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Abstract: Transitioning towards organic consumption and production has been widely promoted as a more sustainable alternative for urban and rural food systems. Our paper shows how a focus on legitimacy can shed light on current barriers to deeper institutionalisation of the organic labelling scheme in China. Based upon documentary analysis, personal observations and over 70 qualitative interviews we identify consequential concerns amongst China's small scale farmers, limited support by the Chinese central government, and procedural problems as the main barriers. We discuss strategies to overcome these barriers, for example tighter certification procedures or more participatory arrangements. Our work contributes to the legitimacy, product labelling and food safety literatures as well as burgeoning discussions on how to facilitate more sustainable consumption and production in China.

# Institutionalising the organic labelling scheme in China: a legitimacy perspective

## *Abstract*

Transitioning towards organic consumption and production has been widely promoted as a more sustainable alternative for urban and rural food systems. Our paper shows how a focus on legitimacy can shed light on current barriers to deeper institutionalisation of the organic labelling scheme in China. Based upon documentary analysis, personal observations and over 70 qualitative interviews we identify consequential concerns amongst China's small scale farmers, limited support by the Chinese central government, and procedural problems as the main barriers. We discuss strategies to overcome these barriers, for example tighter certification procedures or more participatory arrangements. Our work contributes to the legitimacy, product labelling and food safety literatures as well as burgeoning discussions on how to facilitate more sustainable consumption and production in China.

Keywords: Organic Food; China; Product Labelling; Legitimacy; New Institutional Theory

## **1. Introduction**

Transitioning towards more sustainable agricultural production and consumption in China is increasingly viewed as a crucial piece in the global sustainability puzzle. An alignment with organic labelling standards, in other words, a shift toward organic consumption and production is a widely promoted path to achieve these goals (Vittersø and Tangeland 2015; Reisch et al. 2013; Thøgersen et al. this volume; Yi et al. 2001; Qiao et al. this volume). The stated aim of the International Federation for Organic Agricultural Movement (IFOAM) and the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) is for organic consumption and production to become the mainstream approach to sustainability worldwide (Willer and Lernoud 2015). Some argue (Klintman and Bostrom 2012) that organic trends are already far from being insignificant with obvious potential for overall food transitions. Revenues from sales of organic produce have

1 increased almost five fold since 1999 with more and more land certified to organic standards in  
2 almost all regions of the world (Willer and Lernoud 2015).  
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5 China, home to the world’s largest food and beverage retail market (Garnett and Wilkes  
6 2014), has been no exception to this trend. A total organic acreage of 3.529 million hectares  
7 (1.287million hectares certified to Chinese organic standards, 0.807million hectares to foreign  
8 organic standards; 1.435 million hectares to wild collection) produced in 2013 a total of 10.808  
9 million tons of organic cereals (588,000 hectares), soybeans and other oilseeds (235,000  
10 hectares), fruits and nuts (221,000 hectares), green fodder (129,000 hectares), tea (53,000  
11 hectares), vegetables (51,000 hectares), and other plants (22.000 hectares) (Meng et al. 2015),  
12 making it the fastest growing sector of Chinese agriculture (Ken Research 2013) and China the  
13 fourth largest producer of organic food (Willer and Lernoud 2015).  
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26 Early on, the main aim of aligning Chinese agricultural production with international  
27 organic labelling standards was to supply Western markets (International Trade Centre (ITC)  
28 2011; Ken Research 2013; Yin et al. 2010). Recent years have seen an increased focus on a  
29 rapidly rising Chinese consumer society with organic food officials introducing a national  
30 Chinese organic labelling scheme<sup>1</sup> “to develop retail sales among China's growing urban middle  
31 class" (Thiers 2002: 368). The strategy has been partly successful: the domestic market for  
32 products certified and labelled through the Chinese organic labelling scheme has grown  
33 significantly since the mid-2000s, particularly in first tier cities (ITC 2011; Xie et al. 2011;  
34 International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) 2005; Yin et al. 2010; Meng et al. 2015).  
35 China is now the third largest organic market in the world in terms of sales (Willer and Lernoud  
36 2015).  
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57 <sup>1</sup> We here define product labeling schemes as comprising three main building blocks coordinated by one or multiple  
58 organisational bodies: a standard that provides rules, guidelines or characteristics for product related processes and  
59 production methods; an assessment to what extent the specifications of the standard are met; and an aggregation of  
60 the assessment results into higher level information communicated on or with the product (Dendler 2013).  
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2 Yet despite its strong growth, the organic sector in China is still in its “early infancy”  
3 (Thøgersen and Zhou 2012: 316) contributing less than 1% of China's agricultural production  
4 (Meng et al. 2015) and only 0.29-0.44% of total food consumption (Qiao 2014). By shedding  
5 light on current barriers to deeper institutionalisation of the Chinese organic labelling scheme,  
6 this paper aims to improve our understanding of how China could contribute more to a global  
7 transition towards sustainable consumption and production.  
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13 To study these barriers, we focus on the notion of legitimacy as many authors consider  
14 legitimacy to be of key importance for organisations (e.g. Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and  
15 Powell 2008; Dowling and Pfeffer 1975), governance schemes (e.g. Biermann et al. 2010; Borrás  
16 & Conzelmann 2007; Knorringa et al. 2011) and sustainability related product labelling schemes  
17 (e.g. Cashore 2002; Black 2008; Dendler 2013). So far, research on the Chinese organic labelling  
18 scheme has mainly focused on consumer knowledge, understanding and/or willingness to pay  
19 as well as barriers at the primary production level. Studies of how the construction of legitimacy  
20 may facilitate or hinder alignment with its standards are missing. By addressing this gap, our  
21 work contributes not only to burgeoning discussions on how to facilitate more sustainable  
22 consumption and production in China but also the wider product labelling, food safety and  
23 legitimacy literatures.  
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40 In the following we expand on how previous authors have positioned legitimacy as a  
41 crucial variable for the success of social entities. We will then apply these concepts to the  
42 Chinese organic labelling scheme showing how legitimacy has been constructed around four  
43 main principles: procedures, consequences, disposition and regulation. Our analysis is based on  
44 a triangulated approach including documentary review, personal observations and interviews  
45 with over 70 stakeholders. We explain our method in section three. We illustrate the usefulness  
46 of the concepts by discussing how the construction of legitimacy has shaped alignment with the  
47 Chinese organic labelling scheme across different actor groups. We then discuss strategies to  
48 facilitate a deeper institutionalisation of the Chinese organic labelling scheme. The last section  
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1 concludes with reflections on our main findings, their implications for the legitimacy literature  
2 and further research.  
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## 6 **2. Literature Review**

