

Current Status of Animal Welfare and Animal Rights in China

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Summary — In the past few years, new social passions have sparked on the Chinese mainland. At the centre of these burgeoning passions is a focus on animal welfare, animal treatment, and even animal rights, by the public and academic sectors. With China's rapid economic changes and greater access to information from around the world, societal awareness of animal issues is rising very fast. Hastening this paradigm shift were several highly public incidents involving animal cruelty, including exposés on bear bile harvesting for traditional Chinese medicine, the thousands of dogs rescued from China's meat trade, and the call to boycott shark fin soup and bird nest soup. This article outlines the current status of campaigning by animal advocates in China (specifically the animal rights movement) from three interlinked perspectives: wildlife conservation, companion animal protection, and laboratory animal protection. By reviewing this campaigning, we attempt to present not only the political and social impact of the concept of animal rights, but also the perceptions of, and challenges to, animal rights activities in China.

Key words: *animal rights activities, animal welfare, China, laboratory animal protection.*

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Introduction

Although 'animal rights' and 'animal welfare' are terms that may be used by some to mean the same thing, most scholars would agree that the philosophies of animal rights are not interchangeable with those of animal welfare. Animal welfare has been defined as how well an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives (1). It is measured by several indicators, including behaviour, physiology, longevity, and reproduction (2). Animal rights, however, is predicated on the idea that the rights of non-human and human animals are, basically, the same (3, 4). In China, the nuanced differences between animal welfare and animal rights are difficult to understand, because these foreign concepts were introduced into mainland China only in the early 1990s. However, animal welfare, rather than animal rights, has attracted more media attention in recent years. The Chinese media, and especially social media, have significantly increased their coverage of animal cruelty incidents. Furthermore, some international forums on animal welfare have been held in mainland China. These meetings have attracted many scholars and activists from across the world, and have increased Chinese societal attention to the plight of animals, to the point that the discussion of animal welfare has evolved significantly.

Compared with animal welfare, the philosophy of animal rights was introduced to mainland China

when a Chinese translation of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* was published in Taiwan in the mid-1990s (5). In 1993, the concept was enriched by Tongjin Yang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), in an article entitled *The animal rights theory and the eco-centric arguments* (6). This was arguably the first comprehensive expatiation of information regarding the origin, arguments, and counter-arguments of animal rights in China. Since then, animal welfare and animal rights ideas have attracted more attention, and more controversy. Some scholars have emphasised that it is high time that the question of animal rights was discussed in China (7). In contrast, other scholars, represented by Nanyuan Zhao, a Tsinghua University professor, put forward arguments such as *The essence of animal rights arguments is anti-humanity*, or *Animal rights is just moral abduction* (8). These arguments, whether correct or not, are part of the reason why the new social activism about animals has sparked on the Chinese mainland in recent years.

This animal activism has been accelerated by many international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have begun to operate on the Chinese mainland, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Most noticeably, several domestic organisations have been established in the last few

years, some of which are state-sponsored, such as the China Small Animal Protection Association (CSAPA), the Shanghai Small Animal Protection Association (SSAPA), and the China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA), but also some NGOs, including the Beijing Human and Animals Environmental Education Centre (BHAECC), the Chinese Animal Protection Network (CAPN), and the Chinese Companion Animal Protection Network (CCAPN) among others. These organisations have played a critical role in understanding and absorbing foreign animal rights and welfare ideas in China. In this way, animal rights philosophies are being introduced to China from three interlinked perspectives: wildlife conservation, companion animal protection and laboratory animal protection.

Wildlife Conservation

China's vast and diverse landscapes are undergoing an equally significant and complex animal species transformation. The sheer number of species found in the country is astounding: 580 mammals, 1,330 birds, 407 reptiles, 321 amphibians, and more than 3,500 fish (9). Despite China's natural wealth, the country's array of species has experienced unprecedented decline during the last few decades, largely due to the overexploitation of natural resources and unsustainable economic development, followed by severe environmental pollution. As China's human population grows and its infrastructure expands, the country is overusing, fragmenting and destroying habitats. Species by species, the challenges are obvious: to keep remnant populations viable, and to prevent threatened species from becoming endangered and endangered species from going extinct.

