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**Combining Discourse and Policy Analysis on the Topic of Food Safety  
in China: DO THE POLICIES LINE UP WITH THE MANY  
PERSEVERING ISSUES AT HAND?**

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# Combining Discourse and Policy Analysis on the Topic of Food Safety in China

DO THE POLICIES LINE UP WITH THE MANY PERSEVERING  
ISSUES AT HAND?

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## **1. Introduction**

Unhygienic food packaging circumstances (Bloomberg, 2022), dishcloths in a takeaway hotpot (Zuo, 2023), propylene glycol additives in milk (Lau, 2022), ice cream that will not melt (Yan, 2022), these are all issues discussed in news articles in the past year when searching for “food safety in China”. Food safety is a critical issue that affects the health and well-being of individuals and communities worldwide. In recent years, food safety has become an increasingly important topic in China due to the high number of food safety incidents. Following the 2008 milk scandal first caused by the milk from Sanlu Group where melamine was found in infant formula (Huang, 2022), the 154-articles long Food Safety Law of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was implemented in 2009 (Huang, 2021). However, the PRC still experiences numerous reoccurring food scandals.

Such reoccurring food scandals have had a significant impact on public health and have eroded consumer trust in the food system (Chen et al., 2018: 2). Even though the state made alterations to the Food Safety Law of the People’s Republic of China in 2015, 2018, and 2021, food scandals still make up an ever-uninterrupted part of Chinese discourse. Historically, food safety concerns in China have been linked to issues such as poor hygiene, inadequate regulation, and corruption. In the past, the approach of the government toward food safety incidents was reactive, meaning government officials responded to incidents as they occurred. Despite the previous reactive approach, in recent years, after the initial implementation of the Food Safety Law, there has been a shift towards a more proactive approach. Following the Food Safety Law, the government makes an effort to implement policies aimed at preventing food safety incidents before they occur. However, one of the main problems in food safety issues is the lack of enforcement of such food safety measures and regulations. Scholars, like Kang (2019: 2-11), who provides a collective overview of English literature on food safety implementation, attribute this to a number of factors, including corruption, inadequate resources, and a lack of training amongst food safety inspectors. In addition, scholars argue that the food safety management system lacks transparency, which makes it difficult for consumers to make informed decisions about the safety of the foods they are purchasing (Mol, 2014: 49-50). Many Chinese citizens cannot afford to buy their goods from a local farm, or source their foods from more reliable sources, and thus must resort to supermarkets, keeping the issue of skepticism around the legitimacy of products and brands alive (Loh, 2021).

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze policies surrounding food safety in China and to identify the main problems that exist within this area, as portrayed by the PRC government. I map the issue of food safety in China to create an overview of the problems and concerns surrounding food safety as reflected in the government's response. In this thesis, I lay out what the government has done to combat food safety hazards in the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China, as food safety issues are a persistent, reoccurring theme in Chinese discourse.<sup>1</sup> I also explore the factors that contribute to issues of food safety and potential problems that exist within the policies and laws. Lastly, I discuss potential solutions that could be implemented to improve food safety in China. By doing so, I hope to provide a comprehensive analysis of the state of food safety in China and to identify areas where further research is needed.

As there are already works of research that focus on food safety policies, such as an article by Su et al. (2022) that focuses on why cost-reduction oriented policies in food safety governance failed, or an article by Broughton and Walker (2010) that focuses on policies towards food safety in aquaculture in China, my thesis will add to the current discourse on food safety in China by providing readers with an extensive overview of the policies in the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China and their possible limits or shortcomings and the motivation behind these policies.

While a quantitative analysis of China's food safety policies already exists (Song et al., 2022), there are only few articles that lay out exactly what the aim of the policies in the Food Safety Law is and what issues coming forth out of government documents and state media possibly motivated policy-makers to issue them.

For my research, I first conduct a thorough literature review to map the issue of food safety in China, categorize the main concerns that exist surrounding food safety, and provide a general overview of what has already been researched. Then, I look at concerns voiced in state and party documents as well as news articles, via state and party media. I do this to investigate the concerns of the party on this topic and to get an idea of the motivation for certain policies. Then, I carry out a policy analysis of China's food safety laws through utilizing the policy document of the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China, to keep track of what has already been undertaken to combat food safety hazards and issues. Lastly, I investigate the gaps and correlations between the issues addressed in the policy document and the issues

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the central government organizations as the (PRC) government, unless stated otherwise.

discussed in the articles of our corpus in the discourse analysis and propose suggestions for combatting these gaps.

## **2. Methodology**

The first part of the research conducted for my thesis is a critical discourse analysis of written text. A discourse can be viewed as a system existing of thoughts, knowledge or communication that constructs our view, perception, and experience of the world around us. As formulated by the *Miriam-Webster dictionary*, a discourse is “a formal and orderly and usually extended expression of thought on a subject.” A discourse analysis is a qualitative method of research that examines in what way the partakers, the producers of the content in a particular discourse, use language to construct certain meanings in a context. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) focuses mostly on “the social, ideological and political dimension of discourse” (Cameron and Panović, 2014: 66). According to Cameron and Panović, CDA is widely used for examining state and political discourse, and how the state positions itself in the discourse, as it often concerns the media, which can be used as a powerful tool for shaping opinions on current affairs and issues. Critical discourse analysis does not only concern the state, but it can also be used in different contexts. Critical discourse analysis assumes that language is not neutral and that it can be used to reproduce or challenge existing power relations. It is concerned with uncovering hidden ideologies and assumptions that underlie discourse and with revealing how these shape our understanding of social issues. For my thesis, CDA will help to identify the dominant opinions of the PRC government surrounding food safety in China. From my findings, I then extract certain potential motivators for policymaking concerning food safety. The discourse analysis will be represented by news articles and government reports to display state-produced discourse.

In order to be able to select a corpus for my discourse analysis, I conducted a preliminary review of the dominant themes and discourses surrounding food safety in China, which I discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis. The next step was then to establish a corpus of articles and reports. After this, I analyzed the language used in the corpus to identify the discursive strategies and themes that are present. This involves identifying the key words and phrases used to describe food safety issues in China as well as the metaphors, analogies, and narratives that are used to frame the discourse. For the initial key words and phrases, I employ the article by Song et al. (2022), who have used a text mining method to conduct a quantitative analysis of the policies surrounding food safety. In

this article, they state that, in food policy, there are 20 common keywords. These, and their respective translations into Mandarin Chinese, are represented in Figure 1.

I have used these keywords, both in English, as well as translated into Mandarin Chinese, to find the articles and reports for my corpus. The corpus is pieced together with articles and pieces published by Chinese party media. These articles were selected because they represent a variety of sources and viewpoints on food safety policies in China. The articles are sourced from newspapers, such as the People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency. The full citation of all articles in the corpus can be found in the appendix.

From the articles, I determine certain (additional) keywords that can be found amongst the articles of the corpus. By doing this, I extract what is discussed, and what topics are being left out in this part of the discourse on Chinese food safety. For this thesis, I employ the idea of Cameron and Panović (2018: 5), who mention that words, metaphors, and grammatical choices contribute to the construction of a stance through directing attention away from or towards particular actors. In addition to this, I will answer some of the most common questions in discourse analysis in social sciences, such as “what actors occupy the positions of speakers using what resources, interests, and strategies?” (Keller, 2013: 7). This will identify gaps and silences in the language used, as well as identify the voices that might be absent from or present in certain parts of the discourse.

Food and drug 食品和药物	Agricultural products 农产品	Additives 添加剂
Safety accidents 安全事故	School canteens 学校食堂	Diet 饮食疗养
Family planning 计划生育	Commission 委员会	Food poisoning 食物中毒
Infants 婴儿	Butcher 屠夫	Dairy products 乳制品
Health 卫生	Product quality 产品质量/品级	Quarantine 检疫
Disinfection 消毒	Safety hazards 安全隐患	Shelf life 保质期

*Figure 1: 20 most common keywords in discourse on Chinese food safety and their translations into Mandarin Chinese in no particular order*

The second part of the research for my thesis concerns a policy analysis. Policy analysis is a process that aims to identify, evaluate, and recommend solutions to policy issues (CDC, 2022). The goal of this policy analysis is to determine what has already been undertaken to combat food safety hazards and to evaluate how successful these policies have proven to be through looking at correlation with issues at hand. Combining the findings gathered from the discourse analysis, I aim to extract the motivation for certain groups, or categories, of policies, look at which problems they target, and define certain weaknesses and strengths that exist in the current policy framework.

In food safety, problems can be related to, but are not limited to, foodborne illness outbreaks, contamination of food products, or unsafe food handling practices. In order to identify such problems, I will make use of key words and focus points that are present across policies, and combining them with the key words and focus points found in the discourse analysis. By doing so, I present an overview of the focus points of food safety policy in China. Then, I discuss which problems have successfully been targeted in the process of policy making, and which have been left out.

### **3. Literature review**

In this chapter, I explain different approaches scholars have already taken when conducting research on food safety in China. I touch upon two main topics, namely the recurrence of food safety as a problem in Chinese discourse, and the basics of Chinese food safety policy, regulations, law, and the structure of management of food safety in China.