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9 There is a large interdisciplinary literature on the critical role of legitimacy for the  
10 development and success of social entities. Within political sciences, many relate legitimacy to  
11 notions of power and authority, framing it as the linchpin that lends justification to the use of  
12 power through formal or informal social consent (Beetham 1991). Within organisational studies,  
13 legitimacy is seen to determine the support of an organisation across its internal participants  
14 and external constituents (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 2008; Dowling and  
15 Pfeffer 1975). Legitimacy is also included in many models of institutional change and  
16 institutionalisation processes (DiMaggio 1988; Hargrave and van de Ven 2006; Greenwood et al.  
17 2002). Dendler (2013) emphasizes its importance for the institutionalisation of social entities  
18 that aim to provide a new “social order” (Weber 1921), with product labelling schemes being a  
19 prominent example of such entities in current societies. This resonates with many other authors  
20 who have stressed the importance of legitimacy for product labelling schemes (Cashore 2002;  
21 Black 2008) such as the Forest Stewardship Council (Cashore et al. 2006; Waddel and Khagram  
22 2007), the Marine Stewardship Council (Gulbrandsen 2010; Bostroem 2006), the European  
23 Union ecolabel (Jordan 2006), energy efficiency (Wiel and McMahon 2005) and organic labels  
24 (Hatanaka 2014).  
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46 Definitions of legitimacy vary across these literatures. Following a new institutional  
47 approach, we define legitimacy as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an  
48 entity [in this case the product labelling scheme] are desirable, proper, or appropriate within  
49 some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995:  
50 574). These perceptions are assumed to be based on individual “judgements” (Tost 2011;  
51 Bitektine and Haack 2015) along self-interest (i.e “pragmatic”), normative (i.e. “moral”) and  
52 taken for granted (i.e. “cognitive”) dimensions (Suchman 1995). We assume they result in  
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1 behavioural consequences, manifest in non-discursive form, such as engagement in exchange  
2 relations or imposition of sanctions or in discursive form as expressions of judgements to other  
3 actors through social networks, the media, or other channels (Bitektine 2011; Bitektine and  
4 Haack 2015). As such, we hold that legitimacy plays a crucial role in deepening the  
5 institutionalisation of product labelling schemes and furthering alignment across systems of  
6 consumption and production (Dendler 2013).  
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14 New institutional writing emphasizes how (individual) legitimacy judgements are  
15 relationally shaped by majority opinion, in particular by “judgement validation institutions”  
16 (Bitektine and Haack, 2015) and other “key legitimacy actors” (Dendler 2013) with “superior”  
17 (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) or “subject positions” (Maguire and Hardy 2009) in the field. For  
18 example, positive (individual) legitimacy judgements expressed in newspaper articles can  
19 significantly influence other actor’s legitimacy judgements and provide crucial information  
20 about generalized or “collective-level” (Bitektine and Haack, 2015) legitimacy perceptions. Also,  
21 judgements by powerful actors and their respective behavioural consequences can have  
22 significant effects on wider (collective level) legitimacy perceptions. Such ‘relational pushes’  
23 (Dendler and Randles) can include, for example, a powerful corporation expressing its positive  
24 legitimacy judgement by aligning its supply chain management with a particular label or a well-  
25 positioned NGO promoting a label in its corporate and consumer communication. From these  
26 relational arguments it also follows that organisations can strategically influence the  
27 construction of legitimacy for their own organisation (Suchman 1995) and/or a new order they  
28 aim to institutionalise (Dendler 2013) through different legitimization strategies.  
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49 So far, our picture has been a rather dynamic one painting legitimacy as a social construction  
50 between various actors in the field. However, previous studies in the Western context also found  
51 stability. Dendler (2013, 2014), for example, identified a clustering of legitimacy constructions  
52 around several “key principles” (Leca and Naccache 2006), including:  
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- Consequences: association with positive or negative consequences in relation to individual self-interests or greater societal welfare (Suchman 1995);
- Procedures: belief in the validity of the procedures followed (Suchman 1995), often related to norms of inclusiveness and deliberation;
- Disposition: belief in the (charismatic) exemplariness of an organisation that is perceived to have "our best interests at heart" (Suchman 1995: 578) and/or holds (traditional) public confidence (Suchman 1995; Weber 1922) (the former is often associated with NGOs, the latter can be attributed, for example, to governmental organisations).
- Regulation: usually evolving from conformity with laws (Tost 2011; Weber 1922; Barker 1990).

With these theoretical arguments in mind, the aim of our research was to investigate the social construction of legitimacy and its impact on institutionalisation in the context of the Chinese organic labelling scheme. To that end we identified legitimation strategies of the organic labelling organisation(s) and generalized legitimacy perceptions and their behavioural consequences in the field. The latter we inferred from judgments aggregated and communicated by "macrolevel judgment validation institutions" (Bitektine and Haack 2015) and from observable behaviour and discourse of other actors, especially "key legitimacy actors" (Dendler 2013). We used a combination of research methods to meet this aim, which are described in section 3.

### ***3. Empirics***

Firstly, our study drew upon a review of academic and other relevant documents, such as policy reports and plans, administrative documents and organisational reports. All were identified through keyword searches of academic and non-academic databases as well as a review of relevant websites on the Chinese organic labelling scheme. Based upon our review of the legitimacy literature we developed a coding tree consisting of three main branches:



1 legitimation strategies applied by labelling organisations; other relational influences through  
2 key actors; wider legitimacy perceptions. We used this coding tree to thematically analyse  
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4 (Bowen 2009) our material within the software Citavi. Grounded in critical realist thinking  
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6 (Danermark et al. 2002), we flexibly adjusted our codes as our causal enquiry proceeded.  
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9 Secondly, we used primary data from site visits (retail outlets, farmers markets, primary  
10 production and manufacturing facilities), personal observations and over 70 in-depth interviews  
11 as well as informal conversations conducted between March 2013 and May 2014 (see Appendix  
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13 1 for an anonymised list of all interviews). The aim of the interviews was partly to gain insights  
14 into individual level legitimacy judgement processes. Mainly however, we aimed to identify  
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16 generalized or “collective level” (Bitektine and Haack 2015) legitimacy perceptions by  
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18 interviewing key actors. Key actors were identified during the first phase of the research. By  
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20 visiting relevant trade fairs (2013 and 2014 Shanghai Biofach; 14th China (Beijing) International  
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22 Organic Food and Green Food Expo; 15th China (Shanghai) International Organic Food Industry  
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24 Expo) and by following a snow balling approach we arranged further interviews. Ultimately our  
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26 study involved interviews with actors from across the Chinese food consumption and  
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28 production system, including those from primary production, processing, trading, retailing  
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30 (organic and mainstream) as well as non-governmental, governmental, labelling and  
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32 certification organisations. Interviews were conducted in both English and Mandarin, the latter  
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34 with the assistance of a translator. Interview recordings and notes were analysed within the  
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36 software Nvivo drawing upon and further adjusting the coding tree developed during the first  
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38 phase of the study.  
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48 In the next section we discuss the main organisational bodies involved in organic  
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50 legitimation strategies at different levels, more precisely in standard setting, certification and  
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52 communication. In section 5 we present our findings about how legitimacy has been constructed  
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54 by these labelling organisations, and how it has been perceived and constructed further by other  
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56 actors in the field. In section 6 we consider how these legitimacy constructions have affected the  
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58 Chinese organic labelling scheme and discuss strategies to facilitate deeper institutionalisation.  
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#### ***4. The Chinese organic labelling scheme***

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Similar to other countries in Europe or the United States of America (Steering Committee of the State-of-Knowledge Assessment of Standards and Certification 2012; Stolze and Lampkin 2009), the Chinese organic organisational structure is dominated by the state with respect to standard setting and organisational structure. In 1995, the National Environmental Protection Bureau of China issued the “Organic (Nature) food producing and processing technical specification” and “Organic (Nature) food logo management regulation”, which formed the basis for organic labelling in China (Xi 2010). Nine years later, eleven ministries from the central government published the first national policy on organic agricultural promotion (ITC 2011). This was followed in 2005 by the ‘Administrative Measures on Organic Product Certification’, issued by the Standardization Administration of China and the General Administration on Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine. A major revision of this standard took place in 2014.

