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Master's Thesis

# The “Clean Your Plate Campaign”

A Study of “Traditional Values” and Their Impact on Younger Generations

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Master's Thesis in Chinese Culture and Society  
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Autumn 2022



## Abstract

With China's fast-paced economic development, consumerism has reached unseen heights in recent years. Consequently, this economic growth came with various environmental issues and concerns about food safety. In 2013, in the need of limiting food waste, Chinese society was introduced to its first food waste project, called the "Clean Your Plate Campaign". Due to the initiative's great reliance on social trust regarding leftover reduction, the campaign was not able to gain people's participation, and food waste statistics remained rather the same.

Learning from the limitations of the first Clean Your Plate Campaign, by 2020, the government re-launched its second Clean Your Plate Campaign. Furthermore, from 2021, the campaign was supported by sanctions. With the help of the food waste law, in theory, sanctions should raise the participation of Chinese society in this joint leftover reduction. While the two campaigns differ based on policies, they both use social norms as their influencing factors. It was found that there have been recurring patterns of these influencing drivers from governmental campaigning practices. These patterns were founded on the use of the so-called traditional values. Therefore, to acknowledge the use and efficiency of these values, the thesis's research question was grounded on these "traditional values".

As the two-folded question follows: *What is the purpose of "traditional values" within the Clean Your Plate Campaign, and can "traditional values" morally impact younger generations to be more environmentally cautious and change their behavior on food waste?* While aiming to answer the research question through this study, this research will also showcase relevant regulations to the food waste law, current conditions of food waste at canteens, and influencing factors on young generations' behavior towards food waste. Lastly, based on academic studies and this research process, possible guidelines for limiting food waste at canteens will be included in this paper.

## **Acknowledgments**

Being far from my family has given me a different kind of appreciation of the people around me. Regardless of their connection, or purpose in my life, I would like to give my deepest gratitude to those who have guided and helped me through one of the most challenging periods of my life.

To my great supervisor, Koen Wellens. You have guided me with honesty, while also allowing me to discover my way of approaching this research. Owing to you, my muddled ideas came to life, and lastly, reached balance again. Cannot thank you enough for your support. It has been a journey.

My good friend, Ida, has been there all along through this emotional rollercoaster. I am thankful that I can call you my friend.

Lastly, dear Victor. I cannot put into words how deeply grateful I am. Your positivity and support have pushed me through it all. You are my rock. Thank you for everything.

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## **Abbreviations**

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CSVs	Core Socialist Values
CYPC/CYP	Clean Your Plate Campaign/Clean Your Plate
DNLR	Database of National Laws and Regulations
NBSC	National Bureau of Statistics of China

## 1. Introduction

In current years, the academic world has invested a great amount of work to research food security and food waste issues around the globe. However, China remains one of the regions where such research—to a large degree—has been absent. Although, there are many studies based on food security and food waste in countries like e.g., America, “American consumers may be not universally applicable” due to cultural differences (Liao, 2018, p. 14921). Seeing that countries have different cultures and experience differences in how they develop, it can be understood that each country varies in what factors influence their consumer behaviors. For this reason, I have tried to understand the subject of food security and food waste in China at a foundational level by considering cultural and social aspects.

On that account, this thesis’s research aimed to study current food waste conditions in China not only through statistics and policies, but also through China’s latest food waste project, the “Clean Your Plate Campaign” (CYPC), which was introduced first in 2013, and later re-launched in 2020. A noteworthy aspect of this initiative is that it has been tackling social wasting behaviors by using moral values as the campaign’s influencing drivers. The campaign has used so-called traditional values, which have been part of the initiative since the early stages and are deeply rooted within the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) socialist ideologies. These “traditional values” are a part of the CCP’s “China Dream” campaign that has also further presented “core socialist values” as their campaigning practices, and used for moral guidance (Miao, 2020).

The Clean Your Plate Campaign’s “traditional values” have been presented on various media tools, and posters to cultivate and impact social behavior on leftover reduction. This approach of influencing society to change their consumer habits is rather unique, and it has provided this paper with an interesting angle to research whether using these values will work in influencing people’s food consumption behavior in China. With this, the paper aims to gain an understanding of food security and food waste in China by trying to answer this two-folded research question: *What is the purpose of “traditional values” within the Clean you plate campaign, and can “traditional values” morally impact younger generations to be more environmentally cautious and change their food-wasting behaviors?*

This paper will thus provide an outlook on how China has approached handling food waste by promoting an initiative that has utilized “traditional values” as the influencing driver to impact society.

## 1.2 Introduction to the “Clean Your Plate Campaign”

In the last two decades, China has significantly increased its agricultural production. With China's economic development and an overall increase in people's annual income, food waste has gradually become a concerning issue countrywide (Wang et al., 2017). The economic increase China has experienced has led to increased welfare amongst the population which in turn created a lifestyle more focused on fulfilling people's needs. As a result of this economic stability, catering businesses started to flourish throughout China, alongside the growing variety of food in the Chinese markets. With the ongoing changes in consumer behaviors, much debate has surfaced ever since on food consumption, food security, and its influence on people's health. Consequently, to develop all the related industries of the catering sector, sustainable development of the catering industry had to be achieved, which is further elaborated on in the next chapter (Yuan et al., 2016).

As Middlemiss (2014) phrased it with her expertise on sustainable consumption, these debates have created a “nostalgic picture of the past, and an apocalyptic vision of the future” (Middlemiss, 2014, p. 939). With an overall strong connection to “traditional values” in China (Podoshen et al., 2011), new generations, like the millennials and above, were targeted as the reason behind unsustainable and excessive consumption (Diprose et al., 2019). As Chinese President Xi Jinping has stated from time to time throughout the years (Xinhua News Agency, 2013a; Ren & Fu, 2020; CCTV, 2021), people in China should embrace “traditional values” when it comes to consumption and thrive on living a modest lifestyle. Specifically, the phrase “勤俭节约” (*qinjianjieyue*) became commonly used in statements concerning food waste or campaigns, and it translates to “diligent” and “frugal” with a more traditional connotation (Guangming News Daily, 2013; Xinhua News Agency, 2013a).

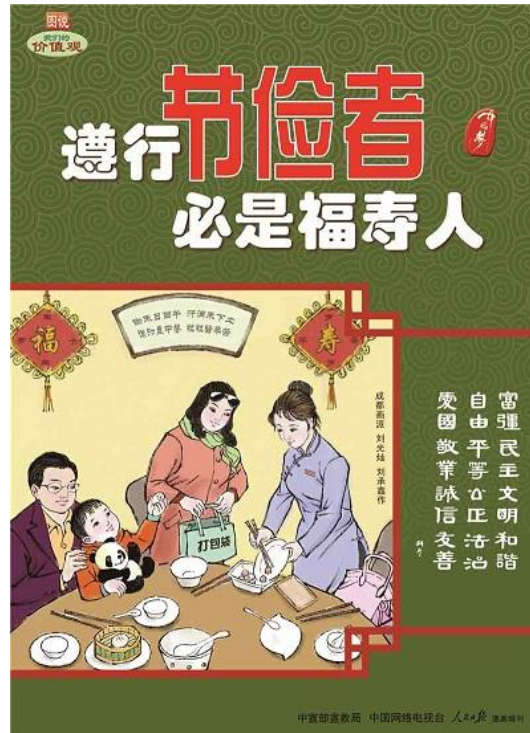
However, the development has slowed down in the last years after 2015, which was considered necessary, as Li Keqiang phrased it, to shape the “export-based economy to an economy [that is] emphasizing internal consumption” (Lavi, 2015, p. 2). The catering sector provided an undeniably comfortable option for Chinese people who prioritized dining outside instead of at home after long working hours, which created a hotspot for the increase in food waste due to the “factor of time value” (Bai et al., 2010, p. 432). The stabilized income has led the newly formed middle class to sustain their consumer habits that are not sustainable anymore and are wasteful (Podoshen et al., 2011). As we learn from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBSC), the statistics have clearly shown from 2010 until 2018 a steadily growing number in consumer waste (NBSC, 2010; NBSC, 2018). With this gradually

increasing number of food waste in China, the government had to take precautionary steps to slow down and reflect on recent years' numbers on consumption waste.

In January 2013, the Chinese government introduced the earliest form of the so-called Clean Your Plate Campaign (*Guangpan Xingdong* 光盘行动). The name translates to the “Plate Initiative”. Interestingly, the idea of the initiative did not derive from government officials. On Sina Weibo, a dedicated user and journalist called Zhijun Xu (徐志军) began to urge people to join his initiative on food waste along with the title “Operation Empty Plate” by photographing and documenting his empty plates (Miroso et al., 2018). Although, the online presence of this idea did not reach far back in 2012; by 2013, a so-called IN\_33 nonprofit organization took the idea one step further and launched it officially, which is known by today as the Clean Your Plate campaign I (CYPC I) (Wang et al., 2022). When it was introduced—and even more so in recent years—on Sina Weibo, this initiative tried to raise awareness through media about the concerning status of food waste. Due to Sina Weibo's popularity in the country, online media created a bridge between the people and the campaign (Miroso et al., 2018). With their online presence, the campaign has caught Xi Jinping's attention, and therefore openly advocated the idea further on terminating food waste (Wang et al., 2022).

