the first non-certified organic agriculture farm in China, to gain her Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) experience in the US. Later, as Tina started to work full time for BOFM, a closer cooperation between BOFM and PAG grew naturally. The organization offered a small grant to support the operation of BOFM at its early development stage. It has also been able to connect BOFM with North American organic agriculture experts, so that BOFM is connected with a large volume of applied and research information which would otherwise be inaccessible to the Chinese community.

Balancing Business Interests and Social Justice

Every Thursday night, BOFM would hold its workshop in the office of *Nv You*, the women's rights advocacy organization. During my fieldwork, I was commonly in the audience for these workshops as I incorporated it into my participatory observation schedule.

The office of *Nv You* is located 5 minutes away from a subway station in a residential community. What differentiates the *Nv You* office from a regular home are several posts of vagina-themed artwork hanging on the wall, as Vagina Monologues was its weekly event. One evening, I arrived as the first few audience members had arrived in the office. The rest of these audience members appeared to be new since they told me that it was their first time and were

relieved to find the place in time. Among them, there was Shen, an informant I interviewed (Chapter 3). Shen's face carried a complicated expression before his finally popping out the question "What kind of organization is this?" as he pointed to one of the vagina artworks. That question was expected. From my interview, I learned that Shen called himself a "typical pragmatic man who carries responsibilities for his family" and "who was not buying into idealistic clichés." It would be hard to imagine Shen going to a Vagina Monologues show himself or that he would want to have anything to do with it. However, connecting multiple social worlds via BOFM resulted in this somewhat bizarre encounter between these two worlds. Such an effort however, is Tina's everyday job. As Tina revealed,

Not every grower in BOFM has awareness of social justice. Nor was every grower carrying the same business sense. Thus, it is part of our job to keep a balance between business sense and social justice values. Hopefully, the growers can eventually learn something from the other side (Tina).

For BOFM, how to maintain its operations is a challenge, as it lacks a stable funding source. As Tina remarked,

BOFM does not collect funding from the growers who attend the market. If we collect money from them, it is possible that we will have conflict of interests in the organic certification issue, so we prefer to remain as independent organizers who seek funding outside. BOFM started as a consumer-organized platform for buyers and producers to communicate. That's why consumers trust us. It will always remain as a consumer-governed organization. (Tina)

BFOM, in this sense, emerges and grows organically by itself. Thus, it differs quite significantly from a "typical" well-defined farmers' market. There were at least three "natural food" markets in Beijing after the launch of BOFM but none of them attracted as much attention or as many consumers as BOFM did.

The XX market was just a company which tried to sell. They did not value diversity and social justice values: how would you ever trust another "business model" while many of the current problems are caused by the for-profit model. (Tina)

Negotiating between the Traditional and the Modern

"High-quality" organic food business owner Bidi constantly argued that BOFM was just using social justice as a cover for its "fraudulent" organic agrifood. Bidi once applied to be a seller at BOFM but did not fit well with the organization. He constantly expressed disagreement, both in public media and online forums, that "BOFM is just a fraudulent market which misuses 'organic' to cheat consumers." In its composition, BOFM has both groups of modern and traditional "organics," and those small-scale farmers are what Bidi attacked.

If you are not certified but just have a bunch of well-drafted or not even so well-drafted stories, how could you just name yourself as 'organic'? They just did not play the game fairly and it puts businesses such as mine at a disadvantage, but I play by the rules (Bidi).

Tina and other growers stay aloof to Bidi's harsh accusations, as they assert that the commodities on the market share the core essences of the "organic agriculture movement" of promoting social justice and sustainability, and they are the most "organic" that farmers can grow

in the currently available conditions. Also, the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) model was adopted as the mechanism to monitor farms of BOFM, as these small farms are too small to get organic certification, due to the high fees. PGS is an alternative to third-party certification, which certifies producers “based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange” (IFOAM)⁷. Both the BOFM organizers and consumers visit the farms often, and the farmers of BOFM go to each other’s farms once in a while to update each other about what is happening on the farms.