The Chinese organic standards partly mimic the principles and requirements of IFOAM Basic Standards for Organic Production and Processing as well as international regulations but with added emphasis on contamination by pollutants and prohibited materials and quality management systems (Marchesini 2009; ITC 2011; Sheng et al. 2009; Xiao and Xiaorong 2003).

Since 1994, the Organic Food Development Centre (OFDC) in Nanjing, which is part of the Ministry for Environment, has been the leading official organisation in charge of inspection, certification and management of organic production in China. Their remit extends to management and supervision of the official organic product logo (Sanders 2006a; Yi et al. 2001 Biao and Xiaorong 2003). According to documents (OFDC-MEP n.d.) and interviews, the OFDC has engaged in planning and research on policies, standard production and technology, as well as publicity, technical support, training and quality control of organic farming. The OFDC are also actively involved in the drafting, revision and evaluation of the organic standards (OFDC-MEP n.d.). In 1999, an additional Organic Food Research and Consulting Centre (OFRC) was

1 established to further promote "the growth of the organic food industry." The OFRC advises  
2 farmers, processors and traders and helps source certified organic fertilizers, pest control  
3 materials and physical control materials (OFRC 2006-2014).  
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7 Currently the Global Organic Trade Guide  
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9 (<http://www.globalorganictrade.com/countries.php?idx=11>) lists 26 national and 6  
10 international certification companies including a certification body within OFDC. As with all  
11 certification schemes in China, OFDC needs to be approved by the Certification and Accreditation  
12 Administration of the People's Republic of China (CNCA) and accredited by the China National  
13 Accreditation Service for Conformity Assessment (OFDC n.d.; ITC 2011). According to their  
14 promotional material, OFDC is one of the main professional training facilities for national  
15 organic product certification inspectors. OFDC cooperates closely with international  
16 organisations such as FIBL, Soil Association, United Nations Environment Programme and the  
17 World Bank (OFDC- MEP n.d.) and its certification operation is accredited by the International  
18 Organic Accreditation Service under the IFOAM accreditation programme (ITC 2011; Siriex  
19 2011; Sanders 2006b).  
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35 In summary, one can identify OFDC, OFRC and CNCA as the main organisational bodies  
36 involved in legitimisation strategies at different levels of the consumption and production system.  
37 Certification organisations are also very active in wider legitimacy construction. This includes  
38 the building of links between companies; trainings; information services and involvement in the  
39 development of organic product standards and policies (see e.g. China Organic Food Certification  
40 Centre (COFCC) n.d.). We will now outline how legitimacy has been constructed between these  
41 organisations and other actors in the food consumption and production system.  
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## 5. *Constructing legitimacy in the context of the Chinese organic labelling scheme*

We systematically analysed the secondary and primary data according to the theories described above, using legitimacy principles, namely consequences, procedures, disposition and regulation, as the main structure. Where appropriate we further unpacked legitimacy construction across actor groups.

### 5.1 *Consequential legitimacy*

The organic labelling scheme has been promoted as providing multiple positive societal consequences: “ensuring human health and protecting [the] ecological environment” and contributing to a “healthy sustainable development of the society” in China (OFDC-MEP n.d.). Most dominantly, this has been linked to food safety and potential health benefits on the side of the consumer. This resonates with previous findings on the organic scheme in China (Thiers 2002; Liu et al. 2013; Xie et al. 2015; Klein 2011) and in other countries (Stolze and Lampkin 2009; Klintman and Bostroem 2012; Steering Committee 2012; Thøgersen et al. 2015a).

Across actor groups, analysis of the interview and documentary evidence reveals that both promotion and support based on environmental benefits (e.g. reduction of water and soil pollution, protection of biodiversity), animal welfare, and equality goals (e.g. rural development and greater protection of and welfare for farmers and their spouses) have limited impact. For example, one interviewee asserted: “*Consumers are worried about food safety. The companies cultivated demand for organic based on that mind set. [...] the organic industry is kind of twisted: organic is actually about harmony between people and nature and not about food safety.*” (Interview 24, translated). The following sub-sections will discuss in more detail how different consequential self-interests shaped judgements across actors groups, including primary producers (farmers), manufacturers, retailers and consumers.

### 5.1.1 Primary producers

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2 Economic and market related benefits are commonly mentioned in interviews and  
3 documents (Oelofse et al. 2010, 2011; IFAD 2005; Zhang et al. 2015) as positive consequences of  
4 an alignment of primary production with organic standards. These benefits include creating  
5 recognition with and meeting demands of consumers, higher market prices, differentiation from  
6 competitors and better market access through improved positioning with retailers and  
7 manufacturers. However, not all interviewees recognised these benefits with several  
8 commenting on insufficient demand and limited opportunities for price premiums. Farmers  
9 often refer to additional labour and knowledge requirements as well as higher financial and time  
10 costs (see also IFAD 2005; Oelofse et al. 2010; Qiao 2010; Cadilhon 2009; Xi 2010; Kuehl and  
11 Yonggong 2014; Xio and Xiaorong 2003; Liu et al. 2010; Zhang et al. 2015; Sanders 2006a;  
12 Sanders 2006b). Interviewees repeatedly communicated problems of getting access to modern  
13 organic technology, including organic pesticides and fertilizers, but also access to suitable land.  
14 One interviewee commented how the *“price of land is increasing but even if you have enough  
15 money you can still not get enough land....because they have to find agreement with all the farmers  
16 as in China the land belongs to everybody”* (interview 37, translated).  
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37 In addition, farmers spoke of long conversion periods during which they were likely to  
38 see yield decreases (see also Xiao and Xiaorong 2003; Zhang et al. 2015; Sanders 2006b). One  
39 interviewee for example described: *“Crop yield is lower especially for small and new companies as  
40 the organic fertilizer is effective only very slowly. If the fertility [of the soil] is not high, the yield will  
41 go down. And the crop disease will be higher”* (interview 37, translated).  
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49 Whilst IFAD (2005) advocates a stronger consequential orientation towards wider  
50 benefits, such as drought resistance and erosion reduction, improved local nutrition security or  
51 protection of biodiversity and clean water sources, we found that such benefits were mentioned  
52 less frequently as consequential motivations (Oelofse et al. 2010; Cadilhon 2009; Yin et al. 2010;  
53 Liu et al. 2013). Instead, pragmatic support mechanisms, in particular from local government  
54 organisations, appear to be more effective. These include technical and financial (e.g. lower tax  
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1 rates, direct payments, investment and loan privileges, subsidized rental rates and land  
2 donations, subsidized bio-pesticides, seeds or organic fertilizers and initial financing for  
3 certification), organisational, marketing and market access support (see also IFAD 2005;  
4 Sanders 2006a; Taylor 2008; Thiers 2002, 2005; Qiao 2010).  
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10 5.1.2 Manufacturers and retailers