The IN\_33 began to encourage people to change their consumer behaviors while dining out (Zhou, 2013, as cited in Miroso et al., 2018). The attention around the campaign reached the restaurant businesses as well. Close to 800 restaurants from Beijing joined the initiative by offering half-sized meals and complimentary takeaway containers. In addition, customers who left their plates empty by the end of their meals also received discount certificates (Miroso et al., 2018). The campaign was firmly focused on the “face-saving culture”, called *mianzi* culture (*mianzi wenhua* 面子文化) while breaking down misconceptions of shame in terms of using takeaway options for leftovers (Figure 1). This ingrained perspective is rooted in this “face-saving culture” that is founded on pride, where showing generosity and hospitality is key in social gatherings (Li et al., 2021). Therefore, e.g., at restaurants, taking leftovers home can show low prestige and might be perceived as a factor in “losing their status” among guests (Gui, 2016, as cited in Miroso et al., 2018). On that account, *mianzi* culture is perceived as one of the most commonly practiced social norms by people at restaurants or gatherings in China (Liao et al., 2018).





**Figure 1.** “The Frugal are Blessed with Happiness and Longevity” (Translation from Miao, 2020). Poster demonstrating “frugal” people using takeaway options for their leftovers (CPC News, 2015).

As Xi Jinping announced in 2013: “The wind of waste must be stopped!”<sup>1</sup> (Guangming News Daily, 2013). Due to the earlier-mentioned increase in food waste in the catering sector, this industry was a top priority to set these urgent measures firsthand (Liu, 2014; Miroso et al., 2018). The prime goal was to adjust consumption to a more modest level and guide people at restaurants to order half-sized portions to control excessive consumer habits. Advertising smaller portions seemed popular among businesses that tried to change their restaurants along with these guidelines (Guangming News Daily, 2013). However, the first launch of the Clean Plate campaign in 2013 did not make a lasting impact. Despite the campaign receiving great media coverage, after a few years, there were barely any traces left of the original initiative (Xinhua News Agency, 2017a). Small portions were rare to find, while required minimum orders were still prevalent in the catering sector. By 2017, most of the newly implemented measures regarding food waste had slowly disappeared (Xinhua News Agency, 2017a), and by the year of 2020, the food waste statistics were still deficient (Tsai et al., 2020).

<sup>1</sup> “Langfei zhi feng wubi hen sha!” “浪费之风务必狠刹!”

On the 11th of August in 2020, Xi Jinping set in motion the latest version of the Clean Plate campaign II (CYPC II) with a more pressing tone (“China’s Xi says the nation needs to put an end to soaring food waste”, 2020). In the Economic Daily’s article (2020), we learn that Xi Jinping and other members of the Ministry of Commerce reported that several departments would be working together to promote and launch policies to stop catering waste. According to Wang et al. (2022)’s research on dissimilarities of the CYP campaigns, in comparison to the CYPC I, in 2020, the government itself initiated the re-launching of the campaign and led the strategy to further improve the scale of the new implementations. Whilst in 2013 the CYPC was mainly promoted by online media platforms, in 2020, the government heightened its tactics and aimed to navigate food waste in China *nationwide* with more versatile platforms and instruments. Moreover, CYPC II had to implement laws and regulations into its agenda to reach its desired goal and strengthen the effectiveness of the campaign, instead of relying purely on morality as CYPC I has done (Wang et al., 2022).

The timing was rather crucial in the history of the CYPC, since launching the campaign came as a project on strengthening national security, including food security, during the Coronavirus disease 2019 outbreak (COVID-19) (Song, 2021). This pandemic disrupted the food supply chain and increased consumer food waste due to panic buying during this period (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, “lockdowns and transport restrictions have resulted in significant increases in food loss and waste” (Marchisio, 2020).

Extreme weather conditions have also aggravated the circumstances during the same period. Millions of hectares of cropland were damaged due to drought and flooding in 2020, affecting the country’s summer harvest (Chen, 2021). With such alarming conditions around the country, the Clean Plate initiative was timed perfectly to prevent the food sector from even more destruction and loss. Although promoting sustainable development and digitalizing the supply chain to reduce food loss would have created efficiency, during this campaign, preventing catering waste started with society and their consumers’ behaviors, and attitudes towards excessive consumption (Marchisio, 2020).

To cover various segments of society under the campaign, some sectors had to receive more supervision for further development. As we learn from the online Database of National Laws and Regulations<sup>2</sup> (DNLN), official departments and sectors targeted under the new regulations and laws had to establish a legitimate collaboration for long-term sustainability and higher efficiency (“Practicing Economy and Opposing Food and Beverage Waste”,

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<sup>2</sup> *Zhongguo falü fagui shujuku* 国家法律法规数据库.

2020). Although this chapter gave an insight into the history of the Clean Your Plate campaign; the “Regulations and Laws Regarding Food Waste” chapter will showcase more precisely how the Chinese government aimed to achieve changes within society and businesses through this initiative regarding consumerism and food waste.

### **1.3 The Eight-point Regulations: Policies Concerning Lavish Consumerism**

Food waste has been highly affecting the process of sustainable development among catering enterprises, and reducing wasteful habits has become an urgent matter for the government. In 2012, a new wave of changes started with the introduction of the “Eight-point Rules/Regulations” (*Zhongyang ba xiang guiding* 中央八项规定), to achieve the desired changes in the catering industry not just within the mass catering levels (Cao et al., 2021).

While the catering industry was a top priority, the government also aimed to control officials’ and enterprises’ banquets due to their recurring extravagant feasts during their meetings and celebrations (“Transformation and sustainable development of the catering industry under new circumstances”, 2013). By the end of 2012, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has set the so-called Eight-point Regulations in motion, considering how highly their extravagant administrative expenditures have impacted food waste in China (Fan et al., 2010). These policies were designed to suppress officials’ consumer habits at public expense and beneficially impact the catering sector (Liu, 2014; Jiang, 2013, as cited in Cao et al., 2021). The authorities highlighted the importance of staying modest, and everyone in society should play their *equal parts* and practice *diligence, and frugality* to stop extravagant behaviors.

Regarding officials’ lavish consumerism, mianzi culture had played, and still plays an important role in China when it comes to personal expenditures. This “face-saving culture” is part of the traditional Chinese customs and has an immense impact on social norms and hospitality. It is one of the most influential factors that affect food waste in China during social gatherings. It influences people to order vast amounts of food to show wealth and generosity towards guests, therefore generating food waste (Li et al., 2021).

Mianzi culture is even more compelling for dinners, banquets, and receptions held by government officials. Face-saving and proclaiming success, and pride during business meetings and events are completed by hosting high-end gatherings in an extravagant style (Fan et al., 2010). This culture of social norms has been significantly affecting China’s

consumer food waste, thus the government had to impact officials to follow a more moderate, “thrifty” lifestyle to reduce waste (Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, promoting frugality, diligence and a humble lifestyle started with the Eight-point Regulations, which has been a significant part of the campaigning practices of the current government since 2012 and takes up a great part of the foundation of this thesis.

According to Cao et al. (2021)’s article, since high-end catering had to be transferred down to mass catering, or closed down, due to the new regulations on food waste, the public catering sector has taken on a more crucial role in serving all consumers levels.

Consequently, the middle- and low-end catering businesses for the masses have started to thrive and therefore deal with more food waste. Despite that, the catering industry began to transform and develop in a more sustainable direction, due to their substantial revenue that resulted in limiting official catering and merging it with the mass levels.

Following the growth of the mass catering sector, public restaurant businesses have been advertised around the country while coexisting with the Clean Plate Campaign which was still opposing excessive consumption and trying to make an impact publicly to stop waste. The policies implemented after 2013 clearly show that the catering sector has taken more reasonable steps toward reducing food waste and starting a more *balanced development* on both environmental and economic levels (Cao et al., 2021).

## **1.4 Interconnection Between Economic Development and Food Waste in China**

There is a cardinal segment of policies that is crucial to mention in order to understand the complexity of food waste in China. This subject lacks regulations concerning food waste, and only a few guidelines have been implemented on this issue. As discussed in Liu (2014)’s article, the general focus on regulations seemed to mainly include solid waste. Since this paper is built on consumer food waste and not concerning household or agricultural food waste, it is essential to separate these types of waste due to their current position in regulations.

China’s economy plays a key role in this matter; therefore, we need to understand how its development impacted food waste. Food waste comes in many forms throughout the stages of food production; from the agricultural sector down the supply chain to the consumer level. “In low-income countries food is lost mostly during the early and middle stages of the

food supply chain; much less food is wasted at the consumer level. [...] In medium- and high-income countries, food is to a significant extent wasted at the consumption stage [...]” (Gustavsson et al., 2011, p. v). The tendency behind the increase in food waste occurs alongside many different factors in China. Owing to the speedy development of the country’s economy, gradually the nation’s annual income has grown, and with wealth, therefore the consumers’ expenditure has expanded as well (Liu, 2011, as cited in Cao et al., 2021)<sup>3</sup>.