#### *3.1 An introduction to Chinese food safety as a recurring issue in academic discourse*

Academic discourse on Chinese food safety has provided valuable insights into the causes and consequences of food safety issues in the country. In this subchapter, I will draw on several sources that address food safety in China and state their main takeaways on food safety as a recurring issue in society. One of the causes in food safety issues in China relates to the country's fast economic growth. Not only this, rapid globalization has also contributed to an increase in food trade and growing demand for food products sourced from China. As Wu and Zhu (2014: 9-11) state, together with a growing economy, living standards improve greatly, bringing along changes to the dietary standards of urban and rural citizens in China, further pressuring the Chinese agricultural market. Along with this, some sectors, such as the Chinese dairy sectors, develop rapidly and relatively unsupervised and unregulated (Pei et al., 2011: 413-414).

For quite some time, Chinese citizens have increasingly incorporated meats as well as

fruits and vegetables in their diet. The demand for staple foods such as rice and wheats has declined relatively since 1995, and the proportion of demands amongst agricultural products has changed. Whether it be due to domestic promotion of milk consumption, rapid changes in Chinese dietary patterns since the 1980s (Yan, 2015: 264-265), or a growing demand from outside the country, China's dairy sector grew with an annual average of 15% between 1995 and 2011 (Pei et al., 2011: 413) and continues to grow with an annual average of 6.1% from 2018 until today (Statista, 2023). The rapid increasing demand for other types of edible goods created a market where speed and efficiency of production became significantly more important than the safety of products. For example, due to the growing demand for dairy, the practice of adding chemicals, such as in the Sanlu milk scandal where melamine was added to increase the protein percentage in diluted milk, or pesticides to increase crop yields, became widespread across the country.

Another issue is China's food safety management structure. The domestic agricultural sector consists of hundreds of millions of small private farmers (Wu and Zhu, 2014: 134). Such fragmentation is problematic, as it may result in a lack of effective supervision and policy enforcement due to the large scale of supervision needed. Some other issues with the fragmentation of farms are included by Chen et al. (2019: 1-7), who study the relationship between farmer behavior and food safety in China. Small-scale farmers often lack knowledge and resources to implement proper food safety practices, which increases the risk of contamination and other food safety issues. Fragmentation of farms also makes it difficult to implement modern agricultural technology, lowering yields and potentially lowering food safety standards (Tan et al., 2010: 117-123).

This brings me to the penultimate topic I want to discuss in academic discourse on food safety: the implementation of modern technology. Modern technology offers a solution to many issues in the food industry, according to several scholars. Lei et al. (2022) write about the use of technology to increase food safety in China. The authors argue that the use of blockchain technology can help to create a transparent and traceable food supply chain, which can enhance food safety by identifying and preventing contamination issues. The authors also mention artificial intelligence (AI) as a potential tool for identifying and monitoring food safety risks to improve food safety management and reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses.

All of these issues or solutions for food safety, and more, come together in studies on consumer attitudes towards food safety in China. In their article on consumer attitudes

towards genetically modified foods in China, Huang and Peng (2015: 2398-2399) discuss the recent rapid and drastic shift towards a more dominantly negative viewpoint on genetically modified foods. They discuss that this might be due to a higher educated audience, as more awareness and knowledge on the topic can infuse more doubt amongst customers. Other factors Huang and Peng (2015: 2398-2399) list for developing a negative stance on, in this case, genetically modified foods, are big food scandals and anti-genetic modification initiatives on public media (and the internet).

Another factor that contributes to the number of concerns about food safety amongst a certain group, is the height of salary. Wike and Stokes (2016) and Liu et al. (2020: 9) have found that there are more concerns of food safety amongst citizens residing in higher scales of income than in the lower scales. The study of Liu et. al (2020: 9) points out that there is a demand for transparency. Another thing they point out is that consumers are willing to pay a premium for food safety attributes, such as personal labelling and increased traceability. They state that consumers most value the traceability and government certification of products (Liu et al.: 8). According to the surveys of China Consumer Association (2022), food product complaints are the type of complaint most made to the Chinese Customer Association (CCA). In 2022, the amount of food complaints rose with 38.23%. The CCA (2022) states that with current practices, the “consumers' right to know and right to choose are damaged.” In the same article, the CCA mentions six major problems issued in complaints, these are:

1. A lack of freshness in online products
2. Problems with the labeling of imported food purchased online
3. Food ingredients containing prohibited additives
4. A lack of obvious reminders of expiry dates during the sale of soon to expire or expired food
5. Vague or unknown community group buying fresh food purchase channels and worrying quality of products coming from these purchase channels
6. A lack of details on labels of pre-made, ready to eat dishes

To sum up, there are several issues that exist in food safety according to scholars and citizens of China. These issues can be found in Figure 2, where I have displayed them in a word association graph.

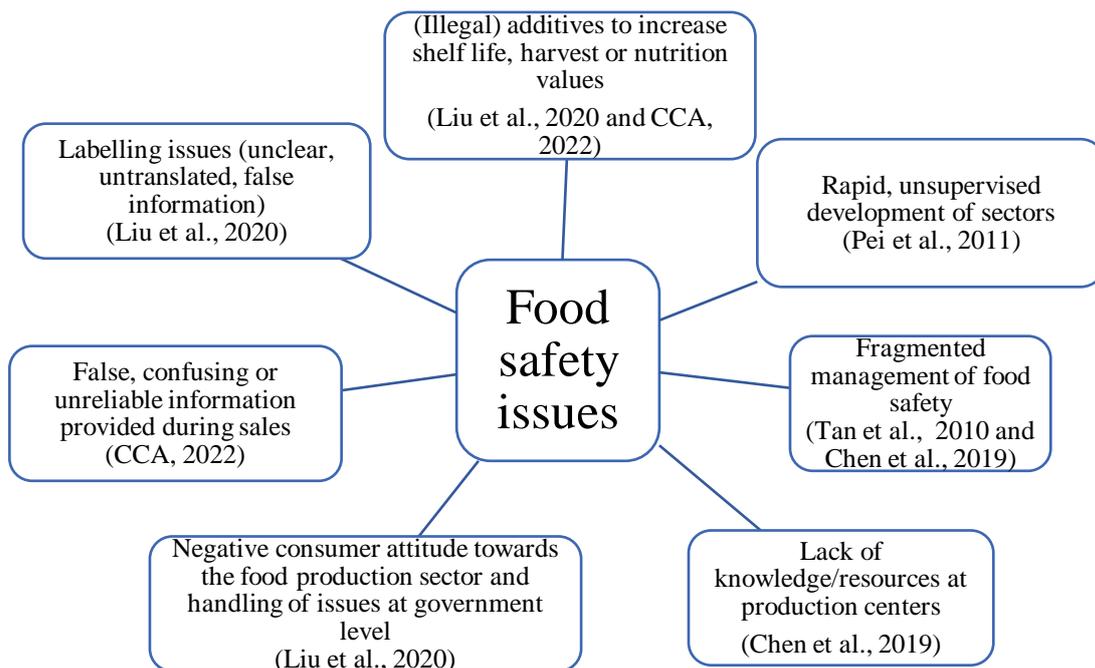


Figure 2: Structured overview of issues in food safety discussed by scholars and organizations

### 3.2 An introduction to Chinese food safety policy, laws, and regulations

Not only is China the global leader in pig meat, wheat, and rice production, it also holds a place in the top three producers of raw milk of cattle, cotton seed, rape seed, maize, and sugar cane (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Statistics Division, 2022). However, from diseased animals getting into the human food chain and adding chemicals that are not food-safe to meat won from carcasses to preserve it or enhance flavors, to using strong pesticides and toxins in order to lower the costs of food production: being the global leader in production of many edible goods does not mean mentioned produced foods are necessarily safe to consume (Yan, 2015: 267-269).

Now, how can we look at China’s food safety and its laws and policy in a structured manner? As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the PRC issued the 154-articles long Food Safety Law of the People’s Republic of China in 2009, after the Sanlu milk scandal in 2008 (Huang, 2021). The state made alterations to this law in 2015, 2018, and 2021.

The Food Safety Law governs standards for food quality and integrity and implements regulations on food safety in the categories of production, circulation, recall, and import and export of food products. As mentioned by Zhou and Jin (2013: 1), scholars often divide food safety into two sectors, namely the security of food quantity, otherwise known as food security, and the safety of food quality. Safety of food quality ties in with health security in a

region or country and takes up a place in the non-traditional safety and security categories that ought to be managed in a country. The management of food safety issues in China is now a central government-led system with little to no interaction or feedback loops. The two parties in the management system are made up of the objects of governance and the receivers of policies, namely the companies responsible for, or producers of, certain products and consumers (Zhou and Jin, 2013: 4-6). However, the system is more complex than it seems to be at first glance. Article 6 of the Food Safety Law of the Peoples' Republic of China defines that "local people's governments at or above the county level are responsible for the food safety supervision and management work in their respective administrative regions" and that they themselves should manage the working mechanisms and information sharing mechanisms. Due to the lack of communication between the receivers of policies and the source, the central government, there exists a great deal of asymmetric information, and problems cannot be eliminated adequately (Zhou and Jin, 2013: 4-6).

In addition to the general rules and laws in the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China, there are additional regulations and rules that apply to different sectors of food production. To give you an idea of the fragmentation of regulations across sectors, I will provide an example of additional regulations. Food production regulations are also governed through the Administrative Measures for Food Product Permits issued in 2017. For food trading, the Administrative Measures for Food Trading Permits, also issued in 2017, are to be followed. Since the establishment of the internet, online food trading came into the picture. For these types of food trading, there are additional measures concerning safe food trade online, namely the Measures of the Investigation and Punishment of Illegal Conducts Concerning Online Food Safety, issued in 2016. Additional measures for trading concerning import and export are governed by the Administrative Measures for Food Safety in Importation and Exportation issued in 2011.