11 During interviews, primary producers often mentioned demand from manufacturers  
12 and/or retailers as incentives for the support of the organic scheme. Manufacturers pointed to  
13 consumer demand and brand image as potential consequential benefits but mainly talked about  
14 the associated costs for human resources, certification, materials and processing technology. As  
15 organic certification usually needs to be obtained for every ingredient, negative consequences  
16 can emerge from having to manage, control and certify often highly fragmented supply chains.  
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26 For retailers, consumer demand and potential price premiums are prominent gains, both  
27 in documentary (e.g. Ken Research 2013) and interview data. Similar to Western markets  
28 (Dendler 2013) consumer surveys are influential. One interviewee from the retail realm  
29 (interview 66) describes for example how retail managers are driven by a desire to meet  
30 consumer demand in reaction to consumer surveys that communicate higher willingness to pay  
31 for organic certified products. Increased food safety concerns, provoked by media coverage of  
32 various food safety scandals as well as activities by non-governmental organisations (NGOs)  
33 have created interest from retailers in providing traceable products (see also Scott and Suarez  
34 2012). For example, Greenpeace exposed major supermarket chains selling products with illegal  
35 pesticides and made the connection with negative impacts on human health (Greenpeace 2006a,  
36 2006b). Over the next few years Greenpeace continued to put pressure on retailers to ensure  
37 their supply chains were transparent and to minimise pesticide residues (Greenpeace 2011a,  
38 2011b, 2012). While NGOs generally play a comparatively small role in the Chinese organic  
39 labelling scheme (see further discussion in section 5.2.3), such activities have captured much  
40 attention, especially within Chinese social media. As such, it resonates strongly with NGO driven  
41 “individualised collective action” (Clarke et al. 2007) and “naming and shaming” (Steering  
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Committee 2012) dynamics prominent in Western labelling contexts (Steering Committee 2012; Gulbrandsen 2006).

5.1.3 Consumers

Both documents (Yin et al. 2010; Lin, et al. 2010; Liu et al. 2013; Cadilhon 2009; Wang 2014a; Xi 2010; Xie et al. 2015; Yip and Janssen 2015; Siriex et al. 2011) and interviews frequently blame high prices for negatively affecting consequential perceptions on the consumer side. Higher production costs, as well as premiums added along the supply chain, means the price of most organic products is at least two to five times higher than that of conventional products (Meng et al. 2015; Thogersen et al. 2015a). To overcome this barrier, many previous studies (e.g. IFAD 2005; ITC 2011; Yin et al. 2010; Cadilhon 2009; Taylor 2008; Liu et al. 2013; Veeck and Burns 2005; Wang 2014a; Willer and Lernoud 2015; Xie et al. 2015; Chen et al. 2013; Yip and Janssen 2015; Siriex et al. 2011) and nearly all interviewees pointed to the relevance of perceived food safety and health benefits, especially for children. Food safety has become one of the most prominently discussed societal issues in China, including controversies around excessive pesticide and other chemical use and, to a lesser degree, potential negative health impacts associated with genetically modified organisms (Liu et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2012; Wang et al. 2008; Wu et al. 2011; Whitehead 2015; Xu et al. 2012; Yin et al. 2010; Yang 2011; ITC 2011; Klein 2011). The purchase of organic certified products has been communicated as directly addressing such concerns by providing a healthier and safe alternative that is more “fresh” (interviews 14/23), “tasty” (interviews 5/20/64), “nutritious” (interviews 19/20) and free of genetically modified substances, pesticides, fertilizers and carcinogens (see also Cadilhon 2009). OFRCC, for example, promotes the “virtues of organic food: healthy, security and tasty” (Xi 2010). Another interviewee from a certification company described how they organize events for new born babies, young children and the elderly in health centres and hospitals during which nutritionists emphasize the health benefits associated with the consumption of organic certified products (Interview 8). Our own observations supported such descriptions. Resonating with Klein (2011) we found connections to traditional food therapies that draw upon a close

1 relationship between human health, nature and rural livelihoods. Recent restructuring  
2 strategies target this issue more explicitly by shifting the organic standard from non-use of  
3 prohibited materials to one of non-contamination and residue free production assurance  
4 (Lernoud et al. 2013). We discuss these and other procedural changes in the next section.  
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## 8 9 10 *5.2 Procedural legitimacy*

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13 Many interviewees referred to the organic scheme as helping to create “*recognition*” (e.g.  
14 interview 53) and “*trust*” (e.g. interview 26). However, both the previous literature (Ken  
15 Research 2013; Liu et al. 2013; Scott et al. 2014; Taylor 2008; Veeck et al. 2010; Xie et al. 2015;  
16 Chen and Lobo 2012) and our interviews also point to significant procedural criticism. Some  
17 interviewees related this to a “*general trust crisis*” (interviews 23) and a “*lack of credibility for*  
18 *certification*” (interview 68) created by “*shadows left*” (interviews 41) from previous food  
19 scandals; others made explicit links to procedural shortcomings of the organic labelling scheme  
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32 Calls for multi stakeholder participation, inclusiveness and transparency, considered  
33 highly important in Western contexts (see e.g. Gulbrandsen 2010; Boström and Klintman 2008;  
34 Meidinger 2008), were not prominent in our research. While the CNCA has enabled participation  
35 in standard setting by posting standards online for public feedback or inviting academics,  
36 certification companies and other organisations to comment, interviewees emphasized limited  
37 engagement. One interviewee explained: “*I think the Chinese public does not have the awareness to*  
38 *be involved and give comments.... I know when USDA [United States Department of Agriculture]*  
39 *issued the draft they had more than 10000 comments from producers and all stakeholders. But for our*  
40 *standard, not so much: less than 1000 maybe [and] the main comments came from the certifier”*  
41 (interview 4).  
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55 At the same time we find concern about dominant state actors and potential conflicts of  
56 interests with the certification process (Thiers 2002; Kuehl and Yonggong 2014; Organic Trade  
57 Association; Wei 2012). In 2011 Chinese national television reported how certification “could  
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1 easily be bought" as some certification departments, producers and retailers were "willing to  
2 stick organic food labels onto non-organic food in order to make more money. [...] Organic food  
3 such as vegetables from producers that claim not to use chemical fertilizers or pesticides cannot  
4 be entirely trusted" (Zhang 2011). Wal-Mart, amongst others, was accused of fraudulently  
5 selling organic products (Wang 2011); an online newspaper reported that "organic certification  
6 officials regularly accept 'gifts' from food companies in China" (Wei 2012). Similar criticism  
7 featured frequently in our interviews describing how certification companies are in fierce  
8 competition with each other and would interpret the organic standards with different degrees of  
9 stringency. Others reported how some companies would sell all their products as organic even  
10 though only some of them received certification.  
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23 Such prominent procedural criticism has had serious effects not only on consumer but  
24 also corporate legitimacy judgements (Ken Research 2013; Yin et al. 2010; Liu et al. 2013; Scott  
25 et al. 2014; Taylor 2008; Veeck et al. 2010; Xie et al. 2015). One interviewee from a main retail  
26 chain for example argued: "*...it is difficult for retailers to be 100 percent sure that the products are*  
27 *organic .....the consumer will have a question mark when they go to [retailers] as there has been a*  
28 *lot of negative news in the past. Products were labelled organic but were actually not*" (interview  
29 68).  
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40 CNCA officials have publicly acknowledged exaggeration and false promotion, non-  
41 standardised use of the label and insufficient control of the circulation of the label. In response,  
42 CNCA engaged in multiple procedural repair strategies. Interviewees reported how immediately  
43 following the national TV coverage, CNCA asked all certification organisations to recheck their  
44 documentation, resulting in the withdrawal of many certificates. Shortly after, the National  
45 Standards for Organic Products were revised, according to Scott et al. (2014: 161) to better  
46 "protect against fraud". Major changes included not only zero-tolerance for residues but also the  
47 introduction of authentication codes for each product to enable consumers to trace their origin  
48 (the barcode scheme); prohibition of parallel planting in one-year crops; certified inspection of  
49 each crop variety; and inspection of all farms in cooperative groups (Hallmann and Xu 2012).  
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1 CNCA announced that they would also increase the control over certification organisations;  
2 increase risk management; and strengthen risk assessment of employees through the  
3 certification companies. Associated with these changes, a number of interviewees commented  
4 on stricter standards, increased monitoring and better traceability; how it was *“easy to bribe*  
5 *certifiers in the past but not anymore. [...] They come and test every piece of land”* (interview 41).  
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11 But despite procedural progress, both interviews and documents suggest that procedural  
12 problems are not fully solved. During the 2014 Shanghai Biofach Fair, the director of CNCA  
13 reported ad hoc checks were still finding around 15% of products using the term organic even  
14 though they are incorrectly or not at all certified, around 2% exceeding pesticide levels and 3%  
15 not being fully in line with other organic regulation (Wang 2014a).  
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### 22 23 24 *5.3 Dispositional and regulatory legitimacy*