That's why we want to build trust by promoting the organic Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) certification model. Through face-to-face communication between food producers and consumers, understanding and respect are built. BOFM is not for commodity exchanging, but for trust building. By engaging consumers, we are able to build the trust relationship between buyers and producers, which is the “essence” of Chinese “organic” (Tina).

Noticeably, there is not such a balance between certified organic farms and non-certified organic farms, as only two farms in the market have received organic certification. The organizer of BOFM explains that the national organic standard is not customer-oriented because it sets what is “organic” in a logic which is not necessarily shared by consumers in a Chinese setting – and there is no mechanism for consumers and small farmers to negotiate with the standard. At

⁷<http://www.ifoam.org/en/value-chain/participatory-guarantee-systems-pgs>

the same time, consumers already have little trust in both the state and the third party certification agencies, as those agencies are linked to the state in one way or another, even though they are officially categorized as “non-governmental” organizations. In many cases, they give out certificates to local companies under the pressure of local governments. Or in other scenarios, the third-party agencies are so lacking in governmental support that they desperately seek money and will give out certificates to whichever companies are willing to “buy” certificates from them^[8].

^[8] It a general problem with third-party certification, as there is a built-in conflict of interest since the certifier’s income comes directly from those who get certified.

Negotiating the Illegal Status and Legitimacy

Although BOFM is generating support from a wide range of groups, it does not develop without difficulties: After all, it is an illegal organization without any documentation from the state. Except for two vendors in the market, all other sellers on the market do not have licenses of any sort. There had been rumors circulating that BOFM could have trouble from the State. According to the staff, Xia Jun who worked at the China Organic Food Certification Center (COFCC), BOFM was just a small informal organization which has no real capacity to negotiate with the State in policy making.

Strictly speaking, they are breaking the law by misusing “organic” but they are so insignificant that they can be ignored. Since they are not causing too much harm, the related institutes will not ban them for now (Xia Jun).

According to several of my informants, in the past there were anonymous letters sent to the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China to report BOFM because its misuse of “organic” caused disadvantageous competition with other “real” organic agrifood producers. The official who was in charge at that time did conduct an investigation about BOFM and found out how it worked but did not persist in levying any penalty against the organization. Momo, who also works at BOFM, revealed,

The official was moved by the spirit of the organizers in some way, especially those mothers who were trying so hard to find safe food for their young children in the setting China experiences today. So the official concluded that what this organization was doing was

‘heqing’ (reasonable) although it was not ‘hefa’ (legal). We had good luck that time (Momo).

Being illegal does not mean the organization could not have legitimacy. Despite the good luck in the past, the organizers of BOFM realize that it is critical to remain both alert and strategic in its negotiation of legitimacy, as well as to gain support from a wide spectrum of actors. The consumers of BOFM are composed of a special democratic group including artists, social activists, journalists, university professors and government officials who are both “socially conscious and affluent.” As one informant explained,

Those who do not care about social justice will not buy from us. They just subscribe certified organic agrifood directly from those agrifood companies or buy food with organic labels from the supermarket: they only care about high-quality food for their own personal sake. Meanwhile, the sense of social justice is not enough either: unfortunately, at this stage of the market, organic agrifood sold in our market is much more expensive than other places, so our consumers also have a relatively high income (Tina).