Although China issued the first wildlife animal protection law — *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Wildlife* — in 1988 and revised it in 2004, regrettably there are only about 20 wild Siberian tigers (*Panthera tigris altaica*, also known as the Amur tiger) in China, of the estimated 500 tigers left in the wild, compared to approximately 100,000 at the beginning of the 20th century (10). Why have the tigers gone? While habitat destruction and fragmentation is the main cause, along with the removal of most of the prey species that tigers need in order to survive, poaching is also problematic, with most of the demand coming from practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine and the illegal trade in pelts and bones. But, new initiatives are in place to save this species. In August 2010, China and Russia agreed to enhance conservation and cooperation in protected areas in a trans-boundary area for Amur tigers. China has undertaken a series of public awareness campaigns, including the celebration of the first Global Tiger Day in July 2010, the

International Forum on Tiger Conservation and Tiger Culture, and China 2010 Hunchun Amur Tiger Culture Festival in August 2010 (11). At the same time, with the assistance of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the Chinese government will create nine new protected areas along its border with Russia, in order to safeguard the nation's remaining population of endangered Siberian tigers.

Last year, Fujian Guizhen Tang Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd (hereinafter referred to as Guizhen Tang) became the centre of debate about the production of traditional Chinese medicine that relied on the cruel practices of the bear bile farming industry. Bear bile is widely used in 123 kinds of traditional Chinese medicine, and media coverage recently exposed the Chinese people to the reality of bear farming practices on an unprecedented scale, with the issue dominating the headlines for weeks. Guizhen Tang held more than 400 black bears, so that bile could be extracted by what is referred to as the free-drip method (12). A bear, older than three years of age, was kept in a narrow cage and an iron pipe, of approximately 1cm in diameter, was used to cannulate the bear's gall bladder; bile was harvested twice a day, for a total volume of roughly 130ml. Many animal rights groups issued a statement that this method of bear bile extraction is harmful to the animals and is a form of cruelty. Animals Asia Foundation (AAF), an NGO working to improve the welfare of wild and urban animals in Asia and dedicated to the conservation of endangered species, initiated a programme called *Moon Bear Rescue*, aimed at bringing the practice of bear farming and the bile trade to an end (13). In China, working with conservation officials in Beijing, as well as forestry officials in individual provinces, AAF has closed down 43 Chinese farms, and has seen 20 of mainland China's 31 provinces proudly become bear farm-free. To date, approximately 350 bears have been rescued and brought to the AAF's bear sanctuary near Chengdu. Sadly, based on an analysis of 165 bears (out of 181 free-drip bears), 163 (99%) had cholecystitis, 109 (66%) had gall bladder polyps, 56 (34%) had abdominal herniation, 46 (28%) had internal abscessation, 36 (22%) had gallstones, and 7 (4%) had peritonitis. Many of the bears had a combination of these conditions (14).

The welfare of black bears has received increasing attention by China's policy-making agencies in recent years, exemplified by the issuance of the 1997 Forestry Ministry's *Tentative Implementation Regulation on the Use and Management of Black Bear Farming Technology* (15). Subsequently, a forestry national standard regulation was issued — *Feeding Technical Rules of Asiatic Black Bear*. In this regulation, the availability of food and water, time in cage, veterinary care, sanitation and quarantine, method of bile extraction, and the

health conditions of the bears that can be used for extraction are specified; in addition, the regulation prevents bodily injury to the farmed bears (16). Meanwhile, the reaction from the public was overwhelmingly opposed to this industry. As opposition to bear farming gained momentum, reports of celebrity support for the cessation of bear farming began to flow in, with the Ta Foundation, a local animal welfare organisation founded by a group of influential media figures, making an appeal that was endorsed by 72 prominent people, including well-known lawyers, television hosts, actors and animal rights advocates. Subsequently, several celebrities in China — including pop singer Yu Kewei, artist Ai Weiwei, actress Sun Li and former NBA star Yao Ming — followed in the footsteps of actor Jackie Chan (who has spoken out against bear bile farming), and joined forces with Chinese animal rights activists to raise awareness of animal abuse in China (14).

Companion Animal Protection

Although instances of animal cruelty have occasionally happened in recent decades, China actually has a long cultural legacy of compassion for non-human animals. Daoism calls for compassion for all other creatures on Earth. Many of China's Emperors were Buddhist believers, who called upon the people to practice vegetarianism, the liberation of animals, and the suspension of slaughter in times of mourning or celebration (17). However, it is hard to deny that eating dogs, and other companion animals, also has a long history in some regions in China and is ethnically-based. Why do these differences in societal practices exist? On one side of the coin, is a misconception about Chinese eating habits. Several factors led the majority of Chinese peasants living in poverty during the history of China, to look for whatever food was available locally to fill their family's stomachs, and, when needed, to make medicines. Therefore, rather than assuming that the Chinese's eating habits are cruel, these practices reflect a historical resiliency and resourcefulness. On the other side of the coin, even with the economic development of recent years, a few citizens in relatively advanced regions, such as Guangdong province, Shanghai and Beijing, are experimenting with novel foods, and are eating dogs, cats, snakes, sharks' fins and bugs.

