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Veg*n advocacy and sustainability transitions in the Sino-cultural sphere

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PO Box 117
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Foodscares of Civil Society

Contemporary Sino-cultural meatless foodscares are in flux. This dissertation comparatively examines social change 'and', 'with, as well as 'through' food through the emerging 'new' vegan and plant-forward movements found in Taiwan and China. While these Sinophone societies feature long established meatless foodways tied to Buddhist and Daoist practices, a new generation of veg*n (inclusive of vegan and vegetarian) is leading a significant process of socio-cultural transformation around veg*n dietary and lifestyle choices through secular approaches that increasingly foreground issues of animal ethics, health, and sustainability.

Focusing on the assemblages of human and nonhuman actors at play, this study highlights the role of veg*n organizations, new media, meatless markets, veg*n restaurants, and plant-based meat innovations reshaping regional foodscares. While this phenomenon reflects the globalization of veganism, this dissertation argues that the cases of China and Taiwan foreground distinct processes of material-semiotic and moral translations where veg*nism is being disentangled from its traditionally religious or strict spiritual associations, while being actively entangled with broader domestic and planetary projects of plant-based modernity and food systems sustainability.

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Foodscares of Civil Society

Foodscapes of Civil Society

Veg*n advocacy and sustainability transitions in the
Sino-cultural sphere

Gina (Chih-lan) Song Lopez



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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract: This dissertation is about social change 'and', 'with', as well as 'through' food. It examines the rise and expansion of novel approaches to veganism and plant-based lifestyles in the Sino-cultural sphere by foregrounding the assemblage of actors (human and nonhuman) at the forefront of this phenomenon. While East Asia, and more specifically Sinophone societies like China and Taiwan, have long-established meatless foodways, these have predominantly been tied to religious and spiritual traditions, particularly Buddhism and Daoism. Against this backdrop, a new generation of veg*ns (inclusive of vegans and vegetarians) is increasingly engaged in dietary and lifestyle advocacy that builds on secular narratives such as animal ethics, health, and sustainability. Drawing from interdisciplinary discussions on food studies, social movements, and sustainability transitions, but grounded in Asian Studies, this dissertation presents a compilation of four papers that foregrounds a foodscape in flux. It directs attention to the role of a diverse assemblage of actors that include the founding of veg*n organizations, the growth of vegan 'new media' accounts and platforms, the emergence of meatless markets and fairs, the proliferation of trendy veg*n and plant-based restaurants, and the inception of the next-generation of plant-based meat alternatives in shaping contemporary Sino-cultural veg*nisms. At first glance, these developments may appear to follow the globalization of veganism and plant-based diets as a trend. However, the cases of veg*n advocacy in China and Taiwan offer unique comparative insights into local processes of socio-cultural and political translation. Within these processes, meatless diets are being disentangled from their traditionally religious or strict spiritual associations, while being actively entangled with broader domestic and planetary projects of plant-based modernity and food systems sustainability.

Key words: Taiwan, China, Veganism, Plant-based, Sustainability, Animal Rights, Lifestyle, Foodways, Foodscape, Food Systems

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Veg*n advocacy and sustainability transitions in the
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Paper 4 © 2026 Gina Song Lopez (Unpublished Manuscript)

Cover image by Herbibobo Creative Studio, Taiwan.

The artist used the concept of a board game to represent foodscapes, framing a narrative in which food choices reshape the landscape. As people shift toward more plant-based diets, animals are freed from the livestock industry, and the land itself is transformed.

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MADE IN SWEDEN 

To my father Song Ming-Foo

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List of Papers

Paper 1

Song Lopez, G., 2025. Going Weigen: Animal Advocacy and Sustainability Intersections under Taiwan's New Vegan Movement. *International Journal of Taiwan Studies* (October), <https://doi.org/10.1163/24688800-20251412>

Paper 2

Song Lopez, G., 2026. Going Plant-Forward? Dietary publics and plant-based lifestyle advocacy in contemporary China. *Asian Studies Review* (January), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2025.2597990>

Paper 3

Song Lopez, G. and Linné, T., Accepted manuscript. Dreaming of plant-based meat? Veg*n traditions and future food imaginaries in the Sino-cultural sphere, in *Transforming MEAT: Reducing, Replacing and Refining Meat Use*, ed. Sophia Efstathiou. Earthscan-Routledge.

Paper 4

Song Lopez, G., Unpublished manuscript. We have always been 'Going Veg': Plant-based lifestyles, moral translation, and ecological modernity in China and Taiwan.

Authorship statements

Paper 1

Single author article.

Paper 2

Single author article.

Paper 3

Co-authored chapter with Tobias Linné.

GSL: Research design (90%); Data collection (100%);

Theoretical/conceptual framework (80%); Analysis (80%); Writing (80%)

TL: Research design (10%); Theoretical/conceptual framework (20%);

Analysis (20%); Writing (20%).

Paper 4

Single author manuscript.

Note on Chinese characters

This dissertation kappa predominantly favours traditional Chinese characters (trad. 繁體字) over simplified Chinese characters (simp. 简体字) due to the author's paternal heritage and previous educational background based in Taiwan. However, any references to original simplified Chinese sources including names or terms have been kept and identified for clarity.

The articles comprising this compilation work employ either traditional or simplified characters, depending on publication outlets. For discussions engaged with Taiwan studies, such as Paper 1, it employs traditional characters, while for discussions engaged with China studies, such as Paper 2, it adheres to simplified Chinese. In the case of discussions pertaining to the wider Sino-cultural context, such as Papers 3 and 4, the text favours traditional Chinese with the exception of acknowledging relevant differences in terminology and diverging character usage.

Chinese names, organizations, and keywords are first introduced with their English translation, followed by their Chinese characters in parenthesis. Usage of Pinyin is employed where relevant or deemed necessary by the author.

Examples:

- *su shi* (素食)
- Environment and Animal Society of Taiwan (台灣動物社會研究會)

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It is generally agreed that doing a PhD and writing a doctoral dissertation is a deeply personal endeavour. Nonetheless, it also “takes a village.” I think that applies equally to human children, to various nonhuman animal groups, and to this specific example of a “brainchild.”

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Abbreviations

AP	Animal Peptalk
ARATS	Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits
AV	Anonymous for the Voiceless
CAS	Critical Animal Studies
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CEVA	Centre for Effective Vegan Advocacy
CSSTA	Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement
CVS	China Vegan Society
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EAST	Environment and Animal Society of Taiwan
GFF	Good Food Fund
KMT	Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)
KITA	Kindness to Animals
LCA	Life Conservationist Association
MFM	Meat Free Monday
NMF	No Meat Festival
NPP	New Power Party
PBM	Plant-based Meat
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHDRI	Sustainable Healthy Diets Research Institute
SMS	Social Movement Studies
STS	Science and Technology Studies
TVF	Taiwan Vegan Frenzy
TAEA	Taiwan Animal Equality Association
Veg*n	Vegan and/or vegetarian.

1 About the Menu: Introduction

1.1 Foodways, foodscapes, and food systems

I have, somewhat accidentally, ended up with a tiny collection of vegan cookbooks. It is an outcome of encountering them throughout my doctoral project, and these books eventually becoming their own sources of a different type of insight for my research. After all, this is a dissertation about food and social change in the Sino-cultural sphere. I shall elaborate on this conceptual region later. For now, what matters is that the book that started this collection was published by the Taiwanese vlogger couple behind ‘Veggie Deer’ (野菜鹿鹿), a YouTube channel launched in 2020, which represents a cohort of digitally savvy practitioners engaged in social media-based vegan advocacy. Published in 2021, their book ‘Versatile Plant-based Meat’ (植物肉百搭料理) was the first vegan recipe collection extensively dedicated to plant-based meat dishes in Taiwan (Lubi & Xiaoye, 2021)¹. More importantly, this book captures the particular zeitgeist that gave birth to this doctoral research project.

At the end of 2018, the Economist’s edition of ‘The World in 2019’ forecasted that the last year of the 2010s would mark the point when veganism and plant-based food products would finally go mainstream (Parker, 2018). This prediction was incidentally followed by the release of the then widely publicized Food in the Anthropocene report by the EAT-Lancet Commission in January 2019. The report positioned the adoption of predominantly plant-based diets at the centre of health and sustainability goals (Willett et al., 2019). This was an argument further cemented with the subsequent publication of the Special Report on Climate Change and Land by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which outlined the necessity to urgently realize a dietary shift where the adoption of plant-based diets could play a significant role in mitigation efforts (IPCC, 2019). In tandem with these developments and building on the urgency for dietary change, alternative proteins such as so-called plant-based meats (PBMs) emerged as a socio-technical innovation,

¹ The authors are published under their publicly known nicknames.

subject to growing advocacy and industry interest, due to their potential to facilitate the transition toward sustainable food futures (Sexton, 2018; Tziva et al., 2020; Mylan, Andrews and Maye, 2023). With this direction, companies such as Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods came to be seen by the media and many advocates as flagship players, heralding the advent of a more sustainable, animal friendly, and healthier foods system (Sexton, Garnett and Lorimer, 2019).

At the same time, in East Asia, the growing international profile of the latest generation of meat substitutes was being mirrored by an emerging base of environmentally and ethically conscious consumers, and a growing number of local producers and investors (the Good Food Institute, 2020; Tseng, 2021; Zhu and Fan, 2022). What is more, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread in 2020, concerns over food safety and health reportedly led to increased interest in meatless diets in China (You, 2020), and a growing demand for plant-based food products in the Asian region (Master, 2020). During this period, major food chains such as Mos Burger began selling the Beyond Burger in Taiwan (Shibata, Chan and Furusawa, 2020), and McDonald's incorporated the plant-based pork product known as Omnipork into its menu in Hong Kong (Chan, 2020). Most notably, Beyond Meat launched its products across KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell in China, and further sought to claim a share of the country's plant-based pork market (S. Ho, 2020; Toh, 2020).

While the hype around plant-based food products was making news during this period, it only told a partial story. In the years leading to these headlines, veg*n advocates and organizations in both Taiwan and China had been laying down a considerable central part of the initial groundwork for these discussions to take off. In Taiwan, the rise of vegan fairs led by a young and active generation of vegans and animal rights advocates had gradually started the conversation on a new wave of veg*nism, changing perceptions of meatless diets along with it (D. Chang, 2016; 2020; Tseng, 2021). The next addition into my cookbook repertoire by Traveggo (找蔬食) launched in 2018 by the vlogger couple Hao and Yang (2018)² is illustrative here. Like Veggie Deer, their work belongs to the same group of 'new media' actors engaging in vegan advocacy. Their book 'Traveggo's Proposals for Meatless and Fully Plant-based Simple Meals' (找蔬食Traveggo無肉全植簡單提案), released in 2020, employs two converging perspectives: that of a meat eater turned vegan 'for love', and that of a vegetarian since birth (胎裡素, *tai li su*), who came to embrace veganism based on animal rights and environmentalism. This piece is

² The authors are also published under these publicly known nicknames, in English.

significant in its efforts to introduce the concept of veganism as a lifestyle choice to a wider Taiwanese public. The book also delves into other areas of conscious consumption, including cruelty-free beauty, sustainable fashion, and low-carbon living.

Meanwhile in China, similar progress had been taking shape. Following China's deep-reaching economic reforms and liberalization, vegetarianism had been undergoing a revival with a growing base of practitioners citing an increasingly wider range of issues, including self-cultivation, health, environmental concerns, and animal ethics among their motivations (Liu, Cai and Zhu, 2015; Klein, 2017; Cao, 2018). Along with these developments, a new set of actors led by a younger and urban demographic, the spread of vegetarian media, and the founding of new organizations began taking a more active approach to the promotion of veg*n diets (Fu, 2017; Zhou, 2017; Jian, 2020; Hind, 2021). An illustrative moment of this was when I found an addition to my accidental cookbook collection. The book was on the bookshelves of the Tsinghua University branch of *Tianchu Miaoxiang* (天厨妙香), a Chinese vegetarian banquet-style restaurant in Beijing,³ where a fun and modern-looking cover titled 'We decide to eat more vegetables' (simp. 我们决定多吃菜)⁴ caught my eye. It turned out to be a collection of 34 personal stories and recipes featuring China's modern generation of veg*ns, compiled and published in 2017 by VegPlanet (素食星球), an online platform promoting veganism on WeChat since 2013. I was later able to obtain probably the last and very beat-up copy of the book that the platform's CEO had to hand.⁵

Although the expansion of veganism through sustainability, health, and animal ethics discourses seemed to have so far been developing in a positive direction around the world, it was also not difficult to miss that, by 2023, the sentiment around plant-based meats had taken a different direction with regard to market expectations, a turn that coincided with the start of the last half of my doctoral project. Within this period, suddenly the story circulated around PBMs in mainstream business media became one of unfulfilled potential and failed promises (Shanker, 2023). In China, the successful organization of 'Meat Festival' (simp. 肉类节) by a Shanghai-based vegan group in 2019, showcasing both China's own tradition of meat replacement products and the new generation of plant-based meats, was noted as a sign of a 'meatless

³ Eat-along, 4 July 2023.

⁴ English title translation by publisher.

⁵ Eat-along, 9 July 2023.

revolution' beginning to take shape in an article on the online magazine known as Sixth Tone (Chow, 2019). Yet in 2023, just a few days after I attended a vegan pop-up market in Shanghai, this time held by the vegan e-commerce platform EcoBuyer (一棵)⁶, another article in the same outlet painted a different picture to what I had gleaned from the event. The piece echoed the pessimistic global outlook around PBMs, describing local start-up failures and poor sales performances (Ye, 2023). The entire situation was puzzling. While veg*nism was, and still is, seemingly becoming more widely practiced, and advocates have been making important strides in expanding the movement in the region, PBMs have been reportedly struggling to meet consumption expectations. So, what was going on?

The shape of a missing piece began forming as I continued attending vegan events in 2023, talking to practitioners, and engaging with the digitally embedded lifeworld of veg*nism. Yet ultimately, I again found the answer in cookbooks. Split between two to be precise. One was Hannah Che's (2022) award winning⁷ *The Vegan Chinese Kitchen*. The other was George Lee's (2024) *A-Gong's Table*. These books contained an entirely different discussion on vegan food from what I had seen so far. To begin with, they are written in English and primarily intended for a Western audience. As such, their aim is not to introduce the concept of veganism or illuminate new approaches to meatless or plant-based diets to a local Chinese or Taiwanese population. Rather, they are centred on personal projects, that of a Chinese American and a foreign educated Taiwanese, to rediscover heritage and explore culinary roots through already existing plant-based foods and consumption practices. In short, they are about food culture, they are about engaging with traditionally meatless foodways such as Buddhist cuisine, and the distinct approaches to vegetarianism found in Chinese and Taiwanese practices. That was the missing, and very much cornerstone, piece of my research puzzle.

The resulting picture can be summarized as follows. This study is particularly interested in the specific intersection between three distinct types of phenomena: civil society and social movements, food production and consumption, and sustainability transitions. In other words, it navigates across the three dimensions through which the link between food and social change has been commonly abstracted into foodways, foodscapes, and food systems. As further elaborated:

⁶ Participant observation, 3 June 2023.

⁷ 2023 James Beard Foundation Award.

Foodways, defined by anthropologist and Editor-in-Chief of Food and Foodways, Carole Counihan (2018, p.2), as the “the beliefs and behaviour surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food”. It encompasses cultural, social, and economic practices embedded in food traditions such as cuisine, dietary taboos, and seasonal or celebratory feasts. Foodways embody the symbolic and everyday significance of food, linking identity, heritage, and history.

Foodscapes, in turn, can be understood as the spatial, environmental, or geographical manifestation of foodways (Yasmeen, 1996; 2023). It comprises the places and spaces where food is produced, accessed, consumed, and experienced, and where we as eaters, diners, consumers, “generally gather some sort of meaning from food” (MacKendrick, 2014, p.16). Since its inception, ‘foodscape’ has been treated in a widely fluid and interdisciplinary manner. However, as Vonthron, Perrin and Soulard (2020) have extensively reviewed, the application of the concept can be grouped into four main approaches: 1) Spatial, which in its more literal sense explores ‘food environments’ through infrastructures of access such as restaurants, food retail, and markets, and their effect on diet and health. 2) Social and cultural, which zoom into the ‘people-food-territory’ nexus to highlight the social construction involved in food culture, issues of food justice, and everyday food consumption. It also includes aspects such as food media and traditional knowledges. 3) Behavioural, which is concerned with consumer preferences, choices, and literacy through the configuration of food consumption via institutions, home, and retail spaces. And finally, 4) Systemic, which poses critical questions to global food regimes and food supply chains by focusing on aspects such as alternative food networks, policy, and agricultural localities.

Food systems, that is, the macro-view of the interconnected actors and activities involved in the production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food; which includes agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and food industries, as well as the broader economic, societal, and natural environments that influence these systems (von Braun, 2021).

In the context of this thesis, the concept of foodscape is understood as the middle ground between foodways and food systems, and where a socio-cultural approach serves as a vantage point from which to observe the intersection between everyday veg*n practices and meanings, and wider systemic processes informing the plant-based food transition.

1.2 Entanglements, assemblages, and translations

This dissertation is the result of a doctoral research project embedded within Asian Studies that is both contemporarily focused and interdisciplinarily oriented. To be precise, it is first and foremost concerned with examining a currently ongoing phenomenon located in the geographical area that is Asia. And more specifically, East Asia, zoomed into the region that I refer to as the ‘Sino-cultural sphere’ defined further below, to provide a contextually rich analysis. The interdisciplinarity that informs this study draws from a social sciences and humanities repertoire that primarily engages with Food Studies, Social Movement Studies (SMS), and Sustainability Studies based on the dissertation’s topical focus on veg*n movements, their work fostering dietary and lifestyle change, and the role of this type of socio-cultural shift in sustainability transitions centred on food. These interconnected processes are viewed under the lenses of Science and Technology Studies (STS), supplemented with the critical filters of Vegan Studies, and a sensibility from stemming Critical Animal Studies (CAS).

Ultimately, and drawing from such a broad interdisciplinary disposition, this project comprises an intellectual exercise in aligning different theoretical-methodological strands and synthesizing them into an analytical discussion that cuts across the three aforementioned dimensions through which food and social change are examined. To be specific, it builds on a material-semiotic approach that combines Food Studies and STS to put the materialities, meanings, moralities, and advocacy actors entangled in the process between foodways and social change into view. This is, at the same time, viewed through a predominantly Habermasian interpretation of New Social Movements to centre on the assemblage of social, political, and economic actors shaping contemporary Sino-cultural veg*n foodscapes, and thus engaging with SMS, as well bringing in insights from Vegan Studies and CAS. This ultimately ties this project’s treatment of Food Studies and SMS into Sustainability Studies under the umbrella of an Area-Studies informed approach to STS, as the previously discussed phenomena become operationalized as socio-technical translations towards food system sustainability. In this process, the assemblage of human/non-human actors, by way of Chinese and Taiwanese civil society and social movements, are coming to enact specific entanglements (and disentanglement) as they translate veg*nism into a contemporary and modern practice in the Sino-cultural context.

I shall delve further into the definitions of these concepts and terms, the theories and approaches they relate to, and the dynamics of interaction between

the distinct fields of study that they stem from as I discuss the theoretical, methodological, and analytical underpinnings of this project in their respective chapters.

1.2.1 Interdisciplinarity and scope

As this study is an exercise in bridging across different disciplinary fields into a hopefully coherent discussion, it must be noted that in practice these components not only operate on different levels in relation to foodways, foodscapes, and food systems, but they have also largely stayed within entirely different academic discussions, although sometimes they have come to interact more closely by being at odds. This last matter is perhaps most notable in the way that the potential of plant-based meats to contribute to a more sustainable food system within Sustainability Studies discussions (Vinnari and Vinnari, 2014; Tziva et al., 2020) has been met with growing concerns regarding the rise of ‘Plant-based Capitalism’ or ‘Big Veganism’ by scholars who apply a Critical Animal Studies lens to Science and Technology Studies (Giraud, 2021; Sexton, Garnett and Lorimer, 2022). At the crossroads between Vegan Studies and Food Studies, these tensions are well illustrated by wider debates regarding the definition of veganism and the weight of moral and ethical arguments in the mainstream adoption of meatless diets and lifestyles (Dutkiewicz and Dickstein, 2021; North et al., 2021). Yet perhaps even more telling is the overarching lack of more critical stances regarding the role and agency of the non-human in global sustainability pursuits as framed by the Agenda 2030 regime, such as in the case of non-human animals and nature (Strang, 2017; Kopnina, 2021; Schapper and Bliss, 2023). This anthropocentric bias is an issue of equal concern to the sibling fields that are Vegan Studies and Critical Animal Studies, while a call for greater and symmetric attention on non-human actors, or actants, is a known aspect of STS components.

Although the interdisciplinarity of this project opens the possibility to engage in a broad and multidirectional scope, it is first and foremost grounded in Asian Studies and, perhaps more specifically, in the growing meta-field of Global Asian Studies with its focus on inter/global/trans-Asia to engage with the entanglements, tensions, and flows at play (K.H. Chen, 2010; T. Chen, 2021; Sato and Sonoda, 2021). It is these Area Studies-based origins that have allowed for considerable interdisciplinary flexibility, but as in any project of knowledge production, this also requires disclosure of its ontological negotiations, epistemic limitations, and analytical clarifications. Of these, it is important to pre-emptively address three specific points, as they will inform the reading of the remainder of this dissertation:

First, is a negotiation. This project engages with a very broad conceptualization of ‘civil society’ that might not fit ‘traditional’ disciplinary, sociological, or political science oriented definitions of the third sector in the sense that it takes on a more inclusive approach to some market elements. This is both by design and necessity. It is deliberate in the sense that the interdisciplinary underpinnings of this project, and particularly its STS leanings, have led to an expanded understanding of what constitutes an ‘actor’; in turn, making space for the inclusion of human and non-human entities in its understanding of civil society.

It is also a result of adaptive needs, which have different origins but ultimately related justifications. On one hand, goal alignments between civil society and the private sector do happen. These alliances have been previously conceptualized as “technology-and product-oriented movements” (Hess, 2005) and pertain to instances when such actors come together to promote alternative technologies, products, and policies. These dynamics are becoming increasingly visible within some niches connected to the environmental movement, such as those promoting wind energy or organic foods (Hess, 2005; Smith, 2007). More pertinently, this type of movement-market alliance is characteristic of a sector of the animal advocacy movement which supports the development of alternative protein technologies and the growth of its industry (Hall, 2025). Conversely, alternative protein companies have also come to position themselves as movement actors, pursuing systemic change as disruptors within the food industry (Chaput and Paulsson, 2023). What is more, movement-market alliances are a common feature found on both sides of the Strait, as further discussed in this study. That being said, these alliances are certainly not free from tensions and problematizations, as clearly noted in arguments against the capitalistic co-optation of veganism (Jones and Sanbonmatsu, 2024). Nevertheless, it is important to start by acknowledging that such alliances do exist, and that they might have a role to play in instances where more radical approaches to activism are not possible.

This last point is particularly relevant to the other justification for this project’s flexible treatment of ‘civil society’ as a concept, which is directly connected to its comparative aims. In short, this project compares veg*n advocacy across China and Taiwan. However, traditional definitions of civil society and social mobilization are subject to considerable debate when applied to examinations of China due to the prevalence of state control on matters of social organization. Nevertheless, and despite the challenges, a great wealth of scholarship remains concerned with Chinese social actors’ ability to navigate, create, and maintain space for civil society (Benney and Marolt, 2015; Gleiss, Sæther and Fürst, 2019; Qiaoan, 2021; O’Brien, 2023). Among such

approaches, the rise of social entrepreneurship and start-ups as bridges between social change and state-approved socio-economic innovation to achieve social goals are of distinct note (Yu, 2016; J. Wang, 2019). Certainly, there are caveats to the optimism that such developments might suggest, as well. This is also partially why this dissertation focuses on the type of social actors involved in promoting veg*nism and plant-based lifestyles who can be described as ‘advocates’ rather than ‘activists’.

Second, is a limitation. Although this project cannot claim to be a product of feminist scholarship per se, as it does not directly address patriarchal structures nor employ a critical gender lens, it does in practice owe considerable inspiration to the intellectual stock of a variety of feminist scholars ranging from those engaged in feminist technoscience (Haraway, 1985; Barad, 2007), as well as those discussing the travel of women’s human rights norms (Levitt and Merry, 2009) and local trajectories and translations of global feminism (Min, 2016). Nevertheless, while the work of these feminist scholars provided critical insights throughout this project, their voices and influence might not be as prominent in the main research outputs. This is why I must acknowledge their contribution at this point before their contributions ‘get lost’ within the broader discussions advanced in this dissertation. I must also point out that this limitation is in part the result from the difficult balancing task involved in conducting an interdisciplinary research project that required the narrowing down of its scope at some point. However, it is largely because although there is an undeniable link between gender and meatless lifestyle ethics that can be observed both in China and Taiwan, this did not lead to significant discussions among the veg*n actors I encountered or resulted in visible contentions at that point.⁸

Last, is a clarification. This dissertation employs the notion of ‘translation’ quite prominently and in seemingly different ways that include linguistic-ideological, material-semiotic, or socio-technical translation. However, their diverse applications in the present text and their operationalization across the different research outputs of this dissertation all have a common logic stemming from this project’s engagement with STS. More specifically, its foregrounding of ‘translation’ as an analytical framework to explain the dynamic of power across heterogeneous actors (Callon, 1984). As such, this approach to translation is a direct outcome of the study’s concern with the

⁸ Contentious here being the key factor. While I have encountered the occasional vegan feminist in Taiwan or China, their advocacy did not necessarily encompass the two issues for various reasons. This might be changing as noted in the conclusion chapter.