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26 Our research found some NGOs, such as the World Wildlife Fund, and other civil societal  
27 organisations (Klein 2009; Nanjing Global Organic Food Research and Consulting Center 2006-  
28 2014; OFDC-MEP n.d.; Monica Tan 2012) actively promoting the organic scheme. In line with  
29 dominant consequential concerns, this promotion is linked mainly to health and food safety  
30 through events in health clubs or schools (see also Klein 2011). To some extent this contributes  
31 to what may be referred to as ‘dispositional legitimacy’ in the form of a belief in organisations  
32 that are perceived to operate in our best interests. But overall, NGOs play a comparatively small  
33 role in the Chinese organic scheme, a finding that resonates with previous studies (Oberheitman  
34 2009; Sun and Zhao 2007; Geall and Hilton 2014).  
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47 Instead, the role of the state occupies the foreground. Next to the pragmatic support  
48 described above, interviewees described how governmental involvement in the organic labelling  
49 organisation contributes to the creation of trust: *“without government nothing can happen”*  
50 (interview 10), *“government has to stand behind”* (interview 13) as it is *“important”* (interview  
51 40) and *“most powerful”* (interview 21). Such statements resonate with consumer surveys in the  
52 food context (Ortega et al. 2011; Liu et al. 2013) and other academic studies on China (e.g. Wang  
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2005 or Zhang et al. this volume) who refer to high levels of trust in the central government in a more abstract sense (as opposed to activities carried out at the local level). It seems that governmental involvement in product labelling facilitates cognitive acceptance based on what Weber referred to as “immemorial traditions that have always prevailed and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them” (Weber 1922: part 1, III, 1, 2). Further supporting such arguments, we find a number of authoritative governmental interventions. These include the conversion of land for the establishment of ecological agriculture zones or the initiation of individual farm conversions (Scott et al. 2014; OFDC-MEP n.d.; IFAD 2005; ITC 2011; Thiers 2002, 2005; Qiao 2010; Xi 2010; Sanders 2006b). Thiers (2002: 396) speaks of “administrative methods to convince the peasants” to engage in organic farming, which implies that “if a peasant family refuses to participate, they are moved off the land and exchanged with a family from another field who are willing to cooperate”. IFAD (2005) notes that with increasing trends towards market orientation local governments are moving away from direct ownership and have transferred rights to private firms. However, this process has allegedly left some of the former public companies in the private hands of local government leaders, which often enjoy unique advantages and support for their contracted farmers. In many communities former state owned farms and collectives continue to exist and often direct rural industry and sideline production (Selden and Perry 2010; Sanders 2006a). More recent management literature re-emphasises how especially in sectors based on key resources, such as land, China maintains strong ties between government and business (Walder 2011, Shi et al. 2014). Our interviews supported such propositions, reporting governmental initiation of organic conversion, encouragement to engage in organic promotion and the relevance of organic alignment in governmental evaluation of local companies.

The Chinese central government is also involved in what can be referred to as regulatory legitimation as all products using the term “organic” or other characters, graphics or symbols suggesting organic production need to comply legally with the national organic regulation (National Standard of the People’s Republic of China). While this regulation used to be mainly

1 enforced with respect to the Chinese language, law enforcement has recently started to extend  
2 its scope to the use of the term in other languages (Hallmann and Xu 2012).  
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6 **6. Discussion**  
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9 In the following we discuss how legitimacy constructions outlined in the previous  
10 sections have affected support for the Chinese organic labelling scheme within the current  
11 production and consumption system. We then reflect on strategies organic labelling  
12 organisations may apply to achieve more positive judgements and facilitate deeper  
13 institutionalisation.  
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21 **6.1 Primary producers**  
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24 As a result of the rural reforms of the early 1980s (Sanders 2006; Selden 2010; Zhang et  
25 al. 2013), farming in China is conducted by millions of small farmers with an average farm size of  
26 0.6 hectares often living on an income of less than \$2 per day (Carter et al. 2002; Garnett and  
27 Wilkes 2014). While some argue that “farmers’ poverty has been one of the primary factors in  
28 predisposing them to take the risks involved in converting to organic methods” (Sanders 2006a:  
29 127), our research finds significant consequential barriers. These relate partly to capacity  
30 problems in terms of finance, quality control, harvesting or post-harvest techniques. Few  
31 farmers in China have the ability to operate and negotiate within a complex value chain (IFAD  
32 2005; Hu et al. 2008; Jia et al. 2012). Price premiums, usually gained in urban areas and/or by  
33 other market actors, or long term contracts with buyers are not easily available (Yang  
34 2011/2012; Thiers 2005). Increasing pollution levels and competing demands from the  
35 construction and other sectors amplify longstanding land access challenges while current  
36 ownership structures reduce incentives for investment into the land (Wang 2014b; Li  
37 Chenggang 2013).  
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56 Capacity problems for smallholders are not an issue limited to China. It is a widely  
57 recognized problem within the organic movement (Willer and Lernoud 2015; Klintman and  
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1 Bostroem, 2012) and with many other sustainability labelling schemes (Matus Forthcoming;  
2 Dendler 2013; Steering Committee 2012). However, the very high number of small scale farms in  
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4 China makes this a more acute challenge.  
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7 **6.2 Governmental actors**  
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10 IFAD (2005: 5) conclude that the most important factor for successful organic adoption  
11 in China is the availability of a reliable support system, an assertion supported by interviewees  
12 for this study. Echoing other studies in the Chinese food context (e.g. Zhang et al., this volume;  
13 Mol 2014), our research finds a particularly strong role for governmental actors, not only in  
14 pragmatic and more abstract trust building terms, but also in more authoritative terms where  
15 they can draw upon their traditional position in the Chinese agricultural system. In this sense  
16 our findings resonate with previous authors who refer to China as “fragmented  
17 authoritarianism” (Geall and Hilton 2014) or a “fragmented entrepreneurial state” (Thiers 2002:  
18 358) where state actors use political authority through “an unassailable civil service” (Fan et al.  
19 2011: 18) as well as competitors in the socialist market economy (Thiers 2002).  
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33 However, it is interesting to note the limited extent to which government has exercised  
34 these types of power. While developing organic agricultural products has appeared repeatedly  
35 in China’s central policy documents (Liu et al. 2013), been promoted by some of its senior party  
36 leaders (Sanders 2006a) and incorporated into local government promotion schemes to  
37 facilitate green development and “eco-civilization” (Meng et al. 2015; Wang 2014a; Qiao 2010; Xi  
38 2010), our research suggests more scope for governmental influence. Many interviews,  
39 documents (e.g. IFAD 2005) and academic studies (e.g. Zhang et al. 2013) argue that central  
40 government support has been comparatively low, lacking “substantial funding” (Qiao 2010) and  
41 falling behind the support of other product labelling schemes such as the Green Food Label<sup>2</sup>.  
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57 <sup>2</sup> Next to the organic labelling scheme, the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture hosts a so called Hazard Free and a Green  
58 Food labelling schemes. While the emphasis of Hazard Free food is on the residue content, Green Food is based on  
59 concepts of environmental protection and sustainable development. Unlike the organic scheme both allow for  
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1 Indeed, the vast majority of resources still promote conventional agriculture (IFAD 2005). Some  
2 observers point to competing ministerial priorities (Taylor 2008), especially in regard to food  
3 security. Given lower productivity rates and greater demands by organic agricultural practices  
4 on highly scarce land resources, it is widely considered that organic production cannot provide  
5 for China's growing population (Xie 2008; Chen & Wan, 2005; Xiao this issue; Scott et al. 2014;  
6 Zhang et al. 2013). As one interviewee from a governmental organisation involved in the organic  
7 labelling scheme points out: *"China is a very big country with a big population so the highest  
8 priority is to produce enough food for the population, and then it is [about] producing safe food and  
9 then it is [about] the environment. That is why the aims for organic are limited"* (interview 7).  
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### 21 **6.3 Manufacturers and retailers**