In the last decades, China has been pursuing *sustainable development* on all sides. The country had to reach a particular growth and innovation in both science and technology to solve various issues that were consequences of unsustainable approaches from the past (Cheng et al., 2021). Fighting food security has been a significant issue waiting to be solved. Therefore the government needed digital transformation to improve current technologies to pursue a more sustainable future (Lyu et al., 2021). The development of new technologies can significantly impact the catering sector, from production to delivery (Cao et al., 2021). For example, having greater supervision over agricultural production and its storage and processing facilities is key to limiting food losses on the first level of the supply chain (Liu, 2014).

With a new generation of technologies and sustainable development, enterprises and industries emerged and became more developed on the market. Furthermore, the government implemented various regulations to boost the support market’s need for sustainable development (Lyu et al., 2021). These policies have both negative and positive impacts on enterprises towards this development economically and technology-wise. Although overall, Lyu Fen et al. (2021)’s article showed with their analysis that the effect of policies was positive and lasting on the market. Pressuring companies to adapt to new technologies was the main force behind keeping up with the competitive advantage. Several companies that have adapted to new technologies created a snowball effect on the market, and transforming their business became a strategic move, focusing on keeping up with their competitors. After all, with their capability to maximize their investments and take on further advantages in their products or services for their customers (Lyu et al., 2021), these new digital technologies created a beneficial result.

Through sustainable development, not just companies benefited, but they also improved people's lives. Economic development led the dominant industries to create and develop products to meet people’s needs for a higher quality of life, like in the service

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<sup>3</sup> The original article could not be downloaded by Liu, 2011.

industry (Lu & Sun, 2012). Because the Chinese government contributes to allocating resources and implementing policies to influence the market, enterprises that the government supported were able to create more labor flow and opportunities, like personnel training for the new market demands. Accordingly, *human capital* and *entrepreneurship* became an essential part of how production formed through economic development (Doh, 2020).

The catering industry played a crucial role in promoting this *economic growth* (Gao, 2019, as cited in Cao et al., 2021). Yuan et al.'s article (2016) on sustainable development in the catering industry explains why it is essential for this sector to follow this type of development to expand the catering sector. The catering services and all the related sectors had to be developed. To achieve that, these enterprises had to focus on their market status and future regarding competition and business environment, alongside newly-created sustainable development strategies. These strategies are requisite to be innovative and keep up with the current policies or campaigns introduced by the government, like the CYPC. Food waste and overall loss are generated without cooperation among all management and production levels in the catering businesses. Therefore, sustainable development is crucial for enterprises to limit food waste and be cost-effective (Yuan et al., 2016).

## **2. Methodology Design**

The Clean your Plate initiative has not widely known outside of China despite being almost a decade old. The trajectory of the campaign has also been rather complex considering that it has been based on both social and moral aspects, while in recent years significant laws and regulations were added to these campaign practices as well. To conduct the paper's research around the CYPC, including both moral and jurisdictional sides, it had to involve various data-collecting practices to provide a clear understanding of this campaign. Accordingly, for the purpose of conducting sufficient data from various points of view, the paper called for *triangulation*, which is based on multiple data collection methods and analysis (Strauss & Cobin, 2014). In addition, to analyze the paper's focal point, "traditional values", government materials required *framing theory* in order to identify campaign strategies based on these values.

Firstly, by choosing several data collection practices, I was able to get access to rich amounts of data that helped me understand the developments of the campaign and ultimately create a foundation for my qualitative research approach. The primary data sources that were

utilized throughout this paper were rooted in academic, governmental, and media sources. An important aspect to account for when using these diverse sources with their often non-academic background is to facilitate validity. To achieve this, I used triangulation as a tool to help me “test the validity and reliability” of this study (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604). Through multiple data sources, I was able to assist my research in ruling out the possibility of bias, thus bringing quality to the thesis while reflecting reality but also the aim of this study (Denzin, 2009).

To further emphasize the importance that triangulation had on this paper, it should be mentioned that academic research on social-cultural aspects of food waste behaviors in Asia is scarce (Liao, 2018). This has created some challenges in terms of collecting academic literature, however, it has also provided me with the opportunity to extend the research on factors influencing food waste in China. Triangulation was thereby used to gather critical and sufficient data from different realities.

With the intention of discovering and acknowledging how ideological, and cultural frames are applied by the government, through framing analysis, this research was expected to identify some of the most common frames, and thereby gain a profound understanding of their use, and efficiency. Furthermore, this chapter will now elaborate on my triangulation approach by first showcasing the selected methodologies for then to expand on their role in researching and discovering new findings. Lastly, the chapter will also elaborate on how the combination of triangulation and framing analysis instrumented this study, while possibly answering the paper’s main research question.

## **2.1 Data Collection Approaches and Their Limitations**

With the Clean Your Plate campaign’s latest relaunch in 2020, this thesis’s original approach was in fact to base its research and data collection on fieldwork in China. Due to the thesis’s unfortunate timing during COVID-19 and the cancellation of our Chinese university scholarship, fieldwork was not achievable for this paper. The original method of this subject was to conduct research at school canteens, workplace cafeterias, and restaurant businesses to investigate the impact of the CYP campaign and further see if the campaign would still be present in people's lives after a decade of existence. Due to this, the source of information had to be changed to be able to conduct the research and have enough data to answer my research question. Therefore, relevant information regarding educational institutions or consumer

habits at restaurants had to be primarily based on online academic studies, Chinese media platforms, and the Database of National Law and Regulations.

The paper first introduces its main foundation, the Clean Your Plate Campaign from both 2013 and 2020. While researching the very basis of this campaign, due to the lack of awareness of this initiative outside of China, the paper faced its first obstacles in finding comprehensive information on the actors behind the campaign. Whereas obtaining data on food waste in China and regulations regarding food waste existed, there were several limitations on this subject with no further understanding of several influencing factors on wasting patterns within different consumer groups. Finding sufficient data on the second Clean Your Plate Campaign was even more limited since the newest campaign was set in motion only two years ago, which has not given enough time to conduct empirical studies on this topic just yet. Therefore, the paper's most significant challenge was to sustain a balance between using academic documents and studies, alongside Chinese government-owned and run platforms for this campaign. Oftentimes, in current segments of the CYPC, there was little available data from academic research, and therefore the paper had to rely mostly on information written by supporters of the initiative and values surrounding the topic, which raises the issue of bias.

Further on, by analyzing the CYPC's past and presence, a cardinal detail, such as the campaign's characteristics alongside the so-called traditional values formed the focal point of the paper. To further elaborate on and analyze the significance of these "traditional values", the question had to be asked: *What is the purpose of "traditional values" within the Clean Your Plate Campaign, and can "traditional values" morally impact younger generations to be more environmentally cautious and change their food-wasting behaviors?*

To guide an analysis of such "traditional values" and acknowledge the purpose of their use, *frame analysis* has been used. By conducting a framing analysis, it allowed me to understand how the Chinese government and some media platforms have been framing public campaigns or news on food waste and how this has been received by the public. Nelson et al. (1997) formulated the idea of framing well: "Framing is the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy" (Nelson et al., 1997, p. 221). Thus, framing is about people being introduced to something e.g., how the CYPC has been introduced to the public through posters, news, and media (this is the Frame), for then to be interpreted by the people the frame was directed towards, which then will influence their choices regarding what was informed.



With this, an essential part of doing a framing analysis is to identify and understand the audience, such that I can understand why and how the approaches for the campaign have been used, and how this helped to gain the campaign's desired response and reflection from the public on the matter. Creating the most effective and compelling way of presenting a campaign or news can be done to favor certain actors, or "may [even] be unconscious, and there may be no motive other than a conscientious effort to frame events in a way that the sponsor considers most meaningful" (Gamson, 1989, p. 158). When campaigns aim to impact social behaviors and attitudes toward an issue, persuasive bonds must be built to be able to impact communities based on their beliefs or their social norm backgrounds, and preferences (van Hulst & Yanow, 2016). These effects can be done in various ways. Often with incentives that relate to social acceptance or ideology, where once again, cultural background and values play a crucial factor to create the desired message through media and news (Rice & Atkin, 2008).

Seeing that the purpose of this paper is to understand the purpose of moral values within Chinese campaigns and how "traditional values" impact society, it is crucial that I will be able to understand how these campaigns have been presented to the public and how it has been received. Through doing a framing analysis I will look at how the campaign has used phrasing and applied specific vocabulary or storytelling to influence the target audience's behaviors and attitudes towards campaigns, or issues (Rice & Atkin, 2008). Thus, framing analysis is a good approach to use in order for me to answer this thesis's research question.