‘globalization’ of veg*nism as it is taking shape in the Sino-cultural context, as elaborated next.

1.3 Research aims and questions

This dissertation is about social change ‘and’, ‘with’, and ‘through’ food. More specifically, it is the result of a doctoral project aiming to provide an alternative account of social change and civil society engagement with sustainability transitions through the case of veg*n advocacy in the Sino-cultural sphere. In doing so, it has been guided by two overlapping aims.

The first is largely empirical, to bring the phenomenon of Taiwan’s and China’s veg*n advocacy to the forefront of discussions pertaining to the role of social actors in bringing about sustainability transformations. While regionally speaking there is an extensive tradition of research on civil society and ecological movements, both in Taiwan and China, less attention has been paid to the development and expansion of veg*nism and the advocacy of plant-based food and lifestyles. In this sense, this project is particularly timely as social interest in veganism, vegetarianism, and plant-forward diets has taken off in recent years in connection to sustainability. On the other hand, and from a global perspective, scholarly inquiries of vegetarianism and veganism have come to develop into a distinct field of international academic interest (Ruby, 2012; L. Wright, 2017). Within these lines of inquiry, non-Western and more culturally diverse accounts are only beginning to enter the discussion (L. Wright, 2021). What is more, while there has been attention on the rise of vegetarianism in China, less has been discussed about Taiwan, and even less in terms of a Sino-cultural comparative perspective. This study has sought to fill these various gaps, highlighting the existence of a significant niche of veg*n advocacy in China, foregrounding the rise of Taiwan’s vegan movement among a highly active civil society landscape, and providing a much needed comparative take on the globalization of veg*nism based on Sino-cultural perspectives. This final comparative element is at the same time directly connected to the other aim of this project.

That second aim is both theoretical and methodological, along the lines of ‘middle-range’ approaches (Merton, 1968) in Area/Asian Studies and calls to produce, and to defend production, of theoretical, conceptual, and methodological insight from the region and societies being studied (K.H. Chen, 2010; Mielke and Wilde, 2017; Jackson, 2018). This is particularly pressing at a time when globalization is at the centre of various contentions spanning from

nationalistic and anti-democratic turns to the planetary climate crisis. Although this project does not aspire to produce any paradigm-shifting theoretical insights, it does hope that the stories and trajectories of veg*n advocacy in the Sino-cultural sphere can offer conceptual insights based on the efforts of ‘glocal’ actors operating in the middle. As such, this study is methodologically aligned with Chen Kuan-Hsing’s (2010) proposed strategy of ‘inter-referencing’. The comparisons at the heart of this project are not made in terms of comparing Western veg*nism and Chinese or Taiwanese veg*nism, but by positioning both China and Taiwan as co-equal points of reference to favour mutual contextualization. Thus, focusing on the multiple local and regional flows that shape globalization processes, zooming in on the dynamics of contact, friction, and translation within Sino-cultural contexts.

Considering the aforementioned scope and aims, as well as the theoretical-methodological inclinations of this study, this project has been guided by the following overarching question:

*What are the features of contemporary approaches to veg*nism and plant-based lifestyles in the Sino-cultural sphere, and how are they engaged in sustainability transitions?*

This question is supplemented by three interconnected threads of inquiry:

- a) Who are the actors informing the adoption of new practices and meanings surrounding veg*nism and plant-based lifestyles?
- b) How does contemporary veg*n advocacy integrate global trends, such as animal ethics and sustainability, with localizations that engage pre-existing meatless practices?
- c) Does the process of mainstreaming veg*nism led by movement actors differ between Taiwan and China? What are the factors that inform these differences or similarities?

1.4 Defining the Sino-cultural sphere

This doctoral research project locates the contemporary ‘Sino-cultural sphere’ as its area of interest and study. The term might fairly be inferred to mean something along the lines of ‘related to Chinese culture and the spatial,

physical, or imagined reach of its influence’. However, any thorough academic exercise requires that this term, which is central to this dissertation by virtue of being in the title, be properly unpacked and problematized where applicable. For starters, this study approaches the Sino-cultural sphere as a socio-cultural construction to navigate the geo-political underpinnings that characterize the region primarily comprised by the geographical entities that are: Taiwan, officially known as the Republic of China (ROC); and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which includes the area often referred to as ‘Mainland China’ (中國大陸), along with the special administrative regions that are Hong Kong and Macau. For the purposes of this project, the focus is on developments taking place in ‘Mainland China’ (hereafter China) and Taiwan. The choice of employing the ‘Sino-cultural sphere’ as an overarching term in this dissertation is informed by two factors.

First, and foremost, it is a pragmatic terminological choice based on the fact that this project has sought to examine the phenomenon of veg*n advocacy in Taiwan and China through comparison. I go into further detail as to what this entails in the methodological and summary chapters of this kappa. The second factor stems from a combined wealth of discussions which have a common defining concern (Shih, 2011; Engebretsen and Zeng, 2024; Fu, King and Klein, 2025). That is, how to approach the historic socio-cultural, linguistic, religious, and demographic flows originating in the historical point that is present-day China in a way that recognizes the multiplicity and multi-directionality of ‘Sinitic-language cultures’ as they have spread throughout the region and the world via migration and diaspora. The point of this question is to problematize the concept of ‘Chineseness’; to crack it open to explore its ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity and avoid essentializations that might lend themselves to homogenizing imperial, colonial, or nationalistic narratives. This goal is at the heart of the inception of the ‘Sinophone’ as a concept first defined by literary scholar Shu-Mei Shih (2004; 2007; 2011), and which gave rise to Sinophone Studies as an interdisciplinary field to examine issues of culture, language, migration, and identity (Shih, Tsai and Bernards, 2013; Chiang and Shih, 2024). It is also behind recent adaptations of the ‘Sinosphere’ as a ‘methodological standpoint’ advanced by Engebretsen and Zeng (2024), and which considers activist flows, the power of language, and socio-cultural translation underlying the trajectories of globalized movements, such as the feminism and LGBTQ+ rights.

As will become clear throughout this compilation work, an examination of Sino-cultural veg*nism shares similar concerns over a movement’s twists and turns as it undergoes travels and translation in globalizing settings. Yet perhaps closer to the topical focus of this project on matters of food and social change

and its comparative aims, is the definition of ‘Chinese’ in the context of *Modern Chinese Foodways* as outlined by Jia-Chen Fu, Michelle T. King and Jakob A. Klein (2025). They recognize that ‘Chinese’ is a term that exists alongside various contentions, and more importantly, they note that limiting the concept of ‘Chinese’ to a geopolitical unit or geographical place is problematic. Instead, they propose “an alternative vision of ‘Chinese’ identity that does not adhere to the nation-state alone and instead escapes its hegemonic shadow” (p. 12). This exercise is necessary to engage with the way in which what is largely understood as ‘Chinese cuisine’ or ‘Chinese foodways’ is in fact a multifaceted medium, characterized by historical, technological, cultural, political, and migratory entanglements and flows.

Lastly, while the scholarly projects discussed above make a specific point of foregrounding a carefully delineated conceptualization of the ‘Sinophone’ or ‘Chinese’, it cannot be missed that in this specific dissertation work I emphasize the cultural element by virtue of employing the term ‘Sino-cultural’. This emphasis is meant not only to centre the relationship between food and culture, which in this dissertation is articulated as a material-semiotic entanglement; it is also meant to examine and question the Schrodinger-like state of food culture as always being both static and changing at the same time (Dusselier, 2009). In this coupling of food and culture under the banner of a specific dimension of the Sinosphere, perhaps what comes more immediately to mind is K. C. Chang’s (1977) extensive discussions in *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*. However, this project is not really detailed in the way of introducing food habits, foodstuffs, or foodways in the contemporary Sinophone world with a particular focus on meatless or veg*n food cultures. Rather, the purpose of foregrounding culture here is more closely connected to examining the concept of culture (or counter-culture), its role in social movements, and what this translates to into in terms of ‘cultures of care’ by way of ethics or, more precisely, the moralities surrounding the consumption (and production) of food, animals, and the non-human.

1.5 Translating veg*nism

There is no direct translation for ‘veganism’, as widely understood in the Western Anglophone context,⁹ in Chinese. In general, the word *su shi* (素食) is often used as a blanket term encompassing both vegetarian and vegan foods and diets without specification. However, *su shi* is often understood to imply religious practice; more specifically, Buddhist vegetarianism. What is more, meatless food is also referred to as *zhai shi* (齋食) meaning ‘fasting food’, which also hints at the influence of Daoism in such dietary practices (Wong, 2010; Cao, 2018; Tseng, 2018). I shall go into more detail about the connection between religion and Sino-cultural foodways in the background section of this kappa. For now, what is most important to know is the fact that considering the increasing secularization informing vegan and vegetarian diets in the Sino-cultural sphere, some practitioners have come to favour the alternative term of *shu shi* (蔬食), which also does not differentiate between vegan or vegetarian. It is also relevant to note that in recent years the transliteration of vegan as *weigen* (維根) has come to be adopted by some practitioners. However, its usage is limited and mostly employed as a playful colloquialism. Therefore, in the context of this dissertation, the synthetization of ‘vegetarianism and/or veganism’ into *shu shi* is interpreted along the lines of the colloquial term ‘veg*n’¹⁰, which is suitable as a secular and encompassing term for the increasingly diverse understandings of meatless diets in the region. Unless otherwise specified, veg*n will be used to imply this nuance throughout the kappa.

As for the matter of translating ‘vegan’ or veganism to Chinese and *su shi* to English, a main difficulty stems from the fact that norms and usage pertaining to *su shi* itself is not standardized across the Sino-cultural context. In its strictest form, *su shi* only applies to fully vegan food that also excludes the *wuxin* (五辛) or ‘five pungent plants’ (primarily allium plants, such as garlic, onion, chives, shallots, and leeks). Nevertheless, in contemporary lay practice, *su shi* diets generally range from ovo-lacto vegetarian to vegan that adheres to the *wu xin* exclusion rule. Therefore, foods without any animal ingredients but containing *wu xin* are vegan in the western context, but not *su shi*. Conversely, as stated, *su shi* does not necessarily mean ‘vegan’ as it applies to both vegan and vegetarian foods. At the same time, labelling practices and

⁹ Or most commonly as defined by The Vegan Society based in the UK, further discussed in chapter 3.

¹⁰ The usage of this term has appeared in Food Studies journals such as *Appetite*.

laws have come to diverge between Taiwan and China. In Taiwan, strict *su shi* food is most commonly labelled as ‘completely vegetarian/vegan’ (全素, *quan su*) or ‘pure vegetarian/vegan’ (純素, *chun su*) as per the Vegetarian Labelling Law, which is enforced through inspections and fines (Ministry of Health and Welfare, n.d). In China, although terms like *quan su* or *chun su* are also found in use, they do not correspond to the Taiwanese usage. Rather, the term ‘Pure Buddhist’ vegetarian/vegan (純淨素, *chun jing su*, or 淨素, *jing su*) is preferred. In addition, there is no nationally applied vegetarian labelling law. Instead, labels are subject to business discretion and industry-led food standards certification.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the above discussed variations of *su shi* (素食) are, at the end of the day, primarily terms applied to diets and food. Thus, they are somewhat distanced from the broader aspect of ethically and purposely chosen lifestyles or politics. Yet as Giraud (2021) noted, although veganism is more than just a diet, food and diets are still the largest source of everyday animal exploitation. Therefore, working toward dietary change serves as the starting point in the project of animal liberation and environmental justice. In a more purposeful vein, some groups like the China Vegan Society (CVS) have sought to establish a more culturally relevant and inclusive term through the reintroduction and usage of the ancient character *mang* (𣎵), which can be translated as “abundant plants” (China Vegan Society, 2022). Alongside these efforts, the CVS released a culturally relevant certification employing the word that differentiates between Buddhist-friendly and secular vegan foods in 2023 (China Vegan Society, 2023). According to its website, the organization hopes to move toward non-food items, including cosmetics and clothing, in the future (China Vegan Society, n.d.). In Taiwan, the choice of wording has been a matter of confusion and debate until recently. However, vegan, animal rights, and plant-based food advocacy groups have been working towards the inclusion of a new vegan label to be applied nationally (Vegonomist, 2025).

1.6 Positionality

Most, if not all, contemporary cookbooks begin with a tale of their origins. They usually tell stories of heritage, family, and culture. Yet allusions to nation, politics, gender, and everything else might also be found in between the pages that connect recipes (Culver, 2012; Ferguson, 2020). While this project is not part of a cookbook in the literal sense as it neither contains a list

of ingredients nor a step-by-step guide on how to make a dish, it does involve a similar process of inspiration, research, and preparation, as well as many of the same elements of identity, global flows, social change, and personal leanings and experiences that are involved in the making of a memorable meal.

The story behind this particular project began in Paraguay where, as a mixed Chilean-Taiwanese, I grew up as what is known as a ‘Third Culture Kid’ (Pollock, Reken and Pollock, 2017) but also as what used to be commonly referred to as *Huaqiao* 華僑 (Overseas Chinese/Chinese diaspora) in the 1990s-2000s. During the mid-late 2000s,¹¹ a number of Taiwanese vegetarian buffet restaurants began opening around Asunción.¹² At some point, one such venue opened at a shopping mall food court and a group of ‘riot grrrls’¹³ (see: Kristen and Elke, 2008) met one afternoon to put together a fanzine about women’s rights, animal liberation, and veganism. Growing up amongst the Taiwanese diaspora, where there were many Buddhists, I was familiar with the concept of meat avoidance due to religious beliefs. As a teenager involved with the alternative-punk scene, discussions around ethical lifestyles were also common amongst the more socially or politically conscious members of the community. Nothing from this eclectic food court picture really stood out to me. It was simply a part of my everyday life that later became a distant memory. Fast forward a couple of years and a move of thousands of kilometres, I found myself going out for lunch with a group of friends in Brisbane, Australia. It was circa 2010, and the aim was to enjoy a variety of imitation meat dishes at an Asian vegan restaurant that we had found online. This was a veggie-majority university cohort, with students of the social sciences, health sciences, and natural sciences who shared an interest in environmentalism, health, and animals. I later found out that the restaurant was the first Australian location of an international vegan chain affiliated with a religious organization headquartered in Taiwan. Another leap in time and space and I was back on my father’s homeland a few years later. I had wanted to ‘reconnect’ with my Taiwanese roots after university and went on to re-learn Chinese. During this period, I was also very fortunate to experience and observe the socio-cultural and political changes that followed the 2014 Sunflower Movement. I eventually pursued an MA degree there and, more specifically and to my

¹¹ This term has since become contested as Taiwanese identity has risen in prominence, favouring ‘Overseas Taiwanese’ or Taiwanese diaspora in its variations 台灣裔, 台僑、海外台灣人, etc

¹² Paraguay is the only South American country that recognizes the Republic of China (Taiwan) as a sovereign nation-state instead of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

¹³ A feminist movement within the punk rock subculture that emerged in the 1990s.

interests, I noticed how discussions around animal issues began to gain more attention in the public eye and found myself witnessing the emergence of a vegan animal rights movement in the latter half of the 2010s. It was not the same as the folk and Buddhist-influenced vegetarian practices and ‘mercy for animals’ discourses that were culturally prevalent; this was something else.

Now, as a doctoral candidate in East and South-East Asian Studies based at a Swedish institution, I am suddenly recalling those random memories and my personal journey, to reflect on how my identity and positionality has influenced my approach to research and its materialization through this project. After all, not only do I research veg*nism in the Sino-cultural context, but I am also part of the ‘new generation’ of practitioners that embraces the subjective and diverse motivations that I have been studying. Although there is little auto-ethnographical insight involved in this project, I must acknowledge that my own practice and research directions have been evolving as I have come to engage with critical questions in Asian Studies as a ‘partial insider’, become involved in fields like Vegan studies, and joined the Lund University Critical Animal Studies Network (LUCASN). These are fields where the boundaries between research, membership, and practice have either always been blurred, or more recently have become not so clear-cut (Nocella et al., 2014; L. Wright, 2017; 2021; T. Chen, 2021; Sato and Sonoda, 2021). At this point, it is evident that a great amount of privilege and amassed cultural capital is behind the making of this dissertation; that must be acknowledged first and foremost. In this sense, by the lottery of birth and family circumstances, I have enjoyed a unique and particularly advantageous standpoint from which to engage with the elements of globalization, travel, and translation that inform a great proportion of this project. However, as a mixed-race female who is vegan, there has also been experiences of ‘otherness’, being an ‘outsider’, and part of a ‘moral minority’, which contribute some shades of ‘scholar-activism’ (Bashiri, 2024) to this work. This can be noted in the aim of this dissertation to engage with alternative and multi-directional conversations regarding the globalization of veg*nism. It certainly informs its ambition to foreground the work of Sinophone and locally based actors, highlighting their contributions to social change at home, and as part of the broader movement that has come under the global spotlight. Last but not least, the purpose of a positionality statement at this early point of the *kappa* is not to make a point about whether or not I possess some special insights or to make a show of the normative orientations informing the topic of this dissertation. The point is to provide full initial disclosure about the undeniable influence of such personal experiences and views on the trajectory that this project has taken and, once laid out in the open, to engage in reflexivity and make sure to ask questions about them even

when the answers are not so clear cut. I shall come back to the issues stemming from this positionality in Chapter 4 as I discuss the methodological and ethical considerations involved in the making of this project.

1.7 Outline of chapters

Having introduced the broader strokes concerning this study's topic of inquiry, it is now time to explain the layout of the components involved in the making of this dissertation piece. As this is a 'compilation thesis', it consists of two main parts. The first part pertains to the present text, the kappa (or summary of the thesis), which is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 pertains to the background and literature review. It employs news coverage of the rise of veg*nism and plant-based lifestyles in China and Taiwan to set the stage to comparatively review the literature on civil society, then outline Sino-cultural traditions of vegetarianism, and introduce the differentiated wealth of literature on contemporary veg*nism across both sites to put recent developments into view in relation to green food movements and sustainability. Chapter 3 foregrounds the theories and concepts, as well as the analytical dispositions of this project. It presents a set of ethnographic vignettes to begin to theorize about food and social change and map out the three terrains of foodways, foodscapes, and food systems through which this phenomenon has been discussed throughout this project. Chapter 4 zooms into the methodological journey of this study with another set of reflections that exposes its epistemic concerns. It then outlines its offline and online ethnographic components, its selection of research methods, additional ethical considerations, and approach to data analysis. Chapter 5 pertains to the summary of the papers in lieu of 'findings' as is customary in the compilation thesis format. It zooms in on how the four research pieces produced in connection to this project engage with its broader theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and analytical themes, and to each other. To conclude, Chapter 6 will provide some final reflections and suggest future directions for research on the topic of veg*nism in the Sino-cultural sphere.

The second part pertains to the complete text of this dissertation's research outputs. These consist of two published articles, one chapter for an edited book volume, and an as-yet unpublished manuscript. These are placed in corresponding order at the end of this kappa.

2 Table Setting: Background and Literature Review

2.1 From headlines to an ontology-epistemology pipeline

On 18 November 2020, an article on CNN had the following headline: “Beyond Meat launches plant-based minced pork in China” (Toh, 2020). The piece outlined the company’s ambitions for the Chinese market via Shanghai with a specialized substitute for pig meat, the distribution of its products through major food chains, and noted Beyond Meat’s Asian outlook. Over a month later and into January 2021, *Time Magazine* ran a more extensive piece on a key question: “How China Could Change the World by Taking Meat Off the Menu” (Campbell, 2021). The article zoomed into the growing reception of plant-based options in China’s urban centres, introduced key domestic industry players, noted government agendas, and made a very brief nod to China’s pre-existing vegetarian food culture. This was followed by *The Guardian*’s positive assessment that “China’s appetite for meat fades as vegan revolution takes hold” (Reid, 2021), an article in the same vein, published on 9 March. Around this same time-period, developments in Taiwan also made a story, for significantly different outlets. In September 2020 the UK-based *The Vegan Review* reported that “The Taiwan Vegan Frenzy fairs are rebranding veganism on the island” (Nesher, 2020). The piece noted the ongoing transformation of veganism from Buddhist practice to lifestyle ethics through the case of Taiwan’s first vegan fair. In December, Taiwan-based multilingual outlet *The News Lens* published the piece “Taipei’s Vegetarian and Vegan Food Culture”, featuring the city’s changing meatless foodscape, introducing restaurants, and movement actors (F. Chang, 2020). A copy of the article also ran alongside pieces on green consumption and sustainable travel in *TAIPEI*, a magazine published by the city’s Department of Information and Tourism¹⁴.

¹⁴ Volume 22, Winter edition.

The following year, the publication *Taiwan Panorama*, run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, zoomed into this phenomenon with the cover “Taiwan, Veggie Heaven!”¹⁵ along with an introductory editorial and four articles that showcased “Taiwan’s Vegetarian Awakening” (Tseng, 2021). Yet in contrast to all this focus on ‘newness’ and market prospects in China and Taiwan, a piece in *Food & Wine* told a different story. One that foregrounded earlier East to West flows, celebrated Sino-cultural traditions of meat substitution, and highlighted the innovation and creativity in the vegetarian Buddhist cuisine found in Taiwan (Wei, 2021).

At first glance, this account of media coverage appears to be merely informative, largely anecdotal, and not entirely relevant. After all, this is not a project centred on Media Studies or Journalism. However, it is definitively concerned with what this background information shows in terms of the zeitgeist I referred to in the introduction. What is more, the asymmetry and issue focuses of such media coverage is also reflective of two important points to keep in mind in terms of the state of knowledge production on China and Taiwan. This is in turn illustrative of two epistemic points. First, the difference in size and economic impact between China and Taiwan, which also demonstrates the geopolitical dynamics that shape their position in the international stage. This is a situation that is, in turn, reproduced in global academic practices and research priorities, which have naturally focused more on the former than the latter. Second, the differing standings of disciplinary engagements with China and Taiwan and questions regarding civil society, social change, and the like. On a closer look, and as the same developments were being mirrored across the Taiwan Strait, striking differences in their narrative focus and media outlet status become glaring. To be precise, while well known-international media outlets hyped China as the next big market based on its increasingly affluent population, emerging consumer consciousness, and receptiveness to technological innovation, coverage of veg*nism in Taiwan was limited to niche outlets with a special interest on movements and civil society, food and travel, or part of public diplomacy outputs. As further elaborated below, these topical priorities and narrative trends can be noted in the scholarly literature, where the rise of veg*nism and plant-based diets has been discussed. This wealth of literature has certainly examined this phenomenon from qualitative sociological and anthropological standpoints to highlight aspects of social change, yet it can also be noted that interest in consumer choices and the market dominate the logic of latter inquiry. However, in order to get there, it is necessary to examine the context

¹⁵ January edition, 2021

in which contemporary developments in the Sino-cultural sphere is taking place.

2.2 Civil society and publics across the Strait

This study is primarily concerned with two distinct socio-political settings found in the Sino-cultural sphere. As the subject of the first paper in this compilation's collection, Taiwan serves as the point of departure to discuss contemporary veg*n advocacy in the region. Taiwan today functions as a de-facto state with a vibrant democratic system (Fell, 2018). Following the defeat of the Kuomintang (KMT) by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the Chinese civil war and the retreat of the Republic of China to Taiwan in 1949, the island and its surroundings were put under a period of martial law that lasted almost four decades (Roy, 2003). The beginning of this period was marked by the February 28 massacre of 1947, also known as '228', in which the KMT brutally suppressed protests against corruption and discontent with the ROC government, and which originated with the violent mishandling of a widow's sale of contraband cigarettes. This incident started what is now widely known as the 'White Terror' in Taiwan, an era of intense political repression characterized by arrests, executions, and surveillance against suspected communists, dissidents, and political opposition (Roy, 2003; K.W. Chen, 2008). The memories and trauma of this period remain central to transitional justice debates and continue to play a key role in Taiwan's democratic activism (Wu, 2005; Lee and Chang, 2023).

Taiwan began its process of political liberalization in the late 1980s in tandem with the 'third wave of democratization' around the world (Huntington, 1993), and reached its heights with the Wild Lily student movement in March 1990, which pushed for final reforms (T. Wright, 1999; H. Chen, 2005). Taiwan held its first direct presidential elections in 1996, followed by a first peaceful turnover of power to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) with the victory of Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) at the 2000 presidential elections (Roy, 2003). Since then, Taiwan's political landscape has been characterized by the existence of a demanding civil society comprised of heterogeneous actors and social movements promoting the rights of diverse sectors of society, including women and indigenous groups, as well as engaging with issues pertaining to labour and environmentalism (Hsiao, 1990; 2011; Fell, 2018; Ho, Huang and Juan, 2018). In particular, Taiwan's environmental movements have been closely examined in relation to the

process of democratization as well as environmental governance (Hsiao, 1999; M.S. Ho, 2011; Grano, 2015; Jobin, 2021).