The consumption of exotic food items, with the ensuing pressure on vulnerable animal species, is now resulting in large scale awareness by activists, some of whom are members of animal rights organisations, who are particularly concerned about these practices. It has been reported that 1,137 dogs were rescued from the back of a flatbed truck by a 40-year old blogger and volunteers at the

Chongqing Small Animal Protection Association (18). A volunteer at the Beijing-based China Small Animal Protection Association (CSAPA), saved the lives of 580 dogs, which were on their way to the northeastern city of Changchun, where they were to be slaughtered and, eventually, consumed (19). These two rescues are examples of successful social activism, in a country where animal welfare is an almost unrecognised issue and animal welfare legislation is quite nascent. Attitudes toward animals are changing, and the Chinese public are becoming increasingly aware of animal welfare. Notably, the Chinese authorities are becoming tolerant toward this changing attitude, allowing animal protectionist welfare groups to train and recruit volunteers, protest on university campuses, and vent their concerns, thoughts and anger on the Internet. Animal protection organisations, despite not having the appropriate government permits in some cases, are being founded, and people are more willing to join them now than perhaps they were in the past.

Though China passed a Wildlife Protection law in 1988, a similar law for the protection of domesticated animals (including companion animals) has not been passed. But, as of October 2011, regulations issued by the Ministry of Agriculture require dogs and cats to be quarantined before being shipped around China (20). In March 2011, the draft animal protection legislation was presented to the national Government during the annual National People's Congress (21). Although the draft is still in the feedback collection process, the legislation has widespread public and academic support, and ten Chinese law professors from across China collectively appealed to the Chinese Government to enact this legislation to protect animals from cruelty. This very positive beginning has been buttressed by celebrities, like basketball superstar Yao Ming, by speaking out and being featured in advertisements all over the country, asking people to stop eating shark fins, and it has energised China's animal welfare movement. It is hoped that further positive changes will occur in the near future for China — and its animals (22).

Laboratory Animal Protection

Considering the lower costs of doing business and the emerging market in China, more and more international pharmaceutical companies are setting-up an R&D centre in mainland China, particularly after the country's entrance to the World Trade Organisation. In addition to extensive internal demand, external collaborations and contracts with both academia and industry (e.g. contract research organisations [CROs]) have increased exponentially in China. Large numbers of laboratory animals, including rodents and non-rodent

species, are being used for drug discovery and in the development of medicines and biological products. As China has joined the global stage, the country is no longer immune to attention from animal rights organisations that have an interest in laboratory animal protection.

China supplies more than 70% of the research non-human primates to US laboratories, and is therefore challenged by national and international animal rights organisations that focus on the animal transportation system. For example, in March 2012, China Southern Airlines cancelled a shipment of 80 crab-eating macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) from Guangzhou, destined for Los Angeles, which is the largest US port of entry for research primates. PETA, an animal rights organisation based in the Washington DC metropolitan area, led a campaign in the social media, by e-mail and by telephone, that resulted in the cancelled shipment, as part of a broader initiative to halt animal-based research (23). After that, another major Chinese airline, Air China, declared that they have also stopped transporting non-human primates for research, as has China Eastern Airlines (24).

Closer to home, the Chinese Animal Protection Network (CAPN), a domestic animal rights group with a science-based philosophy of animal rights, addresses many animal issues, including “academic research of animal ethics” and promotes an “awareness campaign of lab animal protection”. The CAPN has organised World Lab Animal Day in China since 2008 (25). They have put forward six principles of their animal protection philosophy, namely:

- *Unity*: animal rights philosophy is a part of universal law; philosophy and science unite in the law.
- *Complexity*: everyone has his/her own animal rights view.
- *Evolution*: humans’ understanding of animal rights is evolving with the development of science.
- *Continuity*: continuity exists between everything, from human to animals, from more-human-related animals to less-related animals; the difference is not discrete, but is gradual, and the rights of different animals are different.
- *Non-violence*: people cannot fight unethical behaviour by using unethical behaviour; love and justice can make the difference.
- *Originality*: animal rights is not a Western concept; the three pillars of Chinese tradition, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, all have teachings regarding respect toward the lives of animals — they are the essence of animal rights (26).