Lastly, the ideas presented by Gamson (1989), regarding frame analysis, are important to consider when doing such an analysis. Gamson clarified that even with experience, giving an adequate picture and understanding of content through frames is almost an impossible task, due to the complexity of content creation with its often multiple creators and its multiple meanings. However, Gamson does mention that by identifying grammatical-based elements, recurring phrases of news, or content can still help the analyst to collect some significant information. This is something I have tried to account for throughout my analysis.

Based on these facts and accepting the complexity of possible outcomes of the subject of frame analysis, we must keep in mind that by the very nature of this analysis, there is always a possibility that unintended meanings can get involved during research. This paper was written by only one author, and even with two writers, there is always a probability that under frame analysis, the outcome can end up with two individual understandings of the same subject (Gamson, 1989), and this is a limitation to this study.

Applying “*search word-based research*” has also been a key component of this thesis. This was done to acquire sufficient data, both to understand the most common locations of the specific vocabulary used under “traditional values”, and then further analyze its purpose with the help of framing theory. These search words were mainly 文明, 勤俭, 孝悌, 美德, 道德, and lastly 勤俭. Since out of all “traditional values” only frugality is the one that is related to food waste in general, firstly, 勤俭 was the research’s main keyword. Once the conducted data contained numerous uses of the word “frugality”, the document was further analyzed if it also consisted of the other mentioned search words to recognize any similarities among the subjects and frames. This analytical search word method was used under the laws and regulations chapters as well. This could help the paper to understand what environments the government has used to place these “traditional values” in to frame their subjects as a tool to impact their audience during speeches, articles, slogans, and posters as their contemporary campaigning practices.

Due to this thesis’s limited circumstances regarding fieldwork, WeChat provided the source to discover any online presence of the mentioned posters, or slogans regarding the CYPC. Moreover, how the campaign has been impacting educational institutions’ routines, dining facilities, and children from kindergarten to university age-groups. The process of data collection from WeChat was mainly generated by the search word “光盘行动”. Articles and short films relevant to the “traditional values” were collected and translated, and lastly analyzed for any recurring patterns regarding social-cultural aspects and moral values. Although the goal of this research was to combine information from both younger generations and adults on food consumption and consumer behaviors; other than a couple of studies available online that provided a few statistics regarding adults’ dining habits at restaurants, Chinese media platforms mainly based their CYPC content on children and students.

Lastly, in terms of the validity of this research method, it should be mentioned that it has its shortfalls regarding insufficient academic data and possible bias through government-run websites, and media platforms. On the other hand, due to scarce academic sources on food waste and consumer behaviors in China, with the assistance of the triangulation method, the paper’s focal point was to understand how the campaign and its practices evolved over the last decade, and why it progressed the way it did. The diverse selection of sources facilitated a balance within the study, such as official laws and regulations. The possibility to analyze food waste laws from the Database of National Law and Regulations provided a

stable source of official data to understand how the CYPC expanded its influence and measures on society throughout the existence of this campaign.

### 3. Findings

Despite the fact that the Clean Your Plate campaign was founded almost 10 years ago, the activity and focus around the campaign have been rather operative again in the last two years or so. Media has been working as the most effective tool for news or campaigns in China and played an irreplaceable role to the government in this food waste campaign as well. Chinese media platforms like WeChat or Sina Weibo still provide one of the most frequently used instruments to broadcast news in regards to the campaign where people can share the news or comment their opinions under thousands of short films and videos on this subject. While these platforms deliver efficiency in introducing the development of the campaign to all Chinese citizens, it has been providing a beneficial tool for this paper as well. Owing to COVID-19, opportunities for traveling or doing field-work in China were not achievable, thus this research had to be almost purely based on online materials. Conducting the research for this thesis could not have been sufficient by only gathering sources on the CYPC and their campaigning practices. On that account, framing theory served the paper as the right tool for identifying patterns and schemas regarding the initiative. Observing the government's campaign strategy through framing has provided the research with a profound understanding of the use of "traditional values" and therefore more well-grounded findings.

The first section of this chapter will further elaborate on how media frames can assist the paper's angle into a deeper understanding of the current presence of the food waste campaign in the media and the characteristics of this type of framework. The second section will discuss how particular topics have been continual in the presence of this campaign and how these patterns are possibly connected to Chinese *cultural aspects* that still establish a great impact on its audience once they are used as frames in the media. And lastly, the third section will seek to introduce another recurring detail of the campaign's media presence that brings the contrast between the regulations and specific age groups of society that the media has been focusing on for the most part.

### 3.1 Cultural Understanding Behind the Campaign's Characteristics

As mentioned in the paper earlier, ever since the CYPC launched, Xi Jinping has highlighted specific phrases and vocabulary that have been recurring in the history of the initiative. During the research process of this thesis, the pattern has formed since the very beginning with repeated persistent catchphrases from both speeches from the Chinese Communist Party's General Secretary and from the media where the campaign has been promoted. Over time and with more collected material, a fixed pattern seems to be forming the way the campaign and its several projects have been presented to the audiences and to people who have been influenced by the CYPC.

This mentioned pattern relies on the cultural environment and social value system of China. Especially since Xi Jinping became the president of China, the CCP has been dedicated to bringing back "Chinese values" that are profoundly rooted in China's past and history, therefore stating such intentions in several of President Xi's speeches (Xinhua News Agency, 2013b; Xinhua News Agency, 2017b; CCTV, 2019). While doing so, the government has been pursuing to integrate these "traditional values" back into society and restore some core values through neo-traditionalism and innovating the old (Yang, 2017; CPC News, 2015).

According to Miao (2020), these so-called traditional values are being portrayed as deeply rooted in the past, even though these values are mainly a "mixture of ideas from Confucian classics to socialist revolutionary exemplars" and many of these values are in reality "core socialist values"<sup>4</sup> (CSVs) (Miao, 2020, p. 171). As the General Office of the State Council issued it in 2017, the CCP launched their so-called "Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing Exceptional Chinese Traditional Culture"<sup>5</sup>. Through 18 articles, they have comprehensively issued Chinese core values and their desired future, from Chinese education, classic literature, music, leadership, and most importantly, traditional Chinese virtues and morality. This includes promoting these virtues through media, education systems, and political strategies involving mutual learning and exchange with foreign countries while promoting Chinese traditional culture, among nations alongside the "One Belt One Road" (*yidai yilu* 一带一路) (Xinhua News Agency, 2017b).

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<sup>4</sup> *Shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhi guan* 社会主义核心价值观.

<sup>5</sup> *Guanyu shishi zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua chuancheng fazhan gongcheng de yijian* 关于实施中华优秀传统文化传承发展工程的意见.

Since Xi Jinping became president, rejuvenating China with its “traditions and past” has been on the rise, up until today (Xinhua News Agency, 2013b; Xi, 2022). In 2013, with the General Secretary’s arrival, so did the “China Dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦), which has been intended to expand China’s position internationally, whilst strengthening, rejuvenating the Chinese nation domestically (Xinhua News Agency, 2013b; Miao, 2020). Learning about Xi Jinping and his upbringing from Chinese media (CPC News, 2020; Xinhua News Agency, 2021), it is no surprise that the party leader is even more devoted when food waste is on the political agenda. Mr. Xi was sent to the countryside for seven years of physical labor and farming during his teenage years as part of the re-educating program for children of the elite as punishment, due to his father’s known history in politics (“Xi Jinping: From Communist Party princeling to China’s president”, 2022).

Considering the above-mentioned Chinese “traditional virtues” and Xi Jinping’s commitment to oppose, and limit food waste in China, his approach through campaigns and projects has been steadily based on these “traditional social customs” to make an impact on Chinese society. Filial piety, frugality, modesty, loyalty, helping the poor, and practicing bravery are just some of the most consistently used “virtues” in Chinese media and even in regulations regarding the CYPC, and in other campaigning practices (Xinhua News Agency, 2017b; Miao, 2020). As Miao (2020) presented in her research on key values regarding political movements and slogans that have been recurring, the study showcased how these values are a combination of both the CSVs, traditional “Confucian values”, and “values of the CCP”. In an era like the twenty-first century, where modernization, consumerism, and materialism are at their peak, studies show how a more conservative wave of ideologies is finding its way back to Chinese society, alongside seeking spiritual guidance through religion and traditional Chinese values, culture (Liu, 2015; Magstad, 2017).

As an example of these “traditional values”, frugality (*jian* 俭 or *jiejian* 节俭) has been an essential part of the CYPC’s and other initiatives’ characteristics and is presented as traditional, whilst frugality is a core “CCP value” (Miao, 2020). Being frugal, or “thrifty”, has been a key segment of the food waste campaigns and even blended together with traditions or history openly, as in the People’s Daily Online (2014)’s article:

As the ancients said, ‘Frugality is a common virtue, extravagance is the greatness of evil’. Passing on these traditional virtues of diligence and frugality, along with

mobilizing everyone is starting with me, right now, and hundreds of millions of people will be able to build this era on the ‘virtue of frugality’.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, we learn from the same article that integrating “core socialist values” into people’s lives could mean moral fulfillment and enrich spiritual wealth, which could lead the path to national conservation actions or rejuvenate China.