A key event in Taiwan's more recent socio-political history was the 2014 Sunflower Movement where students and activists occupied the Legislative Yuan to oppose the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA). The CSSTA was a trade deal signed between the Straits Exchange Foundation, representing Taiwan, and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS), representing China, in 2013. From the Taiwan side, this was done under the auspices of a KMT-led government that returned to power in 2008 with the election of Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九). The agreement was deemed to be highly controversial due to the potential implications that deeper economic integration with China could have for Taiwan's self-determination, democracy, and economy, thus raising alarms among civil society groups and bringing in a new generation of politically engaged youth (Rowen, 2015; C. Wang, 2017). The aftermath of the Sunflower Movement saw the rise of 'Third force' parties like the New Power Party (NPP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) (Nachman, 2020). It also revitalized social protest and activism with the infusion of a new generation of actors engaged in issues such as anti-nuclearism, land reform, digital democracy, and perhaps most notably, LGBTQ rights and marriage equality (Fell, 2017; M.S. Ho, 2018; Lee, 2020; Jung, 2021). In paper one, I build on this post-Sunflower era context to make the case for the emergence of a 'new' vegan movement in Taiwan.

The second location is China, which since 1949 has operated as a single-party state led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Li, 2024). Following China's 'reform and opening up' characterized by economic liberalization and limited social reforms, a space opened for the emergence of civil society. In particular, between the 1990s and the 2010s, China saw the rapid growth of associations and social organizations, and its hosting of the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, has been seen as a pivotal moment. The conference opened an unprecedented avenue for domestic actors to foster dialogue with international organizations and shaped the later trajectory of the Chinese women's movement and feminist thought (Zheng, 1997; Howell, 2003; Kaufman, 2012; Min, 2016). Following these developments, the rise of an environmental movement in China as a result of growing concern over pollution and ecological crises has also received considerable attention. Scholars have noted the unique approaches of China's environmental groups navigating political constraints through 'embedded activism' aligning with state goals while fostering public participation (P. Ho, 2001; Yang, 2005; Ho and Edmonds, 2007; Xie, 2009).

Another influential event of this period pertains to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. The tragedy marked a critical point for the contemporary development of civil society in China, and is widely recognized as the catalyst for more mainstream engagements with activism and the growth of civic engagement. As various authors have noted, 2008 is often described as the year that gave birth to volunteerism and civil society in China (Teets, 2009; Shieh and Deng, 2011; Qiaoan, 2021, pp.22–24). In tandem with this, the development of domestic Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) led to a ‘golden’ period for the expansion of the public sphere and for civil society actors to discuss and organize around a variety of issues (Yang, 2009). Research on this phenomenon has highlighted organization around issues such as rights protection or rights defence (*weiquan*, simp. 维权) (Biao, 2012; Svensson, 2012), environmentalism (Yang and Calhoun, 2007; Sima, 2011; Xie, 2009; 2012), and women’s rights and feminism (Kaufman, 2012; Ip and Lam, 2013). The contentions that emerged within the Chinese public sphere of this period have shed light on the paradoxes and push and pull mechanisms that have underlined state-society relations and governance through communicative and legal institutions as the country pursued a grand vision of modernization (Lei, 2017).

However, in the post-2010s and in tandem with Xi Jinping’s rise to power, the country began curtailing these spaces by targeting the very same grey areas that had previously allowed the operation of such actors and organizations. In particular, in 2016 two far-reaching laws concerning NGO registration and operations were enacted. The ‘Charity Law’, which established guidelines for domestic NGOs, and the ‘Law on the Management of the Activities of Overseas NGOs within Mainland China’, which focuses on foreign NGOs operating in the country. These developments naturally led to questions regarding the future of Chinese civil society among scholars, and ultimately resulted in rather pessimistic assessments that suggested further control and repression, as well as highlighting contradictions (Shieh, 2018; Spires, 2020; Snape, 2021; Zhu and Jun, 2022; Snape and Wang, 2023). Despite the new challenges and a sense that deems the two laws as having effectively thwarted the chances for civil society to continue to develop in the country, matters of advocacy and social organization have remained a main area of scholarly interest in China. What is more, China continues to be a source of new and alternative ways to think and theorize about civil society, the closely intertwined realm of the public sphere, and democratic mobilization (J. Wang, 2019; Qiaoan, 2021; 2023; Salmenkari, 2025; Spires, 2025).

Studies primarily concerned with civil society along such spirit have sought to re-theorize social actors’ agency under the Chinese authoritarian state

(Gleiss, Sæther and Fürst, 2019), examined the responses to party-building within social organizations and the dynamics at play (Nie and Wu, 2022), as well as highlighted the ways in which social organizations have come to adapt and show resilience (O'Brien, 2023). On the other hand, and of primary interest to this project, there has been a thread of discussions that seek to bypass the constraints that emerge from more narrow definitions of civil society and the public sphere by zooming into the different modes through which social actors engage in activism and navigate communicative infrastructures (Benney and Marolt, 2015). For example, Woodman (2015) has noted how censorship and selective openness coexist in China, resulting in a 'segmented public' where the possibility of public critical debates largely depends on institutional context, speaker identity, and timing. At the same time, as Jing Wang (2019) has extensively discussed, activism does not have to be confrontational in order to lead to social change. In this sense, ICTs have become important tools for social actors to mobilize around issues, engage in social entrepreneurship, and 'do good'. That is not to say that nonconfrontational versions of civil society do not run into trouble. As scholars like David A. Palmer (2019) and Runya Qiaoan (2021) have noted, the receptiveness of civil society messages across China's unique public sphere ultimately depends on adherence to certain codes and protocols. According to Qiaoan's (2021) in-depth study of these dynamics, civil society actors can be successful in influencing policy if they effectively engage with 'cultural resonance'; a mechanism that entails advocates' active 'performance' according to a culturally resonant script, and 'framing' work along symbolic codes to which the audience, comprising both state and society, is receptive.

I ultimately drew inspiration from these various lines of discussion pertaining to civil society and the public sphere to put forward, in Paper 2, the concept of a 'dietary public' that taps into China's meatless heritage and is aligned with the national imperatives of building an 'ecological civilization'. I will circle back to the matter of social mobilization and food-focused advocacy in both China and Taiwan in the final part of this chapter. For now, it is time to first flesh out the more immediate socio-cultural background and demographics in which the phenomenon this dissertation project is concerned with takes place.

2.3 Veg*n histories and recent demographics

Beyond the aforementioned distinct political trajectories and contrasting civil society landscapes, meatless diets have a long and established history and remain a point of socio-cultural commonality across the Sino-cultural sphere. These practices have been traced back to ancient China and are most predominantly associated with its Daoist and Buddhist traditions. More specifically, fasting practices tied to Daoist rituals of purification gradually evolved into complete abstinence from meat, resulting in various types of vegetarianism (Wong, 2010; Cao, 2018). Such precedents have continued to influence vegetarian practices, illustrated by the interchangeability of terms such as fasting food (齋食, *zhai si*) and vegetarian food (素食, *su shi*) (Wong, 2010). However, the main wealth of research into vegetarianism in the region has been primarily connected to the history of Buddhism, starting with the development of a Sinicized Mahayana Buddhism (Kieschnick, 2005; Cheng, 2014; Greene, 2016). Although Buddhism does not explicitly mandate a meatless diet, the connection between Buddhist practice and vegetarianism in China can be traced back, at least more widely, to the sixth century. While there are accounts that suggests the coupling of Buddhism and vegetarianism might have even older and more diffuse origins, it was Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (梁武帝, r. 502-549), Xiao Yan (蕭衍 464-549), who solidified this connection. He came to follow Buddhism, adopted vegetarianism, and promoted its adoption to his subjects. He also forbid animal sacrifices and decreed the practice of vegetarianism for Buddhist priests and nuns (Kieschnick, 2005; Greene, 2016; Tseng, 2018). Following this, vegetarianism became more prevalent among the lay public as Buddhism further proliferated during the Tang (618-907 CE) and Song (960-1279 CE) dynasties. Ultimately, and throughout the centuries, Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism developed into a distinctive cuisine and industry intertwined with distinct food moralities and practices (Simoons, 1990, p.37; Kieschnick, 2005; Klein, 2017; Cao, 2018).

Apropos to Chinese ancient traditions, it must be noted that no discussion would be complete without acknowledging the influence of Confucianism at some point. However, the relationship between Confucian thought and meatless food and diets is less straightforward. More specifically, Confucianism does not promote the adoption of lifelong meatless diets per se or deem the consumption of animals as food as inherently morally wrong. Rather, it emphasizes aspects such as harmony with nature, self-cultivation, and measured food enjoyment (Cao, 2018; Tseng, 2018). That being said, Confucian notions of filial piety do involve aspects of food consumption

which, in some cases, might be meatless. An example of this last point is found in temporary meat abstinence tied to ancestor worship and mourning practices, which is also connected to Buddhism and Daoism (Y.H. Wang, 2016; P. Chen, 2024).

The scientific modernization of the early 20th century brought about significant shifts to Chinese approaches to meatless diets. During this period, influential figures began promoting the benefits of vegetarianism, emphasizing its adoption as both hygienic and patriotic. Republican and Chinese anarchist movement actors such as Wu Ting-fang (伍廷芳) and Li Shi-zeng (李石曾) are known to have adopted and promoted vegetarianism, building on scientific nutritional narratives advanced by Western science. What is more, while not a practitioner himself, Sun Yat Sen is noted to also have seen merit in the diet (Fu, 2018; Leung, 2019; Lu, 2021). Liang-hao Lu's (2021) research on the modernization of Chinese Buddhism has also highlighted how Buddhist vegetarianism came to be influenced by this scientific zeitgeist, evidenced in the work of Buddhist figures such as monk Taixu (太虛), as well as in the language of Buddhist periodicals. Ultimately, this point in time saw the re-evaluation of China's tradition of vegetarianism and soy-based foods, elevating them as indigenous sources of nutrition and avenues for nation-building (Fu, 2018; Leung, 2019; Lu, 2021). Although the Chinese civil war brought such projects to a halt, they set a precedent for the developments currently taking place in China and Taiwan, as vegetarianism has continued to occupy a special place across regional foodways.

In more recent history, vegetarianism became subject to renewed interest and growth amidst Taiwan's process of political liberalization since the late-1980s and China's socio-economical context in the post-reform era. In both instances this phenomenon took shape along the rise and expansion of 'socially engaged' or 'humanistic' Buddhism led by groups that endorse or actively promote meatless diets, environmentalism, and social service (Schak and Hsiao, 2005; Kuah-Pearce, 2014; Chen and Hansen, 2022; Stapleton and Tao, 2022). In contemporary practice, the Buddhist clergy generally adheres to a fully plant-based diet, while lay followers engage with meatless eating in different ways (Cao, 2018). Occasional vegetarianism is a widespread approach among lay Buddhists and entails the observance of meatless days on specific dates, such as the Ten-Fasting Days (十齋日) of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva or based on a time of the day, such as breakfast (Tseng, 2019). Yet perhaps the most common lay observance pertains to practicing vegetarianism on the first and fifteenth days of the Chinese lunar month (初一十五). In addition, a vow of vegetarianism is also prevalent as part of the practice of

‘fulfilling a vow’ or *huanyuan* (還願), a folk religious practice where a person makes a promise to make a personal sacrifice, such as giving up meat for a specific period of time, in return for heavenly favours (Simoons, 1990, p.35). Here it must also be noted that besides abstinence from meat, a materially significant aspect of Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism is the fact that vegetarian food should not contain any of the ‘five pungent plants’ or ‘five pungent spices’ (五辛, *wu xin*), which comprise allium plants such as garlic, onions, scallions, chives, and asafoetida (Simoons, 1990, p.36; 1998, p.155). The primary reason for this is the perception that alliums are ‘impure’ or unclean, and that their strong smell interferes with, or excites, the senses, all of which is contrary to the goal of self-cultivation and asceticism outlined in Chinese Buddhism (Kieschnick, 2005, pp.191–192, 202).

In terms of population statistics, the precise number of practitioners in the region is elusive. To be clear, there are no official government statistics. In the case of Taiwan, media reports have placed the number of vegetarians to be about 13 to 14 percent of the population based on estimates published by ‘World Atlas’ and ‘World of Statistics’ (Su, 2023; Wan, 2021). In other words, it is likely that as many as over 3 million people in Taiwan might practice some form of meatless diet. As for the case of China’s veg*n population, the digits are even less clear. The number of 50 million vegetarians has been circulating around since at least 2013 (Percy, 2019). It was mentioned in a report under the ‘What’s for Lunch’ series by Public Radio International’s ‘The World’ program (Magistad, 2013). However, this estimate does not differentiate between types of meatless diets, and its source is unknown. In contrast, based on data from national censuses and UN statistics of China’s Buddhist demographics, Tseng (2019) has estimated that by 2025 the Han Chinese population was to contain over 37 million vegetarians and over 9 million vegans. In contrast, according to an estimate by *Yisujie* (壹素界) (2019), a Chinese vegan media outlet, the number of vegans might be around 20 million.

Consequently, other than the widespread understanding that veganism and vegetarianism are prevalent in China and Taiwan, it is difficult to ascertain accurate population numbers. Nevertheless, a few other inferences can be made about the veg*n demographics based on existing studies in China and consumption research in Taiwan (Liu, Cai and Zhu, 2015; Y.H. Wang, 2016; Klein, 2017; H.S. Chen, 2022; Lee and Tseng, 2023). In this sense, the demographic characteristics of so far documented veg*n or veg*n-friendly populations in China and Taiwan are decidedly similar:¹⁶ urban, educated, and

¹⁶ As these observations are based both on the existing literature, and my own fieldwork, it is important to note that there is an element of sampling bias that excludes rural populations.

predominantly female. This resonates with discussions on vegan demographics from around the world (Martinelli and Berkmanienè, 2018), such as, for example, studies focused on veg*n population characteristics in Germany (Pfeiler and Egloff, 2018) or Chile (Giacoman et al., 2021), and more recently also noting the widening gender gap in the adoption of vegetarianism in the United States (Nezlek and Forestell, 2024).

2.4 Veg*nism in contemporary China

A few pieces of research have laid out the foundations from which discuss contemporary veg*nism in China. Liu, Cai and Zhu (2015) have provided one of the earlier discussions linking vegetarianism and rising ethical consumption behaviours in contemporary China with the case of vegetarian eating in Guangzhou. On similar terms, Ya-hong Wang's (2016) ethnographic study centred around the new generation of veg*ns in Beijing presents their demographic characteristics, motivations, and life experiences. This piece outlines how the combination of 'western' ethics with local Buddhism has facilitated the acceptance of this new lifestyle trend. Along these lines, Klein (2017) has discussed the changing meanings of meatless diets through the case of vegetarian restaurants in Kunming. He has noted the interplay of modern Buddhism, western animal ethics rationales, and health and environmental consciousness underpinning 'voluntary vegetarianism' in the context of China's growing affluence. Lastly, Debora Cao (2018) has provided a thorough overview of modern vegetarian culture in China, emphasizing the influence of Buddhist and Daoist morality alongside growing interest in animal ethics among practitioners. This thread of scholarly output has continued, with recent works by Francesca Tarocco (2024), more explicitly linking these transformations to the rise of modern or humanistic Buddhist ethics and green consumption, as well as examining the changing Buddhist vegetarian foodscapes (Tarocco et al., 2024).

In tandem with these developments, a few studies have come to shed light on the increased visibility of veg*nism and plant-based foods in digital spaces. Perhaps most noticeable along this line of inquiry has been an examination of the backlash against WildAid's 2017 *Shushi* (蔬食) campaign (Du, Liu and Mix, 2024), and an analysis of the criticisms against the 2021 documentary *Vegetarian* (素食者行) (Zeng, Chen and Zhong, 2024). Both studies have highlighted public contentions based on nationalistic narratives around food culture and visions of dietary sovereignty, as well as differing traditions

regarding food moralities and nutrition. While on the other hand, in their study of veg*n discourses on Weibo, Zheng Chen et al. (2025) have highlighted the de-politicized nature of veg*nism in China through social media posts, which predominantly pertain to discourses centred on lifestyle and community, spirituality, and conscious consumption.

Lastly, and of importance to note, is an adjacent line of inquiry found in consumption behaviour research that has stemmed from growing interest in the potential of plant-based meat or meat alternatives in China. Such research has explored the reception, motivational factors, and market prospects of such products against a mixed backdrop of rising meat consumption, sustainability imperatives, and vegetarian food heritage (Chen and Zhang, 2022; Ortega, Sun and Lin, 2022; H.H. Wang, 2022; Chung, Bryant and Asher, 2023; G. Wang et al., 2023; Guo and Wiwattanadate, 2024; Wu et al., 2024). These studies have in general found a cautiously optimistic outlook, with a complex list of caveats pertaining to pricing, messaging, and demographic characteristics, as well the matter of the status of animal meat in Chinese food culture.

2.5 Veg*nism in contemporary Taiwan

In contrast to the clear and more widespread interest in developments around China's veg*nism, literature on Taiwan is considerably sparse. In general, scholar interest in Taiwan's contemporary meatless practices has been marginal to other topics. To begin with, vegetarianism has mostly been mentioned in relation to discussions regarding the rise of Engaged Buddhism along democratization (Schak and Hsiao, 2005), or explicitly connected to the practices of other religious groups with significant presence in Taiwan, such as *Yiguandao* (Broy, 2019; 2024). An adjacent and relevant line of scholarship regarding Buddhism has been on investigations around its role in the rise of contemporary animal ethics discourses in Taiwan. This research has paid particular attention to the work of the Life Conservationist Association (關懷生命協會, LCA) and the hybridized ethics advanced by its founder, the Venerable Shih Chao-hwei (Nicolaisen, 2020). The LCA is Taiwan's first 'modern' animal advocacy organization to actively engage in legislative and policy change, most notably pushing for the enactment and enhancement of laws like the Animal Protection Act in 1998 and the 1989 Wildlife Conservation Act. The LCA is also known for translating Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* and introducing it to a Sinophone public, thus establishing an East-West dialogue on ethics that most recently culminated in the co-

authored *The Buddhist and the Ethicist* (Singer and Shih, 2023), a book centred on a series of exchanges that took place over the course of five years on a variety of topics that included a discussion on animal welfare and mentions of vegetarianism.

Here, the most extensive work that first documented this ethical hybridization, and which also connects it to social mobilization in Taiwan, is Ying-li Wang's (2012; 2013) master's thesis turned into a book. The thesis covered the LCA's history from 1992 to 1999, and was later expanded to include developments up to 2012. Along this line of work, another piece of note is Wan-Li Ho's (2016) examination of female-led environmental organizations in Taiwan, which includes the case of the LCA's animal advocacy. However, it must be noted that the topic of veg*nism is quite limited in these works, as dietary change has not been a priority to the organization. In regard to the specific aspect of veg*n advocacy, Harvey Neo's (2016) study on vegetarian ethical framings covers the work of Taiwan's 'Meatless Monday' or 'Meat-Free Monday' Platform (週一無肉日聯絡平台). This piece also revealed an interesting contrast to the case of animal advocacy in Taiwan. That is, vegetarian advocacy has emphasized environmental and health framings rather than animal issues, a matter further noted in a comparative discussion of vegetarian advocacy between the cases of Taiwan and Singapore (Neo and Emel, 2017).

Lastly, and mirroring the interest and receptiveness observed for the topic in the case of China, literature on consumer behaviour and preferences regarding plant-based meats in Taiwan has also increased in recent years. These studies have explored consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (H.S. Chen, 2022; Chen and Tsai, 2025), youth consumption trends (Chen, Tey and Ho, 2023; Lee and Tseng, 2023), and assessed motivational factors and food neophobia (M.F. Chen, 2025; N.H. Chen, 2025).

2.6 Green food movements and sustainability

While the above wealth of literature has highlighted the socio-cultural transformations underlying the Sino-cultural sphere, as well the changing approaches to meatless diets, it can be noted that discussions that centre on vegan, vegetarian, or plant-based lifestyles as a movement in its own right have remained considerably underexplored. Nevertheless, there is a growing line of research that focuses on food movements, or social organization around food,

and where veg*n consumption may be adopted by some actors or play a role as part of a broader process.

Again, the main body of research along this line comes from studies foregrounding developments in China. These studies zoom into the rise of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) (Si, Schumilas and Scott, 2018), shedding light on the different ways in which social actors have come together into diverse initiatives and organizational forms to address concerns over food safety, pursue healthfulness, or engage in ethical consumption. These include models of community supported agriculture (CSA), ecological farmers' markets, and buying clubs, as well as people engaged in semi-urban recreational farming (Si, Schumilas and Scott, 2018). Of particular interest in this line of scholarship has been the work of Joy Y. Zhang (Zhang, 2018a; 2018b; 2021) foregrounding the emergence of a 'Good Food Movement' in China that reflects a localized yet cosmopolitan response to food safety crises and ecological anxieties. Her work traces how grassroots networks and urban consumers can be conceptualized as a "cosmopolitan risk community" that mobilizes through ethical and sustainable food practices as a means of reclaiming social trust and performing modernity, while at the same time, negotiating global concerns through local food ethics and showing how 'good food' becomes a site of biopolitical negotiation, where moral, ecological, and national modernity intertwine. Also along this line is Angela Leggett's (2020) examination of how social organizations, farmers, and urban consumers are reshaping China's foodscape through the promotion of green food practices. Her work shows how these civil society actors help fill institutional gaps in aspects of consumer trust and sustainable farming. What is more, and of particular interest to my project's theoretical-methodological leanings, she draws on Consumer Culture Theory enriched by Actor-Network Theory that combines online and offline ethnographic data to show how material practices, discourses, and social meanings co-produce green consumer culture that reframes notions of responsibility and modernity which are parallel to global movements for sustainable consumption. Lastly of note, is a study centred on the Beijing Farmers' Market by Xie, Zhu and Yin (2024) examining how the market functions as a socio-spatial platform that redefines relationships between people, food, and nature, fostering social sustainability and localized resilience.

In the context of Taiwan, of most immediate relevance are case study accounts such as Yi-chieh Lin's (2020) exploration of the intersection of sustainability, ethics, and innovation within Taiwan's Slow Food and Low Carbon Food movements that promote localism and traditional culinary knowledge. Her work shows that such food movements in Taiwan are not only

environmental initiatives but also constitute socio-political expressions and grassroots innovation to drive transformation in food production and consumption. With a somewhat similar focus on Taiwan's Slow Food Movement, Eric Siu-kei Cheng's (2023) investigation of the evolution of the movement from community festivals to high-end gastronomy, reveals tensions between local sustainability and market-driven commodification. His study foregrounds a "politicized foodscape" where food practices intertwine with identity politics, environmental consciousness, and cultural preservation. Cheng's account is also of particular interest to the later aspects of my own project's focus, as his work highlights the complex dynamics between grassroots activism, mainstreamization, and globalization. Along this line of scholarship, also of interest is I-Liang Wahn's work, which has shed light on the link between the rise of consumer movements along the development of civil society under democratization (Wahn, 2015), as well as his examination of Taiwan's AFNs based on a typology of consumer cooperatives, community supported agriculture, online platforms, and food magazines, which are involved in the construction of a community of governance and food practices, as well as of articulation and affection resulting in a diverse food economy (Wahn, 2020).

Lastly, and in terms of comparative research centred, Wahn's work is also of interest as his more recent outputs align with this dissertation's theoretical-methodological leanings. He not only employs an STS approach that foregrounds the assemblages, or *agencement*, involved in the making of AFNs, he provides a rare comparative take on the changing moralities of consumption and wider social processes within the East Asia context; more specifically, through an examination of the moral economies and transnational flows in the trajectories of AFNs in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China. He conceptualizes such AFN organizations as moral actors negotiating between market rationalities and ethical consumption, paying particular attention the language choices and translation processes turning 'good consumers' into 'life persons' (生活者) (Wahn, 2023). What is more, Wahn's (2024) work has also provided a unique comparative account of AFNs in China and Taiwan, foregrounding and reconceptualizing the function of certain assemblages as civic food networks (CFNs). Drawing on the cases of two mediated 'agrifood forums', the *News&Market* website and market in Taiwan and WeChat-based *Foodthink* in China, he explores how they enable civic engagement. In Taiwan, he finds that CFNs are more clearly aligned with issues of food democracy, creating opportunities for engagement with food policy, while in the Chinese case, CFNs highlight concepts of food citizenship and everyday sustainable food practices.

3 Mise en Place: Theories and Concepts

3.1 Eating (veg*n) food in theory

During an early December evening of 2021 in the southern city of Kaohsiung (高雄), Taiwan, the *Itamae* (板前) at a Japanese *Omakase* style restaurant known as *Gorou* (五郎時食, *wulang shi shi*)¹⁷ called for the dining guests' attention and playfully said:

I will give you a minute to feed your phone [camera] first, after that I request your full attention please.

As people took their last food snaps, he proceeded to introduce the *nigiri* before us and dared those sitting along the bar across his station to guess the ingredients, in lieu of fish, involved in the preparation of this distinctive fare found in Japanese cuisine. I had found my way to this establishment thanks to my accompanying informant, Sophie.¹⁸ We had met at a vegan youth-oriented experience camp in Taichung organized by the group 21 Vegan (21維根) held over a few weekends in October.¹⁹ As it turned out, she was a Kaohsiung-based aspiring social media influencer and a neophyte to veganism after learning about the fate of animals in factory farming at the camp. This place had stellar reviews from the 'foodie' community and had quickly become her favourite restaurant. The guessing game and banter with the *Itamae* continued over the course of the dinner as we learned that what we were consuming was not, in fact, tuna, scallops, or eel. This was an entirely veg*n course where plant-based ingredients like sweet peppers, king oyster mushrooms, and a

¹⁷ Names in Romanized Japanese due to the specificity of the term and the restaurant's culinary focus and naming choice.