The BOFM only has five staff, but they are able to manage the organization’s operations due to support from consumer groups. One aspect of support is social resources sharing: BOFM has remained as a floating market and nearly all the location resources come directly from consumers’ suggestions as to where to hold the market. These locations include the BMW 4S Event Center, Canadian International School of Beijing, Iron Chef Kitchen, Vintage Arts Square, Beijing New World Women’s Shopping Mall, Children’s Event Center at Chongguang Mall, Nali Patio at Sanlitun Bar Street, Red Wall Garden Hotel, Shijia Hutong, and so on. Besides finding locations

for BOFM to be held without monetary costs, consumers also give BOFM organization-building and information consultation. For instance, Lian, a consumer of BOFM, worked at one of the national labs authorized to give organic certification and explained to me her understanding of Chinese “organic” by expressing her experience with the official certification system,

It is my job; that is why I know that I would not trust the certification. It is not necessary to determine whose fault it is. For instance, there was an “innovational” invention that a certain enzyme was invented to degrade all the pesticides of agrifood so that all the indicators look just perfectly “organic” but both we and the producers know that two weeks ago, before the enzyme was applied to the agrifood, it was NOT organic at all (Lian).

Lian’s voice has been considered to be quite powerful to assure the quality of products sold at BOFM by other consumers because of her position as an insider of formally certified organic agrifood. However, BOFM has been given even more credit by its proponents associated with public media as the “market which solves the food safety problem” in China. Since its launching in 2010 to November 2013, there were approximately 100 media reports about BOFM, ranging from national media such as China Central Television (CCTV) to global media such FT Magazine UK. BOFM has also won a range of awards, such as the 2012 Annual Gourmet Innovator Award (Wall Street Journal Chinese version); “Green Living Action” Award (British Council); and the Consumer Contribution Award (Lifestyle Weekly). Although some of these articles were published in lifestyle magazines, a majority of the newspaper articles framed BOFM as a possible solution to the food safety crisis in China. The *China Daily* article titled

How Far Can the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) Certification Model Go? raises the legitimacy of PGS as a question without a definitive answer. These media articles lent BOFM a certain level of legitimacy despite its illegal status.

Boundary Organizations and Flexible Governance

When Tina visited a farmers' market in the UK, she noticed that BOFM had gone rapidly through the stages which would have taken other farmers' markets many years to achieve. There seems to be more flexibility for informal organizations in China than with other countries, even in comparison to the US, where a range of laws and regulations are being enforced to facilitate organic agrifood development. And the quick development of BOFM is a result of efforts of the immediate actors connected to BOFM who have the resources and are persistent in creating a space for the organization's development while the state remains silent as to its existence. There are many gray areas under the current system, as many informants commented that an imaginative line is always more powerful than written and visible rules because the textual standards are purposely made impossible to meet and fail to take account of local situations. As one informant, HSY, commented,

Whether you are breaking the rule or you are doing well is vague. Everyone evaluates how far we can go. Thus we each take our own precautions. Through the guess, the line is embedded in us deeply enough that nobody will take the risk in breaking it. The efficiency of standards happens to come from the case that its strictness is impossible to apply in reality (HSY).

This kind of governance can be called "flexible governance" although the government still seems to be behind different forms of governance. BOFM cannot be classified into a well-defined categorization in the market sector or in civil society. In its function, BOFM enables

different levels of individuals and organizations to connect together and create space for non-certified organic agrifood in the current Chinese settings. Flexible governance, in a sense, provides space but this type of governance is also fragile, as it may collapse quickly if the state acts against it. However, even if that happens, other formats of organizations of a similar nature would emerge soon afterwards. As in many other areas, informal organizations emerge and fill the space where formal organizations fail to perform effectively.

Conclusion

Drawing from Miller (2001), BOFM functions as a boundary organization as it allows both the certified and non-certified organic agrifood spheres to co-exist together, as well as promoting collaboration among producers who may have multiple goals, so as reach a consensus. Accountability is shown in the trust relationship it builds: in a time when consumers are anxious about food safety risks and highly doubtful about the current system, BOFM creates a platform to connect producers and consumers. As the boundary between legal and illegal remains invisible and flexible, information and social ties appear crucial. The actors directly connected to BOFM are crucial in increasing its ability to negotiate among different worlds.