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23 In light of limited governmental support, market actors seem to have become more  
24 relevant for the institutionalisation of the Chinese organic labelling scheme. In the Western  
25 context, major retailers and branded manufacturers have exercised significant influence on the  
26 institutionalisation of organic and other sustainability related product labelling schemes  
27 (Dendler 2013; Steering Committee 2012; Bostroem and Klintmann 2008; Gulbrandsen 2006;  
28 Klintman and Bostroem 2012). Several interviewees saw large agricultural companies also as  
29 major drivers of the Chinese organic scheme. Generally however, organic food processing is  
30 presently in a nascent stage with retailers complaining about insufficient availability of organic  
31 (processed) products and the majority of organic farm products being sold as raw products  
32 (IFAD 2005; Ken Research 2013; Meng, Fangqiao et al. 2015). Our research suggests the main  
33 barriers for wider manufacturing support are: restricted scope of organic standards (i.e. criteria  
34 only covering some processing); difficulties in certifying multi staged, often highly fragmented  
35 Chinese food supply chains; procedural contestations and limited 'relational push'.  
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55 controlled and limited use of synthesized fertilizer, pesticide, growth regulators, feed additives and gene technology  
56 (Liu et al. 2013). They are hence sometimes considered as "half-way house" between conventional and organic food  
57 (Paull 2008).  
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1 Similar barriers hinder retailers. While some documents suggest that conventional  
2 supermarkets have become the main channel for selling organic produce (ITC 2011; Xie et al.  
3 2011; Taylor 2008; Meng et al. 2015; Yip and Janssen 2015; Siriex et al. 2011), we found  
4 negative perceptions and very reserved support for (and further relational influence on) the  
5 organic labelling scheme among mainstream retailers.  
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#### 10 **6.4 Consumers**

11 The limited relational push from manufacturer and retailer side can partly be explained  
12 with dominant perceptions of consumer demand. While consumer studies identify some demand  
13 and willingness to pay for organic certified products amongst Chinese consumers (ITC 2011; Liu  
14 et al. 2013; Xie et al. 2011; Yin et al. 2010; Zhang et al. this volume; Yip and Janssen 2015), this  
15 demand is generally considered to be limited to high income consumers in major cities (Lin et al.  
16 2010; Thøgersen and Zhou 2012; Yin et al. 2010; Xie et al. 2015; Thøgersen et al. 2015a; Siriex et  
17 al. 2011). Multiple sources of interview, academic and documentary evidence report collective  
18 consumer knowledge and awareness of the organic label to be low, with considerable confusion  
19 between different schemes (Yin et al. 2010; Zhang et al. 2012; Liu et al. 2013; Xi 2010; Zhang et  
20 al., this volume; Xie et al. 2015; Wu et al. 2014; Chen and Lobo 2012; Yi et al. 2001). With current  
21 media reporting on the organic scheme focusing mainly on procedural inconsistencies, we find  
22 rising mistrust among Chinese consumers and businesses alike. Linked to these procedural  
23 doubts, public criticism raises questions about the consequential benefits associated with the  
24 purchase of domestic organic certified products and facilitates a shift towards imported rather  
25 than Chinese organic certified food (Xie et al. 2011; Walley et al. 2014; ITC 2011; Yip and Janssen  
26 2015; Wu et al. 2014).  
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#### 50 **6.5 Potential strategies to facilitate deeper institutionalisation**

51 In the light of such developments, improving perceptions of procedural legitimacy has  
52 become one of the main challenges for the deeper institutionalisation of the Chinese organic  
53 labelling scheme. This resonates with global organic trends, where there are increasing  
54 problems with fraud (Gould 2015), and wider discussions about inconsistencies in standard  
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1 interpretations (e.g. Steering Committee 2012 on sustainability labelling in general; Jacquet et al.  
2 2010 on the Marine Stewardship Council or Allison et al. 2000 on ecolabelling schemes) as well  
3  
4 as general conflicts of interest in paid certification processes (e.g. Matus forthcoming). For the  
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6 Steering Committee of the State-of-Knowledge Assessment of Standards and Certification (2012:  
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8 15) ‘auditor competence’ is “one of the most significant challenges to the integrity and credibility  
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10 of voluntary standards and certification”.

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13 To overcome these challenges, some interviewees called for deeper institutionalisation  
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15 of social norms like honesty and trustworthiness. Others demanded a reduction of the number of  
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17 certification companies involved, more severe punishments or more regular checking processes  
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19 (see also Chen and Lobo 2012). But with increased procedural demands usually comes greater  
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21 costs for those in supply chains which, as outlined above, can hinder consequential motivations  
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23 of especially small scale producers.<sup>3</sup> Again we find overlaps with international certification and  
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25 labelling discussions around appropriate levels of standards stringency (e.g. Boström and  
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27 Klintman 2008 on general sustainability labelling dynamics; Erkinen and Collins 1997 on the EU  
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29 ecolabel; Steinruecken and Jaenichen 2007 on the Fairtrade scheme).

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32 Bottom-up initiatives are an alternative way forward that does not rely on certification.  
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35 Although there is no formal support in the Chinese organic regulations for ‘Participatory  
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37 Guarantee Schemes’ and participants are not allowed to use the term organic (Wai 2015), our  
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39 research found evidence of many primary producers engaging directly with consumers through  
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41 membership schemes, farm visits, farm shops and home deliveries. Many of these new initiatives  
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43 echo descriptions by other authors (Zhang et al. this volume; Si et al. 2014; Scott et al. 2014; Qiao  
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45 2014) of emerging “alternative food networks” (Zhang et al., this volume), in particular  
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57 <sup>3</sup> For example, recent procedural adjustments are already said to facilitate a shift away from small scale farming (which tends  
58 to include a variety of crops and is hence associated with more bureaucratic steps) towards large scale mono cultures.  
59 Such trends further contribute to what some see as an increased “conventionalisation” (Oelefse et al. 2011) of the organic  
60 scheme as well as growing urban migration.  
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'Community Supported Agriculture' or 'Participatory Guarantee Systems' (Kirchner 2015) schemes.