#### **4. Discourse analysis**

This chapter aims to identify dominant opinions and social practices surrounding the issue of food and food safety in China by examining discourse from Chinese party media. By examining the underlying ideologies and assumptions in state-media discourse, the findings in this chapter will provide insights into potential motivators for policymaking concerning food safety in China.

This thesis will employ a combination of qualitative methods, including content analysis and close reading of Chinese party media and public discourse. The discourse analysis will focus on language use and the ways in which language constructs meaning around the issue of food production and food safety.

CDA will be used to identify and describe the dominant themes and patterns in the discourse, such as the use of specific vocabulary or recurring metaphors. CDA will also be used to uncover the underlying ideologies and assumptions in our discourse and to examine how language use reflects and reinforces power relations and social inequalities that might affect policymaking and policy implementation.

This chapter consists of four parts. First, I explain why I selected the articles for my corpus. I then introduce these articles and conduct a discourse analysis separately on both the English and Chinese articles. Lastly, I will piece these two together to conduct the critical discourse analysis, answer the question of which gaps and silences exist in the language used, as well as identify the voices that might be absent from certain parts of the discourse.

#### *4.1 Selection of articles*

For my discourse analysis of state-produced media, I sourced 15 (news) articles from (news) websites run by the CCP in the past five years (2018-2023). I chose this timeframe, as research on food safety is an ever-developing discourse, and articles are plentiful, and thus I need to delineate an accessible number of articles. The CCP adjusted the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China in both 2018, as well as in 2021. Focusing the discourse analysis on this period provides a useful overview of recent issues portrayed in state media. This makes it simpler to assess the aim and the succession of the policies after the period of adjustments.

I found all articles through the search engine on the websites of Xinhua net, the website of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, and the website of Chinadaily. Along with this, I examined the 14<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan of 2022, and the 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan of 2017. Lastly, I included an article on the roadmap of food safety policy implementation in China sourced from China CDC weekly, a newsmagazine produced by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one of the organs of the National Health Commission. To piece together an accurate sample of state-media discourse, I made sure to include both articles written in English, as well as articles written in Mandarin Chinese.

I will briefly introduce the content of the articles used, and then move on to the analysis. The corpus itself can be broken up into smaller categories. First of all, there are respectively eight English and seven Chinese articles. The English articles tell us more about how state actors portray issues for audiences outside of China, whereas the Chinese articles aim to reach the citizens of China, or rather a Chinese-speaking audience. I will refer to all the articles by their corresponding numbers specified in the appendix (1-15).

#### *4.2 State-produced media in English*

The English articles in my corpus are made up of seven news-style articles. These all report on events relevant to the topic of food safety. The remaining article is an academic research-oriented article. It is evident that the general sentiment of the English articles in the corpus is one of understanding. In the articles, the authors express several times that the PRC government has understood that there are certain issues that need solving. Three out of eight articles (1-3) report on government officials calling for change in the regulation and handling of food safety on several different occasions. Not only this, but another article (4), in which the topic of food poisoning incidents amongst students and sanitary conditions in canteens arises, reports that a ministry, the Ministry of Education (MOE), states that the state needs to improve food safety work for the country's nutritional improvement plan for students. The articles repeatedly mention (twelve times) a need for an updated strategy for hazard prevention.

Five English articles (3-7) contain concrete examples of the food safety issues, or concrete examples of solutions. Article 3 discusses that Zhang Gaoli, China's vice-premier, and Wang Yang, deputy head of the State Council's food safety commission, urge for making efforts to modernize the current systems. They also mention that food safety administration capacity needs to increase, in order to strengthen general production and supervision processes. According to the article, Zhang Gaoli also mentions that the government should focus more on soil pollution prevention and enhancing ethics in the food production industry itself.

Three news-style articles (5-7) report solely on events that concern food safety (implementation of new laws, campaigns to find out about unsafe practices, and measures to prevent transmission of disease via imported goods). In article 5, the topic is implementing new techniques for food packaging and quality control for metal containers. Article 6 reports on the results of a crackdown on the illicit use of food additives and the sale of counterfeit or substandard food products. Article 7 deals with the stricter supervision on imported food

products from overseas, as they were virus transmission channels during the pandemic. The last English article (8) discusses how the state might implement food safety measures in China.

Numerous problems and issues surrounding the topic of food safety are, directly or indirectly, highlighted by the authors in the English state-produced discourse. These are: a lack of ethics in the industry, soil pollution, faulty and/or unreliable food packaging, and problems with the general production and supervision of food products (as stated in article 6: “excessive amounts of additives or inedible substances, and meat products that have failed inspection tests”).

The authors of the articles reflect a hands-on approach for solving these issues by repeatedly mentioning the already established system. The authors express trust, or confidence in the system, by using terms such as ‘enhancement’ and ‘intensifying’ of certain measures, instead of using terms or wording that could point to (a need for) more radical changes or for establishing completely new policies and rules.

The texts can be seen as a source of continuous reassurance for the reader when it comes to maintaining trust in the current system and in the decisions of actors in the field of food safety. This is apparent in sentences like in article 1, where the author creates a compelling narrative for the reader through usage of hyperboles, writing: “China has been dealing with food safety issues with the most rigorous standards, the most stringent supervision, the most severe penalties, and the most serious accountability.”

Another example of this exists in article 3, where together with urging for stricter measurements and punishment, Wang mentions that “related work has yielded significant achievements and the food safety situation has stayed generally stable over the past five years” (Xinhua, 2018). These examples use hyperboles and adjectives, such as “the most severe penalties”, “the most serious accountability”, and “significant achievements” (Xinhua, 2018). These hyperboles, or adjectives, express a sense of confidence and trust in one’s doing, and leave the reader little room for doubt or even for thinking to form their own opinion on the issue.

The authors write out of a position of subordination to the government and their actions, seeing that they report on events they have no influence on or, presumably for the reader, partake an active role in. Another factor that contributes to this subordinate position can be found in articles 1 through 7, where the authors directly cite, or paraphrase, the words of certain government officials or governmental organizations as a direct substantiation of the

need for change or for establishing and/or implementing certain policies.

However, even though the authors can be perceived as subordinate, they also aim to educate their audience on certain decisions that are being made, or on why certain measures have to be taken. Examples of this are the given reasoning behind closer management of imported and exported foods in article 7, the reason for “ramped up supervision” of food products and production in article 6, and the reasoning behind the implementation of new measures explained in article 5. This education can give the reader a sense of control, as they know what is now going on, why issues are taking place and what is being done against these issues, or why certain policies are being implemented. This can then be reconnected to the previous statement that our articles function as a source of reassurance for readers.

#### *4.3 State-produced media in Mandarin Chinese*

The Chinese articles can be divided into categories a similar matter as the English articles. For simplicity, I will divide them into four categories: news-style articles (10), informational articles (9, 11), government documents (12, 13, 15) and miscellaneous (14).

The news-style article discusses, as in the articles in subchapter 4.2, an event, here the Sixth China Animal Health and Food Safety Conference in China, and several discussions that took place at the event. The informational articles are also of reporting nature; however, they are specifically aimed to educate the reader on issues that arise in the field of food safety management and food production and to raise awareness. For example, article 9 focuses on different outlooks on food safety in academic research. The emphasis in this article is on the (solutions for) problems in agriculture and the seed industry. Article 11, however, raises the concept of faulty nutrition labels and what issues these might cause. The government documents mostly touch up on the plans for the next five years for the field of food safety in China, and how to realize these plans. Article 15 deals with the direct consequences of these plans, as well as the plans in the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year plan, stating how decisions were implemented. Lastly, Article 14 is an article that is composed of an interview with Liu Yan: the representative of the National People's Congress, Deputy District Mayor of the Minhang District in Shanghai. In this interview, the topic of food safety in minors is discussed.

Like in subchapter 4.2, here we can also see that the authors in the Chinese state-produced discourse highlight several concrete issues. They are the following: the three rural

issues (三农问题)<sup>2</sup>, insufficient production to provide for the whole country, a need for modernization of processes, an excessive use of antibiotics in meat and dairy cows, faulty or missing nutrition labels, issues with capacity for overseeing production, insufficient risk assessment for food safety supervision, insufficient food safety hazard identification, obesity in minors, and lastly, an excessive use of additives.

Also in the articles in the Chinese part of the corpus, it is evident that the authors express a kind of trust, or confidence in the system, by using terms such as ‘enhancement’ and ‘intensifying’ of certain measures, policies, management and/or procedures.

Something I touched upon in chapter 4.2, the education of the reader, is widespread in these texts too. In text 9 and 10, for example, the authors write about the contents of two conferences focusing on food safety, and several policies and measures that will, or should, be taken to combat existing issues in the field of agriculture (article 9) and the dairy sector (10). The authors write about issues of food safety mostly from the viewpoint of different experts that were present at these conferences, and rely on their expertise. One example of this can be found in article 10, where the author, seemingly without doubt, paraphrases the words of Wei Xiaojun, a speaker on the conference and director of the Training and Epidemic Prevention and Health Care Center of the Dairy Cow Science Research Institute of Yili Group, to form a statement on the current situation. Amongst other things, the author then writes: “It is necessary to improve the dairy cow disease prevention and control system, continuously upgrade and optimize, and form a disease immunity technology process suitable for my country's pastures; (...)” (Lǐnán (李楠), 2022). After this statement, there is no other sourcing available that would prove these claims to be true.