¹⁸ Eat-along, 16 December 2021.

¹⁹ Participant observation, 17 October and 24 October 2021.

special breed of locally sourced eggplants prepared in elaborate and ingenious ways, played the central role in the restaurant's project to change perceptions about meatless food.

This approach focused on technique was significantly different to another widely popular place that I had visited over a week earlier in Taipei.²⁰ This other restaurant, Baganhood,²¹ is a vegan gastropub offering an extensive menu that includes salads, burgers, foreign inspired dishes, and both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. However, it is probably best known for showcasing a selection of the latest generation of plant-based meat or 'future meat' (未來肉, weilai rou) and other alternative protein and dairy food products. I was there meeting a vegan activist informant for lunch, Darice, who would introduce me to Carrie, the restaurant's owner and founder of the Future Catering Group (未來餐飲集團).²² We discussed her motivations informed by animal ethics and sustainability concerns, and her efforts to introduce products like Beyond Meat into the Taiwanese market. The logic behind her trajectory toward vegan entrepreneurship in the food and hospitality industry was surprisingly simple, she felt that the vegan choices available were not to her taste, and therefore she worked toward making the types of foods she wanted to eat more available. As we conversed, she told us about her latest project, a fully plant-based *Rechao* (熱炒), a type of late dining restaurant that focuses on 'hot stir fry' dishes usually paired with beer that is popular in Taiwan for after work and casual gatherings. She had come to crave it often due to working late since starting her business ventures. The place called Chao (炒炒蔬食熱炒), like Baganhood, also widely features plant-based meat products in place of the animal ingredients in common rechao fare, such as Kung Pao Chicken (宮保雞丁) Sweet and Sour Fish Fillet (糖醋魚片), and Pineapple Shrimp Balls (鳳梨蝦球).

Two years later, in May 2023, I would again find myself meeting informants at veg*n restaurants and having similar conversations, this time across the other side of the Taiwan Strait. Starting in Shanghai, I joined a small birthday dinner gathering at Dancing Dumplings (simp. 舞蔬尚餃),²³ an

²⁰ Eat-along, 03 December 2021.

²¹ The restaurant's name is a word play that combines 'bacon' and 'vegan' with the suffix 'hood' that denotes a condition or state of being to imply the restaurant's vision of transition from meat to veganism.

²² The company has established a variety of vegan restaurants, a joint yoga studio/vegan café, and two vegan food brands under its name. It also provides consulting services.

²³ Eat-along, 21 May 2023.

aesthetically modern and minimalistically decorated restaurant at *Yangpu* District (simp. 杨浦区) specialized in updated vegan and experimental interpretations of foods usually found in a handmade noodles house (simp. 手工面食馆). My companions, college educated and bilingual urbanites, would discuss various aspects of their vegan lifestyle throughout the evening as we enjoyed the venue's signature dishes like *xiaolongbao* (simp. 小笼包) and *xian bing* (simp. 馅饼). The leisurely conversation ranged from how to make house moving more sustainable, clothes-swapping, health, and yoga practices. At some point someone told me about their journey to veganism by learning about animal ethics issues as a university student in the United States. Nine days later I would meet the owner of the restaurant at *VegeGood* (simp. 素来很好) its sister establishment located near *Xintiandi* (新天地) which offers an extensive selection of vegan dishes inspired by Shanghainese tastes, flavours from Yunnan and Taiwan, and highly globalized cuisines such as pasta or burgers. As we discussed China's current veg*n culture, I learned that her own vegan practice was due to her interests in spirituality and health. However, the majority of the patrons at her restaurants were younger people informed by more diverse motivations. In particular, she noted the role of ecological films and green media, inspiring this newer generation's approach to ethical and climate-friendly diets and, since the pandemic, the increased demand for healthier and safer foods. These various motivations were well reflected in both of her restaurants' menus, which emphasized unprocessed and natural ingredients, and their limited offering of plant-based meat substitutes.

At an initial glance, relying on an ethnographic account of such diverse dining spaces and demographics to set up a theoretical discussion about veg*n food and social change in the Sino-cultural sphere might not appear efficient or relevant. However, it is necessary. To start with, these various settings present a few commonalities. First, four out of five of these restaurants were relatively new, having opened in the last few years, slightly before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, they were popular among both veg*ns and non-veg*ns alike, a point of pride for all establishments. Third, their menus and spaces were well featured across the food and travel focused digital sphere, listed as must-try places, and reviewed by social media content creators. Last, they were a far cry from the often noticeably Buddhist vegetarian buffets, banquet-style restaurants, and modest noodle shops that are conspicuous across the Sino-cultural sphere. Most saliently, at their most essential and abstract level, these restaurants, their approach to food, and their clientele are clearly seeking to convey, in one way or another, some vision of 'eating for change'. Be it change that involves improving individual eating habits for health or self-

cultivation, adopting environmentally friendly diets to combat climate change, or helping change the fate of animals destined for the slaughterhouse. These iterations in their various configurations and across both sides of the Strait have come to represent ‘new’, modern, and updated interpretations of veg*nism and plant-based diets. These developments were certainly not isolated to these specific restaurants; over the course of the past decade they have been reshaping the foodscape, becoming a main feature in the rise of veg*n fairs, and hinted at in the new selection of plant-based meat and milk products suddenly available in everyday places like the local 7-Elevens and Family Marts I visited throughout fieldwork in Taiwan and China. In the digital realm, they permeate the narratives weaved into plant-based product and restaurant reviews of popular veg*n media content creators and official social media accounts.

Amidst these transformations, restaurants constitute a fixed point of intersection for the differing threads making up the overarching discussion that spans from rapidly changing foodways, shifting foodscapes, and food systems in transition. After all, the act of eating is what in sociological and anthropological terms has been conceptualized as a ‘total social fact’ stemming from Marcel Mauss’ work on gift giving, and which is also widely applicable to discussions of food and eating (Counihan, 2000). It is not only an activity where biological imperatives, cultural meaning, and social order intersect; it also has ramifications across moral, economic, political, cultural, and social spheres (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002). By this logic, restaurants which function as the foremost specialized space dedicated to eating in the contemporary economically-liberal urban world, can be understood as important institutions at the centre of broader processes of food production and consumption (Beriss and Sutton, 2007; Shore, 2007). This discussion can quite organically be expanded to other aspects where eating is the main activity, such as food festivals, and also extended to consider the new ways in which we have come to order food via mobile delivery apps and consume food media, as well as in provisioning practices through e-commerce. In many cases, some version of a favourite restaurant can and does exist across all those channels.

This expansive discussion is all just to say that considering the multidimensional nature of food and eating, the factors at play in matters of social change, and the complexity of sustainability transitions, conceptualizing and theorizing on a topic that combines all three is simply not a straightforward matter. With this in mind, restaurants constitute a familiar type of public space and accessible point of intellectual inception to map out the different conceptual and theoretical strands that have been weaved into this interdisciplinary Asian Studies project. This is done specifically by aligning

and synthesizing a discussion on food and social transformations that draw insight from Food Studies, Social Movement Studies, and Sustainability Studies, under a Science and Technology Studies lens with Vegan Studies and Critical Animal Studies sensibilities that cuts across micro, meso, and macro levels. It starts with matters of entanglements and disentanglements in veg*n foodways, then zooms into the issue of veg*n ontologies and the role of civil society in shaping foodscapes along such configurations, to then conclude with their socio-technical ‘translation’ into the wider efforts toward sustainable food systems transitions.

3.2 Foodways and (dis)entanglement

This study has a sort of ‘catchphrase’ with some keyword variations. That is, Chinese, Taiwanese, Sino-cultural, meatless, plant-based food or diets are ‘in flux’. To say that something is in flux implies that it is in a process of change. It is fluctuating, flowing, moving towards something. Some combination of this makes up abstracts, introductions, or background section headings throughout the body of work comprising this compilation. It even made it to a panel I organized for the European Association of China Studies Conference in 2024 titled: “Edibility in Flux: Diets, Moralities, and Foodways in the Contemporary Sino-Cultural Sphere.” Certainly, at its most basic level this project’s intellectual exercise has been to examine the transformation of China’s and Taiwan’s foodways. But what exactly is being changed? Who or what is making the change? In what direction? The phenomenon at the heart of this project has been constantly described by practitioners, advocates, and the media as a shift departing from meatless food traditions stemming from religious and cultural practices and moving toward modern, scientific, rational, global, forward-looking diets and lifestyles. As outlined in the previous section, this change is taking shape via the diversification of motivations, the rise of secular ethics, and growing health or environmental consciousness among educated urbanites. At the same time, it is marked by advances in food technology, ‘greening’ global norms, and national eco-developmental imperatives as addressed in this study. In other words, behind a piece of plant-based sushi, a bite of a ‘future’ burger, or an order of vegan dumplings at the internet popular or highly recommended restaurants where I met informants, there is an assemblage of actors and an entangled web of relations that ‘translates’ into change across Sino-cultural foodways. Ultimately, this change can be conceptualized as being both material and semiotic.

The material-semiotic approach provides a useful conceptual frame from which to zoom into the ‘entanglement’ of new meanings, practices, and materialities related to food and eating in contemporary China and Taiwan, while at the same time, old meanings, practices, and materialities are undergoing ‘disentanglement’; I shall elaborate on this below. For now, what precedes is that the coupling of the material and the semiotic dimensions to explain their translation into social phenomena has been central to two converging traditions starting with the feminist posthumanist thought of Donna Haraway (1985; 1988) and a main component of Science and Technology Studies (STS). However, it is perhaps more widely known in its operationalization across the scholarship linked to what is commonly known as Actor-Network Theory (ANT) developed by scholars such as Michel Callon (1984; 1986; 2001), Bruno Latour (Latour, 1987; 2005), John Law (1992; 1993; 2008), and Madeleine Akrich (1992; 1995). Despite its name, ANT is not a theory per se; it is a “set of tools, sensibilities, and methods” (Law, 2008, p.141) that redefines the boundaries between the social and the material by emphasizing that both human and non-human entities co-produce realities through networks of relations. The word ‘actor’ encompasses non-human and non-individual entities, both commanding equal levels of agency as actants. Conversely, the word ‘network’ does not merely refer to a physical interconnected structure or to inter-personal relationships (Latour, 1996, p.369). Thus, the actor-network embodies the collective bundling of societies, technology, and natures (Callon, 2001, pp.62–63). This characteristic allows ANT to bridge traditional dichotomies such as agency and structure. In short, ANT “treat(s) everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located” (Law, 2008, p.141). As such, ANT is distinctive for being ontologically ‘flat’, characterized by its symmetrical treatment of the human and non-human, and its focus on empirical tracing and description. These distinctive points have at the same time been some of the main sources of its criticisms. In particular, for failing to recognize power asymmetries, falling into relativism, and endless description that lacks analytical closure (Star, 1990; Collins and Yearley, 1992; Strathern, 1996).

Later ANT (or post-ANT) scholarship came to redirect the material semiotic discussion to the role of ‘assemblages’ in the making of social realities (Law and Hassard, 1999; Law, 2004; Latour, 2005), the multiple ontological ‘enactments’ and politics at play (Mol, 1999; 2002), and the co-constitutive functions of such ‘entanglements’ (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2007). This last development reconnected with feminist technoscience, which has been particularly concerned with aspects of power and situatedness (Haraway, 1988;

Star, 1990), and which later developed into discussions foregrounding matters of responsibility and care in managing the entanglements making the world in the age of ecological crisis (Haraway, 2016; Bellacasa, 2017). Here, the concepts of entanglement and disentanglement are key to understanding how scientific, technological, and social orders are formed, maintained, and transformed because they describe the simultaneous process in which entities come together or are ‘made’ and come apart or are ‘unmade’. The notion of ‘entanglement’ asserts that entities, actors, or actants do not pre-exist relations but emerge through intra-actions of humans, non-humans, and meanings, thus resulting in multiple and hybrid worlds (Mol, 2002; Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2007). Conversely, disentanglement refers to the processes that artificially separate, stabilize, ‘purify’, or simplify such complex relations along projects to pursue modernity, practicality, and efficiency (Latour, 1993; Callon, 1998). Yet ultimately, as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s (2017) work foregrounds, entanglement and disentanglement are co-constitutive acts of caring to connect and disconnect at the heart of material-semiotics where linking and cutting are normative-political expressions. Although not entirely obvious or expanded within the research outputs connected to this dissertation due to space limitations, thematic scopes, editorial and/or review comment directions, these notions have played an important background role in the logic behind these articles and require additional unpacking. This is particularly the case in terms of this project’s approach to civil society as an assemblage of actors across advocacy and market spaces involved in a process of ‘translation’, which is central to making sense of the (dis)entanglements shaping veg*n foodscapes as unpacked below.

3.3 Foodscapes of civil society

Depending on who you ask in China and Taiwan, any choice of wording such as vegan, meatless, and plant-based might be an adequate noun or adjective to describe the diet, lifestyle, or philosophical stance aimed at disentangling of non-human animal lives and bodies from human consumption activities. While there is a long-established tradition of religious vegan and vegetarian foods (*su shi*) in the region, the recent diversification of meanings and secularization of motivations to forego meat does not only suggest that interest in veg*n diets and lifestyles is on the rise. In practice, a Sinophone meat avoider may identify as a vegan/vegetarian, Buddhist, animal lover/advocate, or environmentalist, and in many cases adopt and express such

multiple identities. In terms of everyday life in the Sino-cultural context, this bundling together of terms and meanings is generally not a big problem and even a welcomed development. Yet, from a Critical Vegan/Asian/Animal Studies perspective, this is an entangled mess that requires some unravelling. To begin with, in the predominantly Anglophone context of ‘global veganism’, the main understanding of veganism as a concept and practice derives from The Vegan Society’s, (n.d.) definition, which in its most recent full version states:

Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude - as far as is possible and practicable - all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.

This definition captures the close relationship between veganism and the animal rights movement, highlighting the coupled history of both movements’ radical ethical commitments against the exploitation of non-human animals (Francione, 1996; Munro, 2012; Giraud, 2021). However, in recent years, motivations to adopt meatless or animal-free diets have diversified and expanded beyond the paradigm of animal ethics and justice. Individuals are increasingly turning to veganism in response to motivations that range from addressing ecological crises to public health concerns, as well as in line with broader lifestyle trends that prioritize aspects such as wellness or sustainability. As a result, the diversification of directions has come to call into question veganism’s ‘ideological baggage’ (Dutkiewicz and Dickstein, 2021; North et al., 2021). On one hand, the mainstreaming of meatless diets and lifestyles can represent an expansion of moral concern and a step toward broader social acceptance (Lindblom and Jacobsson, 2014). On the other, with the transformation of what was once a radical social movement into a consumer-driven identity or wellness trend, there is also growing concern over how such depoliticization signals the commodification of veganism and the rise of ‘plant-based capitalism’ or ‘big veganism’ (Giraud, 2021; Sexton, Garnett and Lorimer, 2022; Jones and Sanbonmatsu, 2024). In short, veganism is increasingly seen as a spectrum of practices and beliefs that includes moral activism, ecological pragmatism, and lifestyle choice in varying and subjective configurations.

This fluidity certainly raises important questions about the normative commitments and future trajectories of veganism. However, it can be further complicated in a number of ways. For example, although in the Western-

Anglophone context the coupling of veganism and animal rights activism have developed along a mostly progressive and intersectional agenda (Harper, 2009; Adams, 2015; Giraud, 2021), there is also an undeniable niche of far-right or nazi-identifying vegans which has been puzzling and concerning, but not entirely surprising (Forchtner and Tominc, 2017; Muller, Rooney and McNeill, 2025). What is more, as veganism becomes increasingly global, it has come to meet and adapt to socio-political settings that further compromise and redefine its ethical standing along ethnic, nationalist, or discriminatory narratives (Weiss, 2016; Cordeiro-Rodrigues, 2021; Shankar, 2023). In the specific case of veganism in the wider Asian context this complication is best summarized by Klein's (2008) comparative reflection piece, which highlights how meatless practices in the region have been historically intertwined with long-standing religious-moral traditions such as Hinduism or Buddhism, and which have also undergone their own round of regional flows, adaptations, and politicizations. Thus, in an increasingly globalized Asian landscape, an examination of meat and meatless diets ultimately demonstrates that the boundaries between global and local, modern and traditional, and voluntary and rule-based are in fact porous. The most immediate point here for my own discussion of veganism in the Sino-cultural sphere and what this means for veganism in general is that the convergence of these diverse motivations and diversification of meanings challenges the notion of veganism as a singular, universal philosophy or way of life.

At this stage, neither the point nor the conceptual-theoretical merits of this discussion are probably entirely clear to the reader. The only thing that has been established is that a scholarly discussion of food, eating, and veganism is a complex endeavour that entails social, cultural, political, religious, and a whole plethora of other entanglements, and that basically everything matters, everywhere, all at once. Here, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) arguments for the application of an ethics of care to entanglement offers a starting point to problematize and rethink such matters. However, it is Eva Haifa's Giraud's (2019; 2021) work that bridges STS, Vegan Studies, and Critical Animal Studies and helps pull back the discussion to what this thesis 'cares' about in the sense of what it is ultimately narrowed down to. That is, the issue of social mobilization, which entails a particular project of entanglement and disentanglement. Here, Giraud's engagement with vegan and animal rights activism helps foreground the importance of identifying power and privileges in the entangled web of relations between human and non-humans. In short, her argument can be summarized as follows: When everything matters, then nothing matters! So, what now? Giraud (2019) argues that we need to problematize what is dictating the shape of entanglement and intervenes by

proposing an “ethics of exclusion” which recognizes that every political or ethical stance necessarily involves closing off certain possibilities in order to actualize others. This approach does not reject relationality but insists that acknowledging exclusions allows for more reflective, accountable, and ‘tactical’ activism. In a somewhat similar fashion to how she operationalizes her arguments by following the trajectory of anticapitalism, animal, and environmental activism to highlight the choices and decisions made by actors in a complex world, my project has sought to foreground the transformation of Sino-cultural veg*nism as new assemblages of actors/actants, meanings, and motivation become entangled and come to enact specific disentanglements. This in turn, directs attention to the characterization of these assemblages into a social movement.

3.3.1 New Social Movements

The debate surrounding what veganism entails as an ideology, concept, and practice, has also translated into differing positions regarding its typology and status as a movement, with different authors characterizing it as a political, radical, cultural, or lifestyle movement (Cherry, 2006; Bertuzzi, 2017; Wrenn, 2019; Gheihman, 2021). Nevertheless, there is an established niche of social movement studies focused on animal rights activism where the adoption of veganism, vegetarianism, or meat avoidance constitutes known practices (Jasper and Nelkin, 1992; Guither, 1998; Munro, 2012; Jacobsson and Lindblom, 2016). That being said, there is also general agreement that veganism connected to such types of mobilizations aligns with the paradigm of what has been commonly known as ‘new social movements’ (NSMs) (Cherry, 2006: 155; Gheihman, 2021: 4; Munro, 2012: 166). NSMs refer to the movements that gained prominence from the 1960s onwards and which marked a shift away from social organization around class-based struggles toward symbolic, cultural, and identity-oriented areas of contestation. Movements such as feminism, civil rights, and environmentalism, as well as anti-war or anti-nuclear activism exemplify this transition. More specifically, these movements came to expand the discussion on rights, and foreground identity issues centred on gender, sexuality, race, and other types of group membership, while simultaneously emphasizing ecologic and social justice values, and embracing alternative ways of living centred on pacifism, spirituality, and counter-cultural expression (Buechler, 2011).

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Theorization around NSMs is diverse yet primarily shaped by the work of European scholars who operationalized the concept and led foundational discussions on such novel mobilizations. Most notably: Alberto Melucci (1980; 1989; 1996), who centred his discussion on the ‘nomadic’ and fragmented movements emerging in advanced capitalist societies organized around new collective identities, and where of the central conflict is not material production but the control over symbolic and cultural resources and based on personal needs; Alain Touraine (1981; 1985; 1988), who examined post-industrial social struggles that centre on the control of meaning and cultural orientation through the production and organization of knowledge, information, and technical systems. Through his extensive examination of social movements, he foregrounded the concept of ‘historicity’ to capture the dynamics of such contentions as social actors seeking to produce and reproduce their own cultural frameworks, thus influencing the direction and development of society; Jürgen Habermas (1981; 1987), whose discussion of NSMs places social actors’ territory of operations and contestations between ‘the system and the lifeworld’. In his account, the system is understood as the realm of ‘practical rationality’, built on ‘power’ or the administrative or bureaucratic systems of government, and ‘money’ in terms of economic systems and markets. The lifeworld is the realm of ‘communicative rationality’, constituted by the norms, values, and relationships that inform the

conduct of everyday life; and lastly, of note is the work of Manuel Castells (1983), who focused on the characteristically urban features of these movements and discussed the dynamics of their resistance against the encroachment of power structures into vital spaces. For Castells, such urban contentions are not simply about material distribution but about the production of meaning and identity, where urban spaces become sites of resistance where social actors engage in cultural projects of identity and meaning construction. Most notably, his later work would translate these types of dynamics and contestations to the digital and globalized realm of ICTs (Castells, 1996; 2012).

In summary, theorization around NSMs is varied, with different authors operationalizing theoretical arguments around specific aspects of their mobilization. However, as Steven Buechler (1995; 2011; 2013) has extensively discussed, these different perspectives can be synthesized into recurring or overlapping themes. Therefore, we can conclude that NSMs are historically specific to advanced capitalist or post-industrial contexts, and that they arise from tensions within late modernity. Their social bases are diffuse and plural, encompassing heterogeneous identities and memberships. Instead of class solidarity, their cohesion largely stems from collective identity formation, everyday politics, and post-material values that privilege symbolic and cultural transformation over economic struggle. As a result, NSMs often exhibit decentralized, egalitarian, participatory, and prefigurative forms of organization that reflect their moral or ethical agendas.

That being said, two aspects must be noted before continuing. First, there is no shortage of criticism regarding the conceptualization and theorization of NSMs, which has questioned their ‘newness’, over-generalization and abstraction, neglect of structural factors, and their Western-centric middle-class bias (Tucker, 1991; Weir, 1993; Pichardo, 1997; Barker and Dale, 1998). This last point then directs attention to the second and perhaps most relevant limitation of employing a NSM lens from this project’s standpoint; NSM theory certainly has a Western-European origin, and applying it to explain developments in the Sino-cultural context requires careful consideration, just like any other projects of theoretical and intellectual transplantation.

In Taiwan, while the process of political liberalization that started in the late 1970s led to the rise of various ‘new’ areas of social mobilization as captured in Hsu and Soong’s (1989) edited volume on ‘Taiwan’s Emerging Social Movements’ (台灣新興社會運動), engagement with NSM theorization was ultimately quite limited and selective. Rather, the more immediate concerns of social actors in that period were Taiwan’s democratization, as well as issues of territoriality. As a result, and as noted by Taiwanese sociologist Mau-kuei Chang (1997: 20, 28), Taiwan’s socio-political setting was not ripe for morally

specialized movements to emerge. This assessment continued with Ming-sho Ho's (2004) examination of Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement, which is commonly understood as an NSM, and concluding that such a lens was still unsuitable for the Taiwanese case in the 2000s. In China, although the reform and opening up era of economic liberalization led to deep reaching socio-economic transformations and the rise of social advocacy around issues such as the environment and women's rights, engagement with NSMs in theory is difficult to pinpoint. Here, the most relevant discussion can perhaps be noted in Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce and Gilles Guiheux's (2009) examination of movements in the 2000s, which do make a mention of NSM theories. This overall limited application and lack of interest in NSMs is not surprising given that social actors in China operate in a distinctive political environment that in general curtails the 'trigger happy' application of imported concepts. However, as I argue and, hopefully, make a good case for in Papers 1 and 2, it is perhaps a good time to revisit the discussion around NSMs in the context of contemporary Taiwan and China. What is more, from a comparative perspective, a NSMs framework is suitable because its emphasis on post-materialist values, identity, and culture provides a valuable lens for examining how advocacy actors, and more specifically civil society across the Strait, navigate their unique socio-political landscapes and engage in alternative forms of democratic and global participation. This last point is particularly relevant considering this study's focus on the globalization of veg*nism.

3.3.2 Civil society

This in turn directs attention to the dynamics and relationship between social movements and civil society. As noted by Donatella Della Porta (2020), in most of Western scholarship the study of social movements and civil society have been treated as their own distinct fields and developed in a relatively isolated matter from each other. This is "puzzling as there is instead ample theoretical and empirical overlapping, which calls for the building of bridges between these fields of study" (p. 938). What is more, as she notes, social movements, in particular the NSMs, which have been defined by their quest for alternative forms of meaning making, autonomy, and participation increasingly intersect with civil society's emphasis on solidarity, civility, and voluntarism. Such convergence is increasingly pronounced, as social movement organizations adopt service-oriented roles, 'NGOization', and civil society groups become more activist and politicized, 'SMOization' in response to different political, economic, or social crises, thus resulting in 'hybridization' as social movements and civil society actively reshape each

other and transform norms of participation, solidarity, and democracy. This dissertation project takes on this hybrid approach, zooming into the role of veg*n advocates as civil society actors who are part of a broader veg*n movement as further elaborated on in Papers 1 and 2. This hybrid framework is suitable for zooming into the development and more recent direction of veg*n advocacy in both China and Taiwan as the movement is not only increasingly ‘visible’ within the public sphere, but its actors are also becoming professionalized and institutionalized.

