

## **Alternative food networks with Chinese characteristics**

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In this session we are seeking to use the experiences of China and Southeast Asia to help us rethink concepts of alternative food networks. In this paper we ask whether 'alternative' food system or network even applies to China. We chart China's path of development and ask what is alternative about the production-consumption relations of certified and non-certified natural, green, and organic food. Has the organic sector in China been 'conventionalized', particularly through the roles of government in propagating its development? Paradoxically, while globally, ecological agriculture is emerging as an 'alternative' to (subvert) industrial agriculture, in China it is to a large extent a vehicle for agricultural modernization and neo-productivism, absent of any language of justice, food sovereignty, autonomy, empowerment, or fair trade. In this way, many 'alternative' agriculture practices in China might be more about alternative production practices (i.e., no chemicals) than about celebrating or supporting small-scale farmers and alternative retail outlets. And yet, we can also find alternative food networks in China that exemplify relations of trust, for example, in the emergence of CSAs and informal food procurement networks. Finally, we discuss whether it would be more appropriate to move beyond the conventional-alternative dichotomy, and how we can draw on China's experience to argue this case.