Within such schemes certification plays a less important role. Interviewees reported how they wanted to *"sell to consumers who have built trust in their brand without certificate"* [interviewee 39, translated] and to have *"proper relationships"* with customers and *"build a community"* (informal conversation 75). Similar findings are described by Scott et al. (2014). Some actors within the global organic movement argue that *"the world needs to escape the limited perception that organic equates with certification"* (Gould 2015: 138). David Gould (2015: 138) from IFOAM, for example, calls for *"a new market assurance framework"* that moves towards a focus on common interest and transparency with more participation. Rather than formal third-party certification, 'Community Supported Agriculture' and 'Participatory Guarantee Schemes' are based on *"active participation"* of closely linked groups of producers, technology consultants and consumers *"built on a foundation of trust, social networks, and knowledge exchange"* (Nanjing Global Organic Food Research and Consulting Center 2006-2014). Resonating with previous findings in the Chinese food sector (e.g. Zhang et al. this volume; Zhang et al. 2008; Veeck et al. 2010), several of our interviewees supported the importance of trust building through *"seeing"* (e.g. interviews 10/36/37/39/51/58), *"trying"* (e.g. interview 10) and *"tasting"* (e.g. interviews 43/53/58) and relational dynamics where *"old customers will promote [their products] to new customers"* (interview 43). As such, these schemes fit well with a Chinese traditional focus on personal experience (e.g. extensive individual checking prior to food purchase) and direct relational links (Berkenama et al. 2015; Redding and Witt 2006; Veeck et al. 2010; Hoiman and King 2008) in what some authors refer to as a *"low-trust society"* (Sheng et al. 2009). They also fit into central governmental rhetoric of a shift towards *"social-co-regulation"* (Xiao 2015) to ensure food safety or environmental protection (Horsley 2006; Geall and Hilton 2014).

Indeed, Scott et al. (2014) propose that consumers and small producers increasingly *"reject the state's assurances and begin the complex civil process of reconnecting and re-*

1 negotiating trust through direct relationships between producers and eaters” (Scott et al.  
2 2014:164). Zhang et al. (this volume) on the other hand report comparatively low uptake of  
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4 ‘Alternative Food Networks’ even among wealthier and higher educated Chinese consumers and  
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6 suggest a continuous high trust in central government. Our research supports especially Zhang  
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8 et al.’s (this volume) latter point and additionally highlights less prominence of norms of  
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10 participation and inclusiveness in the Chinese context. While this resonates with previous  
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12 scholars that emphasize the importance of Confucian values of authority, obedience and  
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14 harmony rather than individual expression in China (e.g. Gamer 2008; Christiansen and Rai  
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16 1996), it is in considerable contrast with findings in the West as well as some the core idea of  
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18 ‘Alternative Food Networks’.  
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23 Calls to “focus on [the] common interest” (Gould 2015) also begs questions about what this  
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25 implies. Across our interviews and consistent with previous studies within and beyond China’s  
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27 ‘Alternative Food Networks’ (Si et al. 2014; Scott et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2014; Klein 2011) we  
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29 found a dominant consequential focus on monetary, health and other individual interests with  
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31 limited orientation towards societal benefits of rural development, environmental protection or  
32  
33 other “collective” aims (Barkema et al. 2015; Tang 2009). This may change as China moves from  
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35 a focus on subsistence and safety towards other ‘Chinese dreams’. Yet, so far, the exact content of  
36  
37 those dreams and the extent to which they resonate with principles of sustainable development  
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39 remains to be seen. Vitterso et al. (2015) conclude in their recent study on organic consumption  
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41 in Norway that it is important to open up the debate on what constitutes sustainable food  
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43 consumption and production. We would add to this that it is crucial to take into account  
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45 different contextualities within this debate.  
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## 51 **7. Conclusion**

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55 Considering the rising economic, social and environmental importance of Chinese  
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57 consumption and production systems, a better understanding of institutional changes within  
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59 these systems is needed. Our paper focused on a transition towards organic consumption and  
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1 production. By shifting attention to the notion of legitimacy, we identified barriers for such a  
2 transition and explored the role of different actors and currently considered strategic  
3 adjustments in overcoming those barriers.  
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7 We find that in the highly fragmented Chinese agricultural system, perceptions of  
8 negative consequences associated with the support of the organic scheme are dominant. This  
9 holds for retailers and manufacturers but especially primary producers, who must make  
10 considerable adaptations to their practices to align with organic standards. Positive relational  
11 impacts are promised from the consumption stage but there is currently insufficient evidence of  
12 a translation of health and food safety concerns into consumer demand for organic produce. This  
13 partly relates to procedural legitimacy challenges associated with a dominant discourse around  
14 corrupt certification. These problems have given rise to calls for a tightening of organic labelling  
15 procedures. Yet the unintended effect of such strategies is additional requirements for  
16 producers, which negatively affect consequential evaluations for small scale producers and,  
17 some argue, for society as a whole. As such, an inherent conflict between procedural and  
18 consequential aspects emerges, which mirrors findings in other sustainability product labelling  
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37 Reconfiguration of the Chinese organic labelling scheme towards more bottom-up  
38 participatory arrangements offers an alternative way forward. At least for the moment however,  
39 'Alternative Food Networks' are very much inspired by Western values of participation, which  
40 seem to find limited support in traditional Chinese culture.  
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47 In these circumstances, construction of legitimacy around other principles, in particular  
48 disposition and regulation, become more relevant. Our analysis highlights an important role for  
49 government, which can exercise its influence through regulation and its 'taken for granted'  
50 authoritative position in the field. But for the organic case, this role is not clear cut as  
51 government must balance the promotion of the organic scheme next to other priorities,  
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1 including other product labelling schemes, and conflicting objectives within (e.g. food security)  
2 and beyond (e.g. support for industrial and construction sectors) agriculture.  
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4  
5 Our study illustrates the value of applying concepts of legitimacy to better understand  
6 current barriers to deeper institutionalisation of the Chinese organic labelling scheme. Many of  
7 the legitimacy principles identified in Western contexts have been shown to be relevant also in  
8 the context of the Chinese organic labelling scheme, supporting their ontological positioning on a  
9 “real” level (Leca and Naccache 2006). However, significant differences emerge with regard to  
10 their interpretation. In particular, procedural norms of deliberation and inclusiveness are much  
11 less prominent. Dispositional dynamics, in the Chinese context mainly associated with a strong  
12 traditional belief in the authority of central government rather than the exemplariness of NGOs,  
13 are of greater importance. Further research should establish to what extent these findings could  
14 help to understand better also other institutional processes in China.  
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7 **Appendix 1**  
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No	Actor Group	Date	Location	Recording	Language	Position
1	Academia	27.2.14	Beijing	Yes	English	Postgraduate Student
2	Academia	31.3.14	Hohhot	Yes	Mandarin	Professor
3	Academia	19.1.14	Harbin	Yes	English	Postdoctoral Researcher
4	Academia	27.2.14	Beijing	Yes	English	Professor
5	Certification Organisation	23.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	No	English	Project Assistant
6	Certification Organisation	25.11.13	Beijing Organic Fair	Yes	Mandarin	Office Director
7	Certification Organisation	28.11.14	Beijing	Yes	English	Manager/Senior Inspector
8	Certification Organisation	28.2.14	Beijing	Yes	English	Project engineer
9	Certification Organisation	17.1.14	Beijing	Email Response	Mandarin	No information
10	Certification Organisation	22.11.13	Beijing Organic Fair	Yes	Mandarin/English	Regional Manager
11	Certification Organisation	28.2.14	Beijing	Yes	Mandarin/English	Deputy General Manager
12	Certification Organisation	28.2.14	Beijing	Yes	Mandarin/English	General Manager
13	Certification Organisation	22.1.14	Harbin	No	Mandarin	Certifier
14	Certification Organisation	12.1.14	Hangzhou	Yes	English	Technical Manager
15	Labelling/Governmental Organisation	17.1.14	Beijing	Yes	Mandarin	Director
16	Labelling/Governmental Organisation	27.2.14	Beijing	Yes	Mandarin	Director of personnel certification department; Secretary general
17	Labelling/Governmental Organisation	17.1.13	Beijing	No	Mandarin	Director
18	Governmental Organisation	24.1.14	Harbin	No	Mandarin	Government Official
19	Labelling/Governmental Organisation	11.3.14	Nanjing	Yes	Mandarin	Research Fellow
20	Labelling/Governmental Organisation	11.3.14	Nanjing	Yes	Mandarin	Deputy Director
21	NGO	11.3.14	Beijing Organic Fair	Yes	Mandarin	Project manager