Such developments at the same time reveal the types of localization and adaptations that civil society actors who are aligned with global movements engage with and undergo as they navigate domestic cultural contexts and socio-political paradigms. Peggy Levitt and Sally E. Merry (2009; 2017; 2019) have extensively discussed this in terms of ‘vernacularization’, the process through which global norms, such as human rights and feminist discourses, are operationalized into local contexts. This involves adapting ‘universal ideas’ to resonate with local cultural values, languages, and power structures so they become relevant and actionable for communities as they are mediated by activists, NGOs, and governments. Dongchao Min (2016) has discussed this through the lens of ‘travelling theory’ (Said, 1983) and translation in the case of feminism in China as she notes that the global flow of theories and movements is not linear. In practice they may take various and alternative trajectories and ‘translations’ that navigate linguistic, cultural, social, and political structures as they are received, adapted, or resisted by actors, thus leading to either successes or failures as they travel.

The main point of this latter discussion is that globalized movements are, in practice, subject to a number of negotiations and compromises as they take local roots and, perhaps more importantly, as they become institutionalized or professionalized. In the hybrid movement-civil society context that has dominated discussions of social organization in the Sino-cultural sphere (Chuang, 2004; Ho and Edmonds, 2007; J. Chen, 2010; M.S. Ho, 2010), this is an important dimension to keep in mind to assess the later trajectory of veg*n movements and its actors/actants. This is outlined somewhat in Paper 3 and at the centre of the discussion in Paper 4.

3.3.3 The system and the lifeworld

From this point, a Habermasian lens of NSMs and more specifically his discussion of the dynamics of the ‘colonization of the lifeworld’ becomes particularly relevant and further justifies the choice of treating veg*n movements in the Chinese and Taiwanese contexts as NSMs. In short, while

the lifeworld is the realm of ‘communicative rationality’ based on shared meanings, culture, and norms, it is also a dimension that is engaged in constant resistance against, and threatened by, encroachment from the ‘instrumental rationality’ that operates through bureaucratic and capitalist means. As the lifeworld becomes colonized by the logic of power and money, social solidarity and community life is compromised as relations become instrumentalized, and citizens are transformed into consumers and clients rather than active participants in a radically democratic public sphere (Habermas, 1981; 1987). Food movements and food-focused civil society that give rise to Alternative Food Networks promoting local, sustainable, and meaningful community-based systems of provision are a prime example of the ways in which social actors have come to organize in order to resist and create alternative approaches within the context of the food system as they navigate market forces (Starr, 2010; Goodman, DuPuis and Goodman, 2012). In the case of veganism, these dynamics are well illustrated throughout its evolution from a radical philosophy and way of life to a lifestyle centred on consumption choices (Gheihman, 2021). What is more, and as previously noted, this ‘colonization of the lifeworld’ is at the centre of ongoing debates regarding the globalization and mainstreaming of veganism. This is directly pertinent to the rise and expansion of the veg*n movement in the Sino-cultural context. This is because while the trajectories of veganism in China and Taiwan in many ways capture this exact fate toward marketization and legislation, they also put into view the dynamics that enable such colonization. By paying closer attention to these dynamics, it is also possible to foreground alternative paths of resistance or even note instances in which advocacy actors seek to actively ‘influence’ the direction of such colonization. In this sense, the foodscape and, more specifically, veg*n foodscapes across Taiwan and China can effectively be understood as the space for NSMs’ operations where the new discourses and contestations around food ethics, meatless diets, and plant-based lifestyles is effectively taking shape; that is, “the seam between the system and the lifeworld” (1981, pp.33–36). This ultimately explains this dissertation’s primary focus on the ‘foodscape’ as a vantage point between the foodscape, and as discussed next, the food system.

3.4 Food systems in transition

As will become clear throughout Papers 1 to 4, veg*n movements’ actors/actants in the Sino-cultural context are NSMs which, rather than being

in conflict with ‘traditional’ socio-political adversaries, are organized with the goal of transforming a specific socio-technical system, while at the same time, increasingly engaging with global sustainability narratives and the Agenda 2030 regime. In the context of sustainability transitions research, a socio-technical system refers to the essential industrial-service sectors that enable everyday life to function in modern societies. These include energy provision, water supply, transport infrastructures, and agro-food regimes, among other sectors. From this perspective, a socio-technical transition consists of the process by which socio-technical systems undergo fundamental transformations based on key changes in their technological, material, organizational, institutional, political, economic, and socio-cultural make-up (Markard, Raven and Truffer, 2012). In response to the existential and environmental threats arising from unchecked development, sustainability has now become the prime logic underscoring socio-technological transformation. Sustainability transitions refer to the “long-term, multi-dimensional, and fundamental transformation processes through which established socio-technical systems shift to more sustainable modes of production and consumption” (Markard, Raven and Truffer, 2012, p.956). Food systems transition is a particularly complex area for sustainability interventions. This is because, in comparison to sectors such as energy or water supply, food production and consumption is a dimension informed by deeply embedded cultural and social nuances (Fourat and Lepiller, 2017; Mintz and Du Bois, 2002). However, there is growing scientific consensus that a sustainable food transition entails necessary and massive dietary shifts; in particular, from meat to predominantly plant-based food (Vinnari and Vinnari, 2014; Willett et al., 2019; Rockström et al., 2025). Nevertheless, this type of transformation faces numerous obstacles which include not only institutional and market structures, but also imply deeply embedded food culture and traditions.

3.4.1 Carnism and the animal-industrial complex

From the angle of this dissertation, the concept of ‘carnism’ is a key starting point of intervention. According to Melanie Joy (2009), the vegan scholar and advocate who first coined the term, ‘carnism’ refers to the system of beliefs that conditions us to eat certain animals. In short, beyond the physiological characteristics of ‘carnivore’ and ‘omnivore’ sometimes employed to describe diets, the key feature of carnism is that it is based on the prevalent and unquestioned choice to eat meat. Thus, when there is no necessity to consume animal flesh, but it is otherwise chosen or accepted as the norm, it constitutes carnism. Joy (2009) further argues that ‘carnism’ has so far remained invisible

and left outside mainstream scrutiny due to its entrenchment in social concepts and practices. Taking it from here, Potts (2016, p.19) has noted that if carnism embodies the ideology of eating meat, then ‘meat culture’ is the tangible and practical way in which carnism is expressed in the everyday. This also means that carnism, and thus meat culture, is expressed in different forms across varying geographies and customs (Gilbert and Desaulniers, 2014, p.377).

In the Sino-cultural context, although regional foodways are known for the variety and the diversity of animal and plant ingredients, it is also known that meat, and specially pork, have a special place in food and eating culture (K.C. Chang, 1977; Watson, 2014); a matter that has also been noted in the region’s recent phenomenon of ‘meatification’ (Hansen and Jakobsen, 2020; Jakobsen and Hansen, 2020). In the specific case of China and as noted in Lora-Wainwright’s (2007) ethnographic account of the transformation of everyday life in a Chinese rural village, eating meat every day is closely connected to the concept of ‘eating well’ or to satiety (吃好 *chi hao*) for many. With China’s growing economic affluence and the rise of its middle class, meat has further come to enjoy a conspicuous presence in everyday meals in the region (Gerth, 2010, p.107; Hansen and Jakobsen, 2020, p.32). What is more, industrial livestock, in particular pig farming, and dairy production have been important cornerstones of China’s agricultural modernization and continue to play important roles in terms of the country’s development path and food security priorities (DuBois and Gao, 2017; M. Schneider, 2017; 2019; DuBois, 2019). In Taiwan, although local cuisines are often also seen in relation to Chinese foodways, in the past decades and since democratization there has been growing efforts to find and define a distinctively Taiwanese cuisine (Y.J. Chen, 2011; 2025). Meat certainly plays a role in such dishes; however, the embeddedness of meat has perhaps been more effectively foregrounded in terms of discussions focused on global food and biosecurity regimes, as well as Taiwan’s search for sovereignty through food which involves animal bodies (Yuen and Kan, 2021; C.M. Wang, 2022).

In any case, these discussions ultimately direct attention to a defining assemblage of contemporary socio-technical food regimes, that is, the ‘animal-industrial complex’. First coined by anthropologist Barbara Noske (1989), who drew inspiration from the ‘military-industrial complex’, the ‘animal-industrial complex’ (A-IC) is an analytical framework to understand the systemic interlocking of capitalist industry, animal exploitation, and human consumption practices where animal life is commodified and transformed into raw materials for food, clothing, and research. Critical Animal Studies scholars have further engaged with this framework. Most notably, Richard Twine (2012; 2013) further advanced and developed the concept to reveal the

entangled networks of biopolitical, economic, and ideological systems that perpetuate the large-scale commodification and control of animal bodies, thus foregrounding how corporate, scientific, and governmental institutions collaborate to sustain animal exploitation under neoliberal capitalism in the age of ecological crisis (Hunnicut, Twine and Mentor, 2024).

3.4.2 Niche-regime interactions

Within this context, animal and veg*n advocates advancing plant-based diets and lifestyles are at the cornerstone of efforts to transform the A-IC by disentangling animal lives and bodies in a critical moment when the world has turned its attention to sustainability transitions. More specifically, such advocates have a long history of involvement working toward reconceptualizing social understandings of meat, and they are at the centre of the plant-based niche and food regime interaction (Mylan et al., 2019; Hall, 2025). Niche-regime interactions describe the dynamic relationships between innovative ‘niches’, protected spaces fostering ‘radical innovations’, and established socio-technical regimes that structure dominant practices, institutions, and technologies. Within the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) framework developed by innovation and sustainability scholar Frank W. Geels (2002), these interactions determine whether niches can challenge, transform, or integrate into existing socio-technical regimes. Such interactions may include learning processes, alignment of expectations, and actor-network collaborations that facilitate systemic change (Geels and Schot, 2007; Schot and Geels, 2011; Geels, 2024). In the context of this project, veg*n advocacy actors and plant-based foods are at the heart of such niches and share agency as civil-society actants seeking to reconfigure the agri-food socio-technical regime by developing and promoting alternative technologies, practices, and products that are ultimately meant to make their way into the mainstream (Mouat and Prince, 2018; Twine, 2018; Fuentes and Fuentes, 2022). This process ultimately taps into bioeconomic and ontological politics that underlie the food system (Sexton, 2018; Jönsson, Linné and McCrow-Young, 2019).

These dynamics are at the same time, built on specific visions and imaginaries of the future (Hansen, 2025). New technologies often carry promissory, even utopian, narratives about their benefit to society. These narratives are central to the emergence and maintenance of ‘socio-technical imaginaries’ which refer to the “collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology” (Jasanoff and Kim, 2015,

p.96). While socio-technical imaginaries might primarily be associated with the nation-building projects of governments and market ambitions of industry, they are also subjects of civil society opposition or alignment. When such alignments occur, they can be conceptualized as ‘technology-and product-oriented movements’ (Hess, 2005). In the case of alternative protein products such as PBMs, animal-free food technologies are presented by industry and advocacy actors as vehicles toward healthy, secure, animal-friendly, and climate conscious food systems that are still able to meet popular taste requirements (Sexton, Garnett and Lorimer, 2019). These so-called ‘promissory narratives’ (Stephens and Ruivenkamp, 2016) are key to understanding the juncture in which PBMs exist in the Sino-cultural context today. Veg*n foodways are changing; studies of perceptions and motivations surrounding PBM consumption indicate the role of a younger population interested in the health, sustainability, and animal welfare benefits of such products (Chung, Bryant and Asher, 2023; ProVeg China, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). At the same time, alternative proteins have come to figure in the socio-technical imaginaries that underlie domestic discussions on the food systems. In China, this is illustrated by the inclusion of ‘future foods’, such as cultivated meat and plant-based proteins, into the country’s agricultural modernizations plans (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, 2021). In Taiwan, this can be noted in recent civil society efforts to build pressure on the government to implement plant-based food policies within the country’s climate action legislation (T.Y. Chen, 2023).

From the standpoint of this project, these developments capture a specific juncture of niche-regime interaction and direct attention to the final element of note to this project’s theoretical-conceptual discussions. That is, the matter of translation. As already noted in the introduction, this dissertation refers to ‘translation’ in various ways. More specifically, it shares a common focus on the process in which concepts, ideas, and core issues are operationalized into specific mobilizations and expressions by an assemblage of actors.

3.4.3 Socio-technical translations

Although aspects of translation have been discussed by different authors in relation to topics such as the travel and ‘translation’ of feminism (Min, 2016), and to the point of this section, the translation involved in niche-regime interactions to sustainability (Smith, 2007), this dissertation’s notion of translation is largely inspired by Michel Callon’s (1984) approach. He treats ‘translation’ as an analytic framework that is “particularly well adapted to the study of the role played by science and technology in structuring power

relationships” (p.197). In this sense, translation involves four stages starting with a (I) problematization in which an actor identifies and defines an issue, and in doing so positions themselves as indispensable to its resolution while creating an ‘obligatory passage point’ through which other actors (human and non-human) must interact with the problem. This leads to a process of (II) intersement in which the indispensable actors attempt “to impose and stabilize the identity of the other actors it defines through its problematization” (pp. 207-208) through a variety of actions. If successful, this leads to (III) enrolment, which involves negotiation with the different actors to perform and interrelate according to their allocated roles. This thus results in (IV) mobilization as actors become the ‘spokesmen’ of their collectivities which may remain in a stable alliance. However, as Callon concludes, there is also the possibility of eventual controversies and betrayal.

Interestingly and as noted, while the notion of translation has been discussed within examination of niche-regime interactions in sustainability transitions (Smith, 2007), and also applied to the mainstreaming of the plant-based food sector (Aschemann-Witzel, Mulders and Mouritzen, 2023), their approach to translation differs in their ultimate concerns and research ‘enactments’. With this in mind, in this dissertation I engage with the notion of translation in different ways, zooming in and out of the different levels in which socio-technical translation takes place. In Papers 1 and 2, I put into view the assemblages of ‘new’ veg*n advocates ‘translating’ veg*nism into local mobilizations and practices, while in Paper 3 I focus on the material-semiotic processes ‘translating’ plant-based meat proteins into an ontological artifact bridging Sino-cultural traditions of veg*n foods into the plant-based foods of the future. In the final piece of this compilation, Paper 4, I attempt to synthesize the sum of these niche-regime interactions as a process of ‘moral translation’ in the pursuit of modernist plant-based sustainable futures.

4 Cooking Instructions: Methodology

4.1 ‘Mirror Flower, Water Moon’

During my fieldtrip in China in 2023, I had planned to attend a vegan cooking class located at a *siheyuan* (四合院) in a traditional *hutong* (胡同) neighbourhood. It was a monthly event held by a local WeChat-based group that, among other things, hosted dining meet-ups, vegan markets, and a meatless month challenge. I signed up as soon as I saw the class announcement post and was looking forward to gleaning some data through ‘cooking along’. The menu information explained that we would be making two kinds of vegan dumplings and smashed cucumber salad. Attendance to this class would provide a chance to meet members of the group, obtain a banquet chef’s perspective on meatless foods, observe an instance of skills acquisition, and enjoy some plant-based food in a unique spatial setting characteristic of China’s capital. It did not come to pass. A few days before the class, a cancellation notice was posted on the event-specific WeChat group, the kitchen was to be closed until further notice due to new regulations requiring renovation work.

I still visited the *siheyuan* and met the chef a few days later.²⁴ We sat at a table next to his kitchen space and drank many cups of tea. It turned out that he was not a vegan or vegetarian practitioner. He was also different from the plant-based chefs that I had encountered at veg*n events so far. He simply enjoyed experimenting with meatless foods. Being a Chinese banquet chef, he already prepared too much meat, often at the request of customers who wanted to leave out a vegetable dish in favour of adding more meat to the menu. As a result, in his own everyday life he was interested in preparing healthier meals and as he stated, “eating vegetarian foods is healthier”. At the end of my visit, he directed me to his preferred local traditional market, the place from where

²⁴ Interview, 12 July 2023.

he sourced most of his ingredients. Nothing about this meeting went as I expected. It was perhaps one of the most insightful conversations I had during my fieldwork, but I was not sure what to make of it. This is because it took me to the margins of my research and made me wonder whether I was focusing on the right things or asking the right questions.

In thinking about the methodological journey involved in this dissertation, the idiom ‘Mirror Flower, Water Moon’ (鏡花水月)²⁵ has often come to mind. The phrase is used to describe dreams, desires, or ideals that captivate the imagination but remain out of reach. It is also used to refer to fleeting or transient phenomena, yet it might alternatively be interpreted as referring to that which is fake, a mirage, or empty, thus reflecting the Buddhist philosophy of impermanence. In studying veg*n advocacy and sustainability transitions in Taiwan and China through the lenses of still fairly new or nascent actors, this project is concerned with something that is in flux, not fully formed, or becoming in multiple ways. In short, this dissertation pertaining to food and social change is an attempt to lock down a ‘moving target’.

4.2 Methods assemblages

In *After Method*, John Law (2004) engages with the methodological issues that are very relevant to this conversation, starting with a discussion on the limits of traditional social science methodologies. He asks whether there is need for a different approach to methods that can match and better capture the complexity, ambiguity, and messiness of social realities. He argues that “the problem is not so much lack of variety in the practice of method, as the hegemonic and dominatory pretensions of certain versions or accounts of method”, and explains “while standard methods are often extremely good at what they do, they are badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular” (Law, 2004, p.4).

He highlights the need to accept that indefiniteness is also a reality in itself, and discusses the complex and entangled dimensions involved in the enactment of scientific realities through the intertwined concepts of *out-there-ness*, *in-hereness*, and the *hinterland*. Out-there-ness refers to the external world that is assumed to exist independently of observation and representation. It’s the ‘real world’ that methods claim to describe accurately. Law argues that

²⁵ In the Chinese translation of ‘The Great Wisdom’ Vol 6.

this external reality is not fixed but enacted through practices. In-hereness involves the practices, tools, and context through which knowledge is constructed, and by which the world is made knowable. It emphasizes that what we see as reality is not simply discovered but actively enacted by researchers' scientific practices, methods, and tools, as well as shaped by their own cultural, cognitive, and scientific backgrounds. Bridging these two, the hinterland is a conceptual space where out-thereeness and in-hereness interact. It is a zone of negotiation where practices, methods, and material realities integrate to produce knowledge. This hinterland embodies the messy, contingent nature of reality, highlighting how methods are not neutral but actively shape what is considered real.

Law (2004) frames the processes taking place within the hinterland into a *method assemblage*, which is "a combination of reality detector and reality amplifier" (p.14). He describes how researchers craft and enact boundaries between three components of reality: 1) 'what is present', an observable representation or object; 2) 'manifest absence', something that is absent but noticeably so, and as such can be described in relation to what is present; and 3) 'Otherness', referring to what comes to fill in the gaps between presence and absence. It is the unacknowledged and often routine by-product of research practices. These components are not naturally given but are methodologically produced, emphasizing that knowledge creation is performative and selective. The interplay of these dimensions illustrates the contingent and exclusionary nature of research practices. By foregrounding the concept of a *hinterland* and the enactment involved in *method assemblage*, Law critiques traditional methods for oversimplifying and excluding the complexities of reality. His framework invites social scientists to embrace the fluid, messy, and performative nature of knowledge production, encouraging reflexivity and inclusivity in understanding the social world. He challenges researchers to reconsider what is included, excluded, or ignored in their methodological choices, ultimately reframing the boundaries of what counts as reality. Law's arguments have their origins in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and, more specifically, in the 'material semiotic' approach that, as the reader might have noticed, is recurrent in this dissertation. As a predominantly inductive process it does share some commonality with Grounded Theory, in observing, comparing, and taking note (Law, 2004: 9). Yet it takes a step further by following 'flat ontologies' that attribute agency to not only human actors but also the non-human subjects involved in the emergence of social phenomena.

4.2.1 Into the Asian Studies hinterland

In the study of a rapidly changing landscape and society like China, Basile Zimmermann (2015) has made the case that bridging STS and China Studies methodologies to explore technological and cultural phenomena within the Chinese context has particular merit. This in itself is not exactly a novel stance, as there is a well-established Asia-focused engagement with STS, such as illustrated by specialized journals like *East Asian Science and Technology Studies* (EASTS). However, there are two aspects of Zimmermann's (2015) work that are most relevant to the purpose of this dissertation. One is that his arguments are inspired by STS's broader discussion on socio-technical change to grasp the co-evolution of global popular culture and materiality in China. Second is that he uses the case of China's electronic music devices and music scene to challenge certain essentialisms that can be found in area-focused fields, like Sinology or China Studies, to question the boundaries of what makes something 'Chinese'. This focus on an element of 'authenticity' or 'representativeness' is somewhat central to area-focused studies and can be extended to discuss what makes something 'Western', or 'Taiwanese', or 'East Asian', and so forth. For example, the case of a prospective vegan cooking class led by a Chinese banquet chef at a *huntong* in Beijing, is certainly Chinese. It is about a Chinese citizen, making Chinese food, in China's capital. Similarly, an instance of 'eating along' with a Chinese interlocutor at Shanghai's *Gongdelin* (功德林)²⁶, a centuries-old vegetarian restaurant counted among China's 'time honoured brands' and known for cooking techniques awarded with the status of national intangible cultural heritage²⁷, is undeniably Chinese. More accurately put, both cases are representative of a generally imagined Han China. In the case of Taiwan, a night-market style vegan fair in Kaohsiung where one can find dishes like vegan *xiaolongbao* (小籠包), millet mochi (小米麻糬), and plant-based 'popcorn chicken' *yansuji* (鹽酥雞) certainly feels Taiwanese²⁸. It nods at the historical flows, colonial influences, indigenous elements, and globalization processes that make up Taiwan's contemporary culinary landscape and capture its quest for a multiethnic culinary identity (Y.J. Chen, 2011; 2025). However, these easily categorized instances represent only one fragment of the subjects, foods,

²⁶ Eat-along, 05 June 2023.

²⁷ Also known as 'Godly'. It was founded in 1922 and awarded National Intangible Cultural Heritage status in 2008.

²⁸ Participant observation, 1 April 2023.

places, and practices discussed in this dissertation. Once I took a step back and considered the wealth of instances comprising my data, the picture started to blur. How should I consider the views of informants who were born overseas or are foreign educated? What about Taiwanese veg*n media content creators reviewing imported plant-based food products on YouTube? Perhaps most controversial would be the question, can I or should I include the views of veg*n community members who happen to be ‘foreigners’? In short, what makes something qualify as representative of phenomena shaping Chinese or Taiwanese veg*nism? For the most part, I have to recognize that the new generation of veg*n actors and their advocacy work based on ideas of animal ethics, climate action, or sustainability are seen as a novel development and largely foreign, despite the region’s own traditions of meatless diets, mercy for animals, and ecological thought.

One particular event that took place during the fourth year of my studies is of note in this discussion. It was during the European Association for Chinese Studies Summer School 2023, hosted at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, my academic home, with the theme of ‘Situating Global China’. Incidentally, this event took place right as I returned from fieldwork, and around the period when I began writing the major pieces of this dissertation. During one of the coffee breaks, and on hearing about my project on veg*n advocacy, one of the attendees wondered what it was about this topic that connected to the summer school’s thematic and methodological focus on ‘Global China’ (Franceschini and Loubere, 2022). The question did not surprise me. As I learned about the other participant’s work looking at China’s ‘going out’ via economic, institutional, and migratory processes, I had been wondering the same. Perhaps mostly due to the fear of being found out as an ‘impostor’ more than anything else, I quickly pointed out that the topic of ‘Global China’ was not only about China going global, but also about how the global is taking shape within China. Although my interlocutor seemed satisfied enough with the answer, it made a lasting impression on how I thought and went about my project in its later stages. Drawing from Law’s discussions of out-thereness, in-hereness, and the hinterland, that brief coffee break conversation made evident that what I had thought of and seen as a clear reality ‘out-there’ to be found in the cases of veg*n advocacy in Taiwan and China, was not a concrete reality in the ‘in-here’ of scholarly discussion. In other words, this was a major landmark to consider across the expanse of my project’s *hinterland*.

To begin with, as my project looked at veg*n movements in both China and Taiwan through a comparative lens, it necessitated that I engage at a more fundamental level with the other side of the equation of ‘Global China’. That

is, the concept of a ‘Global Taiwan’. Yet, this is not a straightforward endeavour. It is inherently imbued with the type of contestations, topical sensitivity, and marginality that underlie Taiwan’s standing as an ontological entity. This in turn has epistemological implications. More specifically, while China Studies and Sinology are well-established fields, Taiwan has often been seen as an adjacent subject matter in relation to these two. Yet, though smaller in size and niche in interest, Taiwan Studies has gradually developed into its own field with an increasingly globally-oriented agenda and supported by an active circle of scholars and institutions that find value in looking at Taiwan as a distinct site for knowledge production (Fell et al., 2018; Fell and Hsiao, 2019). By extension, in approaching a Global China and Global Taiwan in a comparative manner, the issue of how to effectively engage with these two fields and sites while bypassing the issue of cross-Strait relations, acknowledging differences while avoiding essentializing dichotomies, and moving beyond methodological nationalism emerged.

