

Trends and developments in Asia Pacific food ethics: Perspectives from APSAFE2020 and 2023

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Abstract

The Asia Pacific region faces complex challenges in developing sustainable and ethical food systems amidst rapid urbanization and climate change, and diverse cultural influences further complicate this landscape. The Asia Pacific Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (APSAFE) conferences in 2020 and 2023 provided a transdisciplinary platform to explore these challenges and identify opportunities for advancement. Historical contexts, such as colonialism and wars, cultural factors, religions and local customs, and recent policy changes related to food safety and environmental protection, have significantly shaped the region's food ethics. Understanding these influences necessitates combining approaches from ethics, sociology, policy studies, and anthropology. The conferences highlighted the importance of ethical justification for food practices, the role of food in forming identity, and the potential for cross-cultural learning. Case studies showcased the diversity of challenges and opportunities, from indigenous food practices in Taiwan to immigrant herb gardens in Germany. The conferences also revealed potential tensions, such as the acceptance or reservation of advanced technologies and the evaluation of top-down versus bottom-up approaches. Collaborative networks and knowledge sharing will be crucial for advancing food ethics and sustainability in the region, with insights from the conferences serving as a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.

Keywords: cross-cultural exchange, cultural identity, food system governance, indigenous knowledge, transdisciplinary

Introduction

The Asia Pacific region, with its rich tapestry of cultures, histories, and ecological landscapes, presents a complex and dynamic context for the evolution of food ethics. As rapid changes in demographics, urbanization, and climate continue to strain food systems, examining the trends and challenges in food ethics across the region is increasingly important (Cinner *et al.* 2022; Rousham *et al.* 2023; Thompson and Thompson, 2018; Weinberger *et al.* 2009). The Asia Pacific Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (APSAFE) has provided a transdisciplinary platform for researchers and practitioners to engage in discourse on sustainable and ethical food systems since its inception in 2013. This paper aims to analyse the presentations from the APSAFE2020 and APSAFE2023 (Figures 1 and 2) conferences to identify key trends, challenges, and opportunities in developing food ethics in the Asia Pacific region.

4th APSAFE Symposium Supporting Sustainable Food Systems: Quality Food and Ethical Consumption
December 3 - 16 2020

ONLINE Individual Presentation via Slack & Google Meet
Keynote Speech via Google Meet

We cordially welcome researchers, students, policy makers, community activists, and practitioners! **Admission Free!**

Presentation and Discussion via Slack | 2 Weeks for Networking Opportunities | New Knowledge and Ideas on Food Ethics

Rethinking and restructuring food production methods is inevitable if we hope to make food systems more sustainable. New technologies in agriculture, aquaculture, animal husbandry, and food processing have many potentials, and research results from various perspectives such as agroecology, resilience, human-animal relationships, degrowth, gender, and food sovereignty have many visions for future. However, none of them are a panacea. To tackle the wicked problems of the food system in each place, we need a platform for transdisciplinary mutual learning. We hope that APSAFE 2020 will be one of those opportunities to create such platform.

<https://www.apsafe2020.online/>

December 3 Opening Plenary
Kirill O. Thompson (Tohoku National University)

December 3-16 Individual Presentation

December 11 Keynote Speech
Paul B. Thompson (Michigan State University), Wei-Chi Chang (National Tsing Hua University), Steven McCreavy (Research Institute for Humanity and Nature), Mimi Lam (University of Bergen)

December 16 Closing Plenary

Organized by The Asia Pacific Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (APSAFE), European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EuSAFE), and Research Institute for Humanity and Nature

Figure 1. APSAFE2020. Source: <https://www.apsafe.online/apsafe2020/>

APSAFE 2020 ONLINE December 3-16 2020

Plenary session via Google Meet, Presentation and Discussion via Slack

Real-time events, including plenary session, will take place on Google Meet, while presentations and discussions will take place in Slack. After registration, anyone can participate in the real-time events and discussions.

Program

December 3 Opening Plenary via Google Meet & Slack 20:00-22:00 (JST)

We will post Google Meet links for Opening Plenary to Slack (JST) on December 2 in Japan time.