This so-called traditional culture and its values that are presented by the CCP are meant to create a bond with its audience by presenting a more conservative, “cherish the old” sort of ideology, alongside the government’s intention to romanticize the socialist past. Finding balance and direction in people’s everyday life through these “traditions” could label the government as spiritual guidance for some—as the CCP somewhat intended it as well—whereas the public worship money and tend to follow greed in a market-based world (Zhang, 2013; Miao, 2020).

### **3.2 Younger Generations on Food Waste in China**

Xi Jinping has made it clear in his recent statement that children should be a prioritized focus group regarding food waste in China from kindergarten to university canteens (Xinhua News Agency, 2021). Originally in this paper, the goal of this subject was to analyze and include various generations regarding the CYPC, yet Chinese media had a rather extensive amount of news and short films based on young generations, which have raised some questions regarding official data on food waste and its most frequently occurring locations. It is a necessary and significant step to educate young people on consumer behavior and food waste. Despite this, as we learn from statistics, restaurants are the most important locations regarding the vast majority of food waste occurring in China, while school canteens generate around half as much waste (Li et al., 2021). As we learn from Tsai et al. (2020)’s article, “as universities have a high degree of social influence, some policies and activities are piloted in universities, and then, promoted to society after achieving significant results”. These pilots are aimed to acknowledge drivers behind young adults’ personal and consumer behavior toward food waste (Tsai et al., 2020). Based on the CYPC’s

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<sup>6</sup> “古人讲“俭，德之共也；侈，恶之大也”。传承勤俭节约的传统美德，动员每个人从我做起、从现在做起，亿万人民必定能在共同的价值认同中，营造“节俭养德”的时代风尚。”

young history, it has not been acknowledged yet if the Chinese government has similar practices behind CYPC projects at education institutions.

As discussed before, China is facing such food waste issues due to its economic development, and change in people's welfare (Xu et al., 2020). As statistics have shown, China wastes around 200 billion Yuan worth of food annually (Li et al., 2018), and nevertheless, let alone the catering industry, the yearly food waste settles at approximately 17-18 million tons which would be an ample supply to feed between 30 to 50 million people (Cheng et al., 2018<sup>7</sup>, as cited in Xu et al., 2020). However, China's position differs in comparison to other countries, due to its population which raises the question regarding the number of students in the country from pre-school to secondary education levels.

As the statistical database of the National Bureau of Statistics of China shows, in the year 2018, 46.5 million children enrolled in pre-schools. During the primary education state, the number is 104 million. By the time of the secondary education level, the number of enrolled students is at 86 million (NBSC, 2019). With such large numbers of students in China, educational institutes and campuses might just be one of the major generators of food waste alongside catering businesses. However, studies and research based on China nationwide are rather scarce and even if existing, it is most likely to be based on a specific age or education group. Therefore, due to insufficient data on the matter, it has been rather challenging to propose a comprehensive understanding of various food waste generators and the drives behind wasteful consumption habits in China.

Nevertheless, Qian et al. (2019) and Qian et al. (2021)'s research on Chinese university canteens acknowledges some of the driving forces and patterns concerning the wasteful habits of Chinese university students—a paper that has given a great foundation to understand this thesis topic. Another article that helped to facilitate a better understanding was the work of Li et al. (2021) and their systematic review of several factors regarding food waste from several age groups in China. Both of these research also illustrate a few aspects of the CYPC that greatly contributed to a deeper understanding of the campaign's current influence through media, posters, or catchphrases on people's behavior.

Approximately 74% of students in Qian et al. (2019)'s study have acknowledged that they have wasted food at university canteens and the older the university students were, the less food waste occurred, compared to undergraduates. Even primary schools have shown the same tendencies regarding youngest students wasting more, than the oldest ones, mainly due

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<sup>7</sup> The original article could not be accessed by Cheng et al., 2018.

to unchanging serving sizes based on age groups (Huang et al., 2017). Interestingly, the social aspects and the time pressure of school canteens are significantly affecting food waste per capita along with many other drivers, such as *age, gender, education, or income*. E.g., female students are more likely to waste food, just as younger students in comparison to older peers. Also, students from more affluent families who still rely on them financially generate more waste, not only adults who live affluent life (Qian et al., 2021). Furthermore, social factors are crucial while dining altogether with fellow students at canteens, due to dissimilarities between the pace of students consuming their meals or expenditure habits behind purchasing more food as part of the *Mianzi culture*. As the study shows, students who dine alone are less likely to waste food, compared to those eating with others. People who eat faster than their peers can unconsciously pressure others at the same table to leave in a hurry, even though their plates are still full of food, therefore resulting in waste (Qian et al., 2021).

Studies have also presented various other drivers of students' food waste that should be taken into consideration for adjusting catering practices at educational institutions. According to Huang et al. (2017), Qian et al. (2019), and Qian et al. (2021)'s studies on university students, it has been proven that hygiene, plating, flavor, and portion size do play a critical part in food waste generated by campus canteens. Based on these studies, students' plate waste was highly affected by large serving portions, poor taste, or unbalanced ingredient usage. As mentioned above, females had a higher tendency to waste food in every study used in this paper, which is a consequence of non-optional portion sizes for individual preferences. Moreover, unhygienic, unpleasant-looking food and meals that simply did not live up to students' expectations were one of the most commonly answered causes. While the financial aspects of developing dining facilities, or their meal plans have to be taken into consideration; with the help of dieticians, canteen management should build open communication with students to determine students' preferences and create more balanced meal plans.

While the above-mentioned factors are crucial in understanding and researching food waste in China for future solutions, the CYPC has set up specific measures nationwide in educational institutes to raise awareness. It mostly includes brochures, posters, slogans, or lectures on farming. These promotions of the campaign have been studied based on their effectiveness, and while students are faced with various posters at canteens, statistics have shown that three of the most functional ways to advocate the campaign were through *media-based information, slogans, and catchphrases* (Wang et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2018). Cultural and moral values are one of the main focus of persuasion of these posters and brochures



which has only a short-term attention period from the public and does not capable of making a lasting impact on the diners. While interestingly, in other countries like the United States or South Korea, using patriotic values or religion was able to influence consumer behaviors in comparison to China (Wang et al., 2022).

Cultivating the mindset and consciousness of young generations is essential for a more sustainable future. Educating society on food waste is fundamental to understanding how food waste puts the environment at risk but also causes losses within the economy (Ishangulyyev et al., 2019). As we learn from a trial document of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, called "Guidelines of the Implementation of Environmental Education for Primary and Secondary Education"<sup>8</sup> (2003), China was rather late with proper education on environmental studies. The document also describes how environmental education from the late last century lacked focusing on sustainable development, in comparison to the United Kingdom for example. And while education has focused on overall environmental knowledge, it failed by not impacting students' environmental ethics and ability to reflect on their environmental education in reality. Studies have shown that environmental concerns can make a lasting impact on students and young adults, resulting in food waste reduction; therefore education on the consequences of environmental issues and their possible solutions can cultivate the leftover generation's behavior (Fujii, 2006; Zsóka et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2018). With an understanding of the official trial document and relevant studies, it was found that young generations became the focal point of the CYPC to develop an early environmental consciousness and personal responsibility for food waste and environmental issues. Therefore, regardless of statistics on students' food waste, compared to other waste generator groups or locations.

However, as we know Xi Jinping's interest and connection to agriculture and farming, as we learn from WeChat, the Chinese government has been promoting the CYPC by educating children on farming helping to familiarize themselves with various plants and grains. While younger children at educational institutes receive lectures about the importance of farming and preserving nature, older students have been mainly reminded of the campaign by posters, stickers or leaflets at school canteens. Surprisingly, as we learn from Chinese media, educating children through alternative ways—other than teachers' presentations on agriculture—has been exceptionally rare to find. With a few exceptions, some institutes had the opportunity to visit their garden to showcase to children how some plants look in reality

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<sup>8</sup> *Zhong xiaoxue huanjing jiaoyu shishi zhinan* 中小学环境教育实施指南

and how long it takes to grow and harvest them (Figure 2). Based on the institutes' own media posts, in theory, these would help young generations to understand and appreciate the work behind food production.



**Figure 2.** Teaching children about agriculture under the CYPC. (Left image) Children in kindergarten are learning about rice (Zhenjiang shi xinqu cui zhu yuan you'eryuan, 23.10.2022). (Right image) Children in elementary school are learning about farming through activities (Xing Qu Ban, 28.10.2022).

Source: WeChat

While mostly “frugality” has been the main value to be used by the government for advocating for society on food waste, interestingly, there has been also a recurring figure among the collected data from WeChat. He is none other than Yuan Longping (袁隆平)(1930-2021), who was an agricultural scientist who developed the very first high-yield hybrid rice varieties in the 1960s and 1970s. His work and dedication helped his own country through hunger by inventing hybrid rice that has a 20% higher yield than the typically known rice (Wang, 2021). Although during the 1970s, Yuan and his work did not receive the deserved recognition, under President Xi Jinping, his legacy became a matter of interest in a

more ideological direction. Yuan’s devotion to his country to helping the nation through agriculture formed and served as a perfect example of “socialist values” (Schmalzer, 2017).