Here, Chen’s ‘inter-referencing’ approach provides the perfect bridge to put different Asian localities and societies at the centre of comparison, dialogue, and theoretical insight. Under this approach, the aim is to move beyond the Western-centric paradigms of knowledge production and analysis, and to reconfigure how we make sense of Asia by shifting frames of reference to include multiple, local, and regional flows. In relation to this project, this approach is central to obtaining the answers to the main threads of inquiry outlined in the research questions, which very plainly put are just the more ‘academic’ and structured versions of what I really wanted to know: What do the globalization of veg*nism, Global China, and Global Taiwan have to do with each other, if anything? Incidentally, what is ‘Global Veganism’? After all, globalization is hardly a uni-directional process and is not merely a matter of transferring ideas, technologies, and people between East and West and vice-versa (Mohácsi and Morita, 2013; Min, 2016).

Henceforth, a practical question remains. What methods have helped me assemble the components that will in turn allow me to ‘enact’ this so-far underexplored reality of vegan/plant-based food culture and practice? In the case of this project, it spans the multiple sites through which contemporary veg*nism can be found ‘out there’. This includes the more ‘classical’ approach of observing social practices, events, and behaviours. It also considers the role of non-human actors, such as food technologies involved in the making of what is broadly categorized as plant-based proteins, and it most certainly involves the digital dimensions that have come to characterize everyday life in the 21st century, such as social media platforms, mobile apps, and websites, as elaborated on next.

4.3 Ethnographic hybridity

Veg*n movements, like many organized issue areas of contemporary civil society, have come to be digitally embedded. More specifically, co-evolving, expanding, and reproducing through Information and Communication Technologies (Lawo et al., 2020; Giraud, 2023; Righetti and Bertuzzi, 2024). In focusing on veg*n advocacy, this research project has built on the opportunities afforded by the digital dimensions of the movement, while also maintaining the practice of in-person immersion. After all, participatory observation, often interchangeably referred to as ethnography, is a well-established qualitative approach in the social sciences as well as being increasingly employed in the study of social movements (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014; Bryman, 2016, p.423). As noted by Balsiger and Lambelet (2014), the introduction of ethnography into social movement studies stems from the fact that protest participants eventually became researchers of movements themselves. As a vegan practitioner, engaging with ethnographic methods has been an organic outcome of my personal involvement with the movement and my research interest in food-focused civil society. While acknowledging this positionality, it must nevertheless be noted that this dissertation, apart from the text of this kappa, has a limited auto-ethnographic element. This limitation in question is a deliberate choice, drawing from the need to allow some distance between my own vegan practice and my research topic.

Aside from these considerations, this dissertation's integration of online and offline avenues of data collection informed by an ethnographic lens is perhaps best characterized as 'ethnographic hybridity'. To be specific, the rise of an ever-evolving digital realm has added new levels of complexity to the goal of finding a truth, fact, or pattern that represents a more or less stable reality. What is more, the digital realm is an incredibly messy hinterland that combines everyday routines, a diffuse terrain of relationships, and methodological negotiations (Postill and Pink, 2012; Abidin and Seta, 2020; Seta, 2020). The social sciences have discussed the adaptation of ethnographic methods to the growing digitalization of everyday life, and some path-opening approaches have been advanced by Christine Hine's (2000) *Virtual Ethnography*, Robert Kozinets' (2009) *Netnography*, and Sarah Pink et al.'s (2015) *Digital Ethnography*. In this latter title, the authors offer an overview of how society's evolving integration of ICTs are shaping human experiences, practices, things, relationships, social worlds, localities, and events. Most importantly for the practical considerations involved in this dissertation, they outline five principles to guide the conduction of digital ethnography. In short, digital

ethnography should recognize the ‘multiplicity’ of digital interactions across interconnected platforms, technologies, and environments. It should emphasize ‘non-digital-centric-ness’, acknowledging that online and offline worlds are deeply intertwined and must be studied together. It must also be guided by ‘openness’, viewing digital ethnography as an evolving, flexible process that allows for collaboration, adaptability, and co-creation to suit research needs. As in any ethnographic approach, it must engage with ‘reflexivity’ to critically assess how positionality, presence, and choices may influence the digital spaces and communities they study. Finally, it should also consider ‘unorthodox’ research communication, involving innovative and unconventional methods to capture and convey the dynamic, fluid nature of digital environments.

In a similar vein, Liz Przybylski's (2020) *Hybrid Ethnography* framework moves beyond binary distinctions of online versus offline and emphasizes the continuity between these spheres in contemporary social life. Her approach is particularly relevant for studying communities that rely heavily on digital platforms, and to zoom into the intersection between the production of culture, the conduction of activism, and community building. Most relevantly, she notes that the role of recording social interactions is no longer exclusive to researchers or journalists; any social actor with a phone camera and internet access can be involved in creating discourse, documenting it, and circulating it themselves. What is more, social actors’ use of ICTs has also come to break down temporal and spatial dichotomies between the online and offline worlds, with events taking place both synchronously, such as livestreaming, and asynchronously accessible afterwards to the wider public.

4.3.1 Digital food studies

The spatio-temporal, communicative, and democratizing affordances presented by ICTs have become especially visible in the realm of Food Studies, where the intersection between everyday digital technologies and food is a defining feature of contemporary foodscapes. This development is characterized by the mushrooming of online food-focused content, ranging from everyday consumption in the form of food photography sharing on social media and recipe inspiration on websites or blogs, to the global flows of mediatized eating and cooking that are entangled with wider political, moral, and social processes (Dürschmidt and Kautt, 2018; Kirkwood, 2018; Lewis and Phillipov, 2018). As Lewis (2018, p.213) has argued: “food is a particularly generative space through which to understand the complex evolution and impact of the digital realm in both our everyday lives and public

and political cultures more broadly.” Further expanding on this discussion, she has noted the rise of ‘digital food’ as a specialized field of inquiry (Lewis, 2018; 2020), which Zeena Feldman and Michael K. Goodman (2021) more specifically discuss in terms of the creation and reproduction of ‘digital food culture’. As such, the digital realm is now an arena where food and culture are shaped along the dynamics of power contestation, knowledge production, and consumer politics (Lewis, 2018; Feldman and Goodman, 2021). According to Schneider et al. (2018), the integration of ICTs into food-focused social mobilization may be best conceptualized as ‘digital food activism’ and defined as “an Internet-based, organized effort to change the food system or parts thereof in which civic initiators or supporters use digital media” (p. 8). In this process, digital platforms do not merely play a supporting role; rather, they constitute infrastructures that actively foster and mediate social action.

Ultimately, examining these phenomena, this new reality found ‘out there’ in the digital world requires new or updated methodological approaches that can help us make sense of the intersection of food and digital media ‘in-here’. Taking note of this need, Jonatan Leer’s and Stinne Gunder Strøm Krogager’s (2021) *Research Methods in Digital Food Studies* provides a comprehensive and interdisciplinary framework from which to explore the convergence of food studies and digital media, outlining innovation and adaptation in the employment of methods analysing digital food culture. The edited book outlines four broad categories of methods discussed by the volume’s contributors: (I) Textual analysis, adapting an ‘old’ method to read multimodal and multisensory media artifacts that include social media, ASMR, and YouTube videos as text; (II) Digital ethnography, applying an ethnographic lens to the digital food landscape involving activism, blogs, and reviews; (III) User’s practice, paying particular attention to how digital technologies are engaged in everyday habits, knowledge production, and food communication; and (IV) Digital archives and network analysis, treating websites and social media as sources to trace the histories and map discourses surrounding food. This research project has taken considerable inspiration from these discussions on methods and adopts a broad digital food studies approach as detailed further below.

4.3.2 Field contingencies

While the ethnographically hybrid element of this dissertation has been a natural product of the evolution of social sciences inquiry along digital phenomena, it must also be recognized as the result of a necessity informed by two contingencies. The first refers to the possibilities and challenges regarding

conducting research in politically restricted settings. This issue is particularly pertinent in terms of the nuances involved in this research project's aim to apply inter-referencing across two cases in the Sino-cultural sphere, and where half of the equation pertains to accounting for the socio-political context of China. In this regard, while the country is known for its strict controls over matters of social organization and mobilization, digital research on social movements and civil society has offered significant advantages in navigating the complexities of information control and in obtaining alternative perspectives. These affordances have been extensively discussed in the work of Guobin Yang (2003; 2009; 2018) in terms of China's internet as a site of empowerment and contestations. In this sense, social media platforms like WeChat (微信), *Weibo* (微博), *Douyin* (Simp. 抖音) and *Xiaohongshu* (simp. 小红书) have become rich sources for observing public sentiment, social trends, everyday advocacy, and innovative repertoires of contention (Svensson, 2014; 2016; Tu, 2016; Yu, Hou and Zhou, 2023; Gu et al., 2024).

The second source of contingency refers to the more practical issue of feasibility in conducting in-person research. To begin with, and in relation to the issues associated with studying social mobilization in authoritarian contexts, digital methods facilitate safe access to a wealth of data while minimizing the necessity of a researcher's presence in a potentially risky environment. On the other hand, even when the research topic is not exactly sensitive, such as the case of veg*n advocacy, other factors might hinder a researcher's capabilities to conduct in-person fieldwork or interviews. These issues have been made more salient in the face of the wide-reaching impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the academic world. To be specific, this dissertation project began in 2020 when I moved from Taiwan to Sweden to pursue my doctoral studies amid the pandemic. This relocation, the travel restrictions, and the distinct public health mandates put in place at the time posed great challenges to the customarily 'in-person' approach to fieldwork. Most notably and within Asian studies, this led to a discussion about the merits of doing research at a distance (Sato, 2020). Yet from the standpoint of this project, it also resulted in valuable opportunities. In the case of the Taiwan-focused aspect of the project, physical distance led to the establishment of much-needed personal distance. Being cut from the field and my networks facilitated the shift in my frame of reference from that of an insider to that of an informed outsider. Furthermore, while as a Taiwanese citizen I could in theory have entered the field more easily than others, travel requirements and the costs involved, such as COVID-19 testing and quarantine accommodation fees, became a key motivation to engage more creatively with digital methods.

4.3.3 Fieldwork locations

This dissertation project comprises a combined total of roughly eight months of onsite fieldwork in Taiwan and China between 2021 to 2025. Here it must be briefly noted that exploratory data from the period in which I resided in Taiwan, more specifically between 2016 to 2020, has also been integrated on a limited basis. Nevertheless, the primary wealth of data were obtained from 2020 onwards, starting with fieldwork in Taiwan conducted on three separate occasions. The first trip took place in 2021, lasting about three months spanning across October to December. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions at the time, only citizens and a selected few foreign visitors were allowed into Taiwan after undergoing 14 days of quarantine and seven days of health management. While such restrictions posed a lengthy and costly barrier to the conduct of fieldwork for most researchers, my original trip was prompted by family matters and later evolved into capitalizing on the opportunity to reconnect with the veg*n community and conduct follow-up exploratory fieldwork. This coincided with various activities taking place as Taiwan remained unaffected by the pandemic due to its strict entry rules. This first visit provided great insight into how rapidly the veg*n movement had evolved since my departure in 2020 and afforded me opportunities to observe the latest developments in terms of veg*n events and the actors involved. The second fieldwork trip lasted roughly one and half months from April to Mid-May 2023, and served to expand on the developments noted in 2021. On both occasions I was primarily based in the capital Taipei, travelling to major cities like Taichung in central Taiwan and Kaohsiung in the south when relevant opportunities for participant observation arose. In terms of conducting in-person research in China, entry was similarly restricted during the pandemic and travel remained highly limited until 2023. For this reason, my field trip was delayed until May of that year. It lasted a total of two months, comprised of sequentially planned short-term stays in three cities. The first stop was Shanghai, a cosmopolitan city with a thriving vegan community, followed by Hangzhou, a historical capital known as the centre of vegetarian culture in Southeast China. The trip concluded with Beijing, the nation's capital and home to another highly active vegan community. These cities were selected due to the significance of their 'plant-based food scenes', and assessed through consultation with a local informant who in turn also functioned as a gatekeeper and helped me connect with local veg*n groups, as well as individuals of note within the community of veg*n practitioners. Lastly, I briefly returned to Taiwan in 2025 for three weeks, which allowed for a final follow-up on the progress of vegan advocates now working on climate food policy and labelling.

4.4 Methods

Building on these methodological considerations, the rest of this chapter will outline how I went about a method assemblage that produced a blend of data through qualitative methods, specifically via three broad categories: digital food ethnography, participatory observation, and semi-structured interviews. In addition to these, the emergence of a sub-category consisting of ‘eat-alongs’ is also detailed. While this section of the kappa discusses these methods individually, it is important to note that the typology of methods outlined here are not mutually exclusive. In practice, the boundaries between methods were navigated with varying degrees of flexibility on account of the project’s treatment of ethnography as a hybrid online-offline approach and informed by methodological needs, research contexts, and ethical considerations. I will go into more detail about how the data resulting from this method assemblage ultimately led to the enactment of the realities of veg*n advocacy in Taiwan and China that I found ‘out there’, in the ‘in-here’ of academic output via four research articles at the end of this chapter.

4.4.1 Digital food ethnography

This project applied an ethnographic treatment to the food-focused digital media landscapes found in the Sino-cultural sphere. In doing so, it has taken note of Tanja Schneider and Karin Eli’s (2021) discussion regarding the adaptation of ethnographic approaches to digital food and digital eating to account for the increasingly blurred lines between the digital and the analogue, enabling ‘co-presence’. As one of the main components of this study’s qualitatively oriented methodological toolkit, the study approaches the digital realm as an extension of foodscapes and treats them as another ethnographic site for ‘deep hanging out’ (Geertz, 1998); more specifically, by ‘friending’ veg*n informants, ‘joining’ online veg*n groups, ‘subscribing’ to veg*n channels, and ‘following’ accounts involved in the creation and reproduction of the veg*n niche across the ‘digital food cultures’ of Taiwan and China. Along these lines, it must be noted that as both sites’ socio-political contexts result in distinct infrastructures of communication, media control, public access, and usage, they translated into ethnographic engagement with significantly different social media outlets.

In short, Taiwan’s mediascape features a mixture of platforms including sites such as: Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram that, while originating in the West, are globally popular; regionally specific to East Asia such as LINE, a

messaging and networking app which has grown to support various additional functions and services; homegrown ones such as the bulletin board system (BBS) Professional Technology Temple (批踢踢實業坊, *pi ti ti shiye fang*) more widely known as ‘PTT’; and Dcard, a social network and forum website that primarily caters to young people and university students. According to a survey by Taiwan-based think tank, Market Intelligence & Consulting Institute (MIC) (2024), these comprise the top five most popular platforms, with Facebook leading the usage by 70%, followed by YouTube (53%), Instagram (34%), PTT (11%), and lastly Dcard with 9%. In contrast, China’s mediascape is a notoriously self-contained and centrally-governed ICT megastructure (Brehm, 2021), populated by numerous domestic platforms where social and networking applications such as the ‘super app’ WeChat, the micro-blogging site Weibo, and to a surprisingly lesser degree, Tencent’s QQ, have been subject to scholarly attention due their impact on China’s digital everyday life (Chen, Mao and Qiu, 2018; Han, 2018; Wu, 2019; L.Y. Chen, 2022). At the same time, various video sharing applications and sites have come to draw different sets of users based on algorithmic content that appeals to distinct interest, lifestyle, demographic, and consumption preferences, such as *Douyin* (TikTok) and *Xiahongshu*, now known as ‘Red Note’ in English. According to numbers from Statista (Thuy, 2025), the usage numbers of these different platforms in the 3rd quarter of 2024 were as follows: WeChat (91.8%), *Douyin* (83%), QQ (63.4%), Red Note (56.3%), *Weibo* (46.3%).

For the purposes of this research project, engagement with a selected number of platforms was informed by their general popularity and usage among the observed veg*n populations. In the case of Taiwan (Table 1), this was focused on Facebook, which provided insight on everyday veg*n practices and advocacy efforts; YouTube, useful in illuminating lifestyle trends and narratives; and LINE, which facilitated access to group chats and personal contact with informants. In addition, Instagram eventually became another source of interest as an increase of veg*n actors and accounts became more apparent across Taiwan’s vegan social media sphere during the later stages of the project. In terms of the China-focused aspect of this study (Table 2), WeChat was the dominant platform (Tu, 2016; Chen, Mao and Qiu, 2018). As a multi-purpose application that integrates various functions including messaging, video sharing and streaming, and official accounts with blogging features, as well as supporting mini-programs and other services, it greatly facilitated a sense of immersion. More specifically, it provided a one-stop access point to a variety of data procured by ‘hanging out’ in veg*n groups, scrolling through Official Accounts (simp. 公众号), and watching videos and livestream features on WeChat ‘Channels’ (simp. 微信视频号).

Table 1. Digital sources, Taiwan

Type	Name	Platforms
Organizations	Kindness to Animals	Facebook, IG
	Taiwan Animal Equality Assoc	Facebook, IG, YouTube
	VegePromotion Assoc./21 Vegan	Facebook, LINE, IG, YouTube
Fairs	Taiwan Vegan Frenzy	Facebook, IG, YouTube
	No Meat Festival	Facebook, IG, YouTube
	Veg Broadway	Facebook, IG
	Future Market	Facebook, IG
Groups	21 Vegan	Line
	Taiwan AR volunteers	Line
	Mercy as a force	Line
	Veggy Love	Line
New Media	Animal Peptalk	YouTube, Facebook, IG
	Go Vegan	YouTube, Facebook, IG
	Traveggo	YouTube, Facebook, IG
	Veggie Deer	YouTube, Facebook, IG

Table 2. Digital sources, China

Type	Name	Platforms
Organizations	Good Food Fund	WeChat, Weibo, Website
	China Vegan Society	WeChat, Red Note, Website
	Hangzhou Vegetarian Assoc.	WeChat
New Media	VegPlanet	WeChat, Red Note
	Yisujie	WeChat, Weibo, Red Note
	VegRadar	Mobile app (iOs), WeChat, Weibo
	Individual creators & Other	WeChat, Red Note, Bilibili
Groups	Shanghai	WeChat
	Hangzhou	WeChat
	Beijing	WeChat

In relation to the Chinese mediascape, Red Note also emerged as a relevant site to observe the work of veg*n media content creators during the final phases of this study. Lastly, this China-focused digital component also involved the use of VegRadar (simp. 素食雷达), a restaurant locator and review mobile application and WeChat mini-program widely used among Chinese veg*ns.

Data collection via ‘deep hanging out’ (Geertz, 1998) in these digital foodscapes resulted in three main types of research materials: screenshots, documenting discussions and digital instances of interest; textual data, based on links to relevant posts and websites saved as PDF files and added to the Web Archive for later recall when possible; and research notes, taken on visual or video content. While these resulting materials greatly overlap with data obtained through desk research, their analysis involved the application of an ethnographic sensitivity to the examination of content gleaned from websites, blogs, and hashtags, as discussed by Schneider and Eli (2021).

While both Taiwan and China presented distinct digital foodscapes, the selection of specific groups, accounts, and contacts followed a similar procedural route. Sources of interest emerged through interactions with the community and were encountered as a result of the different platforms’ algorithmic sensitivity to my online activities. In terms of the relevance and suitability of identified sources, accounts and pages were assessed via ‘walkthroughs’ (Light, Burgess and Duguay, 2018) and by taking note of public information such as ‘mutual followers’ which served to confirm their relevance within the veg*n community. Online groups and individuals were identified through referrals, also known as snowball sampling (Bryman, 2016, p.415), or through fieldwork encounters either in the digital or offline world. This latter issue hence directs attention to the ethical considerations involved in this component of the project. To begin with, throughout my online presence and interactions, I sought to make my identity as a PhD candidate and researcher based in Sweden as visible as possible. Considering the private/public fluidity of online spaces, I made sure to introduce myself and my research aims where the context required it. For example, a ‘group chat’ is private in relation to the need to be ‘added’ to the conversation by an existing member or group administrator. Yet, it is also a public space where all group members can read comments and view individual profiles. When ‘added’ to a group chat, I posted introductory greetings containing key points about my identity, research purpose, and welcoming any ‘friend requests’ for those seeking to make contact or learn more. Through this approach, group administrators served as the main gatekeepers and provided a first degree of consent to my presence in the groups. At the same time, this opened

opportunities to establish individual contact and pursue more explicit permissions from eventual informants; people who, in many cases, I came to meet and establish rapport with throughout the ‘offline’ instances of fieldwork.

4.4.2 Participant observation

The more traditional ethnographic element of this project consisted of participatory observation at a wide range of events promoting veg*nism or plant-based diets and lifestyles, such as vegan fairs, animal rights marches, veg*n meet-ups, and plant-based food industry conventions (Table 3 and 4). These events were identified primarily through the digital ethnographic component of this study. In summary, information about most events was first encountered online due to their promotion on platforms such as Facebook or Instagram in the media context of Taiwan, and on WeChat pages and groups in the case of China’s media sphere. In addition, events were also identified and discussed through referrals or direct invitations from informants.

Documentation of these events consisted of a first stage of collection of publicly available event material, including online posts, advertisements, posters, etc. This was followed by attendance and collection of data consisting of photos, videos, and field notes. In addition, where possible, participant observational data were supplemented by digital ‘follow-ups’. This consisted of reviewing public posts about the attended events through social media content posted by organizers and affiliated hashtags to take additional notes and fill any identifiable gaps due the temporal-spatial limitations of collecting data about large events as a lone researcher.

Table 3. Participant observation in China (May – July 2023)

Place	Shanghai	Hangzhou	Beijing
Period	19 May-8 June, 18-19 June	8-17 June, 20-27 June	27 June-17 July
Event	Chongming Island Organic Farm EcoBuyer market Green Food for Change Plant-based Food Expo	Chinese Cuisine Museum DIY Vegan Baking	Vegan cooking class Vegan market* Vegan cooking class II*
Note	*Events postponed due to renovation work in respective venues.		

Table 4. Participant observation in Taiwan (2016-2025)

Type	Organizer	Dates	Place	Note
Vegan fairs	Taiwan Vegan Frenzy (TVF)	2016/12/17	Taipei	
		2021/10/30-31	Taipei	
		2021/11/20-21	Kaohsiung	
		2025/04/20	Taipei	
	No Meat Festival (NMF)	2021/11/05	Taipei	
		2021/12/18	Taichung	
		2023/04/02	Taichung	
	Little Veggy Night Market	2023/04/01	Kaohsiung	
	Veg Broadway	2023/04/08	Sizihwan, KH	
		2023/04/09	Fengshan, KH	
	Future Market	2023/04/22	Taipei	Earth Day event
Street activism	Kindness to Animals (KITA)	2016/11/26	Taipei	
		2016/12/03	Taipei	
	Anonymous for the Voiceless (AV)	2019/08/03	Taipei	
		2021/11/20-21	Kaohsiung	at TVF
Marches	KITA	2017/12/14	Taipei	
		2018/10/06	Taipei	
		2019/09/28	Taipei	with Surge Activism (UK)
	Meat Free Monday (MFM)	2023/04/22	Taipei	Earth Day event
Animal Rights Day	KITA	2018/06/03	Taipei	with Our Planet. Theirs Too (US)
		2019/06/02	Taipei	
CEVA workshop	Tse-Xin Foundation	2018/03/10-11	Taipei	Center for Effective Vegan Advocacy
Public hearing	Chen Jiau-Hua (NPP)	2023/05/18	Legislative Yuan, Taipei	Connected to Earth Day events
	Chen Gau-tzu (TPP)	2025/04/22		

It must also be noted that even though the majority of the events attended were open and public, I strove to contact and inform organizers about my intent to participate and collect data. This in turn opened opportunities to engage with organizers and procure interview opportunities. At the same time, in the context of contact with impromptu informants during participant observation, verbal consent was requested where applicable such as in the case of onsite interviews/conversations that were to be written down in fieldnotes.

4.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

The interview component of this project consisted of semi-structured conversations that involved a variety of actors actively engaged in their local veg*n communities. The typology of informants generally consisted of vegan advocates and practitioners, as well as other relevant individuals, such as restaurant owners, social entrepreneurs, and plant-based industry insiders. However, due to the distinct civil society landscapes of Taiwan and China, the selection of informants and approach to interviewing in both settings ultimately differed. In the more liberal context of Taiwan, interviews played a larger role in data collection and also involved actors such as animal rights activists and representatives from animal advocacy organizations. Further details and numbers on this are provided in Paper 1.

In the context of China, actors explicitly involved with issues such as animal rights activism were not included. While this was in part due to the potential sensitivities of the topic that became apparent throughout the project, it was primarily a result of the fact that such types of practitioners constitute what could be considered a ‘micro-minority’. That is, they make up an even smaller fraction of the societal-dietary minority that comprises the country’s veg*n population. Consequently, in the Chinese context, the selection of informants was focused on openly active actors engaged in promoting veg*n lifestyles and plant-based diets, as well as individuals involved in the plant-based food industry.

In both contexts, informants were identified throughout participant observation, digital ethnography, and through snowball sampling. Potential interviewees received an interview invitation with information introducing the researcher and outlining the project in both English and Chinese. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that they consisted of a progression of questions departing from the themes of the interviewee’s experience of adopting veganism, their approach to advocacy, and their

reflections on their local vegan movements. The questions were adjusted or expanded based on the interviewee's answers. Informants were asked for verbal consent at the start of the interview and informed that they may choose to opt out at any time. In addition, the interviews were carried out according to informants' preferences and convenience. As a result, an important variable to account for in terms of the material outcomes of this particular component pertains to the matter of location and record keeping practices. To be precise, the meetings' spatio-environmental settings came to influence data collection procedures. Some interviews took place in a more 'traditional' setting, meaning a sit-down and in-person meeting at a private or quiet space. In a few instances, they also comprised one-to-one online calls. These types of settings were ideal for recording conversations, and hence, for producing what can be considered ideally transcribable material. However, a larger proportion of interviews ultimately took place in public spaces where recording was not optimal, such as at cafes and restaurants. Such instances required improvisation and adaptation, which translated into taking shorthand notes during meetings for later recall, resulting in interview notes rather than transcripts.