Another example of the education of the reader can be found in article 11, where the author writes “What provisions does the law have on the content of food labels and instructions? Are there any relevant cases in practice? People's Daily Online sorted it out” (Xinhua, 2021). Here, the author literally guides the reader through the topic of faulty food labels as an authoritative storyteller, and explains that the article will deal with any questions they might have when it comes to this topic.

Similar as in section 4.2, we can see that the authors of the Chinese texts leave little to no room for interpretation of the articles by the reader. In article 10, we can see that the author guides the reader along a moral compass. The author paraphrases, or justifies, the words of an

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Baidu page on ‘三农’, 三农 refers to agriculture, rural areas and farmers. The three rural issues are studied to solve problems of increasing farmers' income, agricultural development, and rural stability.

expert present at the conference by writing: “Telling customers how to buy the right milk for them is a basic and necessary task” (如何告诉消费者自己去选择合适的好牛奶是一项基本且必需的工作) (Línán (李楠), 2022). Another example of this guiding along a moral compass can be found in article 11, where the author writes the following about faulty nutrition labels: “Low and chaotic standards are not only dishonest, but also irresponsible to consumers.” (低标乱标不仅是不诚信行为, 更是对消费者不负责任) (Xinhua, 2021).

Another example of leaving little to no room for interpretation can be found in the Five Year Plans (12, 13) and the interpretation thereof (15). In this, the author(s) write about the previous Five Year Plan, and the “remarkable” results of their implementation (各项工作取得明显成效). The author(s) then follow(s) up with a list of implementations made, before heading onto the plans for the upcoming five years.

#### *4.4 State-produced media: combined analysis*

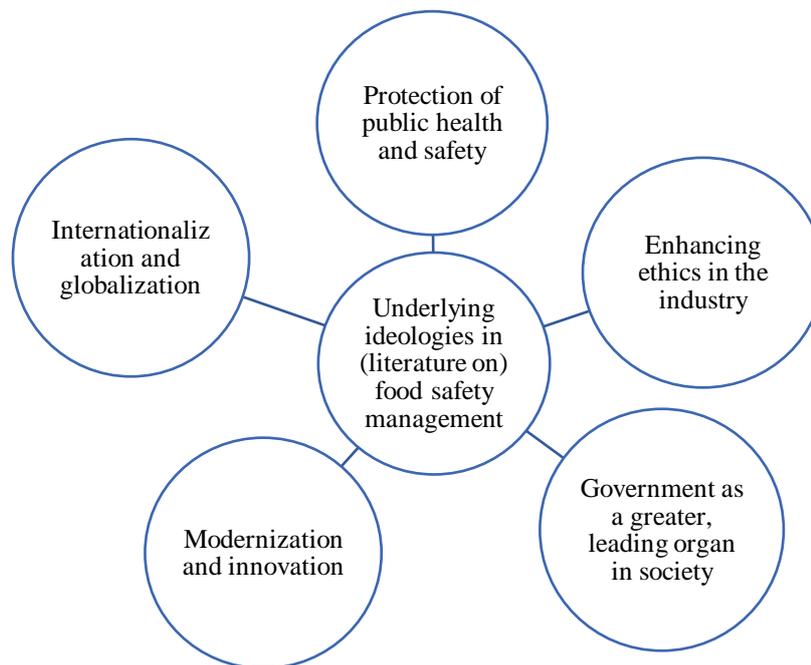
What we have discovered in the preceding subchapters is that the government uses several communicative strategies to convey their outlook on the topic of food safety. From the corpus, it is evident that the governments sentiment towards the topic is one of understanding towards the reader. The authors repeatedly mention, through the quoting of government officials and ministries, that the government is aware that there are issues in the current system, that these issues are in need of solutions, and that they know that readers are equally aware of these issues. To comfort the readers, the authors make use of ways of reassurance and trust-building. The authors use language that emphasizes the existing system's rigor, standards, and accountability. They employ hyperboles and adjectives to leave little room for doubt or autonomous interpretation, and in this way, to create a sense of confidence in the government's actions. Then, another communicative strategy is the usage of concrete examples of issues and solutions. Examples of issues that are being addressed are soil pollution, faulty food packaging, unethical practices, and problems with production and supervision. The authors write about such issues to emphasize the awareness of issues by the government.

In the articles in my corpus, authors take on the role of educator, explaining certain measures and issues to the reader. We can see that the authors can be placed at a superior position compared to the reader, but they are in subordination to the government: the authors report on events and quote government officials, positioning themselves as subordinate to the government and her actions. They cite officials and experts as a direct substantiation of the

need for change or certain policies. However, when it comes to educating the reader, we can see that these articles are used to educate the readers about certain decisions and measures being taken by the government. They provide the readers with reasoning for certain actions and policies, again through providing concrete examples, giving the readers a sense of control, to build confidence in the system, and to create understanding for the government's efforts. The authors have a way of guiding the readers' interpretations, by, for example, using language that emphasizes the readers' moral responsibility and make definitive statements about what is necessary and dishonest in relation to food safety.

Overall, the strategies employed emphasize expressing understanding, presenting concrete examples of issues and measures taken, building trust in the system, highlighting solvable (or already solved) problems, and guiding the interpretation of the information by the readers.

The texts in the corpus display clear messages on the underlying ideologies of the government and authors. For a quick overview, these ideologies can be found in Figure 3. The elaboration accompanying these ideologies can be found in the text under the figure.



*Figure 3: Underlying ideologies in (literature on) food safety management*

One of the reoccurring themes in the discourse on Chinese food safety in these articles is public health and safety. In the articles, a strong emphasis is put on the protection of public health and safety in a handful of ways. For example, the ideology of public health and safety

is apparent in article 2, where State Councilor Wang Yong said, “Food safety is directly related to people's livelihoods, industrial development, public security and social stability” (Xinhua, 2022). The need for protection of the consumer against faulty or unhealthy food products is, whether directly or indirectly, addressed in the majority of articles in this corpus. An example of the indirect promotion of protection of the consumer, is that in the introduction of the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year plan, along with the stress on healthy development of the social economy, reaching greater public health and safety through food safety regulation is strongly encouraged.

According to the authors, one of the ways the protection of public health and safety must be reached is through government regulation, policy, and control. While the responsibility to enhance ethics is partly placed at the operators and food producers (article 2-3), the articles repeatedly mention that there needs to be greater, stricter supervision by the government and an enhancement of supervision and administration processes. This idea of the government as a greater, leading organ can also be found in article 11, where the author of the People’s Daily Online takes the hand of the consumer to guide them through the regulations that surround food labels and instructions. In this article, the author specifically writes: “The Shanghai Consumer Protection Committee reminds that food nutrition labels are an important guarantee for consumers' right to know” (Xinhua, 2021), placing the responsibility of consumer wellbeing with the government and food producers. One last piece in the corpus that advocates for changes in the regulation of food production by the government is found in the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year plan, where the government itself stresses the importance of strengthening regulatory measures.

The articles that urge for greater supervision, safer distribution, and safer production of food, as well as greater levels of administration often propagate for efficiency through modernization and innovation of the processes. A strong emphasis on modernization of processes is expressed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year plan: one of the plans for the agricultural sector includes “developing advanced agricultural machinery suitable for all cultivation conditions, with a focus on high horsepower tractors and compound operations machinery, large and efficient combine harvesters, precision seeders, and other food crop equipment, as well as machinery for seeding, farmland management, and harvesting of cotton, sugar cane, and other cash crops.” (National Health Commission, 2017).

Another important ideology present in the corpus is that of internationalization and globalization. In the corpus, the authors, here representing the government, repeatedly mention a need, commitment, or effort to align with international standards and practices. The

emphasis on internationalization is also evident in the roadmap (8) that, amongst other things, discusses the significance of international collaboration in addressing food safety. In article 9, Xiwen Chen pointed out that since the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the situation surrounding the grain production in China has not been developing quickly and well enough to sustain the needs of citizens in the future, as the existing agricultural resources and agricultural technology levels are already insufficient. Therefore, they are forced to rely on import and international agricultural resources/products.

The aim of this chapter was to provide insights into potential motivators for policymaking concerning food safety in China. Even though the ideologies and communication strategies already provide us with many insights, the articles in our corpus also discussed multiple concrete issues that surfaced in these articles in the light of the topic of food safety. To complete the analysis, I will provide these concrete issues in Figure 4, as to give a complete overview of the possible concrete motivators for the current policymaking.

Lack of ethics in the industry	Soil pollution	Faulty and/or unreliable food packaging	(Excessive) use of additives
Virus transmission through imported foods	Food poisoning incidents among students and in canteens	The three rural issues (三农问题)	Insufficient resources for production to provide for the whole country (dependent on imported goods)
Outdated processes in the industry	Excessive use of antibiotics in meat and dairy cows	Faulty or missing nutrition labels	Insufficient capacity in the industry for overseeing capacity, resulting in unreliable/insufficient supervision
	Insufficient food hazard identification due to long communication channels	Obesity in minors	

Figure 4: The concrete issues addressed in the articles in the corpus in no particular order

## 5. Policy analysis

In the corpus of the discourse analysis, and in the literature review, several concrete issues were addressed through state media and scholarly research on the topic of food safety. Examples of these concrete issues are problems with additives, food packaging (unsafe packaging, or faulty labels), false information provided to consumers, food carrying harmful bacteria or viruses, cases of food poisoning in canteens, excessive use of antibiotics for treatment of (dairy and meat) cows, meat products that have failed inspection tests but nevertheless ended up on the market, and problems with soil pollution. However, the backstories that accompany these concrete issues point to more severe underlying structural issues that need to be solved through structural changes in the system, or perhaps simply through enforcement of enhanced supervision and administration processes, as repeatedly mentioned by the authors in the corpus.