In order to increase public understanding of animal welfare, animal rights and ethics, in 2007 the CAPN developed a Chinese language online encyclopaedia, addressing numerous topics related to animal protection (APpedia), as a free-of-charge eBook by Animal Rights in China. The content of the APpedia includes, but is not limited to: science, religion, events, animal behaviour, philosophy, important proponents in the field (including Harry Harlow, Bernard Rollin, Maneka Gandhi and Peter Singer, to give just a few examples of the diversity of individuals profiled), animal protection, advocacy, animal welfare, animal rights, animal protection organisations, and book reviews (27).

With China’s entry into the World Trade Organisation, the country could encounter trade restrictions, if animal testing procedures are not conducted according to international standards, or, in some cases, if non-animal alternatives are not used. Much of this pressure has been felt in the cosmetics industry. For example, the 2003 amendment to the European Union’s Cosmetics Directive called for a timetable to implement a progressive ban on the use of laboratory animals in the testing of cosmetic products. Since 2004, the animal testing of finished cosmetics products has been banned in the EU, and in 2009 a timetable to prohibit animal testing of cosmetic ingredients was established. As a result, Chinese officials are in the final stages of approving the country’s first-ever non-animal test for cosmetics ingredients (28). The First International Symposium on Cosmetics — Alternatives to Animal Experimentation for Cosmetics, was held in Beijing in 2011, and participants called for more-focused action to reduce the number of animal toxicity tests and to increase the use of alternatives, with a specific request for assistance from the West for the development of non-animal alternatives. The State Food and Drug Administration (SFDA) requires the submission of an animal toxicology test report prior to licensing a new cosmetic ingredient. However, this requirement is undergoing review, due to concern expressed by countries where non-animal testing methods have been demonstrated to be valid and due to the economic pressure on Chinese companies that conduct the non-animal tests for the export of ingredients, but must still conduct animal tests for the SFDA and the domestic Chinese market (29). These steps suggest that the cosmetics industry may become the first sector to give up animal testing as a result of legislation in China.

Currently, medicines and vaccines have to be studied in the animal model that best matches the disease process in humans. As collaborations and contracts between China and other countries around the world increase, harmonisation of animal care and standards and practices of use will become essential in mainland China. To demonstrate that

the quality of laboratory animal care and use meets international level, more and more Chinese R&D companies and CROs are seeking voluntary accreditation from recognised agencies, such as the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International (AAALAC International), which has a defined set of animal welfare standards. At the same time, legislation to protect the welfare of laboratory animals is being considered in China. There are three legal milestones governing laboratory animal science in China: the 1998 *Statute of Laboratory Animal Administration*, the 2001 *Regulation on the Management of Laboratory Animal License System*, and the 2006 *Guideline on Humane Treatment of Laboratory Animals*. The 2006 Guideline is the country's first broad animal welfare regulation, and is aligned with practices in countries/regions, such as the United States and Europe (30).

Perceptions and Challenges

Although enormous progress has been made, awareness of animal welfare is still inconsistent and rudimentary in China. Since the concept of 'animal welfare' has been introduced into mainland China only in the last few decades, members of the general public have varying degrees of understanding of the concept. There remains confusion about the concepts of 'animal rights' and 'human rights', resulting in philosophical resistance, with concern about the expenditure of taxpayers' money to ensure animal welfare, when people's rights are not yet fully protected. In addition, in recent years, some animal rescue activities were conducted outside the existing legal framework in China, which has contributed to the emergence of different attitudes toward animal rights (such as the dog rescue operation performed on the highway, as described earlier). The lack of education in the school system regarding animal welfare, and the importance of good animal welfare to sound scientific research, in terms of the validity of the data obtained from the animals, are important contributing factors. There is no good soil in which to cultivate the awareness of animal welfare; people tend to ignore animals' feelings and consider that animal rights are just luxury propaganda. This attitude is popular with many people, and will be difficult to reverse in a short period of time. Thus, there remains resistance to the implementation of laws and policies for the protection of the welfare of animals in China.