It must be also noted that the language used in my interviews also varied according to my informants' discretion and comfort. Sometimes they took place in Chinese, other times in English, but most often they involved some back and forth. In a similar vein to these concerns, in discussing the unpredictability and spontaneity encountered throughout fieldwork in China, Nicholas Loubere (2017) has noted how these factors affected the production of verbatim transcriptions, which are generally regarded as 'prime' research materials. In addition, he also notes the challenge of accurately transcribing interviews conducted in Chinese, in this case a second language to the author, and where a lot of regional dialect and accents were encountered. In the context of my own research project, these types of outcomes came to problematize a few aspects. Specifically, given the variety of interview settings and differing research material outcomes, what type of meeting could count as an 'interview', and how should variance across interview notes and transcripts be managed? While these types of challenges were to some degree already noted when conducting fieldwork in Taiwan during the first stage of the project, they became more recurrent as I ventured into exploring and meeting the actors that comprise China's veg*n foodscape, which thus eventually evolved into a distinct method, as detailed in the following section.

4.4.4 Eat-alongs

As previously noted, interviews came to play a lesser role within the China-focused aspect of this study. This was in part informed by my own and my potential informants' concerns regarding the formality of meeting in an official 'interview' setting. To begin with, as an outsider to China and to the local veg*n community, my first order of business was to meet people and establish rapport. However, this was also layered with an overarching concern to engage with the potential informants in a manner that was safe and comfortable for everyone involved. In general, the people I came into contact with across the online community and during participant observation were more receptive to meeting in a more casual setting, for a meal or a coffee. In addition, restaurants became a natural place to meet the community throughout the fieldwork. Some informants sought to introduce me to their favourite spots in the city, as they were convenient places to meet and were the sites of local veg*n groups' meet-up events. Within these settings, it was still possible to conduct individual conversations and obtain interview-like data. Hence, I came to conceptualize this component as 'eat-alongs', building on Margarethe Kusenbach's (2003; 2018) 'go-alongs'.

The 'go-along' is a method that integrates the advantages of both participant observation and interviews. At the same time, it addresses the limitations that arise from a participant-observer's 'insider' interpretive bias and facilitates more dynamic conversations compared to static interview settings. Kusenbach (2003, p.463) argues: "What makes the go-along technique unique is that ethnographers are able to observe their informants' spatial practices in situ while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time." While the 'go-along' shares a similar logic with other mobile and phenomenological approaches focused on spatiality and reflexivity, such as Svensson's (2021) discussion on walking in her ethnographic work on neighbourhood and heritage in China, it is also considerably adaptable. In summary, doing things 'along' with informants can provide a unique type of insight into their experiences and behaviours as they share in various activities such as driving, running, or riding. Yet in more experimental cases, it has also been applied to study aspects of working, commuting, and even shopping (Kusenbach, 2018). In relation to food and eating practices, Thompson et al. (2015) employed the 'go-along' method in their study of 'picky eaters' by accompanying informants in their trips to grocery shops, in addition to cafes and restaurants. Similarly, in her doctoral research, Jin Yingying (Jin, 2020; Jin et al., 2023) adapted 'go-alongs' into her study of social eating and food waste in China as 'eat-along'

sessions with participants or informants at cafes and restaurants, and ultimately served as a point of reference to my own approach.

Within this research project’s employment of ‘eat-alongs’, sessions predominantly took place in the context of veg*n community meet-up events as well as diner or lunch meetings with informants. The selection of restaurants followed veg*n groups’ organizational discretion or was determined based on individual informant preferences. Documentation procedures comprised note taking to record main conversation points, as well as picture taking. This latter material, related to visual data, focused on the dishes ordered by participants and the restaurants’ environments. Due to privacy concerns and in order to protect individual identities, I avoided the inclusion of people in picture frames as much as possible. However, it must be noted that a common practice of veg*n meet-ups was to share pictures of the events on WeChat groups. While these instances provided supplementary data, they were treated as digital ethnographic material and subject to additional ethical considerations.

Table 5. Eat-alongs, China

Place	Shanghai	Hangzhou	Beijing	
Period	19 May-8 June	8-17 June	27 June-17 July	
	18-19 June	20-27 June		
Total	10	10	9	Tiajin
				1

4.5 Further ethical considerations

To begin this conversation, it must be noted that this project underwent ethical review and received approval under the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (2022-06660-01). Regarding the data comprising the period preceding the start of this doctoral project, it must be explained that such data were first obtained in connection to my MA thesis starting in 2016 and later in continuation with my involvement with vegan actors as I lived in Taiwan up until 2020. Throughout this period, ethical conventions were also observed. This included research intent disclosures and consent requests to the actors I came to interact with during the earlier MA days and subsequently reiterated

along my intention to develop such insights into a doctoral project. At this point, it is also pertinent to clarify that the inclusion of such earlier data was also disclosed in the doctoral Ethical Review application for transparency purposes. However, and as already noted, the utilization of such data was limited. In practice, it mostly contributed to produce longitudinal ethnographic insight and was only engaged with in the first research output of this compilation.

While I have already mentioned procedural aspects regarding this project's ethical considerations, both in the description of methods and in the previous paragraph, it would be a mistake to assume that such matters are all there is to research ethics. As noted by Gillan and Pickerill (2012) in their special issue discussion on 'The Ethics of Research on Activism', inquiry into the dynamics of activism and mobilization is complex and many situations cannot be easily captured and addressed in bureaucratic checklists. This is more so in cases where the research settings span across different social, cultural, and political contexts. What is more, this project pertains to the advocacy work of veg*ns who constitute a 'social' or 'moral' minority (Nezlek and Forestell, 2020; De Groeve, Hudders and Bleys, 2021). Thus, it also requires further reflection on aspects such as the relevance of the research for movement participants, the risks involved, the power dynamics, and the issues of accountability (and expectations) involved (Milan, 2014). In addition, this research project involved a digital component that also necessitated the application of a basic ethical approach to internet sources and materials that takes ethical pluralism and cross-cultural awareness into account (Franzke et al., 2020). As I came to engage with the realities of fieldwork, and in producing research outputs for this dissertation, a variety of additional ethical questions and considerations in relation to my own positionality as disclosed in the introductory chapter emerged. More specifically, the fact that I was conducting a study across two locations characterized by distinct degrees of socio-political freedoms, Taiwan and China; combining two modes of ethnography, online and offline; and all the while, holding multiple identities as a Western-based researcher and vegan practitioner with Taiwanese heritage.

4.5.1 Differentiated red lines

In regard to critically sensitive issues when conducting research with participants in social movements, it is important to note that my project only included advocates working with the mainstreaming of meatless diets and lifestyles, primarily through consumption approaches which stemmed from diverse motivational standpoints. Consequently, one aspect of special

consideration was that while the religious or political philosophies of informants were not the main focus of this project, some mention or allusions to such perspectives did take place when discussing animal-friendly/eco-friendly lifestyles. Although at first this was not expected to be a matter of major concern outside the issue of handling personal data, it became increasingly clear that by focusing on any form of social organization in Taiwan and China, I had to be additionally mindful of differentiated red lines.

To be specific, despite my focus on ‘mainstream’ types of advocacy, the geopolitical characteristics of the region do exert great influence in the shape of the movements that I observed and the ways in which I could operate as a researcher. This became more evident as the project gradually shifted focus from Taiwan to China. So far, I had only conducted research ‘back home’ in Taiwan, a place where I enjoyed both a ‘local’ and ‘insider’ vegan practitioner status, and where my focus on social movements is part of a well-established tradition of social science inquiry and engagement with civil society actors (Hsiao, 1990; Ho, Huang and Juan, 2018). On the other hand, while there is also a solid tradition of research on civil society in China (Yang, 2003; Benney and Marolt, 2015; Qiaoan, 2021), the tone of discussion and approaches are comparatively different due to the country’s distinct restrictions on matters of social mobilization and organization. In addition, while I could easily establish some form of rapport as a fellow vegan, I was still an ‘outsider’ and newcomer to the Chinese vegan community on which my investigation depended.

Ultimately, in practice, these differing civil society landscapes and levels of familiarity meant that while observing the research ethics standards that apply in open and democratic settings such as Sweden and Taiwan, I also needed to engage with the added level of assessing issues connected to the state of academic freedom and censorship regarding scholarship in China. In a manner of speaking, this created a situation of researching Sino-cultural vegan advocacy with two paradigms. In short, research focused on Taiwan, touching on the occasional/impromptu mentions of religious influence or politics of everyday life that is embodied in consumer activism, was not expected to have negative outcomes for informants. However, research focused on China required further and careful consideration. Although veganism in China is so far a non-sensitive topic, it is difficult to predict what the government might deem problematic in the future. Therefore, I had to consider any outcomes that could potentially affect my informants and myself. This then raised questions about self-censorship, an issue that most researchers whose research deals with authoritarian contexts such as China (and other places with authoritarian regimes) have to grapple with, regardless of the sensitivity of their research (Glasius et al., 2018).

4.5.2 Navigating online-offline spaces

While navigating two distinct red lines posed its own challenge; the fuzziness of hybrid online-offline research added a new level of complexity. At first glance and as discussed by Przybylski (2020), hybrid ethnography involves similar concerns to fully online research regarding the accuracy and transparency of sources, as well as adherence to the basic principles of protecting identities, assessing risks, and mindful dissemination of material. However, as already noted, the online component of this project took place across two distinct mediascapes. These at the same time operate along the differentiated red lines regarding freedom of speech and issue sensitivity that characterize the public spheres of China and Taiwan. This in turn had implications as to how to ‘treat’ my sources and data, becoming a matter of special consideration during the writing and publication stages of the articles included in this compilation. When the online and offline components were viewed in relation to each other, it became clear that while it was fairly simple to pseudonymize or anonymize individual practitioners, widely mediated or digitally public events, social media accounts and creators, or organizations required a more tailored approach to data protection and privacy.

This matter can be observed in the differing approaches to presenting findings and discussions resulting from the material gleaned from participant observation and online ethnography. In the case of Taiwan, the treatment of online-offline data was more straightforward as practitioners, movement advocates, organizations, and events can operate in an equally open manner. In fact, in some cases advocates wanted to be properly identified for their advocacy work. In the case of China, online-offline transitions were a bit trickier. To be specific, topical sensitivity usually predetermines the possibility of holding events, accessing online content, or encountering advocacy organizations in the first place. In this sense, if an event is open for public participation and actors are readily searchable or accessible, it is reasonable to consider them to be ‘safe’ or niche enough in their issue-interests. However, this does not guarantee that they will remain free from sensitivity or scrutiny in the future. Thus, in discussing China two aspects emerged as issues of concern. First, protecting the identities of individual practitioners and individual advocates to the greatest extent possible in relation to their publicly known work and affiliations; and second, navigating potentially sensitive topics while maintaining integrity and avoiding blatant academic self-censorship.

4.5.3 Between scholarship and practice

This last aspect leads me to the final point that is my own positionality as a researcher who happens to also be a member of the very same community that I have been studying. Alternatively put, I too share a vision of ‘less animals, more plants’ on people’s plates as expressed by most of the veg*ns that have, in one way or another, been involved in this study. This is also in line with the Vegan Studies and Critical Animal Studies inclinations of this project with shared veganism and animal advocacy as foundational principles (Nocella et al., 2014; Wright, 2017; 2021). What is more, and as also stated in my introductory positionality statement, I am part of the global Asian diaspora. This in turn has come to inform my view of the need to increase geographical, cultural, and racial representation and stories in the ongoing conversations surrounding the global expansion of veganism. In this sense, this project can be viewed as part of my own ‘scholar-activism’. What this term means is largely subjective to each practitioner. As Bashiri (2024) notes in her conceptualizing work of the term, it is characterized by three interconnected components: criticality, which involves employing a critical approach to theorization, reflexivity, and power dynamics; active engagement, which ranges from emotional or moral commitment to participation in movements and activist praxis; and normative orientation, where the facilitation of social change toward more just, equal, and democratic outcomes is the goal of academic pursuit.

Beyond how these three components come together in various configurations, the central guiding tenet of scholar activism is that research should matter to the communities, groups, and places involved. In terms of my own practice, though I am not involved with the most hands-on versions of advocacy work, I am part of a university-based network that teaches about animals and society relations through a critical lens. On occasion, I also help movement actors in Taiwan by taking on a limited advisory or consulting capacity when requested (and my schedule allows). Here I must note that this is comparatively different to my relationship to the vegan community in China, where due to my overall ‘outsider/foreign based’ status, I have first and foremost been an observer who has been granted goodwill and trust by the local actors I came to know through this project. In this sense, my relationship with the community in China has been more clearcut and defined as one between that of a researcher and research participants. Nevertheless, the main logic behind the advocacy leanings of this project has been the desire to ‘give back’ to these communities in some way, primarily by highlighting their work as locally-based and socio-culturally relevant actors, as well as contributing to

the broader goals of the global movement to realize multispecies justice and combat climate change.

Ultimately, these additional points of ethical reflection also imply some form of bias. The need for disclosure and transparency of such factors has been, in essence, the logic behind placing my positionality statement at the beginning of this kappa, and the present lengthy methodological discussion. Although I have sought to address these aspects by observing general conventions in knowledge production in terms of balancing distance and involvement with the actors under study, employing a neutral approach in the data and their sources, and applying a critical eye to a topic that is very much close to my heart, in practice it all comes to a head in terms of approaches to analysis and research outputs as discussed next.

4.6 Enacting in-hereness

I have gone into detail about my project's hinterland and the method assemblage (Law, 2004) involved in detecting and amplifying the 'realities' of Sino-cultural veg*nism I found 'out-there', as well as the ethical and positionality considerations taken within that process. Now it is time to conclude this discussion with how I came to 'enact' that reality in the 'in-here' of academic practice based on the collection and analysis of the diverse types of data I gathered and their operationalization into a coherent scholarly corpus. For this doctoral project undertaken in the Swedish University context, this meant an early choice in the research design between producing a monograph or a compilation thesis. The present text, as previously established, comprises the kappa that traditionally accompanies the latter. Because the overarching goal of this project was to place the phenomenon of contemporary Sino-cultural veg*n advocacy into view, it was determined that a multi-sited or collective case study approach would enable a more straightforward thematic engagement with the research questions (Silverman, 2009; J. Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010). These questions pertained to a) the actors involved, b) their role in integrating globalized concepts in local veg*nisms, and c) ascertaining whether this process differed between China and Taiwan and in what ways. I will introduce and discuss these specific papers and their findings in the 'summary' chapter that comes next. What is more immediately pertinent at this point is that, per my doctoral program's requirements, a total of four individual research papers were to be produced. What this all means, methodologically speaking and in terms of this study's approach to data analysis, is that each

paper resulted from a distinct configuration of methodological choices which required different treatment and analysis of the data.

Paper 1 contributed to fill the gap in the discussion on Taiwan's social movement landscape regarding animal advocacy, and directed attention to the new vegan movement. It addressed the questions about a) the advocacy actors at play, and b) the dynamics between Taiwan's veg*n culture and the integration of animal ethics and sustainability rationales. It must be noted that this is the only output that incorporated the exploratory ethnographic data pre-dating the start of this doctoral project, which served the purpose of building a longitudinal view of events between 2016 and 2025. The methods employed to answer these questions comprised a combination of offline-online 'hybrid' participatory observation across the spatially heterogeneous 'foodscape' of Taiwan and resulted in three main types of materials: 1) fieldnotes and photographs from in-person participant observation; 2) digital notes and screenshots from online participant observation and visual data, archived websites, and news; and 3) interview transcripts produced from individual conversations with veg*n advocates. The materials resulting from these differing contexts were treated as equivalent sources of ethnographic insight as prescribed in digital and hybrid approaches, and informed by a special sensibility to the foodscapes in view (Pink et al., 2015; Przybylski, 2020; Schneider and Eli, 2021). Initial coding took a cue from Charmaz's constructivist approach to Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006), which facilitated the development of a typology of Taiwanese veg*n advocacy actors and their work. As the resulting wealth of materials predominantly comprised text, these were ultimately examined through a narrative approach that focused on thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008), and coded according to themes that emerged from actors' meaning-making processes that captured identity constructions and discursive shifts in their approach to veganism.

Paper 2 expanded on the existing literature discussing China's changing veg*n foodways and brought forth a discussion on the more active approaches to veg*n advocacy in this distinct socio-political context. It also addressed questions about a) the advocacy actors at play, and b) the dynamics between China's veg*n culture and the integration of globalized ideas about animal ethics and sustainability rationales. The method assemblage employed to answer these questions followed a similar combination of offline-online 'hybrid' participatory observation across the spatially heterogeneous 'foodscape' found in urban China. However, as previously noted, rather than individual structured interviews, this study opted to obtain insight into personal and community practices through 'eat-alongs'. As this is in essence a type of focused ethnography, it shares a similar documentation logic based on

observation and attention to details, though focused on food and eating. Ultimately these choices led to two main types of materials: 1) fieldnotes and photographs from in-person participant observation and eat-alongs, and 2) digital notes, screenshots, archived websites, and textual data, such as publicly available WeChat posts by veg*n advocacy actors. Again, the materials resulting from these differing contexts were treated as equivalent sources of ethnographic insight, and informed by a special sensibility to the foodscapes in view (Pink et al., 2015; Przybylski, 2020; Schneider and Eli, 2021). Mirroring Paper 1 and in line with the project's broader comparative aims, initial analysis drew on a constructivist approach to Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006). However, in contrast to the previous paper, the categories of actors identified in the Chinese context proved to be considerably more ambiguous. To be specific, aside from a shared focus on veg*n and plant-based lifestyle advocacy, the actors involved in this part of the study could not be classified according to a distinctive issue or ideological orientation. As a result, the data were ultimately coded into a typology based on the actors' distinctive approaches to advocacy, resulting in four distinguishable dimensions. This was then followed by a narrative analysis lens that focused on thematic elements (Riessman, 2008); coding along this line took cue from Runya Qiaoan's (2021) extensive discussion on advocacy in the Chinese civil society context and focused the socio-cultural negotiations and framings involved in promoting veg*nism in the Chinese context.

Paper 3 engaged with the broader discussion on changing Sino-cultural foodways by shifting the ethnographic perspective and centring on the food products and actors of the veg*n niche, thus foregrounding the role of the new generation of plant-based meats and a shifting industry landscape in this process. While the paper addressed questions about the a) advocacy actors, and b) the integration of globalized ideas about animal ethics and sustainability rationales, it also brought a small degree of c) comparison by similarity between PBMs in the contexts of China and Taiwan. The methods employed to answer these questions started with a similar combination of offline-online 'hybrid' participatory observation. PBM actors of interest were identified and selected based on their observed popularity within the Taiwanese and Chinese veg*n communities and through encounters at events such as food fairs and markets. Initial coding resulted in two broad categories of actors based on their company profiles: traditional or new producers of PBM. To facilitate analysis, and taking into count the highly mediated lives of PBMs, the later stage of the study came to rely on digitally sourced materials that centred on: 1) website and social media content that resulted in screenshots; 2) archived website content; and 3) digital notes from videos. Largely due the study's reliance on

a corpus primarily composed of digital media sources, and its targeted focus pertaining to food media and food actors operating within the digital veg*n foodscape, the treatment of this data was informed by Krogager and Leer's (2021) discussion on digital food studies methods. This is particularly the case in relation to paying attention to the variety of textual data that can be gleaned from food-related media, which also includes approaching visual data gleaned from platforms such as YouTube as food text (Phillipov, 2021; Simonsen and Krogager, 2021). These texts were subsequently coded through narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) that foregrounded distinct food imaginaries (Calabrese and Vezovnik, 2025).

Paper 4 foregrounds recent directions in the mainstreaming of veg*nism in Taiwan and China, highlighting the changing moralities surrounding meatless foods and veg*n practices and their convergence with global processes. Building on the different a) sets of actors introduced in Papers 1 to 3, this output centred on questions regarding b) the integration of globalized ideas, and c) how this process differs across the Strait. As such, it is more explicitly a comparative ethnography (Simmons and Smith, 2019). The data employed in this paper focused on four ethnographic accounts, selected on the basis that they all shared similar features involving participant observation in events held in relation to 'international observances' in Taiwan and China, as well as the fact that they provide some degree of temporal insight. The primary research material centred on the first two accounts which discuss events held in 2023 in relation to Earth Day in Taiwan and World Environment Day in China. These events served as the basis of initial coding, and resulted in the identification of seven moral frameworks. These developments were subsequently supplemented with two 'follow-up' events in 2025. First was an online vegan challenge in China held by a different group of actors but located in the same network as the hosts of the events in 2023. Here, data collection primarily relied on digital ethnography that included participation and observance across WeChat and a mini-program walkthrough. The second event consisted of another Earth Day public hearing in Taiwan with the same actors from 2023, and comprised a brief stint of participant observation and digital ethnography. As this corpus of data ultimately consisted of a combination of offline-online 'hybrid' participatory observation, the materials resulting from these differing contexts were treated as equivalent sources of ethnographic insight (Pink et al., 2015; Przybylski, 2020). The combined discussion of these four accounts aimed to achieve the type of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1998) produced through 'deep hanging out' (Geertz, 1998), but adapted to the hybrid foodscapes of veg*n advocacy put into view through these accounts, and

facilitated through detailed fieldnotes, photographs, and triangulation with digital sources such as social media and news about the events.

5 Veg*n Banquet: Summary of Papers

5.1 How do you say ‘vegan’ in Chinese?

“I don’t take milk that is stolen from cows” - You know, that wording that she used? like “stolen milk”? I didn’t understand what that meant. So, I just felt curious, but she didn’t tell me more, I think she didn’t want to scare me with all those things at that point. So, I was just curious ... and then we became friends, and I learned that she was vegan, but I constantly forgot about that because I didn’t know what ‘vegan’ meant. After I came back from New York, I don’t know why, I can’t remember correctly, maybe I was searching for ‘vegan’, or something [online], and then YouTube popped up a video, it was Melanie Joy’s Ted Talk. It was an 18-minute talk, and she talks about Carnism of course, you know that book, right? That she wrote?²⁹ It’s a very important book to me. After those 18 minutes I was shocked ... For a long time, I thought I’ve been a very socially aware person. I mean, I see myself as someone who cares about justice, or as someone who cares about social issues. For example, food waste or the environment. Because I was working in the documentary industry for a little while, I did translation for documentaries right ... So, then I just felt ... wow, I never knew ... The thing we have done to animals is so cruel and so inhumane. In any respect, it is injustice. You know, I was shocked, totally shocked.

Lan explained how her journey toward veganism began when she visited New York in 2018 and made a friend who took her dumpster diving. The New Yorker was a vegan and refused to take products containing milk. It was a Sunday morning in Sweden and afternoon in Taiwan when Lan and I hopped on an online call in April 2022. We had been introduced digitally via a common friend from the Taiwanese vegan community. On learning about my own struggles and interest in the issue of translating veganism as a concept and word between Chinese and English, this friend had directed me to Lan, who

²⁹ Joy, M., 2009. See bibliography.

was then working on completing her MA in Translation and Interpretation Studies. Her thesis titled: *Is Vegan 'Sù Vegetarian'? An Inquiry into a Translational Polemic* (Lo, 2023) was defended a few months later. During the 1.5 hours of our call, we talked about her vegan practice, her language translation work, and the challenges, nuances, and ethics involved in establishing word equivalence between 'vegan' as understood in the Western Anglophone context and *su shi* (素食) as it is widely understood in the Sinophone world. The gist of the problem that we shared was the fact that in the West veganism is a concept with well-established links to animal rights movements and to intersectional activism concerning gender, race, and social justice (Harper, 2009; Adams, 2015; Giraud, 2021). On the other hand, in the Sino-cultural sphere, both veganism and vegetarianism have traditionally been linked to religion and have remained primarily in the realm of dietary and spiritual practice (Kieschnick, 2005; Tseng, 2018; 2019). As already noted in the introduction, and briefly in the work of groups mentioned in Papers 1 and 2, there is no formal translation for the word vegan in Chinese. There are commonly used approximations, yet such word choices have implications for the trajectory of the movement and are subject to ongoing debate. As she more extensively explained:

I think *chun su* (純素) is the most used word for vegan³⁰; I didn't question this term [at first], *chun su*, because I had seen other videos or subtitles translated that way [...] people around me translated it as *chu su* so that's what I did. [...] There used to be a vegan advocacy group [...] I think they were the first and the only organization that really did care about language use in the social movement. They rejected the idea of translating veganism into *chun su*, they didn't want veganism to have anything to do with *su*, because *su* is mainly a diet, but veganism is not just a diet. So, they really reflected on that, and had a lot of discussions [...] Actually, *chun su* is a new word [neologism], it is not a word that can be put into the dictionary. You can't find *chun su* in the dictionary; you can only find *su shi* or *yange su shi* (嚴格素食, strict vegetarian). Basically, we don't see veganism. If you check a bilingual dictionary, I don't think you will find veganism equals *chun su zhu yi* [純素食主義]. We use that word a lot, like on the internet, but it's not lexicalized, it's not a formalized term in dictionaries, but we use it a lot. [...] I think the word veganism will sooner or later be put into bilingual dictionaries, but I am not sure how it will be formalized. Maybe some people think: 'OK, *chun su* can represent the word', but I think a lot of people cannot agree with that. So, it's a debate, and also, I think the vegan movement needs to be stronger than now.