With numerous articles regarding his work, life, and his passing away last year in 2021, hybrid rice became a subject under the CYPC, as a topic for educating children on cherishing food and the effort behind food production. Yuan Longping’s face represents the effort behind giving China, and the world, a gift that can nourish people. His photo was even used on an occasion in an elementary school to coerce students at the canteen on returning their food trays entirely empty, as shown in Figure 3. On the paper, it was printed: “Yuan grandpa is not with us anymore, we have to be more obedient and do it! Cherish food and stay away from extravagance.”<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 3.** Yuan Longping’s photo in an elementary school food waste project. Screenshot from a video where students were being lined up in front of Yuan Longping’s photo to empty their serving trays under supervision as a way of bidding farewell to him. The video was created two days after Mr. Yuan’s death (Henan TV Station People’s Livelihood Channel, 05.24.2021).

Source: WeChat

<sup>9</sup> “袁爷爷走了, 我们更要听话, 做到! 珍惜粮食, 远离浪费。”

Acknowledging these various approaches to the CYPC is a crucial segment of this thesis, to acknowledge the government's and educational institutions' personalized methods of affecting their children, and students regarding food production and waste. According to Zhang et al. (2018)'s study, people with knowledge of farming tend to be more frugal when it comes to food waste, compared to those who had no experience in that field. Furthermore, from a study by Zsóka et al.(2013), we learn that educational courses and activities regarding food production or techniques on food waste have a lasting beneficial impact on children's environmental understanding and consumer behavior. Although, due to the complexity of various aspects that are impacting children and their personal behavior or values, such as education, family, or community, it is still rather challenging to measure every angle of this subject in a well-grounded way. However, as the study has shown, given the right curriculum and plan of activities to children by institutions is vital in raising environmentally conscious generations for the future, therefore an early introduction to food production and a leftover reduction might just be a key to a healthier and more reasonable consumer society (Zsóka et al., 2013).

Lastly, even though many of the studies on students' consumer behavior were not conducted after the second launch of the CYPC, researches have shown that students who were aware of the CYPC did not waste significantly less food, than those who were not familiar with the campaign (Qian et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2018; Qian et al., 2021). Consequently, based on these findings, students are one of the greatest focus groups under this initiative for a reason, and gaining students' participation and willingness to transform their habits into environmentally conscious consumerism is therefore waiting to be solved by the Chinese government.

### **3.3 Regulations and Laws Regarding Food Waste**

Although there has been insufficient data on regulations regarding food waste from online platforms, with the help of the newly launched online Database of National Laws and Regulations ("China: National Database of Laws and Regulations Launched", 2021), this chapter will be able to provide an insight into provincial regulations and the Anti-food Waste Law from both 2020 and 2021. Under this chapter, certain aspects, issues, and significant guidelines are included from both official documents; however, the chapter on Analysis and

Findings will elaborate on the main dissimilarities between the two documents and how they may affect society and people's consumer behaviors differently.

As mentioned earlier, the Clean Your Plate campaign was re-launched in August 2020. As we learn from the above-described online database, the first regulations on food waste were not launched nationally but on a provincial level. The database provides access to national and provincial laws and regulations, which is crucial to monitor a countrywide history of these policies.

Due to the number of regulations launched on a provincial level since 2020, in this chapter, the main focus will be given to the very first provincial regulation on food waste, and secondly, to the latest national Anti-food Waste Law from 2021. The decision is based on the acquired data, considering that all provincial regulations on food waste were written similarly, many of them with identical titles even.

Although the Clean Your Plate campaign had been known from 2013 until 2020, there were no official records of regulations or laws to oppose food waste regarding this initiative. On the 29th of September 2020, the very first provincial regulation was issued, specifically for Hebei province, under the name of “Provisions of the Standing Committee of the Hebei Provincial People’s Congress on Practicing Economy and Opposing Food and Beverage Waste”<sup>10</sup>. This regulation was intended to be carried out on the 1st of November in 2020 (“Practicing Economy and Opposing Food and Beverage Waste”, 2020).

With 37 Articles included in this regulation, practicing frugality and self-discipline became a number one goal. To do so, publicly opposing extravagant behaviors and food waste has grown to be a crucial campaign segment. Organizing activities, volunteering for supervision, or spreading through media and advertisements the importance of fulfilling the social responsibility of living a modest life settled the campaign’s foundation. The document also highlights the importance of supervision between the departments while implementing these new regulations. The reasoning behind this is that with proper maintenance and collaboration, departments can develop and combine technologies that can work beneficially for promoting healthy diets and educating the community on this matter.

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<sup>10</sup> 河北省人民代表大会常务委员会 - 关于厉行节约、反对餐饮浪费的规定

### 3.4.1 Specific Changes Regarding Catering and Kitchen Waste in Hebei's Provincial Regulation

Even though the campaign from 2013 implemented alternative options for diners with half-sized dishes, it did not make a lasting impact on restaurant businesses. The primary strategy regarding quality and quantity remained the same under this regulation and kept offering smaller-sized meals for half the price. Furthermore, under *Article 18*, it is stated that restaurants should not guide customers to order excessive amounts or be required to follow minimum consumption; therefore, they should only order dishes based on the number of people at the table. Moreover, businesses should only encourage guests to leave a clean plate behind or use takeaway options for leftovers and offer incentives, like discounts or points, if they leave no food waste (“Practicing Economy and Opposing Food and Beverage Waste”, 2020).

On the other hand, canteens at schools and kindergartens received more strict supervision under this campaign. As *Article 22* describes it, to educate young children on the Clean Your Plate campaign, further inspection of them and their eating habits at canteens was expected to increase children's self-awareness of food waste. Additionally, with proper supervision, it was meant to improve the management of canteens by facilitating the dining needs and habits of students to reduce waste in the future (“Practicing Economy and Opposing Food and Beverage Waste”, 2020).

Last but not least, the regulation includes a short paragraph on kitchen waste treatment in *Article 19*. Proper treatment of disposing kitchen waste has been a primary issue in recent years due to its increasing number and possible health concerns in China. While most of the rules on handling waste were not explicitly designed to adjust to the catering sector's food waste, the ones already in use had to be changed because of illnesses and diseases. In the past, 80% of the kitchen waste in China has been handed to pig farms as unsterilized animal feed (Li et al., 2016). However, with the growing concerns about food security and environmental protection, the Chinese government had to look for a lasting sustainable treatment method. *Article 19* did suggest establishing a new charging fee system based on the quantity of kitchen waste handed over to waste treatment facilities. This system, in theory, would impact the community and businesses to practice economy and frugality, although to be able to understand all the various implementations regarding kitchen waste

treatment, this paper does not have the capacity to research those regulations (“Practicing Economy and Opposing Food and Beverage Waste”, 2020).

### 3.4.2 Anti-Food Waste Law of China

Effective immediately on the 29th of April in 2021, the Chinese government issued its latest law regarding food waste and food security. The law’s official title is the Anti-food Waste Law of the People’s Republic of China<sup>11</sup> (“Anti-food Waste Law of the People’s Republic of China”, 2021). The law is formulated similarly to the other provincial regulations, however, we must take into account that the law is exclusively founded on the catering sector, leaving out the public from its sanctions.

The law similarly touches upon the same subjects as the previous regulation, including articles on environmental protection, the promotion of sustainable development, and the importance of educating society on dietary and nutritional knowledge to limit food waste. Due to these various similarities, in this chapter, there is no subsection included among the food waste law’s implementations and its specific changes regarding consumer behaviors, like under the section of the provincial regulation (“Anti-food Waste Law of the People’s Republic of China”, 2021).

Although, some articles may differ in terms of details. Food loss occurs from the core of food production, and the focus point has to be broadened from production to the last stage of the consumer if lasting, sustainable development is wanted to be made by the government. For instance, one cardinal segment of articles differs from the provincial law, which is *Article 5* from the national law and *Article 9* from the regulation. Both articles include one paragraph on grain under the “粮食” search word; however, the national law also incorporated information on food and agricultural grain production. As mentioned earlier in this paper, food waste occurs in various stages of the supply chain. This issue requires the initial production level to be strengthened with proper facilities, storage, and transportation to limit food waste already on an agricultural stage, including preharvest and postharvest food losses (Liu, 2014). *Article 5* of the national law outlines the essential part of analyzing the annual food waste situation for further precautionary steps to heighten the oversight of food producers. Moreover, the national departments of agriculture and grain must strengthen their

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<sup>11</sup> *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo fan shipin langfei fa* 中华人民共和国反食品浪费法.

management to establish higher standards for their pre-and postharvest facilities, including storing and transporting (“Anti-Food Waste Law of the People’s Republic of China”, 2021).