Another important factor holding back improvements to the Chinese people's awareness of animal welfare is that the legislation system on animal welfare still has significant gaps, compared with economically developed countries and regions. Although there are many regulations aimed at pro-

tecting endangered wildlife, rare marine fish and shellfish, there are still no laws focusing on animal welfare in China. On 29 December 2005, the National People's Congress voted on the *Animal Husbandry Law of the People's Republic of China* (31). In the final version, the eighth article states that *stockbreeding and veterinary administrative departments should provide guidance to improve livestock breeding, feeding, transport conditions and the environments* — a revision from the draft proposal which stated that *stockbreeding and veterinary administrative departments should provide guidance, in accordance with animal welfare, to improve livestock breeding, feeding, transport conditions and the environments* (emphasis added by the authors of the present article). The deletion of the term 'animal welfare' reflects the fact that much of the public and many legislators are of the opinion that animal welfare cannot become a topic codified in the law.

China's current level of productivity is often driven by short-term economic interests. Some businesses use production methods that completely ignore animal welfare, in order to save on costs. For example, some intensive livestock and poultry farms provide very limited space for the animals, and do not use contemporary agricultural animal waste management practices, which compromise the living conditions of the animals. Also, to save on expenses, some dealers allegedly do not send their livestock and poultry to the national slaughterhouses, but slaughter the animals on their own farms. This private and unsupervised slaughter may result in animals experiencing fear and unnecessary pain and distress. Similarly, the conditions in which agricultural animals are transported over long distances, may be very rough and over-crowded, with inadequate rest-time and feed/water provisions for the animals.

Faced with these challenges, many Chinese people are asking what they can do to improve animal welfare in China. Fundamentally, it is critical to accelerate the legislative process on animal welfare. A proposal on animal protection legislation was drafted in 2009, and submitted to the National People's Congress in 2011. The proposal calls for an expansion of the list of wild animals under state protection. In addition, it suggests that four other types of animals (livestock, companion, laboratory, and working animals) should also be protected. Should the approval of an integrated, nationwide animal welfare regulation fail or be delayed, animal welfare could instead be reflected in other national relevant laws and regulations, adopted at the provincial or municipal level, or could be combined with other relevant administrative measures, such as wildlife conservation or companion animal registration and immunisation. These regulations are recognised as necessary measures by the majority of the public — thus, they are rela-

tively easy to implement, and their present scope can perhaps be extended.

China should provide animal welfare education to the general public through the dissemination of information pertaining to practices that improve animal welfare in an incremental manner. It needs to be explained that promoting animal welfare does not mean that humans cannot use animals for food, companionship, research or entertainment, but that such use should be conducted in a reasonable and humane manner. At the same time, professional education and training about animal welfare should be given to husbandry and veterinary professionals, who are the closest bridge between humans and animals. In their work practices, these professionals should primarily ensure the health and safety of animals, reduce the pain and distress experienced, prevent zoonoses, and ultimately evaluate the overall welfare of the animals in their care.

Finally, researchers in China should participate in the globally-burgeoning field of animal welfare science, in order to provide a reliable basis for the implementation of changes in practices and standards. APpedia is an example of a way of expatiating information on animal behaviour and psychological well-being. However, there is still a paucity of information regarding some aspects of animal welfare, such as livestock production and management, pain and distress control, and the humane killing of livestock. Factoring in China's large population and increasing demand for food resources, an intensive farming mode will likely continue in China for the foreseeable future. Thus, the improvement of the housing conditions and management practices, as well as the welfare of livestock in production settings, will remain an important issue.

Conclusion

The debate on animal welfare and animal rights is a new phenomenon in the reforming China. Focus on animal welfare is important for China's ecological environment and for a harmonious society. This debate was initiated by independent-minded scholars and animal activists, but has subsequently become a public discussion. The Chinese Government's tolerance of societal participation in policy debate is the soil in which to cultivate such initiatives. This could not have been possible in the pre-reform era. Therefore, under China's current social, political, economic, and cultural environment, the recently recognised (in China) philosophies of animal welfare and animal rights are new topics for discussion and debate.

Importantly, with the contribution of international and domestic NGOs, discussion of animal welfare issues by the public and the Government is

progressing quickly, and is informed by similar discussions that have occurred in other countries. In China, the basic precepts of animal welfare should be introduced to the public, research efforts should be directed toward animal welfare science, and animal welfare legislation should be promoted, with the steady incorporation of animal welfare principles into practice. The protection of animals is closely related to the protection of humans; therefore, respect for animal welfare is also respect for human well-being.

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