

# It Is Time to Legislate to Put an End to the Bad Habit of Eating Cats and Dogs in China\*

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Based on social consensus, on February 24, 2020, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress passed "The Decision on Comprehensively Banning the Trade in Illegal Wildlife, Eliminating the Bad Habit of Eating wildlife, and Ensuring People's Health and Safety".

The decision stipulates a total ban on the consumption of general terrestrial wild animals and "animals with three values (terrestrial wildlife with important ecological, scientific and social values). The decision also bans the hunting, trading, and transportation of terrestrial wildlife that naturally bred in the wild environment for food.

The decision has raised some economic and employment concerns, but how much does it matter compared with the loss caused by the coronavirus and the significance of prevention and control of infectious diseases in the future?

The decision is conducive to wildlife protection and disease prevention, forcing the whole population to form an environmentally friendly diet and promoting the sustainable development of the country and society. From the perspective of social and ecological civilization, it is great historical progress.

It is worth noting that consumption should be prohibited not only for wildlife but also for domestic animals such as cats and dogs. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress should take this opportunity and go one step further by introducing laws and regulations to eliminate the bad habit of eating cats and dogs.

## I. Dogs and cats should not be eaten according to emotion and facts

Some wild animals carry germs, the same for cats and dogs. They can easily carry parasites in their fur or inside their body, and even viruses such as rabies. It is not safe to slaughter them for food. Besides, cats and dogs are human pets, therefore, from both emotionally and rationally level, abusing and eating of cats and dogs should be banned.

The source of the cats and dogs sold in the market



mainly comes from family raising, vagrancy, and theft. Unattended stray cats and dogs, which have close contact with the environment, carry some viruses or bacteria or are intermediate hosts of some viruses. For the source of theft, many dogs and cats stolen from people are even poisoned to death. Thus, enormously increase public health risks.

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As for the slaughtering methods, there is a lack of unified regulations on the slaughter of cats and dogs, as well as inspection and quarantine regulations. The slaughter places for cats and dogs are simple and unsanitary, with neither quarantine marks nor food safety and hygiene permits.



From the social emotions, with the continuous improvement of China's living standard, more and more people are having pets. Many people see dogs and cats as family members with deep emotional attachments. Especially for the elderly, pets are an indispensable companion in their family that can bring them joy. Abusing and eating cats and dogs is bound to hurt people's feelings.

In terms of social order, the media has revealed a lot of mass incidents in the past decade or so, such as animal protection volunteers blocking trucks transporting cats and dogs for slaughtering. In the past two or three years, there have been fewer centralized slaughtering and long-distance transportation of cats and dogs across different regions, and thus fewer public opinion incidents. But as the bad habit of eating wild animals draws attention recently, public opinion will turn to the problem of eating cats and dogs soon.

For the international image perspective, China is actively involved in global environmental issues. The United Nations Conference on Biological Diversity will also be held in China in 2020. But very few people eating dogs and cats, China has been openly criticized by international media and public figures. For example, in May 2016, the New York Times and other international media reported repeatedly on the Yulin Dog Meat Festival; American actor Ian Somerhalder, British pop star Leona Lewis, and many others have spoken out against it. In 2016, after the government of Yulin of Guangxi Province adopted active restrictive measures, the heat of international public opinion for this has declined, but there is always a risk of fermenting again.

## II. It's not hard to break the bad habit of eating cats and dogs

Cats and dogs are not categorized under the edible species recognized in the "National Livestock and Poultry Genetic Resources Protection List", which means eating cats and dogs is not supported by law. However, there is still a fuzzy zone between non-support and prohibition, therefore we need explicit prohibition in law. So far, some elemental underlying conditions have been reached for legislation to end the bad habit of eating cats and dogs.

From the perspective of nutrition acquisition, China's economic and social development level is constantly improving, and in the period of realizing "Well-off Life in All Aspects", there is no need to rely on wildlife as well as cats and dogs to provide protein. It is now also a window period to foster a diet that is responsible for the public health and civilized development of the country and society, cats and dogs are no longer essential food sources.