³⁰ In the Taiwanese context.

So, the mainstream will consider putting it into a dictionary, otherwise it will be just like a trend or something. [...] That group [I mentioned] ... they closed the [Facebook] group in 2020, October 2020. I think it had something to do with their name rectification movement, *Vegan zhengming yundong* (Vegan 正名運動), they wanted to make sure that people call them ‘vegan’, not anything else. I think it probably had to do with that because a lot of people disagreed with them, or some people felt hurt, because they have double identities. Probably because they were religious vegetarians and then became vegan. So, they were not opposed to using the word *su*.

This conversation reveals a very important and ongoing socio-cultural process and tensions that permeate the transformation of Sino-cultural foodscapes. It also did not make it into any of the research outputs involved in this dissertation. As I grappled with the very same question of how to translate veganism into Chinese, I had to recognize that I did not have the training, background of linguistic translation, or the experience to deal with a problem that translator-advocates like Lan and others I encountered throughout this journey chose to address in very different ways. Second, and more to the point, I simply did not know how to ‘fit’ that particular dimension of translation into the scope of my work. It turned out that what at first seemed to be a simple question of language equivalence was in fact one of the messiest realities ‘out-there’. Thus, the language translation debate was ultimately relegated to ‘Otherness’, a by-product of this project.

5.2 Translating Sino-cultural veg*nisms

That being said, I ended up performing my own version of translation work. As I strove to enact the realities of contemporary Sino-cultural veg*nism I found out-there in the in-here-ness of research practices and addressing the ‘so whats?’, I was in essence engaged in a project of academic translation to make the cases of veg*n advocacy in China and Taiwan into the types of phenomena that have social, political, cultural, and not least economic implications, and thus worthy of inquiry. In answering the main question regarding contemporary Sino-cultural veg*nism and its engagement with sustainability transitions, I came to conceptualize the issue of veg*n translation as a material-semiotic process led by an emerging assemblage of actors comprised of a new generation of advocates that include human stakeholders, food technologies and media, and food institutions, which are coming to enact specific entanglements and (dis)entanglements by way of socio-technical translations

toward ecological modernity as defined by domestic and international sustainability imperatives. This is the theoretical, methodological, and analytical ‘red thread’ that I have tried to pursue throughout the four papers produced to answer this project’s main and subsequent points of inquiry. Though perhaps to different degrees of success, clarity, or visibility due to the various limitations that accompany the compilation thesis format, this was operationalized as explained next.

5.2.1 Going *weigen* in Taiwan

Paper 1 presents a case of translation through social movements. It examines the emergence of Taiwan’s ‘new’ vegan movement over the past decade through a NSMs lens and identifies the period that followed the events of the Sunflower Movement in 2014 as the socially receptive point of inception for a new generation of vegan advocates to advance novel moralizations. In doing so, and in connection to the directions of inquiry guiding this dissertation, the paper first identified a key *assemblage* of NGOs, groups, vegan fairs, and media actors involved in vegan advocacy since the mid-2010s, and put into view the nature of the material-semiotic translations at play. In short, the new generation can be characterized along three focus areas of engagement: animal rights, vegan animal advocacy, and sustainable living. The globalization of ideas about animal rights and veganism has been a central element in the shift surrounding meatless diets and lifestyles as advocates have come to play a key role in the *vernacularization* of veganism as both linguistic and cultural translators (Levitt and Merry, 2009; Min, 2016). At the same, this has led to a younger demographic promoting a flexible approach to vegan identity construction that has moved beyond religion to embrace diversified and even hybrid motivations, thus highlighting a process of *entanglement* with global ideas, such as animal ethics and sustainability, and *disentanglement* from religious tradition. This feature is later expanded on in Papers 3 and 4, illustrating the role of these processes in reshaping Taiwanese veg*n *foodways*. Paper 1 also foregrounds the importance of alternative spaces (Cassegård, 2012) in the social transformations connected to this movement, which also points to the role of non-human actors and entities. Offline, vegan fairs and camps provide a space for community building and diffusion. Online, ICTs and the rise of vegan ‘new media’ actors are facilitating the acquisition of skills, sense of community, and promotion of veganism in novel ways. These spaces constitute the *foodscape* where new meanings and identities connected to meatless diets and lifestyles are emerging, being contested, and re-defined, thus embodying the historical, urban, symbolic, and communicative sites

where NSM take shape (Touraine, 1981; Castells, 1983; Habermas, 1987; Melucci, 1989). Nevertheless, the study also highlights the fate of NSMs as they become ‘colonized’ by the logics of power and money (Habermas, 1987). This is well illustrated by the latter trajectory of the vegan movement in Taiwan as veganism has gradually become mainstreamed into debates regarding the *food system*, and where the adoption of plant-based diets and lifestyles have become a matter of low-carbon food policy and global sustainability. Consequently, this paper has made two main contributions. Empirically, it addressed notable gaps in the literatures on Taiwan’s social movements, food studies on Taiwan, and in the growing discussion regarding the globalization of veganism. Although there is a great wealth of research on ecologically oriented movements in Taiwan, this study directed attention to the so-far greatly overlooked history of mobilization around animal issues and their groups. Along these lines, it also made the case of social mobilization and change based on food ethics and lifestyle. While Taiwan has a well-established meatless food culture due to the prevalence of Buddhist practices, not only has this aspect hardly been considered under a social movement lens, but discussions on the topic of Taiwan’s veg*nism in its own right have also been limited. In opening this discussion, this study also sets the stage to engage in the broader conversation on globalizing veganism. Theoretically, this paper re-engaged with the discussion on NSMs in the Taiwanese context. Even though NSM theories have been considered by past scholarship, their applications had so far remained limited and even rejected as scholars determined that Taiwan’s socio-political landscape was not conducive to this line of theorization (M.K. Chang, 1997; M.S. Ho, 2004). As such, by treating the case of Taiwan’s new vegan movement as a NSM, this paper has opened the opportunity to revisit this conversation in relation to contemporary novel movements.

5.2.2 Going plant-forward in China

Paper 2 presents a case of translation through civil society. It expands on the scholarship regarding China’s changing veg*n foodways and engages with broader discussions concerned with the country’s distinct socio-political landscape, which has paid considerable attention to civil society and environmental mobilizations. It synthesizes these separate lines of inquiry by foregrounding the emergence of a specific niche focused on meatless food within China’s Green Public Sphere (Yang and Calhoun, 2007). Through this lens, this study conceptualizes the highly heterogeneous set of vegan, vegetarian, and flexitarian advocacy actors operating in China into ‘dietary publics’ that are concerned with introducing, reproducing, and shaping plant-

based food and lifestyles. This study identified four dimensions in which this process is taking place: food education, food culture, food exploration, and food innovation. Offline, these efforts can be observed in events that range from small vegan meet-ups to plant-based food industry conventions and food summits. Online, this is exemplified by the growth of vegan media platforms and content creators, as well as specialized mobile applications. Viewed together, this *assemblage* of actors and their diverse channels of expression and mobilizations characterize China's contemporary veg*n *foodscape*. It also constitutes the point of inception for the emergence of a plant-forward movement. The article therefore examines the role of these actors in actively engaging in the *entanglement* of China's veg*nism with modern ideas of sustainability, health, and animal ethics, while seeking *disentanglement* from sensitive ideological or religious practices. This feature is later expanded on in Papers 3 and 4, illustrating the role of these processes in reshaping China's veg*n *foodways*. Keeping to the comparative aim of this doctoral project, this paper somewhat mirrors Paper 1. In this paper, I also argue that China's plant-forward movement can be conceptualized along the lines of NSMs, although the cultural kind, as opposed to the political ones (Buechler, 2011). At first, this application may seem like an odd direction to take given that in the context of China, the government is known to be deeply embedded within socio-political and economic spaces, leaving little room for civil society actors. However, this is precisely why every-day, non-confrontational, and apolitical ways of organizing, such as those found amongst Chinese veg*n dietary publics, is of note. It helps to move beyond authoritarian/democratic dichotomies to focus on the agency that small groups, or 'tiny publics', create and work to retain as they organize around novel issues and interests and engage in identity and meaning making (Fine, 2012). Ultimately, by looking at recent developments in China's food and sustainability policies, I show that the country's veg*n dietary publics and the plant-forward movement are actively framing or vernacularizing (Levitt and Merry, 2009; Qiaoan, 2023) veg*nism along broader national goals. Thus, they are capitalizing on such opportunities to legitimize their existence and work as partners in the transformation of the *food system*. Consequently, this paper has made empirical and conceptual contributions. Empirically, it expanded on the existing literature on contemporary Chinese veg*nism, and put the case of China onto the map of discussions on the globalization of veganism. Although the rise of veg*nism in China has received attention in terms of practitioner experiences and motivations, the cultural nuances, and the changing meanings of meatless foods, this study presents a focused discussion of dietary and lifestyle advocacy which had been missing in the literature. In filling this gap,

this study also set the stage to engage in the broader conversation on globalizing veganism. Conceptually, the study expanded on the discussion on China's public sphere by introducing the concept of *dietary publics* as an analytical concept to examine a specialized group of actors in the Chinese civil society landscape. Additionally, this article also presented an adaptation of the theorization surrounding NSMs. By making the case for China's plant-forward movement to be regarded as a culturally oriented NSM, this paper sought to move beyond the binary conceptualizations of social movements and civil society to engage in the conversation of the possibilities for social organization and expression found amongst the country's ecologically-minded urban middle-class.

5.2.3 From veg*n traditions to plant-based futures

Paper 3 presents a case of techno-cultural translation through food. It shifts the frame of reference to discuss food and social change started in Papers 1 and 2 by focusing on food as the actor of interest and engaging in the broader discussion on the potential of alternative proteins as solutions to the environmental, ethical, and health issues affecting the food system. The paper puts into view a specific *assemblage* comprised of the new generation of plant-based meats, an emerging domestic alt-protein industry, and veg*n new media, which are located at the centre of the transformations characterizing contemporary Sino-cultural veg*n *foodscapes*. In short, Paper 3 applies the material-semiotic lens of STS (Law, 2008) to examine the mainstreaming that has accompanied the inception of PBMs into Taiwanese and Chinese markets, and the implications of this phenomenon to local veg*n *foodways*. By foregrounding the transformation of traditional Buddhist 'mock meat' producers and the rise of PBM players in China and Taiwan, it posits that PBMs are involved in a process of 'translation' on two levels. Materially, new technologies transform plant-proteins into 'meat'. Semiotically, these new meats become the 'meat of the future'. At the same time, transforming the ontology of foods. Through this process, meatless foods become *disentangled* from religious foods and practices to embody new *entanglements* where plant-based food is tied to secular ethics, environmental consciousness, and forward-looking consumption. This paper concludes by reflecting on the success and failure of these new food actors in challenging carnism in local foodways and what this means for the broader project of *food systems* transition. Consequently, this paper's main contribution is empirical and to some degree also analytical. Empirically, it opens a discussion focused on PBMs in the Sino-cultural context through an ethnographic lens. Whereas ethnographic

accounts of veg*nism in China have noted the consumption of meat replacements to some degree, the new generation of PBMs have remained mostly out of the conversation. At the same time, although there is a growing number of studies on consumer interests and reception of PBMs in China and Taiwan, these have consisted of quantitative examinations focused on market research. Within this last line of inquiry, little attention has been given to the dynamics between traditional vegetarian ‘mock meats’ and the new secular PBMs. Building on this, analytically, this paper expands on previous discussions on the ontological politics of alternative proteins by bringing in socio-cultural nuance. This is particularly relevant to the case of East Asia, where meat replacement products have long-established cultural and religious histories, putting into view the tensions and alignments introduced by these PBMs as they challenge and transform the ontological categories of meatless foods.

5.2.4 Plant-based modernity in the Sino-cultural sphere

The concluding paper ties the various threads laid out in Papers 1 to 3 into a case of moral translation. It more explicitly comprises a comparative examination of the changing moralities surrounding meatless food across Sino-cultural *foodways* as characterized by shifting veg*n *foodscapes* in Taiwan and China, and puts these developments into view in the context of *food system* transitions. In doing this, the paper builds on the role of advocacy and social movement actors as ‘moral entrepreneurs’ (Becker, 1973) and STS perspectives on socio-technical translation and niche-regime interactions (Callon, 1984; Smith, 2007). Through this synthezied lens, it foregrounds the concept of ‘moral translation’, and the roles of the veg*n advocacy actors in Taiwan and China as ‘moral translators’. The paper employs a series of ethnographic accounts centred on participant observation at events held in relation to international observances such as Earth Day in Taiwan and World Environment Day in China. Through these instances, the study brings into focus an *assemblage* of actors comprised of veg*n advocates, ICTs, and veg*n markets, as they engage in a distinct project of *disentangling* meatless food practices from certain interpretations of tradition and religion, while leading the *entanglement* of plant-based food and lifestyles with broader domestic and global visions of socio-technical ecological modernization. Ultimately, this paper also shows that despite the juxtaposing socio-political settings of Taiwan and China, and the differing trajectories of their veg*n movements outlined in Papers 1 and 2, advocacy actors across the Strait are similarly increasingly focused on mainstreaming plant-based foods and lifestyles through

sustainability transition discourses that are closely aligned with domestically informed visions of ecological modernity. Along these lines, the study highlights the more recent directions of veg*n advocacy in China and Taiwan as the former has continued its focus on promoting lifestyle changes while the latter has grown increasingly involved in matters of domestic food policy. As such, this study offers comparative insight into localization of global vegan norms and practices in Sino-cultural contexts which have come to be characterized by eco-developmentalism (Esarey et al., 2020). Consequently, this paper makes a significant empirical contribution to the literature on food movements and veg*nism in the Sino-cultural sphere through comparison. It expands on the literature on Chinese veg*nism, and further opens the conversation on Taiwan's vegan movement. Although some discussions of veg*nism in the Sino-cultural context have touched upon groups and histories relevant to both China and Taiwan, these previous lines of inquiry have mostly centred on religious or Buddhist vegetarianism. What is more, this paper also puts developments in China and Taiwan onto the map of global veganism. In terms of theoretical-conceptual contributions, this study bridges discussions on food moralities, social mobilization, and socio-technical change to provide a synthesized framework that identifies the newer generation of veg*n advocates as *moral translators*. As such, this paper further adds to the discussions regarding the travel and translation of ideas and movements, and the importance of social movements and niches in sustainability transitions.

6 For Take Away: Concluding reflections

6.1 Contemporary Sino-cultural veg*nisms

It was a somewhat typical April afternoon with warm, humid, and cloudy weather in Taipei when I attended the second part of the Taiwan Vegan Frenzy's (草獸派對) weekend-long festival for Earth Day in 2025. It was also the first of a line-up of events to be held throughout the rest of the year marking its 10th anniversary. A lot of things have changed in the decade since the vegan fair and media channel pioneered the introduction of veganism as a secular and animal rights oriented practice to Taiwan as discussed in Paper 1. The number of veg*n and plant-based restaurants that offer diverse and creative dishes beyond the traditional vegetarian buffet fare have grown. Many supermarkets now also offer the new generation of plant-based meat and milk products, and major food retail players like 7-Eleven and Family Mart have developed and expanded their own range of meatless convenience meals, respectively known as *Tiansu dishu* (天素地蔬) and *Zhi jue shenghuo* (植覺生活) (FoodNEXT, 2020; 2023). What is more, the number of veg*n markets and fairs has also increased and evolved. The No Meat Festival launched in 2019, which was greatly inspired by the organizer's experience participating as a seller at a previous TVF (Z.R. Chang, 2023, p. 19) but focused on sustainable living, has more recently gone transnational by engaging in collaborations with actors hosting vegan fairs in Japan and South Korea (No Meat Festival, 2025). Other newcomers are locally focused or thematically oriented, 'Veg Broadway' (草食百老匯市集) which since 2022 has held a series of fairs around Southern Taiwan, and the 'Future Market' (未來市集) which later that same year began bringing together a combination of trendy restaurants, fashion, and lifestyle industry actors on an occasional basis. There is also the 'Little Veggy Night Market' (素食小夜市), a mobile mini night market/pop-up/food truck fair that moves around Taiwan (Meng, 2019).

In parallel developments across the Strait, veg*n actors in China discussed in Paper 2 have also been making progress on a similar front centred on consumption and lifestyle. The platform VegRadar, which functions as a restaurant locator app has continued to update its map of veg*n restaurants with new additions every month. Yet perhaps most timely and telling, a month earlier, in March of 2025, I had followed the China Vegan Society's launch of the country's first V-March (齋春三月) campaign online. Fashioned after the internationally renowned Veganuary, it is a 31 day-long veg*n challenge aiming to encourage people to start the Chinese New Year by trying out plant-based diets. As such, it also constituted an significant instance of vernacularization (Levitt and Merry, 2009) by taking place after the Spring Festival (春節), and thus held in March rather than January. According to the organizer's own survey of participants and post-campaign assessment, it was a success (China Vegan Society, 2025).

Ultimately, what all of this shows is that in the past 10 years, the veg*n foodscapes of China and Taiwan have undergone great transformations alongside an evolving assemblage of actors. Meatless diets and veg*n foods have gone from a category of practices and foodstuff embedded within the Chinese Buddhist vegetarian niche to become part of a wider and increasingly secular and global conversation informed by diverse motivations that include animal ethics, climate, and health. This in turn foregrounds the dynamics of entanglement and disentanglement at the heart of the phenomenon that is 'contemporary Sino-cultural veganism', and which is defined by a material-semiotic process where traditional meatless practices are being actively translated into 'modern', forward looking, and globally minded plant-based diets and lifestyle choices as examined in Paper 3. In this concluding overview, it is impossible to miss the fact that what originally started as a discussion about a new and heterogeneous generation of veg*n practitioners and advocates characterised as a social niche, 'tiny public' (Fine, 2012), or 'moral entrepreneurs' (Becker, 1973) has grown larger, become embedded, in parts co-opted, or even forgotten as veg*nism and plant-based lifestyles have entered 'mainstream' industry and policy discussions. From a Habermasian (1987) point of view, this trajectory captures the fate of NSMs to become 'colonized' by the media of power and money. As shown in the final paper, number 4 of this compilation dissertation, despite their diverging socio-political contexts, the veg*n lifeworlds found in Taiwan and China have become increasingly entangled with domestic and global narratives of food system transitions.

Such outcome is not entirely surprising. What is of note is the socio-cultural and perhaps most importantly, political, contexts in which this colonization is

taking shape. At the time of writing, Taiwan is about to see the release of its first National Plant-based Action Plan and a major update to its food label rules with the inclusion of a new category of secular and fully plant-based vegan food (Vegonomist, 2025a; 2025b). This development is the culmination of the active efforts of a specific sector of its ‘new’ vegan movement that has come to effectively elevate the matter of plant-based diets into a matter of national policy. In China, despite challenges, the outlook for the meatless foodscape and the expansion of veg*n diets and lifestyles continues to suggest a positive trend. In particular, in relation to matters of national food security and health imperatives. In recent months the country has made headlines for leading in various aspects of protein innovation including an increased focus on microbial fermentation, as well as leading in the number of new patents obtained for cultivated meat technologies (Mridul, 2025). What is more, the CVS will soon hold the second instalment of the V-March campaign, this time featuring a tour across four cities with a representative of Veganuary (China Vegan Society, 2026).

Finally, I must note that those developments are simply the manifestations of one higher profile type of assemblage and its entanglements. Back to that Earth Day-themed TVF event in April 2025, and against the backdrop of such domestic, regional, and global processes, I was reminded of the diversity of veg*n actors and the various other possibilities of entanglement and disentanglement that remain in play as I made my rounds of the venue. There I met Peter, the CEO of the vegan advocacy organisation known as Kindness to Animals (KITA), who updated me on their new efforts: a campaign to ban the use of ‘wild boar snares’ due to their cruelty and indiscriminate impact on wildlife and other free roaming animals (KITA, n.d). Although they have grown more professionalized, they remain committed to their mission of promoting veganism and animal rights. A few steps further, I found a stall run by People for The Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). They have had a small presence in Taiwan throughout the years, and later in October went on to hold a demonstration to raise awareness of the ethical issues concerning the BBQ culture that has come to develop around Mid-autumn Festival. It involved some aspects of ‘moral shock’ for which the organisation is widely known for (Fernández, 2020; PETA Asia, n.d). After chatting with the PETA volunteers who were conducting a mini quiz about animal issues and handing out stickers at the event, I eventually reached the music stage area. I arrived just in time to see a young Taiwanese female rapper known as Yang Shuya (楊舒雅) opening her act. Though a ‘flexitarian’, she identified herself as an ally to the vegan movement and went on to rap about a variety of issues that touched upon Taiwan’s politics, social issues, and perhaps most notably, about issues of

misogyny. It was a very rare instance where feminism and veg*nism somehow converged during my fieldwork. Just a few days earlier, I had met with Mona and Darice, two of my informants in Taiwan, for a quick catch-up and had brought up the question of vegan feminism within the broader movement. Although they both identified as vegan and feminist, they noted that it was so far a considerably limited discussion, and mostly an individually operationalized approach to advocacy. This is why a surprising development took place a few months later. The animal rights organization known as Taiwan Animal Equality Association (TAEA) released the Chinese translation for Carol Adam's *The Pornography of Meat* (2025). What is more, it features Lan as one of the translators. Although Adams' other works have also been previously translated to Chinese, this was a new development in the context of Taiwan's new vegan movement. In paper 1, I discussed the TAEA as one of the pioneering NGOs promoting animal rights, which to some degree also encouraged veganism. In the time since, the organization has come to define itself a 'vegan' animal rights organization (Vegan動物權倡議團體) (TAEA, n.d.), taking on a more active approach to promoting veganism while also opening the conversation on the intersection between different forms of oppression (TAEA, 2025). In this sense, hinting at an alternative direction for the Taiwanese vegan movement to take further shape.

Ultimately, contemporary 'Sino-cultural veganism' as discussed throughout this project and its research outputs should be understood along the lines of other 'global assemblages' (Collier and Ong, 2007). In a nutshell, the mainstreaming of veg*nism and plant-based diets and lifestyles in China and Taiwan has been contingent upon the timely and fortuitous alignment between policy minded and politically savvy civil society actors, domestic agendas, and global sustainability regimes. However, although this is the current and most prominent direction in which veg*n advocacy has developed in the contexts of Taiwan and China due to a variety of contextual factors as outlined throughout this study, it is not inevitable. From a social movements' perspective, there are still many possible interventions left unexplored, as well as emerging projects of entanglement and disentanglement. This in turns brings forth a final question, which at this point will remain unanswered even though it is increasingly worth asking: What makes veganism 'global', or more specifically what is 'global veganism'?

6.2 Future research directions

This doctoral research project has been about social change ‘and’, ‘with’, and ‘through’ veg*n and plant-based food in the Sino-cultural sphere. It has been first and foremost embedded within an interdisciplinary Asian Studies program of inquiry that has engaged with Food Studies, Social Movement Studies (SMS), and Sustainability Studies, while at the same time viewing the phenomenon of contemporary Sino-cultural veganism through the lenses of Science and Technology Studies (STS), supplemented with the critical filters of Vegan Studies, and a sensibility stemming from Critical Animal Studies (CAS). In doing so, this doctoral research project has been undeniably ambitious. It set out to ‘enact’ the realities of contemporary Sino-cultural veg*nism found *out-there* in the *in-hereness* (Law, 2004) of scholarly discussions by relying on four distinct research outputs. Each paper has contributed to opening different threads of discussion about veg*nism in the Sino-cultural sphere. They are the results of specific methodological choices, navigated constraints, as well as delineated scopes. In turn, this suggests various areas for further research and new directions that could:

- Further engage with the politics and processes involved in enacting veg*n or plant-based food policy in a Sinophone or East Asian context. The recent developments in Taiwan present a case that is ripe for this type of study.
- Focus on comparative analysis within China itself, where veg*n communities can be found across diverse regions of the country. These communities are shaped by distinct local histories, cuisines, cultural practices, and degrees of economic development and may provide further insight into contemporary Chinese veg*nism and its articulations. This line of inquiry could shed additional light on socio-economic factors, age and gender differences, as well as urban-rural dynamics.
- Explore the translation and vernacularization of veg*nism across other key centres of the Sino-cultural sphere, with attention to the local practices, traditions, and socio-political contexts that shape these adaptations, such as in Hong Kong. This inquiry could also be extended to other sites of known Sino-cultural flows and diaspora, such as Singapore or Malaysia.
- Expand on the emerging literature on Sinophone veg*n media through qualitative approaches centred on the online community and its practices. Although some groundbreaking studies have discussed the rise of veg*nism in the Chinese mediascape, these have primarily engaged in

quantitative models examining online contentions or foregrounding practitioner narratives.

This list is by no means exhaustive and simply identifies a few paths. After all, this doctoral research project and its resulting threads of discussion have come at what can still be considered the ‘early days’ of inquiry into Sino-cultural veg*nism. As such, the possibilities await.

7 References

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