Now, what are some of the mechanisms China uses to implement food safety policies? The key mechanisms include the usage of regulatory measures, enforcement actions, and monitoring and surveillance systems. For the use of regulatory measures, the government counts on the public to participate in implementation of these measures, to be able to successfully enforce measures. The main legislative framework includes the Food Safety Law, the Regulations on the Administration of Food Production, and the Regulations on the Administration of Food Safety Standards. For this policy analysis, I will be examining the main policies through considering the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国食品安全法) issued on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April in 2021.

In this chapter, I will examine exactly how the government decides to direct her policies to solve the concrete issues at hand, and what broader purpose the food safety laws anno 2021 exactly serve. Combining the findings from the discourse analysis, I aim to extract the motivation for certain policies and examine which problems the policies mainly target. Together with this, I will define weaknesses and strengths that exist in the current main policy framework by determining whether any areas of concern are yet left untargeted.

### *5.1 Introducing the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China (FSL)*

The policy document of the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China<sup>3</sup> is divided

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<sup>3</sup> From this point on, the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China will be abbreviated to "FSL"

into ten chapters, each divided further, into a total of 154 separate articles. The chapters divide the articles into the following topics:

- General provisions
- Food safety risk monitoring and assessment
- Food safety standards
- Food production and operation
- Food inspection
- Food import and export
- Handling of food safety accidents
- Supervision and management
- Legal responsibilities
- Supplementary provisions

Before we head onto the analysis of the policies issued by the government, I want to define the stakeholders that participate in maintaining and managing food safety in China, and who can be directly, or indirectly, affected by these policies. The first important party in this analysis is composed of the central government, local governments and relevant governmental organizations such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural affairs and the National Health Commission.

Then, there are regulatory bodies such as the China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA), and the China National Center for Food Safety Risk Assessment (CFSA). These regulatory bodies are responsible for setting the standards, conducting food safety inspections, and enforcing regulations.

Several consumer associations exist in China. One of these is the China Consumers Association, which monitors food safety incidents, conducts surveys amongst consumers and handles complaints. Along with this, they are appointed to be responsible for raising awareness about food safety issues.

Representing both the state and the consumer are the media. For state-owned media, we can say that they are responsible for raising awareness, reporting on food safety incidents, and can be used in certain ways to shape public opinion. However, non-state-owned media can, in turn, be used to represent the general public as a feedback system towards the state and other stakeholders in the topic of food safety.

Lastly, there are the food producers, manufacturers, food service providers, and

retailers. The producers and manufacturers are directly responsible for ensuring the safety of food products, as well as protecting the industry. These producers and manufacturers are obliged to process food safety measures and policies, adhere to government regulations, and maintain quality control. Food retailers, and food service providers, in their turn, are responsible for ensuring the safety of consumers through providing reliable information on their products and selling genuine products for genuine prices.

Even though the policies in the FSL document are already divided into ten chapters, classifying the direction of their employment and general topics; in order to further ease the analysis of policy, I set up a set of categories to classify the existing policies. The categories, including their descriptions and corresponding articles, are displayed in Figure 5.

<b>Category and description of category</b>	<b>Article</b>
Informational – Provides information on what a policy targets, who is to be held accountable, who enforces certain policies/regulations, and/or how a policy is enforced	2, 4, 6, 7, 12, 15, 17, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 36, 44, 49, 66, 69, 70, 71, 72, 76, 82, 84, 88, 90, 91, 92, 96, 99, 101, 102, 108, 110, 114, 121, 122, 124, 127, 137, 144, 146, 147, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154
Motivational – Provides information on the aim of a policy, what it, or the previous/following article(s), will do/cause/prevent	1, 3, 21, 24, 85, 109, 141
Clarifying – Clarifies and provides a concrete example of a measure, or a guideline thereof, the government will take to solve a particular/concrete issue in food safety	5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22, 26, 31, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 42, 45, 47, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 58, 63, 67, 68, 77, 79, 80, 95, 97, 100, 104, 105, 106, 112, 113, 118, 123, 125, 126, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 138, 148
Guiding – Clarifies a guideline, or less concrete measure, of something the government will do to solve issues in food safety	8, 14, 18, 30, 32, 37, 40, 41, 43, 46, 48, 50, 53, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 73, 74, 75, 78, 80, 83, 86, 87, 89, 93, 94, 98, 103, 107, 111, 116, 117, 119, 120, 128, 134, 135, 136, 142, 143, 145, 149

Figure 5: Policies divided into four categories

In some cases, categories can overlap, such as in the case of article 53, which could be classified as guiding, as well as clarifying and informational. In any case, we could argue that policies are informational, as any policy in some gradation informs the reader on the aim, target, subject and motivation for the policy. However, in the case of the category ‘informational’, the aim of these articles is merely to inform the reader, whether this be an individual producer, consumer, a local government, or a food production company, on their rights or responsibility towards the state, other businesses, or the consumer.

To further explain the above-mentioned categories, I provide in Figure 6 to 9 the topics and issues that the articles in the categories of ‘informational’, ‘motivational’, ‘clarifying’ and ‘guiding’ articles discuss and target. As the articles in the last two categories of “clarifying” and “guiding” policies discuss more concretely the issues at hand, and the measures taken to combat them, the articles in these two categories are most useful for this policy analysis.

There are 3 sections that further divide the articles in Figure 6 into manageable components in the category “informational policies”. The section “declarations of responsibility” entails the articles that explain which actors have which responsibilities for certain aspects of managing food safety. Amongst actors in this section are food producers and tracers, warehouse keepers, production workers, those responsible for export and import, local governments, storekeepers, consumers, and governmental organizations. In this case, managing food safety is a broad topic that can refer to maintaining a sanitary production environment, to registering information about the product and labelling, establishing food safety standards, as well as selling a product to consumers or selling points such as supermarkets and restaurants.

Then, there is the category of “specifications/elaborations”, that mainly deals with clarifying guidelines or information given in the articles in other policy categories. Examples of this are article 28 and article 29, that clarify how and when food safety standards are established, who is responsible for them, and what they might entail. Lastly, there is the category of “rights and obligations”, that describes the rights of the agents, or different stakeholders, in the food safety sector. Article 88, for example, deals with the rights of a producer to obligate in case of unwanted inspection.

<b>Informational policies</b>		
<b>Declarations of responsibility</b>	<b>Specifications/elaborations</b>	<b>Rights and obligations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•(4) Responsibilities of food producers and traders</li> <li>•(6) Responsibilities of the local governments</li> <li>•(7) Responsibilities of the local government (implementation of food safety management responsibility system)</li> <li>•(9)Responsibilities of food industry associations</li> <li>•(15) Who is responsible for risk monitoring + their exact rights and obligations towards the state</li> <li>• Article 23 (exchanging communication), 27 (food safety standards), 36 (small businesses), 44 (food production enterprises), 66 (food related products), 76 (health foods), 82 (registrants), 91 (import and export), 96 (overseas exporters), 102 and 114 (large hazards), 124 (fines), 146 and 147 (compensation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•(2) Who does the FSL apply to?</li> <li>•(17) Information about food safety risk assessment work/systems</li> <li>•(25) Information about the use of standards in food safety, production, and processing</li> <li>•(28) and (29) Information about the formulation of food safety standards</li> <li>•(49) Information about the legal use of resources/additives/pesticides by agricultural producers</li> <li>•(69) - (71) Information on labelling</li> <li>•(84) Conditions for engaging in food inspection activities</li> <li>•(90) Information about the governing of food inspection</li> <li>•(122) Information about fines during uncertified production</li> <li>•(127) Punishment shall be implemented according with local measures</li> <li>•(137) Who can be held accountable/be punished?</li> <li>•(150) - (152) and (154) Specifications about the document</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•(12) Rights of individuals and organizations to report on hazards or possible hazards/winning information</li> <li>•(72) Food operators should abide the law of food labels</li> <li>•(88) Rights of producers on objecting against inspection activities</li> <li>•(92) Imported and exported goods should follow the same FSL</li> <li>•(99) Obligations of export food production enterprises</li> <li>•(101) Rights of the national quarantine department on reevaluation of information</li> <li>•(108) Rights of investigation department</li> <li>•(110) Rights and responsibilities of food safety &amp; management supervision department</li> <li>•(153) The state council may alter the law if needed</li> </ul>

*Figure 6: Above-mentioned “informational” policies summarized and divided into three main categories*

In the category of “motivational policies”, shown in Figure 7, there are only two kinds of policies. The first kind is motivational. The articles in this category motivate certain policies or explains the purpose of the FSL in general. The other kind of policy is the applicational policies, in which the articles explain what certain plans, systems or data are employed for. These policies are important to include in a policy document, as it informs the reader about the purpose of the document or the implementation of a certain law/system/procedure but is of less importance for this policy analysis.