From the perspective of employment and economy, eating cats and dogs is only a traditional dietary habit in some regions, such as Yulin in Guangxi Province and Xuzhou in Jiangsu Province. There is almost no mass breeding industry for cats and dogs meat, the vast majority of cats and dogs on the market come from households, and the associated employment only limited to transporting, slaughtering and catering industries. China has entered a stage of high-quality development, with its economic growth faster than the world's average. Similar to the ban on wildlife, after the ban on cats and dogs, there will be concerns that it will adversely affect the economy and employment. However, compared with the benefits brought by the ban on eating cats and dogs, the impact on the total population and economic scale can be withstood.



From the perspective of social support, according to the social questionnaire survey conducted by our research group on CCTV in 2016, among the 30,000 participants, 64% supported legislation to ban the consumption of dog meat, 24.4% did not support it, and 11.6% remained neutral. With the development of the economy and the improvement of living standards, most young people no

longer support eating cats and dogs. What's more, due to the impact of the novel coronavirus, the support rate to ban such habit could rise significantly.

### **III. Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan have legislated to ban eating dogs and cats, Shenzhen has started to solicit opinions**

The international community, especially the European and American countries generally ban the consumption of cat and dog meat. Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao also have legislation to ban the consumption of cat and dog meat.

In 1999, the Hong Kong "Dogs and Cats Ordinance", which was enacted in 1950, was amended to stipulate that no person shall slaughter any dog or cat for food, and no person shall sell, eat or permit others to sell or eat such and their product, whether for human consumption or not. Taiwan has also revised its animal protection law to prohibit the slaughter and sale of cat and dog meat. According to an animal protection law enacted in 2016 in Macao, people who illegally kill animals, including cats and dogs, can face up to three years in prison and a fine of 100,000 yuan.

Some cities are also experimenting with legislation. In February 2020, Shenzhen is soliciting public opinion on the revision of the draft on the total ban of eating wildlife, prohibiting the consumption of cats and dogs and other pets, reflects the civilization consciousness and the rule of law progress of the economic developed areas, it is worthy of reference for other parts of the country.

### **IV. National level legislation should be made to eliminate the bad habit of eating cats and dogs**

To sum up, at the national level, I suggest that the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress should amend the "Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases" and the "Animal Epidemic Prevention Act", or to issue a decision to eliminate the bad habit of eating cats and dogs, and stipulate a complete or principled ban on the consumption of cats and dogs, as well as the relevant behavior of catching, transporting and trading.

If the legislative amendment provides for strict legal responsibility, it can make the offender or people, after weighing the gains and losses, to be scared to dare to try the law. Therefore, it is recommended to impose a fine of less than 200 yuan on individuals who break the law and order them to sign a statement of repentance; To impose a fine of not less than 10,000 yuan but not more than 200,000 yuan on organizations that break the law;

Whoever disturbs public security and violates the "Law on Punishment for Public Security Administration" shall be sentenced to administrative detention; If a public health incident is caused, criminal responsibility shall be investigated according to law.

As for some ancient traditional eating habits of some regions, if it is difficult to implement a comprehensive ban at the national level, the Standing Committees of the People's Congresses may be required to make special provisions per the ethnic group and customs of the respective regions.

In addition to legal accountability as a means of post-mortem defense, it can also be managed from the source, with the relevant regulations formulated by the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Administrative Department under the State Council. It is suggested that the state comprehensively establish the system of the designated breed, designated sales, and identity registration of purchasers of cats and dogs, and prohibit the illegal abandonment, purchase, and breed of cats and dogs.



El tratamiento de los Animales se contempla a día de hoy como un espacio holístico de estudio y acción, pero no hay demasiados ejemplos de verdadera cooperación científica organizada, salvo el que, desde hace años venimos practicando en la UAB y esfera UAB algunos profesionales del Derecho, Veterinaria, Ciencias Clásicas, Ciencias de la Salud, Sociología, Biodiversidad. De ahí la coherencia de la creación del ICALP (International Center for Animal Law and Policy).