This paper addressed why and how the worlds of social actors with organic agrifood multiples are connected together and gain significant influence among consumers in China, without any legitimacy from the state. The study has shown that even though these social worlds are seemingly separated from each other, they are connected through the boundary organization: BOFM. The lack of an agreed non-certified organic agrifood standard actually gives BOFM more space than what would otherwise be possible. This permits it to negotiate its way through a wider range of audiences and to draw social resources toward the promotion of non-certified organic agrifood in China. Although BOFM as an organization itself may appear illegal, a fair amount of agency is still articulated by BOFM in the processes by which it is mobilizing resources through connecting these different social worlds.

CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY

In this chapter I summarize my major findings, discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions, and suggest implications of this research for further study in the future.

A Brief Summary of the Study

In recent years, in a time where food safety scandals are constantly exposed in media reports, domestic organic agrifood consumption is favored by the middle to high income classes in China (USDA 2010). Meanwhile, prices of organic agrifood are approximately 3-15 times more expensive than their conventional counterparts (ibid). Yet, it is predicted that domestic sale of organic products in China will rise to \$3.6-8.7 billion by 2015 (ibid).

Against this background, the controversy of whether there is authentic organic agriculture in China emerged as a response to the rising concerns over health, environmental deterioration, and food safety. This study is not only aimed at finding an empirical answer to this very question, but to making the invisible debate over organic agrifood visible so as to engage in a discussion of power. With the preliminary field study, and ten months of qualitative field research, I collected detailed data to answer the proposed questions. I described the process by which multiple realities of organic agrifood in dispersed worlds co-exist without any unified or legitimized non-certified organic agriculture regimes, such as a set of concrete informal standards among Chinese small household farmers.

With a broad definition of “organic agriculture,” this study sees the essential disagreement over the question “Is there authentic organic agriculture in China?” as centered on one core

question: Whose words/what knowledge counts in defining organic agriculture in China? The question can be seen as relevant, if not central, to the current debate over food governance. The boundary literature has been constantly mentioned through this study study. Chapter 2 indicates that organic agriculture is a boundary object which allows interpretive flexibility of the dominant social actors: The state is still the main authority in defining organic agriculture according to the mainstream media discourse. Chapter 3 is based on the concept of boundary work to show how various actors define lines between traditional and modern knowledge to define “organic.” In Chapter 4, the “Boundary and Arena Analysis” perspective is applied to show why and how various social worlds are within the arena of “organic” even though they were usually dismissed as “irrelevant.” While interpretive flexibility of social actors is allowed, there is a “boundary organization” of the BOFM loosely connecting these different social worlds. It is important to emphasize BOFM’s function of “connecting” is less institutionalized than standards.

The study showed that, at the current stage, Chinese organic agriculture is a boundary object in terms that it allows interpretive flexibility of social actors thus different groups are able to work together without consensus. While it is intertwined with much interpretive flexibility of social actors, authenticity of Chinese organic agriculture will always remain problematic as the result of a lack of concrete formal and informal standards to define its authenticity in the first place. The major argument of this study is not merely that “organic” is constructed by different actors, but that the argument is also the implication of multiple organics; that is, behind the empirical question regarding authenticity of organic agriculture in China is a question less about

authenticity, but more about a lack of the authority to define that agreed authenticity. It is about food governance, about asking the question “who is governing?” The boundary literature is extremely critical to show how social actors mobilize knowledge to govern. It shows that various social actors actually have a certain power to define “organic,” even though seen from other lens, they do not have that power.

Research Contributions

An Empirical Study of a Less Studied Social Issue

Food safety is one of the most serious public issues in current Chinese society. This dissertation provides an empirical examination of this issue by studying organic agrifood as its possible solution. Environmental pollution, food scares, modernity, urbanization, the emergence of a middle class and many other factors have contributed to the fast development of the organic agrifood domestic market in China. Distrust in the current food system and uncertainty with technological advances have intensified such trends.