20:00 Welcome Speech Conference Schedule Kazuhiko Ota
20:10 Introduction of Slack & Google Meet Kazuhiko Ota
20:20 Plans for Special Issue of the Food Ethics Journal Matthew Koenig
20:30 Lightning Talk self-announcement Presenters (applicant)
21:15 **Online Plenary**
21:15 Ethical Meetings on Farm and Food Futures Kirill Thompson
21:35 Discussion

December 11 Keynote Speech via Google Meet & Slack 20:00-22:30 (JST)

We will post Google Meet links for Keynote speech to Slack (JST) on December 10 in Japan time.

20:00 Introduction Kazuhiko Ota
20:05 **Introduction and Food Ethics: Is It Time to Go Back to Basics?** Paul B. Thompson
20:25 Discussion
20:40 **Food Safety or National Security? The Impact of Global Political Changes on Local Food Systems in the Post Pandemic Era** Wei-Chi Chang
21:00 Discussion
21:15 **Ethical implications of transitioning to 1.5-degree Food Systems** Steven McCreavy
21:35 Discussion
21:50 **Sustaining the Global Ocean-Human System with Ethical Seafood Value Chains** Mimi E. Lam
22:10 Discussion
22:25 Closing Kazuhiko Ota

December 16 Closing Plenary via Google Meet & Slack 20:00-21:30 (JST)

We will post Google Meet links for Keynote speech to Slack (JST) on December 15 in Japan time.

20:00 Closing Speech Nobuharu Kaneko
20:10 Lightning Talk (summary) Presenters & Participants (applicant)
21:00 Discussion: Next steps for APSAFE and New collaboration

Guest Speakers

Keynote speaker 1 Kirill O. Thompson Tohoku National University
Keynote speaker 2 Paul B. Thompson Michigan State University
Keynote speaker 3 Wei-Chi Chang National Tsing Hua University
Keynote speaker 4 Steven R. McCreavy Research Institute for Humanity and Nature
Keynote speaker 5 Mimi E. Lam University of Bergen

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APSAFE 2023 Asia Pacific Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics Conference 2023

Just Transition in Regenerative Food Systems Under Urbanization and Climate Crisis

10 March - 11 March 2023
Nagoya JR Gate Tower & ONLINE

Join us on the APSAFE Slack! Questions and discussions are welcome there.

We cordially welcome researchers, students, policy makers, community activists, and practitioners.
<https://www.apsafe.online/apsafe2023/>

Figure 2. APSAFE2023 in Japan. Source: <https://www.apsafe.online/apsafe2023/>

Historical context, migration of people, and policy changes

Historical context, migration of people, and policy changes are some of the angles that support an understanding of the complex Asia-Pacific food systems. The Asia Pacific region has a diverse history of food practices, with ecological and traditional food use playing a pivotal role in shaping current food cultures. Moreover, the region has also experienced profound changes due to historical events, such as colonialism and wars, which have significantly impacted food systems and ethics (Huang *et al.*, 2022; Leong-Salobir, 2019). Cultural influences, including religions, social structures, and local customs, have played a crucial role in shaping food ethics in the Asia Pacific. These influences have tied to food as not just a source of sustenance but as the basis of individual and collective identity, moulding dietary traditions, agricultural practices, and social attitudes toward food production and consumption. The migration of people highlights the relationship between their cultural identity and food. The case of Vietnamese immigrants maintaining informal herb gardens to preserve their cultural praxis and access traditional foods exemplifies this phenomenon (Mami and Bentcheva, 2022). Policy changes in recent years related to food safety regulations, environmental protection, and fair food distribution have been underway in many countries across the Asia Pacific. Governments and international organizations are working to address the challenges posed by rapid urbanization, climate change, and changing demographics. The comparative analysis of policies across countries in the Asia Pacific region can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of different approaches and the potential for regional cooperation on shared challenges (Islam and Kieu, 2021; Thow *et al.*, 2022).

APSAFE2020: Combining approaches for sustainable food systems

The APSAFE2020 conference, held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, brought together diverse perspectives on food ethics in the Asia Pacific. The conference combined approaches from ethics, sociology, policy studies, and cultural anthropology to explore ways to make food systems more sustainable. All presenters' full papers can be read in the proceedings, which can be downloaded free of charge from the APSAFE2020 website.