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22	NGO	27.2.14	Beijing	No	English	Climate and energy campaigner
23	NGO	26.12.14	Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	Founder
24	NGO	21.10.13	Shanghai Organic Fair	Yes	Mandarin	Editor
25	Multinational Manufacturer	6.11.13	Telephone	yes	English	Senior Food Safety Manager
26	Multinational Manufacturer	22.5.14	Shanghai Biofach	Yes	English	Global Sales Manager
27	Multinational Manufacturer and Producer	24.1.13	Harbin	No	English	Founder
28	Multinational Manufacturer	3.9.14	Manchester	Yes	German	Export Director
29	Manufacturer and Producer	11.3.14	Changzhou	No	Mandarin	Manager
30	Manufacturer and Producer	28.3.14	Hohhot	No	Mandarin	Quality Manager in charge of certification
31	Manufacturer and Producer	23.3.14	Hohhot	Yes	Mandarin	Vice President
32	Manufacturer and Producer	27.1.14	Harbin	No	Mandarin	Manager in charge of organic
33	Manufacturer and Producer	27.3.14	Telephone	Yes	Mandarin	Senior Manager
34	Manufacturer and Producer	27.3.14	Hohhot	No	Mandarin	General Manager Quality Control
35	Manufacturer and Producer	26.2.14	Shandong	Yes	Mandarin	Vice President
36	Manufacturer and Producer	26.2.14	Shandong	Yes	Mandarin	Processing Manager
37	Manufacturer and Producer	26.2.14	Shandong	Yes	Mandarin	Certification Manager
38	Manufacturer and Producer	30.12.13	Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	Sales Chief Inspector
39	Manufacturer and Producer	23.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	Executive Consultant
40	Manufacturer and Producer	25.5.13	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Sales Manager
41	Manufacturer and Producer	25.11.13	Beijing Organic Fair	Yes	Mandarin	Sales Advisor
42	Manufacturer and Producer	25.5.13	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Sales Manager
43	Manufacturer and Producer	23.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	Marketing Manager
44	Primary Producer	23.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	Procurement Manager
45	Primary Producer	25.11.13	Beijing Organic Fair	Yes	Mandarin	General Manager
46	Primary Producer	24.1.13	Harbin	No	Mandarin	Cooperative Manager

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47	Primary Producer	27.1.14	Harbin	No	Mandarin	Cooperative Manager
48	Primary Producer	21.10.13	Shanghai Organic Fair	No	Mandarin	Cooperative Manager
49	Primary Producer	28.3.14	Hohhot	No	Mandarin	Cooperative Manager
50	Primary Producer	25.5.13	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Trade Fair Representative
51	Primary Producer	22.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	Vice general manager for production
52	Primary Producer	25.5.13	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Trade Fair Representative
53	Primary Producer	21.11.13	Beijing Organic Fair	No	Mandarin	Trade Fair Representative
54	Primary Producer	25.5.13	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Sales Manager
55	Primary Producer	25.5.13	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Product Manager
56	Primary Producer	22.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	Marketing manager
57	Primary Producer	23.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Trade Fair Representative
58	Primary Producer	22.11.13	Beijing Organic Fair	No	Mandarin	Sales Manager
59	Primary Producer	25.11.14	Beijing Organic Fair	Yes	Mandarin	Trade Fair Representative
60	Primary Producer	25.5.13	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Trade Fair Representative
61	Organic Retailer	19.3.14	Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	President China
62	Organic Retailer	23.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	No	English/German	Trade Fair Representative
63	Retailer	22.3.14	Fudan	No	English	President China
64	Retailer	6.3.14	Shanghai	Yes	English	Head of quality management
65	Retailer	6.3.14	Shanghai	Yes	English	Quality Manager
66	Retailer	23.11.13	Beijing	Yes	Mandarin/English	Director of Sustainable Promotion Department
67	Retailer	8.11.13	Shanghai	Yes	Mandarin	Department Manager
68	Retailer	20.5.14	Shanghai	Yes	English	Senior Sustainability Manager
69	Distributor	23.5.14	Biofach	Yes	English	Brand Supervisor and General Manager

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			Shanghai			
70	Distributor	24.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	No	English	Trade Fair Representative
71	Distributor	29.3.14	Hohhot	Yes	Mandarin/English	Trade Fair Representative
72	Distributor	24.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	Yes	English	Trade Fair Representative
73	Distributor	25.5.13	Biofach Shanghai	No	Mandarin	Trade Fair Representative
74	International Umbrella Organisation	5.6.13	Shanghai	No	English	Asia Representative
<b>Informal Conversations</b>						
75	Primary producer	7.6.13	Beijing	N.a.	English	No information
76	Distributor	21.10.13	Shanghai Organic Fair	N.a.	Mandarin	General Manager
77	Primary producer	25.11.14	Shanghai Farmers Market	N.a.	English	Sales Director
78	Primary producer	16.6.13	Shanghai	N.a.	English	Director of Agriculture
79	Primary producer	27.2.14	Shandong	N.a.	Mandarin	Manager Large Scale Farm
80	Manufacturer	22.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	N.a.	English	Trade Fair Representative
81	Trader	22.5.14	Biofach Shanghai	N.a.	Mandarin	Trade Fair Representative

1 **Appendix 2**

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4 AFN	Alternative Food Networks
5 CNCA	Accreditation Administration of the People's Republic of China
6 CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
7 COFCC	China Organic Food Certification Centre
8 FIBL	Research Institute of Organic Agriculture
9 IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
10 IFOAM	International Federation for Organic Agricultural Movement
11 ITC	International Trade Centre
12 MEP	Ministry of Environmental Protection
13 OFDC	Organic Food Development Centre
14 OFRC	Organic Food Research and Consulting Centre
15 PGS	Participatory Guarantee Systems
16 SEPA	State Environment Protection Agency
17 USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

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