Employing a qualitative approach, I have conducted in-depth interviews in my fieldwork with three groups of individuals—government regulators, the business community, and civic actors, who have participated in the development of formal organic agriculture standards. Examples are officers from the Ministry of Agriculture's Green Food Development Center and China Organic Food Certification Center, and the Certification and Accreditation Administration (CNCA). I also investigated the emerging informal organic food standards developed from urban farmer coalitions such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farming, through which local actors are making civic efforts to rebuild trust by creating face-to-face interactions between organic agrifood producers and consumers. By discussing how formal and informal standards emerged through public policies and alternative means such as the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) certification model, my study examines how government, business and civic actors endeavor to produce organic food as a solution for people to access safe and high-quality

food at this particular historical moment in China—i.e., when the country is entering a period of fast urbanization and formation of a large middle class.

Applying the STS Framework in a Non-Western Setting

Various approaches have been applied to study organic agrifood, but this study focuses on the STS scholarship framework to study the organic agrifood case in a developing and non-western setting. It contributes to the growing social science scholarship on applying STS to the context of non-western countries. Specifically, it draws on the framework of boundary making and boundary objects from STS to study organic agrifood in China. The boundary framework was applied to understand how non-certified organic agrifood can be assembled across socially and geographically disparate social worlds without any agreed upon concrete standards.

An Innovative Approach in Studying Governance in China

Studying rationalities and standards which define organic agrifood have thus revealed how power is “naturalized” within a commodity market and how food governance is seen through the lens of governmentality. This approach is different from the literature on governance that focuses primarily on the role of the state. At different scales, I examine how people and things are arranged into networks that distribute power through the material devices of standards (Tanaka and Busch 2003; Busch 2011). In other words, I capture both what actors “are” in terms of who has power and authority and what these actors “do” as they engage in the processes of governing and standard making.

The politics of categories “focused on the concept of order and its implementation in categorical discourse” (Foucault 1970 quoted in Bowker and Star 2000, p.5). This gaze at the politics of categorization can reveal techniques of governance in blurred areas which conventional analyses of state, market, and civil society dynamics tend to bypass. By studying the process of defining the boundary between real and fraudulent organic agriculture, I explain why this categorization is not an analytical question which should only be put into the hands of certain authorities such as agriculture experts and the state; this problem is a practical debate involving the interests and livelihood of actors such as small household farmers and mothers, who can easily become invisible and irrelevant. This study is an attempt to turn our “gaze” to seemingly less political issues to learn about governance techniques in China.

Future Research: Similarities between the Global and China Cases

Comparative research of China's case with other countries would be interesting in terms of innovative solutions and strategies.

Worldwide, organic agrifood is classified into certified organic and non-certified organic agrifood. In China, only commodities officially certified according to national standards are recognized as real “organic,” while there is no official classification such as “non-certified” organic agrifood. However, the study has shown that, in practice, a certain kind of “fraudulent” organic agrifood may be considered to be more authentic than certified organic agrifood in terms of how it differs from conventional agrifood, and how it is accepted as “organic” by urban consumers. Thus, this type of “organic” is not defined in an agricultural sense but in a social sense, although the practices of this type of “organic” do share some similarities with the agricultural practices of ideal organic agrifood. And the boundaries of this type of organic agrifood are defined by networks of social actors. Empirically, I located them in my fieldwork by following their producers, who I came to know within the small “circle of domestic organic agrifood producers.”

As mentioned in various chapters, the major reasons why the Chinese producers rebel against the formal organic agriculture certification system can be summarized as follows:

Problems with Standards

National organic standards made for the purpose of organic agriculture exportation are thus heavily skewed to meet requirements enforced by developed countries. As a result, the national

standards do not take Chinese local conditions into consideration, especially ignoring the interests of Chinese small farmers.