One of the key themes that emerged from the conference was the importance of ethical justification for certain norms and practices in food systems. Presenters explored the philosophical and moral foundations of food ethics, examining questions such as the rights of animals, the responsibilities of producers and consumers, and the role of food in human well-being. Applying ethical frameworks, such as environmental virtue ethics, to the analysis of traditional food practices in the Asia Pacific region, as seen in the case of Yap Island fisheries, highlights the potential for integrating Indigenous knowledge and values into the discourse on sustainable food systems. According to Jeffery & Sellmann, for a more detailed discussion of this, a sociological study of how traditional fishing is practiced on Yap Island and a cultural anthropological study of how it relates to the lifestyles of the fishermen and surrounding communities on Yap Island in general and their attitudes toward resource management, in particular, are essential.

The conference also revealed narratives that may have potential tensions. These narratives may be tied to social and cultural factors that shape food choices and the power dynamics and inequalities within the food system. One potential tension is the active acceptance/cautious reservation of advanced technologies. For example, according to Thompson, a Japanese organic farming researcher expressed bewilderment (not condemnation) at the case study presentation of Taiwanese organic farmers' active use of drones and precision surveying equipment. Another tension was the evaluation of top-down/bottom-up approaches. For example, according to Khader, one presentation highlighted how top-down technology guidance and product diffusion in India has improved gender disparities. On the other hand, according to Patnaik, another presentation in India highlighted the significance of bottom-up activities

that became a distribution channel for food during the pandemic lockdown period. These narratives, considered to have potential tensions, suggest the importance of understanding the sociocultural context in which food practices are embedded and the potential for cross-cultural learning and exchange in developing sustainable food systems.

APSAFE2023: Food as more than just nutrition

The APSAFE2023 conference, held in Nagoya, Japan, built on the themes explored in the previous conference and delved deeper into the role of food as more than just a source of nutrition. In short, food in forming personal and collective identity and the potential of food to promote intercultural exchange and solidarity. All presenters' full papers can be read in the proceedings, which can be downloaded free of charge from the APSAFE2023 website.

One of the conference's highlights was the variety of case studies presented, showcasing the diversity of food ethics challenges and opportunities across the Asia Pacific. For example, Feuer presented a study that explored the interdependence of indigenous diets and forest ecosystems in Taiwan, highlighting the importance of traditional knowledge and practices in promoting sustainable food systems. Wu discussed the case of the Amis tribe in Taiwan, who have developed a complex system of resource management and food sharing based on their spiritual beliefs and connection to the land, exemplifying the potential for indigenous food practices to inform the development of sustainable and equitable food systems. Eguchi examined the trust-based contracts between sake brewers and rice farmers in Japan, showcasing the role of social capital and community relationships in building resilient food systems.

The conference also featured presentations that explored the challenges faced by marginalized groups within food systems. For instance, Dinh examined the informal herb gardens of Vietnamese immigrants in Germany, highlighting the importance of food in maintaining cultural identity and the challenges immigrants face in accessing traditional foods. Saeki looked at the challenges insect farmers face in Laos, where entomophagy is a traditional food practice but where farmers feel discomfort with the world's "new entomophagy" trend. Seekings noted that the case of insect farming in southeast Asia highlights the complex interplay of traditional and modern food practices and the cultural appropriation and power imbalances in the development of new food trends.

Conclusion

As the Asia Pacific region continues to face significant pressures on its food systems, the development of collaborative networks and platforms for knowledge sharing and capacity building will be crucial for advancing food ethics and sustainability in the region. The APSAFE and other organizations and initiatives will provide the insights and recommendations generated by the transdisciplinary conferences can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working to advance food ethics and sustainability in the Asia Pacific region and beyond: Policymakers can draw on the comparative analysis of policies across countries to identify best practices and opportunities for regional cooperation. Practitioners can apply the insights from case studies and participatory research to develop more culturally sensitive and inclusive approaches to food system transformation. Researchers can build on the research framework and research agenda for further advance the understanding of food ethics and sustainability in the Asia Pacific context. It is an opportunity to highlight and discuss multiple aspects of the often-conflicting topics in food ethics and governance. APSAFE2020 and APSAFE2023 conferences highlighted such as the debate between bottom-up and top-down approaches to food system transformation or the acceptance or withholding of advanced technologies, highlight the complexity and diversity of perspectives on food ethics in the Asia Pacific. The tensions between different approaches

Section 6

to food system governance and technology adoption reflect deeper philosophical and ideological differences that require careful consideration and dialogue to resolve.

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