



Consumer-citizen Hybrid?

Cooperatives for Organic Food Consumption in Urban China

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Abstract:

Because of the frequently occurring food scandals in China in recent years, urban middle class consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about the issue of food security. While many consumers turn to authenticated organic food sold by big corporations, a few people choose to solve their food problems by establishing community-based cooperatives and directly connecting with small peasants. In big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu, as these cooperatives evolve, participants have extended the discourse of their activism and addressed wider public concerns, such as environmental protection and fair trade. Since the operation of the organic food cooperatives involves cross-class interactions, they have presented themselves as an interesting case for observing the potential of and the constraint in China's public sphere. In this talk, three sets of questions would be discussed. First, how could organic food cooperatives, which are usually established for serving consumers' private interest, be transformed to civil society organizations that address public concerns? Where does the idea of consumer-citizen hybrid come from? Second, what are the modes of interaction between urban middle class consumers and peasants? How does the mode vary across cities? Third, what are the constraints for realizing the ideal of consumer-citizen hybrid? How are these constraints related to the organizing structure of civil society in China?

Bio:

Mujun Zhou is a cultural political sociologist. She obtained her PhD degree from Brown University in 2015, and has since then been doing research in the University of California, Berkeley, and Sun Yat-sen University. Her research covers a wide range of topics in social movements and the public sphere in China, including homeowners' associations, labour activism, environmental NGOs, equal education campaigns, and the practice of human rights lawyers. She is currently working on a book that aims to explain the emergence, development, and involution of the realm of social movements in China since the 1990s.

Language: English

All are welcome!

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