Problems with Certification

The cost of organic certification seems astronomical to small producers since the certification procedures are based on standards which are not practical in the Chinese context. As a result, only large scale Chinese state-owned, export-oriented farms and private agricultural firms with strong venture capital investments are able to be in the business of “organic agrifood.” This reality is the opposite of the agenda of the organic agriculture movement, as some informants cited in the study argued.

The accountability of the third-party certification agencies is also in question. Some third-party certification agencies used to be governmental organizations, so even now that they are independent, their interests are still inextricably linked with government and they still receive governmental funding. For example, in certain agricultural provinces, certification of “organic” is closely tied with local economic development and tax income. Local certification agencies for organic agriculture may get “inquiries” from local state officials and not follow certification procedures strictly under pressure. It is difficult enough for those third-party certification bodies without any official background to survive and compete with their counterparts who have an official background; thus the certification fee is seen as a fee for the purchase of organic labels, as agencies may not follow procedures in organic agrifood standards. These problems spur producers to ask why they shouldn’t simply save the certification fee and spend it on farming.

Problems with Accreditation

In general, the government's credibility is questioned because the food safety issue has become a serious social problem. As a result, domestic consumers show doubt with respect to the official “organic,” which is seen as a part of the problematic system. Even though accreditation bodies attempt to improve the situation, the distrust seems to be strong, as it is generated by general distrust of the public in the state and the party (Yan 2012).

To solve problems associated with food safety and industry organic agriculture standards, solutions have emerged worldwide from social movements. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recently collected cases of innovative organic agriculture certification solutions from different countries. The Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)⁹ certification model is a popular model. And some non-certified organic agricultural producers promote diverse organic agriculture standards so as to combine elements of heterogeneous scientific and local traditional knowledge.

What are Chinese solutions to these problems? Do they share similarities with the cases of FAO and IFOAM? As shown in chapter 5, the Beijing Organic Farmers' Market advocates unofficial certified organic products and claims these are the “real” organic agrifood that fits into China's current conditions. The organization strives to establish its own standards system.

⁹ <http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/a1227e/a1227e01.pdf>

However, this move has not been supported by many market participants, as they would rather stay in the gray area selling agricultural products, than to propose another set of standards and to get into potential conflicts with the state. And they claim the organization does have more flexibility by not putting together its own standards for organic agrifood.

Particularly, most informants of my research did not hold a positive attitude to organic agrifood standards and standardization. As one informant commented,

Organic agriculture is authentic. But when it becomes standardized, there is deception. Big companies want to set standards so they can monopolize the name and benefit from it without caring about the original intention of the organic agriculture movement. Therefore, when the world advertises with “organic” standards, we need to stay away from this trend.

The informant further explained that this idea of labeling oneself is only needed when you are not the authentic being, as rooted in Taoist philosophy. As Tao Te Ching (the classic Taoism text) reads,

“When the great Way is abandoned, there are benevolence and righteousness. When wisdom and intelligence come forth, there is great hypocrisy. When the six familial relationships are out of balance, there are kind parents and filial children. When the state is in turmoil and chaos, there are loyal ministers” (Lao Tzu and Ivanhoe 2003, p.18) .

It is difficult to tell if this argument comes from this informant’s genuine belief in Taoist philosophy or is a result of a justification he finds convincing enough support his stand. However, each individual social actor is more or less affected by knowledge systems of the particular

society and culture in which s/he is embedded.

As a certain number of the non-certified organic producers draw from other-worldly philosophies such as Taoism and Buddhism (Chapter 3), it is likely that these non-certified organic producers, unlike their counterparts in other countries, would not actively fight for an indisputable name of “organic” or participate in making rigid standards to discipline their products. If so, without standards, what governing techniques and devices will they invent to maintain the stability of their networks with an increasing number of non-certified organic agrifood producers and consumers? Will the Chinese producers adopt possible solutions proposed by their global counterparts? Will their attitudes towards standardizing organic agrifood change, given local contexts and knowledge systems? These questions can all be studied in the future.

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