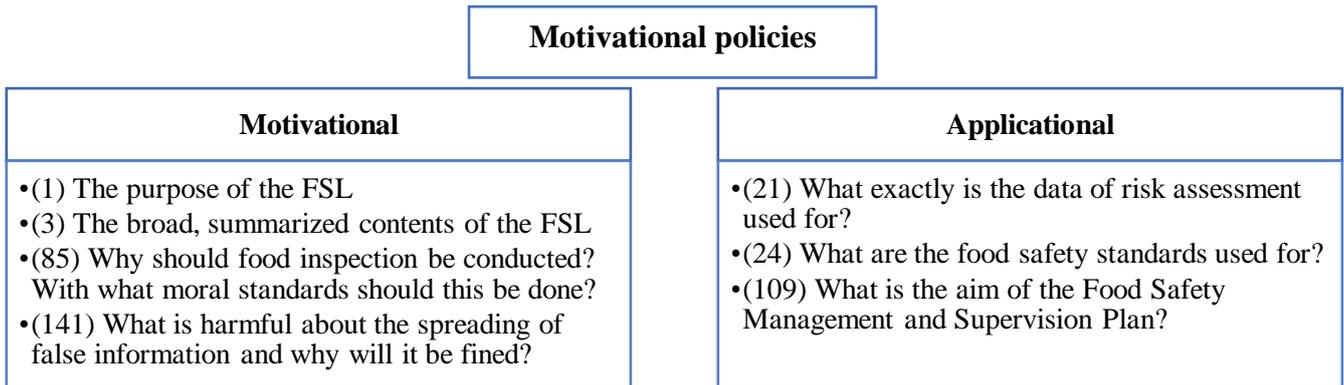


Figure 7: Above-mentioned “motivational” policies summarized and divided into two main categories

In Figure 8, there are three main categories: implementations, clarifications, and policies for special situations. In the category of “clarifying” policies, the focus lies on explaining plans the government has and measures it will take to improve food safety, and how these will be implemented. For the implementation section, this means that the articles deal with concrete systems, methods or measures in the food production sector. An example of this is the establishment of fines to further manage food safety and force citizens to comply with the FSL as a whole. By collecting the summaries from the articles, we can see that the implementation section, as represented by the articles in the FSL, displays four main objectives:

1. An increased (transparent and orderly) administration of food safety
2. An increased compliance with and enforcement of the law
3. An enhancement of the ethics in the food production industry
4. Modernization of the food production sector

The articles in the section “clarifications” provide us more insight into the direct content of a policy. It includes guidelines with specific measures to follow when adhering to the FSL. Examples of this are article 26, which explains to the reader the exact content that needs to be included in food safety standards, or articles 55 and 56, that explain to caterers how exactly catering should be executed and what is allowed and prohibited in the case of catering.

## Clarifying policies

### Implementations

- (5) A food safety committee should be established by the state council
- (13) Rewarding contributions and efforts made to maintain/improve food safety
- (31) Publishing documents online for more transparency and awareness
- (35) Implementation of a licensing system
- (39) Implementation of additive licensing system
- (42) Implementation of a full-traceability system
- (45) Implementation of a health management system for employees of the food sector
- (47) Implementation of individual quality control systems
- (58) Concrete disinfection laws
- (63) Implementation of a food recall system
- (112) Implementation of rapid detection methods
- (113) Establishment + enforcing of “food safety credit system” by the government
- (125) Fines
- (126) People should warn the authorities if they see the following...
- (129) Anyone who falls in the following categories are punished...
- (130) - (140) Info about fines (import, online business, storing and transport of food products, interfering regular processes during production, issuing false reports, false advertisement)
- (148) Compensation rule for harmed consumers

### Clarifications

- (19) Clarifies what will happen if risk assessment is deemed necessary
- (20) Clarifies need/obligation for prompt communication in the case of hazards
- (22) Clarifies what will happen after a risk assessment analysis
- (26) Explains the exact content that needs to be included in food safety standards
- (33) Specific guidelines to comply with food safety standards
- (34) Specific prohibitions of foods, additives and food-related products
- (51) Clarifies specific measures food production enterprises must take
- (52) Clarifies the certain processes a product should go through before being allowed to be sold
- (54) Specific guidelines on how to store products according to the law
- (55) - (56) Specific guidelines on how catering should be executed
- (67) Specific guidelines on what needs to be present on a label
- (68) Specifications for bulk-selling
- (77) Specifications for needed documents for health foods
- (100) Clarifies the exact information that should be gathered at quarantine department
- (118) Guidelines on usage of email for consultations, complaints and reports and how to handle them
- (123) Clarifies conditions for fines

### Policies for special situations

- (10) Concrete plans for spreading awareness about food safety
- (16) What to do in case of a food safety hazard
- (38) Policy regarding (Chinese) drugs as additives
- (79) States certain specifications that need to be made on the labels of health foods
- (81) Descriptive responsibility of child/infant formula producers
- (95) Measures to take when hazards are present in country of export
- (97) Specific measure regarding the contents of labels of imported and exported goods
- (104) Reporting at hospitals when patient is foodborne ill
- (105) Measures in case of emergency
- (106) Guideline on conducting accident responsibility investigation

*Figure 8: Above-mentioned “clarifying” policies summarized and divided into three categories*

Lastly, there are the policies that come into account in special situations. These policies range from policies such as stated in article 16, that describes what to do in the case of discovering a

food safety hazard, to policies such as described in article 81, which entails the responsibilities and guidelines that child and infant formula producers must bear and follow when producing.

In the last figure for this subchapter, Figure 9, the “Guiding” policies are divided into two sections. As the title of the head category “Guiding” already points out, the articles in this category focus mostly on explaining certain guidelines to stakeholders. The difference between the guidelines in this category and the ones in Figure 8, is that the guidelines in this category deal with less concrete issues. They are described in a manner that leaves room for interpretation, for example on how a local government or production company can implement a measure with the resources they have at hand. The measures described in the articles range anywhere from, as in article 43, encouraging large-scale production, to establishing inspection records amongst agricultural product sellers (article 65), to dealing with imported food without national food safety standards and for overseas production enterprises (article 93 and 94). However, we can divide the guidelines into four main objectives.

1. Guidelines for increased administration and proper management of food safety
2. Guidelines for special cases (in case of hazards, emergency situations, reoccurring issues, changes to the current situation, etc.)
3. Guidelines for establishing new systems (production quantity management system, food additive factory inspection record system, administration system for import, etc.)
4. Guidelines for the handling of food safety in different sectors of the food safety industry (canteens, agricultural sector, health foods, import, 3<sup>rd</sup> party platforms, etc.)

Then, there’s the category “miscellaneous”. These, in all cases, deal with laying out a sort of guideline for the reader but are less explicit in doing so. They are not concrete measures as in the category of clarifying, nor are they merely informational. A perfect example of this is article 32, that clarifies that there needs to be adequate reporting on the topic of food safety and in case of hazards. In most cases, they deal with more singular, specialized objectives than the articles grouped under the category of “guidelines”, hence they are unable to be divided into objectives in a similar matter as the category “guidelines”.

## Guiding policies

### Guidelines

- (37) Guideline for taking into consideration a new type of production
- (40) Guideline for including an additive on the permitted list
- (41) Guideline for licensing in the case of special handling of products
- (43) Guideline for local governments to encourage large-scale production
- (46) Guideline for which control requirements should be formulated
- (50) Guideline for what food producers must do when buying production materials
- (53) Guideline on checking licenses and certificates
- (57) Guidelines for canteens (schools, childcare, elderly care, etc)
- (59) Guideline on establishing a food additive factory inspection record system
- (60) - (62) Guidelines on keeping records and certificates of food additives in different circumstances (violations, 3rd party platforms)
- (64) Guidelines on how a wholesale should be equipped
- (65) Guideline for establishing inspection records amongst agricultural product sellers
- (75) More guidelines for handling of health food
- (80) Guideline for registration of products
- (83) Guideline for establishing a production quantity management system
- (86) - (87) Guideline for the format of food inspection and sampling
- (89) Guidelines for self-testing
- (93) - (94) Guideline for imported food without national food safety standards and for overseas production enterprises
- (98) Guideline for importers on establishing an administration system
- (103) Guideline for handling in case of emergency situations
- (117) What to do when issues keep reoccurring and guidelines on responsibility interviews
- (119) Guidelines on the order of reporting
- (121) What measures to take when discovering food safety crimes
- (128) Guideline on what to do when dealing with/reporting on the hazard fails
- (134), (135), (136), (142), (143), (145) Guideline for violations, demerits and penalties

### Miscellaneous

- (8) States a broader measure that entails the inclusion of food safety in development plans
- (11) Stance on academic work on the topic of food safety
- (14) Explains the purpose of the establishment of a food safety risk monitoring system
- (18) Clarifies when risk assessment takes place
- (30) Encourages food production enterprises to be stricter
- (32) Clarifies that there needs to be adequate reporting on the topic of food safety and in case of hazards
- (48) Encouragement of meeting requirements of good production practices
- (73) Information on what producers shouldn't do in regards to promotion in combination with food labels
- (74) Implementation of strict supervision of special foods
- (107) Information on what investigations should consider (science)
- (111) Formulation of new policy/standards in case of potential food hazards
- (116) Specifications on the need for training of law enforcement personnel
- (120) States that: "No false information should be spread"
- (144) Explains which acts are prohibited for government departments above country level
- (149) Explains that in case of violation, the government has the right to investigate the violator (and their criminal responsibility)

Figure 9: Above-mentioned "Guiding" policies summarized and divided into two categories