With the firm foundation of the provincial regulation, the national law varies in its details regarding guidelines on consumerism or how catering businesses should guide their customers towards more modest dining. One of the significant dissimilarities was the severity of the actions regarding consumer food waste. The regulation set guidelines for the catering services to reward their diners in case of no food waste, while the law’s *Article 7* focuses on not only rewarding customers if they participate in the CYP initiative but also on charging the cost of disposing of food waste from customers in case of a notable amount of leftover. *Article 21* describes similar suggestions for educational institutes and their cafeterias. Guidelines for children with wasteful behaviors were set to be disciplining measures, which will raise self-awareness in the students, as the article specified, although the law does not specify exactly what measures these institutions should apply (“Anti-Food Waste Law of the People's Republic of China”, 2021).

In addition, more vital decisions were made regarding media platforms and excessive consumer behaviors. Even though Hebei’s regulation in *Article 11* also forbids sharing videos or information on people who overeat themselves or induce vomiting due to immoderate eating habits—extreme restrictions were only implemented by the national law in 2021 (“Practicing Economy and Opposing Food and Beverage Waste”, 2020). Under *Article 22* of the food waste law, the law expressly forbids producing any video or audio information on binge eating. Competitive binge eating has become immensely popular on online media platforms in recent years, which promotes unhealthy eating habits and does not match the principles of the Clean Your Plate campaign or the Anti-food Waste Law. Therefore with *Article 30*, video creators on this subject that violates this prohibition can face severe fines between 10,000 and 100,000 RMB (renminbi) (“Anti-Food Waste Law of the People's Republic of China”, 2021).

All things considered, the Anti-food Waste Law’s most cardinal segment is solely targeting catering services and public cafeterias around China while leaving out the citizens under this law. Once again, relying exclusively on the voluntary actions of the public and placing trust in their actions, interest is once again rather familiar with the CYPC I’s *morality-based* campaign characteristics from 2013 (Wang et al., 2022). Despite these specific details and comparisons to the previous regulations, particular findings and dissimilarities are included in the next chapter or the “Findings” about their impact on society and the catering businesses.



### 3.5 Shifting Direction of the Food Waste Law

With the paper's research process, it was possible to witness the Chinese government's strategy clearly showing how the trajectory of the campaign has shifted since 2013. Although under the latest chapters on Hebei's regulation and the national food waste law, we have mainly learned the similarities between the two documents; with further analysis, there were significant dissimilarities regarding their strategies on society.

From a more analytical perspective, the online database used for researching regulations and laws shows that after launching provincial regulations on food waste, the bylaws were put in an experimental stage for future purposes. Considering various similarities, it is clear that the content of articles was created as a foundation for the following years. Although, after years of forgotten measures on food waste in reality, by 2021, the national law began with more serious compulsory actions than the previous policies. Controlling a population of 1,4 billion people around the country required measures from the government that is also assisted by sanctions to reach the desired changes within society. Although these measures and sanctions have a fixated focus group on commercial catering businesses, while almost leave the general public out of these policies (NBSC, 2019; Westcott & Gan, 2020).

It is essential to acknowledge China's recent history of agricultural crises to understand the process of launching regulations and more imperative laws on food waste. In 2019, China came upon an African swine fever outbreak, losing around 40% of the country's pig livestock. Owing to this deficit, meat prices rapidly increased, and the government aimed to import over 40% more pork than the year before to repress the prices of the Chinese market (He, 2019). During this time, the country was not aware of the forthcoming epidemic by the end of 2019. Due to the pandemic, cities were locked down, and businesses had to be closed temporarily or permanently, which caused difficulties in food production, transportation, and import, as well as shattering the supply chain around the country (Westcott & Gan, 2020; OECD, 2020). Due to such strict policies and further lockdowns, many catering businesses could not recover financially from the pandemic even until today (Yurkevich, 2022; Westcott & Gan, 2020).

Through battling COVID-19, in 2020, as mentioned earlier, the country faced one of its worst agricultural crises due to both flooding and drought. Under these three significant factors, Chinese society came across issues that required long-term sacrifices. Timing the launch of the Anti-food Waste Law during the health and agriculture crises was intentionally

sanctioned to adjust and strengthen the system of food security (Feng et al., 2022). Interestingly, the actions behind the policymaking of this law were rather unique. In the current years of Chinese politics, the government has been rather open to consulting with the public before launching a new policy (Kornreich, 2019). Through social media, the government has found its latest platform to reach out to the public and provide them with a relatively open space to discuss environmental issues. Such platform can provide information further to the government from the public's perspective regarding environmental policy-making; but can also result in pressuring the government to respond to these open discussions (Rauchfeisch & Schäfer, 2015; Chen et al., 2016; Popović, 2020). By the second launch of the CYPC and seeing the forming circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, "the growing social movement and the Chinese government" somewhat allied to work together on leftover reduction (Feng et al., 2022, p. 468). With a more closely connected relationship between the public and the government has resulted in allowing the public through surveys and consultations to select the catering sector as the main focus of the Anti-food Waste Law, due to its higher food waste occurrence (Legislative Affairs Committee of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2021). "Online consultation therefore increases, within well-specified limits, information disclosure and public participation in the policymaking process" (Balla, 2017, p. 389).

The Anti-food Waste Law is an integral part of China's food security. With the country's rapid economic development and blooming consumerism, China has been lacking the right instrument to fight food waste. The national food waste law is important because of its detailed selection of measures that aim to reduce leftovers, while also educating future generations on consumer behaviors and environmental issues. Unlike any previous regulations on food waste in China, the food waste law is directly targeting the catering services with juridical instruments and while the public is not directly affected by the law, there is a "twist" within. While the sanctions are directly aimed at restaurants, these sanctions also allow them to carry out measures concerning their customers. Therefore "the general public is *indirectly targeted*, and fines for food waste can be passed to customers by restaurants" (Feng et al., 2022, p. 470). Although these sanctions sound rather profound and were a necessary step from the government, as of today, there are no well-grounded empirical studies on these sanctions' effect on society and the current food waste statistics of China yet. On that account, the Anti-food Waste Law is remaining a subject to be further studied and researched to disclose its effectiveness in a country, where cultural aspects are still a

dominant factor when it comes to consumerism. Therefore the paper elaborated on the Anti-food Waste Law's potentials and possible limitations for a deeper understanding.

#### 4. Discussion

For the discussion, I will start by addressing the first part of my two-folded research question, which is: *What is the purpose of these “traditional values” within the Clean Your Plate Campaign?* With this in mind, it is important to remember that Xi Jinping and the government have proceeded with a plan of “rejuvenating” China with its own “Chinese characteristics” since 2012 (Xi, 2012, Xi, 2022). “Consequently, the CCP now depicts itself as the inheritor and promoter of the purified ‘essence of traditional culture’, to achieve the so-called rejuvenation and therefore the ‘China Dream’” (Miao, 2020, p. 173). Meaning, they have used “traditional values” as part of a political tool to influence the nation’s moral senses to, in turn, achieve the so-called rejuvenation, or the “Chinese Dream”. (Miao, 2020). Throughout this study, it was found that various political posters and short films advertise CSVs, e.g., within the China Dream campaign (Miao, 2020). Similarly, the CYPC’s strategy has applied these “traditional values” to influence and cultivate people’s food-wasting habits. Thus, the purpose of these values is to provide moral guidance on food waste.

The second part of the research question is more comprehensive and invites a larger discussion: *Can “traditional values” morally impact younger generations to be more environmentally cautious and change their food-wasting behaviors?* To discuss this, I will first prompt two important points. Firstly, research conducted on food waste in China, or even in Asia is still insufficient (Liao, 2018), while studies on the younger generations’ food waste behavior are even more scarce (Tsai et al., 2020). Despite this, the thesis is yet built upon the young generations’ food waste behavior, instead of the original approach of involving adults’ consumption and food waste habits. The decision to take such an approach was primarily based on currently available information from online media platforms and sources, where the younger generation is more prevalent. Therefore, the second part of my research question will not be able to answer its relevance to adults (to a large degree), but mostly for the young generations.

Secondly, the Chinese government has centered its attention around the catering sector, mainly because the majority of waste is caused by restaurant businesses and due to the complexity of analyzing the current status of household waste (Feng et al., 2022). While the

government has been pursuing to limit food waste by sanctions, the general public remains mostly uninvolved. Nevertheless, although the CYPC I and CYPC II do differ based on the second campaign's sanctions; in 2022 the initiative is still greatly relying on the trust of Chinese society and carries the same pattern of "traditional values". Based on Miao (2020)'s study on the use of CSVs, or "traditional values", "they present a homogenized and romanticized idea of China's past and seek to establish a hegemonic discourse of how to build China's future" (Miao, 2020, p. 172). These CSVs carry on a more traditional connotation, whereas media-based information, advertisements, and posters are just as similarly built with more "traditional Chinese characteristics", painting or design styles (Miao, 2020). While people do encounter these short films, and posters daily, based on the connotation of "traditional values", young generations might acknowledge these values, however, the desired effect behind these morals might not connect deeply with younger audiences.