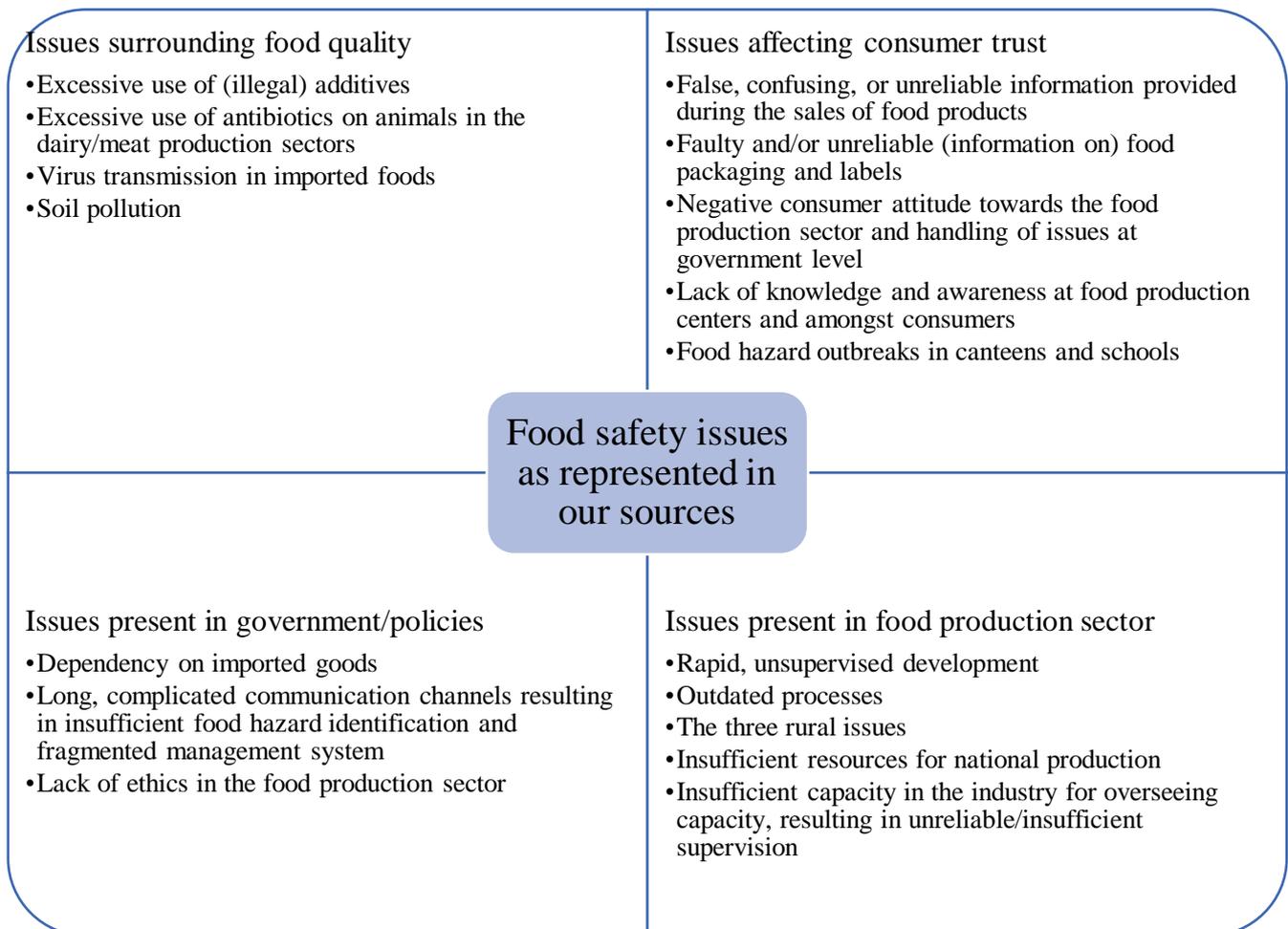
All in all, we can say that the policy document can be divided into several objectives and types of policies. There are 10 different types of policies:

1. Declarations of responsibility
2. Specifying/elaborating policies
3. Policies that shine a light on rights and obligations
4. Motivational policies
5. Applicational policies
6. Implementational policies
7. Clarifying policies
8. Policies for special situations
9. Guidelines
10. Miscellaneous

In the next subchapter, I will discuss the objectives that come forth out of our policies, and whether they correspond with the issues at hand. For this thesis, we must consider all of our ten different types of policies. However, while it is important to consider the policies that fall under first main categories of “motivational policies” and “informational policies”, to analyze the implementation of policies, our applicational, implementational, clarifying, guidelines and special situations policies will be leading.

## 5.2 Analysis of the FSL combined with uncovered issues

We can see from the schematic overview provided in the previous subchapter that there are several objectives that surface in the policies. Before we consider if the objectives that surface correspond with the issues at hand, I will provide a graph of all issues we have come across in the literature review, as well as the problem areas uncovered in the discourse analysis. This overview can be found in Figure 10.



*Figure 10: Food safety issues as addressed in our literature review and discourse analysis categorized to form four groups*

For a simple schematic overview, the issues in our corpus and literature review are divided into four groups. The first group concerns issues surrounding the quality of food, where any issue that directly endangers food safety can be placed. These are mostly concrete in nature, in the sense that, for example, one can prohibit the use of additives or other substances to combat the issues at hand.

Issues that directly endanger the trust of the consumer make up the second category. This does not only affect the consumer itself, but it also targets the government and how

content the people are with the governments way of handling food safety issues. Consumer trust is a broad subject, as it can either concern the consumer during purchasing of certain products and brands, as well as the trust of the consumer in the governmental approach to dealing with hazards and issues in the system and production sector.

The third category deals with structural issues which, according to the authors of the articles in our corpus and articles of our literature review, are present in the ideas, policies and systems of the government for handling food safety. These issues are less of concrete nature, and more of abstract nature.

Lastly, there are issues that are present in the food production sector. These issues indirectly affect the rest of the categories too, as the food production sector in this case is the source for most food products (considering that there are imported food products as well). After summarizing the aims of the policy document, I will systematically work through each category to define whether the policies have been addressed adequately.

When we move on to the policy document, we see that there are multiple topics, or focus areas, that are being addressed in the FSL policies. These include, but are not limited to, the way the chapters divide the articles into several sections. Then, there are focus areas that can be extracted from the policies in the FSL themselves. Combined, we find the following seven focus areas:

1. An emphasis on the need for more awareness of food safety (pointed out by the new plans for promoting awareness amongst companies and consumers to increase awareness, together with the many policies on guidelines on how to function)
2. An emphasis on the need for a more centralized and specialized approach to managing food safety
3. An emphasis on the need for improved ethics in the industry and increased compliance with and enforcement of the law
4. An emphasis on structural changes for an increased, transparent, and orderly administration of food safety
5. Modernization of the food production industry, together with the smooth implementation of new practices and systems
6. An emphasis on reaching adequate handling of food safety in different sectors of the industry through the use of extensive guidelines and measures.
7. Smooth interception in special circumstances such as hazards, emergency situations, reoccurring issues, changes to a current situation, etc.

Now, to make the translation between focus areas and issues mentioned in the corpus and literature review, we first must look at which areas need to be targeted. For the issues surrounding food quality, we need to look at policies that target the direct quality of food. These policies, amongst other things, include, as mentioned in Figure 10, policies regarding additives, antibiotics, virus transmission, and the protection of soil. For this, we need to cross-categorially consider different articles. The issue that exists around additives is targeted by several policies, and with this, the problem of soil pollution is also addressed. Article 49 deals with the additives and resources agricultural producers are allowed to use, in order to maintain a healthy soil and product. Article 34 includes a list of prohibited additives in production. Then, article 39 explains more about the implementation of the additive licensing system. However, in the FSL, there is no law that deals with the exclusion, or reduction, of certain antibiotics in the live-stock sector. This does surface, in a less concrete way, in the Administrative Measures for Organic Product Certification, where it is clarified that veterinary drugs fall under the category of GMO's, and thus need to have surpassed a safety evaluation (Holthuis and Jiao, 2019). Virus transmission in imported food is adequately dealt with in the section on imported and exported goods.

For the issues present in the government or policies, we must look at structural changes the government has made with the FSL. One of the problems were the long, complicated communication channels resulting in insufficient, or late, food hazard identification and a fragmented management system. In the FSL, the order of reporting hazards is extensively described, as well as measures the government will take to intensify food hazard identification. As discussed in focus point two in the FSL, the government does this through appointing several specialized committees, establishing responsibilities of individual committees, as well as implementing new systems, such as the traceability system and rapid detection system. However, with the establishment of new committees, even though the responsibilities of each committee and individual in the system has been described (article 119: Guidelines on the order of reporting), there's a risk of further fragmenting the current food safety management system. The increase in committees and points of contact can overcomplicate the system, resulting in worsening the circumstances, rather than solving the problem that persists.

When it comes to the topic of dependency on imported goods, we can see that the government tried to solve several problems that arise with import. First of all, the policies in the FSL discuss measures surrounding quarantine, to minimize the risk of virus transmission and contamination of the soil with foreign viruses or pests. Then, in order to increase the

domestic production, in article 43, the government encourages local governments to encourage large-scale production. Large-scale production has several benefits, such as decreasing dependency on import through creating a more sufficient flow of goods domestically, as well as decreasing fragmentation across farms or production companies to ease risk assessment.