In terms of this—reaching the younger audiences—Ajzen (1991) had a fitting phrase on how people can be influenced: "The more favorable the attitude [...] with respect to a behavior, [...] the stronger should be an individual's intention to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). Attitude can thus be understood as a crucial factor when trying to impact the younger generations food wasting habits. With China's economic development, society has been more aware of the price of such a fast-paced development. There have been some reported changes in people's attitudes from young adulthood age groups in recent years. More specifically showcasing changes in consciousness about environmental issues and their protection. Although the cause for this change is not transparent, it has been found that early adulthood consumers have shown positive attitude changes toward leftover reduction mainly due to their concerns about environmental protection (Tsai et al., 2020). However, people in their early adulthood have also gained great *independence*, and as a result, their *subjective norm* can decide whether the cause is worth feeling obliged to contribute to, or not (Zhang et al., 2019).

As mentioned, the cause for this change is not clear, but we see that media-based platforms and information have been among the most efficient ways to promote the participation of leftover reduction. Although it was not found if "traditional values" were the drivers behind impacting younger people's attitudes, it could be that simply the online presence of the CYPC made an indirect influence on their environmental consciousness. This argument is founded on that internet usage has shown unseen heights in current years ("Survey indicates serious mobile-phone addiction among Chinese", 2019), and young

generations are largely impacted by media, and their internet and social media usage. Moreover, studies have proven that university students are more receptive to media-based information on food waste, and can have a great effect on their leftover reduction behavior (Wang et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2019). While CYPC posters became a common tool, there is arguably a higher possibility for students to change their subjective norms by information seen online that will make them reflect based on environmental consciousness, and not by ideological “socialist core values”, or “traditional values”. I would therefore hypothesize that students have a low tendency to be pressured into an attitude change only based on “traditional values” that are presented through Frames such as non-digital posters, newspapers, and other media. Furthermore, the Chinese government would potentially benefit from implementing a higher usage of *environmental and food safety issues* into the CYPC’s strategy to reach broader audiences from all age groups, and not solely focus on using ideological aspects to influence people.

Studies have shown that education on environmental issues and sustainable development can make a lasting impact on consumer and environmental behaviors. However, the Chinese government has not, to a large degree, been presenting the actuality of environmental issues or the consequences of food waste in their campaigning practices. Thus, in theory, with the application of presenting the negative effects of food waste and the environmental issues it can cause, the campaign could potentially influence society on their leftover reduction behavior and build positive moral values surrounding food waste (Liao et al., 2018).

However, research has also found that a higher educational level can result in both higher environmental awareness (Zhang et al., 2018), and increased food waste, due to the possibility that higher education presumably comes with higher income. Furthermore, the affluent lifestyle that has become more prominent in China has proven to be one of the main drivers behind food waste behavior, mainly due to dining outside instead of at home (Bai et al., 2010; Qian et al., 2021; Liao et al., 2018). Mianzi culture is also arguably a great driver behind leaving leftovers in case of multiple guests as well. In this case, using “traditional values” could potentially be a source to influence people to change this Mianzi culture, however, due to lacking evidence showcasing the success of the ten-year-old CYPC, it is questionable if promoting “traditional values” can change people’s habits. Likely, different approaches must be utilized e.g., laws and regulations, using different media approaches, having a different substance or message (as opposed to traditional values), and probably catering services will need to pay attention to details and create new ideas, solutions for their

customers to make them more comfortable, e.g. by offering *discreet options* to take their leftovers home once their guests are gone (Stancu et al., 2016).

Also, restaurant businesses have not been commonly implementing additional information into their menus based on dish sizes, calories, allergens, or even photos of the meals, thus customers could be aware of the details of their orders (Yamada et al., 2017). According to Zhang et al. (2018)'s study, it has proven that placing leaflets about food waste on menus or dining tables at restaurants are more likely to be noticed by people with higher education or with farming experience. On the other hand, people who are aged over 40 have a less tendency to acknowledge such information. However, defining the tendency of food waste based on age is rather complex due to the variety of other factors that potentially could influence personal food waste habits.

Nonetheless, studies on children aged from and above kindergarten have shown promising results for the future. Educating children from a very young age on farming and nature can develop their cognitive skills and inspire the development of pro-environmental behaviors and consciousness (Ardoin & Bowers, 2020). On that account, the Chinese government's second campaign does demonstrate promising features within their aim of introducing children to nature and food production. Similarly, referring back to Tsai et al. (2020)'s article on pilot university projects, this article might provide insight into China's forthcoming years on food waste initiatives and laws. Even though the Anti-food Waste Law does not refer to the general public by policies directly, it does represent a shifting direction in contrast to CYPC I, which has raised a possible theory during the paper's research. Despite the fact that Tsai et al. (2020)'s article describes the common practice of pilot projects at universities, it has not been discovered during this research if the CCP has made similar steps toward policymaking in connection to food waste laws at Chinese universities. However, I hypothesize that the current Anti-food Waste Law is the first stage of food waste policy-making in China that could provide the government with sufficient data and statistics on the efficiency and participation of society. Therefore, through improvements of the latest law, the government could acquire higher efficiency regarding future projects on consumer food waste in China.

## 5. Conclusion

By 2023, the Clean Your Plate Campaign will be officially a decade old. Considering the CYPC's transformation from a purely social trust-based initiative to a campaign that is now assisted by sanctions, such as the Anti-food Waste Law, the campaign showcases the efforts being made by the government toward a more sustainable future. Through academic literature and available statistics on food waste in China, this paper presented the campaign's opportunities and limitations as of today. Even though food waste policies are in place, the general public still requires experts' insights and help to create relevant projects and strengthen educational plans on environmental studies.

Due to COVID-19 and China's "Zero-COVID" policy, the paper had its shortcomings. Purely online-based studies have their limitations, nevertheless, this research has also been founded on both academic materials and media-based information. While the possibility of bias existed due to government-controlled Chinese media, the paper attempts to provide a critical analysis throughout the research to maintain validity. While the original approach of the paper would have focused on the general public's, mainly adults' food waste behavior, due to the limitations of online-based media, the topics' angle has shifted towards younger generations' consumer habits. On that account, the subjects of "traditional values" and the focus on children have created a great contrast throughout the study, resulting in diverse findings and insights on China's limitations, and possibilities for controlling food waste.

Most importantly, this research was able to provide answers to the paper's two-folded research question regarding the CCP's popularly used CSVs, or the so-called traditional values. CSVs have been a key instrument for the government to impact Chinese society by claiming that these "core socialist values" serve people with "guidelines" on how to behave based on the CSVs (Miao, 2020). Therefore, through government-published articles and speeches, with the help of these "guidelines", China could achieve its desired "China Dream". By collecting relevant materials from government-run websites, with the guidance of framing analysis, the paper has been able to determine that both posters, catchphrases, and advertisements are used by the government as framing approaches to build a connection with their target audience. Although it became apparent that while catchphrases were able to gain the attention of young people, it seems due to a rather "*old-fashioned*" *campaigning style* and design, these frames cannot build the desired connection with younger generations. As discussed previously, these "traditional values" and their related campaigns carry a

combination of Confucian classics and socialist ideologies. As a result, it was found that “traditional values” under the CYPC have not been the right tool to cultivate the young generations’ attitude towards leftover reduction.

While the paper presented the current limitations of the CYPC, it also collected possible solutions concerning gaining the attention of younger audiences, or how to limit food waste at canteens, and restaurants. Recent studies have shown that education plays a significant part in acquiring a lasting effect on students’ environmental consciousness. Providing children with early education on environmental issues, protection, and the consequences of food waste on food safety had the potential of influencing their attitude towards food waste and raise awareness of their actions on environmental protection. Furthermore, canteen management should take into consideration individual serving sizes, or different portion sizes based on age groups in elementary schools. Also, at restaurants, menus should provide additional information, or a photo, of their meals, so people will not waste food based on expectations, or unsatisfactory orders.

All things considered—approaches and insights offered by academic studies and this paper’s understanding of current limitations of institutions’ canteens—the Chinese government could possibly apply experts’ knowledge on catering management practices to improve catering based on students’ needs. Additionally, based on China’s substantial number of students, questionnaires could perhaps be an efficient and cost-effective source of information to discover dietary necessities and current deficiencies at canteens from students’ point of view.

In summary, the research’s key takeaways are the two previously discussed hypotheses:

- 1. I hypothesize that students have a low tendency to be pressured into an attitude change only based on “traditional values” that are presented through Frames such as non-digital posters, newspapers, and other media.*
- 2. I hypothesize that the government should rely on online media to a larger degree than in current practices to approach and impact age groups in more versatile ways.*

From my research it is apparent that insufficient research on food waste in China is a concern, especially when considering the possible benefits of providing China with information and statistics that could help them make decisions that potentially could help



them influence a broader audience. Thus, I propose these hypotheses as possible future research areas which would be excellent research subjects for fieldwork in China to study both the efficiency of the “traditional values” on society and of the national food waste law.

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