Lastly, there is the issue of a lack of ethics in the food production sector. We can see that the government chose a system of reward and punishment here. Ways of increasing the ethics in the industry are through the implementation of the food safety credit system, implementing the obligation to warn the authorities in case of potential danger, introducing fines for punishment after violating the law, and lastly, by rewarding contributions and efforts made to maintain and improve the current level of food safety.

Then, there are the issues present in food production sector. One of these issues is the rapid, unsupervised development of the food industry. Due to the growing demand for food domestically, but also outside of the country, the food industry is forced to grow rapidly. In the FSL, as well as in the corpus, we have read that the government tries to combat this through modernization and automation of processes. Modernization and automation of processes also solves another issue that exists in the food production sector, namely having insufficient capacity in the industry for overseeing capacity, resulting in unreliable or insufficient supervision. Examples of automated solutions are the numerous quality control, full-traceability systems, and administrative systems that are implemented to ease food safety management and supervision. Another measure the government has taken is to rely more on imported goods. This, in turn, solves the problem of having insufficient resources for national production.

Then, when dealing with the three rural issues, it is hard to say whether the policies successfully combat these issues, as we focus mostly on the FSL, and don't look at additional agricultural laws. However, there are some articles that deal with agricultural development, such as article 65, that entails a guideline for establishing inspection records amongst agricultural product sellers, as well as article 49, that deals with the additive lists for the agricultural production sector. In order to answer whether the policies regarding food safety in China truly solve the issues of the 三农, one would need to further inspect the laws that center themselves around agricultural production.

Lastly, there is the complicated topic of issues affecting consumer trust. As one can imagine, it is not easy to solve issues of trust through simply implementing concrete

measures. As a study by Macready et. al. (2020: 1) pointed out, an average consumer is vulnerable, in that they cannot assess a products ingredients or nutrition, and thus need to rely on a credible producer or vendor. Another interesting point they bring up, is that “policy-makers and regulators need to improve certification and control measures to promote transparency and trust in food standards, with the willing cooperation of supply chain actors, and in a coordinated manner to compensate for weaknesses among individual partners” (Macready et. al., 2020: 13). This is exactly what the government has aimed to do in the FSL, as we can see from the numerous policies that promote certification, administration, and transparency.

Another problem the government addressed through implementing concrete measures is the problem of false, confusing, or unreliable information provided during the sales of food products and faulty and/or unreliable (information on) food packaging and labels. The concrete policies that were issued include policies on fines for selling a product that is not genuine, as well as on implementing certain standards for food packaging and labels. For the lack of knowledge and awareness at food production centers and amongst consumers, the government is promoting media to report on food safety, as well as promoting local governments to spread awareness on the topic through publishing documents online for more transparency and awareness (article 31).

Now, what is left is to turn around the negative consumer attitude towards the food production sector and handling of issues at government level. As Macready et. al. (2020: 12) mention, consumer trust is largely based on cognitive beliefs about trustworthiness, and “Cognitive beliefs are more likely to change and can be changed faster than spontaneous affective reactions, meaning that consumer trust is amenable to communication and reasoning, and that observable changes in the behavior of food chain actors therefore also have the potential to change consumer trust”. It is therefore merely a matter of time, and sustaining good efforts, to revive the trust of the consumer in the food industry and the governments approach to food safety.

Based on this analysis, we can see that the issues addressed in my corpus and literature review and the policies in the FSL correspond rather well. However, there are a few gaps and challenges that can be found in the policy correspondence with the issues at hand. One of the gaps in the FSL is the matter of limited domestic resources. There is no policy that actively aims to solve this problem, other than relying on imported goods, something the authors in the corpus were rather reluctant towards. Another gap is the lack of policies that are addressed

towards the 三农 issues. A challenge for the actors engaging in the FSL is to keep up a strong enforcement of the law throughout the rather fragmented management system and to minimize the risk of miscommunication amongst stakeholders. Finally, the last challenge that persists is that of managing consumer trust.

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

In this thesis, the main objective was to find out whether the policies implemented in the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China (FSL) correctly target the persevering food safety issues in China as portrayed by state media. For this, I used a discourse analysis to examine how state media is used to shape the discourse about food safety, as well as to extract concrete issues and ideologies from my corpus. Then, I combined the issues addressed in the literature review and discourse analysis, to uncover any potential motivators for establishing certain policies in the FSL. In this way, my thesis adds to the current discourse on food safety in China by providing readers with an extensive overview of the policies in the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China and their possible limits or shortcomings and the motivation behind the policies.

However, there are certain limitations to this research. First of all, due to limited space, there was no option to include a case study on the implementation of the FSL. Further research could conduct comparative research to the Food Safety Laws in different countries, where the food safety level is relatively higher. Other objectives for research could be to look for gaps in the policy framework when compared to the actual implementation of the policies. Second of all, again, due to limited space, this thesis could only focus on the FSL, without including accompanying policies that specialize on specific food production or food handling sectors. To achieve greater insight into structural issues present in the current food safety management system, one would need to include a case study on the implementation and enforcement of the FSL, as well as consider other policy documents on the topic of food safety.

Taking into consideration the limitations of my thesis, by employing a combination of discourse analysis and policy analysis, I was able to find five underlying ideologies that are present in the articles produced by state media on food safety:

1. Protection of public health and safety
2. Internationalization and globalization
3. Modernization and innovation

4. Government as a greater, leading organ in society
5. Enhancing ethics (in the industry)

These five underlying ideologies form the base of the motivations for the policy document of the FSL. We saw that the policymakers utilized these ideologies to form the basis for the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China's policy document. Then, through investigation of the materials in my corpus and literature review, I extracted seven urgent focus points that were to be addressed in, and reached by the policy framework:

1. An emphasis on the need for more awareness of food safety (pointed out by the new plans for promoting awareness amongst companies and consumers to increase awareness, together with the many policies on guidelines on how to function)
2. An emphasis on the need for a more centralized and specialized approach to managing food safety
3. An emphasis on the need for improved ethics in the industry and increased compliance with and enforcement of the law
4. An emphasis on structural changes for an increased, transparent, and orderly administration of food safety
5. Modernization of the food production industry, together with the smooth implementation of new practices and systems
6. An emphasis on reaching adequate handling of food safety in different sectors of the industry through the use of extensive guidelines and measures.
7. Smooth interception in special circumstances such as hazards, emergency situations, reoccurring issues, changes to a current situation, etc.

The FSL targets most of the focus areas that were uncovered in this thesis, and corresponds with the majority of issues brought up in the literature review and corpus. However, in my policy analysis, I found that there are still several pressing issues that need to be addressed differently to solve the problem of persisting food safety issues in China. Due to the establishment of new organizations and committees for managing food safety in China, there's a risk of further fragmenting the current, already highly fragmented food safety management system. The increase in committees and points of contact can overcomplicate the system, resulting in worsening the circumstances, rather than solving the problem. Not only this, establishing more committees and merely promoting large-scale production also does not immediately solve the problem of fragmentation in the agricultural sector. This brings us to

the next gap in the policy document: the lack of policies that are addressed towards the 三农 issues. One would need to further inspect the specialized policies on additional sectors to understand whether such issues are addressed properly, and whether the management of food safety among the largely fragmented small-scale farmers is executed adequately.

One of the biggest challenges that exists in the topic of China's food safety management for the actors engaging in the FSL is to maintain a strong enforcement of the law throughout the rather fragmented management system and to minimize the risk of miscommunication amongst stakeholders. I believe that more radical changes to the current food safety management system will be needed to deal with this challenge.

The penultimate issue that persists is the issue of limited domestic resources. There is no policy that actively aims to solve this issue, other than the alternative of relying on imported goods, something the authors in the corpus were rather reluctant towards. Other solutions for this issue that are proposed in the articles, as well as in the policy document of the FSL, deal with the implementation of modernized processes and systems.

Finally, the last persisting challenge is that of managing consumer trust. As mentioned in the last subchapter of my policy analysis, consumer trust is largely based on cognitive beliefs about trustworthiness, and "consumer trust is amenable to communication and reasoning, and that observable changes in the behavior of food chain actors therefore also have the potential to change consumer trust" (Macready et. al., 2020: 12). It is therefore necessary that the PRC government sustains her efforts to change the structural issues present in the current system (fragmentation, corruption as mentioned by Kang (2019), etc.) and keeps up her aim for a higher degree of transparency, to revive the trust of the consumer in the food industry and the governments' approach to food safety. I argue that once the position of the government as a greater, leading organ in society is secured, it will be only natural to undertake structural changes to advance towards a greater sense of public health and safety together. As the current system relies heavily on public participation for successful policy enforcement, it is only through structural changes in the management system of China's food safety to regain the publics' trust, that China can further improve its' national food safety.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Chinese vice premier urges food safety

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### 8.2 State councilor urges efforts to improve food safety

*Full citation:* Xinhua. (2022, August 30). *State councilor urges efforts to improve food safety*. The State Council - People's Republic of China. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from [http://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/wangyong/202208/30/content\\_WS630d44edc6d0a757729df637.html](http://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/wangyong/202208/30/content_WS630d44edc6d0a757729df637.html)

### 8.3 Vice-premier vows strictest punishments, standards for food safety

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### 8.7 Food safety prioritized to end pandemic

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*Full citation:* The National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China (全国人民代表大会). (2021, September 3). *According to the case | Food nutrition labels are low and chaotic? violate the law* (以案说法| 食品营养标签低标乱标? 违反法律规). The National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China (全国人民代表大会). Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202109/34889f50191a49a1b0d11246ba86743e.shtml>

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